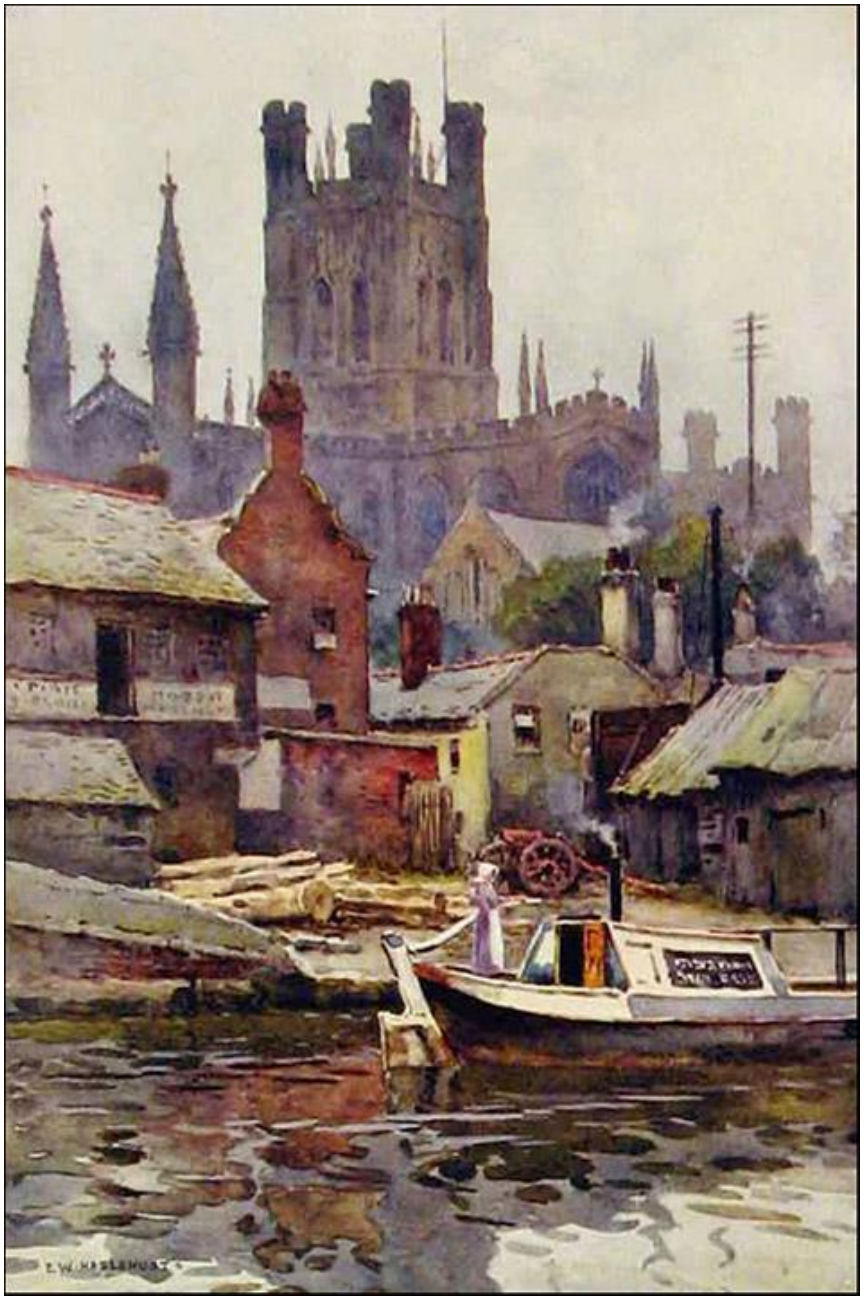
RCHS NW Group Pre-Christmas Lunch: Telford's Wharf, Chester, 5th December 2019 – Canal Walk Notes



E W Hazelhurst: Chester Cathedral from the canal 1927

Chester Station, 1848: Illustration taken from Chester History & Heritage Newsletter Winter 2012.

Tower Wharf area as it was in 1790. The building at the end of the towpath is Telford's Warehouse. The building to the left is the former headquarters of the Shropshire Union Canal Company.

Notes adapted from a description of a canal walk in Chester: www.chester.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Canalside. For use of RCHS members and should not be passed to any third party,

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Shropshire Union Canal: **a brief history**
(*a progressive amalgamation of several separate canal companies, viz. the Chester Canal, the Ellesmere Canal, the Ellesmere &Chester Canal and the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal*)

In 1771 a prospectus was drawn up for a barge canal from the River Dee at Chester to join the Trent & Mersey Canal near Runcorn, later changed to Middlewich. The Act for the Chester Canal received Parliamentary Assent in March 1772. The canal ran from the Dee tidal basin via a five-lock staircase rise near to the City's Northgate. By 1775 it had reached Beeston. Due to the problems with the T&M proprietors and a lack of capital the Chester Canal Company was forced to abandon its line to Middlewich and opted for an alternative line, 16 miles long, to Nantwich which opened in 1779. Without an end-on connection with any other canal and no developing industrial hinterland the Chester Canal became a complete failure and by 1790 it was derelict.

Its fortunes revived in 1793, with the passing of the Act for the Ellesmere Canal, which authorized the building of a waterway to link the Rivers Severn, Dee and Mersey. The Chester Canal proprietors saw the advantage of a connection with this new canal and this was achieved in part in 1797 with the building of the Wirral line from Netherpool (later named Ellesmere Port) on the Mersey to a junction with the Chester Canal at Chester. It made a connection in 1805 with the Ellesmere Canal when the Whitchurch Branch was extended and opened to Hurleston near Nantwich. As the Ellesmere was dependent on the Chester for access to the Mersey, the two companies eventually amalgamated in 1813 to form the Ellesmere & Chester Canal Company. The new company finally obtained powers to make the connection to the Trent & Mersey Canal at Middlewich and this was eventually opened in 1833.

With support from Thomas Telford, the Act for the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal (BLJC) received Royal Assent in 1826. The title of the canal shows that it was for long-distance rather than local traffic. This major waterway from Wolverhampton (Autherley Junction) to Nantwich (junction with the Chester Canal) was eventually opened throughout in 1835 forming the country's last trunk canal. It shortened the distance and reduced the lockage between Liverpool and Birmingham to 69 locks in 94 miles instead of 99 locks in 114 miles by way of the Trent and Mersey. The journey from Manchester to Birmingham was also reduced by 30 locks. It opened a year after Telford's death and just two years before the Grand Junction Railway, affording a rail link from Liverpool and Manchester to Birmingham, was opened a few miles to the east. In 1845 the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Company and the Ellesmere and Chester Canal Companies merged under the title of the latter.

This marriage was short lived and in 1846, to counter the threat from the railways, three Acts were approved whereby the name was changed to the Shropshire Union Railway & Canal Company (SURCC) and powers obtained to convert most of the Company's canal systems into railways. This was quickly identified by the London & North Western Railway as a threat to its own ambitions in the West Midlands. In a strategy aimed at buying out the competition and impeding its railway rivals, the LNWR made an offer in 1846 to lease in perpetuity, the SURCC's canals and railways. The canal company's directors were attracted by the offer and in particular the guarantee of profits from the LNWR. Agreement was reached and by an Act of 1847 the LNWR assumed overall control of the Shropshire Union's affairs. The SURCC became known as the Shropshire Union (SU). The appendix map shows the SU network with its constituent companies and connections with other canals.

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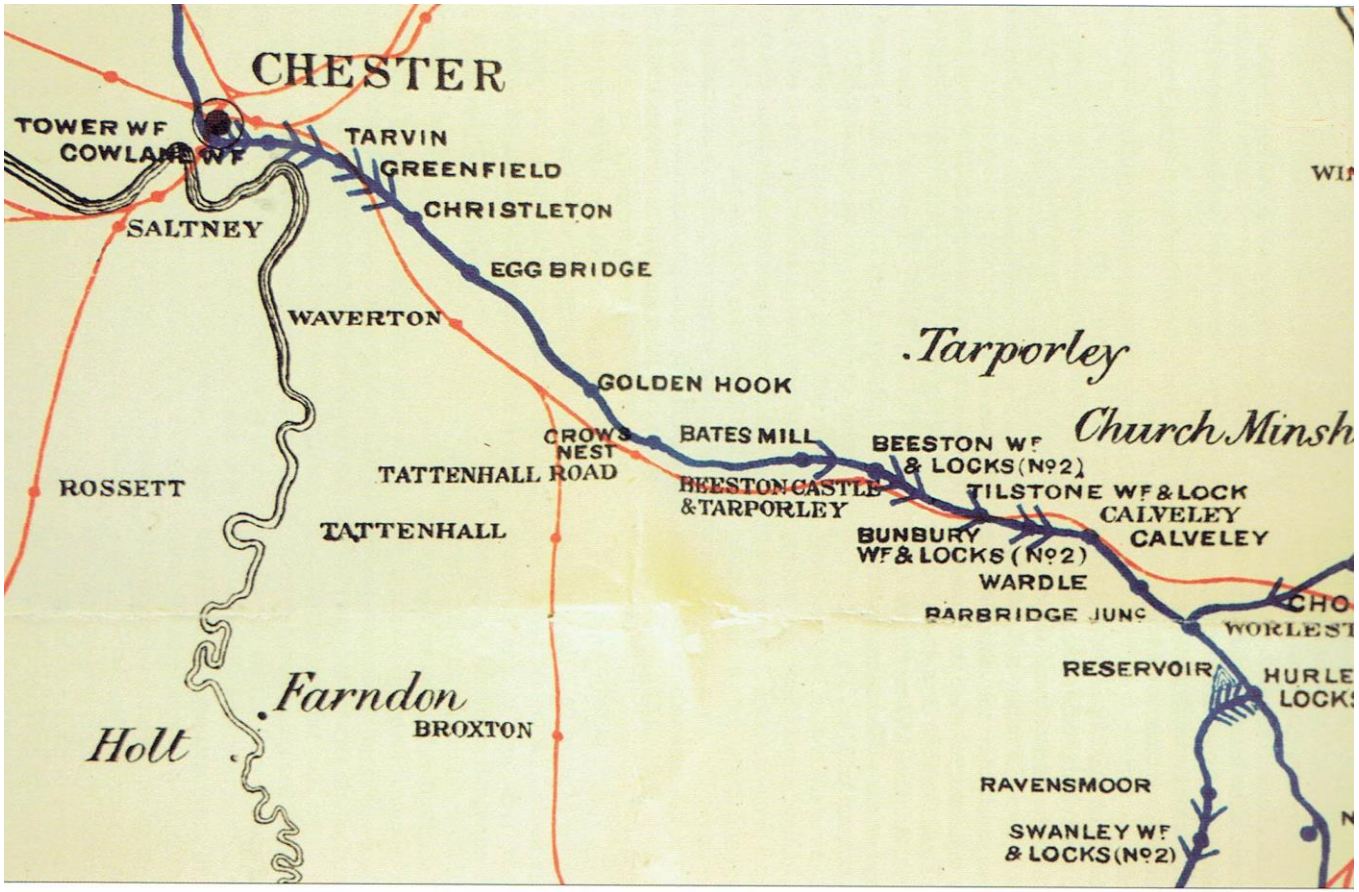
The Llangollen Canal was originally the Llangollen Branch, running NW from Frankton Junction (near Ellesmere) to Llangollen. The Llanymynech Branch, running SW from Frankton Junction, closed below Frankton in 1936, following a breach at Perry Aqueduct. In 1944 much of the Shropshire Union system was closed by the then owners, the London Midland and Scottish Railway (successors to the L&NWR) but the main line survived and also the line to Llangollen which was saved from closure by the need to use it as a water feeder not only for the canal but also to the Hurleston Reservoir from where it is piped for distribution for domestic and industrial use in the mid-Cheshire area. The whole length from Hurleston Junction to Llangollen has been rebranded as the Llangollen Canal.



The Chester Canal, derived from a 1895 map of the Shropshire Union Canal with peripheral detail removed.
Canal & River Trust

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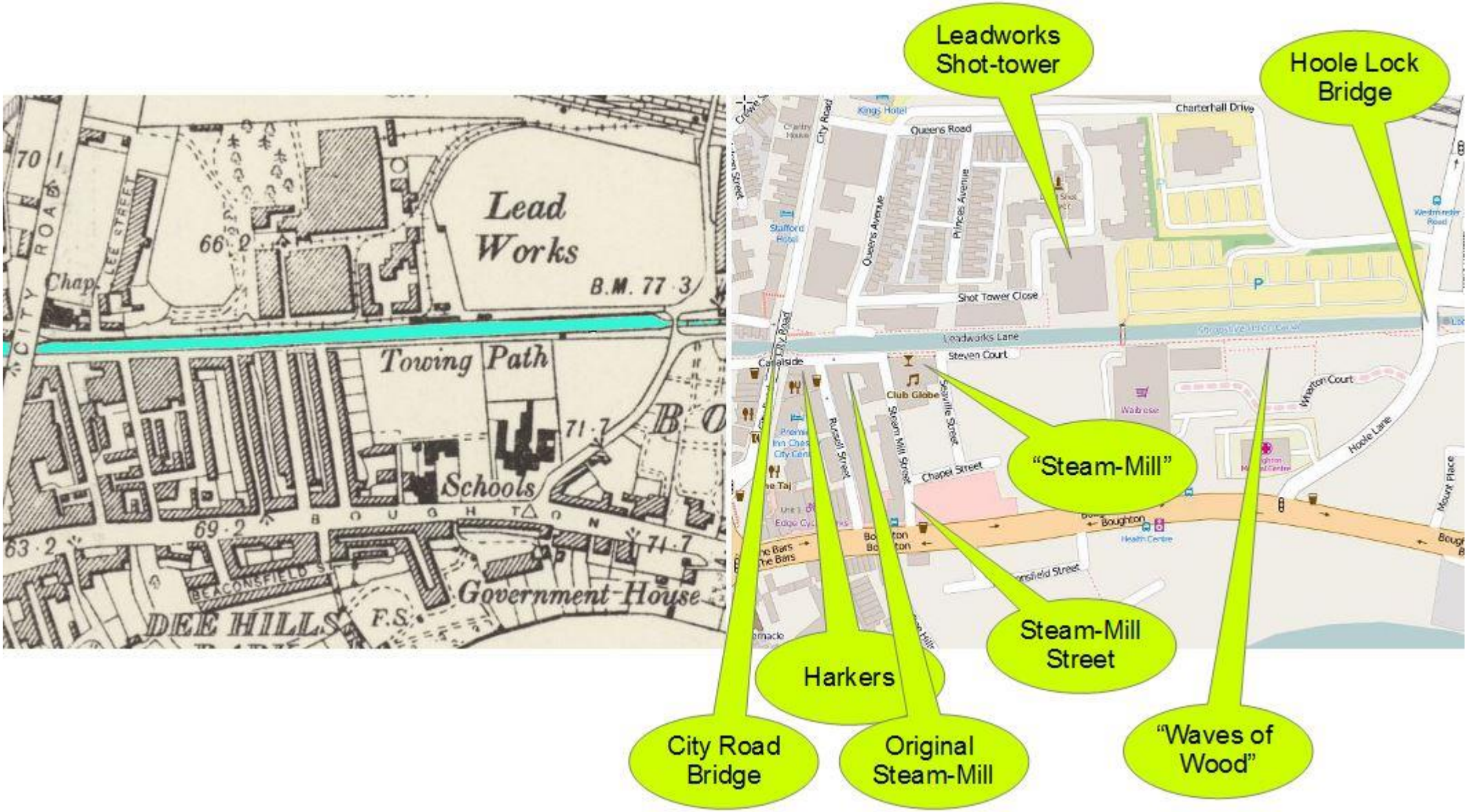
Hoole Lock Bridge to City Road Bridge



The section of the tow-path between Hoole Lock Bridge and City Road Bridge has the best surviving buildings from the Industrial Revolution in Chester.

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After Hoole Lane bridge the canal is flanked by a modern housing development (Wharton Court) which echos the architecture of the warehouses which once lined this section of canal. The wooden sculpture "Waves of Wood" (2008) can be seen over the hedges - it is inspired by canalboat tillers. On 17 July 2009 sixteen flats at Wharton Court were destroyed following an explosion on the first floor: more than thirty firefighters from Chester Fire Station tackled the resulting fire. Waitrose's £13m store has a towpath frontage and was opened in November 2014: the development also included a "new" footbridge over the Shropshire Union Canal - and the path passes a stunningly good place to have Sunday lunch.

Opposite the towpath the landscape is dominated by the 168 foot "shot-tower" of the Leadworks, and on the towpath side by the "Steam Mill". The shot-tower, which dates from around 1800, is the only remaining historic shot-tower in Britain and supplied shot for British muskets during the Napoleonic Wars. William Watts of Bristol (originally listed in his tax returns as a plumber) took out a patent (number 1347, filed 10th December 1782, granted on March 28th, 1783) for his new technique for making lead shot, a process *"for making smallshot perfectly globular in form and without dimples, notches and imperfections which other shot hereto manufactured usually have on their surface"*

Far Left: The Leadworks in 2014, awaiting redevelopment.

Near Left: The "Steam Mill" with the "Miln" livery, probably about 1914. Note the canalside cottages to the left. The actual Steam Mill is the older and lower building to the right of the "Miln" building

According to a legend (of which there are many versions), William Watts, while watching the rain fall, possibly in a dream, noticed that the raindrops formed perfect spheres as they fell. Watt's patented technique, was to allow molten lead, to which the deadly poison arsenic had been added, to be poured from the top of a tower, passing through a griddle to separate it into pellets before landing in a wooden vat of water below. During the fall, the pellets became spherical, and the various sizes obtained could be graded using sieves. Whatever, the truth, Watts' shot was very regular and smooth, unlike the lead shot produced by a moulding process, which had a ridge where the mould parted.

The Leadworks was fortunate that when the railway came to Chester in the 1840's, it passed very close by, so that sidings could be constructed for loading lead and lead products directly onto wagons. The shot-tower was in use until 1986 and the Leadworks as a whole closed in 2001 when production was moved to Sealand Road. The move was in part brought about by environmental concerns about the toxicity of lead. Some theorists have even put forward a convincing case that the increasing crime wave of the 20th Century was brought about by the use of tetraethyl lead in petrol and the decline in crime over the last decade of the 20th century was brought about by the removal of lead from petrol and paints.

From 1841 to 1871 Chester enjoyed thirty economic boom years. The main evidence for this is the extent of migration to the city and population growth, but prosperity was also reflected in a large rise in the number of businesses and in the amount of rebuilding in the city centre. The arrival of the railways reasserted Chester's importance for transport and consolidated its function as a service centre for the region. A limited growth in manufacturing further diversified the economy. In choosing their route through the City, and given the main imperative of creating efficient communication with Ireland through the new port of Holyhead, the railway avoided the City Centre, locating Chester Station in a then outlying area of marshy land known as Flookersbrook after the stream that ran through it. The land was previously only occupied only by market gardens and a single row of cottages.

The prominently marked "Steam Mill" beside the Canal dates from 1834 and was built partly over and partly alongside the original mill, which was the first steam-driven commercial flour mill using Boulton and Watt's rotative engine in 1786 and predates the often-quoted Albion Flour Mills in London by three months - while work at the Albion Mill had started earlier, the Chester engine was the first to be completed. The Albion Mill in London was later gutted by fire, but the shell of the building was the inspiration for William Blake's "dark satanic mills". The interior of the Chester mill was notable for a blown-air seed-transport system upward, and a gravity system downward, which were removed on conversion of the warehouse to offices.

Far Left: The dilapidated condition of the Chester Canal in the 1920s. The Leadworks is on the left and the Steam Mill on the right.

Near Left: Griffith's Mill (now the Mill Hotel), early 20th century

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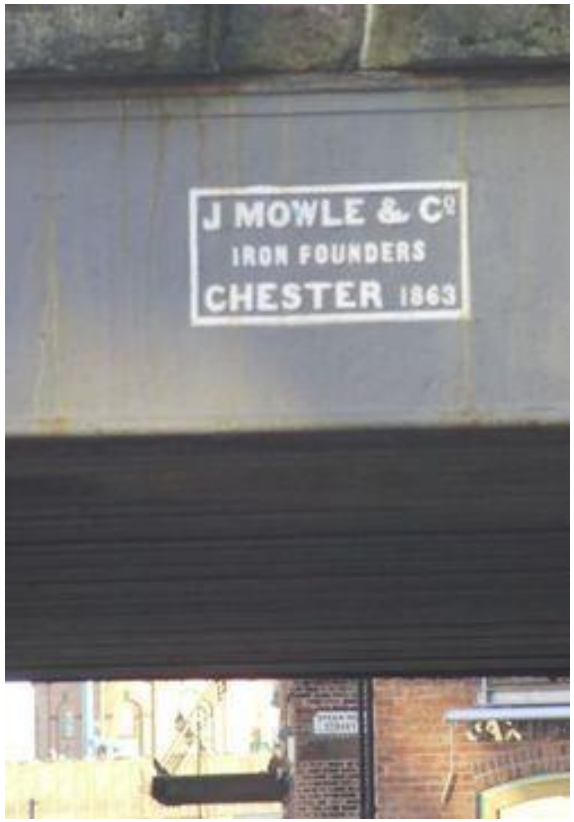
The Old Harkers Arms was a Victorian factory before it was converted into a pub in the 1990's. It takes its name from the fact at one time it had been a canal-boat chandlers cum rope and twine factory run by a Mr Harker. It has had other uses: between 1864 and 1866 William Collinson started a large new factory here housing 'vast amounts of machinery' and employing 250 hands who turned out 2,000-3,000 pairs of boots a week. Collinson did not, however, stay in manufacturing. Around 1875 the factory was taken over by Alfred Bostock & Co., a Stafford shoe firm, but by 1892 Bostocks had left and the premises were occupied by Mr Harker the rope and twine manufacturer.



The adjacent City Road bridge (1863) has ironwork which was produced at the Egerton Iron and Brass Foundry, which was operated by James Mowle & Co. in 1871 and Mowle and Meacock by 1892. The foundry was located between Crewe Street and Albert Street, but had been demolished by 1910 when Egerton Street school was built on the site. Mowle and Co appear to have partly specialised in lead-manufacturing equipment (they were quite close to the Leadworks) as in 1880 they provided a horizontal single-cylinder steam engine driving a lead rolling mill at Sheldon, Bush and Patent Shot Co, Bristol.

Although the land between the south bank of the canal and the gardens to the north of Foregate Street was still fields in the 1770s, development started there before 1800. Queen Street was the first to be built up but the earliest planned development was Bold Square, built c.1814 by Thomas Lunt (1770-1851)

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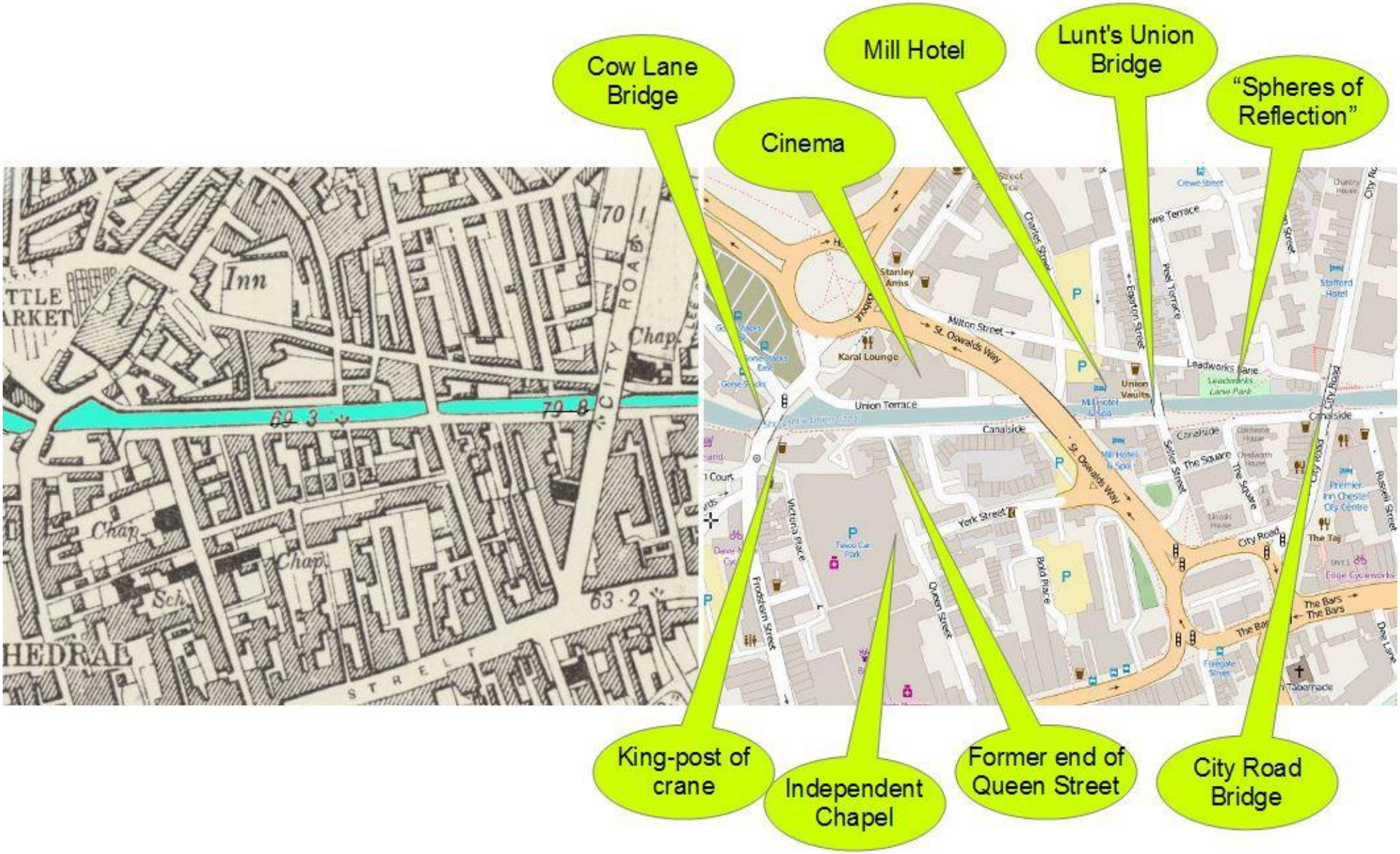
City Road Bridge to Cow Lane Bridge: The major changes between the old and new maps are attributable to the construction of the Inner Ring Road.



Lunt, a foundry owner and builder, built Bold Square (south west of Union Bridge) comprising two terraces of small houses facing each other across a strip of garden. He erected Union Bridge across the canal at his own expense and on the north bank built much of Egerton Street (c.1820), which included a terrace on the west side and five pairs of slightly larger semidetached houses on the east. South of the bridge, Seller Street was developed in 1818-19 by the brewery owner Alderman William Seller.. Lunt also turns up with some practical suggestions in the "Mechanics Magazine" of 1835 (where he suggests the "firewall" for steam vessels):

Union Bridge (Egerton Street is to the right of the picture)

Cow Lane Bridge in the 1880s

Union Bridge (now referred to as Seller Street Bridge) connects Seller Street with Egerton Street. The Egerton's were no friends of the Chester Canal. The original plan for the Chester Canal was for a canal linking the south Cheshire town of Middlewich on the Trent and Mersey Canal with the River Dee at Chester, with a branch to Nantwich, providing a route for produce (including salt) from Nantwich to reach Chester and, beyond it, the sea via the Dee Navigation of 1737. However there were difficulties with the Trent and Mersey Canal Company, and its owner the Duke of Bridgewater (Francis Egerton), who were jealous of their own lucrative traffic and put up a prolonged and robust opposition to any link with the proposed Chester Canal. The overall canal project was seriously undermined by a requirement that the new canal should end at least 100 yards away from the Trent and Mersey Canal at Middlewich, requiring overland portage rather than allowing for a functional junction. As a result, the Middlewich branch of the Chester Canal was not begun, and the branch to Nantwich became the course of the final section of the initial Chester Canal.

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When the canal between Chester and Nantwich opened in 1779, it was a dead end and attracted little traffic other than a moderately successful and fast passenger trade, leading to financial disaster for its backers who at one stage saw the share price in the canal company fall to 1% of the initial value.

Further steam mills along this stretch of canal included the Milton Street ("Wiseman's Cestrian Corn") Mill, built in the 1830's, later a furniture warehouse and then the "Mill Hotel" since 1987. The building retains many of the original iron stanchions employed in its construction. For many years the Mill Hotel has run a floating restaurant on a converted barge - the "L'Eau-T Cuisine". This is wider than a conventional narrowboat and is a "push me pull you" with a rudder at both ends, so it can go back and forth on the canal without turning. The glass bridge crossing the canal was built in 1990.

John McGahey's 1855 "balloon view" shows the area around Cow Lane Bridge. The Cattle Market is the area of pens to the right. The king-post of the crane at the woodyard just to the left of the bridge can still be seen today. Queen Street, in the lower left corner has since been cut in two. The frontage of the Queen Street "Independent Chapel" (1777) can also still be seen today.

The port of Chester declined so drastically that by 1840 Chester's wharves were of little importance, and the city also suffered problems with its road and canal traffic. It was only the coming of the railways and the building of Chester Station at the end of this period that boom returned.

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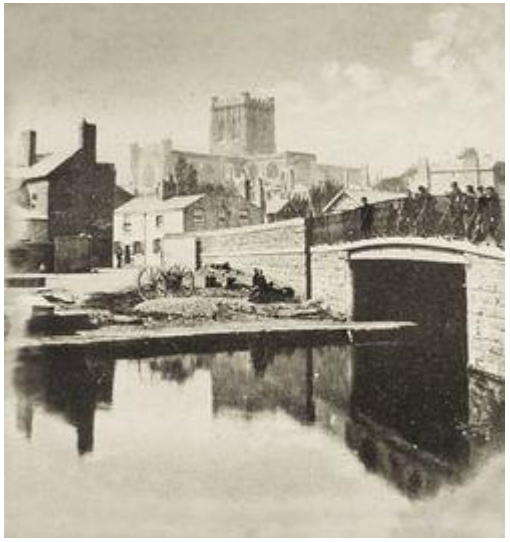
Approaching Cow Lane bridge, the huge and complex brick building opposite the towpath was originally Chester's first 1997-seat "super cinema", the Gaumont Palace which opened on the 2nd March 1931. The cinema finally closed on the 9th December 1961 and is now a "Mecca" Bingo Club. The original frontage is extant, although "defaced" by modern signage.

Cow Lane gets its name from its being the route to the nearby cattle market which was located at "Gorse-stacks". For centuries, livestock were driven in from the surrounding countryside to be sold at Northgate Street and later, after the inhabitants of Northgate Street complained about the noise and smell in the 19thC, just here. The cattle market remained an active and vibrant part of the Newtown area until it was demolished to make way for the Inner Ring Road in the 1960s. From the latter half of the century the Gorse Stacks area has changed significantly: major land-uses have disappeared, radial routes have been bisected and degraded by the inner ring road and the fine-grain street pattern has been replaced by large floorplate uses and open sites. Fortunately the canal towpath is shielded from most views of this modern "improvement".

Cow Lane Bridge to Morgan's Mount

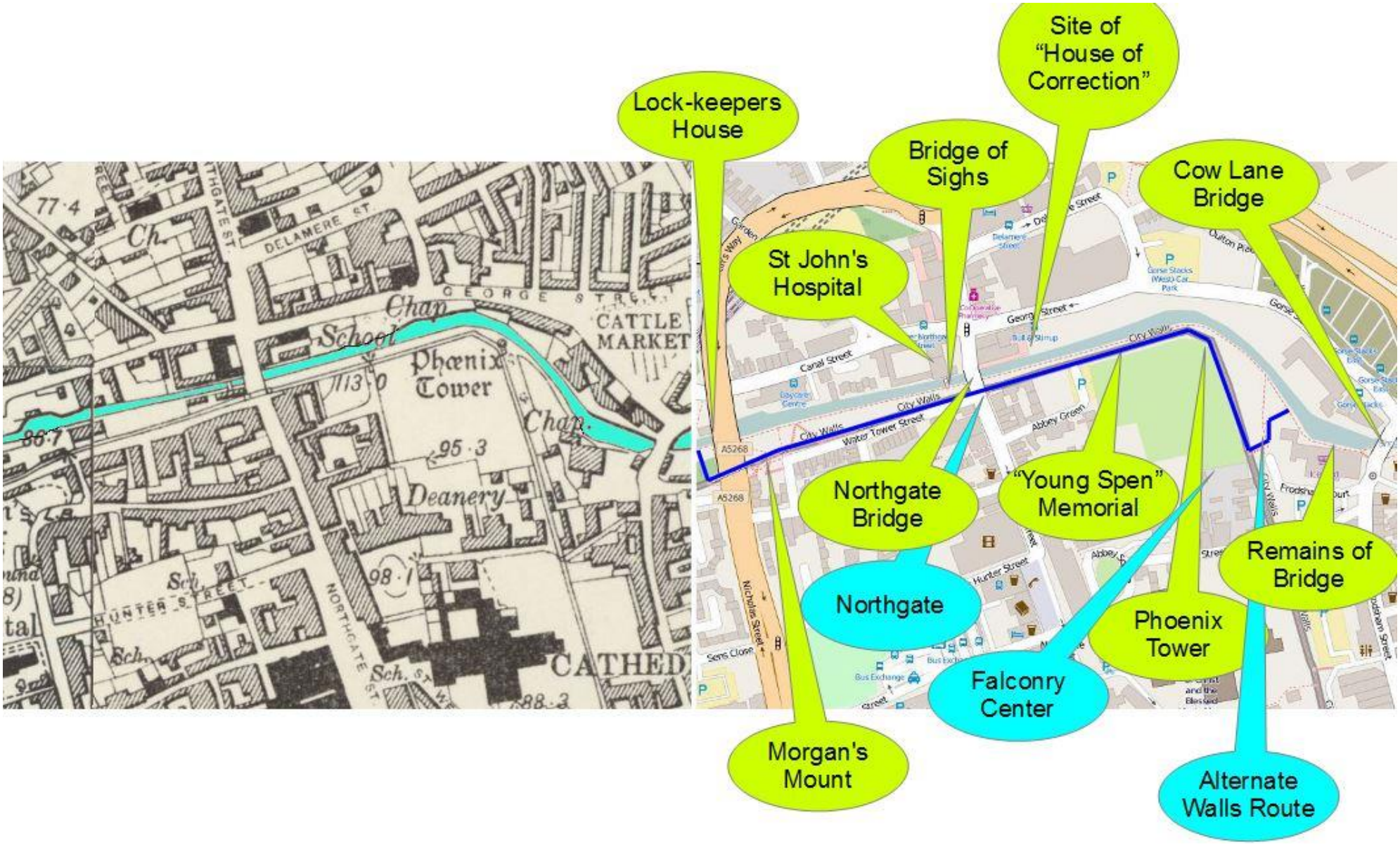


Far Left: An older version of Cow Lane Bridge with the Cathedral in the background.

Near Left: The canal, looking east from Cow Lane Bridge in the early 1900's, showing the short branch crossed by an arch under the tow-path.

Musgrave's wood yard seems to have had its own short branch of the canal for loading and unloading, although all that remains of this today is a short stretch of brickwork that would have formed the abutment of the bridge carrying the tow-path over this branch.

The "Phoenix Tower" (west of Cow Lane Bridge) stands almost on the site of a corner tower of the original layout of Roman Chester. Also known as: "King Charles' Tower", this north-east corner tower was probably built in the 13th Century, was altered in 1613, damaged 1644-6 during the Civil War, largely rebuilt 1658 and during the 18th Century, and repaired thereafter. The inscription on this tower reads: *'KING CHARLES STOOD ON THIS TOWER SEPT 24th 1645 AND SAW HIS ARMY DEFEATED ON ROWTON MOOR'.* After the Phoenix Tower the canal is enters a deep cutting. There was a Roman ditch (fosse) before the wall but the depth of the cutting along the north wall seems excessive. However Simpson's "Walls of Chester" seems to suggest that very little extra work was needed for the construction of the canal cutting. This suggests that hardly any actual rock needed to be cut. However, maybe it is just an "urban legend", although it seems that at one time the plans were for a tunnel to be used for this section of the canal and these were changed when work began. This was the first section of the Chester Canal to be constructed (1774) and its opening was reported in the Chester Courant as something of a gala occasion.


Lock-keepers House
Site of "House of Correction"
Bridge of Sighs
Cow Lane Bridge
St John's Hospital
Northgate Bridge
"Young Spen" Memorial
Remains of Bridge
Northgate
Phoenix Tower
Falconry Center
Morgan's Mount
Alternate Walls Route
DELAMERE ST
GEORGE STREET
CATTLE MARKET
School
Phœnix Tower
Deanery
HUNTER STREET
NORTHGATE ST
CATHED
Canal Street
City Walls
Water Tower Street
Abbey Green
Nicholas Street
A5268

The cutting in which the canal runs reaches its deepest beneath the Northgate. The new Northgate was built in place of the former medieval gatehouse in 1810 by County architect Thomas Harrison for the City Council. There appears to have been a bridge of some sort here since the middle-ages - the City Treasurer's accounts for 1569 contain an entry which reads: "for making the north-gate bridge new, great joists, thick planks £4/3s/2p". The present bridge dates from around c1790 and its construction may have been supervised by Thomas Telford.

Far Left: The Northgate, the Bridge of Sighs and the "Long Cottage" (a former Toll House and possible rope factory), just above the Northgate Locks. The large building with the courtyard is St John's Hospital and the courtyard contains alms houses.

Near Left: The "Bridge of Sighs" spans the deep cutting containing the canal. It is a narrow stone arch which spans the chasm containing the canal. It is a flimsy-looking structure with no railings, and there is now no means of accessing it at either end. The bridge cost £20 to build in 1793, and was designed by Joeseph Turner. It originally went from the Prison to a nearby chapel (in St John's Hospital) and had over-arching iron railings to prevent the prisoners from escaping. During WWII the metal railings were removed to be melted down (like many others) as a source of metal.

Northgate to the Basin

The Bridge of Sighs is bridge number 123H. It is sometimes called the "Bridge of Death" in view of what was coming for some of those who crossed it. It was planned to remove the bridge when Northgate Prison closed in 1807, so it was only ever expected to be a temporary structure, which despite its flimsy construction has now lasted well over 200 years.

The Northgate Staircase Locks were the deepest in Britain when they were built and are unusual in that they are cut out of solid rock. The rise through the locks is 33ft. They are grade II listed and the Historic England entry is: "*Stair of 3 locks. c1790. By Thomas Telford. For the Chester Canal Company. Sandstone. Double gates to each lock, replaced in steel except part of upper gates to upper lock. Footbridge across each lock has iron handrail. Paving and ramps and steps of stone and brick, repaired in concrete. Iron mooring bollards"*

The sandstone here is typical of this part of the River Dee geology and shows signs of "cross-bedding". The Chester basin rock system is part of the "Sherwood Sandstone Group" which extends from Devon northwards as far as Armagh in Ireland and Gretna, Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland. This "New Red Sandstone" was deposited as a result of the erosion of the Variscan mountains in what is now France and transported northwards by a Nile-like river flowing through a vast desert. The Chester Pebble Beds Formation are part of this series and are river-formed sandstones with some conglomerates and siltstones of the early Triassic age.

One of the internationally recognised "reference sections" for these strata is the railway cutting nearby at Northgate stadium, but this same type of rock can be seen in several places around Chester, including here alongside the canal. The formation extends from the south Devon coast northwards, up to the Cumbrian coast on the west side of England, and to the Doncaster area on the east side.

Top Left: A recent photograph of Northgate Locks.

Bottom Left: Northgate Locks in about 1900. The tall chimney-stack is at the long-vanished Northgate Brewery.

The City Walls above this part of the cutting saw a lot of action in the Civil War

The flight of the three Northgate Locks then descends to beneath the railway and ring-road bridges as the cutting in which the canal runs becomes less deep. Northgate Lock Keeper's Cottage dates from c1790 and is believed, along with the locks, to have been designed by Thomas Telford. When constructed, the lock chambers were the largest in Britain, dropping boats down 33 feet. "Staircase locks" with two ajoining locks are quite common, although there are less than 20 in Britain with three or more locks and the Northgate Locks were among the first of these staircase locks to be built. Originally (1770's) there was a staircase of five locks, but these were replaced with the present three deep locks in the 1790's. The original "barrel organ" paddle gear on one of the locks has been retained, although it is not always in use.

The railway from this point heads off on what should have been the course of the Ellesmere canal down to Shrewsbury had not Telford virtually bankrupted the Ellesmere Canal Company building his enormous Pontcysyllte Aqueduct leaving an embarrasing gap in the middle of the canal and no money to finish it. The compromise solution was to use the, at that time quite ruinous, Chester Canal to link the sourthern and northern sections of the Ellesmere canal rather than build the final Ruabon-Wrexham-Chester section of that canal. It isn't clear how Telford proposed to cross the River Dee in the 1790's with the original route of the Ellesmere canal: when the Grosvenor Bridge was built in 1827-33 it required the world's largest single masonry arch so that ships could pass beneath. Perhaps Telford would simply have boats "sail" between a pair of tidal locks and/or basins on either side of the river, either with a swing bridge for horses or a chain tow to get the unpowered narrowboats across the river.

Along the City Walls above the canal are Morgan's Mount and the Goblin Tower called in Henry VIII's reign, Dille's Tower and now generally known by the name of Pemberton's Parlour. The road bridge just past Morgans Mount marks the corner of the walls of Roman Chester, and from here on the walls are the extension constructed by Æthelflæd "Lady of the Mercians" (d. 12 June 918). She was the eldest daughter of Alfred the Great, king of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex, and his queen, Ealhswith. Æthelflæd was born at the height of the Viking invasions of England. Her father married her to Æthelred, Lord of the Mercians. After his death in 911, she ruled in his place. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle referred to her as the *Myrcna hlæfdige*, "Lady of the Mercians".

The Branch to the Dee

Opposite the Water Tower, where a newish development of apartments can now be found, the canal tow-path was made in part of the gravestones of those who had lived and died on the water. These stones and any stories they could have told are now gone. The canal was linked directly to the River Dee by a tidal basin. In 1801 the lock was constructed so that craft in the basin could remain afloat when the River Dee was at low tide. The basin was partly filled in around 1950, burying over thirty often part or fully submerged boats which had been laid-up and abandoned there. It is now known as "Earl's Port" after the name of one of the submerged and buried boats - Earl. The modern lock at the riverward end of the Earl's Port dates from the 1960's and was constructed at the same time that a swing bridge between the location of the lock and the River Dee was replaced with a permanent concrete bridge. Slightly to the east of the Earl's Port is an old row of small terraced houses: the first "Social Housing" (Council houses) to be built in Chester (1904), although Chester had a history of "Alms houses" going back centuries.

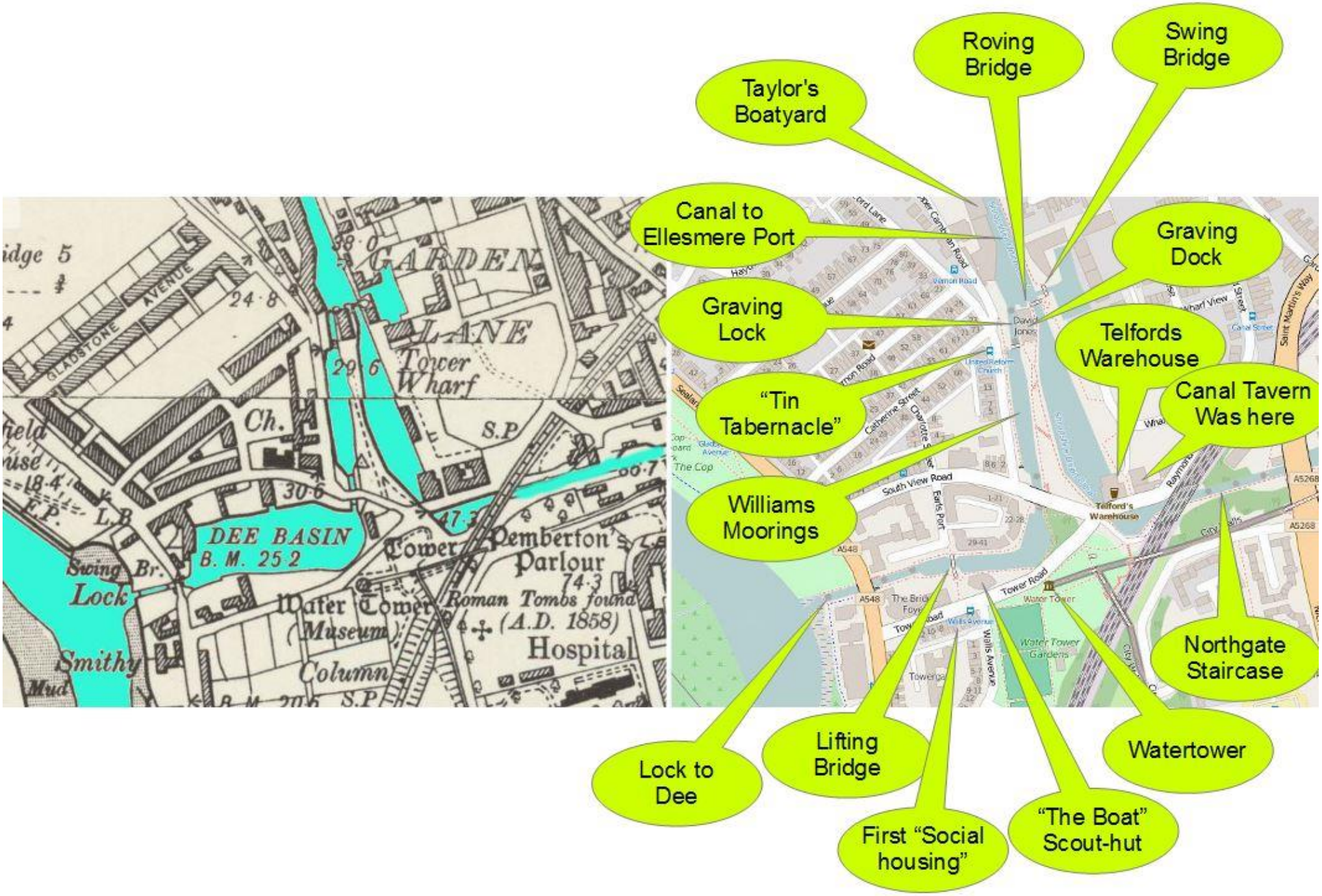
When the council decided to re-develop the Earl's Port area, there was a rather run-down scout hut standing on the site, so to clear the way for re-development the council offered to build a new scout hut, a couple of hundred metres away from where the old one stood. In keeping with the general nautical theme of the area the building has been constructed to look like "Noah's Ark". At the same time (1998) the "Dutch Style" lifting bridge was constructed. This modern addition is the only lifting bridge on the Chester Canal.

The locks on the Dee Branch do not have by-washes, so excess water simply pours over the tops of the gates. In the early 19th Century the canal company did not like the loss of water from the canal system that use of the river lock caused, as well as the loss of income from boats not using the "main line" so they imposed a higher toll for those boats which used the Dee Branch. In 1827, traders from Chester actually refused to use the Dee Branch for six months in protest (which got them nowhere). While boats were often left to sit and rot in the Dee Branch as the canal declined, it was still used, with some of the last traffic being steel-carrying barges taking cargo from the John Summers steelworks at Shotton to the "Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company" at Ellesmere Port. The Tidal Lock was also used by riverboats going to Taylor's boatyard for maintenance work and having their bottom's scraped in the Graving Dock.

Some of the corrugated iron may have been used to build the nearby example of a "Tin Tabernacle". The "Little Tin Chapel", in Whipcord Lane, otherwise known as the "Sealand Road United Reformed Church", was the city's only "tin" chapel. This "flat-pack" church held its final service in May 2011, following which it was put up for auction in a fairly sorry state, and has since been converted into a holiday let. Built in 1909, it was supposed to be a temporary structure, but has lasted for over 100 years. Chester's "Tin Tabernacle" provided a place for the Rev Jesse Salt to preach at the waterborne community that passed by, and had a schoolroom for the children of the bargees. The reference to "tin" is of course quite spurious as the corrugated iron from which the chapel was built was coated with zinc rather than tin. William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, wrote a pamphlet in 1890 decrying the construction of corrugated iron buildings "that were spreading like a pestilence over the country".

Currently the Dee Branch Canal bottom lock is not operational due to the ruinous state of the lock gates, the presence of "stop boards" and silting, so it is not possible to take a boat between the River Dee and the canal. If boats could access the Dee then they can pass the weir at the Old Dee Bridge by a lock built-into the weir and travel upstream for a considerable distance. Walking out onto the riverfront at this point one can see the "Old Port" (Crane Wharf) upstream and just downstream Wilcox point where the River Dee turns into the "New Cut", a "canalised" section of the river which runs as far as Connah's Quay through land reclaimed from the Dee estuary. The Dee Coastal Path follows the river downstream and starts just a little way below the Tidal Lock, where Flookersbrook (that rose near Chemistry Lock and flowed through what is now the site of Chester Station) finally empties into the Dee.

Hunter's map of c1782 shows the "Canal to Middlewich" and has some interesting features. First, the mention of Middlewich, as the canal had opened to Nantwich in 1779 and the branch to Middlewich was not completed until the 1830's due to the resistance of the Trent and Mersey Canal Company. Second, the map shows the original five locks at Northgate Staircase, but does not show the "Earl's Port". The canal just seems to get slightly wider before its connection with the River Dee. Third there is what appears to be a large winding hole by the Phoenix Tower. This may be where the course of the original plans was altered to rub along the City Walls, whereas an earlier proposal was for the canal to run further from the walls through a series of stone quarries to the north of the City and then along what is now the line of the railway.


Roving Bridge
Swing Bridge
Taylor's Boatyard
Canal to Ellesmere Port
Graving Dock
Graving Lock
Telfords Warehouse
"Tin Tabernacle"
Canal Tavern Was here
Williams Moorings
Northgate Staircase
Lock to Dee
Lifting Bridge
Watertower
First "Social housing"
"The Boat" Scout-hut
GARDEN
LANE
Tower Wharf
DEE BASIN
B. M. 25·2
Swing Br.
Lock
Smithy
Mud
Water Tower
(Museum)
Pemberton Parlour
Roman Tombs found (A.D. 1858)
Hospital
Column
Ch.
S.P
GLADSTONE AVENUE
South View Road
Tower Road
Water Tower Gardens
Telford's Warehouse

RCHS NW Group Pre-Christmas Lunch: Telford's Wharf, Chester, 5th December 2019 – Canal Walk Notes

Basin and Boatyard

Taylor's Boatyard forms part of Chester's inland port, known as 'Tower Wharf', at the once busy junction of the Chester Canal with the River Dee and the Wirral Line. The wharf was a major cargo terminal, utilising narrowboats and larger 'Mersey Flats', and was also a starting point for passengers travelling to Liverpool. Many of the wharf's buildings and features have since been lost or built upon. Originally the boatyard was larger with a slipway building, travelling crane, and rack saw structures all located at the north end of the present site, but these have since been demolished, along with part of the boundary wall. The boatyard has been added to, and altered, incrementally since its original construction in keeping with the varying trade and development of boatyards and their work, with the flat shed added in the late-C19 (c1892-3), along with the carpenter's shed, paint shed and stores, and erection of the dry dock/graving dock's canopy was approved in 1888.

Taylor's Boatyard at Tower Wharf was for many years run by David Jones, (67 in 2009), who repaired craft there for 35 years. Parts of the yard date from the 1840s, and it is said to be "possibly the best surviving example" of an historic boat-building yard. In its commercial heyday, the boatyard employed more than 200 people, servicing the huge fleet of canal company working vessels. It comprises a workshop, former saw mill building, former blacksmith's workshop, covered slipway and dry dock.

The yard has been known as Taylor's Boatyard since it was leased by Joseph Harry Taylor in 1921 when the Shropshire Union Railway & Canal Company ceased carrying. Prior to 1921, Taylors had a yard on the Dee Basin alongside South View Road. The Dee Basin Slipways were established by Joseph Harry Taylor about 1913. Initially, Taylors operated the Graving Dock, and one of the 90 ft bays - the other half was operated by a Mr Horne, Canal Carrier of Cambrian Road. They also worked out of what was known as "Dandy's Shed". Dandy's Shed was removed when the North Basin was excavated. Taylor's became very well known to the post-war pleasure boat fraternity as the builders of a well-respected range of elegant mahogany canal cruisers in the 1950s and '60s. Much of their other work was maintaining river cruisers and fishing boats from the Dee.

The Taylor family owned and ran the yard until 1972. Bithells Boats then took over the yard for two years before David Jones leased the proprty in 1974. In 2005 there was disappointment over the failure of a Lottery bid which would have restored the yard. It had been supported by waterway enthusiasts including Mr Taylor's grandson Geoff Taylor, who lives in nearby Cambrian View. Some of the older photographs in the main source document for these notes (www.chester.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Canalside) are reproductions of the informative signage used along the canal and are from Mr Taylor's collection. Taylor's Boatyard still operates under that name, although the Taylor family no-longer have a share in the business. (Geoff Taylor is scheduled to give a talk to the NW Group on 10th October 2020.)

The Junction Facilities

At the side of the upper basin is a building which appears to have a roof but no walls. This is actually a covered dry-dock for narrow-boats and can accommodate two boats at once, allowing the hulls of the boats to be maintained. The dry dock at Tower Wharf (known as the "Graving Dock") is believed to date from 1798, potentially making it the oldest surviving example of its kind on the canal system. Although Pevsner assigns a date of 1798 to the Graving

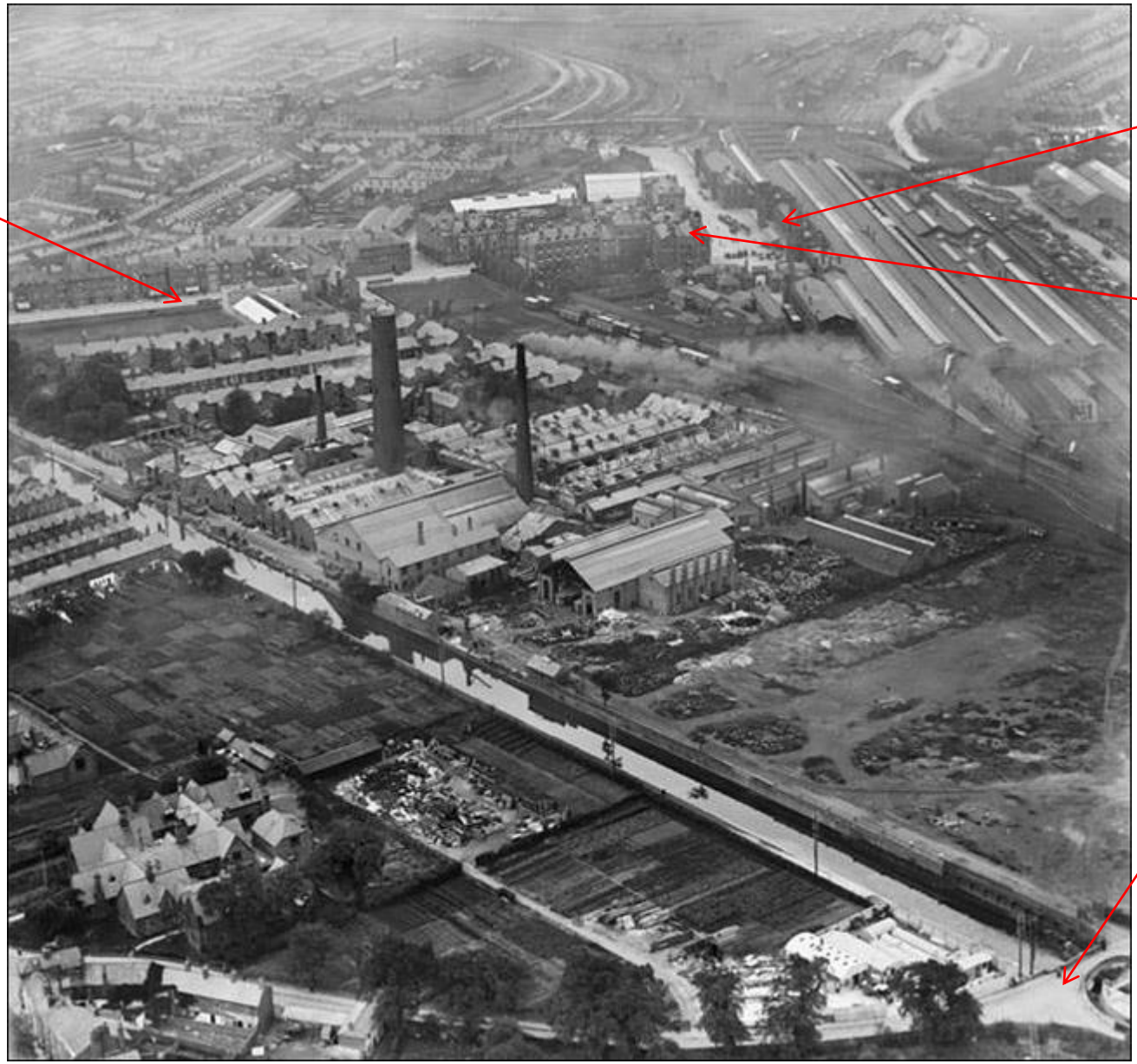
Dock, it is believed that it dates to the mid-C19 (it is not depicted on an historic map dating to 1833, but is depicted on the tithe map of 1847). The Dock, which can accommodate a single wide beam boat placed centrally (a 14-foot "Mersey Flat") or two narrowboats side by side, has a brick floor and brick lower walls, with large sandstone blocks forming the upper parts of the side walls and the curved end walls. A pair of lock gates are situated at the north end of the dock, whilst at the south end is a flight of twelve brick steps with stone treads that lead down onto the dock floor, which incorporates a brick drainage channel that runs around the edge. Timber bearers for the boats are located on the floor, and set to the south-west corner of the dock is a steel shutter leading to a sluiceway.

The Graving Dock, c1920.

Graving Lock on Canal Link to River Dee

This lock was constructed during the first half of the nineteenth century, to connect Chester's inland port, known as 'Tower Wharf' with the Dee branch (and hence the River Dee). The wharf was a major cargo terminal, utilising narrowboats and larger 'Mersey Flats', and was also a starting point for passengers travelling to Liverpool. The lock is Grade II-listed (Historic England List Entry Number: 1375932).

The buildings behind the lock formed Taylor's Boatyard which was established in the late-1840s/1850s by the Shropshire Union Railways & Canal Company as their major boat building and repair yard, and the majority of the yard's surviving buildings are believed to have been constructed at this time. It is a Grade II listed building (Historic England List Entry Number: 1375715).



An aerial view of the Chester Leadworks taken in 1920. Note the quantity of open land still surrounding the works and canal at this late date..