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REVEALING CHESHIRE'S PAST

From Turnpikes to Trains

7 Transport



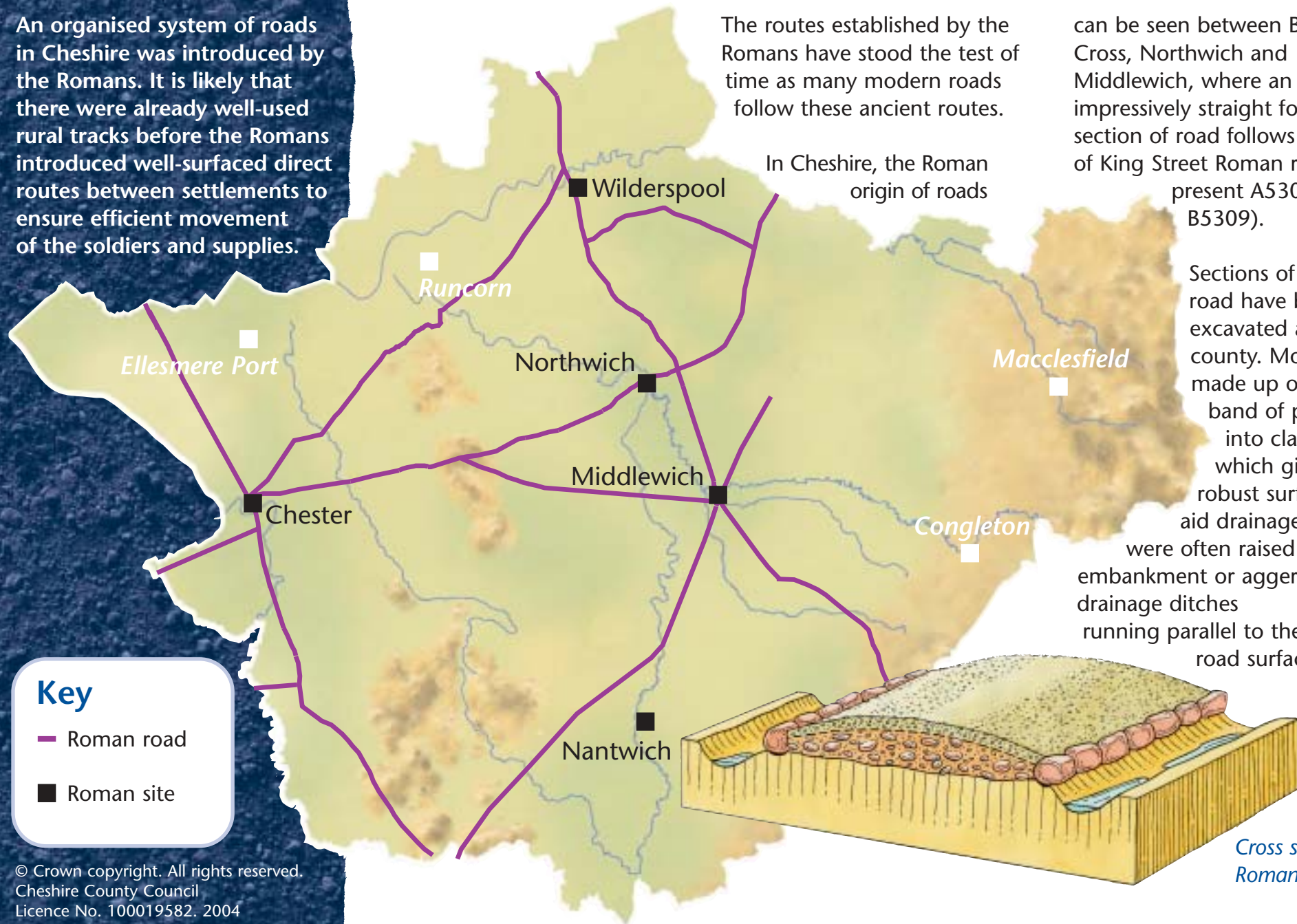
Roman Roads

An organised system of roads in Cheshire was introduced by the Romans. It is likely that there were already well-used rural tracks before the Romans introduced well-surfaced direct routes between settlements to ensure efficient movement of the soldiers and supplies.

The routes established by the Romans have stood the test of time as many modern roads follow these ancient routes.

can be seen between Broken Cross, Northwich and Middlewich, where an impressively straight four mile section of road follows the route of King Street Roman road (the present A530 and B5309).

Sections of Roman road have been excavated across the county. Most are made up of a thick band of pebbles set into clay or sand which gives a robust surface. To aid drainage they were often raised on an embankment or agger with drainage ditches running parallel to the road surface.



Key

- Roman road
- Roman site

Cross section of Roman road

Packhorses

Sturdy ponies have been used to transport goods since prehistoric times. They could go where wheeled transport could not. They were vital to trade, and long teams of ponies transported goods to markets across Britain using remote routes.

Packhorse transport was used well into the 19th century. In Cheshire, it was used to transport salt, as the roads were too poor for wagons. A network of track ways linked the salt producing towns of central Cheshire to towns across the Pennines in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire. Place name evidence is an indication of the

original purpose of these routes. Saltersford, Saltersbrook and Salter's Lane all occur frequently in these counties. After the introduction of toll roads, some traders would use the remote routes to avoid paying the tolls. Only with the introduction of

canals and rail travel did packhorse transport become redundant. You can still find packhorse bridges in remote parts of the countryside.

Packhorse bridge at Hockenhull Platts, Chester



Turnpikes

Turnpikes were the first "proper" roads built in Britain since Roman times. Most Cheshire roads were badly maintained narrow tracks until the "Turnpike Trusts" were established by law in the late 17th century. They took over control of the roads from the parishes. The Trustees invested their own money to improve the roads and received tolls from the road users to maintain them.

The tolls were collected from purpose built houses with windows that faced the road. Gates or toll bars would have been built across the highway.

Better roads meant that more wheeled transport could be used. Long distance stagecoach routes ran from Chester and Manchester to London and the Midlands.

Shorter local routes were used for the transfer of goods between rural areas and commercial centres. Records show that heavy loads of cheese were blamed for the poor state of the Chester to Whitchurch road (before it was the first road in Cheshire to be turnpiked.)

In the early 19th century, long stretches of new roads were constructed. In East Cheshire the textile trade needed better transport to

commercial centres. The Macclesfield to Buxton turnpike, built in 1821 was designed to have low gradients for horse drawn vehicles. It was a longer road than the previous turnpike for this route, but was not so steep.

From 1888 onwards, Cheshire County Council took over the upkeep of the main roads. By the end of the 19th century, railways were the most efficient form of transport and the last turnpike was built in Britain in 1895.

Former turnpike tollhouse on the Chester-Northwich Road



Rivers and Canals

Rivers

Water transport has a long history in Cheshire. An Iron Age log boat from Baddiley Mere is the earliest boat found in Cheshire. Both Chester and Wilderspool were ports in Roman times though no boats have survived. A remarkable number of Saxon log boats have been found near Warrington, showing the Mersey was well used at that time.



Parkgate

The introduction of tolls made roads an expensive way to transport goods. Transport by river was cheaper, but few of Cheshire's rivers were navigable. The Dee estuary was silting up by the 17th century so a new

channel was cut in the early 1700s. A side effect of the new channel was that the river silted up in other places. Parkgate was once a prosperous port with passenger sailings to Ireland in the 17th century. The former quayside is now bordered by a huge salt marsh.

The River Weaver was improved as far as Winsford in the 1720s. This was prompted by the success of the salt industry and the need for a more efficient way to transport salt out of Cheshire and to move coal in.

Canals

In the mid 18th century, new waterways were constructed as an alternative to river and road transport. They linked important industrial towns to commercial centres.

The Sankey Canal was the first artificial waterway in England. It was opened in 1757 to carry coal from St Helens to the Mersey and then on to Liverpool. It was extended to Widnes in 1833.

The Bridgewater Canal was built to link the Duke of Bridgewater's coalmines to the Mersey. It was joined to the Trent and Mersey Canal in 1775, linking the east and west coasts of England.



Manchester Ship Canal

The improved access to Liverpool and Manchester meant that by the 19th century, Chester had lost its position as the county's main trading port.

Rivers and Canals *continued*



The Weaver Navigation was connected to the Trent and Mersey Canal by an inclined plane. This was replaced by the first boat lift in the world, built at Anderton in 1875. This allowed boats to be lifted 15 metres from the Navigation to the canal. It fell into disrepair in the 1980s but has recently been restored and is back in use.

A canal port was built on the River Mersey in 1796. It was originally the port for a canal from Ellesmere, Shropshire. The town that grew around it was named Ellesmere Port. In 1846, the Ellesmere Canal linked with canals from Chester, Birmingham and Liverpool to become the Shropshire Union Canal.

Most canals suffered from competition from the railways in the 19th century but the Shropshire Union Canal was an exception and thrived. The opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894 brought new trade to Ellesmere Port. It was an important interchange and new rail links and warehouses were built.

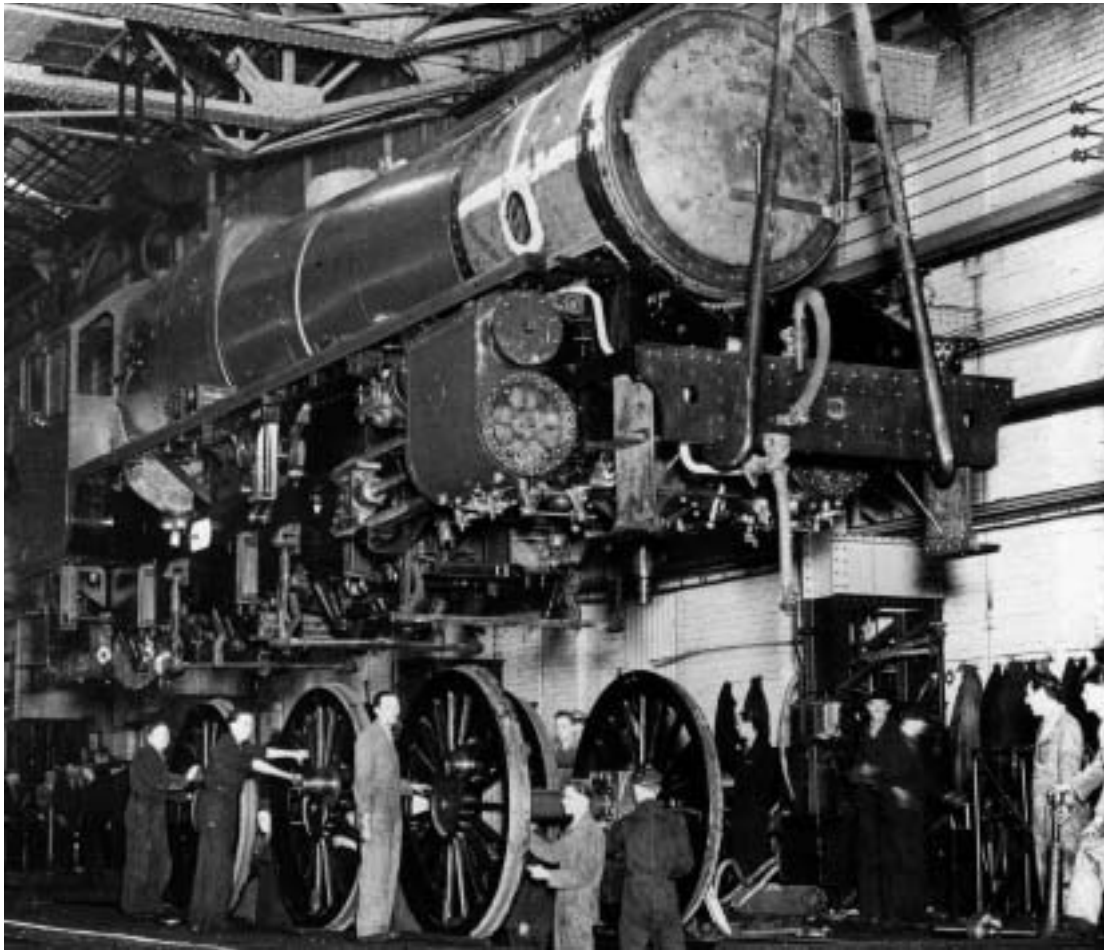
The Ship Canal also allowed ships to dock at Salford. By the 1930s Manchester was the fourth busiest port in Britain.

Bunbury Locks, built between 1775-1779 on Chester Canal

The Age of the Train

The first steam powered railway engine was built by Richard Trevithick in 1804. The steam engine itself had been invented in 1712 and was used to power mills and water pumps. Wagons already ran on rails in mines and quarries but this was the first time the two had been combined.

A much lighter and faster engine was invented by George Stephenson for the first public railway between Stockton and Darlington in 1825. Stephenson's "Rocket" steam engine won a competition to serve the first railway in the North West, from Manchester to Liverpool, in 1830.



The Grand Junction Railway linked Liverpool and Manchester to Birmingham. It was built between 1830 and 1850 and Crewe was adopted as the company town for the railway. It grew from a sparsely populated rural settlement to a town of over 40,000 inhabitants in less than 100 years. The Grand



Junction Railway and later the London and North West Railway (LNWR) were responsible for building schools, churches and houses as well as engineering works.

In Cheshire, many small companies were set up to create local links, such as the Cheshire Lines Committee which created a series of railways between Stockport, Knutsford, Northwich and Chester.

Many of the smaller companies were absorbed into larger ones like the London and North West Railway (LNWR), created in 1848.

Cheshire still has a good network of railway lines as many branch lines survived the rationalisation of the 1960s.

Crewe Works, 17 January 1946

Bridges & Viaducts – Landmarks of Cheshire



Medieval road bridge between Farndon and Holt. Built around 1345.



Wooden lifting bridge over the Shropshire Union Canal. Built in 1790 by Thomas Telford.



Railway viaduct for the Northwich – Chester Railway, opened in 1869. It crosses the rivers Dane, Weaver and the Weaver Navigation. It has fifty arches and is 950 metres long.



Runcorn – Widnes Transporter Bridge. Opened in 1905 it was one of only four built in Britain. It was demolished soon after the opening of the Runcorn road bridge in 1961.



Transporter bridge built between 1913-15, to link Crossfields soap works on both sides of the river at Warrington Bank Quay. It could transport trains as well as road vehicles and pedestrians. It has not been used since the 1950s.



The Thelwall Viaduct carries Britain's longest motorway, the M6 across the Manchester Ship Canal and River Mersey. It was opened in 1963.

Did you know...

A Navvy was someone employed to construct new navigations such as canals and railways. No digging machinery was used, just muscle power!

Navvies working on the Manchester Ship Canal



As long as we have been creating transport routes, we have been looking for ways to cross natural boundaries such as rivers, valleys and hills.

Places to Visit

Opening times vary; please check before planning a visit

The Railway Age, Crewe
Vernon Way, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 2DB
www.therailwayage.co.uk
Admission Charge

The Boat Museum
South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire
CH65 4FW
www.boatmuseum.org.uk
Tel: 0151 355 5017
Admission Charge

Anderton Boat Lift
Lift Lane, Anderton, Northwich, Cheshire
CW9 6FW
www.andertonboatlift.co.uk
Tel 01606 786777
Admission Charge to Visitor Centre



www.cheshire.gov.uk/archaeology

