

NEW VICTORIA

Long Millgate, now subsumed below the New Victoria development was an important medieval thoroughfare, one of several streets radiating out from the ecclesiastical heart of the medieval town and leading to the mill on the River Irk. Archaeological excavations carried out in 2020 have revealed another part of that story.

MANCHESTER SINCE THE ROMAN PERIOD

There is very little archaeological evidence in the city that represents the period between the end of the Roman occupation in about AD 410 and the Norman Conquest in the 11th century, although documentary evidence suggests that Manchester was an Anglo-Saxon defensive settlement, or burg, by the early 10th century. This was probably located on the spur of land overlooking the confluence of the rivers Irwell and Irk, which was later to become the core of the medieval town.

Norman control of north-west England began in the winter of 1069-70 when William I crushed a rebellion and placed land between the Ribble and the Mersey under the control of a new overlord, Roger de Poitou. He retained the manor of Salford but is credited with placing Manchester under a separate lord, and the two settlements have had a separate administrative history since that time. The earliest known lords of Manchester were the de Grelley family, who erected a castle here in the late 12th century.

The castle may have been replaced by a fortified manor house, which is first documented in 1267. The castle and the later manor house are thought to have been located on the site occupied today by Chetham's School.

Hanging Ditch, originally a natural post-glacial channel, was modified in the 13th century, most likely as part of the defence of the medieval settlement.



The earliest plan of Manchester dating to c 1650. The medieval core of the town centred around the cathedral can be seen, with later medieval and post-medieval streets such as Long Millgate and Deansgate can be seen radiating outwards.

This panel stands on what was formerly Long Millgate, the name reflecting the manorial mills to which it provided access. During the 14th century the medieval town expanded along streets such as Deansgate and Long Millgate, extending out from the centre. Burgage plots appear to have been laid out between the southern side of the River Irk and Long Millgate in the 15th and 16th centuries. Increasing prosperity during the late 15th century probably provided the impetus for the construction of a bridge crossing the River Irk at Hunt's Bank on the modern line of Victoria Street. A fragment of a stone cross, one of the few medieval finds from Long Millgate, was discovered during the formation of Corporation Street in 1848.

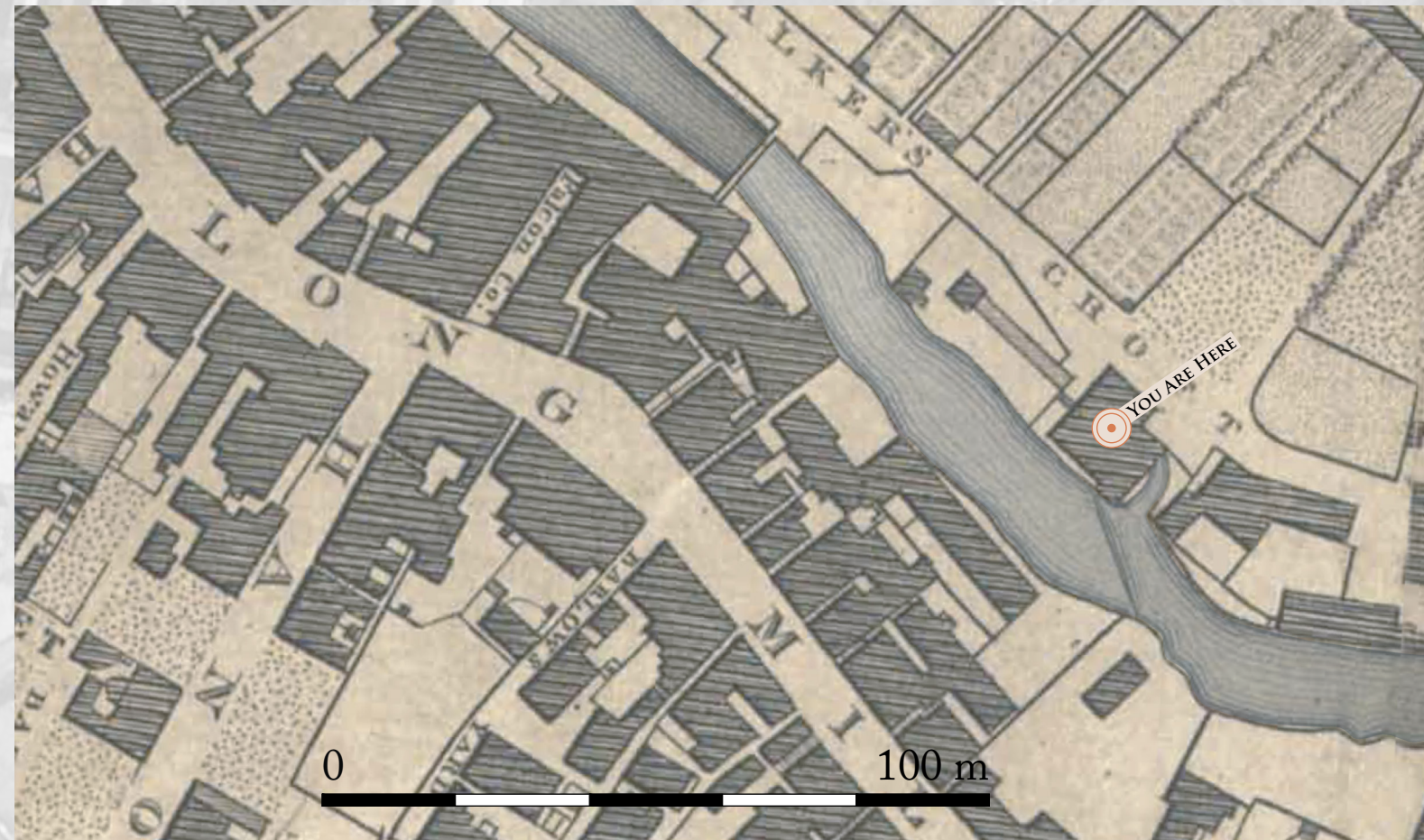
Manchester had become an important centre for the manufacture and trade of woollens and linen goods by the mid-16th century and was considered at the time to be the most populous town of all Lancashire. The wealth of this period can be seen in the fine timber-framed houses that once graced this part of Manchester.



The Sun Inn photographed in 1866, one of several timber-framed buildings that graced this part of Manchester (Manchester Archives and Local Studies)

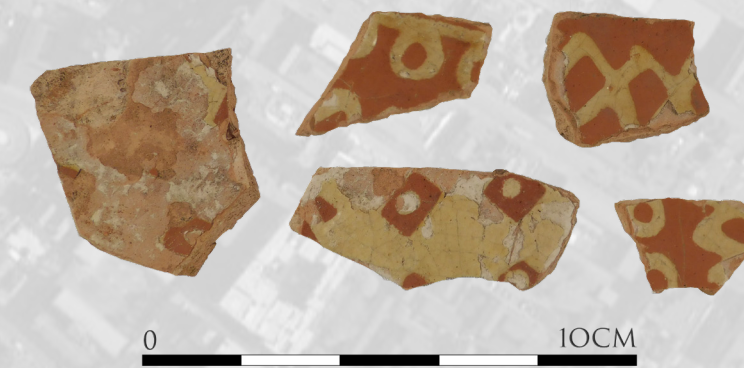
The earliest map of Manchester dating to c 1650 shows the development of the town in the post-medieval period. What can be seen is the expansion beyond its original medieval core. Continuous rows of buildings now line both sides of the Long Millgate street frontage with undeveloped land on the north side of the River Irk.

EXCAVATIONS ON LONG MILLGATE



The excavation area superimposed on Green's map of 1787-94

Archaeologists had the opportunity to excavate along part of Long Millgate in 2020. In the north-east part of the excavation faint traces of a building was exposed formed by postholes cut into the natural bedrock. These features likely pre-date the detailed maps.



Fragments of 17th-century slipware (above) recovered during the excavations and Cistercian ware cup (left) from the Midlands similar to fragments found on the site.

One such feature contained fragments of 17th-century slipware, whilst part of a 16th-century Cistercian cup was recovered from later demolitions deposits. Also revealed was a well cut into the underlying rock, and a series of rock-cut pits that may have been connected with industrial processes such as tanning. Sandstone walls were also exposed, as well as evidence that the bedrock had been levelled to form floor surfaces. A possible quarry was also found. This was a vertical rock face some 2.3m deep. The quarry was potentially a source of building stone for 17th- and 18th-century buildings in the locality.



Rock-cut features including the well (centre) found during the excavation

18TH- AND 19TH- CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

The second half of the 18th century in Manchester was characterised by an accelerated pace of development. This can be seen on the first detailed plans of the area produced by Casson and Berry between 1741 and 1751. Such development was aided by the growth of waterborne transport. The Mersey and Irwell were made navigable by 1736, opening a route from Manchester to the port of Liverpool.



Casson and Berry's plan of Manchester and Salford in 1741

In the late 18th and early 19th century growth continued apace around Long Millgate area with Bedford & Stewart's cotton mill recorded in 1797. Contemporary plans from 1822 notes that the mill was seven-storeys high.

VICTORIA STATION

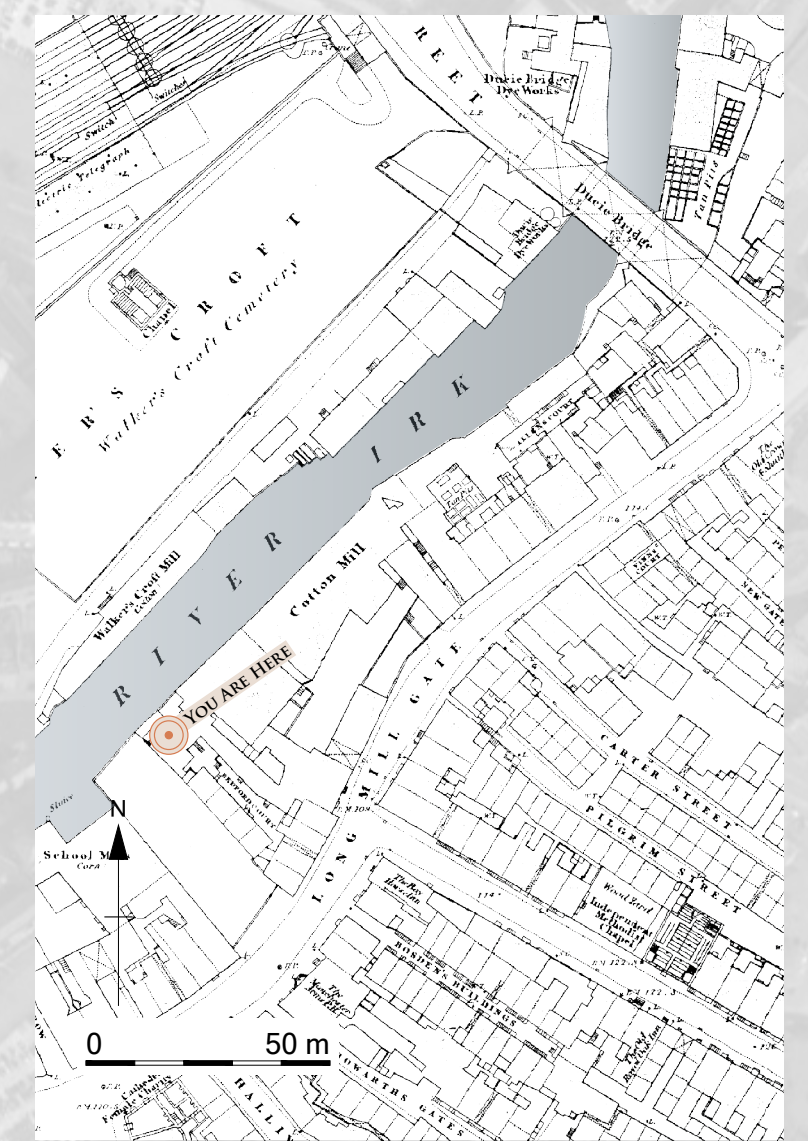
The opening of Manchester & Liverpool and Manchester & Leeds Railways in 1844 signalled a significant change to the local townscape. Initially, the station was situated entirely to the north of the river. In order to extend the station Walker's Croft cemetery was purchased in 1846. The cemetery had been established in 1815 and when it was sold was believed to have contained as many as 40,000 burials. By 1855, a new platform was created across the former cemetery, extending the station towards Long Millgate. Further extensions followed in 1865, reaching the Long Millgate street frontage by 1908, resulting in the clearance of further buildings. Those that survived appear in a contemporary photograph.



In 1844 Victoria Station building was originally built in an Italianate architectural style. The second storey was added in the 1860s.



Buildings that occupied the south-east side of Long Millgate in c 1900 (Manchester Local Image Collection)



Ordnance Survey Town Plan of 1851 showing Walker's Croft cemetery Victoria Station and 19th-century development on Long Millgate

Redevelopment in the late 1970s and early 1980s resulted in the demolition of the remaining buildings in this part of Long Millgate, including the Manchester Arms, the Bay Horse Tavern and the Wool Pack Inn.