

**Broadfield Park Slopes:  
History and Issue paper by RDA, November 2021.**



**Date unknown, showing an uninterrupted view of St Chads from Packer Spout.**

**PURPOSE / INTRODUCTION:**

The purpose of this paper is to briefly set out the current condition of the slopes and their history and importance to the town.

**CONTEXT:**

On the 2nd September 2021 a walkover survey of the Broadfield Park slopes to the south of Rochdale Town Hall was conducted to establish the current condition of the slope drainage. The survey revealed the long term historical neglect of the 1930s drainage system which has meant that it is now in a very poor state of repair and is now no longer adequately controlling runoff and spring water flow, resulting in widespread areas of saturated ground on the slopes.

Another area of concern with respect to possible uncontrolled water flow from the slopes is the network of catchpits on the slope which could have been part of the water supply system feeding Packer Spout, the Corn Mill and possibly Rochdale Town Hall in the for over 60 years from 1870 to 1934. An additional related potential area of concern with respect to the control of water flow from the slopes is that water is currently seeping from under the slope retaining wall 10 m to SW of the SW Corner of Rochdale Town Hall.

Even though the groundwater, spring water and runoff water sources are no longer used for commercial and domestic uses, the significant volume of water that still issues from the slope will still need continual management to avoid risks of slope instability, rises in groundwater levels and issues relating to historical water distribution systems.

The poor condition of the slopes is made far worse by the unchecked growth of scrub and of poor quality self-seeded trees. Key views are obscured, no surveillance can take place and the roots are damaging the historic drainage system. These conditions continue to encourage anti-social behaviour, the self-seeded trees and scrub that have been allowed to grow unmanaged all contribute to the visible neglect of a key area of the historic town centre, obscuring the critical view to the parish church of St Chads.

The condition is worsening and will continue to do so, risking destabilisation of the slopes and the public realm adjacent to the rear of the town hall. Changes in rainfall patterns will only exacerbate the risks to the slopes and the town hall.

At Informal Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021 the Leader and Members supported plans to clear the slopes and proceed with development stages of a project to restore the slopes.



**2018, showing view of St Chads almost fully obscured.**

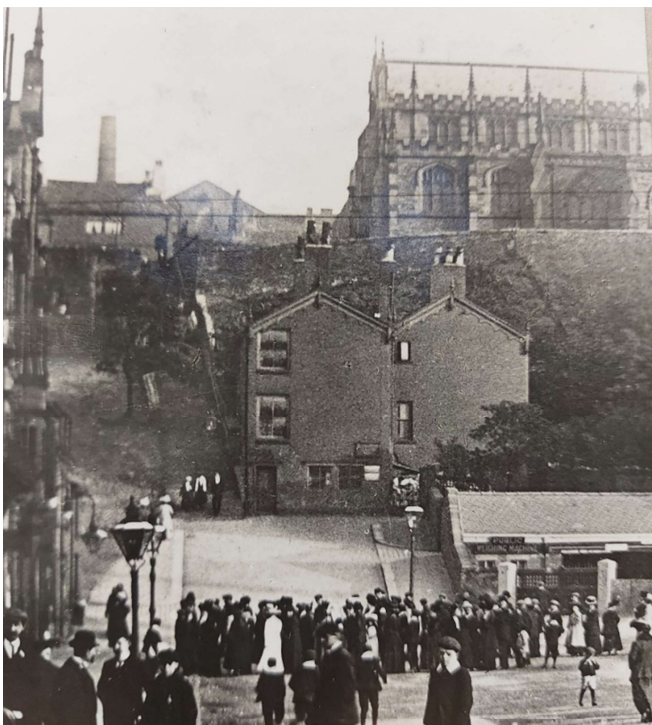
**The history of the slopes:**

The glaciofluvial sand and gravels which form the Broadfield Park plateau immediately to the south of Rochdale Town Hall are a significant water source which has been exploited for at least the last 250 years.

Local records indicate that the first water works was constructed in about 1763 by John Clegg and Ralph and Samuel Taylor. They built a semi-oval shaped reservoir from stone known as Packer Spout which still exists and is 70 m to the SW of Rochdale Town Hall.

The management of the water from the spring source on the slopes developed over the next 150 years to Packet Spout and on the River Roch by the town was effective and elegant. When the town hall was built in the late 1860's the water was controlled so well that the area around the town hall remained dry.

The exploitation of the water source at Packer Spout ended in 1934 following the demolition of the Central Corn Mill which was immediately to the north of Packer Spout. As a result in the latter half of the 1930s the area around Packer Spout and the demolished Central Corn Mill was redeveloped as municipal gardens.



**1930's, detailed view of the East end of St Chads, showing substantial stone boundary wall and lack of vegetation on slopes, after demolition of the Corn Mill.**



**2011, view of St Chads almost completely covered by vegetation, no stone boundary visible.**





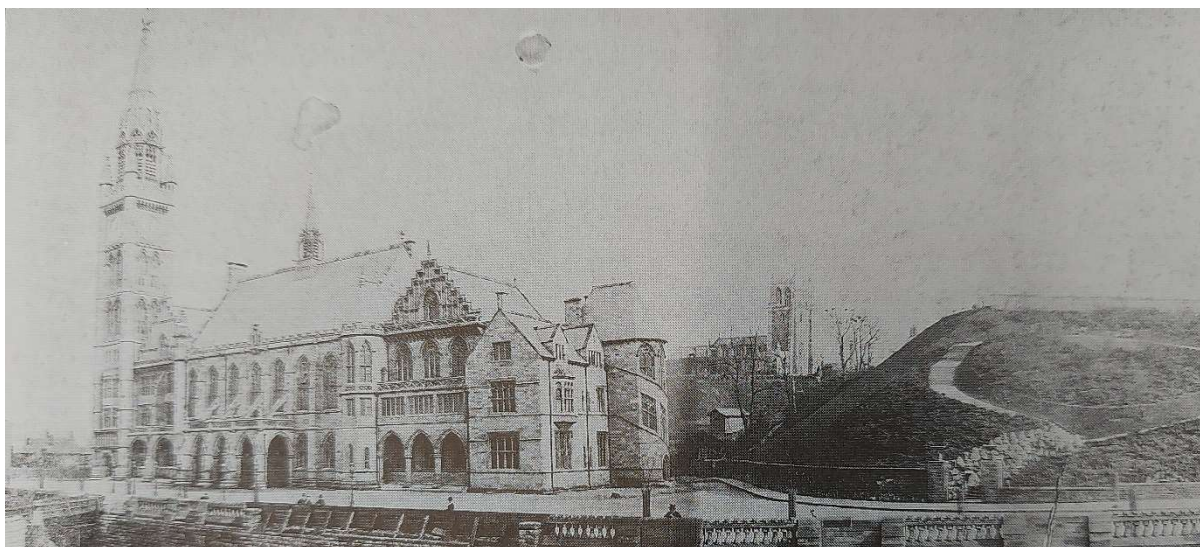
**1934, showing uninterrupted view of the whole of St Chads.**

Broadfield Park and Sparrow Hill slopes were laid out on former glebe land acquired by the Rochdale Corporation in 1860, and were designed by Messrs Stansfield and Son, Landscape Gardeners of Todmorden.

By the 1890s Broadfield slopes had been added to the park and were laid out to a design by, and at the expense of Mr J Ogden Kilnerdeyne.

Packer Spout and St Chad's Gardens lie to the east of Broadfield slopes and were presented to the town in 1893 but were not laid out until 1925 to a design by the Borough Surveyors Department. This part of the park is bisected by a flight of 122 stone steps which connect the church with Town Hall Square.

In the 1860's when the Town Hall was built the architect Crossland conceived of the slopes as a moorland backdrop for his magnificent and ambitious building plans.



**1874, Crosslands New Town Hall with his anticipated 'moorland' landscape.**

## Significance of the Slopes:

Historic England, when consulted over the planned changes to the Town Hall, expressed concern over the current condition of the slopes and a desire for the project to restore the key town centre view from the river up to the parish church. The slopes are not only the backdrop for the town hall but are also the town's most significant landscape, joining the river to St Chads. A restoration project for slopes gives the council a unique opportunity to recreate the historic town centre landscape, eliminate the anti-social behaviour, create a public amenity of some quality and protect its investment in the town hall and associated public realm.



Date unknown, view from Broadfield Park.



2020, view from Broadfield Park.



## Map regression

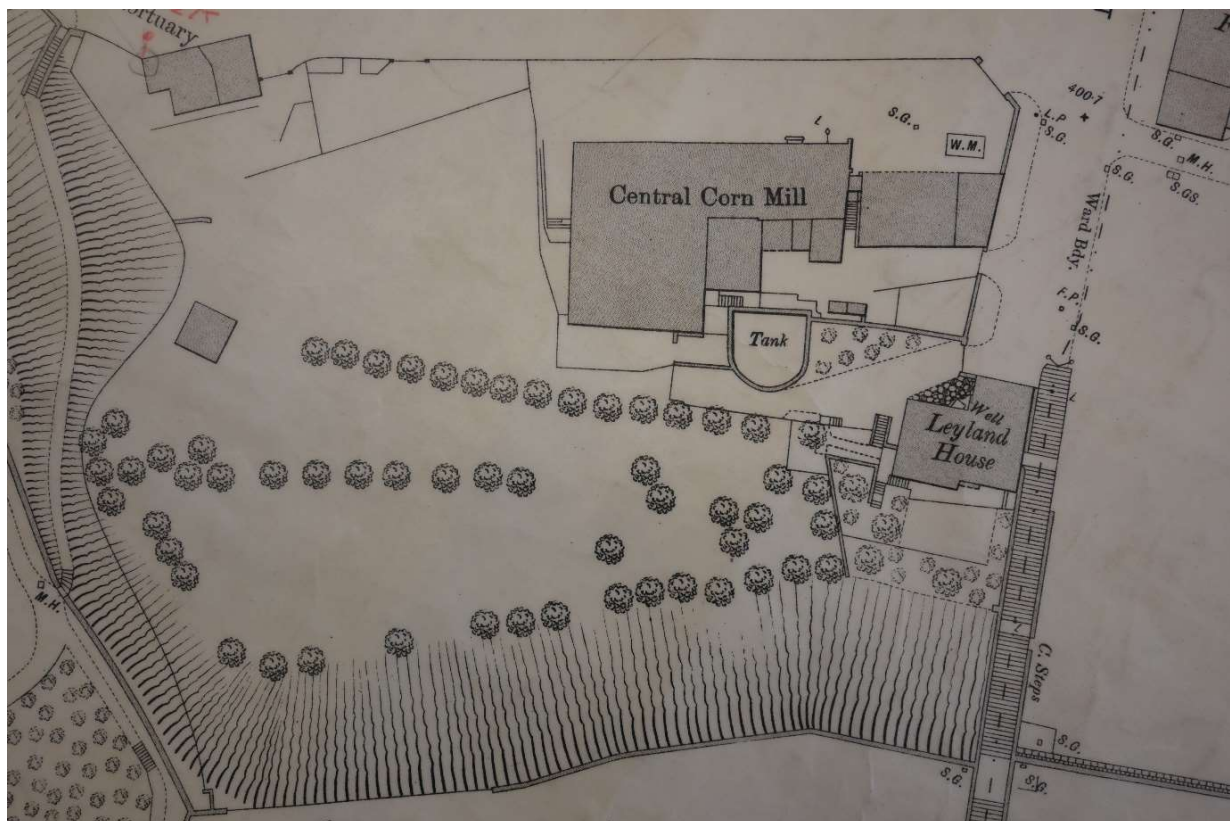


1831, showing land prior to Town Hall development and the lack of woodland on the slopes.



1890, showing Corn Mill and Tank, which is formerly Packer Spout spring.





1890, showing the Town Hall, slopes and the Corn Mill.



1890, showing the moorland condition of the slopes.