

Dublin - the Grand Canal Docks - 2004 & 2008

23 November 2008

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In 2004 members of the HBA were in Dublin to celebrate fifty years of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWA) and the opening of the Grand Canal from Dublin to the Shannon, two hundred years previously. We also celebrated and attended the official opening of the floating moorings in the Inner Basin of the Grand Canal Docks.

All of us who were there, at the locks or on the boats, remember the challenge and the sense of accomplishment of getting over forty boats from the Guinness Beds at Park West to Dublin in one day.

What a difference four years can make. It was the last time boats came to the IWA Dublin Rally from the Royal Canal, as Spencer Dock was closed shortly thereafter. Unfortunately, the Waterways Ireland Visitor Centre is once again closed to the public after its latest refurbishment to create a new dynamic multi-functional space. It had a brief re-opening in May 2008 when dignitaries attended the official opening of the new McMahon Bridge. [Update 2009 - has now once again reopened as an Art Gallery]. Regrettably, the moorings in the Grand Canal Docks Inner Basin were also closed to boaters in November 2008.

The pictures here show many of the changes that have occurred over the past four years.

Outer Basin

In 1997 the Dublin Docks Development Authority (DDDA) started the process of change when it acquired the sites now known as Grand Canal Harbour. Since 2004 considerable development has taken place on the west side; for instance, Grand Canal Square, the Plaza and work is in process on the Grand Canal Performing Arts Theatre due to open in Spring 2010 [see Mar 2009 photo]. The public areas in, about, or relating to the development on the land in this area are now maintained by the Grand Canal Harbour Management Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of the DDDA.

The freehold interest of 1.24 hectares of the eastern side, between the Outer Basin and the Dodder, known as Plot 8, is owned by Waterways Ireland (WI) and the DDDA has a leasehold on the former gasometer site of .55 hectares. The Plot 8 Planning Group [renamed Flagship 21 in Jan 2009] which includes WI, is currently deciding the future of this peninsula. There are rumours that at least one of the graving docks will be restored to full working order. Since the graving dock in Alexandra Basin was filled in, these are the only 18th or 19th century graving docks left in Dublin.

The Outer and Inner basins in their original form had over 5300 feet of wharfage. The Ringsend Dockyard and the Vickers companies both operated on what is now known as Plot 8, from 1913 until 1963. Using two of the graving docks they built and repaired many of the M, B and E barges, currently owned by HBA members.

Westmoreland, Buckingham and Camden Locks built in 1796 as the entrance from the River Liffey to the Grand Canal, and the original lock-keeper's cottage at Britain Quay, have been declared heritage structures. They have both been valued in the Inventory of Architectural and Industrial Heritage for their group, design, aesthetic and technical innovation importance.

Inner Basin

The new McMahon Bridge connecting the Outer with the Inner Basin, has been rebuilt with a higher clearance for boats.

The Inner Basin has also changed considerably with many of the old warehouse buildings now fully restored and some extended. The old house which was located beside the WI Visitor Centre, was demolished and replaced with a glass skyscraper in 2007.

Work has started on the Montevetro building, located in the corner beside the Dart Station and there are plans afoot for a Boland Mills Hotel, which will totally change the view from the moorings.

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Photographs by Gerry Burke, Brian Goggin and others

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Below are a selection of images from 2004 and 2008.

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