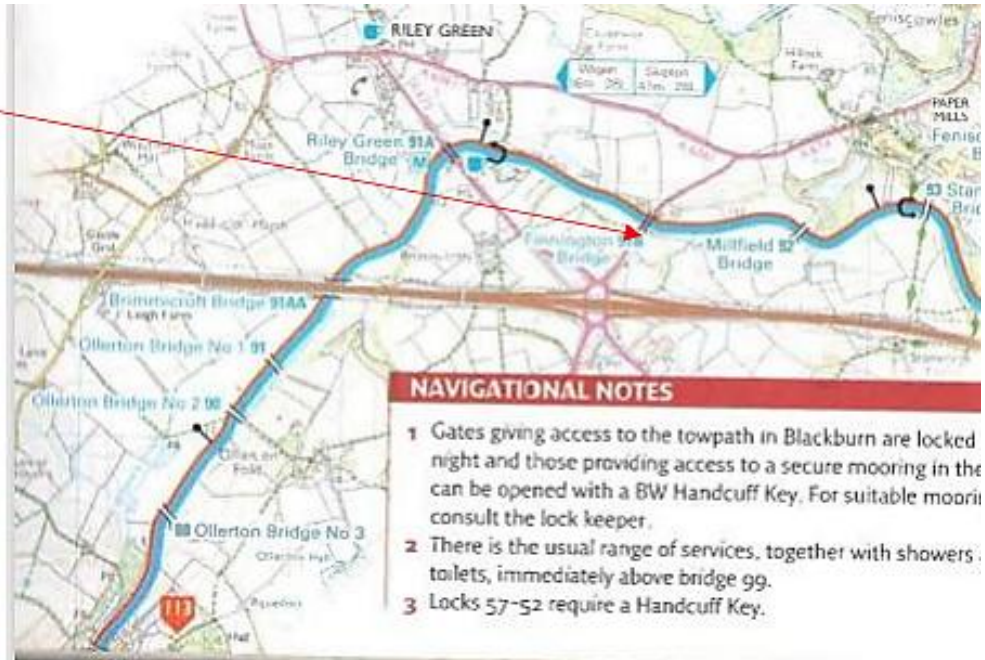


Walking the Leeds & Liverpool Canal between Feniscowles and Johnson's Hillock

The L&L is 127 miles in length, crossing the Pennines with 91 locks on the main line. Notable sites on this walk on part of the final (1816) section of the canal from Finnington Lane Bridge to Moss Lane Bridge include Withnell Fold and the flight of 7 locks at Johnson's Hillock. We shall also be able to consider a rural gasworks and part of the route of the Thirlmere Aqueduct, including a short section where it is above ground. The suggested location for a packed lunch is at the site of the stocks in Withnell Fold. Liquid refreshments will be available at Top Lock Inn (Bridge 82).

Bridge 91B (Finnington Lane)
Start of Walk



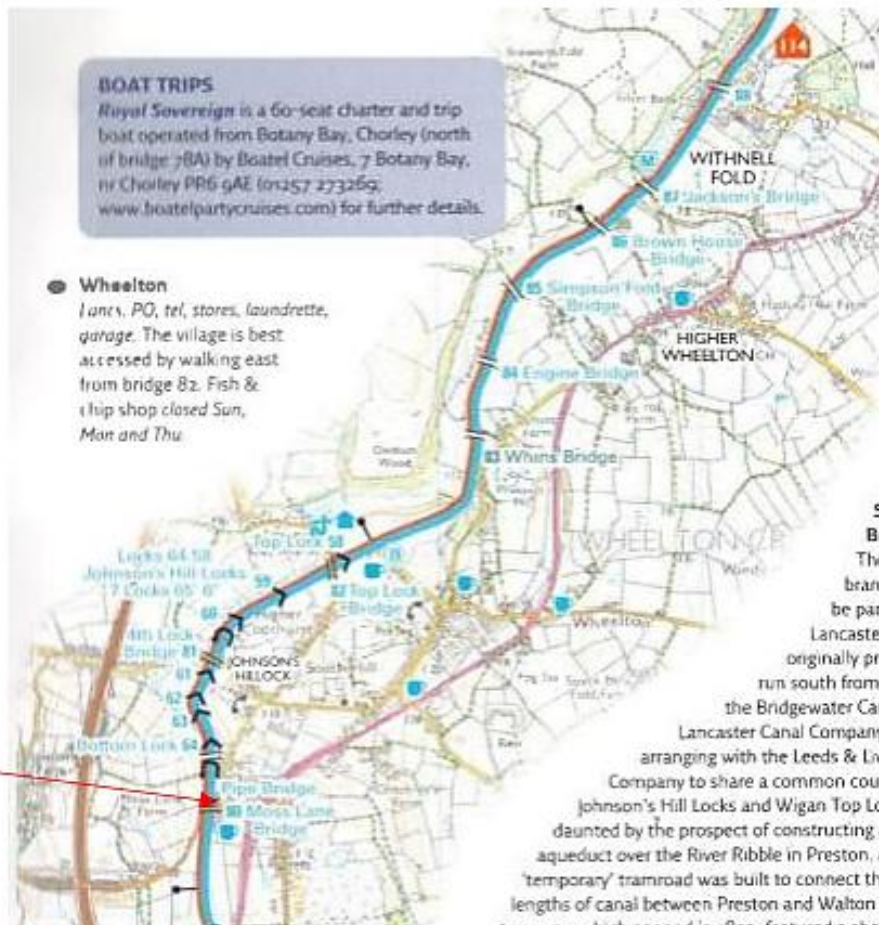
BOAT TRIPS

Royal Sovereign is a 60-seat charter and trip boat operated from Botany Bay, Chorley (north of bridge 78A) by Boatel Cruises, 7 Botany Bay, nr Chorley PR6 6AE (01257 273269; www.boatelcruises.com) for further details.

Wheulton

Lunch, PO, tel, stores, laundrette, garage. The village is best accessed by walking east from bridge 82. Fish & chip shop closed Sun, Mon and Thu.

Bridge 80 (Moss Lane)
Walk finishes at east end of Moss Lane





Route of Thirlmere Aqueduct Crossing L&L Canal near Riley Green - 25" OS Map (nls.uk)

The alignment of the Thirlmere Aqueduct is shown as a dotted line running SE from top of the map (above Whave's Brook) to the Valve House (lower centre) and then SW to cross Whave's Lane at the bottom of the map.

The M65 runs east-west across the top of the map. Bridge 91AA is just off the map.

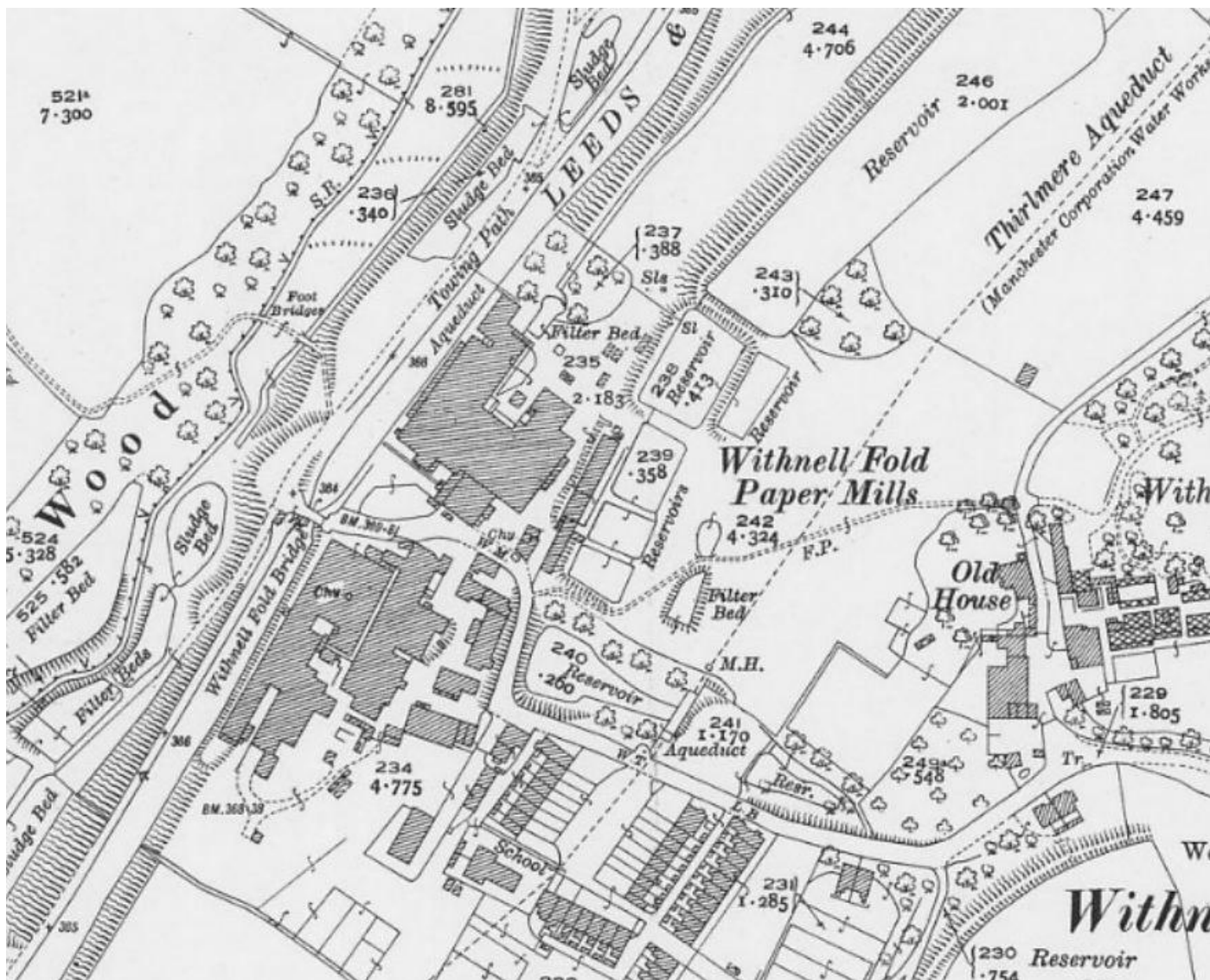
The two Whave's Bridges, from north to south, are now called Bridge 91 (Ollerton Bridge No 1) and Bridge 90 (Ollerton Bridge No 2).

The **Thirlmere Aqueduct** is a 95.9-mile-long (154.3-kilometre-long) pioneering section of water supply system in England, built by the Manchester Corporation Water Works between 1890 and 1925. Often incorrectly thought of as one of the longest tunnels in the world, the aqueduct's tunnel section is not continuous.

The aqueduct was built to carry approximately 55,000,000 imperial gallons (250,000 m³) per day of water from Thirlmere Reservoir to Manchester. The construction of the reservoir and aqueduct was authorised by the Manchester Waterworks Act of Parliament. The first phase was completed in 1897 and, for the pipeline sections, subsequent phases were completed in 1925. The first water to arrive in Manchester from the Lake District was marked with an official ceremony on 13 October 1894.

In 1874 John Frederick Bateman advised Manchester Corporation that the increasing demand for water, then averaging 18,000,000 imperial gallons (82,000 m³) per day, would soon exhaust the available supply from Longdendale. His first recommendation was to source water from Ullswater, but it was eventually decided to seek powers to acquire Thirlmere and build a dam there. In the face of local opposition^[1] the project received Royal Assent in 1879. Under this act Manchester was granted priority of right to 25 imperial gallons (110 L) per person per day.

The route of the reservoir passes through Lancashire and then enters Manchester through Salford. It has been mapped on OpenStreetMap: <https://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/7937446>



25" OS Map (1927, nls.uk)

Withnell Fold (extract from 'Lancashire Life' - date unknown)

"Circumstances, care, and community spirit have preserved the model village at the heart of Withnell Fold as well as any such settlement in the county. And it is worth keeping, as a reminder that not every Victorian factory owner was heartless, and because it is a very lovely spot known to few outsiders.

'Standing at the stocks looking across the village square, if you take away the cars, and the occasional porch, it could be 1850.

'Externally, the houses are pretty much the same as when they were built,' says Boyd Harris, a local historian whose boyhood was spent here.

Both the paper-mill and the village were the creation of Thomas Blinkhorn Parke, the son of a cotton magnate, just 19 when building began in 1843. 'He was a Methodist and a sympathetic boss to his workers. All the cottages had an outside earth-closet toilet, all had a front garden, and it's very leafy and green,' Boyd says. 'The money he paid his workers was about double the national average, and the women in the 1840s were paid as much as men were elsewhere.'

A lane, the part through the village still cobbled, joins Withnell Fold to the A674 quarter of a mile up the hill, but when the village was built it was the Leeds-Liverpool Canal that brought rags and coal in and shipped paper out. The canal is quieter now, these days the graceful bridges of Parke's era passed by leisure craft not barges.

The stone cottages Thomas built remain, but most of the mill was demolished in the 1970s. One chimney from an 1854 addition to the factory was saved from demolition and still dominates the skyline and, in keeping with the rest of the place, it is in fine condition, lovingly re-pointed within the last few years.

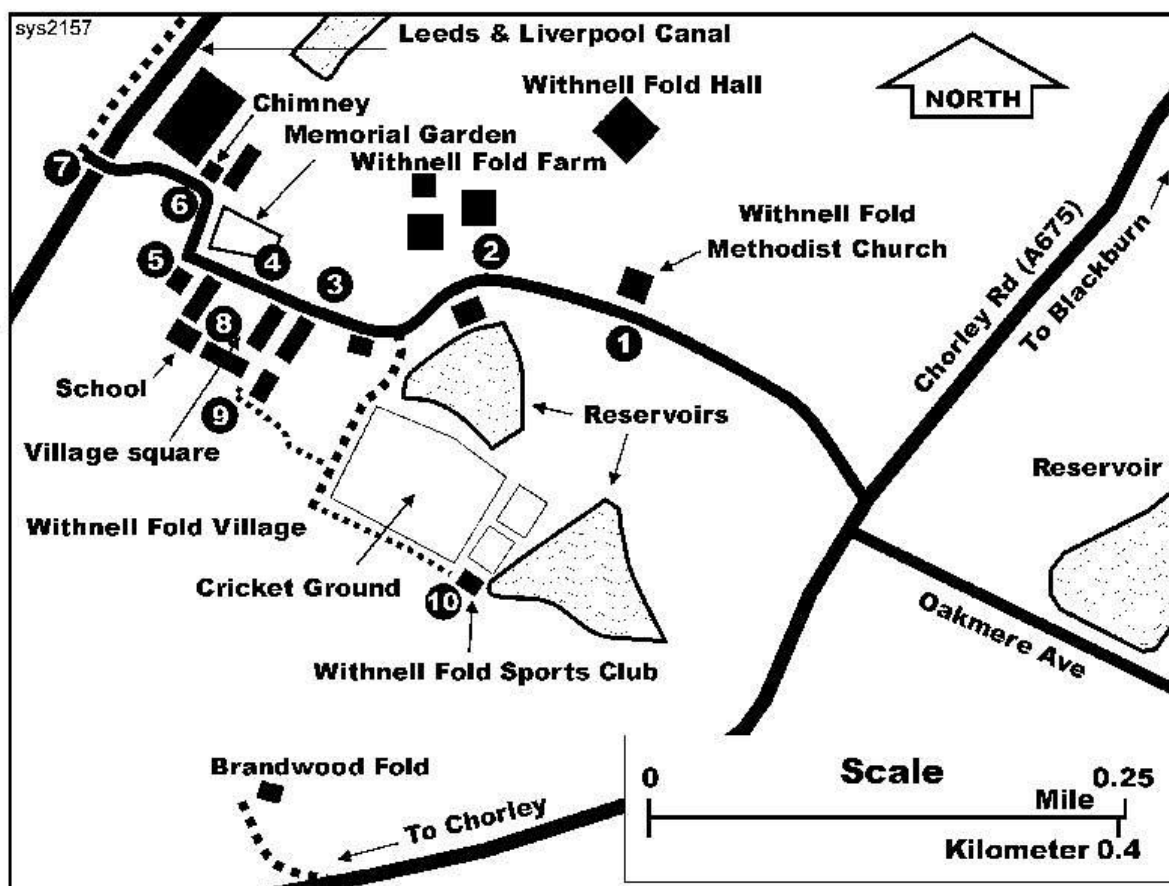
Many of the buildings that served the plant still stand, however, converted now to very desirable residences. 'The social centre of the village since 1890 was the old reading room, built by Thomas's son Herbert. They had all the current newspapers, a billiard table and upstairs there was a sprung dance-floor - my parents came to dances here in the 1930s. And sometimes Kathleen Ferrier played piano here,' adds Boyd. In fact, she married Bert Wilson who lived at 9 Withnell Fold, now a very substantial family home.

Boyd points out other homes that once fulfilled different roles - a couple of the old stable blocks that housed the horses used to haul goods to and from the canal; the old mill offices and laboratory where his father worked; the mill canteen. Careful development has occurred around the Victorian village, but feels organically linked to it. Parke Mews follows the line of one part of the mill and some large and elegant 1960s houses back onto one of the mill lodges.

The people have changed, but the spirit remains. 'Everybody still knows everybody else, people stop and talk. Quite large groups do organised rambles together, then go back to the cricket club for tea and cake,' says Boyd. The playing fields that date from 1904 still serve the village for cricket, tennis and for, the last few decades at least, a place for a social drink - Methodist Blinkhorn Parke would not have approved.

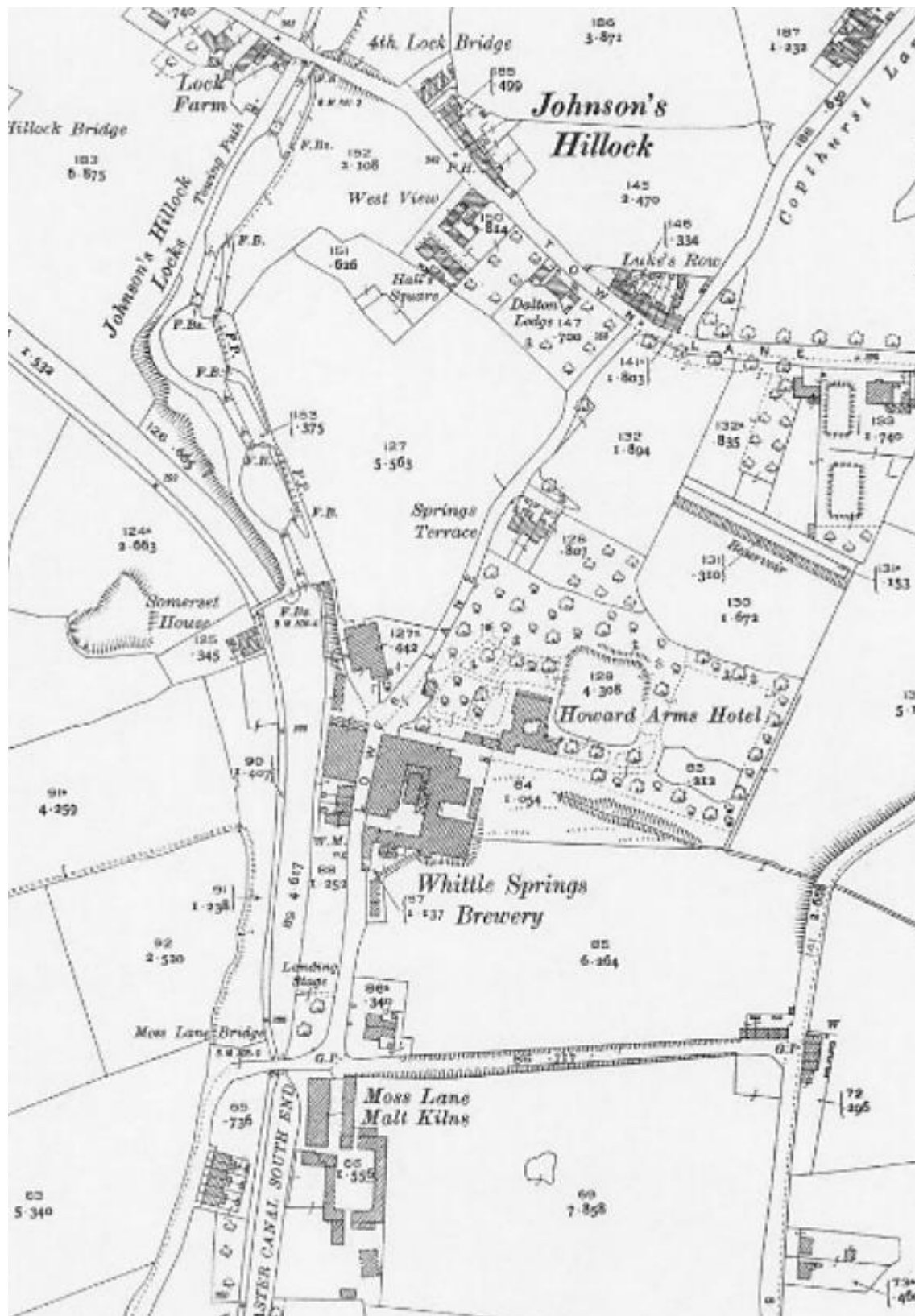
'In 1966, standing on the cobbled roadway up from the mill at shift change, we'd have been trampled,' recalls Boyd: 'The mill emptied, a sea of black as they all shot up to the bus stop. Now the big danger is the school run! It's a very popular school.' A very popular place to live too. 'When they auctioned off the houses after the closure they almost gave them away,' says Boyd. 'One of the larger end houses - they were for department heads - went for £500.'

For memories of living in Withnell Forge, click <http://www.boydharris.co.uk/sys1693.htm>



The suggested location for lunch is at the stocks (#3 on map above)

Construction of the L&L began in 1770, with first section of the canal being opened from Bingley to Skipton in 1773. The canal was built in sections from both east and west, with delays attributable to a war with France. There were several proposals for the route over the Pennines from Parbold with the final decision being for a (southerly) route through Wigan, Blackburn and Burnley. Even then, the route west of Blackburn was the subject of much debate. Common sense prevailed and the Leeds and Liverpool connected with the Lancaster Canal between Aspull and Johnson's Hillock – just north of Moss Lane Bridge on the Lancaster Canal. The main line of the L&L was thus completed in 1816 – some 46 years after the first sod was cut.





Thirlmere Aqueduct viewed from canal bridge 87, near Higher Wheelton (By Charles Rawding, CC BY-SA 2.0)



Moss Lane Bridge looking north (www.canalwalking.co.uk)

These notes have been prepared for the use of RCHS members and friends joining a walk along the Leeds & Liverpool Canal on 27th June 2024. They should not be passed, in full or in part, to any third party or retained in any storage facility, physical or electronic, belonging to any person, society or any other body without the written permission of the author (rogerbrice1504@icloud.com).



Withnell Fold from the south-west with gas works to the north (1947)



Withnell Fold Paper Mills (1947)

Roger Brice, 26th June 2024

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