

GRAHAM EVANS

The route of the Birmingham Canal Old Line starts and ends at the Birmingham New Canal Main Line. It was built in the 18th century and meandered through numerous industrial areas between Birmingham and Wolverhampton. It became so busy that in the 19th century Thomas Telford built his straight canal that took about 7 miles off the route to Wolverhampton. The combination of these two waterways creates an artificial island that is largely occupied by Birmingham City (Dudley Road) Hospital. There can't be many NHS properties with their own moat. Interestingly other than the odd cooling tower and chimney, you can't see any of the hospital due to the amount of greenery on the canal side.

The canal edge is constantly changing, alternating between industrial on one side and residential on the other. The last time I walked here, the start of the walk was very much old industrial building on both sides: it is now residential on the north side. You can see one of the two new footbridges built to allow people access from the island. On the south is the constant rumble of a scrap yard.

As you follow the route there are residential areas from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. There are parks, green areas and a nature reserve. Views over the city centre are interspersed with scrap yards, factories and finally the imposing HMP Birmingham, better known as Winson Green Prison. Even this is approached from the green All Saints Park. There are bricks, corrugated iron, concrete and synthetics making up the buildings, bridges and paths. Ironically, at the end of the loop you are greeted by the Soho rail depot; its where electric carriages are maintained and cleaned. Trains spelt the end of the canal age and the end of our edge walk.
