



PORT OF PRESTON – HISTORY TO 1981

The long use of the River Ribble as a means of trade and transport is illustrated by the remains of the Bronze Age canoe and artifacts, excavated by the Dock construction in the 1880's and on display in Preston's Harris Museum. In the twelfth century, a "Portmote" or court met at regular intervals to give judgement on matters relating to the operation of the Harbour: in the seventeenth century, the silting of the River was causing problems of navigation to larger vessels.

However, it was to be the rapid expansion of the cotton industry that provided the impetus for the development of the Port, with the organised movement of raw material and manufactured goods in bulk being essential to the new industrial age.

The First Ribble Navigation Company (1806-1838) was primarily concerned with the reclamation of estuary land by the straightening and fixing of the meandering River within the training walls. The Second Ribble Navigation Company (1838-1853) continued this work, and by 1880 some 1100 acres of land had been reclaimed: during this period the new quays, later called the Victoria Quays, were established at the bottom of Marsh Lane, and the extent of the Port legally defined by the Customs and Excise.

The Third Ribble Navigation Company (1853-1883) continued the improvement of the River channel to keep pace with the development in the size of ships. The company realised the requirement for heavy investment as early as 1861 with the proposal for a Dock basin, and following lengthy negotiations, the Ribble Navigation and Preston Dock Act of 1883 passed the undertaking to the Preston Corporation, and authorised the construction of the present Dock.

This Act also authorised the diversion of the River approximately from the modern Penwortham by-pass bridge west towards Penwortham Marsh, to create an area for the Dock Basin astride the former river channel toward Water Lane. Construction work began in 1884, with the foundation stone of the Dock Basin laid in July 1885: the construction period was protracted, with the need to return to the House of Lords on occasions to increase the borrowing powers of the Corporation to meet the ambitious plans prepared by the Engineer, Edward Garlick. During the construction period all shipping was handled at the "Diversion Quay" built at the east end of the new river channel.

The Official Opening of the dock was carried out on Saturday 25th June 1892 by Prince Albert, Duke of Edinburgh and the second son of Queen Victoria, with appropriate ceremony. The Basin, at 3000 feet long by 600 feet wide was the largest single dock in Europe, a tribute to the Victorian age and enterprise. The first ship, the SS Lady Louise, under charter to the grocers, E.H. Booth & Co. Ltd. discharged its cargo of port later on the same day.

At the time of opening the Dock had few facilities, but gradually these were developed to include a variety of warehouses, the Hydraulic Power House and a hospital. The railway link to the main line was soon completed. Early development of trade concentrated on foreign markets with considerable success, 4 vessels only being unloaded in 1892, rising to 170 in 1900.

The Dock handled a wide variety of general cargoes – timber, bananas, china clay, wheat, cattle, coal and cotton products being prominent in the returns. The facilities on the quays were developed to match the rising trade, but the difficult maintenance of a clear channel down the Ribble to the sea remained a constraint, limiting the size of vessels and requiring constant dredging. There was also a demand for leisure traffic, with several paddle steamers offering day trips to Blackpool, North Wales and the Isle of Man.

Cargoes continued to diversify with the establishment of the oil storage tanks at the west end of the Dock in 1914: the First World War saw the manufacture and export of munitions, but generated a decline in trade which never fully recovered in the inter-War period. After the Second World War the Dock pioneered the roll-on, roll-off ferry service for road lorries with regular sailing's to Larne in Northern Ireland. At first surplus tank-landing craft were used, but in 1957 a purpose-build vessel "Bardic Ferry" took over the service with three return sailing's a week.

The expansion of this trade and the return of general traffic created an improvement in the accounts: the period 1960-1972 was the busiest in the Dock's history. However, the Dockers Strikes of 1969 and 1970 deterred much of the Ports foreign traffic and a change in shipping types to an emphasis on size and speed clearly affected general trade. The continued dredging of the River could not keep pace with these developments and absorbed much of the profits – in 1975-76 for example, 45% of income was used to keep the channel clear. The combination of such rising costs and the decline in trade effectively closed the Port on the grounds of economic viability: the last vessel, appropriately a dredger "Hoveringham V", left the Dock on 22nd October 1981.

The Port was formally closed by the Preston Dock Closure Act of 31st October 1981, creating a large scale development site of 383 acres close to the Town Centre.



RIVERSWAY DOCKLANDS **PORT OF PRESTON – HISTORY FROM CLOSURE (1981)**

A report to the then Preston Borough Council in September 1979 advised that there was no prospect for operating the Port at a profit; it was resolved that the Port should be closed and the area redeveloped. The Port formally closed on 31st October 1981.

The Central Lancashire Development Corporation carried out a preliminary study into the potential of the land. Their study “Preston Dock Redevelopment – Summary Reports” (1980) proposed a mixed redevelopment strategy in broad terms, and identified the principle constraints to the project – pollution of water and land, old landfill sites, inadequacy of flood defences, exposure and lack of infrastructure. The resulting high costs of clearance and reclamation necessitated a partnership approach between the Local Authority and private enterprise, backed by central government funds in terms of Derelict Land Grants.

The process thus began with Council inviting bids from consortia of design and development consultants to produce detailed proposals for the redevelopment. Due to the complexity of the problem, this course of action was protracted and it was not until 1985 that the chosen plan, by Holder Mathias (Architects) and Balfour Beatty developments, was accepted by the Council.

The general principle of the development strategy was that the clearance, reclamation and infrastructure works would proceed immediately (with the assistance of Derelict Land Grant funding), to open up the former Docklands and attract investment from the private sector in terms of individual site redevelopment. As part of their agreement Balfour Beatty retained the development rights on the prime waterfront area north and east of the dock basin, in return for the funding of road infrastructure projects.

Certain major elements of infrastructure were required regardless of the detail of the chosen Development Plan. The railway system serving the Docks ran along the north side of the basin, effectively disrupting valuable development sites: a new line was therefore constructed along the bank of the Ribble, on the edge of the development. The alignment required a swing bridge crossing to the entrance channel, which was combined with the roadway to minimise costs and land-take, after which the new route joined up with the existing sidings serving Lancashire Tar and Petrofina (who still relied on rail transport for raw materials). Further sidings were constructed to cater for a projected expansion of traffic,

together with a new Engine Shed and Workshops for the storage of equipment and engines; these railway works were completed in four contracts between 1982 and 1987.

A new Control Building, sited adjacent to the Swing Bridge was completed in 1985; the building is the operations centre for the Dock Railway and the lock gate/entrance system, and contains offices of the Docklands Manager, replacing the former Dock Office on Watery Lane.

Almost as if to emphasise the dangers of construction in such a low-lying area the Dock estate was flooded in 1977 by a combination of high river levels and westerly winds blowing a high tide in to the estuary. To protect the development from further occurrences flood banks were built along the river edge to a level of 8m AOD. At the river entrance a pair of former lock gates, removed from the swing bridge area were repositioned outside the lock gates at a higher level, to be closed against the river flood as a storm gate to continue the protection across the channel. This work was completed in two stages between 1982 and 1985, and involved the refurbishment of all the gates and the installation of a new operating system.

During this time redundant buildings and machinery were demolished gradually removing the Port functions and leaving the area open for redevelopment. Four buildings were retained for re-use, – Shed No.3 on the south side (redeveloped for residential use as “Victoria Mansions”), the Customs House on the Dock Road, the office of Transport Ferry Service at Pedders Way and the original Pump House building adjacent to the Tidal Basin: the last two were subsequently demolished to make way for more modern office developments. To suit the new image the area was renamed “Riversway” in 1985; the name arising from the fact that most of the development occupies the former course of the River prior to diversion to create the Dock in 1884.

A further essential element of work in this early phase of reclamation was the removal of land contaminated by former industrial use. The most cost-effective solution was to create a purpose-made disposal area, licensed by the Waste Disposal Authority, sited on the riverbank west of the main development. The contaminated soils are sealed in clay lined cells, with the site scheduled for future development as playing fields or parkland.

Development of the infrastructure works continued 1985-1992 with the construction of the new road system and services to open up the development sites: this was generally done working from east to west, allowing the eastern sites to be developed first along with the Morrisons Superstore on the north side of the Dock Basin. The last major infrastructure project was the Chain Caul Way Contract, completed in 1992 and opening up the industrial zone in the west.

Whilst development of land steadily continued, development of water activity was restricted to the construction of the Marina pontoons to allow the mooring of pleasure boats. Further development of the marina is the responsibility of Preston Marine Services, which operates independently of the City Council. A Marina Building was constructed in 1989 opposite the Dock Control Building. General use of the dock basin, however, is restricted by the lack of investment in a Water Sports Centre, this being an expensive item to construct in view of the high dock walls and the consequent difficulty of providing appropriate launching facilities: there is also a degree of concern over the quality of the dock water. From October 1982 the former Isle of Man passenger vessel "Manxman" was moored at the East End of the Dock and developed as a floating nightclub and restaurant. When the lease on the berth expired in 1990 the vessel was towed down to Liverpool in November of that year.

Various trawlers, tug "Whisky Warrior" and the Scottish "Puffer" VIC 80 which is undergoing refurbishment, are berthed in the half tide basin adjacent to the boatyard.

An early study in 1986 by Sir William Halcrow & Partners has considered the feasibility of construction a weir across the Ribble to raise water levels for amenity and recreation purposes. The chosen site was just upstream of the Bullnose, with the possibility of a connecting waterway into the Tidal Basins. The high cost (7.4m) and the limited financial returns made the project un-viable and the idea was shelved.

One further partnership with the private sector began in 1989 when the Council organized a limited competition for the architect/developer teams to construct the residential areas on the south side of the Dock. The competition was won by the team of Brock Carmichael Associated, local architects, with the firm Lovell Urban Renewal and Salford Quays. Construction of the distinctive housing began in 1990, but after completion of the first phase the project was shelved due to the general recession in the housing market. The work was finally completed in 1995 by a subsidiary company, Lovell Housing, working to a much modified version of the original concept to suit the relevant market. Conversion of the former Shed No. 3 into Victoria Mansions was carried out by a Preston Company Tustin Developments, who also constructed the houses and flats immediately adjacent. Residential development recommenced in 1997 with Wainhomes constructing 72 houses at the land south of the half tide basin and Newfield Jones building flats and houses on the last piece of land on the south side of the main dock basin east of Victoria Mansions.

During the course of the redevelopment the Dock Railway, which had been in continuous operation since 1846, continued to receive up to nine trains a week, delivering petrol to Petrofina on Chain Caul Road, and tar to Lancashire Tar Distillers on Chain Caul Way. However, in 1992 the traffic to Petrofina ceased and the storage tanks were demolished, leaving three trains per week to serve Lancashire Tar Distillers. This traffic ceased in 1995 when the company switched to road transport as part of a reorganisation, which also saw the construction of new offices and facilities to improve the image of the last remaining Port of Preston industry. Attempts to attract rail-based industries to vacant sites have not met with success. However, interest in using the line for leisure which had been shown by the Steamport Railway Society, formerly based in Southport, has culminated in a major land purchase and re-location of the Railway Society to Riversway.

Renamed the Ribble Steam Railway the Society are building a new rail-connected museum, running shed, and repair shop on land off Chain Caul Road. There will be an exhibition of static engines and a visitor centre, including an audio-visual suite. Passengers will be able to ride on Steam or Diesel powered trains on a 1½ mile long stretch of track. The industrial Heritage Railway Complex is expected to be fully open to the public by early 2004.

In the period since the Port Closure in 1981 the Riversway development has progressed steadily during varying national economic conditions. The pleasant waterside environment, ease of access and parking have been major factors in attracting new firms and seeing re-location of established local business. Well over 2000 jobs have been created.

This success story means that most sites are now occupied. Riversway with its varying modern waterfront architecture is now established as a distinctive quarter of Preston. During the 1992 Guild celebrations, Riversway played a major role. From 1995 – 1999 Riversway has hosted its own annual Maritime Festival bringing thousands of visitors to the area, in turn raising the profile and public awareness of the development.

Further development opportunities remain, particularly to the west of Riversway, where the area known as “Riversway West” lies on land owed partly by the Borough Council and by the Government Agency, English Partnerships.

Work started on this section of the development in 1997 with the demolition of a former wartime fuel storage facility. Following the demolition, construction of the Riversway Motor Park, a complex of five motor trade showrooms was commenced in 1998 by Marcus Worthington & Co.

An off road motor sport park, which has comprehensive training facilities, vehicle hire, cafeteria, bike sales, changing rooms, showers etc. has also been established on the Riversway West site and is located at the end of Wallend Road which is off Nelson Way.

Other uses of a recreational nature are envisaged for the area known as Riversway Park with the possibility of a future extension of the Ribble Steam Railway through the area of Savick Brook.

The extreme west of the site abuts the low-lying area of Lea Marsh. This is bounded by a watercourse known as Savick Brook, which joins the River Ribble to the south of the site.

An exciting new development, the Millennium Ribble Link, a new canal joining the River Ribble with the Lancaster Canal using the course of Savick Brook was started in 2002. This enables the Lancaster Canal to be accessed from the main countryside canal system, via the rivers Douglas and Ribble, for the first time since it was built in the 1790's. The corridor created by the development will be of benefit to Wild Life enthusiasts, walkers, anglers, boaters and the local tourist industry. The footpath accessing this development passes through the "Riversway West" site.

The potential remains for further commercial development and recreational use on the Riversway West site.



RIVERSWAY DOCKLANDS: MARKETING OF DEVELOPMENT SITES

Once the former Port of Preston had closed, and the area had been redeveloped as Preston Riversway by the building of new roads and the provision of new infrastructure, the available sites had to be sold.

The redevelopment of residential, office, retail and leisure areas around the Albert Edward Dock has already been described. However, the Chain Caul Way area was designated as an employment area principally to attract manufacturing, office and distribution jobs. Its modernisation occurred some years after the initial redevelopment of the area from Strand Road to Pedders Way.

The disposal of the sites in the Chain Caul Way area, through to Nelson Way has been the responsibility of the Estate Division of Preston Council.

Once the roads had been completed and the permanent landscaping created the first task was to prepare accurate plans of the land available and to calculate the site areas.

This process, together with confirmation of the type of uses that would be allowed by the Planning Authority, sets the basic parameters in which an advertising campaign can be organised. Advertisement for the written press and attractive brochures have to be designed to show the area in its best light.

An advertising campaign is organised to reach the anticipated market. Some campaigns can be international but for Riversway the market was seen to be mostly local, regional and national.

Advertisements were thus placed in newspapers/magazines such as:

Locally: Lancashire Evening Post
 Chamber of Trade Magazine

Regionally: Insider
 Industry North West

Nationally: The Estates Gazette
 Property Week
 Property Monthly
 Estates Times

By far the greatest concentration of advertising has been locally in the Lancashire Evening Post and nationally in the Estate Gazette. This publication has an acknowledged position as the premier national property journal.

Responses to these adverts are met by the issuing of a brochure on the sites available, as enquiries tend to be general in nature seeking more background information. For this reason the placing of adverts and the posting of brochures is undertaken by clerical staff.

An enquiry following the issuing of a brochure is usually dealt with by a qualified surveyor because matters such as the size of a site, the type of business to be undertaken and a sale price are usually discussed.

If agreement on the basic parts of a sale (i.e. price, size and location of site, type of building) have been reached, then a Committee Approval is required. For a private – rather than publicly – owned site, client approval would be required.

Following receipt of a Committee Approval, Solicitors are instructed to prepare contracts and submit them to the purchaser's solicitors for approval and signing.

Normally a purchaser is not the legal owner of the site until the building has been finished. Normally a 12 month Building Agreement is signed to allow a building to be constructed. Once this has occurred the site can be transferred to a purchaser. A deposit of 10% of the sale price is paid on signing of the Building Agreement with the remaining 90% paid when the site is finally transferred to the purchaser.

Development land is usually sold either on a long lease, usually 125 years which does not transfer ownership outright or freehold which does transfer ownership outright.



RIVERSWAY ESTATE - PRESTON - WATER BASED LEISURE USE

The closure in 1981 of the Port of Preston gave the then Borough Council the opportunity to redevelop the 450 acre estate.

The development strategy included provision for the leisure use of the 45 acres of water forming the Albert Edward Dock. From 1982 until 1990 the former Isle of Man passenger vessel "Manxman" was moored at the east end of the Dock and developed as a night-club/restaurant.

In 1982 a small rally of inland waterway craft took place which led in 1985 to the start of annual rallies of up to 100 craft in support of the campaign to have the Ribble Link, a new length of canal from the River Ribble to the Lancaster Canal, constructed.

1983 saw an "Aquaganza" event staged in and around the Dock in order to promote the possibilities for development.

By 1987 a Marina Operator had been appointed and with the provision of buoy moorings the use of the Dock as a Marina commenced.

In 1988/89 the construction of the Marina building and installation of pontoon berths for 75 craft protected by a wave attenuator took place.

Boat yard facilities and a chandlery were provided by the Marina Operator in 1989.

Additional pontoon berths were installed in 1991 (26) and 1992 (24) the latter to ensure adequate berthing for craft expected to visit during the 1992 Preston Guild Celebrations.

The success of the festival type activities which took place at the Aquaganza and the 1992 Guild celebrations led in 1995 to the start of an annual series of Maritime Festivals.

The water in the Dock is maintained to a level within a 2 metre range by staff of Preston City Council, who operate the lock gates and swing bridge, to permit the passage of craft to and from the Marina and river. Topping up water is obtained from the River Ribble on spring tides. The water is of a quality not currently deemed suitable for water contact sports, due to the presence of Blue Green Algae. (see separate information)

However within the restrictions that this creates, many varied activities have taken place. In addition to visits by large sailing ships, historic vessels and craft of the Ocean Youth Club the following have utilised the Dock waters.

During the 1992 Guild Celebrations the theatre ship M. V. Fitzcaraldo and its company performed.

Keel boat racing by International Olympic Soling Class Yachts. The match racing style of this event provides spectacular viewing for non-participants.

Annual regattas for pulling boats staged by the Sea Cadet Corps.

Royal Yachting Association sponsored "Try a boat" weekends.

Royal National Lifeboat Institution boat naming ceremonies.

Firework displays from floating platforms.

Minor fishing competitions. (Fishing also takes place in the River and the Dock entrance)

Sailing of radio controlled model ships and yachts

Displays by historic diving group

Displays of distress and rescue at sea

Craft of the marina also utilise the open area of dock water for both general sailing and engine trial purposes

The dock basin is also home to a variety of bird wildlife with ducks, cootes and cormorants in residence. Swans and various gulls spend time on the dock and herons may be seen feeding in the adjacent river.

Fish inhabiting the dock include eels and flounder. Freshwater species such as Roach, Chub and Bream have been caught, as have Sea Trout and Salmon.

If and when improvements are made to the water quality the development allows for the provision of a Water Activities Centre which is anticipated could house a sailing school together with facilities for canoeing, rowing and similar activities.

The development scheme included for a walkway around the dock basin with links to a footpath running along the riverbank which itself is part of both the Round Preston Walk and the longer Lancashire Coastal Footpath. A leaflet detailing this is available from the Tourist Information Office, or a copy may be downloaded from Preston's Web page.

Both the walkway and riverside paths are suitable for wheelchair access. The provision of seating at various locations and the facilities available for both light and alcoholic refreshment around the Dock, help to provide a pleasant area from which non-water users may view those undertaking the various water based activities.

The provision of restaurant facilities at a number of outlets together with the siting of a multi-screen cinema adjacent to the dock attracts many customers who use the Dockside Walk during their visits.

The Dockside Walkway is fully railed at its junction with the Dock Wall in accordance with R.O.S.P.A. recommendation with lifebuoys being stationed at 100m intervals along the walkway.

Nautical features linking with the Docks Maritime History are placed at strategic locations adjacent to the walkway and at other locations within the estate.

The former port's 'Nelson' safe water landfall buoys previously moored where the Ribble Estuary met the Irish Sea off St. Annes provide the centrepiece of large features at the Portway and Pedders Way entrances to the estate. In their current locations they mark the original course of the river Ribble prior to its diversion to allow for the construction of the Docks.