The River Medlock

The River Medlock rises in the hills above Oldham and empties into the River Irwell in central Manchester.

The name MEDLOCK means 'Meadow Stream' and was adopted to the river running in Manchester, Oldham and Tameside. It is the only river that actually runs through the City Centre on Oxford Road next to the Refuge Building.

Throughout its history, the Medlock has been famous for bursting its banks and flooding parts of the city. During one event, 13th July 1872, it rose suddenly after two days of torrential rain to disastrous ends, as this contemporary account from a Manchester newspaper describes:

"It was about half past twelve when the floods came ... the banks of the Medlock were overflowed to such an alarming extent and the first intimation of the flood was the sweeping away of a footbridge near to Philips Park ... It must have been very strongly fixed, for it not only bore the rush of the flood for a considerable time, but it resisted it to such an extent that the water backed up for a considerable distance. The flood increased in depth and power, and at a length swept in a fierce torrent over a large portion of ground apportioned to the Roman Catholics at the Bradford Cemetery carrying away not only tombstones but actually washing out of their graves, a large number of dead bodies. Indeed from the first indication of danger, so far as works on the banks of the Medlock were concerned, dead bodies were observed floating down the river, and those watching could easily see that the bodies had been disinterred out of the Bradford cemetery. It is impossible to calculate how many had been swept out of their final resting place but the number is not short of fifty." (source: Manchester Courier, 15 July 1872)

Afterwards there were rumors that as many as five hundred bodies had been swept away, with large numbers lost at sea. At a Government Enquiry, Manchester’s Town Clerk stated that the total number of bodies disinterred by was seventy six, and that all had been recovered - however the local Roman Catholic Ministers strongly refuted this claim.

In response to the flooding, work began on the red terracotta-brick channel, which has since carried the river between the park and adjoining cemetery.

A song written and published at the time, entitled 'The Great Flood', describes
the event as "one of the most destructive floods ever known in this part out of
the country". You can download a copy of the song in our downloads section.

**Song poster supplied by Manchester of Science and Industry.**
Floods in Manchester
from The Annals of Manchester by William E.A. Axon

1616 Lambard’s Flood – ‘...water suddenly rose yards plummet above the ordinary course, that men stood upon Salford Bridge, and laded up water with a little piggin...’

1648 July – A flood caused by sudden and terrible rain

1767 8 October

1787 A flood in the Irwell which lasted 7 days and carried away part of Salford bridge

1804 High floods in the Irwell did considerable damage in January

1816 5 & 6 January - There was a great flood in the Irwell

1829 27 August – High floods on the Irwell

1833 1 August – High floods on the Irwell

1837 20 December – There was a high flood on the Irwell

1838 16 October – ‘The centres of Victoria Bridge washed down by a flood.’

1843 28 October – High floods on the Irwell caused the temporary footbridge near the New Bailey to be washed down.

1852 5 February – In consequence of heavy rain, the rivers broke their banks
- Lower Broughton St., Great Clowes St., Hough Lane and other streets were flooded and inhabitants had to be taken home in boats
- The lower part of Peel Park was covered with 4 ft of water
- The Medlock, Irk, Mersey, Goyt and Black Brook also overflowed.

1857 13 & 14 August – Considerable damage to property was done when the rivers Irwell and Medlock overflowed in consequence of heavy rains.

1860 6 December – in consequence of heavy rains the river Medlock overflowed and caused considerable damage to property.

1866 17 November – ‘Great damage was done in Manchester and Salford by the unprecedented floods ion the rivers Irwell and Medlock.’

1869 17 February – A great flood in the Irwell did considerable damage to property
1872 13 July – The most disastrous flood which ever visited Manchester

- The rainfall of the previous week was enormous and the rain which fell on 12th & 13th was equal to the rainfall of an ordinary month
- The Irwell rose many yards above its ordinary level
- Parts of Peel Park and the racecourse were flooded
- The Medlock was most disastrous – water began to rise at 11am
- The fields were covered at Medlock Vale, 3 miles beyond Bradford-cum-Beswick and 2 bridges were washed away.
- At Taylor and Boyd’s calico printworks at Clayton Bridge the river rose 12 ft. above its normal
- A weir at Lord’s brook was washed down and roads were impassable.
- Several tons of earth was washed onto the Lancashire and Yorkshire railway near Clayton Bridge station.
- Wood and Wright’s Clayton Vale printworks were devastated – 2 bridges were destroyed, a weir partially washed away and goods and machinery were carried away with the water.
- When the flood reached Manchester City Cemetery near the Philips Park, Bradford it had grown in volume and power. At noon it broke through a stone wall and rushed towards the RC section of the graveyard. Coffins were washed out of the earth and broke up – the corpses were swept down the stream. It is not known how many bodies were disturbed but more than 50 bodies were recovered.
- The water reached Fairfield St. where it flooded the houses of the poorer people.
- In a densely populated area of Ancoats the water rose to the bedrooms and rafts had to be used to rescue the inhabitants.
- In some factories the water level rose to 15 ft.
- The water accumulated at the junction of the Medlock and Irwell. It passed over into the Bridgewater canal and flooded the wharves. Two barges laden with coal were lifted from the canal and when the water subsided they were left on the wharf near one of the goods warehouses.
- Only 1 life was lost.

1881 8 February – The Irwell overflowed and Peel Park was flooded. The river rose 13 ft. above the ordinary level. Houses and works in Lower Broughton were flooded.

1881 14 October – During a terrific storm the Irwell rose 15 ft. and many cellars in Lower Broughton were flooded.
Factors aggravating floods:
- House and road building meant that there was less open land to soak up excess rainwater.
- Rivers silting up with trade waste, excrement and cinders.
- Obstacles in river like weirs restricted the flow.
- Increased water supply to city from Manchester’s new reservoirs (e.g. Longdendale, 1851).

Following the flood:
1889 Work started on Manchester’s first main drainage scheme.
1911 Work started on Manchester’s second main drainage scheme.
River Medlock
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia

The River Medlock is a river of Greater Manchester in north west England that flows for 10 miles before joining the River Irwell in central Manchester.

Source
Rising in the hills that surround Strinesdale just to the east of Oldham it flows through the steep-sided wooded gorge that separates Lees from Ashton-under-Lyne and the Daisy Nook Country Park with its 19th century aqueduct carrying the disused Hollinwood Branch Canal over the shallow river. Along its course, the valley provides a welcome respite from the urban sprawl of the east Manchester suburbs, and is perennially popular with locals.

Lower Reaches
The final miles of the river's flow to the River Irwell have been extensively modified. The river is culverted underneath the car park of the City of Manchester Stadium (the site of a former gasworks), beneath the former UMIST campus (London Road to Princess Street), and again at Hulme Street, appearing briefly at Gloucester Street before flowing under the former gasworks at Gaythorn, reappearing at City Road East. At Deansgate (Old Chester Road) the river meets the Bridgewater Canal head on, where a sluice gate (a listed structure) allowed water to feed the canal, until the water quality of the Medlock became too polluted for canal use. Normally the level of the river is several feet below the level of the canal, and the river is carried in a tunnel under the Castlefield canal basin, reappearing at Potato Wharf, where it is supplemented by excess canal water draining into a circular weir. When the river is in spate the tunnel cannot cope and river water enters the canal, flows across the basin, and exits via the weir and manually operated gates. A quarter of a mile further on the Medlock enters the Irwell adjacent to the bottom gate of the disused Hulme Lock.

Navigation
In the latter part of the 18th century the river was navigable at least between the Bridgewater Canal (at Deansgate) and India House (on Whitworth Street). At India House was the entrance to a tunnel used to carry coal to a wharf at Store Street (by Piccadilly station) [1]. The tunnel mouth is still visible. The tunnel was rendered obsolete by silting of the river and the construction of the Rochdale Canal.
Notable Features
The area just south of Oxford Road station enclosed by the railway line and the loop in the river was known as Little Ireland, and was discussed by Friedrich Engels [2].

Tributaries
- Thornley Brook
- Taunton Brook
- Lumb Clough Brook
- Lords Brook
Medlock Valley Way
- Whole Valley from Oldham to City Centre Background Info

The Medlock Valley Way runs from where the Medlock starts in Oldham to the City centre at Castlefield. I have not got a map marking it on but any OS should as far as I know have it on. It was marked incorrectly but I think Jo was sorting that out.

Some info is below but basically in the City Centre it comes under the Mersey Basin Campaign, then from Pin Mill Brow to Edge Lane it is under Manchester City Council (our bit), from Edge Lane at Clayton through Woodhouses to Daisynook and beyond it is under Oldham council, then it goes to Park Bridge which becomes Tamesides responsibility. Eventually winds back to Oldham to the start where is under Oldham but at the very start it comes under North West Water who have a ranger at Strinesdale.

Contacts for each council if you want more info are:

**Tameside - Park Bridge:**
http://www.ashton-under-lyne.com/parkbridge.htm
http://www.tameside.gov.uk/parkbridge
http://www.tameside.gov.uk/countryside/Medlock
Park Bridge Heritage Centre, The Stables, Park Bridge, Ashton under Lyne, OL6 8AQ
Tel: 0161 330 961, Fax: 0161 343 1834

**Mersey Basin Campaign**
www.merseybasin.org.uk
Mersey Basin Campaign, 1st Floor, Fourways House, 57 Hilton Street, Manchester M1 2EJ
tel: 0161 242 8200, fax: 0161 242 8201, info@merseybasin.org.uk

**Oldham - Daisy Nook:**
http://www.ashton-under-lyne.com/daisynook.htm
John Howarth Countryside Centre, Daisy Nook Country Park, Newmarket Road, Ashton-under-Lyne, OL7 9JY
tel: 0161 308 3909

**Oldham - Strinesdale**
http://www.visitoldham.co.uk/country/strinesdale.htm
From Punch Magazine in 1882
(T2018 Punch 1882)

This cartoon drawing was created as art of the publicity to promote the Manchester Ship Canal as a port and fantastic asset. You can see the rivers around Manchester are indicated with the children playing having the names on their hats i.e. Irk, Medlock and Irwell.