

Kingfisher on Seven Acres (Cath Halliwell, 2017)



Lancashire,  
Manchester &  
N Merseyside

# The art of the **KINGFISHER** TRAIL

KATIE H.



*Protecting wildlife for the future*

## Introduction

The Kingfisher Trail project was a three year project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to reinvigorate a 14 mile walking route through the beautiful Croal-Irwell Valley. The project took many forms but focused on engaging local communities and enabling them to improve, interpret and celebrate the trail.

It took an artistic turn after a serendipitous conversation with a volunteer, who loved to paint and donated a colourful reproduction of Darley Hall, once an historic house on the trail. Interest in the painting led to other artists sharing work and the whole project snowballed. We've had to whittle down the collection of artwork to this small selection here.

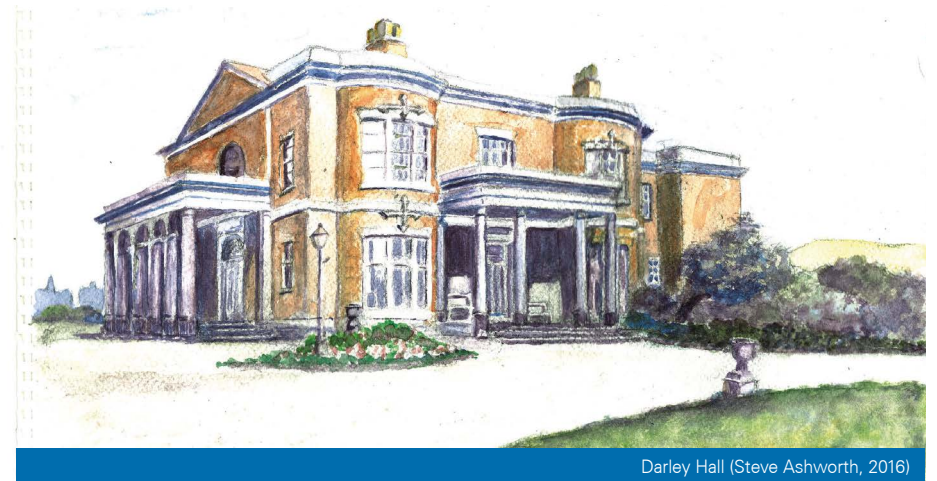
There's a long history of creativity in the Croal-Irwell Valley. Much of the early industry revolved around colourful calico printing and bleaching and dying cloth. There's pride too, for example individual bleach works used to stamp unique icons onto cloth as a badge of honour, like Bradshaw Work's 'Sun' stamp.

The connection with art doesn't end there, many industrial figureheads of the valley rose to real prominence in society and marked their success by commissioning portraits painted by the great and the good. Oil paintings exist of Samuel Crompton, Thomas Bonsor Crompton, Matthew Fletcher, James Brindley, Mark Philips, Robert Needham Philips and Thomas Hardcastle to name a few, whilst the various portraits of Lord Leverhulme, his thoughts about them and his run-ins with the artists require a separate article on their own!

### Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to Ian Pringle who was passionate about the Croal-Irwell Valley and so generous with his knowledge. With thanks to all the volunteers of the Kingfisher Trail project and to the community groups and rangers who help to maintain it, as the special place it is.

Text by Catherine Roberts & Stephen Cartwright.  
Edited by Clare Sweeney.



Darley Hall (Steve Ashworth, 2016)



Painting wasn't the only art form used to recognise achievements, both Samuel and Thomas Bonsor Crompton have likenesses on commemorative medallions. Robert Philips' outline lives on as a cut-out silhouette, whilst his son Mark Philips, commissioned a marble bust that now stands in Manchester Town Hall. The Philips family's love of sculpture, fostered by a Grand Tour around Italy led to many more sculptures. Family members Anna Maria (with her pet dog), Caroline and Margaret Philips all had childhood likenesses created, resulting in a rare appearance for women along the documented history of the trail. On a grander scale, William Calder Marshall's bronze statue of Samuel Crompton has stood in Nelson Square since 1862, paid for by public subscription. While Lord Leverhulme has a bronze effigy atop his tomb at Port Sunlight created by the celebrated William Goscombe John.

Despite the industrial nature of the valley, it's surprising how many of the artworks have focused on historic houses and picturesque landscapes. Samuel Towers created a view of Bolton with smoggy chimneys surrounding the town hall but he also painted the rural charm of Darcy Lever Old Hall. Fred Balshaw painted Firwood Fold at the turn of the 20th century, but chose a viewpoint that shows a sleepy little hamlet, ignoring the large Firwood Bleachworks immediately behind him. An almost identical view was later painted by Harold Hill, part of a series marking the centenary of Samuel Crompton's death.

Geoffrey Scowcroft Fletcher, famous for line drawings of London, found beauty in the ivy covered bulk of Bradshaw Hall. Coincidentally, his painting of the derelict locks at Nob End shows the exact spot now occupied by the famous Meccano Bridge designed by Liam Curtin - a functional piece of art.

The bridge is also a good example of how creativity can bring people together. Built by volunteers from the Canal Society and the local area, it's become a small artistic hub. Liam Curtin returned in December 2018 and created a temporary sculpture of tiny swan figures, when lined up perfectly, a trick of perspective shows a larger swan.

Yolande Baxendale's 'milestone' sculpture stands nearby along with a set of Meccano picnic tables. Back in the 1970's local street artist Raymond Heaton, used another bridge as his canvas, the sewage pipe that crossed the Irwell. He painted local themes, including a mural of Dick Turpin riding a horse after a (slightly dubious) story that he once passed nearby.



Kingfisher Carvings (Neil Bradshaw, 2016)

Outdoor art features prominently in the area, Irwell Sculpture Trail is the UK's largest at 33 miles and overlaps with the Kingfisher Trail in Clifton Country Park where artist Stephen Charnock acknowledges our mining past. Sculptures include a 'starvation' boat, used to carry coal from flooded mines. It was named after the exposed ribs of the boat where containers of coal were packed in between. Charnock also created figures of a man, woman and a steel Galloway pony all standing where real pit workers and animals would have worked.

While sculptures are made to last, Clifton Country Park has also been home to more ephemeral art, including chainsaw sculptures of nature in wood. Examples can be found along the length of the Kingfisher Trail if you look hard enough including foxes, deer, badgers and even toadstools. Darcy Lever Gravel Pits has some special examples of complete life cycles of both toads and the dragonfly captured in carvings around the site.

Of course, wooden art fades in time and retreats back into woodland like the distinctive head at Moses Gate Country Park, once similar to an Easter Island Moai. This sculpture had its own local legend too, apparently if you were 'pure of heart' and placed your hand inside its mouth and made a wish it would come true. If you weren't, your hand would be bitten off. This sculpture has gradually begun to rot and it's grown a mossy beard and fungi sprouting like hair.

The Wildlife Trust added to the collection of wooden art in the area with two kingfishers, carved from a windblown tree created on site by chainsaw sculptor Rick Goodwin in 2018.

It's worthy to note that the Kingfisher Trail also crosses the spot where Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian Pottery Company used to be. In its heyday many famous artists produced pottery designs for Pilkington's including Charles Voysey, Walter Crane and Alphonse Mucha.



Kingfisher Trail at Philips Park (Rick Goodwin, 2017)





Cath Halliwell, Jean Hilton, Steve Ashworth & Enid Brooks

L. S. Lowry sketched many scenes from Nob End to the Thirteen Arches Viaduct, from the Wet Earth Colliery at Clifton Country Park to Ringley Old Bridge. He sketched Ramsfold Bridge across Fletchers Canal, painting it in watercolour and oil. In 'Barges on a Canal' his trademark figures stand on the path of the Kingfisher Trail. Lowry often used artistic license, adding buildings which in reality would have been right in the River Irwell. Given his 'cut and paste' style, it's interesting to wonder how the rest of the valley and trail have made appearances in his paintings too.

Along with the top talent, the company nurtured its own artists. One of these, Charles Cundall, went on to be an official artist during the Second World War (teaching himself to paint with his left hand after an injury to his right in the First World War). Another resident artist, Richard Joyce, renowned for pottery featuring animals also sketched the valley surrounding the factory. He left snapshots of an area altered when smog was deliberately released in the 1940s to protect industry from German bombs.



Megan Kelly

However, the final word must go to one of Britain's iconic artists who was known to walk the route between Clifton and Bolton.

Artists continue to enjoy the surprising wildness today, creating images of beauty. Brian Barlow is an obvious modern example with his series of postcard and calendar images for Bolton Hospice.

We thank volunteers who have produced art for this booklet, they've joined a wonderful tradition we hope you enjoy.

Written with special thanks to Michael Shippobottom



Kingfisher at Philips Park (Rick Goodwin, 2017)



## Bradshaw Hall

Bradshaw Hall grew from humble beginnings into a grand nineteenth century manor depicted here. The building named after the Bradshaw family, who filled key positions on the parliamentary side during the Civil War. Most fatally, John Bradshaw presided over the trial of Charles 1st pronouncing his execution, while Henry Bradshaw played his part condemning the Earl of Derby to death.

Following the Restoration of the monarchy the family's fortunes fell and the estate was sold. The area became increasingly industrial, with coal, quarrying and bleaching thanks to a 999 year lease granted to the Hardcastle family. Thomas Hardcastle financed the building of a new school, a mission hall (on the Kingfisher Trail) and St Maxentius church, the family also set up the first Bolton bank. All that remains of the industrial past nowadays is the Turton & Entwistle Reservoir, built to provide local industries with a steady supply of water.

The last resident of Bradshaw hall, Colonel Hardcastle, died in 1948. At its peak before WW2, the bleachworks had 700 employees, it closed in 1963 although the building continued to be used by other businesses for another 30 years. Finally demolished, only a porch remained as a historical reminder.



Bradshaw Hall (Steve Ashworth, 2017)

The story doesn't quite end there, during clearance work a chimney fell the wrong way and damaged the remaining porch. It was restored and now retains an early 17th century appearance, in a tranquil setting, just off the Kingfisher Trail.

Information thanks to Turton Local History Society who publish books on the area. Of particular interest are:

The Bradshaw Estate, 1542 - 1919,  
Bradshaw Works,  
Bradshaw Floods.

## Firwood Fold

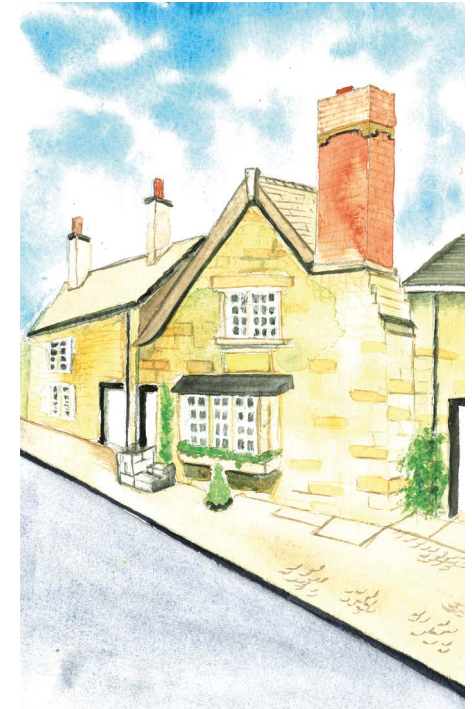
Firwood Fold is a beautiful little hamlet by the side of Bradshaw Brook. Today it's very picturesque but it was once surrounded by bleach works.

The inventor Samuel Crompton was born at number 10, Firwood Fold, in 1753. He only lived there until he was five but his family history and those early years among textiles must have seeped into his bones, as twenty years later, he invented the famous Spinning Mule.

Despite his genius he was a spectacularly bad business man and had bad luck. He died penniless despite nearly five million Spinning Mules being in use. Only after his death did he assume his place alongside the elite of his day, (although having one of Bolton's main roads, Crompton Way, named after him is a slightly dubious legacy).

The name Firwood Fold reflects an older history. A 'Fold' was a farmstead whilst 'Fir' simply means a woodland. Nearby Bradshaw Brook is named after the Old English for 'Broad-wood'. The age of the Fold can be dated back to the 16th Century, with number 15 originally built then making it the oldest inhabited house in Bolton today.

For more history see Bolton Council's publication titled 'Firwood Fold Conservation Area' available from their website.



Firwood Fold (Enid Brooks, 2016)

## Kingfisher Bridge

The Kingfisher Bridge was installed in 1992 and links both sides of Bradshaw Brook. Previously the only way across was by wading or shuffling along the sewage pipe, negotiating steel spikes in the middle.

The Kingfisher Trail was created at the same time, named after the return of Kingfishers to the river and some years later, the Friends of Seven Acres named the bridge after the Kingfisher too, its design took account of how these colourful birds would pass by, too low, and it would cause a barrier.

To the north, is Sycamore Wood. Some conservationists regard Sycamore as a pest species for casting too much shade and creating poor ground flora. It's true, but Seven Acres Sycamores are a living heritage, planted for use in the bleachworks. Unlike other trees, sap from sycamores doesn't stain, making it ideal for the bleaching and dyeing industry all along the Trail. An old nickname is the Lancashire weed for this reason.



Kingfisher Bridge (Megan Kelly, 2017)

## Seven Acres Local Nature Reserve

Seven Acres is named after the various lodges, ponds and brook that contain this amount of water. Water's been very important for industry here, particularly bleachworks, but also paper making, coal mining, laundry, and even stage construction and long ago, a medieval corn mill powered by a waterwheel.

Despite its past Seven Acres is now home to wildflower meadows, heathland, woodland and lots of wetland areas, a picture of the Kingfisher Trail in miniature.

With over one-hundred species of bird recorded on site, a visit to Seven Acres will reward you at any time of the year. In the height of summer, the place is in full bloom, with swathes of purple devil's-bit scabious covering the grasslands and carpets of yellow tormentil flowering underneath.

The site is managed by a volunteer group run jointly by the Friends of Seven Acres and LWT. To find out more visit [www.lancswt.org.uk/](http://www.lancswt.org.uk/) volunteer. Seven Acres has had some notable volunteers and visitors over the years with Blue Peter presenters visiting in the 1960s to plant trees and more recently Mr Bloom and his Tiddlers pulling up Himalayan balsam!



Seven Acres Local Nature Reserve (Jean Hilton, 2016)



## Environmental Resource Centre

The Environmental Resource Centre is the Greater Manchester office of the Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside.

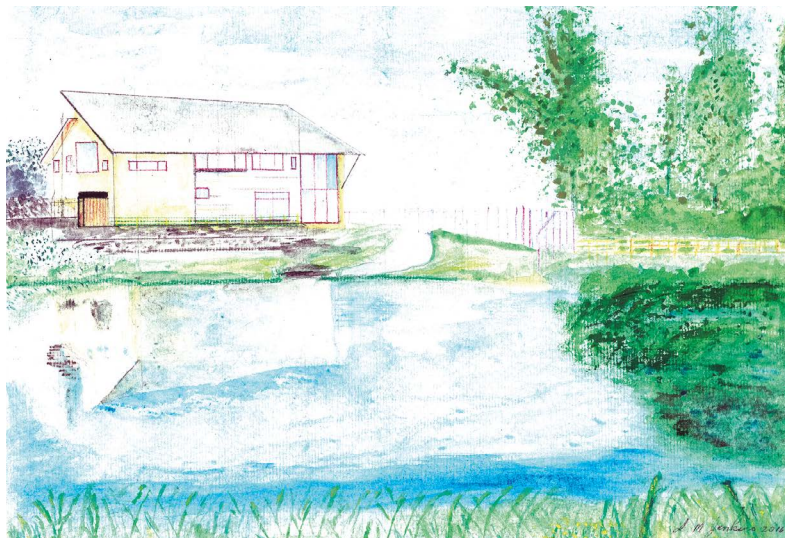
It was built in 2007 as a new environmentally sustainable home for the trust (the previous office, in an old Warburton's Bakery, was very damp and full of holes!) Officially opened by Chris Packham, you can still see his 'carbon' footprint on the wall. Other notable visitors include David Bellamy, Aubrey Manning and David Miliband.

The 'ERC' is an active community centre with regular sessions each week covering a range of themes.

It's a point of access for our busy education calendar and hundreds of school children are introduced to the wonders of rivers, ponds, meadows and woodlands each year.

Friends of Seven Acres community group meet here, with monthly events, meetings and they create interpretation materials for the site. To find out more visit [www.7acres.org.uk](http://www.7acres.org.uk).

Or call in to say hello next time you are passing!



Environmental Resource Centre (Linda Jenkins, 2016)

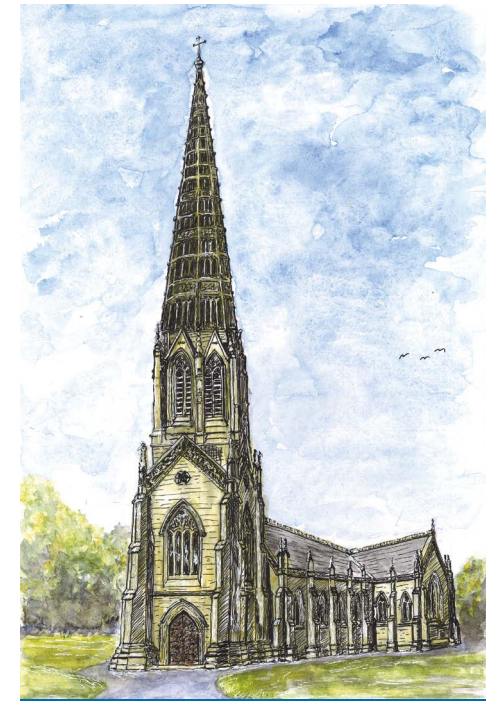
## St Stephen & All Martyrs Church

St Stephen and All Martyrs' Church is one of only three 'pot churches' in England, designed by architect Edmund Sharpe and was consecrated in 1845. Just off the Kingfisher Trail, it is beautiful in its own right as remarked upon by Queen Victoria and entirely made of Terracotta.

The magnificent spire shown in the painting, was inspired by Freiburg Minster in Germany, but was sadly removed in 1939 after becoming unsafe. The church shows the influence of the Fletcher family in Croal-Irwell Valley. Terracotta clay came from the family's mine at Ladyshore in Little Lever before traveling along their Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal. It was fired on site to Edmund Sharpe's designs who became part of the family by marriage. John Fletcher financed the build and is remembered by an inscription on the beautiful stained glass window designed by Henry Holliday.

Although on the opposite side of the river to the Trail, it can be reached by a bridge or by Radcliffe Road and really shouldn't be missed. Do check to see if it's open to avoid disappointment.

More information from 'St Stephen & All Martyrs Church' booklet is available from the church.



St Stephen & All Martyrs Church (Steve Ashworth, 2018)

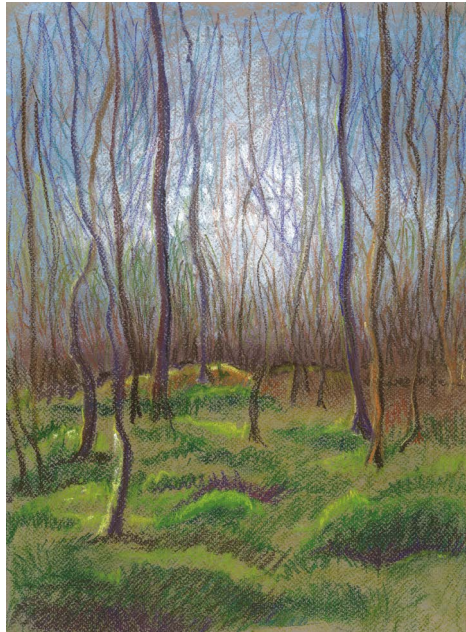
## Darcy Lever Gravel Pits

Hidden in the wider woodland, Darcy Lever Gravel Pits, habitat to five UK inland amphibians is now a tranquil oasis. Managed by volunteers, it's testament to what can be achieved by willpower & time.

It was originally dug for gravel, clay and sand for the nearby A666. In the process several ponds were created and now nationally important species including great crested newt, an assortment of invertebrates and one of the best dragonfly populations in the North West are found there. On a sunny, summers day expect to see brown, common and southern hawkers, broad bodied and 4-spotted chasers, common, ruddy and black darters, plus a myriad of damselflies including the stunning banded demoiselle.

Apart from gazing into pools or enjoying aerial invertebrate displays, keep your eyes peeled for wildflowers. You might need an ID book for the huge variety of species. From Sneezewort to Vetch and Fleabane to Toadflax in the meadows land and Marsh Cinquefoil and Water Violet in the ponds.

There's more information at Darcy Lever Gravel Pits Action Group's (GPAG) website here: [www.gpag.co.uk](http://www.gpag.co.uk).



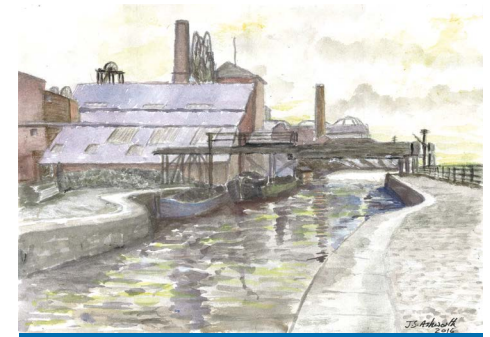
Darcy Lever Gravel Pits (Angela Honeyford, 2017)

## Foggs Colliery

The woodland around the Gravel Pits used to be full of landfill, sewage and chemical works as well as a coal mine.

In the 1970s, reports stated 'over sixty acres had been tipped on to an average depth of over twenty-five feet', with parts of Kingfisher Trail, 'frequently blocked by old cars which had toppled from the steep banks above', and 'a visit to the tip at night revealed waves of rats in the car headlights'. Over 50,000 tons of soil delivered to the site during 1976-7, 'covering the refuse to an average depth of 15 feet'. A new woodland was planted with Norway maple, able to cope with drought conditions caused by the refuse. It's hard to imagine now, as the woodland feels like it's been there forever.

The Trail follows the old Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal here and passes the spot where the infamous Fogg's Colliery was once found. The colliery had two mining disasters, in 1877, ten men died in an underground fire and in 1907, a further ten died after lift cages collided. Then, in 1831, John McGowan was executed outside the mine after murdering his wife.



Foggs Colliery (Steve Ashworth, 2016)

The 1877 disaster was widely reported in the news of the day, a London publisher put this poem to music:

*At a colliery not far from Bolton,  
These poor men laboured in the mine;  
Colliers see but little comfort,  
Working where no sun can shine;  
The fire damp so fierce and scorching,  
Their helpless bodies did surround,  
None could help them, none assist them,  
Burnt to death while underground.*

Kingfisher Trail Volunteer, Lewis Dawson's report (available on our website) has the rest of the poem and more information. Other insight comes from 'The Water Rat' - former newsletters of the Croal-Irwell Valley Ranger Service. These ran for years and make a fascinating read, a full set can be found in the Bolton archives.



## Farnworth Paper Mills

At 750 acres, Moses Gate is Bolton's largest nature reserve. In the 19th Century, it was the site of Farnworth Paper Mills, one of the biggest paper producers in the country. Thomas Bonsor Crompton invented a process of continuous drying that gave him a huge advantage over his rivals and made him a millionaire.

At the time, the river was so dirty it couldn't be used for paper making and 'Crompton's Lodges' were built. Nowadays the lodges are home to waterfowl including mute swans, tufted duck and great crested grebe. Common tern can also be seen flying above the lodges in summer.

The Croal-Irwell Valley had 25 paper mills on its banks, Farnworth Paper Mills being the earliest, opening in 1674. At its height, five-hundred people were employed from the local areas of Little Lever, Farnworth

and Stoneclough. After closure in 1882 the Farnworth Journal described decline as 'a terrible spectacle of ruin and desolation'. Various other industries occupied the buildings here until they were demolished in 1974 and restoration as a country park began.

For more, see Paul Hindle's '*The papermaking industry of Bury and Radcliffe*' available at local archives.



Farnworth Paper Mills (Steve Ashworth, 2016)

## Rock Hall

The Crompton's also built Rock Hall and it was here, during the early 1990s, that the Croal-Irwell Valley Ranger Service first thought of the Kingfisher Trail. The story goes people kept calling in to the visitor centre to say they'd seen a Kingfisher.

The rangers would smile politely and once the visitor left, have a little chuckle. This carried on until sightings were so frequent, it was obvious the bird had really returned. The kingfisher is a perfect symbol of how the valley had become revived and the trail was designed to celebrate this. Unfortunately, Rock Hall is now closed but it remains a reminder of industry from the past as well as the Ranger Service.

Still a great place to see kingfishers, you may also see brown trout jumping whilst herons wait to catch them.

The woodland across the river is relatively young (only 40-50 years), showing how coal mines, sewage and bleach works, paper mills and even a landfill are not too distant a past.



Rock Hall (Cath Halliwell, 2016)



## Darley Hall Gatehouse

Darley Hall was once home to Benjamin Rawson, owner of a vitriol (sulphuric acid) works across the river at Nob End. It was very grand with porticoed and colonnaded sides and extensive grounds overlooking the river Croal.

Shown here is the gatehouse to Darley Hall and park. The park was reduced in size when the railway cut across the land and shortened again when the A666 was built. Nowadays Benjamin is remembered by the name of the road approaching Darley Park and Farnworth Cemetery. If you look closely, just before heading under the A666 you can just make out the remains of the two stone gateposts.

One notable visitor to the hall was Dodie Smith, famous author of *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*. Her family lived at the hall (she was from the southern end of the Kingfisher Trail at Whitefield) and she describes visiting the estate in her 1974 autobiography 'Look Back with Love' - 'the house [Rock Hall] near the disused paper mill was occupied, with the dilapidated washing outside and forlorn looking children playing'.

For more information, read Phil Sharples' *Nob End: History, Management and Development*.



Darley Hall Gatehouse (Steve Ashworth, 2017)

## Oaks Bridge

Oakes Bridge, a well-known landmark of Moses Gate Country Park, was known for many years as the 'broken bridge'. In the 1940s, two of its arches collapsed leaving the remaining two as a rather wistful ruin until 1987, when they also succumbed to the elements.

Some claim, mysteriously, that the bridge was over four hundred years old in 1987, although others agree it was constructed for Benjamin Rawson in the 1790s connecting his home and mill over the newly built canal.

One notable incident reported in the local press involved an altercation between Rawson and another mill owner, John Seddon, who arrived at the bridge with his workforce and demanded to cross the bridge. A brawl ensued with Rawson's men coming out on top, if a little bruised and battered.

Seddon later put up public notices accusing Rawson of being a 'well destroyer and stopper of roads'. The tale of the well is a story for another day but as an interesting aside, the same well now gives its name to the new Farnworth Baptist Church.

Oakes Bridge owes its name to the Croal Brick and Tile Works owned by James Oakes, it allowed a tramway to carry the brickwork's products across the bridge to the canal.



Oaks Bridge (Steve Ashworth, 2016)



## Bee Orchid

The bee orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) by artist Louise Angus, is one of many beautiful and rare species growing at Nob End SSSI. The flower mimics a female bee to attract males and pollination of other plants. Unfortunately, this particular species of bee no longer lives in the UK so bee orchids self-pollinate and their appearance is a historical remnant, like many features along the Trail.

Nob End SSSI highlights the way nature has reclaimed this industrial valley. Formerly home to a mill, the site became a dumping ground for sulphuric acid and washing soda. Time weathered the waste, creating an alkaline rich soil which now hosts a rare collection of plants, unique in Greater Manchester, including marsh, heath and bee orchids, helleborines, autumn gentian and blue-eyed grass. These plants led to a designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and the area holds the distinction of being the only SSSI created through dumping (as opposed to extraction).

Croal & Irwell rivers meet here, providing arguably the most dramatic views along the Trail. Wellfield House stands sentinel and it's from this spit of land that the site gets its name. Nob is old English for a rounded premonitory and across the river Kearsley Woods envelope the site like a natural amphitheatre. Visit at dusk in winter to witness crows roosting noisily before nightfall.

For many years this site was managed by the Croal-Irwell Valley Ranger Service, particularly by Phil Sharples. Phil extensively researched local history and has written a booklet that can be found on our website



Bee Orchid (Louise Angus, 2016)

## Prestolee Locks

Prestolee Locks (actually located in Little Lever rather than Prestolee) is where the three arms of the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal meet. A series of six locks, in two flights of three, raise the canal sixty-four feet up to the summit level. Once at the top you can continue without passing through another lock, something that seems incredible if you drive the route along undulating Bury/Bolton Road.

In 1936, the canal burst its banks and the breach is still visible if you take a short walk along the Bury arm. It effectively cut the canal into three, the Bury arm was busiest until it officially closed in 1961.

Nowadays the scene is very different from Steve's painting. The stone from the bottom locks is missing altogether, used to repair other canals and only traces of the warehouse (top left) and the lock keeper's cottage remain.

You can find a wall of the cottage still in place while the last wall of the warehouse is now a storage area for the canal society.

To get an idea of how the locks looked in their heyday we recommend a trip to Bolton Museum to see their fabulous scale model. Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society are a very active community group who carry out practical work, hold monthly talks and publish a quarterly newsletter and numerous books. To find out more visit their website at [www.mbbcs.org.uk](http://www.mbbcs.org.uk).



Prestolee Locks (Steve Ashworth, 2016)

## Meccano Bridge

The Meccano Bridge was designed by artist Liam Curtin and constructed by volunteers from the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society in 2012. It is made from 338 steel pieces (including 48 trunnions) and 720 nuts and bolts, all real Meccano pieces but scaled up ten times (the ribbon cutting was even done with a pair of Meccano scissors). The bridge weighs 1000 times more than its model counterpart.

It's a real focal point, drawing attention to restoration efforts and it's symbolically fitting as it sits at the exact point where all three arms of the canal came together. To commemorate this, artist Yolande Baxendale, created a 'milestone' that was installed nearby at the same time, with three sides directing people towards Bolton, Bury or Manchester. If you look closely you'll see it's engraved with tracks of past users of the site.

And while you're here? We suggest you enjoy your lunch on the Meccano picnic benches, added to the site to compliment the bridge.

You can read more about the design process from the artist and the installation from chairman of the canal society in 'Manchester Geographies' published by the Manchester Geographical Society.



Meccano Bridge (Steve Ashworth, 2016)

## Prestolee Bridges

The three bridges shown here all cross the River Irwell close to its confluence with the River Croal. The oldest of the three is the closest, once part of the old packhorse route from Manchester to Bolton. Built in the late 18th century to replace an older wooden medieval bridge, it's a typical packhorse bridge only five feet wide, so only one horse could cross and low sides to avoid obstructing the horse's panniers.

Shortly after construction it was superseded by the Prestolee Aqueduct in the background, carrying the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal. The canal opened in 1797 and the aqueduct still holds water over two hundred years later. It has four arches over the river and a fifth with a small road underneath, connecting the canal to Prestolee Print Works. A mason's marks can be found under this fifth arch.

The middle bridge carries a sewer pipe, one that disappears underground and reappears every so often along the trail. The bridge shown here was replaced by a concrete bridge in the 1960s.

Just to the right, another bridge crosses the canal and famously appeared in the film 'Spring and Port Wine' (along with other parts of the Kingfisher Trail). It's not the only time the trail has appeared on film, actor Ian McShane once filmed a scene in the Thatched Cottage at Philips Park.



Prestolee Bridges (Steve Ashworth, 2016)



## Ringley Top Lock

This drawing shows two locks and a keeper's cottage looking towards Ringley Road. Nowadays the canal ends at the top lock with nothing remaining of the bottom lock or the cottage, demolished in the 1950s.

On the towpath, milestone 7 indicates a distance in miles to where the canal re-joins the River Irwell. These markers were originally every quarter of a mile to help calculate fees for moving goods. Quite a few remain and can be seen as you walk along the Kingfisher Trail.

The area of woodland on the opposite side to the towpath is classed as ancient, continuously wooded since 1600AD. Such a long period of stability provides a rich habitat for nature, helped by the site's inaccessibility. When you walk along the towpath, listen out for buzzards calling from the woodland, or a rustle of leaves as a roe deer dashes away.



Ringley Top Lock (Ron Clayman, 2017)

## Ringley Old Bridge

This painting was inspired by a drawing by L. S. Lowry, well known for walking this stretch of the valley along what is now the Kingfisher Trail. Lowry painted and sketched many views, some recognisable today. Ringley Old bridge must have held an attraction as Lowry created various versions across the decades, almost always from the same angle.

It's classed as an ancient monument, built in 1677, to replace an earlier bridge washed away when the river was in flood. A set of stocks dating from the 17th century can be found at one end, if you were drunk on a Sunday morning you could find yourself in the stocks until everybody had passed you on their way into the church opposite.

Alcohol plays a different role in local tradition of electing a 'Lord Mayor'. A pub crawl starting and ending at the Horseshoe (the white building in this painting) accompanied the election and the winner was allowed a free pint in three local pubs every Saturday night as long as he presented himself washed, shaven and wearing a clean shirt. He also had the privilege of being allowed to sleep in any local pig pen for warmth if his 'wife turns him out'!



Ringley Old Bridge (Brian Mort, 2016)

Pubs also play a part in early surveying of wildlife. The Artisan Naturalists were a group of self-taught working class men who met regularly in pubs around north Manchester to identify plants and go on joint field trips. One of the most notable naturalists, John Horsefield, reports he attended one of these meetings at 'Ringley Bridge' in the early 1800s.

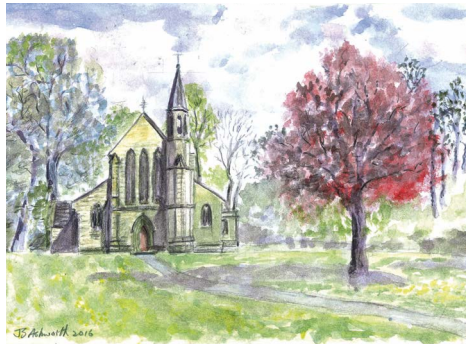
## St Saviour

The picturesque Church of St Saviour sits by the River Irwell, nestled against a steep wooded valley.

It holds monuments to the Fletcher's, arguably the most influential family on the Croal-Irwell Valley, playing a leading role in the creation of the Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal. The canal used to run immediately behind the church although not anymore.

An old clock tower, with a plaque that reads 'Nathan Walworth build me ad 1625' is all that remains of an earlier church. It was rebuilt by Charles Barry (of Houses of Parliament fame) but his building only lasted thirty years before being replaced by the current building, designed to fit a larger congregation. Until the 1980s the church was dominated by the smokestacks and cooling towers of Kearsley Power Station (including the tallest cooling tower in the world).

Despite the incursion of industry, much of Ringley Woods nearby are classed as ancient and full of wildlife. Dominated by pedunculate oak yet featuring ash, birch, alder, elm, beech, willow, sycamore, hawthorn, rowan, holly and hazel to name just a few species.



St Saviour (Steve Ashworth, 2016)

Birds including treecreeper, nuthatch, great spotted woodpecker, buzzard, sparrowhawk and tawny owl. Undoubtedly, the best time of year to visit is spring when cascades of bluebells carpet the wood and the fragrance of ramsons hangs in the air.

Find out more about the Fletcher Family, 'Coal, Canals and Cotton' by Robert Cornish is a great place to start, written by one of the family's descendants. It can be purchased from the MBB Canal Society.

## Fletcher's Canal

From the 1700s until the early 20th century, Clifton Country Park was used for coal mining. Here in the 1750s, famous engineer James Brindley made his name.

19 year old Matthew Fletcher oversaw the sinking of Gal Pit, only to find the coal seam continually flooded. Brindley came to devise a solution and did so, ingeniously using a weir on the River Irwell, underground tunnels, an inverted syphon, a leat, a waterwheel and another tunnel to solve the problem. You can still look down the mineshaft today, although it is full of water again. Brindley topped this achievement and went on to canal engineering superstardom with the Bridgewater Canal.

Subsequently the feeder stream was extended and adapted to make it navigable and became Fletchers Canal, connecting to the rest of the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal and allowing coal to be transported away from the mine. If you'd like to find out more, Clifton Country Park visitor centre has copies of 'Exploring Clifton Country Park', a booklet published by the Salford Ranger Service.

The scene in this painting is a stretch of the canal running past Pilkington's Tiles, once famous for tiles and pottery with many notable artists working there. Its two most widely used glazes also reflect the trail, an orange vermillion and a 'Kingfisher Blue'. Pilkington's Lancastrian Pottery Society publish some fascinating accounts of the potteries history, which we highly recommend.



Fletcher's Canal (Cath Halliwell, 2016)



## Thirteen Arches

A disused monolithic 13-Arch railway viaduct dominates Waterdale, an area once thriving with industry but now one of Bury's best greenspaces.

Important as a navigational route, Bradley Ford first provided a pack horse route across the river, before the opening of Clifton Aqueduct in 1797 for the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal to cross. Less than fifty years later, the Manchester to Bury railway mostly superseded the canal and the area had a new icon in the 13 Arches Viaduct. These days, birds of prey from kestrel to sparrowhawk and buzzards to the extraordinary peregrine falcon are seen more often than trains.

Forestry England manages the land for people and wildlife. Major work was needed to stop heavy metals leaching out of contaminated ground and thousands of tons of soil were imported to establish a wildflower meadow. A mixture of deciduous trees were planted and are managed traditionally by local coppice workers to produce sustainable products



Thirteen Arches (Jean Hilton, 2016)

## Philips Park Conservatory

The grand house at Philips Park (simply called 'The Park') was built for Robert Philips, a local wealthy industrialist, in the early nineteenth century. The Philips Family campaigned for political reform and provided MPs for both Bury and Manchester. Part of elite Manchester Society, the author Elizabeth Gaskell gives a wonderful description of attending parties at their house.

Unfortunately, nothing remains of the family's grand home but some outbuildings exist including a wonderful conservatory built in the mid nineteenth century. It used to be filled with statues and urns collected on a grand tour of Italy as well as a famous display of Camellias, open to the public at weekends.

Following the demolition of the house in 1951 the area became a park and gardeners managed to produce beautiful bedding displays here.

The fantastic Friends of Prestwich Forest Park manage the site with Bury Council. They hold regular events and practical task days. To find out more visit their Facebook page under 'Philips Park'.



Philips Park Conservatory (Steve Ashworth, 2017)

## From here the Pylon does not crackle

Here's an image that predates the Kingfisher Trail project. Ian Pringle, painted it in 1968 while attending Nottingham Art College. Ian was 18 at the time and going through a psychedelic phase, apparently this creation was painted under the influence of barley wine. Ian was particularly proud of individual praise from David Hockney, on a visit to Nottingham Art College.

The painting shows a view from the Carriage Track at Philips Park, looking towards Waterdale Dye-works that closed thirteen years earlier, bringing to an end 172 years of bleaching on the site. Photographs from the time show a heavily industrial valley with Agecroft Power Station looming over the buildings. In 1932, pylons were erected to carry electricity to Chadderton, referred to in the title. Ian said 'those pylons used to upset me, but the tree growth is such that you don't see them as much now'.

The landscape is completely unrecognisable from 1968, buildings have gone and 250,000 tons of soil spread by the Environment Agency, has added a new substrate for planting trees.

Much of the above information was taken from books written by Ian Pringle, Diana Winterbotham and Sara Gremson. Namely, 'The Philips Family of the Park, Prestwich' and 'Philips Park: Its history and development'.



From here the Pylon does not crackle (Ian Pringle, 1968)

## Kingfisher Tails

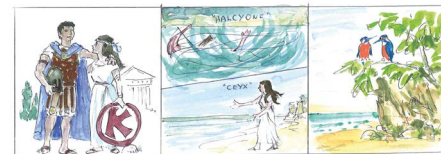
As a beautiful but elusive bird there are many myths around the kingfisher. Here Roderick Hamm has depicted two of the most famous. First is an ancient Greek myth told by Hesiod and made famous in Ovid's Metamorphose. The details change slightly depending upon the version but the story basically runs like this:

Ceyx, the son of the Morning Star and Alcyone, daughter of a god of the winds, were a beautiful young couple in love. They recklessly became proud, above their station and as punishment, Ceyx was shipwrecked and drowned at sea. Alcyone, waited for his return, heard the news and threw herself into the water to be with him. The gods took pity and revived them in the form of resplendent birds who could only live over the water.

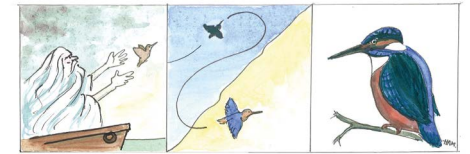
Strangely Alcyone decided to come ashore to lay her eggs and did so in the middle of winter at the height of storms. Her father controlled the winds and calmed them during this time.

This is where we get the phrase for a period of calm between turbulent times, or 'Halcyon days' in winter. The bird's scientific name, *Alcedo atthis*, also remembers Alcyone, the first Kingfisher.

Another story tells of a dull grey bird on the Ark with Noah, who was first sent out to look for land. Unfortunately, the Kingfisher was so overjoyed at being free, it forgot about Noah's task to find land and it flew so high it was stained blue by the sky and orange by the sun. When the bird returned Noah was so angry he made it perch on the edge of the Ark and find its own food, as Kingfishers can be seen when fishing today.



How the Kingfisher came to be.



How the Kingfisher got his Colours.

(Roderick Hamm, 2017)



## Anthony Prescott

Geof Hadfield, volunteered practically along the Kingfisher Trail every week of the project. One particularly pleasant day he surprised us by producing a sketchbook, paints and paintbrush while the volunteers were having dinner. This painting of Anthony Prescott is the result.

He painted Anthony at Nob End SSSI, part of Moses Gate Country Park and although we didn't know it at the time, it turns out to be particularly significant. Anthony has been a Wildlife Trust volunteer for many years and is loved by everyone in the Bolton conservation scene. We've conducted interviews with people who have made a difference to the Croal-Irwell Valley and when it was Anthony's turn the following story emerged.

Anthony's grandfather, George Kenyon Brown, was once mayor of Farnworth, also chairman of the Parks committee and a passionate advocate for 'open space properly maintained'.

In his younger days he'd worked in the planning department and when an application came in for a new landfill site at Farnworth Paper Mills (see painting 14), he used his influence to turn it down. Then as local councillor, he campaigned for the local authority to buy the land and transform it into a country park - he considered this his greatest achievement in local government. We knew nothing of the family history before the interview and it shows we're just the latest in a long line of people who recognise the importance of this valley and care for it greatly. It's a reminder to be thankful for the conservationists who've gone before us!



Anthony Prescott (Geof Hadfield, 2017)

## Wednesday Wildlife Volunteers (WWV)

This is another painting paying tribute to our wonderful volunteers. Created by Emma Halliwell from a photograph taken at Moses Gate Country Park after a session of meadow management. The WWV are out every Wednesday working somewhere in the local area.

Tasks are varied but range from litter picking and removing rubbish from the river to fixing fences and clearing vegetation from pathways to digging ponds, coppicing woodland and sowing wildflowers - basically anything that keeps the valley accessible for people and improves it for wildlife.

Emma's one of a small group of long-term placements helping with all aspects of the Kingfisher project and we're very proud to say that she is now employed by the Wildlife Trust!



Wednesday Wildlife Volunteers (Emma Halliwell, 2017)

It has taken much more than practical work to see us through the three years of the project, with 242 people volunteering behind the scenes for all kinds of tasks, from helping to run the project to legal advice about public rights of way or conducting and transcribing oral heritage interviews, carrying out wildlife surveys, planning and running events and much, much more - even painting these pictures!

In total our volunteers contributed 4504 days to the project, if we had to pay somebody to do this work it would cost around £450,000. We really couldn't have completed the project without their help and we are proud of the contribution of every one of them - Thank you gang!

## Kingfisher Trail by Tre Cope (2017)

In the garden temple at Philips Park there once stood a marble statue brought back by the family from Rome in 1856. The statue was of Erato, ancient Greek muse of poetry. We think this is the perfect excuse to finish our booklet with a poem.

During the project, five Kingfisher Trail Festivals brought people together from across the valley. At each event, live music by local musicians created a lovely atmosphere. One of these musicians, Tre Cope, was inspired to explore the trail and write a song that sums up the Croal-Irwell Valley wonderfully.

The lyrics work well as a poem too (you can watch Tre singing on our YouTube channel in a video made by volunteer David Pennington - search 'Lancashire Wildlife Trust').



### Chorus:

Cotton Mills and Paper Mills, Bleach Works and Mines,  
Remnants of industry, we left behind  
Park lands and forest lands, rivers, streams and lakes  
Nature claims back, what once we did take

In rivers once stained with hews of the dye,  
Now live perch, and roach, damsel and dragonfly  
Where workers once trod, their ways to the mills  
Ramblers and strollers tread their pathway still

### Chorus

In reservoirs built to service the works  
Grebe, goose and heron are taking their perch  
In a valley once filled, with smoke, dark and black  
The green of the forest takes her colours back

### Chorus

In pits dug for gravel, for making the roads  
Among celandine and ransoms, roam mice, newts and toads  
A half hidden towpath, a forgotten canal  
Reed buntings and warblers call out to you now

### Chorus

Down the Kingfisher Trail the wildlife thrives  
But nature needs us, to help her survive  
'gainst litter and pollution she tries to take a stand  
Now it's up to us, to lend a helping hand

Cotton Mills and Paper Mills, Bleach works and Mines,  
Remnants of industry, we left behind  
Park lands and forest lands, rivers, streams and lakes  
Help Nature claim back, what once we did take



“The wildlife Trusts play an important role in protecting our natural heritage. I would encourage anyone who cares about wildlife to join them”

**Sir David Attenborough,**  
President Emeritus, The Wildlife Trusts



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## The art of the **KINGFISHER** TRAIL



To find out more about the nature & heritage of the trail visit our website

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