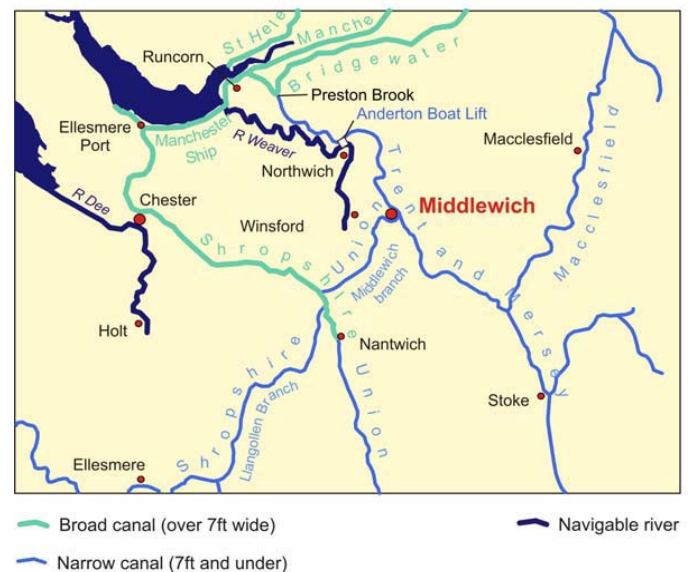
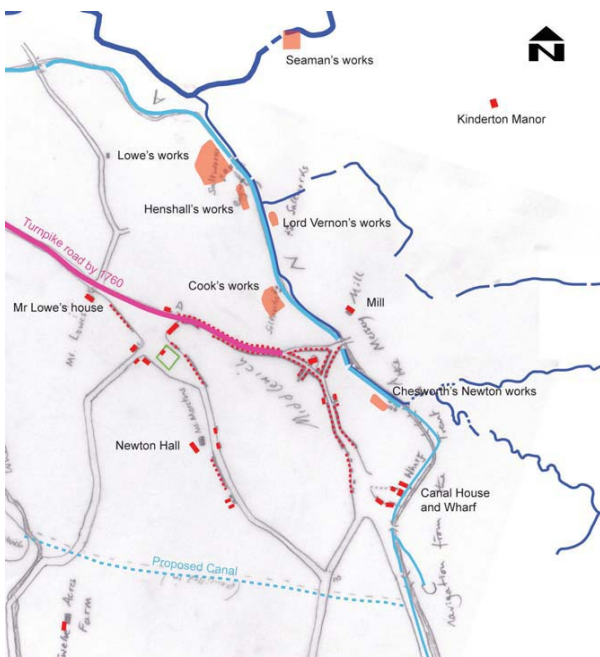


From the Factory... How Salt transport changed

Before the canal network existed, Middlewich Salt Proprietors had to use horse and cart via the unsatisfactory road-ways to access the River Weaver transport at Winsford. In the winter months the roads became difficult if not impossible to use, the process was described as, 'cumbersome, slow and expensive'.

The roads were seen as the responsibility of the parishes, however an Act of Parliament came into force and the first turnpike trusts were established. Tolls were set up so that the frequent road users paid for the upkeep of the road and not the rural population of the parish through which the road was run.

In 1776, the new age of the canals arrived in Middlewich, enabling industry to trade and export more easily.



Map dated 1778, showing the new Trent & Mersey Canal and one of the Turnpike Roads where tolls were in force.

In 1788, Middlewich Salt Proprietors suggested to the Canal trustees that quays & communications might be made at Anderton, so that goods could be transferred directly from the Trent & Mersey Canal to the River Weaver below.

A plan of wheeling goods over the towpath was accepted in 1791 and land adjoining the canal & Anderton was purchased. The Middlewich Salt

Proprietors were asked to give a £500 security that they would carry their salt to Liverpool by the new link and this was duly done.

By 1794 a crane was erected and a basin made at the river level.

In 1870, the first mention of a lift was made to carry two narrowboats from the Canal to River level; the result was Anderton Boat Lift opening for use on the 26th July 1875 at a reported cost of £48,382.



Digging out the common salt and loading into barrows at the transfer point, the chutes were placed over the boats. Anderton Boat Lift. Photos supplied by The Waterways Trust, Ellesmere Port ©

Salt chutes were used right up to living memory; generally loose salt was transferred from the boat via a barrow down the towpath to the chute and straight into the hold of the waiting boat.

Seddon's first motor boat was the Sweden in 1948; they used horses until the 1950's. The firm also owned two steam packets built in Northwich; Weaver Belle and Danehurst. Weaver Belle was paired with Gowanburn, built for Thompson's of Northwich in 1902, later acquired by Seddon. Their job was to work Anderton to Liverpool and Birkenhead for export.



Top left to right: Digging out the loose salt and transferring it to the waiting ship below via the salt chute. Note: The two boats in the background are Weaver Belle and Gowanburn.
Left: One of the Seddon's boats in Anderton Boat Lift.
Images from: The Waterways Trust ©.

By 1840 the railways had taken Britain by storm and as a result the railway network from this date expanded considerably. By 1868 Middlewich was serviced by the Northwich branch of the London Midland & Scottish Railway (LMS). Not surprisingly, both the canal and railway travelled in the same directions and called at the same places!

The railway however was much quicker. Despite the growth of the railway, the Trent & Mersey Canal Company continued to function.

(Left: Original Salt Wagons, photo supplied by George Twigg ©)



By 1857 the canal company was taken over by the North Staffordshire Railway Company; over the next eighty years the canal continued to serve the manufacturing and mining industries along its route. The canal and railway networks were both nationalised in 1947, during this time the canal continued to transport salt and coal. However road freight became a more convenient and faster way to transport goods, canals such as the Trent & Mersey fell into commercial decline.

