



Find out why this canal was so important to local trade and why it is being restored.

The Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal formed a 24.5 km (15 miles) link between the towns of Bolton and Bury and the River Irwell in Salford. The three 'arms' of the canal met at Nob End, near to Little Lever. The Bury and Bolton arms were built on one level. However the Salford arm descended from Nob End through 17 locks, and was carried over the River Irwell twice on aqueducts at Prestolee and Clifton. Although the canal was abandoned in 1961, restoration work starts in early 2006.

## Why and when was it built?

The main reason for building the canal was to provide easier and cheaper transport of coal from collieries in the Irwell Valley to fuel local mills, factories and homes during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Construction work began in 1791, and by 1796 most of the canal had been built and was open to boats. However the final section from Oldfield Road in Salford to the River Irwell was only completed twelve years later. This provided an important link with the rest of the canal network and meant that cargoes could be transported in and out of the area.



This is the start of the Bolton arm of the canal at Nob End.



The Prestolee Aqueduct carries the canal over the River Irwell.



Lock 1 on the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal in 1901. This is where the canal joined the River Irwell in Salford.  
(Photo courtesy of John and Margaret Fletcher)



Lock 1 no longer exists and the junction with the River Irwell has now been filled in.  
(Photo courtesy of John and Margaret Fletcher)

## Changes of plan

The Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal was originally to have been a narrow canal. However as it was being built there was a plan to link it with the Leeds and Liverpool Canal which has broad locks and can carry much wider boats. Therefore any narrow locks on which construction had started, had to be taken down and re-built as broad locks. In the end the link with the Leeds and Liverpool Canal never happened as its route was changed.

## Cargoes on the canal

With easier transport of cargoes being possible, chemical factories, cotton mills and dye works were built along the banks of the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal.

The canal's main cargo was coal but it also transported other goods such as lime, limestone, manure, stone, sand and slate. Packet boats ran regularly from Bury and Bolton to Manchester carrying parcels and people. By 1812, 60 000 passengers a year travelled on the canal. The service was quite luxurious compared to some other packet boat services, with heating provided during the winter and drinks served on board.

## The decline of the canal

In 1831 there were plans to convert the canal into a railway. Although these plans never took place, a railway from Manchester to Bolton was built and opened in 1838. Passengers preferred to travel by the quicker trains and the packet boats were no longer needed. By the end of the 19th century much of the coal had been taken from the older mines, and as a result less cargoes were also carried along the canal.

The coal mining in the Irwell Valley caused the canal to be prone to landslips and breaches. A major disaster happened in 1936 when the canal bank on the Bury arm near to Nob End collapsed. The breach was never repaired and the Bury arm became cut off from the rest of the canal. After World War II the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal became virtually disused and in 1961 the canal was officially abandoned.



When the canal collapsed in 1936, two boats were swept down into the River Irwell nearly 30 metres below. (Photo courtesy of John and Margaret Fletcher.)

## Restoration

After the canal was closed parts of it became infilled or derelict. Over time roads and even buildings had been built across parts of the canal, with some of the locks being dismantled.

In 1987 the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal Society was formed to campaign for its restoration and protect the line of the canal. Since 2000, the society has been working in close partnership with British Waterways and the three local authorities of Bolton, Bury and Salford, to restore the canal.

In early 2006, restoration of 500m of canal from the junction of the River Irwell to Oldfield Road in Salford will begin. The first phase of the restoration project is part of a large re-development taking place in Salford, where offices, apartments, hotels, restaurants and leisure facilities are all to be built. The project will create 6000 new jobs for the area.

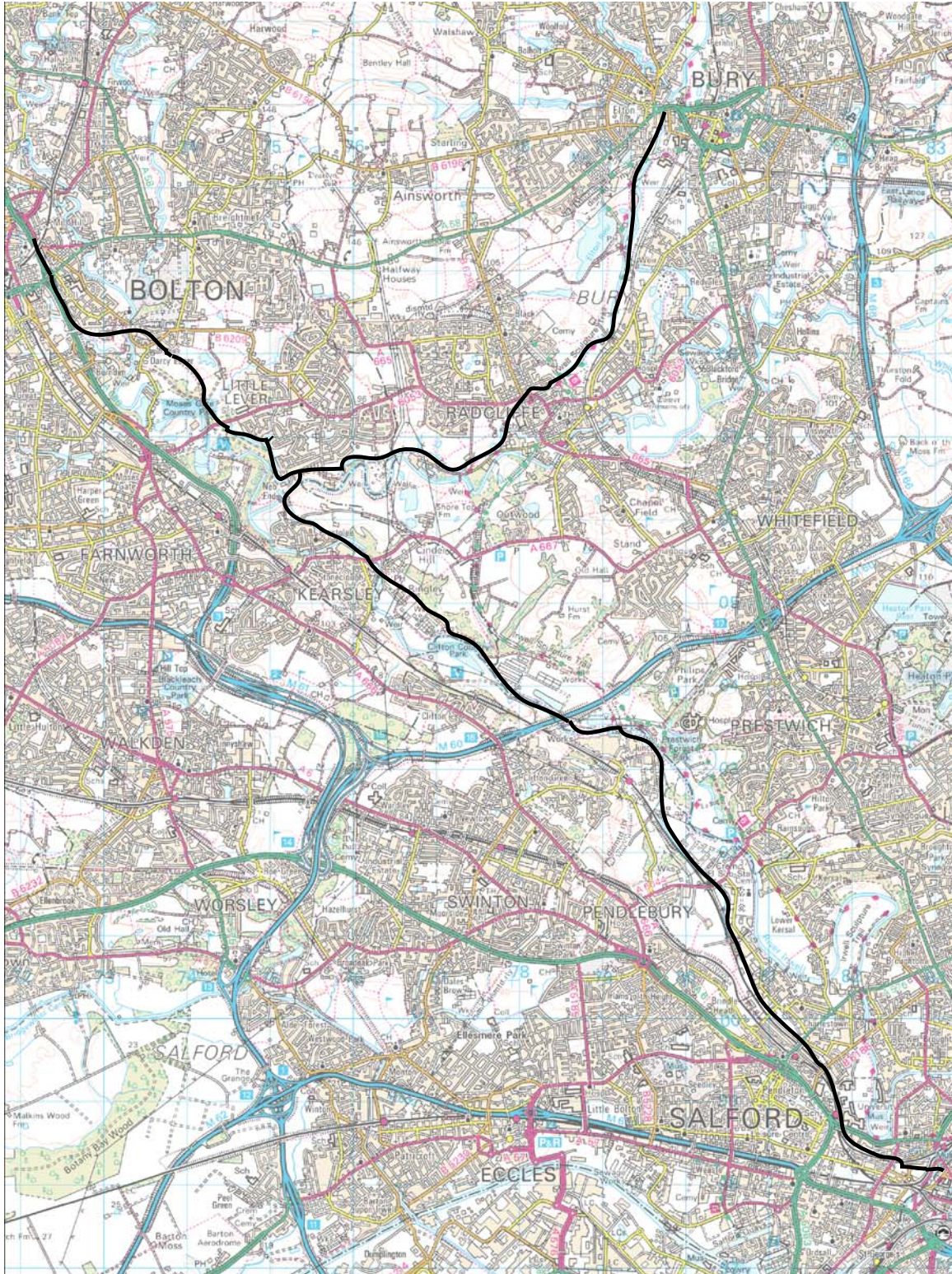
It is hoped that this will then lead to further restoration plans for the canal including a visitor centre at Little Lever, improved towpath walks, mooring facilities for boats and better fishing sites.



A map showing the Salford area in 1805



An artist's impression of the re-development project in Salford



— Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal as it was in the 19th Century