

Hold Factsheet

- The **hold** is the space where the **cargo** is carried. The narrow boats were the Eddie Stobarts of their day.
- Saturn's hold could carry **up to 16 tons** of cargo though she would often have carried less weight. When she is fully loaded the boat goes down in the water so that only a few inches of side are showing.
- She was **originally built to carry cheese** from the rural areas of Shropshire, Cheshire and North Wales to the city markets in Manchester or to Ellesmere Port for export from Liverpool.
- Boats carrying perishables worked **"fly" – non stop** as there was no refrigeration. Holes were cut in the cratch (the triangular wooden board at the front of the hold) to create a cooling draught and the hold would have been covered with white cloths to reflect the heat of the sun.
- The hold was **"clothed up"** to protect perishable or valuable cargo from the weather. The **side cloths** are nailed to the gunwales (the top of the boat's sides) so that water cannot splash into the boat when it is deeply loaded in locks or in rough water in the docks. The **top cloths** overlap the side cloths to keep the cargo dry and deter pilfering.
- The cheese trade being one way on the return trip the boat would carry **a mixed cargo travelling to a timetable** picking up and dropping off items at the Company's warehouses along the route. These might be anything from a sack of sugar for the grocer in Ellesmere to a new piano for the vicar in Newtown.
- **The boatmen were often responsible for loading and unloading** their cargoes themselves. The top cloths would be removed and the side cloths rolled down to make the cargo accessible. They might have to shovel out tons of coal by hand or lift hundreds of heavy sacks out of the boat at small wharves with no lifting equipment. There is a half-hundredweight weight in the boat which can be used (with care) to demonstrate the weight of one sack.
- The boats were mostly used to carry **bulk cargoes** such as coal needed by the factories alongside the canal. Salt from Middlewich and Northwich, clay passing up the Trent and Mersey to Stoke on Trent and finished pottery coming back down, limestone from the quarries in North Wales going to the many canal side lime kilns, grain imported from Canada through Ellesmere Port to mills all over the SURCC area.
- Before the canals were built goods were moved by horse and cart on roads that were muddy or frozen in winter and rough and rutted in summer – very slow and bumpy – one horse could only pull 1 or 2 tons at a time. On the canal **one horse can pull a boat loaded with 20 tons, or more.**