

**Restoring the canal through  
Bolton, Bury and Salford**

**No 136**

**November 2022**

# Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society

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## **Chairman's News**

### **The Breach**

Watson Homes are appealing against the decision of Bolton Council not to grant planning permission for housing and the repair of the breach; the appeal is scheduled for November.

### **Restoration Partnership**

This joint steering group includes representatives of the Society, C&RT, the three councils and Watson Homes. We met again in October, discussing strategic issues such as the Restoration Feasibility Study and the Canal Vision document. There were also detailed reports from the councils. We meet again in January.

### **C&RT**

We have regular meetings with C&RT discussing workaday issues including spraying, working parties, health & safety, dredging and signage. We meet again in November.

### **Working Parties**

Work is continuing. Details are given on our website and on our Facebook page. The next provisional dates are 12/13 November and 10 December.

### **Canal Workshops**

I have written about the workshops not least to debunk three myths which keep getting repeated.

First, the workshops were not built in the 1790s at the same time as the canal; in fact the map evidence clearly shows that they were built in two stages between 1850 and 1890.

Second, the workshops were in such a poor state by the mid 1990s that the scheme to convert them into a visitor centre would probably not have been possible without demolition, because of the poor foundations of the walls.

Third, that the Society was not responsible for the demolition of the workshops; that was done by British Waterways in 2012. The Society did try to get the building listed, without success.

*Paul Hindle*

## The Sad Story of the Canal Workshops

Paul Hindle

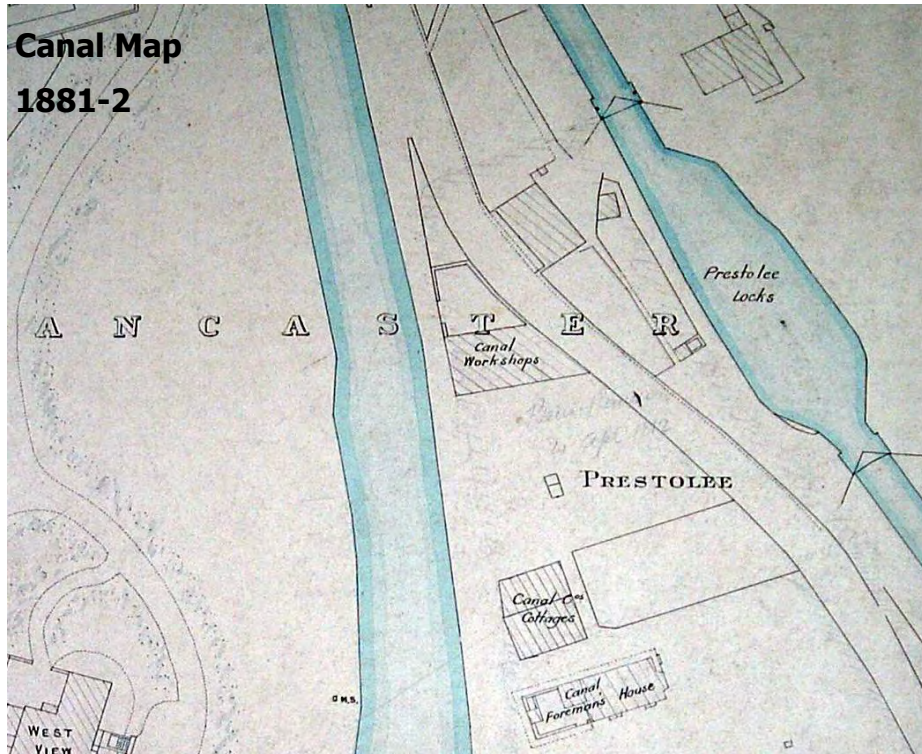
It is often wrongly stated that the workshops were built in the 1790s, at the same time as the canal. But the bricks are a clue that the building is later in date. The map evidence is very helpful; the first detailed survey at 6-inch scale was done by the Ordnance Survey in 1848, and the workshops are simply not there. The canal's own maps at a much larger scale, done in 1881-2 show the western end built as 'canal workshops', but the eastern end (later to include the office) appears to be an open area partly enclosed by a wall. Finally the OS 25-inch map surveyed in 1890 shows the completed triangular-shaped building. So the workshops were built in two stages between 1850 and 1890.

The building is variously described as 'workshop', 'shop' and 'office' in the 1890s diaries of James and his son George Holdsworth who were in turn both canal supervisors. When completed there was an office at the eastern end, plus workshops and a forge at the western end.

### Ordnance Survey 6-inch, 1848.

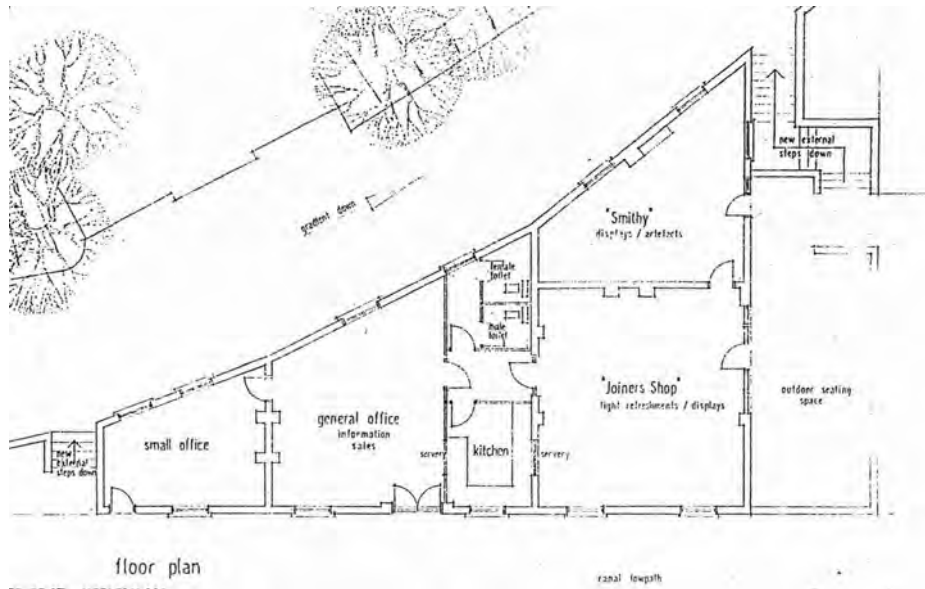
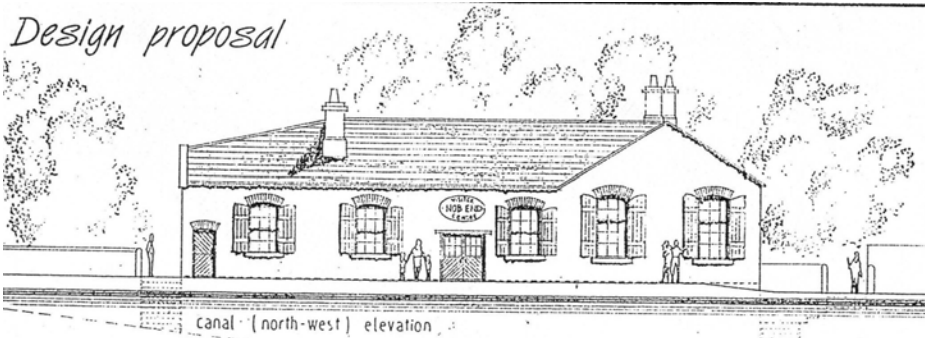






The building must have gone into a slow decline with the closure of the Bolton arm in 1924. The breach in 1936 cut off the workshops from the Bury arm and much of the remaining canal to Salford as far as Clifton Dock. The building remained largely intact, both inside and out, into the 1980s.

In 1992 the Bury Journal reported that the Society hoped to restore the building as a visitor centre but noted that 'cash is expected to be raised' – there was a plan but no cash. A feasibility study was done in 1994 and outline planning permission was granted in 1995. In 1996 the proposal for a visitor centre was part of a bid to the Millennium Commission called *Irwell Valley Connections*. As seen below the centre would have had an office, display space, a shop, café and kitchen. Sadly the bid was not successful.



But the building was not maintained, and as slates went missing, trees began to grow inside the building, which eventually grew through the roof and caused a potential danger to the whole building in any strong wind. The entrances were sealed, though access was sometimes still possible, but only at some risk.

**Launching a boat**  
**1949**



**Inside the**  
**Workshops**  
**1992**



*Photo:*  
*John Fletcher*



Without warning British Waterways posted this demolition notice on the building in December 2011, stating that it would be demolished on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2012. The Society first complained to British Waterways, and the regional manager and an engineer met us on site to explain why the building had to come down. They said that not only was it a potential danger to passers-by, but that the walls had little or nothing in the

way of foundations and could not be made safe. With hindsight it would thus have been extremely difficult to convert the building into a visitor centre without total demolition. The only concession we obtained was that walls were to be left at 1 metre high where possible.

The Society was certainly not in any way responsible for the demolition of the workshops. In fact we wrote to English Heritage to see if the building could be listed; they inspected it very quickly and rejected the application on the grounds that it was not an original 1790s building, had little architectural interest, was in not particularly intact and had few fixtures and fittings. They did however admit that it had local historic interest.

One strange outcome was that many of the workshop bricks were used to help reconstruct the abutments of the Meccano Bridge in 2012-13. In particular the bricks with one curved corner can still be seen.

We do still have a long-term aim to build a visitor centre and café here, built alongside the canal when it is restored.

**SITE NOTICE**

The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)  
The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995  
Schedule 2: Part 31

**Proposed demolition of buildings**

**Application for a determination as to whether prior approval will be required**

1. Take NOTICE that **British Waterways** has made an application to Bolton Council, Planning Control, Development & Regeneration Service, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Town Hall, Bolton BL1 1RU for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the Authority will be required to the method of proposed demolition and restoration of the site located at Canalside Building, Prestolee Road, Nob End, Little Lever, Bolton BL3 1AD.
2. The proposal involves the demolition of **the vacant, Canalside building on Prestolee Road** by use of an excavator with selector grab which will demolish the buildings in a controlled manner and restoration of the site **to slab level**.
3. Demolition is proposed on.....*1<sup>st</sup> February 2012*.....
4. Any representations about the proposal should be made to Bolton Council in writing within 21 days hereof.

Signed.....*[Signature]*.....

For and on behalf of **British Waterways**

Dated:.....*21/12/2011*.....





Two photos taken by Ken Howarth inside the workshops in 1980  
Above: a fireplace    Below: the forge and anvil  
[www.heritagephotoarchive.co.uk](http://www.heritagephotoarchive.co.uk)



## **The Fletcher Connection with Bedford Basin**

John C Fletcher

Since 2014 I have lived in a farmhouse, well a farm bungalow, on the outskirts of Leigh and close to the Leigh Branch of the Bridgewater Canal. The farm shares a name with the bridge over the canal – 'Great Fold'. *Teesdale's Map of Lancashire* (seen opposite) was published in 1830 and it shows Leigh, which was much smaller than it is today. The Manchester and Liverpool Railway had just been opened and the proposed line of a railway through Leigh to Bolton is shown. To my surprise, 'our' bridge over the Bridgewater Canal was labelled Great Todd Bridge. The first edition of John Lunn's *History of Leigh* confirms that the farm was called Great Fold, long before the Leigh Branch was opened. It also said that a Fletcher had built Bedford Basin on the Leigh Branch with a rail tunnel leading down to the canal. The line came from the collieries at Atherton.

My wife Kate had spent time researching my family tree. That is how we came to find out that although it had been rumoured that the Matthew Fletcher, who built the Manchester Bolton and Bury Canal and then became chairman of the Mersey and Irwell Navigation Company, had died without issue, it was in fact not true. Baptismal records from Radcliffe showed him as a father, and Kate had already traced my line back as far as his grandchildren. And so it became known that THE Matthew Fletcher was my Great (x6) Grandfather. Robert Cornish, a member of the Canal Society, had produced a comprehensive family tree of Matthew Fletcher and he was also related. Not knowing at the time that I was related to Robert I went with him when Clement Fletcher unveiled a plaque commemorating Fletchers providing the first pit head baths in the country at Howe Bridge (part of Atherton). I later went to Clement's funeral in the same locality.

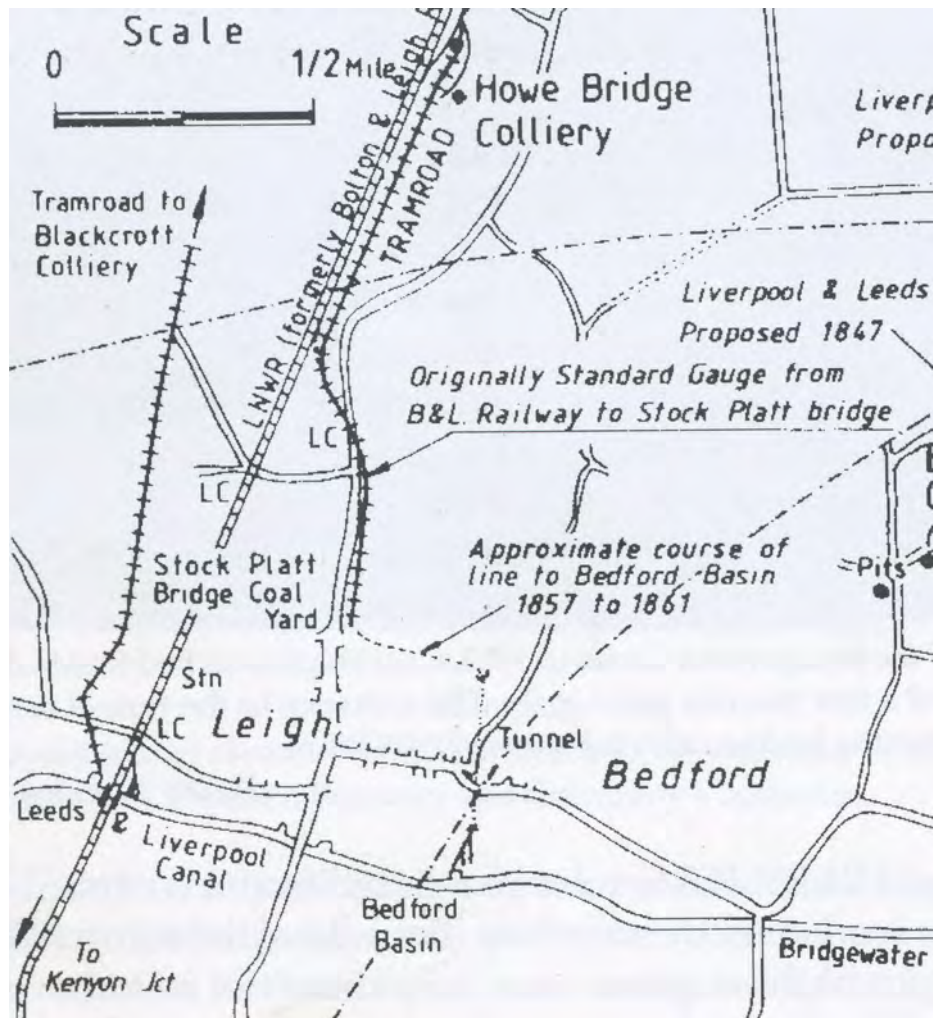
Fletchers had owned and operated the pits in Atherton for generations and they were subsequently owned by Fletcher Burrows, and Manchester Collieries, before nationalisation and closure. Back in the 1860s they had built a horse-drawn tramway which developed into a railway to take coal from their collieries to the canal at Leigh, and they had constructed Bedford Basin. John Lunn's *History* confirmed it was a John Fletcher who had built the canal basin. He was, at that time, owner of the collieries in Atherton.

*The photograph opposite shows Bedford Basin;  
the entrance to the tunnel can just be seen at the centre.*

*The text on pages 11 & 12 was added by Paul Hindle,  
based on the book referred to.*

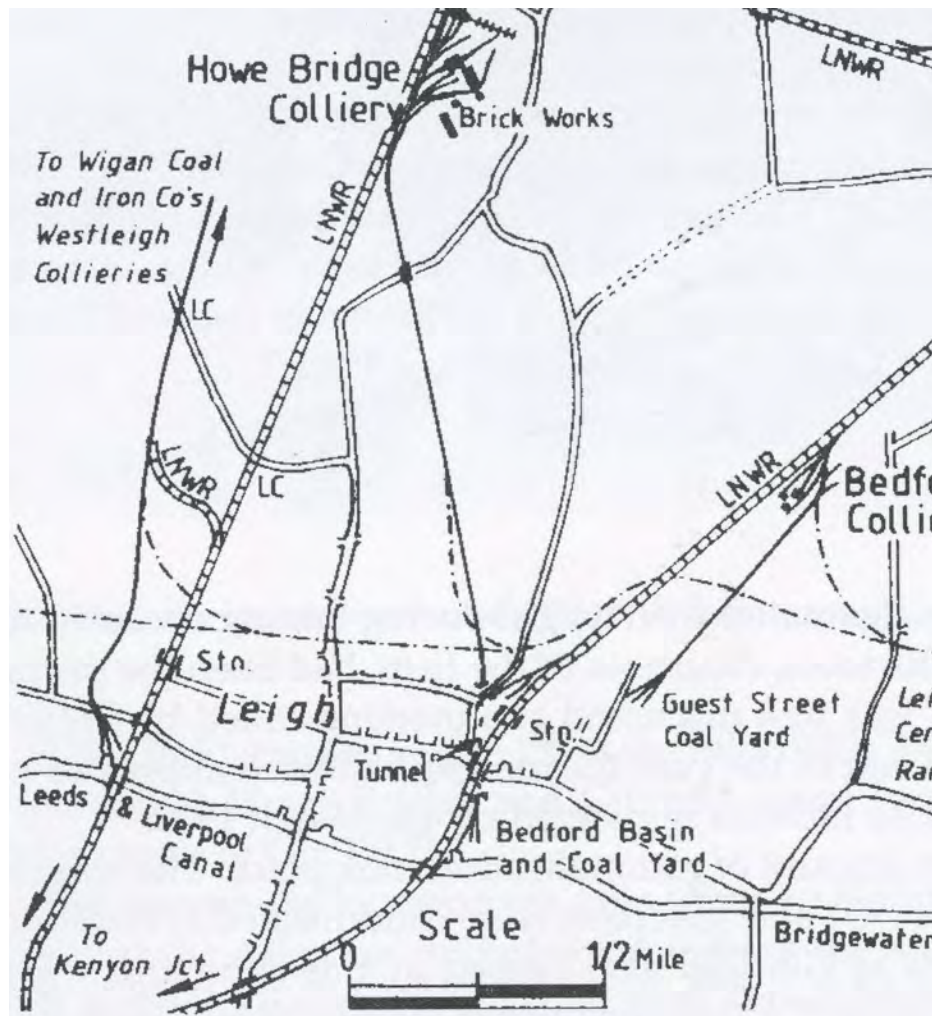






Howe Bridge Colliery was begun in 1845, and a narrow gauge tramroad from Howe Bridge Colliery to Bedford Basin was constructed in 1857, partly replacing a standard gauge line as far as Stock Platt Bridge. It ran alongside the Bolton & Leigh Railway for the first half mile. The tramroad probably had a gauge of 2 feet, and included a 880ft tunnel to reach Bedford Basin. It was technically a tubway, which used the tubs straight from the pit, pulled by horses. At the same time the basin was excavated, being 150ft long, 90ft wide and 6ft deep. Everything was operational by the end of 1857. One problem was that the tramroad crossed the Bolton and St Helens turnpike at an angle, causing inconvenience to road users.





John Fletcher was asked to alter the angle at which the tramroad crossed the turnpike, or to make an underbridge. Instead he constructed a new direct standard gauge line to the tunnel and two small locomotives were bought which would be able to use the low tunnel. The new line was formally opened in 1861, the first train had six open trucks with seats for the Fletcher family and their guests. A local band played, and a second train brought the first four wagons of coal.

The maps show the area in the mid-1850s (opposite) and in about 1890 (above).

The maps and details are taken from *The Industrial Railways...of the Manchester Coalfield (Part 2)* by Townley, Appleton, Smith & Peden (1995)

## Outwood Wharf

*Graham Mottershead from Salford Archaeology at the University of Salford has done an archaeological evaluation at Outwood Wharf in Salford. Seven trenches were dug across the site and the report was dated March 2022.*

'The extremely fragmentary remains of two walls, some sett surface and part of a stone flagged surface at the north side of the watching brief area were related to the irregularly shaped building visible in this area on the mapping of 1851. This building certainly appears on Bancks & Co's map of 1831 and on the earlier Swire's map of 1820. The canal arm appears on maps as early as Dean & Pigot's map of 1809 and each seems to depict a building next to the canal arm. The building on these early maps does not appear to be in the same form as that on Swire's and Bancks & Co's but this may be that it is indicative rather than an exact depiction. Neither the canal arm or the building are visible on Green's map of 1787-94 and so it is likely that the building is contemporary with the construction of the canal arm and is associated with the area's first non-agricultural use, as a coal wharf. Mapping suggests that this building remained in the same form from at least the 1820s, if not the 1800s, until demolition during the 1970s.

The two buildings observed in the south of the watching brief area represent the northern two buildings of a range of five buildings first depicted on the 1891 mapping. These may have been built as early as the late 1850s and remained in the same form until their demolition in the 1960s. The internal floors of these buildings were stone setts and so it is unlikely that they were of any kind of domestic or office usage. More likely they were used as either stables or as coal storage.

The canal wharf was surfaced with stone setts. These were set into natural clay in places and into levelling material in others suggesting that the original ground surface was not completely even across the site with differences of up to 0.6m in places. No earlier pre-mapping features were encountered within the natural clays.'

*The map shows the site in the 1890s with the seven trenches superimposed.*



## Middlewood

One of our members, Richard Lysons, has written to Canal & River Trust about the buddleia filling the entrance to the Margaret Fletcher Tunnel (seen in the last magazine and here). He received this very positive reply:

**From:** [Lauren Turner](#)

**To:** [Mr Richard Lysons](#)

**Subject:** [CASE:916640] Overgrown vegetation, Margaret Fletcher Tunnel, Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal



Good afternoon Mr Lysons,

Thank you for contacting Canal & River Trust regarding the overgrown vegetation at the Margaret Fletcher Tunnel entrance to the Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal. I have spoken with the Area Operations Manager who has advised that the vegetation will be removed when the dredging work is undertaken at the end of this financial year (March 2023). He visited Middlewood on Friday and has asked his Operations team to attend as soon as able to begin works to tidy the area up - this will be completed before stoppage season begins in November. He also has a site visit this week with a volunteer leader to provide him with detail on what he wants to see achieved in the area in the near future.

I hope this goes some way in assuring you that you will see an improvement to the area over the coming months.

Kindest regards,

**Lauren Turner**

Customer Service Administrator

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**MB&BC Through Time - Paul Hindle £12 \*\*\***

**On the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal - Alec Waterson £4 \*\***  
**Historical Map of the Canals of Manchester - Richard Dean £5 \***

**Salford Through Time - Paul Hindle £12 \*\*\***  
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**Barton Swing Aqueduct - John Fletcher £1 \*\***  
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| <b>Couple at same address:</b> | £18 | [5 years: £72] | [Life: £216] |