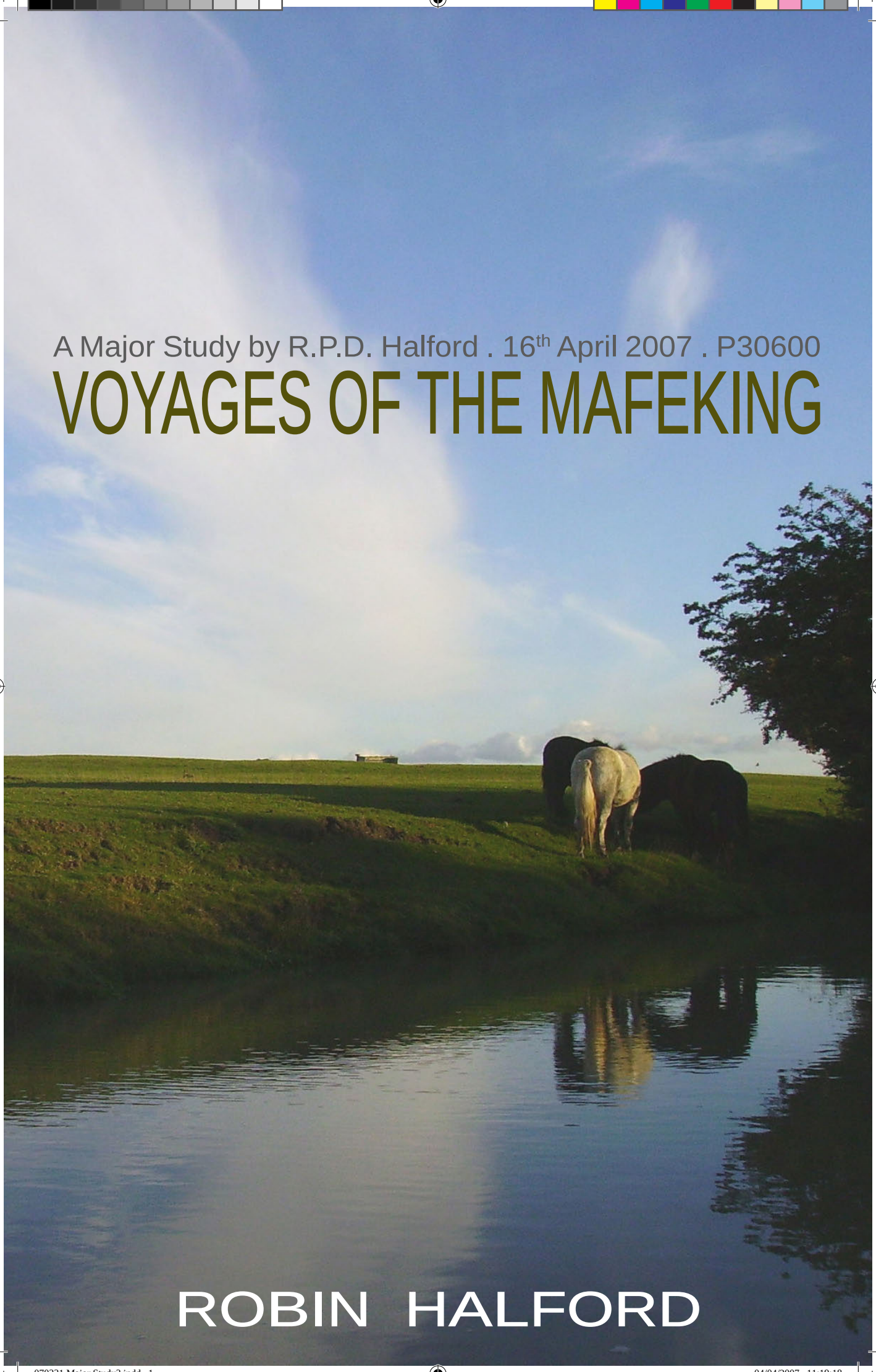


A Major Study by R.P.D. Halford . 16th April 2007 . P30600

VOYAGES OF THE MAFEKING

ROBIN HALFORD

Voyages of the Mafeking

Robin Halford

Contents

Introduction

1. *Mafeking* moored near Weirs Lane, Oxford, 2006.

I bought a narrow boat as an alternative to a flat when moving back to Oxford in 2005. After weeks of searching for a suitable craft and having no success, I had written the idea off when I stumbled on an advertisement for *Mafeking* as I surfed the Internet. I rapidly drove up to its mooring in Oxford making the decision to buy her there and then. With little knowledge about what I was taking on or how much money it could cost, I naively believed that a lick or paint would be sufficient to rectify the dilapidated interior. *Mafeking* was sold to me as a 'heritage' boat but I was completely unaware of what that actually meant. I had very little knowledge of canals and all of my experiences had been on hire boat holidays. My optimism for a quick refurbishment was ill founded and I continue to work on the boat to this day but it was my unplanned restoration, as I peeled away layers, stripping out rotten wood and scraping up bags of rust that aroused my curiosity. Every component I uncovered and book I read inspired a new, and often inaccurate, theory of *Mafeking's* origin. But why focus on an unremarkable old narrow boat, in a study that should contribute to the field of architecture?

An understanding of how changes in society are connected to architecture and vice versa is critical to comprehending both society and architecture at anything other than a superficial level. As Mark Girouard pointed out in *Life in the English Country House*:

> *Even the most knowledgeable country-house enthusiasts tend to think in terms of architects, craftsmen or family history, but to know surprisingly little about how families used the houses which architects and craftsmen built for them.*[1]

It may seem strange to talk of architecture and country-houses in a study examining canals and narrow boats but from the early 19th century onwards people began to live, as well as work, on their vessels which now took on the additional roll of a house, expressing the needs of its occupant's. Many families who inhabited their stern cabins decorated them with folk art, graining and elaborate rope fenders. Internally they appropriated the small space to serve all the needs of a family and decorated them accordingly with ornamental plates, crochet work and yet more painting. Domestication and use of space, expression of a cultural identity and semi-transient life styles are just a few examples of the architectural issues explored through this subject. A narrow boat is a mixture of vehicle and home that, unlike most nomadic structures, simultaneously fulfils functions of travel, work and living. The canals on which they floated became an infrastructure of culture as well as a vital transport network. To inform an understanding of how changes in society are connected to architecture, in its broadest sense, and vice versa this study examines the narrow boat and canal system by adopting a similar methodology to Girouard.

Canals have been in a continual state of flux, their meaning and use having altered throughout their short history. From a pure transport system to an inhabited floating city they have dwindled into dereliction, inspired romantic literature and reborn themselves as a giant leisure park. *Mafeking* becomes the vehicle for a socio-historical exploration of the canal system in Britain, by tracing its history through a combination of archaeological examination, archive research and accounts from past owners. The social and physical differences in the treatment of narrow boats and canals in different areas and eras are revealed. *Mafeking* has travelled extensively on the canal system and in more recent years many people have regarded the boat as a home.

1. Girouard, M. (1978) *Life in the English country house.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p. V.

If the narrow boat is to be fully understood it is necessary to consider the canal network with which narrow boats evolved simultaneously. The canals were Britain's first purpose built transport infrastructure but, as important as they were, they are known today only for their leisure industry. Therefore it is difficult to comprehend them from an 18th or early 19th century mindset. Drawing a parallel with today's major transport infrastructure, the roads and motorways, creates a more vivid impression of how society at that time may have regarded the canal system and all that came with it.

The Importance of Infrastructure

Like good health, we tend to take some of the most important basics in life for granted. Transport infrastructure is another, only missed when it fails, yet crucial to our whole existence. The lorry blockades of September 7th, 2000 effectively closed down Shell's Stanlow oil refinery and the Hertfordshire Oil Storage Terminal to protest against rising fuel prices. Three days later six out of the eight major oil refineries across the country had also been targeted, resulting in a third of petrol stations running dry and motorway traffic dropping 40% below normal levels.[2] Amidst the ensuing turmoil society was not only reminded of its utter dependency on the internal combustion engine but also its reliance on the massive interconnected structure of concrete and asphalt that makes motor vehicle transport viable.

On the surface, transport infrastructure is an easy concept to understand. To provide resources for any concentration of people requires things such as food, fuel and building materials. Bigger and more complex civilisations require greater quantities of materials, which are consumed more quickly. People must also be able to move freely from place to place if they are to live comfortably and work effectively. Transport infrastructure is not only essential in maintaining quality of life but it also greatly influences human behaviour. Hillier's 'Space Syntax' contends that the connections between spaces determine how much the spaces are used and that these connections are mathematically predictable. The theory sees:

> *Roads and corridors as one and the same: spaces. Roads are spaces that link buildings; corridors are spaces that link desks with photocopiers, faxes and coffee machines.*[3]

In a building the corridor is not considered to be divorced from the main spaces but is seen as an integral part of the overall architecture. Without circulation space a building cannot function because we cannot move around or interact with the spaces. In the same way the road is an integral part of architecture but on a grander scale. If there is no road, the buildings cannot interact with humanity and the city, or community, ceases to exist.

In Vers une Architecture of 1923 Le Corbusier presents a definition of architecture:

> *You employ stone, wood and concrete, and with these materials you build houses and palaces; that is construction. Ingenuity is at work. But suddenly*

2. Doherty, B. et al., (2003) Explaining the fuel protests. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations,* **5** (1), pp.1-23.

3. Hamer, M. (1999) Well connected. *The New Scientist*, November 13, p.29.

you touch my heart, you do me good, I am happy and I say: 'this is beautiful.' That is architecture.[4]

In relation to this statement it seems that transport infrastructure is merely construction, after all gazing at the M25 for several hours hardly touches the heart.

But the streets and roads are amongst the main spaces in which we experience architecture. They have become areas that dictate the order in which buildings and settlements are perceived, differing according to a journey's start and end point. Street scenes such as Times Square, New York or the Champs Elysées, Paris are examples of collective architectural spectacles that emanate from the interplay of different buildings and spaces. These are held together and dictated by the transport infrastructure without which they would not exist to *touch hearts* or *do people good*. Transport infrastructure enables travel through rural and urban areas and can reveal many beautiful vistas during one short journey. Do these not also *touch hearts* and *do people good*? Do the meanings inherent in a transport system run deeper than that of 'ingenious construction' alone? The motivation behind road building might appear to be straightforward practicality but the resulting side effects; the experiences people have on the road, the way it alters their perception of themselves and the environment imbues it with a deeper aesthetic significance that goes beyond its original intention. This is true of all transport infrastructure whether road, rail, air, sea or canal.

Through using Hillier's theory, researchers at University College London's Space Syntax Laboratory claim they can explain the growth of cities and the reasons why shops thrive in certain areas. In their case study of Oxford Street, London, the Space Syntax Laboratory demonstrates that a hierarchical organisation of streets exists based on how the whole network interconnects. Oxford Street has optimum connectivity as Allan Penn explains:

On average… you only need to turn left or right nine times to reach anywhere in inner London from Oxford Street. On the other hand, if you start from a back street in west London, you'll have to turn twenty times or more.[3]

For this reason Oxford Street will remain special and will not be overtaken by newer centres less well placed on the infrastructure. The canal system can tell us equally interesting information about the relative prosperity of the towns it served until it was supplanted with newer technology infrastructures (rail and road). It is probably no coincidence that Birmingham grew so rapidly from about 15,000 people in 1700, before the canal age, to Britain's second largest city in 1800 when the canal was dominant. Hillier's theory, if applied to the canal system, suggests that Birmingham's location in the network would make it the obvious candidate for the centre of canal culture that it became.

Modern transport infrastructure has a major influence on how people perceive their surroundings today, as canals did in the 1800's. In his 1960's study, *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch explores people's differing perceptions of the built environment. One of the participants in his study:

Noted the extension of the city's scale due to the new roads, which have changed her whole conception of the relation of elements.[5]

4. Le Corbusier. (1923) *Vers une architecture,* quoted by Frampton, K. (1985) *Modern architecture: a critical history*. London: Thames and Hudson, p.149.

5. Lynch, K. (1960) *The image of the city*. London: MIT Press, p.42.

The speed of travel, distances travelled and routes available inevitably lead to an individual relationship with space and architecture that is dictated by the transport infrastructure:

> *On these fast roads, one can have some sense of the major topography.*[5]

Louis Kahn states:

> *The street wants to become a building' and in doing so he highlighted the architectural significance of transport infrastructure.*[6]

Kahn exhibited a, perhaps justified, paranoia about the power of the street. The transport infrastructure could, if not addressed in terms of architecture, dominate the city:

> *If because of the demands of the motorcar, we stiffen and harden the city – omitting water, omitting the green world – the city will be destroyed.*[6]

So the influence of the transport infrastructure on architecture, as elsewhere, has been well recognised for nearly a century but was it just as valid in the days when the canal system was dominant? One might expect that transport infrastructure would, by now, be a well understood subject but recent experience suggests otherwise. In recent years travelling across cities has become increasingly difficult whether by bus, car or underground train especially in the rush hours. Motorway traffic jams are commonplace and at peak time roads such as the M25 or A1 can leave motorists stranded for hours. Main arterial roads such as the A14 remain only two-lane carriageway despite taking traffic from the four-lane M11 and A1. According to the Commission for Integrated Transport:

> *Almost a quarter of British trunk roads are fouled up for more than an hour a day, fewer than one in 20 French and no Danish roads experience similar gridlock, according to the Commission for Integrated Transport.*[7]

It is as though little notice is taken of the system until neglect causes noticeable problems. Strangely, this does not seem to have happened in the age of canals, probably because their development was often undertaken or supported by great landowners who were unhindered by financial or environmental considerations. This was one important factor fuelling the unprecedented development of the industrial revolution.

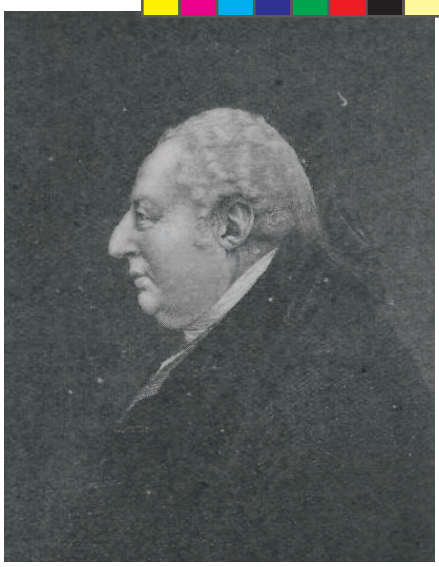
The current transport infrastructure is both the saviour and scourge of the new millennium. Roads desecrate the natural environment, make antisocial noise, create light pollution and continually pump out harmful gases, yet without them the high living standards that society now takes for granted would plummet. Our perception of the village, city and entire country would be altered as well as our expectations of what is possible in an average life. At the moment the road is becoming ever more dominant and the day of its obsolescence seems so far away that it is barely conceivable. In the late eighteenth century, the demise of the canal system would have seemed equally implausible.

Looking at the canal network through *Mafeking* affords an opportunity to

6. Kahn, L. quoted by Frampton, K. (2001) *Studies in tectonic culture*. London: MIT Press, p.223.

7. 2002. For whom the road tolls. *BBC News online*, [internet]. 20 May http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1998208.stm [cited 26 March 2007]

examine the history of Britain's first national, purpose-built transport infrastructure. The technology, economics and politics that created and destroyed it are all available for study. The effects that the network has had can be seen both nationally (through the alteration of our cities, villages and landscapes) and globally (through the network's major role in the industrial revolution). It is also possible to examine the network's development into an 'accidental' architecture, which has influenced Britain socially as well as aesthetically. Following the events surrounding *Mafeking* reveals many unexpected phenomena from the creation of a unique social class working and living on an industrial infrastructure to the unlikely creation of a 4000-mile long leisure park.



2. Francis Egerton, the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater (1736-1803).

3. The Bridgewater Canal at Worsley.

Whilst France was in the grip of turmoil in 1793, a frenzy of canal building in England was laying the unpredictable infrastructure of revolution: one that would be technological in nature as well as fiercely militant. Some 39 years previously Francis Egerton, III Duke of Bridgewater, had been in a very different France.

With title and money his grand tour was supposed to be the culmination of an Eton, Ox-bridge education: the final cultural rounding off for a young aristocrat of the British Empire. Having lost his father at nine he had been neglected by his Mother and thought too dim-witted to deserve the title of Duke. In reality it was, almost, an inconvenience that the sickly twelve year old would not share the consumptive fate of his elder brother. Uneducated and apparently unwanted Francis's 'Grand Tour' was a crash course in culture, which taught him only that he had no interest in culture. His tutor, Wood, was an Eastern Traveller and Homeric scholar but such things meant little to the seventeen-year-old Duke. In Rome he placated Wood by buying marbles but they remained packed till after his death. In Paris he refused dancing lessons and Wood became so exasperated that he "often wished himself back in the desert he had so lately left."[8] It was in Lyons that Francis's Grand Tour started to live up to its name when he discovered the Languedoc Canal, now the Canal du Midi. This 320mile cut linking the Atlantic at Bordeaux with the Mediterranean at Sete was undeniably grand and Francis, seemingly in awe of the ambition behind such a feat, toured the locks and docks with obsessive fascination. He had met his first love.

The young duke, back in England by 1755, now involved himself in the theatre of London high society, culminating in his engagement to the Duchess of Hamilton. Scandal made Francis break the match and withdraw from London life forever, back to his manor house in Worsley, back to the only thing that had ever really interested him: canal building. By 1759 the Duke of Bridgewater had funded the building of a new canal to transport coal from his mines in Worsley to his markets in Manchester. It was the equivalent of £60 million worth of pioneering construction and the money came out of his own pocket.

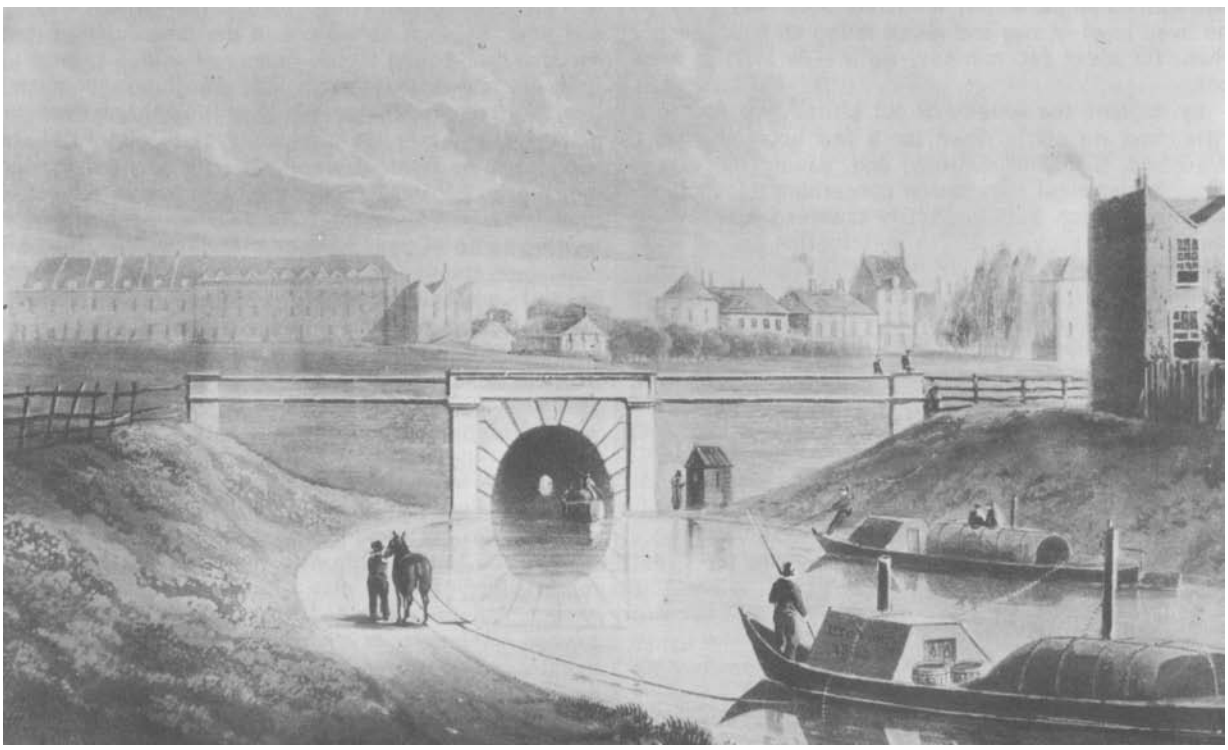
It was a time of packhorses and endless nauseating carriage runs across punishing mud tracks. The already magnetic urban centres were swelling, driving the price of food and coal ever higher whilst the seething poor of cities such as Manchester were driven, out of desperation, to yearly riots; an ominous prelude to the coming decade but hardly the stuff of world beating technological success. It took Francis, the supposedly dimwit Duke, to be inspired by established French technology and employ it so effectively in England that everyone started investing in the new transport infrastructure and 'canal mania' swept Britain (See Appendix A). The canal he built immediately benefited the poor as coal prices plummeted. Francis himself often visited his coal markets and made sure that:

> *Whenever any deficiency in supply was apprehended, those people who came with their wheel-barrows, baskets and aprons, for small quantities, should be served first.*[8]

The canal gave Manchester a head start in manufacturing but the people

8. Espinasse, F. (1874) *Lancashire worthies.* Manchester: Abel Heywood and Son, see chapter. XI.

4. The Regent's Canal, Islington c.1828.



working the industrial inferno, now crammed into cities nation wide, were becoming agitated. Manchester Patriotic Union Society called a mass meeting in the summer of 1819, pulling a crowd of around 50,000. Under the banner of Universal Suffrage, dressed in their Sunday best, working families marched to Methodist hymns gathering to hear the likes of Henry Hunt and Samuel Bamford speak. Class paranoia was rife, the French revolution had seen to that, and the authorities were edgy about this dangerously massive mobilisation of potential mob. It had to be stopped and how better to do this than arrest the speakers? Sadly the ensuing scuffle after Henry Hunt's arrest resulted in the accidental trampling of a little girl. Trapped in a throng of outraged protester, Hunt's captors were panicking. It was then that the 'Massacre of Peterloo' took place as a group of fully armed cavalry Hussars charged the crowd, swords wildly maiming and killing the astonished families. 11 dead, 106 with sabre cuts and 421 seriously injured.[9]

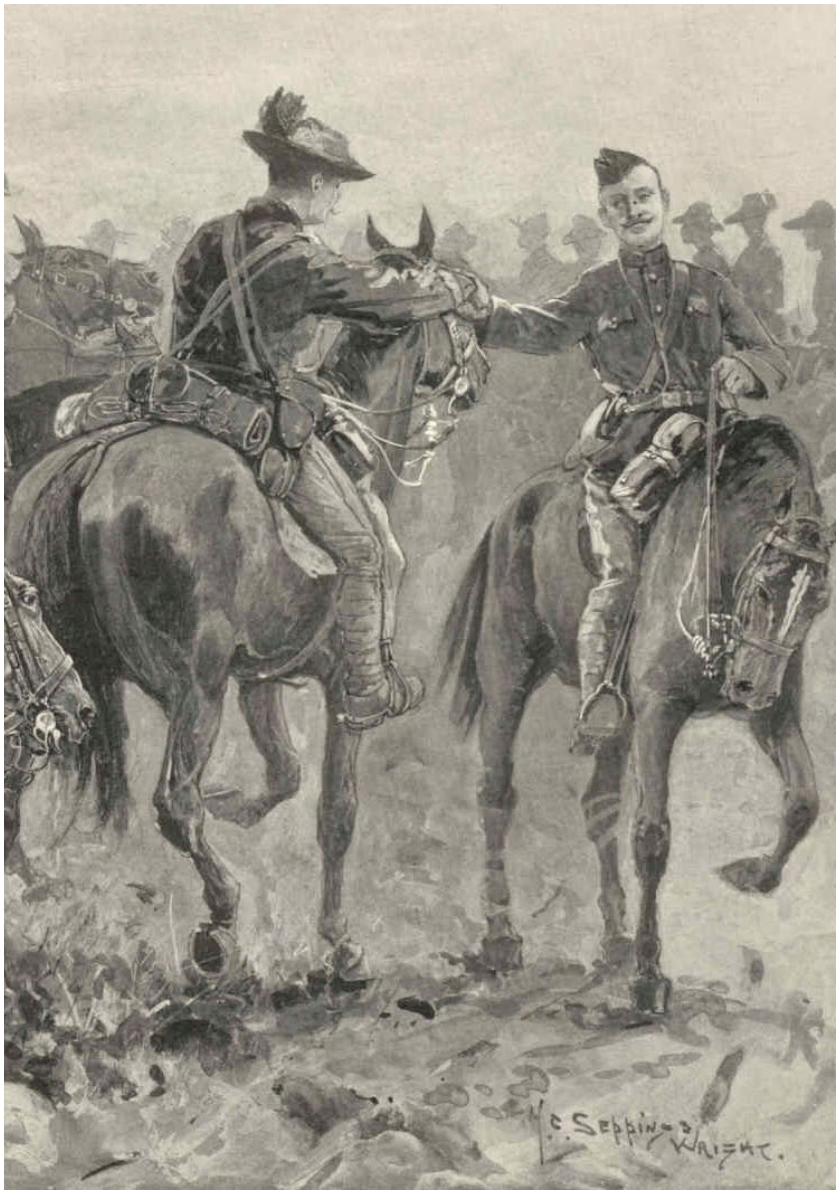
Whilst the common man rebelled in Manchester the architect John Nash, son of a millwright, was at the peak of his social mountaineering. The gambling, womanising drunkard *Prince* Regent (Later George the IV) had seen an ebullient self-indulgence in Nash's work that struck a chord. When the Dukes of Portland's lease expired in 1811, 487 acres of hunting and farmland became a perfect site for some self-gratifying architectural debauchery. Marylebone Park, as it was known, would become a *Prince*s paradise; a "garden city" with great reflecting lakes, grand holiday villas for his gambling entourage and delightful terraces and crescents to house the well to do.

Thomas Homer, a wharf owner and canal carrier had been eager to create a new canal between Paddington and the Thames, Nash's royal funding being a potentially valuable resource that Homer could ill afford to ignore. Homer, a plausible wide boy, approached him on the subject. Having previously lost his substantial inheritance in a series of ill-considered investments Nash had proved himself anything but a shrewd judge of character. The canal would become an architectural feature of the park providing a moving focal point in the open landscape. Homer's idea paid off handsomely and what followed was not only funding and the influential leverage needed to obtain permissions but also the royal seal of approval; the project would be known as The Regent's Canal. Nash echoed the *Prince*'s evident enthusiasm when he became a director of the Regents Canal Company. Characteristically delegating the work, Nash overlooked the original surveyor James Tate, and promoted his dangerously under qualified assistant, James Morgan, to chief engineer.

Work began in 1812 but Morgan's incompetence was already frittering away precious capital. The Maida Hill Tunnel had to be diverted at its eastern end as no one had obtained permission from the Portman Estate who subsequently refused passage over its land. Instead a new route was negotiated involving the relocation of a cricket ground belonging to a certain Thomas Lord. This was a considerable financial blow to the company made worse by a devastating revelation. Homer, the reason for Nash's and thus the *Prince*'s involvement in the canal, had been embezzling funds to pay off his own insurmountable debts.

As Homer sailed off to begin his seven years in Australia, work had stopped on the canal. Another four-year interval bought yet more disaster as an innovative hydro-pneumatic lock, constructed at Hampstead Road, proved to be a consummate failure and had to be rebuilt. It quickly became clear that the canal was insufficiently fed necessitating the unforeseen damming of the river Brent in order to create a suitable

9. Based on information from Schama, S. (2003) A history of Britain: 1776-2000 the fate of empire. London: BBC Worldwide, p.101.



5. A drawing from inside *The Illustrated London News* depicting the meeting of General Baden-Powell and Colonel Mahon at *Mafeking* on the morning of May 17th 1900.

reservoir. With Morgan's incompetence complete and the recently ascended king, George IV, exhibiting signs of Alcohol-Laudanum induced insanity Nash, must have been more than relieved when the canal finally opened on the1st August 1820.

Homer's embezzling had prefigured the depression of 1815 as war-ravaged foreign markets declined and foreign manufacturing re-established itself. In the midst of failing harvests and a spate of cancellations of wartime industry contracts the economy was blighted. Until this time those who operated the narrow boats that worked on the canals (often ex-soldiers, redundant farm workers or the labourers and navvies who dug the canals) lived with their families in private or rented houses on the land. As the boat families incomes fell they sold their houses and possessions moving onto the boats permanently, wife and children evolving into crew, eliminating further expenditure on hired assistance. Work and everyday life were now intertwined, as the boat became a home not just a livelihood.

By 1899 the British Empire was becoming unwieldy in the face of Europe's new colonial ambitions and an undignified struggle for territory in Africa and the East was inevitable. Britain, anxious to fend off France and Germany, pushed to establish dominance in South Africa, its activities culminating in the Anglo-Boer War. British soldiers were not sent directly into South Africa, instead Colonel Baden-Powell and a few officers were despatched with orders to build two regiments of mounted riflemen from the local population. Faced with potential attack from the much bigger Boer army, Baden-Powell decided that a defensive strategy would have the best chance of success considering the abilities of his 500 barley-trained soldiers. He chose the administrative centre of *Mafeking*, already well stocked with supplies and on a railway line close to the border. It was September the 19th when they set about transforming the town into a fortress, building defences round its six-mile perimeter and beginning an extensive network of trenches and gun emplacements. Less than a month later the town was shelled by General Cronje and besieged by his 8000 strong army.

The situation attracted a large amount of media and public interest and Winston Churchill was among the newspaper journalists reporting the events. British troops pretended to climb over invisible barbed wire when moving between trenches and fake landmines were laid as obviously as possible in front of the besiegers to create the illusion that the town was well defended. The deception worked and Baden-Powell held *Mafeking* for 217 days. The siege was finally relieved by British reinforcements and when the news was received in England it caused a national outpouring of joy so great that a new verb, to *Maffick* (meaning 'to celebrate with boisterous rejoicings and hilarious behaviour')[10] entered the English vocabulary.

10. (1966) *Webster's third new international dictionary.* London: William

6. Wooden 'Starvationers' on the Bridgewater Canal at Worsely.

7. An iron steam chest used by the Samuel Barlow Coal Company at their boatyard in Braunston.

Building Boats

In 1902, an unknown boatyard somewhere in the Black Country was finishing off the paintwork of a new wooden narrow boat called *Mafeking*, named after recent global events. She was destined for a life of coal carrying having been built to order for the Moira Colliery Company, a large mining business. It is difficult to be sure exactly who built *Mafeking* because records are scarce and boat building was a widespread craft that many small and large businesses were involved with. Luckily, because of the constancy that existed in the boat building process, passed down knowledge together with photographic evidence creates a detailed picture of the canal culture from which *Mafeking* emerged. These construction processes are of relevance because they are intertwined with the lives of those who lived and worked aboard the boats, affecting the cycles of their lives, the spaces that they inhabited and forming the basis for their very existence.

The boat community was, more or less, totally illiterate so few first hand accounts survive of their lifestyle and the scarcity of detailed evidence makes it a challenge to identify who lived aboard *Mafeking* when it was first launched. What evidence does exist shows that at least two adults and two children below the age of twelve were aboard from the beginning. The details of these people have to be based on sources of extant evidence that provides an overall picture of early canal society. There are also some personal accounts preserved in old interviews that give more specific information on individual experiences.

Early 19th century narrow boat building took place in many yards distributed across the country. They were often family businesses, with half a dozen to a dozen employees, adding their own styles to a basic design that had evolved on the Bridgewater Canal. Originally, small wooden boats operated in Bridgewater's mines taking loads directly from the coalface via a 46mile long, multi-level network of underground canals. Flat bottomed and straight sided, they were bluntly nicknamed 'starvationers' due to their prominent structural knees (ribs). On the surface the coal was transferred to vessels built along the same principles but bigger. These were the direct ancestors of the narrow boat.

James Brindley, Bridgewater's engineer, went on to apply the knowledge he gained when building the Duke's canal to the Trent and Mersey, the first long distance canal scheme, and it is likely that the width of locks were designed around the narrow mine craft he had seen at Worsely. Whether or not this was the case his actions effectively standardised much of the future canal system and would lead to the building of enough 'narrow gauge' canals to ensure the narrow boat's proliferation as a uniquely British Craft.

The boat-building firms needed little space to set-up and required only a basic level of technology. A strip of land as long as a boat next to the canal, with some additional space for a steam chest (for bending timbers) a sawpit and a few workshops to accommodate the Carpenter, canvass maker and the Blacksmiths forge, completed a basic yard. The business would make most of its money out of 'docking' or repairing existing boats while there were often additional opportunities for the yards to act as retailers selling coal, building materials or anything else that could be brought in by canal to the local community.

8. A boat builder using an adze to complete the shaping of a stem post.

Considering narrow boats were built for heavy 19th century industry it is surprising to find that iron was not the favoured material. At the time the technology needed to manipulate it was expensive and beyond the reach of small craftsmen. Engineers and drawings were also uncommon, 'medieval' being the word that best describes the canal boat-building trade with its chief tool, the adze, little altered since Roman times. Knowledge of materials, especially wood, ran deep in the minds of the builders. *Mafeking* was a product of this small enclave of craftsmanship, quaintly hanging on in its own autonomous world of understanding passed down via apprenticeships and by word of mouth. The resulting construction processes developed a variety of ritual characteristics. For example:

> *A boat builder's rule of thumb was that the wood from one old boat has to be burnt to steam the curved timbers of the new one.*[11]

This practice was grounded in practicality but at the same time there was a sense of genuine loss when an old boat reached the end of its life. The hand woodworking skills that went into building narrow boats elevated them above the status of mass-produced work vehicles. Construction always started with the building of a wooden framework allowing access to the new boat's underside. 6ft Elm boards were then placed side by side as a base and a large beam, called the keelson, was fixed down the middle to become 'the back [bone]'. The double curve made from 2.5inch thick wooden planks, so desirable on the fore-end and stern, would be a challenge for any designer today. Planks can only be curved in one direction after steaming. Double curving in this fashion weakens the timber so the solution was to obtain trees and timber that had grown in a curve to start with. Oak provided strength for the side planks while Elm, with its resistance to decay, created the submerged base planks. After the stem and sternposts were fitted, the side planks were shaped and a whole host of other construction tasks could be undertaken. Floating the vessel was nearly always achieved with a dramatic sideways launch down a pair of iron topped timber slides, the boat hitting the water in such a way that it practically capsized.

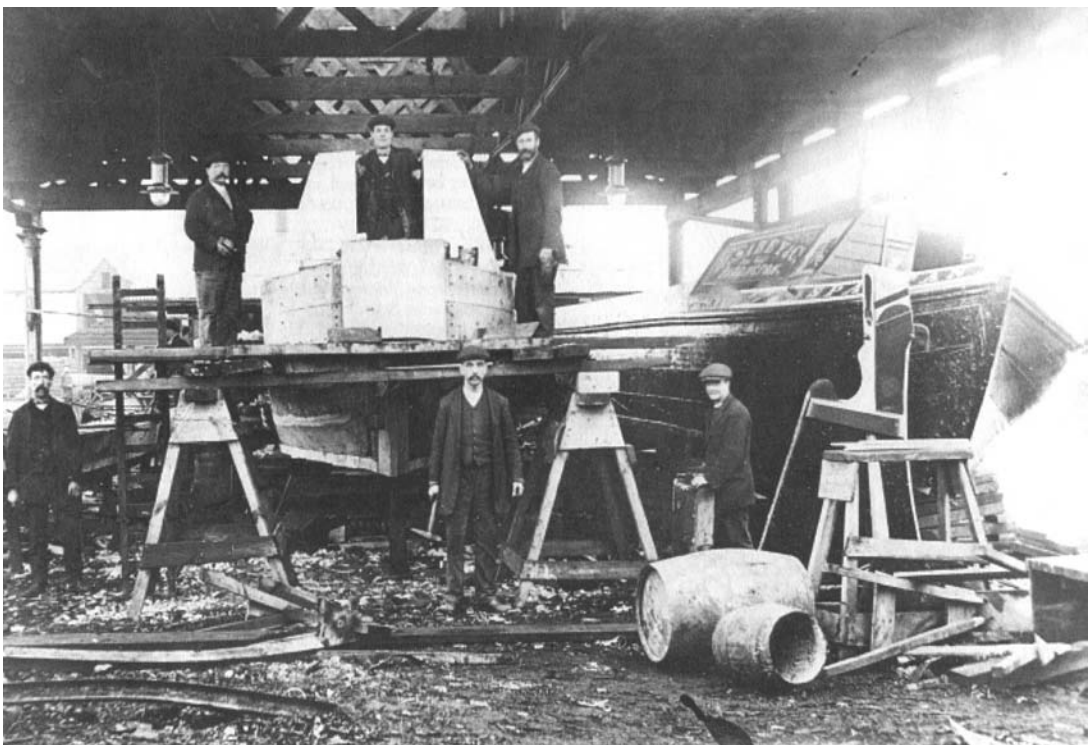
Designs and details, kept in the builder's head, gave information about the different types of narrow boat and their corresponding capabilities, dimensions and materials. This passed down knowledge was often supplemented with some written notes and the odd sketch. For example, the famous boatyard manager Frank Nurser:

> *kept a small paper covered notebook, which contained the basic dimensions of typical motor and butty boats, and a thumbnail sketch of any specialised detail.*[11]

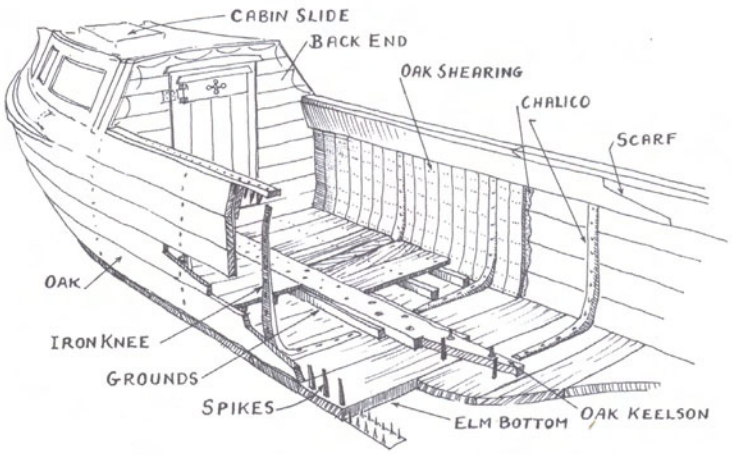
Frank Nurser became manager of a particularly successful boatyard. His father, the son of a canal labourer, had started the family business in 1875 quite possibly taking over an existing boatyard. Frank was the youngest of two brothers although he had a further eight half brothers and two half sisters from his father's previous marriage. By the age of 15 he had learnt much about his craft having gained particular skill in boat painting. The family business closed in 1927 but Frank went into a three-way partnership with one of his half brothers and a local Blacksmith buying the yard back and calling it Nurser Brother's. Although a shy man, he was destined to become something of a celebrity by

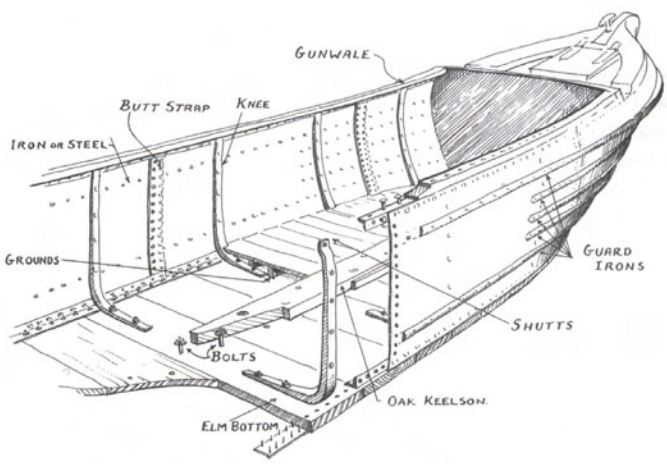
11. Wilson, R. (1974) *Boatyards and boatbuilding*. Rothwell: Robert Wilson,

9. A new wooden motor boat under construction.



10. Narrow boat *Mira* being launched after docking.

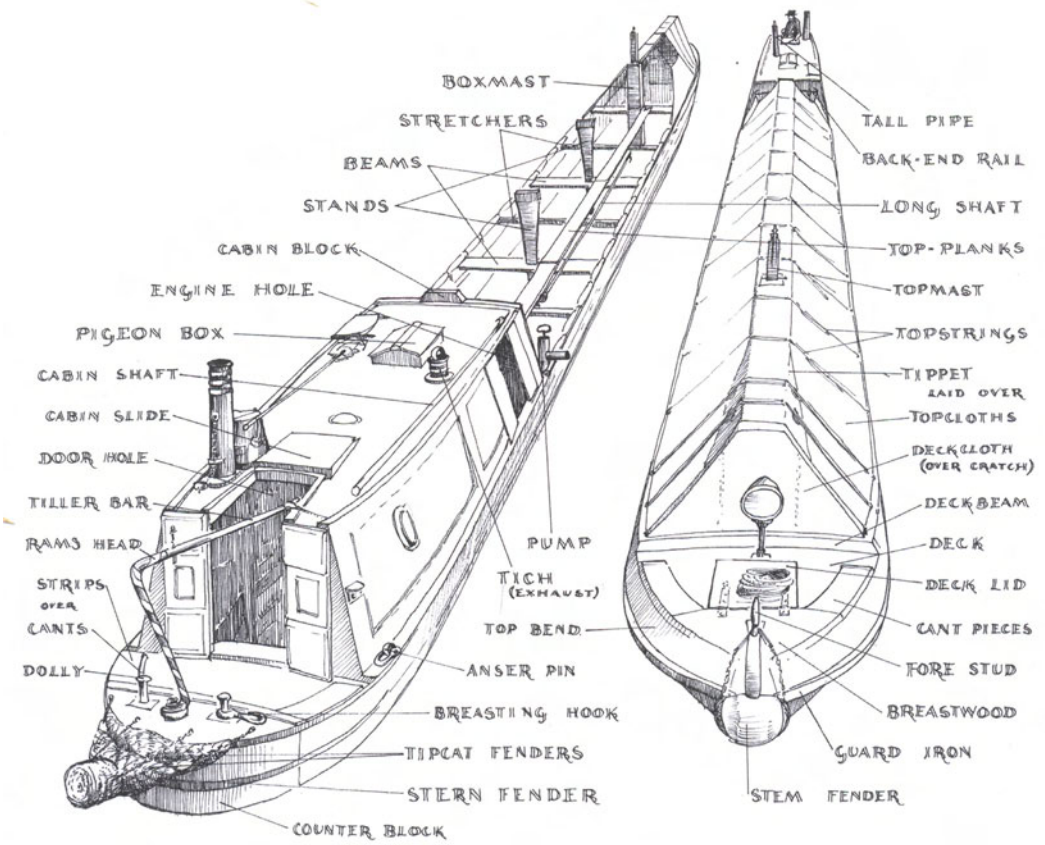




11. Diagram showing the construction of a wooden narrow boat.

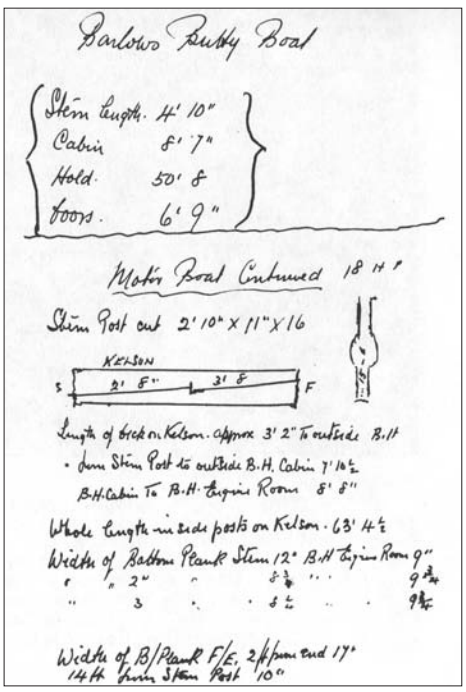
12. Diagram showing the construction of a composite boat, made out of wood and iron.

13. The anatomy of a motor narrow boat. *(Drawings by Edward Paget-Tomlinson)*



14. A page out of Frank Nurser's notebook.

15. Frank Nurser (1886-1952), Braunston, 1950.



the standards of boatyard owners. It was his painting that attracted the canal revivalists and the author Rolt befriended him, keen that his boatyard should be the location for the 1945 film, *Painted Boats*. Three years later, having been bought out by The Samuel Barlow Coal Co., he remained manager of the yard and later appeared on television demonstrating the craft of canal painting. The Nurser boatyard became famous for its decoration and many of the owner boatmen docked there with the knowledge that their resulting paint schemes would be among the best on the canal, enhancing their social status:

> *The Lane family, several generations of whom worked their own boats… even went so far as to pay the boatyard extra to ensure their boats were unsurpassed in appearance.*[12]

A yard owner had to be a skilled builder but, like Nurser, they were often painters as well, giving them a considerable roll in the development of the canal people's identity that went beyond the construction of boats. Boatmen did do their own painting occasionally but this would be limited due to their arduous working hours rarely affording them enough time to indulge in such luxuries.

Providing the basis to family boat life was the working pair consisting of a horse boat and a butty (buddy or towed boat). Both had a streamlined fore-end to lessen water resistance but the stern was also pointed allowing as much water as possible to contact the rudder. Horse boats had a short mast at the front attached to the horse's towrope while butties, such as *Mafeking*, were pulled along behind. The vessels' long narrow dimensions meant that they needed rudders that were deep as well as long. Unlike modern motors, butty rudders were a prominent feature of the boat, decorated with paintings and symbols. On the death of a much loved or relied upon tow horse the family would have the tail preserved and hung behind the butty rudder:

> *You tact that patch of leather to yer rams'ead, the top of yer big rudder post, and the tail would flow down, and the spirit of that 'orse would stay with yer and bring yer luck.*[13]

The lives of the boatpeople were continually affected by the methods of construction and the small businesses that serviced their needs. After about two years *Mafeking* would have to be docked for re-caulking and from then on every three years to repair worn timbers and, as the boat got older, to check for rot. This always meant an upheaval for the family who had to move all of their possessions into a 'change-boat' belonging to the dock. They could not afford to wait around the dock and often used the change boat to collect a new load while their boat was attended to and later transfer the contents by hand. Docking always occurred in the summer so that any rotten boards would not be disguised by frozen water.

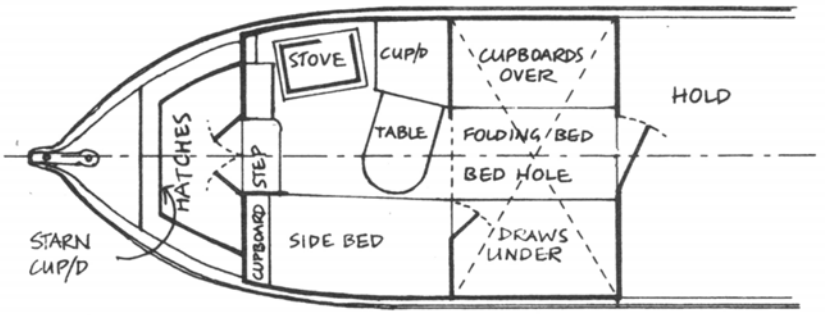
12. Wilson, R. (1972) *The number ones*. Kettering: Robert Wilson,

13. Stewart, S. (1994) *Ramlin Rose: the boatwoman's story*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.60.

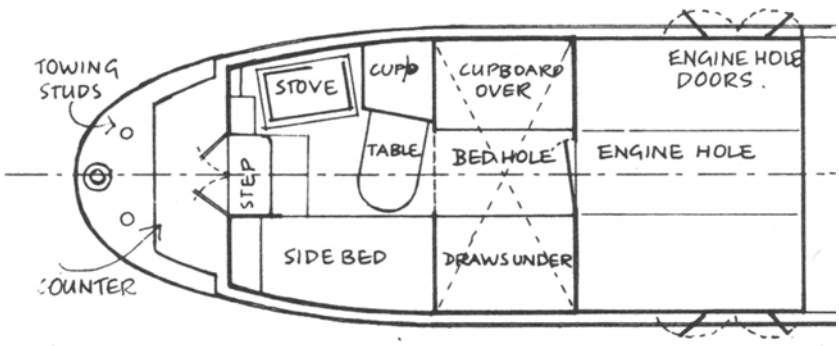
16. Harold Hood sitting on the side bed retouching flowers on the cross bed flap.

17. The tiller on *Mafeking* with a horse's tail attached, c.1950.

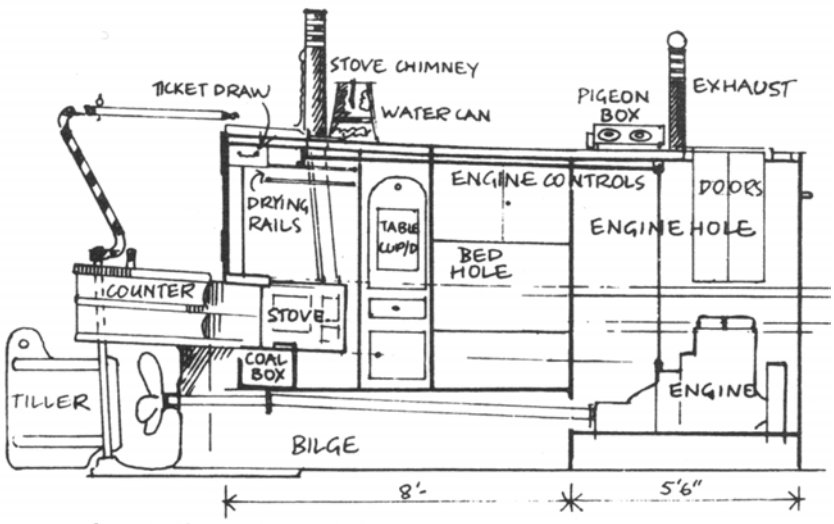
18. An empty working pair photographed at Buckby locks c.1910, heading back to the coalfields.



INTERIOR LAYOUT OF HORSE OR BUTTY BOAT



INTERIOR LAYOUT OF MOTOR BOAT



SOME EARLY MOTOR BOATS WERE CONVERTED HORSE BOATS AND HAD THE PROPELLER MORE EXPOSED

19. Cabin layout plans and section.

The Cabin

The canal acts of 1877 and 1884, designed to safeguard canal children and prevent overcrowding on live-aboard boats, also created a vague but important historical record of the occupants. It is from one of these health documents that *Mafeking*, registered at Hinckley as number 78, reveals four occupants living aboard at the time of its launch in 1902; two above the age of twelve and two below. In practice the number of people living aboard may have been more, as families hid additional children to avoid the strictures of the law. It was common for two adults and, sometimes, up to ten children to inhabit the tiny stern cabin.

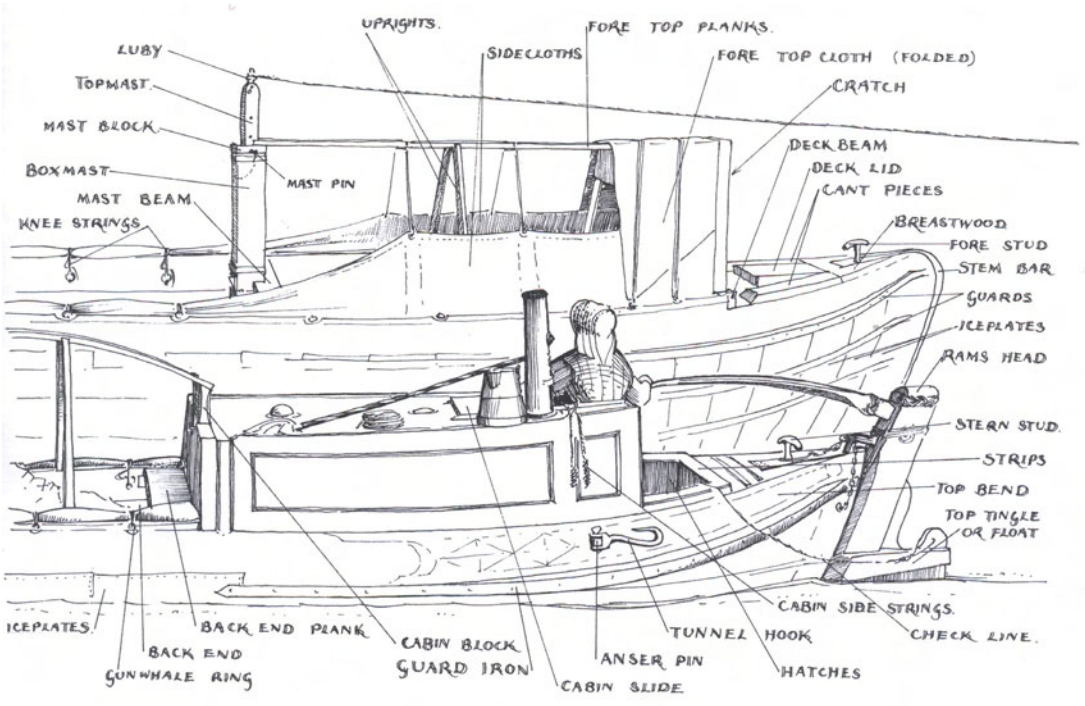
Layered lace-edged plates and crotchet work defined the narrow boat cabin's domesticity. It was promoted from utilitarian shed to a respected space lined with delicate picture china and stylised floral painting. Cupboard door panels were painted to become imaginary windows surveying distant mountain vistas. Folk-art roses mimicked the vibrancy of a flower arrangement that, in reality, had no place to stand. Without these fantasies the cabin was a dingy hole, pleasant only to the persistent bugs thriving in their humid air gaps.

Long before anyone had thought about living in a boat cabin the physical parameters that formed the space had already evolved. Entry was from the stern through two slim rectangular doors and a square roof hatch leading down a single step that was often the decorated end of a coal box. To prevent collision with the meanest hump back canal bridge the topsides sloped inwards, their roof height restricted so they could pass underneath even when the hull was unloaded and riding high out of the water. Hardly able to fully stand up the inhabitants contended with a claustrophobic width, set by the hull, of less than 7ft whilst a length of over 10ft ate into cargo capacity and ultimately income. Represented by a single wooden bulkhead, the spatial balance between the cabin and the hull, the domestic and utilitarian, was physically defined. The cargo hold, a 'backyard' accessed through a Wendy house door emblazoned with castle towers, was a useful place for hanging out washing and letting the kids run around but when fully laden with coal such an access point became the purveyor of a thick black dust that found its way into every gap.

The cooking range, emery clothed and filed to a shine or polished with lead blacking, became an indicator of pride and a prominent status symbol for the family. Every time someone stepped into the cabin it would be on their left hand side, just visible enough from the bank to be noticed and close to the cabin doors to warm the helmsman's legs. Representing a sizeable financial investment, this piece of equipment always belonged to the boat family even if the boat did not. Providing a constant supply of tea, stews and heat the range became the spiritual heart of the cabin.

If the stove was the spiritual centre of the cabin the table cupboard was the focal point. Just in front of the stove a floor to ceiling cupboard set at an angle to the central walkway provided a flap door that cantilevered into the room creating a table. Its comfortable rounded corners created an archway opening into the cupboard where the best plates and crockery were displayed. The cutlery drawer, just below the opening, completed the instant dining room. Yet another castle scene occupied the front of the flap maintaining its focal dominance even when closed. The rest of the space was occupied with various holes and cupboards all with special names, some

20. Details of the stern cabin and fore-end on a horse-drawn narrow boat.
(Drawing by Edward Paget-Tomlinson)

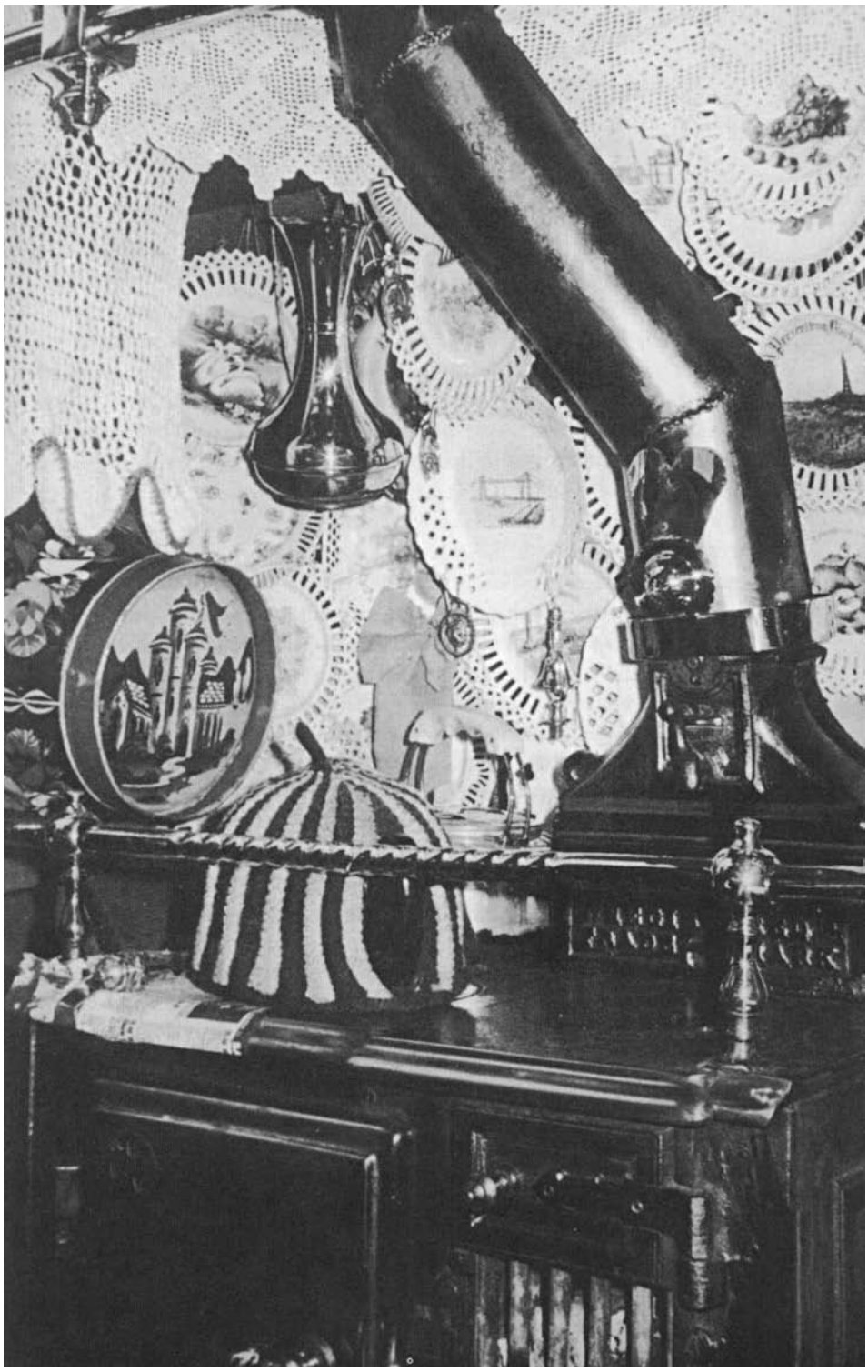


21. A glimpse inside the cabin of the narrow boat *Wye*.

22. Illustrations of canal life from the *Graphic* in 1875, showing the inside of a narrow boat cabin.

23. 'Tea-time on a Monkey Boat' from the *Illustrated London News*, 1874. 'Monkey Boat' is a slang term for a typical narrow boat.

24. Plates and crotchet work inside the cabin of the butty *Argo*.



25. Photograph of the cabin on the horse boat *Friendship,* which operated from the 1920's until 1959.

hard to explain like monkey-'ole where polish was stored, others obvious like soap-'ole and windlass-'ole.

Night saw a transformation of the space as a cupboard door swung down bridging the gangway from left to right simultaneously revealing a mattress and bedding. The resulting cross bed, blocking off the cargo bulkhead door, took up a generous third of the cabin. It was here, with the smell of cargo thick in the air, that the boatpeople created their most intimate space and romantically named it the bed-'ole. Not so bad if they were carrying barrels but unpleasant if it happened to be city rubbish or coal. Sheila Stewart's fictional character Rose Ramlin, based on the cumulative experiences of several real boatwomen, describes how she inhabited the cabin at night:

> *I slept in the cabin with Granny and old Man Statham. I slept on the sidebed the old 'uns slept on the crossbed in the bedroom. It wasn't really a room but once the crossbed was let down from the bed-'ole cupboard, the flockroll mattress made oop, and the crosher* [crotcheted] *curtains let to fall across that end of the cabin we always called it the bedroom.*[14]

The side bed was opposite the fire, nothing more than a bench with storage space underneath and a small door in the front to take a chamber pot. These were emptied in to the canal but were more pleasant to use than the privies of tenement blocks or the official sanitary stations provided by the canal companies.

It was the Midlands, waterways such as the Oxford and Shropshire Union canals, that became the centre for long distance boating; long journeys made more profitable thanks to the unpaid toil of a family crew.

Life Afloat

"Familiar to his mouth as household words"[15] became the Shakespearian inspiration for Charles Dickens' *Household Words Journal* of 1851. Keen to promote social reform philosophies he began editing the weekly publication after giving up on his radical paper The Daily News. The journal serialized Dickens' own novel, *Hard Times*, along with other works by Elizabeth Gaskell and Robert Stephen Hawker but also included short stories and writing on science, history and politics. The overall theme was always toward social reform. It attracted a young writer and theatre manager called John Hollingshead. In 1858, after embarking on a narrow boat journey between London and Birmingham, he produced a series of articles collectively titled *On The Canal*. His first observations aboard a narrow boat go against the evident prejudice of land society as he describes how:

> *Melancholy pictures of drunken brawls, improper language, constant fights, danger to life and property, hordes of licensed ruffians beyond the pale of law and order, which my cheerful friends had drawn the moment they heard of my intention to make an unprotected barge journey, all proved false before the experience of a few hours and shamefully false before the further experience of a few days.*[16]

14. Stewart, S. (1994) *Ramlin Rose: the boatwoman's story*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.14.

15. From Shakespeare, *Henry V*.

16. Hollingshead, J. (1973) *On the canal*. Stoke Bruerne: The Waterways Museum, p.23.

Hollingshead was travelling on the *Stourport* a particular kind of narrow boat known as a flyboat that worked around the clock, both day and night, shipping goods. The crew was all male and although they lived on the boat for much of the time it was not a permanent home and was only similar to family boats in terms of its layout. Hollingshead's detailed descriptions offer some of the earliest written evidence of a standardised cabin layout and the existence of an established folk art. They also provide an early account of living conditions and culture. He is complimentary about the crew of the *Stourport* and their standards of cleanliness and points out that:

> *Every inch of space is carefully economised. Everything is scrupulously neat and clean, and wherever a piece of metal is visible, that metal is sure to shine.*[17]

However, on his journey aboard the *Stourport* he encounters various family boats and his full account provides a detailed illustration of 1858 family boat culture:

> *There is the boatman, and his wife, a stout, sunburnt woman; and children, varying in number from two to ten, and in ages from three weeks to twelve years. The youngest of these… dirty, ragged, and stunted in growth, are confined in the close recesses of the cabin… When these helpless creatures reach five or six… they are… made useful to their thoughtless parents… as drivers of the horse… Not a week passes, but when one of these canal-children is drowned… and, painful as the incident is, it is too common to excite much observation.*[18]

As an outsider Hollingshead saw overcrowding and the exploitation of children when he observed family boats. It is a view that is supported by the personal accounts of William Henry Gibbins, recorded in an article by E. Corrie (1991), where he describes his childhood on a family boat some 45 years after Hollingshead's journey.[19] Bill Gibbins was born in 1913 on a family narrow boat in Coventry. The Gibbins family worked a pair of horse boats for the carrier L.B. Faulkner who owned and docked the vessels but charged the family rent for living aboard. It was a similar arrangement to that which the Moira Colliery had with the *Mafeking*'s inhabitants where the family paid around 9 shillings a week for each boat out of their wages. The different boats both worked on the same stretches of canal in the early 1900's and the world that Bill describes was shared by those living aboard *Mafeking*; it is probable that the boats passed one another at some time. Although the carrying company paid for major boat maintenance, the family had to fund the tow horses along with their gear and the ropes. At the age of four Bill's father built him a box to stand on so he could see over the cabin and steer the boat along the busy canals. Bill was the third out of nine children but despite such a large family his father allowed little money for looking after them, preferring to spend most of it on beer. As Bill got a little older his father expected the children to do most of the work, often staying in the pub himself and catching up with the boat later by train.

Hunger was a common problem and if cargo weights dropped below 65tons between the two boats the food situation became dire due to the corresponding drop in wages. Although, in the right conditions, spear fishing from the fore end provided some free food, Bill often had to resort to steeling Swede's or Turnips from the nearby

17. Hollingshead, J. (1973) *On the canal*. Stoke Bruerne: The Waterways Museum, p.30.

18. Hollingshead, J. (1973) *On the canal*. Stoke Bruerne: The Waterways Museum, p.31.

fields and describes using a fishing line baited with bread to snare ducks, pulling them into the boat as they went along. This was commonplace among many in the canal community but both the vegetables and ducks belonged to farmers and as a result boat people developed a bad reputation as thieves among the land community. Bill slept on one boat with three of his siblings whilst his parents and the younger children were in the other. As a result he could hide much of the illegal catch from his father who would take anything if he found it:

> *My dad used to say "you little bugger you, what have you had?" He didn't know how many* [ducks] *I'd got. I might tell him I'd caught three but keep another three out of sight. When we got to Birmingham he would sell them for 2/6d each but we never had any money; he wouldn't give us anything. So my brother Joe and I would sell three without dad finding out. If he got a shilling then he could get twelve pints of beer… But he wouldn't give us any.*[19]

Both boat equipment and cargo were regularly stolen and people snatched coal from the boat even when it was going along. For a while the family kept a dog to keep guard and control the booming rat population attracted by corn cargoes but it died after only a few years having, probably, been poisoned by thieves.

The water posed a continuous hazard for young children and adults alike. Bill was taught to swim the hard way when he was about four years old. His father stripped him and some of his siblings naked in the summertime, tying a line round their waste from the moving butty, and dropped them into the canal for ten or fifteen minutes. After instructing the child to "wave your arms and kick your feet"[20] he then swapped them over, eventually dispensing with the line entirely so the children had to swim to the bank. It seems a brutal technique, but swimming was essential for a child's survival on the canal and as Hollingshead's account suggests, drowning had always been commonplace. When a woman fell in it could take several people to pull her out, with layer upon layer of petticoats turning into a saturated dead weight.

Winter was the most hazardous time especially on the icy side of a lock. The paddles that let water in and out of the lock are usually near the gate on the very edge and often on the gates as well. They have a square spindle that can only be operated by a windlass handle that every boater carries, even today. These can slip off during vigorous winding, potentially, throwing a man off balance and into the water. The hazard is even greater if the paddle is half up and the lock emptying. Bill describes both he and his father being washed through the lock sluices and, astonishingly, surviving although it would be more common for people to be dragged under by the powerful currents and drown. Often the depth of the lock meant that a drowning person might go unnoticed especially if the location they entered the water had not been observed. Under such circumstance Bill's father looked for air bubbles and fished around with the long boat hook to rescue the unfortunate victim, consoling them with a drop of brandy.

Despite the hardships there were still things that Bill and his siblings looked forward to and enjoyed. When his mother went to the pub near Marsworth bottom lock to buy bread and cheese she would also purchase, for each of the children, a '1d prize packet' that contained a few badges, or marbles and some sweets. This was a rare acknowledgement that they were still children in a world where the young were expected to grow quickly and do adult work. Illiteracy prevented the family from enjoying

19. Corrie, E. (1991) A hard life. Waterways World, October, p.76.
On the decimalisation of Sterling one shilling (1/-) was equivalent to 5p and there were 12 pence (12d) to the shilling.

20. Corrie, E. (1991) A hard life. Waterways World, October, p.78.

26. A family and their working pair, *Water Lily* and *Forget Me Not*, at Braunston top lock c.1914.

27. Bill Gibbins at 78 photographed in 1991.

28. A typical large boating family with one child for every year of marriage, as was the case in the Gibbins family.

29. A boat girl photographed in her best clothes c.1900. The smacking whip, in her right hand, was used to give warning of approach to other boats and not to whip the horse. In her left hand is a fresh water can.

30. Bill Gibbins, as he left the canal aged 21, poses with his parents.

newspapers and books but there were cinemas at Moira and Measham by the canal and for 1d they could watch a silent film. Although cinema visits were many months apart this was a popular pastime for most canal people and offered an alternative to the pub, which was not a family activity.

In addition to steering and working the boats, the burden of domestic work was on Bill's mother. Although they were often poor and hungry she always kept the cabin clean and well decorated with the mandatory lace edged plates and lace that had now become a universal canal tradition:

> *The cabins were nice. They were all brasses with hanging up plates, ornaments and curtains. The floors were all scrubbed white. There were no carpets or anything; it was all scrub, scrub, scrub. My mother made the curtains and the lace curtains and tied them back with silk ribbons.*[21]

She made clothes for the whole family with the sewing machine in front of her on the cabin roof while simultaneously steering the boat. The canal people dressed differently to the rest of society and Bill's mother wore clothes that typified the canal women's taste of the era. She often wore shawls, bonnets and black beads along with plenty of gold finger rings, large hoop earrings and tied back plaited hair. The clothes were long with plenty of room for movement inside to allow for winding lock handles, pulling ropes and opening lock gates. An apron gave some protection from grease and dirt while a thick black leather belt held the windlass. Men often wore brown or blue bell bottomed cords with crocheted braces, a shirt and waistcoat. Trilbies or soft cloth caps were both worn and reinforced with cane to keep them in shape whilst a silk handkerchief was worn around the neck. Their belts were particularly important and, usually hand made by their wives, were sometimes elaborately decorated with multi coloured glass diamonds. In the winter old sacks, worn like a shawl over the shoulders, provided an extra layer of insulation while in rainy weather a thick coat simply absorbed the water before being left to dry by the fire. Steel toe capped pit boots with studded bottoms were worn by the men and children who would sometimes repair them with old traction engine belts found in nearby fields. Clogs were also popular, although Bill's Mother wore button boots that went half way up her leg.

Fed up with being exploited and underfed, Bill's family boating experience ended at the age of 13 when he left his parents and wandered along the towpath in search of better conditions. Finding occasional work here and there he kept himself going but ultimately left the canal world, even though there was no shortage of work at the time, and gained employment in a tile works on the land.

Although both Hollingshead and Bill Gibbins's account paint a relatively bleak picture of canal life there were social divisions within the canal community itself and not all people lived on the breadline.

21. Corrie, E. (1991) A hard life. Waterways World, October, p.75.

31. Ernest Carter, a young ‘Number One’, dressed in the fashion of a steamer crew-member.

No. 1's

Amongst canal society there were those profitable enough to afford their own boats and able to run their own business. Although, perhaps, never more in number than two or three hundred at any one time they became a considerable driving force behind the development of canal culture. Known as *Number Ones*:

> *These were the men and women who, above all, demanded and maintained the most complex standards of painted decoration on their boats.*[22]

They were very aware and proud of their independent status and regarded themselves as an elite. The decoration served to distinguish them from the canal people working for larger companies and enabled them to compete with other *Number Ones* for the best boat on the canal. Son followed father into the business sometimes becoming captain of a new working pair in his teens. This arrangement benefited everyone creating more space in which to accommodate a growing family as well as providing a greater income. Although the new pair would operate more or less independently the boats remained the father's responsibility placing the son under considerable social pressure to perform. Some businesses wouldn't even entrust their cargo to a captain under 21. Eventually the hard work and pressure paid off and the son could inherit his father's business.

The working day would start at around 5 a.m. by fetching the powerful shire horse from the stables and having breakfast, usually cooked bacon, before getting underway by 6am at the latest. Depending on the conditions, two loaded boats weighing about 60 tons, would expect to travel 25 miles during the day, slowing down considerably for locks. Sometimes an earlier start was necessary, to overtake a boat in front or to get the first tug through a tunnel, and this meant getting up as early as 2 a.m. The horse never pulled the boat much faster than 2m.p.h., half the speed that modern canal boats are permitted to cruise, and wouldn't stop until around 9 p.m. Although this seems a long number of hours to work an animal, once the boat was underway it was relatively easy to keep moving under its own momentum.

Flights of locks created harder work with boats constantly stopping and starting. On canals with single width locks, that could only take one boat at a time, the horse boat went first leaving the butty to be pulled by hand between the closely spaced locks, a process known a bow hauling. Under these circumstances the horse had its load halved and the humans had to take some extra strain. The condition of the horse affected the speed of work and income of the family and, as a result, it was well fed and groomed being kept overnight in the stables provided every 5miles along the canal. The same standard of decoration present on the cabin was bestowed on the horses equipment, its harness brightly painted on the wooden parts and the nose tin treated in much the same way as the cabin water can. In the summer they would wear decorative crotched ear caps with tassels to keep off the heat and flies. Some families would display their horses at local boat shows, dressing them up with brasses and exhibiting them as another signifier of pride and status.

All boat people, but particularly the *Number Ones*, were vulnerable to hold ups, having to fund non-working days out of their own pocket's. A certain amount of their pay

22. Lewery, T. (1996) Flowers afloat: folk artists of the canals. Newton Abbot: David and Charles, p.83.

32. Rose Ward, with a tow horse. The lace cap on the horse's head provided some protection from the sun and flies.

had to be saved to support them through times when the Mills or Coalmines were on annual holidays and to pay boat yard bills at least every 2-3years. In the winter the slow flowing water was prone to freezing and, despite the best efforts of icebreaker boats, it wasn't uncommon for the canal to become un-navigable. Severe winters always caused a financial problem and in 1929 a freeze of eleven weeks forced many boatmen to work on the land to feed their families. As well as being financially debilitating, wooden boats could be badly damaged if frozen-in and ice had to be broken out from around the hull every morning to prevent crushing. But apart from these hardships the Number One's could expect around £21-22 for delivering a double load of coal in the 1930's. After they had paid for tunnels tugs, horse food, canal tolls and their own supplies, they were left with a comparatively comfortable salary, there were even some perks. The common law of the canals allowed a boatman to take fuel from his own cargo for personal heating and cooking purposes and they were also exempt from rates. Some families found it possible to take the odd seaside holiday to Brighton, perhaps a source of the lace-edged plates and other knick-knacks used to pretty up the cabin.

Canal Culture

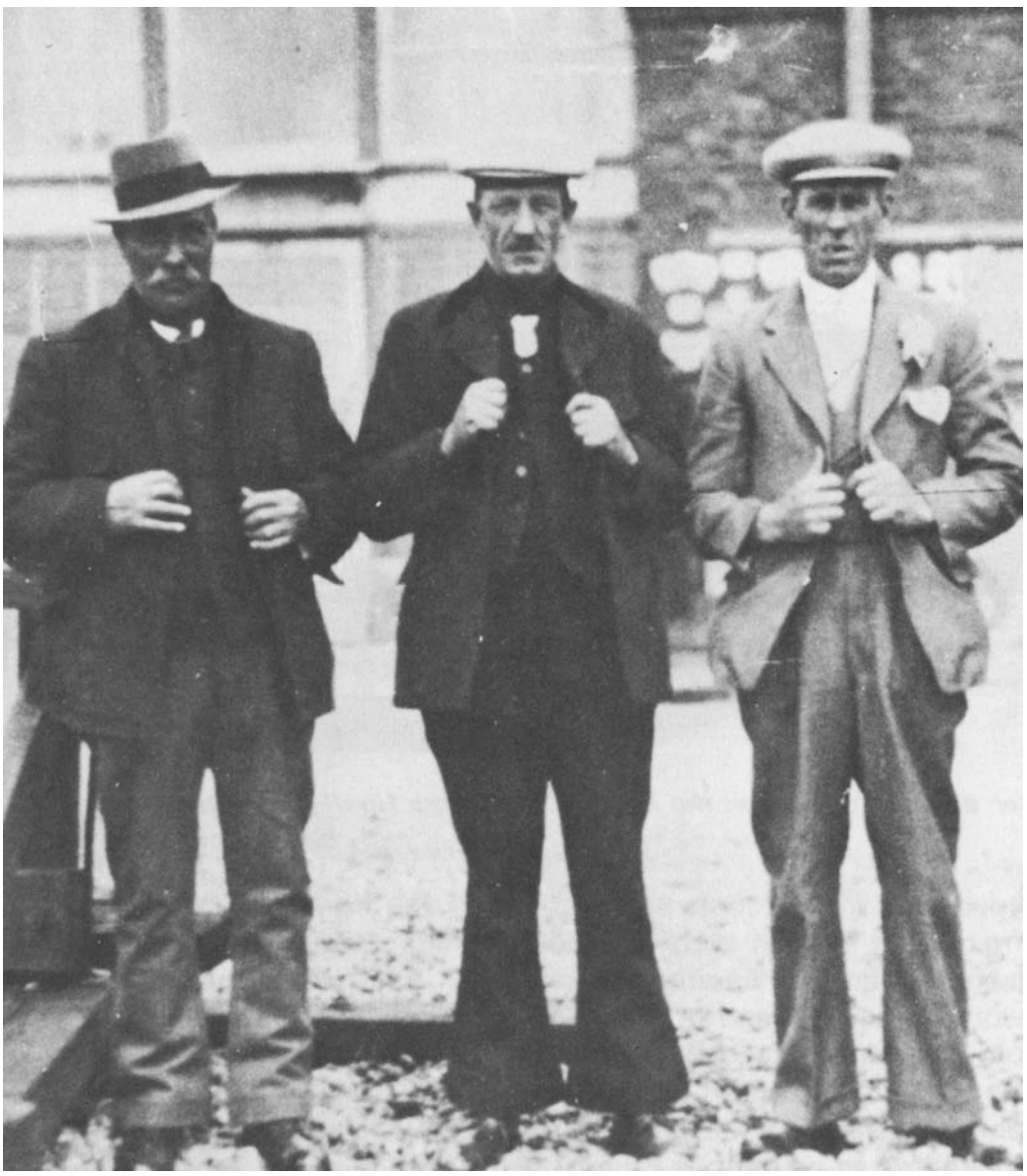
> *Perhaps it was some old wandering Romany who exchanged his caravan for a narrow boat… and adorned the walls of his new home with… fairy-tale castles in the Carpathians.*[23]

The canal revivalist and author Rolt expressed the commonly held belief in a Gypsy link to narrow boat life. This idea was based on canal folk art and assumed the presence of castles, that appeared stylistically foreign, was evidence enough of a link to eastern European Gypsies. It was also widely believed that some Gypsies may have worked on the Bridgewater canal and decided upon narrow boat living as a profitable change in lifestyle. After all, they were used to horses and living in small spaces that constantly moved.

But there appears to be little evidence to support this idea. The Bridgewater canal was only short when it was first opened in 1759 and there would have been little need for living aboard the boats when journeys took less than a day to complete. It seems unlikely that culturally nomadic people would have suddenly limited themselves to travelling up and down a few miles of canal everyday. As Tomlinson has suggested, the depression of 1815 spawned the live aboard culture when boat captain's moved their families onto the boats to cut overheads. Before this point there is little evidence of family boating.

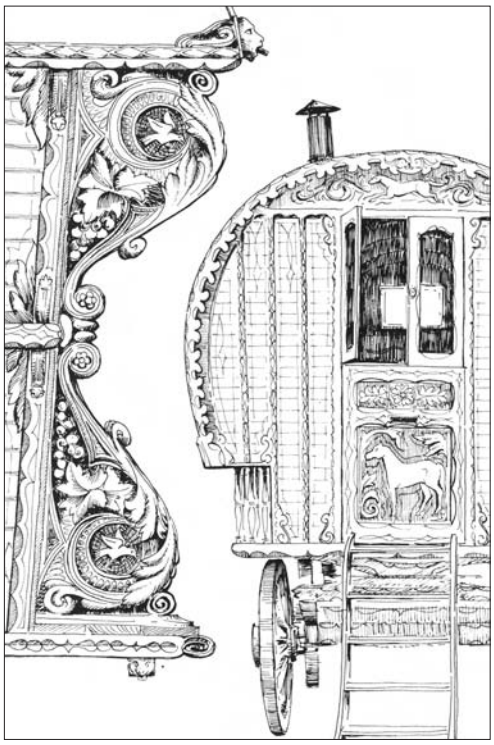
We know from Hollingshead's description that a canal folk art was already well established by his journey in 1858. At this time the Gypsies were still in the process of adopting caravans and moving away from tents so it seems implausible that the artwork on boats developed from Gypsy caravan art. On closer inspection the artwork exhibited by these new wagons existed in another league of sophistication to boat folk art. The wagons themselves feature large amounts of relief woodcarving that never appears on narrow boats and the general motifs appear to be late Victorian baroque and less naturalistic in style, again, providing no similarity to boat decoration. As the

23. Rolt, L.T.C. (1991) Narrow boat. Stroud: Sutton, p.24.



33. ‘Number Ones’ on holiday in Brighton c.1930 posing for a beach photographer.

34. A coal yard at Hayfield Wharf, Oxford, served by the Oxford Canal ‘Number Ones’.



35. Late Victorian Baroque motifs in English Gypsy caravan decoration c.1850.

36. An illustration of the narrow boat *Pride of the Thames* from *Life on the Upper Thames,* 1875. It provides some early evidence of canal paintwork conventions.

canal art historian A.J. Lewery states:

> *The whole effect could be an echo of an old mythology, an effect that is entirely missing in boat decoration.*[24]

Canal art is a much debated and rich subject in its own right, but it is worth considering briefly in greater detail as it illustrates how:

> *The academically sanctioned art of the educated elite percolated down to the lower classes through the medium of cheap mass-produced household items and ornaments – coal scuttles, tea caddies and thousands of tea trays.*[25]

Fashionable taste was reinterpreted by the boat people and became one of the most characteristic signifiers of their culture.

Painting was a quick and cheap way to turn the utilitarian world of the canal into something precious and beautiful. Everything that provided a suitable surface was covered with some sort of artwork and this treatment extended to the tools and equipment as much the boat itself. The painting techniques and styles used were diverse in both origin and function. The only parts of the boat to escape the painter's brush were the cargo hold and the majority of the hull, which had to be blacked with bituminous paint.

Although there is no hard evidence to support a singular origin for canal folk art, Lewery tentatively argues in favour of several possibilities. Between 1760 and 1780 painted white iron clock dials took over from engraved brass. The dials and surrounds were painted with crude but slick picturesque images and flowers. The fact that most of these dials and surrounds were mass-produced and painted in Birmingham, the heart of the canal system, suggests the presence of many commercial painters in the area, inevitably close to the canal. In addition, the new type of clock face had become widely fashionable with the working classes by 1820, a time when people were moving onto the canals. It is feasible that, even if the clocks were left behind, the decorative tastes were kept in mind.

Japanning, originally developed to mimic Chinese and Japanese lacquer work imported in the 17th century, evolved into a thriving trade spreading from South Wales through to Birmingham employing scores of skilful painters. Papier Mache furniture, ornaments and tin boxes were among the many products produced all swathed in flowers and basic imitations of the fashionable art of the time. Again the high concentration of commercial painters using similar decorative subject matter around the Birmingham area surely had an influence on the emerging canal community?

Worcester, Measham, London, Derby and Staffordshire all had potteries right on the canal and were dependent on it for raw materials and for shipping out their finished products. Many canal people would have been regularly exposed to the decorative fashions of pottery decoration and skilled painters were in high concentration around these areas as well. It provides another influence that the canal people may have drawn on.

Finally, some of the most similar looking scenes to the castle on the cabin sides are to be found in the glass paintings that swamped the cheap end of the market around the mid-nineteenth century. Many survive and some believe they are German

24. Lewery, A.J. (2005) *The art of the narrow boat painters*. 1st Paperback ed. Newton Abbot: David and Charles, p.27.

25. Lewery, T. (1996) *Flowers afloat: folk artists of the canals*. Newton Abbot: David and Charles, p.42.

37. *Top Left:* A freshwater can dated 1896, painted with a variety of natural looking flowers, a sailing boat and, also, a castle (out of view).

38. *Top Right:* A pre-war freshwater can painted with stylised roses and a typical castle scene with bridge, lake and mountains. The painter of this can considered the mountains to be a representation of slag heaps.

39. *Bottom Left:* A freshwater can dating from the early 1970's. The paintwork is dashed and crude compared to the 1896 example.

40. *Bottom Right:* A dipping bowl which would have been used to scoop water from the canal for shaving, pealing potatoes or scrubbing. Unusually, The *Mayflower* is painted on the bottom.

41. Naive painting on a cabin stool depicting a typical castle scene.

42. Stylised roses on a cabin block (See fig. 20 on p.26).

although there is, surprisingly, no universal agreement on their origin. The image is painted onto the back of the glass and is of a low technical standard. The techniques are rapid and stylised while the subject matter features castles, mountains, lakes, boats and sometimes cottages. These were cheap and cheerful 'nick-knacks that might well have been appreciated by boat people but could practically not have been hung in a cabin so were, perhaps mimicked by painting directly on to the wall.

This circumstantial evidence suggests that local industry, working in close proximity to the canals, was the conduit through which the decorative traditions of canal culture evolved and that a foreign source, such as an eastern European or Gypsy influence, is less probable.

A Change of Identity

The residents of *Mafeking* were familiar with a transient life style, constantly cruising and moving out of their boats every three years for maintenance, but on occasion a far more significant change would affect their lives. Carrying companies, such as the Moira Colliery, would part exchange their aging vessels a few years before their thirty-year lifespan was complete, selling them onto other boatyards as cheap second hand vessels. A family would then be forced to move onto a new boat regardless of any emotional ties they may have had to their old boat.

It was the practice of gauging that created traceable records of a boat's history. Gauging was a method of ascertaining a boat's cargo weight by measuring its freeboard (i.e. how much of the hull was above the water line). Due to the waterways being owned by different companies, a toll would have to be paid whenever a boat changed canals during its journey. An official would note down the name, date and gauging details of the boat on a certificate. Although these documents do still exist for many boats tracing them can be difficult and many are kept by individuals or in private archives. However, some of *Mafeking's* gauging certificates are extant and, if read alongside information from the Canal Act health records, show that in her 27th year she was sold on to a boatyard called Sephtons at Tusses Bridge, just outside Coventry on the Oxford Canal. That boat then lost its identity and was renamed *Victory* and it can only be imagined, after working for a further three or four years, became fuel for a steam chest.

But this was not the end of *Mafeking's* story. Moira Colliery replaced their loss with a new wooden butty in January 1929 registered at Coventry as number 515. She inherited her predecessor's identity, continuing where old *Mafeking* had left off, and had an altogether more interesting life ahead of her. Only twelve years after taking over from her namesake, *Mafeking* was sold onto yet another large carrying company, the Samuel Barlow Coal Co., in the new year of 1941. For nine more years she continued carrying coal and being lived on in much the same way as she had been for decades but as the forties came to a close the canals were losing out to competition from the railways. In 1950, as Barlow's began to expand their fleet of motor vehicles, *Mafeking*, now a mature butty of 21 years, became surplus to requirements.

Change on the Canals

Acting as a non-oil dependant infrastructure, the Second World War engaged the canals in a final burst of activity. The call up of many canal men, captains' and dredging teams alike, placed the burden of boat operation on wives and daughters' while working the boats became increasingly difficult. The lack of maintenance allowed the channels to silt up, clogging with weed, and paddle gears on locks became perilously stiff. During the war many civilian women volunteered and were trained in weeks to do a job that benefited from a lifetimes experience. They were successful and generally accepted as they transferred themselves from often middle class backgrounds into a culture that had shunned the land for generations.

When the war was won, the canals had been over used, under maintained and were hardly able to sustain the last working pairs who held on to the only existence they had ever known. The railways bought up entire canals only to let them languish and speed up their demise. Many of the boat people migrated to the factories abandoning their floating homes, sometime leaving them to sink. Meanwhile a new generation of entrepreneurs and 'romantics' were seeing the canals from a different perspective. Dilapidation and undergrowth made, what was once dangerous and undesirable, soft and poignant and the remaining boat people, previously held in suspicion by the land community, were now a rare and novel sight to marvel at.

It is ironic that this functional transport infrastructure came to represent notions of conservation and idealized rural England in retreat:

> I *saw in the course of my 1947 voyage… fungus-like outcroppings of those tin huts called 'pre-fabs'; new factories in the fields while the land's fertility was squandered in the smoke of straw fires and woodlands were clear felled.*[26]

Some years previous to the publication of *Narrow Boat* a relative of Rolt had converted the entirety of a working boat into habitable space thus experimenting with the idea of the canals as a leisure-park. The romantic writings of Rolt along with the support of celebrities such as Sir John Betjeman drew public attention to the mysterious potential of a ruinous canal network. General interest and economic potential was sufficient for the government to take notice and in 1962 the British Waterways Board was founded. This regulatory body would take responsibility for the canal network and the fledgling leisure industry growing up around it.

26. Rolt, L.T.C. (1991) *Narrow boat*. 2nd ed. Stroud: Sutton, preface to 2nd ed.

43. Ruined lock on the Ashton Canal, Manchester in the 1960's.

The Answer to Abandonment

To contemplate setting up a hotel business on the 1950's canal network required a lot of vision and courage. Many areas were almost un-navigable, clogged with thick weed, and most boat people had left because of their inability to make money. With locks in a state of disrepair and little in the way of sanitation (i.e. water points and pumps out for holding tanks) journeys would prove long and hard. But it was a new sort of boat that would navigate this decaying system. Speed was no longer critical to the journey, in fact quite the reverse, because the new human cargo was paying to relax and see the countryside at a leisurely pace. The shortage of water supplies and sanitation wasn't a problem because the boat now had room for holding tanks. A human cargo could use the full length of the converted hold while the crew stayed in the old cabin. This method of conversion kept the original cabin dimensions but the craft were now weighed down enough with ballast to enable a much more comfortable roof height on the converted cargo hold and still pass under the bridges.

That year, a narrow boat rally in Market Harborough was to initiate hotel and leisure boating on the canals. Amongst the hundred or so craft on display were the first hotel boats, *Wanderer* and *Wayfarer*. Also at the event was an ex-musician and already long time live-aboard called Tom Whitley. Since 1946 Tom and his wife, Doris, had lived on a converted sailing barge in Hammersmith where Tom pursued a successful career as an oboist playing with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and London Philharmonic. Deteriorating eyesight intervened prompting the couple to rethink their lifestyle. After reading Rolt's book, *Narrow Boat*, they made plans to explore the canal system buying the ex-steamer, *Prince*, from the Oxford Co-op and turning it into a new home. Originally built in 1898, *Prince* had been worked as a flyboat for one of the biggest carrying companies (Fellows, Morton and Clayton) but had subsequently been fitted with a diesel engine making it more suitable for a conversion.

Tom and his wife were not the only people to be influenced by Rolt's book, and several years previously the author and theatre critic, Robert Aickman had been considering the canal system. His ideas were not so much an overnight revelation as a gradual fascination that started when he was young walking along the towpath of the Grand Union with his family. His career regularly took him to Stratford-upon-Avon where he saw the derelict Stratford canal. Preliminary meetings with Rolt lead them to found the Inland Waterways Association (IWA), the inauguration of which took place at his London home in 1946 and they launched themselves into the process of publicising the network, producing a booklet entitled *The Future of the Waterways*. Following their drive for publicity, MP's joined up and the house of Lords took an interest as the group continued to apply pressure by resisting neglect, pushing for restoration and keeping public interest alive. By the time of the Market Harborough Festival the IWA had established its foundations:

> *The 1950 festival changed the entire prospect for the waterways of Britain… It would hardly be too much to say that an entire new form of public recreation entered history at Market Harborough.*[27]

By 1949 Tom and Doris had sold their barge, moving aboard *Prince* to start

27. Aickman quoted by Squires, R. (1979) *Canals revived: the story of the waterways restoration movement*. Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, p.39.

44. *Prince* towing *Mafeking* in 1955.

45. *Prince* and *Mafeking* moored in the countryside.

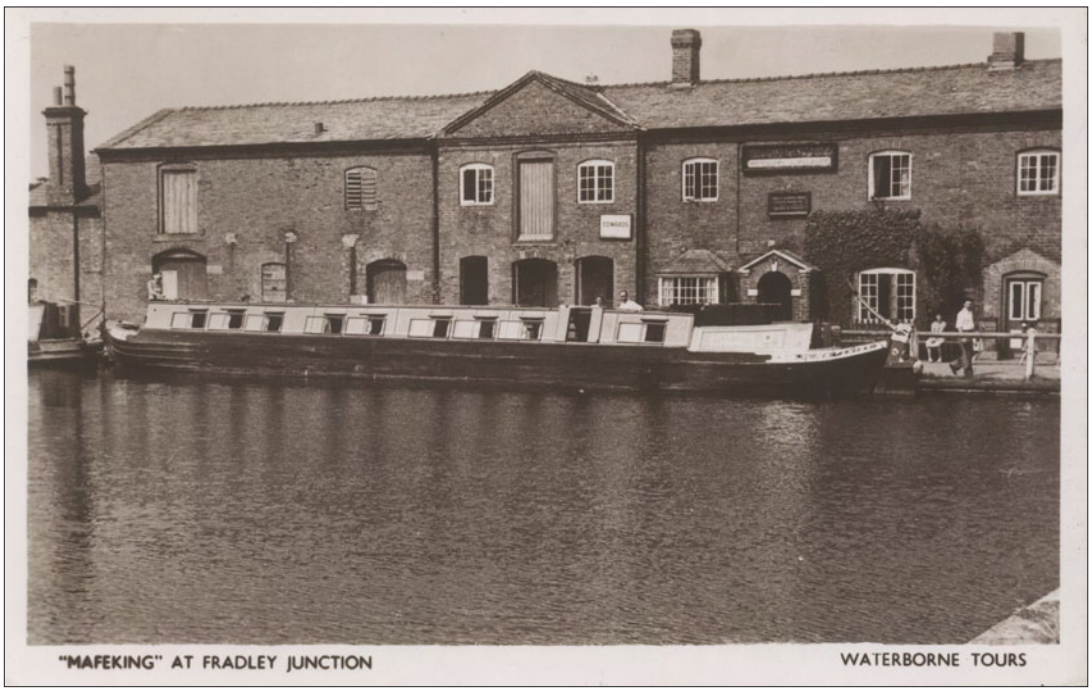
46. Tom and Doris Whitley photographed in November 1978.

a new life. Cruising around the empty waterways, Tom saw the potential in running a second boat that could generate some income as a floating 'hotel', a business that could follow them on their explorations. At the rally he met other likeminded couples and seeing *Wanderer* and *Wayfarer* clarified his business plans. In the autumn Tom purchased *Mafeking* from the Samuel Barlow Coal Co. and wasted no time in converting her, ready for business the following spring. Unlike *Wanderer* and *Wayfarer*, both motorised, *Prince* and *Mafeking* acted in the tradition of a working pair requiring more skill and effort to control but allowing the guests to experience the narrow boating techniques once so fundamental to narrow boat life. Their varied and adventurous journeys were exciting for guests and meant that the Whitley's could continue with their exploration of the canals, the thing that had initially attracted them to the lifestyle. Tom reported back his experiences to Aickman, *Prince* and *Mafeking* becoming unofficial 'scouts' on the network, feeding the IWA with information about the conditions of each waterway and highlighting any problems that needed to be addressed. As a spin off from his regular reports to Aickman Tom, along with other hotel boat operators, founded the Association of Pleasure Craft Operators (APCO). He held the first meeting on *Prince* in December 1953 where the five hire and trip boat operators present elected Tom as chairman. As a group they met with the British Waterways Board chairman to discuss the standardization of tolls across the network and established a relationship that continues to the present day.

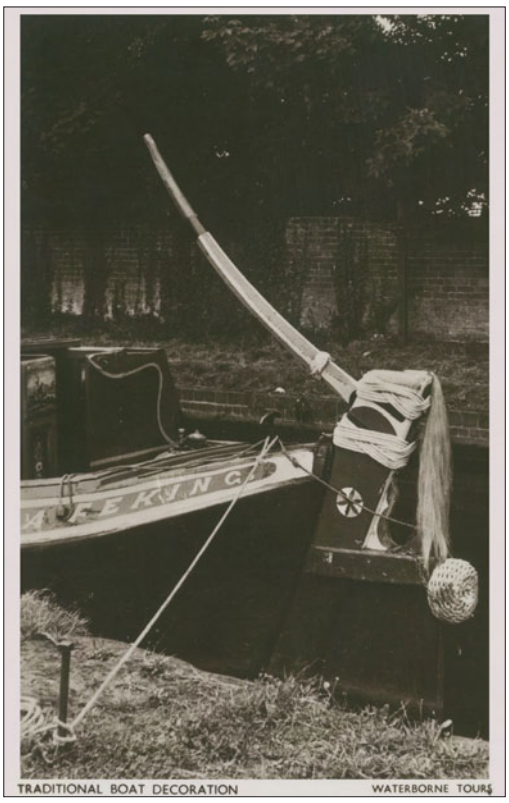
Whilst *Wanderer* and *Wayfarer* struggled to make a profit and changed hands Tom and Doris's business did well and after a successful first season they set up their headquarters in a Wharf building at Penkridge. Tom ensured a relaxed atmosphere was maintained by keeping his crew happy. Cruising only took place during the morning to allow the crew time to rest after lunch and give the guests an opportunity to walk off any cabin fever. Similarly, in the evening, dinner was less lavish and served earlier than on other hotel boats thus freeing-up the cook and the guest's evenings.

The hotel boat revolution stimulated experimentation with full-length cabin layouts. Designs started off on an ad-hoc basis and early boats were not particularly luxurious or even comfortable. The passengers generally regarded the holidays in much the same way as camping and were prepared to put up with a certain level of 'discomfort'. *Mafeking* took eight guests in four twin bunks and could also accommodate additional crew while leaving room for a galley, dining area and saloon amidships. It was an architect, Michael Rogers, who presented a more considered approach to hotel boat design. He too had been present at the Market Harborough rally, with his working boat *Mabel*, where he met many other future hotel boat operators. As a newly qualified architect from London, he had bought *Mabel* as a student, with the intention of making her into his London home but post war wood shortages thwarted his early conversion efforts.

For a time he worked *Mabel* on the Oxford Canal carrying coal for S.E. Barlow, eventually purchasing a butty called *Forget-me-not* to share the load. His work, although financially unprofitable, was culturally educational allowing him to absorb the remnant of working boat culture by befriending the last real narrow boat families. As culturally enlightening as it was, the economic limitations of coal carrying became too much and Michael decided to try his hand at hotel boating as a potentially more profitable activity. Converting both boats at once proved too expensive so *Mabel*, being a motor, was redesigned first and worked alone for several seasons. *Forget-me-not* took a

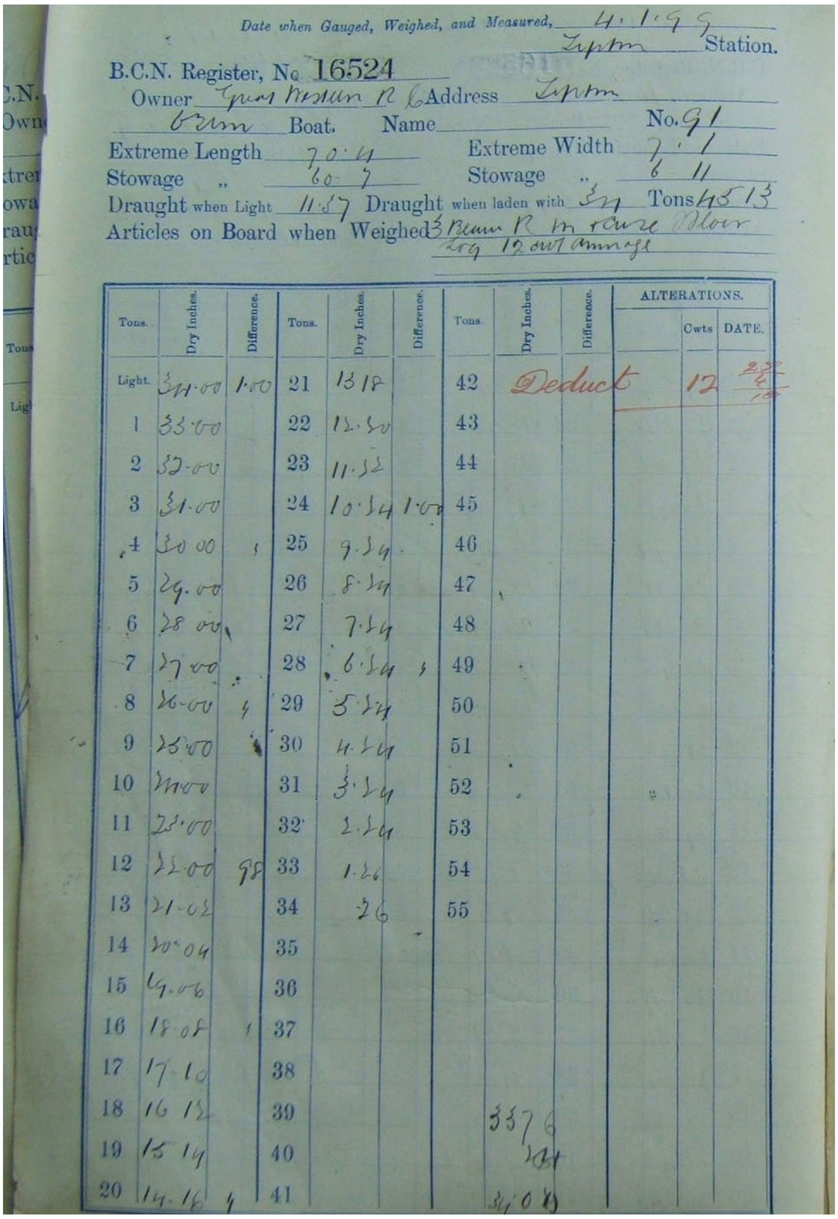


47. 48. & 49. Three 1950's postcards of *Mafeking* as a hotel boat. These were produced by Tom and Doris's company, Waterborne Tours.



TRADITIONAL BOAT DECORATION WATERBORNE TOURS

CORNER OF SALOON, "MAFEKING" WATERBORNE TOURS



Date when Gauged, Weighed, and Measured, 4.1.99
Tipton Station.

B.C.N. Register, No 16524
Owner Great Western R C Address Tipton
Open Boat. Name No. 91
Extreme Length 70.4 Extreme Width 7.1
Stowage " 60.7 Stowage " 6.11
Draught when Light 11.57 Draught when laden with 34 Tons 45 13
Articles on Board when Weighed 3 Beam [illegible] [illegible] 12 cwt [illegible]

Tons.	Dry Inches.	Difference.	Tons.	Dry Inches.	Difference.	Tons.	Dry Inches.	Difference.	ALTERATIONS.	Cwts	DATE.
Light	34.00	1.00	21	13.18		42	Deduct			12	[illegible]
1	33.00		22	12.30		43					
2	32.00		23	11.32		44					
3	31.00		24	10.34	1.00	45					
4	30.00		25	9.34		46					
5	29.00		26	8.34		47					
6	28.00		27	7.34		48					
7	27.00		28	6.34		49					
8	26.00		29	5.34		50					
9	25.00		30	4.34		51					
10	24.00		31	3.34		52					
11	23.00		32	2.34		53					
12	22.00	98	33	1.36		54					
13	21.02		34	.36		55					
14	20.04		35								
15	19.06		36								
16	18.08		37								
17	17.10		38								
18	16.12		39								
19	15.14		40								
20	14.16		41								

50. An original gauging certificate for *Number 91*, dated 4th January 1899.

51. Tom and Doris Whitley with guests aboard iron *Mafeking*, which took over as a hotel boat from its wooden namesake in 1958.

further two years of work at Tooley's yard in Banbury, and eventually Michael was given free reign of their workshop and facilities to get the job done. On her completion in 1957 *Mabel* and *Forget-me-not* were marketed as 'architect designed and built.'[28] The accommodation was spread across both of the boats with cabins for six guests in each. *Mabel* also contained the lounge whilst the butty housed a dining area and galley. Michael introduced clearstory windows giving the craft a unique appearance and although this particular feature didn't seem to catch on, his basic plan can still be seen today on many commercial boats.

Hotel boating created a way for people to appreciate the canal network when it was difficult for the general public to navigate on their own. Its roots are heavily intertwined with the canal restoration movement, meaning that *Mafeking* played a small but significant part in this regeneration. Although there are still hotel boats operating today, the well-maintained waterways are less difficult to navigate and self-hire boats dominate the leisure industry. Anyone can now explore the canal system on their own terms and this tourism continues to keep the network healthy and prosperous.

Iron Mafeking

When *Mafeking* reached her 29th year she became too costly for the Whitleys to maintain and a replacement to the wooden hotel boat had to be found. It came in the form of an iron narrow boat, identified as *Number 91*, and bought for £50 from British Railways. This vessel, unlike its wooden cabin boat predecessors, had never been inhabited and didn't even posses a cabin. It had been a day boat or 'Joey' operating over short distances along the numerous canals that make up the Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN). Although built to the same dimensions as the wooden boats, iron vessels utilised different construction methods that required expensive technology only available in the industrial centres. The day boats lacked the attention lavished on their long distance cousins and, as a result, have been overlooked by the writers of romantic canal fiction and many historians. However, their history is a fundamental part of the canal age that demonstrates an alternative strategy for narrow boat carrying, one that outlived long distance canal carrying and continued profitably into the railway era. This iron boat had a strong hull, requiring less maintenance than a wooden boat, and provided ample room for conversion into a hotel boat. *Number 91* was renamed *Mafeking*, a title that was, by remarkable coincidence, quite appropriate as it had been built in 1899, the same year as the siege of *Mafeking*, and was older than its original namesake of 1902.

28. Bolton, D. (1995) Canal pioneers: Michael Rogers. *Waterways World*, April, pp.50-54.

52. *Top:* A Bantock ‘Station Boat’ with identical construction to *Mafeking*. This is how *Mafeking* might have looked in the early 1900’s.

53. Thomas Bantock (1823-1895).

After a journey passing near Birmingham in the autumn of 1832, a 13 year-old *Princ*ess Victoria wrote in her journal:

> *The men, women, children, country and houses are all black… The country is very desolate everywhere… intermingled with wretched huts and little ragged children.*[29]

It was into this urban excrescence of choking smog that a young Scotsman called Thomas Bantock was sent. Having grown up in a small Scottish village not far from Inverness, Bantock must have recoiled in horror when he arrived in Wolverhampton at the age of 26. Perhaps it was his strong Presbyterian religion that bolstered him in those formative years or maybe he was eager to get a piece of the industrial action; either way the bright but poor Thomas was not one to pass up a business opportunity.

After leaving education at 16 it can only be imagined that the former prize winning schoolboy found employment, involving himself in repair work on the nearby Caledonian Canal. Whatever he did impressed the Trustees of the Duke of Bridgewater and his foot was in the door. It was as an Agent of the Trustees that he moved to the, concisely nick-named, 'Black Country' and in characteristically bold fashion decided that there was little future in the canals as an independent infrastructure. This was a canny decision made all the more profound considering Birmingham was riddled with 35 miles of waterway within its boundaries and his fledgling career had been facilitated, courtesy of that original canal entrepreneur Francis Edgerton. The Birmingham Canal Navigations, or BCN as they became collectively known, were the wheezing bronchiole tubes of Birmingham's insatiable activity. They had developed into a mass of public and private waterways many of which lead straight to the factory floors and furnaces.

In understanding the futility of long distance canal carrying in the face of railway competition, Bantock also understood the weakness of the steam train. After all, railway lines simply couldn't cut deep into the city's well-established fabric delivering the 'door-to-door' service that the BCN managed so well. The answer then, was not to abandon canals, in the process turning traitor to the Trustees and selling out to the railways, far from it. Instead the railway and the canal would become conjoined in an unlikely marriage of convenience. It was with the Great Western Railway Company that Thomas finally struck a valuable contract in 1851. Coal and goods would be brought to the edge of the city by steam train whereupon they would be transferred via new 'canal exchange basins' onto utilitarian iron narrow boats or 'station boats' for transportation to their inner city destination. The train would leave carrying manufactured goods carried directly from the factories. It was a progressive success that assured him promotion to District Agent by the Trustees whilst opening a new avenue of independent work through the Railway Company.

At 38, principles still in tact, he turned his hand to politics being elected as a Liberal to one of the poorest wards in Wolverhampton. Ten years later, faith stronger than ever, he stood for mayor despite Tory suspicion over, what they saw as, the inferior form of Christianity that drove his social conscience. But religion wasn't the only problem with Bantock in Tory eyes. Now, in a finely cut waistcoat, jacket and bow

29. Schama, S. (2003) A history of Britain: 1776-2000 the fate of empire. London: BBC Worldwide, p.118.

tie, sporting a well-trimmed beard it was easy to forget that this Bantock was once the humble son of a poor gamekeeper. Did the Tory dissenters, sneering at his candidacy across the council chamber, sense something dangerous or even revolutionary in Bantock? But Thomas was elected and hadn't forgotten those humble Scottish origins. Within his first year, against a backdrop of media cries complaining: "that working men" would "get into the town council"[30] Wolverhampton was amongst the first towns to bring in the Education Act of 1870. That year was bitterly cold and those "little ragged children", the inhabitants of Victoria's perceived "wretched huts", were unable to work outside in the sore inducing hoarfrost. As the town's first free library prepared to open, Thomas personally funded handouts of oatmeal and bread to relieve the worst suffering, encouraging his fellow councillors to follow suit.

As Thomas branched into politics for the first time, the heady days of Mayoral Office still in the future, he took a dramatic leap in his professional career. Confident in his abilities, equipped with extensive experience, he resigned his previous post and went into business. Thomas Bantock & Co. would become a diverse little industrial empire eventually encapsulating several coalmines, an iron foundry or two and a wagon and boat building yard. Bantock's boats would end up all over the system, the company having constructed hundreds of craft adding to the thousands of day-boats or 'Joey's' on the system. These vessels made wooden butties look delicate with, their constant need for docking, and lacking fancy paintwork they were often very utilitarian in appearance.

They operated along the short distances of the BCN and had no requirement for live aboard crew, travelling short distances of around 30miles or less. Carriers often contracted out the working of the boats to companies known as 'Steerers'. Men were hired as required on a casual daily basis and assigned two to a boat, one to steer the other to lead the horse. The boatmen would take a loaded vessel to its destination and simply leave it and its load as floating storage then move on to the next boat, which could be a considerable distance away. As a result the pride that saw the long distance boats adorned with decoration was more or less non-existent on the day-boats. Essential detachable items were the towing mast, the helm and tiller, a stove and a water can moved around with each different crew, the heavier of these articles being attached to the horse and dragged between boats at every changeover. In open boats a stove was not practical so fire buckets provided the warmth instead, nothing more than a tin can with some holes in the bottom

In addition to horse drawn towing, the day-boats were often strapped together in long trains for transportation and pulled by motorised tugs instead of horses. A system of hand signals and whistles helped the different 'Steerers' to communicate with the tug driver. It's as if these boats had more in common with the railway than the canal culture of the rest of the system and boats like *Mafeking* were still working well after the last *Number Ones* had sold out and the canal system was generally failing. These simple horse drawn boats were still operating in a commercially viable way even as the motorways were establishing themselves, the large company T & S Element only stopped work when its stables were demolished to accommodate a new road.

Despite their general utilitarian appearance there were many variations in the shape of day boats and they were often built out of wood as well as iron or sometimes both. The most basic had straight stem and stern posts and their iron plates were overlapped and riveted, as opposed to butt-jointed, thus saving time and money during

30. Hickman, P. et al. (2007) Bantock house. *Bantock house* [online]. Available from: http://www.localhistory.scit.wlv.ac.uk/articles/Exhibition/bantock/bantock03.htm [cited 10 February 2007].

the building process. The shortcuts employed in their construction have lead many to consider the vessels to be little more than floating skips. In some cases this may be a valid judgement but it fails to consider the existence of Bantock built vessels like Iron *Mafeking*. Her construction does not employ a straight stem post and has a carefully doubled curved bow with distinctive rivet patterns which would have taken time and care to create. Bantock's day boats worked at the railway exchange basins and, as a result, are often referred to as 'station-boats' putting them in a class of their own as a sort of elite 'Joey' boat, although the reasons for this can only be guessed at. Perhaps Bantock wanted a more streamlined shape for efficiency or maybe it was a matter of pride and a demonstration of the skill of his workmen. Then again, could the construction differences be down to the influence of railway and train building through Bantock's involvement with the Great Western Railway Company? Whatever the case, the appearance of Bantock boats is distinctive enough to identify three different consecutive styles. Iron *Mafeking* belongs to the latest 'Mark III' variety, which possessed the most elegant fore-end of the three types, a key factor in its later historical identification.

It is possible that Tom and Doris Whitley had picked *Mafeking* out from the many other iron boats on sale in 1958 because of her elegant fore-end. After her conversion she was to serve only four years as a hotel before Tom, with his eyesight severely impaired, terminated their hotel boat business in 1962 selling off both *Prince* and *Mafeking* into private ownership.

The Houseboat

From being an anonymous, cabin-less, cargo boat in the early 1900's, Iron *Mafeking* inherited a new identity in 1958 from the wooden narrow boat culture that ran parallel to her working life on the Birmingham Canal Navigations. Her conversion into a hotel boat saved her from neglect and sinking, the new full-length cabin keeping water out and preventing the hull from rusting through. *Mafeking* passed into private ownership becoming a fulltime houseboat and has belonged to at least seven different people since 1962. Each of these individuals has had a different effect on *Mafeking* either changing something about her or moving her to a different location.

Most of those who live aboard houseboats today are sedentary, tied down to a certain location by their job, seldom moving their boats. However, it is still preferable to have a means of propulsion so that boats can be docked for repairs or can go cruising in the holidays. *Mafeking* remained an un-powered houseboat until about 1976 before which she had sat on a mud bank at Hampton Hall Farm residential moorings, a boat community moored on farmland outside Rickmansworth. Brian Allan and his girlfriend Wendy Johns bought her and, unhappy with the lack of engine, towed her to Charity Dock, Coventry. It was here that they converted her, cutting off the original riveted stern and adding a new welded steel motor counter and diesel engine. While *Mafeking* was in the dry dock they did some significant work to the topsides and internal layout, abolishing the old cabin and corridor plan of the hotel boat in preference for a more open arrangement. They did not alter the pattern of regular rectangular windows, so

54. *Top Left: Mafeking* covered with a yellow tarpaulin, being towed from Rickmansworth for restoration in Coventry in the late 1970's.

55. *Top Right:* Brian Allan rebuilds the new cabin after fitting a new counter-stern and engine in Charity Dock, Coventry.

56. *Bottom Left:* Brian Allan (*far left*) and Wendy Johns (*far right*) relax with friends, sitting on the newly restored and painted *Mafeking*.

57. *Bottom Right:* Brian Allan and his dogs taking the restored *Mafeking* up a lock on their way back to Rickmansworth.

characteristic among hotel boats, and thus preserved an important piece of the vessels identity.

The work was done by Brian between working his full time job, for the fire service, and lasted 18 months. They lived in another boat at the dock for the duration. Wendy's son Eric grew up on *Mafeking* at Rickmansworth and spent his youth learning about the canals, seeing some of the last Three Fellows Carrying Co. working boats carrying limejuice barrels from London to Hemel Hempstead. He trained as a horse boy on the hotel butty *Pamela*, gaining experience moving heavy boats through locks and maintaining their rope work fenders. He bought a wooden Joey boat from British Steel and ran it as horse boat travelling on the canal system selling rope fenders. Eventually he was able to go into business as a fender maker in Oxford having gained his knowledge of rope work from ex-working boatmen and continues to keep the old craft alive. By 1980 Wendy and Brian had moved off the boat into a cottage by Grants lock on the Southern Oxford Canal and they moored the boat outside. Wendy went on to own a wooden boat, the *Heatherbell*, built in the Nurser yard at the turn of the century and, now aged 76, still lives in Banbury.

Nikky Spencer, a student nurse, bought *Mafeking* in the early 1980's moving her onto a mooring near Hythe Bridge Street in Oxford. Her boyfriend at the time, an architecture student called Chris Park, undertook some carpentry, gathering reclaimed wood from the canal and skips to build a new galley in the centre of the boat. He also fitted new sliding windows made of hardwood with distinctive OG curves and heart shaped mouldings on the frames. The steep angle of narrow boat topsides make it particularly difficult to water proof sliding windows without a rubber seal, and although the new windows looked good they were hopeless at keeping the rain out. In an attempt to rectify this problem plywood hoods were eventually added above each opening giving the boat an even more distinctive appearance, although driving rain still caused a problem. Most modern boat windows are made from aluminium extrusions with square tops and rounded bottom corners and a small opening flap at the top for ventilation. Even though Chris's sliding windows leaked they could be opened up in the summer to let the breeze in and were big enough to lean out of, a luxury often impossible on modern boats. Around 1987 British Waterways decided to renovate the canal bank where *Mafeking* was moored and charge mooring fees to the inhabitants, a move that sparked a dispute with the local canal community with both Nikky and Chris becoming heavily involved. That year they put the boat on the market and split up, Nikky moving to a Dutch Barge in Bristol while Chris moved back to the land.

Mafeking's next move was off the canal and onto the River Thames. Muriel Egerton, a student of sociology at Oxford University, bought the boat and moved her to moorings on a weir stream near Donnington Bridge. Muriel used the boat as student accommodation and moved on after finishing her qualifications in 1991. Changing hands again in the summer of 1991 *Mafeking* passed to a couple, Philip Powell and Sarah Loving, who made her their home for eight years bringing up their daughter onboard before finally moving to a house in Oxford in 1999.

Reverting back to an academic residence, *Mafeking* came into the possession of Bronwen Morgan, an Oxford University law Don, in October 1999. By this time the leaking windows had filled the hull, underneath the floorboards with water, and the iron base plates were beginning to rust from both sides. It was four years before *Mafeking* underwent a routine survey and once in dry dock the surveyor, using a small pick

58. Wendy Johns today in 2007.

59. *Mafeking* moored on its residential moorings at Rickmansworth in the late 1970's *(on the right of the photo infront of the yellow boat)*.

60. The kitchen built by Chris Parks in the

61. The lounge on *Mafeking* when lived in by Bronwen Morgan.

62. *Mafeking* is craned out at the, now closed down, Castle Mill boatyard, Oxford, in 2004. This picture appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* in an article about the boatyard closure battle.

to test the hulls integrity, went through the base plate. *Mafeking* had been perilously close to sinking and now some serious work was required to make her sound again, a considerable financial burden for Bronwen. She decided upon a local firm, Alchemy Boats, to undertake the work, which would involve welding a new steel base below the existing one and over-plating a significant proportion of the hull sides. This would be a disruptive procedure requiring the boat to be on dry land for the duration of the work. Ideally this kind of repair work, on an old riveted boat, would require the rebuilding of much of the hull, replacing the rusted iron plates with new ones and re riveting into position. This would also require the whole inside of the boat to be rebuilt as well and the financial cost and disruption of such a project made it impossible.

The over-plating option allowed Bronwen to live on board while the work was carried and didn't damage the inside, although, on the down side, much of *Mafeking*'s historical construction such as its lapped, riveted joints were covered up by the new steel. Fortunately, the fore-end, the most distinctive part of the boat in terms of historical identification, remained unaffected by the work. The job was made even more difficult because it involved welding steel to iron and there was also the problem of craning the fragile 7-ton, 71ft narrow boat on to dry land. The only place where this could be accomplished nearby was the historic Castle Mill boatyard in Jericho, Oxford. Subsequently British Waterways have seen fit to sell this land for development, much to the dismay of the local boat and land communities who fought hard to preserve it. While the work was carried out Bronwen lived on *Mafeking* in the yard and later, used her knowledge of law, to help the save Castle Mill Boatyard campaign but they were ultimately unsuccessful and it was finally closed in 2005 amid dramatic eviction scenes as protestors and squatters were forcibly removed by Bailiffs.

Bronwen was very attached to the boat and while living aboard enjoyed having musical evenings with her friends, playing the violin and regular entertaining. When in America she met Jim Connly who moved to England from Texas to live with her and they eventually married. She was often away allowing other people to stay on the boat during her absence and produced a list of rules and advice to assist new live-aboard's during their stay. It is an interesting document, and provides genuine insight into a long-term live-aboard's attitude to houseboat living, revealing many of the idiosyncrasies associated with an aging narrow boat. It is aimed at people who have little experience of the lifestyle, covering all the things that are taken for granted by most house dwellers (see Appendix B).

In 2005 Bronwen was offered the chair of law professor at Bristol University and had to move from Oxford to a house in Bristol. It was she who placed the advert on the Internet, to which I responded, thus beginning the most recent episode in *Mafeking's* story.

63. *Mafeking's* distinctive riveted fore-end.

The Voyage

After spending many weeks walking the Oxford Canal towpath I remained unsuccessful in finding either a boat for sale or a residential mooring. I passed clusters of moored narrow boats; some were shiny and new with small gardens, others had peeling paint and rusting junk strewn around the bank. I turned my attention to the Internet, browsing adverts but most were out of date and the boats had already been sold by the time I rang up. The Marinas were my next target but ringing around only provided me with offers to join five-year waiting lists.

When I was three months old I went on my first narrow boat holiday and through the years it became a regular family activity. For a couple of weeks, at the end of summer, we would work locks and explore England's cities and countryside from another angle, taking our hotel with us as we progressed. Holiday cruising slowed us all down to 4m.p.h. and as we passed under roaring motorway bridges the real world looked quite ridiculous. My parents often contemplated the virtues of owning a narrow boat and inhabiting a world associated with leisure and relaxation. Now it seemed as if there was no way to break into the live-aboard community so, reluctantly, I wrote the idea off. Some weeks later my father stumbled across an advert for a narrow boat named *Mafeking* on a boating website. It read "For Sale: Heritage Narrow boat *Mafeking*, touch lightly on the earth". The posting looked old but, to our surprise, we got a response and hastily arranged a viewing.

Mafeking was located in an awkward but leafy spot, not on the canal, but along a weir stream just off the River Thames on the outskirts of Oxford. It was the first opportunity I had been given to obtain a boat on a residential mooring and I agreed to buy *Mafeking* there and then even though I hadn't had time to think the decision through. Fortunately the mooring owner insisted on a hull survey every time a boat changed hands and although the Marine Surveyor assured me that the hull was sound he said nothing about the rest of the boat, which would prove to be in need of serious attention. In places the floorboards had disintegrated revealing several inches of standing water in the stern causing severe corrosion. I started work on the renovation but *Mafeking* required more than just a lick of paint as I previously thought. The rotten old finishes had to go. So I stripped out the back 30ft, which included the bedroom and bathroom, down to the steel hull in order to rebuild the interior from scratch. The stripping out proved a lot easier than the rebuilding and as the wallboards were prized off the rot and rust were further revealed. The gunwales were also a problem having been badly designed in the first place and were now in such a state of disrepair that they channelled water into the boat like gutters. I took out the loose rust, all thirteen-bin bags of it, and managed to install a new floor along with a treated wooden frame on the hull sides to take the new finishes. Winter had come quickly and with no insulation yet installed, the atmosphere inside the cabin was cold, damp and smelt of diesel. Every torrential downpour of rain brought with it a new leak indicating the deteriorating state of the topsides. Rain trickled through the windows and the gunwales finding its way in through nearly every join in the roof. It even seemed to soak through the boards themselves softening the rotten roof timbers.

I was faced with a dilemma: if the new finishes were installed they would be ruined by the leaks but if I delayed the boat would remain uninhabitable. As it was

64. *Mafeking* stripped down to the iron hull and repainted.

65. Dustbins filled with water and many bags of sand weigh *Mafeking* down in the water.

impossible to pinpoint the exact source of every leak I resorted to sticking Flash-band along every suspect joint. After a day of frantic sticking it was finished and looked appalling. The peeling paintwork was now trimmed with ruckled metallic blue strips, a look that would not please the mooring owner, however, it was the middle of winter and nothing more could be done quickly. The repairs were mildly successful and stopped the obvious drips but the whole structure continued to absorb water and I could smell wood-rot in the air.

The entire cabin needed repairing or replacing before there was any point in continuing with an internal fit out. I considered cladding materials and techniques such as fibreglass, new wooden panels or steel. Fibreglass was too weak while new wooden topsides would cost £60,000 leaving steel as the only viable option. The decision was forced in April when a blunt email arrived from the mooring owner demanding to know my 'intentions for *Mafeking*'. It was a fair question; he wanted his mooring to look good with no tat on the bank and certainly no derelict boats bringing down the tone of the community.

A friend of my father's had owned a steam narrow boat that had suffered from similar problems. He knew a man, called Yates, who could weld steel plating over the wooden topsides thus waterproofing the boat with a minimum of interior disruption. Having visited his boat and viewed Yates's work I became convinced that steel over plating was the only way the problem could be solved and contacted Yates.

My first voyage, then, would be to a boatyard in Coventry where Yates could carry out the work undercover, but reaching this destination wasn't going to be so easy. Normally a narrow boat could cruise to Coventry via the Oxford Canal in less than a week, but this canal contained some very tight locks. Due to years of constant loading and unloading *Mafeking* had become a little wider in her old age. No one could be completely sure of the precise lock widths but I had no desire to become jammed in one on my first outing. I had heard stories of boats becoming wedged so badly that British Waterways were forced to cut them up in order to clear the way and that scenario was to be avoided at all costs.

The alternative route involved cruising down the Thames, briefly along the tidal section, to Brentford and then onto the Grand Union Canal, bypassing the tight locks at Napton and allowing me to join the Oxford Canal further up before continuing into Coventry. The downside of this route was the distance involved which was about three times the distance of the other route. River cruising was also a difficult and, if done alone, dangerous activity and then there was the problem of experience. I could steer narrow boats as I had learnt aboard hire cruisers that were easy to handle. If you pushed the throttle forward the boat went forward and if pulled backwards it slowed down as a lightweight tiller made the craft easy to handle. In contrast *Mafeking* was a beast with a deafening Diesel engine that shook the boat so hard it wound down the throttle wheel if you took your hand off it. It also had a dubious gear stick some way inside the engine room, and reverse was not its favourite direction. When steering *Mafeking*, a lapse in concentration of just a few seconds would mean a rapid change in direction and it was a struggle to get back on course. In all she was not the ideal cruising vessel and steering her was more of a job than a pleasure. Fortunately my brother, Rup, was between jobs so offered his assistance. He had at least six years more experienced steering than I, and is naturally better at that sort of thing so I was confident we could handle the voyage between us.

66. *Mafeking* moored on the Thames at Hurley, May 2006.

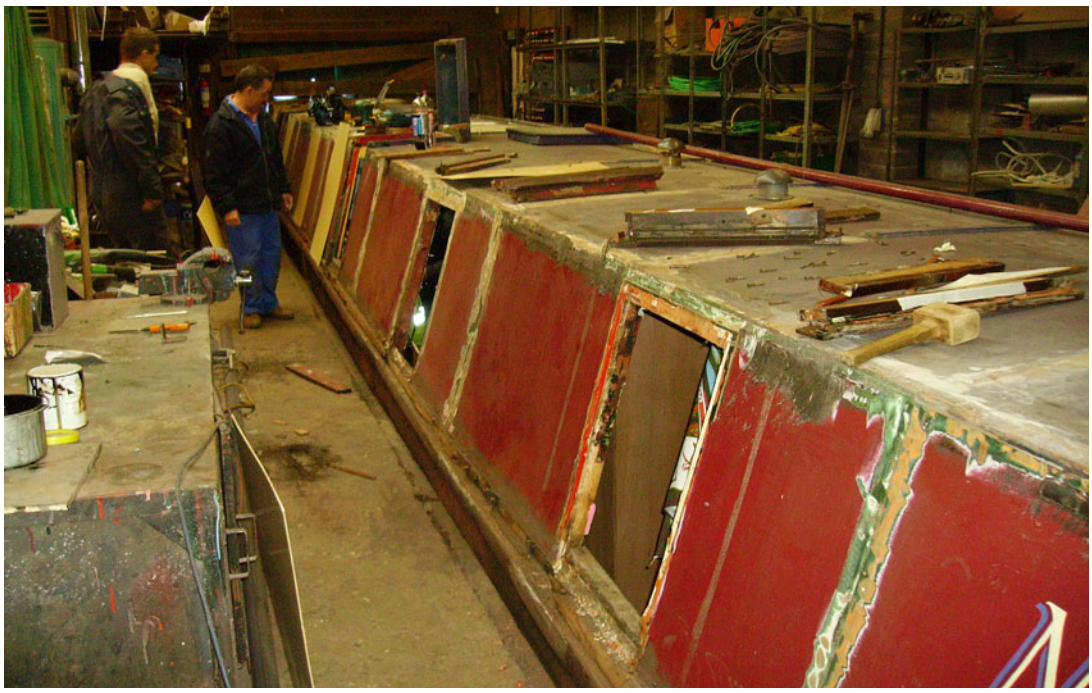
The first obstacle to be negotiated was the concrete road bridge next to *Mafeking's* mooring. All of the bridges over the weir stream had not been built to accommodate boats so we had no alternative but to pack every spare space of *Mafeking* with bags of builders sand and dustbins filled water to push her further down into the water. Even with two or three tons of sand aboard, Rup still had to fetch the lock keeper to gently open the weirs, lowering the water level so we could pass through. Once out of our backwater we cruised down the river at full speed, happy to be underway, but our spirits were soon dampened as we passed several groups of police fishing about in the river. At Iffley the lock keeper looked shocked and told us he had just found a body in the weir. It was a murder and the police were hunting for evidence. "This was surely a bad omen" I thought to myself but the coming days were kind to us; it was spring and the weather was warming up.

It took a week to reach London passing through Wallingford, Reading and Henley on the way. At night we stopped on the riverbank in the countryside near small villages and, as we closed in on London, we found ourselves able to tie up outside Hampton Court Palace. The journey was beginning to feel like a holiday as the river breeze blew away the smell of rotten wood and diesel. I remembered, once again, the delight of waking up to a different scene every morning, feeding swans and ducks and watching the other boats go about their business.

The next morning we cast off as usual. I was standing on the fore-end as we left Hampton Court looking down the river for the next lock. My vigil was interrupted by the horn and on turning around I saw clouds of smoke billowing out of the engine room. 'Fire!' Rup shouted above the noise of the engine. 'Shut it down!' I bellowed back jumping onto the roof to assist. Rup emptied a fire extinguisher onto the flames, the dry powder adding to the smoke. With the engine now turned off we were drifting on the current, steering toward the shore and grabbing at the willow trees to hold us still. The seven leisure batteries in the engine room were responsible for the fire. Some of the terminal covers had come loose and a piece of iron ballast had fallen across them shorting out the electrics and sending sparks flying. We were lucky to put it out so quickly thus mitigating the damage but now there were still repairs to be done and both of us had been rattled by the event.

The next day's cruising took us to the short section of tideway that led to Brentford lock and the Grand Union Canal. Negotiating the tidal Thames is quite a big deal for a narrow boat, which lacks the power and agility of a sea going vessel. If the engine failed it could leave us at the mercy of strong tidal currents, washing the boat towards the sea and stranding us on the mud. We waited until high tide and cruised out of the lock onto the retreating river. The current was in our favour flowing ever faster, which was fine while we travelled but would test *Mafeking's* reverse gear when slowing down at Brentford. Once through the lock, the Thames behind us, we set off on the canal tackling the first of the 104 locks that lay between Brentford and Coventry. After fifteen full days of cruising we finally arrived at Swan Lane Wharf boatyard just two days later than planned and left *Mafeking* in the hands of Yates.

Yates took about ten weeks to put the new steel shell on. He stripped out the old windows, dismantled the leaking gunwales and replaced it all with new steel following the shape of the old wooden cabin below. It was a filthy business, the welding and grinding ruining anything I had been foolish enough to leave aboard. The cheap wooden table had pits burnt in the surface while the old worktops and kettle were



67. *Top left: Mafeking* in Swan Lane Wharf wet dock having its windows removed and being prepared for over-plating.

69. *Bottom Left:* The new steel top is finished.

68. *Top Right:* New steel plates encapsulate the old topsides

70. *Bottom Right:* Spray painting.

spattered with molten metal. *Mafeking* now smelt of charred wood and iron filings. As Yates neared the end of the welding I realised the bare steel needed painting. I had mentally pictured it as a comparatively small job but I had, as usual, underestimated the amount of effort involved. Yates had booked the dock for twelve weeks leaving us two to finish the painting. The fresh steel required eight coats of paint if it were to last five years; two primers, three undercoats (for the different colours) and three gloss topcoats. My ambitious panelled colour scheme, complete with coach lines, would mean hours of masking up and painting in a dock that wasn't up to the standards of a paint shop. The dock was enclosed by a breezeblock structure that joined onto the workshop and every time the wind blew, black dust, which had accumulated over many years, blew from every shelf over our fresh sticky paintwork. When it rained water cascaded in from the paved parking area, running across the floor and soaking our boxes of equipment and tools. The roof also leaked, spattering the new paintwork as the water splashed off the concrete floor.

The problem was overcome by pinning polythene over everything. For speed we would forget brush application and educate ourselves in the ways of spray guns, taking advice from a local car paint-shop. We worked continuously, day after day into the night grinding mill scale off, sanding, filling, spraying, masking, mixing and cleaning out the equipment. The lead paint was toxic so we wore our masks almost all day wiping down the visors with white spirit when the accumulating paint blocked our vision. The task that I had barely considered now took over my life and finances. At first we commuted between Cambridge and Coventry until it became too tiring so a hotel became our base. Swan Lane Wharf was being closed down so the manager had no problem with letting us stay over our booked time and seemed little concerned about the extra dock rental money we were racking up so our deadline slipped forward into the autumn. Twelve weeks later and *Mafeking* was no longer a dull steel hulk but sported mirror finish red panels on a green background with yellow coach lines. She was finished and ready for her return voyage.

The shortening days were eating into our cruising time and every week that we delayed lengthened the duration of our homeward journey. I had learnt that some working boats used to pull their gunwales together with a winch in order to squeeze through tight locks. If we could do the same then *Mafeking* might get along the Oxford Canal saving us considerable time and effort. It seemed worth a try and after some brief calculation we decided that two to three tons force would be sufficient to pull the sides in enough to give us an extra inch. I had no idea what effect this operation would have on the boat's structure so a test in the dock seemed the best way of finding out. I hired a ratchet winch with two chains coming off the centre and after bolting steel eyes through the gunwales, hooked up the winch and cautiously wound. Despite the creaking it was a success and with *Mafeking*, having lost that critical inch, we could now attempt the tight locks at Napton.

It took four days to reach the flight of locks at Napton-on-the-Hill. We passed through the first without a hitch but the second was a different matter. The canal was climbing uphill so we cruised into the empty lock chamber with eight-foot high walls on either side. It was important to go slowly in order to avoid wedging *Mafeking* too hard but despite her sides being pulled in she still got jammed half way in. Two British Waterways officials appeared and offered to help us. They would 'flush' us through, a process whereby the top sluices were rapidly fully opened for a few seconds even

though the lower gates were still open. The locks often tapered towards the bottom and the momentary rise in water caused by the open sluices allowed the boat to float in above the narrowest point. *Mafeking* grated against the side and sparks flew from the exhaust hole as Rup revved the engine hard to fight the current and after five attempts we prevailed. The third lock was even narrower and it was there that we discovered that it was *Mafeking* and not the lock that widened below the water line. After several days hard flushing it was time to accept defeat and reverse several miles along the canal to the nearest winding hole where we could turn the boat around. Our bid at a short cut had only served to increase our journey time by several days so reluctantly we headed back along the Grand Union towards the Thames.

This time we were going up the Thames against its current and the heavy rainfall had swollen the river so much that the lockkeepers had hung Strong Flow warning signs on their gates. At times *Mafeking* seemed to stand still as she struggled against the flow. Our gearbox had needed attention for a while but as it was old and an unusual variety it had been difficult to find anybody with the knowledge to repair it. It was on a wide section of the river, lined with brambles and willows, where it was impossible to moor, that it finally gave out. We lost power and Rup rapidly pulled in to the trees as we frantically grabbed hold of the willow fronds to hold us still. We were unable to get close enough to the bank to tie to anything. Just as I was debating what to do next the branch in my hand began to break and the fore-end moved out sweeping the boat broadside across the river before flipping us round 180 degrees and washing the boat back in the direction we had just come. The only option now was to drop the anchor and hope it would hold us against the current. If it didn't we would be propelled at full speed into the fast flowing weir stream that bypassed the lock which we had passed through half an hour previously. Just as I was on the verge of throwing the anchor overboard a passing narrow boat had turned around and was coming to our aid. Its topsides were painted solidly with Matisse style paintings, and as it came along side the skipper threw us a line. To my relief, it didn't take too long to tie the boats abreast and we sailed in that old fashioned way back to the last lock, mooring up to attend to our ailing gear box.

Several of the river locks ahead of us were due to close in the next few days for winter repairs making our laborious up-stream journey all the more frustrating, as we struggled against the current. There was now a deadline to meet and failure to get through in time would trap us on the fast flowing river with no permanent mooring until the spring. By casting off in the early dawn and cruising non-stop until dusk we just made it in time with only a day to spare but the long days of non stop cruising in bad whether were becoming tedious. Finally *Mafeking* passed through the last lock at Iffley in mid October but although we were nearly home there was one last challenge awaiting us. The meandering weir stream, overhung by tree branches and low bridges, with its numerous underwater obstructions, had been difficult to negotiate back in summer when the flow was gentle but with the river in its current state it would be hazardous. We decided to recruit some extra help in the form of my parents, to help with this final task.

It was the next morning when we attempted it, soon running into difficulties when manoeuvring off the river at right angles and into the backwater. Once in, it became clear that the current was too strong for us to resist even in full reverse. *Mafeking* was now out of control travelling faster than I had ever been before in a narrow boat.

71. Leaving Hampton Court and heading back to Oxford.

72. Being rescued on the Thames.

73. A double width lock on the Grand Union Canal.

We tried to keep control negotiating the first bends successfully but the pace was quickening. As a man from the bank yelled at us to stop it was already too late and at the next sharp bend *Mafeking* couldn't turn fast enough and rammed into the soft bank, rising alarmingly out of the water. My father was on the fore-end and jumped off in the panic. Securing the front would let the stern drift across the stream turning the boat into a damn; the resulting water would rise on one side and wash over the gunwales, sinking her. He had no choice but to push the fore-end out, straightening us out but returning us into the quickening stream. As he pushed from the overgrown bank he over stretched himself, falling into the water clinging to the gunwale with his fingertips. I pulled him out but no sooner had that disaster been averted than another was looming as we reached full speed again.

After crashing through undergrowth and battering into several trees, which painfully scraped along our new paintwork, the low concrete bridge came into view with the fully open weirs visible beyond. We were nearly at our mooring space but at the current speed there was no possibility of stopping and I couldn't imagine what would happen if we collided into the concrete and steel weir gates; we would probably crash through them and be wrecked, drowning in the process. In a last ditch attempt to avert the impending catastrophe, Rup steered the fore-end into our scaffolding and wood jetty, which was destroyed but stopped the boat. Meanwhile I jumped onto the bank with the mid line in an attempt to hold the stern in but it was impossible to resist the force on the stern as the rope slid away before I could secure a knot. With her fore-end caught on the jetty, *Mafeking* was blown across the weir stream, her stern smashing into the far bank, creating an instant dam. The rush of water underneath immediately rocked her violently to the side and as the water pressure built up the distance between water line and gunwale reduced until, with less than an inch before *Mafeking* would be overcome, it was time to abandon ship. I watched for a few seconds expecting her to capsize but instead she stabilized at a precarious angle. The only hope now was to close the weirs before it was too late. I ran across the fields to alert the lock keeper who could close the weir sluices. By the time I arrived back a small crowd had gathered on the bridge but, to my relief, *Mafeking* hadn't yet sunk. Without further hesitation we wound shut the weir sluices one at a time and as the pressure dropped *Mafeking* began to right her self. With the weir stream temporarily calmed, we were able to pull *Mafeking* into her mooring signifying the end of our first precarious voyage.

As I secured the ropes and the crowd dispersed I considered my voyages aboard *Mafeking*. I had bought a narrow boat to live on, basing my decision on notions of a calm and tranquil lifestyle, one that was more affordable than on the land. What I actually got was the opposite, as the boat took over my life and finances and forced me to work harder than ever before to complete tasks that I underestimated with a monotonous regularity. My cruising experiences gave me a glimpse of how those boat people from the past might have felt, with their home and possessions so vulnerable if something went wrong and I could now see the waterways from a new perspective; not just a holiday park but a potentially perilous place full of the dangers associated with industrial activities.

Epilogue

The canals and narrow boats that fed our industrial revolution and helped give the Black Country its name, set Britain, and much of the world, on a course of energy hungry development apparently at odds with the natural environment. It is an interesting paradox that people now move onto them to escape the technology driven world that the system helped create, and live in a more sustainable manner than the rest of the population. 'Touch lightly on the earth' were the words Bronwen Morgan used to advertise the concept of living on Mafeking and, in many ways it is a justified perception of canal boat living. The way people live on narrow boats today shows that it is still possible to live a low energy lifestyle and be perfectly comfortable. With many boat communities not connected to services, boat owners have to generate their own electricity and heat. Normal toilets use in one flush what a boat toilet uses in three or four days. The fact that people have to fill up their water tanks and generate their own electricity with solar panels, wind turbines and diesel generators, makes them far more aware of the energy that they are consuming and it's not so easy to leave that extra light on or the tap running because it will flatten the batteries or create an extra journey to fill up with more water. The small space challenges the inhabitants to come up with innovative plans and configurations for efficient living and requires far less heat, light and water in comparison to even the smallest house.

No one designed the canal system as a catalyst for culture, just as the narrow boats were never conceived of as dwellings but the fact is they succeeded very well at these functions and continue to do so. The canals were industrial constructions built as a result of economic considerations but they quickly developed a far deeper significance. Following the evolution of the canal infrastructure, through the history of Mafeking, has revealed complex and unpredictable interactions between human beings, their technology and economic prosperity. The unique technological canal infrastructure facilitated the industrial revolution and with it significantly aided Britain's prosperity. Its narrow canals proved efficient in construction cost and use but, more than that, they created a symbiotic relationship with narrow boats. Without the narrow boat the narrow canal was, and still would be, useless. Without the narrow canal there would be no need for narrow boats. The canal determined the size of the narrow boat and its spaces, which in turn created a potential living space. Once inhabited it became a small but, in most cases, well cared for home. An individual in this world had to develop a detailed understanding of their boat and its operation on the canal. It was simultaneously their home, their work and their vehicle. The specific knowledge needed to live and work like this was completely different from the rest of society and brought about a split, creating a distinct micro culture. It was a culture fundamentally woven into, and dependant on, an industrial machine, governed by its repair cycles and speed of operation. Using the boats to express their status and cultural aspirations through an array of pictures and decoration, the canal people displayed their interpretation of taste and fashion along with their status and identity.

74. *Mafeking* back at Weirs Lane, Oxford after the voyage.

In those days the recent renaissance of the system could hardly have been predicted. The industrial machine turned into its antithesis, a leisure park, a place that people would pay to experience. Once the canals were regenerated, many people saw a way to live, which avoided taxes and the expenses of a house while providing a pleasant, green environment in which to reside, even within the city. Now, as demand for moorings and narrow boats drives up the cost of canal living, the makeup of the canal population is beginning to change again, along with attitudes towards its inhabitants. They are now becoming a desirable place to live for the affluent and well off with:

> *Over 25,000 powered pleasure craft based on the British Waterways system, a figure that has grown at an average 2.4 percent over the last five years and which could almost double as the 50+ age group increases in numbers. (By 2015 there will be 2.1 million more people in this key boating age group)*[31]

From water gypsies to the luxury boats of the recently retired, the canal system continues to evolve. The importance of this transport infrastructure on every aspect of society throughout its existence and its continuing survival is generally little understood and has gone largely unnoticed. Can we expect equally surprising cultural evolution on our present day transport infrastructures?

31. Ludgate, M. (2006) On off switch. *Canal boat and inland waterways*, May, p.66.

Appendix A

British Waterways.
Waterway Map.


KEY
1 Scotland
Northern Waterways
2 North West
3 Yorkshire
4 Wales & Border Counties
5 East Midlands
Southern Waterways
6 West Midlands
7 Central Shires
8 South West
9 South East
10 London
SCALE
0 50 kilometres
0 10 20 30 miles
WATFORD British Waterways' Offices
A Waterway Unit Boundary Reference (See Below)
Managed by British Waterways
Active Restoration Projects
Other AINA Waterways
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This map includes waterways managed by members of the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA) as well as BW's current planned restoration and new build projects. There are other inland waterways that have not been included, but can be found on more detailed maps (contact BW Customer Service Centre on 01923 201120 for more information). © British Waterways 2004
GLASGOW
CASTLEFORD
WIGAN
NORTHWICH
NEWARK
FAZELEY
BIRMINGHAM
MILTON KEYNES
GLOUCESTER
WATFORD
PADDINGTON

Appendix B

(Not available in .pdf document)

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