



Did you know that the Walsall Canal was the **second** canal to reach Walsall? Read on...



Map of the Walsall and
Walsall Junction Canals

The Walsall Branch of the [Wyrley & Essington Canal](#), opened in 1797, ended at Birchills Wharf, 1.5km (1 mile) north of Walsall town centre.

A second canal for Walsall

In 1799, a new canal was built to link the centre of Walsall with the [Birmingham Canal](#) near Oldbury. The Walsall Canal runs 11km (7 miles) from Walsall Town Wharf via Darlaston to join [James Brindley's](#) original [Birmingham Canal](#) of 1769 (now called the [Wednesbury Old Canal](#)) at Ryders Green Junction.

The 'missing link' and the Boatman's Mission

Although a link between the two canals was first proposed in 1825, it was 1840 before the 1.5km (1 mile) Walsall Junction Canal, with its flight of eight locks, was built to link the Walsall Canal near Bradford Ironworks to the Walsall Branch of the [Wyrley & Essington Canal](#) at Birchills Wharf. Here, beside the toll house, a Boatman's Mission was built in 1900 to provide food, friendship and overnight accommodation for boatmen. A stone plaque still records that the Cadbury family (of chocolate fame) provided most of the funds to build the mission.



Walsall Town Wharf is now overlooked by cafes, bars and the new Walsall Art Gallery opened in 2000

The impact of the canal on Walsall

When the Walsall Canal opened in 1799 its impact was dramatic. The price of coal from the Wednesbury collieries was halved, so iron works and factories grew up beside the canal. Limestone quarries near Walsall provided a return cargo, to be used in building and for liming fields.

The Town Arm was soon lined with busy wharves unloading coal for the gasworks, iron ore, cocoa, sugar and fruit. Over 50 boats arrived daily.

Boatbuilding in Walsall

Many of the boats used on the Walsall Canal were built locally. There were at least 20 boatyards in Walsall in 1900. The largest - Thomas's Boatyard - also had its own carrying fleet of 625 narrowboats.

The decline of freight traffic

The canal served Walsall's economy for over 150 years until lorry traffic, using the new motorways, took over from the 1950s. Until 1966, tar bi-products were carried from Walsall gasworks to a tar distillery at Oldbury. The last horse-drawn narrowboat brought a cargo of steel pipes to connect the Walsall area to natural gas supplies in 1974.