



Typical Canal Diggers of the 19th Century

Canal Diggers at Burbage

The Canal diggers of the late 18th and early 19th century would have worked on both the Wilts and Berks Canal and Kennet and Avon Canal. Evidence of this can be found in the parish register of Burbage where at least 3 baptisms in the parish name the father as being a canal digger.

The job of the digger would have been hard and sometimes dangerous as this would have meant excavating tons of earth from what would become the canal way. This would be dug by hand and removed by barrow loads. The canal diggers would have also been working on the tunnelled sections of the proposed canal routes raising the possibility of earth collapses burying them. Along the routes of both canals and railways there is a high number of burials in local churchyards.

The digger was not a highly skilled worker and would therefore work hard for little money and often lived in tented or caravan communities until the section being dug out had been completed and they would move on to the next section. Sometimes they would be lucky to find digs but rarely found family accommodation and thus the whole family would move with the digger to the next location. Often you can trace the route the diggers take by the baptism records in parishes along the canal route. The diggers if efficient in their work may then be employed by the contractors on other projects around the country hence so many different baptism, marriage and burial parishes crop up in a family history.

Below is a table of entries of Baptisms of children of the Canal Diggers in the Burbage Parish Registers. The dates give an indication of the length of time the diggers spent in the parish before moving onto the next section of the canal.

Year	Date	Surname	Given Names	Father's Surname	Father's Given Names	Mother's Given Names
1807	11-Feb	Lear	Lucy	Lear	Thomas	
1807	03-Jul	Tredwell	Thomas	Tredwell	William	Elizabeth
1807	04-Oct	Gardener	Elizabeth	Gardener	John	Amelia
1807	11-Oct	Edwards	Ann	Edwards	George	Mary
1807	15-Dec	Millington	Sarah	Millington	Richard	Ann
1808	17-Jan	Bleades	Caroline	Bleades	Brownlow	Elizabeth
1808	17-Apr	Burgess	Michael	Burgess	Michael	Rebecca
1808	17-Jul	Lyne	William	Lyne	Thomas	Liddy

1808	07-Aug	Danes	John	Danes	John	Martha
1808	02-Oct	Mattock	William	Mattock	Henry	Elizabeth
1808	16-Oct	Glass	Mary	Glass	James	Jane
1808	13-Nov	North	John	North	John	Harriet
1808	24-Dec	Walton	Elizabeth	Walton	William	Sarah
1808	24-Dec	Walton	William	Walton	William	Sarah
1808	24-Dec	Walton	Mary Ann	Walton	William	Sarah
1809	22-May	Jones	Elizabeth	Jones	Evan	Jane