

The futures of our boat: *Southam* is in fair condition but no longer very original, She has recently had a lot of work done her engine, hull and cabin and for the foreseeable future will be maintained as a converted boat.

She has also been used as a useful tug, while Forget-Me-Not has been temporarily engine-less. *Southam* has towed the boats for the recycling trips.

**How you can join in or help us,
find more information
or contact us**

- Come on a monthly **RECYCLING TRIP** from Portland Basin
- **Become a member or Trustee.**
- **Contact us via our Website:** wcbs.org.uk or **Mailto:** general@wcbs.org.uk
- **Find us on Facebook** - search on 'Wooden Canal Boat' for the main page then link to the project or shop pages
- **Visit our shop:** 173 Stamford Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, OL6 7PS
- **Phone us:** 0161 330 8422

THANK YOU - hope to see you soon



**The Wooden Canal Boat Society
173 Stamford Street Central
Ashton-under-Lyne
OL6 7PS**

Registered Charity No 1069820

OUR BOATS

Southam



WOODEN CANAL BOAT SOCIETY

Canal History: In 1929 several canal companies running between London and the Midlands amalgamated to form the Grand Union Canal. A carrying subsidiary, the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company (GUCCC), was then set up to develop new traffic on the waterway. During the 1930s this company underwent a rapid fleet expansion programme until, at its peak, the company owned over 200 pairs of boats. At the same time the main line of the canal, from London to Birmingham, was widened and deepened to ease the flow of traffic.

Classes of boats and the companies: The new boats fell into three main classes, Royalties, 5 feet deep and named after royal persons, Stars, 4'2" deep and named after heavenly bodies, and Towns, 4'9" deep and named after various towns. Royalties were built by a range of boatyards to a common design. Stars and Towns were built at Yarwoods of Northwich, Harland & Woolf of Woolwich and Walkers of Rickmansworth. Walkers were the only yard building a wooden version and in the case of the Town class, constructed between 1936 and 1938, they only built butties. These were known colloquially as big rickies.

Walkers order was for 62 butties and they re-organised their boatyard so that they could work on 6 boats at once. They recruited extra boat-builders from the West Country. The intention was to launch two boats a week but this was not

consistently achieved. One major problem was finding enough good oak for the planking and it is noticeable that big rickies are built from relatively poor quality timber.

***Southam* on a WCBS trip at Woodley**

Birth of our boat: *Southam* was launched in 1936. By then the GUCCC was running into trouble. The development of new traffic was slower than expected and they could not find enough skilled crews to operate all the new boats. Brand new craft were lying unused. In 1938 GUCCC captured the Coventry to Hemel Hempstead coal traffic from number ones like Henry Grantham. This helped, but it was until the wartime boost in traffic, the road hauliers hampered by blackout and fuel shortages, that the fleet came into its own. Crew shortages were still a problem, partly solved by the recruitment of women trainees.

In 1948 the canals were nationalised and the GUCCC boats were operated by the Docks and Inland Waterways Executive.

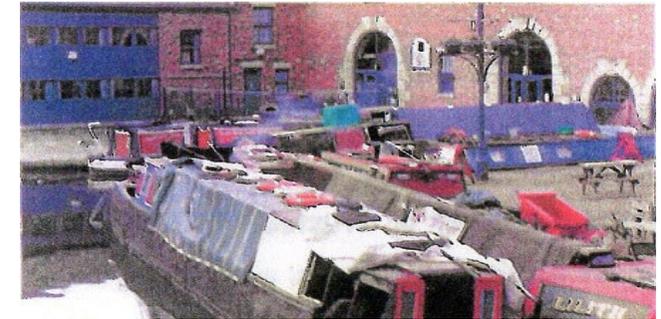
Southam Carried on working between London and the Midlands, towed by big steel motor boats. Traffic declined but standards of maintenance were very high.

Our boat moves on: In 1962 *Southam* was sold, Shortly before a re-organised British Waterways (B.W.) gave up narrow boat carrying. After changing hands several times she was fitted with a BMC Commodore engine and a full length conversion in about 1965. For many years she was a mobile residential boat, spending much of her time on the River Nene and the southern Grand Union.

By 1968 even Willow Wren were unable to compete with lorries using the expanding motorway network, Elton was sold to David Blagrove, a teacher and diehard canal carrying enthusiast, who used her to carry coal for retailing from the boat.

The boat joins our society: In 1992 *Southam* sank at Braunston and was impounded by B.W. who took her to Hillmorton where she sank again. The Wooden Canal Craft Trust (since re-organised as the Wooden Canal Boat Society) bought her, and after an epic journey to Runcorn, carried out extensive refurbishment and hull repairs.

The huge BMC engine was stripped down and re-assembled after spectacularly expiring on the journey from Hillmorton.



***Southam* being maintained at Portland Basin**

