

The Wooden Canal Boat Society exists to save examples of the wooden boats that used to ply the canal network. They are then restored to good condition and used on projects that serve today's community.

HOW YOU CAN JOIN IN AND HELP US,

FIND MORE INFORMATION

OR CONTACT US.

BECOME A VOLUNTEER: volunteering activities revolve around boat handling, boat building, maintenance and repair, "boat sitting", community recycling (collection, sorting and sales), van driving, charity shop sales, tourist information, industrial heritage, marketing, project development and fund raising.

BECOME A MEMBER OR DONATE TO HELP OUR FUNDS: visit our website wcbs.org.uk to download a membership form or donate via the 'Donate' button. If you are a U.K. taxpayer, don't forget to 'Gift Aid' your donation.

VISIT OUR CHARITY SHOP: at 173 Stamford Street, Ashton-under-Lyne where we have many household items and the largest collection of paperbacks and vinyl records in the area.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE – wcbs.org.uk or **FACEBOOK PAGE**.

CONTACT US by email - general@wcbs.org.uk

THANK YOU - hope to see you soon

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WOODEN CANAL BOAT SOCIETY AND OUR BOATS



HOW THE SOCIETY STARTED

In 1974 Chris Leah was a student at Chester College, living on boats to save money. He bought a full length wooden narrow boat called "Lilith" for one hundred pounds. The boat needed repairs and Chris set about doing them. Before long Chris had acquired a second boat "Sarah", later renamed "Forget me Not". In May 1987 the Wooden Canal Craft Trust was formed. Initially this was a small group of friends who wanted to build a future for "Lilith" and "Sarah".

The 1989 British Waterways Bill threatened to introduce new regulations that would make the work of the Wooden Canal Craft Trust virtually impossible and force most owners of historic wooden craft to destroy them.

The Trust petitioned against it and their case was put at the Lords Committee stage and several witnesses called.

This, and negotiations over the next two years, resulted in substantial changes in the legislation together with the beginnings of a recognition of the importance of the floating heritage by British Waterways. By the Spring of 1995 The Wooden Canal Craft Trust owned six boats, Elton, Forget Me Not, Hazel, Lilith, Southam and Queen. Over the next couple of years the Trust changed and eventually was wound up with its assets going to the new charity we have today and our first boat had moved to the Portland Basin Museum. In 1999 Tameside Council provided a much-needed boatyard site at Knowl St in Stalybridge.

The histories of our boats are varied and more detail can be found in individual leaflets. Here's a summary starting with Hazel who joined the others at Portland Basin in 2015.

HAZEL is one of the few surviving wooden boats from the Northern parts of the canal system. She was built at Runcorn in 1914 and is the last complete example of a Runcorn "Wooden Header". These boats were deep, 6 plank boats, intended for use on the Bridgewater canal and connecting waterways. Being narrow beam they were able to work up to Ashton or down to the Midlands. Drawn by a single horse, woodenheaders could carry a good 30 ton load if the water was deep enough. Originally known as "Mull" she worked for the Salt Union, carrying coal, salt and chemicals to and from the Northwich area. It is possible that she may have brought some loads up the Ashton canal. In 1929 she was sold to Agnes Beech who renamed her "Hazel" and used her to carry coal from Leigh to Northwich and Runcorn. From 1948 she became a crude passenger trip boat. In 1951 she was fitted with an engine and converted into a luxury cruising houseboat and for many years she was home to a series of families and travelled extensively around the canal network until she was donated to the WCBS in 1988.

LILITH was built in 1901 and spent her first 70 years carrying goods in and out of the Coombeswood Tubeworks on the Dudley No 2 Canal near Halesowen. She is a joey boat, built for short distance carrying work on the complex Birmingham Canal Navigations. Originally she had no name, being known simply as number 9, and no cabins. The hull is of a very simple shape and has been almost completely renewed since 1974. Similar craft

were once used for short distance traffic on the Ashton Canal, carrying coal from the pits to canalside mills where it was used to fuel the mill engines. Unfortunately no examples of these local boats survive. In 2001 she celebrated her centenary by carrying the first load for 80 years over the summit of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal.

Dating from 1917 **QUEEN** is probably the oldest surviving wooden motor narrow boat. She is typical of boats of her period and is a remarkable survivor, having been discarded 3 times since 1947. Originally called "Walsall Queen" she worked for Hildick & Hildick, a Walsall based company of which little is known. From 1926 she worked for Harvey Taylor of Aylesbury. The post war decline in traffic resulted in her being abandoned and sunk in 1947, but she was rescued for pleasure boat use two years later. In 1994 volunteers recovered her from deep water in Buckinghamshire where she had been abandoned. With help from the Waterways Trust in 2002 she had essential conservation work carried out to ensure that the old boat survives long enough to be fully restored.

FORGET-ME-NOT was originally built as a horse drawn boat in 1927 and belonged to Number One (owner boatman) Henry Grantham. He supplied coal to industrial premises and was always something of an innovator. In 1929 he had "Forget me Not" motorised, then two years later he had the stern end rebuilt with a counter. In 1941 Mr Grantham retired and the boat was sold to the Samuel Barlow Coal Company who used her for similar work and gave her the name "Sarah". She was sold and converted to a houseboat in 1959, becoming derelict by the mid 1970s. In 1987 she was hauled out of the water for restoration work to begin. Relaunching in 1994 she has now reverted to her 1930s appearance. An original Bolinder engine has been renovated and fitted.

SOUTHAM and ELTON, built in 1936 and 1937 respectively, were 2 of the fleet of 62 wooden butties ordered from Walker Bros. of Rickmansworth as part of the fleet expansion programme of the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company. Intended to work with new steel motor boats, these craft were all named after towns. They mainly worked on the Grand Union main line between London and Birmingham but could travel to any part of the narrow canal network and carried a wide variety of commodities. They were both sold by British Waterways in the early 1960s. "Southam" was motorised and fitted with a full length cabin. "Elton" continued with limited carrying work for her new owner. Eventually both boats became sunk and were rescued by volunteers.