

# KS2 CANAL MANIA

James Brindley

BLACK COUNTRY  
LIVING  
MUSEUM

From 1766-1900 the canal system was the main means of transporting goods in the Black Country and Birmingham. Over 160 miles of canals enabled raw materials and finished products to be shipped out all over the country and the world. The transport network linked collieries and ironworking industries with the ports of Bristol and Manchester.

The first Black Country canals - the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal (1766 - 72) and the Birmingham Canal with its arm to Wednesbury (1768 - 72), were built under the supervision of James Brindley, "the father" of the English canal system.

There followed a frenzy of "Canal Mania" and the Black Country became criss-crossed in a dense network of canals, known as the Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN).

The canals became so busy that gas lighting was installed beside the locks to permit round-the-clock operation. For most of the BCN's history, boats were open and horse drawn, often built without cabins for maximum carrying capacity. Journeys were generally short haul, with the cargoes such as limestone, coal and iron being moved relatively short distances within the Black Country region.

This intensity enabled a huge increase in movement of materials and products allowing the Black Country and Birmingham to become literally "the workshop of the world".

## PIONEER OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

**James Brindley  
(1716-1772)**

Brindley was born near Buxton in Derbyshire. He was the pioneer of the British canal system.

By the age of twenty six he had founded his own business constructing mills and steam engines. This led him to work as a canal engineer surveying and laying a network of canals totalling 375 miles. His projects included the Bridgewater Canal (between Manchester and Liverpool) and the Grand Trunk Canal (between Trent and Mersey).