

Reflections on the Surface: reviewing the River Severns history

Image: Ironbridge in Telford

Historians of the West Midlands have always recognised the importance of the River Severn navigation, yet its significance has often been clouded by cliché – it is not helpful to call the river the ‘M1 motorway of its day’ and no single body of documents illuminates the history of the Severn Navigation.

This article attempts to show how our understanding of the navigation has increased, through the opening up of new sources but also through the re-casting of the ways in which we think about the river and its relationship to the economy of the West Midlands.