

Floating Heritage on Ireland's Inland Waterways

The inland waterways of Ireland are rich in floating heritage. There are many stories which illustrate the unique and colourful history of these boats. The following two heritage boats, the 45M and the Blackthorn which both operated on the waterways, are still in use today.

45M Heritage Boat

45M was built in 1928 by Vickers (Ireland) Limited and worked for only 17 years before she sank in Lough Derg in December 1946 with the loss of three of her crew.

She operated as a Hack Boat, sub-leased by Tom Moore of Carlow, for about two years during the "Emergency", being used to carry sugar and general goods between Carlow and Dublin. She was also used for the shipment of turf into the city.

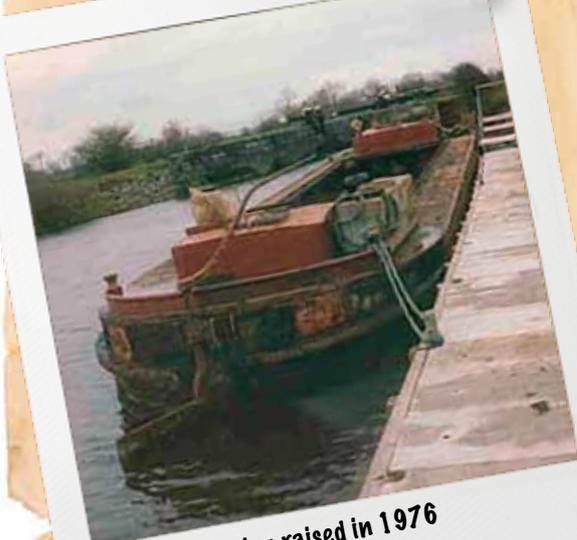
In November 1946 Christy "Copper" Cross was Skipper with Jack Boland driving and Tony Brien as deckhand. They had left Dublin with a cargo of porter for Limerick. "Copper's" father was seriously ill and on meeting 61M at Lowtown he swapped jobs with "Red" Ned Boland for the week so he would be close to home.

On Sunday morning December 1st, 45M travelled down the lake from Portumna heading for Killaloe. Opposite Parkers Point 45M was struck by a gale that passed over the lake. The high winds caused the cargo to shift. The tow rope snapped as large waves swept across the deck and the barge heeled over and sank.

When she went down "Red" Ned Boland, Jack Boland and Jimmy McGrath (who was Webbing) all died. Tony Brien swam to safety and was the only survivor.

45M lay at rest for the next 29 years at the bottom of Lough Derg. In 1975 after buying it from CIE for £20 Donnacha Kennedy salvaged 45M from where she rested in 80ft of water. When she was brought up from the bottom the general condition of the hull was beyond their dreams as a thin crust of lime formed over everything and when that was knocked off the original paint showed underneath.

In March 1976 45M was sold to David Coote. After restoration she had her first voyage in 1980. In the mid 80's she travelled back to Lough Derg to her current moorings near Killaloe. She has travelled between Lough Derg and the Grand Canal in the years since then. 45M has been made famous world wide by the 1991 Waterways programme with Dick Warner, when she carried a cargo of bricks, crystal and stout from Dublin to Limerick.



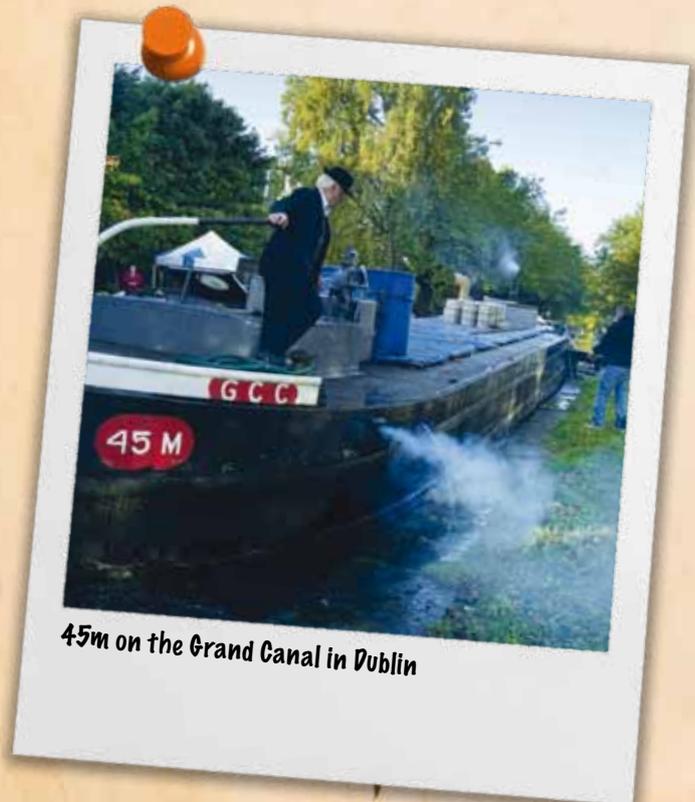
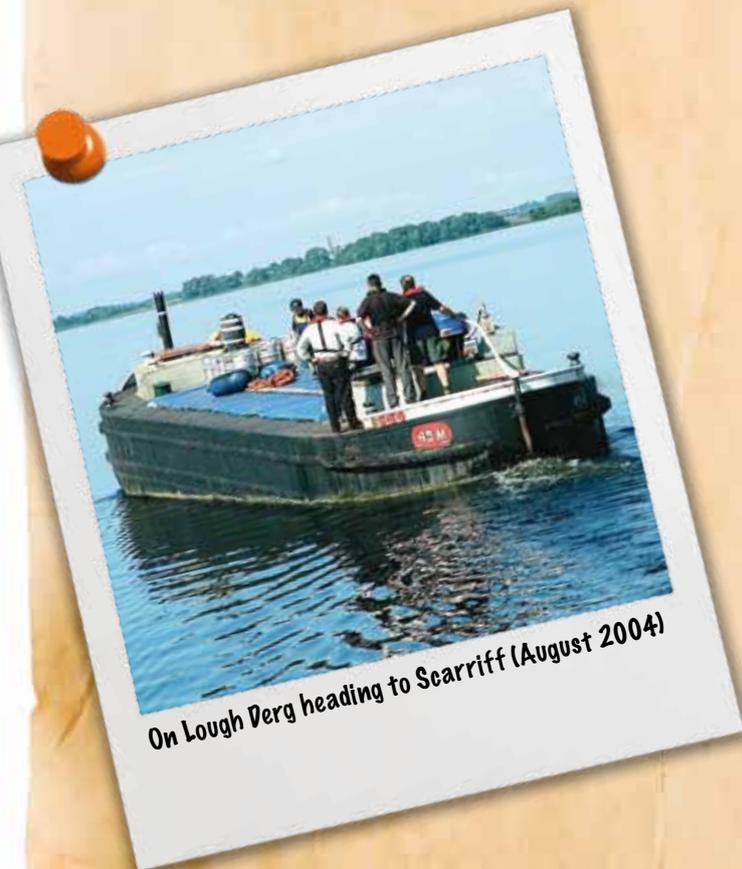
45M after being raised in 1976

Crew included

Her first skipper was Dan Logan. In January 1939 Joe Connolly, Shannon Harbour, joined the 45M as Greaser, at that time her crew were Mick "Oilhat" Connolly as skipper, Tom "Nanny" Lyons as deckman and Paddy "Smythy" Dunne as engineman. Tom Moore from Carlow with his two brothers Eddie and Jack, operated 45M as a Hack Boat.

Technical Details:

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| Reg No.: | 45M |
| Built by: | Vickers (Ireland) Ltd |
| Year: | 1928 |
| Construction: | Riveted Steel |
| Length: | 61' 6" |
| Beam: | 13' 2" |
| Payload: | 62 Tons |
| Draft: | 4' 6" |
| Weighed: | Killaloe 1928 |
| Engine: | Bolinder E Type 15Hp |



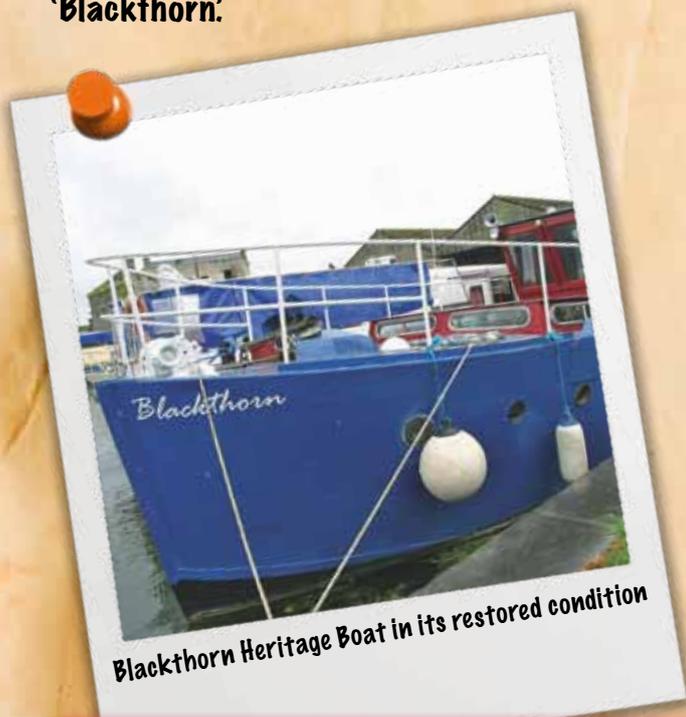
Activity

Investigate what is meant by the terms length, beam and draft. How would they impact on your decision to navigate certain waterways e.g. low bridges, narrow locks etc. Present your findings to the class.

Blackthorn Heritage Boat

Blackthorn is one of many 45ft Fast Re-fuellers built in Southampton by Vosper Ltd from 1938 to 1944. These craft were used for refuelling the flying boats and tending to other marine craft during World War 2. Blackthorn was stationed in Castle Archdale and was used on Lower Lough Erne by the RAF. With all holding tanks filled to capacity she could carry a total of 2,500 gallons of aviation fuel and 200 gallons of engine oil.

Following the war, Blackthorn was sold to the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland and was used on Lough Neagh. The duration of time she spent on Lough Neagh is uncertain, as is how long she was lying on the Grand Canal before she was purchased by Mick & Fran Clinton in May 1985. The Clintons became aware of two sister ships on the Shannon, Eamon Egan's 'Hawthorn' and Tim Keane's 'Whitethorn' and thought they would add to the thorn fleet hence the name 'Blackthorn'.



Blackthorn Heritage Boat in its restored condition

She made her maiden voyage to the Shannon and back to Hazelhatch in May 1986. In order to prepare for the journey, specialist improvisations were necessary such as a chain of coat hangers between the steering position and the gearbox enabled the skipper to select forward and reverse! The crew quarters were very basic and consisted of camp beds and sleeping bags for the accommodation of 2 adults, 2 children and a dog. Luxury items were few and far between and it was not until reaching Tullamore that the cooker was bought. This trip has fond memories of non-stop rain, a windowless spot-welded leaking superstructure and more plastic bags than you could ever shake a boat hook at. But it was a testament to her crew and the little ship she has become.

In 1994 after winning the cup at the Dublin Rally, Blackthorn was one of five cruisers (Ringsend Raiders) who made the momentous first journey from Ringsend in Dublin to Belleek in Co. Fermanagh via the newly reopened Shannon-Erne waterway. Making this arduous journey returning once again to where she served the RAF on her 50th anniversary.

Technical Details:

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| Built by: | Vosper Ltd |
| Year: | July 1944 |
| Length: | 45 ft |
| Beam: | 10ft |
| Draught: | 2ft 9in |
| Engine & Gearbox: | Ford Thames Trader Diesel, Marinised by Parsons Barracuda, Parsons Gearbox with 2:1 reduction |
| Loaded Capacity: | 2,900 Gallons |

Activity

Research other heritage boats and create your own classroom 'Floating Heritage Wall'. Investigate what these boats were used for.