

ISSN 1476-1580



North West Geography

Volume 17, Number 2, 2017

Bury in 1831: a newly-discovered early plan of the town

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Abstract:

A formerly unknown town plan of Bury by John Wood has recently been discovered. Previously the only known plan of a Lancashire town by Wood was of Rochdale which was also done in 1831. The Bury plan has some features which differ from most of Wood's numerous plans of other towns, for example its lack of reference to inns, the absence of landowners' names and the very generalised depiction of many buildings. This may suggest that Wood cut short the survey in light of poor sales. However, the Bury map is important since it is now the earliest detailed plan of the town and comparison with the first 6" OS map shows it to be highly accurate. Comparison with an 1843 map of Bury by Benson shows the pattern of the early growth of the industrial town in the 12 years between the two surveys.

Key Words:

Town plans; John Wood; Bury; 19th century growth

John Wood, the nineteenth-century cartographer, surveyed an impressive range of towns across much of Great Britain. The most recent listing suggests that he published plans of 16 towns in Wales, 57 in Scotland and 75 or 76 in England.¹ However, the towns of neither Lancashire nor Cheshire feature significantly in this list since until now a plan of Rochdale has been the only plan of a Lancashire town by Wood that had been known;² and Cheshire is equally little represented, with Wood's lone plan being of Chester. Within the wider North West, Cumbria is much more fully covered with plans of no fewer than 7 towns.³

The absence of Lancashire towns can probably best be explained by the fact that Baines's *History of Lancashire* contained large plans of Manchester and Liverpool and smaller plans of Ashton, Blackburn, Bolton, Lancaster, Oldham, Preston and Rochdale, as well as Stockport in Cheshire. Since the first edition was published in 1825, Wood may well have considered that there would be little market for new plans of these places. The fact that he produced a plan of Rochdale could possibly have been a case of Wood dipping his toe into the market to see whether there were sufficient sales to justify his surveying other Lancashire

towns. Since there appears to be only a single known surviving original of Rochdale this may suggest that sales were limited and that Wood's caution was fully justified.

However, a hitherto unknown plan of Bury by John Wood has recently been unearthed in a private collection (Figure 1). It is at a scale of 4 chains to the inch and measures 59 by 50cms. No other copy appears to be held in any of the obvious archives.⁴ If it is a unique example, its survival may well be due to the fact that this copy has been dissected on linen and folded into card covers with dimensions of 11x17cm, which would have made it much less prone to damage than had it been kept in a large single-sheet format like the copies of most of his other town plans. The surveying and publication details of the Bury plan are identical to those of Rochdale: it is dated 1831; Wood shows his (temporary) address as Northallerton in Yorkshire, which was presumably the base which he used to travel to Lancashire; and the engraving was done by William Murphy in Edinburgh, Wood's home town. It can now confidently be added to the already impressive list of towns surveyed by Wood.

1: Robson BT (2014) 'John Wood: the undervalued cartographer', *The Cartographic Journal*, 51, 257-73. The uncertainty about the number of English plans is because Wood may or may not have done a plan of Grantham.

2: The Post Office Museum has an original, but the only other known example is a photocopy held by the Rochdale archives.

3: Robson BT (2013) 'John Wood's town plans and the evolving urban hierarchy of Cumbria', *North West Geography*, 13(2), 1-13.

4: If any reader is aware of other copies we would be very grateful to be informed.

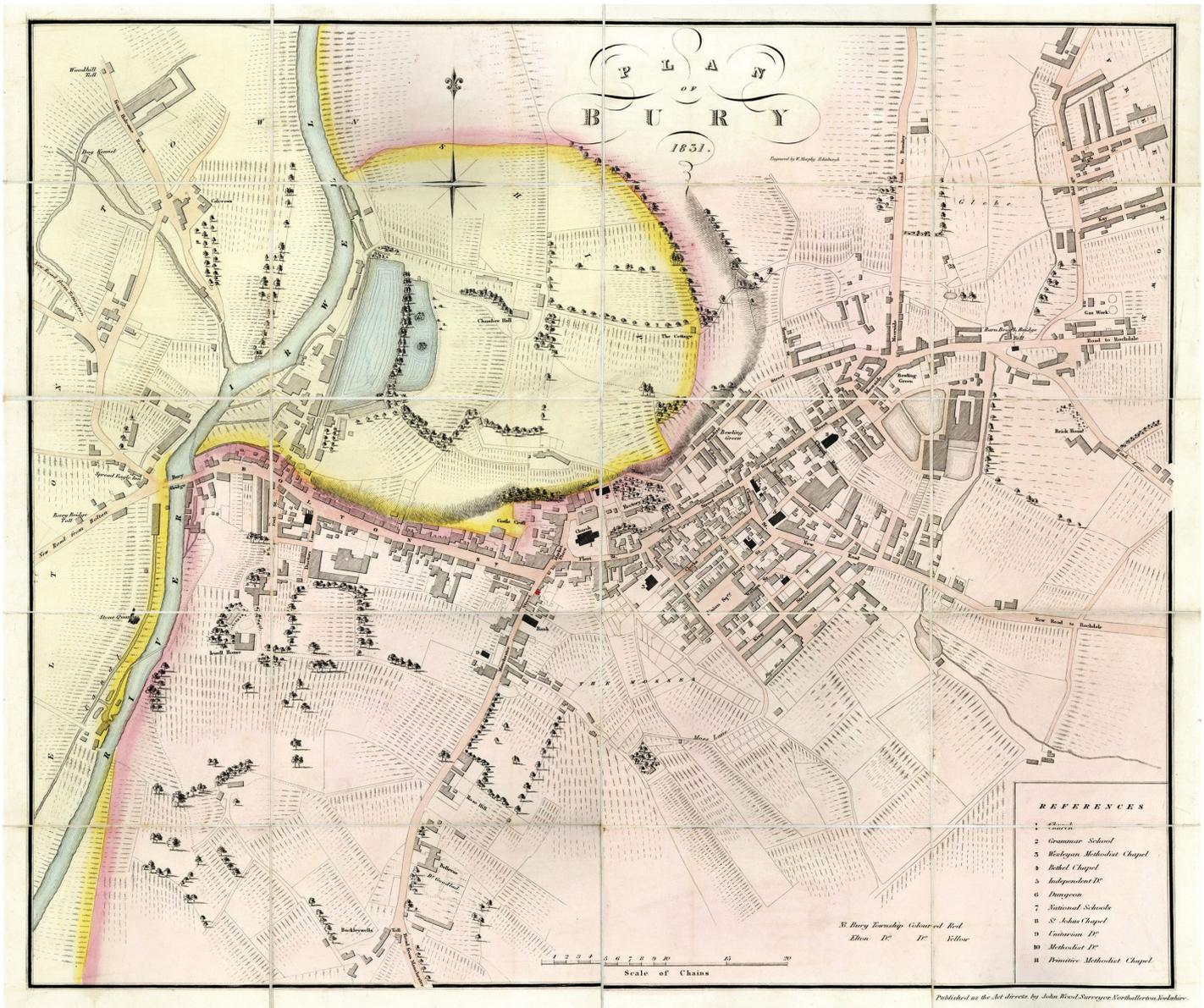


Figure 1. Wood's 1831 Plan of Bury.

As well as being an exciting addition to the Wood corpus, and throwing valuable light on the history of the town's development, the map also poses some questions. Amongst the welter of Lancashire towns, why did Wood pick out these two towns? In Bury's case it may have been that there was no competition since it was not one of the towns for which a plan was included in Baines's *History*. However that is not the case for Rochdale. It is tempting to think that both may have been done in connection with mapping for the 1832 Reform Act, not least since both show township boundaries and the Rochdale plan includes the curious circular boundary of the town's police district which was used to define the new borough in that Act. However the plans of both towns that were used by Robert Dawson for

the Boundary Commission were surveyed by Thornton and Smith at 2 inches to the mile and it is their plans, not Wood's, that were included in the Commissioners' published report.

Much of the detail of Wood's Bury is similar to his other plans. Most of the principal streets are named; some individual buildings are depicted in outline, suggesting that Wood did indeed undertake a detailed survey; some of the larger houses are named, including Chamber Hall, birthplace of Sir Robert Peel, the soon-to-be Prime Minister; four toll houses are marked, including Barn Brook Bridge in the east and Bury Bridge in the west; and all eight of the churches and chapels that existed in 1831 are shown and named.

However, compared to most other Wood maps the Bury plan shows far less detail. Unusually, there is only a single reference to a land or property owner – Dr Goodlad at Bellevue, south of the town centre – and there is little suggestion of the growing importance of the cotton mills or iron foundries that were becoming the staple of the town's industry. Curiously, some of the mills and foundries are depicted on the plan, but are not named as such; examples include the large cotton mill complex just south of Moorgate, the cotton mill east of Butcher Row, Hudcar Mill and Chesham Mill in Freetown and the iron foundry just north of Bury Bridge. In all cases these are shown simply as outline buildings without any indication of their function. Indeed, the only named references to any form of industrial activity are the naming of a rope walk, a gas works and a stone quarry. Moreover, the majority of buildings, especially in the outer areas, are shown only as generalised outlines. A further puzzle is that, uncharacteristically, his reference list of individual buildings is both short – with only 11 numbered items – and is almost wholly comprised of churches and chapels. Unlike typical Wood plans, it does not include the large numbers of inns that he almost invariably listed. Indeed, there is only a single inn identified on the Bury plan, the Spread Eagle on the Elton side of Bury Bridge. There were clearly more both in the town centre and in Freetown.

This all gives the plan a curiously unfinished quality, unlike most of Wood's other plans, and indeed unlike his Rochdale plan which both includes numerous inns amongst its 24 numbered references as well as identifying a variety of mills on the body of the map itself. This supports the view that Wood may initially have surveyed Rochdale but, since subscriptions to buy the finished engraved copy proved sparse, he never spent time to complete the details of his Bury survey in full.

The most authoritative listing of British town plans suggests that a large manuscript plan of 1840 is the earliest plan of Bury, followed by a detailed plan by W. Benson in 1843.⁵ However, the appearance of Wood's 1831 plan must now be seen as the earliest detailed plan of the town and it offers a valuable depiction of the early pattern of the growing town.

The 1840 plan is intriguing. It is unsigned and titled only 'Plan of the Borough of Bury in the County of Lancaster'. At a scale of 2 chains to an inch it is larger than Wood's plan, but it covers exactly the same area as Wood's. While it incorporates some new developments built in the nine years since Wood (such as the triangular New Market House, New Market Road and Moss Lane) and lists 24 named buildings, it nevertheless bears a striking resemblance to Wood's plan, both in the naming of streets and the rather generalised outlines of buildings. The suspicion must be that it may have been based to a greater or lesser extent on Wood's earlier plan. Its purpose is not clear, but it has one novel feature which may hold clues as to why it was drawn. It names and demarcates four 'districts' in the town: Parish Church District; St. John's District, St. Paul's District; and Irwell School District. The most probable explanation is that the map was drawn in connection with one of the numerous church building acts in the 19th century and showed the need for an established church in the western part of the town. It could therefore have been used to make the case for the building of All Saint's Church in Elton which was founded in 1843 and shown on Benson's map, so the timings make some sense.

The Benson plan (Figure 2) is rather more detailed than the 1840 manuscript plan and incorporates many more original features. It must therefore offer a more valuable comparison with Wood. Both are at large scales⁶ and the comparison between the two can therefore show details of the town's growth over the intervening 12 years.

First, however, it is interesting to compare the 'geometry' of the Wood and Benson plans to explore their accuracy. Figure 3 takes the principal streets shown by Wood together with the detail of the rivers, and then overlays the corresponding features shown on Benson's plan.⁷ The vast majority of the outlines of the two plans is virtually identical, suggesting that Wood not only made an original survey of the town but one that was apparently very accurate since there were no earlier plans on which he could have drawn. In the body of the town there are only very minor discrepancies between the two maps. However, elsewhere there are three main areas where differences occur: in the streets in Freetown in the east; in some of the streets to the

5: See the invaluable website catalogue of British town plans by Roger Kain and Richard Oliver (<http://townmaps.data.history.ac.uk>); also their *British town maps: a history*, British Library, 2015. The Bury Archives has the 1840 manuscript map and a copy of the Benson, but not the Wood map.

6: Wood's plan is 1:3168 and Benson's is 1:2376.

7: There are clearly other main streets shown by Benson (and, later, by the OS), but they would not have been built by the date of Wood's plan and so are not shown in the outline comparisons.

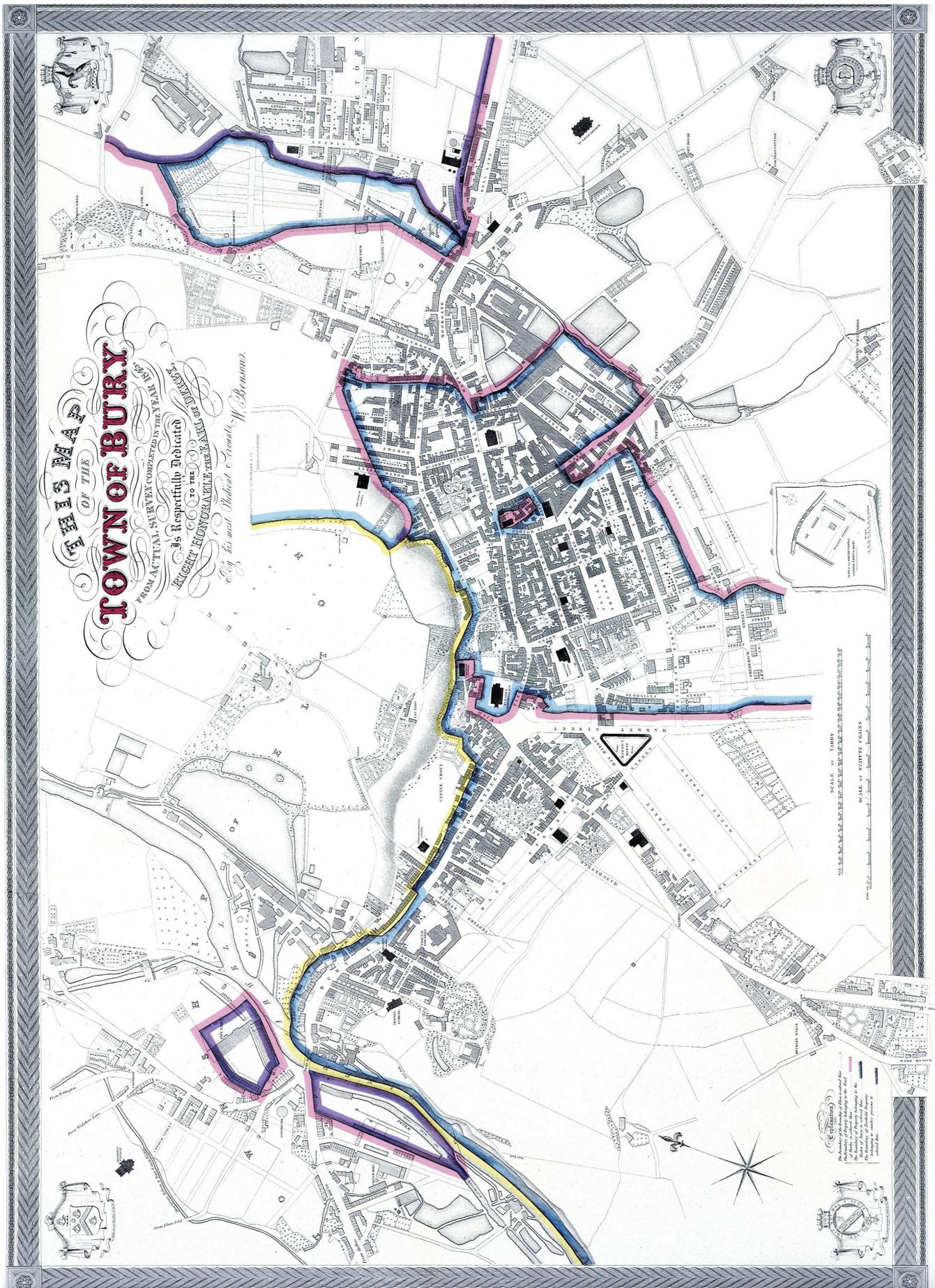


Figure 2: Benson's 1843 plan.

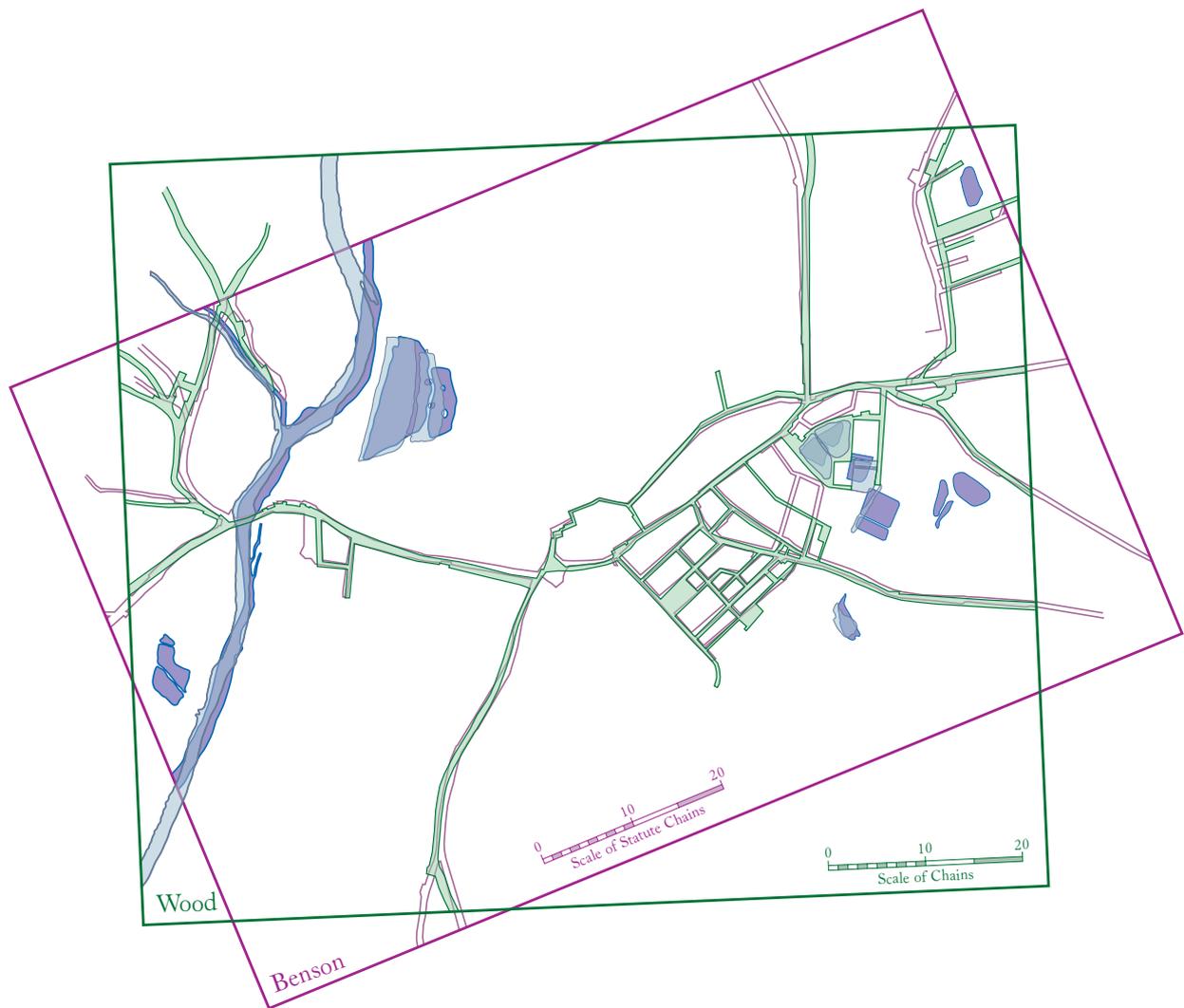


Figure 3: An outline comparison of streets and waterways shown on Wood and on Benson.

east of the town centre (although some differences are the result of subsequent building, for example Chapel Row was truncated by the large cotton mill to the south which had been built by the time of Benson's map⁸); and in the line of the Irwell in the north west which Wood shows as being to the west of the orientation shown by Benson. Assuming that the Ordnance surveyors produced accurate plans, Figure 4 then compares the same streets and rivers on Wood's map with their depiction on the first 6" Ordnance Survey plan which was published in 1851, and surveyed in the years up to 1847. This shows the high degree of accuracy of Wood's survey – with his outline of the streets in Freetown corresponding with the OS distinctly better than does Benson, although the OS plan of the line of the Irwell supports Benson's rather than Wood's depiction.⁹

Comparing the three maps shows clearly the pattern of expansion of the town up to mid-century. There was considerable growth in the period between 1831 and 1843. Indeed, Benson shows with dotted lines a significant number of streets intended for development, which indicates that there was then growing pressure for new development. While many of these never came to fruition in the form shown by Benson, they all suggest that this was a period of active development when plots of land were probably being laid out by landowners in the hope of attracting developers. The main areas of expansion in the west included: the opening of Silver Street; the infilling of much of the areas west of Union Street which Woods called 'The Mosses' and on which the New Market House and new streets were built; some new development along the

8: The 1840 map shows the same truncation of Chapel Row.

9: Unless, of course, the river changed course slightly between 1831 and 1843.

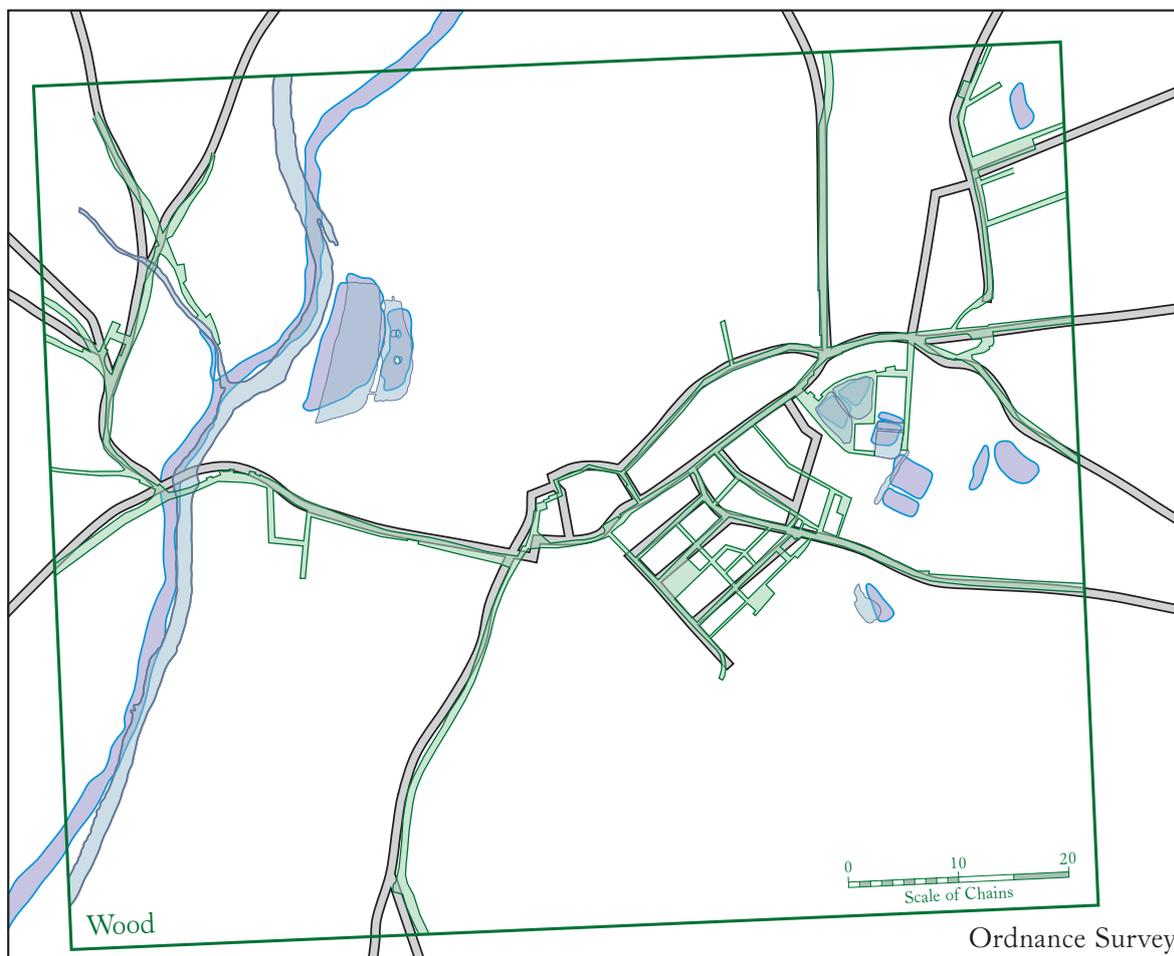


Figure 4: An outline comparison of streets and waterways shown on Wood and on the 1847 OS 6" map.

line of Peel Street towards Irwell House, which included the appearance of Irwell School; and a significant number of cotton mills and new houses to the west of the Irwell in Elton. Paul Hindle has helpfully pointed out that there were also further developments of the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal: Wood shows only a single arm terminating in a warehouse south of Bury Bridge¹⁰, whereas Benson shows further development of the canal with a second short arm having been built to the west (presumably to serve the new cotton mills shown on his map) and an extension of the main arm under the Bolton Road terminating in a wharf beyond the iron mill north of Bury Bridge. There was less growth in the east, with some new buildings appearing along

Moorside and with Benson showing a pattern of projected development of streets on glebe land between Moorside and Freetown.¹¹ The almost separate industrial colony of Freetown had begun to fill out on both sides of Bridge Street. Benson identifies the two large cotton mills which were at the heart of the colony (and were only shown as un-named outlines by Wood). Hudcar Mill¹² to the north and Chesham Mill on High Street provided the employment base for the colony of Freetown which was largely founded by Thomas Greenhalgh who owned the Chesham Mill and built numerous cottages for the workers whom he employed. By 1846 it was said that between one-third and one-quarter of Bury's population lived in Freetown.¹³

10: The 1840 plan shows exactly the same configuration.

11: This is an example where, by the time of the OS survey, the projected streets had not appeared in the form suggested by Benson.

12: The Gregs of Styal acquired the cotton spinning and weaving Hudcar Mill in 1827 and Samuel Greg's son William was given the job of managing it as his apprenticeship to the family business. Weaving started in the mill in 1830.

13: See J.D. Marshall (1968) 'Colonisation as a factor in the planting of towns in North-West England', in H.J.Dyos (ed) *The study of urban history*, Edward Arnold, pp.215-30.

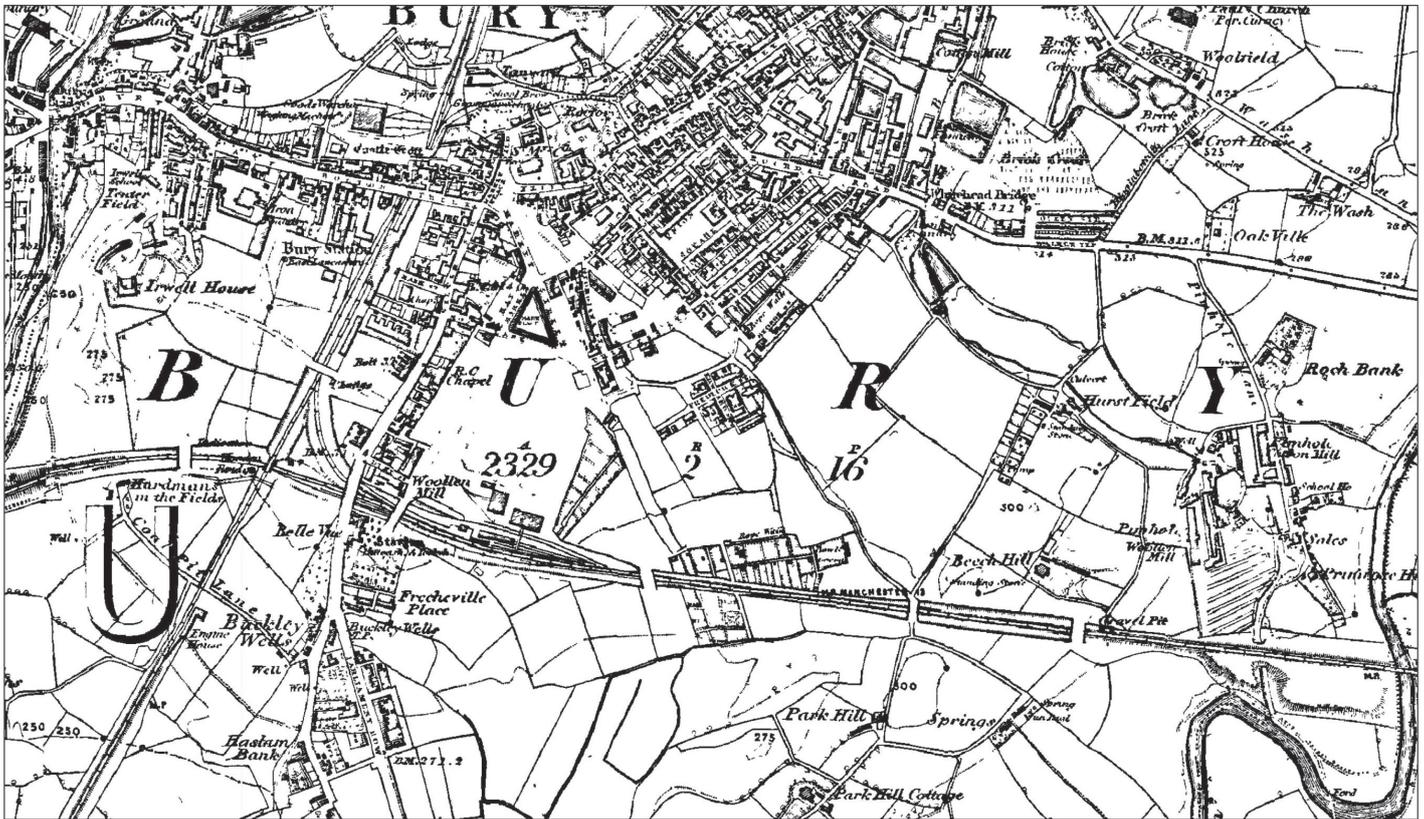


Figure 5: The East Lancashire and Lancashire & Yorkshire railways and their stations shown on the 1847 OS 6" map.

In the second period, between the Benson plan and the Ordnance Survey, there was less change, understandably given the shorter time span between the two maps. However, the really major change was the coming of the railways. The OS plan shows the north-south line of the East Lancashire Railway with its station at Bolton Street, which opened in 1846; and the east-west line of the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway with its Knowsley Street Station which opened in 1848 (Figure 5). The link shown between the two lines – the Bury East Fork – was opened in 1848. The East Lancashire line was driven close to Chamber Hall, the old home of the Peel family, and its proximity clearly made the Hall a less attractive residential site; from 1866 it was used as a Baptist college and was eventually demolished in 1909.

Maps invariably throw up innumerable puzzles, and the early maps of Bury are no exception. The suggestions made here about the role and sequence of the three early plans are speculative but seem plausible. At the very least, Wood's plan of Bury is a valuable discovery, both in augmenting the already impressive range of British towns that he surveyed and in adding cartographic evidence of the early shape of the town and providing a base to show the stages of its growth.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Paul Hindle and Keith Sutton for their helpful comments, and to the staff of Bury Archives.