

London Canal Museum Audio Tour for Visually Impaired Visitors

Recorded 14/8/07

VOICE 1 = MALE

VOICE 2 = FEMALE

TRIGGER ONE

INTRODUCTION

VOICE 1 Welcome to the London Canal Museum, which celebrates the years when canals were a vital part of Britain's transport infrastructure and stretched over much of the country, linking many industrial cities and towns. The museum is housed in a Victorian warehouse that was built as an ice store around 1860 by Carlo Gatti, who became a successful London restaurateur – and a section of the exhibition down here on the ground floor is devoted to Carlo Gatti and to the ice trade. On the floor above – which can be reached by lift or by stairs – the importance of another indispensable link in the transport system is given due prominence – the horse, which towed the barges and delivered the cargo once it had been landed.

VOICE 2 As you enter each area of the museum the commentary on your handset will start automatically. You may also need to use some of the controls during the tour. On the front of the handset are two indicator lights – and below these are two rows of two buttons, followed by a single button in the bottom centre. The button on the left of the first row is the Stop button. Underneath it is the Replay button – by pressing this you can listen to the commentary again. On the right hand side of the first row is the Volume up button, with the Volume down button below it. Finally, at the end of each commentary there are instructions on where to go next – but some areas have extra dialogue to which you can choose to listen before moving on. When you're ready to leave these areas, press the single button at the

bottom to hear the directions to the next point on the tour. But don't worry, we'll remind you when the time comes.

If you prefer to wander at will just switch the instructions off by pressing the stop button.

I'll start by describing the ground floor. It's a rectangular space, about 28 metres long and 11 metres wide, which stretches from the street up to the canal basin that lies behind the far wall.

To the left of the entrance door is the shop. Its floor is carpeted and there's a metal strip on the join of the carpet with the stone floor – so be careful when you go there. Beyond it is the sales desk. Then comes a narrowboat, which you can enter and explore. The boat sits under a red brick arch that spans some two-thirds of the room's width.

This arch, together with the colour of the floor, which on this side of the room is painted blue, gives the impression that the boat is travelling towards us, passing under a bridge after it has left a lock.

Beside the far end of the boat is a flight of nine steps with handrails on both sides. These lead up to a platform forming a mezzanine floor that stretches the width of the end wall, which has in its centre glass doors that lead out to Battlebridge Basin.

There's a small exhibition in the far right-hand corner of the platform, and from it another short staircase leads down to the ground floor. Beside it is a wheelchair lift.

Against the right-hand wall at the foot of those stairs is an exhibition of handling and weighing machinery. This is followed by an exhibition on the other main theme on this floor – Carlo Gatti, the ice trade and ice cream. The floor on this side is painted green, for land. The main staircase to the first floor comes next, followed by the disabled visitors' toilet at one o'clock, and then the administrative office to the right of the entrance, facing the shop.

In the centre of the room, a few paces away from the desk, is a vintage ice-cream tricycle and two or three metres behind it is the pillar of the arch,

which has a glass panelled display set into it. As we said earlier, this building started life as an ice house, and in the floor beyond the arch there's a railed-off area. Inside is the open pit where the ice was stored. Finally, in front of the mezzanine wall behind the railed-off pit is a long display cabinet. All the stairs have tactile mats at top and bottom, and there are various tactile signs for the toilets and for an interactive button that we'll point out later.

VOICE 1 On the back wall of the area we're in now are three wall panels, entitled "early transport by water"; "the canal age begins"; and "a transport network".

For centuries there have been canals – waterways made by man. The ancient Egyptians and Romans built them, the Dutch and Italians are famous for theirs, and the Fosse Dyke in Lincolnshire, made by the Romans in 120 AD, is thought to be Britain's oldest canal, though it was probably used for irrigation rather than transport. But canals were the exception rather than the rule in Britain – until the 18th century. As was customary at the time, the third Duke of Bridgewater made a grand tour of Europe to finish his education. While over there he recognised the potential of canals as a cheap way to transport coal from his extensive mines to Manchester – a city in the throes of the Industrial Revolution. But there were no professional canal designers in Britain so, to design his canal, he employed James Brindley, a millwright with experience in drainage. Work began in 1759 and by 1761 the first 10-mile stretch was finished, carved into the ground by an army of labourers – nicknamed 'navvies' because they dug navigation channels – whose tools consisted of little else than shovels, pickaxes and wheelbarrows.

The canal was a great success and a branch to the west was added – linking it to the River Mersey which flows through Liverpool. Other industrialists soon followed suit and Brindley became much sought after. Most of these canals were local but a group of men, which included Josiah Wedgwood the famous pottery maker, saw the potential in creating a

national network, linking them to the four main rivers of Britain – the Trent, the Mersey, the Severn and the Thames – and in 1772, the year that Brindley died, the first of these was completed.

William Jessop succeeded Brindley as the foremost canal engineer, and it was he who designed the Grand Junction Canal, which was completed in the early 1800s and connected Birmingham to London – at the time Britain’s busiest seaport. As far as possible the earlier canal builders had followed the lie of the land, twisting and turning around the hills. By the 1830s, when Thomas Telford was the leading engineer, canals were being designed in as straight a line as possible to improve speed and reduce costs, overcoming the problems of hills and valleys by designing aqueducts, locks and tunnels. Few major canals were built after the 1830s – for the railways were advancing relentlessly – and by the 1860s some canals had been bought by the railway companies, to be filled in and serve as railway routes. Others continued to survive and canal transport continued, enjoying a brief revival during the two world wars – when working on canals was designated a reserved occupation. But by the 1960s competition from rail and road transport had become too great, and canals became a place for leisure rather than transport.

VOICE 2 We’re going to go into the narrow boat now, which is about two metres away on your left as you stand with your back to the wall. The end nearest you, which is two metres wide, has been cut away and is open, but there’s a ledge with a screen on it on the left-hand side, so I suggest you enter at the right-hand side, avoiding the low strut that holds the pitched canvas roof – headroom is restricted throughout the boat. Go up a slight ramp and then down onto larger and rougher floorboards. Take care as you do this – inside, on the floor at the right hand side of the boat, are two large iron brackets holding the deck to the sides, and two barrels stand on the left with a bench between them. Make your way to the bench, where the commentary will start automatically.

TRIGGER TWO

LIVING ON CANALS

VOICE 1 Until the advent of the railway, the narrow boats used on canals were crewed by perhaps two men and a boy, who returned to their family homes between each trip. But once the railway had spread throughout the country, canals had to remain competitive. As well as reducing the toll charges (sometimes several charges were made by the different canal companies for a single journey), other cost-cutting measures were taken – and these included the introduction of family boats. From the 1840s it was common for whole families to live and work on the canals. At the peak of canal transport, some 40,000 people spent all their lives in this way. As you will find when you explore this narrow boat, which is named the *Coronis*, living conditions were very cramped and, as you’ve already heard, headroom is restricted, so take care.

VOICE 2 But before we move on I’ll give you a brief description of the boat’s layout. In fact it’s only half a boat, for this front end has been cut off. Made of metal, it’s around 10 metres in length and two metres wide – if it were complete it would be double that length. We’re in the new bow end which was opened to provide easy access. The left and right sides of the boat are around a metre and a half high, and from them the tented grey canvas roof rises to a central ridge, which is just under two metres high. This space, which still comprises more than half the boat, is where the cargo was stored.

In the centre of the painted blue wall to the left of the bench there’s a small stable door – it’s hinged on the left and opens towards you. This leads through to the living quarters and is where you should go now. In the low doorway you will find a small wooden block in front of the step, so be careful not to trip over this. The doorway threshold is about 10 centimetres. Step over it and into the small inner cabin. The commentary will pause for 30 seconds while you do this.

30 secs PAUSE

VOICE 1 Most of the space in these canal boats had to be given over to cargo, so the living quarters were very cramped and personal storage was at a premium. This tiny reconstructed cabin is perhaps two metres in width and a metre in length, and you're welcome to examine it. Built into the wall on the left is a bench with a small cupboard below; there's a doorway through to the front cabin in the centre of the wall facing you, and floor-to-ceiling cupboards and drawers on the right. Their doors are made from varnished honey-coloured wood – the panels outlined in a cheerful red – and they have brass handles.

VOICE 2 There's no space for a door, so on either side of the inner doorway hang green, blue and pink patterned curtains – their white cotton lace edgings add a touch of luxury to this highly practical interior. Now step through the inner doorway into the rear cabin, which is slightly longer than this one – about two metres rather than a metre. As soon as you're through, I suggest you sit on the bench which is immediately to the left. Again, the commentary will now pause for a short time.

10 secs PAUSE

VOICE 2 Under this bench are three small cupboards giving yet more storage space. There are two high steps on the nearby end wall – to the left if you're on the bench. These provided access to the stern of the boat – and also served as a coal store for the small cast-iron stove that stands on a cupboard in the left-hand corner of the wall facing the bench. Do examine it. On its hob are iron pots – they have long handles so take care not to knock yourself – and beneath this is an oven. Again, it has a protruding handle. There are shelves on the wall to its left, and dotted about behind it, and on the adjoining wall of the cupboard to its right, hang several attractively decorated lace-edged plates. The cupboard unit again has floor-to-ceiling cupboards and drawers – but here the panel on the main cupboard has been decorated with a bright picture of a golden castle standing on a green mound against a blue sky, with a blue canal running past it on the right.

This is typical of the folk art, known as ‘roses and castles’, for which canal boats are famous.

VOICE 1 Rather than opening in the normal way, this cupboard door pulls down to form a table at which the family ate, and was used for all kinds of other tasks, such as making, mending and patching clothes, which were then pressed with a hand iron heated on the stove. Many of the canal people had large families and the table also served as a bed for the smaller children, while the older children and adults slept on the benches and floors, using thin mattresses that were stowed away during the day. It was a tightly-knit community, for many families had been born on, married from, and died on boats like this. As soon as the children were old enough they had to help their parents with the boat, the horse, the ropes and locks, loading and unloading the cargo, the cleaning, cooking, washing, mending. There were special schools at the places where the cargo was loaded or unloaded, and they attended these on the days their boat was in. A favourite task for many was to lead or ride the horse along the tow path. After motor boats were introduced in the early twentieth century, pairs of boats began to operate, one being an unpowered boat called a “butty”. The extra accommodation eased the cramped living conditions. But usually the older boys found work on other boats, to relieve the overcrowding.

VOICE 2 If you’d like to hear a dramatisation about the lives of these families, press the square button on the wall at the end of the bench just beside the door to the stern. When you’re ready to move on, press the single button on the handset to hear where to go next.

LAYER ON TRIGGER TWO

VOICE 2 Make your way back through the inner cabin. Remember there’s a high threshold in the doorway between the cabin and the front of the boat. Once over it, keep to your left, but be careful of the iron brackets in the floor and remember the ceiling height is restricted. When you leave the boat

turn left and, keeping it on your left, walk down to the tactile mat on the floor, then turn right and walk forward for around two metres to the red brick wall of the arch.

TRIGGER THREE

VOICE 1 Cut into the corner bricks of this arch is a display case containing examples of various objects decorated in the style known as ‘roses and castles’. They include a wooden stool, a bucket and a large tin. No one knows the origin of Roses and Castles – but it seems to have come into being in the 19th century, at about the same time as whole families moved to live on the canals. Soon afterwards decorated canal boats began to be seen – on their sides naïve paintings of castles, churches and landscapes – some imaginary, others painted from life; roses and other exuberant flowers – and romantic hearts. All the paintings were done in vibrant yellows, blues, reds and greens. More and more surfaces were covered – rudders, water cans, horse bowls and harness, furniture – in fact any object used on a narrow boat was liable to be decorated. Some designs included a motif that was instantly recognisable as coming from a particular region, others were original designs passed down through the generations – for wear and tear meant they had to be frequently retouched or redone.

VOICE 2 The end of commercial boating came in the 1950s and early 1960s, Today the traditional art form is still practised widely – and decorated narrow boats now used for leisure can still be seen on most canals.

We’re going up to the mezzanine floor next. As you face the roses and castles case, turn round and walk forward to around 11 o’clock for about two metres, where you’ll find the tactile mat in front of the foot of the stairs, which are to your right. There are nine steps with handrails on both sides, and another tactile mat on the floor at the top. If you can’t manage any stairs at all ask the nearby staff to show you the second lift.

TRIGGER FOUR – MEZZANINE AREA IN FRONT OF THE LIFT

VOICE 2 You are now standing on the mezzanine floor. With the top of the stairs behind you, there's a small exhibition of costumes in the far left-hand corner facing you. There's a glass case containing a russet-coloured woman's outfit, with a full skirt and short, high-necked jacket with leg of mutton sleeves and braiding round the waist. The display beside it includes a small girl wearing a white dress and pinafore, with a long cream lacy bonnet on her head, and a man in dun-coloured trousers with a wide brown leather belt fastened loosely round his waist, a black waistcoat over a white shirt and a red handkerchief tied round his neck. On his head is a brown flat cap. Beside him stands a small boy, dressed in the same costume but wearing a hat with a brim. Adjoining the display is the lift – it's about four metres from the top of the stairs at 11 o'clock. Its handle and button are to the right of its door, and you have to press and hold the button to call the lift. In front of you is a glass wall which gives out onto Battlebridge Basin, and in the far right-hand corner is a small exhibition of canal signs. Beside this staircase, immediately to your right, is a barrier with a rail on top. Down below ground level on its other side is the ice well we mentioned earlier. Keeping the barrier on your right, follow it round to the right, where a row of chairs stands against it, and where you are welcome to sit. The chairs face the glass double doors which are two metres away and lead out to the Basin.

TRIGGER FIVE – AT THE BACK DOORS

VOICE 2 You are now standing besides the glazed rear wall of the museum, which looks out over Battlebridge Basin. Rectangular in shape, it stretches for about 130 metres from the left to a T-junction at the right, where it meets the Regent's Canal.

VOICE 1 Battlebridge Basin, which opened in 1822, was built by William Horsfall, who owned the land, and was originally named Horsfall Basin after him. But the area had always been known as Battlebridge and the basin's name was eventually changed. By the mid-19th century the open yards and wharves of iron and stone works, coal and timber yards had sprung up around it. There were also some warehouses, such as this ice house, and a flour mill – and the basin was a hive of activity. In the early 20th century many of these yards were replaced by factories. The tall building opposite was built in 1903 – and by the 1920s was in full production as a bottling plant for Guinness, which was shipped from Dublin to Limehouse, then brought here by canal. Some of the cranes used to lift the beer barrels still remain. During the same period other businesses around the basin included a jam bottling factory, a salt store, engineering works and a timber yard. The canal continued to serve the businesses in Battlebridge Basin until the 1950s, when canal transport declined – and the traffic that kept the basin alive with its comings and goings came no more. Today the basin has been through a period of regeneration, with offices and flats being built here, and Battlebridge Basin has started a new life.

There are buildings on all sides of the high rippling water, and moored at the left is a cluster of residential narrow boats, some with pots of red geraniums and other flowers in their doorways and, in summer, on their decks and roofs. Tall grey stone buildings rise from the water on the side facing the museum and there are often birds swimming in the water – including Canada geese, ducks and coots. Sometimes, especially on very hot days, terrapins can be seen sunning themselves. Frequently moored in the basin to the right is a small red, green and yellow pusher tug – the Bantam IV – with a black and yellow striped curved bow – or front. It's a steel boat, nearly six and a half metres long and two and a half metres wide. Its bow and stern are rounded and it has rubber fenders. Towards the rear is a small rectangular wheelhouse painted green. The tug was built in 1949-50 and during its working life carried out maintenance work in

gravel pits, rivers and canals. It's called a 'pusher' tug because it pushes, rather than pulls barges – a considerably more efficient way of using power than the traditional towing method.

VOICE 2 If the weather is fine you're welcome to go outside, but I must warn you, there's no railing or wall on the paving at the water's edge, only a low kerb that stands about 10 centimetres high, so you may prefer to stick to the platform and ramp just outside the door. The ramp has a left-hand rail and slopes down to the right, to the paved area beside the water. The doors are opened by pressing the button on the sloping top of the post just to the right of the doors. To re-enter from the outside, press the top of two buttons which are situated at waist-height on the mullion to the left of the doors, immediately at the top of the sloping ramp. At certain times, for security reasons, this button will not open the door. In this case, press the other button, immediately beneath it, which rings a door bell that you will hear. This alerts the staff who can open the door by remote control. If you're going outside, press the single button on the handset when you're back inside and at these chairs. If you're remaining here, press the single button on the handset now.

LAYER FOR TRIGGER FIVE

PAUSE

VOICE 2 With your back to the chairs, turn right and follow the railing along to the point where it turns to the right. This commentary will now pause for a short time.

10 secs PAUSE

VOICE 2 Tucked into the angle of the fence near the chairs on the right is an ingenious Victorian device called a bucket fire extinguisher. You're welcome to examine it. Ten buckets were stacked inside a tall square tank of water, fitted into vertical slotted channels either side to hold the buckets in place. A lid covered the top. In case of fire the buckets could be pulled

out, ready filled with water, and used without delay to throw on the fire. On the front is a brass plate telling us that it was made in London under a patent of 1885.

VOICE 2 Hanging on the walls to the left and facing you are various signs erected by the canal companies. One that belonged to the Regent's Canal and Dock Company bans:

VOICE 1 ... trespassing, bathing, damaging fences; throwing refuse, live or dead animals in the canal or onto the company's land...

VOICE 2 Another, erected by the Grand Union Canal states...

VOICE 1 The towing path is private property, and may be used only for the purpose of the navigation. There is no public right of way...

VOICE 2 Also on the wall facing you are two panels outlining canals in decline and canal revival.

Now, as you face the fire appliance turn left and, keeping the railings on your right, follow them round, past the door to the wheelchair lift, to the top of the stairs. Take the nine steps, which again have railings on both sides, down to the ground floor.

TRIGGER POINT 6 – HANDLING EQUIPMENT

VOICE 1 You are now standing beside an exhibition of weighing and manual handling equipment. In the past, almost everything had to be moved by hand and the world of work was often a world of back-breaking manual labour. As you stand with your back to the stairs, there is a weighing machine against the left-hand wall, and above it a large hand-operated crane with a Hessian sack hanging from its hook. There's also a trolley, a barrel ramp and another weighing machine further along the wall. Weighing sacks of grain, flour or other goods was always important in case some of the contents had been stolen: pilfering of cargo was a major issue in the nineteenth century. Immediately to the right of the stairs we've just come down is a hand-operated crab winch, similar to those used to raise and lower large ice blocks into the ice well which you'll be visiting shortly. You're welcome

to examine the weighing machines and winch. When you're ready to move on, return to these stairs and press the single button on the handset.

LAYER FOR TRIGGER SIX

VOICE 2 With the staircase behind you and the crab winch to your right, walk straight ahead to the railings, where there is a sloping information panel. Once you've reached it, turn right and, keeping the railings on your left, follow them round to the left. Stop once you've turned the corner.

TRIGGER POINT 7 – PLATES & ICE WELL

VOICE 2 A long display case, containing commemorative pieces of pottery and china, faces you as you stand with your back to the railings. To the left are examples of flamboyant Measham teapots – named after the town where many were bought – and also known as barge-ware. The pottery teapots are pear-shaped rather than round, with the spout set low down. They have a high rim and the crowning glory is the lid, which often has a miniature teapot as its handle. Made from rich brown glazed pottery, the teapots are decorated with colourful motifs of flowers and animals, and some even have presentation plaques and carry a date. The teapots come in all sorts of sizes and, because of this, were probably kept safely on shore, rather than in the cramped living quarters on boats. They were manufactured from around 1870 to 1939 together with other barge-ware items, which included kettles, dishes, vases, tobacco jars and chamber pots.

VOICE 1 The right-hand side contains a display of lace or ribbon plates, similar to those hanging in the Coronis – the narrow boat we visited earlier. Mostly about the size of a salad plate, some have decorated inner rims on a pale pink or white background. Others are decorated in the centre with floral patterns such as yellow roses – or postcard-type views of the seaside, countryside or towns, and one even has a portrait of two women. But they all have perforated rims, giving the appearance of a lacy border, and

through which pretty, brightly-coloured ribbons could be threaded. Made in the midlands and Bohemia between the late 1800s and early 1900s, many of these are souvenir plates, which families collected avidly during their travels up and down the country's canals and displayed in their tiny cabins, which were brightened by the reflected light from the china glaze of the plates.

VOICE 2 Now turn round and face the railings. As we mentioned earlier, the pit inside the railings is a brick-lined ice well – one of the two this building contained. After they had fallen into disuse in 1904 they were filled with rubble and earth then sealed. But this one has now been partially excavated. Dimly-lit from below, it's circular, just under 10 and a half metres in diameter – and is now around four metres deep, although its full depth is thought to be around 12.8 metres – that's about 42 feet.

VOICE 1 Today we take ice for granted, but in the days before electricity ice was an expensive commodity, especially in the summer. Not only was it needed to keep food fresh and wine and water chilled but doctors also used it to reduce fevers and swellings. The average winter was much colder then, and large country houses often had an ice house where ice from special ponds was stored. These, too, were circular, but were usually semi-submerged in the ground, with a domed roof covered with turf. There were also various commercial ice houses in towns from which ice could be bought – but demand always exceeded supply.

This began to change when, in 1822, pastry-chef William Leftwich commissioned a shipload of ice from Norway. He made a handsome profit and during the next 15 years built two large ice wells near the Regent's Canal, to which the ice was delivered by barge from London docks. Others followed suit and in 1899, at the peak of the trade, 340,000 tons of ice were imported from Norway by the British ice merchants. Imagine barge load after barge load of rectangular blocks of ice arriving here – each weighing up to three hundredweight. They were lifted by hand-operated crane onto the wharf outside, then slid or wheeled by barrow in here.

Finally they were winched by hand into the well, where they were carefully stacked. When it was fully operational this well could hold two whole shiploads of ice, which was brought here through the spring. But ice supplied in this way was expensive, and after the development of mechanical ice-making plants in the early 20th century, the import trade rapidly declined.

VOICE 2 Keeping the fence on your right, follow it round to the side opposite this one. You will come to first one, then another, sloping panel mounted on it, so take care not to go too fast. Attached to the railings immediately past the second sloping panel is a metal panel holding a telephone receiver. By picking it up and pressing the button to the left of the receiver rest, you can hear Joseph Assirati telling his grandson Nick about his father Guiseppe – Nick’s great grandfather – who started work here in 1899 when he was 16. When you’ve listened to Joseph, press the single button on this handset.

LAYER FOR TRIGGER SEVEN

VOICE 2 With your back to the telephone, walk forward to 10 o’clock for around four metres. The pillar containing the roses and castles display will be on your right and in the wall on your left is a partially-open doorway, giving a glimpse of the interior – a small reconstructed toll office with a high desk on which sits a large, leather-bound, open ledger. A few paces past the doorway there’s a sloping lectern projecting from the wall. Stop when you reach it.

TRIGGER POINT 8 – ICE TRADE EXHIBITION

VOICE 1 You are now at the ice trade exhibition. This section is devoted to Carlo Gatti, the restaurateur and ice merchant who once owned this building – and to the ice trade of which he was so much a part. Gatti owned other ice stores as well, and up on the left-hand wall is a foundation stone bearing

the inscription ‘This stone was laid by Mrs C. Gatti and Mrs R. Gatti’. It’s the stone from an ice store Carlo Gatti built in the Caledonian Road in Islington – which was laid by his young second wife and his daughter Rosa in 1872.

Below it is a glass display case containing a small Victorian model of a horse trotting towards the right and pulling a box-shaped yellow cart with the driver seated on it. Made of wood and a variety of fabrics it’s around three quarters of a metre long and about 25 centimetres high, and is a reminder of how essential this form of transport once was. Gatti had a fleet of horses and carts – and every morning they were loaded with blocks of ice before setting off through the streets to deliver to their customers. The blocks could be split by chisel or bradawl into the quantities required by customers – then put into a sack and delivered. One man could carry about a hundredweight (or about 50 kilograms) at a time.

Also on the wall above the exhibition are two ice dogs – scissor-action curved iron tongs around a metre long – holding mock ice blocks in their jaws.

VOICE 2 Standing on the floor in front of the wall is a collection of large rectangular blocks, some standing on top of the other, marbled in blue and white to resemble ice. From them you can get an idea of the size of the ice blocks that were loaded onto the carts. The nearest block that projects out to the right has a touch screen in its sloping top and by touching various areas of the screen you can hear about different aspects of Carlo Gatti’s life. You might like to play it randomly – but if you’d prefer to know the categories a member of staff will be pleased to help. Briefly, Carlo Gatti was born in Switzerland in 1817, two years after the battle of Waterloo. His family was poor and, after spending some time in Paris, he moved to London where, through hard work and good business sense, he opened a string of café-restaurants. As you’ve already heard, his other business interests included the import and sale of ice.

- VOICE 1 The sides of the three blocks which face into the centre of the room have been cut away and serve as display cabinets. There's a push button with a tactile sign on the left-hand side of the centre case, which brightens the display lighting for a minute or so. Included in the display are several items of advertising material, including the plaster figure of a fair-haired girl in a blue dress supporting an enormous ice-cream cone about 35 centimetres high. Incidentally, cones have been around since the end of the 19th century, and probably longer. There are ice-cream scoops and ice moulds, ice-cream tubs and the glass 'penny licks' that were used by customers to taste the ice cream. They were only wiped after each use and were banned in 1926 for being unhygienic.
- To the right of the group of showcases are three wooden chests. These are ice boxes, the forerunner of the refrigerator. Beside them to the left, in the centre of the room, stands an unusual tricycle – its single wheel is at the back, enabling the double wheels in the front to support a cream-coloured container box with 'ice cream' written in red around its top, and its front emblazoned with the slogan 'stop me and buy one'. Do examine this forerunner of today's ice-cream van if you wish. They were developed by the Walls ice cream company in the 1920s and remained in use until the second world war.
- VOICE 2 Ice is essential in the making of ice cream – for centuries it has been known that mixing ice and salt together lowers the temperature below freezing. If a bowl containing the ice cream mixture is put into the ice and salt the ice cream freezes. To keep it smooth, the mixture is stirred or rotated. This was the method used until the development of the freezer. At first the ice-cream was made from water but from the 17th century milk began to be used, hence 'ice cream' rather than 'water ice'.
- VOICE 1 We're going upstairs next. With your back to the saddle of the tricycle walk forward for 3 metres to the foot of the stairs. On your left you'll pass the bottom of the ramp up which horses were led to their stables above. Tucked beside the left of the ramp are two upright rectangular metal chests

– these are the moulds for making ice mechanically and it was these that eventually made ice affordable by all.

There's a tactile mat at the foot of the stairs and handrails on both sides. The first 15 steps lead up to small half landing where the stairs turn left. Nine further steps take you up to the first floor.

If you'd prefer to take the lift to the first floor, stand with your back to the front of the tricycle's ice box and walk for a metre or so towards two o'clock and the side of the Coronis narrow boat. Then turn right and follow the side of the boat to the flight of nine steps at the end. When you come out of the lift on the first floor, make your way diagonally over to the top of the staircase in the far left-hand corner.

TRIGGER POINT NINE – TOP OF MAIN STAIRCASE, ON ARRIVAL AT FIRST FLOOR

VOICE 1 Please take a step or two sideways to the left and stand in front of the wall. This first floor room is the same size as the one downstairs, though it appears larger because it's all on one level. The room's open to the roof, which is lined with wood laths and supported by wooden beams stretching across the room. These in turn are supported by the occasional iron pillar.

VOICE 2 Moving clockwise around the room, on the wall behind you, immediately to the left of the stairs, is a large map showing London's canal system. It lies mainly north of the Thames and stretches from Brentford in the west to Limehouse in the east. This is followed by a poster-frame book hanging on the wall, which contains the map in sections, then a door leading to the Ladies and Gents. In the left-hand corner of the room is a television screen with rows of chairs facing it. This is where archive films are shown. Against the next wall are some barrels.

VOICE 1 The lift is towards the far left-hand corner – there is sometimes a temporary exhibition on screens in that area, so be careful as you approach it. The far wall facing you has windows in it, looking out onto

Battlebridge Basin – and, high up, a hayloft door through which goods were hoisted. Below the left-hand windows is a small exhibition on water and locks. This is followed by a display of harness on the outer side of a horse stall, which projects into the room and houses the full-sized replica of a dray horse. The far right-hand corner contains items connected with the care of horses. The wide ramp used by the horses to get up here runs up the right-hand wall and is now fenced off with metal railings. The railings face you and stretch almost to the far end of the room. Standing against these are some wooden trolleys and another large barrel. At this end are some display cabinets containing models of canal boats such as narrow boats and lighters – and in the centre of the room are several free-standing exhibition stands arranged in a row and in a group.

TRIGGER POINT 10

VOICE 1 The main topic of this corner behind the lift is water, locks, and the Regent's Canal. Canals are supplied with water from reservoirs, rivers, or natural springs, and sometimes the water has to be pumped from a lower level. The water has to be level – but the land the canals travel through often undulates. To get round this problem locks are built at intervals along the canal, making a form of water steps. Two gates are inserted into the water, enclosing a chamber between them. The gates have paddles in them, which can be opened to let water through. There are three of these wooden paddles under the window on the outside wall to the right, which you are welcome to examine. To go down hill, the gates at the top are opened and the boat goes into the chamber, which is full of water. The gates are then closed and the paddles on the bottom gates are opened. The water drains out of the chamber, lowering the boat to the level of the water below the lock. The boat comes out of the chamber and continues on its way. To go uphill, the reverse happens. The boat goes into the empty chamber, then the paddles on the top gate are opened. The water rises, bringing the boat up to the level of the water beyond the gate.

VOICE 2 The Regent's Canal, which lies at the end of Battlebridge Basin, has 12 locks in its eight and a half miles. Between the area near Paddington where the Canal starts and its end at Limehouse Basin, the land level drops around 26 metres, 86 feet. Incidentally, a boundary marker stands in a wooden case on the left-hand side of this area which you're welcome to examine – it bears the Regent's Canal logo of the Prince of Wales feathers. The Canal was built between 1812 and 1820, and was designed by James Morgan, a long term assistant of the architect John Nash, who was a Director of the canal company and a powerful driving force. The locks on the Canal were built double, so that one boat could go up while another descended. This saved time and water – for 56,000 gallons, that's 250 cubic metres, are needed to fill a lock. The canal also passed through two tunnels – at Maida Vale and Islington – the latter is over half a mile long. Tunnels have no tow path, and so the horse was unhitched and led over the top, while the boatmen lay on the top of their boats and used their legs on the tunnel roof to propel the boat through. Later, steam tugs were used to tow the boats, which created an unpleasantly smoky atmosphere within the tunnel, which was potentially lethal.

VOICE 1 The towpaths were wide enough for two horses to pass – the cotton tow rope of one of the boats was taken off the horse and passed over or under the other boat, then reattached when the boats were clear of each other. The tow ropes themselves had to be replaced ever six weeks or so, for they were constantly rubbed against the iron or stone supports of bridges, which cut grooves into the supports and frayed the ropes. The work was hard for the horse so, although the Regent's Canal was only eight and a half miles long, it had three staging posts where boatmen changed their horses.

VOICE 2 Facing this display is the horse stall, and on this side is a display of harness worn by the cart horses. High up on the outside wall beside the stall is a hay rack. These were placed above the horse's head to make them stretch up to eat. Below it is a board used by a vendor of horse shoes

displaying various sizes of horseshoes, and beneath this is a soft saddle. Among the various pieces of harness ranged along the side of the stall is a head collar on the left, (the most important piece of the harness), which takes the weight of the cart. These were tailor-made from leather and stuffed with horsehair or straw. They had to fit perfectly – if they were too tight they could choke the horse, while a loose collar would rub and cause sores. Other items include a blinkered bridle with a metal bit, a saddle band and a body strap with loops on the side into which the shafts were placed.

TRIGGER POINT 11 – HORSE POWER EXHIBITION

VOICE 2 This area is devoted to horse power. Until the development of motorised vehicles horses were essential for haulage and transport. In the 1890s there were around 300,000 horses in London and some three thousand donkeys – and stabling was a problem. So horses were often housed on the upper floors of buildings, with the carts and wagons on the ground floor below.

VOICE 1 The horses pulled omnibuses and trams, delivery and refuse carts, cabs, fire engines, ambulances and hearses. They were crucial to the smooth-running of the police, the post office, the railways and, of course, the canals.

The horses destined for the city started work when they were fully grown and aged about five. The work was hard, particularly for the animals working in the busy streets – the constant stopping, starting and jolting put an enormous strain on them, especially with loads that could be up to two tons. Little wonder that their working life was an average of only five years and their whole life expectancy was only half of the usual 20 years. Although canal boats carried even greater loads – up to 50 tons – the horses fared better, as they moved at a slow steady pace and it takes a lot less effort to pull a heavy load on water.

Horses were bred in the country here and in Ireland, and broken in to harness before being sold at horse fairs – such as the annual fair at Barnet. But sometimes demand exceeded supply, and at times horses were brought in from Europe and even North America. Strength and agility was more important than breed – and though large shire horses were used for heavy street loads, smaller, more nimble types were the preferred horse for the canal towpaths.

VOICE 2 This roped-off rectangular reconstruction of a horse's stall is around two and a half metres deep and four wide – and in it stands a life-size model of a sturdy brown horse, with white markings on its legs and body, a white blaze on its face, and a long dark mane and tail. It's about a metre and a half high at its withers and, although facing in to the stall with its hindquarters towards us, its head is turned to look at us over its right shoulder, as if interrupted while feeding from the metal manger fastened to the brick wall at the far end. The floor is scattered with straw and contains some of the original cobbles, found when the floor was being dug out – and to add authenticity, there's a small pile of droppings near the horse's back hooves! The two wooden sides of the stall are curved at the top – in the shape of a horse's neck and back – and a leather horse blanket is slung over the wall on the right-hand side. There's also a leather nosebag and a string hay net.

After 1906, when the building was remodelled and became stables, three of the walls up here would have been lined with stalls like this. There was also a loose box – a spacious stable - for sick animals. Along one side is the ramp up which the horses climbed every night. It has a gradient of 1 in 3. There used to be rungs across the slope to help the horses to grip.

VOICE 1 The section beyond the stall, in the last corner, deals with the maintenance of the horse – for during their working life horses were well cared for. The items in the glass topped table to the left, beside the right-hand side of the horse stall, include various items for grooming, such as brushes, a curry

comb and clippers; there's a whip and a searing iron, which was used to remove warts from horses.

Against the back wall is a travelling forge and anvil – and a case on the right-hand wall contains examples of veterinary equipment.

Horses were fed three times a day. Canal horses were occasionally able to graze fresh grass, but the street horses seldom had this opportunity.

Instead they were fed a diet of oats, maize, bran, hay, sometimes carrots, parsnips and beans. During the day this was given to them in a nosebag during their rounds. They were groomed regularly and in winter their shoes were replaced by special ice shoes. The travelling forge that stands here is similar to an open circular barbecue containing an impression of glowing coals, but on its side is a hand-wound bellows. Do examine it and the anvil standing alongside if you wish.

VOICE 2 The blacksmith or farrier – a specialist blacksmith – also acted as a vet until the 1880s, when those without proper training were no longer allowed to do so. Medicinal compounds were formed into a ball by a balling iron – a long metal instrument with a cup-shaped depression at one end for placing solid medicine in the back part of the mouth of a horse, to ensure that it is swallowed whole – or administered in liquid form by drenching, which was poured into the mouth through a horn or bottle. The diet of sick horses included an easily-digested oatmeal gruel. However, keeping a horse or horses was expensive and many were hired from large stables rather than bought. For example, the Regent's Canal Company had a policy of using leased horses rather than the boatmen using their own, and employed a company vet.

TRIGGER 12

VOICE 1 Thank you for visiting the London Canal Museum today, we hope you enjoyed this tour and will tell your friends about us. If you would like a memento of your visit, there is a wide range of souvenirs in the shop.

Have a safe journey home – and do ask a member of staff if you need directions to the station or bus stops. Goodbye.