

ODFHS Boatfamilies - 2025 Updates

(Canal Family 1 except where indicated)

Update V201- 30.12.2025

New Total: 69, 693 people

No New Names

Main Increases: Holland +37; Green +26; Blackburn(e), Gough +20; Golbourn/Goben +13; Bowen, Shaw +6

We have continued expanding our Cheshire and Staffordshire families, including Alfred Gough, b1863 Runcorn, who married Matilda Blackburn, daughter of a Liverpool mariner. Also Henry Green b1842 Sandbach, who married Betsy Holland, a Cheshire boatman's daughter born in Kidsgrove. And thanks go to our regular contributor Keith Howard for additions to the family of Burscough boatman Thomas Bowen, b1888.

Update 200 - 29.11.2025

New Total: 68, 530

New Names: Ricketts 16; Cowhorne/Cowern 7

Main Increases: Follows +12; Shaw +12; Atkins +10; Theobald +9; Johnson, Williams +8; Condliffe +5

Our new names and increases are again connected to the Cheshire and Staffordshire families developed recently, unexpectedly finding that that some boatmen married daughters from canal families already on our website. We have also been able to separate some Follows and Fallows boatfamilies.

Update V199 - 14.11.2025

New Total: 68,423

New Name: Midwinter

Main Increases: Tolley +30; Wimbush +29; Stevens +22; Clifton +20; Gardner +14; Turner +10; Franks +9

We have continued to develop our recently introduced Midlands families, mostly inter-related, some of whom traded into and out of London along the Grand Union Canal. As a result we now have a second Thames lighterman, David Henry Tolley, a boatman's son from Brierley Hill near Dudley, who in 1907 married Ellen Ann Connelly of Marylebone in Little Venice, on the Regents Canal, and raised their family in Paddington and Brentford.

Update V198 - 22.10.2025

New Total: 68,233

No New Names

Main Increases: Holloway +36; Downing +32; James +20; Wilkinson +13; Boardman +10; Wenlock +8

Our Wilkinson, Boardman and Downing increases result from detailed research by ODFHS member Jean Ellis, who also discovered The Aspull Atrocity, a shocking court story of how 'inhuman conduct' by L&L Canal boatman Richard Barrow caused the death of his baby son, but he was merely bound over to keep the peace (see Media/Documents).

Other main increases are among families related to Midlands boatmen developed in recent updates.

Update V197 - 6.10.2025**New Total:** 68,036**New Names:** Steadman 25; Lamsdon 9; Howkins 6**Main Increases:** Grainger +34; Collier +27; Mew +26; Hunt +11; Edwards +10; Spindler +7

We have added our first Thames lighterman - Frederick John Collier of Reading, son of an Oxford boatman whose family connects with the Ashleys from our last update.

Our new names are also related to recent Midlands additions and include the Steadman family of Staffordshire boatbuilders. Likewise the Graingers and Mews of Tewkesbury who worked on the Gloucester and Worcester Canals which connect with the Birmingham Canal Navigations.

Update V196 - 14.9.2025**New Total:** 67,781**New Names:** Dash 6; Spindler 3**Main Increases:** Hough +29; Whitmore +25; Curtis 11; Ashley +10; Lawson +6

Our new families, plus the Curtis and Ashley increases, involve our first boatmen based on the Oxford Canal, with connections to the Hollinsheads of Staffordshire already on the site.

Thanks go to Mike Hough for passing on more of his family records, and to Michael Connolly for further help with his Lawson ancestors and related families. We are also grateful to Gill Gladwin for details of a pocket book kept by her great-grandfather, George Brown - see Runcorn Boatman's Notebook in Media/Documents.

Update V195 - 2.9.2025**New Total:** 67,642**New Names:** Cresswell 12; Dewis 12; Mew 4**Main Increases:** Goode +33; Burton +23; Lawson +20; Barlow +14; Drinkwater +12; Burley +11; Moore +6; Butters +5

Our new names and main increases are connected to the Cheshire and Staffordshire families developed in recent updates. Thanks go to Michael Connolly for introducing his Cresswell ancestors and a new branch of Lawsons which we will expand in our next update.

Update V194 - 7.8.2025**New Total:** 67,409 people**New Names:** Doughty 32; Boswell 20; Wooding 11**Main Increases:** Mitchell +27; Hollinshead, Wood +26; Higgins +19; Atkins +13; Carman +11; Tolley +9; Harrison +8

Press reports of two girls sadly drowned in Liverpool canal locks have been added to our Media/Documents section, for which thanks go to a regular contributor, Keith Howard, who has also provided detailed amendments to our Burscough Baldwin families.

All new names and increases are connected to the Cheshire and Staffordshire families involved in recent updates, with individuals born across the canal system - in Chester, Nottingham, Rickmansworth and one boatman's daughter, Violet Burley, on the Regent's Canal at King's Cross in 1920. Our most populous name has become Harrison.

Update V193 – 13.7.2025**New Total:** 67,080 people**New Names:** Cornwell 56; Hixon 20; Lowke 18**Main Increases:** Johnson +25; Sutton +23; Simpson +11

Further links between boatfamilies from different areas come with the 1915 marriage of Staffordshire boatman Arthur Alfred Johnson and Mary Adelaide Appleton, who was born on a canal boat in Manchester to Jabez Appleton of Barnton, Cheshire, and Mary Alice Haspell of Leigh.

All new names and increases are connected to the Midlands families we have developed recently, and include a possibly bigamous marriage in 1918 by Sarah Ann (nee Salmon), wife of boatman Hugh Cornwell who had been badly injured fighting in France. Records show that he remained in hospital there with vertigo and did not return until after the war, by which time Sarah - assuming he had been killed - had remarried.

Update V192 - 23.6.2025**New Total:** 66,881 people**New Names:** Copson 34, Brain, 24, Tabberner 14, Bustin 12**Main Increases:** Cooksey, Jones +16; Sheldon +15; Sutton+14; Watson +12; Williams +11; Lightfoot, Needham +9

We have continued the development of Midlands boatfamilies connected to those we highlighted in Update V191 and include four new names, providing further evidence of boatmen's children marrying into other canal families in the mid-1800s and early 1900s.

One example is that of John Francis Copson b1854 Worcester, son of Thomas Copson of Birmingham, marrying Ellen Tabberner who was born at Tardebigge Wharf, on the longest lock-flight in our canal system, 30 locks in 2½ miles.

Update V191 - 1.6.2025**New Total:** 66,606**New Name:** Sands 48**Main Increases:** Firkins + 40; Johnson +31; Lightfoot +6; Bailey +5

Inter-connected Midlands boatfamilies dominate this update, which introduces the Shropshire family headed by Thomas Sands and Mary Challinor. Three of their sons were boatmen, and Joseph, b1835 Wem, married Sarah Mary Firkins of Worcester, whose family was already on our site.

Sarah's father and brothers were boatmen, one of whom, Jeremiah Firkins b 1832, was fined in 1884 for 'overcrowding' - contravening the recently invoked Canal Boat Acts by allowing two daughters above the age of 12 to live and work in his boat on the Birmingham canals. (Press report in Media/Documents – 'Fined for overcrowded boat'.

Update V190 - 7.5.2025**New Total:** 66,373**No New Names****Main Increases:** Beech, Clewes +24; Morton, Wood +13; Hollinshead +10; Carter +8; Bailey, Preston +6

We have added three generations of the Clewes family of Staffordshire boatmen after discovering that the Lottie Clewes we had as wife of William Fradley of Middlewich was born illegitimately in 1902 as Charlotte Sheldon, daughter of Hannah Sheldon and Daniel Clewes of Stoke-on-Trent. Apparently mother and daughter never married their partners.

Charlotte's brother Daniel Sheldon married Mary Beech of Runcorn, whose father John was a Cheshire boatman from a line of Staffordshire watermen headed by Ralph Beech, b1778 Burslem, and Jane Mountford. Other increases are also among inter-connected Cheshire/Staffordshire families.

Update V189 - 22.3.2025

New Total: 66,213 people

No New Names

Main Increases: Knott +53; Whittaker +28; Ambler +18; Crooks +13; Todd +6

We now have a VC on our site - William Thomas Forshaw, awarded the Victoria Cross for 'most conspicuous bravery and determination' at Gallipoli in 1915. His grandfather Thomas, b1822 Lathom, was a boatman whose family moved to Barrow-in-Furness where his father worked in Vickers Shipyard. Thanks go to Keith Howard for adding details of his ancestors descended from Daniel Forshaw b1743 Rufford.

We are also grateful to Mick Knott of Hull for developing his family of Yorkshire watermen descended from three generations of Lincolnshire mariners called Henry Knott, the earliest born in 1745.

Our Whittaker and Crooks increases are due to detailed work by Lesley Orrell who discovered that the widowed Mary Dutton (nee Dickens) who married Isaac Brockbank in Warrington (1842) had previously married Cheshire waterman Thophilus Whittaker in 1829 as well as Thomas Dutton in 1835. Thomas and Mary's daughter Elizabeth Dutton married carpenter Robert Crooks of Warrington, whose family were shipbuilders in Blackburn and elsewhere.

Update V188 - 6.3.2025

New Total: 66,027 people

New Name: Ambler, 16

Main Increases: Bentley +23; Farnill +21; Arnold +17; Palin +14; Bloor +7

Thanks go to Jayne Stidham for details of her Bentley family of Yorkshire keelmen and mariners, connected to the Farnills and Arnolds of Knottingley already on our site. They also link to our new family headed by waterman James Ambler, b1793 Knottingley.

We are also grateful to Jenny Benson for alerting us to a false marriage in our records for her 2X great-grandfather William Bloor, b1813 Northwich, whose family we have now revised. Separately we have added another Cheshire waterman, Robert Palin b1821, who married into the Barton family of Northwich who were already on our site.

Update V187 - 13.2.2025

New total: 65,866 people

New Names: Chew 19, Wildey 19

Main Increases: Holt +21; Smallwood +13; Roberts +12; Carter, Jones +8; Postles +7; Meese, Williams +5

Our new names are linked to the Cheshire/Staffordshire families we have recently been developing. Emma Smallwood, a boatman's daughter from Wolverhampton, married Samuel Wildey whose son Alfred's wife was Alice Jane Chew of Northwich, daughter of boatman Jabez Chew of Audlem (surname Tew in early records). Their sons plied the Trent and Mersey, Shropshire Union and Llangollen Canals in the late 18th/early 19th centuries.

The Smallwood family is also connected by marriages to the other increases, members of which are found in the censuses trading on the Grand Union Canal between the Potteries and London.

Update V186 - 22.1.2025

New Total: 65,647 people

New Name: Hackney 8

Main Increases: Bould +33; Hodgkinson +24; Griffin +22; Moore +14; Stevenson +13; Smith +8

Our new name and most increases are among the inter-related families we have recently been developing in the Sandbach area of Cheshire, including the descendants of Samuel Hodgkinson and Mary Sherwin. Their children Sarah b1871 and Joseph b1878 married into Potteries boatfamilies headed by William and Henry Bould of Stoke-on-Trent.

We are pleased to have added a photograph of The Halsall Navvy to our Media/Photos section, a sculpture by Thompson Dagnall commemorating the navigation labourers involved in the start of construction on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal in 1770.