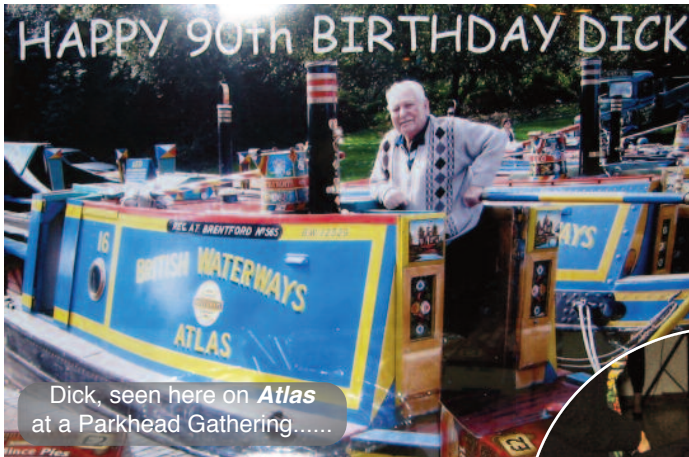


## ISIAH RICHARD BOSWELL Former Boatman Celebrates his 90th Birthday



Just before Christmas I was invited to attend a party to celebrate Dickie Boswell's 90th birthday. His wife Jean had sprung this surprise for him, and he was a little overwhelmed to be wheeled into a function room above the leisure centre in Long Eaton to be greeted by the



assembled masses. Although very spry he doesn't get around too well these days, and many of you will have seen him at Parkhead and the Braunston Gatherings battling around in his motorised chair. Some time ago Dick wrote out his autobiography as follows:

Born 29th December 1920. The middle of 5 children born to Edward Mackenzie and Edith Emily Boswell, living at 45 Gisbourn Street, Derby.

My father died when I was 8 years and 3 months old. At his funeral was mother's sister, Aunt Florrie (Ike Argent's mother) and her partner Billy Moulds, who worked on the canal boats, carrying coal and slack to Loughborough. All factories in those days were powered by steam. My mother having 5 children to clothe and feed, used to work at Moore and Eddies Mill on Mill Dam, working as a weaver. My father used to have an allotment just beyond the mill. It was here that my older brother and I buried my father's 12 bore gun and ammunition and a drum of gunpowder, before we surrendered the keys. It was decided for me to spend a holiday with my aunt on the boats, a working holiday may I add, driving the horse and lock wheeling. In return my aunt would buy me a pair of boots on one trip or a pair of trousers on another. I worked along with my cousin Ike Argent, known in those days as Ikey Moulds.

At home our house was directly at the rear of the Napoleon Inn, the front entrance being in Parker Street. The publican was Bob Griffiths. His son made a swap with my brother for my father's violin, which was a copy of a Stradivarius, for a crystal set, this being the forerunner of the wireless set. This was wonderful to listen to, music coming through the headphones. In those days we didn't have the mod cons of electricity, we had a lamp in the living room and candles to light us to bed - or to the outside toilet. When we had gas fitted this was wonderful, a very short time afterwards we had electricity installed, just press a switch and we had light - marvellous.

In May 1932, the year of the big flood, my mother decided to leave Derby and move into a small cottage in Wilne road, Old Sawley. In those days there were 5 farms in Sawley, one being Braddy Smith's where I used to help out fetching the cows in for milking and in many other ways. There was also Bate's Farm, Clem Gregory's and Grammar's Church farm, which



went out of existence in 2003. Houses are now built on this land. When we arrived at Sawley, the old gas lighter Hiram used to go round with his wick on a pole. He would light a match, lifting it up to the lamp. When it was windy I used to climb up the lamp and light it for him. The vicar of the church was the Reverend Clark, who was handicapped and walked with sticks. When I was knocked off my bicycle he brought me sweets. My older brother Algar bought a motorcycle, an Alldays Allen, one I had never heard of nor seen again. This had a flat tank with gate change gears, cow horn handlebars, belt drive and carbine lights. We used to buy a pop bottle full of petrol from a man that had a petrol pump next to the Nags Head. Around the corner in Tamworth Road was the only butchers in Sawley, Tommy Ironmonger. Back to the motor cycle, we used to ride up and down Wilne Lane until we ran out of juice, then we would push it back home, fetch another bottle of petrol and start again.

My mother was now working at Wilne Mills, Marcus Astles, weaving the same as she had done at Moore and Eddies, Mill Dam, Derby

We had our bus service, down the side of the Railway Inn was a thatched cottage owned by the Kirkland family and this is where they kept their bus. The bus used to run from the Big Lamp in the centre of Sawley to Long Eaton. We also had Frake's bus running from Castle Donington to Long Eaton. Mr Kirkland senior and his son John used to drive their bus in shifts, until the old man got mixed up with another woman and decided to end it all by jumping off the Trent Bridge in Nottingham. John carried on for a few more years, and then Bartons came on the scene and bought everything up. I used to go to school where the head master was Chas Hutchinson who used to live in the big house on Wilmot Street. This building is now a car showroom, G T Motors, Wilne Road Sawley.

On the Sawley side of Trent Bridge were two toll houses, where the Chamberlain family used to live. The family used to sleep on one side and feed on the other. I was at school with Sarah Chamberlain. The only family with electric light at that time was the lock keeper at Sawley. He had a generator, powered by a water wheel, in turn powered with a paddle partly open at the outside lock, which was not used by boat traffic. (Mr Worthington)

After a short time we moved to a bungalow in Shirley Street, Sawley and this is when I joined the St John Ambulance Brigade cadets in 1933. The meetings were held in the T A headquarters, just on the corner of Broad Street and Albert Road, I would be 13 at the time, coming up 14. I got a job at Concordia and started work 2 days before my birthday on the 27th December. In those days employees only had 2 days holiday at Christmas. After a few months we moved again to the Shamrock bungalow at the corner of Oakland Avenue, New Sawley. These were very happy days, we had a boat and spent many hours rowing up and down the canal with our family and friends.

It was at this time I heard about Walter Tuberfield, skipper of horse drawn boats bringing coal slack from Langley Mill to factories in Sandiacre, Long Eaton, Borrowwash and Spondon. All factories then were powered by steam and needed slack for the boilers to generate the power. I applied for a job and got it, with my boating experience, although I was only 4ft nothing, that was the easy part. When we brought the boats to the factory we carried planks and barrows on the boats. We would put the 30ft x 12in x 3in planks from boat to bank (it being very rare to be able to get near the bank) then with wheel barrows which, when filled carried 5cwt, we would start getting the 50 tons off the boats and onto the wharf. At some places we had to wheel over a long distance, as was the case at Leach & Neils, paint manufacturers at Spondon. Here we had to barrow it many yards, then up more planks to empty the barrows then back and re load. Fortunately there were 3 of us, the skipper, his son and myself. The factories we used to supply were at Bridge Mills and Leopold Mills at Sandiacre, Fearn's Lace factory at Long Eaton and Leach & Neil's at Borrowwash (on the Derby Canal). After 2 years and having muscles like Popeye, I decided that I'd had enough of this hard labour, it was time to get out, although I had been earning a man's wages, I was working very hard for it.

At this stage I decided to apply for a pair of boats of my own, as I had heard a pair



were coming available, although only 17 years of age I applied and got them. The motor was the **Achernar**, with an 18hp National diesel engine and a butty. I am at last the proud skipper of my own pair of boats. My first orders were to take a load of doubles - little cobbles, about 2 inches round - to London. My furthest previous trip had been to Loughborough with Billy Moulds, who was now retired. I went and had a chat with him, and he was able to tell me almost every lock that I would come across. He had a marvellous memory then same as I have nowadays, which I will be going into detail of later. This first load was for a brick works just above Uxbridge lock. Having discharged my load, I proceeded south, passing HMV at Hayes and Nestles factory, I arrived at the head quarters of the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company. I have omitted to say that I was working for the Erewash Canal Carrying Company, which was later to be taken over by the Grand Union.

**Erewash Canal Carrying Co., Ltd.**      No 275  
 Loughborough Wharf.

12195

Issued to Erewash Canal Carrying Co.  
 Boat Orpheus

..... gals. Fuel Oil      42  
 ..... gals. Lubricating Oil.

Received by J. Boswell  
 Date 18/2/39

An oiling ticket issued for the **Orpheus**, dated 18.2.1939

The GUCCCo. was based at Bulls Bridge - although there was no bridge in sight - here is to be found their dry dock, slipway, offices and re-fuelling point, where I filled up with diesel. There is also a very large layby, where some of the boats moored while waiting for orders. I filled up with fuel, reported to the office for a sub and to see if they had any orders for me. I was told to go down

to Limehouse Dock and take on a load of steel for Tyseley, Birmingham. This was much better than travelling back home empty, as there was very little pay for travelling empty. Directly opposite the dry dock was the Paddington Arm. While travelling down this arm, one passed many places of interest as, Celotex Board Factory, Pilkington's Glass

**PETTY CASH VOUCHER**      Date 26/7/1939

For what required	Amount		
	£	s.	d.
J. Boswell. Butty "Orpheus" - "Nelson" Erewash b. b. br. All Advance on account of freight	2		

Signature J. Boswell  
 Folio      Passed by

Sold by A. Mansford & Sons, Ltd.,  
 166, Moorgate, E.C.2-82, Queen St., E.C.4-4, Grosvenor St., W.1-60, Theobalds Rd., W.C.1

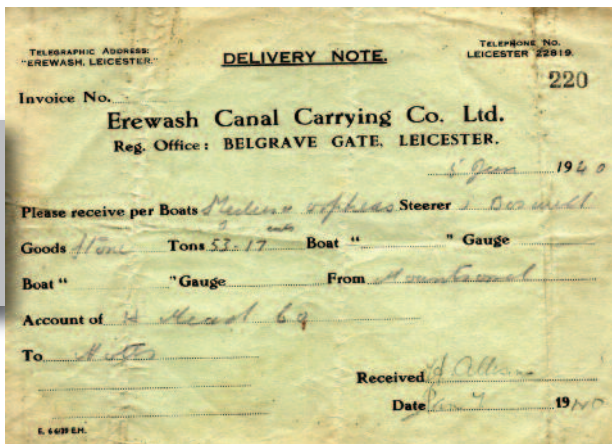
Starting money!  
 Dick applied for an advance and received £2.0.0 to see him through

at Greenford Green, Park Royal where the Guinness beer was made - this was like treacle, I know because we used to barter a bag of coal for a large jugful. You didn't need a lot of this to feel merry. On reaching Paddington Junction we turned left onto the Regents Canal, through the zoo, and several downhill locks, the last being Commercial Road, and straight into



Limehouse Dock, where many ships were discharging their cargoes and one was loading scrap metal for Germany.

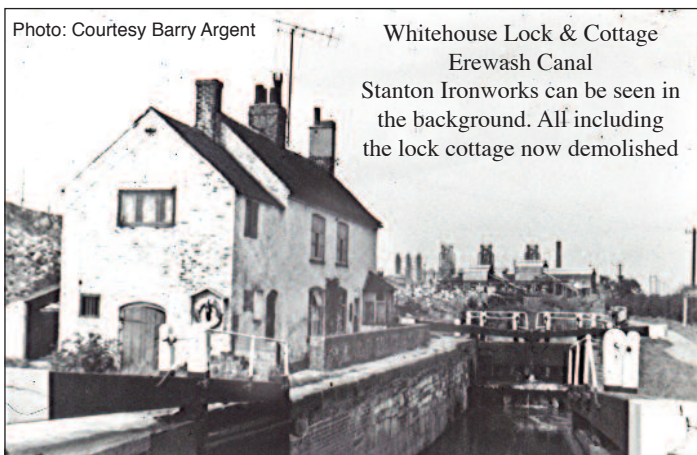
A delivery note issued when Dick was running the *Orpheus & Medusa*, dated 5 Jan 1940, carrying 53ton 17cwt of stone from Mountsorrel to Nottingham



After doing numerous trips to London, Birmingham, Coventry and Leicester and covering thousands of miles on canals and rivers I decided to

join the Fellows, Morton and Clayton Company and go fly boating with the butty *Tring*. We were paired up mainly with Jimmy Webb and his mate Ike Argent with their motor *Clover*. I had my younger brother Ken as mate and we would load goods in Birmingham. Then in 48 hours we would be in London. Having put our clothes on, we wouldn't take them off again until we arrived back in Birmingham. After several months of this, my brother, not being able to keep his eyes open during the night, would swap with Ike on the motor, the vibration of the 15 hp Bolinder would keep him awake and I could get my sleep, when it was my turn, instead of Ken hitting every bridgehole and rolling me off the side bed. After many months I applied for a motor and eventually had orders to report to Saltley dock yard to pick up the newly painted *Cormorant*. I had a pair again! It was now another life for Ken and me, travelling now on the Shropshire Union and Cheshire canals, and including the River Weaver and the Manchester Ship Canal, picking up all kinds of cargoes from Ellesmere Port and Runcorn. We passed down the Anderton lift from the Trent & Mersey Canal onto the River Weaver for goods such as sugar for Cadburys at Knighton, then loading crumb - this was mixed sugar and milk - for Cadburys at Bourneville. We took a load of flour for the Co-op bakery at Long Eaton, the last load delivered there before it was closed

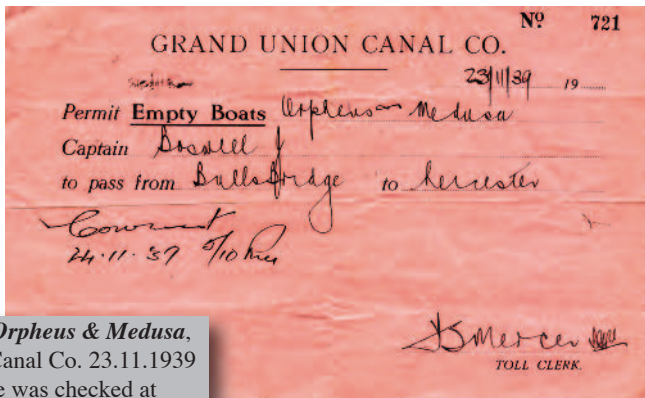
down and demolished. The Sandiccliffe Garage and showroom now stands on the spot. I was then ordered to go to Stewarts and Lloyds for a load of 500lb bombs for the Woolwich Arsenal on the Thames, which meant going back along the Grand Union. The second world war had just been declared on 3rd September at 11.00 am 1939.



Stanton Ironworks was now producing 500lb bombs and they bought 12 pairs of boats. My oldest brother Algar got one pair carrying the bombs to Stone in Staffordshire.



On arriving at Brentford the tide was out and I had to wait. During the night there was a bombing raid and the Thames Steam Tug and Lighterage warehouse was bombed, and molten sugar had poured down the front of the building, the fire brigade was called to put it out. Below



An Empty Boat ticket for *Orpheus & Medusa*, issued by the Grand Union Canal Co. 23.11.1939  
The added note shows he was checked at Cowroast the following day

there were two sunken barges loaded with Nestles condensed milk. This luxury being on ration, I decided to borrow two cases. The tide turned and I set sail down the Thames, arriving at Woolwich I started to unload. My butty was empty and all the bombs out of the stern end of the motor, with my prop being out of the water, when everything stopped. I climbed up some 50ft up the vertical ladder onto the top of the jetty. On enquiring the reason, I was told that the evacuation of Dunkirk had started. I asked them to finish emptying me so that I could go over, but they refused, expecting Jerry to follow them. Small craft that were not canal worthy were coming down the Thames to go across. If I had been emptied I could have brought a hundred or more back from Dunkirk.

After a few more trips for FM&C I decided I would change to the GUCCo, which I found out that I could do. This meant I would be able to return to my own part of the country, getting orders to go to Langley Mill. With my family living in the Shamrock bungalow, I was able to moor up alongside and spend a few days at home with my mother.

One day whilst on the dock at Bulls Bridge I had a walk up the canal bank on the outside. I was just outside of Nestles when a flying bomb - or as we knew them, a doodlebug came over. When the engine stopped, the fire had gone out of its backside and I knew it was coming down. I ducked down as it just skimmed over the railway line, hitting H M V. It was just at lunchtime, with the employees going into the canteen. It was a direct hit, killing and injuring numerous casualties. After my repairs had been carried out, I got orders to go down to Limehouse. On arrival at the docks, many of the warehouses were on fire, due to all night bombing. With my butty tied up, using my motor we were picking up the barges tied next to the warehouses and towing them towards the dock lock. They were then picked up by the capstan and shot out into the Thames, clear of the blazing buildings. I then went alongside the ship to load with steel for Tyseley, and return to my own part of the country. Next orders were to proceed to Langley Mill to load slack for Loughborough, then go to pick up a load of gravel being dredged straight from the Trent by Joe Howard. We started just above Sawley Bridge, but after several loads it was poor quality. Ernest Wragg, the dredger operator, with my cousin Ike as his mate moved to Shardlow and found some wonderful gravel just below the bridge. With the government laying down landing strips for the many airstrips that were being formed all over the country much gravel was needed. Thousands of tons were taken from this site, until it was found that small pieces of tile were coming up with each bucketful. At this point we high tailed it out of there, and started dredging further downstream. Needless to say, the next high water we had - that bridge was no more. it fell into the Trent. The army were brought in to construct a Bailey Bridge, and it was never brought to light.....why?

Having covered many thousands of miles carrying thousands of tons, in March 1945

at the end of the war, I decided to leave the water and got a job at Stanton Ironworks, and you would not believe this - at the bomb plant, making 500lb bombs. They were still making them, although the war was over in Europe, it was still being carried on in Japan, that is until the USA dropped the atom bomb. That finished that, and shortly afterwards the bomb plant closed down. I was made security officer on nights, to guard thousands of pounds worth of tools and equipment, all of which was 440volt 3 phase, therefore no good for home use, only for industrial purposes. In a short time this was all cleared away and I was transferred to the old works blast furnaces on the top side, getting the pig beds ready for casting. When casting, the whole area was illuminated, which could be seen for miles around lighting up the sky with the molten metal being run down the pig beds. Stanton had their own division of the St John's Ambulance, so I

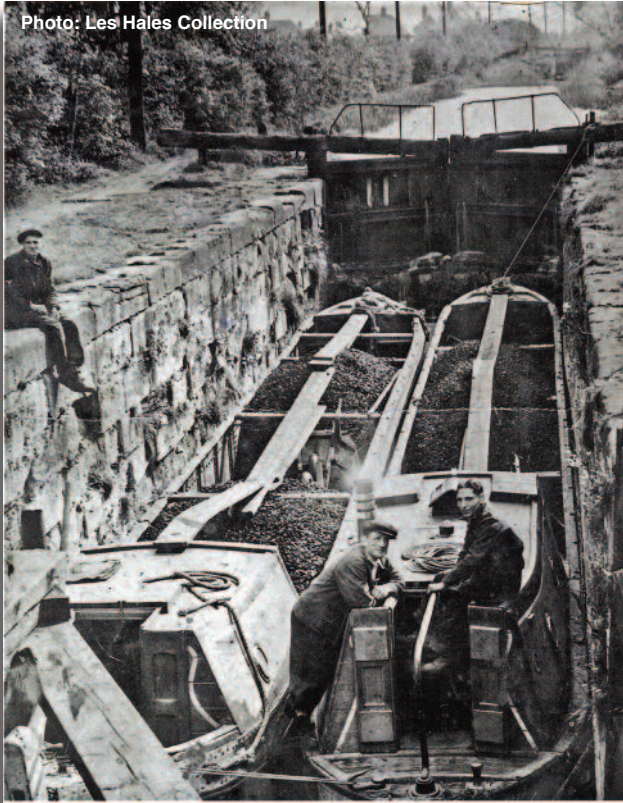


Photo: Les Hales Collection

joined them, there were many perks with this. For any parade of any kind I was given time off with pay to attend. Covering at weekends in the medical room we used to get some very nasty injuries from all over the works, there being some thousand employees. After some years here I decided to move again, going to the Excelsior Foundry as a moulder. I did this for a short time.

**Sandiacre Bottom Lock**

The first lock of the Derby Canal at Sandiacre Junction with the Erewash Canal in 1947. Dick, Captain of *Atlas & Vela* sits on the cabin top, while his mate Bill Rogers rests on the lock wall.

Ralph Moulds, Ike Argent's half brother and Dick's cousin, visits during the long sojourn in the lock chamber

But the water was still in my veins, so I picked up another pair of boats, my first load being coal for Leach & Neils, at Borrowwash. Having loaded at Langley Mill and going downhill, passing Eastwood, Shipley and Stensons. Just below here a gang of workmen were working on the canal bank. One of these was George Briggs who lodged with the widow lock keeper at Sandiacre on the Derby Canal. He told his mates he was going for some cigarettes at Barkers Lock, but instead rode his bike down to his lodgings, and advised the widow that I was on my way to go along the Derby Canal. I suspect that he put the lock and chain on the bottom lock. Me, being ignorant of this continued my journey passing down through the locks to Whitehouse lock, which was a toll house where my boats were dipped to gauge the amount of tonnage I had on board. Passing through this lock we arrive at Pastures Lock, being the last lock we have to pass through on the Erewash Canal.



We proceed through Sandiacre and arrive at the junction with the Derby Canal, turning right here we enter the first lock. On going to close the gates we find them chained. Undecided whether to get a crowbar and break the chain, I phoned my office in Leicester. They contacted the Derby Canal Company and were told that the Derby Canal was officially closed. There followed some 2 weeks of negotiation, but to no avail and the Derby Canal was officially closed in 1947.

Reversing the boats back into the Erewash Canal, I carried on down the Erewash Canal through Sandiacre, Dockholme and Long Eaton Locks to empty out the load onto a lorry at Balls Wharf. Billy Cobb driving for Fletchers, coal merchants, took this to Spondon.

*(This incident marked the end of carrying on the Derby Canal, which in spite of local and IWA campaigning was officially closed in 1962. Ed)*