

Pisces Celebrates 50 years' Community Service



Photo: Tim Lewis

Ray Butler writes:

The London Borough of Hillingdon's **Pisces** is celebrating over 50 years' service to the community. She was built for Grand Union Canal Carrying Co in 1935 at Yarwoods, and started work with butty **Puppis**. In the late 1930s the GUCCo. had difficulty manning all their boats, and many, including **Pisces** were laid up out of use. A lot of the Northwich boats were laid up. Was this because their unlined steel cabins made them unpopular with the boaters? ("ot 'ouse in summer, ice box in winter")

In 1942, with 13 of her sisters she was requisitioned by the Ministry of War Transport and became a fire boat based in the Surrey Commercial Docks in South London, fitted with powerful pumps and water monitors. She was returned to GUCCo. post war and passed to British Waterways

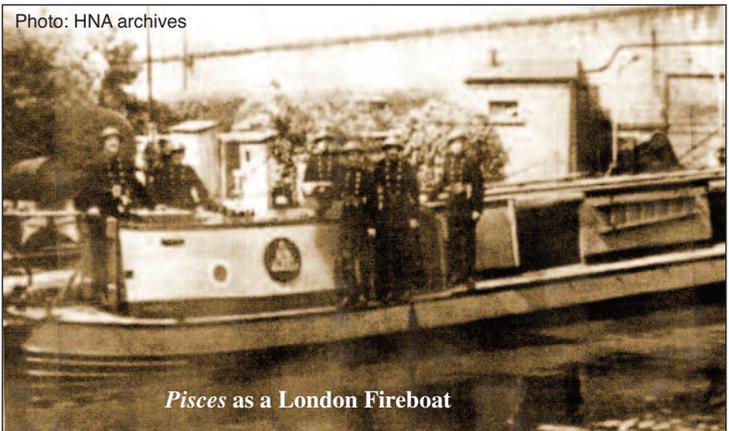


Photo: HNA archives

Pisces as a London Fireboat

on nationalisation. They concentrated trade on the larger Town class boats and transferred **Pisces** to the South West division as a maintenance boat.

In 1957 **Pisces** was converted to a passenger trip boat and renamed *Water Sprite*, working in the Birmingham area. In 1963 she failed her Board of Trade survey and was retired. In 1964 she was purchased from British Waterways by Stan Clover for use as a camping boat, with bunks in the curtain-sided trip boat cabin and re-named **Pisces**. Can you spot her NBOC Plaque?

Pisces as a youth hostel

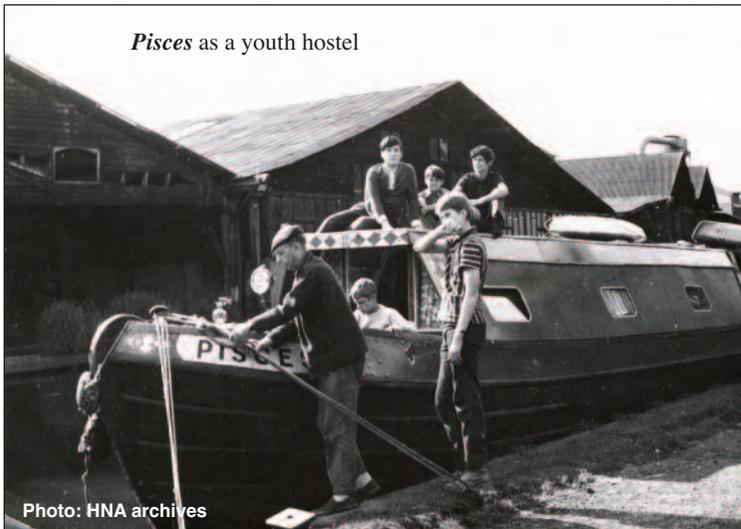


Photo: HNA archives

In 1968/9 she was purchased by the London Borough of Hillingdon as a floating youth club/hostel. She was operated successfully by the council for many years, joined by first the pair *Gemini 1 & II* and later by *Hillingdon Star* but in the late 1990s public expenditure cuts started to bite and management of

the boat was transferred to her supporters in the Hillingdon Narrowboats Association, who have run her ever since, sometimes with the children and grandchildren of early passengers on board. *Pisces* is believed to be the longest serving community boat on Britain's Waterways

At a celebration at the Hillingdon Narrowboat Association's boat house on the Grand Union Canal Richard Parry (Chief Executive, Canal & River Trust) praised the enthusiasm and dedication of the volunteers who work so hard to run *Pisces* and her sisters, introducing many thousands of people to the canals. He said "Community boats like *Pisces* are the unsung heroes of the waterways, doing such a lot of good work promoting their benefits for the well-being of everyone, and especially getting young people onto the waterways". He then presented the Mayor of Hillingdon, Cllr David Yarrow with a water can painted specially for the occasion by Mavis Blunn (Waldron). Cllr Yarrow said "*Pisces*' 50 years of community service show what can be achieved by people of goodwill and vision for the benefit of the community"

"As the owner of the boat the Borough is obliged by the Canal Boats Acts to provide the steerer with a suitable water container. Much as I'd like to keep this can in the Mayor's Parlour it gives me great pleasure to present it to Loraine Grainger, chairman of Hillingdon Narrowboats Association"

Accepting the can, and putting it in the right place on *Pisces*' cabin top Loraine Grainger said "We all know Doctor Canal is a great healer. It's great that so many organisations are working together all over the country to look after and preserve the waterways for their changing uses, and It's a great pleasure and privilege to be part of this.

"We agree with Ratty from the *Wind in the Willows* when he said 'Believe me, my young friend, there is NOTHING--absolutely nothing--half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats'

