

Canal Walking Group

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Leeds Liverpool Canal Walk 24th November 2016

We started in the narrow valley of the R Douglas at Gathurst which was shared with the canal and railway on an unbelievably beautiful morning. After a couple of hundred yards we passed under the spectacular M6 viaduct and low rail bridge, not to be out done immediately adjacent where a twin set of canal locks with handsome bay windowed lock keepers house.



The wide canal with its sturdy stone bridges bent sinuously westwards hugging the contours as the valley gradually widened with autumnal

trees mirrored in the still water. Nearby the narrow R Douglas babbled gently towards Appley Bridge where bricks and tiles would have been made and transported on the adjacent railway and canal while coal for firing was mined locally or brought in by barge. In the widest part of the valley we saw Ice Age remains in the gently rounded "drumlin" hills lying to the south of the canal. Appley Bridge gradually revealed itself with smart new brick red brick and stone houses above the canal and close to the village centre we came to what had been canal management and artisan's housing in similar but much older materials. The dwellings faced a broad area which would once have been a busy canal wharf for the "export" of local materials and produce together with the import of goods from Liverpool and other canal side towns. Also here would have been canal workshops and stables including those for the fast 'fly' boats hauled by 'running horses' (hence the pub of the same name in Maghull)

The widening valley continued towards Parbold which included an almost right turn in the waterway where an unbuilt branch would have joined. At Parbold the towpath crossed the canal by the tower of a former windmill and we admired the newish housing on the site of a mill that had produced animal feed. Unknowingly we passed over the River Douglas on an early aqueduct as it now flowed towards Tarleton and we trekked on towards our destination at Burscough. However there were still more delights to see close to the canal including "Giant's Hall" an attractive Georgian stone house and a lovely circular stone sculpture known as the "Lathom Fish" by Thompson Dagnall....who did the "Halsall Navy" we saw on the last walk. The sculpture was made from stone found on the site and it made excellent seating for our lunch stop!

Our final leg included more canal side cottages, the lovely triangular settlement, bridge and overgrown dry dock at the junction with the Rufford Branch canal. As we reached Burscough the canal was overshadowed by the bulk of the former Ainscough flour mill which having empty for several years but is now converted into an attractive housing. Finally a little weary (but happy) we reached our destination and caught the train back to Gathurst to collect our cars for the journey home after a super day!,