

Dear Diary...

We find out about what happened in the past by looking at historical evidence. People's diaries are a form of evidence and a wonderful way to find out not only what happened in the past but also about the thoughts and feelings of the people who lived through these times. Read through the diary extracts below to find out more about life on the canal in days gone by.

Sarah Ann Terry aged 70 travelled with her husband aboard the Humber Sloop 'Providence' on a journey from Dewsbury to Driffield. She kept a diary throughout the voyage and the following extracts illustrate the hardships which were a common experience for many people in the nineteenth century.

July and August 1887

Getting near Goole. My heart fails me, they all give a bad report of the voyage from Hull to Driffield. The only consolation I have is that we are doing the work God in His own wisdom has given us to do. May he preserve and bless us! Just landed at Goole. They have put us in a corner. Think I cannot bear to stay long. Hope they will move us on soon.

Friday 29th July, Goole

A restless night. Up at five. Fine when we got the boats out but it has come on wet. Getting breakfast when it strikes six. Rather out of sorts. Down about the passage to Hull.

We started at three o'clock and arrived in Hull harbour at about six. We have had a splendid run. The day has been all we could wish.

Sunday 31st July

We had to start this morning on account of the tide at four o'clock. We were delighted to go on. There is one boat before us and one after, and they cannot pass so we are obliged to go with the tide. Just had dinner – onions and potatoes.

Monday 1st August, River Hull

Been to bed for the first time since the first night, but was glad to go to bed as I felt done up.

The river is made up with weeds and bulrushes so that we cannot get on a bit, there are three men on the shore trying to drag the boat along, and they have the sail, but we only go about like a snail creeping.

Tuesday 2nd August, River Hull

The men have to pull the boat as there is no path for a horse and no horses to get, but we are assisted by our sail...

One of them says if he ever sees anyone kick an old hauling horse again, he will kick the man again, if he can, he knows what it is to be one now.

4th August, Driffield

We started to deliver this morning but I never saw so slow-motioned a lot in my life. They will talk an hour how things ought to be done before they will try to do them.

We shall not get unloaded this week as they have to cart it nine miles and they take it in wagons and four horses, there is a saddle on one and the men to drive, it is a common sight here.

9th August Driffield

Glad to say the men have come for the last load... It is a fortnight since we started from Savile Wharf and have only had one night in bed.

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Is your life as exciting? You can try keeping a diary of your own to record the things that happen in your life. You can also try reading Evelyn Holt's amazing story of her childhood. What do you think Evelyn would have written in her diary?