

# **Tardebigge Canal**

**The Birmingham to Worcester Canal  
as a transport system for Redditch**

# The Development of Canals in Britain

The British canal system was an important feature of the Industrial Revolution in the UK. Roads were primitive and medieval and pack horses were the principle means of "mass" transport by road of raw materials and finished products.

The canal system grew rapidly at first, and became an almost completely-connected network covering the South, Midlands, and parts of the North of England and Wales. The canal boats could carry 30 tons at a time with only one horse pulling it. This was more than ten times the amount of cargo per horse that was possible with a cart.

By about 1840, the canal system had expanded to nearly 4,000 miles (over 6,400 kilometres) in length. Up to then they had no competition. However, this would change with the introduction of railways.



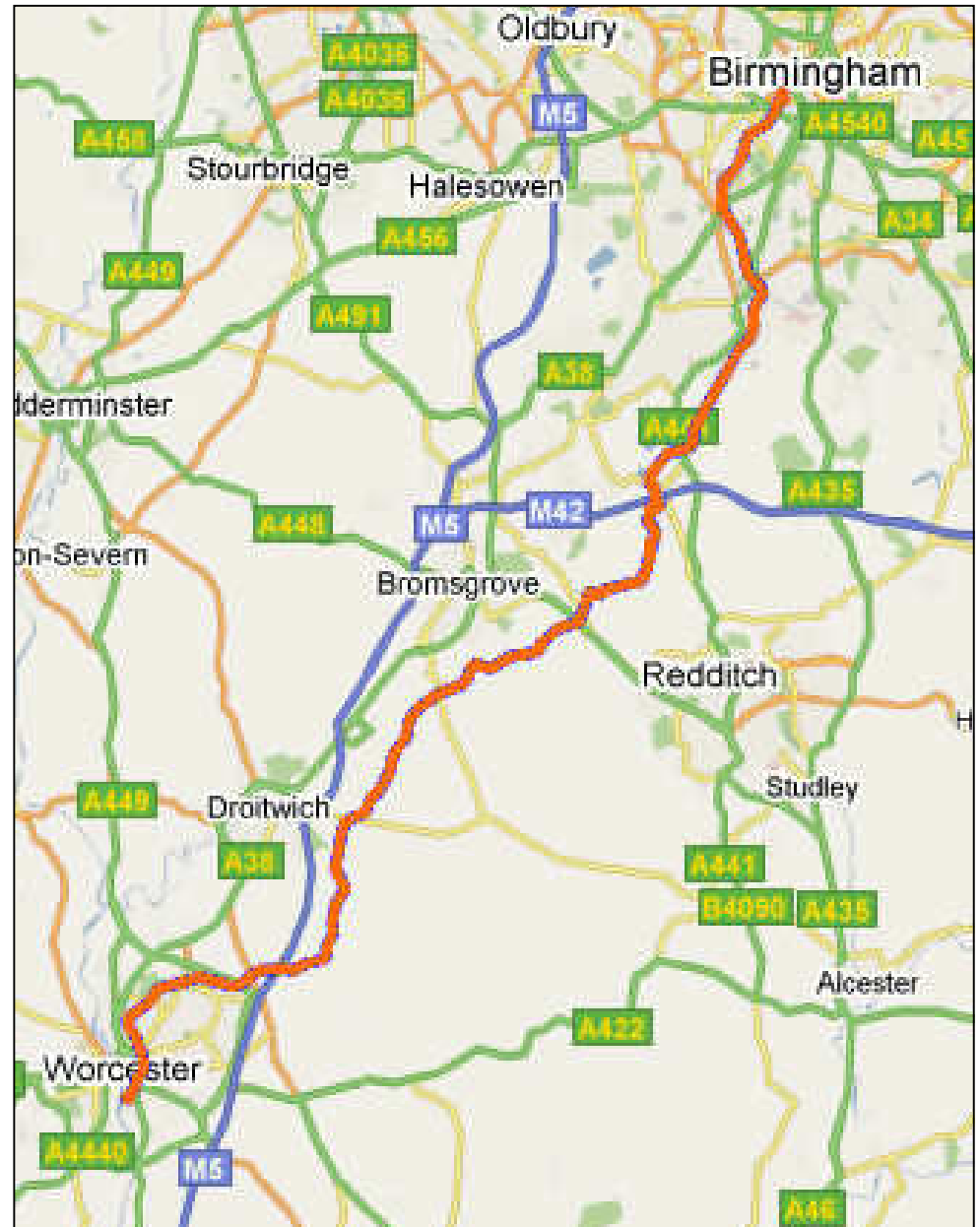
# The Worcester to Birmingham Canal

Work began on the Worcester to Birmingham Canal in the late 18th Century and the route from Birmingham reached the Tardebigge Old Wharf in 1807. It took six years to complete the Tardebigge tunnel to the New Wharf and the route to Worcester was finally opened in 1815.

It had taken 24 years and cost more than three times the original estimated cost. This was due to the difficult terrain requiring the construction of three major tunnels and 58 locks.

The route of the canal is shown on the Google map.

The Canal was only three miles from Redditch and was to play an important role in the development of the town.



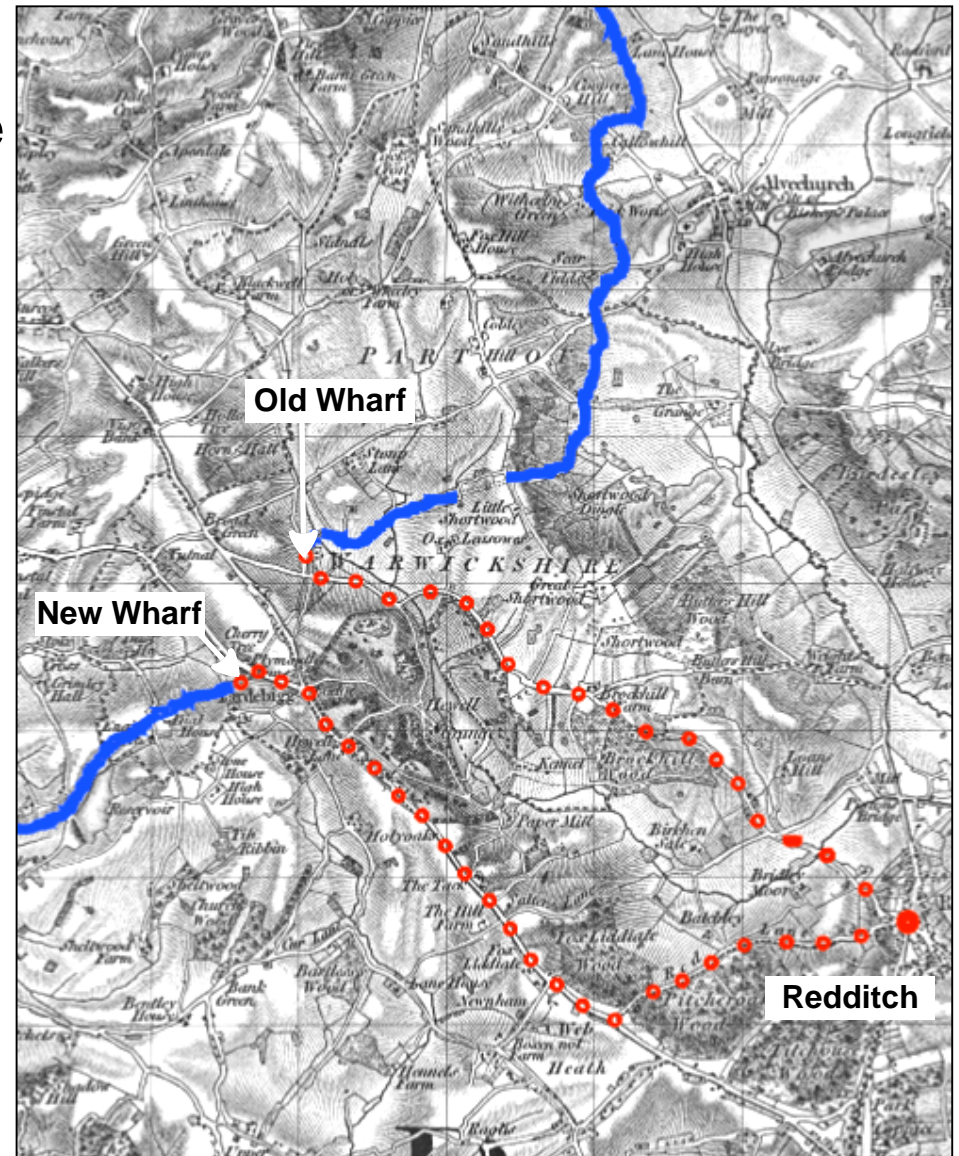
# The Canal as Transport system for Redditch

Redditch used initially the Tardebigge Old Wharf as this was the first to be constructed and later both the New and Old Wharfs were used. It was more efficient and less costly for Redditch manufacturers to use the canal rather than low grade road transport.

The principle routes from Redditch were via Brockhill Lane to the Old Wharf and via Red Lane (Bromsgrove Road) to the New Wharf.

It was vital for Redditch manufacturers as they were able to bring in coal, steel and other raw materials and export manufactured goods by this route.

This method of transport was of importance for Redditch from 1807 to 1859 as this was the date when the railway arrived in Redditch and made the canal uncompetitive.



# The Decline of the Canal System

By the 1830's, railways had rapidly become the most important means of long distance transport.

The canal network started their decline because the canals could not compete with the new, faster and cheaper steam trains that could efficiently carry raw materials, finished products and, critically, people.

The railways arrived late in Redditch and it was not until 1859 that the branch line arrived from Birmingham.

By this time the railway system had become well established and the amount of cargo carried on the canals had fallen by nearly two-thirds, lost almost entirely to railway competition.



Tardebigge New Wharf in 1920.

Tardebigge New Wharf in 2010 (photo Vince Green).



# The Revival of the Canal System

The canals continued their decline but had a brief revival during the Second World War. However this was short lived, but, although the commercial decline continued after the end of the war, recreational use gradually increased as people had more leisure time and disposable income.

In 1946 a group called the Inland Waterways Association was formed and this helped revive interest in the UK's canals.

British Waterways, which has the role of running the canal system came to see the economic and social potential of developing the system and has encouraged recreational use.

This has moved the canals from an historic relic of our Industrial Revolution to the point where they are a major leisure destination.



Tardebigge Church which has the graves of many canal people who lived and worked on the canal.



A view of the New Wharf from Tardebigge Church.

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