

The crystal canal

A self guided walk along the Stourbridge Canal



Explore a canal that used to be a busy industrial hub
Discover why the area became world-famous for glassmaking
Find out about the people who worked in the canalside industries
See how the industrial heritage has been preserved

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the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks







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The crystal canal

Discover glass and iron making along the Stourbridge Canal

During the Industrial Revolution the 'Black Country' was a hub of heavy industry and manufacturing. Central to this was the canal network.

Barges carried coal, sand and limestone to factories and foundries that manufactured everything from heavy bridges to delicate jewellery.

Discover why Stourbridge became world-famous for making iron and glass. Find out about the people who worked in these industries.



Crystal Mile sculpture
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

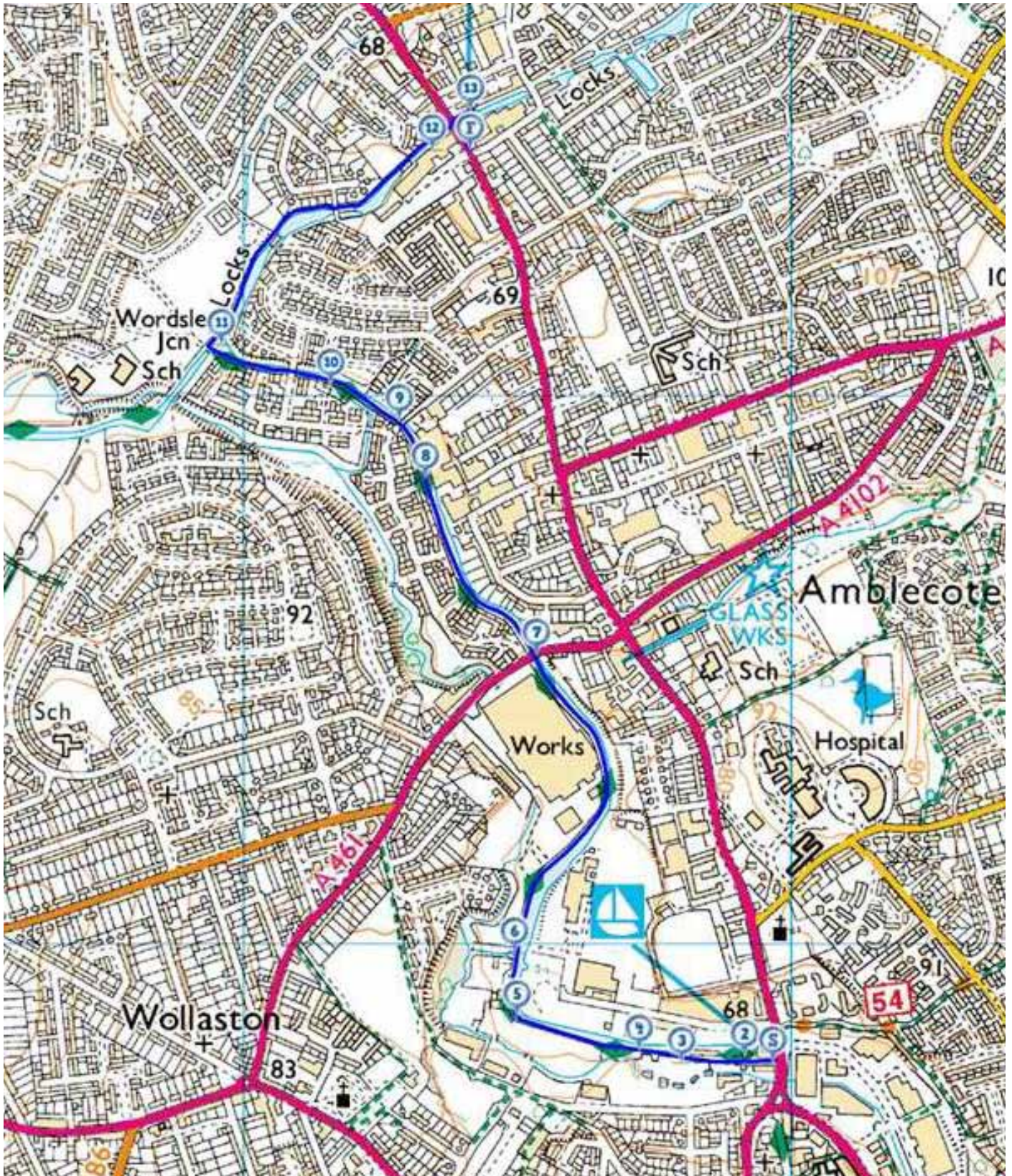


The White House Cone museum of glass
under construction, April 2016
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Explore the canal and find evidence in locks, bridges and buildings that tells the story of this area. Visit Britain's most complete working 'glass cone' and see how the glass-making industry continues today.

This walk along the Town Arm of the Stourbridge Canal was created by writer and broadcaster Graham Fisher MBE, who specialises in inland waterways with an interest in glass – particularly Stourbridge glass. The route was inspired by his book on this subject, 'Jewels on the Cut'.

Route overview

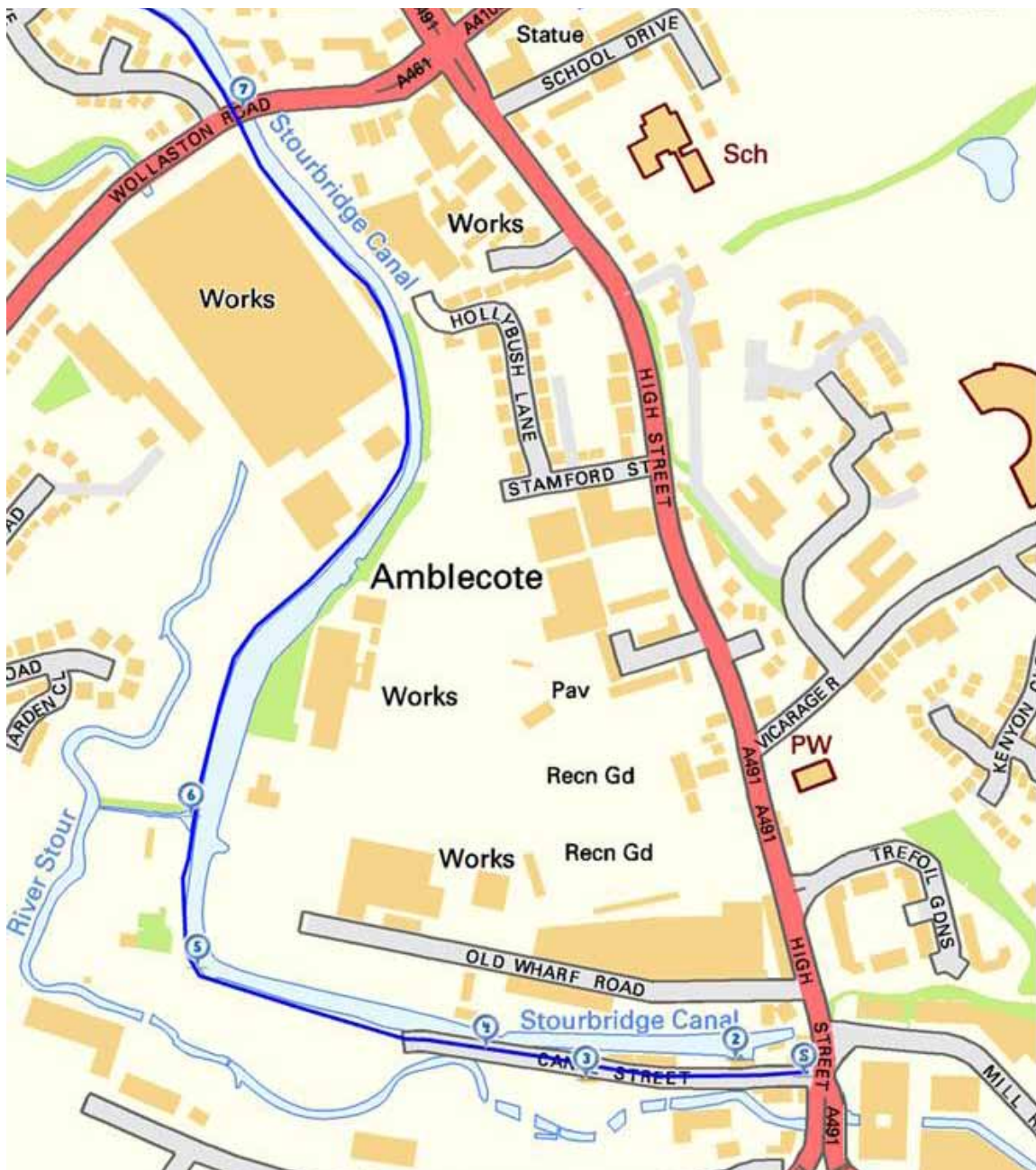


Practical information

Location	Stourbridge, West Midlands
Getting there	<p>Train - The nearest station is Stourbridge Town. A frequent shuttle service runs from Stourbridge Junction. Stourbridge Junction has direct services to Birmingham Snow Hill, Kidderminster, Warwick, Leamington Spa, Worcester and London Marylebone.</p> <p>Bus - Served by local and regional routes to Bridgnorth, Kidderminster, Dudley, Wolverhampton and Birmingham.</p> <p>Most bus routes run from Stourbridge Interchange, next to Stourbridge Town railway station. Buses run frequently from the end of the walk back to the Interchange.</p> <p>Car - Access via the A491 (close to Junction 4 of the M5) and the A449 from Wolverhampton. Parking is limited at the walk route, with a few spaces at Canal Street and the Red House Glass Cone.</p> <p>Bicycle - Stourbridge is on National Cycle Route 54 (Stourport to Derby)</p>
Start point	Canal Street, Stourbridge DY8 4LU
Finish point	Red House Glass Cone, Wordsley, DY8 4AZ
Distance	1 ½ miles
Directions from railway & bus station to start	<p>From the Interchange, take the underpass signed Town Centre. On leaving the underpass, turn right into the High Street and continue for about 300 metres to a pedestrianised section by Market Street.</p> <p>Continue into Lower High Street for another 300 metres to an underpass. Turn left after the first underpass and right after the second. Canal Street is ahead on the left.</p>

Level	Gentle – An easy walk along the canal towpath
Conditions	The towpath was restored by the Canal & River Trust in 2015. It is in excellent condition but it is advisable to wear stout footwear. The towpath is used by boaters, anglers and cyclists as well as walkers.
Suitable for	<p>Families - Keep children away from the canal edge especially at locks</p> <p>Wheelchairs / Pushchairs - Radar Key Scheme gates on the towpath, a couple of the bridges may be steep for pushing wheelchairs / pushchairs. There is a stepped path towards the Red House Glass Cone.</p> <p>Dogs - Must be kept on a lead</p>
Refreshments	<p>Café at Ruskin Glass Centre (Stop 7)</p> <p>Hot and cold refreshments are available at the Red House Glass Cone Coffee House (Stop 14)</p>
Toilets	<p>Ruskin Glass Centre (Stop 7)</p> <p>Red House Glass Cone when the museum is open (Stop 14)</p>
Places to visit	<p>The Red House Glass Cone features a museum, exhibitions, craft studio and glassblowing demonstrations at weekends. Open Monday to Sunday 10am – 4pm. Free entry. Tel: 01384 812 750</p> <p>Ruskin Glass Centre is home to a wide range of glass crafts. Open Monday to Saturday 10am – 4pm. Free entry. Tel: 01384 399 419</p> <p>The Tudor Crystal shop at the New Dial is open weekdays 10am - 5pm, Saturdays 9.30am - 4.30pm. Tel: 01384 392525</p>

First half of the route

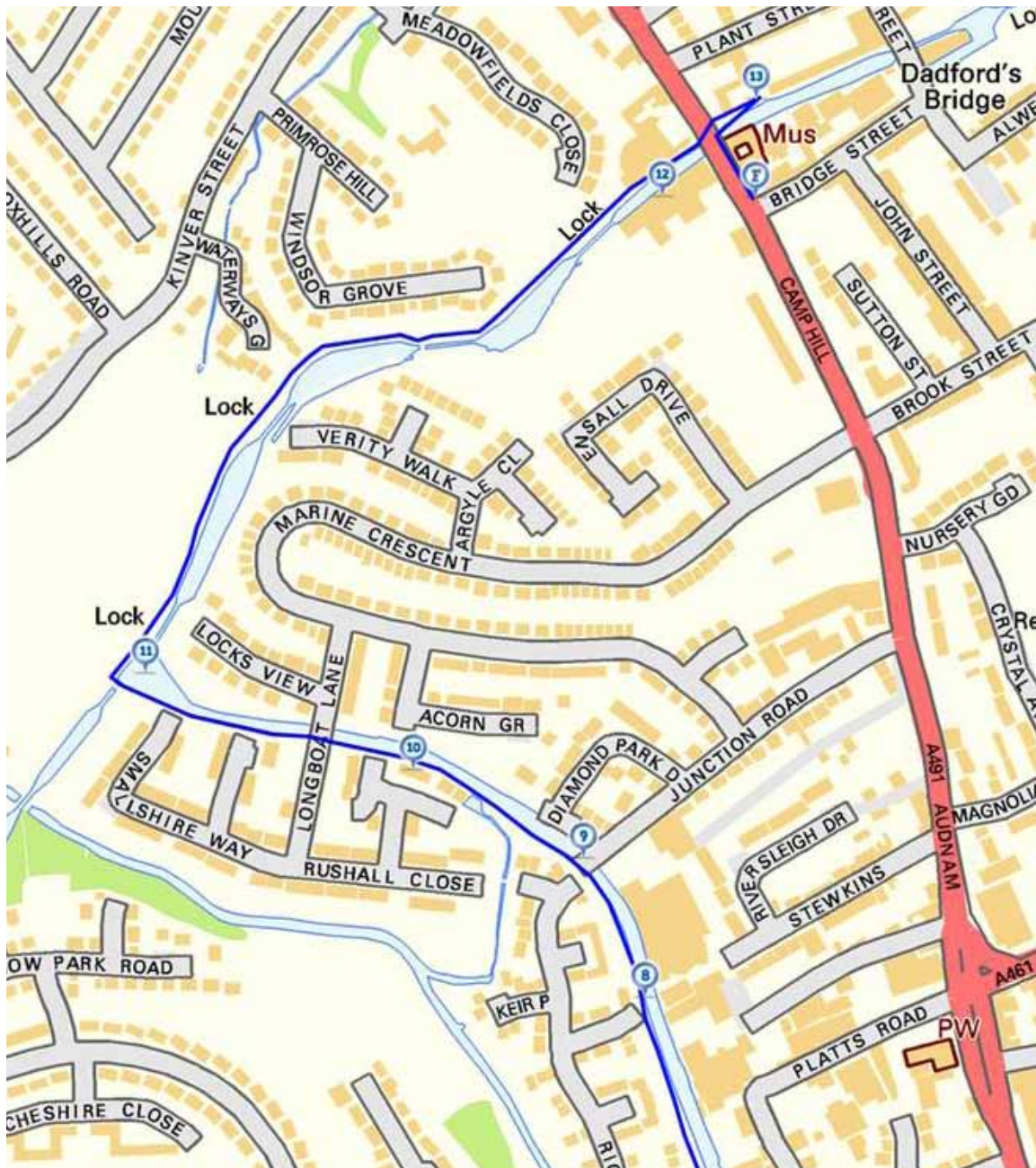


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Stopping points

1. Junction of High Street and Canal Street
2. The Bonded Warehouse, Canal Street
3. Site of the James Dovey glassworks, Canal Street
4. Neville Garratt Bridge, Canal Street
5. Bridge to John Bradley ironworks and the New Foundry
6. Former Stourbridge Canal Company dry dock
7. Coalbournbrook Road Bridge

Second half of the route



Stopping points

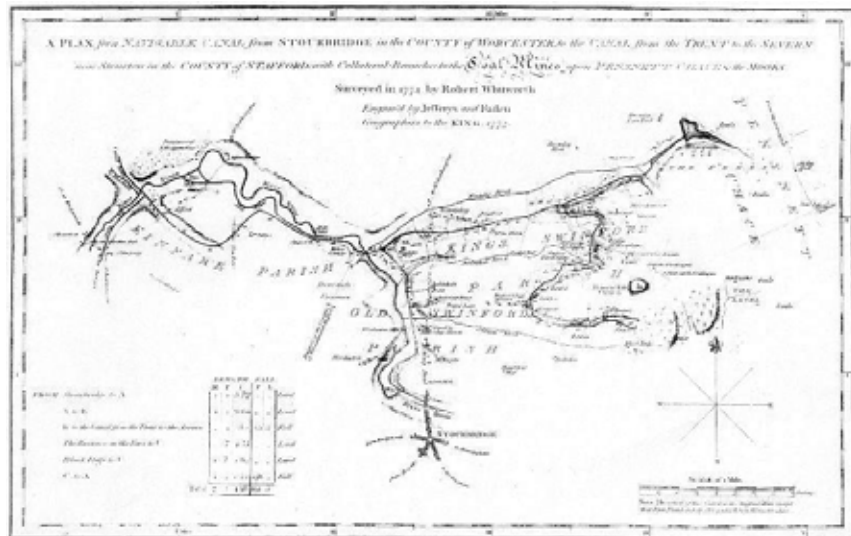
8. Opposite the New Dial Glassworks
9. Chubb's Bridge
10. Junction Cottages, Longboat Lane Bridge
11. Wordsley Junction
12. Former Stuart & Sons works, Lock 13
13. Opposite Red House Glass Cone
14. Red House Glass Cone

1. Welcome to Stourbridge

Junction of High Street and Canal Street

Welcome to this Discovering Britain walk in Stourbridge. This unique region westwards of Birmingham is underlain by a seam of coal and is rich in mineral resources such as iron ore, limestone, clay and sand. These were mined during the Industrial Revolution and used in factories and foundries.

As a result this became one of the most industrialised parts of Britain. Some people say that it was the high levels of air pollution that gave the region its name, the Black Country.



Robert Whitworth's plan of the Stourbridge Canal (1774)
By kind permission of www.oldstourbridgemaps.kjdocs.co.uk

Indeed, the very opening line of a book entitled 'Walks in The Black Country' by Elihu Burritt (published in 1868) says; "The Black Country, black by day and red by night, cannot be matched, for vast and varied production, by any other space of equal radius on the surface of the globe. It is a section of Titanic industry, kept in murky perspiration by a sturdy set of Tubal Cains and Vulcans, week in week out, and often even days to the week".

At the end of the eighteenth century canals provided a reliable and economic way to transport heavy raw materials. So industrialists established new factories along the canal banks. This walk follows the towpath of the Stourbridge Canal, along the Town Arm and part of the Main Line. From derelict factories to restored warehouses, the canal and its architecture provide clues that tell the story of this area's industrial history.

The walk is entirely on the canal towpath. As a result of substantial improvements made during 2015 by the Canal & River Trust the towpath condition is excellent throughout. The route starts on Canal Street, Stourbridge and finishes at the White House Cone Museum of Glass. It is a little over one and a half miles long. Canal towpaths are shared by boaters, anglers and cyclists so please take care and if you have children make sure they stay away from the water's edge. You can return to the start point by retracing your steps along the canal or by catching a local bus. We hope you enjoy the walk!

Directions 1

Walk for about 20 metres along Canal Street and stop by the Bonded Warehouse on the right hand side of the road.

2. Tea, tobacco and tax

The Bonded Warehouse, Canal Street

This building is the Bonded Warehouse. It sits at the end of the Town Arm of the Stourbridge Canal which was completed in 1779.

If you look over the wall of the small car park you will see the River Stour. In the seventeenth century an engineer named Andrew Yarranton tried to make this river navigable but his efforts eventually failed. A major flood destroyed Yarranton's navigation and it was not until the arrival of the canal a hundred years later that there was a navigable waterway in the area.



The Bonded Warehouse
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



The Bonded Warehouse end wall
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The Stourbridge Canal is only 5 miles long and was built to bring coal from Dudley. It also provides a connection from Birmingham to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and on to the River Severn. The canal once continued a short way to a basin which served an ironworks but this was filled in in the 1970s. Opposite the warehouse you can see the Stourbridge Canal Company Offices.

Look at the Bonded Warehouse with its distinctive semi-circular end wall. Can you see its heavy door and barred windows? It was originally built in 1799 to hold goods such as tea, tobacco and spirits. High value goods like these were taxable and held in secure or 'Bonded' warehouses.

This building lay derelict for many years but thanks to the Stourbridge Navigation Trust it was rescued and is now used for community events. We will see more examples of canal restoration along the walk.

Directions 2

Continue along Canal Street for about 100 metres until you reach a solitary derelict white house on your left.

3. The French connection

Site of the James Dovey glassworks, Canal Street

The derelict white building roughly marks the site of the first glassworks on our walk. There were so many glass companies based here that the area is now known as 'the Crystal Mile'.

The term 'Stourbridge Glass' is quite ironic because there never was a glassworks in the centre of Stourbridge. Most of them were sited along the canal between the villages of Amblecote and Wordsley. The term 'Stourbridge Glass' originated because most of the glassworks proprietors and officials met in the Talbot Hotel in Stourbridge High Street.



Site of the former glassworks founded by James Dovey
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

You might be wondering why Stourbridge developed as a glassmaking area. It was actually the Romans who first brought glassmaking to Britain but the industry lagged behind most of Europe until the second half of the sixteenth century. This was when glassmakers from the Continent came to England with the encouragement of the government. These European glassmakers settled in the forests of southeast England which provided fuel for their furnaces.

All this changed in 1615 when King James I became concerned about the rapid loss of forests and banned the use of wood in glass furnaces. A new fuel was needed and the Stourbridge area had ideal natural resources. The glassmakers from the Lorraine region of France who moved here were attracted by rich deposits of coal and fireclay for lining furnaces.

Glass is made by heating sand with potash and other ingredients to a very high temperature. Transporting heavy raw materials for glassmaking and distributing fragile finished goods were both very difficult on the poor roads of pre-industrial Britain. The arrival of the canal made a huge difference and glassmakers were quick to concentrate their glassworks along its banks. This spot on the canal was where James Dovey established a glassworks in 1790. It was one of the first to use a steam engine for the "manufacture, cutting and grinding of glass".

Directions 3

Continue along the towpath for about 100 metres until you reach Neville Garratt Bridge.

4. Lime and iron

Neville Garratt Bridge, Canal Street

Until the 1970s the Neville Garratt Bridge spanned the Standhills Branch Canal. When it was removed it was held in storage at the Black Country Living Museum before being re-sited here and renamed.

If you look under the bridge where the canal narrows you will see a set of grooves. These were used to insert stop-planks which could isolate either side of the canal for repairs or in the event of emergency.

Look closely at the bridge and you will see a plaque that gives its origins as Bradley's Foundry which we will see shortly.



Neville Garratt Bridge
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Now continue just past the bridge and look closely at the canal edge. See how it has been reinforced with cast iron. These plates indicate that heavy duty work took place here and are another clue to the local iron industry.



Cast iron reinforcing plates at the canal edge
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

A bank of limekilns once stood on the other bank. Limestone is prevalent in hills near Dudley and was heavily mined. At their peak the mines at Wren's Nest near Dudley were producing between 20,000 and 90,000 tons of limestone per year.

Limestone was transported here by canal and had two main uses in local industry. It was used to make lime for glassmaking and used in the iron making process to remove impurities.

Directions 4

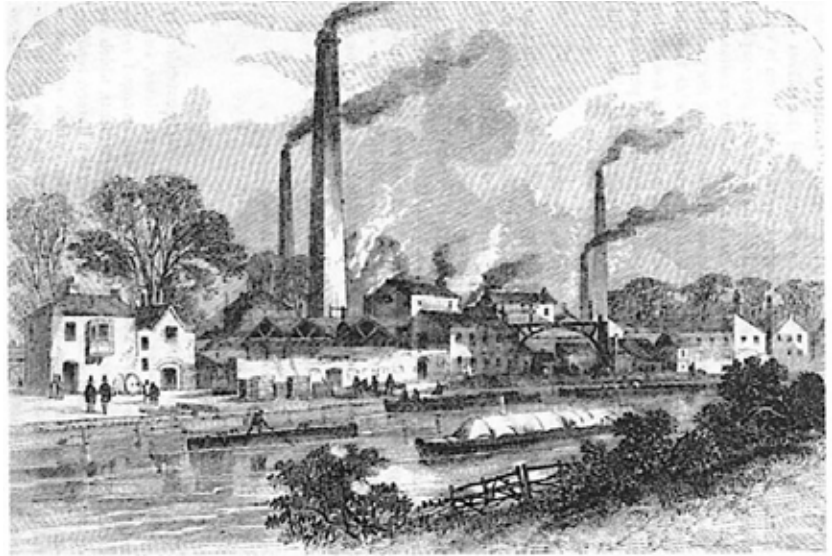
Continue along the towpath for about 200 metres. Just before the canal turns to the right is a bridge. Stop by the bridge.

5. A steaming lion

Bridge to John Bradley ironworks and the New Foundry

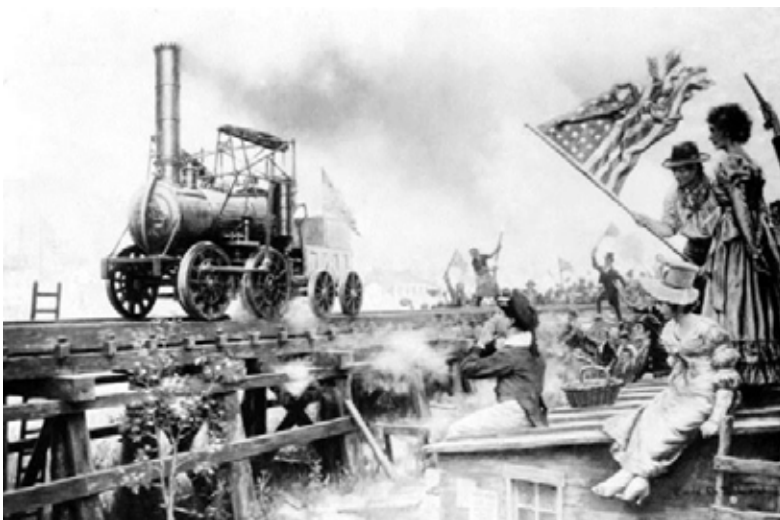
Two barge tunnels pass under the towpath here. Look on the cast iron bridge and you will see the name Bradley appears again but the place of origin is not Stourbridge but Coalbrookdale. These tunnels once provided access to John Bradley's ironworks which he established in about 1800.

This is where he converted crude iron ingots, known as pig iron, into wrought iron plates and rods for local industry. After John Bradley died a foundry was added and it started to produce steam engines, trading as Foster & Rastrick.

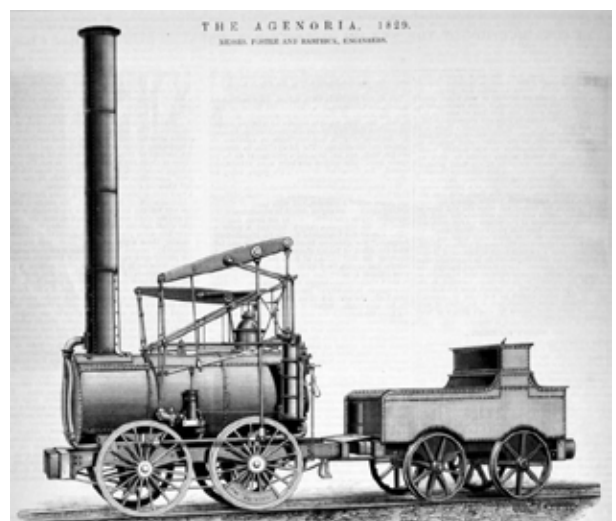


'The Stourbridge ironworks of John Bradley & Co'
from The Official Illustrated Guide to the Great Western Railway (1860)
Reproduced by kind permission of the History of Wollaston Group

In 1828 a hugely significant railway engine called the 'Stourbridge Lion' was built here, the year before Stephenson's famous 'Rocket'. It became the first locomotive to run on rails in America. Then in 1829 an engine called 'Agenoria' was built here which operated on the Earl of Dudley's Shutt End Railway for 35 years. It supported further industrial growth by carrying coal from his colliery to the canal. 'Agenoria' is still intact and on display at the National Railway Museum at York.



The first run of the 'Stourbridge Lion' August 8th 1829,
in Honesdale, Pennsylvania. By Clyde Osmer DeLand (c.1916)
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)



The 'Agenoria' steam locomotive
Courtesy of Grace's Guide - www.GracesGuide.co.uk

The ironworks had a dramatic effect on local employment. We are now near the village of Wollaston, which was originally a rural area where the main industry was farming. By the 1861 Census that had changed. The data records that of 460 men and boys in the village, 221 (or 48%) worked in the ironworks. Another 137 (or 30%) worked in glassworks nearby. Only 44 people (10%) worked in agriculture.

Look beyond the wall and you can see the New Foundry building. After suffering years of abandonment and neglect it is now the Lion Health medical centre.

As you continue off the bridge, look for a metal plate set adjacent to the towpath about one and a half metres from the water's edge. This was a crane base and was likely to have been used to lift the 'Stourbridge Lion' railway engine and other heavy goods into narrowboats. A private narrow-gauge railway led from the foundry out to this wharf. Remnants of the rails lie concealed under the grass.



The then derelict New Foundry in 2008
© Chris Allen, Geograph (Creative Commons License)



The metal crane base by the towpath
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 5

Continue along the towpath for about 100 metres. Stop where the towpath crosses a brick bridge.

6. Wasting water

Former Stourbridge Canal Company dry dock

The towpath here crosses a brick bridge which is immediately followed by a weir and a spillway. The bridge crosses over a spur of the canal that once led into the Stourbridge Canal Company's dry dock. A boat would enter the dock then planks would be inserted to isolate it from the main canal. The water would be drained away via sluices into the River Stour below so that the underneath of the boat could be painted or repaired.

This dock was later replaced by one at Lock 11 on the Stourbridge flight, probably because of concerns over how much water was wasted. The only feeder to this section of canal is the small Coalbourn Brook which enters just after the next bridge.



The bridge over the former entrance to the dry dock
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Traditional working canal boats
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

In the early days of the Canal men were attracted from poorly paid jobs on the land by the prospect of higher earnings. As bargemen they could then earn enough to rent houses near the canals.

With the coming of the railways the canals faced competition and wages fell. By the 1880s most canal families had been forced to leave their homes and live on their canal boats.

These 'boat people' rarely mixed with other people. They were often born, brought up and worked all their lives on the canals.

Directions 6

Continue along the towpath for about 500 metres. Stop just before a road bridge crosses the canal.

7. Fresh air and fun

Coalbournbrook Road Bridge

On the other side of the canal is the Glasshouse College incorporating the Ruskin Glass Centre and Webb Corbett Visitor Centre, which stand on the site of two glassworks which were founded in the 1690s. Imagine two conical chimneys rising about 100 feet into the air and belching smoke. These were known as glass cones and housed glassmakers and their furnaces.

On the stretch of canal that we will walk along today there were more than a dozen of these glass cones here or within a short distance. We will finish at one of just four complete glassmaking cones that remain in the entire country.



The Kinver Light Railway at The Fish and Coalbournbrook Glassworks
By kind permission of the History of Wollaston Group

In Victorian times glassmaking was a tough and mainly male occupation. Furnaces could not be allowed to go out and production took place 24 hours a day from early Monday to midday on Friday when the pots of molten glass were refilled. Glassmakers worked in shifts six hours on, six hours off putting in 48 or 54 hours a week.

Compared with other trades skilled glassworkers were not badly paid. In 1867 the average wage in the glass industry was 28 to 30 shillings a week compared to 21 to 23 shillings for cotton workers and miners and 14 shillings for farmers. Iron workers earned similar wages to glassworkers.

The road bridge here was widened in 1978 but look underneath and you can still see the original arches. It once carried the Kinver Light Railway which operated from 1901 to 1930. The railway, more accurately a tram, linked Stourbridge with Wollaston, Dudley and Birmingham. It offered workers an escape from polluted towns into the fresh air of the countryside. A major junction was very close to the canal at a pub in Amblecote called The Fish (now a Cantonese restaurant).

If you have time for a short diversion, do visit the Ruskin Glass Centre. It is home to studio glass artists, engravers and glass decorators who are maintaining the traditional craft of glassmaking. Webb Corbett Visitor Centre relates their proud history.

Directions 7

Continue along the towpath for about 500 metres. Stop opposite a factory with a circular building.

8. Cones and chairs

Opposite the New Dial Glassworks

Can you make out the shape of a circular building opposite? This is the remains of a glass cone that was truncated in the mid-1930s. These conical buildings were designed to channel air into the furnace to make the fires burn hotter. They also provided a large work space for the glassmakers.

In the nineteenth century work in these cones was a task for men and boys over the age of 12. It was carried out in teams of four called 'chairs'. Each person in the chair had a specific role and was paid differently according to skill.

To make a wine glass for example, a 'servitor' would blow and form the glass bowl. The 'workman' or 'gaffer' was the senior glassmaker; he sat in the chair and shaped the foot and stem from glass brought to him by the 'footmaker' before attaching it to the bowl. The finished piece was collected by the 'taker in', often a young boy, who would take it to be cooled. After the glass had cooled cutters and engravers would work in separate facilities and were paid well for their creative work.



The New Dial Glass Cone and the remains of barge canopies
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

This cone was originally part of the New Dial Glassworks and was built specifically to take advantage of the canal. Look at the wall across the canal and you can see remnants of canopy frames for protecting coal boats which unloaded directly into the works. The Old Dial Glassworks was a short distance away on the A491 and the opening of the Stourbridge Canal left it somewhat isolated.

The New Dial is still used for glassmaking today. The company Plowden & Thompson specialise in scientific and high tech equipment, such as precision drawn tubes. Tudor Crystal makes fine tableware here using many traditional methods described above. They are one of the last companies to make lead crystal by hand and can run up to five furnaces

Directions 8

Continue along the towpath for about 100 metres and stop at Chubb's Bridge.

9. Sand and lead

Chubb's Bridge

Here at Chubb's Bridge the canal crosses the boundary between two different underlying rocks. One is the Kidderminster Conglomerates - also known as the Bunter Pebble Beds - which is a type of sandstone that contains rounded pebbles. The other is dune sandstone which was formed from ancient sand dunes. Look at the opposite bank and you can see the sandstone clearly exposed.

The local sand extracted from this rock would have been used by the iron makers for the casting process. Early glassmakers would probably have used it too but it was not pure enough for high quality crystal glass. The most common form of glass is called soda-lime glass which uses sand and soda ash together with lime. Soda ash, like potash, is an alkali flux that reduces the melting point of the mix.

It was George Ravenscroft who developed earlier technology by introducing lead oxide to create a higher quality clear glass good for cutting and engraving. In 1674 he took out a patent for Lead Glass or Lead Crystal and Stourbridge glassmakers came to specialise in this kind of glass. It needed higher quality sand and this was imported from as far afield as Leighton Buzzard, King's Lynn and even the Continent.



Exposed sandstone on the canal bank
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



A Ravenscroft lead glass jug
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Chubb's Bridge itself is an attractive original structure that was once surrounded by glass cones. It would have served Canalside Glassworks just opposite the Old Dial. The Stourbridge Glass Company was on other side of the canal beyond the bridge and this later became Tudor Crystal.

Directions 9

Continue along the towpath for about 150 metres. Stop by a row of cottages on the left just before a modern bridge.

10. Long or narrow?

Junction Cottages, Longboat Lane Bridge

This row of old cottages was once part of a canalside community. Look discreetly at the glass pane above the door of the cottage at the far end and you will discover that they were built by J Guest in 1829.

The concrete bridge ahead is much more recent and is somewhat out of character with the rest of the canal. It is called Longboat Lane Bridge. This seems a strange name for a bridge over a canal. Perhaps the person who named it confused canal boats with the longboats which the Vikings used, although curiously there are some areas that do use the term longboat.

The bridge provides access to the housing estate to the left which is surrounded on all four sides by water: the Audnam Brook, the River Stour, the Town Arm and the Main Line of the canal. When the area was being redeveloped, there was a proposal to fill in the canal to create a road between Stourbridge and Wordsley.

That was quite understandable since the canals at the time were in a poor state but it would have resulted in the loss of the entire Town Arm. Happily, the proposals were abandoned so even though Longboat Lane Bridge may be unsightly, it helped to save the canal.



Junction Cottages
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Longboat Lane Bridge
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 10

Continue along the towpath for about 200 metres. When you reach the junction with the Main Line of the Stourbridge Canal, stop on the Wordsley Junction bridge.

11. Town tolls

Wordsley Junction

Here at Wordsley Junction the Town Arm meets with the Main Line of the Stourbridge Canal. Again notice the sandstone outcrop which has been cut back to make it easier for boats to access the branch line.

To the left the canal falls through four locks to meet the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at Stourton. To the right it rises up sixteen locks to Delph and the mineral rich area around Dudley

Notice the long narrow gap directly beneath the bridge. This was a gauging stop where boats could be assessed for the tolls they had to pay, dependent on the type of cargo they carried and its weight.

Just above the waterline you can see a hole. A gauge was inserted here to measure a narrowboat's height, which in turn was used to calculate its weight. The canal manager's cottage would have stood roughly where the finger post is between the bridge and the lock.



Wordsley Junction Bridge and Stourbridge Bottom lock
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

As you reach the bottom lock you should be able to make out the tower of Holy Trinity Church in Wordsley. This church contains the graves of many people associated with the glass industry.

Directions 11

From the bridge turn right onto the towpath of the Main Line of the Stourbridge Canal. Continue up the flight of locks. Stop when you reach Lock 13.

12. Decline, fall and renaissance

Former Stuart & Sons works, Lock 13



A selection of Stourbridge-made glass including Webb cameo pieces, a 'Burmese' style night light and a coloured vase
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

We are now on the Stourbridge Canal Main Line. Across the canal stands the site of Stuart & Sons which closed in 2001. The company was the last of the big glassmakers in Stourbridge to cease production.

After years of dereliction and vandalism the buildings have been renovated, the centrepiece of which is the White House Cone Museum of Glass built to house the internationally renowned Stourbridge glass collection.

The nineteenth century is recognised as the 'Golden Age of Stourbridge Glass'. This is when innovative glassmakers introduced colour and new decorating techniques and learned how to make glass of all sorts of shapes and sizes. Beautiful cameo pieces were produced with layers of different colours.

By the beginning of the twentieth century there were about a dozen glass manufacturers and many independent decorating facilities. Stourbridge had become a world leader and the industry was a major employer.

Demand fell around the time of the First World War and afterwards production increasingly moved away from coloured glass. Stourbridge became strongly associated with high quality cut and engraved lead crystal glass which was exported all over the world.

For many years glassmaking remained profitable but towards the end of the twentieth century decline set in. Rising production costs and increased competition from abroad, together with a decline in the popularity of cut glass, devastated the industry.

Today the big names of Thomas Webb and Sons, Webb Corbett, Royal Brierley and Stuart Crystal have all gone. Some smaller crystal manufacturers remain in the area and, while the days of large scale production are clearly over, small studios are springing up to breathe new life into this traditional industry.

The White House Cone Museum of Glass has been spearheaded by the British Glass Foundation and full details can be found on their website: www.britishglassfoundation.org.uk.



Stuart Crystal advert (1970s)
Courtesy Grace's Guide www.GracesGuide.co.uk



The White House Cone Museum of Glass in October 2016
© Lynn Boleyn

Directions 12

Continue along the towpath. Go under Glasshouse Bridge and stop just afterwards opposite the glass cone.

13. Heart of glass

Opposite Red House Glass Cone

Glasshouse Bridge is surrounded by glasswork sites. Standing here you really can get a feeling of being at the very epicentre of the Stourbridge glassmaking industry.

The White House Glassworks, now a museum, stood on the former home of Stuart's. This was built shortly after the canal's arrival and was occupied in the latter part of the nineteenth century by Edward Webb who specialised in tableware and coloured glass.

On the towpath side was the Wordsley Flint Glassworks which was one of the biggest in the area. It was built in the late eighteenth century and became home to the Richardson Glass Company from around 1829. Manufacturing ceased in 1924.

Across the canal is the unmistakable Red House Glass Cone. This was built between 1788 and 1794 by Richard Bradley. Glassmaking continued here until 1936. The glass cone fell into disrepair but reopened again in 2002 as a visitor attraction.



The Red House Glass Cone - one of only four glass cones left in Britain
© Julian Osley via Geograph

Just four intact glassmaking cones are left standing in Britain and the Red House Glass Cone is the most complete example. If you have the time then take the fascinating self-guided tour around the cone to learn more about what it was once like to work here. Then visit the White House Cone Museum of Glass directly opposite to finish off a truly memorable walk through the heart of the Stourbridge glass industry by inland waterway.

Directions 13

Retrace your steps and go back under Glasshouse Bridge. Walk up the ramp to the top of the bridge. Turn right onto the A491 High Street (crossing the canal). Continue for about 50 metres and stop outside the Red House Glass Cone.

14. The crystal canal

Red House Glass Cone

The Red House Glass Cone and the White House Cone Museum of Glass denote the end of this walk. In just over one and a half miles we have learned a great deal about this canal and the raw materials that were carried by narrowboats to the factories and foundries of the area.

We have enjoyed the architecture of bridges and locks and seen various special features that supported the glassmaking industry, such as the Stourbridge Canal Company dry dock and Wordsley Junction toll point. There is also still an incredible concentration of historic industrial sites here, including John Bradley's ironworks where steam engines were built.



The Red House Glass Cone Museum
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

As we passed sites of many former glass cones, we learned something about the lives of glassmakers and the glass they made. We have heard how Stourbridge became famous around the world, how the industry collapsed at the end of the twentieth century, and how artists are continuing the tradition of glassmaking on a smaller scale.

We hope you have enjoyed this walk and discovered more about the Stourbridge Canal and the industries that grew up alongside it. If you want to learn more about glassmaking then we recommend a visit to the Red House Glass Cone and the new museum where 'Jewels on the Cut' and other glass-related works by the author Graham Fisher are available in the gift shops.

Directions 14

If you have time, do explore the Red House Glass Cone. To return to the start of the walk you can either retrace your steps along the canal or follow the A491 towards Stourbridge for about one mile.

Alternatively local buses (routes 256, 257, 267) run from the bus stop 50 metres along the A491 road from the Red House Glass Cone (away from the canal). Buses stop opposite the end of Canal Street where the walk started and continue to the Stourbridge Interchange bus station.

Further information

British Glass Foundation

www.britishglassfoundation.org.uk

Red House Glass Cone Museum

www.dudley.gov.uk/see-and-do/museums/red-house-glass-cone

Ruskin Glass Centre

<http://ruskinglasscentre.co.uk>

History of Wollaston Group

www.historyofwollaston.info

Tudor Crystal

www.tudorcrystal.com

Black Country Living Museum

www.bclm.co.uk

Credits

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