Rochdale Canal Lock No. 88 to East of Oxford Street

Grade II listed; Whitworth Street Conservation Area

Heritage Statement



The Rochdale Canal (opened 1804) was the first trans-Pennine canal in the country. Spanning 32 miles with 91 locks, it connects Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, and Calderdale and played a pivotal role in the industrial revolution. The canal closed in 1952, with only a short section remaining active in central Manchester. However, volunteer restoration has breathed new life into this iconic waterway, reestablishing it as a vital part of the region's history and modern recreation.

‘Rochdale Canal Lock Paddle Gear: Conservation Statement’, Clarke M. (2004) discusses the history of the Rochdale Canal. It was built 1794-1804. Because it had virtually ceased to be used by the end of the Second World War, the canal was not included in those which were nationalised in 1948 and it remained independent until restoration was well under way.

The first proposal for a canal from Manchester to Sowerby Bridge came in 1766. James Brindley made two surveys, one as the canal was subsequently built and one for a line via Bury.

The Rochdale Canal Act passed in 1794; it was for a broad canal. William Jessop was retained as the Consulting Engineer, with William Crosley and Henry Taylor appointed Resident Engineers (Crosley died in 1796 and was replaced by Thomas Townshend, who in turn was replaced by William Crosley Junior in 1802). The first section of the canal, from Sowerby Bridge to Todmorden, opened on the 24 August 1798. In Manchester, the section from Castlefield to Piccadilly, opened at the end of 1799 with water supply from the newly opened Ashton Canal. The canal fully opened on the 21 December 1804 at a cost of c. £600,000.

The canal was successful, regularly producing a £4 dividend per share. By 1819 it was carrying 317,050 tons annually; coal, stone and corn being the main cargoes.

In 1830 a railway surveyed by George Stephenson was proposed, following closely the route of the canal. When the Manchester and Leeds Railway opened in 1841, the canal company had to reduce tolls to retain business. The company resisted take-over bids from railway companies but leased the canal to a consortium of railway companies in 1855. The canal remained profitable for some time but by the twentieth century the tonnage being carried was in sharp decline. In 1937 the last boat made the through journey across the Pennines on the Rochdale Canal.

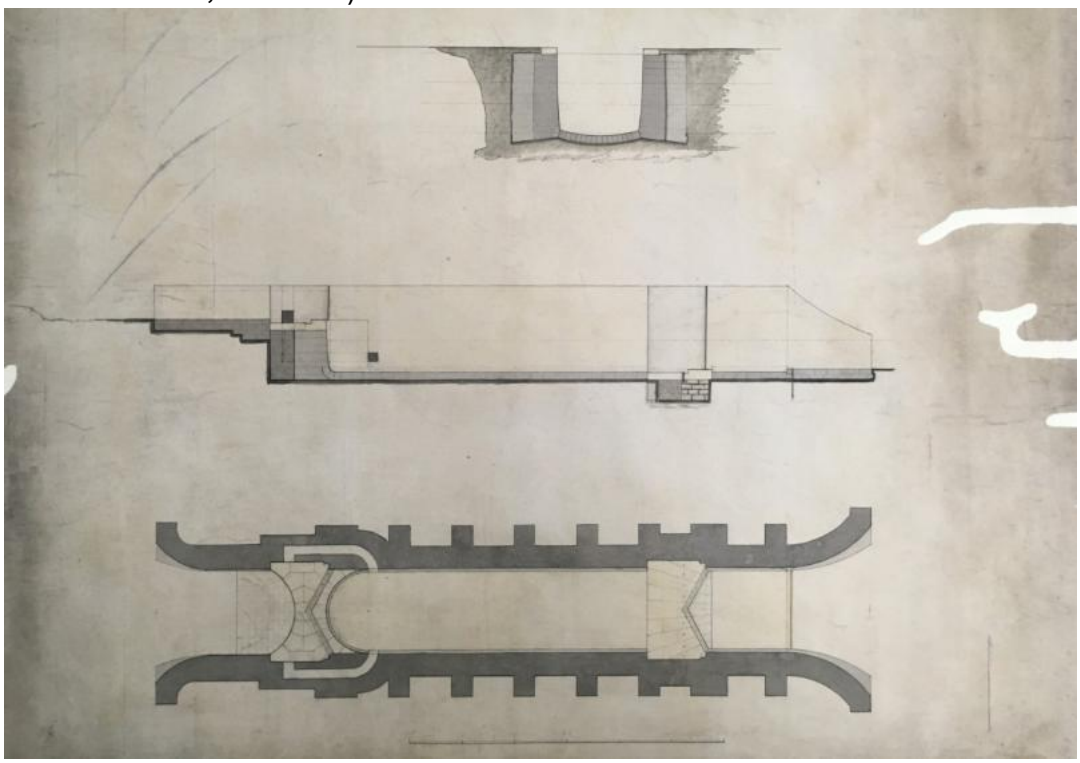
The nine Rochdale Canal locks from Castlefield to Piccadilly were the link between the Bridgewater and Ashton Canals. The restoration of the Ashton Canal by volunteers in the 1960s and '70s, and subsequently by British Waterways, removed the possibility of the Manchester section of the Rochdale Canal being closed. It was the success of the Ashton Canal restoration that led to similar plans for the Rochdale Canal, which subsequently reopened in 2002.

The list description for 'Rochdale Canal Lock No. 88 to East of Oxford Street' (Grade II; June 1994) identifies the importance of lock wall materials ('*Coursed squared sandstone'*) and the overlapping functional settings of this series of locks ('*Fifth in series of 9 locks on extension linking former Rochdale Canal basin at Dale Street with Bridgewater Canal basin at Castlefield'*; see other list descriptions).

The site is within the immediate visual settings of 'The Palace Theatre (Grade II) and 'Bridgewater House' (Grade II; considered to form "*a group with Palace Theatre to left (q.v.), and Refuge Assurance Buildings (q.v.) and India House opposite (q.v.)"*).

Lock 88 is within the Whitworth Street Conservation Area. Its appraisal on the Manchester City Council website identifies the historic importance of the Rochdale Canal to the cheap movement of cotton in all its stages of production and (following John Rennie's 1805 extension of the Rochdale Canal to connect with the 1760 built Bridgewater Canal) the cheap movement of coal to power cotton mill machinery. Whilst the canal is now only used for leisure traffic, it is an important ingredient in the regeneration efforts in this part of the city.

Below and for information only is a historic plan of a lock on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. This is not necessarily the form of the Rochdale Canal Lock 88 but may provide some indication of canal lock construction. The series of stone walls perpendicular to the main lock chamber stone wall are termed 'counterforts'. Please note that this plan is subject to copyright (see The Head of Archives and Records, Canal & River Trust, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire).



Assessment of significance

NPPF paragraph 207 and 208 identify the importance of heritage asset significance assessment in decision making.

NPPG: Historic Environment: paragraph 6 identifies that significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting. Heritage interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.

• Archaeological interest: the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity;

• Historical interest: the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present – illustrative or associative; a material record of our nation's history; can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

• Architectural and artistic interest: design and aesthetics. The art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings (architectural); other human creative skill (artistic).

The Rochdale Canal has historical and communal value, illustrating the early development of the national canal network and was instrumental to the development of the cotton industry and C19 urbanisation of Manchester. Its continued use (albeit recreational) reinforces historic significance.

The juxtaposition of Lock 88 in the Whitworth Street Conservation Area with other historic buildings directly or indirectly associated with the cotton industry and subsequent development of Manchester, reinforces the significance of setting, character and appearance.

The survival of Lock 88's traditional and mostly locally sourced materials and evidence of original construction techniques together with the distinctions of the Rochdale Canal has Archaeological and Architectural value.

Nature of works

There is a significant leak to the Rochdale Canal Lock 88's towpath side lock chamber. The leak is out-letting on the towpath downstream and at Lock 90, flooding the towpath and making it unsafe for members of the public (the towpath has been closed).



It is proposed that a specialist contractor drill horizontally in the towpath side lock chamber wall and then insert Polyurethane (PU) grout to seal the leaks. Drilling is restricted to mortar joints (i.e. no damage to stone arrises) which fall within a c. 500mm x 500mm grid.

There is a disused gas main in the Rochdale Canal towpath and the water from Lock 88 is tracking down this, causing damage further down the canal at Lock 90. 'Rochdale Canal Lock No. 90, Approximately 30 Metres West of Albion Bridge' is also Grade II listed (and is within the Castlefield Conservation Area). The list description identifies "*Seventh in series of 9 locks on extension linking former Rochdale Canal basin at Dale Street with Bridgewater Canal basin at Castlefield, all in working order. Forms part of group with Lock No.91 and Lock Keeper's Cottage to west (q.v.), and Albion Street Bridge to east (q.v.)*").

Conclusions

The grouting works are proposed to address lock wall leaks and ensure the proper preservation of the listed building (to stem the creation of voids in the fill below the towpath and behind the stone chamber walling which could compromise the structural integrity of the lock wall), conservative water management, public safety and the prevention of further damage to Lock 90. The PU grouting works have been used successfully by the Trust across the network over a long period of time and avoid the need for more intrusive interventions to historic fabric.

Adrian Dowd MRTPI IHBC

Heritage Advisor, Canal & River Trust