

FRIENDS OF HOCKLEY VIADUCT

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Here we are in the Autumn and we hope you've all had a great summer. The weather has been mixed, to say the least, but we're British and can cope with that, can't we? People have continued to open their gardens to the public, and afternoon tea and strawberries are not just for Wimbledon.

One of our members, Phil Yates, went for a walk with Julia on the Viaduct back in May – like several of our members he no longer drives and finds a long walk out to the Viaduct rather too much, so she offered to take him by car to see it again. He sent our Editor the following essay which we think may well bring back memories for lots of you!

'A gentle breeze wafted across the meadows with the sun casting its rays over the Hampshire countryside. On a perfect Spring morning early in May, I strolled along the Hockley Viaduct with Julia, our hard-working and enthusiastic Secretary. At the start of the walk she explained in great detail the plans for the future of the Viaduct. I sensed immediately that here was a charming lady, dedicated and determined to see the end result of a difficult project which still lies ahead for this unique structure. Of course, Julia is not the only member who has the Viaduct's future at heart. Chris Webb, along with the late Jeffrey Smith, the late Alan Weeks, and Edwin Course, were the first citizens to highlight its serious condition, fearing that it would collapse unless urgent action were taken.

Halfway along our walk, Julia stopped and pointed out the remains of a piece of equipment attached to the side of the wall. "Look" she said, "this is a small section of the signal which used to be here and all that is required now is the signal itself. Chris has a replacement in hand." I told her that I remember that signal well: it was controlled from the signal-box at Shawford Junction. Leaving the Viaduct, we continued on down the uneven trackbed path to the embankment with steps descending to Five Bridges Road, but not before Julia said "There should be two old telegraph poles complete with some wires around here", and quick as a flash she exclaimed "Look, there they are – they should be saved". I agreed with her.

Once we reached the road I was able to tell Julia that, as children many years ago, we watched passenger and goods trains pass across the bridge over Five Bridges Road (long ago demolished) before reaching the Viaduct, but as the trains were few and far between we had to time it just right to catch them! I noticed the white lines still on the road leading up to the notorious Hockley Lights – the most famous in the country at one time, I believe.

Joggers and dog walkers passed us by as we stood by the disused Navigation tunnel. At this point Julia, with arms stretched out enthusiastically, declared "Now this is where a new ramp will be constructed to connect the Viaduct to the towpath, running parallel to the river, to the

bridge by Garnier Road and will eventually link up with the Barfield Park and Ride". I reminded her that this used to be the Goods Yard and again as kids we watched from the footbridge, approached from Domum Road, the wagons being shunted.

Before we set off on our return journey across the Viaduct, Julia pointed to some of the many plants that adorn this area. "Here we have Goat's Beard, there are Cowslips and Dog Daisies, but quick: see the Common Blue and Woodland White". The last two are just some of the butterflies that thrive on the nectar of the many flowers carpeting the foot of the St Catherine's Hill area. She also pointed out the many native trees and shrubs planted by the Council when Five Bridges Road and the Hockley Lights were disconnected from the road system, notably the Field Maple and the Spindle, wood traditionally used for making the spindles for weaving.

Back on the Viaduct Julia showed me the coping bricks on the top of the walls. These special heavy bricks, dark blue-grey in colour, are really in a decorative form to complete the Viaduct built of red brick. Impressed on many of these coping bricks is the name of the makers: "Blanchards - Bishops Waltham". Several of these bricks are missing and quite a few large gaps appear along the tops of the walls. Over the years of neglect since the railway line finally closed in April 1964, the bricks have fallen on to the land below or into the River Itchen which flows under the Viaduct. "One day" said Julia "we shall endeavour to retrieve them all!"

With swallows and a kestrel flying over us and a fisherman settling down on the river bank for a day's fishing, there is a certain air of tranquillity that surrounds this area, despite the roar of traffic from the adjacent M3 motorway. The rustle of leaves on the Hawthorns and Field Maples standing erect on the river banks, the cows grazing in the field below, the swans on the river, and St Catherine's Hill towering over us - a lovely view to end a perfect morning. As we were leaving the Viaduct, Julia turned to me and said "You know, I really love this place". I can see why.'

Thank you, Phil, for bringing this lovely area to life for those of us who cannot get over to it very often. If you'd like a visit there but cannot manage it under your own steam, give Julia a call and she'll be more than happy to collect you by car and drive you to the end of the Viaduct for a walk. Her number is Winchester (01962) 867490.

We thought you might like a little information about Sustrans, the UK and Northern Ireland cycling initiative, which hopes to take over our Viaduct. It began with the creation of the Bristol to Bath railway path between 1979 and 1984. Other routes followed until the Millennium Commission awarded Sustrans a grant of £43.5m. The current National Cycle Network is over 10,000 miles long, following traffic-free paths, special cycle lanes, traffic-calmed roads and quiet country lanes, and through towns, cities, and all the countryside. 450 local authorities are involved with a variety of other organisations, all co-ordinated by Sustrans, a registered charity. The National Cycle Network Centre is in Bristol - very fitting since that was where it all began! If you'd like to know more, why not visit their website at www.nationalcyclenetwork.org.uk

and discover some wonderful places to cycle along: you could also walk along them if you wanted!

Many of you will be regular readers of the Hampshire Chronicle, the Winchester Observer or the Daily Echo and will thus be aware that your Committee is quite successful at keeping the Hockley Viaduct in the public eye and we do hope that you are all aware of just how much your Committee is doing to ensure that the powers-that-be are aware of the Friends. We took 2 senior Officers of the City Council for a walk there in early August. Sadly unlike previous trips with "important" people the hot sunny weather had changed overnight to pouring rain and the 4 of us got extremely wet! However this was yet another opportunity to introduce people to our Viaduct and they too were impressed with it all. A few days later we took our Mayor Barry Lipscomb and his wife Christine for a walk across – they too had never been over it!

Our last guest walkers this summer were Councillor George Beckett, leader of the City Council, and Patricia Stallard, the City's Heritage Champion. Patricia has been a stalwart supporter of several of our city's important structures and we count her as a good friend. George of course was in the chair, as it were, when the City Council decided to allocate funds towards the restoration of the Viaduct and has renewed that promise on his return to the leadership. However he can only actually hand over funds when Sustrans has all its funding in place and can actually begin the necessary work.

As we all know, we're officially in the middle of yet another economic crisis so we may have to polish our patience and wait longer for what we really desire! In the meantime, continue to appreciate this majestic structure and visit it to watch the changing seasons on its pathway. Your committee wishes you a happy, warm winter and, although it still seems a long way ahead, a Christmas and New Year surrounded by your loved ones with several seasonal walks along Hockley Viaduct!

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