



Sir Peter Scott and Narrow Boat *Beatrice*



Photo: Courtesy Nick Grundy

Beatrice pictured at Market Harborough in August 1950

Alison Smedley writes:

Early history

The boat that naturalist Peter Scott (later Sir Peter Scott after he was knighted in 1973) bought and had converted by Spencer Abbott & Co in 1949 is probably the *Beatrice* built by Fellows Morton & Clayton Ltd at their Uxbridge yard in 1922, given that this wooden butty was sold by FMC to Spencer Abbott & Co in 1948.

Beatrice was Registered at Uxbridge No 528 on 31/10/22 and was part of FMC's fleet of 27 butties with girls' names. It was No. 4 in FMC's fleet numbering system and probably had a forecabin as well as the usual back cabin.

IWA Campaigning

Peter Scott was an early IWA member who had been appointed as the Association's first Vice-President in 1947. It was apparently Robert Aickman who encouraged Peter Scott to buy the *Beatrice*, which was converted for him in 1949 by Spencer Abbott & Co of Birmingham. The conversion was fitted with 8 bunks to allow the boat to be used as a hostel boat at Slimbridge, where Peter Scott had recently set up the Severn Wildfowl Trust. Now known as the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, it continues to this day, situated between the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal and the River Severn. The plan was for it to be used as accommodation for researchers and ornithologists visiting the Trust.

During its maiden voyage after conversion, *Beatrice* took part in IWA's Stratford Canal campaign by requiring passage through Lifford Lift Bridge, involving a request to the railway



authority to raise the bridge in order for the boat to pass through on its way to Slimbridge.

The month-long campaigning voyage of *Beatrice* during the spring of 1950 has been well documented in both Robert Aickman's *The River Runs Uphill* and Sir Peter Scott's *The Eye of the Wind*. Robert Aickman planned the complicated itinerary and accompanied Peter Scott on the journey. The journey took them along 450 miles and through 273 locks on their way from Slimbridge to the waterways of the North West and back. During the journey Peter Scott gave lectures at various canalside locations about the work of the Severn Wildfowl Trust.

As well as Aickman and Scott, the crew included Philippa Talbot-Ponsonby (Peter Scott's personal assistant), Lord Geoffrey Percy (younger brother of the Duke of Northumberland), and Ray Gregorson (Robert Aickman's wife).

The journey was beset with problems, including severe weather and difficulties with the engine. At Tewkesbury the decision was made to replace the Model 'T' engine with another, but the replacement also caused difficulties. The route took *Beatrice* as far north as Wigan, down the Leeds & Liverpool Canal into Liverpool, and then across the Mersey Estuary from Stanley Dock to Weston Mersey Lock, along the Manchester Ship Canal to the Runcorn & Weston Canal and up the now long closed Runcorn flight of locks. This was in the days of very few pleasure craft, and it is likely that *Beatrice* was the first narrow boat to cross the Mersey (the crossing is described in detail in *The River Runs Uphill*). Young IWA member Martin Grundy joined Scott and Aickman for the crossing, taking a day off work from his Liverpool solicitors' office.

The return journey to Gloucestershire via the Midlands included getting stuck in Harecastle Tunnel (the towpath was still in place in those days). Later the same year, August 1950, *Beatrice* returned to the Midlands to attend IWA's first Boat Rally and Festival at Market Harborough. In 1951 plans to do a similar tour were cancelled, and by 1952 the Severn Wildfowl Trust was offering *Beatrice* for sale. The boat was described as "...excellently equipped narrow boat *Beatrice*. Sleeps 10 on bunks with Dunlopillo, two wash basins, separate flushing w.c. Large galley with Calor Gas. Saloon with Cosy stove. Engine. Traditionally decorated inside and out."

Later History

By 1953, *Beatrice* had been acquired by active IWA member Richard Damerham and he was living on board the boat in London. *Beatrice* had been motorised using a milk float motor and batteries driving Hotchkiss Cones, an unusual but not unique solution for motorising a butty, and later on had "Electric Butty" signwritten on the back cabin.

By the 1960s *Beatrice* was moored at Blomfield Road, Little Venice, and was owned and lived on by E & D Hargrave who were artists. Sometime in the 1970s *Beatrice* was bought by Mr Herbert, a musician and instrument maker, and was moved to a mooring just above Hampstead Road Locks at Camden. It was still there in 1986 according to the archives of the Historic Narrow Boat Club.

By the early 1990s Mr Herbert was attempting to find a new owner to take the boat on, and *Beatrice* was moved to "The Stinkhole" (otherwise known as Maple Lodge Canal Basin, near Harefield). This is a small mooring basin where the River Colne enters the Grand Union Canal, south of Springwell Lock, in the vicinity of Maple Cross Sewage Works (hence "stinkhole"). As well as the small mooring basin, the River Colne is navigable for a quarter of a mile or so upstream, and has been used for boat moorings for several decades at least. *Beatrice* was moored at the top end of the moorings on the sewage works side.

And this, it is sad to relate, is where the *Beatrice* met her end. By the turn of the millennium the boat appeared to have no owner, and so the operator of the moorings, being aware of the history of the boat, attempted to find someone to take the boat on. He contacted the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at the time, in case they had any interest in taking on the boat or finding somebody to do so. The boat was offered to several people but unfortunately an attempt to raise her was unsuccessful and *Beatrice* was broken up in situ about 10 years ago.