

# Timeline of the Museum

The building was originally a steam powered corn mill.

In the 1840s it was owned by Joseph Ebberrn.

The original Museum in 1963 was named the Waterways Museum but later changed to The Canal Museum to avoid confusion when the Waterways Museum opened in Gloucester (1987).

In 1997 it was renamed The National Waterways Museum linked to the two other Museums at Ellesmere Port and Gloucester.

In 2010 it reverted to The Canal Museum as it was decided that visitors preferred a more local story.



## Museum Guide

The Canal Museum, housed in an old steam powered corn mill was opened by British Waterways in 1963, as a result of the initiative of local lock-keeper and ex boatman, Jack James.

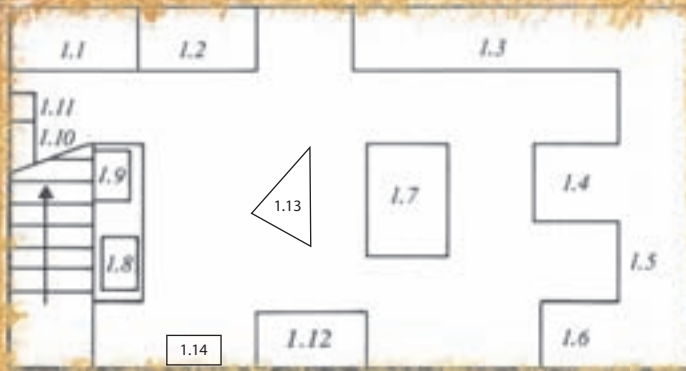
Stoke Bruerne was chosen to become the site for Britain's first canal museum even before commercial traffic had finished and British Waterways Board took over from British Transport Waterways.

For many years the late Jack James had been winning awards for his efforts in maintaining the locks at Stoke Bruerne, and his display of traditional canal ware in the old leggers' hunt was always much admired. When Jack won again in 1961, the BTW Genreal Manager, hearing of the award, decided that the old mill at Stoke Bruerne was the best place for the museum. The district engineer at the time was Charles Hadlow and he joined forces with Jack James in collecting material.



*Stoke Bruerne in the 1900's showing the mill engine house and tall chimney*

## First Floor



- 1.1 Surveying
- 1.2 Gauging
- 1.3 Boats
- 1.4 Painted Ware
- 1.5 Painted Ware
- 1.6 Crockery
- 1.7 Costumes
- 1.8 Company Seals
- 1.9 Diver
- 1.10 Engineers
- 1.11 Pickfords Painting
- 1.12 Wartime
- 1.13 Railway
- 1.14 Iron Chest

The displays on this floor introduce the engineers and navvies responsible for the building of the system and describe the boats and the people who worked on them.

## The old village

Stoke Bruerne is over 1000 years old. It was at first a tiny settlement called a "stok". That accounts for the "Stoke". The "Bruerne" may come from the fact that William de Bruere owned the village in 1200.

## A new plan

James Brindley aimed to build canals to link central England north-south and east-west. By 1790 this was done, but the London-Birmingham section via Oxford was slow, narrow and liable to flooding. So in 1792 a new direct route through Stoke Bruerne was proposed.

## The Grand Junction Canal

In 1793, work began. Soon gangs of navvies arrived in the village to start work on the Blisworth Tunnel. In 1800, there were huge building works in the village itself. The canal was excavated, and locks and a tramway were constructed.

## The village transformed

The Grand Junction Canal opened in 1805, with the great engineer Thomas Telford present. The village was cut in half and the main street made to lead over a new bridge. The beer shop was rebuilt as The Boat Inn. The rector lost three large fishponds, to his great annoyance.



Braunston 1911 - The Powell Family



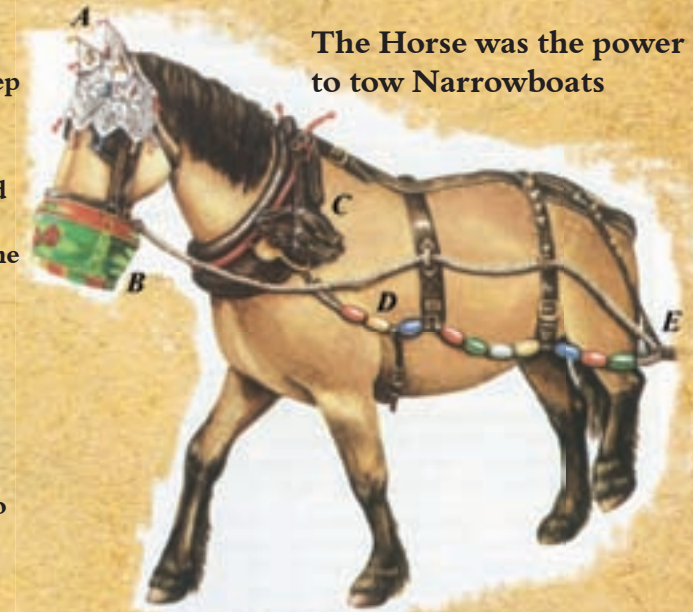
The Vulcan

## Education / Meeting Room



Horses were used in the building of canals to provide the power for barrow runs, pulling loaded wheelbarrows out of cuttings or up embankments. Circular horse gins were also used as winches pulling waste material up tunnel shafts. Many canal companies ran their own delivery services and horse drawn wagons loaded on the waterside travelled to premises away from the canal.

- A Crocheted top to keep the flies off in the summer.
- B Traditionally painted nose tin
- C Muzzle to prevent the horse from grazing while working
- D Wooden bobbins to protect the horse's sides from being chaffed by the rope
- E Tow rope attached to bar at the rear of the horse.



The Horse was the power to tow Narrowboats

*Don't forget to visit Sunny valley and Joey the Horse in the education room. Also - try on the costumes and take a Photo!*

# The Canal Age

## 1760 – 1785

Two great engineers were James Brindley and John Smeaton. Surveys were usually carried out on horseback to spy out the lie of the land and plot a basic course on a rudimentary map, after which the survey would be costed for the promoters to raise the money.



James Brindley

## 1785 – 1805

Smeaton's pupil was William Jessop – possibly the greatest canal engineer of the all. He carried out schemes as far apart as the Sussex Ouse and the Caledonian Canal in Scotland, working with Thomas Telford on the later. Jessop played a superintendant role as Chief Engineer, with James Barnes as the engineer responsible for the construction work of the Grand Junction Canal (1793).



Thomas Telford

## 1805 – 1820

Two great engineers were Thomas Telford and John Rennie who worked through this period. Telford is best remembered for the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction and the great Pontysyllte Aqueduct (1805).

*On the top floor is the model of one of the spans commissioned by Thomas Telford when planning the aqueduct. Also between the Museum and car park you can see one of the ribs of the aqueduct.*

## Site Engineers

Site engineers would lay out the line using theodolites, sextants and transits. Surveying in those days was done on a fairly informal basis – it is said that the Blisworth Tunnel was laid out between the church towers of Stoke Bruerne and Blisworth.



## Navvies

*Vast quantities of earth were moved manually with picks, shovels and wheelbarrows. Rock was blasted by gunpowder packed into hand drilled holes. All this very hard work was carried out by 'navvies'.*

*Sometime canal companies would go bankrupt during the digging and riots occurred. At this time coins were nationally in short supply so companies paid the navvies in tokens, which could only be cashed in company shops and a few pubs.*



Thames and Severn Canal Company Token

## Seal

Canals were once maintained and run by Private companies. Each company gave itself a name and seal.

The high point of 'canal mania' was 1793/94.

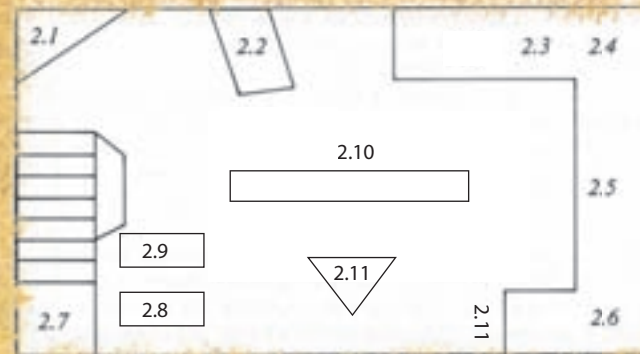
In just two years 38 Acts of Parliament for canal building was 62 different canals were being worked on in 1793 alone.

They became the waterways that fed the Industrial Revolution.



Company Seal

# Top Floor



- 2.1 Wildlife
- 2.2 Fire Engine
- 2.3 Carpenter
- 2.4 Blacksmith
- 2.5 Tools
- 2.6 Blisworth Tunnel
- 2.7 Film
- 2.8 Crane
- 2.9 Foxton Locks
- 2.10 Exhibition
- 2.11 Canal at War

The top floor of the Museum displays structures which carry canals over geographical obstacles and shows some of the tools used in the maintenance of canals and their structures.

## Tools For Carpenters & Blacksmiths ( 2.3 and 2.4).

The Museum display shows a range of tools needed by the companys carpenters and blacksmiths. The carpenter would repair lock gates, make balance beams and paddles to replace worn out equipment. The blacksmith would make ironwork for the lock gates as well as nails and bolts for boats and other structures.

## THE STORY OF THE BLISWORTH TUNNEL (2.6)

In 1795 the canal from Braunston had reached Blisworth on the north side of the hill. In 1800 the canal from London reached the south side of the hill. But there was a gap between the two and a high hill in the way. The canal needed to go over or through the hill. It was decided to build a tunnel.

By the tunnel mouth at Stoke Bruerne there are two buildings. The one nearest the tunnel was the tug store and forge. The other is the shelter where horses could wait for boats to come out of the tunnel.

By 1827 the GUCC was employing registered leggers to work the boats through the tunnel. They would wait for work in a hut. You can see the hut next to The Boat Inn.

The blacksmith would probably make all the ironwork for the lock gates, as well as nails and bolts for boats and other structures. Both craftsmen would be called upon to do any number of miscellaneous jobs.



Men legging through the South Portal of Blisworth Tunnel

The drawing shows how the building looked from the north side and back. The cafe of today was once the engine house.



Line drawing by Brian Collings

Artist Impression of Tramway



Blisworth Tunnel showing the Horse Boat Road and Tramway



The Mill Complex



Locks Being Filled In



Stoke Bruerne circa 1900



Horse and Waggon on the Tramway



Q128 - Sister Mary Ward  
Stoke Bruerne Top Lock (1913)  
Grand Union Canal  
Northamptonshire

Sister Mary Ward was a nurse who dedicated her life to working with the people on the boats. They would suffer their aches and pains until they were in Stoke Bruerne and could be treated by her. When boats were due to be torn, the boatmen would come to her at Stoke Bruerne so that Sister Mary could deliver the baby.

Sister Mary was awarded the MBE for her work and was featured on the TV program, This is Your Life. She lived in the end cottage next to the top lock at Stoke Bruerne.

Q - Why do you think that the boatmen wanted Sister Mary to treat them?

A - Doctors were expensive and they generally looked down on the boat people. There aren't many other places around the country where a nurse lived next to the canal and cared for the boat people.



Blisworth Tunnel



Legging Boats



The Dock

