

THE 1868 DROUGHT

EMERGENCY WATER SUPPLY FOR PRESTON

PUMPING FROM THE RIVER HODDER AT DOEFORD BRIDGE

In 1953 Preston's Water Engineer, Mr Oakes, produced an excellent booklet called "Water Supplies through Three Centuries". He described how, as Preston expanded and the wells and springs within the town became inadequate, it looked towards the hills. The first reservoir was made about 1832 near Gammull Lane, then the Grimsargh reservoirs about 1835 and the first of the reservoirs near Longridge about 1840. For 25 years, between 1850 and 1875, Preston obtained much of its water supply directly from the River Loud near the Derby Arms. "The Loud water was hard and grossly polluted" and there was not much of it in dry weather.

The Stonyhurst records for 1868 show that there was very little rain in May, June and July. By August, Preston's reservoirs were dry. The urgent need to maintain a supply of water to the town demanded a quick solution. Pumping from the Ribble was considered but analysis showed that the water was quite unfit for domestic purposes. Hodder water proved to be ideal, and arrangements were made by the end of August to obtain it. The ingenious emergency measures, to raise water 120 feet above the river Hodder and run it more than a mile to the existing Longridge Fell catchment area reflect great credit on all concerned. Mr Oakes wrote that water was pumped continuously from 27th August to the end of October.

On Thursday September 10th the emergency pumping scheme was inspected by a deputation from Preston Corporation who left Winckley Square, pulled by five horses. A newspaper reporter and a friend who provided a gig and a spirited grey horse left town at 2pm and kept ahead of the municipal party. The entertaining style of the newspaper account of the visit suggests that the reporter was the local journalist Anthony Hewitson.

A shortened version of the original in the "Preston Chronicle" of 12th September 1868 is reproduced below.

A VISIT TO THE HODDER ON 10TH SEPTEMBER 1868 TO INSPECT THE EMERGENCY PUMPING MEASURES

"The first halt was at the Derby Arms, above Longridge. Lord Derby has much property in this quarter, and the inn forms a part of it. It is a good old-fashioned building - none of your modern run-up concerns - and although it must ordinarily be a dull place, it has recently, through the labourers and others connected with the water works, been tolerably lively."

"Jem Bowton", the contractor from Preston, seemed to be in a most generous and luminous frame of mind. He told us that he had given to his labourers during their month's operations at the water works, hundreds of pounds of cheese and bread and vast quantities of ale. After serving the men with their usual daily allowance he put a big chalk mark on each man's back to try to avoid repetition. But Jem has behaved most handsomely to his men, to visitors and to all who have called upon him at the Derby Arms. He told us that he had a leg of lamb and about half a sheep roasted, but we said that we were not hungry, and would give him a call on our return journey."

"So we drove off towards Doe Ford Bridge. The scenery on each side of the road is romantic and quietly pastoral. On one side a wide plateau, hemmed-in by the undulating range of Parlick, and at the foot thereof we have the village of Chipping, with its tiny white church steeple peeping up from the trees. Leagram Hall sits gracefully and quietly upon an adjoining summit. Far ahead there is the Trough of Bowland. On the opposite side we have Longridge Fell, looking dark and black."

"After passing along a most uneven and tortuous lane, we at last reached Doe Ford Bridge - a strong stone structure of two arches. And there, beside the bridge, on its lower side, was the spot selected for obtaining the new water supply for Preston. We went down to it and were wonderstruck at the sight of a Lancashire and Yorkshire railway engine! However it was got there, within three yards of the river, is a mystery, but there it was, with steam up at 100lbs pressure and ready for working at a most rapid rate."

"At a quarter past four o'clock the corporate deputation arrived, headed by Mr Alderman Spencer, who has taken a very active part in connection with the water works of the town, and Mr Armytage, our Borough Surveyor, who has superintended the construction of the emergency supply. All the others might as well have stayed at home, as far as their skill was concerned, but members of Town Councils are just like other people, they have great faith in trips, especially if they are cheap ones."

"At 25 minutes to 5 o'clock the engine driver blew the whistle and put on the steam. The locomotive was propped up about a foot from the ground so that the wheels turned round without moving a single inch! A large leather belt was placed round one of the driving wheels and this belt was continued to a smaller wheel a few yards in the rear attached to one of Messrs J. & H.G. Wynne's force pumps. The locomotive was worked at a speed which, if it had been