

A Charming Canal

by Sandra Mocho

Just one year ago, I was having my Erasmus year in Manchester, Greater Manchester, England. One of the most remarkable, distinctive attractions came to my eyes the second week of being there. The Manchester Ship Canal gave the city a different aspect, other colour, other view... Well-known areas such as Canal St, Quay St, Salford Quays, Deansgate, among others, had a gorgeous vision for a beginner as I was.

The Manchester Ship Canal is a river navigation 36 miles long opened in 1894. Starting at the Mersey Estuary near Liverpool, it generally follows the authentic routes of the rivers Mersey and Irwell through the memorable counties of Cheshire and Lancashire. The canal's terminus was built in Manchester where the river ends.

Manchester Ship Canal (with the Port of Liverpool) offer a comprehensive range of port facilities, handling more than 40 million tonnes of cargo and 15,000 ship movements a year.

But everything is not positive. The quality of water in the ship canal remains affected by several factors. Mersey Basin has a high population density and it placed heavy demands on sewage treatment and disposal. The water also was depleted of dissolved oxygen, which in the latter half of the twentieth century often resulted in toxic sediments normally present at the bottom of the Turning Basin in what is now Salford Quays. It used to rise to the surface during the summer months, giving the impression of solid ground.

Matters have improved since 1990, but the canal's water quality remains low, with mercury and cadmium presenting "extremely high levels".

Wildlife species found are butterflies, dragonflies, kestrels, swallows and house martins. Local flora includes orchids and Broad-leaved Helleborines. Diving ducks are also regular visitors to Salford Quays and they feed on winter nights there.

As we all know, Manchester experiences a temperate maritime climate, with warm summers and cold winters. The canal gives a damp, humid sensation which can turn out to be uncomfortable. But I am pretty sure Manchester's nightlife will not be the same without its canal.

Sources cited:

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