



Two Pearls, One Poyle



Poyle pictured at an NBOC Christmas Rally

Beryl McDowall writes

My boating began in a canoe, and I was asked to join the Stafford Boat Club. I was invited by friends at the Club to join them in a trip by car to an IWA Festival at Marple. It poured with rain, so everywhere was a sea of mud. My one lasting memory of that day - apart from the weather - was standing on a canal bridge, looking down at a converted narrow boat, which I later found out was Binkie Bush's *Pearl* (That's the *Pearl* that had been *Baron* in a previous life.) The house in Stafford was soon sold, as I took up a teaching post in Hemel Hempstead, where a New Town Commission maisonette came with the job.

Not enjoying life in the new home on a noisy road, between a fire station and a hospital, we decided to look for a narrow boat. Like Michael Freeman, (See HNBC Newsletter 2017/1) my first visit to Aylesbury was not long after my move, in the 1960s and like Michael, we saw *Poyle* and *Gainsborough*. *Poyle* was merely an empty shell - no cabin, just the forward bulkhead, the encrusted appearance of which was evidence of the boat's former life, carrying tar up the Shroppie. *Poyle*, previously a butty, had been paired with *Pearl*, not Pinkie's *Pearl*, but the old wooden one which I did subsequently see on one occasion, when I was actually travelling with

Binkie. It could have been in Hatton or Lapworth, but too long ago to remember!

We looked at *Poyle* back there in Aylesbury Basin, and were led to believe by Tom Meinertzhagen, who operated at Aylesbury, that Claytons had cut off the butty's stern and fitted a motor counter just before they stopped operating, when he presumably acquired the boat. No stern tube was fitted at this stage. We did consider the boat, but were really looking for one which had already been converted. *Gainsborough*, also unconverted, was eventually bought by Vivian Chaffer who, ably assisted by his dad, constructed a cabin and fitted the boat out. They both became good friends. I remember, when it was ready to be launched, two large cranes were brought in to drop it into water. It was around 1973, when I was working full-time for Threefellows Carrying Ltd, that we were down in Brentford, loading Roses Lime Juice, that Mr Sibley of the Waterways Transport Police, told me someone had fallen off *Gainsborough* round the Paddington Arm, and was missing, presumed drowned, leaving a wife and young child. It is thought that he had left the steering position for a minute and walked along the gunwale to check the National engine, when he slipped and fell into the murky water, presumably being knocked unconscious when his head hit the gunwale as he fell. It was two days before his



body was found, and a good friend was lost.

Back to our boat hunt, we decided to extend our search for a boat with a cabin. We went up to the Watch House Cruising Club to look at the wooden *Ftataetea*, which had previously been a home to John Evans and his late wife, Wendy. (They later acquired *Daphne*, *Hadley Rail*, and then *Element*). Again it was a wet day, and when we arrived at the boat and knocked, I closed my umbrella, and leant on it lightly against the top plank of the hull. It was at the time when umbrellas had a spike on the top, and this proceeded to embed itself in the boat! Someone answered our knock, and we had a somewhat cursory look at the vessel, saying it wasn't quite what we were looking for (We wanted one which would float!) Several boats and many miles later found us back at Aylesbury buying *Poyle*.

In Aylesbury Basin, Jack Waldron's motor, *Daffodil*, was moored under the overhanging roof of the timber yard loading bay, with *Poyle* outside of it. That was fine until it rained, when, whilst *Daffodil* was in the dry, one side of *Poyle* was under cover, the other side extended out far enough to catch all the rainwater run-off from the overhang. So every weekend, when we drove from Hemel Hempstead to Aylesbury to work on *Poyle*, the first job was to pump out the rainwater. It was a big incentive to get the timber frames for the cabin constructed. Once in place, ply cabin cladding was added - No gunwales, just Trakmark on the roof, which had to be used to

move from one end of the boat to the other - no gunwales! (certainly not my choice today!). The construction couldn't have been too bad, as when I saw the boat in 2013, it was still being lived on, still with the same cabin.

The first major task, when we bought *Poyle*, was to bow-haul the boat from Aylesbury, all the way up the Arm. Luckily someone gave us a tow from the top of the Arm to Leighton Buzzard, where the boat was docked and blacked, and as far as I can recall, the stern tube fitted, before we made our way back to Aylesbury. Some time later, when Ada and Arthur Morris moved *Stour* away from Aylesbury, we were able to move into their mooring, on the off-side, on the basin side of the footbridge.... so no more getting rained on, and more time for fitting out.

Encouraged by Binkie Bush, who was also still based in Aylesbury, we became members of NBOC, and were ready to start attending some of the rallies, etc.

Back on land in Hemel Hempstead, the maisonette was brand new, well equipped, everything needed - and some things we didn't, because the location meant sirens from the Fire Station opposite and the hospital up the road meant an ongoing traffic of emergency vehicles at regular intervals, day and night. And so the decision was made to move completely onto the boat, rather than just use it for holidays. That was around 1968 - and I have never lived on land since!

Photos: Beryl McDowall



Poyle at an NBOC Rally in Coventry c1970