

Vaudrey's Wharf

Canal heritage at serious risk!

Vaudrey's Wharf, an important feature on the Macclesfield Canal between bridge 72 and Dane-in-Shaw, Congleton, is at serious risk of being lost.



Vaudrey's Wharf, 07 August 2005

Tim Boddington

Additional pictures and a Google map are available at <http://www.macclesfieldcanal.org.uk/vaudreyswharf.htm>

The Google link will display a map of Vaudrey's Wharf and the immediate area. The wharf is the spur pointing southeast adjoining the canal in the middle of the picture. The Biddulph Valley Way is under the line of trees running northwest to southeast. The land access to Vaudrey's Wharf is from Brookhouse Lane to the north of the wharf.

Background

Charles Vaudrey built the wharf in 1835 to serve his mills at nearby Bath Vale. The railway was opened in 1860 as the Biddulph Valley Line of the North Staffordshire Railway (NSR) and passed under the canal close by. It then provided a transport interchange between the railway and canal.

CBC bought the railway some time after its closure to convert into the Biddulph Valley Way and with it came Vaudrey's Wharf and the land it stands in. However, it should be noted that the land required to provide access from a public highway to Vaudrey's Wharf and the Biddulph

Valley Way was retained by British Rail and is now owned by BRB (Residuary) Ltd.

For very many years there has been a leak somewhere in the wharf which has allowed water from the canal to run down onto the Biddulph Valley Way. CBC have never felt able to fund the repair of this leak, which is now quite severe, and, in the opinion of British Waterways (BW), represents both an unacceptable loss of water and a potential risk of breach.

A breach at this point could have serious consequences for both the nine mile long canal pound, the Biddulph Way, the aqueduct carrying the canal above it and the gas main buried within the Way, Dane-in-Shaw canal embankment and the culvert carrying Dane-in-Shaw Brook beneath it, through which the released water would have to find a way, and large amounts of property down stream into Congleton including a large railway viaduct carrying the Manchester / Stoke on Trent main line.

Macclesfield Canal Partnership Project

In 2005 the Macclesfield Canal Partnership Project was set up between CBC, Macclesfield Borough Council (MBC), BW, English Heritage (EH) and the Macclesfield Canal Society (MCS) in order to manage the investment of grants. £300,000 comes from EH who normally require 50% matching funds from private or public property owners and/or any others of the project partners. The objective was to identify canal related buildings (heritage) at risk and encourage repair or enhancement by offering the owner 50% support funding.

Tim Boddington (the writer of this document) is the independent chairman of this project. He acknowledged at the outset his interest and support for waterways, the Macclesfield Canal in particular, and is a member of the Macclesfield Canal Society and the Inland Waterways Association (IWA)*.

Vaudrey's Wharf

The wharf was identified by the Partnership project as a 'building at risk'. Although they are prepared to make an initial contribution to making the repairs, CBC do not feel that the actual management of a canal asset is something that they have either the expertise or long term funding to support. All parties, and particularly the canal society, recognised the benefit of transferring the wharf, the surrounding land and the access land, to BW. For their part BW recognised that the wharf was really part of the canal infrastructure but were tightly constrained with regard to taking on liabilities.

A great deal of time and effort, particularly on the part of CBC and BW, went into constructing a scheme that would enable CBC to repair the leak and then BW to take ownership of the wharf and the access land. This scheme was based on the BW cost of ownership being balanced by the potential to rent out the moorings. In order to make the finances work a special dispensation was obtained from EH to provide a 60%

proportion of the cost from their grant fund rather than the usual 50%. The funding arrangement is as follows:

Congleton Borough Council	£20,000
British Waterways	£20,000
English Heritage	<u>£20,000</u>
Total:	£60,000

BW state that they can only take on additional assets where they are both structurally secure and economically viable in the long-term, accompanied by a capital dowry or sufficient income to cover future maintenance requirements.

Project failure

At the very point at which this was all to be signed up BW say that their position has had to change because of the lack of capital to invest in the repair of the Wharf wall and establishment of the moorings. The income from the moorings would only cover future maintenance, not investment as well. Consequently they were obliged to pull out.

Implications - Vaudrey's wharf at risk

The situation is now as follows:

- No project can be arranged that will result in the immediate transfer of the wharf to BW unless a third party can make the necessary capital contribution to repair the wharf, secure the access route from BRB (Residuary) Ltd and establish the moorings;
- BW provided an essential part of the package to repair the leak, and transfer ownership; this is no longer available;
- CBC are reluctant to finance the repair if they must retain ownership of the wharf;
- BW are concerned about the risk to the canal occasioned by the leak and are considering stanking off the wharf (at a cost to themselves);
- An important feature of the canal would be lost at least temporarily;
- CBC cannot find the resources to do anything with the leak without the presently available EH financial assistance;
- The wharf would be lost to the canal until such time as finance could be raised to repair it. BW say they would not want the wharf to be reconnected to the canal until the wharf wall has been repaired to the satisfaction of their engineers;
- The wharf would become overgrown and return to nature;
- CBC would probably incur the cost of fencing off the wharf for safety reasons;
- Restoration would become a much greater and more expensive task;

- The probability is that the wharf would be permanently lost unless other parties could take on the responsibility for the repair and establishment of moorings, for which match funding is still available.

It has been suggested that the Macclesfield Canal Society could take ownership of the wharf in order to ease matters. However, the canal society has never owned property and does not consider itself to be sufficiently large or strong enough to take on such a responsibility.

Time scales

The Canal Partnership project is coming to the end of its three year programme. All grant offers must be committed to by 31 March 2008. In order to meet this date all arrangements should be agreed to by the end of February 2008. Commitments must be undertaken and completed within two years, by 31 March 2010.

Options for rescue

There seem to be very few options, particularly when the very tight time constraints are taken into consideration, but the following come to mind:

- Bring pressure to bear on BW to change their mind about taking over the asset. A key argument must be that in order to avoid this project they may well have to spend a significant sum in stanking off the wharf. Would it not be better to invest for safety plus income rather than for safety alone?
- Prevail upon CBC to subscribe to the repair even though a transfer of ownership may not be possible at present;
- Invite Waterway Recovery Group (WRG)* to undertake the repair of the leak. This would result in substantially lower project costs allowing a different and reduced financial package. CBC may find this lower cost option more acceptable. The liability of the leak would be removed. Ownership could be dealt with at a later date.

Tim Boddington

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* see notes on next page

Inland Waterways Association

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) is a registered charity, founded in 1946, which advocates the conservation, use, maintenance, restoration and development of the inland waterways for public benefit. IWA has about 18,000 members whose interests include boating, towing path walking, industrial archaeology, nature conservation and many other activities associated with the inland waterways. Information provided by 188 corporate members with their own membership structures has revealed that they, in themselves, have a combined membership of at least 59,500 in support of IWA's voice.

IWA works closely with navigation authorities, other waterway bodies, a wide range of national and local authorities, voluntary, private and public sector organisations to raise funds, lobby for support and encourage public participation in the inland waterways.

More than 500 miles of canals and navigable rivers have been re-opened to public use since the Association was founded in 1946. Currently another 500 miles of derelict inland waterways are the subject of restoration plans.

Web site: www.waterways.org.uk

Waterway Recovery Group

In 1970 the Waterway Recovery Group was formed by enthusiasts who had been active in voluntary restoration work since the mid 1960s. Their aim was to be a coordinating force, not centred upon any individual project but backing up and assisting local groups on any worthwhile project. They could help to overcome problems of organisation and communication, supply and loan vehicles and items of machinery, and advise on methods and technique.

Since then, considerable knowledge of restoration methods and a large pool of plant and equipment has been amassed. At present, the group has a fleet of vans, several excavators and a bewildering variety of smaller items of plant, including dumpers, pumps, mixers, winches and other sundry equipment.

All of this is freely available on an 'expenses paid' basis and drivers / operators can be found too. WRG can also help with the supply of labour and training in the use of machinery.

Waterway Recovery Group (better known as WRG, pronounced Werg) are a large group of keen and enthusiastic workers fully trained in the use of their equipment and in all aspects of health & safety. They are fully accepted by British Waterways as a thoroughly competent body equivalent to any good contractor.

Web site: www.wrg.org.uk