

The land east of the Rochdale canal was, for more than a century, the site of the extensive Mather & Platt Park Works (sometimes just Park (Engineering) Works). Mather & Platt moved their textile machinery manufacturing business to Newton Heath in 1900 from a site in Salford, where it had been founded in the 1830s. Land was acquired in 1900, with most departments relocated by 1912. The works eventually produced a range of products including fire sprinkler systems and pumps.

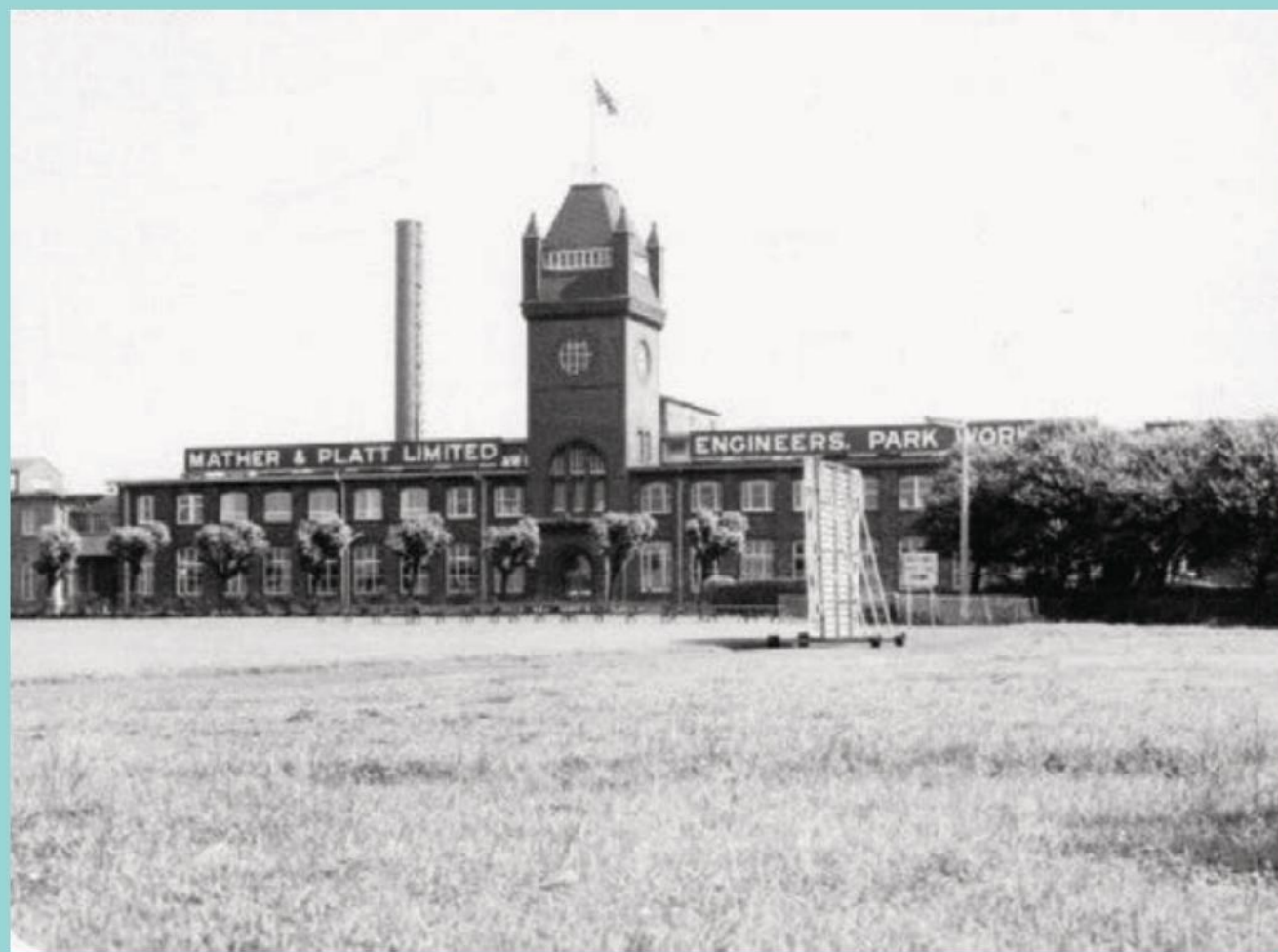


Image 1: The impressive main administrative block of the Mather & Platt Park Works, with cricket pitch in foreground (see also Image 6 – 'General Office')

Prior to the development of the works, historic maps indicate that the site had largely been agricultural land, although clay may have been extracted to supply local brickworks. However, it is also the case that an important Roman road, running north east from the fort and settlement of Mancunium would have run close to the south eastern edge of the works. The road course likely followed the line of Briscoe Lane, the broad road in the south east of Image 2 which a railway bridge crosses.



Image 2: Aerial image of 1926 showing extent of Mather & Platt's Park Works at that time



Image 3: A Mather & Platt product from one of their factories abroad.



Image 5: The site building at the centre of Lowry's 'Going to Work' in 2020



Image 4: Lowry's 1943 painting 'Going to Work' © IWM (Art.IWM ART LD 3074)

As with many factories in Manchester, the works was converted to military production in both the first and second world wars. The Government took over the works in 1915 to produce munitions after earlier use by the Avro aircraft company. The site was again taken over for military manufacturing in the Second World War, which may have ensured additional structures in the site's north west planned in 1938 were actually built (Image 7).

In 1943, L. S. Lowry painted workers leaving the works in his 'Going to Work', commissioned by the War Artists Advisory Committee for 25 guineas and now displayed in the Imperial War Museum, Salford. The picture is a useful source as to the appearance of the buildings at the time. The blackened and apparently roofless end sections painted by Lowry could indicate bomb damage, although there is no other evidence for this having occurred. There are several other inconsistencies in Lowry's representation of the structures.

Mather & Platt Park Works Site

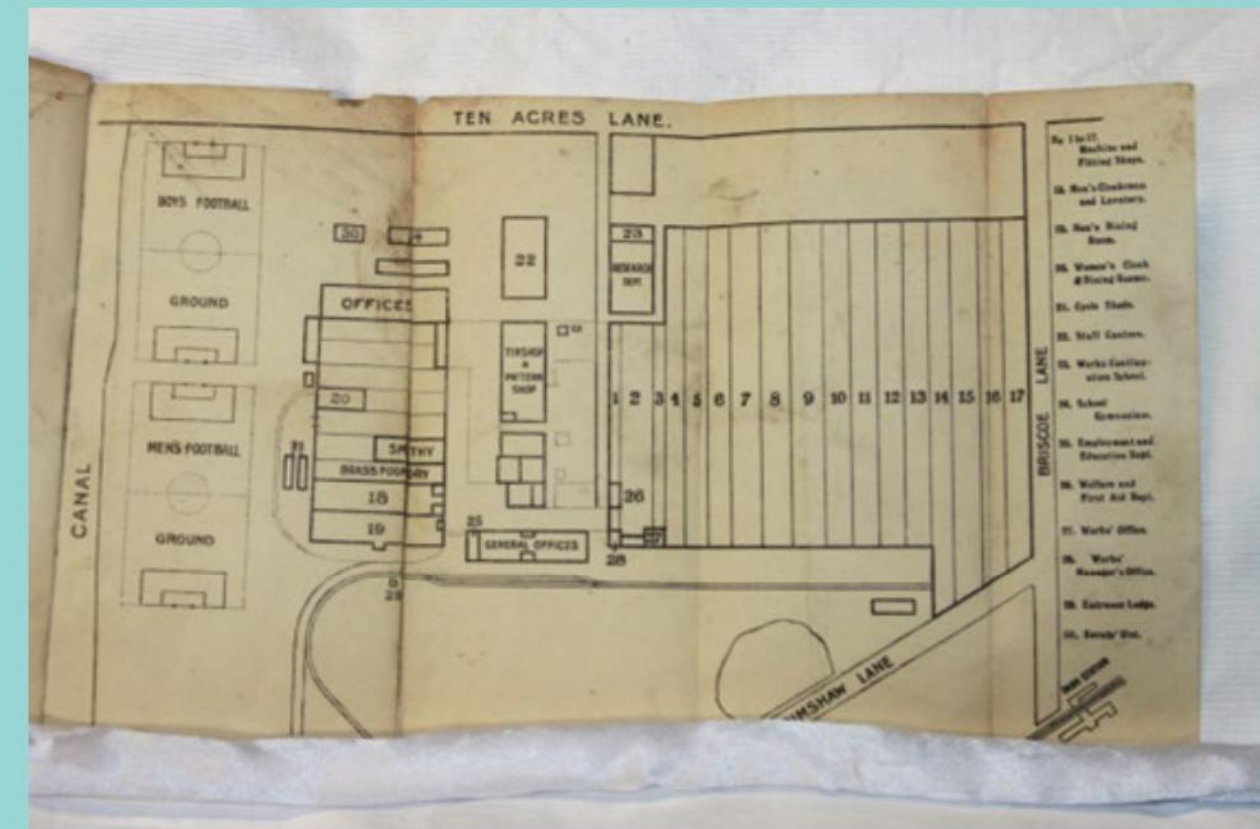


Image 6: Early 20th century staff orientation plan of works

A pamphlet held by Manchester Science Museum has a schematic plan of the works for the benefit of new staff. It is interesting to note the staff football pitches which were later relocated to allow an extension of the works. A sports and social club remained on site until the plant closed.

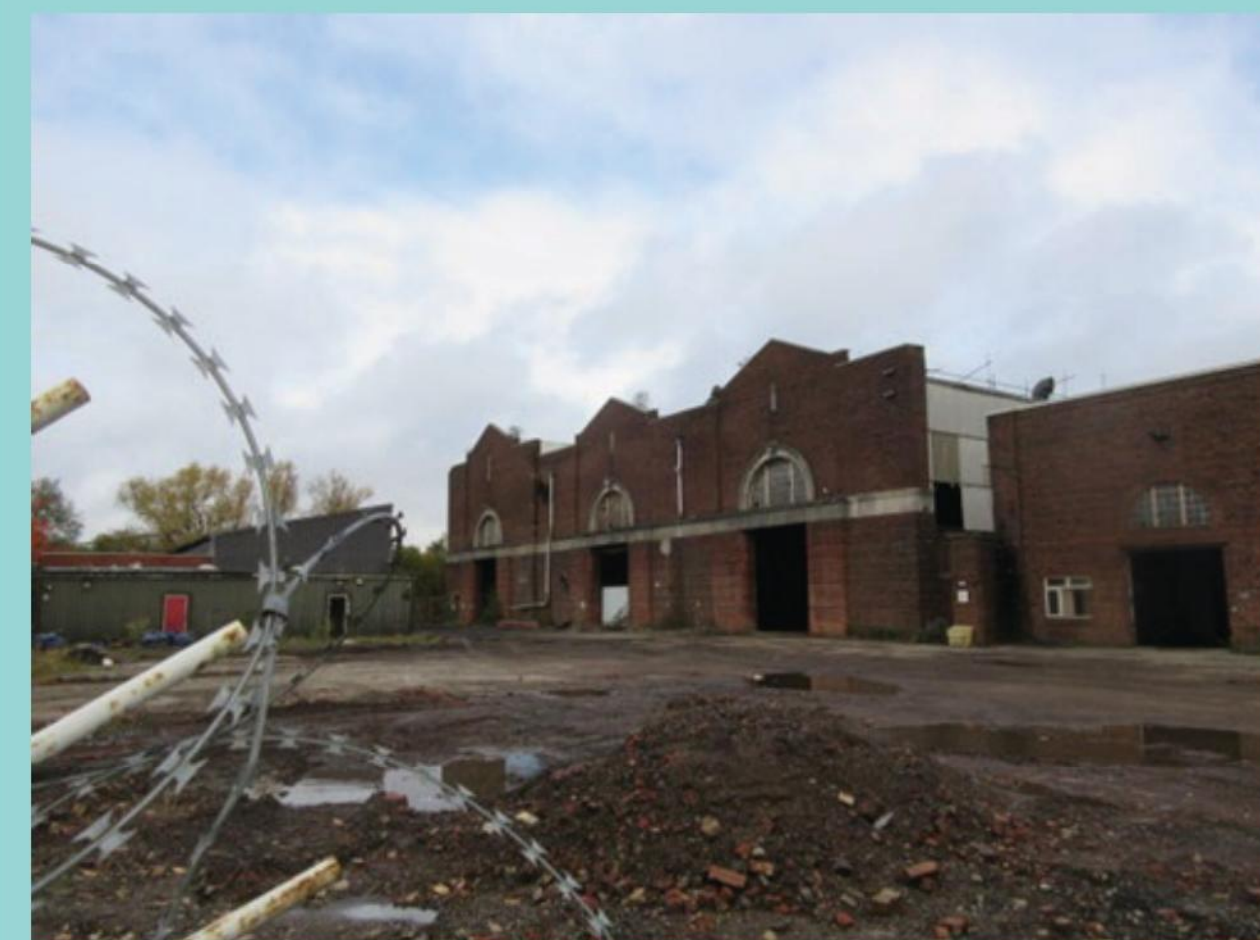


Image 7: Later, likely late 1930s' structures east of the canal in 2020. The simpler style may reflect architectural fashion rather than finances.

Unfortunately, the late 20th century history of the works was less positive, with gradual decline and changes in ownership until the eventual closure of the business in 2017. Much of the works, including the structures in Image 1 were demolished at the end of the 20th century.



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