

# Rochdale Canal Fact File



This **Fact File** will help you to find out more about the canal that connects Manchester city centre with Sowerby Bridge in West Yorkshire.

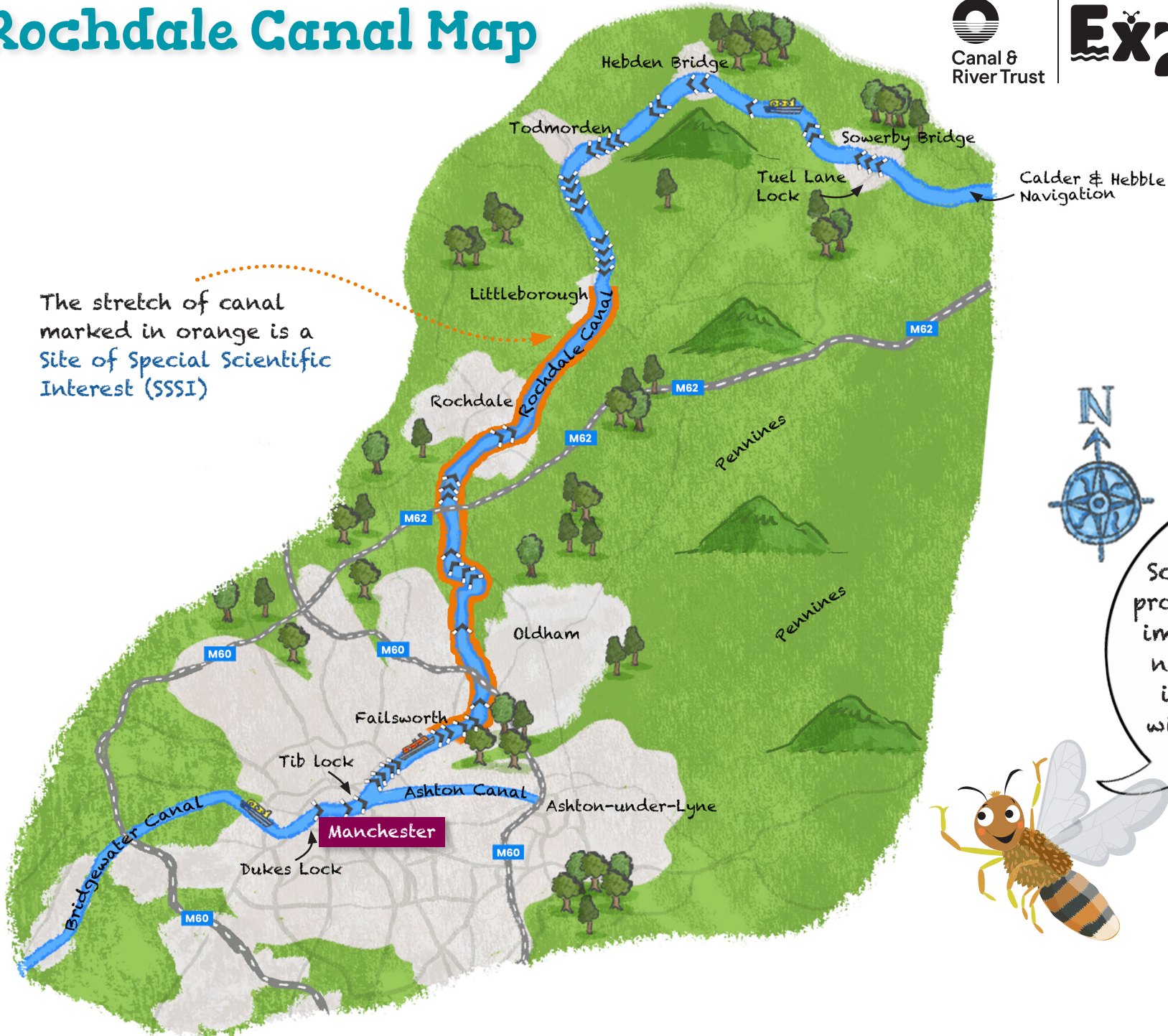
- Discover why it was built
- Find out who built it
- Hear all about its restoration
- Learn why part of the canal is a Site of Special Scientific Interest



Rochdale Canal  
Restoration  
Anniversary  
**2022**

The Canal & River Trust logo, featuring a stylized circular emblem with horizontal lines above the text "Canal & River Trust".

# Rochdale Canal Map



The stretch of canal marked in orange is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)



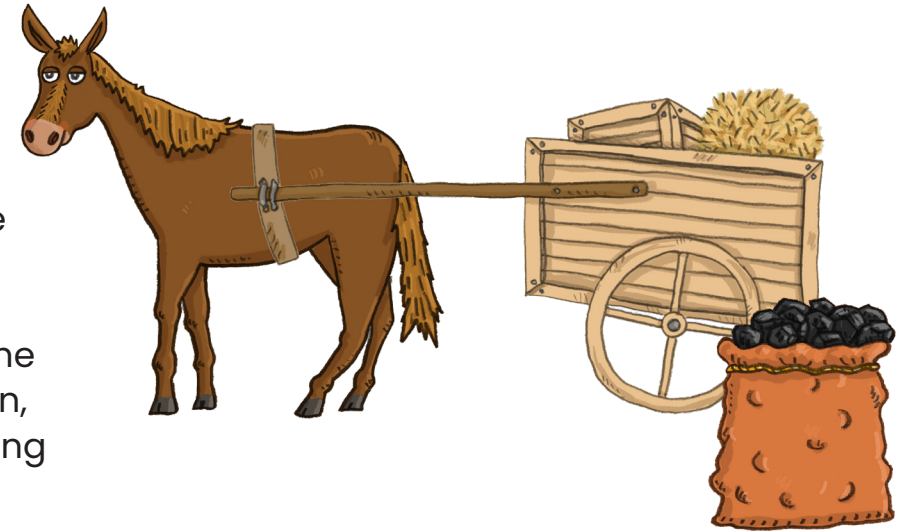
Sites of Special Scientific Interest are protected areas that are important examples of natural heritage (this includes the plants, wildlife or rocks that are found there).



# Rochdale Canal: Why was it built?

Canals were being built all over Britain to carry **cargo** such as coal and building materials. Before canals were built, moving cargo around was difficult as there were no engines. Items such as coal and food had to be moved by horse and cart. This was slow and one horse could not pull much weight across the bumpy ground.

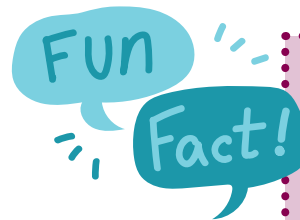
The Rochdale Canal was the first of 3 canals to cross the Pennines, the mountains that separate Lancashire and Yorkshire. Coal, wool, cotton, grain, cement, salt and timber were some of the cargoes carried along the Rochdale Canal.



Although 3 canals crossed the Pennines the Leeds & Liverpool was too far north to get the Manchester traffic and the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, although shorter, could not take the wide Mersey Flat boats carrying cargo from Liverpool.

## Did you know?

- The Rochdale Canal is 51km long
- The work to build the canal started in 1794 and it was opened in 1804



The Rochdale Canal used to have a **tunnel** under Deansgate which was 307m long but because of development in Manchester it has been replaced by a bridge.

# Who built the Rochdale Canal?



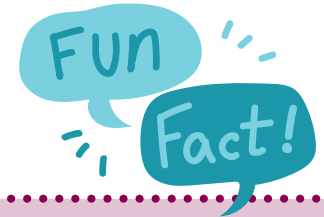
**John Rennie (Chief Engineer)**

There were thousands of people involved in building the canal but the person we usually know most about is the chief engineer. It would be this man that was in charge of the design and have overall supervision for the build. **John Rennie** was the chief engineer on the Rochdale Canal.

Rennie (1761 – 1821) started his engineering career building mills and after gaining recognition, he was employed to do surveying work for canals. His biggest waterway project was the Kennet & Avon Canal, which he surveyed and then became its chief engineer.



**Navvie (Worker)**



Teams of navvies (short for navigators) dug out the canal channel and built the canal. Stone masons, brick layers and carpenters also helped to build the canal.

**What job would you like to have done on the canal?**

**John Rennie** used to skip school so that he could go and watch what went on at a local mill workshop. This inspired his engineering career.

# Working on the Rochdale Canal

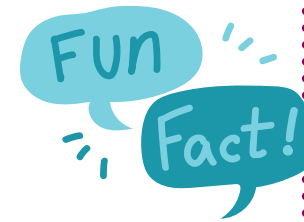
The Rochdale Canal provided a lot of **jobs** during its construction. **Navvies** (people who dug the channel and did manual labour), stone masons and engineers amongst other craftsmen were needed. The waterway attracted workers after its completion. Men who had previously been farmers went to work on the canal because it offered a higher wage.

## Jobs on the Rochdale Canal included:

**Lock keepers** made sure the locks were full of water. Sometimes they sorted out arguments amongst boaters too!

**Wharfingers** were in charge of the wharves where goods were loaded and unloaded. They had to make sure that valuable cargo was kept safe from thieves!

Some people transported cargo on boats for canal companies others became a '**number one**'. Number ones owned their own boats and took on work where it could be found. They were paid when they delivered a cargo so it was important to work quickly and have an empty boat for as little time as possible. Samuel Fielding was a number one carrying coal for a living he became known as 'Coal Sam'.



In 1890 700,000 tons of cargo was carried along the canal which is around 50 barges a day.

Did you know?  
The canal increased the number of people goods could reach so created more work in the mills and factories.



# Restoring the Rochdale Canal

As roads and railways became a cheaper and quicker way to deliver goods, canals were used less often. By the 1930s, many had become overgrown and derelict.

The Inland Waterways Association was set up to try and protect canals from being abandoned. However, there were lots of canals to care for and the Rochdale Canal was not the biggest priority. The Rochdale Canal was officially abandoned in 1952. The canal was filled with rubbish, bridges were lowered and the M62 motorway built across it.



Volunteers began to work on canals all over the country to help raise money and awareness so canals could be restored for pleasure boats to use. They thought they were an important part of the country's history and so should be preserved. The enthusiastic volunteers did a lot of work repairing parts of the canals themselves.

In 2002 the Rochdale Canal was fully repaired and navigable by boat once again.

## Did you know?

Work to restore the Rochdale Canal included the creation of a new channel under the M62, a new canal tunnel under the A627 (M) roundabout, 12 new road bridges and the repair of 24 locks.



# Locks

Engineers invented locks to move boats up and down hill. There are **91 locks** along the Rochdale Canal.

**Tuel Lane Lock** – The Rochdale Canal is home to the deepest lock in Britain, Tuel Lane Lock. This lock used to be 2 locks (locks 3 and 4), which is why it is so deep. A boat moves almost 6m up or down when using this lock.

**Duke's Lock (Lock 92)** – This lock connects the Rochdale Canal with the Bridgewater canal and was owned by the Duke of Bridgewater so that he could control entry to his canal and charge high tolls.



Tuel Lane Lock



## Did you know?

There's a **secret** trap door on the bottom of the canal at Tib Lock (Lock 89)! When the canal is drained the trap door can be lifted and any remaining water is let out of the canal into the River Tib below. To find the location of the trap door look out for the arrow symbol carved into the stone on the towpath.



# Wildlife on the Rochdale Canal

Almost 12 miles of the Rochdale Canal have been given the **SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest)** status due to a rare type of plant that grows there.

**Floating Water Plantain** has 2 appearances, one like in the picture where the leaves are oval and the second looks like rings of grass.



Floating Water Plantain



The Rochdale Canal is also home to some **amazing wildlife**, see what you can spot on your next visit.

Always visit a canal or river with an adult and remember to stay **SAFE** near water – **Stay Away From the Edge.**



Moorhen

Coot

Mallard

Swan

Canada goose

Kingfisher

Butterfly

Ladybird



# The Rochdale Canal today

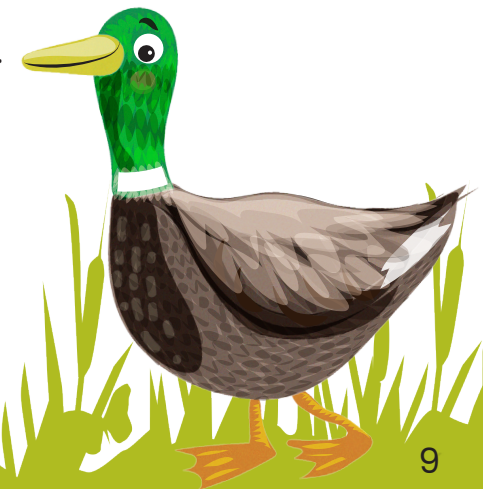
The canal is not used for moving cargo anymore, but it is used by thousands of people every day.

Many people use the towpath for walking and cycling to get to school or work, keeping fit, or enjoying the outdoors. The canal is a special place where people can get closer to nature even in built-up towns and cities.



People still use boats for leisure or as their homes and canoeing and paddleboarding is becoming more popular too.

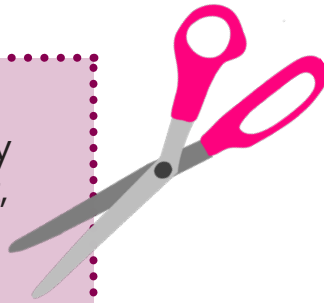
Volunteers are still working hard to care for the canal to make it a great place for people and wildlife to enjoy.



# Timeline: Important dates in the history of the Rochdale Canal

Here are some important dates in the history of the Rochdale Canal but they have been muddled up. Cut them out, sort them into the correct order, and stick them onto the timeline.

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**1790:** The plans didn't go any further until 1790 when it was suggested that the Calder & Hebble Navigation was extended. The plans had to be updated before they could be submitted to Parliament.

**1952:** The canal closed.

**1766:** Plans for the Leeds & Liverpool Canal started.

**1799:** The canal between Sowerby Bridge and Todmorden opened.

**1765:** The Duke of Bridgewater opened a canal from his coal field in Worsley to Manchester called the Bridgewater Canal.

**1794:** A bill for the Rochdale Canal was finally passed by Parliament. The Rochdale Canal Company was created, and building began.

**1980/90s:** Work began to open small sections of the canal.

**1791:** John Rennie is employed to make a new survey of the route.

**1996:** The canal re-opened between Sowerby Bridge and the highest point

**1937:** 1937 Last boat went over the Pennines on the Rochdale Canal.

**2002:** The whole canal was re-opened.

**1792:** The Rochdale Canal bill failed. Partly due to the Duke of Bridgewater refusing to let the canal join up to his.

**1766:** A group of men suggested a shorter route from Leeds to Manchester via Rochdale. James Brindley was employed to find the best route.

**1804:** The whole canal was opened.

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1765

2002

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