

Peter Le Marchant Trust

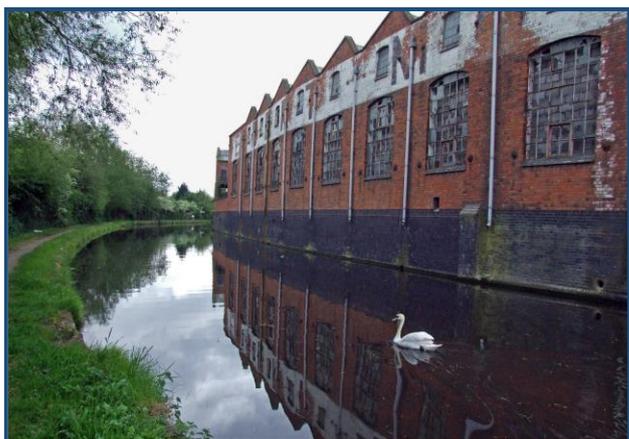
Serenade's Journey

ZOUCH



The Peter Le Marchant Trust was established over 35 years ago as a result of a bequest by Peter Le Marchant to his sister, Clare. Clare wished to enable all groups of disabled people and those who are seriously ill to enjoy the peace and beauty of the countryside in a leisurely way. Inland waterways proved to be the answer. The Trust now operates three boats from its base in Loughborough. Symphony and Serenade can both carry up to 26 passengers on day trips, and Serenade also takes 10 people on 4 night holidays; while Melody is an eight-berth narrowboat for family hire. All are fully fitted with lifts, and other aids for disabled living. Serenade carries a skipper and an experienced crew, and tea or coffee and biscuits are served on both the outward and return journeys.

Serenade's journey today is along the River Soar Navigation, also known as the Loughborough Canal. Opened in 1778, it brought great prosperity to the town, carrying large amounts of coal as well as other goods and raw materials. The importance of the wharf can be judged by the fact that in August 1778 the first ever Cheese Sale was held there, drawing traders and customers from as far afield as Yorkshire and Norfolk. This marked the beginning of Loughborough Canal Wharf (known as the Rushes) as a true inland port. The extension to Leicester was completed in 1794 further increasing the town's prosperity.



Herbert Morris Works

We start from the Trust's base and moorings and follow the canal into the town. Passing under Moor Lane Bridge we approach on our left all that remains of the Empress Works (known as the East Works) of Herbert Morris Ltd, who chose this location to manufacture cranes and elevators. By 1903 they were exporting cranes which could lift up to fifty tons, and by the 1920's the demand for products was so great, further expansion along the canal resulted in the building of the West Works. Today the area is being slowly re-developed as housing, leaving little visible of the canal side engineering firm.

Approaching Loughborough Wharf we pass under Chain Bridge. This was so called after the practice of placing a chain across the mouth of the bridge at night to prevent boatmen sneaking their boats from the Leicester Navigation Company controlled canal to the Loughborough Navigation without paying tolls. The original Chain Bridge collapsed in the 1980's after a breach in the canal and the replacement no longer has a towpath. The canal now begins its descent into the River Soar passing through Loughborough Town Lock



followed shortly after by Bishops Meadow Lock. The scenery now changes dramatically as we enter the pleasant countryside skirting Normanton on Soar.



Descending Loughborough Lock

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Bishops Meadow Lock

In the past the River Soar was very important to Normanton on Soar village economy. Horse-drawn barges to the Plough Inn wharf transported coal and other commodities. Fishing would have been popular, whether by licence or poaching. As far back as 1797 it was said that the Soar was reputed to produce the best pike in England, and in 1850 eels were known to be regularly speared.

The River Soar can rise and fall very quickly following heavy rainstorms. As we proceed past Normanton on Soar Boat Club, emergency mooring can be seen opposite allowing boats secure mooring if caught on a flooding river. Before we enter Zouch the huge sluice gate can be seen which provides protection to the village and surrounding houses by quickly releasing floodwater further downstream.

Passing under the main road and around the tight bend we enter Zouch. Here a few houses surround the Rose & Crown public house, which provides a warm and relaxing atmosphere for all travellers.

Our journey is approaching its halfway point as we descend through Zouch Lock, before turning around. A short stop for lunch at the pub, allows passengers to stretch their legs before the return journey.

The 12th century parish church of St James provides a striking landmark as we approach the village.

Another feature of the village is the Chain Ferry. This is a restored example of a unique and rare type of ferry used to cross the River Soar. From the time of the 1086 Domesday Book, Normanton on Soar was mentioned in the Rushcliffe Hundred. The Hundreds were county divisions, named because they were based on an area of one hundred families or a requirement to supply one hundred men for the King's wars. For centuries afterwards the Hundreds were used to judge how many men should be supplied for the Navy or Army.



St James Parish Church

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Tranquil River Soar



PATRON
H.R.H. Princess of Hanover



Her Royal Highness became our patron following a request from her former nanny, Mrs Maureen Wood, a long serving volunteer, a member of our Thursday crew.