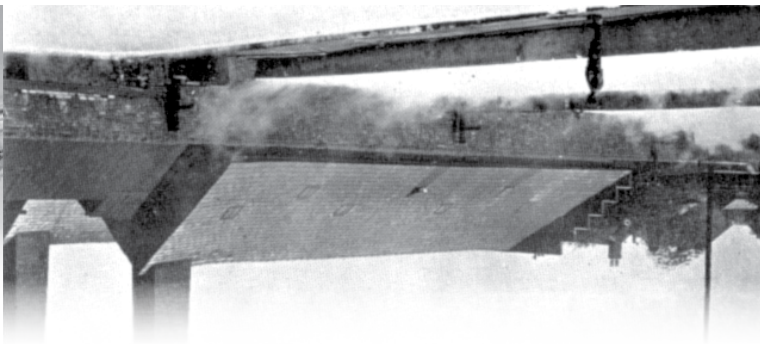


Celebrating the Heritage of Middlewich Town's Canal & Salt Industry

Town's Canal & Salt Industry

The Tales of Wyche and Water is derived from the Canal and Salt Town Middlewich project aimed at celebrating the Canal and Salt heritage of the town, concentrating on the historic changes and relationship between the canal, the salt industries and the community.

Middlewich has been famous for the production of salt since Roman times, an industry which probably started here during the Iron Age. The brine pits and saltworks were part of the settlement along King Street, but during the medieval period most works were located at Newton. Pre-industrial saltworks were family businesses where brine was boiled in lead vats with timber and wicker-walled sheds. Two brine-pits, "Louseat" & "Newseat", supplied more than 100 "wyche-houses" and production was highly regulated. The industrial revolution introduced technological change, such as coal as a fuel and iron for the boiling pans, as well as steam pumps for drawing brine from the below-ground "wet" rockhead. The number of saltworks operating in any one period was reduced to around five, and these often changed hands. In fact the same locations were largely reused over several centuries. Various grades of salt were produced, much of it for preserving food, but it was also used in tanning, dyeing and clothing manufacture. In the 19th and 20th centuries, chemical uses became more important, such as production of ammonia, alkali and bleach. Social conditions for the work force were hard, and the impact of the salt and chemical works on the local environment at Middlewich resulted in great pollution and health problems.



Seddon's open Pans at Pepper Street works.



Take a journey through time...

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, quilder-rose, 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.

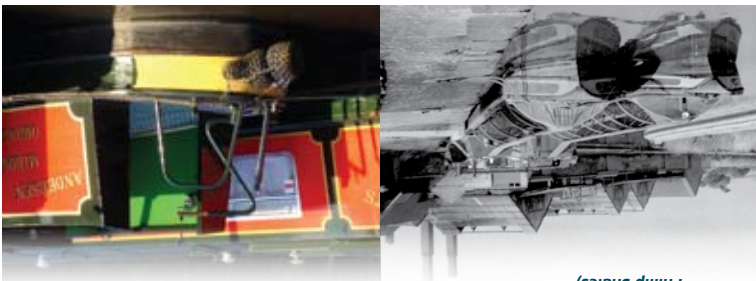


The main shopping centre offering a wide range of local produce, crafts and general amenities, is located along Lewin Street, Hightown and Wheelock Street.

The 1760's were pivotal for canal building. The Earl of Bridgewater's canal had showed the Captains of industry that the canals offered a more effective way of transporting commodities across the country than by pack-horse and poorly maintained roads. For the next sixty years, and before the advent of the next transport revolution – the train; canals were constructed across most of industrial Britain, especially in those areas where heavy industry relied on the constant supply and distribution of raw materials such as iron ore, coal and in the case of Middlewich; salt.

Sadly very few canals made any profit during their lifetime and were subjected to takeovers including consortiums that also had a stake in the railways. The railways had made a significant impact on the way goods and people were transported across Britain. However, the canal systems proved vital during the two World Wars.

The canal system around Middlewich has over the past 150 years been of major importance in transporting coal, dairy products and, of course salt. Although many of these industries have now either gone or goods are moved by road freight, canals have been given a new lease of life in the form of leisure and Middlewich is at the forefront of this new revolution. Investment from the leisure industry and the commitment of bodies such as British Waterways has reignited a new wave of canal users. Allied to this growing industry is a renewed interest in the heritage value of the canal system and this has been taken up with vigour by groups such as Middlewich Vision and the Middlewich Heritage Society.

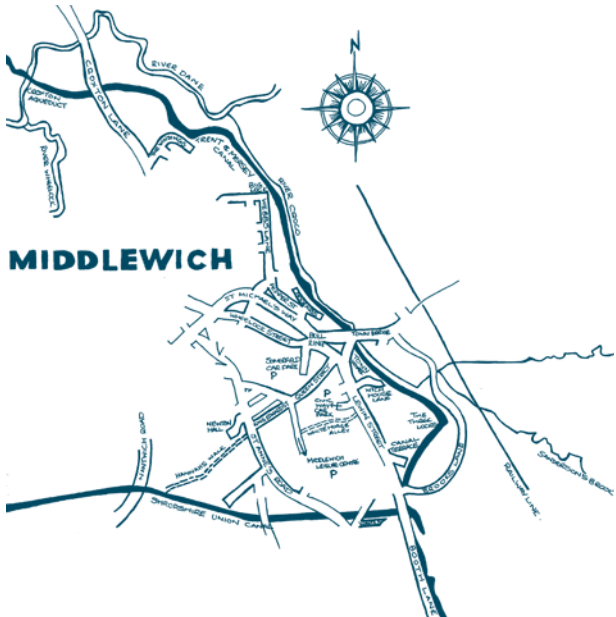


Left: Narrow boats bringing in coal. Seddon's Wych House Lane works are in the background with the town wharf and coal yard to the right. (Photo: Phillip Shales)

TIMELINE

- 1894** Murgatroyd's Ammonia Soda Works becomes Brunner-Mond's Middlewich Alkali Works. Closed 1962.
- 1914-18** During the First World War the canal system, 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.

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.



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| 1675 | Five salt works are listed for Middlewich; The Town works (12 pans), Baron of Kinder-ton (7 pans), Mr. Oldfield, Baron of 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 Wedgewood 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. Seamans 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. |

