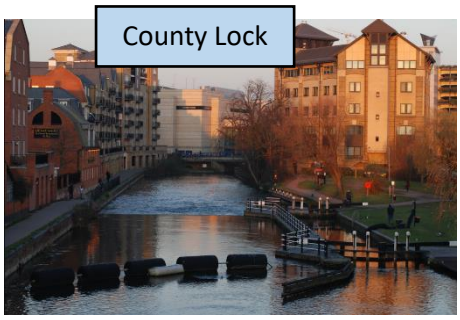
Coley Primary School – Knowledge Organiser

SUBJECT FOCUS:	History – Local History - Canals	YEAR 2	TERM 1

Key Knowledge



What is the difference between a canal and a river?

A **river** is a naturally formed body of water and are usually much deeper than canals.

A **canal** is a manmade waterway which is shallower and narrower than a river. The Kennet and Avon Canal runs through Reading and they used the River Kennet to make it. It has 105 locks.

Navvies cutting out a canal channel



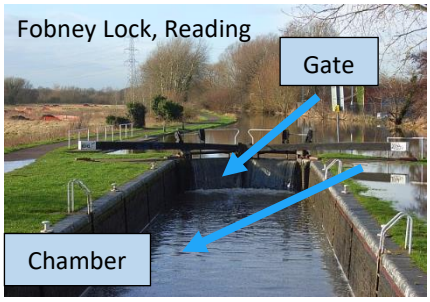
How and when were canals built?

John Hore was an English **engineer**, who made the River Kennet and River Avon **navigable**.

Navigators, known as '**navvies**' built canals during the Victorian period and the Industrial Revolution.

Navvies needed to be tough, strong men or women because they cut out channels for the canals, moved the earth and created huge **embankments** using **shovels, picks**, **wheelbarrows** and **gunpowder**.

Canals were the "motorways" of the 18th century until the arrival of the Railway. Canals have **locks** to help boats navigate up and downstream.



What is a lock?

A **lock** is a device used for **raising and lowering** boats and ships where the water is not levelled.

A lock has a **fixed chamber** made out of brick, stone or metal in which the water level can be varied. There are **gates** at each end of the lock.

A boat goes into the lock when it is nearly empty, water fills the chamber and then it cruises out the other end. This lifts the boat up to a **higher canal level**, or if going the other way, lowers the boat down to a **lower level.**

How were goods transported in the canals?

Narrowboats were originally built as working boats in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries for carrying goods on the narrow canals.

These **narrowboats** were hauled by giant **shire horses** along the **towpaths** at the side of the canals. Canal or narrow boats, sometimes called **barges**, navigated through tight canals, **locks** and bridges. A narrowboat is about 2.1m wide.



In Reading, the canal was a busy place with warehouses, factories and houses along its banks. Narrowboats and barges used to transport goods from the **Brewery** and biscuits from **Huntley and Palmers**.

Life in a narrowboat



Typically, men worked on the boats with a man steering the boat and a boy leading the horses. Their families stayed in land.

However, when the railway arrived, the waterways didn't get the same amount of work and the long distance boatmen's families moved on to the boats to work as unpaid crew.

Narrowboat Art





Water cans, buckets, scuttles, watering cans, teapots and rolling pins were often painted with the roses design.





This picture shows you how the layers of roses and leaves were built up in stages.





Canal Life Now



Canals and waterways have been saved from destruction and have become vital outdoor spaces.

Nowaday, canals are still used for navigation and transportation as well as for many leisure activities. People enjoy boating, caneouing and kayating, cycling, fishing, walking, observing nature and wildlife.

Key Vocabulary

Canal - a manmade waterway
Navigable - a waterway that ships or boats can sail
Barge - a canal boat
Navigators or **navvies** - construction workers on a canal
Embankments - a wall or bank **of** earth or stone built to prevent a river flooding an area.
Gunpowder - an explosive
Lock - a short section of a canal or river with gates and gutters
Narrowboats – a working boat used for carrying goods in canals.
Tow - to pull along / behind
Towpath - a path along a river or canal used by people or horses for towing boats.
Shire horses - a heavy, powerful working horse
Steer - to guide or change the direction of something
Freight - goods carried by a vehicle
Brewery - a place where beer is made
Huntley and Palmers – a company that made biscuits
Engineer - a person who designs and builds complex structure

Possible Experiences

- Walk to County Lock and Blake's Lock
- Visit to the Blake's Museum (Reading Museum)
- Possible Canal and River Trust expert to show children how lock works.
- Canal Safety Talk visitor at school.
- Boat river trip.