

49M - Ye Iron Lung - GCC Canal Boat - Dublin 1928

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Technical Details

Reg Number:

49M

Built By:

Vickers (Ireland) Ltd

Year:

1928

Construction:

Riveted Steel

Length:

61' 6"

Beam:

13' 2"

Payload:

62 tons

Draft:

4' 6.25"

Weighed:

Killaloe 1928

Engine:

Bolinder E Type, 15 HP

Atlantic Marine Engine

BMC 6Cyl Diesel

Home Base:

Athlone

At the end of her working life she was bought at auction in Shannon Harbour by the Anchor Hotel at Ballyleague (Lanesboro). Converted as a houseboat she provided living accommodation for workers constructing Rinenna (Shannon Airport).

The 49M returned to Lanesboro and was advertised for sale or rent. At this time she was painted white with light blue and was named the St. Mary. In the summer of 1961 Sean Fitzsimons hired the St. Mary for two weeks to do the Shannon boat rally. Following a great holiday Sean and John Connors decided to buy the barge between them for a figure believed to be £620.00.

They took possession of the barge on St. Stephens Day 1961 when it was delivered to Athlone and tied by one rope to the railings behind the library without fuel. The plan at this stage was to bring the 49M to Dublin and work on her there, she was duly brought down to Shannon Harbour for the Dublin trip, but that winter was so severe the canal had frozen over. The barge eventually made St. James's Harbour in March of 1962. It is one of the very few barges ever to return to the now defunct Guinness Harbour after being sold into private hands.

Sean and John felt that the harbour was not as safe as they had hoped for the renovations and moved back down the canal to the 12th lock where alterations were made to the layout of the cabins and toilet. A pot bellied stove was also installed in the lounge. The chimney for this went through the superstructure of the top deck and was surrounded by a small barrel. It was in the late 1950's and early 1960's that the now familiar aluminium kegs were replacing the old wooden beer barrels. These somehow got the nickname of iron lungs; also lung is the Irish name for ship and as the St. Mary was not considered a suitable name for the barge she was subsequently renamed "Ye Iron Lung":

The Iron Lung was then bought back down the canal and returned to the Shannon where she has been based in Athlone for more than 40 years. As well as all the Shannon boat rallies, the Lung has been found over the years at most rallies, work parties, hoolies and bun fights the length and breadth of the Shannon, the Grand Canal and was the first barge ever to navigate the Erne all the way to Belleek.

Over the years various work has been done on the 'Lung'. When first bought she had an 'Atlantic' marine diesel engine fitted. Apparently the gearbox was so big that the engine was side mounted. This was later changed and a BMC 6-cylinder bus engine was installed, it is still this type of engine today but we believe it is probably on its second bus.

Sean once bought a second hand double decker and stripped out any parts he could for the barge. Aluminium panels were used for the side superstructure. The large windows were installed in the lounge, with the raised level of this and the amount of light allowed in there is a great feeling of space during the day, and plenty of room for a hooley at night. Also some of the bus seating was used for a time and could double for beds when the crew exceeded the twelve bunks she had up until very recently. The engine was taken out and used as previously mentioned. Sean then managed to sell the remaining windows and chassis and still made a profit on the deal.

Having owned the barge for 40 years Sean found it was becoming too much without regular crew and decided to sell it in 2001. With his usual cannyness he felt that by selling it to family he would have the best of both worlds, get rid of the responsibility but still enjoy use of the barge, hence he sold it to his nephew Andy Fitzsimons, the current owner.