

Liverpool Road Station, Manchester

The Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester occupies much of the former Liverpool Road Station site, which was built as the Manchester terminus of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway (L&MR). The Museum site contains the oldest surviving passenger railway station in the world and the world's first railway warehouse. Both of these buildings are Grade 1 listed, while the other surviving buildings and viaducts are Grade 2 listed. The Museum occupies all of the surviving buildings of Liverpool Road Station except for the Grape Street Bonded Warehouse (occupied by Granada Television).

Construction of Liverpool Road Station

The route approved by Act of Parliament in 1826 placed the Manchester terminus of the L&MR on the west bank of the River Irwell in Salford. This was one of the compromises resulting from the failure of the first L&MR Bill. However, the L&MR Company continued to investigate land availability on the Manchester side of the Irwell in the hope of getting approval to relocate the terminus. It succeeded on both counts: land alongside Liverpool Road was purchased in 1828 and parliamentary approval for the new terminus followed in May 1829. One advantage of the new site was its proximity to the Castlefield canal basin, an established transshipment point at the junction of the Bridgewater and Rochdale Canals. Construction of the Manchester terminus only began in 1830. The only pre-existing building on the site was a three-storey brick house with cellars, built in about 1808 on the corner of Liverpool Road and Water Street. It had been the residence of John Rothwell, partner in a nearby dyeworks and was retained as living accommodation for the Station Agent.

As a pioneering passenger and goods rail service, the L&MR had no clear template to follow. The design of the Liverpool Road passenger departure station seems to have based on that of Crown Street Station, the Liverpool terminus, which was already built by then. A separate passenger arrival 'station', merely a canopied platform, was erected on the other side of Water Street. On the goods side, the L&MR Company began by investigating the possibility of renting local warehouse space, but in March 1830 it decided to provide a warehouse on site. The contract was put out to tender and the successful contractor, David Bellhouse Jr., was appointed in April. The resulting warehouse abuts the original railway viaduct longitudinally. Its functional design owes much to the nearby canal warehouses in the Castlefield Basin. Goods offices were constructed adjacent to the passenger station.



Print drawn by T. T. Bury showing the viaduct and bridges carrying the Railway into Liverpool Road Station.

Within months of the opening of the L&MR on 15 September 1830, passenger and goods traffic was exceeding expectations and it was evident that additional facilities were required. Eight shops were built, extending along Liverpool Road from the goods offices. The upper floor formed a canopied carriage shed facing the railway track. The shops were never commercially successful and were later taken over for workshop and office use. Warehousing facilities were expanded in 1831 by the erection of two warehouses for storing cotton and a transit shed for the rapid transshipment of goods, particularly perishable goods, between rail wagons and horse-drawn carts. The 1830 Warehouse was provided with a steam engine to improve goods handling. In 1844, all passenger traffic ceased when passenger trains were re-routed to terminate at Hunt's Bank Station (now Victoria Station), a more convenient location for expansion of the rail network.

Thereafter Liverpool Road Station operated solely as a goods station. It was operated by the London & North Western Railway (L&NWR) from 1846. In about 1855, the 1831 transit shed was demolished to make way for a larger single-storey transit shed with adjoining freight offices. A major fire in 1866 paved the way for more comprehensive redevelopment of the eastern end of the site. It virtually destroyed one of the cotton warehouses and damaged the other. Both had to be demolished. The L&NWR took the opportunity to review facilities and decided to build a second viaduct to the north of the 1830 viaduct. The Grape Street Bonded Goods Warehouse was built abutting the new viaduct in 1869. Finally, in about 1880, a warehouse was built across the end of the second viaduct, with a frontage on Lower Byrom Street. It was for the use of the Great Western Railway, which had obtained running powers onto the site. As part of this phase of redevelopment, hydraulic power was introduced to improve the efficiency of goods handling. The site changed little over the next hundred years.

Restoration and Reuse

British Rail closed Liverpool Road Station in 1975. The buildings were generally in a poor state as the decline in goods traffic over many years had made the station increasingly uneconomic, resulting in the neglect of building maintenance. Greater Manchester County Council was interested in acquiring the site for museum use, but had failed to reach an agreement with British Rail by January 1978 when the Liverpool Road Station Society was formed. The twin aims of the Society were to secure the preservation of the station as a museum and ensure that there was suitable celebration of the 150th anniversary. In late 1978, Greater Manchester Council finally reached an agreement with British Rail whereby the Council purchased most of the station site for the token sum of £1 and British Rail contributed £100,000 towards the repair and restoration costs.

The first phase of restoration, culminating in the opening of the Museum on 15 September 1983, brought the Station Agent's House, Passenger Station, Transit Shed and part of the ground floor of the Lower Byrom Street Warehouse back into use. Seventeen years later, the 'Final Phase' of restoration, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, was completed in September 2000.

For more information:

Read Fitzgerald, R. S. *Liverpool Road Station, Manchester*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1980.

Makepeace, Chris E. (Ed.) *Oldest in the World*. Manchester, UK: Liverpool Road Station Society/MRIAS, 1980.

Visit The Museum site.