

Jarra - Steamer - Chepstow 1895

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The Jarra was previously known as the "Naas" and was built with her sister the "Athy" during 1895 in Chepstow, Gwent, in South Wales. Chepstow is a town on the river Wye which feeds into the Severn and the Bristol Channel. Both boats were designed with a raked hull to increase speed and manoeuvrability and were fitted with steam engines. The river and strong tidal conditions of the Severn estuary were very similar to the tidal stretches of the Barrow from the "Scar" (from the Viking word SKAUR, meaning an outcrop of rock) at St. Mullins to the sea. It was here in 1896 that the Naas and Athy commenced working between Waterford and St. Mullins where their owners, the Odlum family, had a flour mill. They brought grain and supplies upriver and returned with sacks of flour. The barges spent the next fifty years in the service of the Odlum family and helped indirectly to feed many a poor family as well.

In 1947 the sisters retired from work. Sadly the "Athy" was sold to Hammond Lane Foundries in Dublin for scrap metal.

Her sister the "Naas" was purchased by the Grand Canal Company (GCC), towed up the Barrow and scuttled, to help shore up the weir at Milford, five miles below Carlow town. She rested there in a semi submerged state for twenty five years.

In 1972, John McNamara, a CIE engineer, while repairing the nearby lock gate noticed the "Naas" and asked Claude Odlum for the barge. Claude, an ex-Director of the Grand Canal Company, gave John the boat for nothing, on the understanding that John would restore the barge to her former glory. John re-floated the boat and towed her to Tullamore where he worked on her restoration and conversion for the following nine years.

In 1981, John had completed his labour of love which more than kept his promise to Claude Odlum. He re-launched the boat and re-named her the "Jarra" each letter of the name being the initials of the first names of himself, his wife and their three children (John, Anne, Robert, Ross and Adele). In 1988 John added the wheelhouse which was the last of the major structural work.

John McNamara sold the boat to David Coyle in 1991 and for the following few years David's brother Jasper used it extensively up and down the Shannon. After David's passing away a couple of years ago, John once more got an opportunity to own his labour of love so he bought her back.

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