



# THE THREE BRIDGES OF IRLAM

The development of infrastructure in the area in the late 1800s and early 1900s, with the construction of the railways and the Manchester Ship Canal (MSC), brought with it a dominance of bridges along Liverpool Road, changing the landscape of Irlam and Cadishead.

Prior to the opening of the Cheshire Lines Committee (CLC) Manchester to Liverpool railway line the present road you are standing on did not exist, instead the course of Liverpool Road ran where Station Road is today.

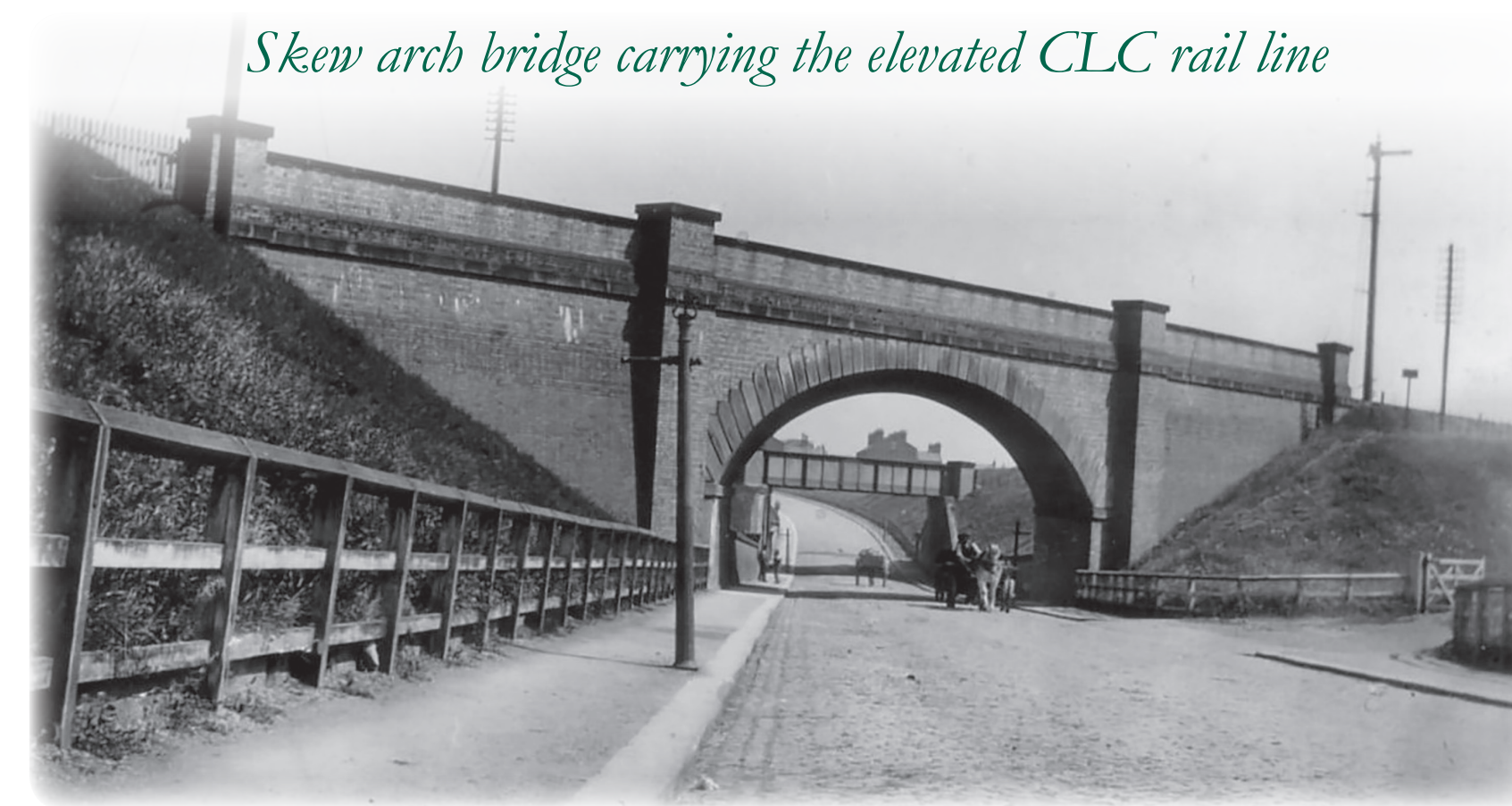


Construction of the CLC rail line and Irlam's first railway station, opened in 1873, brought changes to the original Liverpool Road as the course of the track had to run underneath it.

The building of the Canal in the 1890s brought enforced changes to the railway lines in the area. A new elevated section of line had to be built 75 feet above the water to allow sea going vessels to pass underneath.

To maintain the track's necessary gradients from the Canal to Irlam Station, Liverpool Road had to be realigned and dug out, a new railway bridge built over it and a new higher-level station built. An iron bridge was built to carry the original track, which was still in use, over the new section of road.

*View looking towards Irlam of the iron bridge carrying the original CLC line over the new Liverpool Road section and under the road bridge on old Liverpool Road, renamed Station Road*



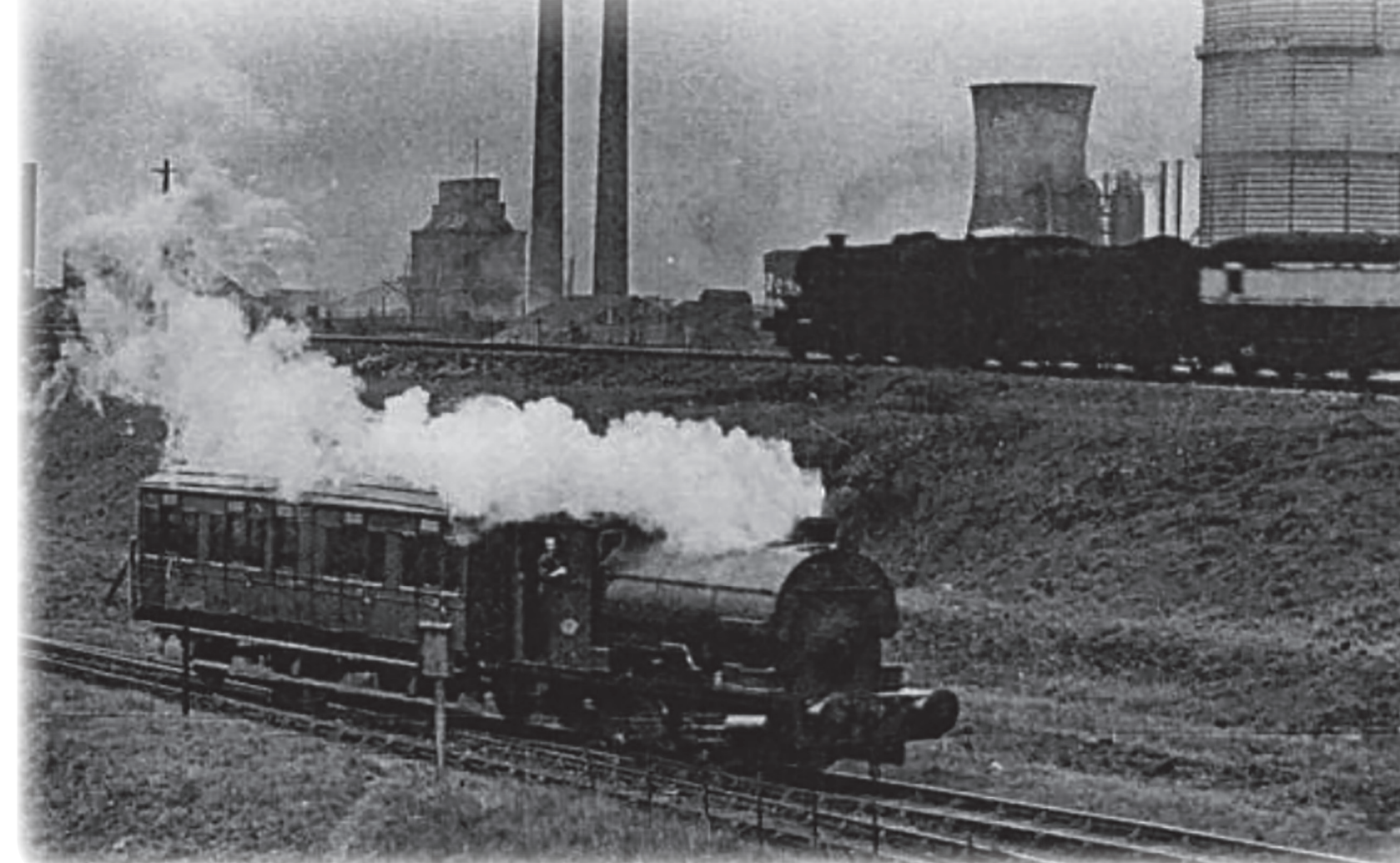
Two rail bridges now spanned Liverpool Road, the iron bridge and the skew arch bridge, which you are standing under. Unlike the iron bridge, the new high-level bridge was built in blue engineering brick and constructed in a skew arch design. This method of construction enables an arch bridge to span an obstacle at some angle other than a right angle.



*Flooding on Liverpool Road looking towards Cadishead - something that happened on several occasions due to the dip in the road*

With the opening of the new main line in 1893 the MSC Company took ownership of the original CLC tracks for transporting workers, raw materials and finished goods. CWS Soap Works were given running rights to use this section of the track, which linked to its own internal rail system and provided a staff service to Irlam Station. The line became known as the Soap Works line or Queens Road.

*Soap Works train, on the last day of service 6th September 1959, heading for Irlam Station on the original line - the train behind it is travelling towards the Canal viaduct, on the new CLC main line*



In 1956 the Lancashire Steel Corporation Ltd (Irlam Steelworks) received approval to build its own rail connection to the main line direct from the works sidings.

*Excavation and foundations for the steel bridge over Liverpool Road – November 1956 – the Steelworks can be seen in the background*



A third bridge was built over Liverpool Road, this time in steel. Imagine the activity during this industrial period with heavy laden trains trundling over all three bridges transporting materials, finished goods, workers and passengers.

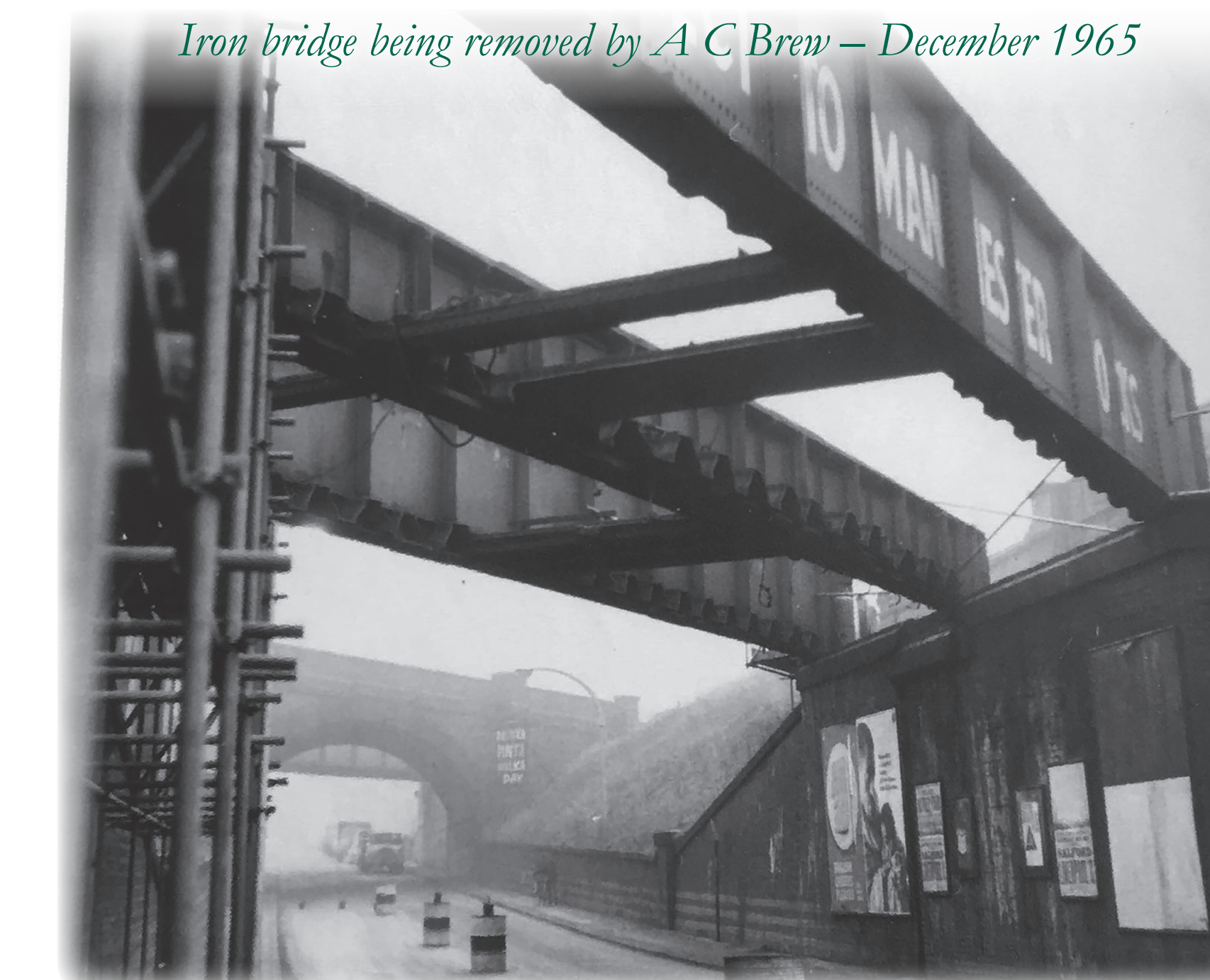
*Opening of the Steelworks new main line connection – 27th May 1957 - train heading from the works to Irlam Station*



*View of the three bridges looking towards Irlam - Steelworks bridge; Skew arch main line bridge; Soap Works line bridge*



Three bridges spanned Liverpool Road for over 8 years. The Soap Works severed its connections with the canal lines in 1959. The MSC Company continued to operate its goods trains along this line until 1965, after which the line became redundant.



*Iron bridge being removed by A C Brew – December 1965*

The brickwork which once supported the iron bridge now forms the backdrop for a piece of urban art called Cheshire Lines. Produced by the Hamilton Davies Trust's IC ART programme, it clearly depicts the community's rich railway heritage.

In 1979 the Steelworks closed and subsequently the steel bridge also became redundant and has been closed ever since.

In 2017, the bridge became a framework for another IC ART piece - Celebrity Express. This wonderful piece illustrates some of the diversely talented people who came from Irlam and Cadishead or influenced how the area has been shaped over the centuries. A lighting system was also installed under the remaining two bridges illuminating this once dark section of Liverpool Road and capturing the attention of pedestrians and motorists alike.

For more information on the station, railways and local industries see the heritage boards at Irlam Station House where more IC ART pieces can also be seen.