

**U3A Bike Ride
Grand Union Canal and Boston Manor
Friday 6th June 2025**

Early heavy rain cleared to give a very pleasant sunny day for the seven riders on this longer ride.

We took the usual route from Brockwell Park to Clapham Common, over Chelsea Bridge then onto the cycle route through Belgravia into Hyde Park.



The Serpentine Café by the lake made an enjoyable coffee stop.

Refreshed we cycled out of the park via Albion Gate to Paddington Station arriving right by the lifts for the Elizabeth Line for the 15 minute ride to Southall. Trains are frequent and it worked well splitting the group over two trains and meeting at Southall Station.



After a short ride on roads we joined the canal towpath. The towpath here is largely a good surface and it was a quiet ride in the lovely sunshine. We saw coot and moorhen families enjoying first outings.

The Grand Junction Canal (now called the Grand Union Canal) was the main link from London to Birmingham. From Brentford where it joins the river Thames, it makes its way via Hanwell, Uxbridge, Watford and what is now Milton Keynes to Braunston, a small Northamptonshire village where there were connections to the west Midlands.

The engineer in charge of building the Grand Junction Canal was William Jessop (1745-1814).

We soon passed Norwood Lock, then the Hanwell flight of locks, comprising six locks, the longest flight in London. It was built in 1794 as part of one of the first stretches of the new waterway to open. It would be over ten years later that the full route to the north was complete due to trouble with the building of the Blisworth Tunnel in Northamptonshire.

The locks adjoin a large hospital, now known as St Bernard's Hospital, but once called the Hanwell Pauper Lunatic Asylum. There is a very large brick wall dating from the early 19th Century to ensure security.



We followed the towpath over Gallows Bridge. A single span iron footbridge with yellow brick abutments, dated 1820 and cast at Horseley Iron Works near Birmingham. Grade II Statutory Listed, probably designed by Thomas Telford.



The bridge, with the Grand Junction Canal insignia, has a rough surface to enable canal horses to grip it. It may have taken its name from a man found hanged in Boston Manor Woods in the 17th century.



We left the canal side path following a sign to Brentford station and after a short way on the cycle route by the A4 we were at Boston Manor Park.

Boston Manor House is Jacobean, built for Lady Mary Reade in 1623 (her husband owned nearby Osterley Park) and later owned by the Clitherow family (from 1670s to 1920s, city merchants and bankers). Particularly notable is the drawing room with a magnificent plasterwork ceiling and fireplace depicting characters from a variety of stories.

The family sold the manor to the council in 1923. It is managed by Hounslow Council and reopened in July 2023 after five years renovation. It is well worth a visit. Entry is free. In addition there is a 28 acre park with a lake, including ancient cedar trees and a walled garden.



The Park provided an ideal spot for lunch. Those who wanted could take a train back from convenient Brentford Station while a few explored part of the park. We then set off alongside the A4 again, crossing it under the flyover and followed back roads to Kew Bridge and along the north bank of the Thames enjoying quiet roads, passing Dukes Meadows, Hammersmith Bridge, Fulham football ground and onto Bishop's Park. This made a good stop for a rest and refreshment.

The return was the familiar route through Fulham, past Imperial Wharf, Lots Road Power Station and over Albert Bridge, into Battersea Park and side roads to Brixton and Herne Hill Station.

Riders: Jane Andrew, Daniela Walther, Martin Goffe, Patrick Mulhern, John Clements, Andrew & Mary Burke.

Distance cycled: 28 miles, 7 hours

Ride leaders: Andrew and Mary Burke

Report: Mary

Photos: Daniela and John

Acknowledgments:

<https://www.canalmuseum.org.uk/hanwelltour/hanwell1.htm>

brentfordhistory.com/2014/02/02/gallows-bridge/

bostonmanorhouse.org