

Whitehead Lodges



Tottington Mill Print Works was started by Joshua Knowles in 1820 on the site of an old corn mill for which the bottom lodge had probably been built. Its business was calico printing of fabric, rather than paper, and it had five printing machines plus 95 hand-block printing tables in 1841, and seven machines by 1846. The site employed over 400 people at its peak of whom about a quarter were under the age of 13. Yates map of 1786 shows the two brooks that now feed the top and middle lodges but no lodge or reservoirs



# Yates Map 1786





The Greenwood map of 1818 does appear to show the bottom lodge as does the Hennet map in 1829. From that we can assume that the Middle and top lodges were built between 1829 and 1852 although the top lodge could have been a bit later (Elton reservoir was built in 1842). Known as Whitehead Lodges they were built by John Whitehead who owned several local businesses and properties. You can see if you walk around the lodges that they have been largely hand built with row after row of local stone used to line them.

At the bridge over the top lodge you can see evidence of where the stone was quarried.



In late November and early December 1852 it had rained heavily for over a week causing the middle lodge to fill to an alarming level. The small stream (Blackshaw Brook) which flows in to it had become a small river. The previous night had seen so much heavy rainfall that many local inhabitants gathered on the reservoir banks to watch concerned that the bank would not withstand the pressure.



At 7am on the Sunday morning (December 5th  
1852) the reservoir breached, by 9am a hole 40" wide  
and 36ft high had opened up in the embankment.  
Water rushed into the bottom lodge where it was  
temporarily checked.





Breach of Middle lodge  
December 5th 1852  
(from London News)



The lower lodge was soon breached flooding the die works and picking up a 4 ton wagon which narrowly missed destroying the base of one of the chimneys. All the ground floor windows in the mill were destroyed and the costs to Mr Whitehead were estimated at £15,000.

Elton Croft Bleach Works being housed in a very robust stone building several stories high escaped with only minimal damage and destruction to the ground floor. One & half miles away Elton Fold Mill saw a 15 horse power water wheel destroyed and extensive damage caused largely due to the water picking up force as it dropped more steeply down the valley and was forced through a narrower space.























Cottages on Elton Road were severely flooded and at one point the water got very close to the newly built Bury Gasworks causing widespread alarm. A 7ft 6" river ran through the gas works yard and no gas lamps were lit that night. Houses on Bolton Road had water marks measured at 4ft 6".

The water then joined the Bolton Bury Canal causing significant damage to Openshaws Mill and lifting several barges from their moorings, dumping one on the tow path before joining the already swollen River Irwell.



Amazingly there was no loss of life but total costs were in excess of £30,000 a huge amount in those days. It is inevitable that if the disaster had happened on a work day many lives including those of children under the age of nine who were allowed to work in Calico print works and bleach works despite the 1833 Factory Act would have been lost.



- The disaster was reported in the London News where this wooden engraved image appeared and in the Manchester Guardian









THE BOTTOM OF THIS PLATE MARKS THE HEIGHT  
OF THIS OVERFLOW SILL AS IT WAS PRIOR TO

20<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1934

THE RIGHT TO RESTORE IT TO THAT HEIGHT  
IS RESERVED



John Whitehead wrote in his diary that day that the local reservoir burst but he did not specify which one.

Ref: London News

Ref: Manchester Guardian

Ref: Rev KP Bullock MA