



A 'JOEY' BOAT RENAISSANCE

Tug and Day-Boat Group

The BHP Fleet - Bernard Hales & Partners

You will be aware from previous issues that a number of day-boats have received attention over the last few years and this article will give the impression that not having seen one for ages, like buses, four come along at once.

For a few years now there has been an informal group within the Club of enthusiastic owners who get together at the Black Country Living Museum every other year to share their experiences and enjoyment of tugs and joey boats. Tug owners naturally have an interest in what their boats were originally designed to do - towing trains of day boats. Today's 'new' canal boater could be forgiven for not knowing they existed but for the spattering of hulks around the system. Most lurk within the boundaries of the BCN and what might be termed 'the National Collection of canal day-boats' resides at the BCLM.

In order of appearance....

BHP No.2

Back in 1993, after 20 years ownership of the former Ernest Thomas (Walsall) Ltd. tug, **Enterprise No.1**, it seemed high time that her original purpose was demonstrated again. This was especially so given BHP's active involvement with the BCLM, where day boats form an essential part of the created 19th and 20th centuries scene.

The first acquisition in 1993 was



a single-ended day boat (early 20th.C) purchased from Robin Hewitt, Union Canal Carrying Co. at Braunston. It had survived ex-Stevens and Keay for some years and, having had a welded steel bottom and footings probably a decade earlier, continued to be used as a work boat. Our friend Denis Cooper, called in to assess the potential acquisition, said "Well, she is alright if you want something like that...(and muttered under his breath)...it's got a wobbly

bottom so you'd be wise to do something to stiffen it up if you want to put a load in it". Well we have just done that...20 years later!

There were no BCN plates or other identifying marks and nothing from UCCCo., except that behind a closed office door someone muttered.. "better not tell him that its called 'George'.."(?). **Enterprise No.1** took her down the GU and up River Thames to Staines. **BHP No.2** was immediately employed as support vessel on the 'Canoe-Camping Club' Golden Jubilee celebration 'International Thames Tour' for canoeists. The cargo carried included a dozen Elsans and bulky campsite equipment plus, from time to time, incapacitated paddlers and their canoes whilst the party paddled and camped their way down from Lechlade to Westminster. (The tug and tow accompanied them as far as Teddington). Note that the Thames



licence (as suggested and issued by the NRA) was for a 70ft canoe!

Subsequently Terry Pooley was engaged at the former base of Ernest Thomas, Birchills Wharf, Walsall. Remedial work addressed the worst hull wear points, straightening out unsightly kinks in the gunwales and replacing the middle cross beam before going to a home mooring at the Black Country Museum, with the kind cooperation of the then director Ian Walden. She carried the BCLM's two 7 ton Trinity House kedging anchors to the Bristol 1996 'Festival of the Sea', a memorable event.

18 years later it roosted at CTS, Norton Canes Dock with Matt Cooper (and a surprised Denis!) got grit blasted, re-bottomed, re-footed and re-topped. Andy West performed miracles daily and 'gilded' it with 1,500 washers for old times sake!

BHP No.3

Frequenting the 'Curly Wyrley' (as we did!) in the 1980s, on a trip round to an early Pelsall Rally we saw the boat that became **BHP No.3**. We had met and assisted the crew of a small newly built tug and a double-ended joey engaged seriously clearing out bridgeholes and removing other debris from the canal. This party included Paul McKintosh, who was running the Birchills Canal Museum in the old Boatmen's Mission at Walsall Top Lock (sadly no more due to cuts!). Prompted by our shared aspirations a friendship quickly developed and we found out about Walsall's 'Beechdale Project'.

In 2001 the opportunity came to acquire this boat, previously also repaired at Birchills for the Walsall youth leaders by Terry Pooley. Another



unidentifiable riveted iron boat, in rather 'bashed-up' condition by then but double-ended and well worth acquiring for the gathering of rubbish encountered on the BCN. After an initial clean-up the boat did not receive any further remedial work until after our visit to Hawne Basin in 2007 for the Stewarts and Lloyds Coombeswood Works closure anniversary. During

the course of the weekend a sideways nudge from another tug caused a series of small leaks above the chine angle that only became apparent following the return trip through Gosty Hill tunnel. On emerging into the daylight the steerer yelled out "there's 6ins. of water in the boat!" Having brought 5 day-boats from the BCLM for the occasion and in anticipation of such an unlikely event (you call it 'Risk Assessment') we had the appropriate pumps, so with a temporary application of old socks and a plank, all was brought under control and later patched up. Winter 2010-11 saw **BHP No.3** taken up to CTS at Norton Canes for a new bottom and footings.



FMC No.138

Francis Stapleton added his Bantock **No.15** to the scene at the BCLM and told me that there was a very interesting boat in the Cement Arm at Stockton. I contacted Tim Higton who put me in touch with the owner. Research done by Francis in the BCN records had established that *Sandalwood* was a composite (confirmed by the extant stem shoes) built by Braithwaite and Kirk, Tipton, for Fellows Morton & Clayton in 1898. BCN No.16473 revealed that she was **FMC No.138**. Also, unusual in a joey, the iron sides were flush riveted with butt plates, the same as the steamers viz **Count** No.47 in 1899! In 2007, Eric Hunt decided reluctantly to move ashore after living on the boat, with its full length Alan Picken inspired motorised conversion, for over 40 years. She had not been dry docked in all that time and it became clear on lifting the floorboards that the state of the early replacement



riveted iron bottom demanded drastic action, the scale lifted by hand included the rivets! Stockton Dry Dock was booked for a survey and Graeme Pearce docked her and immediately had to begin the works culminating in the award of the Hemelryk Trophy that year and previously documented in these pages (2008/2). The houseboat motorising conversion (a la Ken Keay) was removed and the hull returned to the

original double-ended cargo carrying form, but this time with a 10 mm welded steel bottom. The operation involved not only removing the 'modern' riveted iron bottom that replaced the original wood, but re-footing to the 'houseboat waterline' up some 14 ins. During the course of cutting away the distortion of outwardly flared sides, due to the stretched bottom, all of the knees were removed in order to straighten them as well as the bottom guards at both ends of the boat. For the sake of authenticity the knees and guard irons were refitted by hot riveting - about 350 rivets. With its simplicity of shape and line, this hull makes probably the most elegant double-ended joey around.

GWR No.65

Tim Higton decided to dispose of another boat that seemed like a must for the collection, one of WFBCo.'s full length work boats of several decades. BCN No.14130 is a Thomas Bantock horse boat No.65 registered in 1875 and leased to the Great Western Railway. This was originally all iron construction but had had a 10mm steel bottom and modest re-footing about 15 years earlier by WFBCo., executed by Graeme Pearce as it happens.



The hull was still apparently watertight but only by virtue of having stanks at each end holding back water from the very porous bow and stern. The angle iron remains of a 'half height' platform in the hold, were quickly removed. It had been put there to launch fireworks from at the first Braunston Boat Show. 'Graeme's bottom' seemed to be in reasonable order, but plates above the footings he



had put in were now considerably weaker. So extended re-footing was required, up to about a foot in places. The stern end was in a very sorry state and because the decision had been made to recreate a cabin boat in accordance with the GWR Carriage and Wagon Works, Hockley Depot drawing

(obtained from National Waterways Museum, Glos.), a considerable amount of re-plating there was required. The fore end hull sides were not so bad but the top bends were paper thin. Their replacement was a work of art carried out by John Horton. The side plate condition varied tremendously as this boat had seen a lot of work over its long life and in some places the riveted repairs were three layers deep and clearly carried out by people with a history in pressure vessels as they had generously curved corners! The current repairs were welded but arranged to retain the same patchwork effect. The state of the top guards and gunwale angles meant that we ran out of the allotted time slot and it was about 9 months later that she went back in the dock for fitting of the 6 ft cabin. This was expertly executed by Graeme and John to have the appearance of a wooden structure. The livery, the best we could judge from the GWR drawings and the only two photos of a GWR cabin boat at Hockley Port in Tom Foxon's book (various dates around the 1900s) was finally added by Robert MacKintyre at Brinklow Boat Services. The colour scheme was confirmed by viewing preserved GWR buildings and structures (i.e. not the chocolate and cream seen on the coaches!).

The hull shape is outstanding and was particularly visible on turning it on one side for grit blasting at John Pattle's yard, its lines derived from the preceding wooden horse-boats of that period, are obvious. The shape's agility was well demonstrated when the boat made its second horse drawn debut at the 2012 Parkhead Festival. The need to ship a mast in the right place was also very clear!

The fashion for acquiring joey boats is now spreading and other tug owners are strongly encouraged to join in - the next BCLM tug event will be in May 2014 and given all this effort these boats should survive another 100 years!

Acknowledgements: research - Francis Stapleton, Martin O'Keefe, Lawrence Hogg, Caroline Jones (National Waterways Museum Archive) and a former Stationmaster on the Severn Valley Railway! Information on the history and operation of these and similar boats is always welcomed.

Bernard Hales