THE ARRIVAL OF THE CANAL

The town of Sheffield is situated on the River Don at its confluence with the River Sheaf but a combination of size of the river channel and the flow of water, together with industrial weirs every so often, meant that the upper reaches of the river were not navigable. Therefore, as Sheffield emerged as a centre for tool manufacture in medieval times, goods had to be transported overland to the nearest inland port of Bawtry on the River Idle. As time passed, the lower reaches of the River Don were made navigable, but even so, boats could still not reach the centre of Sheffield; a major disadvantage for the import of raw materials and the export of manufactured goods.

There had been proposed canalisation projects to join Sheffield to the navigable River Don as early as 1697, but these were never implemented. The river became navigable at Tinsley, thence to the Rivers Ouse and Trent, and to the great Humber Estuary and eventually the North Sea. From 1751, the canal terminus had been at Tinsley.

However, by 1815, an Act of Parliament formed the Sheffield Canal Company with a recommended route to leave the River Don at Jordan’s Lock, opposite where the ‘Holmes Cut’ of the Don Navigation joined the river and follow the north side of the Don Valley to a basin ‘in or near Savile Street’. This favoured route proved unfavourable to one of the main sponsors, as the Duke of Norfolk’s estate realised it would not pass beside its collieries at Tinsley Park and Manor. The alternative route was to follow the south side of the Don Valley, terminating at a canal basin on what had been the orchards of Sheffield Castle. The new route needed two series of locks. One lock was at Tinsley to raise the level from the River Don and a second one was at Carbrook, to provide the height necessary to flow into the town centre.

On 7th June 1815, with 182 subscribers, an Act of Parliament was passed, the Duke of Norfolk (£2,000) and the Earl Fitzwilliam (£1,000) being the largest contributors for the scheme costing £76,000. Work was overseen by civil engineer William Chapman and Hugh Parker of Woodthorpe Hall laid the first stone on 16th June 1816. The canal opened in 1819 with a crowd of 60,000 people and a flotilla of ten barges arriving from Tinsley, one carrying coal from Handsworth Colliery, the first cargo on the new canal. The opening of the Canal Basin was greeted with great enthusiasm in the town and a fleet of barges festooned with flags and with bands playing on the decks made a triumphant entry into the Canal Basin.

Today the Sheffield and Tinsley Canal is a quiet waterway for mainly recreational craft, with the canal-side banks populated by dog walkers and fishermen.