

William 'Strata' Smith was born in 1769 and died in 1839. He was to become an important English geologist and is now known as the 'Father of English Geology.'

While he was working in coalmines in Somerset, he observed the layers of coal and other rocks and their fossils. Coal was the foundation of the Industrial Revolution. From his observations, he outlined the science of stratigraphy and then published the first nationwide geological map in the world.

During his life, William Smith kept a series of diaries and these are preserved at Oxford University Museum of Natural History. In one diary, William Smith wrote that the Somersetshire Coal, the Kennet and Avon, and the Wiltshire & Berkshire canals ...



William Smith (by Hugues Fourau (1803-1873)
[commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Smith_\(geologist\).jpg#/media/File:William_Smith_\(geologist\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Smith_(geologist).jpg#/media/File:William_Smith_(geologist).jpg)

... form together a most extensive water conveyance to large and most populous part of the counties of Somerset, Wilts, Berks, and Middlesex, and connected with the Thames and Severn navigations, it gives this site a water communication with South Wales, and all the other numerous canals and navigable ramifications of those two rivers, and of course with Birmingham, and all the inland navigations in the north of England.



This resource is one of a group of resources for KS1, 2 and 3 on the subject of the Somerset Coal Canal and coalfield.

More information from the [Somersetshire Coal Canal Society](http://www.somersetshirecoalcanal.org.uk).



Student tasks

1. Why was William Smith called the 'Father of English Geology'?
2. On the blank map below:
 - a. Locate and shade the four counties of Somerset, Wiltshire, Berkshire and Middlesex.
 - b. Locate and label South Wales.
 - c. Locate and label London and Birmingham



English counties map used courtesy of D-maps, d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=5596&lang=en



British coalfields of the 19th century used courtesy of Notuncurious, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coal_mining_in_the_United_Kingdom#/media/File:British_coalfields.19th_century.jpg

3. Use the coalfields of the UK map above to answer the questions:
 - a. Was it likely that coal from the Bristol and Somerset coalfields would be sold in the Birmingham area as William Smith suggested in his diary?
 - b. Why was it unlikely that coal from the Bristol and Somerset coalfields would be sold in the north of England?
4. Why was coal so important in the nineteenth century?
5. Why was an extensive network of canals so important in the nineteenth century?

This resource is one of a group of resources for KS1, 2 and 3 on the subject of the Somerset Coal Canal and coalfield.

More information from the [Somersetshire Coal Canal Society](http://www.somersetshirecoalcanal.org.uk).

