

Out and about in Bolton

Industrial Revelation

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Despite its old name of Bolton-le-Moors, the history of Bolton is tied up with the Industrial Revolution. Its population grew from 17,000 inhabitants in 1801 to nearly 181,000 in 1911. It is well known that the damp climate of England's north west was perfectly suited to the textile industry, and the area's ties with the great and even the good of industry could not be tighter. A walk around the centre of Bolton whether on foot or by the wonders of virtual technology in the form of Google Streetview reveals much about the town's aspirations in the 1870s, with its twin landmarks of the parish church and the town hall.

Bolton's medieval church was demolished in 1866. The Parish Church of St Peter was consecrated in 1871, having been built on the same site in a Victorian Gothic style (refined Early English with some good decorated window tracery). The

cost was borne by Peter Ormrod, who had made his money in the town's cotton spinning factories. The interior has fine stained glass and carving, and contains the remains of an Anglo-Saxon cross. The church tower is said to be one of the tallest in Lancashire, rising to 180 feet. Adjacent was the town's Grammar School, now the parish hall and currently home to the Bolton Branch of the Historical Association.

The area around Churchgate is the oldest part of the town and includes one of the ten oldest public houses in the country, Ye Olde Man and Scythe. The pub's vaulted cellar dates from 1251, with a datestone showing 1636 inside the pub revealing the date of its rebuilding. It stands as a reminder of Bolton's medieval origins, with 1251 being the year that Bolton was granted its royal charter to hold a market. The market was held here on Mondays until it became too large some 600 years later.

Churchgate was also the site of the Bolton Massacre during the Civil War on 28 May 1644. Marching to Liverpool, Royalist forces under Prince Rupert and the earl of Derby, Bolton's manorial lord, attacked the town, which was known as the Geneva of the North. Given that there were 10,000 men in the Royalist army, the 2,500 men of the Parliamentary force stood little chance of successfully defending the town. It is regarded as one of the most brutal episodes in the Civil War, as fighting took place in the streets of the town and it appears that the Royalist soldiers were allowed to plunder the town following their victory. Furthermore, during the massacre, the earl of Derby is said to have killed Captain Bootle, a parliamentarian who had already surrendered. This was an act for which the earl was to pay with his life in 1651. The earl was executed outside the Man and Scythe, where he had spent his last hours.

Also associated with Churchgate was a leading figure in the Industrial Revolution, Richard Arkwright, who lived and worked for a time in Bolton as a barber and wig-maker. A plaque above a



Bolton Parish Church

The Olde Man and Scythe on Churchgate, one of the oldest public houses in the country.



Wood Street represents some of the last remaining Georgian housing in Bolton. Lever's birthplace is on the right of the picture.

newsagent's marks the location of his shop. Later he moved to Cromford in Derbyshire where he set up a large factory next to the River Derwent to house his water frame.

Turning south down Bradshawgate, one passes on the left Wood Street. Here are some of the last remaining Georgian houses in Bolton. William Hesketh Lever, later Lord Leverhulme, was born at 16 Wood Street on 19 September 1851, and another plaque can be found here. Lever went on to found the famous Lever Brothers soap company and in 1918 he was asked to become the town's mayor, despite not being a member of the council.

The results of his philanthropic work can be found all over Bolton and beyond. He bought 67 acres of land and presented them to the town as Leverhulme Park, which was enlarged over time to its present 98 acres. He re-endowed Bolton Grammar School and Bolton High School for Girls, forming what is now Bolton School in 1915 on the grounds of what was his house on Chorley New Road. He is well known for founding Port Sunlight on the Wirral, and Lever gifted the lands of the manor of Rivington, including the prominent summit of Rivington Pike, to the town of Bolton, before an Act of Parliament transferred the park to Liverpool Corporation Waterworks Department in 1902. Above the reservoir, Lever built a copy of Liverpool Castle as one of the follies on the estate. The terraced gardens on the steep hillsides are now largely overgrown, but are nonetheless interesting to explore.

Further down Bradshawgate is Nelson Square, the location of the bronze statue of Samuel Crompton, which was paid for by public subscription in recognition of his services to the cotton industry and the town. Leaving the rear of Nelson Square, a short walk to the right, down Bowker's Row and Exchange Street, alongside the Crompton Place shopping centre, leads to Victoria Square (formerly known as New Market Place following the market's first relocation in 1824). This square is the location of the second of Bolton's twin Victorian symbols of growing pride – the town hall. Unlike the parish church, the town hall's architecture is not in a Gothic style but is a fine example of Renaissance Revival. It was designed by William Hill of Leeds and was completed in 1873. In the words of Pevsner:

Bolton town hall has a six-column portico of Corinthian columns reached majestically up a wide staircase... The style is grand throughout, and there is nothing of the showiness which so often mars such buildings.¹

It is, however, unusual in one respect: there is no foundation stone.

When the town hall caught fire in 1981, the central section containing the grand Albert Hall was destroyed, enabling the council to carry out the expensive project of splitting it usefully into two rooms. The powerful block of the main town hall was enhanced by the addition, in 1939, of a crescent of further buildings, classically stern but elegant, that embrace it on its western side. These contain, among other things, the town's central library (including its local history library), its main art galleries, and a substantial museum.

Leaving Victoria Square by Oxford Street, one passes an encased steam engine, made in Bolton by Hick Hargreaves in 1866. Moving on to Knowsley Street, two buildings are of interest. The Methodist Central Hall, the Victoria Hall, is crowned by a high tower with an octagonal top and copper cap, and still has original Victorian interior decor. Across the road is the portico defining the entrance to the Victorian Market Hall, opened in 1855. This is a worthy architectural construction in its own right, modelled on Joseph Paxton's iron and glass Crystal Palace. The modern Market Place shopping centre that adjoins it is unlikely to be the subject of



Bolton Town Hall was designed by William Hill of Leeds.

The exterior of the market hall.





The interior of the market hall, modelled on the Crystal Palace.

favourable comparisons. In fact, the market hall was saved from demolition by Bolton Council and the efforts of Alderman Harry Lucas in particular. His insistence on its survival, against the wishes of London property developers, saved it from the fate of equivalent halls in comparable northern towns such as Preston.

At the top of Knowsley Street is St George's Road, with further remnants of Bolton's Georgian architecture in terraced houses and the former St George's Church of 1796. For glimpses of earlier Bolton one has to leave the town centre and travel out to the periphery of the town.

Following the A676 Deane Road west out of the town centre by car, a short drive brings one to the right turn of Junction Road, where can be found Deane Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin. Its date is unknown, but it 'is long and low and embattled – a typical North Country sight'.²

The north doorway and the tower are thought to be of the early fourteenth century, with the rest of the structure in a Perpendicular style and likely to date from the mid fifteenth century. The Victoria County History suggests that the church grew gradually through the centuries, with the addition of, for example, a mid seventeenth century pulpit and galleries in 1849.

The churchyard contains a cross, dedicated to the memory of George Marsh, a Protestant martyr. Its base is reputed to be that of a Saxon cross which stood some way to the west of its present site and was used for preaching by early Christian teachers. Marsh was a local man who converted to Protestantism under Edward

VI and continued to preach under the Catholic Mary Tudor, becoming a leader of the then Protestant minority in Lancashire. Having heard of him whilst in London, the earl of Derby determined to arrest him, and when Marsh returned to the Bolton area to visit his mother, the earl grasped his opportunity. Although warned by friends that he was being sought, Marsh decided that flight would undermine his previous missionary work and instead gave himself up at Smithills Hall. Brought before the earl of Derby for interrogation, he was then moved to Lancaster Castle and finally to Chester. Despite being offered a royal pardon if he recanted, Marsh refused to deny his beliefs and was burned at the stake as a heretic on 24 April 1555, close to Chester.

From Deane, the A58 Beaumont Road (becoming eventually Moss Bank Way) can be followed clockwise round the outskirts of the town, passing Moss Bank Park, until reaching Smithills Dean Road and one of the oldest manor houses in the north west. The Grade I listed Smithills Hall is a large country house with three ranges and an open courtyard. With records dating back to 1335, its oldest part is the fifteenth century great hall. When the hall passed into the hands of successful local bleachers the Ainsworths in 1801, it underwent a series of modernisations, including the addition of a suitably timber-framed and stone Victorian wing. However, the changed economic conditions that followed the First World War took their toll on the estate and in 1938 the family were forced to sell the property to Bolton Council because they could no longer afford its upkeep. Parts of the property have been open to the public since 1963, and the museum was extended in the 1990s. The early sixteenth century oak panelling in the withdrawing room is considered to be the best of its period in Lancashire; it contains not only complicated linenfold carvings but also painted coats of arms and small medallions of heads in profile. At the entrance to the withdrawing room is a mark in the stone floor, alleged to be the footprint of George Marsh. The legend tells that as he was being led to the Green Room at the top of the stairs for interrogation, he stamped his foot so hard on the flagged floor that it left a mark in the stone as testament to his faith; it is said to run with blood on the anniversary of his death.

Visitors interested in historic homes may continue along the A58 ring road until they reach the left turn to Green Way, where beyond an unprepossessing, modern housing estate they will find Hall i'th' Wood, a place of significance also to those who have an interest in the rich industrial heritage of the area. Samuel Crompton lived at Hall i'th' Wood at the time he invented his spinning mule, but the property has historical interest notwithstanding the links with cotton history. Built in the sixteenth century as the half-timbered hall of a rich woollen merchant and given a stone extension in the Jacobean period, it is typical of a house built by a successful yeoman farmer in the period before the Industrial Revolution. By the time Crompton's family moved there as caretakers, its fortunes had declined and it had been split into tenements to house a number of less affluent families. It was here in 1779 that Crompton developed his mule, combining features of Arkwright's water frame and James Hargreaves's spinning jenny to make a machine capable of spinning fine cotton thread. Being too poor to afford a patent he sold off his machine by subscription, but received little return. Many years later he was given some financial reward by parliament for his invention, but nevertheless died in poverty in 1827. His tomb can be found in the graveyard of the Parish Church of St Peter in Bolton town centre.

The hall was eventually purchased by Lord Leverhulme, who paid for renovations to the building before presenting it to Bolton Corporation as a museum in 1902. Hall i'th' Wood is also Grade I listed, and is now run by Bolton Metro. In 2009 the council took the decision substantially to reduce its opening hours as a cost saving measure; it is now open only for special events such as medieval weekends. Its displays include seventeenth and early eighteenth century furniture and information about life under the Tudors and Stuarts, as well as the story of its most famous resident.

Any visitor to south Lancashire would find it hard to avoid the links with the industrial past. Many of the railways and canals, several of the most palatial spinning mills and even a few surviving mill chimneys are still to be found. Some of the largest surviving mills, with five, six or even seven storeys, were built just as the textile trade was beginning to lose its world primacy: Dove Mill in Deane was opened in 1905; Swan Lane Mills in 1903, 1906 and 1914; the Falcon Mill on Halliwell Road in 1907; and Sir John Holden's Mill on Blackburn Road in 1926. All these now serve a variety of quite different, non-textile uses, and all are Grade II or II* listed.

There is no sign at all now in central Bolton of the massive engineering works of Hick Hargreaves, Barlow and Dobson or John Musgrave, for example, which produced so many thousands of mules, and so many stationary steam engines and boilers for the spinning mills. All have been demolished. Nor are there more than a few signs of the considerable iron and steel plants, the forges, the foundries, the rolling mills and hammers that provided the raw materials for the textile and steam engineers. However, there is a Bolton Steam Museum in a supermarket's Atlas Mills site off the Chorley Old Road, 1.5 miles north west of the town centre. The museum contains the largest collection of working textile mill steam engines in the country, and is open (with free admission) most Wednesdays and Sundays for static display. Engines will probably be in steam on four weekends during each year.

Bolton has a fine heritage dating back beyond the Industrial Revolution, but undoubtedly its most impressive buildings bear witness to the ambition and achievements of the inventors, industrialists and merchants of this northern town.

Further Reading

Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South Lancashire*. (Penguin Books Ltd, Middlesex, 1969)

Leslie Gent, *Bolton Past*. (Phillimore & Co. Ltd, Chichester, 1995)

Stephen Bull, *'A General Plague of Madness': The Civil Wars in Lancashire, 1640-1660*. (Carnegie Publications, Lancaster, 2009)

Bill Jones, *Bolton's Industrial Heritage*. (Sutton Publishing Ltd, Stroud, 2006)



The sixteenth century, half-timbered Hall i'th' Wood is now open only for special events.

Swan Lane Mills, a fine example of the palatial spinning mills built in the area.



References

- ¹ Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South Lancashire* (Penguin Books Ltd, Middlesex, 1969) p.81.
- ² *Ibid.* p.86.

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