

# Trent & Mersey Canal Fact File



The Trent & Mersey Canal connects the two mighty rivers after which it is named.



[www.wow4water.net](http://www.wow4water.net)

## Why was the Trent & Mersey Canal built?

The Trent & Mersey was part of James Brindley's amazing plan to join up the major rivers in England with Canals, creating a transport system like our modern motorway and train networks. This would mean cargo could be transported from inland factories to coastal ports.

Canals were a quicker way to move things. Before canals were built, everything had to be moved by horse and cart. This was slow and one horse could not pull very big weights.

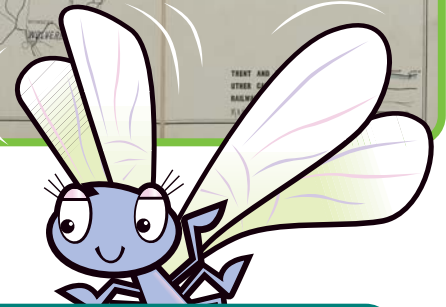


James Brindley



## Where is the Trent & Mersey?

The Trent & Mersey Canal runs from the River Trent near Shardlow to the Bridgewater Canal at Preston Brook. It links places such as Middlewich, Stoke-on-Trent and Burton-on-Trent. It joins the Coventry Canal at Fradley Junction and the Caldon Canal at Etruria (the highest point of the canal), and connects with the River Weaver at the Anderton Boat Lift.



## How long is the Trent & Mersey?

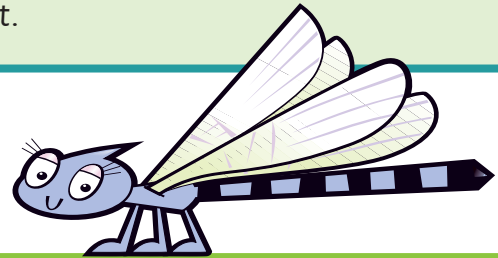
The Trent & Mersey is nearly 93 miles (150km) long, it has 76 locks and 4 tunnels.

## Did people live on their boats on the Trent and Mersey?

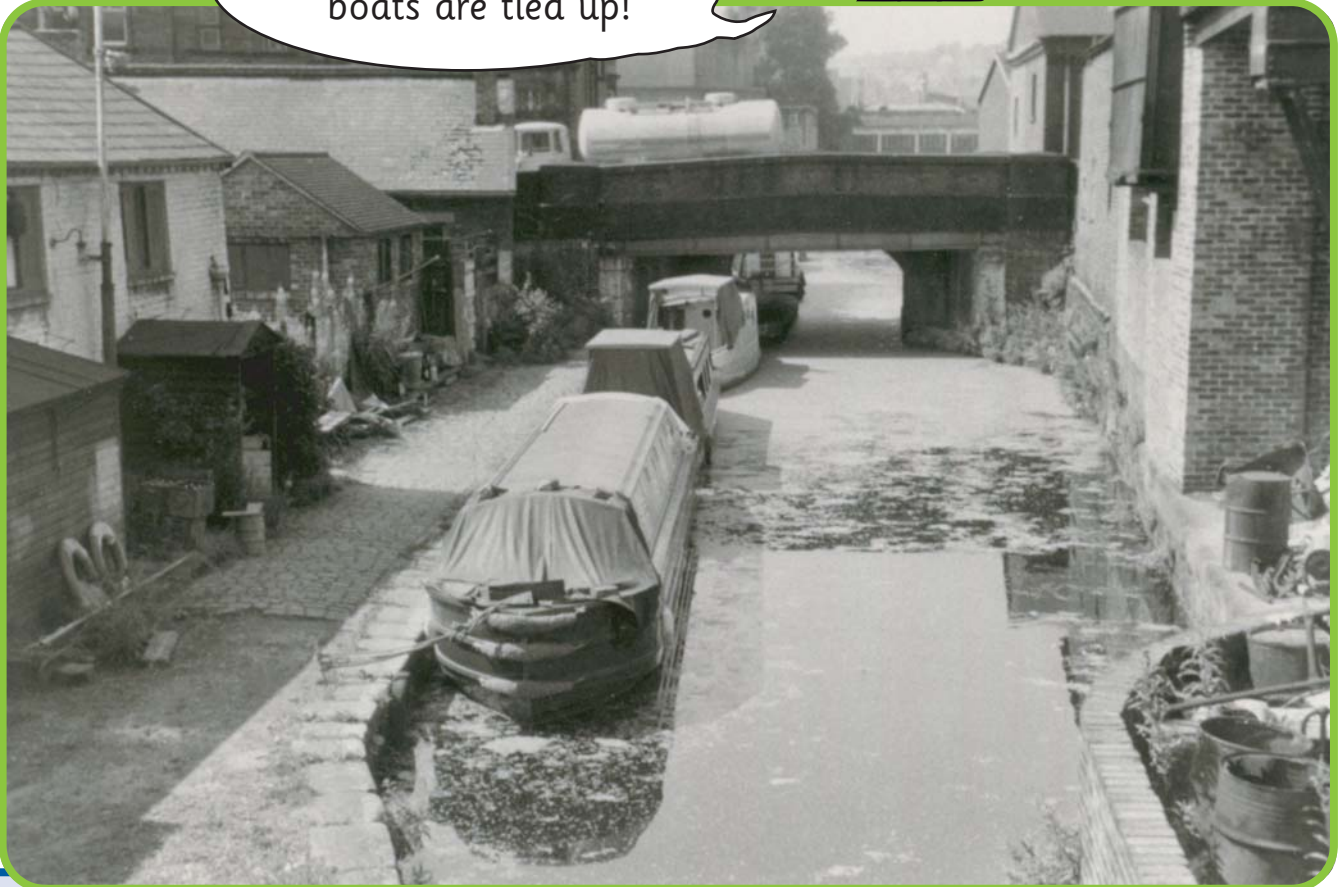
The northern and Stoke section of the Trent & Mersey Canal were different to some other canals, as many of the boats had all male crews. So because their families did not live on board the boats they lived instead in houses by the canal. As a result the houses often faced the canal.

Many boatmen on the Trent & Mersey Canal would not work on a Sunday so their boats would be tied up at their houses. After coming home from church they would clean their boats. The short journeys they did on their boats meant that the men could often visit home twice a week and even spent some weekends at home.

This remained the same for many years because there was plenty of work on the Trent & Mersey Canal and they could afford to keep their houses. In later years, men earned less and more families were forced to move on to the boats to save money. There was not much room on the boats but the women took pride in their floating homes and decorated the boats both inside and out.



It must be Sunday the boats are tied up!



Houses facing the canal on the Newcastle Arm.

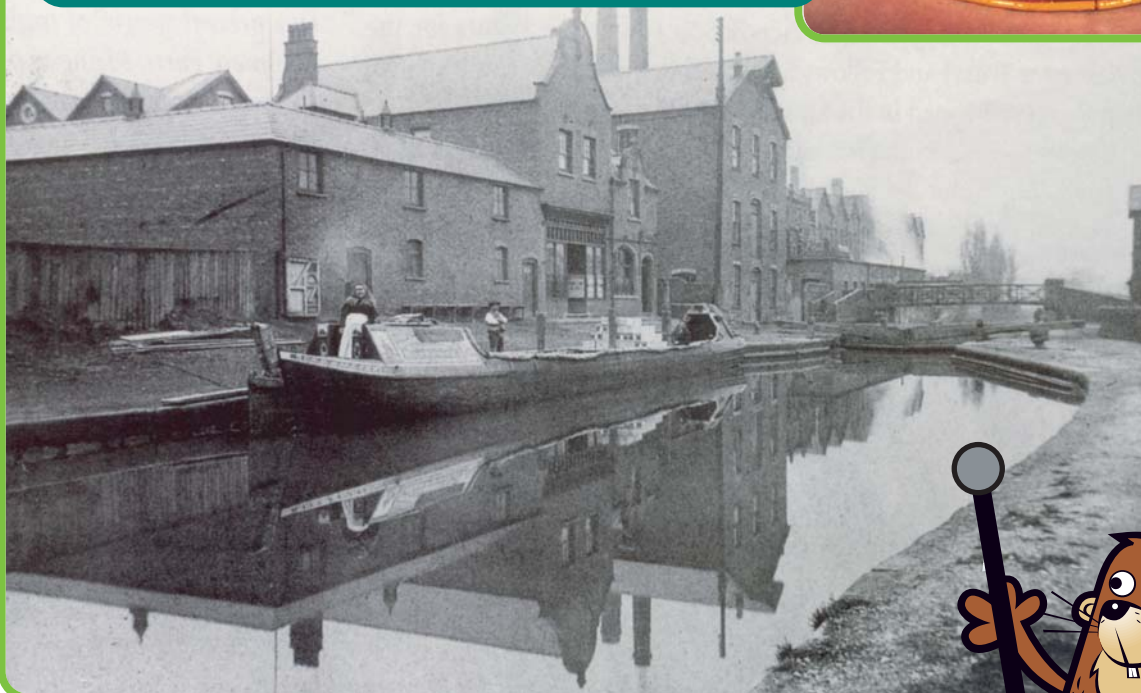
Always remember to stay **SAFE** near water - **Stay Away From the Edge**

## What are Knobsticks?

Knobstick is now a word often used to describe the style of 'Roses and Castles' painting used on the Trent & Mersey Canal.

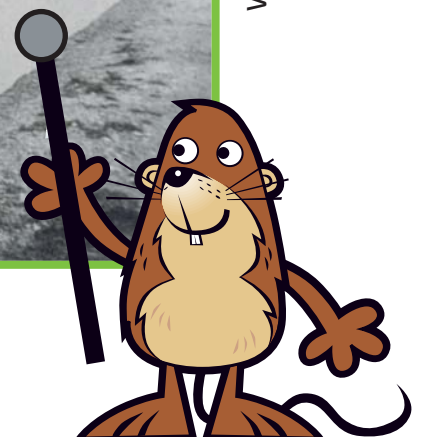
It is thought the word actually came from the Anderton Company. They operated on the Trent & Mersey Canal and with very tight time schedules to keep in order to make money. To ensure the boats kept up with the competition, they employed a marshal to patrol the towpath. He carried a stick with a silver top to show who he was, which became known as the 'Knobstick'.

Over time it became a word used for all the people that worked for the Anderton Company and eventually the boats and their decoration.



Boat moored at Middlewich

[www.wow4water.net](http://www.wow4water.net)



## Knobstick Boats

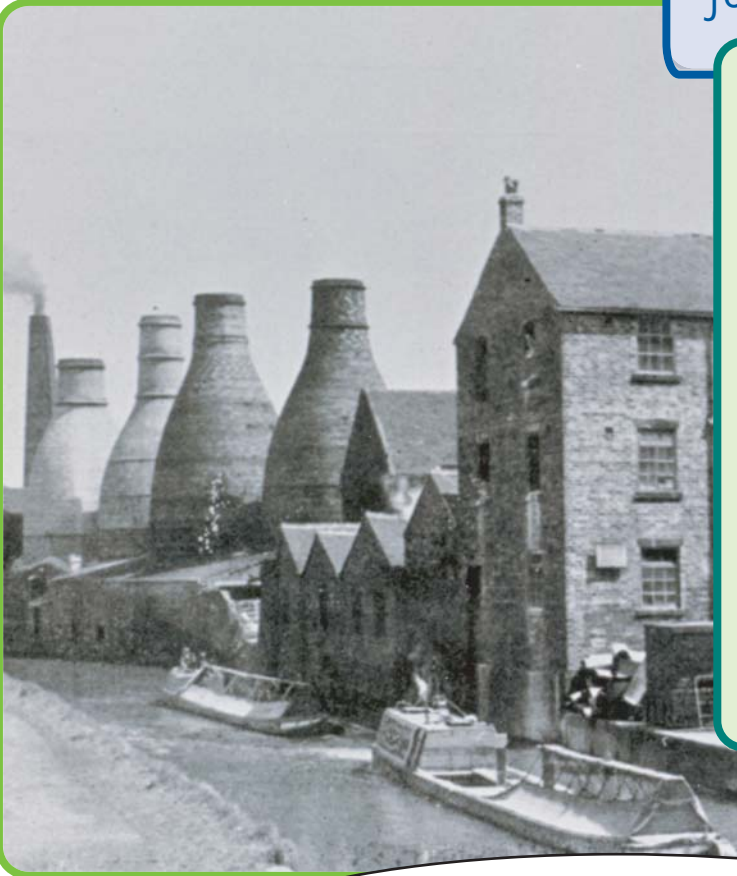
The boats working on the Trent & Mersey were built to suit the work they did and the way the canal was built. Knobstick boats were wooden, with added iron to make the bow stronger to help protect their cargo - particularly the pottery, in the locks. Their sides were more barrel shaped than boats from other areas. Knobstick boats also had a low cabin height which helped them to go through the Harecastle Tunnel more easily.

## The Potteries

The most important area the Trent & Mersey Canal travels through is the Potteries, an area in North Staffordshire where many pottery factories were located. Branches of canal were added to link existing factories, who didn't want to move their businesses closer to the canal. New factories built after the canal opened were usually placed next to the canal.

### Why was the canal good for the Potteries?

The canal was good for the Potteries because it meant they could transport their materials and finished products more easily. Before the canal was built pottery had to be carried like other things, by horse and cart. This was slow and expensive because the roads were so bumpy, fragile pottery was often broken. Boats could carry more pottery and gave it a smoother ride. It was such a good way to transport pottery that it continued to travel this way long after many other businesses had started using trains and lorries.



Some boaters broke the rules and travelled through the night, working their horses hard, to get there quicker.

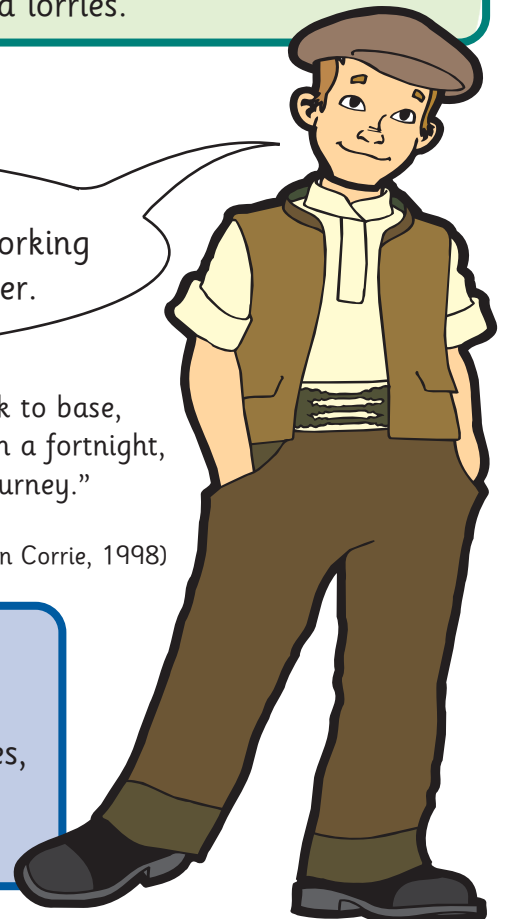
### Fascinating Facts

“You didn't get paid until you got back to base, and no matter how long it took you, even a fortnight, you'd only get paid for that one journey.”

Harry Bentley

(From: Tales From the Old Inland Waterway, Euan Corrie, 1998)

The pottery was carried in crates, packed with straw to protect it. The crates were very light in weight and even when fully loaded, a boat could only carry about 5 tonnes, which was about a 1/4 of the weight of other cargos. This meant boats could travel faster.

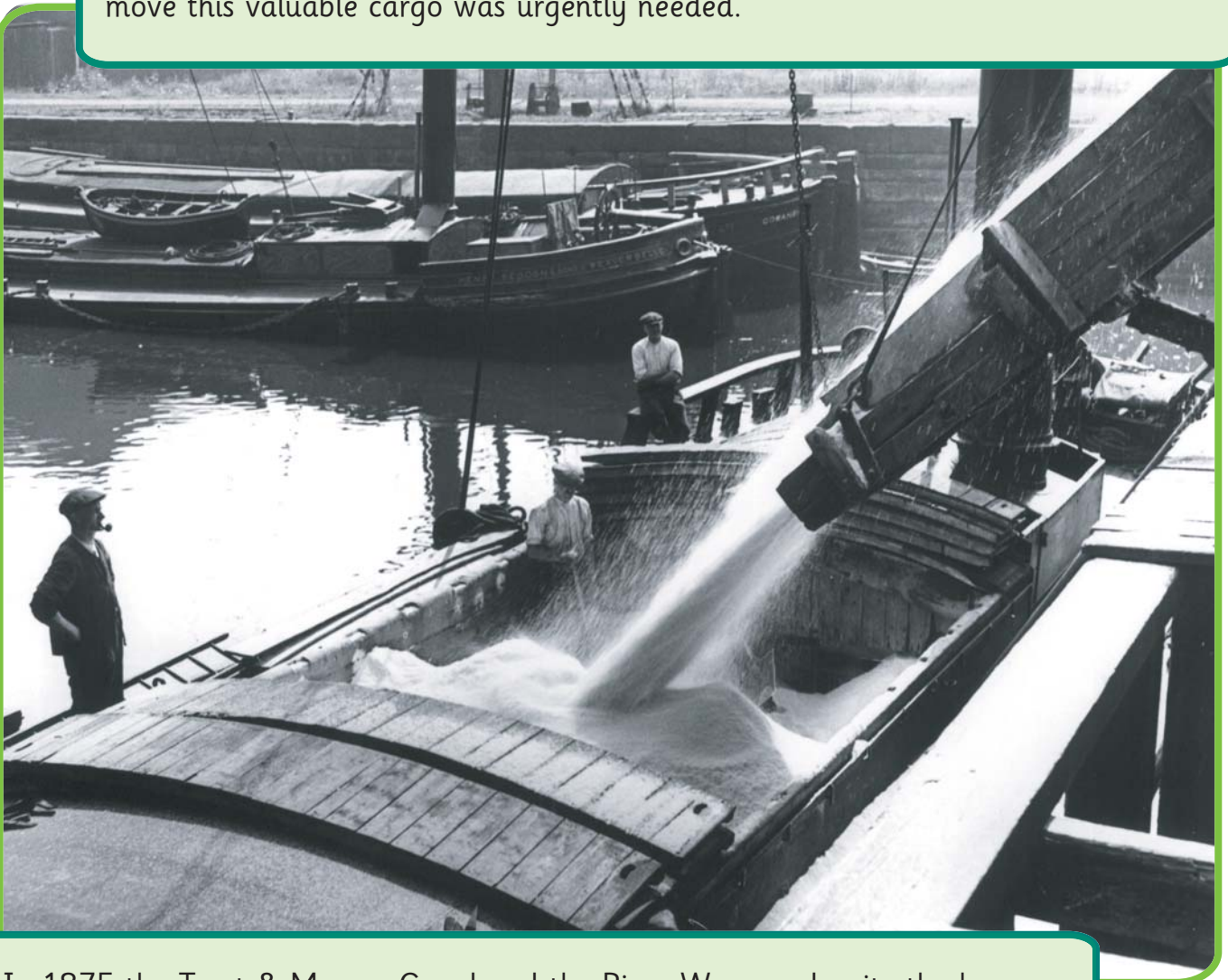


## Salt

Salt was another important cargo carried on the Trent & Mersey Canal. Salt was produced in Cheshire and Staffordshire and then transported along the canal.

As the River Weaver was an important navigation for the transport of salt, many people were worried that the Trent & Mersey Canal would take business away from the Weaver.

However, as the salt works were above the River Weaver, the salt had to be carried down to the River Weaver by pack horse or salt chute. A quicker way to move this valuable cargo was urgently needed.



In 1875 the Trent & Mersey Canal and the River Weaver, despite the huge 25 metre drop between the two, thanks to the Anderton Boat Lift, built by engineer Edwin Clark.

The Trent & Mersey became an important part of salt production in Cheshire. Salt was also produced in Staffordshire, in places such as the Shirleywich Salt Works near Stafford. All the salt they produced at the works was transported by the Trent & Mersey Canal.

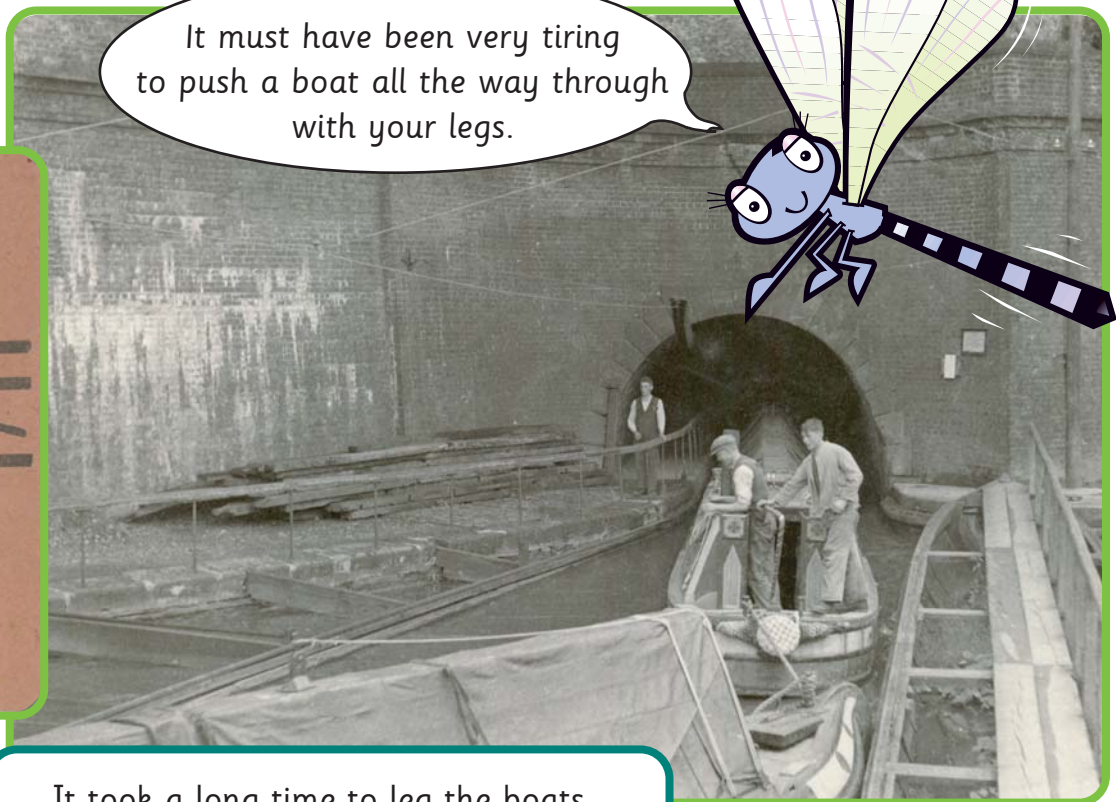
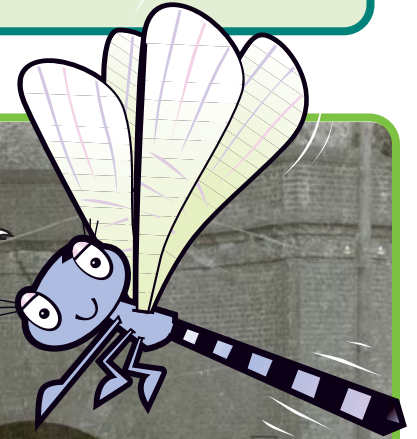
Always remember to stay **SAFE** near water - **Stay Away From the Edge**

## Harecastle Tunnel

The Harecastle Tunnel is built under Harecastle Hill, near Kidsgrove. In those days tunnels were difficult and expensive to build.

The tunnel took nearly 11 years to build - much longer than expected. It is very narrow and has no towpath which meant that horses could not pull the boats through. So the boatmen had to leg their boats through the tunnel by lying on their backs on a board and pushing against the narrow walls or roof of the tunnel.

It must have been very tiring to push a boat all the way through with your legs.



**Strange  
but True**

It took a long time to leg the boats through the tunnel which caused queues of boats. So despite the cost and difficulty a second tunnel was built and opened in 1827. The new tunnel had a towpath running through it, allowing the horses pull the boats through more quickly.

**Fascinating  
Facts**

In 1914 electrical tug boats were brought in to pull boats through the tunnel. By 1915 they were pulling 200 boats a day through the tunnel.

“When we came to the Harecastle Tunnel the tug would take the boat through and it was mostly the children that took the horse over the path over the top.”

Harry & Sarah Bentley

(From: Tales From the Old Inland Waterways, Euan Corrie, 1998)

Always remember to stay **SAFE** near water - **Stay Away From the Edge**

## Linking up with the River Trent

# Fascinating Facts

Shardlow is almost at the end of the Trent & Mersey Canal. It was used as a port on the River Trent before the canal was built and provided an excellent location. Goods could be transferred between the canal narrow boats to the broad river boats and moved further around the country.

Until 1893 the canal was also used to transport local people to church on Sundays.



Local landowners were not in favour of the canal being built. They already charged people a lot of money to use the river which passed through their land. They were worried their business would move on to the canal, which meant they would lose money. In fact they were so angry that guards had to be posted to keep the peace and ensure the building of the canal went smoothly.



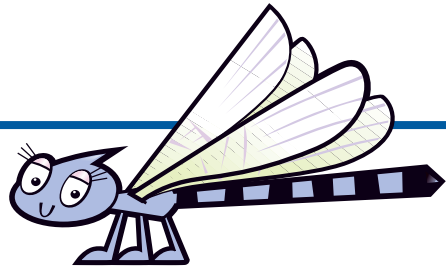
www.wow4water.net

In Shardlow today you can still see evidence of the once busy port. There are lots of warehouses, many included in the 52 protected buildings (ones that can't be changed or knocked down), which is a large number of listed buildings for such a small place.

The number of people in the town grew very quickly after 1770 once the canal was opened and new businesses appeared. Stables were needed for the horses that pulled the boats, along with pubs for the workers to refresh themselves. Boat builders, ropewalks (factories making ropes used by the boats), workshops and offices were also built.

Many different types of cargo were brought through the port and stored in the warehouses. As the canal became less used the warehouses took on new uses such as shops, pubs and a post office.

## Fascinating Facts



The canal cost £300,000 to build which is over £27 million in today's money.

It was used for carrying cargo well into the 1960s.

James Brindley died in 1772, five years before the Trent & Mersey Canal was completed.

Longport was going to be the end of the canal.

www.wow4water.net

## Strange but True

Saltersford Tunnel near Barnton is thought to be one of the most haunted tunnels on the canal system.

**The Trent & Mersey was originally known as the Grand Trunk.**

There are many rumours of strange happenings in the Harecastle Tunnel. The ghost of a headless woman is said by some to haunt the tunnel, while others report a strange white mist surrounding boats as they travel through on their long dark journey - Do you dare to find out if it's true?!

Places to visit on the Trent & Mersey Canal:

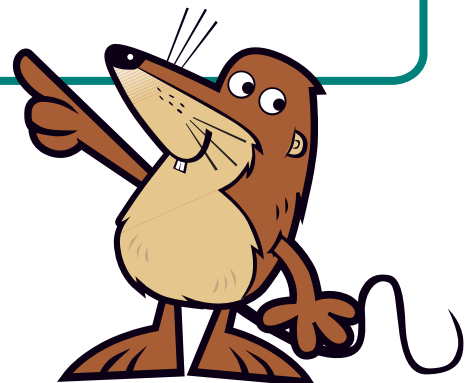
**Anderton Boat Lift**

**Westport Lake**

**Fradley Junction**

**Shardlow**

Find more about other great places to visit at [www.waterscape.com](http://www.waterscape.com) or [www.wow4water.net](http://www.wow4water.net)



Always remember to stay **SAFE** near water - **Stay Away From the Edge**