

Notes for Short Docks tour

The River Severn rises in Wales at Plynlimon and at 220 miles (354 km) is the longest in the UK. Runs down to meet the Bristol channel at Severn Beach – just below 2nd Severn Crossing.

The river has provided an important trade route between the Midlands and Bristol for hundreds of years. There was a quay here in Roman times. Gloucester was awarded Port status by Queen Elizabeth I in **1580**

The River Severn is tidal with a range of about 50' (15.4m). Often quoted as being the 2nd highest tidal range in the world. It is tidal to Maisemore – north of Gloucester.

In the 18th century, there was growing trade on the river and the proposal was made for a ship canal between Gloucester and Berkeley.

In **1794** the work started. The main basin was dug by hand to a depth of 16' (4.88m). Progress was slow, and the combination of inefficient contractors, poor supervision and appalling weather meant that by **1799**, the capital was spent, and the canal had only reached Hardwicke – 5 miles (8km) from Gloucester.

In **1812** the lock gates were put in so that the main basin could be used. Coal from the Forest of Dean was brought in by boat and transferred by horse drawn wagons to Cheltenham on the Tramroad.

After the Napoleonic wars, the returning troops needed employment and work resumed on the canal in **1823** under the supervision of Thomas Fletcher and Thomas Telford.

The original plans were shortened, and the canal ended at Sharpness.

In **1827** the canal was opened. It is 16 miles long (25.75 km), has 16 locks on it, took 34 years to build and was four times over budget.

A variety of boats used the canal – trows, barged, brigs and schooners.

Dry docks – Graving docks – built **1818** and **1853**

Victoria Dock built in **1849**. Also known as the Salt Basin. Salt was transferred to sea-going ships for Ireland and the Continent.

Mariners Chapel. Built in **1849** to serve the large community of sailors.

Imports

Corn from Ireland and the continent; timber from Baltic, North America and Russia; wines from Portugal and France.

Warehouses built to store corn: Herbert, Kimberley, Phillpotts, Vinings, Reynolds, Biddle, Alexander. Three flour mills.

Timber yards grew up down the Bristol road. Bakers Quay built to accommodate timber.

Main export was salt from Worcestershire.

As the size of merchant ships increased, a growing proportion of goods coming into Gloucester arrived in barges from Sharpness and other ports. Corn was sent straight to the Midlands and there followed a decline in the use of the warehouses.

1920's Petroleum products were transported on barges from Avonmouth to Worcester and Stourport. Once underground pipelines were constructed, this traffic ceased.

The growth of rail and road transport meant that commercial traffic died away by the end of the **1960's**.

1580	Port status granted by Elizabeth I
1793	Act passed
1794	Work commences
1797	Main basin dug by hand
1799	Work end at Hardwicke
1811	Tramroad
1812	Lock installed
1815	End of Napoleonic wars
1817	Work restarts under Thomas Telford
1818	First graving dock installed
1823	Hugh McIntosh appointed and work resumes
1826	North Warehouse
1827	Canal completed
1840's	Railway connections
1846	Repeal of the Corn Laws
1849	Mariner's Church
1849	Victoria Dock / Salt Basin
1850's	Increase in imports – warehouses built
1853	Second graving dock
1860's	Merchant ships get larger – too big to use canal fully laden
1874	Sharpness dock improved
1914-18	First World War has disastrous effect on trade
1920's	Warehouses underused
1930's	Petroleum products transported by barge
1960's	Barge traffic declined. Switch to road transport.
1988	Coaster traffic ceases
1998	Grain barges traffic to Tewkesbury ceases