

54M - Aiseiri - GCC Canal Boat - Dublin 1928

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54M was built in Dublin by Vickers (Ireland) Ltd in 1928. She operated on the Grand Canal carrying general cargo up to 1959 when the Grand Canal closed to commercial traffic. After the closure the boats were tied up in James's Street Harbour awaiting their eventual outcome. During this time the Maintenance Department had the pick of the fleet and some boats were transferred over to maintenance duties.

At that time Johnny Dunne and Paddy Doyle were both working aboard the engineering boat 91E which was originally built in 1903 as Horse Boat 21, and became 1M with the installation of a Bolinder in 1912. The lads knew that the newer 54M had recently had her cabin refurbished and a new engine installed. This work was done shortly before the canal closure, so 91E was left in harbour and they took out 54M in its place.

According to Johnny they moved into the lap of luxury compared to what they had been used to. The pair used to stay on the boat during the week when they weren't near home. As an engineering boat 54M worked at cutting weeds during the summer, they moved lock gates, cleaning supplies, and occasionally used her as a mud boat when needed. In 1983 the Office of Public Works started to ferry the workers to site by van which put an end to the use of 54M for accommodation. New mud boats, which were shorter for turning and which were loaded and unloaded by digger, then came on line. This resulted in a number of older boats, including 54M, being retired from service and brought back to the harbour in Tullamore.

In 1995, 54M was selected as one of the barges to be leased out to a FAS community barge restoration project. 54M was rebuilt as a passenger carrying vessel and licenced to carry up to 50 passengers on the Grand Canal. The work was done by a group of FAS workers in Athy between 1996 and 2000. After she was re-launched she was renamed "Aiseiri"; the Irish word for "The Resurrection"

The barge was operated under the Athy Community Council who ran day and evening trips for a number of years after which she lay idle. Waterways Ireland have recently invested in the upgrade of 54M to a higher marine specification for use on the River Barrow under the supervision of the Department of Marine.

Crew included-

It is alleged that Dick Kearney with his uncle Martin and Jim Nevin managed to go under Portumna Bridge, going down river with a load of porter, while the bridge was closed. Dick's brother Todd Kearney also worked on 54M. In 1947 both Joe and Jack Daly from Banagher worked her after which Joe Connolly took over as skipper and Billy Colton was engineman, Joe Manning was deckman. When Billy left Joe Manning went as engineman and Pee Judge joined as deckman. Around November of that year Pee Judge left, Joe Manning went back as deckman and Tom Connolly went as engineman. Her last recorded crew were Tom Nolan (Master) Mick Nolan (Engineman) and Pat rick Nolan (Deckman).

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