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Water Tower
Tower Hill
Ormskirk

Heritage Statement

28•11•16

The Victorian Water tower that is so familiar to every generation in the town from 1853 onwards, dominates the Ormskirk skyline still, despite the removal of the original water tank some years ago. There was a viewing platform on the top from where you could see the Victoria Hotel in Southport, Parbold Hill, Rivington Pike, Harrock Hill, Hunter's Hill, Ashurst Beacon, Knowsley Hall and Liverpool in the far distance. The access to the viewing platform in 1853 was via an iron tube running through the water in the tank. Built to save the town from disease and deterioration, the tower had a massive impact on the health of everyone in the town from the first day it went into operation.

From October 1853 the water system in the town was operational and fed from a 226ft well which was sunk about 300 yards from the tower near to Bath Springs, where a public bath had been in use but had closed prior to the Tower being built. A powerful pump forced the water from the spring/well to the tower.

The Tower itself was sited to the North East of the town with open fields around it, there were no houses close by until Sgt Major Nunnerley built Inkerman Lodge almost directly opposite. The original area around the Tower was used for grazing cattle and sheep. The road had been known as Tinker's Hill for generations but when the Tower was built it became Tank Lane. In the 1920s, it was voted by the council planning committee to rename it Tower Hill.

The water supply from the well served the town's needs adequately in the first twenty years, but with the increase in population by 1876 the water table had sunk below the foot of the well on a number of occasions and supply was looking to be a problem.

Mr Mansergh, at the request of Central Government and on instruction from the council undertook a detailed study of the whole system in January 1876. His report, dated May 1876, confirms that the 226ft well used from the installation in 1853 was indeed becoming unreliable. A second well 60 feet deep had been sunk and had been used to pump 230,000 gallons per day for domestic, trade and railway supply. It was clear in his report that the 20 year old system drastically needed an upgrade.

His report recommended that a Davey Compound Differential Engine be bought with a pair of single-action lifting pumps in a purpose built pumping station, the expense of installation and housing of this new system Mansergh assured the committee, would be less than replacing the beam engine currently in use, with the capability of pumping 200,000 gallons in 12 hours.

The Tower remained in service to the town for a further 100 years and in 1976 it was awarded Grade II listed status. The abandoned tower lost the huge tank from the top and remains as a reminder of the ingenious engineering and foresight used in Victorian Times to improve the lives of ordinary people.





the tower with watertank [before demolition]



the water tower in 1990 [watertank removed mid 1980's]

There have been numerous attempts to develop the tower in recent years – the most recent of which was back in 2007 and involved the creation of seven apartments and the wholesale demolition of huge swathes of the tower – needless to say the application met with stiff opposition from both residents and English Heritage and the application was rejected.



Water tower plans thrown out for the seventh time

By GARY STEWART

PLANS to build seven flats including a penthouse on top of a Victorian water tower in Ormskirk have been halted for the seventh time in nearly 20 years.

More than 100 residents crowded the council chambers at a planning meeting, forcing chairman David O'Toole to ask some people to step outside to comply with health and safety regulations.

The Tower Hill water tower, disused for decades, is believed to be the oldest such tower in Britain and unique in its design.

Philip Tyrer of Tower Hill said: "It's been a very contentious issue, probably the most contentious issue for West Lancashire District Council with over 100 letters of objection, some of them from as far away as Burscough.

"Members may be surprised to see the number of people objecting tonight given that the recommendation is to deny the application but this just represents the strength of feeling."

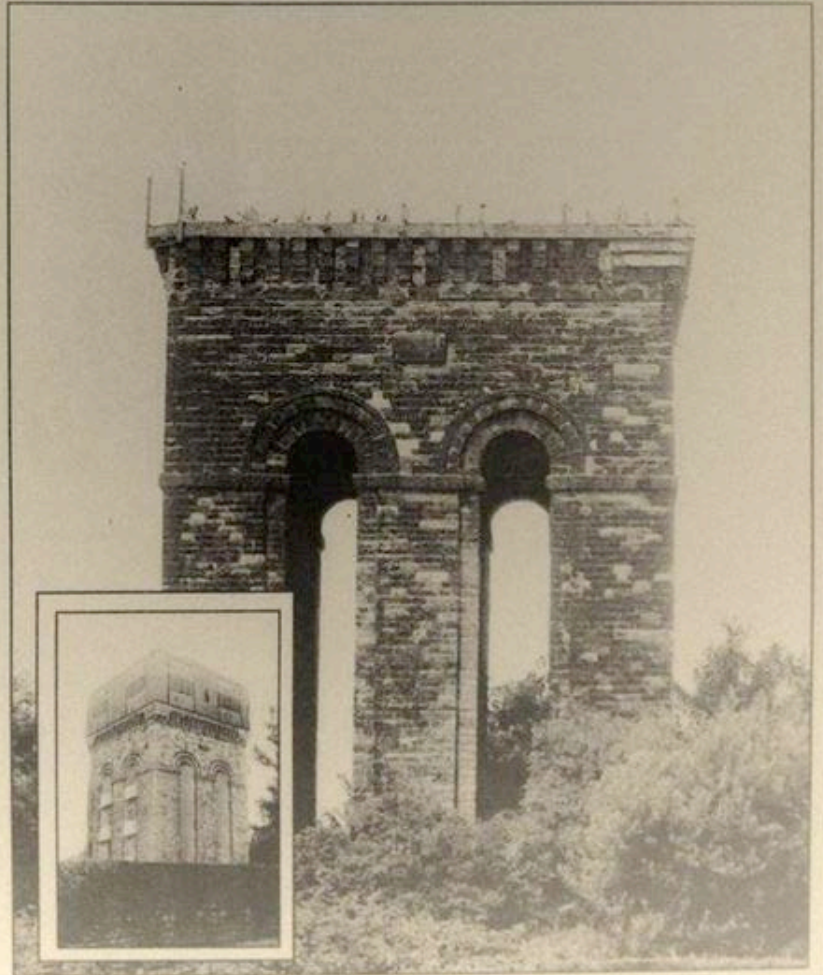
Mr Tyrer outlined the main concerns of residents that the tower overlooked their homes and gardens and that it would increase the number of accidents on a road which already suffered too many, though he presented only anecdotal evidence for this.

Cllr Adrian Owens, who is also the Conservative parliamentary candidate for West Lancashire, was given leave to speak on behalf of the residents.

He rubbished surveys and valuations of the tower as being incompetent and said only one penthouse dwelling would make sufficient return to make renovation worthwhile.

The application was denied though the developers can appeal against the decision to the Planning Inspectorate, a national independent body based in Bristol.

● The plan for the Tower Hill water tower included a 6.2m high tank to be put on top to bring the listed building in line with its original appearance, bringing its height to 23.2m (76ft)



images of the 2007 scheme from local press

The Future

The new scheme seeks to respect the tower and its historic grade II listed status by leaving the tower entirely in tact. Moreover it is this new extension that will secure the towers future by protecting it from the elements and structurally securing the [currently collapsing] upper walls.

The new scheme seeks simply to create a modern reinterpretation of the water tank upon the roof. In spirit, the new rooftop extension will be entirely the same as the previous in that it is utilitarian in nature and furthers the industrial intent and language of the original structure.



In architectural language however there is a clear separation of elements as we feel it is better to separate the new from the old rather than blur the lines in a futile attempt to mimic the past.

