

Ribble Navigation Account

Three successive Ribble Navigation Companies were formed in the 1800s to straighten the river and reclaim estuary land, the third company being passed to Preston Corporation under the Preston Dock Act of 1883. The Corporation was granted borrowing powers, and four 'Interest Warrants' headed Ribble Navigation Account have been acquired by the Ormskirk and District Family History Society.

Mike Clarke, President of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Society, explains that the docks development involved building training walls in the Ribble, for which stone was brought by canal boat from the quarries around Parbold. He says the Corporation would have looked for local investors.

The Warrants concern a £150 loan in the names of Robert Martland and C. H. R. Harrison and were addressed to Mr Martland at his farm in Moss Lane, Lathom (Barton's Farm in the 1901 census) which probably bordered the Rufford branch of the canal, used by the stone-carrying barges. Charles Hodson Ralph Harrison was Robert's cousin and brother-in-law, a Preston rate collector in 1901, later Assistant Bursar of the Ormskirk Board of Guardians.

Interest on the loan was £2 11s for the four six-month periods involved, ending 29.2.1888, 9.2.1892, 31.8.1892 and 28.2.1893. £150 in the 1880s would be about £25,000 today (2023), so the cousins were both wealthy – Probate records show that Robert left almost £3,000 in his 1921 will, and Charles left more than £4,000 in 1933. (Both men are listed in our Canal1 tree, grandsons of Samuel Harrison 1789-1852, Canal and Land Agent, also lock-keeper at Top Locks, Lathom where the Rufford branch diverts from the main canal.)

Mike Clarke adds that today the Ribble is no longer dredged and the training walls have broken. "The 1890s development, by speeding up water flows, made Tarleton more difficult for boats to access and also resulted in the vast sands at Southport. Now the river is resuming its old course closer to Southport, creating deep water at the end of the pier as before." He refers to James Barron's 1938 book *A History of the Ribble Navigation*, published by Preston Corporation to mark the centenary of the second Ribble Navigation Company. It contains this photograph of stone being delivered for the training walls.



CANAL BARGES DISCHARGING STONE ON NORTH WALL AT 12½ MILE