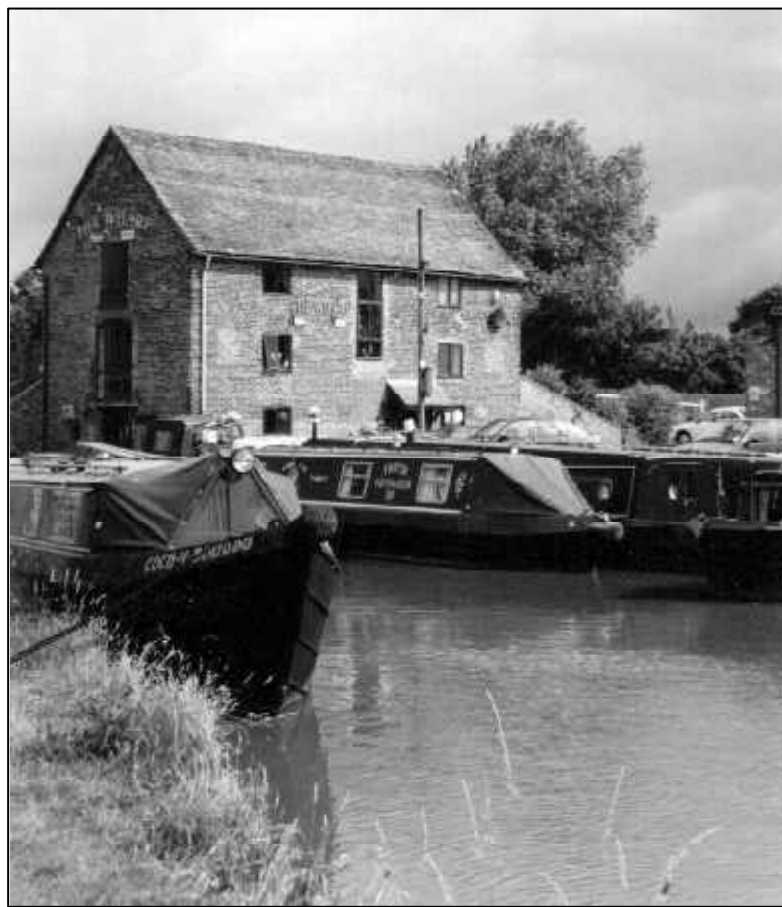


TRENT & MERSEY CANAL CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



*Community Partnerships
May 2000*

HISTORY

1. *Historic evolution of the canal*

Josiah Wedgwood was convinced that a system of inland navigation would provide a cheaper and more efficient means of transporting goods and raw materials than roads. With his financial support, James Brindley began to survey a route for a "Grand Trunk Canal" to join the rivers Trent and Mersey in 1758.

Wedgwood promoted "The Navigation from the Trent to the Mersey Act" which was passed on the 14th May 1766 and work began soon after, with James Brindley as surveyor-general to the canal company. Upon Brindley's death in 1772 he was succeeded by Hugh Henshall, previously Clerk of Works, who completed the construction of the canal.

The Trent and Mersey Canal was finally opened in 1777, covering a total length of 93 miles (150 km approx.) from Derwent Mouth on the River Trent to Preston Brook on the Bridgewater Canal. It was heavily used for sixty years, being the only good transport link between the Midlands, Manchester and Liverpool. Subsequent canal development created the "Grand Cross" system which by 1790 allowed the transportation of pottery, coal and salt between the rivers Trent, Mersey, Severn and Thames. This was an important element in industrial and transport evolution.

Gradually commercial traffic on the canal declined, mainly because of competition from the railways and roads. By the early 1960's commercial traffic was minimal, however this decline has been compensated by the growing interest in boating as a leisure activity.

The Trent and Mersey Canal was nationalised in 1948, and on 1st January 1963 came under the control of the British Waterways Board.

Within Vale Royal, the Trent and Mersey Canal covers approximately 14.5 miles (23.5 km) from Croxton Aqueduct to a point which is just beyond the midpoint of the Preston Brook tunnel. The final 530 metres or so of the canal lie in Halton Borough.

1.2 *Topographical influences*

The canal follows the topography of the landscape, avoiding the necessity for locks. Dutton Stop Lock is the exception as this was designed to restrict the flow of water from the Trent and Mersey Canal into the Bridgewater Canal. Although essentially a 'contour canal', this section contains three tunnels (Barnton 572 yards (523 metres), Saltersford 424 yards (388 metres) and Preston Brook 1,239 yards (1,133 metres)).

The section of the Trent and Mersey Canal between Middlewich and Preston Brook was originally intended as a wide canal, allowing boats (Flats) of 14 feet (4.25 metres) beam to come from Liverpool and Manchester, and unload onto narrow boats at Middlewich. The bridges in this section were built wide enough for the Flats. However, the tunnels between Barnton and Preston Brook which were built later, were not. The Flats still had to unload onto narrow boats at Preston Brook.



1.3 *Influence of land uses*

The impact of the salt industry on this section of the canal is considerable. The completion of the Trent and Mersey Canal, following the earlier approval for the Weaver Navigation, allowed the expansion of the industry in the 18th century. As a result, many salt works were built along the canal banks surrounding Northwich. Although the salt industry has declined, there are still remnants of the impact of salt and its associated industry.

2. *Archaeological significance and potential of the area*

The Trent and Mersey Canal is of great industrial archaeological importance. It was the first major element of the national canal network, and the greatest civil engineering project of the eighteenth century. Reference to industrial archaeology is made, where appropriate, throughout this appraisal. The Anderton Boat Lift is a Scheduled Ancient Monument in its own right.

TOWNSCAPE

3. *Form and structure of the canal*

3.1 *Conservation Area Boundary*

The boundary of the Conservation Area has been drawn tightly along the canal corridor. Generally, field boundaries and hedgerows, especially along the towpath, define its extent for the majority of its length. Significant areas of woodland adjacent to the canal are also included. Where the canal is in a cutting or on an embankment, their respective top or base also defines the boundary. It broadly reflects the overburden above tunnels, and includes the trackways between tunnel portals. The embankments and abutments of old bridges are marked but not modern structures.

Where appropriate, the boundary widens beyond the direct confines of the canal to include buildings and enclosures of direct historic association with the canal. Specific examples of this are at Broken Cross; Wincham Wharf; Marston/Lion Salt Works (which is already a separate conservation area); Anderton Basin/Boat Lift; Barnton Basin; Acton Quay; and the Dutton Stop Lock/Dry Dock complex at the southern portal to the Preston Brook Tunnel. The various marinas and wharfs



along the canal are also included within the designated area.

3.2 *Views*

The linear character of the canal means that most views within the Conservation Area are restricted to terminal views of bridges, tunnel ends and buildings adjacent to the canal. However, its open character and generally elevated location provides almost continuous attractive views outwards. For this reason, only exceptional views, such as those of the churches of Davenham, Great Budworth and Weaverham, have been mentioned in the text.

3.3 *Spaces*

The nature of the canal means that spacially, it is predominantly linear in character, although along the length of the canal, important spaces have been created where the canal widens to incorporate basins and wharves. The principle examples are the basins at Anderton and Barnton, the wide between Barnton and Saltersford tunnels, and the wharves at Wincham and Broken Cross. There are also several marinas along the length of the canal.

The basin at Anderton was built for transporting salt from the canal onto the River Weaver. It was later used by canal boats queuing to use the Anderton Boat Lift. The space is open in character and formed by residential housing to the north and west of the basin. On the south and east sides of the basin, where Anderton Weir channels over spill water into the River Weaver, the space is defined by a line of mature trees. A modern residential development to the north-west of the basin does not enhance the character or setting of the canal and the historic boat lift. This is accentuated by the prominent position of the dwellings.



Barnton Basin developed as a service facility for canal users awaiting access to the tunnel. It incorporated a coal wharf as well as a rope walk, smithy, clog maker, two pubs, a grocer's shop, stabling for horses and terraces of cottages. The space is enclosed by the steep hillside above the Weaver Valley, as the canal enters the eastern portal of Barnton tunnel. Although most of the buildings have been destroyed, traces of the cobbled street and the foundations of houses still remain.

The wide between Barnton and Saltersford tunnels allowed canal boats to queue while waiting to travel through the tunnels. Before the introduction of tugs to the Trent and Mersey Canal, canal boats were propelled through the tunnel by 'legging' - where two boatmen would lie at opposite ends of a plank fixed to the bow and walk along the tunnel walls. On the north side of the canal remains the tug arm, where the tug was kept, and there are many buildings with historic waterways connections. However the area now has a natural regenerating landscape character.

Wincham wharf was used for the transshipment of goods, such as coal coming in for Northwich and the surrounding area, and flour from the mill opposite intended for the town. It is now a busy canal boat repair and sales yard.



The wharf at Broken Cross was developed as a general goods wharf for Northwich, due to difficulties in completing the canal in the Barnton area. Salt left the canal here and was taken into Northwich by road, either for selling or loading onto barges on the River Weaver. A storage

warehouse was built, as well as stables and associated trades. Beyond bridge 184, an old smithy can be seen backing onto the canal towpath. However Broken Cross wharf became less important after Anderton was developed as the shipping point between the two waterways.

3.4 Enclosure

Enclosure along the length of the canal is predominately provided by the offside bank and towpath hedges. Properties along the canal are generally enclosed by brick boundary walls or hedges, which define the private space.

There are a few remaining examples of iron canal side railings and bridge balustrading.

3.5 Urban Form

The urban form of the canal is generally of a consistent width, narrowing at bridges and widening at winding points. Winding holes were constructed because the majority of working boats using the canal were 70 feet long (21.3 metres). Even today, many pleasure craft are too long to turn in the width of the canal.

The line of the canal exists in its original form, with the exception of the Marston New Cut. In 1957 a new straight length of canal about ½ mile or 800 metres long was built, because the existing stretch was in danger of collapsing into old salt workings. It is now difficult to see the old line, since it collapsed as expected, six months after the new section was opened.

Along the length of the Conservation Area it is possible to identify three distinct character areas: Croxton Aqueduct to the A556 near Broken Cross; Broken Cross to Barnton; and Barnton to Preston Brook tunnel.

3.5.1 Croxton Aqueduct to Broken Cross

This section begins where the canal crosses the River Dane by means of the Croxton Aqueduct. The canal parallels the river, north along the eastern side of the Dane valley, until Whatcroft Hall where it turns eastwards before continuing northwards to Broken Cross. The section is essentially rural in character, with very few buildings, alternating between open vistas of the surrounding countryside and attractive wooded

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sections. The original brick built bridges within this section enhance the character of the canal. Throughout this section there are areas where the original stone wall of the canal remains intact.

After bridge 175 is Croxton Flash, the first of three large flashes along this stretch. Shortly after bridge 176, on the east bank, lies the Bramble Cutting Picnic Site. This former waterways pit still retains some original loading rails. On the towpath side between bridges 176 and 177 is a view of the eighteenth century Bostock Hall and park land to the west. There are also views of Davenham Church spire at regular intervals along this section, although the best view is after bridge 177.



Between bridges 178 and 179 on the offside of the canal, glimpses of Whatcroft Hall, a Grade II* listed Georgian building with a copper cupola, can be seen through the trees. Just further on are the Whatcroft lodges which are two attractive private residences beside the canal. After bridge 180 is Billinge Green Flash, and it is at this point that the first glimpse of the Lostock chemical works can be seen on the skyline.

The character becomes more industrial between bridges 181 and 183 approaching Broken Cross. After bridge 181 is the first sighting of the intrusive Morrison's warehouse which dominates the views along this section and has a detrimental effect on the character and setting of the canal. Noise from traffic, Morrison's warehouse, encroaching development from Gadbrook Park to the west and the increased boating activity associated with Orchard Marina all disturb the tranquillity of the canal. Beyond the A556 road bridge 183A, the character changes approaching Broken Cross, as a modern residential housing development backs onto the canal.

3.5.2 Broken Cross to Barnton

The character of this section becomes more urban as the canal contours around the outskirts of Northwich, through Broken Cross, Wincham, Marston and adjacent to Anderton and Barnton. Between Broken Cross and Barnton, the townscape is dominated by the salt industry, from the remnants of salt works which lined the canal banks in the last century, to the large salt-based chemical works at Lostock and Winnington. These vast industrial complexes, with towering chimneys and steam-hissing pipes, dominate the views from the surrounding areas.



After Wincham Wharf, there is a pronounced and immediate transition between the present industrial and new rural landscapes, although this was not always so. A small aqueduct carries the canal over Wincham Brook along which there are particularly good views. The canal then enters a small wooded section, before turning westwards and entering a formerly important area for Britain's salt industry. The offside bank of the canal, between bridges 190 and 193, was lined with salt works in the last century, which have all but disappeared, leaving the remains of wharves.



On the offside are the remnants of the demolished Sunbeam Salt Works. The winding point on the

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offside, was a canal arm leading into the Wincham Hall Salt Works, which allowed coal to be unloaded more efficiently for salt production.

The canal then passes through Wincham. The views outwards are dominated by two recent visually obtrusive developments, the BP Nutrition animal feed factory and the New Cheshire Salt Works. The works produce salt by the modern vacuum process and is the only remaining salt works based on natural underground brine. Adjacent to bridge 192 is the former Wincham Hotel, a canal side pub which provided refreshments for both canal and salt workers. There were two entrances, with canal workers using the back door from the towpath. The curved chimney stacks and the repaired cracks in the right-hand end wall of the building show signs of how land subsidence has affected the area.



After Wincham, the canal passes through Marston. Adjacent to bridge 193 is the Lion Salt Works, the last to produce salt by the open pan method. Brine was pumped up from underground into large iron salt pans and heated until salt crystals formed. Owned by Thompsons, it was opened in 1842 and remained in operation until 1986. Currently, there are proposals to reopen it as a working museum. To the south east of the Lion Salt works, an infilled canal loading arm can

be seen as a depression in a field, behind the towpath. This is one of the few surviving examples of what were once common features.



Opposite there are open vistas of the surrounding countryside, including a large subsidence flash in the foreground, formerly the site of the Adelaide Salt Works.

Once past Marston, the canal returns along the New Cut to the countryside. However, with the remnants of the salt industry surrounding Northwich, the industrial area never feels far away. Northwards in the distance is one of the dominant features of this part of the Cheshire countryside, the tower of Great Budworth Church, a Grade I listed building dating from the 14th and 15th centuries. The canal then runs to



the south-west towards Barnton, first passing through an attractive wooded section, adjacent to the woods of Marbury Country Park. As the number of trees diminish along the towpath, an attractive vista of pleasant arable land occurs before the Brine Pump Cottages, which is terminated by the trees surrounding Marbury and Witton Brook. An obtrusive pipe bridge adjacent to Brine Pump Cottages is a reminder of the industrial character of the immediate area.

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As the canal enters Anderton, the views south are again dominated by large chemical works, this time, at Winnington. On the offside is Anderton Marina, built in 1975 on the site of an old clay pit. On the towpath side, a new marina has been created in the canal basins and dry dock of the former British Salt Company. Once past Anderton Basin it is possible to view the Anderton Boat Lift, built in 1875 to transfer boats vertically between the River Weaver and the Trent and Mersey Canal. The canal then contours around the steep hillside above the Weaver Valley, through another attractive wooded section, before entering Barnton Basin. Along this section there are several groupings of canal cottages. From the opposite direction, there are particularly attractive views of the woodlands lining the canal banks, terminated by a small terrace of canal cottages and the original facade of bridge 200.



As the canal enters Barnton Basin, there is a terminal view of the eastern end of Barnton tunnel, set against a background of trees. Walking along the horse path over the tunnel in the opposite direction to Barnton Basin, the Winnington chemical works dominates the horizon, once over the brow of the hill.

3.5.3 Barnton to Preston Brook Tunnel

After Barnton Basin, the canal enters two long tunnels. It then joins the Weaver Valley, which is essentially rural in character, and runs through woodlands to Preston Brook tunnel.

Beyond Barnton tunnel there is a particularly attractive vista over the Weaver Valley, including

a view down to the Saltersford Locks on the Weaver Navigation and a long view towards Weaverham church. The church tower provides a focal point for the southern views from bridges 204 to 207. Within this stretch the canal runs through several attractive woodland sections, including Bradleymeadow Wood, in which there is a tightly enclosed view of Little Leigh Pond adjacent to the canal. There are also views down to the River Weaver, although the siting of a caravan park on the river bank intrudes on the setting of the river.

Between bridges 207 and 208, there is an attractive view to the Acton Swing Bridge. At Acton Quay, the view to the north is obstructed by the siting of a caravan park on the hillside.



Between bridges 210 and 213, there is another particularly attractive vista over the Weaver Valley, including a view down to the Dutton Locks on the Weaver Navigation and a spectacular profile of the Dutton Arches, a railway viaduct over ¼ mile (400 metres) long, 65 feet (20 metres) above the level of the river.



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The canal then runs through several more woodland sections. From Garden Wood, travelling in the opposite direction, there is an attractive view of Dutton Hollow Farm on the hill top. Running through Longacre Wood, the terminal view of the southern portal of Preston Brook tunnel and the canal cottages located above it, is visually arresting. After this point, the canal continues to the Borough boundary by tunnel. Its line is again defined by the ventilation shafts above.

3.6 Road Pattern

The canal is part of an important transport corridor. Due to its linear nature, other transport systems either parallel or cross its line. The A530 parallels the canal from Middlewich to Northwich, where the A556 crosses over the canal at Broken Cross. Close to Wincham Wharf, the canal is crossed by the A559 and the Manchester to Chester railway line. Perpendicular to the canal, the A533 crosses at Wordsworth's Bridge (201) outside of Barnton.

At Anderton, the canal contours around the steep hillside of the Weaver Valley, before running alongside the River Weaver. Also at Anderton, before its closure, the boat lift allowed the transshipment of cargo from the canal to the River Weaver. Perpendicular to the canal, the A49 crosses at Acton Bridge.

At Dutton the main railway line carrying trains between Crewe, Warrington, Liverpool and the north, lies adjacent to the canal. The planted embankments means that the railway is rarely visually obtrusive, but it can be noisy.

4. Buildings

4.1 Age profile

The age profile of the buildings along the canal shows continuous development from the late eighteenth century towards the end of the twentieth century.

4.2 Dominant architectural styles and types

Most eighteenth century canal buildings were purely functional in design. The lock cottages and other workers dwellings associated with this phase were based on a simple rural domestic style. Subsequent buildings show the influence of early

nineteenth century classicism. Associated structures such as coal sheds and water management structures can also be found.

Along the length of the canal are other related structures such as aqueducts, bridges and tunnels. These are generally of brick construction. Many have been whitewashed. There is no consistent design style for the bridges along the canal. Examples of simple brick arched accommodation bridges can still be found. Others have been adapted to a flat deck which can be jacked up from either end to increase headroom, in the event of subsidence. Modern road bridges are inevitably concrete, although some have brick abutments and some incorporate jacking points. There are composite examples, where older brick structures have been widened by utilitarian concrete sections such as at Broken Cross and Soot Hill, Anderton.



4.3 Building materials

The buildings have a variety of roof pitches, colours and materials, of which grey slate is the most common. Plain tiles can also be found. Building materials are mainly red brick, although some are constructed of stone, and others are rendered and whitewashed. Some utilitarian exposed aggregate concrete structures can be found, looking distinctly out of place.

4.4 Key buildings and structures

The Anderton Boat Lift is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is a prime example of the use of cast and wrought iron. During the nineteenth century, their use as a construction material radically altered the approach to industrial architecture. Built in 1875 and converted from a hydraulic mechanism to electricity in 1906-7, the lift raised boats vertically in two caissons or tanks through 50 feet (15.25 metres) between the River Weaver and an aqueduct leading to the Trent and Mersey Canal. The lift was built on an island in the river, thus necessitating the linking aqueduct to the canal.



The tanks originally counterbalanced each other when filled with water, but following the conversion to electricity in 1906-7, cast iron weights working over new pulleys at the top were added to counterbalance the weight of the tanks. The enormous girders, buttresses and pulleys combined to create a gigantic effect, now somewhat diminished by the industrial buildings on the other side of the river. The lift was closed in 1984, because of structural damage, however it is hoped that it will be restored to full working order before the end of 2001.

Adjacent to the boat lift basin, two contrasting footbridges are found. The older exposed aggregate concrete structure has an alien almost suburban character. The more modern simple concrete bridge deck has metal railings which echo elements of the nearby Boat Lift structure, which itself seems to be of a more structurally honest design.

Dutton Dry Dock is an interesting structure. The ornate roof resembles railway architecture



because it was built by the North Staffordshire Railway Company which formerly owned the canal. The Dry Dock, nearby Dutton Stop Lock and Stop Lock Keeper's cottage and the southern portal to Preston Brook Tunnel are all listed buildings. Together with the cottages above the tunnel portal they form a significant group of buildings giving a distinctive character to what is effectively the terminus of the canal.

The other two tunnels, Barnton and Salterford, are important canal structures. The four portals to these tunnels are listed buildings as is one air ventilation shaft above Barnton Tunnel.

Croxton Aqueduct was originally a complex cast and wrought iron structure of 14 feet (4.27 metres) beam, crossing the River Dane. However it was swept away by floods in the 1930's and replaced by the present narrow structure on a new alignment. The original brick abutments and centre pier foundation are still visible on the bank and bed of the River Dane, immediately to the south of the present structure.



At Marston, The Lion Salt Works complex includes a number of listed buildings. These decaying brick and timber structures are the remnants of the last surviving open pan salt works in the country. Similar examples of these structures would once have been common along the canal side in this area.

The following individual buildings and groups contained within the Conservation Area are important to local character:-

the lodges to Whatcroft Hall (at bridge 179); the Canalside Cottage (near to bridge 182); the buildings at Broken Cross and Wincham Wharf; Canal Side Cottage (past Wincham Wharf); former Wincham Hotel (Marston); Crystal Cottage (Marston); Brine Pump Cottages (Marbury); Jackson's Turn (Marbury); cottages adjacent to bridge 200 (Anderton) and the former Weaver flatmans cottages which are listed buildings near to bridge 201 at Barnton.

5. *The track scene.*

(The line of the canal is known as the track).

5.1 *Track furniture/wirescape etc.*

A feature of the track scene of the Trent and Mersey Canal are the mile posts, originally essential for the calculation of tolls. Every mile along the towpath there was a cast iron post showing the distance from the inland ports at either end of the canal.



Most of the mile posts in the Vale Royal section are original and were cast by a company in Stone named Rangeley & Dixon. They bear the entablature 'R&D Stone 1819'. Most of them are "listed buildings". Where the originals were missing the Trent and Mersey Canal Society have had replicas made, bearing the entablature 'T&MCS 1977'.

Set into the eastern portal of Barnton Tunnel, it is still possible to see the original water point.

An overgrown and neglected water trough is situated in the wide between Barnton and Saltersford tunnels. This provided fresh drinking water for the horses, as the canal water had a high concentration of salt, particularly around the Northwich area.

Along the length of the canal there are many overflow sluices, which were built at intervals to take away excess water, including those at Anderton and Barnton basins. Anderton Basin and Jacksons Turn also have overflow weirs to remove excess water. Too much water would lead to flooded towpaths, bank erosion, breached banks and unworkable locks, as it would be impossible to equalise the water pressure on either side of the top gates.

Along the rebuilt canal section between Barnton and Anderton, ramps have been introduced into the concrete edge to allow small mammals to escape from the water.

Beside the abutments of the western elevation of bridge 198 there is possibly a boundary marker stone, inscribed 'M 1849'. It is believed that the 'M' stands for Lord Mansfield, the landowner in 1849, who had disputes with salt mining companies over ownership rights.

The three tunnels along this section of the canal do not have towpaths. The horses were lead over the top of the tunnels whilst the boat was manoeuvred through the tunnel by legging, and later by steam tug. The line of the tunnel can be easily traced by the tall brick ventilation shafts located to the offside of the path over the top of the tunnels.



Another feature of the track scene is Dutton Stop Lock, near to the junction with the Bridgewater Canal. This lock was originally built for barges although it has now been narrowed at the top

gate. This single top gate is unusual for a formerly wide lock. The stop lock was required to control the flow of water between the Trent and Mersey and Bridgewater Canals.



Wirescape within the conservation area is minimal, with the exception of the alignment of electricity pylons between bridges 205 and 206, which has an obstructive effect on the view of Weaverham Church.

5.2 Shopfronts and advertisements

Shop fronts and advertisements within the Conservation Area are minimal. There are exceptions at the occasional public houses adjacent to the canal, and hand-painted advertisement boards located at some of the wharves along the canal. Where these are of a traditional waterways style, they add character to the local scene.

5.3 Landmarks and focal points

The few landmarks or focal points with historic connection or visual interest within the Conservation Area are described elsewhere in the text. However the general waterways scene is usually colourful and interesting. The linear character of the canal means that the focal points are situated outside the boundary of the Conservation Area, such as the churches at Davenham, Great Budworth and Weaverham.

5.4 Floorscape

The primary floorscape within the Conservation Area is the canal towpath, which varies from a

grass track to a gravel track, and its adjacent grass verge. Where original stone edgings to the canal can occasionally be seen they are far more aesthetically pleasing than the modern sheet piling solution to bank erosion. Engineering bricks have been introduced around the gates of Dutton Stop Lock.

LANDSCAPE

6. Landscape setting



As noted above in Section 3.5 the Conservation Area has three distinct character areas. The section from Croxton Aqueduct to Broken Cross occupies a pleasant, natural landscape, along the edge of the Dane Valley. However the close relationship between these two water systems is not always visually obvious. Between Broken Cross and Barnton, the landscape is dominated by the impact of salt and its associated industry. The section from Barnton to Preston Brook, also occupies a pleasant, natural landscape, running along one side of the Weaver Valley, through attractive woodland stretches.

The linear nature of the canal means that the relationship with the landscape changes along its length. This relationship can be seen in the different types of view out from the canal, varying between the broad panoramic vistas over the Dane and Weaver valleys to many small tightly enclosed views.

7. Green spaces, trees and hedges

The presence of woodlands along the length of the canal is an important factor in the changing relationship. Within the Conservation Area there are many woodland stretches, particularly between Barnton and Preston Brook. These can both truncate and unify views and create a sense of enclosure adjacent to the Conservation Area. Emerging from these woodland areas, views of the landscape are enhanced by the contrast.



However for the majority of the length of the canal, the space is defined by the offside bank and the towpath hedgerow.

Above Barnton tunnel another green space has been created. The line of the canal can be easily traced by the long depression. It is unclear why this was formed, but it is thought that structural settlement of the tunnel below, required the canal engineers to dig away the overburden until the tunnel structure became stable.

When the tunnel was relined in the mid 1990's, special bricks were used to allow the colony of bats to continue to use it as a roost.

Between bridge 184 and 185, the high grass bank to the east was built by ICI to contain the lime waste from their nearby ammonia soda works. The lime beds attract lime-loving plants – rarities in Cheshire because there is virtually no naturally occurring limestone.

The canal is an important wildlife corridor. A wide variety of hedgerow wild flowers can be found and the smell of wild garlic is particularly prominent in the vicinity of Dutton Dry Dock.

8. Water features

Between Broken Cross and Barnton, the landscape is dominated by the impact of salt and its associated industry. The land above many of the old salt mines has collapsed into the workings and some have since flooded. Subsidence has also occurred near bridge 175, at Croxton Flash and between bridges 180 and 181, creating the Billinge Green Flashes. Here the canal bank has disappeared creating large areas of water which provide a valuable wildlife habitat for water birds such as Little Grebes, Great Crested Grebes and Herons. Between the towpath and a large flash is a marsh where plants such as Willow, Reed Mace, Iris and Marsh Marigold grow.

In some of these flashes, lie the decaying hulks of sunken barges and narrow boats, which can occasionally be seen breaking the surface of the water.



OTHER FACTORS

9. Negative factors

The principle negative factors affecting the Conservation Area are the visually obtrusive industrial buildings and unsympathetic residential developments, which have a detrimental effect on the character and setting of the canal along the central section.

Further along from the Anderton Boat Lift, the particularly attractive view of the woodlands lining the canal banks, terminated by a small terrace of canal cottages and the original façade of bridge

200, can be disturbed by a smell of sewage. There is an adjacent sewage pipe bridge and raw sewage has been seen floating on the surface of the canal, but the reason for the smell has not been confirmed.

Another negative factor is the scale of the modern industrial buildings which dominate the views from the surrounding areas. The structures of the chemical works at Lostock and Winnington can be both fascinating because of their complexity and unsettling because of their perceived disrepair. The bulky elevations of the New Cheshire Salt Works and Morrison's warehouse are bland and lack character or visual interest. As the canal passes through the complex at Lostock, there is also a prominent smell of chemicals.



At various intervals along the canal, it is crossed by pipe bridges, utilitarian in nature, and distracting from the subtle industrial aesthetic of the canal builders.

Some of the major road bridges over the canal have been widened in a utilitarian manner, representing a harsh contrast with the more subtle original engineering work. Below some of these concrete bridges there is a problem with graffiti vandalism.

10.1 Neutral areas

Throughout most of the central section within Vale Royal, the canal passes through neutral areas which neither enhance nor detract from the character or appearance of the area.

10.2 Areas and opportunities for development and/or enhancement

There are substantial areas with development potential along the length of the canal, particularly on the outskirts of the urban areas. A potential threat comes from the possibility of unsympathetic new developments which may threaten the character and setting of the canal.

Unlike many urban canals, there are very few waterside public houses along this section of the canal. A notable exception is at Broken Cross where there is an attractive ambiance that could be beneficially repeated elsewhere.



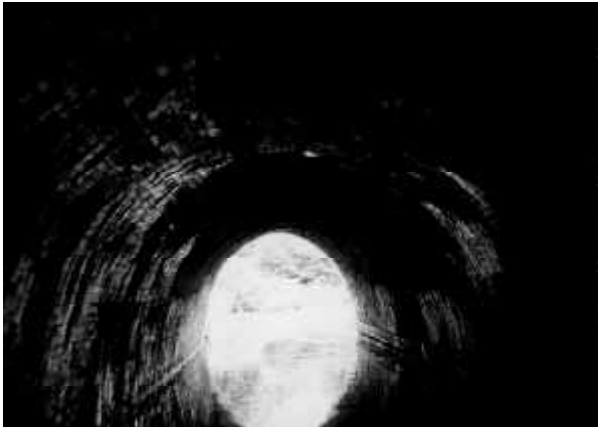
The area surrounding Barnton Basin, with traces of the cobbled streets and foundations of houses which once provided a service community for the canal, has potential for development and enhancement, which could be linked to the restoration of the Anderton Boat Lift.

11. Ambience/Uniqueness

The ambience changes in relation to the character of the different sections along the canal, with hissing pipes and other noises adding to the industrial character of the chemical works at Lostock. Before Broken Cross with the wind from the west, it is possible to sense the aroma of hot bread from Robert's Bakery.

The canal was originally an important transport artery for industrial development. The few remaining artefacts of industrial archaeology along its length have added significance as reminders of this important heritage.

Today the canal is an important recreational facility used by many thousands of people for canal boat cruising holidays, but also for cycling, walking, fishing and natural history studies. It forms part of the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk and the West Cheshire Waterways Ring Walk. Whilst these users can enjoy most of the pleasures of the waterway, the unique experience of passing through a tunnel is reserved for the waterborne traveller.



Whilst an appraisal aims to identify the essential elements that give an area its character, it can only be a 'snapshot' in time. Elements and details of an area may be important even if they are not specifically referred to in the document.

This document should be read in conjunction with "Conservation Area Appraisals", produced by Vale Royal Borough Council in July 1997.

The Trent and Mersey Canal within Vale Royal was designated as a conservation area by Vale Royal Borough Council on 15 June 2000. This appraisal relates to that designation.

Trent and Mersey Canal
Conservation Area Appraisal
(one of a series to be produced)

VRBC Cons 30/X May 2000

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