

Along the Cotswold Canal

Audio Trail Script

Location:	Company of Proprietors
Music	Fade In
Music	Fade Out
Narrator	<p>This special clip is an introduction to the Company of Proprietors. The company owns the Stroudwater Navigation, which is the canal that today runs from the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal to Wallbridge in Stroud.</p> <p>The Company of Proprietors is thought to be the oldest surviving canal company in private ownership and was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1730. Neville Nelder, Chairman of the Company of Proprietors explains.</p>
Neville Nelder	<p><i>The Company of Proprietors of the Stroudwater Navigation has been known by that name since its origins back in 1730 when there were a number of influential businessmen both from Birmingham and locally who wanted to find a quick way to get goods to London.</i></p> <p><i>Originally they were called Commissioners and there were nine of them and then it transformed into a company, which is still limited to 10 directors.</i></p>
Narrator	<p>The Company of Proprietors leases the Stroudwater Navigation to Stroud Valleys Canal Company, which is made up of a number of partners led by Stroud District Council. This lease is dependent on the canal's restoration as Neville explains.</p>
Neville Nelder	<p><i>The full lease is actually a 999-year lease. The time period for the restoration is 30 years from the signing of the lease, which is 2005. What the lease requires is that it shall be completed for the whole length, so this isn't just the bits that's being restored but down to the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal by 2035. What we're targeting is about 2017.</i></p>
Narrator	<p>The Company of Proprietors are also committed to documenting archived records relating to the Stroudwater Navigation.</p>
Neville Nelder	<p><i>There are two things going on in parallel.</i></p> <p><i>First there is a smallish group of volunteers who are going through the archive which is held in Gloucestershire Records Office trying to catalogue the archive because at the moment its vast numbers of papers and tannish books and things like that...no record other than a simple list that says minutes lets say from 1800-1850 and that's it so you don't know what's in there. So any researcher has to wade interminably through loads of hand written minute paper to try and discover what is of interest and value. Now the volunteers are taking this step onwards to give some sort of headings of the subjects that people were considering at the time, say perhaps over a five-year period. Once its digitized and put on a web site your in a whole new ball game of opportunity for a researcher to find things but still the old handwritten papers which remain digitized handwritten papers so you can't convert it in modern technology terms to have it all at the touch of a button you still have to read it, its much more accessible and you'll know much more what its about.</i></p> <p><i>Now in parallel with that we need funding for this digitizing work this is quite a big business with 40,000 records you're going to spend significant money getting it up onto a web site.</i></p>
Narrator	<p>Although the company is now fully supportive of the restoration and committed to</p>

	the archiving of historic records, a clear out in the 1960s nearly resulted in the loss of valuable records.. Iris Capps is a member of the research group. Before her retirement she was a teacher at a school in Stroud and recalls a conversation with the history teacher one Monday morning.
Iris Capps	The history teacher was a man named John Strange. One morning when he leaped onto the coach to lead us of on a day trip to Somerset or somewhere, he was full of excitement because over the cause of the weekend of the previous weekend, he and others had discovered the achieve paper records of the Company of Proprietors were about to go onto a bonfire at the headquarters at Wallbridge and he and his friends had rescued the documents, as many as they could, and later those were transferred to Gloucestershire Achieves.
Narrator	Thanks to the enthusiasm and efforts of the directors, volunteers and of course many partners, led by Stroud District Council; today, everyone is working together for the restoration of the Cotswold Canals. The first phase of this huge project includes the restoration of the Stroudwater Navigation from Stonehouse to Brimscombe Port.
Music	Fade In
Music	Fade Out