Information pack

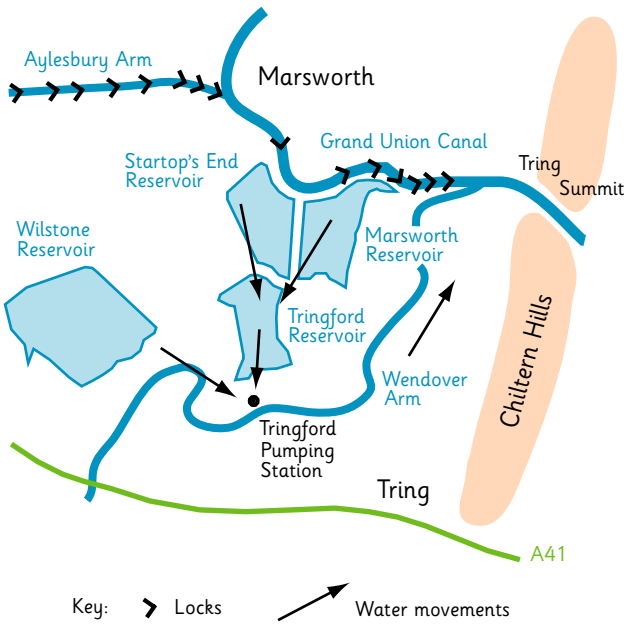
Tring Reservoirs - Grand Union Canal

wild over waterways

Did you know that, in the summer, 18 million litres of water are pumped into the Grand Union Canal every day from Tring Reservoirs? Read on to find out more...

Source sheet A

Tring Reservoirs - Grand Union Canal



Water is pumped up from Tring Reservoirs into the Wendover Arm to supply the highest part of the Grand Union Canal at Tring Summit.

What happens to the Grand Union Canal at Tring?

Near Tring, the Grand Union Canal crosses the Chiltern Hills where a deep valley forms a gap. Tring Summit is the highest point on the canal.

Why were Tring Reservoirs built?

All boats crossing Tring Summit go up the locks on one side and down the locks on the other. Every time a lock is used, water is released and flows downhill into a lower section of the canal. This means that water is lost from the highest stretch of the canal each time a boat crosses the summit.

To replace this water, the Wendover Arm of the canal was built to channel water from local springs into the highest section of the canal at Tring Summit.

Unfortunately, this supply couldn't keep pace with the rising demand for water at Tring Summit as the number of boats increased, so Tring Reservoirs were built to provide an additional water supply for the summit section of the canal.

Source sheet B

Tring Reservoirs - Grand Union Canal

These men are repairing Wilstone Reservoir in 1921.
Look at what they are wearing.
Do you think workmen would wear the same today?

How were the Tring Reservoirs built?

Large earth embankments were constructed to trap water flowing from springs and along local streams. The reservoirs were lined with clay to stop the water from sinking into the permeable chalk rock underneath.

When were the reservoirs constructed?

The earliest reservoir to be completed was Wilstone Reservoir. This was originally built in 1802, and was extended in 1836 and 1839.

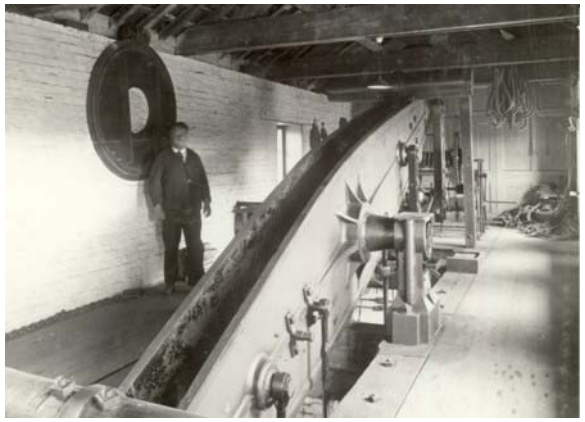
Marsworth Reservoir was built next, in 1806, while Startop's End Reservoir and Tringford Reservoir were built around the same time, between 1814 and 1818.

How much water is used today?

At the height of the holiday season when many boats cross the summit, around eighteen million litres (four million gallons) of water are pumped into the canal each day. Water is usually taken from Wilstone Reservoir first, with Startop's End used next as a backup.

Source sheet C

Tring Reservoirs - Grand Union Canal



Fred Mew in 1911 looking after the pumping machinery at Tringford Pumping Station.

How does water from the reservoirs reach the canal?

As water stored in the reservoirs is at a lower level than Tring Summit, the water has to be pumped up into the canal.

From the four reservoirs, water flows underground through a network of brick-lined tunnels to three deep wells situated directly underneath Tringford Pumping Station. Water from these wells is pumped up into the Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal. From here it flows by gravity into the Tring Summit section of the canal.

Tringford Pumping Station

The original pumping station, erected in 1817 to replace two earlier pumping stations, housed a Boulton and Watt steam engine. Additional diesel pumps were installed in 1911. In 1927, the original beam engine was replaced by electric pumps. As the new electric pumps were much smaller than the steam engine, the second storey of the building (together with the tall chimney) was demolished.

Source sheet D

Tring Reservoirs - Grand Union Canal

Fishing at Tring Reservoirs

A Swift and a Common Tern

How are Tring Reservoirs used today?

In addition to supplying water for the canal, the reservoirs have become a valuable fishery and an important haven for wildlife. Wilstone, Marsworth and Startop's End are fished for carp, roach, tench, pike and catfish, while Tringford Reservoir is managed as a trout fishery.

Why are there so many birds here?

It's rare to find natural lakes on the permeable chalk rocks in this area, so these man-made reservoirs attract birds from miles around. Migrating birds also stop off here to feed on the abundant insects, fish and plants. From the bird hides, you can spot different birds at different seasons.

In the spring, house martins, swallows and swifts swoop low over the water to catch insects, and arctic terns feed here on their journey north.

In the summer, reed buntings and reed warblers nest in the reeds.

During the autumn, wading birds such as sandpipers and dunlin search for insects in the mud, while grebes, bitterns and wildfowl including shovelers, teal, gadwall and goldeneye overwinter here.