

Friends of Brighouse Station

Bringing New Life to Brighouse Station



Calder and Hebble Navigation

The Calder & Hebble Navigation is some 21 miles long, with 27 locks, from its junction with the Aire and Calder Navigation at Wakefield to that with the Rochdale Canal at Sowerby Bridge. There is also a connection to the Huddersfield Broad Canal at Cooper Bridge. The Calder and Hebble, like the Aire and Calder, is known as a 'Navigation' since it uses the river where navigable and a man-made 'cut' where it is not.

The Calder & Hebble was first proposed in 1740 but it was not until 1758 that a further Act of Parliament was passed and construction began in November 1759 with John Smeaton (of Eddystone Lighthouse fame) as Chief Engineer. The Navigation reached Brighouse in November 1764 but completion to Sowerby Bridge was not achieved until 1770.

Until 1769 the scheme was known as the 'Calder Navigation' but a further Act of Parliament, made necessary by financial problems, changed the name to 'Calder and Hebble Navigation'. There was a further Act of Parliament in 1825 which authorised the construction of a branch along the Hebble Brook from Salterhebble to the centre of Halifax. This was completed in 1828, rising 110' by 14 locks, and was abandoned in 1942.

A rather unusual aspect of the Calder and Hebble is the size and operation of the locks. The locks are 57' 6" long and 14' 2" wide and were built to accommodate the 57' by 14' 'Yorkshire Keels' which were commonly used to bring goods up the Aire and Calder and onwards up the Calder and Hebble. This precluded the use of the locks by the usual 70' narrow boats so goods going to or from Lancashire via the Rochdale Canal were trans-shipped at Sowerby Bridge. The other aspect, unique to the Calder and Hebble, is that a timber handspike is required in order to lever open the simple lock gear which lifts the lock paddles to allow a full lock to empty or an empty one to fill.

A wagon-way link from the Clifton coalfield down to Brighouse Canal Basin was in use for many years to bring coal down to be loaded into barges. This fell into disuse in the 1920's. Commercial traffic on the Navigation had largely ceased by 1955, although coal was still carried to Thornhill power station until 1981. The Navigation is now used only by leisure craft.