

51M - Carpenters Boat - GCC Canal Boat - Dublin 1928

18 September 2008

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51M was built by Vickers (Ireland) in 1928. It was one of the series of purpose built motorised (M) boats built by the Grand Canal Company (GCC) in the 1920s and 1930s. She was transferred to CIE in 1950 when the State's transportation was nationalised.

During the first phase of her life she plied her trade from Dublin along the Grand Canal, and down the Barrow and Shannon Rivers, carrying many different types of cargo including the black stuff, Guinness. The public nicknamed these boats "Guinness Barges" and many people in Dublin still remember the barges on the canal and the children calling out from the bridges "Bring Us Back a Parrot, Mister!"

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With increasing competition from the road and rail network, CIE announced the closure of the Grand Canal to commercial traffic in December 1959. However, a few boats continued to transport Guinness into 1960 while a new store in Limerick was being completed.

On a quiet afternoon on 27 May 1960, there was only one barge loading in the Grand Canal Harbour at James Street. It was being loaded with a large cargo of Guinness to go to Limerick. Around tea-time, the loading was complete, and the 51M, heavily laden and very deep in the water, started its Bolinder engine. Slowly, the boat glided noisily out of the harbour. This would never happen again. The 51M was the last trade boat to leave Dublin.

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At the time their departure caused quite a stir with both the public and the press. Press photos of the occasion still exist.

Crews from 1928 to 1960

Working on these boats was very dangerous at times. In 1930 there was a terrible accident when on a cold night the crew packed up the stove and went to bed. The night was so cold that they didn't have any portholes open so there was no ventilation. Two of the crew, Dan Logan from Robertstown and Jack Grace from Blackwood, died from suffocating during the night. The other two crew, Peter Kelly from Ticknevin and Jim McDonagh from Plucerstown were very lucky to survive.

In August 1945 Joe Connolly from Shannon Harbour joined the crew as Deckman, at that time "Guy" Bolger was skipper, Patsy Bill Bolger was engineman and Jim "Pusheen" Bolger was greaser.

On her last journeys from James Street Harbour, Tommy McCormack (Allenwood) was skipper, Ned Doyle and John Doyle (Allenwood/Athy) were the Driver and Engineman.

1960 to 2010

51M was not sold off in the 1960's with the rest of the boats but was maintained by CIE. She was used by the maintenance department, fixing locks etc., and became known as the Carpenter's Boat.

Ger O'Toole from Sallins was the Carpenter and Mick Convey from Rahan was his helper from 1960 to the mid 1970's when Ger retired; at times Paddy Hannon also worked as a Carpenter's helper.

After that she was converted by CIE in Tullamore into an accommodation boat for maintenance crews. She also acquired a new engine, a Lister 4 cylinder, still running today. Following the conversion she was used on the Barrow and the Canal up to around 1989.

51M played a starring role in the Children's Drama Series 'Mission Top Secret', filmed around Hazelhatch in 1994 and broadcast in 1995. In recent years she was moored in the Grand Canal Docks Inner Basin in Ringsend. 51M belongs to Waterways Ireland.

Technical Details

Reg Number:

51M

Built By:

Vickers (Ireland) Ltd

Year:

1928

Construction:

Riveted Steel

Length:

61' 6"

Beam:

13' 2"

Payload:

60 tons

Draft:

4' 5.5"

Weighed:

Killaloe 1928

Engine:

Bolinder E Type, 15 HP, Lister 4 cyl

Steering:

Tiller

Home Base:

Ringsend

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