



Canal &
River Trust

National
Waterways
Museum
Ellesmere Port

Researching your waterway family history



canalrivertrust.org.uk/archive

DOCKS & INLAND WATERWAYS EXECUTIVE

NORTH WESTERN DIVISION.

DIVISIONAL TRAFFIC OFFICE,
LIVERPOOL.

BOATMEN WANTED

To work British Waterways
between the Midlands and
the Mersey Ports.

Good Pay!
A Floating Home!
Healthy Outdoor Life!

APPLY TO:—

S. LOMAS,

Toll Office,

Autherley Junction.

OR

E. R. TART,

Albion Wharf,

Shipton Street,

Wolverhampton.

C. S. & B. CO.
Divisional Traffic Office,
Liverpool.

The Liverpool Printing and Publishing Co., Ltd., 25, Market Street, Liverpool.

44/77/24

Introduction

Ever taken a walk along a canal and wondered what it was like a hundred years ago? Perhaps you have an ancestor who lived or worked on the canals?



In today's changing world it's hard to imagine what life was like then, what they did and how they earned a living.

Discovering your waterways' history might be easier than you think. The Canal & River Trust's Waterways Archive holds a wide and fascinating range of documents, plans and images relating to the history of Britain's inland waterways. Along with other archival sources (some referred to in this book) the Waterways Archive is an essential research tool – and one that could help you unlock your own waterway family story.

There are many reasons why people research their family history; curiosity about their ancestors, a desire to discover something about themselves or just a fascination with the past. At the Waterways Archive you can delve into the past for all these reasons and explore what life was like by water.

This booklet provides you with an introduction – a starting point for your journey of discovery... and if you get stuck there is always our Archivists and archive volunteers you can turn to help you on your way. Happy exploring!

First steps

So, you want to find out more about your boat family history?

The census will usually give you the name of the boat the family were working and its location at the date of the census.



The national censuses for 1841 to 1911 are now available on-line (for example see findmypast.co.uk) and county record offices usually hold film or microfiche copies for each year from 1841 to 1901. Boat families are usually listed at the end of each enumeration district.

With both parish and census records, it is worth bearing in mind that boat families were not tied to one location. In many cases their boat was also their house and someone could have been born, married and buried in three different towns and their children born in yet another county.

Pricks No.	Date	Owner	Name	Trade	Residence	Trade	County
1836	18	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1837	19	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1838	20	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1839	21	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1840	22	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1841	23	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1842	24	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1843	25	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1844	26	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1845	27	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1846	28	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1847	29	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1848	30	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1849	31	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1850	32	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1851	33	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1852	34	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1853	35	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1854	36	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1855	37	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1856	38	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1857	39	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1858	40	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1859	41	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1860	42	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1861	43	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1862	44	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1863	45	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1864	46	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1865	47	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1866	48	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1867	49	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1868	50	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1869	51	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1870	52	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1871	53	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1872	54	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1873	55	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1874	56	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1875	57	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1876	58	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1877	59	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1878	60	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1879	61	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1880	62	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1881	63	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1882	64	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1883	65	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1884	66	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1885	67	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1886	68	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1887	69	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1888	70	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1889	71	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1890	72	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1891	73	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1892	74	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1893	75	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1894	76	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1895	77	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1896	78	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1897	79	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1898	80	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1899	81	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1900	82	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat
1901	83	J. J. King	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat	Boat

The boat people would have stopped off at churches along the canal, where they were welcomed, in order to register births, marriages etc. The family would normally return to their place of origin to bury their dead. Often the boat families made connections to non-conformist churches such as Primitive Methodist and Salvation Army – you can talk to the relevant local

authority record office to find these records or search nationalarchives.gov.uk/discovery.

The Waterways Archive can advise you which churches were popular with boat people.



Names and locations

The name of the boat and location may help you to discover which company a boatman worked for and the canal he was based on.

In large cities such as Manchester and Birmingham there were also day boatmen who would have lived on land and therefore used the local church.

The Waterways Archive has transcriptions of various census and parish records for the mid 19th and early 20th centuries. These are indexed for boatmen (some are also indexed for the name of the boat) and include Wolverhampton (the Norman Holt Transcriptions) and the historic counties of Lancashire, Cheshire and Staffordshire.

Many parish records, including those, for example, for Cheshire, Lancashire and Shropshire are available fully digitised and indexed on findmypast.co.uk or ancestry.co.uk

The Waterways Archive is equipped with a subscription to the former.



GRAND JUNCTION CANAL.

Month June 1922.

Permit No.	Date	Owner	Barge	Freight	Destination	Weight Tons.
8536	1st	J.S. Sug Co.	Quaker	Rollard	Uxbridge (Grimsdalea)	50
8545	"	Hope Lye Co	Chere	Tar	Southall Gas Wks	50
8562	2	Bowker & Co	Sunlight	Gas oil	"	50 1/4
8565	7	Maypole Ltd	Shadwell	Oil	Maypole Dock	44
8560	8	Hope Lye Co	Jug	Coal	Uxbridge Gas Wks	60
8586	8	"	Gene	Tar (10,000 gallons)	Southall	50
8591	"	Clayton (Aldbury)	Medway	Fuel Oil	Greenford (Hyson)	53
8650	11	Hope Lye Co	Gene	Tar (10,000 Gallons)	Southall Gas Wks	50
8653	"	J.S. Sug Co.	Redpole	Ulcose (not by rail)	Botwell (Valley)	65
8693	17	Bowker & Knight	the solar	Gas Oil	Southall Gas Wks	50
8731	21	Clayton (Aldbury)	Gene	Liquor	"	45
8736	21	Thas & Sug Co	Renown	Complies (fms)	Rubastic Dk	25
"	"	"	"	Cocoa & Beans	Botwell (Handons)	65
8737	"	"	Smithfield	"	"	62 1/4
8744	24	Hope Lye Co	Ellar	Coal	Uxbridge Gas Wks	60
8775	"	"	Gene	Tar	Southall (10,000 Gallons)	50
8785	26	Maypole May Wks Ltd	Quebec	Nails	Maypole Dock	30
"	"	J.S. Sug Co	Completed	Sugar	Walthamstow 27/6/22	25
8804	28	Maypole May Wks Ltd	Sunset	Oil	Maypole Dock	28
"	"	J.S. Sug Co	"	Scrap (13000 Gallons)	Botwell (Uphead Wks)	19 3/4
8814	7	Bowker & King	Petrol	Gas Oil	Southall Gas Wks	50 3/4

Transportation

Most relevant records, other than statutory records such as birth, marriage and death and the census, have been generated by the administration of business transactions.



For centuries goods have been manufactured and carried to and from markets. From the 18th century through to the early 20th century they were transported along canals. Company records naturally built up over the life of canal companies, carrying companies and boatyards.

Some of these records are to be found at The Waterways Archive, though others are held by The National Archives. There is now a growing range of finding aids to assist you in your search.

In addition to The Waterways Archive, the quarterly magazine *Narrowboat* is a good source of information about carrying companies and businesses associated with the waterways and *Waterways World* has also produced fleet lists (available at waterwaysworld.com) through which boat names and carrying routes can be tracked.

The Waterways Archive keeps back copies of these and also has an extensive specialist reference library located in the Reading Room at the National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port.

Records held at The Waterways Archive

You can research all aspects of navigation history. These include creation, ownership, maintenance and use of the nation's inland waterways.

The archive has many types of records and information including:

- Company minutes and accounts
- Correspondence
- Personal work diaries
- Engineering surveys and reports
- Deeds and other legal records
- Contracts and specifications
- Staffing records
- Toll, traffic and tonnage records
- Acts and byelaws

Boat people working on tidal estuaries may be recorded in shipping records. Statutory registration of merchant shipping in 1786 brought about the establishment of local registries and central returns were held at HM Customs.



Those for the port of Liverpool (and Runcorn from 1862) are now at Merseyside Maritime Museum and at Flintshire Record Office for the port of Chester.

The Waterways Archive has some copies and indexes of these and many other useful sources. After 1795, inland waterway craft had to be registered by the Clerk of the Peace. Some of these registers survive and originals are usually held at County Record Offices.

Date of Inspection: 1-4-49
 Name of Boat: REM-FORD
 Owner's Name and Address: S. 1446
 Master's Name and Address: [illegible]
 Name to be taken by boat: [illegible]
 Nature of Cargo: [illegible]
 Mode of Propulsion: [illegible]
 Description of Boat: [illegible]
 Certificate of Registration: [illegible]
 Registered at: Birmingham
 Registered for: 3 Adults in Cabin, etc.
 Occupied by: 2 do do
 No. of Children on Board: 3
 and age and sex: [illegible]
 General Condition of Cabin: [illegible]
 Name of Ventilation: [illegible]
 Storage for Drinking Water: [illegible]
 Source of Water Supply: [illegible]
 Waste Water: [illegible]
 Heating: [illegible]
 Habitable Bulkhead: [illegible]
 Selections (Division): [illegible]
 Remarks and Remarks (if any) of Acts or Regulations: [illegible]



In 1877 and 1884 Acts of Parliament were passed to ensure certain living standards on boats were met and that children were educated. Regular inspections were carried out by local sanitary authorities.

These resulted in inspection records. Where these records survive they can be found in local record offices. Though some, either in original or transcribed form, are in The Waterways Archive.

Another useful source of information on boat people (particularly steerers) and their boats, is the gauging record. Gauging is the process to establish how much cargo a boat is carrying, so the appropriate toll can be charged. Tables were kept for each boat gauged and details include boat name, master, owner (sometimes with an address) and gauging station.

These records are useful for locating ancestors who worked as boat people and establishing their role at a particular place and date.

B.C.N. Register No. 117
 Name: [illegible]
 Date: [illegible]
 Tonnage: [illegible]
 Draught: [illegible]
 Articles on Board: [illegible]

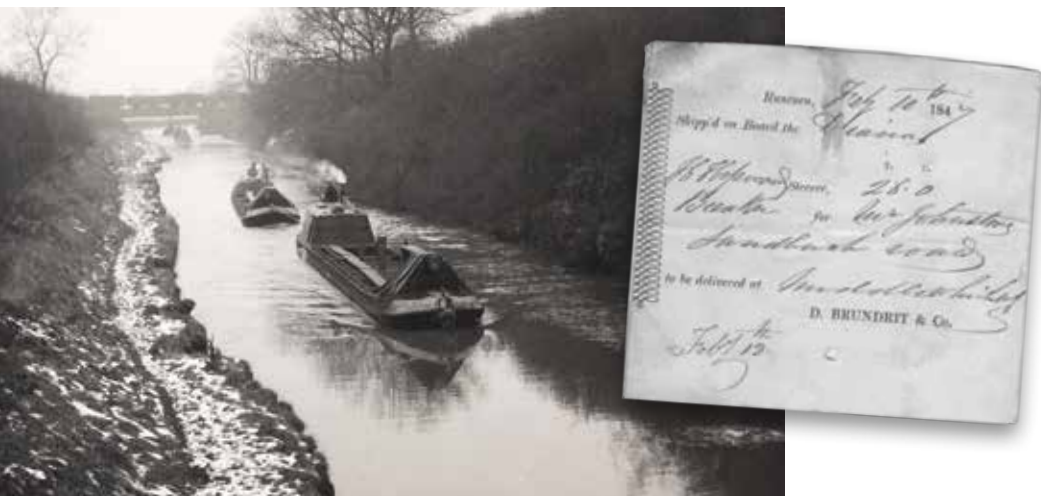
No.	Name	Date	Tonnage	Draught	Articles on Board
1	111	21	117		
2	112	22	118		
3	113	23	119		
4	114	24	120		
5	115	25	121		
6	116	26	122		
7	117	27	123		
8	118	28	124		
9	119	29	125		
10	120	30	126		
11	121	31	127		
12	122	1	128		
13	123	2	129		
14	124	3	130		
15	125	4	131		
16	126	5	132		

The Waterways Archive keeps indexed transcripts. Many of these can be easily searched, including:

- Runcorn Register of Boats and Barges 1795-1812
- Runcorn Canal Boat Registers 1878-1949
- Chester Canal Boat Registers 1879-1916
- Nantwich Canal Boat Registers 1879-1924
- Northwich Canal Boat Registers 1880-1940
- Wolverhampton
- Gloucester
- Birmingham

Toll and Tonnage Records (Traffic)

These record the journeys taken by the boats. Details can include the name of the person steering the boat and cargo.



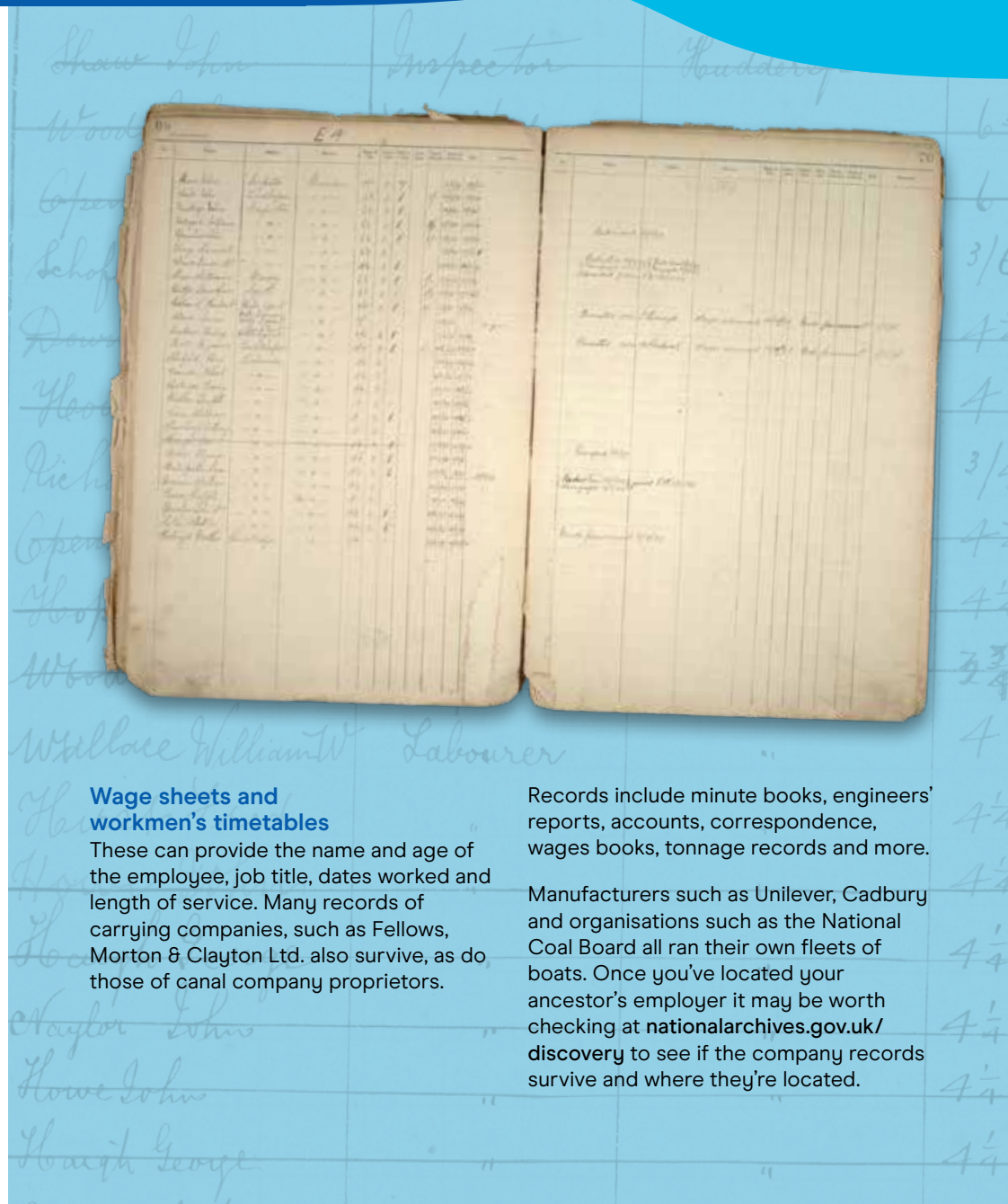
From this information you'll be able to research the route and canal worked by the boatmen.

This will then help you discover more about the places of birth, marriage and death. You may also find other useful documents produced at the time, such as toll tickets, permits, check sheets and loading tickets.

Daily Passings of Boats

These relate, for example, to the passage of vessels through a tunnel or another significant place, and give names of owners and crew. Some of these records can be found in The Waterways Archive and in local record offices.

Some boatmen may have rented property from the canal company. Some rental records survive in The Waterways Archive that show names of tenants



Wage sheets and workmen's timetables

These can provide the name and age of the employee, job title, dates worked and length of service. Many records of carrying companies, such as Fellows, Morton & Clayton Ltd. also survive, as do those of canal company proprietors.

Records include minute books, engineers' reports, accounts, correspondence, wages books, tonnage records and more.

Manufacturers such as Unilever, Cadbury and organisations such as the National Coal Board all ran their own fleets of boats. Once you've located your ancestor's employer it may be worth checking at nationalarchives.gov.uk/discovery to see if the company records survive and where they're located.

Photographs



The Waterways Archive includes over 400,000 images, many of which provide an evocative snapshot of the life and work of the boat families. See canalrivertrust.org.uk/archive



Local libraries, record offices and canal societies may also have historic images of the waterways. Other sources include:

- Personal work diaries.
- Staff magazines
- Canal societies

If in doubt contact The Waterways Archive for advice

Reference books

The Waterways Archive is home to a growing library for anyone keen to find out more about their ancestors. The following publications are good sources of information:

- Sue Wilkes
Tracing Your Canal Ancestors
Pen & Sword, 2011
- George Smith
Our Canal Population
EP Publishing, 1974
- Harry Hanson
Canal People
David & Charles, 1978
- Harry Hanson
The Canal Boatmen 1760-1914
Alan Sutton, 1975
- Michael Stammers
Mersey Flats and Flatmen
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1993
- Tom Lightfoot
The Weaver Watermen
Cheshire Libraries & Museums, 1983
- Richard Cheatham-Houghton
Burscough Boatmen: Their Marriages and Their Boats
Ormskirk & District Family History Society, 2015





You are very welcome to use the Waterways Archive. Please contact us to make an appointment and if you are a researcher wanting to use original records we recommend allowing 24 hours notice.

We open Monday - Friday 10am - 4pm
Please email archives@canalrivertrust.org.uk
or call 0151 373 4378

 @NWMuseum

 /NationalWaterwaysMuseum

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Charity No. 1146792



October 2019