ON THE WATERFRONT

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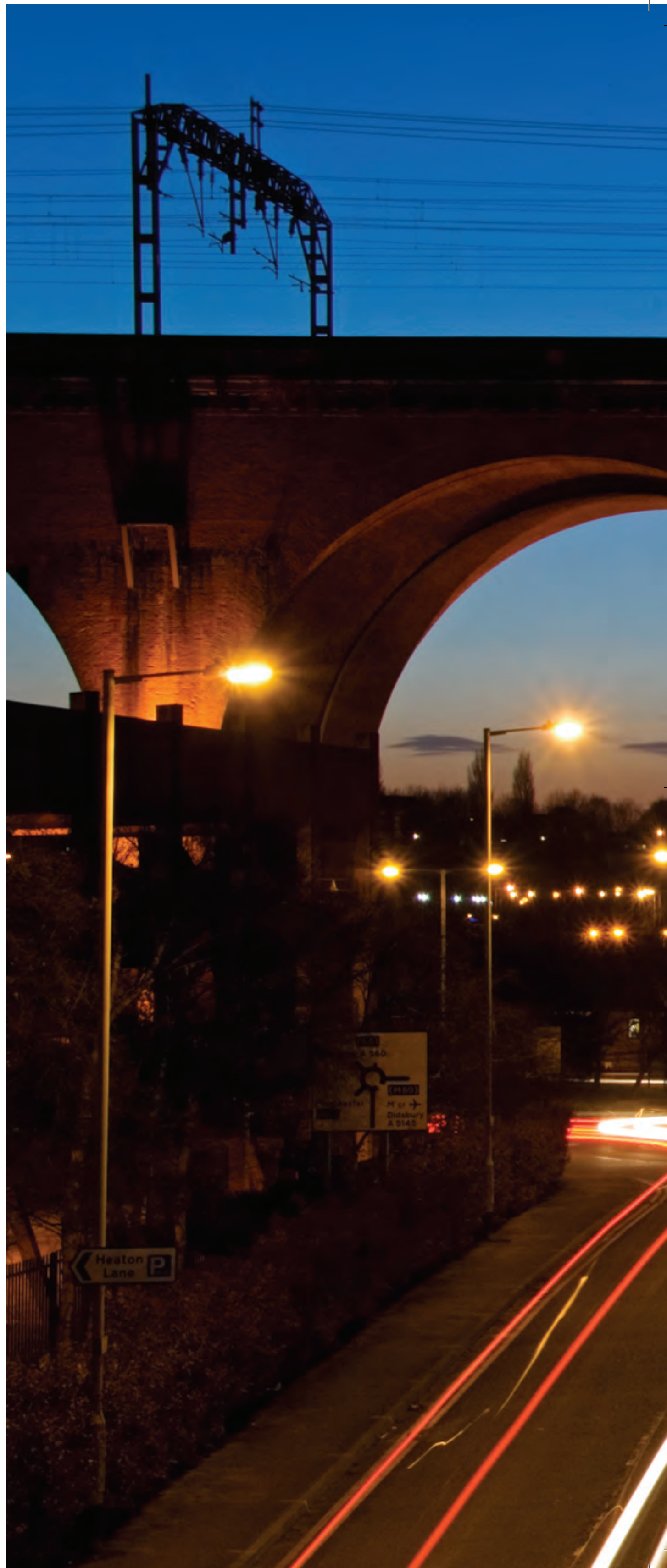
Opposite The Ineos chemical plant at Weston Point, Runcorn. Of Runcorn's former industries, all but the chemical industry have disappeared. The industry dominated for many years by ICI has since been taken over by Ineos.
Photograph by Alan Novelli

The Mersey waterfront is a product of the industrial revolution. Over the past 300 years, the riverside scene has been transformed. For the early 18th century traveller journeying down the River Mersey, the impression would have been largely rural. Some buildings would have been glimpsed, perhaps a scattering of cottages and farms, the odd medieval church or timber-framed manor house. In the small towns of Stockport and Warrington, workshops and dwellings huddled together on the river banks, whilst at Liverpool, still a modest port, warehouses, hostelries and lodging houses clustered around the pool. Apart from the ruined castle at Halton and the remains of the priory at Birkenhead, there was no architecture of any great ambition. 100 years later, industrialisation had taken hold, and over the following century urban expansion occurred on an unprecedented scale.

From the port of Liverpool, with its great docks and warehouses, and its links to international markets, the region's products of industrialisation were despatched around the globe. Yet the earliest factory goods were produced not on the Mersey itself, but along its minor tributaries in east Lancashire and north-east Cheshire, where silk, cotton and woollen mills, powered by water, were built. Few of these buildings survive, but Quarry Bank Mill of 1784 on the banks of the Bollin at Styal, and the much smaller wool scribbling mill of 1779 on the River Tame at Delph, are typical of the early industrial period in their simple proportions and functional design.

The Tame and the Goyt, the tributaries where our present day journey begins, feed into the Mersey at Stockport, a medieval market town that was radically altered by the industrial revolution. The old town occupied the valley bottom together with the steep slopes leading up to the market place and to the medieval church, where the tumble of roofs and dizzying drops in level are best seen from the iron bridge that crosses Little Underbank and from the great railway viaduct with its giant brick arches that stride across the valley high above water level. Yet the river which gave form to this distinctive topography is neglected. In the 1930s the Mersey was covered over with a roadway, which later

Right The M60 motorway passing under Stockport viaduct with, lit up in the background, the Pyramid office development.
Photograph by Alan Novelli

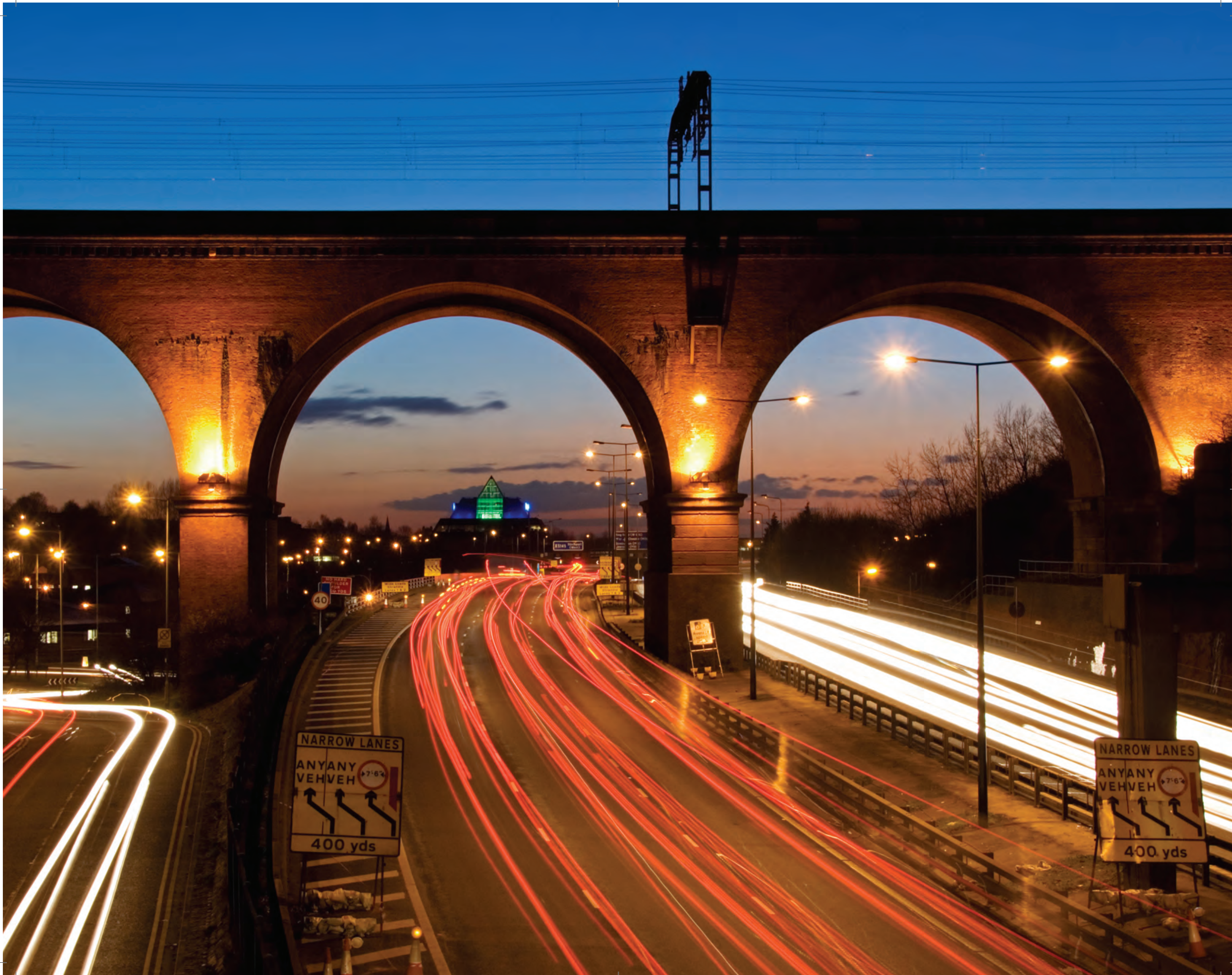


became the pedestrian thoroughfare of a vast and featureless shopping centre, its present dismal state a legacy of misplaced utopian ideas. In recent years, however, attention has returned to the old marketplace and the surrounding network of narrow streets, where the Council's current policy of conservation and renewal has re-established local pride in the old town. The exemplary restoration of the half-timbered 17th century Staircase House as a visitor centre has provided a historic focus.

The river valley at Stockport is also now the course of the M60 motorway, and just west of the town centre between motorway and river is another piece of utopianism, the Pyramid Office Building. This crystal of blue glass built in 1992, set in a desolate landscape of road junctions and roundabouts, has provided the local name for the area – 'the Valley of the Kings'.

Down river from Stockport and the spirit of ancient Egypt the Mersey meanders through a wide flood plain that bisects the southern suburbs of Manchester. The towers of several medieval churches can be seen from the river marking the old villages that have been swallowed up by suburban sprawl. At Cheadle, Didsbury, Northenden and Flixton are churches that serve as focal points for their communities, even if they no longer stand amongst green fields. But they are often upstaged by Victorian churches erected at the expense of Manchester bankers, mill owners and traders, who built their houses on the outer fringes of the city. Sir James Watts, a classic Manchester self-made businessman and proprietor of what was then the largest drapery business in the world, built a spectacular Gothic house, Abney Hall which stands overlooking the river at Cheadle. The house was fitted out by the Roman Catholic architect Augustus Welby Pugin, but Watts himself was a dissenter, and for the local community he built the nearby Congregationalist church in Mersey Road.

Most inspiring of all the churches that were built on the southern edge of the city is the Roman Catholic church of All Saints at Barton-upon-Irwell, completed in 1868 and intended as a family mausoleum for the de Trafford family. It is the masterpiece of Edward Welby Pugin, the son of Augustus, and grew from being a mortuary chapel to a parish church and Franciscan Friary. Immensely tall, with steeply pitched roofs, it soars above the desolate wasteland on the western edge of Trafford Park. At the time the church was built, Trafford Park was a country estate, but the palatial mansion house of the de Traffords was demolished when the Manchester Ship Canal arrived in 1894, and the grounds became the world's first industrial estate, a potent symbol of economic progress. Also seen from the Irwell, and more distantly from the Mersey, the domes and pasteboard glamour of the Trafford Centre represent the consumerist symbol of modern times.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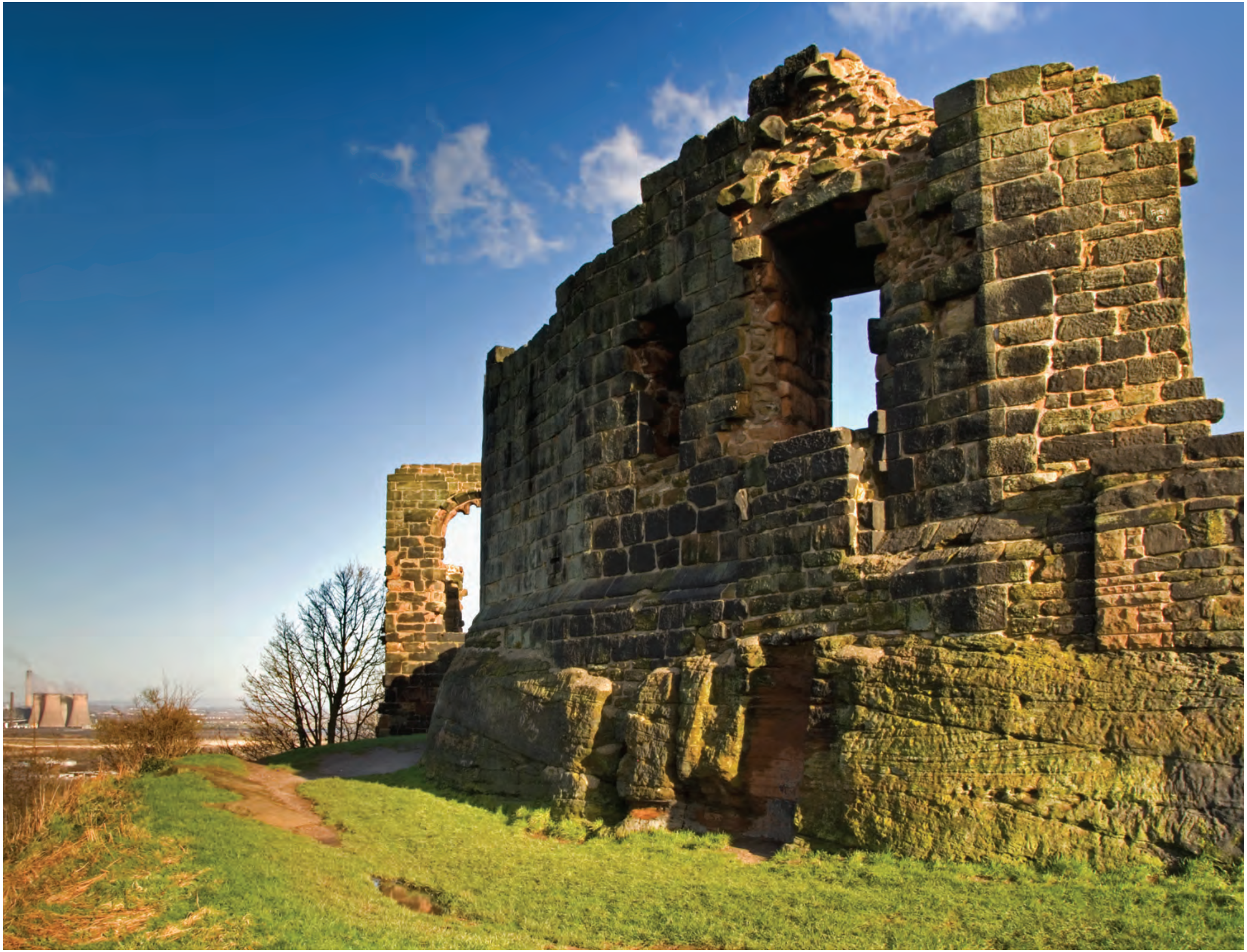


Opposite Halton Castle, Runcorn looking towards Fiddler's Ferry power station on the opposite banks of the Mersey. Halton Castle, one of only two Norman castles in Cheshire, stands on a prominent rocky hill overlooking the River Mersey. Built c1070, it was largely dismantled after the English Civil War.
Photograph by Alan Novelli

The original Trafford Park was an aristocratic family seat that found itself too close to the fast-encroaching city to survive. Many of the merchant villas that were built along this stretch of the Mersey in the Victorian period, however, remain. The Towers at Didsbury, designed by Thomas Worthington, is one of the grandest: it was built for John Edward Taylor, proprietor of the Manchester Guardian in 1872. At Rose Hill, Northenden, lived Sir Edward Watkin, the railway entrepreneur and proprietor of the Cheshire Lines railway, the tracks of which ran alongside his boundary wall. Two ancient houses also miraculously survive in Chorlton-cum-Hardy. Barlow Hall, a timber-framed courtyard house dating from the 1570s is now a golf clubhouse; whilst Hough End Hall, an E plan house built 20 years later for Nicholas Mosley, a Manchester cloth merchant who became Mayor of London and developed metropolitan taste, was much more up-to-date. A national preservation campaign in the 1920s prevented its demolition, but intensive development within the grounds has now ruined its setting.

At Irlam, the Mersey gushes over a foaming weir into the Manchester Ship Canal. The rubble of demolished factories and steel works is now colonised by wildlife, and continuing beyond the oil tanks of Cadishead and Partington, the scene becomes surprisingly rural. At Warburton, Old St Werburgh's Church is a charming mishmash of different styles and periods. Part timber framed, part stone and part 18th century brick, with an interior fitted out in the Jacobean period, it lost its role as the parish church in 1885 when a new place of worship was erected nearby. The rural idyll however is soon shattered by the massive concrete ramps of the Thelwall Viaduct which carry the M6 motorway over the canal. Beyond lies Warrington, a town that is older and more interesting than first appears.

Until the 20th century, Warrington was the lowest bridging point, and this gave it great strategic importance. Here the Romans crossed the river en route from Chester to Wigan, and established metal working, enamelling and ceramics industries. An important market town in the Middle Ages, it expanded in the early 18th century with the coming of the waterways, and the many turnpike roads that converge on the town bridge. The town's most striking landmark is the parish church of St Elphin, for its spire is the third tallest in Britain. Although the chancel is medieval, the remainder is Victorian, built for the Revd William Quekett, whose motto, according to local tradition, was 'always to a-spire'. The church stands oddly isolated from the town centre, for the river crossing was moved half a mile down stream not long after the church was built, thus causing the centre of gravity to shift away. The present reinforced concrete bridge of 1915 is the sixth on the site, but more unusual is the Bank Quay steel transporter bridge, which was built in the same year to carry goods across the Mersey to the former soap works of Joseph Crosfield & Sons. This bridge, a scheduled ancient monument, was last used in 1964 and needs urgent repair if it is to survive as one of only three such bridges in Britain and seven in the world.

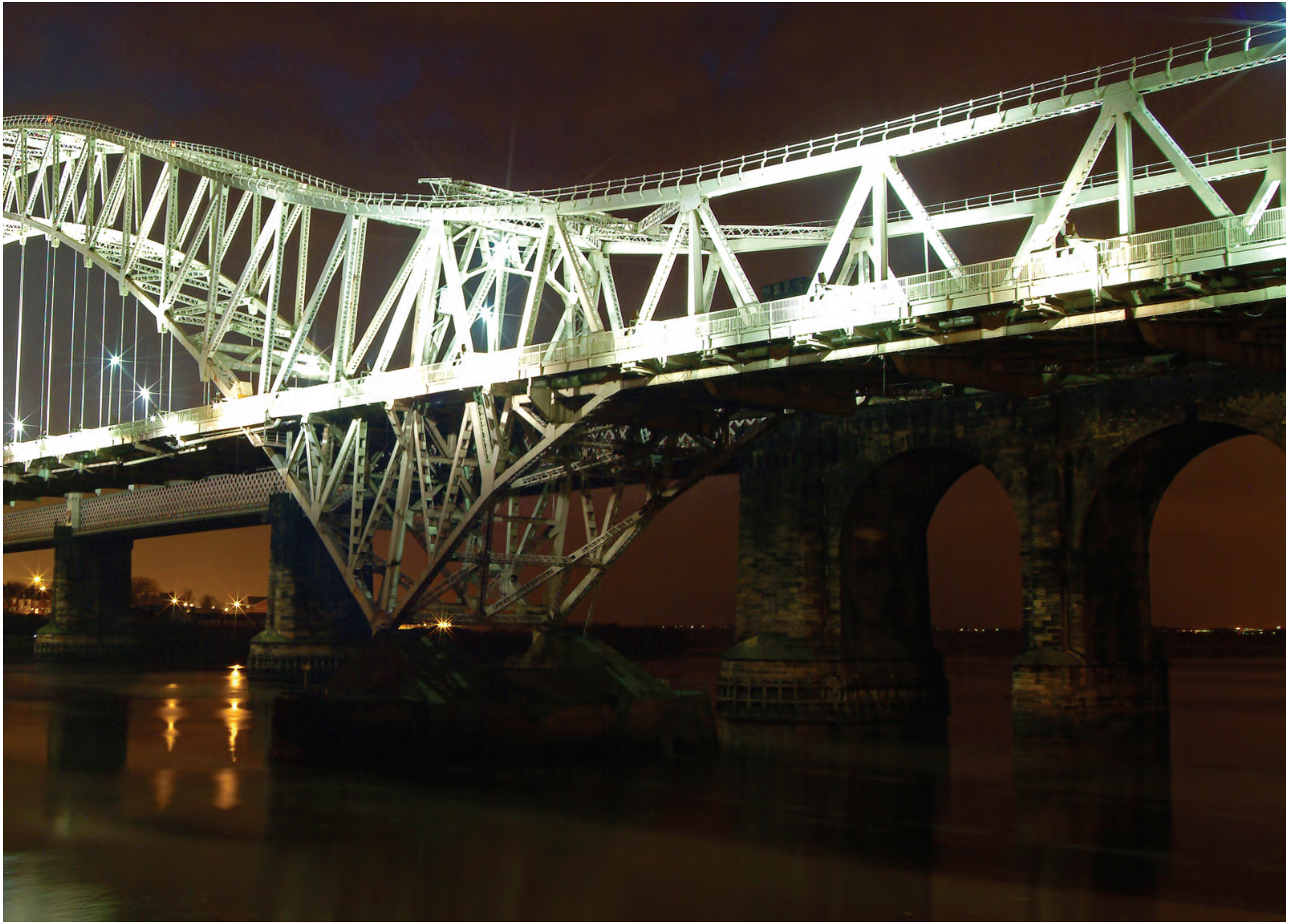
Three miles down river from Warrington is Fiddler's Ferry, formerly a ferry crossing point, and then a river boat yard in the 19th century. Now it is the site of a huge coal-fired power station, built here for its proximity to the coal fields of St Helens. In the bright light of a cold autumn morning, clouds of vapour issue from the rims of the eight vast concrete cooling towers and drift out across the featureless flat landscape. On the other side of the river the ground rises to a rocky hilltop which is crowned by the ruins of Halton Castle, built for defence in the 12th century, and later owned by John of Gaunt, who used it as a hunting lodge. Clustered at the foot of the castle is a group of interesting buildings including a private library, built in 1733 by Sir John Chesshyre, prime sergeant to George II, the Castle Hotel, originally the 18th century courthouse of the Duchy of Lancaster, and the Seneschal's House of 1598. The Castle was garrisoned by the Royalists during the Civil War, then pulled down by the Parliamentarians. Later, it was adapted as an eyecatcher by Sir Richard Brooke to improve the view from his nearby house Norton Priory.

Right The Silver Jubilee Bridge is a compression arch suspended-deck bridge built in 1961 between Runcorn and Widnes. Designed by Mott, Hay and Anderson and built by Dorman Long, the original construction was a two lane road traffic bridge later increased to four lanes. Ferry crossings have been recorded at this spot as early as the 12th century.
Photograph by Alan Novelli

Norton Priory was originally founded in 1133 for Augustinian canons in a remote riverside location. The Brookes family acquired it at the Dissolution, and rebuilt it as a country house, retaining only the undercroft of the abbot's quarters. During the later 18th century the family opposed the encroachment of canals across their land, and then fought against railways and chemical fumes. Finally in 1928 they gave up the struggle, leaving the house to be demolished and the stone used to build a sulphuric acid plant. Today the site of the priory is an archaeological museum and a monastic garden, its great treasure being an 11 foot high medieval statue of St Christopher, formerly a devotional object for travellers fording the Mersey at low tide.

It was the misfortune of the Brookes of Norton Priory to live close to what became an industrial hot spot, for the twin towns of Runcorn and Widnes are now renowned for their toxicity and pollution. But initially it was the coming of the canals and the establishment of a transhipment point on the Mersey at Runcorn that led to the rapid development of the area. The first to see the potential was the Earl of Bridgewater, whose canal gave access to Manchester and its hinterland. In order that he could personally supervise the development of the wharfs and canal basin, he built himself an imposing mansion overlooking the construction site on the river bank (the house has recently been converted to flats). The Bridgewater Canal was followed by the Trent and Mersey Canal, which opened links with the Cheshire saltworks and the potteries. From the northern shore of the river, the Sankey Canal connected Widnes with the coal fields and glass making industries of St Helens. At Runcorn itself, red sandstone of excellent quality was quarried and transported down river for the construction of many of Liverpool's great Georgian and Victorian buildings. But the major economic expansion came with the establishment of the chemical industry, and in particular with the production of alkali, on which the manufacture of soap, glass and many Victorian household products depended.

Alkali production involves mixing salt with sulphuric acid, then burning it in a furnace with lime and coal, and Runcorn and Widnes were situated close to the sources of all the commodities required in that process. But the chemical factories threw vast quantities of hydrochloric acid gas and choking fumes into the atmosphere, damaging the health of the workers and local residents, whilst the toxic waste product (known as galligoo from the oozing



Opposite The lighthouse on Hale Head dates from 1906, replacing a shorter tower built seventy years earlier. Although the lamp chamber is only 75ft above sea level, the beam could be seen from as far away as forty miles. The lighthouse was last operational in 1958 and is now a private residence.

Hale village has its roots in Anglo-Saxon times. The village's principal claim to fame is John Middleton, 'The Childe of Hale', a gentle giant who grew to a height of 9ft 3ins. He was born in 1578, into a poor family. John died aged 45 and was laid to rest in the churchyard, under a sandstone slab.
Photograph by Alan Novelli

noise it made) found its way into the Mersey, producing hydrogen sulphide, characterised by its stench of rotten eggs. The nucleus of this unpleasant activity was Spike Island, the area of land bounded by the north bank of the river and the Sankey Canal. Today this is a nature reserve, with little trace of its industrial past, but the life of the workers is powerfully evoked at Catalyst, the nearby museum of the chemical industry that is housed in part of Hutchinson's former alkali works.

The river estuary at the Runcorn Gap is now dominated by the vast latticed steel arch of the road bridge and the tangle of elevated roadways that lead to it. Within this traffic-laden environment, a civilised waterfront environment has not yet emerged. This is in part because financial resources have been concentrated on Runcorn New Town to the exclusion of the old settlement at Runcorn, but also because the new housing built on the river frontage in recent years has failed to achieve a distinctive character. More successful is the Brindley Centre, a striking new theatre and gallery on the edge of the Bridgewater Canal, designed by John Miller and Partners, that has given Runcorn a lively cultural focus. Across the river at Widnes, which was described in 1888 by the Daily News as 'the dirtiest, ugliest and most depressing town in England', waterfront regeneration has scarcely begun.

From the Runcorn Gap, the estuary widens in a great sweep alongside the Weston Point Dock with its church built for the spiritual guidance of the watermen, past the salt works, the chemical plant and the power station on the hillside above, brightly illuminated at night by a firmament of shimmering lights, and on across the Frodsham Marshes to the ridge of hills beyond. The north bank is entirely rural, its outline punctuated only by the lighthouse at Hale Point which guided river boats past the treacherous sandbanks close to the shore. Nearby is a curiosity, a duck decoy dating from the early 18th century, and possibly earlier. Constructed in a marshy area, it consists of a moated enclosure with a hexagonal pool from which a series of tapering channels or 'pipes' leads off. At the end of the pipes were nets into which the ducks were driven by dogs. It is said that up to 1,500 ducks were trapped in a season, and though no longer in use, it is preserved as a rare example of wildfowling tradition. Just inland from the lighthouse is the village of Hale, which remains untouched by the industrial revolution. Clustered around the village green are the ancient church, groups of thatched whitewashed cottages, and the Manor House, originally the parsonage, with its elaborate Baroque frontage, added by the Revd. William Langford in the early 18th century.

On the south bank of the river, beyond the Frodsham marshes the smells take hold again, borne on the wind from the vast petro-chemical conglomeration at Stanlow, Thornton and Ince. This dramatic and sculptural landscape of fuel tanks and smoking chimneys, gantries and elevated walkways, all connected by miles of snaking metal pipes and cables grew up after the arrival of the Manchester Ship Canal, which runs alongside the river from Runcorn down to Eastham. But it is worth exploring the accessible parts of the area, not just for its wildlife, but for architectural treasures too. Ince Manor is a monastic grange built in the 13th century for the Benedictine Abbey at Chester (now the Cathedral). It has recently been rescued from dereliction by the Chester Buildings Preservation Trust. Stanlow Abbey, a late 12th century Cistercian Monastery where Edward I once stayed, is now part of a farm complex, and is quietly crumbling away. The medieval church at Thornton-le-Moors too needs rescuing, for it has recently been abandoned by its diminishing local community.

The town of Ellesmere Port beyond also profited from the coming of the Manchester Ship Canal, though industrialisation had already taken hold following the construction of the Ellesmere Canal (later the Shropshire Union) in 1796. Thomas Telford was the engineer, and he designed a series of magnificent docks and warehouses that were constructed between 1830 and 1843 on the banks of the river. These now house the National Waterways Museum, with a collection of objects

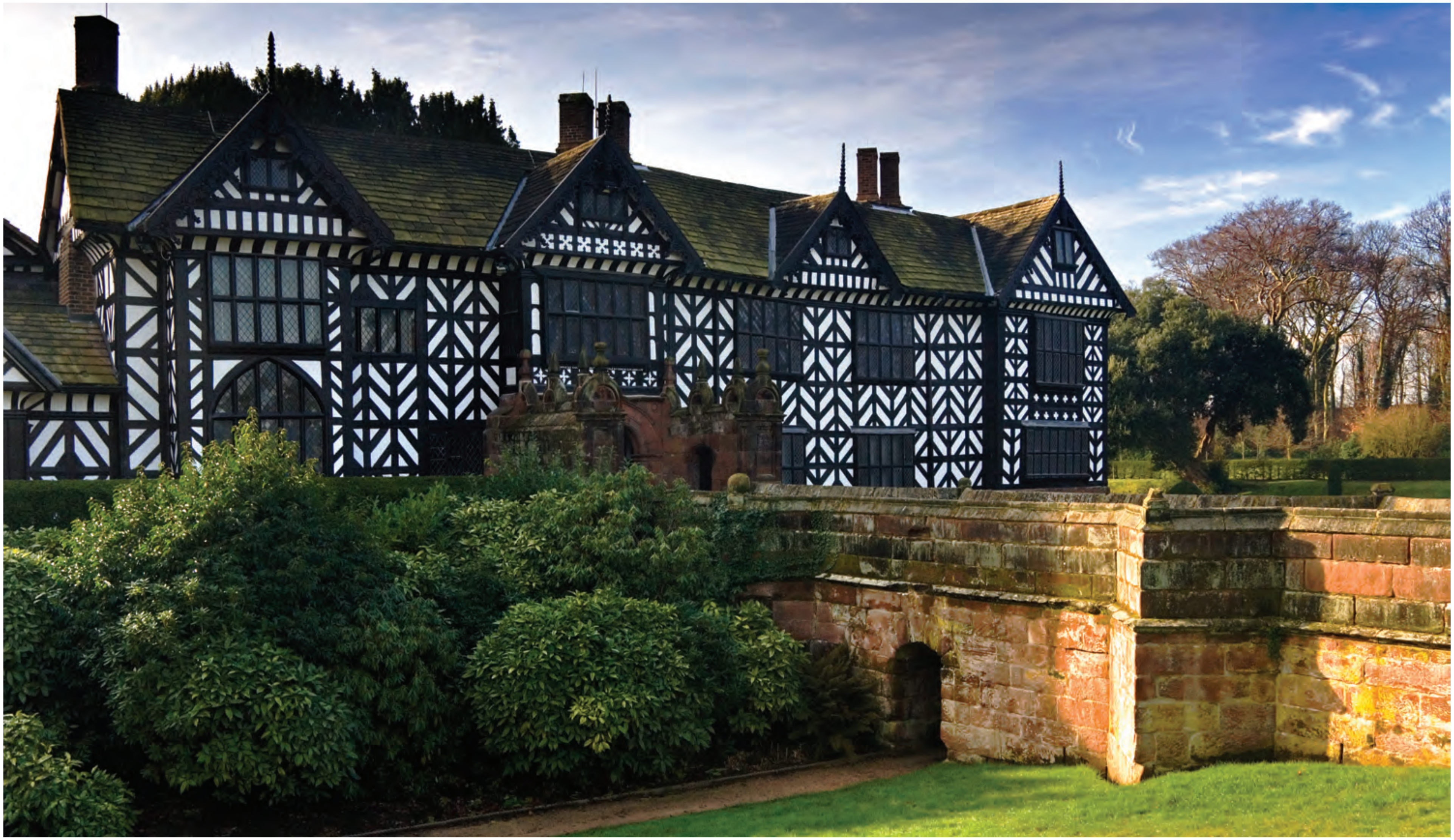
Opposite Speke Hall is one of Britain's finest timber framed buildings. Since the end of the 15th century the building has been gradually renovated and extended. The Great Hall was the first part of the house to be built between 1490–1506. The last significant change to the building was in 1598, when the north range was added by Edward Norris. The Hall is now owned by The National Trust and is open to the public.
Photograph by Alan Novelli

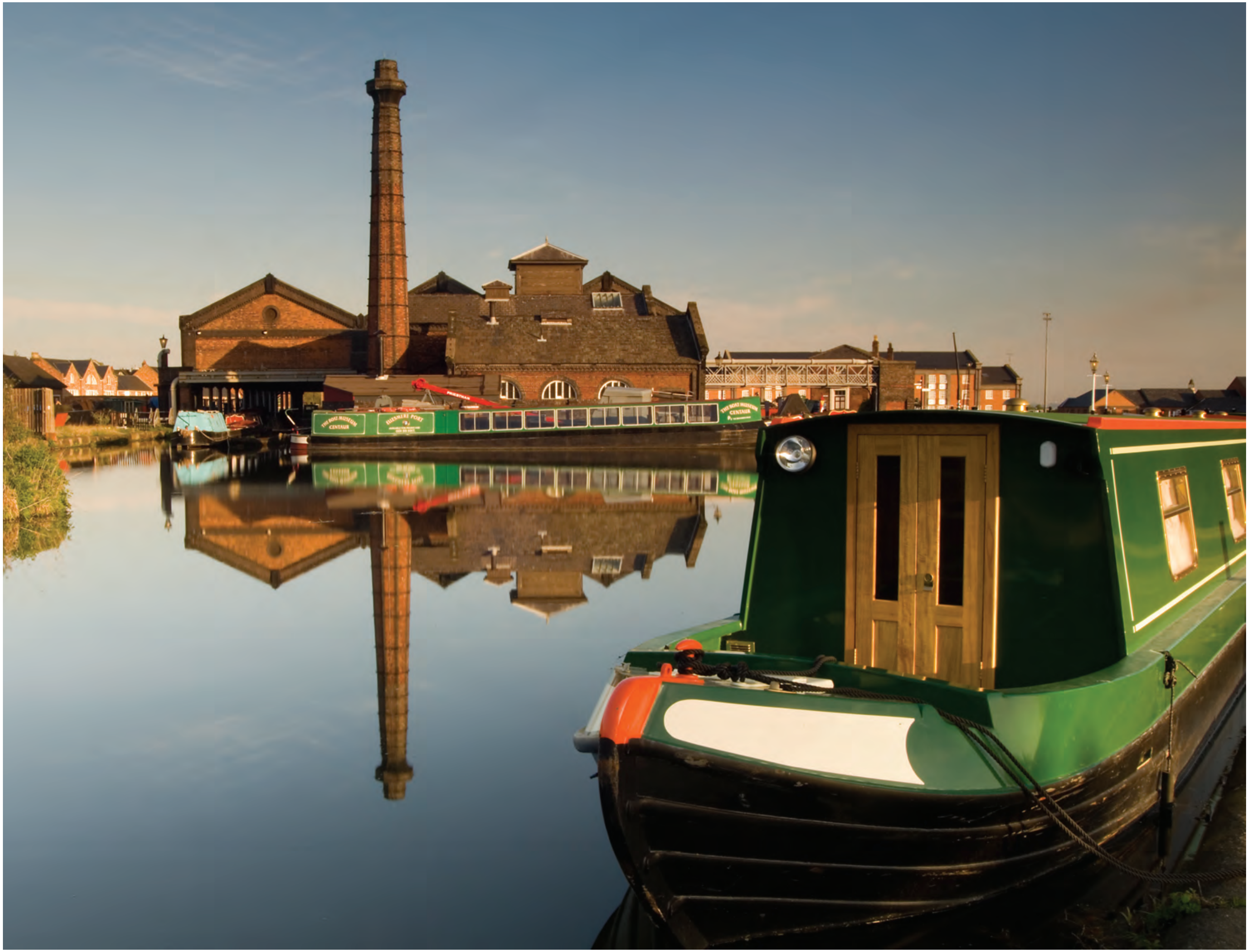
related to canal heritage. In addition to the goods warehouses, the canal offices, engine houses and stables, there is a terrace of dock workers' cottages that survives from the same period. But Ellesmere Port has always had an image problem: in 1847 William Mortimer commented that "there is no town in the Kingdom, possessed of equal advantages, which presents so dull, – so gloomy an appearance". Today it still suffers, and even its showpiece, Telford's canal basin, is blighted by a group of recent apartment blocks that mimic, but fail woefully to capture the character of the Georgian structures they adjoin.

The Manchester Ship Canal terminates at Eastham just north of Ellesmere Port. Here the oil tankers discharge the crude oil that continues by pipeline to the refineries at Stanlow, and here also are engineering, papermaking and chemical factories. But the biggest employer in this area is Vauxhall Motors, which opened a car plant on the bank of the Mersey in 1963. Vauxhalls were persuaded to come to Ellesmere Port, an area of high unemployment, by government incentives, but they were also attracted by the site of Hooton Park This was the former country estate of Richard Naylor, a banker and property speculator, and one of the wealthiest businessmen in Victorian Liverpool. Hooton Hall boasted a tall tower and a columned sculpture gallery, and within the grounds there was a racecourse. But at the outbreak of the First World War, the Park was requisitioned, the Hall demolished and an aerodrome was created for the Royal Flying Corps, complete with a trio of aircraft hangars, their roofs constructed from flimsy Belfast trusses. Intended only for the duration of hostilities, the hangars came into service again during the Second World War and still survive today, kept alive by a group of historic aircraft enthusiasts. In 1930 Hooton Park became the first civic airfield in the north of England, but three years later it was replaced by the new airport across the river at Speke.

The 1930s development of Speke was an ambitious municipal enterprise. It followed the acquisition of 730 hectares of the old Speke Hall estate to create a new industrial area to rival Trafford Park and to attract new industries to Liverpool. A boulevard runs parallel with the river, to the north of which the original industrial buildings were erected, whilst on the south side a new residential suburb grew up. By 1955 the population had reached 21,000, but more recently it has dramatically declined. To counter this, efforts have been made to regenerate the area, the focus being the rapid expansion of Liverpool John Lennon Airport. With the relocation of the airfield to a nearby site, the original Art Deco airport structures have been successfully adapted as a hotel, offices and leisure centre, the focus of the new Estuary Business Park. Less fortunate has been fate of Speke Hall, the beautiful 16th century moated house belonging to the National Trust, which has lost its once peaceful rural setting on the banks of the river, and is now blighted by the roar of aircraft. Yet it is an unexpected pleasure to find such a picturesque timber framed structure so close to a great city.

Continuing northwards from Speke, on both sides of the river the waterfront scene becomes more varied. At Garston are the cranes of a still active port, and beyond are the delightful marine residential estates of Cressington, Grassendale and Fulwood Park, laid out in the mid 19th century with stuccoed villas for prosperous Liverpool merchants. On the Wirral side too there are planned estates, such as Rock Park, where the large houses have fine river views. But more remarkable are the model villages built at Bromborough Pool and Port Sunlight for industrial workers rather than the business class who could afford a favoured location. Bromborough Pool is one of the earliest model villages in the country, created by Price's Candle Company for its factory workers in 1853. Alongside the factory, there are terraced houses, a church, school and village hall, together with a cricket ground and allotments. After the candle factory closed, the village declined; but recently it has been rescued by Riverside Housing Association, which is now fighting Wirral Council's decision to close the school on economic grounds. Much more





Opposite The National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port has the largest collection of canal boats in the world, a working lock and dock workers cottages. The open air museum provides a glimpse of life during the heyday of our waterways, including steam driven pumping engines which supplied the power for the hydraulic cranes and capstans around the dock.
Photograph by Alan Novelli

ambitious was Port Sunlight, the enlightened creation of W.H. Lever, First Viscount Leverhulme. Lever was one of the most successful businessmen of the Victorian age, and his money came from soap. He moved his factory from Warrington to the banks of the Mersey in 1888, with the idea of establishing an industrial village, where he combined his passionate interests in social improvement, architecture and landscape design. His village is the ultimate garden settlement, with avenues, walks, vistas, abundant greenery, statuary and monuments. The cottages, designed in many different styles, are grouped into blocks, neat and ordered as Lever favoured. For the recreation and improvement of his workforce he provided clubs and dining rooms, theatre and institute, schools and social facilities. At the centre of the village is the gallery built in memory of his wife that contains his astonishing art collection.

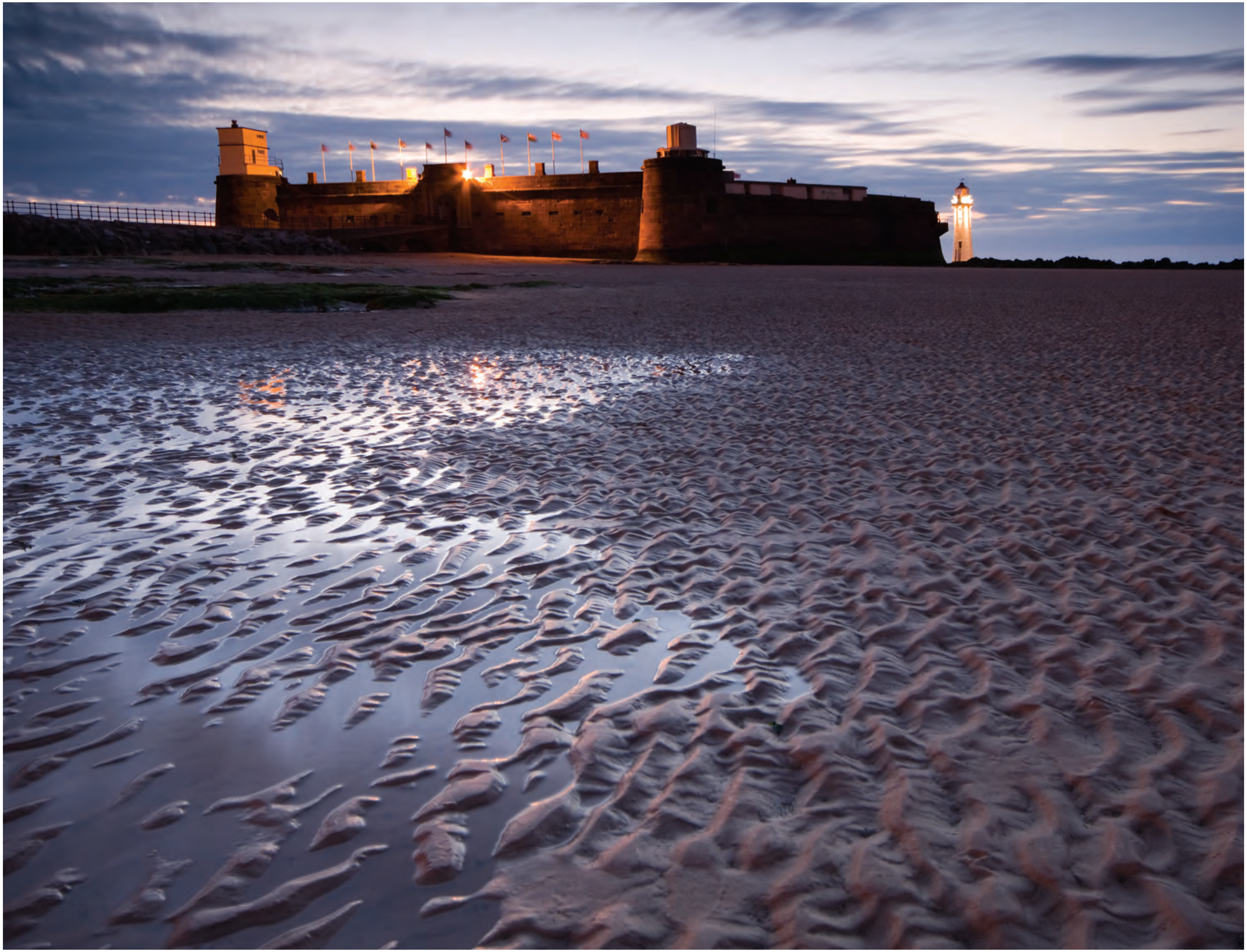
In his social mission, Lever was untypical of his class, but as a businessman he was bold, determined and ruthless. An establishment outsider, a non-conformist and an innovator, he embodied those virtues that led to and sustained the great seaport of Liverpool during its period of prosperity in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. Today Liverpool is a World Heritage Site, inscribed as “the supreme example of a commercial port at the time of Britain’s greatest global influence”. The legacy of that imperial age is strikingly visible along the riverfront: in the urban landscape of the maritime city with its seven miles of docks, its dockside warehouses, its banks, offices and exchanges, in its cathedrals that crown the escarpment, and in the great cultural and civic buildings with their collections and works of art, in the public sculptures, and in the human endeavour that underpinned that relentless drive for profit, prosperity and civic achievement. Whilst the culture and the way of life of a great port no longer survives, the city’s maritime connections with civilisations from across the globe have left a cosmopolitan outlook and enriched the flow of ideas and influence.

It is in Liverpool that the River Mersey reaches its architectural climax. Right on the river edge is the Albert Dock with its vast complex of bonded warehouses constructed in brick and cast iron, an engineering masterpiece that is unmatched in Europe. Opened in 1846, it was the work of Jesse Hartley, Liverpool’s innovative dock engineer. Its successful conversion and reuse as museums and restaurants, shops and offices was the flagship of Liverpool’s first phase of regeneration following Michael Heseltine’s political intervention in 1981. Hartley’s equally robust Stanley Dock warehouses, a mile further down river, however, remain empty, together with the gargantuan Tobacco Warehouse which towers over the central docks.

At the heart of the city is the Pier Head, a vast waterfront space created at the beginning of the 20th century as a transport hub, and full of activity when the Mersey was busy with passenger liners, merchant ships and cross river ferry boats. The Three Graces, as they have come to be known, which date from this period, are the symbol of Liverpool, memorable by their scale, confident swagger, and in the case of the Royal Liver Building, by its idiosyncratic outline of twin towers topped by the city’s famous liver birds with their wings outstretched. Today, the city’s changing skyline is a subject of vigorous debate amongst developers, city planners and conservationists. For whilst most World Heritage Sites consist of groups of static monuments where scope for change is strictly limited, Liverpool’s redundant dockland and war-damaged hinterland is rapidly being developed as a new spirit of confidence and enterprise grips the city. A cluster of tall towers is appearing to the north of the Pier Head, a vibrant retail quarter is taking shape east of the Albert Dock, whilst a new waterfront performance arena adjoins it to the south. The scale, ambition and quality of this regeneration activity far surpasses the timid development schemes of the 1980s and 90s, and promises a sustainable future for the city that is European Capital of Culture in 2008.

Liverpool enjoys one of the most impressive settings of all English cities, and the finest views are to be had from the opposite banks of the river. But

Liverpool waterfront is one of the most recognizable city panoramas in the world. Dominated by the 'Three Graces' (the Royal Liver, Cunard and Port of Liverpool buildings), the historic waterfront has been granted World Heritage Site status.
Photograph by Alan Novelli



Opposite Fort Perch Rock was built between 1826 and 1829 at the entrance to the Mersey with 30 foot walls and 40 foot towers, it was in use until after the second world war. The lighthouse was constructed between 1827-30. The name 'Perch Rock' comes from the original 1683 light, which was referred to as a wooden 'perch' with a light on top of a pole. This lighthouse, although deactivated in 1973, has been recently restored.

In 1830, Liverpool merchant, James Atherton, purchased much of the land at Rock Point, which enjoyed views out to sea and across the Mersey and had a good beach. His aim was to develop it as a northern equivalent of Brighton, a seaside resort and watering hole for the gentry – hence New Brighton.
Photograph by Alan Novelli

the Wirral waterfront has so far failed to benefit from its scenic potential. Whilst Liverpool's buildings, old and new, look outwards in celebration of the city's global connections, Birkenhead has turned its back on the river, hiding its architectural riches from view. Its only real landmark is the ventilation shaft for the Mersey Tunnel, massive and windowless, its outline of diminishing planes enlivened by syncopated patterns of canted bricks. But if the river prospect of Birkenhead fails to impress today, it is not for lack of ambition for, in the mid 19th century, it had aspirations to rival Liverpool in economic power. The town's brief period of prosperity was based on shipbuilding, and its Scottish founder, William Laird, engaged his compatriot James Gillespie Graham to create a plan that was intended to rival the New Town of Edinburgh. Its heart was Hamilton Square, one of the most magnificent residential squares in England. In the 1840s, when Joseph Paxton converted 92 hectares into the UK's first municipal park, and the great series of enclosed docks were opened, hopes were high. But the ambition failed, for the grandeur of the great grid iron town plan was impractical, and the long wide streets were soon built up with rows of brick cottages, no different from the workers' houses of Liverpool. 150 years later, grand plans for Birkenhead are once again in the air. With the recent acquisition by Peel Holdings of the Birkenhead Docks, a £4.5 billion regeneration project has been launched for the Wirral waterfront. Named Wirral Waters, it is to be centred on a cluster of skyscrapers that take advantage of some of the country's finest urban views.

Birkenhead and the adjoining town of Wallasey merge around the great series of enclosed docks, but both have their own separate identities. The centrepiece of Hamilton Square is Birkenhead Town Hall, a robust expression of municipal pride when it was erected in 1887. Yet it was spectacularly upstaged in 1920 by Wallasey Town Hall, which looks out towards Liverpool on an elevated plateau high above the river at Seacombe. With its tower derived from the Mausoleum of Hallicarnassos, built in 353BC as a tomb for King Mausolos by his widow, and one of the seven wonders of the Ancient World, Wallasey's building was chosen to act as the civic heart of the new Borough of Wirral.

Once past Wallasey Town Hall, the open sea comes into view, and off the northern tip of the peninsula, on a sand-covered shelf stands the Perch Rock Lighthouse, built in 1830 to guide ships into the port of Liverpool. Since the lighthouse was built, the Mersey channel has shifted closer to the opposite bank of the river, and in 1973 the structure fell out of use. Threatened with demolition, it was bought for £100 by a local architect, Norman Kingham, who went on to rescue the adjoining Fort Perch Rock, which had also become redundant. Though the fort was built to guard the seaward approach to Liverpool just after the Napoleonic Wars, it has never had to repel invading ships, and today it is connected to the land by a causeway and municipal car park. Nonetheless, the fort and lighthouse are the landmark buildings of New Brighton, whose early developers, like those of Birkenhead, had grand ideas. New Brighton was intended as a fashionable seaside resort, and large marine residences with sea views were erected in the 1830s. But no great hotels followed, and by the end of the 19th century, it had become a place of entertainment for day trippers from Liverpool. Its high point as a working class resort was the first decade of the 20th century, when a great tower that exceeded Blackpool's in height was erected. But alas the tower lasted less than 20 years, and since then the town has struggled to find an identity.

For millions of emigrants who sought a life in the New World, the last glimpse of the Liverpool waterfront as they left the river by ship provided an enduring image. Whilst the Mersey no longer teems with steamers and ferry boats, the survival of the city's historic urban landscape, its pioneering dock structures and its architectural legacy are a testament to the international importance of Liverpool and the great river on which it stands.