

West Lancashire Dry Docks

About the Docks

Latest Restoration Initiatives 2017

The Canal and River Trust was launched as a Charity in 2012 and took over the guardianship of the 2000 miles of canals, heritage structures and operational activity previously nationalised under the umbrella of British Waterways.

The remit of the Trust was to safeguard the waterways and protect the associated heritage for future generations.

The Burscough Heritage Group and the Parbold community including both individuals and Parbold Parish Council had independently approached the trust and were contacted by Bill Froggatt, Heritage Advisor who suggested by combining forces a strong approach might be made to seek funding for a restoration project.

The West Lancashire Dry Dock Restoration Group was formed in January 2017 and funding for a restoration project was sought by the Canal & River Trust in association with the local group and West Lancashire County Council.

A year was lost in the process of seeking European funding for the restoration through a variety of bids. The docks continued to deteriorate, following a meeting with the Restoration Group and the Trust it was decided that community volunteers would work alongside the Trust to begin to restore Parbold Dock, restoration was becoming urgent as the area around the Dock Brook - owned by West Lancashire Council has been invaded by Japanese Knotweed which was beginning to spread to the sides and into the dock basin.

The work on Parbold dock began in February 2018 when, following the cutting down of vegetation by Fountains contractors to the Canal & River Trust, a group of volunteers from the Trust and the local community started to clear the dock basin using a plan which had been agreed by both the Heritage Adviser and the Trust's ecologist.

Sara Ponting, Volunteer Leader was tasked with co-ordinating the work and implementing the plan.

Progress through 2018 /19

The initial approaches for Heritage funding for the two dock projects were unsuccessful and it was decided that a separate application for the Lathom dock which is Grade 2 listed and according to the C&RT Engineers the basin was unsafe for volunteers to work due to the poor condition of the stop planks.

With respect to Parbold it was decided that provided an acceptable risk assessment was made on the condition of the coffer dam (stop planks and clay bunding) and the depth of the Brook at the commencement of each working session it would be ok for an adequately supervised group of volunteers to begin work on the basin. The initial plan was only to remove the vegetation from the rear of the basin to preserve some of the wildlife habitat although as work has progressed, the plan has evolved and it is now intended to clear all of the basin. The bulkhead walls facing the canal have been lime mortared where the wall is in ok condition ; some of the coping stones have to be relocated to the correct position where they have been moved by tree/shrub roots growing in the gaps.

The sluice gate is seized in the open position and needs to be replaced - the condition of the culvert is unclear but even after heavy rainfall the dock appears to be draining effectively.

Although the oral tradition within the Trust suggests that there were problems of leakage from the dock into the brook potentially causing problems with flooding downstream, there has been some major investment by West Lancashire Council to clear the drainage through the meadow and given the natural variability in depth of the brook it is likely that a controlled release of water from the basin would not exceed the channel's capacity. I have tried to find any reference/engineers report covering the reason the dock was taken out of commission by British Waterways but this does not appear to feature in any accessible digital form, there may be paper records or private records held on personal webspace.

The photographic record indicates the speed of vegetation growth on the site and there needs to be a sustainable plan to maintain the dock in its current condition. Ideally if the sluice gate was repaired it would be possible to syphon water into the dock in a controlled way to check its integrity. Keeping the dock in water for a period would effectively minimise the growth of vegetation.

With respect to the ranch fencing around the dock this was a Health & Safety requirement from the Canal & River Trust.

Currently only two out of the four stairwells into the dock are operational and have been fitted with hand rails - again deemed a H&S requirement. Originally there would not have been any fencing round the dock.



Dock at Parbold Feb 2018
after tree felling & strimming by Canal & River Trust contractors - Fountains.



November 2018



Lime Mortar pointing of the Dock Wall June 2019



Basin June 2019 - Grass starting to grow in cleared area

Situation to date - June 2020

Parbold

Unfortunately at the moment work has been suspended on the Dry Dock Restoration due to the Covid 19 restrictions applied by the Government and the Canal & River Trust.

As restrictions ease it is expected that the restoration work party will recommence - we meet at the dock at 10:00 am at the Dock every other Thursday and would welcome any potential volunteers and anyone interested in seeing the site / progress to date.

The dock is on the offside of the canal and accessed via Mill Leat where a new canalside housing development has been built where Ainscough's Parbold Flour Mill was.

Lathom

Although there has been some general maintenance work around the dock the condition of the stop planks is such that until these have been replaced Health & Safety restrictions preclude any volunteer access to the dock.

The Ainscough Flour Mill at Burscough has been converted into flats having survived two major fires. A number of the boats which were originally built to service the mills still survive - Two of these historic 72 ft boats Ambush and Viktoria are usually moored at Crooke and in recent years have been used to transport fuel.