

PRESS RELEASE

25 March 2024

THOUSANDS GATHER TO CELEBRATE 'WONDER OF THE WATERWAYS'

BINGLEY FIVE RISE LOCKS 250TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS HIGHLIGHT THE CONTINUING IMPORTANCE OF CANALS TO COMMUNITIES

Thousands of people joined the celebrations on Saturday 23 March to mark the 250th anniversary of the Grade I Listed Bingley Five Rise Locks on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal in Yorkshire.

The nation's waterways charity that looks after Britain's steepest lock flight, as part of its 2,000-mile network of historic canals welcomed the tremendous show of support for this 'wonder of the waterways' together with the nearby Grade II* Listed Bingley Three Rise Locks.

Fashion designer and star of BBC's The Great British Sewing Bee Patrick Grant, joined comedian, actress and writer Jessica Knappett (who grew up in Bingley), and other local dignitaries, for a special boat trip during the celebrations.

Sean McGinley, regional director, Yorkshire & North East at Canal & River Trust, said: "A massive thank you to everyone who came along to support the celebrations. It was fantastic to see so many people coming together. We had thousands of local people as well as visitors who had travelled from as far as Cumbria and the Netherlands.

"At a time when these centuries-old canals are under threat from extreme weather events brought about by climate change, combined with cuts in vital funding from government, it's heartening to see people coming together to celebrate and support our waterways and demonstrate their importance to our communities.

"It is hugely important that the Trust continues our work to keep canals alive, and I'm hugely proud of our team and amazing volunteers who have helped to make this event such a success.

T 0203 204 4514 **E** press.office@canalrivertrust.org.uk **W** www.canalrivertrust.org.uk **Twitter** [@CanalRiverTrust](https://twitter.com/CanalRiverTrust)

Canal & River Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 7807276 and registered charity number 1146792, registered office address: National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port, South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH65 4FW

Special thanks to Bingley Town Council for supporting the costs of the activities and to Bradford District Council, Damart, Leeds & Liverpool Canal Society, Sport England, BD25, Sustrans, Players of People's Postcode Lottery (PPL) and Northern Rail for helping make this a 'town to towpath' celebration."

Fiona Mannion, managing director at Damart said: "Damart are proud to have supported such a fantastic event. This was the first time we have opened our 1871 cafe to the public and it was fantastic to see the space bustling with so many visitors enjoying the 250th anniversary celebrations. We plan to continue to open our 1871 cafe in conjunction with our Bradley Mill sales, with various community arts groups and exhibitions taking place over the course of the next year."

Cllr Philippa Gibbons (Bingley Town Council), who volunteers with the Canal & River Trust as a lock keeper, said: "This event has been a great opportunity to get footfall into the town and to put Bingley on the map with the Five Rise Locks as our major tourist attraction. We've had some brilliant feedback from the community and local businesses and it would be great to make this an annual canal festival for the community, and we hope it'll be part of Bradford 2025."

Cllr Marcus Dearden (Bradford Council, Bingley Ward), who also runs The Five Rise Locks Café next to the historic locks, said: "We had a very, very busy day at the café – far busier than normal, with thousands of people coming out. The town centre was busy all day long – a really good day for Bingley."

Celebrating what makes Bingley Five Rise Locks one of the seven 'wonders of the waterways', the event showcased the past, present and future of locks and the Leeds & Liverpool Canal. Visitors had the chance to meet the experts from the Canal & River Trust who care for the canals and locks, and get afloat on the water with free paddle sports and boat trips. Free family-friendly activities were on offer along the towpath, with an arts programme of talks, weaving demonstrations, readings by the Trust's Canal Poet Laureate Roy McFarlane.

Local community celebrations helped to extend the event from the canal towpath into the town centre, with Bingley Town Council hosting an artisan market, plus live music and performances and businesses running special promotions, including a commemorative Five Locks beer.

Ruth Garratt, Canal & River Trust's Yorkshire & North East heritage advisor, explains: "With just 2.5% of the country's listed houses and structures awarded Grade I listing, Bingley Five Rise Locks are of exceptional historical importance and puts these locks in the same category as Buckingham Palace and York Minster.

"Constructed in Georgian times, the locks were a vital part of a commercial thoroughfare to transport goods across the Pennines to the North Sea. Thanks to the work of our charity to keep canals alive, it is staggering to think that 250 years later these locks are still in daily use by boaters, but also by thousands of walkers, cyclists and runners who come to enjoy spending time by water."

For information about the Canal & River Trust and 'Bingley 250' visit [Bingley Five Rise 250 | Canal & River Trust \(canalrivertrust.org.uk\)](https://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/bingley-250)

Ends

Media Enquiries:

Naomi Roberts, Communications & Campaigns Manager, Canal & River Trust (Mon-Thu)
naomi.roberts@canalrivertrust.org.uk / 07557 256482.

Notes to Editors:

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day. www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

Bingley Five Rise Locks 250th event programme

Event highlights included:

- See the 'UK's steepest staircase locks' in action
- Lock keeper demonstrations and talks by volunteers
- Boat trips along the canal
- Guided heritage walks & talks
- Ecology and environment talks, plus fish tank display
- Bird watching, nature spotting trail and activities at Bingley North Bog
- Canoe & SUP sessions – some sessions pre-bookable through our Eventbrite page
- Floating market and Kennet boat & floating museum
- Canal art & craft activities, bushcraft, sketch walks
- Demonstrations, handling sessions and talks
- Let's Fish taster sessions – book for Let's Fish through our Eventbrite page
- #TopOfTheLocks selfie opportunity
- Bell ringing and brass band performances

Bingley Five Rise Locks

As the steepest flight of locks in Britain, Bingley Five Rise Locks lifts boats around 18 metres (60 feet), with the five locks operating as a 'staircase' flight, in which the lower gate of one lock forms the upper gate of the next. Each set of lock gates weighs six tonnes (the equivalent of an adult African elephant) and at seven-metres tall, they are some of the tallest lock gates in the country. The gates are handmade by the Canal & River Trust at its workshop at Stanley Ferry and must be replaced approximately every 25 years to keep the locks and canal open.

The Bingley Five Rise Locks is part of an important section of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, together with Bingley Three Rise Locks, Dowley Gap Locks (Two Rise Locks) and Dowley Gap

Aqueduct they are finest engineering feats to be found on the whole of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, Britain's longest canal. The early optimism for a swift completion was ill founded. It actually took forty-six years to complete the canal between Leeds and Liverpool. The hardest work, a change of route and difficult economic times were yet to come.

Bingley Five Rise opened on 21st March 1774. The following was in the Leeds Intelligencer newspaper the following day:

'We hear from Bingley that 20 miles of the Grand Canal between Liverpool and Leeds, was opened yesterday for business from Skipton to below the junction with the Bradford Canal, in the presence of several thousand spectators. From Bingley to about three miles downwards, the noblest works of the kind that perhaps are to be found, in the same extent in the universe, are established, viz. a five-fold, a three-fold, a two-fold, and a single lock, making together a fall of One Hundred and Twenty Feet. A large aqueduct bridge of seven arches over the River Aire, and an aqueduct, and a large banking over Shipley valley. Five boats of burthen passed the grand lock, the first of which descended through a fall of Sixty Feet in less than Twenty-nine Minutes, to the amazement and delight of the spectators. These works (in the opinion of the best judges) are executed in a masterly manner, and the locks and their machinery excellent. This joyful and much wished for event was welcomed with ringing of Bingley bells, a band of music, the firing of guns by the neighbouring militia, the shouts of the spectators, and all the marks of satisfaction that so important an acquisition merits; and, as this is deemed, in various respects, the most difficult part of the work, it gives a pleasing prospect, not only of the practicability, but certainty, of the whole of this grand and most useful undertaking, being completed in a few years.'

On 21 March 1774, around 30,000 people gathered along the towpath to watch the first boats make the 60-foot descent through Bingley Five Rise Locks. Reported by the Leeds Intelligencer newspaper to be the 'noblest works of the kind that perhaps are to be found in the same extent in the universe'. 250 years on, they are a much-loved attraction for leisure and wellbeing and a vital link in the canal's wildlife corridor stretching over the Pennines thanks to the work of the Trust.

End of All