

IS OUR WATER FIT TO DRINK?

Jack Tolley has been trying to get something done about Liverpool's water supply since 1966.

His claim is that the standard of our drinking water isn't up to the requirements of the World Health Organisation's limits.

And he says that if we adhered to those standards strictly, the level of certain chemicals in Liverpool's water would, in the words of the WHO, "constitute grounds for the rejection of the water as a public supply for domestic use."

In other words, it isn't fit to drink.

Jack Tolley isn't short of evidence to back up his claims. As chief technician at the municipal laboratories in Liverpool University's Civil Engineering Department, he has carried out extensive research into just what is present in the water we drink.

Together with a lecturer in the department he has published a series of papers about lead and other chemical in British water. The Lancet, the leading medical journal, has published a number of their letters about their findings. And Jack Tolley has addressed international scientific conferences on his work. Professors and academics from all over the world have asked him to keep them in touch with his work.

In October 1966 he wrote a courteous letter to Professor Andrew Semple, Liverpool's Medical Officer of Health, pointing out that since 1960 the average lead content in Liverpool's tap water coming from lead pipes was always above the WHO safety limit.

Sample

Prof. Semple replied that these figures came from special samples and added... "I would emphasise that we also test a number of tap water supplies in Liverpool but the result for lead content is usually nil, and always below the international standard which you quote."

Tolley replied stating that the picture would be changed if supplies were taken from the first runnings of water in the morning.

Several weeks ago Prof. Semple advised people with lead service pipes to run off the first water, but then added that if they didn't, he didn't think it would do them a great deal of harm.

Independent laboratory tests have shown, however, that the

lead content can be as high as 0.4 parts per million - eight times the WHO safety limit.

If you drink two litres of water a day containing more than 0.3 parts per million of lead your body is beginning to accumulate lead and you are heading for lead poisoning.

Lead poisoning is a slow process. Cases are known where it took 12 years to diagnose.

Russia and the United States both ban the use of lead pipes for carrying domestic water.

Liverpool corporation will not even issue written notices to people with lead pipes warning them of the danger.

Safety limit

Jack Tolley and Mr C.D. Reed have also had a letter published in The Lancet (December 1968) which stated that 24 samples - including one from Liverpool - of water each contained 16 times the WHO safety limit for phenolic substances. These substances include cancer-causing chemicals.

But in a letter to a councillor, Prof. Semple said: "Since Liverpool started taking water from the Dee, there has been a slight increase in these [phenolic] residues, but once again so minimal in quantity that they are not likely to be harmful."

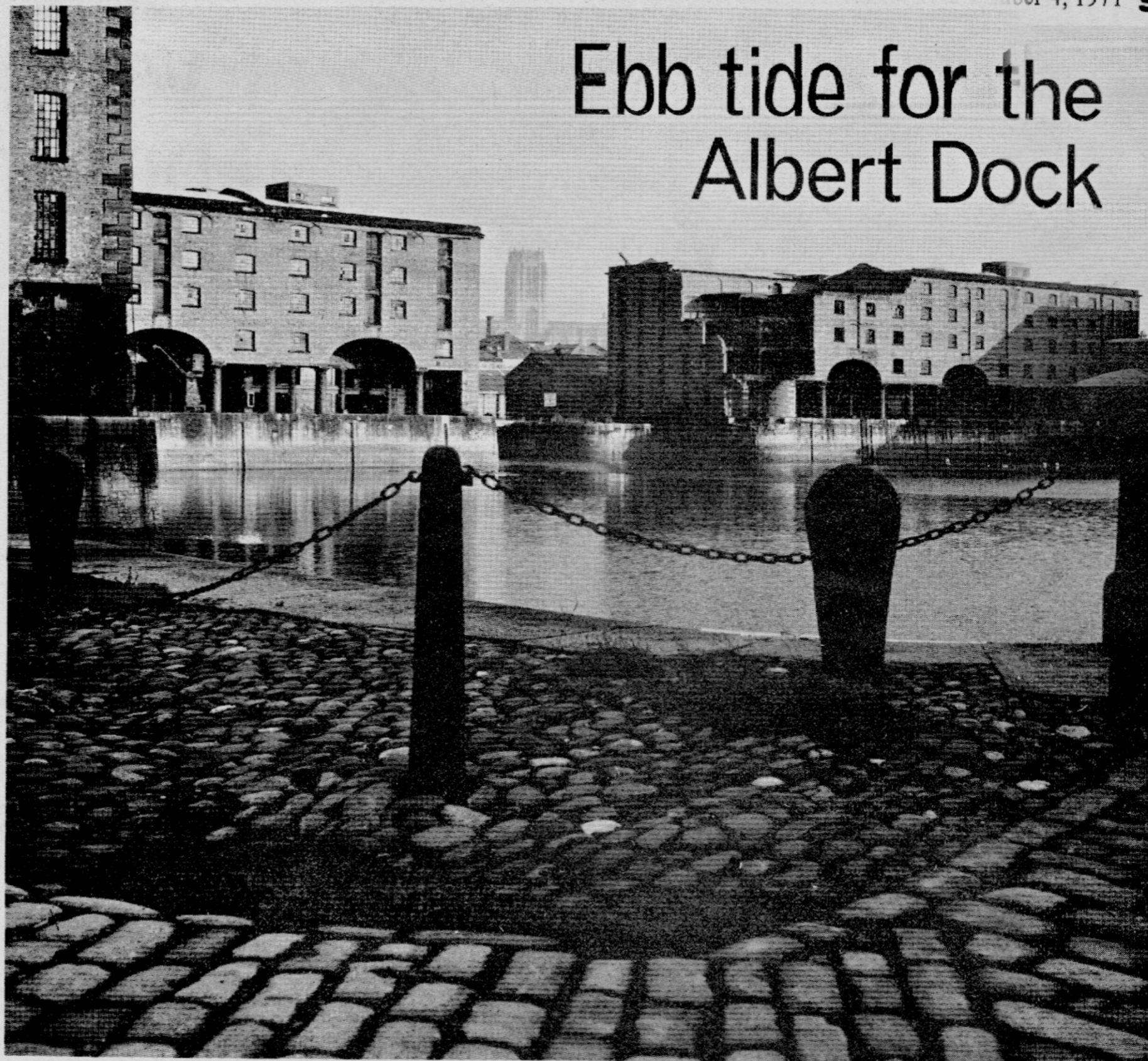
In another article they have had published, Tolley and Reed look at what goes into the River Dee from which Liverpool takes drinking water.

Into the river go half a dozen main industrial discharges, and two dozen sewage effluents.

In 1966 Monsanto Chemicals of Ruabon, near Wrexham, were discharging phenolic substances into the water which before treatment in their effluent plant had a concentration of 160 parts per million. The plant, commented the works manager in his letter to Jack Tolley, had an efficiency of 97%-99%.

Jack Tolley pointed out that on a day when it was 3% inefficient the concentration of phenols after treatment would still be 3.2 parts per million - 1,600 times greater than the WHO international standard, and 3,200 times greater than the WHO European standard.

No wonder Jack Tolley is still worried.



Ebb tide for the Albert Dock

The fate of Liverpool's Albert Dock - listed as a place of architectural and historical value - appears to have been settled.

An ominous last-minute alteration to a report by the city planning office indicates that any intention of preserving the Albert Dock warehouses has gone by the board.

In his report on Liverpool's current planning policies, Mr Francis Amos, city planning officer, said: "Consideration will also need to be given to conserving the Albert Dock warehouses."

But in copies of the report that went before city councillors on October 13, that sentence had been carefully crossed out with a felt-tip pen.

So it is now only a question of time before another group of smash and grab private developers are invited in to rip the warehouses down and replace them with towering slabs of office block, destined to stand as empty eyesores for years to come.

Mesmerised

The last property speculator to mesmerise Liverpool City Council was Harry Hyams, the 'shy millionaire' who took out an option to develop the 53-acre Albert Dock site in 1966.

Hyam's Oldham Estates - 50% owned by George Wimpey, the builders - built Centre Point in London, a giant office development kept empty until they could command inflated rents.

Hyams submitted plans for a vast £50 million development on the site of the Albert, Canning and Salthouse Docks. He christened it Waterfront City, but later changed the name to the more trendy and captivating Aquarius City, and made it a £100 million development.

Hyams garnished his scheme with all the trimmings, and went for the 'soft sell'.

It was to be a city within a city. Shops, restaurants, a maritime museum for the city, underwater car parking, hotel and even dinghy-sailing in between the office blocks which would rise up out of the water.

Aquarius City would provide jobs for 40,000 to 50,000. To that carrot, Hyams added an estimate that the development could benefit the city to the tune of £2,500,000 in rate income.

Tycoon

It was too much for the Liverpool City Council and Alderman MacDonald Steward, council leader. They were overwhelmed. No-one could be so unkind as to view Hyams as a ruthless property tycoon intent upon reducing the Albert Dock to rubble, putting up office blocks and withdrawing from Liverpool, his money made.

Despite suggestions by Walter Bor, then planning officer which would have meant saving the Albert Dock, Oldham Estates submitted further plans, none of which budged from their intention to raze the warehouses to the ground and fill the dock in.

But when Aquarius City was launched, Francis Amos discussed the future of the dock with the Press and said: "There is no case for saying the buildings should be preserved at the expense of jobs in an area of high unemployment."

Any reservations which Amos held privately about the scheme didn't find their way into the Press statements which welcomed Aquarius City.

Invisible

Asked about who would occupy the five million square feet of office space, he replied: "We understand that Mr Hyams has clients who are prepared to come into Liverpool and take one million square feet of this new office space." Doubtless the invisible clients who had been living in Centre Point.

With such a gullible set of politicians and planners it isn't surprising they were agreeing to divert the £9 million inner loop commuter railway line so it could pop up inside Aquarius City.

Before the bottom dropped out of the scheme, another plan was submitted for the same site, by a group of people who wanted to preserve the Albert Dock and its buildings, designed by Jesse Hartley in 1845 and unique in Britain.

The group was from the Polytechnic - staff and students from the planning and architecture departments who thought the warehouses could be preserved and converted for use by the Poly.

They submitted a highly professional set of alternative plans, at a time when Liverpool was trying to do its democratic bit and inviting participation by the people.

Exercise

Somehow this exercise in participation got no further than the Polytechnic's Board of Governors, chairman of which is our old friend Alderman H MacDonald Steward!

Until recently a public right of way existed through the Albert Dock. It was lost when the old Dock Board cordoned off an area they claimed was unsafe.

It isn't the only public right that has disappeared. The speculators and developers who are being invited to make the most of the city centre are as unconcerned about the people who live here as they are about the Albert Dock warehouses.

