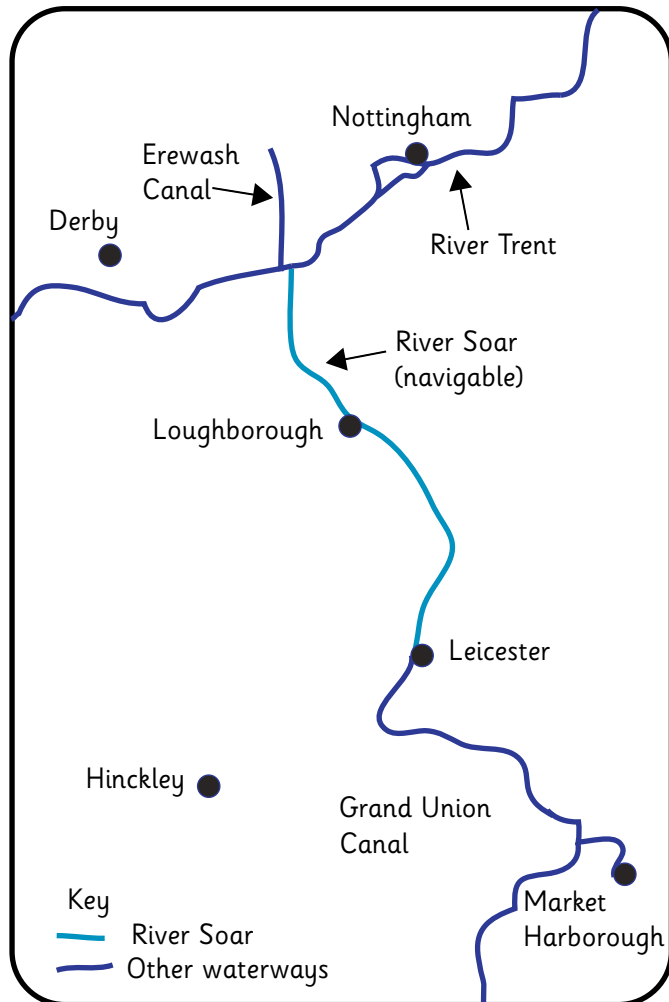




Find out why the River Soar was made navigable, and how it became important to cities like Leicester and Loughborough.



Map showing the River Soar

Where is the River Soar?

The River Soar is a tributary of the **River Trent**. Its source is near Hinckley in Leicestershire. It flows through places like Leicester, Barrow-on-Soar, Loughborough and Kegworth before joining the River Trent near Ratcliffe-on-Soar in Nottinghamshire.

At Leicester, the River Soar is joined by the **Grand Union Canal**. The Soar was made navigable (i.e wide and deep enough for cargo-carrying boats) from Leicester to the River Trent in the 18th century.

The navigable part of the River Soar flows for 28 miles and has 21 locks.

When was the River Soar made navigable?

At first, in 1778, the Soar was only made navigable from the River Trent to just outside Loughborough. A short length of canal was built to connect the Soar to Loughborough town itself. This whole navigation became known as the Loughborough Navigation.

Led by engineer William Jessop, the river navigation was extended from Loughborough to Leicester in 1794. This part of the river became known as the Leicester Navigation.



Factory buildings alongside the River Soar in Leicester.

Why was the River Soar made navigable?

During the 18th century, as the Industrial Revolution progressed, towns were keen to be linked to larger cities and coalfields so that trade could expand. The River Soar was originally made navigable to speed up the transport of coal and iron-ore from local mines to factories.

Waterways and Railways

Along with the river being made navigable, short canal lengths were built to connect the river with local coalfields and iron ore mines. These waterways allowed the engineering industry to grow in Leicestershire. Better transport of goods led to the growth of the clothing industry, as factories making shirts, lace and shoes and boots were built alongside the Soar.

In 1814, the River Soar joined up with the Grand Junction Canal at Leicester, linking places such as Nottingham, Birmingham and London. This allowed easier and cheaper transport of different cargoes in and out of the area.

By the mid 19th Century, railways were being built across the country. Trains soon became able to transport goods more quickly and cheaply than boats. In time, the canals and rivers were used less and less for the transportation of cargoes.



River Soar at Barrow-on-Soar

The River Soar today

The River Soar was once an unusual pink colour due to the pollution from Leicester's clothing industries. However clean-up work by the Environment Agency has greatly improved the river and a range of fish and other wildlife can now be found there.

After very heavy rainfalls the River Soar can flood. At Redhill lock, the last lock before the river flows into the Trent, the high flood levels from between 1955 and 1960 have been clearly marked. Flood defences have now been put in place along much of the length of the river to help prevent flooding.

The river today is enjoyed by many people including boaters, anglers, canoeists and wildlife spotters.