

Time Line

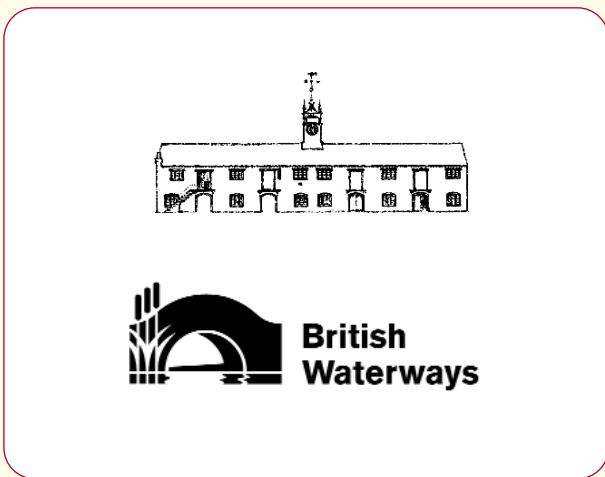
- 1766** Brindley surveys area
- 1767** Royal assent received to build canal
- 1770** First Canal Basin opened
- 1771** Canal completed to Great Haywood
- 1772** James Brindley dies
- 1781** Stourport narrow boat locks opened. Clock Basin opened
- 1806** Engine house and basin commissioned and Lichfield Basin opened
- 1812** Cheapside Basin opens. A clock is constructed on the now Clock Warehouse
- 1862** Railway linked to Hartlebury canal trade starts to decline
- 1866** Cheapside Basin is filled in for Stourport Gas Works
- 1927** Coal Fired Power Station opened by PM Stanley Baldwin
- 1949** Coal from Cannock supplies cease
- 1950** Lichfield Basin filled in
- 1963** British Waterways formed
- 2005** £1.7m Heritage Lottery Funding granted
- 2007** Lichfield Basin partly re-opened
- 2008** Basins Restoration completed

Unlocking Stourport Canal Basins

This leaflet has been produced by British Waterways in partnership with Stourport Civic Society as part of the "Unlocking Stourport's Past" project.

After 1772 when the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal was opened, Stourport grew very rapidly from the small village of Lower Mitton to become a thriving canal town. This leaflet gives a brief insight into the people, the buildings, the structures, the cultures and interesting facts behind the basins and its construction.

Information has been researched and collated by a team of volunteer researchers connected to the Stourport Canal Basins Restoration project who include Joy Rooney, Beverley Saunders, Sally Eastwood and Philip Powell.



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Unlocking Stourport's Canal Basins



www.unlocking-stourports-past.co.uk

Company directors sat facing inwards with the large cut-glass windows behind as they were wined and dined on their horse drawn tour of the waterway. As the canal trade slowed Lady Hatherton fell into disuse in the 1930s and, in the 1960s, was condemned to be burned. Fortunately she was saved by a boat enthusiast and rebuilt at the Allen Boatyard in Oldbury as a pleasure craft.

The Lady Hatherton



The Lady Hatherton

The basins and canals of Stourport were a showpiece and inspected regularly by the canal company and local dignitaries. To aid and enhance inspections the wooden hulled 70 foot narrow inspection launch 'Lady Hatherton' was built in 1898. This high quality boat had no expense spared in its construction with the highest quality materials and craftsmanship used. The panelled cabin housed mahogany seating and wine bins with a full length mahogany table running down the centre.

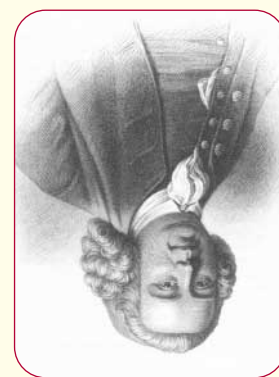
Living alongside their work, often in squalid shelters, these men were employed to dig, tunnel, line the canal with clay to seal it and to construct embankments and locks. The navvies were rough men with low status and poor or no education who moved in large groups following the labouring jobs across the country. Many came from Ireland and Scotland, but a local workforce of farm labourers was common, although dependant on the seasons. Often shunned by locals, these weather-beaten

The Navvies

In 1768 Brindley's canal was nearing the river Severn and, although nearly put off by flooding, he had the land by the rivers Severn and Stour at Mitton surveyed. The area was found to be large and high enough to accommodate the basins and river locks. The canal was able to follow the natural valley carved by the River Stour and this is why Stourport rather than Bewdley was chosen as the junction with the River Severn. Raw materials such as Staffordshire coal, timber from the Wyre Forest and iron from the Forest of Dean could now be transported more easily to the industrial midlands while at the same time manufactured goods from the Black Country could be sent via Stourport to Bristol for export overseas. The links with other canals and rivers transported to the Black Country and beyond. Brindley's great reputation led him to survey a significant number of canals, many of which were built after he died in 1772 from diabetes and, many say, overwork.

Born into a Derbyshire farming family in 1716 James Brindley was a great problem solver with strong mechanical instincts. Taught to read and write by his mother, he became a millwright's apprentice at 17 and proved to be a talented engineer working on watermills, steam engines and windmills. The 46 miles of The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, built following the natural land contours, was part of the 'Grand Cross' which was his project to link the Mersey, Trent, Severn and Thames. It took 6 years to build and contains 43 locks.

James Brindley



James Brindley

At the start of the industrial revolution Bewdley was the furthest northern navigable point of the River Severn. Boats used to pass Lower Mitton (later to become Stourport) on their way up the Severn to distribute goods to and from the Black Country and beyond by pack horse or carts. Transport via horse and carts was limited as they could only carry small loads whereas canal boats were able to carry up to 35 tons at a time. Approval was passed by an act of parliament in 1766 for the Canal Company to build a canal linking the River Severn with the Trent and Mersey. James Brindley was the engineer commissioned to build the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal.

The Severn and The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal

Engine House and Crown / Engine Basin

The Engine House and Basin acted as the heart of the basin system. It pumped water back in from the river as the basins lost 100,000 gallons when a canal boat moved to or from the river through the locks. The Boulton and Watt steam engine pumped 2040 Litres (448 gallons) from the Severn at each stroke (in total 160,000 gallons or 704,000 litres an hour). It was removed for scrap iron during the First World War around 1914.



Engine House, right of centre of photograph. Picture taken from what is now the Riverside Amusements Car Park.

The three storey white Engine House looks completely different now from how it looked 200 years ago. It then had exposed brickwork and a tall chimney alongside. From 1800 there was increased competition from the railways so the locks were in operation 24 hours a day. The Crown Basin was also used as a boat yard, which is where the car park and amusement arcade now stand. Alongside the Engine House one can still see the circular weir, a structure unique to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal.

Locks



View from Lower Severn Bridge up narrow locks towards bridge on Engine Lane.

To move boats up and down hill, to and from the Severn and Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, a distance of more than 36 feet, sets of locks were built. The Upper and Lower Basins were linked by a wide barge lock (with a capacity of 110,000 gallons) together with another barge lock giving access to the Severn. As traffic increased more basins were built with two sets of two rise staircase locks. The bottom gates of the lock are the top gate of the lock below. Today, the Basin is entered through the York Street narrow lock, all the other locks are still in place.

Stables

A chaise house of stables, with an outside staircase, was built at the same time as the Tontine Hotel, presumably to accommodate visitors' horses. Its upper storey is incorporated into No 2 Severnside. This loft was used for sail making for a number of years. The floor was paved with setts, cambered to a near central gutter which drained to the far end into a culvert that ran down to the river. There was a forge at the back through a wide door from the stables to the yard and a manure pit, which could be reached via the second door along Severnside.

Stables (continued)



A look inside the stables

Bridges

The purpose of the bridges at Stourport Basin is to be able to cross the locks at their entrance and exits. The barge locks can be crossed by means of railings over the lock, balance beams. Both the upper and lower narrow locks have brick bridges, the handmade brickwork of which is integrated with the adjacent lock walls. Engine Basin has a disused steel swing-bridge at its entrance. There is a timber and steel swing-bridge with concrete and modern brick abutments in the Lower Basin.



View under the Old Mart Lane Bridge looking west towards the clock Warehouse.

An interesting cast iron footbridge with a lower parapet in a saltire cross design stands over the lower narrow lock.

The Warehouses



The Shed, to the south of the main Upper Basin. Clock Warehouse in the distance.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, Upper Basin had at least seven warehouses built around it, serving the whole basin complex. The Long Warehouse once stood on the east side of the Upper Basin. The Shed once stood at the rear of the Tontine and was demolished around the same time as the Long Warehouse in the 1950's. Today three warehouses remain. These are Clock Warehouse, the Mart Lane Warehouse and The Iron Warehouse (The Wharf). The Iron Warehouse is the earliest, dating from 1771. Its North West and South East corners are curved to enable tow ropes to pass. The Clock Warehouse dates from the late eighteenth century, but its timber clock tower was added in 1812. The surviving Mart Lane Warehouse was built for the Shropshire Union Canal Company and came under railway ownership later. There were five cranes of differing designs around the Upper Basin. Their purpose was to move goods and materials on and off boats.

Mart Lane

Mart Lane is so named because markets were held there up until 1833. The cottages at the north end of the street were built by the Canal Company for employees circa 1770. Later on No.1 was Bowen's Bakery and No.2 was Mrs Jones' Sweet Shop.



View up Mart Lane from the top of Severnside. The curved building is the shed. The old bridge over the link to the Basin can be seen in the background.

Opposite was a warehouse owned by the Canal Company which is now a Chandlers. During the late 19th Century there were a blacksmiths, a corn dealers, a savings bank and a boat builder's yard in the street. Vinegar was loaded in Mart Lane from the brewery in Cheapside.



The Long Warehouse, built directly onto the waterway wall, runs parallel to Mart Lane.

The Tontine



An idyllic scene on the river Severn with the Tontine Hotel behind.

The Tontine was originally The Stourport Inn and Areley Inn and later it became the Tontine Hotel. It was built in 1773 at the same time as the canal and remains to this day the most impressive Georgian building in the town.

The hotel was arranged in an E shape with cottages on either side. It was used by the Canal Company as its unofficial business centre. The main vestibule opened onto a grand staircase, which led up to a ballroom on the first floor and at least nine bedrooms on the upper floors. Visiting gentry and merchants enjoyed sumptuous evenings, dining and dancing beneath candlelit chandeliers.

The terraced gardens were always popular during the summer with visitors enjoying the riverside location. By 1880 as canal use diminished with the coming of the railways it became an inn and flats.

*A Tontine was an early form of life insurance whereby only the last surviving member in a group of people who had taken out a policy would get the payout!