

Introduction



The Leen: Nottingham's River

The Leen is a short river with a vital role in Nottingham's history. From its source in the Robin Hood Hills above Newstead Abbey to where it joins the River Trent at the Meadows 15 miles downstream, the river connects places and communities.

The Domesday book of 1086 records corn mills along its length. In the twelfth century, the Leen supported two new monasteries at Newstead Abbey and Lenton Priory. At Lenton it was diverted to flow through to Nottingham Castle, providing drinking water and a resource for industry in the town.

Around Basford, eighteenth-century enclosure of land and technical innovation supported the development of a range of textile processes. As well as using water,

bleach and dye works returned polluted water to the river. The associated growth in population created a challenge about what to do with sewage and how to stop dirty water flowing down to Nottingham. In the nineteenth century, the borough boundaries were expanded to bring places along the Leen together under the same authority.

Urban expansion and mining activity shaped flood risk. The Trent River Board took charge of sections of the Leen. Their work in the 1950s and 1960s produced the river we see today. A new channel was cut from Lenton to the Meadows. Upstream, large sections were hidden from view in culverts and behind flood walls. This hard engineering frames new management challenges. With changing risks from ongoing urban development and climate change, it is time to look again at the Leen.



Above: Section from Map of the County of Nottingham, by John Speed, 1610. University of Nottingham EMSC Map Cabinet Not 1.B8.C76

The Leen: Nottingham's River has been jointly curated by Dr David Beckingham and Dr Rachel Dishington (School of Geography) and Manuscripts and Special Collections at the University of Nottingham with input from the Environment Agency – the body responsible for managing flood defences along the river today.



Before: View upstream from Bobbers Mill Bridge, Radford, Nottingham, June 1969. University of Nottingham RE/DOP/H23/9



After: Completed channel near Bobbers Mill Bridge, Radford, Nottingham, c. 1970. University of Nottingham RE/DOP/H23/3



Detail from Map of Nottinghamshire by John Chapman, 1792. University of Nottingham EMSC Over. XX Not 1.B8.D92

