

56M - GCC Canal Boat - Dublin 1928

21 September 2008

Last Updated 03 December 2010

Technical Details

Reg Number:

56M

Built By:

Vickers (Ireland) Ltd

Year:

1928

Construction:

Riveted Steel

Length:

61' 6"

Beam:

13' 2"

Payload:

62 tons

Draft:

4' 5.75"

Weighed:

Killaloe 1928

Engine:

Bolinder E Type, 15 HP
Ford Thames Trader 120HP

Steering:

Wheel with steering box of cobine harvester & Tiller

Home Base:

Hazelhatch

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When the commercial traffic closed on the canal in 1960, 56M was sold off by CIE at auction. Limerick Harbour Commissioners (LHC) were her next owners and used her for dredging work. We are lucky to have 56M with us today as when owned by LHC she was lost at sea, and remained so until the tides offered her up several years later. She broke free from her moorings in the waters around the Tarbert area during a strong storm and was swept out to sea. Over the next seven years the tides in the area swept her closer to shore until she eventually became salvageable in the late 1960's.

In the late 1960's Ronnie Gallagher was offered the barge for Â£100 but he had to salvage her himself. She was laden with sand and gravel and on low tides Ronnie and his son had to empty the hold until they were able to tow her with a small sailing boat back up the Shannon. Ronnie lived aboard her above Athlone at Shankeragh having fitted her with a timber superstructure. She passed through a number of hands over the next few years. Davy Dolan, son of the late Paddy Dolan, who lived aboard her on the quayside in Athlone, followed by Deckie Walshe, who is said to have paid Â£4,000 for her in 1978. After working on 56M with Deckie, Gerry Oakman of 29B was to become her next custodian, and in the early 1980's it was he who finished the steel superstructure with the characteristic stepped cabin-top and fitted her current engine. In 1982 Charlie Bishop a retired American naval officer who became enamoured with the Shannon became the proud owner of 56M. Charlie later met and got married to Janice Henry and they lived aboard until 1990. They travelled to length and breadth of the Shannon, sometimes wintering in Athlone, sometimes in Shannon Harbour.

They later sold 56M on to George and Eileen Leonard a retired couple. It was only advancing years that made George part with 56M in 1998. Eamonn Lindsay owned the barge for the next two years before Paul Egan and Mandy Henry (Janice's sister) the current owners bought her in April 2000. After buying her they immediately put it in for extensive rework in Shannon Harbour. The legacy of her time at sea became apparent during her re-plating in 2001. The bow of the barge must have protruded out of the water more than the rest of the hull and with exposure to air, combined with the salt water, corroded the hull severely. Because of this her bow was re-sheeted in new steel for a length of 8ft topside and below the waterline. One curious detail was found when working on the bow. She was correctly numbered 56M on 3 of her panels but on the starboard bow the number 55M appeared, etched into the steel. It had been corrected to read 56M, but no doubt some worker must have been castigated for his error.

56M has been steered by the rudder off 4E for the last 30 years - it had been appropriated for use on 56M before 4E had been salvaged herself - thankfully Joe Treacy hasn't asked for it back!

Crew included-

The "Bishop" (Tom) Whelan was in charge of 56M around 1947-48 before he took out 66M. 56M was operated as a "Hack Boat" when two brothers, Jack and Jim Bolff hired her out from the GCC for around two years that was circ 1949-50. Other people to work her were Chiny Thompson, Tom Bowers, Bert Conroy and Tom Connolly.