

Take a journey through time...

# TIMELINE

**1675** Five salt works are listed for Middlewich; The Town works (12 pans), Baron of Kinderton (7 pans), Mr. Oldfield, Mr. George Cronton, Mr. Charles Mainwaring (1 pan each). Between them they produce 5,590 tons of salt each year.

**1758** The Canal engineer James Brindley surveys sections of the proposed canal link between the Mersey and the River Trent.

**1769** William Seaman, gentleman of Middlewich writes to Josiah Wedgwood putting forward the case for Middlewich to be included on the proposed canal route.

**1772** James Brindley dies, the remaining engineering work on the Canal is finished by Hugh Henshall

**1777** The Trent and Mersey canal is completed, cutting through the eastern part of town. Six salt works are still in production, 5 on canal side including Chesworth's, Cook's, Lord Vernon's, Henshall's and Lowes. Seaman was at Ravenscroft Bridge, on the Dane. Around 10,000 tons of salt are produced each year.

**1833** Work is completed on one of Britain's shortest canals: the 'New Cut' (Wardle Canal). This short stretch of water links the Middlewich branch of the Shropshire Union Canal with the Trent and Mersey.

**1857** The Trent and Mersey is taken over by the North Staffordshire Railway. Commercial interest continues to grow.

**1867** London & North-Western Railway comes to Middlewich. Mainly a freight line.

**1878** Thirteen salt pans in operation producing 14,000 tons of salt each year.

**1888** Salt Union is formed, designed to achieve a fair price for salt in the face of cut-throat competition. It stabilises the market through the closure of many works.

**1889** Murgatroyd's Open Pan Salt Works begins operation and continues until closure in 1966.

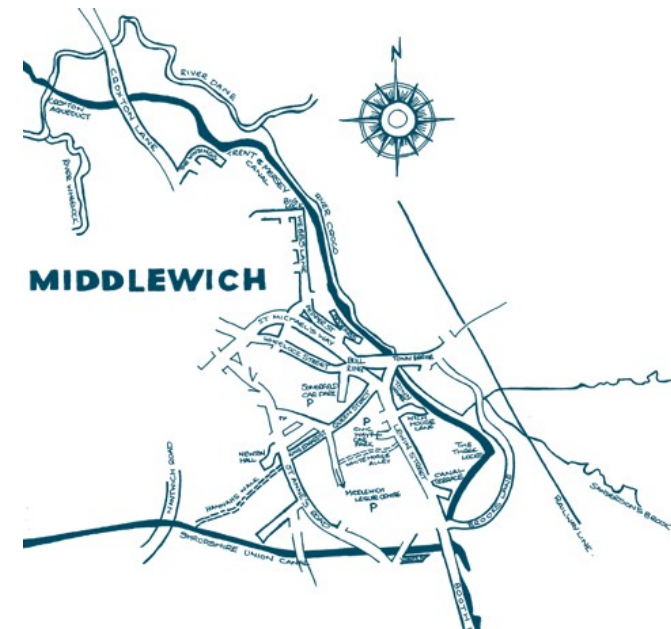
**1894** Murgatroyd's Ammonia Soda Works becomes Brunner-Mond's Middlewich Alkali Works. Closed 1962.

**1914** During the First World War the canal system, -18 especially around Cheshire, Manchester and North Wales plays a pivotal role in supporting the war effort, supplying heavy industry with raw materials such as salt. Middlewich bleach works has a more sinister role, by manufacturing chlorine "mustard" gas for the war effort.

**1937** ICI buys the Salt Union. Over the years it has closed all works except for its mine at Meadowbank, Winsford.

**1947** The canals are nationalised. The canal continues to transport salt, coal and dairy products but road freight is more effective. The canals fall into commercial decline.

**1969** British Salt Co acquires the Booth Lane site, which is now the last surviving saltworks in operation at Middlewich.



# Middlewich In It's Industrial Heyday

the only inland east-west connection between the Mersey and Stafford and runs for 10 miles. A narrow path runs from the canal towards the church and medieval town. 19th century maps name this path as Wood's Alley, and the mature trees that line it show that it was a more ancient route, which was cut when the canal was constructed, and passed Newton Hall and St Michael's church, on its way to the river crossing.



changed little since the late 18th century. Part of the site would have been a busy canal repair workshop and until the early 20th Century it had a coal wharf as well.

7. The Three Lock system is located close to Canal Terrace. Navigation becomes complicated at these locks, here in the centre of Middlewich. The fall between the Top and Bottom Locks is around 7.2m (23'6")! All the lock systems within the Middlewich area date to the canal's opening in 1777. Close to the industrial estate at Maidenhills is a rich wildlife area.

8. The number of wharves and associated buildings along the Middlewich Canal network suggest that the town was an important 'port' and trading place. The 'Town' wharf was the main trading port dealing with over twenty eight canal carriers. Situated on the old bridge was the Navigation Inn, a public house offering a range of services including a brewery, traveller accommodation, stabling and to the rear was Malpas Wharf, storing and selling corn, hay etc

9. In the Saxon and medieval period most salt works were located in the area between the canal and Lewin Street. These were known as "Wych houses" where lead pans were initially used to evaporate the brine over ovens. These were replaced by larger iron pans in the 17th century when pumps were also introduced for bringing the brine to the salt works. By Victorian times salt-working was still a major industry, operating a large proportion of the day and as many as 6 days a week, with the men sleeping on the floors overnight in periods of high production.

10. Croxton viaduct was initially completed in May 1777 under the famous engineer James Brindley. The current aqueduct, however, was constructed around 1930, and due to subsidence and engineering problems, was the third structure to be constructed across the river. A flint mill, grinding flint for pottery manufacture, operated from about 1810 to 1910 between the river and the canal.



5. This length of the Wardle canal is one of Britain's shortest, measuring only 35m. This short section links the Trent & Mersey Canal with the Middlewich Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal and was finally opened in September 1833. Prior to the construction of the 'New Cut' (as it was called) and because of company rivalry, goods had to be transported from the Shropshire Union Canal to the Trent & Mersey Canal over this short stretch of land. The main commodities transported through here were coal, dairy products, agricultural lime and salt.

6. Canal House was the residence of the canal inspector, employed to inspect the structure and worthiness of this particular canal stretch. Much of the building layout including Canal House and the workshop complex has

1. By the 13th century Middlewich had borough status, St Michael and all Angels was not built until the 14th century. Many trades operated as they do today along Wheelock Street and in the market area known as the "King's Mexon". During this period 100 "Wych-houses" (salt works) operated

along the banks of the River Croco, separated from where people lived at Newton and Kinderton, and supplied by two brine wells. The salt was transported overland by packhorse and wagon and was heavily taxed. Salt was particularly valuable as a food preservative, used in the manufacture of cheese, and for curing meat especially to provide a supply over the winter months.

2. Away from the medieval core of the town, Middlewich boasts a varied architectural heritage and this reflects its social history, especially in the way the town was divided up into rich and poor areas. Along Queen Street residences include Georgian, Regency and Victorian architecture.



3. Newton Hall is the latest in a long line of manorial buildings that have stood in the area since Anglo-Saxon times. The present building is largely Georgian in appearance dating from the late 18th century. To the rear is a small, two-storey, gabled Old Hall with attic rooms. It has been faced with 17th century brickwork, and is originally of timber-frame construction dating back to 1604.

4. Although planned in 1772 the Middlewich Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal was finally completed in 1829. It is

# Journey Through Time...



The trail will take around 1½ hours to complete but it can be done in sections. The trail extends across the historic core of the town as well as along the canalside. Stout footwear is advisable as the ground surface is sometimes uneven.



The trail is best done in dry weather although during wet weather the towpath is still navigable.



The trail includes architecture and town heritage. Additional information and discussion on these particular aspects can be found in the accompanying booklet.



To get the most enjoyment out of walking by the canal, please take care by the canalside edge and give consideration to other canal users.



Although the main industries of past Middlewich are long gone, the Canal & Salt trail and range of heritage literature will show what the industrial landscape looked like during the town's industrial zenith.



Whilst embarking on the trail, look out on your walk for the rich and varied wildlife. Occupying the canal areas are a variety of wild fowl, voles, frogs and birds. If you are lucky you may even see a kingfisher or two. Growing next to the canal towpaths is a mixture of seasonal wild flowers including marigolds, butterbur, gorse, guilderose, red champion and primroses.



A picnic area can be found at Croxton Park, located near Information Board No. 10 on the trail.



Toilet facilities can be found at Town Bridge, directly behind the Wharf Cottage on Leadsmithy Street.



Fancy refreshments? Visit the historic pubs on Queen Street and Lewin Street or give yourself a halfway break and stop at either the Newton Brewery or The Big Lock pubs, just off Webbs Lane. There are some excellent Café's in Middlewich located on Wheelock Street.



The main shopping centre offering a wide range of local produce, crafts and general amenities, is located along Lewin Street, Hightown and Wheelock Street.

# Canal and Salt Trail

The story of a canal and salt town is long and complex. The trail allows you to explore the unique history of the town and uncover many of its little known facts. The information panels reveal a thriving market town during the industrial age.

## Board 1

Start from The Bullring, near St Michael and All Angels Church.

## Board 2

Walk to the right of the Church and turn right into Queen Street; the board is located just before the High School on the left.

## Board 3

Unfortunately this board could not be put up for reasons beyond our control.

## Board 4

Continue up Queen Street into King Edward Street until the junction with St Ann's Road, and cross over. You will notice an alleyway to the left, this is known as Hannah's Walk, possibly an old medieval route into town. Follow the path, keeping right at the fork, down to the Shropshire Union Canal and board four.

## Board 5

Turn left and enjoy the walk down to Wardle Canal where you will find the next board.

## Board 6

From Wardle canal you can either continue to follow the path under the low bridge or walk up to the road, cross over and go back down the steps to rejoin the towpath and the Trent and Mersey Canal; keeping left. Board six is located just past the Canal Terrace buildings.

## Board 7

Follow the towpath through the wildlife area of Maidenhills, board seven is located by the historic three locks.

## Board 8

Walk further on and you will see the Town Bridge and a couple of big white buildings, this is the historic Town Wharf and the board is in front of the warehouse building.

## Board 9

It's a nice relaxing stroll up to the Big Lock Pub and board nine.

## Board 10

Continue out into the surrounding countryside of Croxton, the last board is by the Aqueduct. From here you can turn around and head back to the Big Lock, returning to the town centre by turning left onto Webbs Lane and following the road to the end.

