# Audio file

[Canals and Hedgerows SSM24.mp3](https://msuclanac-my.sharepoint.com/personal/frobinson3_uclan_ac_uk/Documents/Transcribed%20Files/Canals%20and%20Hedgerows%20SSM24.mp3)

# Transcript

I have recorded a short history. About the canals and hedgerows in Britain. On this date. Now. It is not spoiled by noises, so please listen to it. And give me your opinion. I think that. You might find it interesting. The history of the canals and waterways in Britain. Is very interesting to say the least. Blossoming when they did. In the 18th century. Our highways were poor that time. With lack of maintenance. Thereby causing deep ruts and in wet weather mile after mile of quagmire and besides they were too narrow. All this together with the possibility of being robbed by the notorious highwaymen. Was travelling. Along the so-called highways. In those days. Prompted the merchants and mill owners to seek alternative transport. Hoping to avoid the exasperating chaos and congestion which would eventually caused the consumption of commerce and the decline of the industrial revolution. Consequently. A network of 6000 miles of inland waterways was established. And they formed the vital arteries between the bustling factory towns and mills. To the seaports. Fresh canals were being dug and opened well into the 19th century. But that was until the advent of the railways. Then they were doomed and began to decline rapidly. That would be about 1830. About 50% of the canal system was closed and abandoned because of the very stiff. Opposition of the railways. Today life is slowly returning to these old canals. But the beautiful, the beautifully coloured commercial barge giving way to the hired motor launch, the sailing yacht and the canoe. On the towpaths once trodden by the magnificent barge horses. Hikers wonder. While anglers, sit on the banks. Under the green umbrellas. The 3000 miles of canals. Have now become Britains's newest and. I think best leisure and pleasure ground. The attraction of the canals today is their loneliness and beauty. Meandering through the countryside. They seem to follow their own secret routes. They penetrate right through the heart of the land. Away from the noise and bustle of the railways and roads. Well, they do meet. But only here and there. Now each canal has its own character. But the difference cannot be seen from a distance. You have to travel along the banks or better still by boat. Some towns and villages owe their existence to them. Because they sprang up with the walls and the warehouses were built along with shops, cottages and a pub. Now. Boatmen lived in the cottages with their families, of course. That was until. The railways forced the mill owners and the traders. To lower their prices so much. That the boatmen were forced to abandon the cottages and live with their families on the barges. Now, to accommodate the needs of the boatman inns that sprang up along the canals. And they are still there today. As I stated before, the ideal way to explore the canals is by boat. You pass under hump back bridges over numerous viaducts through secretive tunnels that open out into fresh displays of beauty. And grandeur on either side. And the best thing about it is. You can take your time and look properly instead of riding past the speed in the car or coach. Every year now. More and more stretches of canals are being renovated and repaired. So that they too can be enjoyed by the growing number of people eager to share their delights. On some urban sections. There is no right way. That you can walk along the banks in the rural areas. But at your own risk. Now wildlife is the is in abundance along the canals, particularly in the Fen district and the wash. So much so that the vast variety, variety of plant life and wild birds. In certain stretches of the waterways have been designated as nature reserves and bird sanctuaries. That gives one the opportunity to observe close at hand what nature has to offer and without undue restriction. There are two types of canals in Britain. Is the broad and the narrow the reason for this? Is that they were constructed by different engineers. And they were built according to the needs of the district. Depending on the requirements in the area. Now let's put things in perspective first. The determining factor of a canal is the locks. As the length and more important the width. Now, a narrow canal will take a barge of up to 7 foot wide. Whereas a broad canal. A broad canal lock. We'll take a boat with a 12 foot beak. That's the width. In the Fens. The length of a boat up to. 45 foot. And a temple 6. Inch wide. Being and beam of course. And on the rivers, of course, you get a boat from 55 foot to 174 foot long with a 10 foot to 19 foot beam. Uh. That depends on which waters they apply, of course. Let's go on a bit and talk about the ones in Scotland. If you're not bored. I think I will be right in saying that. There are only two canals of significance in Scotland. There's a crinan. On the well known Caledonian. That is, apart from a stretch. Remaining of the old Union canal that used to be. There's about 30 miles of it remaining West from Edinburgh. Now you see. Because all bridges. On this canal are permanently lowered. It is only. Used for towpath walks and fishing and canoeing. The crinan. Is a five mile stretch or I should say not a five mile a nine mile stretch and you beg your pardon, a nine mile stretch used as a shortcut by the seagoing vessels. And there are no facilities for pleasure craft on it. The Caledonian is a different kettle of fish. Altogether, 60 miles of it all together, so I understand anyway. That is, with the locks etc. The waterway itself has in it. Actually, 22 miles of canal with 29 locks running right across Scotland. And they connect to Loch Ness, Loch Oich Loch Lochy and Loch Linnhe. The canal passes through dramatic highland scenery. The boats sail almost within the shadow of Ben Nevis. And at three places. Banavie Port Augustus and Inverness. The canal locks are in flights. At Banavie, there's a flight of locks known as Neptunes, Staircase lifting, sea going vessels 64 foot. 64 feet. There are numerous swing bridges, all manned crossing the canal, including two railway swing bridges through which. The commercial vessels traffic usually has priority. Now this canal passes vessels. Excuse me, 150 foot long with a 35 foot beam and a 13 foot, 6 inch draught. And the speed limit is 6 miles an hour. But it's unrestricted in all water. There is a charge made. And advance notice must be given for using the canal on Sundays. When an extra charge is made. Mooring points are few. But buoys are being laid for overnight anchorage now. Great care must be taken when passing through the open water of this canal. Because. The weather can change very suddenly, and this in turn can make your trip most uncomfortable. I think that I've covered the important features of the Caledonian, so let's move on a bit, shall we? Or before I continue, may I point out that most of this information I'm giving you I have gleaned from books. And as far as I can ascertain. It is correct. To go on, that's if you're interested. I believe that Birmingham has the largest. Urban waterway network in Britain? It was owned by the Birmingham Navigation. Now, whether that is still the case, I don't know. I can tell you though that. Its canals radiate to five main river estuaries. There used to be 160 miles of navigable water in that area at one time. Now there's about 100. Although they run through big industrial areas, the canals are still remote. And you can move in peace even in the middle of Birmingham. There are stretches that run through some lovely wonder wooded countryside. Also in that network are some 120 locks. There are poor tunnels as well in the area. There's the Dudley, the Netherton, the West Hill and the Edgbaston. Those are the important ones, of course. Now the Netherton was the last canal tunnel to be built in Britain. And it's 3028 yards long. It was opened, let me think. In 1858. I think remember that rightly. This tunnel was lit by gas throughout. But was led to switched over to electricity. Now it has a tow path on either side. And that's unusual because tunnels usually. Don't have a tow path The end and the tow path ends at the mouth of any tunnel. Except that one. And the boats after be legged through that means that the the boatman, stay on boards on the boat. And push the boat through by pushing their feet against the side of the roof or the roof of the tunnel. Now the dramatic and cavernous Dudley Tunnel. 3172 yards long was restored and reopened in 1973. Much of this is unliving rock. And it opens out into a large grottos. Which branch with the branches leading off to now abandoned underground workings? Our attempt to describe a canal lock and how it operates, so let's have a bit of fun, shall we? Now I can remember first of all. A lock. A canal lock is a Chamber in which a boat can be floated from one level to another. Now that's obvious isn't it so that's straight. The wooden gates, which, by the way are Elm or oak. Always point uphill so that water pressure forces them together. Don't don't forget that every time a lock is used, water is drained down the canal. So it is most important not to waste water by incorrectly closing gates and paddles. So if a lock is empty when your boat is going downhill, downhill, mind you. Fill the lock up by opening the ground paddles, which let water in through the culverts. If there are gate puddles, only raise them slowly. When the lock is full. Opens up Gates and enter. Then close the pedals. And the gates. After that. Open the bottom paddles. So that the lock empties and keep the boat clear of the sill that is. Underneath the top gates. Just underneath the top gate, don't secure the boat to the bollards. For heaven's sake. But if you do, your boat will be left high and dry. Now as the lock empties, just get one of the crew to hold the mooring line from the side of the lock, just to steady it. Now. When the boat has floated down and the lock is empty. Open the bottom gate and leave the lock. That is, unless there's a boat approaching. Or one already waiting to enter the mock. They go past you. And therefore uphill. Close the bottom. Paddles and gates so that the following boat can repeat the manoeuvre you have just completed. Remember to close all gates at the top lock of a flight. And the last lock. After a long stretch of canal. And close your gates by hand and wind down the paddles. Never on any account. Dropped the paddles suddenly, or slam the gates. Because this may cause unnecessary damage to the lock and also to yourself. If the lock is closed, you closed against you. I should say sorry. When you arrive at one Don't empty or fill it. If a boat is approaching from the opposite direction. And similar sequence is used. For going uphill through a lock. Now all that sounds complicated. But if you can take it step by step. You will see how simple it really is. If you care to. Take a close. Look at the aqueducts, bridges and tunnels in Britain you find that they are very impressive. Impressive monuments of British engineering feats of the late 18th and early 19th century. They were built by an army of navigators, workmen and. That's where the term Navy comes from, isn't it? They had some help from horses, of course, had to use a couple of horses or so and maybe a steam pump. But the real hard graft was the digging by hand in all weathers. A striking example of the engineering is the aqueduct on the Shropshire Union Canal. It consists of a cast iron trough perched on stone piers, 120 foot over the Dee Valley. I understand that when the plans were first by Mr Thomas Telford, excuse me. They were derided and scoffed at by his contemporaries nevertheless. The Aqueduct was opened in 1805 and even today the dove tailed joints in the iron trough hardly leak. The longest tunnel ever built was on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. It runs through the Pennines for about 5456 yards. And in some places. It's 600 feet below ground. It is now in disuse. So there's a lot of work there that was done for nothing more. More the pity. That's how it goes. Adding to the beauty and enhancing the scenery of the canals, or as I stated earlier, the humped back bridge is made of stone. And the gracefully curving and casting wands. But probably the most attractive are the roving bridges, which enabled a barge horse. To cross from one side of the canal to the other without the tow rope being detached from the barge. The horse towed the boat off the bridge and walked back over the bridge, trailing the rope over the parapet. There's another magnificent 3 arch aqueduct over the River Goyt at Marble, which carries the Peak Forest Canal, and that's 100 foot up. The intricate flurried designs and family names painted on the barges give the boatman and his family that individual character like a trademark or brand name. Not unlike so many familiar household names. And, eh don't they look well, gliding along? Not far from the bank, within shouting distance. Appearing as it were from the past. And on their way to the future. What is so nice about the whole picture is the stealth. Stealthy like approach. The serene, almost majestic float passed and the departure with only the sound of water. The lapping along the. Side of the canal bank. Now, another aspect of interest are the peculiar designs and shapes of the bollards along the sides of the canal where they moor the boats. And at at the wharf, too, the old wharf. Where the boats are tied up. You se the continuing searing and scorching of these bollards by the mooring ropes over the years. Have given them a very unusual. And the eerie design and shape. It has been announced recently by the media that another 84 miles of canal has just been opened to the public. As far as I can make out anyway. And it's somewhere in the Eden district, although I'm not certain exactly as the location. But all it is. I'm given to understand that there are many more locks and lovely walks to enjoy along these. Banks. Now so far. I have spoken about the canals. Because of the interest that they create, and who knows, perhaps one day. We may be able to get an update. About the total mileage and conditions of these amenities. Which have been so neglected in the past. I don't think there's a cheaper way of having a holiday in Britain, and the best thing is.

But.

You are not tied down to one particular place apart from boating, the boating hire and the fishing permit. Everything is more or less. Free. Water museums are being beginning to spring up here and there, for instance. And I think there's one at the place called. Stoke Bruerne, and that's beside the Grand Union Canal. In Northampton, you know near Towcester. They have an important historical collection of waterway relics there from the past 200 years. And then maybe you could visit the one in Exeter Exeter Maritime Museum on the Exeter Canal. Of course they have a collection of books from all over all over the world. There are many more canals that I haven't mentioned there's quite a few. You get the Leeds Liverpool, the Lancaster, the Bridgewater and the Manchester Manchester Ship Canal, along with Barton Bridge, the Trent and Mersey. With the. Hard Castle Tunnel was it called? And the. Shropshire and Union and the Stafford and Worcester and Ohh yes, there's plenty more, but too numerous for me to mention. Now looking at the maps. Of the canal. that I have It would be possible to sail from the West Coast across Britain to the East Coast or vice versa, and although it would be a long journey, it would be a very interesting one at that. Let me attempt to enlighten you with some interesting and historical facts up returning to our local canal. Now I have much to go on. And just what I've gleaned from reading about. For a start In 1798 canal communication between Preston and Tewitfield That's a place near Burton in Westmoreland. Was established. This was via Lancaster. And it was a success at the time, so it was extended to Kendall. And that was in 1833. The same company prospered and extended the canal from Preston to Wigan. Of course, that was earlier still. That was in 1802 Therefore. Wigan to Preston part of the canal is about 21 years older than the Burton to Kendal section. Now. All this seriously interfered with the coaching trade Obviously Because in seven years from 1830 to 1837, the number of coaches running to and from Preston. Dwindled from 81 to 12. And then in 1842, they ceased altogether. The railways were getting established about that time you see And the safe, leisurely travel along the canal of about 10 miles an hour. Gave way to a more modern and faster mode of travel. In 1840. A portion of the canal between Preston and Lancaster was at leased to the railway company. Shortly afterwards, passenger traffic along that part of the canal ceased. In turn. What the canals did to the coaching trade, the railways did to the canals. The railways were extended to Kendal and in 1846. All passenger traffic along the Preston to Kendal Canal ceased. Just leaving the goods traffic so you stone sand and coal grain, of course. And this state of affairs continued for considerable length of time. Now I want to go back a little to 1802. Remember I said that. all the traffic was extended to Wigan from Preston. And that was from the near, from near the bottom of Wharf Street in Preston to the summit near Bamber Bridge. There was a tram ride, connection, tramway connection, the canal be on the summit was leased to the Leeds and Liverpool because it was part of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal and during the Guild of 1822. They did run a canal package, what they call a canal package from from the Preston to Lancaster. Twice a day. And I believe that such a journey involved. At that time, loads of Celebrity. Was looked upon at a very choice and wonderful thing. Traffic mean while on this tramway. Continued even after the railways had leased the canal north of Preston. The Tramway consisted of two lines of rails and its distance from Preston to the summit was about 5 miles. Only waggons ran on it 8 or 9 constituting the train, they're only small. And they were drawn by horses, maybe two or three, according to the number that made the train. They pulled the train along the hallway with the exception of that, that part traversing Avenham brow. On the Preston side. There they were drawn up and let down this brow. As I was saying. They were drawn up. And. Let down this brow, which was very steep by a stationary engine. Which was in a building near where the Belvedere stood. Whether it is still there today or not, I haven't checked, so it may be it may not, I don't know. Now in 1859. The waggons. Which for some years have been used for carrying coal stop running. Altogether. And the engine house, along with the adjoining cottages. Was deserted. But I don't think that the tall chimney which was after all an eyesore. A bit of local history, but. Here's a bit more. According to some old records. From what I've read. And Mr. John Proctor, who lived in Preston. Was the last horse driver of that tramway. And was employed for 32 years, making the journey twice a day. That was 20 miles. A day. Partly riding and partly walking. And it's estimated that he travelled a distance of 199,000 miles during his work on the tramway. Also. During his career, he evidently did. more walking when he was younger. So much so that. It rendered it necessary for him to have his clogs that resoled every week. And that's that. Another snippet of the informative history is that in 1826. Do you know that the government of the day? Passed 80 Turnpike acts for Lancashire alone. UM, well, I'm saying that. It was in the space of 25 years, but still 80 is quite a lot. In 25 years it is not that meant that toll bars were in existence even then. That meant that tax was payable, wasn't it? It must have been. You call it. You sure you call that tax? You know, as early as the 1800s. It makes one think what will happen. Now that the present governments are considering the privatisation of roads again. Some roads anyway. Now, ever since the 18th century. An enormous amount of hedgerows have been planted. Well. UM. Most of them were planted with nursery raised stock. But a great proportion. Was with wild seedlings. Chiefly Hawthorne. As time went on, you know. More species appeared. They were probably carried on the wind or dropped by birds. Our hedgerows have indeed matured along the canal. And most of them are shrub and woodland originally. Origin. The combine conditions of light, humidity and the soil. Designs the type of hedgerow grown in any area you may get. The picture when I say roughly 600,000 miles of hedgerow growth in Britain now that's a lot. Thought would be an acreage of 436,000. Now that's twice as much as. The. Countries, nature reserves, acreage. Trees, shrubs, plants and grasses make an ideal home for birds, insects and small animals. Now these hedgerows connect with woods and forests. So it's like a kind of highway for the wildlife. It was in the 18th century that acts of the land were passed to refine separate space for cattle raising and crop growing. Now I think these were the ideal thing because they were cheaper than building walls or fences. They consisted of Hawthorne. With elm trees planted intervals. Some hedges, however. Were established. Long before that. They were planted by the Saxons. To create boundaries between estate. And some of these thousand year old hedges exist today. This practise develops slowly through the Middle Ages, right until the major enclosure movement. It came about under the Tudors About 400 years ago and. And primarily. That was done for the sheep. Now, did you know that? Botanists. Can date hedges by counting the number of different shrubs growing in them, for example, as a rough guide. Hedges have one species of shrub growing in them for every 100 years. Growth in each 30 yards stretch, but it's there. Put it this way. They count the number of different species of shrub in every 30 yards. For instance, a Saxon hedge. Has there 10 different species of shrub in every 30 yards? So a Tudor hedge will have around 3 or 4 on it. I hope you can work it out anyway, but then I come. And you go on. For nearly 25 years before 1970. About 4500 miles of hedgerow. were torn up each year This was this was to allow the giant agricultural machinery. To perform more efficiently. But since 1970. This has declined somewhat. You see. When the hedge is removed, it means rather sadly That it's a sanctuary lost forever. For the animals that lived in the hedgerow at that time. Now the animals among them, among the animals that live in the hedges they are. Mice, rabbits voles, Badgers and foxes. I well looked after hedge. Contains many more varieties of plant life. Than a natural one. Because of the life fact. Not as thick as it, and so therefore. You get chance to grow. Dozens of types of birds who live in the hedgerows as well. That's because of the thousands of insects that dwell there. Among the 91 species of birds that live in the lowlands in Britain, 65 species live in hedges. There's no richer variety of life. And the plants that live and grow along the banks of canals and amongst the hedgerows. And about 30 different woody species that grow in the hedgehog itself. The most common. The. The Elm. And. You get the the field Maple and the Hawthorne of course. Then there's the Holly. Oak privet and the wild rose, not forgetting the Sycamore. If you care to look more closely along the canal banks. And in the hedgerows. You'll find another. Wait for it. 500 species of plants, all growing by God's with grace. And ask any herbalist. And they're telling you the useful remedies. That some of them. Are. And Please remember. With a great number of those plants were growing long before the. Neolithic farmers at first cleared the forests over 5000 years ago. Now. That word. Neolithic it. Comes from the dictionary and it means that the later Stone Age the latter Stone Age when the ground or stone weapons and the tools were used. When they prevailed, but. To go on. As I stated earlier, since the 18th century. 50% British hedgerows have been planted deliberately. From wild seedlings or nursery-raised stock. While no wild flower or plant is confined, is confined to the canal banks or hedges Many species are. Characteristic climbers such as the dog rose and the honeysuckle and the black. Briony. There are a group of plants that do need very moist ground in which to flourish. They grow either completely submerged. Or right beside the waters edge. And pardon me. Several species of trees are found only in such places, particularly the elder. And. Several kinds of Willow. Among the herbaceous plants that root in the water. Are the watercress the water, crowfoot and others of similar character. Growing in wet soil. Or the King Cup meadow sweet and yellow flag and that type of thing. There's plenty of comfrey and teasel growing on the banks. Now farmers and gardeners can tell you the type of soil in a field by the type of wildflowers or weeds that they like to call them. Growing there. For example, Scarlet Pimpernel and white complain. Are more likely to be in chalky or limestone soils. Whereas sheep's sorrel. denotes an acid or sandy soil. Well. There are so many fascinating. Things to talk about concerning canals in the countryside. The person can go on for hours. And still not complete the picture. So I'm going to finish. But before doing so. That's just. One thing, may I remind you of and that is. Most of what I have spouted here on this tape. I have read about. So that means please. Observe the copyright laws and. And then things should be all right, I think. And that's it. Well, I hope you like that. If I can find or. So I would say take other. Things of interest that would be of interest to you, of course. I'll be only to please you do it, although I must say that. They're not just five minute jobs, but that's up to you if you think of something that you would you think you could take. I'll always be willing to try. And of course. The thing is, you can either accept or reject them can't. That way no one gets hurt. I won't get hurt. By refusal and. Everything will be OK because after all I must say that this particular. type of thing I'm doing at the moment is kind of hobby. And. I think it's far more interesting than. And watching television all the time or one thing or another. I can keep at this and it keeps me occupied and I think myself that. It doesn't do my brain any harm to be exercised, which is possible. Well, that's it.