



the Worsley village heritage trail

A clock that strikes 13, revolutions,
52 miles of underground canals,
steam boats and early Victorian architecture...

A one mile self-guided walk
taking in places of historic interest in Worsley village.

...Oh! and a certain Mr Lowry.

There's more to Salford than its favourite son
and his matchstick men and matchstick cats and dogs.

Introduction

This one mile circular walk around Worsley Village
takes about one hour. The walk is mainly suitable for
disabled people and pushchairs (with the exception
of steps up to St Mark's Church).

Acknowledgements:

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If you've any suggestions for improvements
to this walk or if you have any memories, stories
or information about the area, then do let us know
by emailing industrial.heritage@salford.gov.uk

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£1.50

Your journey starts here **IN Salford**



The Trail

Background Information

Looking around the village today it is difficult to imagine that Worsley, with its picturesque half-timber buildings, village green and tranquil canal side setting, was once the birthplace of the 'transport revolution' in the 18th century. But the building of the Bridgewater Canal, linking coal mines in Worsley with Manchester city centre, was responsible for halving the price of coal overnight, fuelling the industrial revolution and changing the direction of British history forever!



The starting point for the walk is Worsley Court House on Barton Road opposite the car park.

Three men - the Duke of Bridgewater, John Gilbert and James Brindley - worked together to make the dream a reality. Thanks to their vision, Worsley is now being considered for World Heritage Site status. This walk will take in the important sites of Worsley's heritage and bring its industrial past to life.

Worsley Court House - a grade 2 listed building - was built in 1849 for the 1st Earl of Ellesmere to house the manorial court of Worsley. The site has a history of justice of a different kind, as it was previously infamous as the location of the village stocks! The Court Leet, as the manorial court was known, dealt with administrative matters relating to the manor.

The last Court Leet was held in 1888, but it continued to be used for sometime afterwards as a magistrates court. In the 1850s night school classes were held there for estate workers and tenants and later the building was used as a village hall for social functions.



In 1966 it was purchased by Worsley Urban District Council. It was extended in 1967 and passed to Salford City Council in 1974. Today the building is available for private parties, weddings and business meetings.

Brown plaque reads: Built 1849 for the 1st Earl of Ellesmere. Originally Court Leet and Village Hall, later magistrates court.

From the Court House turn left and walk down Barton Road for approximately 50 metres and turn left down the footpath, past the dentist, to the Packet House and Boat Steps.

Both the Packet House - a grade 2 listed building - and the Boat Steps date from 1760. The half timbering was added c.1850 by the 1st Earl of Ellesmere. Passenger services started on the canal in 1769 and by 1781 there was a daily service between Manchester and Worsley. You would have purchased your ticket for the 'packet boat' at the Packet House and boarded at the Boat Steps, directly in front of the house. (For further details on the packet boat service see px). Brown plaque reads: 19th century terrace on the site of 1760 building for the Duke of Bridgewater's canal company.

Cross the canal using the Alphabet Bridge

(Note to users of wheelchairs/pushchairs if you wish to avoid the Alphabet Bridge, turn back to the Court House and turn right to reach the Library)

The original bridge was so christened by scholars from St. Mark's School who used the bridge daily and practised their alphabet on the 26 planks that made up the span. There are



Walk up the slope to Worsley Road passing a small white, two storey building (the former Nailmaker's Shop) on your right

On Worsley Road turn left and walk back towards the Court House and roundabout. You will pass Worsley Village Library

Turn right, cross over Worsley Road and walk up the hill, under the motorway bridge



Carry on up the hill to Saint Mark's Church - enter via first gate.

(Note for wheelchair users - there are steps up to the churchyard which may be difficult to access)

still 26 planks, so keep up the tradition as you cross! In the past the canal was famous for its distinctive orange colour, caused by iron ochre leaked from the underground canals at the Delph. An intensive cleaning operation has now removed most of the ore making the canal a cleaner and more environmentally friendly place and attracting wildlife and fish to the area.

This is one of the oldest buildings in Worsley, dating from the 17th century. Originally a residential dwelling, it became the Nailmaker's Shop when construction of the canal and all the related building works commenced. It was used as a reading room and later housed the Lantern Gallery.

Old photographs show this was once the site of the village smithy. The library opened in January 1972 and has books and information about Worsley and the surrounding area. (Further information can also be found at the Local History Library at Salford Museum and Art Gallery or at Walkden Library)

Where the motorway slip road now runs stood the 18th century Bridgewater Hotel, known as 'The Grapes' due to the carved bunch of grapes that used to hang over the door. It was a coaching inn and Baines Directory of 1825 lists coaches from 'The Grapes' as:

Ancient Britain to Wigan & Preston
Regulator and Self Defence, to Manchester in the morning and to Wigan in the evening
Royal Pilot to Wigan, Ormskirck & Southport
True Blue, to Manchester in the morning and to Leigh in the evening

The Court Leet was held at 'The Grapes' until the Court House was built. The inn was eventually demolished to make way for the construction of a new gatehouse and carriage drive to Worsley New Hall. 'The Grapes' closed its doors for the last time on 14th May 1903 and the present day Bridgewater Hotel on Barton Road opened the very next night.

The gatehouse was demolished to make way for the M62 motorway. The sandstone coat of the arms of the Earl of Ellesmere that decorated the front of the gatehouse was preserved and is now incorporated into the stonework of the motorway bridge that you cross under on your way to St Marks.

St. Mark's was endowed by the 1st Earl of Ellesmere as part of his efforts to improve the condition of the district. The church was built on Cross Field, so named because of the Lady's Cross which stood at the junction of Leigh and Walkden Roads - possibly a traveller's cross. Built in Gothic Revival style, the church's architect was George Gilbert Scott, perhaps



From the church walk back down the hill on the same side of the road and left along Worsley Road to the road bridge over the canal. From the bridge look over at The Delph (to your left)



better known for the Albert Memorial. The foundation stone was laid on 15 June 1844 by George Granville Francis Egerton, eldest son of the Earl, as part of his coming of age celebrations and was consecrated on 2 July 1846.

The Ellesmere Chapel commemorates the founder, the first Earl and his Countess - other members of the Ellesmere family are buried in the vault below. The church boasts a fine ring of ten bells which is unusual for a parish church - the usual number is six or eight - and is also home to an unusual clock that strikes 13 (more about that later!).

While in the church yard look for the pink granite memorial near the path around to the left of the church: this is the Joseph Evans Memorial. It commemorates Joseph Evans, a medical herbalist and botanist. Known locally as Dr Evans, people came from miles around to consult him. On his death in 1873 over 1,000 people followed his funeral procession from Boothstown to Worsley. His memorial was erected by public subscription. (N.B. Note the pub opposite the church is named after John Gilbert.)

The Delph (the name is derived from 'the delved place') was a sandstone ridge that had been quarried for centuries. It provided stone for the Bridgewater canal construction and is also the entrance to the underground canal system - a total of 48 miles extending as far as Farnworth. You can see the entrances to the twin tunnels which meet after about 500 metres. The underground canal intersected with coal mines to the north and had three purposes: to transport coal from the face to the surface canal; to drain the pits; and to feed the resultant drainage water into the main canal. The canal was also one of the first examples of a one-way system - especially on water!

Work started on the underground canal in 1759. It was cut by hand using picks and shovels, although later gunpowder was used (spoil from the construction was used to reclaim Chat Moss in Irlam). A million tons of coal a year passed through the underground canal until 1887. Then new, deeper mines and the colliery railways made the canal redundant as far as coal transportation was concerned, although it continued to provide a means of draining the pits until 1968 when the last pit in the area closed.

Specially designed boats were built for use in the underground canal with both ends designed as prows to allow them to sail in either direction. The visible ribs and narrow shape gave them the nick name 'starvationers'. M boats worked on the main level, T boats on the side and upper levels and tub boats worked the lowest levels.

The canal itself was also famous as the location for the first trials of boats powered by steam, the forerunners of the mighty paddle steamers that still navigate the Mississippi today.

A corn mill stood next to the Delph as far back as 1420. Worsley Brook powered a 24ft water wheel that operated two pairs of grinding stones and a boulting mill to separate the flour and bran. The mill buildings complex was cleared c.1903 and the present half-timbered property built, which now houses a restaurant and estate agency. Mill Brow, just past these businesses, was named for its proximity to the mill.

Proceed along Worsley Road passing Mill Brow, cross to The Green and walk towards the monument.



The picturesque area of The Green is not, as many people might think, a traditional village green. Until c.1903 it was Worsley Yard, the centre of a busy, noisy industrial complex that mushroomed when work began on both the surface canal and the navigable level. It included a boat building yard, motor mill, timber yard, nail makers, wheelwrights, basketmakers and a warehouse. It is still possible to see the imprints in the grass where railway sidings ran.

The yard boasted an unusual clock that struck 13 at 1 o'clock. The story goes that the Duke of Bridgewater, on an inspection visit, wanted to know why the workmen were late back from their lunch break. On being told they had difficulty hearing the clock strike one because of the noise of the yard, the Duke promptly had the mechanism adjusted so it struck 13! When the yard was cleared, the clock was preserved and installed in the New Hall Gatehouse and then later in St. Mark's church where it still strikes 13 today.

On The Green you will find Worsley's only monument to Francis, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, 'The Canal Duke'. This was constructed from the base of the Worsley Yard chimney. It was originally a fountain, though sadly now dry. The base carries a Latin inscription, which can be translated as:

A lofty column breathing smoke and fire,
Did I the builder's glory once aspire,
Whose founder was that Duke who far and wide
Bridged water through Bridgewater's countryside.

Stranger! this spot, where once did never cease
Great Vulcan's year, would sleep in silent peace,
But beneath my very stones does mount
That water's source, his honour's spring and fount.

Alas! that I who gazed o'er field and town
Should to these base proportions dwindle down.
But all's not over, still enough remains
To testify past glories, duties, pain.

(Translation: Henry Hart)



From the Green cross back over the canal via the hump-backed bridge ahead of you.

Cross the bridge, turn left and walk along the side of the canal for about 10 metres. On the opposite side of the canal is the Boat Yard and Dry Dock.



The bridge was built in the 1890s and replaced an earlier plank bridge. Pause in the middle of the bridge and look back along the canal. This gives one of the best views of the Packet House, one much used by photographers and artists including L.S.Lowry.

The dock is probably the oldest living example of a dry dock associated with a canal, dating from c.1761. There are two dry docks, including 19th century sheds - a third dock has long been filled in. Here boats were both built and repaired. In 1770 Arthur Young in his 'six month tour through the north of England' gave a flavour of the scene:

"The little village of Worsley looks like a river environ of London. Here is a very large timber yard well stowed with all sorts of wood and timbers for framing buildings, and building boats, barges and all kinds of floating machines. The boat-builder's yard joins and several boats, barges etc are always on the stocks."

From here walk back from the canal to Barton Road and turn left. Walk approximately 50 metres until you are opposite Worsley Methodist Church

In 1784 Mr Burgess of Worsley Mill invited Matthew Mayer, a noted Methodist preacher to Worsley. A congregation was soon established, meeting at first in a local cottage, then in a room at the Corn Mill. In 1800 John Osbaldeston, landlord of the Grapes, leased the Methodists land on Barton Road and the present church was erected in 1801.

From the Methodist Chapel walk back along Barton Road, towards the Court House, and your starting point

On the right hand side of the canal, notice the Boathouse, built by Lord Ellesmere to house a barge built specifically for Queen Victoria's visit to Worsley in 1851. The popular story goes that the boat was pulled by two grey horses, one of which became so perturbed by the cheering crowd that it jumped into the canal!

Finally, at the Bridgewater Hotel on Barton Road, note the inn sign, which is a portrait of Francis Egerton, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, 'The Canal Duke'.

If you wish to continue your walk further, continue down Barton Road to the car park on the left hand side. Here you will find the entrance to a series of woodland and canalside paths, which can take you all the way to Boothstown Marina (approximately 30 minutes walk).



Bridgewater Canal Facts and Figures

Key Dates

- The Act of Parliament that authorised the Bridgewater Canal was passed in March 1759 and work began immediately
- In 1765 the canal to Castlefield opened
- By 1776 the canal was open to Runcorn
- In 1799 the Leigh Branch opened
- In 1872 the Bridgewater Canal and the Mersey and Irwell Navigation were sold by the Bridgewater Trustees for £1,115,000, the first ever "million pound cheque". They were sold on to the Manchester Ship Canal Company in 1876 for £1,710,000.

Its namesake

The canal takes its name from Francis Egerton, the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater (1736 - 1803) for whom it was built.

Technical information

- The canal's total length is some 40 miles
- The main length of canal, from Runcorn to Manchester is 28.5 miles
- The branch from Waters Meeting at Stretford to Leigh is 10.75 miles
- It is spanned by 78 bridges
- It is a contour canal i.e. it runs on the same level throughout its length. The only locks are at Hulme providing access to the River Irwell and at Runcorn to the Manchester Ship Canal.

It connects with the

- Rochdale Canal at Manchester
- Leeds and Liverpool Canal at Leigh
- Trent and Mersey Canal at Preston Brook
- Manchester Ship Canal at Manchester and Runcorn

Its goods



Not content with just carrying coal, the Duke of Bridgewater saw the commercial possibility of linking Liverpool and Manchester. When the canal opened to Runcorn in 1776, it provided cheaper, more regular and reliable transport for goods and raw materials. With the expansion of the cotton industry, raw cotton from the Duke's Dock in Liverpool became an important cargo. In 1855 approximately two million tons moved along the canal. By 1862 competition from roads and rail, together with the decline of traditional industries, had reduced this to half a million tons, 80% of which, was coal moving from local pits to power stations.

Other cargo included maize, wheat and rice from Italy and Australia, hardwood from the Gulf of Mexico, tea and coir fibre from Calcutta, lead from North America and paraffin wax from Burma.

Commercial traffic ceased in March 1974. The last cargo consisted of four barges of maize from Salford Docks to Kellogg's in Trafford Park.

Its passengers

The canal carried passengers as well as cargo. The service began in 1769 and in 1774, two new 'Packet Boats' were introduced. The word 'packet' evolved from the term for a bundle of official despatches sent overseas by ship. Later the term 'packet boat' referred to vessels carrying the Royal Mail. It is not proven that the Duke's boats carried mail, but seems likely as they provided the most reliable service between Manchester and Liverpool.

By 1781 there were daily sailings, excluding Sundays, to Runcorn - a journey of eight hours. Another service ran from Manchester to Worsley in two and a half hours for 1/- (5p) and 6d (2.5p) steerage. Hugh Malet, in his book 'Coal, Cotton and Canals' (1981) describes the Packet Boats:

'The bows were fitted with sharpened sabres, curved like a swan's neck - a threat to the tow lines of slow-witted barges which was more symbolic than real, but emphasised that they must give way...The faster vessels carrying first class passengers might be drawn by three horses, with a captain to steer and a liveried postillion (called the jockey) armed with a curved horn to warn other boats of his approach, spurs and a whip to urge his steeds forward. It must have been a gallant and graceful sight, with the ship riding up to six m.p.h. on her bow-wave and passengers ducking as they sped under bridges.'

A 'Swift Packet' service was introduced in 1843 with lower prices. It was possible to travel from Worsley to Manchester for 3d (1p) in the Best Cabin and 2d steerage. However, competition from the railways and the new horse omnibus service meant that the days of canal passenger travel were numbered.



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