

## The Official Opening of the Newly-Restored Hockley Viaduct on 26th February 2013

The official day dawned with a live interview with BBC Radio Solent's Julian Clegg by Julia Sandison. The 10 minute interview, which included an update on the restoration and its new use by the Radio Solent reporter Jo Palmer, gave Julia the opportunity to mention the four men who've been involved with the future of the Viaduct for nearly four decades. She spoke of their dedication to the Viaduct and of the pleasure of the remaining two – Chris Webb, the Friends' chairman, and Dr Edwin Course, the industrial archaeologist who drilled the core from the Viaduct to prove that it was made of mass concrete and only covered with bricks. She also mentioned that due to this fact and the lack of any metal in the structure, the Viaduct could well stand for many more centuries.

The official Opening, organised by the City Council's project team, began at the Guildhall at 1.30 where [information boards](#) gave full credit to the Friends and told the full story of the history and final restoration with the help of several organisations. With refreshments on hand the gathering included City and County Councillors, representatives from Sustrans and the Friends, as well as local cycling groups and several children of all ages from local schools, complete with their bikes. Short speeches were made by the four main organisations i.e. the City, the County, Sustrans and the Friends, and all introduced by the City Mayor. Then everyone left the Guildhall, either to cycle to the Viaduct with Dani King, the Eastleigh-born young cyclist who won gold at the London Olympics and the day before our Opening won another world title in Belarus, or to be taken there in a King Alfred double decker.

On the bus there must have been around 60 people who waited patiently on the chilly Viaduct for the arrival of Dani and her entourage of around a further 60 people of all ages, who cycled down the Viaduct to breast the red ribbon held across the newly-created pathway by the Mayor Frank Pearson and former City Councillor George Beckett, who did so much to ensure that the money was raised to carry out the restoration. Television cameras were there although ITV Meridian was only interested in Dani King

as a sports personality and scarcely aware of the significance of why she was there! However BBC South produced a good piece for the evening regional news programmes, interviewing Chris Webb as well as showing “before and after” photos of the structure and telling of the long haul from the Viaduct’s closure by British Rail to its renaissance as part of National Cycle Route 23, which runs from Reading down to Southampton and on to the Isle of Wight to continue to Sandown.

All in all, an excellent celebration of the Hockley Viaduct and those who’ve worked so hard to bring it to this point – the main organisations responsible being Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council, Sustrans and of course the Friends of Hockley Viaduct!