

Anderton Takes Off !

By Terry Atkinson

Readers may recall that the 3rd Issue of Elevation Magazine carried a cover story relating to the Anderton Boat Lift. Terry Atkinson gives an update regarding this historic monument to our industry.

Let us start with the good news. The grant of £3.3 Million from the Heritage lottery Fund announced in the spring of 1999 means that at last the full restoration of the Anderton Boat lift is a confirmed reality. Please forgive me if I join in feeling smug with all those worthy people who have put in so much hard work. When that sum is added to the £1.5M from British Waterways, £0.5M from English Heritage, amounts from Vale Royal Borough Council, the European Commissions Raphael Programme, The Friends of Anderton Boat Lift, Trent and Mersey Canal Society, and Brunner Mond (the chemical works on the river Weaver opposite the lift) only some £970,000 needs to be found. Lottery rules allow 12 months for this "match-funding" to be raised. With so much optimism abounding that should not be a problem. The Anderton Boat Lift Trust have set themselves this task. They will initially concentrate on grants and donations from charitable trusts and corporate organisations followed by the launch, sometime in the future, of an appeal to the general public for further funds.

The earlier decision to effect the restoration of the lift to that of the modernisation of 1908 has been set aside in favour of a return to a different version of the original concept. In 1875, they built an hydraulic lift with a "one up one down" principle using water. Now we are going to have two independent hydraulic lifts, although the actual fluid which will be used has not yet been decided. This therefore means that only 7% of the metal framework will have to be replaced as opposed to 56% for the 1908 version.

It is anticipated that once work starts, completion will follow in 15 months. I do feel that this time scale may be a little optimistic as there is so much to be done. However, that is the proposed programme of British Waterways who are also optimistic. The present draft works programme is as follows:-

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- Dewater the basin and the well.
- Remove for restoration the machinery deck.
- Dismantle and restore the ten machinery deck 'A' frames.
- Repair the foundations of the 'A' frames.
- Remove the cassions.
- Clean out the ram shafts and install the rams.
- Refurbish the 1875 framework.
- Replace the cassions.
- Replace the 'A' frames and machinery deck.
- Refurbish gear wheels and drive shafts.
- Refurbish aquaduct.
- General mechanical, electrical and civil works.
- Install and commission controls.
- Re-water.

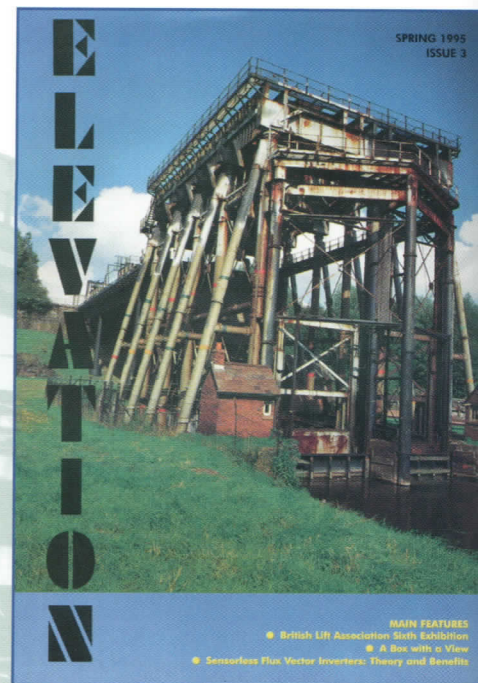
You may notice the lack of mention of detailed lift engineering. That is because most of the details have not been decided yet. The old rams had a diameter of approximately 3 feet. Perhaps the new cylinders will fit inside this. they will need to accommodate a travel of 50'4".

No doubt all the hydraulic related problems that the lift will have (lateral movement of the cassions, oil temperature, sinking etc.) will be addressed. I am sure that at least some of the present day hydraulic technology

eg. rupture/restrictor valves will have to be fitted. What about the tests and examinations as required under LG1 and the Provisions of Use of Work Equipment Regulations? If they are to be applied then provision must be made for the necessary facilities to be incorporated in the new system. Apparently, there is an existing system for propping up the 252 ton cassions.



Terry Atkinson at home with parts from the Anderton Boat Lift.



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As the lift is a Scheduled Ancient Monument the now redundant wheels, pulleys and gearing will be replaced back on the top of the structure. The first load has just gone off site for cleaning and painting. All of the suspect rivets, on the entry aquaduct, will be replaced with bolts with similar looking domed heads, to keep up appearances.

There is a sound belief locally that a working Anderton Lift will revitalise the entire surrounding area. British Waterways, who are responsible for the River Weaver, have many plans for the waterways improvements. Some 2100 new local jobs are anticipated in the area, once Northwich and its environs are re-structured.

A new operations centre is to be built with all the usual facilities and excellent views of the lift. It has been estimated that approximately 180 boats will visit each year to use the lift. My personal guess is that usage will be much greater.

Forgetting the initial rush it could be up to 30 a week in the summer months. The cost of a return trip for a private boat on the lift, despite some published figures of £27-50, has not yet been decided. This proposed figure is less than the cost of using the Rochdale flight of locks, a comparative exercise.



There are to be two new trip boats, based on the river, perhaps operating from the

newly dredged basin, to make the experience of travelling on the lift available to the public. You can directly help the Lift Restoration by joining the Friends of Anderton Boat Lift. It costs £5. Talk to Andrea Peattie on 01606 867531 or write to her at PO Box 83, Winsford, Cheshire, CW7 1BF. They have a quarterly news letter. Also, there is a special limited edition traditional lace plate commemorating the Lift restoration in 2001 (£15.99 Mail Order from 01706 810007) with a proportion of the income going to the restoration fund.

As an aside, £18 million in extra grants has been awarded to British Waterways over the next three years plus the writing off of £15 million worth of loans. This is to assist with addressing the problem of a backlog of repair work on the 2000 miles of canals in use, estimated at about £98 million, nearly all of it safety related.

It is now clear that the dream of riding on a working Anderton lift, after 16 years of closure, is about to become a fact. Whoever is responsible for the organisation on opening day can I please book may place for one 56' narrowboat?