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EN-ROUTE

John Robb: I'm John Robb and you're listening to hearmanchester.com, a series of 10 audio portraits exploring the rich and varied history of Manchester from the towpath of the Rochdale Canal that cuts through the heart of one of the greatest cities in the world...

The reason the Rochdale Canal was built in the 1790s was pretty simple; to get things from A to B. It was the first major transport system to make its way into the city centre, and with the world's first passenger railway station over on Liverpool Road at the Museum of Science and Industry, and the first canal coming into Castlefield Basin, it soon it became a hub for one of the most sophisticated rail, road and water networks anywhere in the world. Combined with our international airport, an integrated transport system before the phrase was invented.

Brian Holden has been walking the towpath for years and we're just making our way along a particularly significant section of the canal's route

Brian Holden: Right here where we're standing, just there, about where that water's coming out from the overflow, there is a plug, which allows that pound to be drained into Tib Brook.

We're at Tib Lock on the Rochdale Canal. Tib Lock is number eighty nine, ninety two is the last lock on the Rochdale Canal, and then you're in

to Castlefield, which is part of the Bridgewater Canal. Tib Lock is almost a neighbour of the Bridgewater Hall. The Bridgewater Hall has a little branch of the Canal going through it so you can actually go to a concert at the Bridgewater Hall in a boat and leave your boat outside.

The Canal was built in, they started building it in seventeen ninety four and with all those locks – ninety two locks over the hills – they finished building it in ten years. Which was some achievement. Nobody knows how many men were employed to do it but I think a lot of them were some of the Irish navvies who came over to get a job in England at the beginning really of the industrial revolution.

Since it was built, all types of transport have chugged up and down the canal. I am meeting Beverley Gallier of Greater Manchester Transport Executive at a significant spot just beneath Deansgate Station where water, rail, road and most recently the tram all come together.

Beverley Gallier: The canals are very important and there are quite a few of them; the Rochdale, the Ashton also the rivers; there's the Irwell, the Medlock, criss-crossing, networking all through the city. They've been derelict for quite a few years but they've just been being renovated now for leisure purposes, for walking and cycling

and that's great, and they're such lovely tranquil places.

JR: *So why do you think the public transport system matters so much?*

BG: It's really important, it's what links us out to the rest of the world and links us together. It's been referred to as the glue of life. Not only do we come into Manchester by public transport and the roads as well but we go out of it and that's just as important over the years. I mean we're down the road from the Hacienda, over here, with its iconic status, representing what Manchester is supposed to be about. A lot of that was born out of going out of the city in the eighties, you've got young people travelling quite widely. So from Manchester you've got buses that link into the railway, from the Piccadilly station, trains all night to the airport and then there's airport links to the rest of the world. They brought in new cultures, and took it out at the same time – it's what Manchester's been built on, and it always has been. It's not new. Not only that it's business as well and Manchester is a gateway to the rest of the North West so you've got links to Liverpool, Leeds, the Lake District, Wales so the importance of Manchester is not only in its knowledge capital, its skills base, its creative industries – it takes that out and brings it in so it's a swap of all these ideas.

BH: You can get on a boat here where we're standing at Tib Lock in Manchester and you can go either way and get to London. The canals really fed the industrial revolution. In the context of a country where there was no means of transport at all, there were no roads there were no railways – Manchester has trams now, there were no trams either. Every street – Manchester Piccadilly, Market Street – all the lot were just dirt tracks really and the canal was a wonder of the world. The first means of carrying goods over long distances and of course the canal was something entirely new it was a revolution in itself.

JR: *If you've enjoyed this programme, why not venture further along the Rochdale Canal and discover more portraits of our magnificent city at hearmanchester.com*