

The Shrewsbury Canal



1.

By late 18th Century, Shrewsbury was one of the 50 largest towns in England.

Between 1750 - 1800, 2 new inns, 2 bridges across the River Severn, new houses and a new shire hall were all built.

The population was growing and as Shrewsbury was a larger town than any in Wales, many Welsh people were moving into the county town especially in the winter months.

2. Transport

Coal was brought from Coalbrookdale Coalfield by road - too far from the river. Many coalfields around Oakengates.



As the town grew, so did the demand for goods such as coal and timber.

New shops also transported their goods by road - roads were still developing and they could not sustain the increased pressure so an alternative means of transport was required.

The Severn was already busy transporting bulky items.

An act of parliament was required to authorise the building of a canal.

3. 2 canals in Shropshire were given the go ahead by parliament in 1793 but only the Shrewsbury Canal was built.



The building of the Canal

Important local industrialists promoted building the canal along with landowners such as Lord Berwick of Attingham Park, John Corbett of Sundorne Castle and John Charlton of Apley Castle.

The proposed route went from Trench (north of present day Telford) to Shrewsbury but there was no connection to national waterways system.

The Flax mill was being built at the same time as the canal and several of the mill investors were also investors of the canal. Therefore, the canal route was altered to bring it alongside the mill thus bringing coal and water for the steam engines

4.



5.



6. What would be used on the canal



Shrewsbury canal was a tub boat canal to carry coal, iron and clay - pulled in trains by horses.

The boats were originally made from wood.

20' long, 6' 4" wide, square ended and flat bottomed for use on inclined planes.

Wharves would be built along the canal route to unload goods and coal.

The canal was constructed between 1793 to 1797. Josiah Clowes was the engineer but he died in 1795 so Thomas Telford took over the unfinished project. At the time, Telford was the Surveyor of Public Works for Shropshire.



7.

The route would be 17 miles long from Wombridge Canal to Shrewsbury. A section of Wombridge Canal was bought for £840 to gain access to Donnington Wood.

The main features of the canal were an Inclined Plane, large reservoir at Trench, 11 guillotine locks, aqueducts across the Rivers Tern and Roden and a tunnel at Berwick.

These were engineering difficulties but there were also human difficulties to overcome. Lord Berwick decided the position of the towpath needed to be changed to the opposite side to his Attingham home as he didn't want people walking too close to his property.

8. A Journey along the canal



In the east was Bullock's Mill or Donnington Wood Mill.

It was a steam mill built in 1818 and the canal took grain there until 1921 (when Trench IP closed.)

The mill has now been converted into apartments.

9. Trench Inclined Plane



223 yards, descended 75', gradient 1 in 9. Reservoir top right. Chimneys in distance

Last canal incline to operate in Britain. Closed 1921.



10.

Steam engine installed to haul boats over sill.

Heavy boats going down pulled empty boats up.

11.



Cast iron water trough to take water to reservoir.

Note the buildings on left are Shropshire Arms pub also known as the Blue Pig - still there today.



12.



Tub boat in the cradle ready to go up

13. Trench Lock



1st of 11 locks

Could take 4 tub boats.

Guillotine gate at lower end and in middle - raised and lowered by counterweight bricks and rubble in box later cast iron into well.

Gate in middle to accommodate less boats (2 boats)



14.

Top had mitred gate for safety reasons Invented by Leonardo da Vinci

15. Hadley Park Lock



16.

4th lock. Still has the guillotine in place. Grade II listed. Currently being renovated by Telford & Wrekin Industrial Heritage £160,000

Lock is uncommon because built from timber whereas later ones are cast iron.

17. Eyton Lock



10th lock. Widened to 7' 4" in 1835 when the Newport branch was built connecting the Shrewsbury Canal to the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal (eventually renamed the Shropshire Union Canal) thus connecting to national waterways system.

18. Eyton bridge.



Cantilever bridge at road level



19.

Lock keeper's cottage in photo can still be seen today. Note only one original window remains.

20. Longdon-on-Tern Aqueduct



Original brick and stone aqueduct washed away in 1795 floods.



21.

Design sketch of Telford's aqueduct made of cast iron.



22.

1st major cast iron aqueduct to be built in this country.

23. Roden Aqueduct



There was another aqueduct over the River Roden which was demolished in 1971

24. Berwick Tunnel



25.

970 yards long, 10 feet wide.

Had unusual wooden towpath due to too long a distance to leg.
Thoughtful!

Towpath removed 1819 probably due to high maintenance.

Legging a cheaper option.

Blocked up late 1960s.

1950 - John Rogers from Preston Lane (above tunnel) remembers older lads getting a crashed Spitfire petrol tank and cutting the top off to use as a boat to paddle through tunnel.

Bike lamp on front Part of roof collapsed in middle.

Boat drifted in to tunnel and never seen again!

26. Ditherington Flax Mill



Canal on right side and kids in picture as always!

27.



28. Shrewsbury Canal Basin



29.

1832 map - before railways

Note prison

30. Butter Market

Butter market built 1835 after standard narrow boat was able to transport milk and dairy goods from butter market to national canal network.



Completion

Canal completed February 1797

Total cost just less than £65,000

People had thought it would mean cheaper coal - but that didn't happen

31. Decline of Canals



Trains took over transportation of trade - led to decline of canals.

London & North Western Railway bought 3 canals in Shropshire, including Shrewsbury Canal, - gradually closed sections of it.

Final section Shrewsbury to Shropshire Union Canal officially abandoned 1944.

32. The Final Fling



Late 1965 Malcolm Edwards, the last Lengthsman, in his 24' maintenance boat, which he lived on.

Just after coming through the tunnel. Note his moped on the boat!

Lengthsman? From Tudor times. Someone who kept a length of road neat!

33. The Future



2000 - "[Shrewsbury & Newport Canal Trust](https://sncanal.org.uk/)" (https://sncanal.org.uk) set up to reopen this the canal.

2012 - "[Shrewsbury Old Canal Group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/shrewsburyoldcanalgroup)" on Facebook

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- Volunteers always wanted working on the Shrewsbury end of canal.

Bibliography

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Shrewsbury & Newport Canal Trust - <https://sncanal.org.uk/>
[Shrewsbury Old Canal Group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/shrewsburyoldcanalgroup) (Facebook)