The River Mersey: Walk the Story



Funded by UK Government

Mersey Rivers Trust

GROUNDWORK

STOCKPORT METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

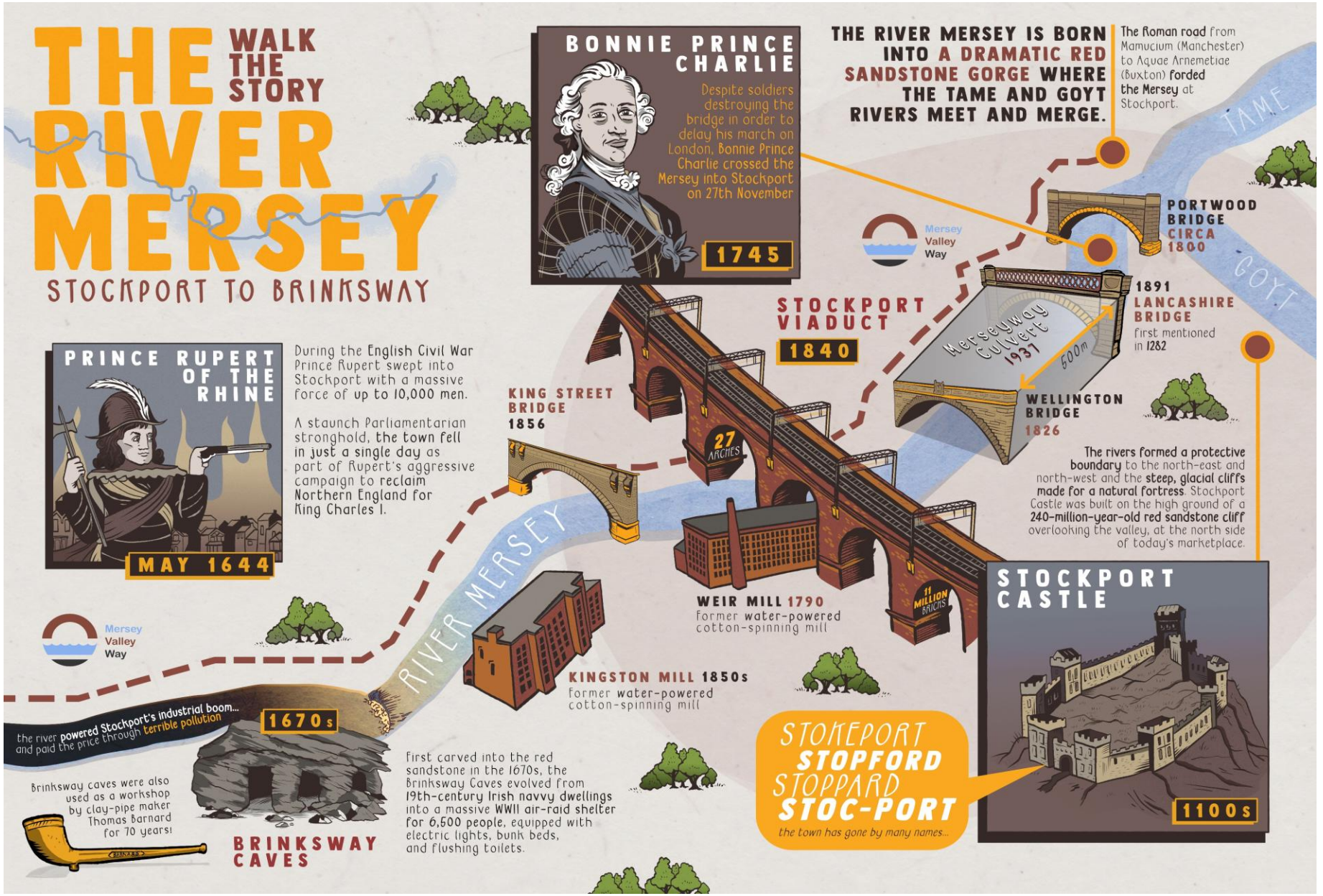
City of Trees

The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire Manchester & North Merseyside

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

TCV The Conservation Volunteers


THE RIVER MERSEY
WALK THE STORY
STOCKPORT TO BRINKSWAY
BONNIE PRINCE CHARLIE
Despite soldiers destroying the bridge in order to delay his march on London, Bonnie Prince Charlie crossed the Mersey into Stockport on 27th November
1745
THE RIVER MERSEY IS BORN INTO A DRAMATIC RED SANDSTONE GORGE WHERE THE TAME AND GOYT RIVERS MEET AND MERGE.
The Roman road from Mamucium (Manchester) to Aquae Arnemetiae (Buxton) forded the Mersey at Stockport.
TAME
GOYT
PORTWOOD BRIDGE CIRCA 1800
Mersey Valley Way
1891 LANCASHIRE BRIDGE
first mentioned in 1282
Merseyway Culvert 1937
500m
WELLINGTON BRIDGE 1826
STOCKPORT VIADUCT
1840
27 ARCHES
11 MILLION BRICKS
KING STREET BRIDGE 1856
PRINCE RUPERT OF THE RHINE
MAY 1644
During the English Civil War Prince Rupert swept into Stockport with a massive force of up to 10,000 men.
A staunch Parliamentarian stronghold, the town fell in just a single day as part of Rupert's aggressive campaign to reclaim Northern England for King Charles I.
The rivers formed a protective boundary to the north-east and north-west and the steep, glacial cliffs made for a natural fortress. Stockport Castle was built on the high ground of a 240-million-year-old red sandstone cliff overlooking the valley, at the north side of today's marketplace.
STOCKPORT CASTLE
1100s
RIVER MERSEY
WEIR MILL 1790
former water-powered cotton-spinning mill
KINGSTON MILL 1850s
former water-powered cotton-spinning mill
Mersey Valley Way
the river powered Stockport's industrial boom... and paid the price through terrible pollution
1670s
Brinksway caves were also used as a workshop by clay-pipe maker Thomas Barnard for 70 years!
BRINKSWAY CAVES
first carved into the red sandstone in the 1670s, the Brinksway Caves evolved from 19th-century Irish navvy dwellings into a massive WWII air-raid shelter for 6,500 people, equipped with electric lights, bunk beds, and flushing toilets.
STOKEPORT
STOPFORD
STOPPARD
STOC-PORT
the town has gone by many names...

WALK THE STORY THE RIVER MERSEY

BRINKSWAY TO CHEADLE

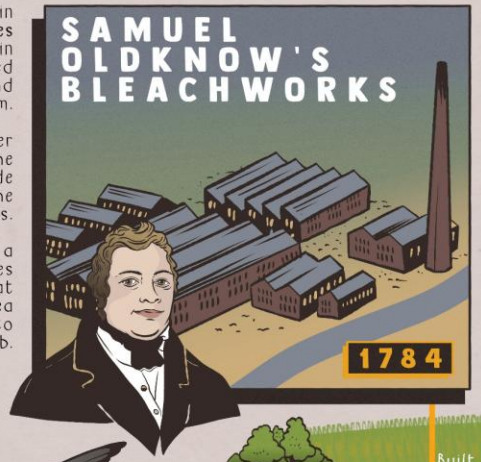


The River Mersey has been an important boundary between kingdoms, counties and councils over the centuries. Look out for the historic boundary stone between Lancashire and Cheshire on Cheadle Bridge

Factories specialising in textile 'finishing' processes developed in Heaton Mersey in the 18th century, kick-started by nearby Stockport and Manchester's textile boom.

Pioneering cotton manufacturer Samuel Oldknow established the Lower Bleach Works alongside the River Mersey to utilise the water for bleaching textiles.

These works, along with a second mill and worker cottages (some of which still stand at Park Row), transformed the area from a rural settlement into a significant industrial hub.



A nesting tower has recently been installed to support a population of Swifts

Built on the ruins of the old bleachworks, Mersey Vale Nature Park now sustains a community orchard, pond and wildflower meadows that support Ringlet butterflies.

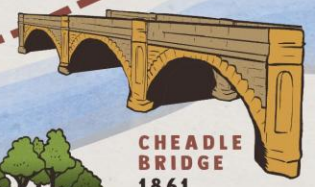
Mersey Valley Way

LANCASHIRE

CHESHIRE

RIVER MERSEY (mæres-ēa)

from the Anglo-Saxon for 'boundary river'

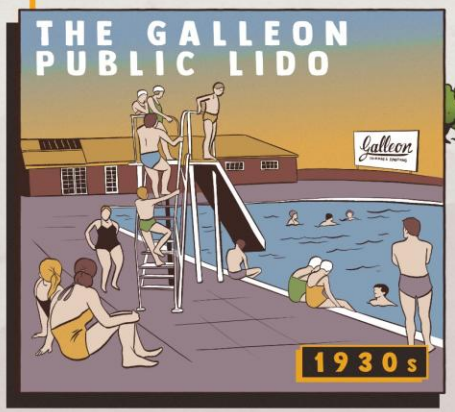


Look out for Sand Martins nesting in the sandy banks of this part of the river



2000s
GEOFF FUNNELL BRIDGE

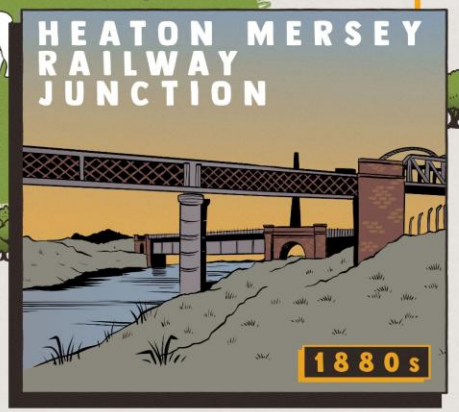
This bridge was named to commemorate the work of two local heroes, Geoff Funnell and Flann Griffin, who dedicated their careers to improving public rights of way to access greenspace in Stockport in the 20th Century



In the grounds of what is now the Waterside Leisure Club was once the Galleon - a massive open-air lido that became a cultural hub for Mancunians.

In the 1950s and 60s it was considered so glamourous that it was chosen as the setting for the heat rounds of the Miss World contests and served as a filming location for the 1934 film Sing As We Go starring Gracie Fields.

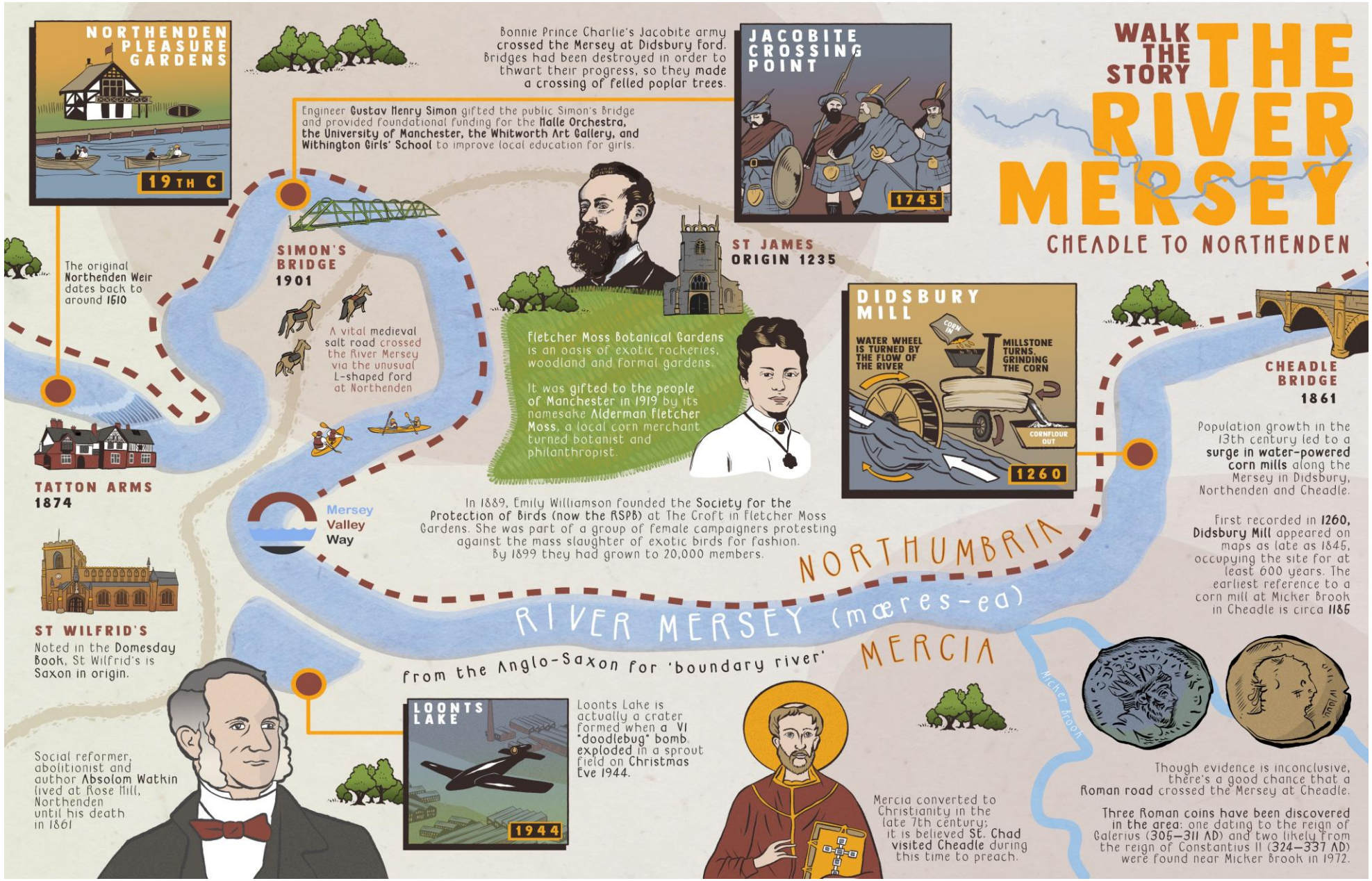
Heaton Mersey means "the high farmstead beside the Mersey"... but these cows might be the last remnants of a previously rural place.

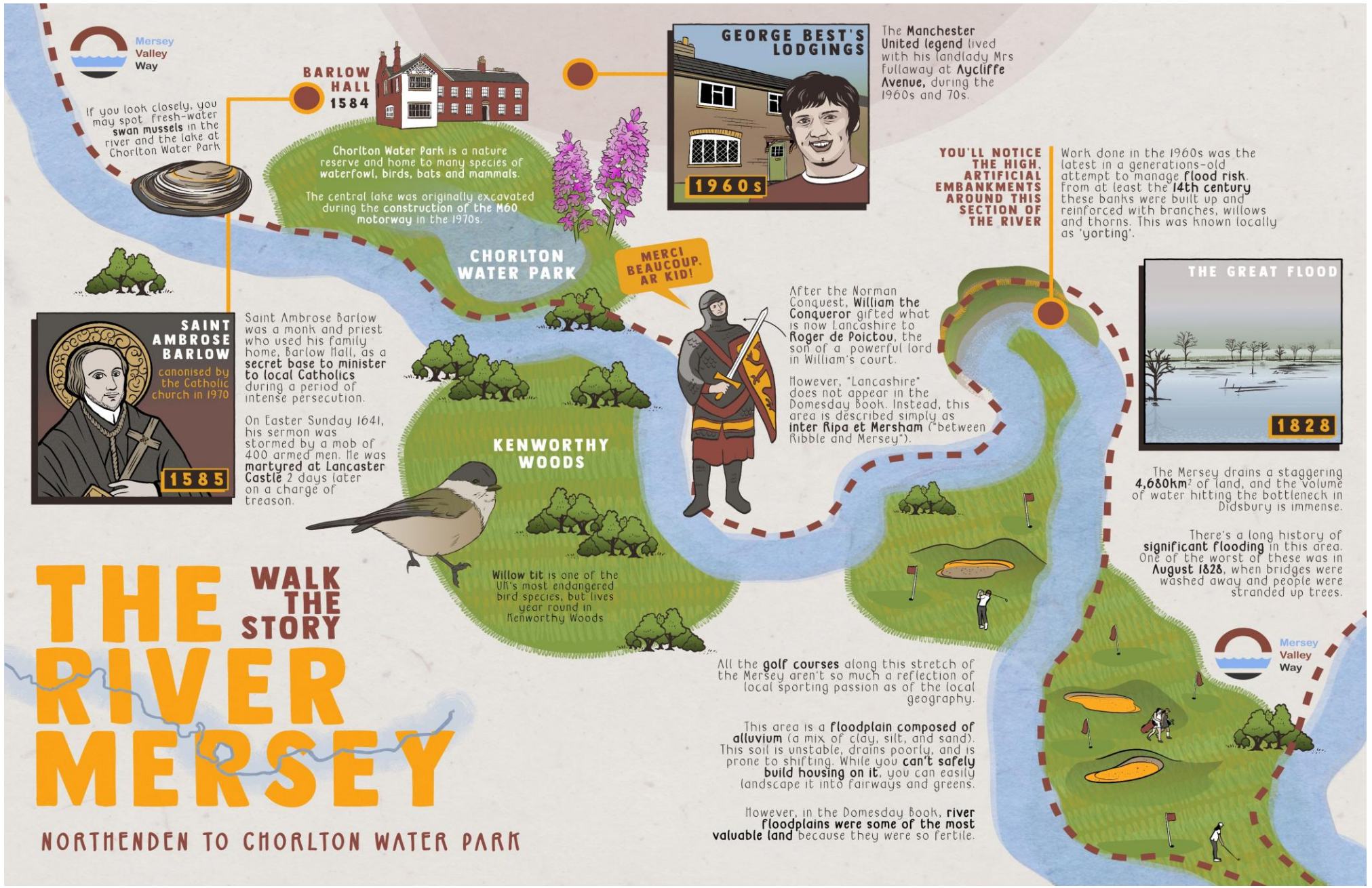


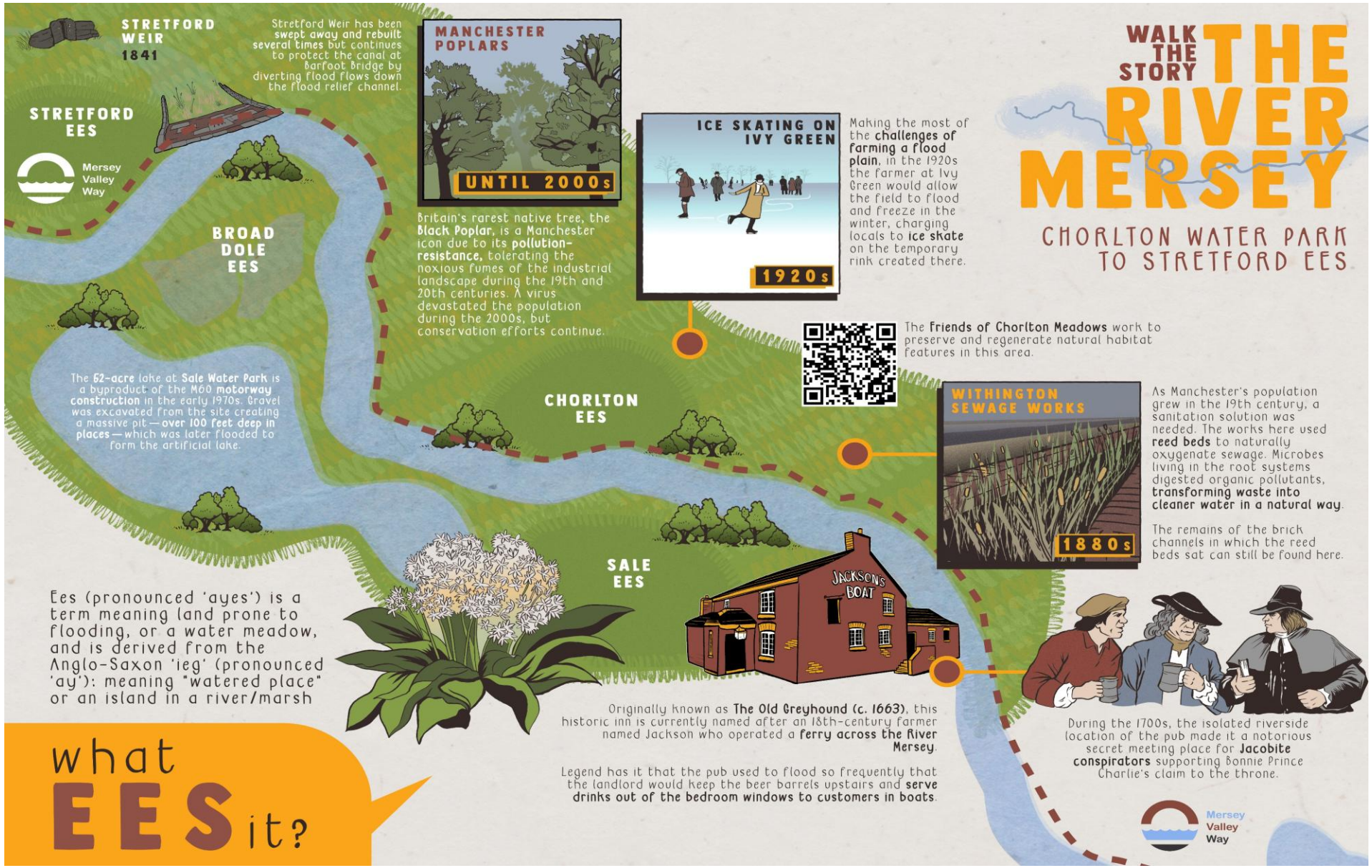
It seems strange now, but up until the 1960s this area was dominated by railway infrastructure.

Heaton Mersey was home to an engine shed, sidings and a large junction between the Manchester South District and Cheshire lines.

The railways crossed the Mersey via a lattice of viaducts, the remains of which can be spotted along its banks in this area.


WALK THE STORY
THE RIVER MERSEY
CHEADLE TO NORTHENDEN
NORTHENDEN PLEASURE GARDENS
19TH C
Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobite army crossed the Mersey at Didsbury ford. Bridges had been destroyed in order to thwart their progress, so they made a crossing of felled poplar trees.
JACOBITE CROSSING POINT
1745
Engineer Gustav Henry Simon gifted the public Simon's Bridge and provided foundational funding for the Halle Orchestra, the University of Manchester, the Whitworth Art Gallery, and Withington Girls' School to improve local education for girls.
SIMON'S BRIDGE
1901
ST JAMES
ORIGIN 1235
The original Northenden Weir dates back to around 1510
A vital medieval salt road crossed the River Mersey via the unusual L-shaped ford at Northenden
Fletcher Moss Botanical Gardens is an oasis of exotic rockeries, woodland and formal gardens.
It was gifted to the people of Manchester in 1919 by its namesake Alderman Fletcher Moss, a local corn merchant turned botanist and philanthropist.
DIDSBURY MILL
WATER WHEEL IS TURNED BY THE FLOW OF THE RIVER
CORN IN
MILLSTONE TURNS, GRINDING THE CORN
CORNFLOUR OUT
1260
CHEADLE BRIDGE
1861
Population growth in the 13th century led to a surge in water-powered corn mills along the Mersey in Didsbury, Northenden and Cheadle.
First recorded in 1260, Didsbury Mill appeared on maps as late as 1845, occupying the site for at least 600 years. The earliest reference to a corn mill at Micker Brook in Cheadle is circa 1185
TATTON ARMS
1874
Mersey Valley Way
In 1889, Emily Williamson founded the Society for the Protection of Birds (now the RSPB) at The Croft in Fletcher Moss Gardens. She was part of a group of female campaigners protesting against the mass slaughter of exotic birds for fashion. By 1899 they had grown to 20,000 members.
NORTHUMBRIA
RIVER MERSEY (mæres-ea)
from the Anglo-Saxon for 'boundary river'
MERCIA
ST WILFRID'S
Noted in the Domesday Book, St Wilfrid's is Saxon in origin.
LOONTS LAKE
1944
Loonts Lake is actually a crater formed when a V1 "doodlebug" bomb exploded in a sprout field on Christmas Eve 1944.
Social reformer, abolitionist and author Absolom Watkin lived at Rose Hill, Northenden until his death in 1861
Mercia converted to Christianity in the late 7th century; it is believed St. Chad visited Cheadle during this time to preach.
Micker Brook
Though evidence is inconclusive, there's a good chance that a Roman road crossed the Mersey at Cheadle.
Three Roman coins have been discovered in the area: one dating to the reign of Galerius (305–311 AD) and two likely from the reign of Constantius II (324–337 AD) were found near Micker Brook in 1972.


Mersey Valley Way
BARLOW HALL 1584
If you look closely, you may spot fresh-water swan mussels in the river and the lake at Chorlton Water Park
Chorlton Water Park is a nature reserve and home to many species of waterfowl, birds, bats and mammals.
The central lake was originally excavated during the construction of the M60 motorway in the 1970s.
CHORLTON WATER PARK
GEORGE BEST'S LODGINGS
1960s
The Manchester United legend lived with his landlady Mrs Fullaway at Aycliffe Avenue, during the 1960s and 70s.
YOU'LL NOTICE THE HIGH, ARTIFICIAL EMBANKMENTS AROUND THIS SECTION OF THE RIVER
Work done in the 1960s was the latest in a generations-old attempt to manage flood risk. From at least the 14th century these banks were built up and reinforced with branches, willows and thorns. This was known locally as 'yorting'.
THE GREAT FLOOD
1828
SAINT AMBROSE BARLOW
canonised by the Catholic church in 1970
1585
Saint Ambrose Barlow was a monk and priest who used his family home, Barlow Hall, as a secret base to minister to local Catholics during a period of intense persecution.
On Easter Sunday 1641, his sermon was stormed by a mob of 400 armed men. He was martyred at Lancaster Castle 2 days later on a charge of treason.
MERCI BEAUCOUP, AR KID!
After the Norman Conquest, William the Conqueror gifted what is now Lancashire to Roger de Poictou, the son of a powerful lord in William's court.
However, "Lancashire" does not appear in the Domesday Book. Instead, this area is described simply as inter Ripa et Mersham ("between Ribble and Mersey").
KENWORTHY WOODS
Willow tit is one of the UK's most endangered bird species, but lives year round in Kenworthy Woods
The Mersey drains a staggering 4,680km² of land, and the volume of water hitting the bottleneck in Didsbury is immense.
There's a long history of significant flooding in this area. One of the worst of these was in August 1828, when bridges were washed away and people were stranded up trees.
All the golf courses along this stretch of the Mersey aren't so much a reflection of local sporting passion as of the local geography.
This area is a floodplain composed of alluvium (a mix of clay, silt, and sand). This soil is unstable, drains poorly, and is prone to shifting. While you can't safely build housing on it, you can easily landscape it into fairways and greens.
However, in the Domesday Book, river floodplains were some of the most valuable land because they were so fertile.
Mersey Valley Way
THE RIVER MERSEY
WALK THE STORY
NORTHENDEN TO CHORLTON WATER PARK


WALK THE STORY
THE RIVER MERSEY
CHORLTON WATER PARK TO STRETFORD EES
STRETFORD WEIR 1841
Stretford Weir has been swept away and rebuilt several times but continues to protect the canal at Barfoot Bridge by diverting flood flows down the flood relief channel.
STRETFORD EES
Mersey Valley Way
BROAD DOLE EES
MANCHESTER POPLARS
UNTIL 2000s
Britain's rarest native tree, the Black Poplar, is a Manchester icon due to its pollution-resistance, tolerating the noxious fumes of the industrial landscape during the 19th and 20th centuries. A virus devastated the population during the 2000s, but conservation efforts continue.
ICE SKATING ON IVY GREEN
1920s
Making the most of the challenges of farming a flood plain, in the 1920s the farmer at Ivy Green would allow the field to flood and freeze in the winter, charging locals to ice skate on the temporary rink created there.
The Friends of Chorlton Meadows work to preserve and regenerate natural habitat features in this area.
The 62-acre lake at Sale Water Park is a byproduct of the M60 motorway construction in the early 1970s. Gravel was excavated from the site creating a massive pit — over 100 feet deep in places — which was later flooded to form the artificial lake.
CHORLTON EES
WITHINGTON SEWAGE WORKS
1880s
As Manchester's population grew in the 19th century, a sanitation solution was needed. The works here used reed beds to naturally oxygenate sewage. Microbes living in the root systems digested organic pollutants, transforming waste into cleaner water in a natural way.
The remains of the brick channels in which the reed beds sat can still be found here.
SALE EES
JACKSON'S BOAT
Ees (pronounced 'ayes') is a term meaning land prone to flooding, or a water meadow, and is derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'ieg' (pronounced 'ay'): meaning "watered place" or an island in a river/marsh
Originally known as The Old Greyhound (c. 1663), this historic inn is currently named after an 18th-century farmer named Jackson who operated a ferry across the River Mersey.
Legend has it that the pub used to flood so frequently that the landlord would keep the beer barrels upstairs and serve drinks out of the bedroom windows to customers in boats.
During the 1700s, the isolated riverside location of the pub made it a notorious secret meeting place for Jacobite conspirators supporting Bonnie Prince Charlie's claim to the throne.
what EES it?
Mersey Valley Way

THE RIVER MERSEY

WALK THE STORY

STRETFORD EES
TO ASHTON-UPON-MERSEY

The **MERSEY BASIN CAMPAIGN** is one of the UK's **greatest environmental success stories**, transforming The River Mersey, once considered "biologically dead", into a **thriving ecosystem**.

Through a coordinated £8 billion investment in modern wastewater treatment, the project stimulated a recovery so significant it won the inaugural **International Thiess Riverprize in 1999.**



Atlantic salmon have slowly been returning to the Mersey since 2000 and spawning in some tributaries, primarily the River Goyt upstream of Stockport. **Adult salmon have to migrate from the Atlantic ocean** and swim all the way up the Mersey to Stockport before finally reaching spawning sites in the River Goyt

THE WATCH HOUSE
1760s



Mersey Valley Way

STRETFORD MEADOWS

Mersey Valley Way

RIVERBANK COFFEE



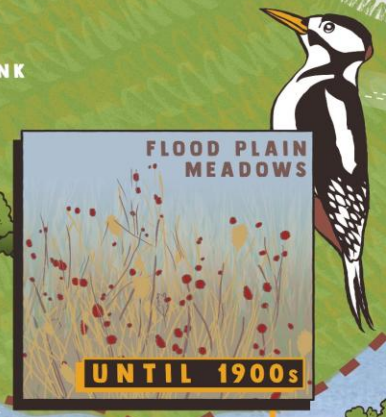
In 2009 an archaeological survey confirmed the remains of a **timber-built mill** on the riverbank at Ashton-upon-Mersey dating back to **at least 1367**.

Little has been done to preserve the site since - **the old millstone still sits on the riverbank** - but campaigners continue to raise awareness of its significance and attempt to safeguard its future.



ST MARTINS

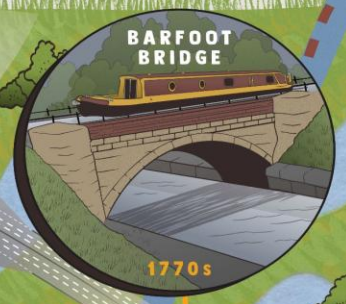
There has been a church on this site since the **9th century**. The current building dates from **1714**



A biolgically rich and ancient part of the British landscape, only 1,100 hectares of **floodplain meadow** remain. while most of the Mersey's meadows are lost, a final remnant survives near Sale Water Park. Key indicator species like **Great Burnet** and **Meadow Foxtail** represent the area's floodplain origins.

RIVER MERSEY

The M60 is the UK's only complete, uninterrupted ring road



CROSSFORD BRIDGE
1800s

The importance of the Bridgewater Canal cannot be overstated. Opened in 1761, it connect coal mines with mills in Manchester for the first time, triggering the **industrial revolution** and changing the face of the city and the world.

BRIDGEWATER CANAL (1776)

Barfoot Bridge is one of the the oldest existing structures on the Mersey - built in the **1770s** by engineering pioneer James Brindley as part of the Bridgewater Canal, **Britain's first canal.**