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WOMEN OF THE WATERWAYS

Thousands of women are now helping to maintain the flow of vital war traffic on Britain's canal system, which, in the days of peace, was so sadly neglected.

The general public have little idea of the part which canals are playing in the war effort. Apart from the three great canals in Scotland, our system can be roughly divided into four sections, the canals working inland from the rivers Thames, Humber, Mersey and Severn. They were constructed between the middle of the 18th century and the building of the first railways, and our ancestors deserve full credit for a splendid feat of engineering.

In the last 100 years canals became the Cinderellas of the transport world. Miles of good navigable canal became choked with weeds, or silted up; banks and tunnels fell in and often all trace of the original canal disappeared. In 1909 a Royal Commission found that there were 4,760 miles of waterways in use; a survey in 1941 showed that only 2,000 miles of navigable water remained. However, those two thousand miles of canal are important enough, for they relieve pressure on the roads and railways.

TOUGH WORK