

68M - The Lora Marie - GCC Canal Boat - Dublin 1936

25 September 2008

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68M was built by Vickers (Ireland) in 1936; one of a series of purpose-built "motorised" boats purchased by the Grand Canal Company (GCC) in the 1920s and 1930s. She was transferred to Coras Iompair Eireann (CIE) in 1950 when the State's transportation system was nationalised.

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Ten years later, when commercial carrying ceased on the canal, 68M was not sold off but was kept by CIE for maintenance work. She was used as a mud boat (also known as clay or gravel boat) until 1980. As a maintenance boat, during the era of the GCC, she would have been renumbered to an "E" (Engineering) boat, but this practice did not continue after commercial activity ceased.

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At one time before 1980 there was a plan to fit her out like the Carpenter's Boat 51M, so her cabin was stripped out in Athy Dry Dock. However, for some reason CIE changed their minds. Her Bolinder engine was then removed and sold, ending up in England where it was carefully restored and installed in a traditional English Narrowboat. Her hull was left to rust away with other disused barges, partially submerged in the Grand Canal at Ballycommon. A year or so later, because of vandalism, all of these boats were taken into Tullamore Harbour for safe keeping. 68M then sank and remained under water until August 1993. The inside of her hull, underwater in Tullamore Harbour, appeared in the 1991 Waterways series which featured 45M.

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68M was raised by her new owner Dick Kearney in 1993. Dick with the help of his sons Declan and Paul then towed her to Lowtown where she remained tied to the canal bank under the watchful eye of Paddy "Waxer" Dunne until she was purchased by Gerry Burke in August 1995. She made her way east on the Grand Canal and south on the Shannon River with two outboard engines mounted on to a bracket on the tiller. With no dry dock facilities on Lough Derg, she was pulled ashore with tractors in December 1995.

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In March 1996 the work began. She was sandblasted and painted and over the following months the bilges were re-plated on both sides. She was re-launched (rolled back into the water) in June that year and the current engine was fitted the following week. She was used extensively in 1996 attending her first of many Shannon Harbour and Lough Derg Rallies. While the living conditions were basic, with the crew sleeping on boards in the cargo hold under a leaky canvas cover, everybody had lots of fun.

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Over the following years the superstructure was designed and created and twenty tons of loose stone were added as ballast. Work stopped each summer while the crew enjoyed themselves. In late 1997 the wheelhouse was added and cabins started to appear below. Summer 1998 included a trip to Belturbet and later that year the interior fit-out was completed.

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Since 1996 68M and her crew have travelled along all the navigable inland waterways. As well as her annual appearances at the Lough Derg and Shannon Harbour Rallies, 68M has made the trip from Clare to Dublin a number of times; the first time was in 2001 for the official launch of the Heritage Boat Association (HBA) at the World Canals Conference.

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Limerick is a favourite destination; the last time was in September 2010 when in her distinctive colours of black and cream and crewed by some of the ex GCC boatmen, she was a focus for the Arthur's Day celebrations. The cargo, some barrels of Guinness, was loaded in Killaloe and delivered to Limerick Docks and Dolan's pub.

68M has also been on a number of trips up the Erne visiting Belleek, Boyle and Lough Allen. In 2005 she navigated the Barrow River for the first time, visiting the Tall Ships Festival in Waterford, New Ross, Carrick-on-Suir and Inistioge as well as some cruising in the Suir Estuary. In the summer of 2007, with a fleet of HBA boats, she cruised the Shannon Estuary traveling out as far as Scattery Island. Unfortunately the weather wasn't settled and a trip to Loop Head had to be postponed.

This year, 2011, 68M is back on the Barrow Navigation, making her way south to the Nore and the Suir as part of the HBA's Three Sisters Fleet, heading to the Tall Ships Festival in Waterford.

If you see her along the way, don't be afraid to say hello.

Here the Boatmen recall her various crews during her commercial days. They included "Old Gent" McDermott (Daingean), her first Skipper in 1936. Dick Kearney was a Greaser in 1939 with Paddy Connolly (Killina), Tom Hilbert (Ballyteague) and Gannon Melia (Ticknevin) as crew. In the early 1940's crew consisted of Amby Dwyer (Newcastle), Tom Doonican (Pollagh), "Banagher" Tom Carroll, "Banagher" Jack Carroll (Tom's brother), Jack Kearney (Dicks brother) with "Baker" Sheridan (Littletown) as Skipper. Gannon Melia was Skipper from c1943-47. Paddy Kearney (Dicks brother) and Bill Cox worked on her c1947 with Anthony Donohue (Allenwood/Killaloe) as Skipper. Tom Nolan took over from him around 1948 with Peter Brien as Engineman and Tom's brother Paddy Nolan as Deckhand.

Tom stayed in charge of her until circa 1953, when Tom left his brother Paddy took over as Skipper and his other brother Jack joined as Deckhand. Peadar Boland (Robertstown) worked on her for a short while in the early fifties. Peter Brien left in late 1954 and Tommy Anderson (Allenwood/Carlow) replaced him as Engineman. Paddy Nolan was skipper for about eighteen months and was replaced by "Gurkyman" (Peter) Anderson (Tommy Anderson's brother). Around 1955 Paddy Doherty (Graiguenamagh) and his two sons John and Paddy took out 68M and worked her until she was laid up with all the other CIE boats when canal operations were halted at Christmas 1959.

In January 1960, when 68M was brought back into service for six months to help in the decommissioning of the canal system and to continue drawing Guinness to Limerick her crew consisted of 'Waxer' (Paddy) Dunne as Skipper, Tom Connolly was Engineman and Tom "Mocus" Farrell (Ballyteague) was Deckhand.

Willy Anger, Tommy "Skranny" Kelly (Rathdangan) and Kit Moran (Robertstown) crewed her from 1968 until 1972 when she was worked as a maintenance boat. Willy left in 1972 and Mick Donaher (Umeras Bridge) replaced him; this crew stayed in place until 1980.

Technical Details

Reg Number:

68M

Built By:

Vickers (Ireland) Ltd

Year:

1936

Construction:

Riveted Steel

Length:

61' 6"

Beam:

13' 1.5"

Payload:

60 tons

Draft Loaded:

4' 5.5"

Draft Empty:

1'6"

Weighed:

Killaloe 1936

Current Draft:

3'3" Ballasted

Engines:

Bolinder E Type, 15 HP

Perkins S6M, 120 HP

Home Base:

Lough Derg

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Photographs of 68M

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