

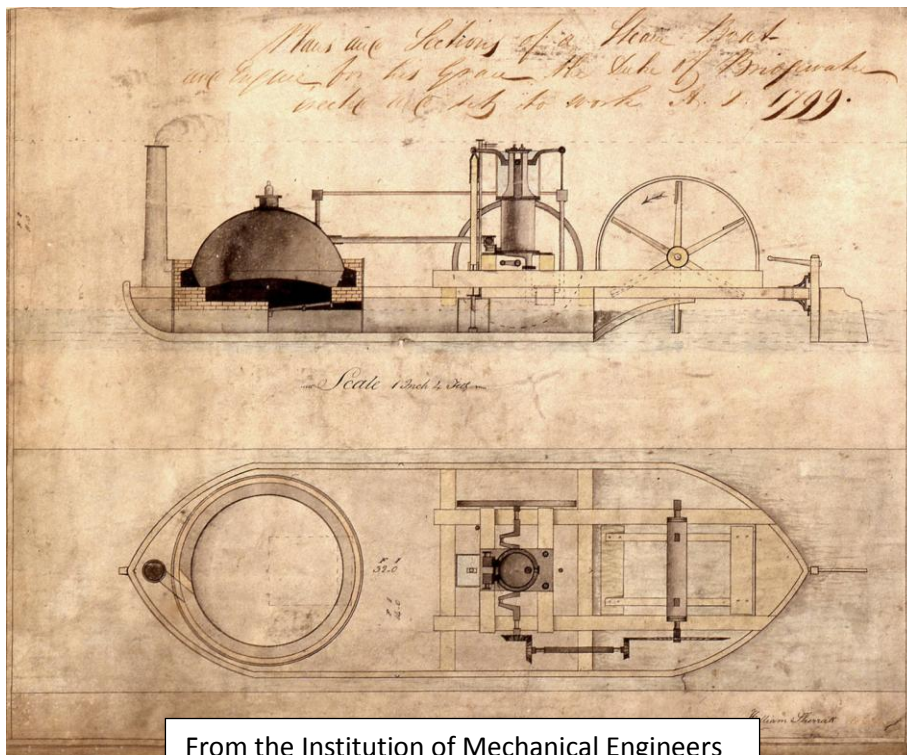
# The Worsley Steamboat

by Norman Scott

'Bonaparte and Old Nancy'

America is generally credited with having launched the first steamboat. It is recorded that Robert Fulton, returned to America from England with one of Boulton and Watt's engines, built a vessel called the *Claremont* and in 1807 made a successful voyage by steam from New York to Albany, up the Hudson. However, eight years earlier, in 1799, The Duke of Bridgewater had been involved with a steam tug which ran along the Bridgewater canal in Worsley.

Fulton suggested to the Duke of Bridgewater the feasibility of tugging boats on his canal by steamboat. The Duke approved a trial and a boat was constructed: the engine and gearing were constructed by Salford firm Sherratt and Bateman, with the hull being made in Worsley Yard (now Worsley Green). It is also known that Capt. Shanks of the Royal Naval Dockyard at Deptford also played a part.



All didn't go well. On the first voyage it was found that the chimney was too high to go under the bridges, consequently they put a hinge on it so that it could fold down and clear the bridges. It took a number of twenty-five-ton coal boats to Manchester, but not so quick as horses took them. Also, the wash considerably damaged the canal banks. The Duke's men (probably fearing for their jobs) gave the belching monster the worst name they could think of: they called it *Bonaparte*. The Duke decided not to continue with the trial, but just before he died he commissioned eight improved steamboats which were never delivered. The engine was taken out of *Bonaparte* and used to pump water from a burst at Stretford aqueduct. After this service the engine was re-christened '*Old Nancy*'

and was used as a pumping engine for local collieries until 1851. The hulk of old Bonaparte lay rotting and was broken up about 1825.

Building steam engines and things like that was quite an achievement at the time - there were no machine tools. There was no lathes, no shapers, no planers and everything had to be cast. The boiler, only in low pressure, could only be formed like that by virtue of using either brass or copper, because that could be beaten into shape. Another man at the same time, Trevithick, was experimenting with high pressure steam. This boat was only very low pressure, but even being low pressure, when you cast an object, places such as where the pipes join, you couldn't get bends in them. There was nothing to drill it out. Steel hadn't been invented then. It was only hardened cast iron. The copper boiler, or I would be better saying 'the kettle', as that's about all it was. The difficulty in creating this one was to get the seams steam-proof. How they got them steam-proof? They used to rivet them and then all the lads used to wee on it. A chemical reaction to seal the joint. The funnel is blue and silver - The Duke of Bridgewater's racing colours. Building the model made me appreciate the ground-breaking skill in constructing the original steamboat. This replica boat was built in my garage and in total it took five years. Salford and Worsley have many 'firsts' to celebrate. Was Worsley home to the world's first steamboat?



*There are references to the steamboat in many of the books about Worsley. However, I can also recommend 'Steamboat Evolution' by BEG Clark, which gives a wider history of the development of the steamboat.*

*The Author with his self-built model of 'Bonaparte'*