



## TRANSFORMED BY WAR 1939 - 1945

### The Ports Crisis



Competition between so many wartime priorities and overloaded transport networks caused congestion and delay.

Despite repeated bombing, ports had to consider every means possible to get incoming shipments on their way quickly. In addition, western ports were then tasked to plan for diversion from the east.

Attention turned to whether more could be done using water transport – some canal barges were lying idle – and using coasters for awkward loads and difficult routes. Small ports got new traffic and return cargoes such as seed potatoes from Scotland and Ireland were subsidised to make them commercially viable



Dock scene in WW2  
Image: IWM D1222



Unloading flour  
Image: IWM TR1427

**Gloucester Heritage Harbour** illustrates the challenges at a key inland port. Gloucester had access to the sea via the Gloucester and Sharpness Ship Canal, good rail connections and links to the canal network.

Cargoes going onto the inland network were transhipped at Gloucester from deep sea vessels unloading to Severn barges at Avonmouth as well as Gloucester handling Sharpness traffic.

Surviving correspondence shows the difficulty of the ports of Bristol (for Avonmouth) and Gloucester getting the Ministry to appreciate what was needed. Pressures at Gloucester can also be seen in the decision (requiring exceptional authorisation) to build a fleet of 3 small new coasters to bring coal to Gloucester from the South Wales ports. The intention was to relieve one of the worst rail network blockages, from Newport to Severn Tunnel Junction which disrupted access from South Wales to England.