

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

**No 137**

**February 2023**

# Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society

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## **Chairman's News**

### **The Breach**

Watson Homes' appeal was heard in November; the Society attended all the sessions. Chris Nash's report is on page 12.

### **Restoration Partnership**

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

### **C&RT**

We have regular meetings with C&RT discussing workaday issues including weed spraying, working parties, health & safety, dredging and signage. We meet again in March. A new initiative creating storyboards is under way.

### **Working Parties**

Work is continuing; details are given on our website and on our Facebook page. The next provisional dates are 18/19 February.

### **The Mayor of Greater Manchester**

We have met Andy Burnham online and he is calling a meeting in February for all interested parties to discuss the future of restoration.

### **Changes to our Articles of Association**

We have made two changes to the more bizarre parts of our constitution. The first simplifies what happens if a quorum is not present at an AGM:

*12. If a quorum is not present within 15 minutes from the time appointed for the meeting the members present shall be a quorum.*

The second simplifies the rules about the rotation of officers:

*46/47. Members of Council normally retire (and can be re-elected) at an Annual General Meeting every third year.*

Companies House has been informed.

*Paul Hindle*

## Obituary - Ben Williams

Ben was born in Preston in 1933, and his family moved to Derby soon thereafter. His earliest waterway memories were visiting the boats on the then working Derby Canal at Borrowash. His family moved from Derby to Macclesfield in 1938 and to Middleton early during World War II, where he recalled seeing working boats on the Rochdale Canal. After an apprenticeship in Trafford Park and national service, including in Malaya, his working career covered engineering, soap, steel and local government.



Ben's first boating experience, other than a cruise around Manchester Docks, was in 1965 when, as a youth worker, he took a group on a 12-foot fibre glass dinghy from Monton Turn to Dutton Stop Lock. In 1974, he and his first wife Connie hired a boat from Tewkesbury, which they took to Stratford-upon-Avon, but were unable to go through the last lock as it was about to be opened by the Queen Mother. Ben soon joined IWA and became an active member, noted for his engagement with and encouragement of new members. He occupied many committee roles, latterly as a branch vice president, and was the recipient of a Richard Bird Medal. He was also a member of the Mersey Basin Trust for several years, served on an Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council sub-committee and was a contributor to the hugely successful 1988 National Festival at Castlefield.

Ben was one of the key figures in IWA Manchester Branch in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He led on IWA's Waterways for Youth scheme in the Manchester area and cruised just about every inland waterway. He was active in Worsley Cruising Club and both the Federation of Bridgewater Cruising Clubs and the northwest region of the Association of Waterway Cruising Clubs. Ben was the originator of IWA Manchester Branch's 'Ringing the Ring' concept for the Cheshire Canal Ring, which was a scheme to promote the installation of hundreds of mooring rings at sites all around the Cheshire Ring. He was a co-director with the late Ian Gall of several big events including the International Festival at Ellesmere Port Boat Museum and the 1993 International Festival in Castlefield. He was one of the main workers at the annual Castlefield Festival until the local authority took over.

Ben was a keen supporter of the Canal Society, both in joining working parties and being a member of the Society's Council (and thus a director of the company and a trustee of the charity) for nine years; many of the Society's council meetings were held at his home. His profile appeared in the Society magazine 66 in 2005. Ben always liked to 'cruise with a purpose'; his last big cruise was in 2006 when he cruised the newly reopened South Pennine Ring, including the Rochdale and Huddersfield Narrow Canals. He had unexpectedly lost his younger granddaughter and he cruised in her memory to campaign for CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young). In 2008 Ben brought his boat 'Woodstock' to the re-opening of the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal in Salford.

Outside of the waterways and his career, Ben was a voluntary youth worker for over forty years and a magistrate for 22 years up to 2003. Ben's first wife, Connie, died in January 1998; Ben looked after her himself until her final week. He re-married in 1999 to a fellow youth-worker – Jean – and they travelled together extensively in this country and abroad, until her health began to deteriorate. She died in November 2018 which left Ben bereft. Ben's own health began to deteriorate a couple of years ago and he moved into a care home in August 2022; he died on Christmas Eve at the age of 89.

John Fletcher



Above: Ben on Woodstock at the start of his 2006 CRY cruise.



Left: At the MBBCS first working party, 1989

Right: On a mud boat, 1992



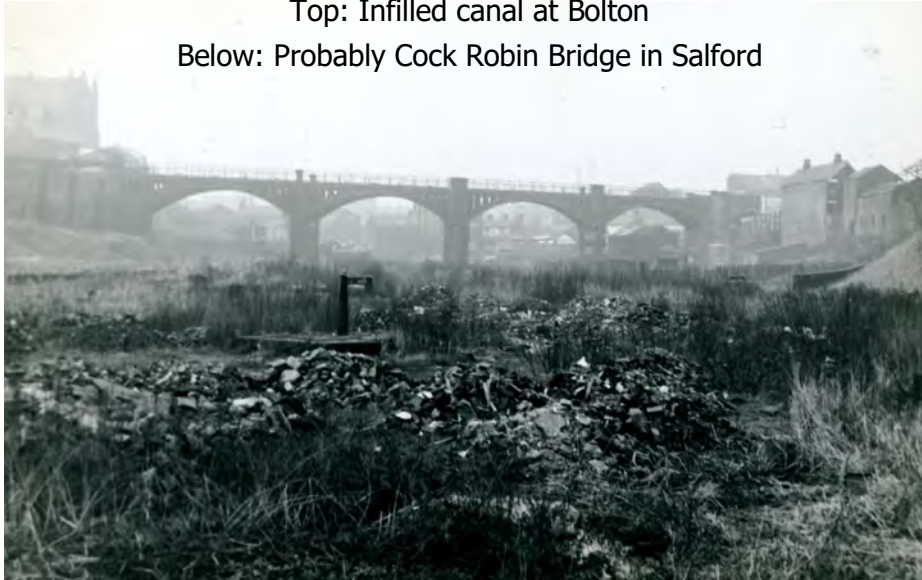
*Photos: John Fletcher*



**Photos by John Foley - mid-1960s**

Top: Infilled canal at Bolton

Below: Probably Cock Robin Bridge in Salford





Above: South of Frederick Road in Salford

Below: Salford Top Lock





Above: Below Salford Top Lock  
Below: Top gates of the River Locks







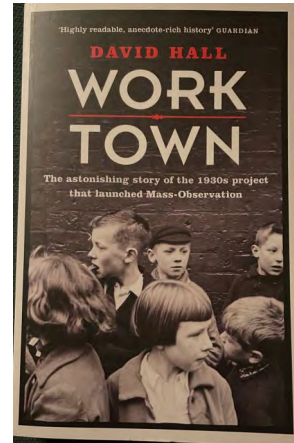
Entrance  
tunnel to  
Gaythorn  
Wharf  
just above  
Oldfield  
Road Locks

Ordnance  
Survey  
25" 1915



## Work Town

John Foley has sent me a copy of part of David Hall's book *Work Town* which describes parts of Bolton in the late 1930s based on conversations with local residents; the project later became Mass Observation. This extract of the area around Burnden is a little difficult to relate to the Ordnance Survey map of 1908.



*"In the valley at the back of Bolton Wanderers' football ground [there were] a few old mills where kids from the terraced houses near by would go fishing in the lodges. ... The Bolton branch of the Manchester-Bolton-Bury Canal ran alongside the River Croal in the valley.*

*Bolton's earliest cotton mills had been built on the banks of the Croal when it was a small clean stream. Now river and canal were little better than sewers: both were used as rubbish tips [and there were] small groups of lads dredging with ropes and iron hooks for plunder. The mills that lined the canal were long abandoned and derelict.*

*Continuing along the canal [were] the remains of Victorian coal-mining engineering, all made of wood, with inclined railways down the side of the banking, pit winding headgear and a huge boiler house at the bottom of a big chimney. Inside [was] the old pit winding engine still in situ with gas lamps all around it. Further along the canal got wider and [there was] a stretch that was full of sunken boats. Their prows and sterns were sticking out of the water and the rest of the barges could be made out under the water. They all had 'LMS' and 'Ladyshore Coal Company. Little Lever' written along their sides. By the side of the canal a handsome boat-building shed, which looked rather like a railway station, with beautifully cut timber board, was still standing."*



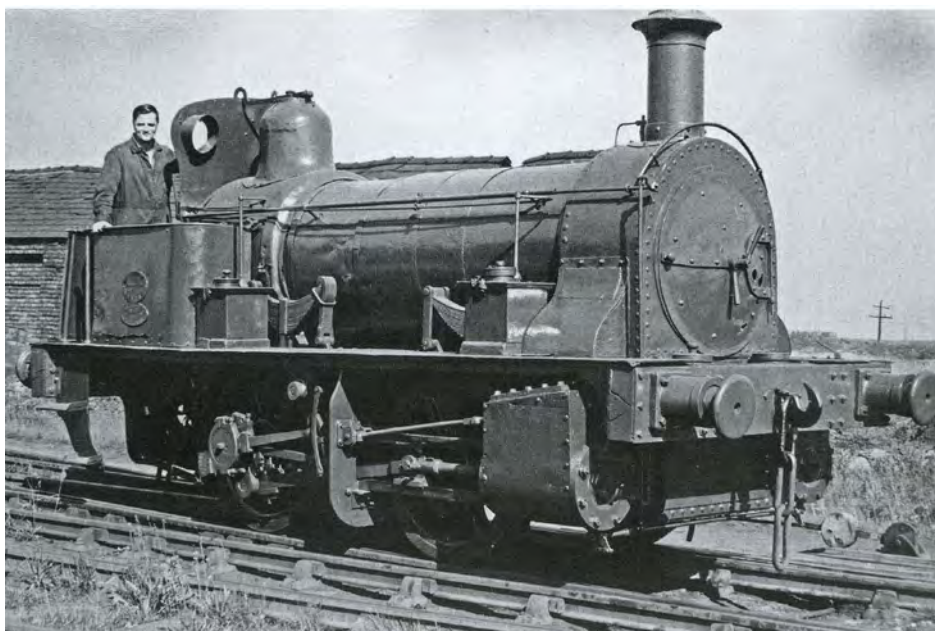
## Ellesmere and the Bedford Basin

Following on from the article about the Fletcher connection with Bedford Basin in the previous magazine here are two images from Alan Davies' book *Atherton Collieries*.

Top: The first engine to work the standard gauge line with its low tunnel from Howe Bridge Colliery to Bedford Basin.

It was originally named *Ellesmere*, and later 1861 (the date it was bought); it is now in the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.

Below: An artistic impression Bedford Basin published in 1859.



LOADING WHARF AT THE ATHERTON COLLIERIES



## Planning Inquiry – Watson Homes

Chris Nash

Following rejection of the Watson Homes planning application and their appeal against this decision, the Planning Inquiry took place over seven days at the end of November. Representatives from MBBCS attended each day.

Bolton Council and Watson Homes were each represented by a barrister who called expert witnesses to make their case. The Inquiry was quasi-judicial in nature and started with a statement from a representative of local people who were against the development proposal. There followed an afternoon site visit by the Inspector of the Hall Lane, Mytham Road, Creams Mill sites and the canal.

The following days saw evidence presented and questioned by each side about the design of the housing schemes on the three sites, planning issues relating to and the impact on Green Belt, housing supply in Bolton and the canal restoration.

Watson Homes had to demonstrate that 'very special circumstances' justified building on Green Belt land at the Hall Lane and Mytham Road sites. Their barrister focussed on the advantages of restoring the canal and the failure of Bolton Council to show an adequate supply of market and affordable housing in the borough. Patrick Moss was the consultant who helped produce the Restoration Feasibility Study in 2021. He gave evidence about the socio-economic and environmental benefits from restoring the canal to create a 5km length in water from Hall Lane in Little Lever to Water Street in Radcliffe.

There was agreement that restoration of the 700m stretch of canal and the breach would be a benefit. However, Bolton Council claimed that because there is no evidence that it will be connected to the wider canal network the benefits of the restoration should carry no more than moderate weight. Although MBBCS was not separately represented at the Inquiry, the Inspector allowed us to make the case why and how the Restoration Partnership would work together to join the restored length of the canal with the existing lengths already in water.

The Planning Inspector will weigh up the arguments on each side and the decision will be known in the next few months. If approved, the construction timetable and planning conditions have been agreed between both parties. Amongst other things, this states that the canal must be fully restored before any new houses can be sold at the Hall Lane site.

*The appellant's barrister's closing conclusion can be seen at [Creamsmill.co.uk/planning-docs/](https://creamsmill.co.uk/planning-docs/) (it is 56 pages long).*

*The 'Proof of Evidence' (ie: the benefits of restoring the canal) provided by the expert witness Patrick Moss can be seen on the same site at reference CD2.6c (you can ignore the file with Appendices in the title).*



### Meccano Bridge Painting

Paul has commissioned a painting of the Meccano Bridge by Jen Orpin.

To raise a little money for the Society high quality prints are for sale (much higher quality than seen here).



The A3 prints are on paper and come in a tube, whilst the A4 prints are on card and come in an envelope

They are in two sizes: **A3 @ £12** and **A4 @ £8**

(UK delivery includes postage and packing)

*Overseas members please email Paul for a price*

Members pay by cheque to MBBCS and send to Paul at Meadowbank

Or pay by BACS transfer to Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society

Sort Code: 30-91-01 Account: 01824453

with Meccano and size as a reference (eg: Meccano A3 or Meccano A4)

### New Members

1044 Mr C Bebbington, Bury

1045 Mr M Holden, Radcliffe

1046 Mr P Baker, Bury

1047 Mr P Broughton, Bolton (Life)

### Ian Astbury - Memorial Bench

We have so far received over £700 for Ian's memorial fund.

After discussing various options with Lisa we are looking at a memorial bench with a couple of fruit trees to be installed at Top o' th' Lodge in Little Lever.

We are discussing possible designs with Iron Art in Radcliffe.

If anyone wants to add to the fund then please send a cheque or a BACS transfer (as detailed above) but with the reference IAN.

Thank you.

## Odds and Ends

Society working parties continue at Nob End with repairs to the fencing next to the Meccano Bridge.

Other volunteers have rescued and replaced milestone 7 $\frac{3}{4}$  which was in the canal near Prestolee Aqueduct. It was still in place in 1990 but disappeared soon after. Paul photographed it in the canal in 2012 (seen right).

A new small bench has also been installed at Ringley Top Lock.



## John Lewis and Waitrose Donation




*'Over the next three months John Lewis Trafford and Waitrose Altrincham are focusing on supporting local charities/community groups which help tackle the important issues of Nature and the Environment. We believe **Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society** to be a great cause with fantastic current projects relating to our focus. Together we would like to donate to help benefit the inspiring work that you do within our local community.'*

Steve Marsden looks pleased to receive the outsized cheque.

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## Sales Items

Available online [www.mbbcs.org.uk](http://www.mbbcs.org.uk), or by post from the Society at  
Meadowbank, Ringley Road, Radcliffe, Manchester, M26 1FW

**Towpath Guide 2 - Paul Hindle £4 \*\***  
**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 \*\*\***  
**Prestwich and Whitefield Through Time - Paul Hindle £12 \*\*\***

**Barton Swing Aqueduct - John Fletcher £1 \*\***  
**The MB&BC in Pictures - Richard Chester-Browne £1 \*\***  
**Boat Building at Ladyshore - Alex Waterson £1 \***  
**Four Engraved Pens £3 \***

**Postage & Packing:** please add \* 80p, \*\* £1-75, \*\*\* £2-25

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*For multiple orders – contact us;*  
*postage & packing will be charged at cost*

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Up to 124: 50p each. 125-136: £1 each.  
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## MEMBERSHIP RATES

<b>Single:</b>	£14	[5 years: £56]	[Life: £168]
<b>Senior / Unemployed:</b>	£12	[5 years: £48]	[Life: £144]
<b>Couple at same address:</b>	£18	[5 years: £72]	[Life: £216]