

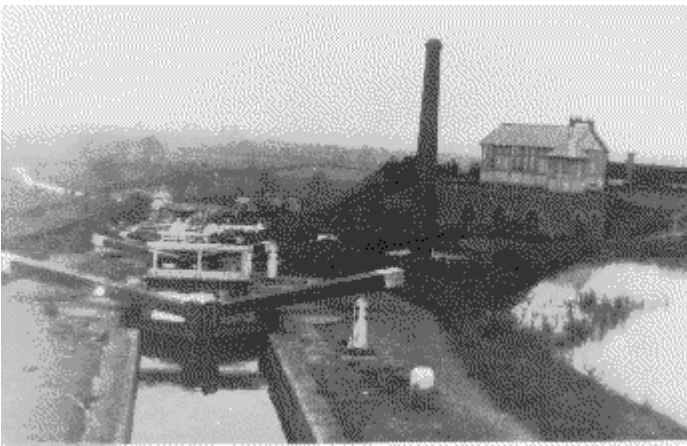
A walk around Foxton Locks

A new version of this walk in leaflet form will be available on site soon.

Compare the old photographs with today's views.

Starting from the top (long Stay) car park, follow the footpath to the left of the main entrance and go to the canal. Turn right under the brick bridge and cross the canal by the wooden footbridge. Turn right along the towpath.

The view from Foxton top lock



The view down the locks from near the top in c1909. the boiler house for the lift is on the right, and is now the museum. How many differences can you spot?

There were two ways of negotiating the hill, the lock flight built in 1810, and the Boat Lift built 1900, closed 1911 scrapped 1928. To visitor and boater alike, the panorama that opens up as they approach Foxton top lock is impressive. With the flight dropping steeply to

the Market Harborough level at the junction below, the view is out across the Welland Valley. To the left, hiding away in the trees on the hill, the clock tower of Gumley Hall Stables, with the village houses surrounded by the ancient pattern of 'enclosure' fields set down on an even older landscape of medieval ridge and furrow – all older than the canal. In the distance, valley villages such as the Langtons, and closer in on the right, Foxton church.

The canal winds to Leicester – 18 miles north by water – and by way of Foxton village to Market Harborough 5 miles away. The Summit canal which runs south (the way you have come from) has straggled for some 20 miles, following the contours and avoiding the settlements along the way from

Norton Junction near Daventry. Its course, to quote one writer 'A bower of roses in the summer, a hell of ice in winter'. Foxton is a place of contrasts – a challenge on a wet and windy day, pure delight in the summer sun. It can vary from crowds and queues of boats on Bank Holiday to quiet solitude in winter. Rest assured there will always be something interesting to see even in the depths of winter, Should the weather take a turn for the worse, retreat into the Foxton Inclined Plane Trust's Canal Museum to find out a little more of the history of the place, the local canals, and plans for the future. And take some refreshment at on of the 2 pubs at the bottom lock.



This view demonstrates the hardships of boating life and the poor state of repair of the locks c1899. it is wet and cold, but work goes on.

Halfway down the flight

The lock flight was built in 1810, and the top summit route opened four years later. A trip through the ten locks takes about 45 minutes to climb the 75ft. hill. Fast working nowadays is discouraged, since this is when mistakes and flooding can occur. Warning: the flight has steep drops into deep water but if reasonable care is taken it is a very safe place to visit. If young children are visiting we suggest that you look at the wow4water.com web site and use it to discuss how to stay safe near water.

Watching the boats on a busy day is a pleasant pastime – but be aware of the dangers of a crowded lockside and enjoy your visit to Foxton. Following a boat down will reveal the mysteries of the flight. An experienced crew will make things look easy and will already have checked their way ahead is clear. They will wind up the top red paddle to fill the top lock, thereafter red and then white paddles in pairs will equalise the levels between the locks. (The ‘paddles’ are underwater sluices connected to the lockside posts.) Red paddles fill lock chambers, white ones empty them. The wisdom to the little rhyme ‘Red before white and you’ll be all right; white before red and you’ll wish you were dead’ becomes apparent. It is important to get water moving out of a sidepond (to fill the lock below, using the red paddle) before using the white paddle to empty a lock into a pond that may already be full and ‘on weir’ (using the white paddles). Excess water can safely be discharged over the weirs, but too much can result in drama akin to a champagne fountain! A dangerous situation on a real-life scale. Foxton has two sets of five lock chambers, set in ‘staircases’ – i.e. the lower gates of a chamber double as the upper gates of the chamber below, hence their impressive total depth. The side ponds or pounds do not operate solely to save water – they hold 5-10 locks full – to enable plenty of water to be available and save a lot of time.

The saving comes in the ease with which the flight can be ‘set’ for a second boat, without the need to pass water down the whole flight, as with some staircases in other parts of the country. Halfway down boats have a chance to pass each other in the meeting pond. One up, one down is the fairest way, and saves water too. Before the old Boat Lift earthworks were built, these central ponds were much bigger, the flight working more efficiently to the original specifications. Here a little forward planning is needed – the crew may need to moor temporarily to enable an ascending boat to pass.

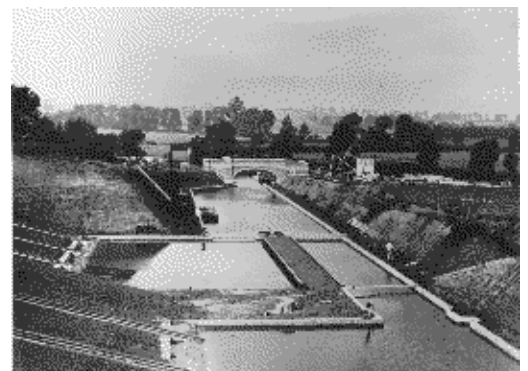
The set sequence of red/white paddles is broken too and a little thought is necessary to progress into the lower locks. The lower half of the flight should be easier now, since the ascending boat has filled the locks and ‘set’ the flight by its passage. In seemingly no time at all our boat will be swimming out across Foxton Junction, looking to moor up and follow the established traditions of the waterways – into the pub to celebrate another successful passage of the hill!



Looking back up the locks from 'Rainbow Bridge' in c1905. the lift can clearly be seen on the hill, and the locks go up under the bridge. Buildings which were for lock keepers and operational use are now pubs and shop.

From here, take the path to the right from the brick bridge over the locks. This takes you between the pub and the bottom side pond. Continue to the next brick bridge and look over the right hand parapet. This is the bottom dock for the Inclined plane.

Viewed from the far end of the bottom dock construction is nearly complete.





The Foxton Incline Plane Boat Lift on opening day, July 10th 1900. The flag only flies on this day. Gordon Thomas the lift engineer stands on the edge of the tank.

Take the track up the hill, with the pulley wheel, tipper trucks and iceboat exhibits on the left. Follow the path until you reach the sign for the museum. This is a good place to view the incline itself. Take the path to the right and follow it to the museum.

The Foxton Incline Plane Trust Canal Museum

The Foxton Incline Plane Trust was founded in March 1980 and since then volunteers have been working hard on the site. The original aim was to reconstruct the former Boilerhouse as a Canal Museum and this was completed in 1989. Now the hope is to tackle the dereliction of the Incline site itself, by reversing nature's claim over the remains. It is the Trust's policy to highlight the many interesting features of the Incline, bring related exhibits to the site and to improve access for the public, paid for by all the usual fund-raising methods.

We have a full-time Museum Curator and excellent links with the County's Education and Museum Services. We are currently working with the 'Foxton Locks Partnership' to improve the site and investigate the possibilities of a fully restored Boat lift. Our prime asset however, is the Foxton site itself the best of all locations in the County (the Country?) from which to spread the 'waterways word' to the public at large.



Incline Plane Boilerhouse, Winding house, accumulator tower and aqueduct during construction c1900. the boiler house was rebuilt by the Foxton Incline Plane Trust and is now its Museum.

The top of the Incline looking South towards the top dock. the winding house is on the right.

A trip up the Incline Plane

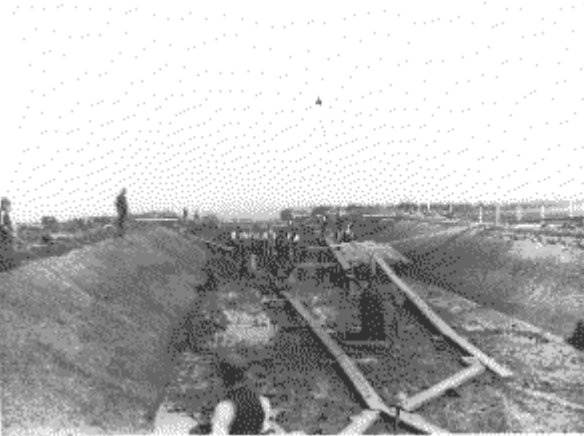
To understand the method of working, follow an imaginary journey through the Lift; on an ordinary day when one of the many horse drawn coal boats made its passage. Approaching beneath the wide arch of the bottom dock bridge, the boatman would see the Lift tank for the first time. Drifting into position, the gate was lowered behind him, mooring ropes made fast to the bollards and the horse led away. A uniformed attendant broke the hydraulic connection, ducked into his cabin and signalled over the telegraph to his colleague in the winding house above. A pause, then movement, very slow at first. As the tanks rose from the canal, water cascaded from the recesses in the wheel assemblies and dripped from the structure work, to be caught in special gutters at either side. Compared with 'waiting turns' at the locks, then toiling up the hill for the best part of an hour, the smooth ride up the long climb in the Lift was completed in a little over ten minutes. There was time to contemplate the splendid view.



Nearing the top, progress would slacken as the tank rolled over the crest; from the boat, looking back, the unique situation would be impressive. The Lift operative would control the docking as the rear wheels slipped into their pit and the leading wheel flanges nudged into the timber stops, finally coming to rest. The 'buffer stop' rams were engaged, pushing the tanks imperceptibly into contact with the dock face; another attendant wound a hand wheel controlling a valve set in the dock gate and the space between the end gates quickly flooded.

With the hydraulics reconnected to the gate cylinders on the tank, both sets were raised. The horse, having plodded up the path round the site, led by a boy, was hitched up, the line tightening as it leaned into the collar, legs braced to 'start' the boat out of the Lift entrances. Drips from the raised gates would splatter on the side cloths. The boat was on its journey once more, out across the 'Twenty mile'.

Exit the museum and turn left from the incline top. Climb up the metal steps, cross the bridge and go to the observation platform to see the views, particularly on a fine day. Turn back and follow the towpath back to the car park. Alternatively, take the path around towards the top lock once more, back to the car park.



The top arm of the incline under construction c1899.
The canal bed is being lined with clay.