

WBC Photos Archive (from Wendy Witheridge)

Many of these photos are from my Dad's old slides and, sadly, are damaged beyond repair. They show how the club moorings looked many years ago, from the early 1960s, and how the boats have changed over the years from almost all cruisers to almost all narrowboats. At the same time, the average age of the members has increased, and it is interesting to note how many young people (teens & early 20s) were actively involved in the club years ago. We were, largely, but not all, sons and daughters of older members, but those older members were more in their 50s than 60s and 70s.

It is important to remember that in the early 1960s, the canals, especially locally, were not the floating holiday parks of today, but were run down and in danger of closure or classification as remainder waterways. The club had many members who actively fought closures, and there was very close liaison with canal societies such as the Staffs & Worcs and, later, the BCNS. We cruised far and wide to protest rallies, typically the rallies at Marple in support of the re-opening of the Peak Forest routes. We supported the restoration of the Stourbridge 16 and the southern Stratford canal amongst many projects.



Molly and Bailey 'Skip' Manion's boat 'Ratty' which was a converted Thames launch. 'Skip' had lost a leg many years previously.

Their son Roger wrote a navigation guide to the BCN with Ken Dunham.

Behind is the Bailey's boat 'Orianne' and the Ainsworth's boat 'Victory'

Note the lack of bridge, the lack of infill and how open the countryside is.

Margaret Bailey is holding the pole. Many will remember Margaret from WBC Burns night suppers. Her husband, Ted, always looked immaculate when cruising, usually wearing a spotted bow tie.

The lady behind the flowers is Eileen Davies. (Wife of Tom who used to lead the singing of Lloyd George knew my father....)





A BBQ at the club (I think, but it could be at a Staffs & Worcs rally site).

From the left, Peggy Ainsworth, Enid Robbins (Wendy's Mum), unknown girl, Albert Ainsworth, Olive Andrews, unknown man.

The Ainsworth's boat was 'Victory' – its BCN plate 1000 is in the clubhouse. The Andrews boat 'Romulus' is still cruised by Geoff Setchfield (Olive's brother).

Jim & Enid Robbins boat 'Meg Merrilies' with Enid at the helm, Diane on bow, Sally amidships with Pat Walton (daughter of Hilda and Wilf Walton). Diane and Sally are Wendy's sisters and we cruised very extensively in this 22' cruiser.

The boat is about opposite the club and, without all the trees, you can see the wide sweep of the canal back to old bridge 3. The housing estates and the new bridge carrying The Droveaway have not arrived yet.



Another BBQ, with the clubhouse taking shape. From the left, Bill Gregory, are Vic and May Hulme, Rita Gregory with back to us and Hilda Walton.

Wilf Walton's company, Walton Sheds, supplied most of the materials for the clubhouse (I think?).

The Gregorys were very involved with the local canals, and their enthusiasm was passed on to their son, Tony. We have to thank Rita annually for allowing us to use Dimmingsdale for our Mayday celebrations.

Inside the club house – the window wall to the left is where the extension and bar are now situated. From the left, unknown woman and young man (Roger Manion?), Enid Robbins & Wendy in front of unknown woman.



The opening of the clubhouse. Note the 'swing' bridge across the canal at the narrows It was made by Bill Gregory. One end was supported by floating 40gallon oil drum with the other end pivoting on a peg set in concrete. It was used regularly until the high bridge was built.

Boats at the opening of the clubhouse. Once again, note how many cruisers there were of all shapes and sizes. In the foreground is the Jim & Enid Robbins boat Meg Merriles. Katie and Herbert Wolff's wooden boat Exodus is opposite. On the opposite side I see Stan Clover's lovely tug Sharpness, 'Shelagh' belonging to Dr. Tom Kemp and Jack Savage (blue & white) and the Manion's ex Thames cruiser Ratty.





Another shot of Stan Clover's lovely Gloucester & Sharpness tug Sharpness, now a heritage boat. Sadly, you just do not see unusual craft like this locally any more.

Astern is (I think) Bob Billington's little boat, with the Craddock's Malaya behind that.

Outside the clubhouse on opening day.

On the left is Sam Lomas. He was awarded B.E.M. for services to the waterways. He was originally employed as a Toll Collector, but in his later years was employed in the Estates Department of British Waterways Board.

Graham has his back to us – he had known Sam since he was a boy. On the right is Wendy.



Graham and Wendy again on opening day. Nice cars -.the Land Rover belonged to Steve Harrison's brother Paul

A shot of our old 60' Josher Penguin - it looks great here but she drew 3'3" standing still so was always welcome on protest cruises to dredge the bottom! She had a rare 2 cylinder semi-diesel Bolinder which was Graham's pride and joy. The paintwork was by Ken Williams, the last pavement artist in London, and a member of North Cheshire CC.

Behind is the clubhouse with the newly built toilet block. I remember laying some of the bricks!

Note how open it is around. The trees have yet to grow so huge.



Some WBC members took a holiday in France on the barge 'Palinurus'. This barge was a new venture by the Parsons brothers who were well known on the Staffs & Worcs as members of the canal society and as canalside residents near Whittington lock.

Aboard the Palinurus. Note the WBC burgee is flying.

From the left, Geoff Yardley (?) and Enid Robbins.





Jim Robbins (Wendy's Dad) is steering Palinurus. George Andrews is adjusting lines on the bits (barge talk for bollards). I can't remember the name of the man with the cigarette, but it is Wilf Walton behind him.

Another picture of Jim Robbins steering Palinurus.

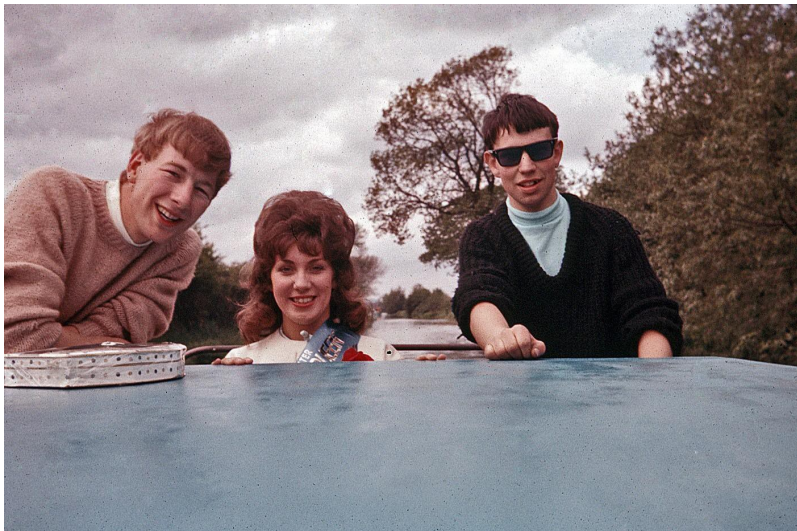
When cruising down the Staffs & Worcs canal, look out for the seat in his memory at Whittington lock erected by British Waterways to commemorate Jim's outstanding contribution to voluntary restoration work on the canals.

He was chairman of the Staffs & Worcs Canal Society, and responsible for the restoration of the Stourbridge 16, bringing together BW and volunteer labour for the first time. He was also one of the first members of IWACC.



Protest cruises with the WBC went far and wide. Trips to the rallies at Marple usually, at some stage, had George Andrews (on Romulus) and Albert Ainsworth (on Victory) take off for a late night cruise to Whaley Bridge, with as many crew as could climb aboard (or were sober enough!). Here is George steering Romulus on this lovely stretch. The parrot always sat on top of the boat, inviting all and sundry to "give us a kiss".

There was a great deal of interaction between WBC and Staffs & Worcs. I cannot remember which Staffs & Worcs rally this is, but climbing the ramp are Peggy Ainsworth (left) and Enid Robbins.



Here two WBC members kidnap the Staffs & Worcs Rally Queen. On the left is Bob Garland, son of Reg & Hilda Garland, and cousin of Ed Slater. On the right is Bob Billington (whose boat it was).

An old favourite, this one. Taken in the beer tent at a Staffs & Worcs rally, WBC members Albert Ainsworth (left) in deep conversation with Bill Gregory.





Yes, they could talk for England (or Ireland in the case of Hilda).

On the left is Hilda Walton, and I can confirm that her hair ALWAYS looked like this and she slept upright with a scarf around her head. On the right is Enid Robbins.

Hilda & Wilf Walton's boat was the cruiser Lady Patricia which they cruised extensively with their daughter Pat, mainly in company with the Robbins boat Meg Merriles.

Graham Witheridge working on Mai Arde. Again, note how open the moorings are, and the lack of narrowboats. The stone bollards on the left remained for many years.

We had cruised narrowboat Penguin for many years but she was very hard work, and by now we had 2 small children, so we swapped for this very child-safe cruiser and had many more years (and thousands of miles) of trouble-free cruising with this go-anywhere boat.



Again, Graham working on Mai Arde on the work point, watched by our younger daughter, Emma (now with teenagers of her own!).

Note the shiny new bridge has appeared, but the crane has yet to arrive.

WBC members clearing a rally site before a Staffs & Worcs rally. Mo Craddock is to the foreground, Diane Robbins in green and a friend of Mo to the left.



Bob Garland and Steve Harrison. My sister Diane thought Steve was sooooo good looking, but Bob was spoken for – Mo Craddock's boyfriend.

An old favourite of mine. My mother, Enid Robbins, having fallen in, taking a last drag of her cigarette before being hauled out. On the Leeds & Liverpool canal, I think, mid 1960s



And lastly, Staffs & Worcs canal Society celebrated the bi - centenary of the canal in style, with period dress. It was attended by many WBC members. Here is Wendy, maybe 20, proving that hair extensions are nothing new!



The End.

With thanks to Tony Gregory for corrections.