

Chang Sha - Steam Yacht - Scotland 1846

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Chang-Sha was built in 1846, possibly on the Clyde in Scotland, of Lowmore iron plates riveted to iron frames. She was built for one of the directors of the Grand Canal, a gentleman by the name of Sankey as his personal launch, and was known for many years as "Sankey's Steamer": When originally built she was steam powered, and from the dimensions of the propeller opening and the shaft, we can guess that it was a very slow revving engine turning a massive propeller. When we re-plated the bilges in 1989, we found that one of weakest areas was under the current wheelhouse, which apparently coincided with the location of the coal bunkers. The iron having been attacked by the chemicals given off by the coal.

Around the turn of century, she was bought by a Major William Lloyd (Connaught Rangers) of Rockville House, Elfin, who removed the steam engine and boiler and converted her to a house-boat. She was fitted out by Miller and Beatty of Dublin to a very high standard with mahogany panelling. It was Major William Lloyd who gave her the present name and in 1912, he passed the boat on to his son, also a William Lloyd.

There are two explanations for the name Chang Sha. It may refer to the capital city of the Hunan Province because Lloyd holidayed there when he was in China or it may mean "River House" or "Long Beach" in some Chinese dialect.

Around 1920 she was sold to the Department of Agriculture and was moored in Portumna apparently with the intention of using her as a fisheries research vessel. There is some doubt as to what role she played but it is well known in ecological circles that some of the seminal work on the ecology of the Shannon was conducted by Southern and Gardner in 1922 from a laboratory in Portumna and it seems at least plausible that Chang-Sha played some role in this.

Around 1923 she was bought by Dr Vincent Delany (father of the founder of IWAI). No engine was fitted to the boat and she was towed to regattas on Lough Ree and Lough Derg for many years by La Vague which the Delanys also owned or by The Rambler (a Royal Canal boat) When not in use by the family, the paid hand, who went by the name of "The Pirate" Donnellan, was permitted to live aboard. The family did not use the boat for a number of years and in 1942 she was spotted in a rather sorry state by Syd Shine who asked Dr Delany to sell her. When he went aboard to inspect the boat, most of the interior had been gutted to provide wood for the fire and little remained except the marble fireplace.

Syd had her towed to Athlone by the Eclipse Flower and there set about re-fitting her. He initially installed a 2 cylinder Kelvin engine, but this was replaced some time later by a V8 Thornycroft petrol engine with a 100 gallon tank. Syd reckoned he needed 16 gallons of fuel to get to the Lough Ree Yacht Club and back from his berth in Athlone. Syd used the boat constantly until 1957 when he bought the Fox. He sold her to Alan Dunne in Carrick-on-Shannon for £150 who used her for a number of years. She lay unused in Carrick for several years and was vandalised and eventually sank.

Ken Simmonds bought her some time thereafter, basically to get the gearbox and some other bits and pieces off her and she was again left semi-derelict, this time in Athlone. In the early 1970s she was bought by Dan Hanovick and Syd towed her to Portlick for him. No further work was done until she was bought in 1973 by Simon Crowe, who was the drummer with a band called the Boom Town Rats. Simon, built the present superstructure of steel over steel and timber frames and had the Thornycroft engine re-conditioned. Pressure of work forced Simon to sell the boat and she was bought by a consortium of five people, John and David McFarlane, William Prentice, David Browne, and Garry Laird around 1980. They re-fitted the interior again and the Thornycroft engine was removed and replaced by a Perkins S6M.

She was bought by the present owners in February 1988 and they carried out extensive re-plating of the hull that year. A major re-fit of the interior took place in 2002 with an engine upgrade to a Perkins 6354 in 2006. And finally, she may be a canal boat, but Chang-Sha is no barge. She was never used as a trading boat and prefers to be referred to as a Gentleman's Steam Yacht. A lady of leisure for most of her life, she merits inclusion in the book 'Cool Metal - Clear Water', because of her short period with the Dept. of Agriculture!

Photographs of Chang Sha

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