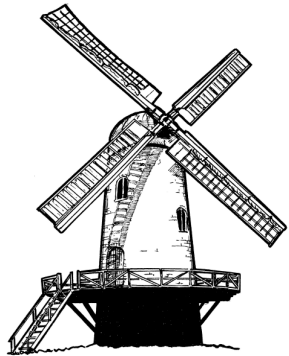


Development of Transport in Wiltshire and why Wilton Windmill was built

Wilton Windmill is linked directly with the developments in transport made in Wiltshire and the rest of the country during the early and middle years of the 19th century. If these developments had not taken place, Wilton Windmill and Crofton Beam Engines would never have been built.

Transport in the 18th century was slow and uncomfortable. Everything travelled by road unless it could travel by boat on a convenient river. Most journeys were made by road, often badly rutted with huge potholes. Heavy loads were always very difficult to move, using carts pulled by huge teams of horses or oxen.

London was already a thriving city and the city of Bristol a thriving port. Ships from Bristol arrived with goods from all over the world. At that time any boats that tried to get to London via the English Channel were in danger from being attacked by the French. The difficulty of getting goods from Bristol to London was addressed by a group of Bristol businessmen who planned and built a canal between the two cities. The Kennet and Avon canal was started in 1794 and the first boats used the full route in 1812. At last both heavy loads and delicate loads could be moved quickly, reliably and cheaply. Boats were pulled by horses that walked along the tow path. A single horse could pull a boat with a load that weighed many tons. The Kennet and Avon canal was a great success and trade flourished. The businessmen made money by charging every boat to use the canal.



If a canal passes hills and valleys, the water level has to be raised or lowered. This is done using locks, but each time a boat goes through a lock, water is drained downstream. This water has to be topped up to keep the canal full, so the highest point (Crofton) needs a water supply. This was made by digging a new reservoir at Wilton Water but sadly it was a little bit too low to feed the canal's highest point, the summit. Crofton Beam engines were especially built to pump the water from the reservoir up the extra few metres.

Unfortunately when the canal was built all the water from the local streams and rivers was diverted to fill it. No water was left for running watermills in the area and five watermills became useless. Local people and farmers had nowhere to mill their corn.

With the five watermills out of action Wilton Windmill was built in 1821. It served quite a large area. Farmers would normally go no further than a horse and cart could go and come back in a day. It worked very successfully for nearly one hundred years.

By the middle of the 19th century a new invention changed both transport in this country and the countryside. The steam engine was invented. It was originally used for pumping out water from the mines. Later it was used to power the early railway engines. These were faster and more efficient than the canals. Between 1856 and 1865 the Great Western Railway was built between Bristol and London. Goods could move very much faster between the two cities and at a cheaper cost. For a while the railway and the canal were in competition for trade. Very heavy goods like coal were moved by canal and lighter things and passengers were transported by rail. Once goods had been moved to London they were moved to the customer's site by horse-drawn carts or by lorries in later years.



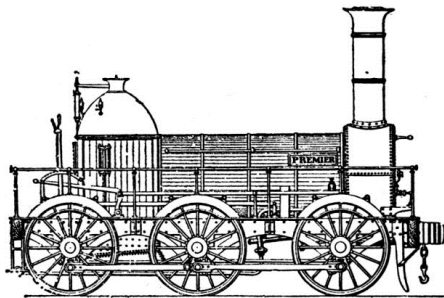
The canal was used until 1950, after which it fell into disrepair. It was only in 1965 that a group of enthusiasts decided to get the canal back into working order. After huge efforts, by 1978 the whole route was cleared and boats could again travel all the way between the two cities. These days the canal is used by pleasure boats, the towpath by walkers and cyclists. Very little cargo is transported by boat any more.

The final stage of this story is when in 1965 the M4 motorway was built. Lorries could pick up goods at Bristol Docks and deliver them directly to the customer. The railways now found road transport was able to deliver goods quickly and cheaply than they could. These days the railways carry mostly people and a few very heavy goods like coal, gravel, stone and cement.



So...

- The Kennet and Avon Canal was an improvement on the old poor-quality roads.
- The Great Western Railway was an improvement on the canal.
- The M4 motorway was an improvement on the railway.
- Now some passengers fly from London to Bristol. So what will come next?
- Wilton Windmill was only built because five old watermills lost their water supply.
- Crofton Beam Engines were built to supply water to the canal.



Great Western Railway

