

The canal today and tomorrow . . .



The Packet House at twilight

The end of coal carrying on the canal

Coal mining in the Worsley area became increasingly difficult as the narrow, faulted seams were mostly worked out or were considered uneconomic to mine. The last working pit in the area was Mosley Common, Britain's most modern pit in the 1950s. It closed in 1968, while Brackley, Wharton Hall, Ashton Field and Sandhole had closed earlier in the 1960s. Almost all trace of mining has gone from the landscape; only part of Astley Green Colliery, now a museum, remains.

The navigable levels continued to drain water from the old workings and were the last part of the coal mines to be closed. The last inspection visit was made in 1998 but the levels are now considered too unsafe even for inspection.



A 'duker' carrying coal at Worsley

Water draining from the workings carries ochre (iron salts in solution), giving the canal its characteristic orange colour. While this is a pollutant, many people find the unique orange canal attractive. Ochre from this area was used until recently as a pigment in paint manufacture.



The canal at Worsley in a strikingly orange condition

Design - jeffinogue@gmail.com



WCT's Packet House boat steps restoration 1975

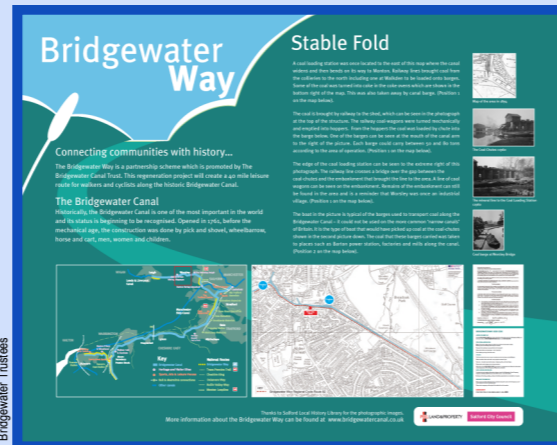
Canal renaissance

The Bridgewater Canal, like most other British canals, went through a long period of decline when transport by railway or road was considered a better option. Many stretches of canal were abandoned and some even filled in and built over. Fortunately this did not happen to the Bridgewater Canal, although Runcorn locks were lost.

In recent years the amenity value of the canal has been realised and it is now used by narrow boats, carrying people on pleasure trips, where once it carried coal.

Work to restore the Packet House steps was undertaken in 1975 by members of Worsley Civic Trust, who can be seen in the photograph above, celebrating the opening of the refurbished landing, with a tourist boat moored at the steps.

Work to maintain and improve amenity value along the canal's entire length, is now being managed by the Bridgewater Canal Trust, a partnership of seven local authorities, the Peel Group and funding organisations. The aim is to establish The Bridgewater Way, a 65 km walking and cycling network alongside the canal, as shown in the interpretive board below. The boards will be placed at intervals along the canal corridor.



Celebrating canal heritage and assuring its future

The importance of the area in industrial history is also being recognised and the canal takes its place as one of the great innovations of the 18th Century.

A heritage walks programme is helping to encourage more people to make use of the canal corridor and to learn about the canal builders, the engineering problems they had to overcome and the importance of canal technology in C18 Britain.

Other activities along the canal corridor include walks with an emphasis on such topics as wildlife or industrial archaeology and opportunities for fishing, canoeing and a variety of other sports.

Canal boat holidays are becoming increasingly popular and the canal infrastructure is being managed to enhance this experience. Marinas, restaurants and visitor attractions, together with transport links are planned to make the canal corridor accessible to as wide a range of visitors as possible.

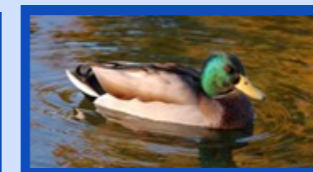
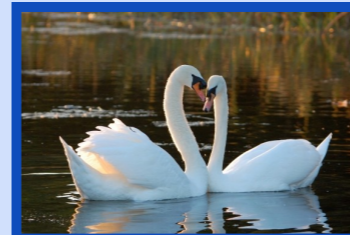
Special events such as boat gatherings are held annually at several places along the canal's length. Maintenance and reinstatement of links between canals in various parts of the country will safeguard the future of the canal network.



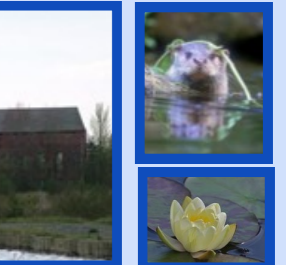
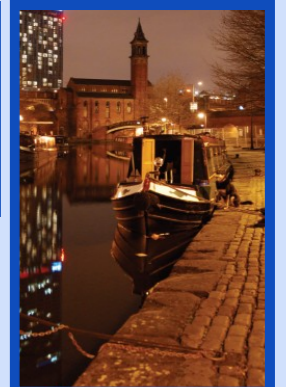
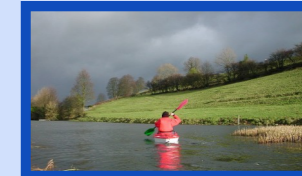
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City of Salford



Images from Bridgewater Trustees, Salford online, Worsley heritage walks & brian@wiganworld.co.uk



Narrow boats at Worsley