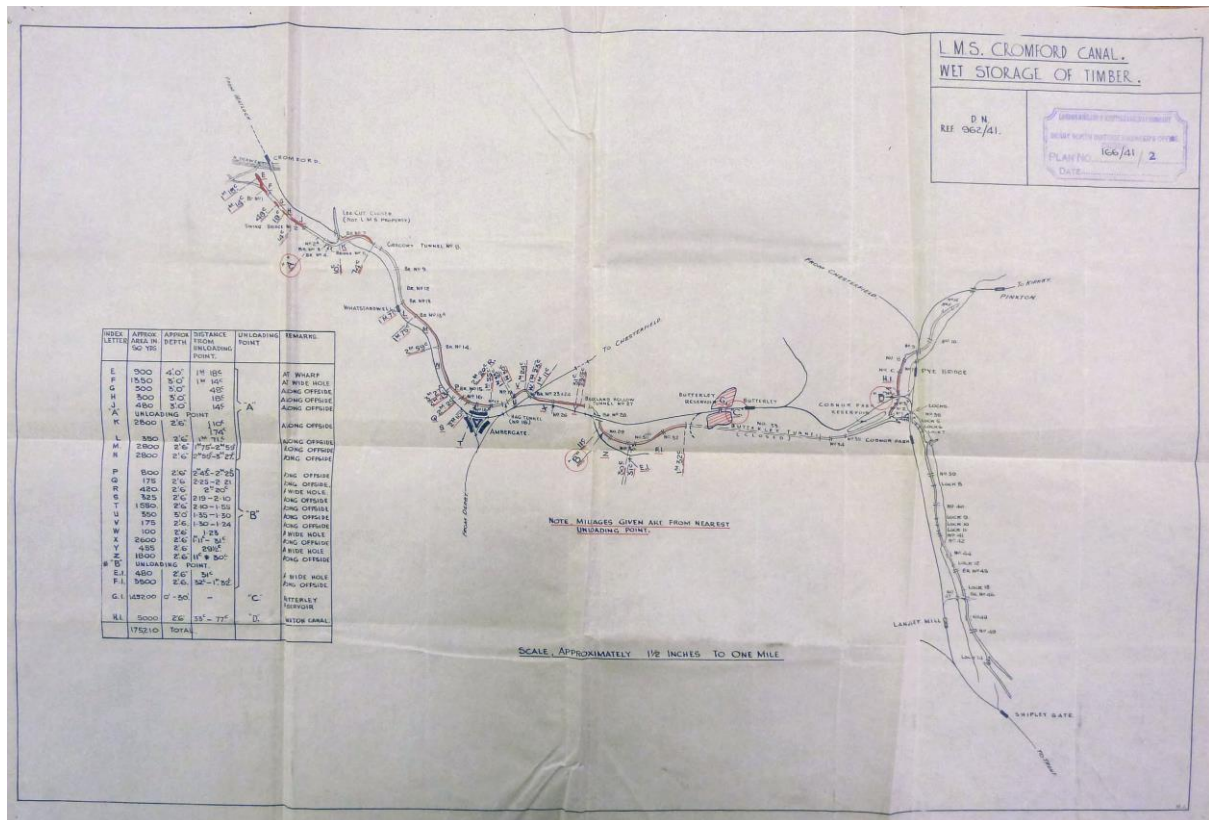


## N&Q 27.27 – Wet storage of timber

Hugh Potter asks

I came across a plan of the Cromford Canal in Wakefield archives the other day indicating areas for 'wet storage of timber'. I have never come across anything like this before. Anyone got any ideas please?



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INDEX LETTER	APPROX. AREA IN. SQ YDS	APPROX DEPTH	DISTANCE FROM UNLOADING POINT.	UNLOADING POINT	REMARKS.	
E	900	4'0"	1 <sup>M</sup> 18 <sup>C</sup>	"A"	A WHARF	
F	1350	3'0"	1 <sup>M</sup> 14 <sup>C</sup>		A WIDE HOLE	
G	500	3'0"	48 <sup>C</sup>		ALONG OFFSIDE	
H	300	3'0"	18 <sup>C</sup>		ALONG OFFSIDE	
J	480	3'0"	14 <sup>C</sup>		ALONG OFFSIDE	
"A"	UNLOADING POINT					
K	2800	2'6"	{ 10 <sup>C</sup> 74 <sup>C</sup>		ALONG OFFSIDE	
L	350	2'6"	1 <sup>M</sup> 71 <sup>C</sup>		ALONG OFFSIDE	
M.	2800	2'6"	1 <sup>M</sup> 75 <sup>C</sup> - 2 <sup>M</sup> 59 <sup>C</sup>		ALONG OFFSIDE	
N	2800	2'6"	2 <sup>M</sup> 59 <sup>C</sup> - 3 <sup>M</sup> 27 <sup>C</sup>		ALONG OFFSIDE	
P	800	2'6"	2 <sup>M</sup> 43 <sup>C</sup> - 2 <sup>M</sup> 25 <sup>C</sup>	"B"	ALONG OFFSIDE	
Q	175	2'6"	2-25 - 2-21		ALONG OFFSIDE.	
R	420	2'6"	2 <sup>M</sup> 20 <sup>C</sup>		A WIDE HOLE.	
S	325	2'6"	2-19 - 2-10		ALONG OFFSIDE	
T	1550	2'6"	2-10 - 1-55		ALONG OFFSIDE	
U	350	3'0"	1-35 - 1-30		ALONG OFFSIDE	
V	175	2'6"	1-30 - 1-24		ALONG OFFSIDE	
W	100	2'6"	1-23		AT WIDE HOLE	
X	2600	2'6"	1 <sup>M</sup> 11 <sup>C</sup> - 31 <sup>C</sup>		ALONG OFFSIDE	
Y	455	2'6"	29 1/2 <sup>C</sup>		AT WIDE HOLE	
Z	1800	2'6"	11 <sup>C</sup> * 30 <sup>C</sup>		ALONG OFFSIDE	
* "B"	UNLOADING POINT.					
E.I.	480	2'6"	31 <sup>C</sup>	"C."	AT WIDE HOLE	
F.I.	3500	2'6"	32 <sup>C</sup> - 1 <sup>M</sup> 32 <sup>C</sup>		ALONG OFFSIDE.	
G.I.	143200	0' - 30'	-	"D."	BUTTERLEY RESERVOIR.	
H.I.	5000	2'6"	33 <sup>C</sup> - 77 <sup>C</sup>	"D."	PINXTON CANAL.	
	175210	TOTAL.				

Mike Clarke writes

Could be ground paddles as they would always be under water, while gate paddles would have one side open to the air, being wet then dry tending to cause elm to rot.

Peter Brown writes

Last Monday I was at Ellesmere Depot and took a photograph of the paddle tank there. Howard Griffiths, the local maintenance supervisor, said that they still used elm paddles - but I can't remember whether he said it was for gate paddles, ground paddles or run-off paddles.



Chris Deuchar writes

Probably a bit of a tangent, but at Trent Lock we have a 'paddle hole'. This is a 5ft x 5ft x 2ft tank buried to ground level and covered with boards. It receives water from the adjacent building and overflows into the canal. Its purpose is to hold newly made timber (ie elm?) paddles for the lock sluices prior to their being fitted. It is redundant nowadays, with the use of coplastic paddles, but I was only thinking the other day that the number of CRT staff who know what it is - or even that it exists - probably approximates to zero. I am not aware of any others.

Mike Smith asks

Hugh, was there a veneer factory or similar nearby? At Aaronsen's Rickmansworth Dock on the Grand Union I believe they used to store 'floaters' and even 'sinkers' sometimes; usually prior to placing in the vats that could be heated to pre-prepare (by manual de-barking initially), as part of the speed seasoning process, the actual veneer cutting from the logs was

done after kiln drying by rotating them against the cutting blades. From memory, these logs were generally 20 ft long by 2 to 3 ft in diameter. There were some half dozen machines. Between leaving school and KEVII Nautical College I worked there for a couple of months and it was extremely interesting. They made an effort to teach young people across as broad a spectrum as possible. That was 1961 and I was 15. Just wish I could remember the huge variety of timbers used. The learning curve was huge fun.

John Howat writes

There were timber ponds on the Forth & Clyde Canal in Glasgow (<https://canmore.org.uk/site/167058>)



Also on the south bank of the River Clyde (<https://canmore.org.uk/site/307418>, [www.secretscotland.org.uk](http://www.secretscotland.org.uk) › Secrets › Ti...) from which the following is taken.

Timber Ponds were set up along the southern shore of the River Clyde in the early days of wooden shipbuilding, occupying the area between Port Glasgow and Langbank. The industry required vast quantities of thoroughly seasoned timber, and with shipyards occupying most of the shore line from central Greenock to eastern Port Glasgow, demand was prodigious. The ponds prevented the timber from floating away and allowed the logs to be organised according to type, length of seasoning, and ownership. Extreme weather could result in the logs breaking free of the ponds, closing the river until they were recovered. Remnants of the timber ponds still exist in the lines of vertical wooden posts sticking out of the mud, and rectangular areas can still be seen in aerial views of the surrounding riverbed. Imported from North America, timber crossed the Atlantic from Quebec to Port Glasgow. In 1825 this trade amounted to some 19,000 tons, and reached almost 28,000 tons by 1834. The timber was unloaded at the mid-harbour, then chained together with rafters and floated to the

ponds. At their peak, the ponds extended as far as the Gare Loch, but the arrival of pre-cut timber and steel construction by 1914 meant that few remained in use. Current practice is to place green, unseasoned timber in vast kilns, gradually reducing the moisture content until the sawn material is stable. This technology was not available in earlier years, when ancient practice was to leave the unsawn logs to lie on the tidal mudflats and season, for months or even years.



Mike Day writes

Wet storage was the norm for timber product to be used on the canals, it seems to me. Particularly this refers to elm which will last indefinitely under water – hundreds or even thousands of years if not disturbed – and will survive like all hardwoods if otherwise kept dry. Unfortunately a cycle of wet and dry will not suit most timbers.

I attach an old photograph of Bulbourne Works on the Grand Union where completed gates were kept ready for transport. Some completed gates may be seen. However, new timber and completed gates or subassemblies were kept in the pool until they needed to be worked on again, or readied for delivery. The pool in this case was the canal, and the gantry reached about 10 feet over the cut for this purpose. I have not been past there in many years, and whether any of the works survive I do not know, but I rather hope they have as they were a museum piece (but still in working order) in the early '70s when I visited.



Tom Foxon adds

Wet storage of timber was quite common. There was a timber pond on the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal at Two-mile Turn.

Stephen Rowson sends a photograph of an additional use:

fishermen on one of the timber ponds connected to the Glamorganshire Canal at Cardiff. The canal bank runs across the background. The twin towers are of St Mary's Church on Bute Road.



Hugh Potter thanks the group for the information about timber ponds etc,

and asks why, amongst all the documents that he has unearthed in diverse archives relating to the Cromford Canal, is there only this one reference to 'wet storage of timber', and is there any significance in the date of drawing (1941 according to plan number)? His thought is that it is something to do with World War Two — but what? Were similar maps drawn up of other canals, or maybe just LMSR canals?

Mike Clarke writes

I have gone through my notes about timber on the L&LC, amongst which was the following:

- 1786-11-13 All timber going up the canal to be placed on the east of the canal between the coal yards and graving docks at Liverpool.
- 1791-4-28 Arch bridges to be built at Lydiate and Downholland. Mr Fisher allowed to erect a crane on his land next to the stop gate for use as timber quay. Whitworth to design a dredger.
- 1800-9-19 Croston Drainage. 22 cwt per ton allowed for coal in Lancashire, 20 cwt in Yorkshire; Lancashire reduced to 20 cwt. New basin for timber and manure to be built at Liverpool.

1801-11-12 Black willow planted to protect canal banks. Halsall cutting towpath to be improved as stone is required on canal. Timber can no longer be rafted due to damage.

1804-11-13 Timber can be rafted from Top Locks, Burscough, if they are 3 baulks deep, to compete with trade through Preston, but only by agreement with the Liverpool agent.

Mike Clarke writes further

I have recently found some more information about rafting timber. In Dublin, the Office of Public Works file, OPW 1/5/3/11 northern letter book 1813-1814, includes towards the end of 1814 several discussions and a report about banning the rafting of timber. It suggests that rafts damaged the locks and canal banks. In particular, they could easily lift a gate if they caught underneath the framing. The local merchants were very much against the ban, but it does suggest that rafting was becoming much more obstructive and damaging as traffic on a canal increased, hence the determination by canal companies to end the practice.