

# 25. THE TRENT AND MERSEY CANAL

James Brindley, the engineer of the Trent and Mersey Canal, was a giant of the canal age. He had a vision of connecting the four main rivers of England (Trent, Mersey, Severn and Thames) in an ambitious scheme known as the Grand Cross. This canal was part of that scheme and was also known as the Grand Trunk canal.



James Brindley, the great canal engineer. The first of his towering achievements to fire the imagination of the age was his aqueduct near Manchester, which carried a canal 'as high as the tree tops' over the River Irwell.  
Image reproduced courtesy of the Institution of Civil Engineers

Josiah Wedgwood, the pottery designer and manufacturer based in Stoke-on-Trent, saw how a canal could be a vital route for the transport of his wares. Canals offered a smooth ride for his pottery, which could otherwise be easily broken. He was present at the momentous meeting at Wolsley Bridge, just outside Rugeley, where the canal was planned in 1765. It was opened fully in 1777.

The canal helped to raise the profile of Rugeley and greatly benefited the trades and industries of the town. It had cost approximately £300,000 to build (equivalent to over 27 million pounds today) but was nevertheless a good investment, as carriage costs were reduced by over two thirds. It cost nine shillings (45p) to transport a ton by road and two shillings and sixpence (12.5p) by canal.



A boatman and his family on the Trent and Mersey Canal at Rugeley, c1890-1900. Horses were used to draw the narrowboats, and could transport up to one hundred times more weight on water than on land.  
Image courtesy of Staffordshire Arts & Museum Service.



Image courtesy of Staffordshire Arts & Museum Service

### Spot the differences

These two photographs, taken one hundred years apart, show the same spot on the canal, at Trent Lane about four miles from Great Haywood. The lock-keeper's house, seen in the earlier photograph, still stands. The narrowboats seen on the canal now are more likely to be pleasure boats than the industrial transporters of a hundred years ago.



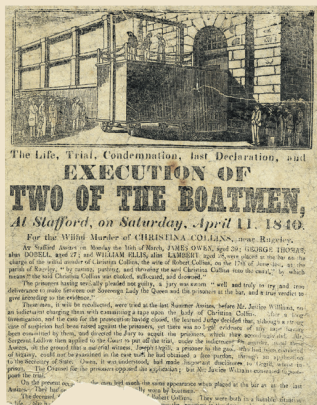
2008

The junction of the Trent and Mersey Canal and the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at Great Haywood. Construction of both canals was granted by Act of Parliament on the same day.



### The murder of Christina Collins

On 15 June, 1839, Christina Collins began her journey as a passenger on a freight-carrying narrowboat from Liverpool. Her intended destination was London, where her husband had gone to look for work. She never got there. Her body was found in the canal at Brindley Bank near Rugeley aqueduct, about a mile from here. Two of the crew of boatmen with whom she had shared her journey were later convicted of her murder. The story was used by the author of the Inspector Morse novels, Colin Dexter, in 'The Wench is Dead'.



Nearly 10,000 people attended the hanging of James Owen and George Thomas in Stafford for the murder of Christina Collins. This broadsheet shows the portable gallows that was wheeled out of the gaol gatehouse into Gaol Road to enable the public to view the hanging.



These steps, known locally as the Bloody Steps, are at Brindley Bank, just outside Rugeley. It was here that Christina Collins' body was carried after being found in the canal. Some said that her blood had dripped on the steps and stained them, giving rise to the local legend: the 'Bloody Steps'.

### EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

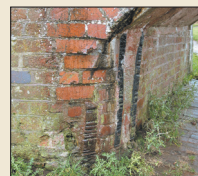
#### Canal furniture

Canals are engineering on a grand scale. For the Industrial Revolution to flourish a transport system was needed to carry heavy, as well as fragile, goods and raw materials around the country. Canals were the 18th-century equivalent of today's rail and road network.

You can find clues to the past along any canal, and you can see how canals continue to work today.



Canal bridges are numbered. This helped the narrowboat families know where they were.



On many old canal bridges you can see where ropes drawn by horses rubbed against bricks and wore grooves in iron bars.



Mile posts indicate the distance to well known places. This post tells us that Sharrow Brook is 34 miles away, and Preston Brook is 58 miles away. It was installed in 1977 by the Trent and Mersey Canal Society and recreates the traditional style of the past.



These planks kept in a shelter are used to seal a lock when maintenance work is done. They slot into the notches you can find on canal bank stonework.



Sturdy paddle-gears are used to control the flow of water in and out of locks.



A sluice allows water to flow out of the canal. This sluice operating gear is near Rugeley.

### CANNOCK CHASE HERITAGE TRAIL

Cannock Chase Heritage Trail is a 10-mile route linking the towns of Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley. It passes through, or close to sites of historic or environmental interest, with interpretation boards along the way that tell the story of each location. Intended to support a healthy lifestyle, the trail is a facility for walkers and cyclists, offering walks and off-road cycle routes. The trail was initially funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and several project partners in 2008.

The trail passes close to wildlife sites of international importance. Cycle wheels, horse hooves, and feet, can severely damage these sites, and out of control dogs disturb wildlife. Please help us to protect wildlife by remaining on designated routes and by keeping dogs under close control.

Remember to follow the Cannock Chase Code.



Scan the QR code to download a map of the Cannock Chase Heritage Trail



Take on the  
**Cannock Chase Heritage Trail Challenge**  
with the **Cannock Chase Can App!**

**Cannock Chase Can** is an exciting health and wellbeing programme to help you make healthier lifestyle choices. It hosts a variety of wellness challenges which can be undertaken as an individual, group or family. Here's how you can get involved...

Download the App for **FREE** today by visiting **Google Play** and the **App Store** and searching for '**Cannock Chase Can**'.



Scan the QR codes on each interpretation board to bring to life elements of the Trail. Content has been created by local schoolchildren alongside professional artists and The Birmingham Repertory Theatre.



Collect all the QR codes for each themed trail to complete the challenge and gain points and rewards for your efforts.