



From The Archive

This article was published in the Oct 1968 Newsletter and first published in the Stratford on - Avon Canal Society Magazine. As Lady Hatherton has recently, again, been refurbished I thought you would find it of interest.

The Lady Hatherton - A REVITALIZED LADY.

The *Lady Hatherton* you all know. What perhaps you don't know is the story of her life. We don't know much, but the gleanings have been garnered by word of mouth, hearsay and sometimes guesswork and they make an interesting if wistful story.

She was built at Stourport. No expense was spared in her construction and the sum allowed for her building was not disclosed in the minutes of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company, probably out of trepidation at the shareholders feelings. The model, with the revolutionary slim and elegant line for a canal boat, which was made for, and approved by the Directors, seems to have disappeared, torn to pieces no doubt by generations of youthful Hathertons.

The boat was begun in May 1897 and, though craftsmanship in those days was cheap, much time was spent on every detail. It took a master joiner two months to cut and fashion the circular fanlight in the roof. This was done in fact after the boat was built as the directors discovered their cigar smoke was lingering in the cabin.

Lord Hatherton made frequent visits to the yard. He insisted on the installation of lead lined wine bins at the rear portion of the boat to accommodate 6 dozen bottles; plate glass windows etched in acid with the monogram of the company; individual coat hooks for each of

Photo: Bob Jervis



This is a picture of the current restoration showing that the beautiful wood panelling and the etched glass windows are still lovingly restored

the directors, and specified that only the finest Honduras mahogany and Canadian maple was to be used. He stood for no imperfections

There were at that time ten directors of the company of which Lord Hatherton was chairman and virtual owner. The company

was very rich: at the height of the Canal era their £100 shares were being sold for £1200. This boat was to be the last fling of a company being strangled by the railways.

On June 2nd 1898 she was launched with champagne by her Ladyship Charlotte Louisa Hatherton at Penkridge. There was, so the company minutes report, a big crowd and the day was fine. *The Lady Hatherton*, for so she had been christened, was then pulled by horse to her covered moorings at Stourport where she remained cherished by boatmen for the annual two day inspection of the Waterway made by the all-male complement of Lord Hatherton, his guests and directors. The boat was then pulled at a canter by a pair of matched bays mounted by liveried horsemen. There was an 'elmsman, a cook, a butler and a wine waiter who had to



serve the long boardroom table from both ends, climbing over the roof, rain or shine, to do so. In the kitchen was a bell pulled by a cord from the boardroom which summoned the help. If this bell was to ring due to a bump during their progress the 'elmsman was in most cases fired.

On one particular outing one of the bays went lame. Lord Hatherton would not allow a mismatched pair so a pair of greys were co-opted from a railway yard. They were mounted by the liveried servants and set off at a fine canter. At the first bridge hole however one of the greys refused to go through when mounted. Lord Hatherton was so furious at this that he insisted the recalcitrant servant, or so he obviously appeared in Lord Hatherton's eyes, should run beside his horse at the canter for the rest of the day. The mud apparently ruined his servants livery!

On the two days yearly that the boat was used, the Canal was cleared of all traffic; there were heavy penalties for those who dared to flaunt this law. Their progress was always stately and invariably drunken. The wines that were handed round were of superb quality and the cuisine was excellent; their lunch started at twelve and finished at four in the afternoon. It was a sad day when, because of the financial state of the company, it was no longer possible to justify the expense of this luxury.

The railways took over the Company and, along with the subsequent owners British Waterways, used the boat for inspections, though infrequently and not in the grand manner of the former owners. British Waterways sold her for £60,000. and after passing through one more pair of hands, when she was used mainly on the Shroppie Cut, she came into the possession of David Hutchings, who was at that time involved in the magnificent project of rebuilding the Stratford Canal. A certain amount of work was needed on the hull and this was done at Braunston. The interior had a high tide watermark and the general condition of the boat was poor. After an immense amount of work David Hutchings had the boat looking very fine. It was decided that the boat should be pulled by a donkey which should live in the front well on deep litter with the chickens and children. Theoretically this was a good idea, but in practice the donkey was determined not to demesne itself to pulling a heavy boat. Considerable bow hauling was done by David Hutchings in order to try and teach the donkey how it should be done, but the stubborn brute refused to assimilate anything.

The donkey was returned to a peaceful field beside David's cottage and replaced by a 10 H.P. Ford engine. Anyone who went to the Stratford Rally of boats will testify to its unreliability as once again The **Lady Hatherton** appeared bow hauled by David Hutchings. In 1965 to his great sadness David Hutchings sold her to us, Christophers Dobson and Hobson. In 1967 due to the very poor condition of the hull it was decided after much consultation with Mr. Les Allen of Oldbury that a new hull should be built. This was constructed in the Oldbury yard, to the exact design of the old using the same method of building. A three cylinder Lister was installed and the new hull then moved to the top lock at Lapworth.

In the meanwhile the roof of the boat had been hacksawed through below the gunwale; long beams had been put through the windows fixed by U bolts to lower beams lipped under the gunwale. It was thus intended to lower the water in the lock so that the underside of the long beams rested on the lock sides, the weight of the roof being supported by the beams under the gunwales; then empty the lock completely and float out the old hull; bring in the new and fill the lock to marry the roof to its new mate. This anxious operation took all day and though Lloyds had underwritten the scheme for a premium of £25 it was very satisfying when the two sections fitted perfectly together. How Les Allen was able to judge his measurements so exactly we shall never know.

Some people say we shouldn't have done it, nor put in any bunks, nor removed the wine bins. Isn't it better however that everyone should be able to see the **Lady Hatherton** rather than she should have rotted on some canal bank.

The old hull, by the way is now called the *Shadfield Rose*, owned by the 181st. Birmingham Boy Scouts Group and can be seen on almost all waterways throughout the summer, at full speed and weaving from bank to bank.