



Here she is being shafted by Chris Leah

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 **Email:** general@wcbs.org.uk  
**Find us on Facebook** - search for The Wooden Canal Boat Society
- 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

# OUR BOATS

Elton



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

Registered Charity No 1069820

# 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.

**Birth of our boat:** Elton was launched in 1937. 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.

Elton 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 1960 Elton was sold to Willow Wren, a carrying company set up and subsidised by waterway enthusiast Captain Vivian Buckley-Johnson. It was managed by Leslie Morton, former managing director of the GUCCC.

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.

### **Elton looking in poor shape**

**The boat joins our society:** In the late 1980s "Elton" had a rudimentary houseboat conversion fitted and was sold. By 1995 she was sunk and abandoned at Southall in west London. British Waterways donated her to the society and volunteers raised her, then arranged tows north.

Even though she requires a lot of work, Elton stills earns her keep. She is used to store scrap metal waiting to be weighed in and recycled.

**The future of our boat:** Considerable work has been carried out to reduce her sieve like qualities. You can read many stories (hilarious after the event) on our website: [wcbs.org.uk](http://wcbs.org.uk).

She now plays an important role in the recycling project, acting as floating store while she very patiently awaits her turn for full restoration and gets back to work, probably as part of the existing recycling project.