

Industrial Period Landscape of St Helens

St. Helens is a relatively modern town owing its development to the Industrial Revolution. The rapid expansion of the town during the late 18th and 19th centuries from a collection of small hamlets to a town of 85,000 people in 1901 was due to the availability of coal and sand suitable for glass making. The catalyst for this growth was the cutting of the St Helens Canal from 1755 -1757 between the River Mersey at Warrington and the coalmines around Haydock and Parr.

The combination of local resources, together with the ability to import additional raw materials and export finished products, led to the expansion of the mining, chemical, glass and metal refining industries.

An important aspect of the existing wildlife interest of St Helens is very closely linked to the industrial history of the town and, in particular, to the waste products generated by the coal, chemical and glass industries.

The Burgy Banks at Haresfinch are two large plateaux reaching 20metres in height and covering 53hectares. They consist of sand and miller's rouge and are a waste product of the glass industry. On the Burgies are displaced colonies of coastal plants and the parasitic broomrape.

The Mucky Mountains at Earlestown are by-products of the chemical industry and self-seeded flora has some resemblance to limestone grassland.

Numerous wetland areas exist in St Helens, including ponds, reservoirs, streams, flashes, mosses and canals. The majority are a consequence of industrial activity. Carr Mill Dam, the largest area of open water in the Borough was originally a millpond but was enlarged in 1820 to provide water for the St Helens Canal system.



St Helens Canal

Dams at Eccleston and Sutton, which served local industries, are now rich in marsh vegetation and associated insects such as dragonflies and damselflies.

St Helens Canal (also known as the Sankey Canal), the first industrial canal in England, supports a wide range of aquatic plants, insects and birds including kingfisher and water rail. Daubentons or water bats use areas of open water for feeding and in 1994; the first winter roosts for this species in Merseyside were found at two sites in St Helens.

Havannah Flashes were formed by subsidence following mining activity in the Sankey Valley. The subsequent wetland now provides habitat for water voles, water rail, red and sedge warblers and water ladybird.