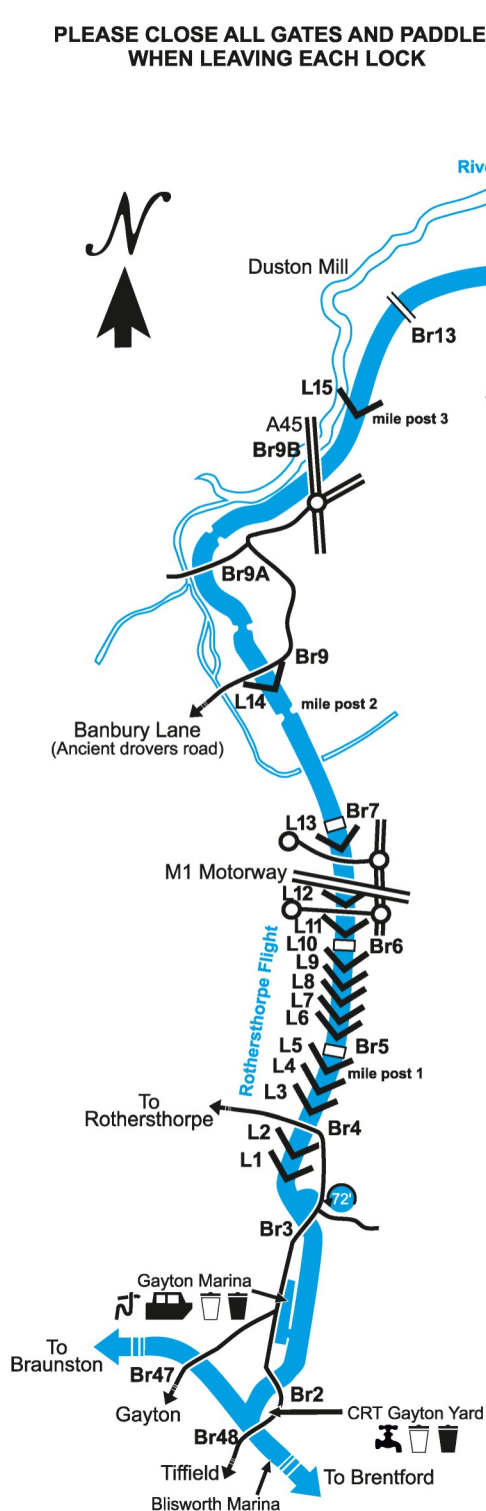


PLEASE CLOSE ALL GATES AND PADDLES
WHEN LEAVING EACH LOCK



The Nene Navigation opened from The Wash to Northampton in 1761. Sea Coal from the North-East was a regular cargo; also several timber yards were based beside the river. Once the Northampton Arm opened in 1815, the river traffic was largely superseded by canal traffic. This steadily declined although large quantities of grain were carried from London to Wellingborough by narrow boat until the late 1960s. The locks were rebuilt in the 1930s using similar dimensions to the locks being built by the Grand Union Canal Company north of Braunston. Had the Northampton Arm also been widened, the Nene could have seen a significant revival of through traffic from the east coast ports to Birmingham and beyond.



Top Lock Cottage and Lock-keeper's Hovel

The Northampton Arm opened on the 1st May 1815, replacing the tramway which had been built using equipment from the no-longer needed Blisworth Hill tramway. The Arm falls 109 feet (33.5 metres) over the 4.5 miles from the GU Main Line at Gayton Junction through 17 locks to the Nene (pronounced Nen) at Northampton, carrying steady traffic until the end of commercial carrying in the late 1960s. It has witnessed many changes, including the construction of the M1 Motorway and later the Blisworth by-pass (A43), which members of the Northampton IWA were able to persuade the DoT to move and also construct an earth bank to screen the listed flight of locks at Rothersthorpe. Sadly the very attractive stretch from lock 14 down to the town is seeing considerable development. Even so, the Arm is still one of the unsung attractions of England's canal system with enormous character.

Moreover, with the possibility of the Milton Keynes to Bedford waterway being constructed, it will figure more prominently as a key link when this ring is created taking in the canal system, the rivers Great Ouse and Cam, the Middle Levels and the River Nene.

Although we have done our best to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this guide, we cannot undertake responsibility for errors, omissions or their consequences.
Last reviewed March 2019
The Inland Waterways Association, Northampton Branch

Welcome to **The Northampton Arm** of the Grand Union Canal



This leaflet has been produced by the IWA Northampton Branch
(adoptees of the Northampton Arm since July 2013)
and kindly sponsored by ABC Leisure Group



Northampton Branch



Cruising the Arm

After leaving Gayton Junction, the first bridge (No.2) brings the towpath to the right hand side for the remainder of the route. Next on the left is Gayton Marina (operated by ABC Leisure Group), a former clay pit now connected to the canal and used for private and hire boat moorings.

After Bridge 3 we commence the fall through the Rothersthorpe flight of 13 locks, with the former keeper's cottage at the top. A 72ft winding hole is sited just above the top lock. There were originally three other cottages - one alongside Locks 10 and 15 (towpath side), and the other by Lock 16 (off-side).

After Bridge 4, the M1 Motorway becomes visible, and over the top of it, the Express Lifts tower. The Blisworth by-pass (A43) follows the Arm to the right with the village of Rothersthorpe across the fields to the left. Most of the locks have open spillways on the left hand side of the chamber. These can be a danger to smaller children and appropriate care should be taken.

Old lift bridges below Locks 5, 10 and 13 have now been re-instated, a feature that enhances the character of the Arm.

Lock 12 is almost under the M1. A mural has been painted by local schoolchildren on both sides of the main carriageway bridge depicting the history of Northampton on the towpath side and the canals natural history on the other. Soon after Lock 13 the traveller crosses an aqueduct over a feeder stream to the River Nene. There is a gauging weir in this stream by the towpath. From this point on the urban sprawl of Northampton is enclosing upon the Arm, with the Swan Valley complex to the west and housing to the east.

A look back from Lock 14 shows how the motorway embankment forms a visual barrier across the Nene valley at this point. On the hill ahead are the distinctive buildings and tower of the former St. Crispin Hospital.

The canal now runs alongside the river with a country park on one side, spanned by the ring road and the Express Lifts tower is in full view. This tower, 417ft (127metres) high, was once considered to be the best testing facility for high-speed lifts in Europe, but sadly Express Lifts have left Northampton and Terry Wogan's famous 'lighthouse', despite its relative youth, has become surplus to requirements. Nevertheless, the site has been redeveloped for housing and the tower, a listed structure, is presently used as a communications tower.

As Northampton's high rise downtown area comes into view, the tallest building is identified as Northampton House - previously headquarters of the County Council and now converted into luxury flats.

Around Bridge 14 and Lock 16 is a favourite play area for local children of all ages and extra care should be taken. After passing beneath the main railway line and between the abutments of a demolished bridge, the canal deviates to the left, a diversion made at the time of railway alterations in 1879.

After a busy main road, a new housing development is on the south bank. On the left is the Carlsberg Brewery. Above Lock 17, boats up to 65ft in length can be turned, albeit with a struggle.

At the tail of Lock 17 you leave the canal and join the River Nene (pronounced Nen in these parts) and responsibility for navigation changes from CRT to the Environment Agency. Boats from the canal are permitted on to the river only if they have a Gold Licence or if a licence has been obtained from the EA National Customer Call Centre*.

At the junction with the River Nene, a right turn should be made to pass under the centre arch of South Bridge. Almost immediately you pass under a striking suspension footbridge known as the Wathen Wigg Bridge, named after the founder of the Northampton Saints Rugby Club. Ahead is Northampton Town Lock in Becket's Park.

Moorings are available both above and below this lock on the left hand side, but the brick wall below the lock should be approached with caution. A new marina, in Becket's Park with all essential services (pump-out, overnight mooring, shower block and laundry room), operated by the EA, opened in 2011. It is accessible by the channel south of the lock island - but beware of the remains of the old railway bridge below water in this channel. A channel marker gives warning. A notable landmark here is the new University of Northampton Water-side complex.

Arm Adoption

The Branch adopted the Arm in July 2013 and holds regular Task Parties to help improve and maintain its condition.

West Bridge Arm (also known as the Brampton Arm)

At the junction of the canal and river, turn left and then take the right hand branch alongside the brewery. Keep on the outside of the bend, then under the concrete footbridge, through the site of the old gasworks. Between the junction and the footbridge the original course of the river lies under the brewery. There were two breweries and other wharfs, including FMC, along this stretch, where boats loaded coke and tar at the gasworks. Keep left and navigate as far as the winding hole (60ft maximum turning). This part of the navigation led to the Borough Council Depot and Watkin Bros' timber yard, which is mentioned in Bradshaws.

B&Q have a large retail store and provide moorings for their patrons on the other fork of the river, a short distance from the junction, but there are no facilities to wind, so boats above about 40ft will have to reverse out of this branch.

Plaques

A brass plaque is available to commemorate your trip along the Northampton Arm. This can be obtained by post from Sandie Morton, 14 Baker Street, Gayton, Northampton NN7 3EZ (01604 858294) Email sandie.morton@waterways.org.uk at £10.00 each. Cheques should be made payable to 'IWA Northampton Branch'.

Facilities

All the usual facilities, including chemists, are available in Northampton town centre, which is little more than a quarter of a mile walk from Becket's Park. Markets are held on most days on the Market Square. Nearer to South Bridge and the canal is St. Leonard's Road with a variety of shops. An Asda supermarket is near the disused railway level crossing en route to St. Leonard's Road. There is also a large Morrisons Store (with cash points) above Town Lock with close and easy access from the towpath by Wathen Wigg footbridge. Rubbish disposal, sanitary station and water point are all available at the CRT Maintenance Yard at Gayton Junction. The former pump-out/water facilities provided about a quarter of a mile below Town Lock on the river are now available in Northampton Marina.

Nature Trail Challenge

A new canal mosaic nature trail, featuring 34 mosaic designs, has been installed along the Northampton Arm of the Grand Union Canal. This wonderful new feature is made possible by the work of volunteers from the IWA Northampton Branch, pupils from two Northampton primary schools — Briar Hill and Delapre, and mosaic expert David Bowers. At each of the 17 locks on the 4 ¾ mile Northampton Arm you will find two mosaic plaques set into the grass. One depicts an aspect of canal heritage, the other has a letter with an associated image from nature. Download the form from www.waterways.org.uk/northampton/northampton to collect all 17 letters and work out the phrase, then submit your form by email or post to earn yourself a Certificate of Achievement.

Boatyards:

Grand Junction Boat Co. Gayton Yard. tel. 01604 858043

www.boatrepairs.uk.com

ABC Leisure Group, Gayton Marina. tel. 01604 858685

www.gaytonmarina.com

Blisworth Tunnel Narrowboats, Blisworth. tel. 01604 858868

Blisworth Marina, Blisworth. tel. 01604 879827

www.blisworthmarina.co.uk

Northampton Marina, Northampton. tel. 01604 604344 or 07867 580129

Pump-out facilities are available at Blisworth, Gayton and Northampton Marinas.

EA licences and keys are available from Northampton Marina.

*EA National Customer Call Centre 0370 8506 506 - ask for the Boat Registration Team

All the following are in and around St. Leonard's Road

- High quality bakery
- Nationwide Building Society (with cash-point)
- Dental surgery and optician
- General store (open late), off-licence
- Launderette, cleaner, ironing services
- Men's/ladies hairdressing
- Takeaways (fish and chips, Indian, Chinese) plus a Chinese takeaway on way to St Leonard's Road close to South Bridge
- Newsagent
- Betting shop
- A high quality butcher's shop in Haines Road (walk up to it from general store in St Leonard's Road)
- Petrol stations: Morrisons Store and on London Road beyond Asda

General

- **Vet:** Rhodes, 66 Towcester Road Tel. 01604 762607
- **Tourist Information:** Tel. 01604 622677
- **Swimming:** Upper Mounts
- **Railway Station:** Adjacent to West Bridge. Services to London and Birmingham. National Rail enquiries on 08457 484950
- **Pubs and restaurants:** a wide variety in the town centre
- **Post Office:** in St Giles Street not far from Town Hall at top of Guildhall Road
- **Theatres:** (Derngate & Royal) and Museum: Guildhall Rd
- **Hospital:** Northampton General (1/4 mile from Becket's Park) Tel. 01604 634700
- **Police:** Campbell Square. Tel. 101
- **Telephones:** inside Morrisons Store and town centre area.

The IWA

The Inland Waterways Association is a registered charity campaigning for the retention, restoration, conservation and the fullest commercial and recreational use of all inland waterways.

For further information, including membership details, contact:

The Inland Waterways Association, Island House, Moor Road, Chesham HP5 1Waa, Tel. 01494 783453
website www.waterways.org.uk Local enquiries: 01604 858294

