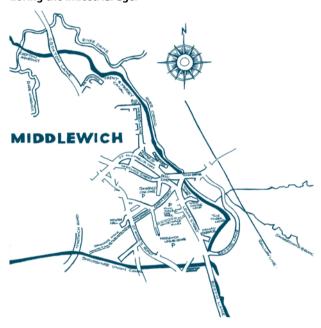
- 1894 Murgatroyd's Ammonia Soda Works becomes Brunner-Mond's Middlewich Alkali Works. Closed 1962.
- 1914 During the First World War the canal system,
 -18 especially around Cheshire, Manchester and
 North Wales plays a pivotal role in supporting the war effort, supplying heavy industry with raw materials 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.

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.



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

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.

tons of salt each year.

1878 Thirteen salt pans in operation producing 14,000

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

Staffordshire Railway. Commercial interest continues to grow.

The Trent and Mersey is taken over by the North

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

produced each year.

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

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

proposed canal route.

William Seaman, gentleman of Middlewich writes to Josiah Wedgewood putting forward the case for Middlewich to be included on the

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

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.

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, guilder-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.





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)

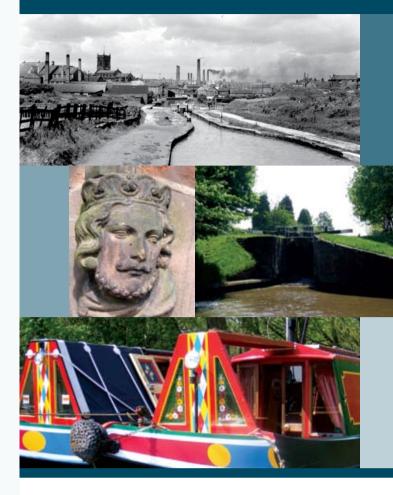
Heritage Society.

by groups such as Middlewich Vision and the Middlewich of the canal system and this has been taken up with vigour growing industry is a renewed interest in the heritage value has reignited a new wave of canal users. Allied to this and the commitment of bodies such as British Waterways this new revolution. Investment from the leisure industry the form of leisure and Middlewich is at the forefront of road freight, canals have been given a new lease of life in industries have now either gone or goods are moved by dairy products and, of course salt. Although many of these 150 years been of major importance in transporting coal, The canal system around Middlewich has over the past the canal systems proved vital during the two World Wars. goods and people were transported across Britain. However, The railways had made a significant impact on the way consortiums that also had a stake in the railways. lifetime and were subjected to takeovers including Sadly very few canals made any profit during their

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 Nraw materials such as iron ore, coal and in the case of hiddlewich; salt.



Take a journey through time...

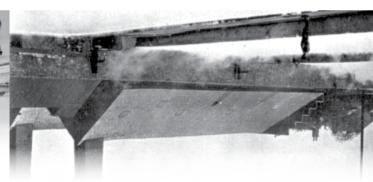




BRITISH SALT



Seddon's open Pans at Pepper Street works.



roblems.

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

The Tales of Wych 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.

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



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.



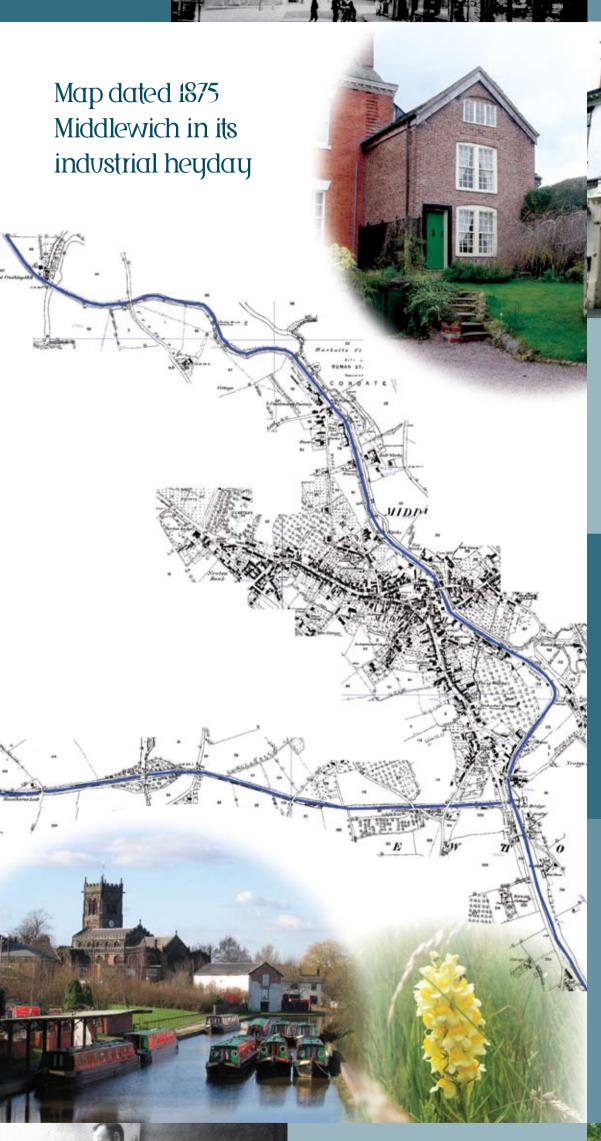
2. Away from the medieval core of the town, Middlewich boasts a varied architectural heritage and this reflects its social history, especially in the way the town was divided up into rich and poor areas. Along Queen Street residences include Georgian, Regency and Victorian architecture.



- 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.
- 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.



- 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
- 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.



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 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.

- 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 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.
- 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.

