

Life on the English Waterways

Topic Pack

Going to school was difficult for the children living on narrowboats.

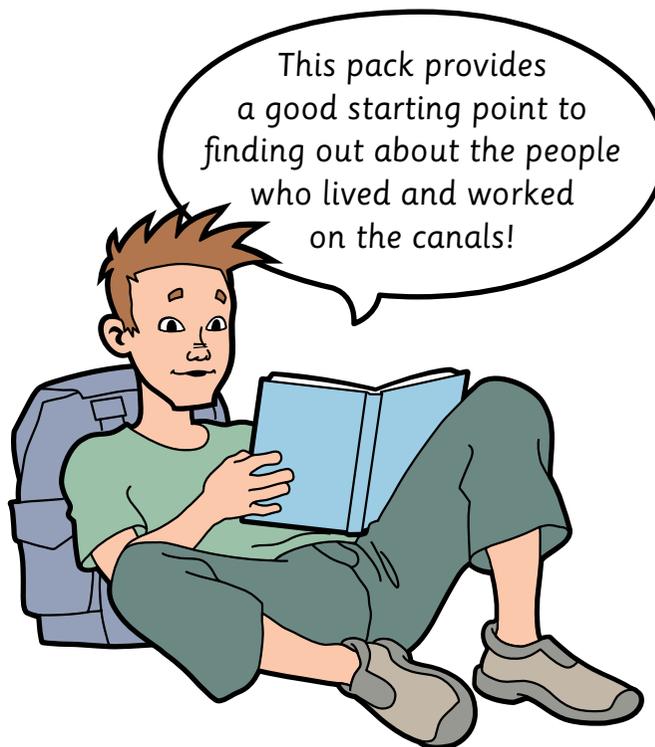


Did you know there were many different jobs associated with canals and rivers?



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Introduction

I'm sitting here writing this after many months of collecting information, pictures and stories for you to read.

I had a great time visiting the archives, looking at old pictures and reading old diaries – deciding which ones to include was tough. I didn't think the pack would get this large but there is just so much information about the waterways. In fact, probably the hardest part was working out what not to put in.

So here it is, a pack all about life on the waterways between 1760 and 1960. I hope you find it interesting and learn something about the canals and rivers which have been such an important part of Britain's history. This pack should provide a good starting point to finding out about the people who lived and worked on the canals, whether you are doing a history project, a local study or are just interested in discovering what life was like for a boater.

You can find out more about individual canals, building canals and wildlife at www.canalriverexplorers.org.uk

Katie

Katie Donlon
Education Coordinator



Chapter 1

Working on the waterways

There were once many different jobs associated with canals and rivers. Some people lived on the land and came to work by the canal each day, while others lived and worked on the boats.

Jobs linked with the waterways

The waterways created employment for a large number of people. There were lots of jobs linked with the waterways, such as:

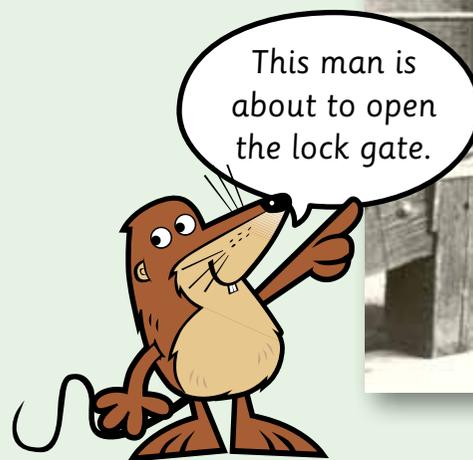
- lock/bridge keepers
- toll collectors
- navvies
- engineers
- factory owners
- people working in the docks and wharves
- canal inspectors
- transport companies
- crew on the boats

 Would you like one of these jobs?



Lock cottages were a nice place to live but many don't have easy access to a road.

 What problems do you think this might create for people living there today?





Here is a lock keeper outside his hovel with a cat to keep him company

Working on the waterways

Perks of the job

Jobs such as canal inspector and bridge keeper were good jobs to have, so there was a lot of competition for the posts. Employees had to have a good set of references.

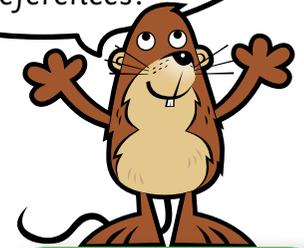
In return they got a house near where they worked. This also meant they were on hand at all times.

Working on a boat

Thousands of men and women worked on boats.

In some areas all-male crews were the most common, and they returned to their families and houses on completing a job. Fly boats – boats that worked as quickly as they could, often through the night – were also often crewed by men only. In some areas whole families worked on boats.

Did you know employees had to have a good set of references?



Fascinating Facts

Rubbish was carried on boats long after dustbin lorries became popular as they could carry so much.

Local authorities had their own **fleets of boats** to collect rubbish!

“This is the life, all work and no bosses makes me very happy.”

Robert Amey, 1960

Chapter 2

Living on the waterways

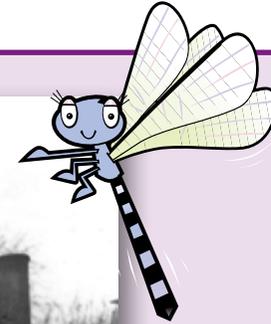
People lived on boats for a number of reasons, depending on who they were and what they transported.

Transporting goods

Some cargo didn't have to be taken very far along the canal so it was easy for the workers to come home at the end of the day. However, cargo often had to be transported over long distances, which meant that the workers couldn't go home every night; they had to sleep on the boat. When they came back from dropping off goods, they would go back to their families and homes for a night or two before setting off on their next journey.

Families on board

On some canals families began to live aboard the boats with their husbands or dads. This saved them money as they didn't have to pay for a house on the land. Only the captain of the boat got paid but the whole family helped with the jobs on the boat. The quicker the boat got to the destination, the sooner they were paid for their load.



? What do you think it would have been like coming home once a week?

All the family help to get jobs done on a boat.

? What do you do to help your family at home?



Working conditions

Pay was not very good for workers but they had more freedom than many land workers.

Pay

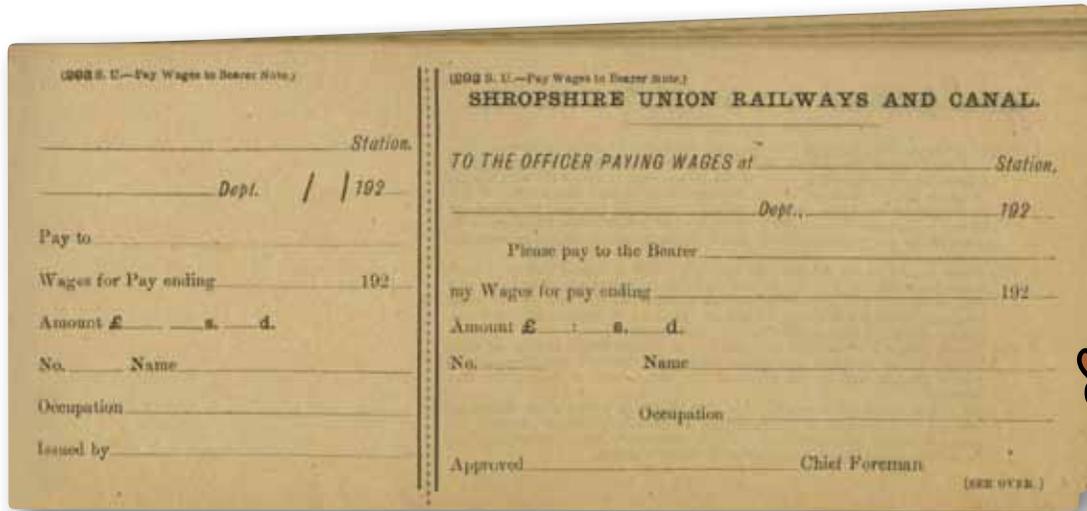
There was only one wage for the boat even though often the whole family was helping out. Boaters were paid by the ton of cargo they delivered not by the hour or week. This meant the faster you worked, the more trips you could do and the more you were paid. It got even harder in the 20th century when pay was lowered.

Hours

Working 12 to 15 hours a day was considered normal and on some stretches it was not unusual to work 18 hours.

 Would you like to work an 18-hour day?

It doesn't leave much time for doing anything else.



(192 S. U.—Pay Wages to Boater Note.)

Station Dept. / 192

Pay to _____

Wages for Pay ending 192 _____

Amount £ : s. d. _____

No. _____ Name _____

Occupation _____

Issued by _____

(192 S. U.—Pay Wages to Boater Note.)

SHROPSHIRE UNION RAILWAYS AND CANAL.

TO THE OFFICER PAYING WAGES at _____ Station, _____

Dept., 192 _____

Please pay to the Boater _____

my Wages for pay ending 192 _____

Amount £ : s. d. _____

No. _____ Name _____

Occupation _____

Approved _____ Chief Foreman (SEE OVER.)

A blank wage slip

 Why not fill in one for yourself?

Not sure you'll get paid though!



Extra money

If the cargo was unloaded by the boaters, they were paid more. Some families worked more than one pair of boats so were able to carry double the amount of cargo.

Race to the finish

Boats were often heading for the same destination and if they didn't get there first, they had to wait to unload. This meant the crew had to wait to get paid. Loaded boats can't go fast so the only way to get there first was to work longer hours. Some boaters would get up really early and try to sneak off while the other boats were still tied up.



Boats had to be loaded up in the right way so the cargo's weight was balanced and they could fit in as much as possible.

Blow-Up Bridge – Case Study

Some cargoes were dangerous to carry. Many travelled safely to their destination but here is an account of one that was not so lucky.

Gunpowder boats

Some boats were designed to carry gunpowder and this was the cargo of the ill-fated **Tilbury**, with containers of highly flammable petroleum. The gunpowder was being carried to coal mines, where it would be used for blasting through the rock.

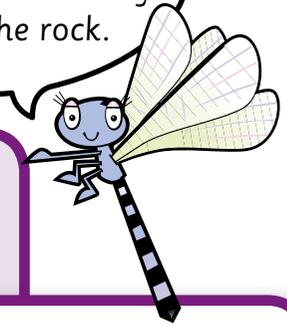


Macclesfield Bridge was blown up in 1874

Explosion

No one knows exactly what caused the explosion, which happened 130 years ago, but it went with quite a bang, causing devastation to the bridge it was passing under and the surrounding buildings. It is reported that the 3 men and 1 boy aboard the **Tilbury** lost their lives in the blast.

The gunpowder was being carried to coal mines for blasting through the rock.



Strange
but True

“An extraordinary accident, which happened yesterday week at 5 o'clock in the morning, cost the loss of several lives, much damage to houses and furniture, and a vast alarm to the north western suburbs of London. This was the blasting up of a barge laden partly with petroleum and gunpowder for blasting, which was one of a train drawn by a steam-tug along the Regent's Canal.

London News, 1874”

When they rebuilt Macclesfield Bridge, now known by boaters as **Blow-Up Bridge**, they reused the undamaged columns but turned them around to offer a smooth surface for tow ropes.

If you go to the bridge today you can see the marks left by the tow ropes before the blast, on the wrong side of the column.

Conditions aboard

There are many different reports of what it was like to live and work on a boat. Like houses on land, some people looked after their floating homes better than others.

Space

Space was limited on board. If a family had moved from a house, it must have taken some getting used to. Families were often large and overcrowding on boats was considered a problem.

 Could you live in just a few square metres of space? Where would you put your belongings?

Canal Act 1877

The Canal Act, among other things, aimed to limit the number of people that were allowed to live on a boat. This depended on the type of boat and how many cabins it had. Children above 12 (girls) and 14 (boys) years old were counted as adults and there were strict rules as to where they could sleep. Inspectors were sent along the towpath to ensure the rules were being followed but families often saw the inspector coming and sent their children on ahead!



Credit: K.C. Ward

Can you imagine all these people living on one boat?

 How many people live in your house? Do you know anyone who lives on a boat?



Fascinating
Facts

Narrowboat
cabins were
about 3m x 2m.

 Why not measure this out and see how much room you would have to live in on a working boat?

Chapter 3

What was it like living on a boat?

Were there toilets on the boats?

No! The boaters used chamber pots, which were emptied into the canal. Or in countryside areas they probably just nipped behind a bush! Boats today have flushing toilets and even showers!

Where did the boaters keep their things?

There wasn't a lot of space on board so it had to be used carefully. There were lots of hidden cupboards and spaces that had more than one job. It also helped if you didn't have too many things in the first place!

Where did they get their water from?

There was no running water on the boats. Water taps or pumps were provided alongside the canal. This was used for drinking and cooking. It was stored in water cans kept on the roof of the boat. Water for washing and cleaning was often taken from the canal.



Inside a narrowboat cabin

It is much easier to get clean water today. Look out for the taps and service stations along the towpath.



This woman's making the most of being moored up and doing her washing on the towpath.

“Woke up this morning to the sound of heavy rain beating on the water cans.”
Robert Amey, 1960

Inside the cabin

Cabins were small and every last bit of space had to be used carefully.

Everything has a place

Although there was some variation between boats and regions, the issue of space was a common one and everything had to be carefully stored away. The majority of the boat had to be given over to carrying the cargo. This did not mean that the boats didn't look like home. On boats where women lived, the cabins were often highly decorated and very well organised. Over the years standardised layouts of the interior became popular.

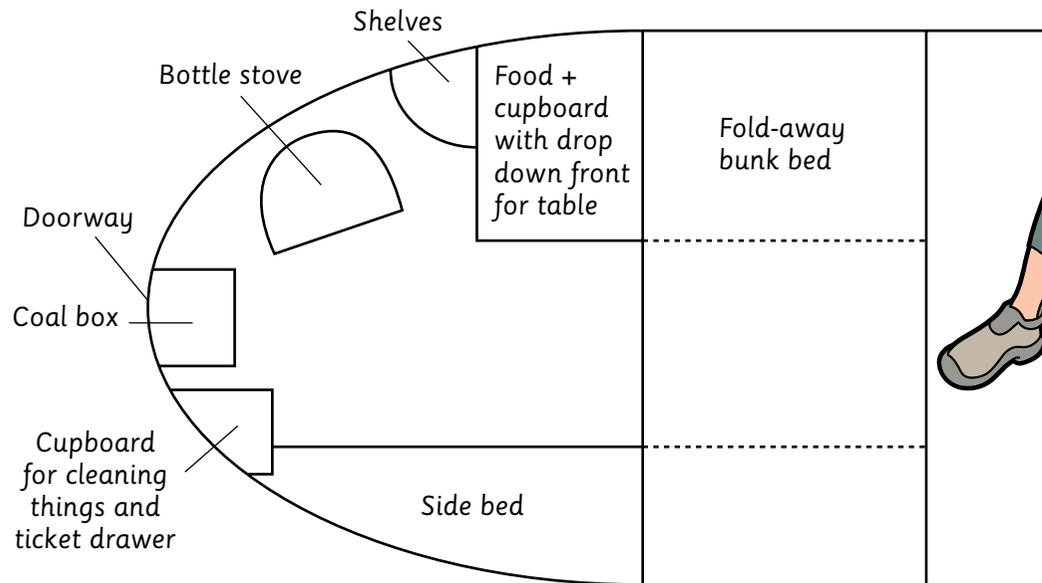
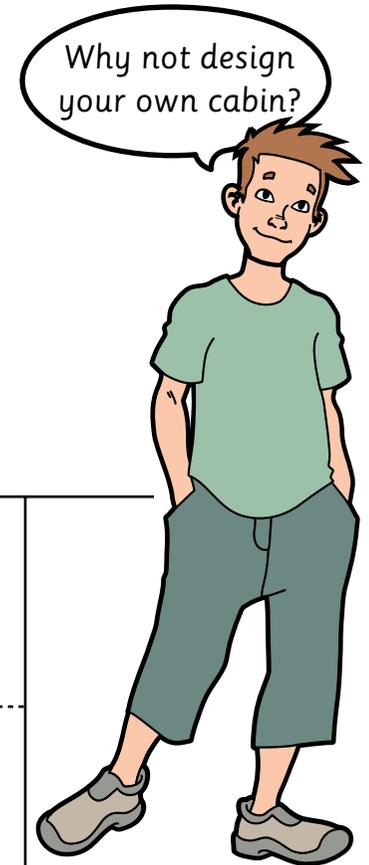
 How do you think narrowboats might be different today?

What did they look like inside

The inside of the cabin was often painted cream and 'combed' with brown paint to create grained patterns. Cupboard doors and drawer fronts were made with panels that had pictures painted on them. The decoration was influenced by the Victorian style of the time, which meant lots of frills and fancy items. This made living in such a small space easier as it was such a colourful cosy place.



 If you could only have a tiny room like this, what would you keep in it? How would you decorate it?



Outside the boat

The outside of the boat was kept smart as it represented the company and showed a sense of pride.

Colours

Boats were given names, which were shown on the outside, and also had to display the company's name, if it wasn't privately owned. It was important that the lettering could be seen from a distance. It had a least 2 colours, with the font changing to suit the styles of the time. The most popular colours for boats were red, white, blue, yellow and green.

**Strange
but True**

In 1948 the canals **became nationalised** and the colours for boats changed to **mainly yellow with some blue.**

Only a year later it changed to mainly blue and some yellow!



Who decorated the boats?

There were people who decorated boats as a job, but some boaters preferred to decorate their own. The brightly painted boats stood out from other forms of transport and the dull colours of the industrial era.



How would you decorate your boat?



Roses and castles

No one knows where the canal painting known as roses and castles came from, but it is still popular today.

Beginnings

The first painting on boats was probably to help identify them, which was especially important as many boats looked the same. Roses and castles didn't really appear until families moved on to the boats and it was more important for the boat to feel like a home. There wasn't much room for ornaments and other decorative items so it is likely they began to paint images straight on to the walls.



This man makes painting look easy but it's not – I've tried!

What was painted?

The amount of decoration was often dependent on where the boat worked and whether a family lived on board. In some regions, only the cabin would be decorated, but in others it was common for the exterior to be decorated too.



This water can is painted in the knobstick style, which was popular on the southern end of the Trent & Mersey Canal.

Roses and castles style

Roses and castles probably started being used because beautiful landscape and flower paintings were popular at the time. The boating community created their own style, which varies from region to region. Roses and castles were more popular on some canals than others. The technique for roses was to paint quite quickly with broad strokes, the more stylised designs taking less time to complete.

Chapter 4

Women

Women were not usually in charge but did a lot of work!

What did the women who lived on the boats do?

One of the reasons for the presence of women on board was to attend to cooking, laundry and cleaning and where the women were also the mothers of young children, it was natural for them to have their offspring with them.

Wendy Freer

All for free as the captain was the only one who got paid!



It is the baby in the picture's christening so everyone is dressed in their best clothes.

Community

Boaters were a close community and often married other boaters. The boats were always on the move but there were places where boats would tie up for the night and it was a good place to catch up with the washing and have a gossip!

Female captains

There were a few women in charge but they were not often called captain. Where the person in charge was a woman it was usually because their husband had died and they'd chosen to take over. During World War II women from the land were brought on to the canal as a part of a government scheme.



**Strange
but True**

Girls were considered women at the **age of 12.**

According to the law they were no longer supposed to **share their parents' cabin.**

Children

Birth

Pregnant women had to work as close in time to the birth as possible. The boat was then tied up and the baby was usually born in the cabin. After only a few days for the mother to recover, the boat was on the move again.

Babies

Children often sat on the roof in fine weather, fastened with a harness to prevent them slipping into the water. As they got older they had more freedom but had to be watched carefully. The canal was a dangerous place and many people couldn't swim.



Look how small the child is in comparison to the horse. They were there really to encourage the horse to keep going.

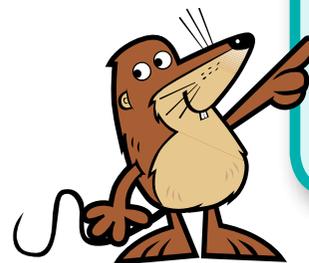
 Would you like to do this job? What would be good/not so good about it?

Play

Boat children didn't have much time to play, as from around 5 years old they began helping to steer the boat. Children enjoyed playing in the hold when it was empty or on cargoes such as coal. If the hold was empty, a swing could be hung from the planks above. Cowboys and Indians was a popular game, possibly because of the horses.

On loan

Children were often lent out to other boats that didn't have as many helping hands, although the majority of children lived on their parents' boats. This is not quite as bad as it sounds as they mostly knew the people they were going to. Most were well cared for, although had to work hard. They were leading the horse by about 7 years old, and working locks by age 12 was not uncommon.



Fascinating Facts

Reports by Inspectors showed **4,000 children** living on boats in 1895.

Education

Going to school was difficult for children living on narrowboats because they were always on the move.

Did children living on boats go to school?

Most children hardly went to school at all, only for about three weeks a year. Sometimes they would go to school for half a day or occasionally up to a wee, depending how long their boats were tied up.

 Was it a good or bad thing that children didn't go to school?

Fascinating Facts

Few early boaters could **read or write**. However, they knew their numbers as they didn't want to be tricked out of their pay.

1920 Boat Children's Education Act

A law was passed to say that boat children had to go to school 200 days a year, the same as children who lived in houses. Some children were taught on land and returned to their families and boats in the holidays. Schools on boats also opened in stopping places along the canal.



Floating classroom used in London today

Elsdale School

One of the schools held on a boat was on Elsdale, which opened in 1930. This made it easier for children but they still did not attend every day.

 Would you like to go to school on a boat?

 Why do you think the government thought it was so important for children to go to school?



Look at all the different children in these class photographs.

 How are they different from your own class?

Education – Case Study

As education for the rest of the population became better after the 1948 Education Act, people tried to think of new ways to ensure boaters' children the same opportunities as were given other children.

Boarding boaters

As there was less work and poorer pay on the canals in the 1950s, boaters had to work extra hard to make a living. This meant the children went to school even less. So hostels were opened, where children could stay during term time and have a full-time education.

What was it like living in the hostel?

It must have been very strange for the children coming off the boats to live in the hostel. They had a television and plenty of games, with time to play them.

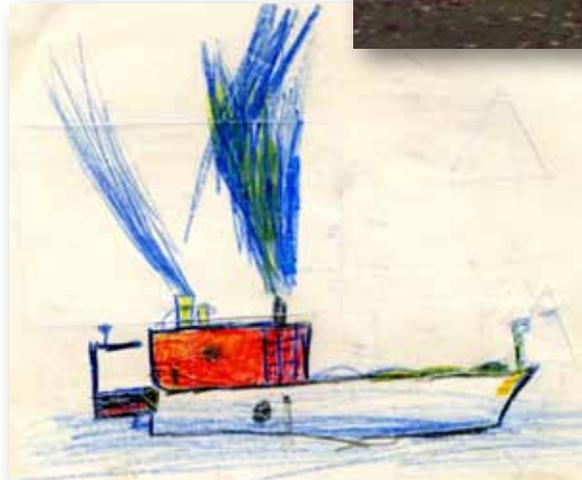
 Would you like to go and live at school all term? What would be the good and bad things about this?



Wood End Hostel

One of the hostels opened in 1952 was called Wood End. Up to 29 children could stay there and attend local schools. They could go home to their boats in the holiday, although this could be difficult as the hostel was not near the canal. Most children left the hostel and returned to live and work on their boats when they reached age 14.

Credit: Rosemary Phillips



The detail in this drawing, done by one of the children living at the hostel, shows how much they knew about boats.

Credit: Rosemary Phillips

**Strange
but True**

The children were **not used to flushing toilets**, as they did not have them on boats. When they first arrived, they were quite an attraction and the children enjoyed **flushing them!**

Chapter 5

Crochet and collectables

It was customary to decorate the inside of the cabin. Certain objects and crafts became particularly popular on the waterways.

Crochet

The most popular craft among boat women was crochet. It became very common in the 1890s and the boat women copied the patterns they saw on 'the bank'. Nearly every boat had a 'ticket drawer piece' as well as curtain and shelf edges. They also made edgings for bonnets, aprons, underwear and woollen shawls. Crochet was quick and easy to do, took up little space and could be done while steering the boat.

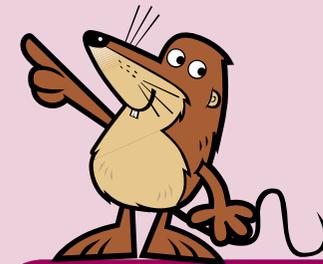
Collectables

Like all Victorians the boatmen and women were collectors, collecting items to decorate their cabins. Brasses – often called 'bright bits' were a popular choice. Horse brasses were made of solid brass until World War I as were the brass rings round the chimney. Boaters took great pride in keeping them shining. Women often brought 'bright bits' into the cabin as decoration, miniature windlasses were popular.

 Do you collect anything?



Dressed as an early 20th-century boat woman, this lady demonstrates the skills of crochet.



**Strange
but True**

Women also crocheted ear caps! They decorated them with coloured tassels to help keep away the flies from the horse's head.

Plates and teapots

Lace-edged or ribbon plates or hanging-up plates

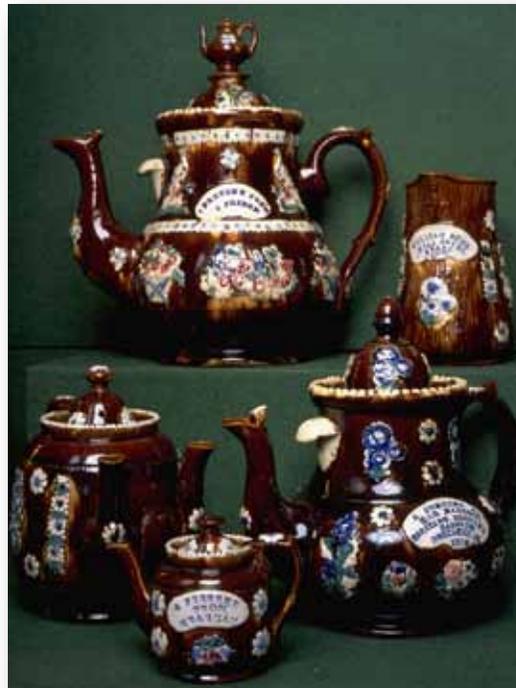
Lace plates have a series of holes which make it look like lace. They are also known as ribbon plates because ribbon was often passed through the holes, or hanging-up plates as they were hung on the wall. The ribbon could be used to hang them up. They were often displayed in rows.



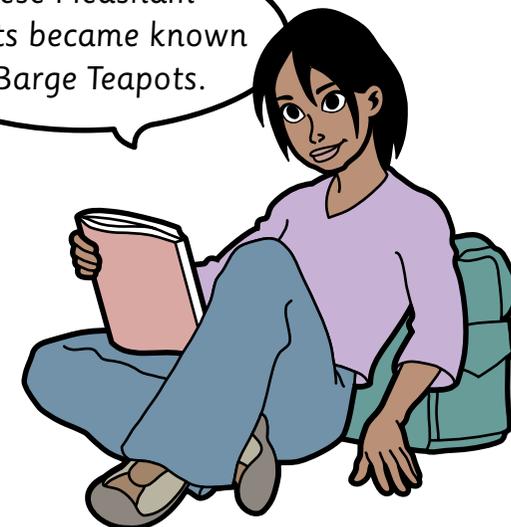
This woman looks very proud of her smart cabin.

Measham teapots

Large teapots which had smaller ones forming the knob on the lid were so popular with boaters they became known as Barge Teapots. They were brown glazed with fruit, flowers and birds moulded on to them. The teapots were often passed down through the generations and had sayings such as 'love at home' painted on. They were popular on the Oxford and Midland canals as they were manufactured in Leicestershire, near the Ashby Canal.



These Measham teapots became known as Barge Teapots.



 Why not have a go at making your own lace plate using a paper plate, hole punch and ribbon.

Fenders and ropework

A fender is a piece of wood or a mass of rope used to protect the side of a boat from getting damaged.

Fenders

Something soft and hard-wearing was needed between the boat the lock gate or edge of the canal. It helped to protect the elaborate paintwork. Fenders can be a variety of shapes and sizes and were often made from waste rope. A good captain always made sure his fenders were kept neat and tidy. Many different knots and patterns used on boats.



Making a boat fender from rope

Ropework

Rope was used in many ways and an important feature of boating. It was used to tie up the boat, secure the cloths and as a tow line for the horse to pull the boat. Cotton was the most popular rope as it stretches and will take the strain slowly. With constant rubbing on bridges and locks, new rope was regularly needed for towing, leaving the remains to be salvaged for fenders.



Horses

Horses were an essential part of waterway life before motor boats. They pulled the boats along the canal.

Take care

A good horse would be pulling a boat for 16 hours a day so it was important to take care of it. If your horse was ill then there was no way of keeping up the pace, which meant loss of money. Horses needed to be fed regularly through the day, have their feet checked and – groomed at night. Blacksmiths were an important part of canal life as they were needed to shoe horses.

Meals on the move

The horse could eat as it walked along the towpath from a nose tin or sack. Like the water cans, the tins and sacks were usually decorated.

Stick or trade

Some boaters kept their horse year after year and others liked to trade regularly. Some used mules or donkeys instead of horses.

Bobbin along

Bobbins were placed along the flanks of the horse to prevent the ropes rubbing and make the task of pulling the boat as easy as possible. If the horse was uncomfortable, it would not be so eager to pull the boat mile after mile.



Look at the differences between these pictures. In one the horses are working, in the other the horse and the boater are all dressed up, ready to lead a trip boat on a special outing.



Stabling

Where it was possible horses were given a break and allowed to sleep in stables. Many waterside pubs, where the boats tied up, had stables.

**Strange
but True**

If a captain had kept a horse for a long time and it had served him well he would pin its tail to the rudder when it died!



Chapter 6

Health

Boaters were wary of doctors and hospitals and it was almost impossible to have a regular doctor while on the move.

The floating population might be expected to be a healthy class, since they live much in the open air, are forced to take a reasonable amount of exercise and earn wages sufficient to procure a proper supply of food. But from a recently published Report of the Registrar General, it would appear that the mortality among them is higher than all but a few classes of the community. Among 'bargemen, watermen and lightermen', between the ages of 25 and 65, the death rate is nearly twice as high as among agricultural labourers.

Annual Report of the Local Government Board for 1885



People kept as clean as they could but it was hard in the conditions.



What could have made the death rate higher?

- Fresh water points few and far between
- Lack of sanitary facilities
- Some cargoes were unpleasant and carried disease or attracted rats
- Cabins could become infested
- Over crowding – disease spreads quickly
- Little separating the cargo from the cabin
- Risk of accidents and drowning

What was done to make conditions better for boaters?

The Boat Acts attempted to improve conditions and prevent illness. It was difficult to get boat people to register for health care as they felt that the government would start enforcing the education of their children. It was also difficult for the boaters to find the money to pay for health care. This improved when the NHS started and health care became free.

Health – Case Study

Sister Mary Ward

Who was Sister Mary Ward?

Sister Mary Ward lived in Stoke Bruerne and became a trusted provider of health care to the boaters passing through. They respected her and often came to her for medical assistance, which she often paid for out of her own pocket until the 1930s. Eventually the canal company saw the benefit of the work being done by Mary Ward and contributed to the costs of her medical supplies.

Recognition

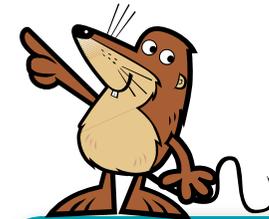
In 1951 she received the British Empire medal for the work she had done. She continued to provide her services until she retired in 1962.

“People think my boat people are dirty and crude and want to get rid of them, but they are wonderful, proud, wise people.”

Sister Mary Ward quoted in *The Times* in 1962



“You can’t take me away from boat people. There isn’t one of them wouldn’t die for me, or one I wouldn’t die for.”
Sister Mary Ward



**Strange
but True**

Mary Ward was never a qualified nurse

She had learned a lot on **her travels** as a nursing ‘sister’ to **convents in Europe and USA**. She then returned to nurse her sick father, who was a rope manufacturer, and came back into **contact with the boating community**, many of whom she had known while growing up.

Food

Food often had to be eaten while travelling along, which also meant shopping trips had to be very quick.

Food on the move

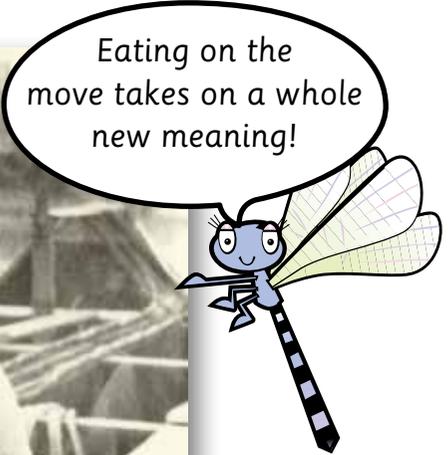
On family boats the wife would often pass a plate to her husband at a lock. Many boat people preferred sandwiches or cold meat at midday and would wait until after tying up to have an evening meal. If they were working late, they would forego the cooked meal and have fish and chips. Sundays were often marked by a cooked lunch. There were often long gaps between meals. On all-male boats there was even less cooking and it was limited to the basics. Food was cooked on a coal stove. This was often turned off in the summer months and cold meals were common.

Shopping

Often shopping was done while the boat was going through the locks but it had to be done quickly so the shopper didn't get left behind. Shops were often far apart and it was up to the women to know which use. Some shops along the cut catered especially for boaters and kept in certain supplies.

Supplementing diet

Boaters supplemented their diet by fishing off the stern of boats for eels, and sometimes poached birds. They also collected fruit and veg from hedgerows and fields.



These children are enjoying a picnic on the Grand Union Canal in the 1950s

“If I called in and there was a shop full of people, Tom Schofield would say to them ‘Do you mind if I serve this young fellow. He’s off the boats?’ You could get what you wanted there.”
Harry Blundell talking about life on the canals

Food – Case Study

Boatmen supplemented their diet and income with the goods they carried.

Cadbury's chocolate

'Crumb' – milk, sugar and cocoa formed into slabs – was carried to the Cadbury factory by boat. A lump dropped in hot water made cocoa and boat children enjoyed their sweet cargo.

Black market

Shropshire Union boatmen had a well organised black market in sugar during World War I. They were careful to take only 1lb of sugar from each sack so it could not be detected when the cargo was weighed at its destination. Boatmen experienced in this loaded their boats so they could get to all 250 sacks during the trip. They could then steal as much as possible, which they would sell.

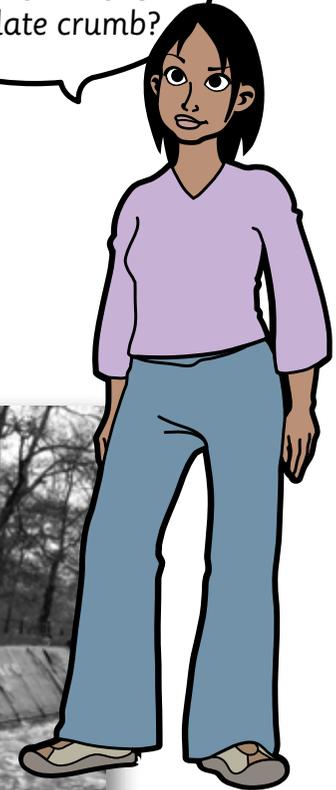
“In 1917, Len was frozen in at Audlem for over a month, by ice 10 inches thick. His load was half flour and half currants so their staple diet for the month became spotted dick!**”**

Kath Irving speaking in 1980



Boats often got stuck in the ice. Some iron hulled boats could break through but when it got really thick it was difficult for anyone to move. Boaters could be stuck for days or even weeks without getting paid.

Do you think this boat girl enjoyed chocolate crumb?



Chapter 7

Clothing – women and girls

Boaters' clothing varied according to time period and area but generally it had to be practical for the job.

Everyday clothing

Generally women in the 1800s wore an ankle-length skirt and a blouse, which needed to be practical. In other words the skirt had to be full enough to step on and off boats but not so full as it got in the way, and the blouse had to be loose enough round the sleeves to allow full movement.

An apron, usually white, protected the skirt and a shawl and bonnet kept the women warm and offered some protection from the weather. From 1901, when Queen Victoria died, the natin was in mourning and many women wore black bonnets. Some had their ears pierced and wore gold hoops in their ears. From 1914 some younger women started wearing more fashionable clothing.

Children

Girls often wore shorter skirts than the women and smaller bonnets. In the 1920s children's clothes became less traditional. They started wearing jerseys, and girls wore berets instead of bonnets.



A modern copy of a boatwoman's bonnet.



Many of the photographs are of people in their best clothes as pictures weren't taken very often.

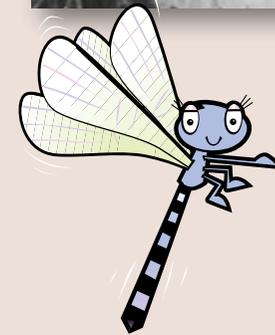
 How do clothes today compare?

Where did the clothes come from?

Many boatwomen made their own and their family's clothes, some using a hand-operated sewing machine. Other clothes were made to order in canalside villages. Best clothes were often decorated with embroidery and crochet, which could be done while working at the tiller. Boaters' missions supplied secondhand clothing.

Old photos can be great clues to the past.

 Why not see if you have any old photos of your family and look at what they're wearing.



Clothing – men and boys

There are no surviving navvies clothes, only sketches and descriptions. Boaters clothes had to be practical and hardwearing.

18th-century navvies

Breeches, shirts, waistcoats and stocking caps. The clothes were colourful and distinctive. The most important part of the clothing was the boots, which needed to be heavier and stronger than other wore.

19th-century navvies

Trousers made from moleskin (thick woollen cloth with a short pile), canvas shirts, rainbow-coloured waistcoats, velveteen square-tailed coats, gaudy neckerchiefs around their necks and white felt hats.



Caps helped to keep the sun off as well as the wind and rain.

Boatmen-everyday clothing

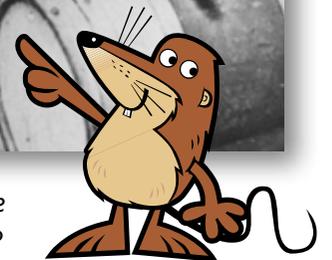
Boatmen wore corduroy or moleskin trousers, shirts and waistcoats. In winter jackets with high lapels and hats were added for extra warmth. Colourful neckerchiefs were often worn around the neck. After the 1884 Canal Boat Act, some companies began to supply clothes for their workers, which were similar to the above, with jackets and flat caps. Flat caps were often worn even in the warmest weather. The women made belts for the men using spider web embroidery.

Boys

Boys often wore smaller versions of the men's clothing until the 1920s when, as with the girls, they began to wear less traditional, more fashionable clothing.



 What do you think these men are chatting about?



Pets

Pets were popular with boaters, particularly dogs and birds.

Birds

About this time my mother had a parrot. My dad got it from a sailor on Liverpool Docks; he swapped it for a piece of print material he got from the print works. Everybody knew about our parrot – the boatmen, the local farmers, even the passers-by used to call for drinks of water as an excuse to see and hear it. The things it could say! My mother always knew when the boat was coming long before she could see it. ‘Put the kettle on – the boatmen are coming!’ it used to say, and before it had boiled we’d be home. It seemed to know. It would say ‘Gee-up!’ to a horse after the boatmen had said ‘whoa!’ and the horse would set off again. They used to curse at that.

Harry Blundell remembering life on the canal 1915 – 1960



Mrs M. A. Smith with her daughter Violet and their pet dog in 1964



Dogs were often the only ones living on the boat that **could swim.**

Strange
but True

 Why do you think birds might have been popular pets?

Dogs

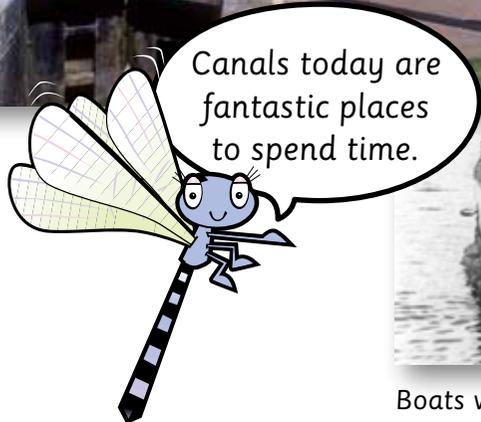
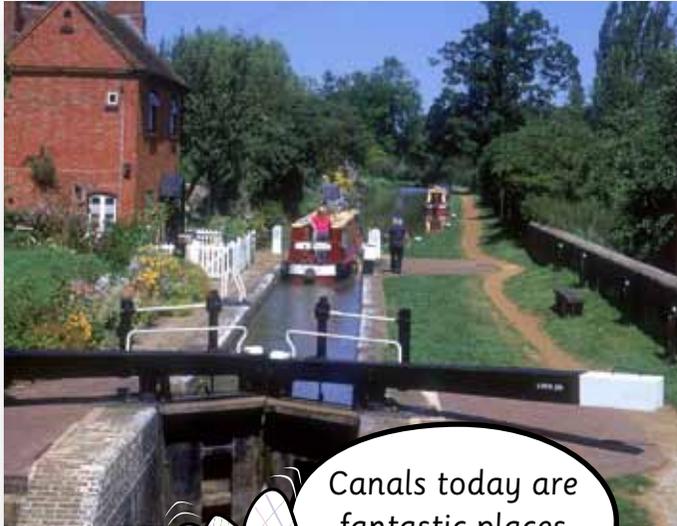
Dogs made useful pets as they could catch food in the hedgerows and provided the boat with some security when left unattended.

Waterways in decline

As other ways of transporting cargo became quicker and more efficient, business moved from the waterways to the rails and roads. Most people stopped living and working on the canal.

Goodbye?

As the amount of work and money declined, the waterways fell into disrepair and many areas silted up and were no longer navigable. Road bridges were built over the cut in some places and boats could no longer travel down the once busy waterways. Boats lay rotting and it seemed the age of canals was in decline. Locks were considered dangerous to passers-by. They were filled in or replaced by weirs.



Boats were abandoned and sunk at the flash at Billinge Green in Cheshire

New life

However, not everyone wanted to see this happen to the waterways and slowly they began to take on a new life. People wanted to boat for pleasure and towpaths became a place to walk, fish and enjoy the surroundings. Enthusiasts set up groups to help restore waterways to their former glory. Bit by bit British Waterways and the supporters of the waterway system have begun to bring the canals back up to standard and now millions of people enjoy using them every year. There is still work to do to restore some canals and maintain the ones in operation but today a slice of the past can be seen alongside the users of today.

 Do you know where your local waterway is? Have you been there?

Find out more things you can do at the canal in our Waterways Today Fact File.

Appendices

Mr Woodhead's holiday diary 1950-52

...find regatta in full swing. Hailed ex-sail boat from Offord. Hailed by Titchner so tied up and saw some of regatta. Heard that boy had been drowned (on head) this morning. Had Titchner and friends on board for cyder. Evening down and through Hemingford Grey Lock after Snow Goose and latest Banham boat 'Crest'. Tied up at 8.30 by large field below mill. Calm and cool after blazing hot day.

11.45 T coming in

Tues 8th Aug

7.45 Took dogs a walk towards St Ives and watched mist clear. (2 photos of misty river)

Early tea and breakfast in saloon as Ri was tired of waiting. Spent morning cleaning up, and taking dogs another good walk.

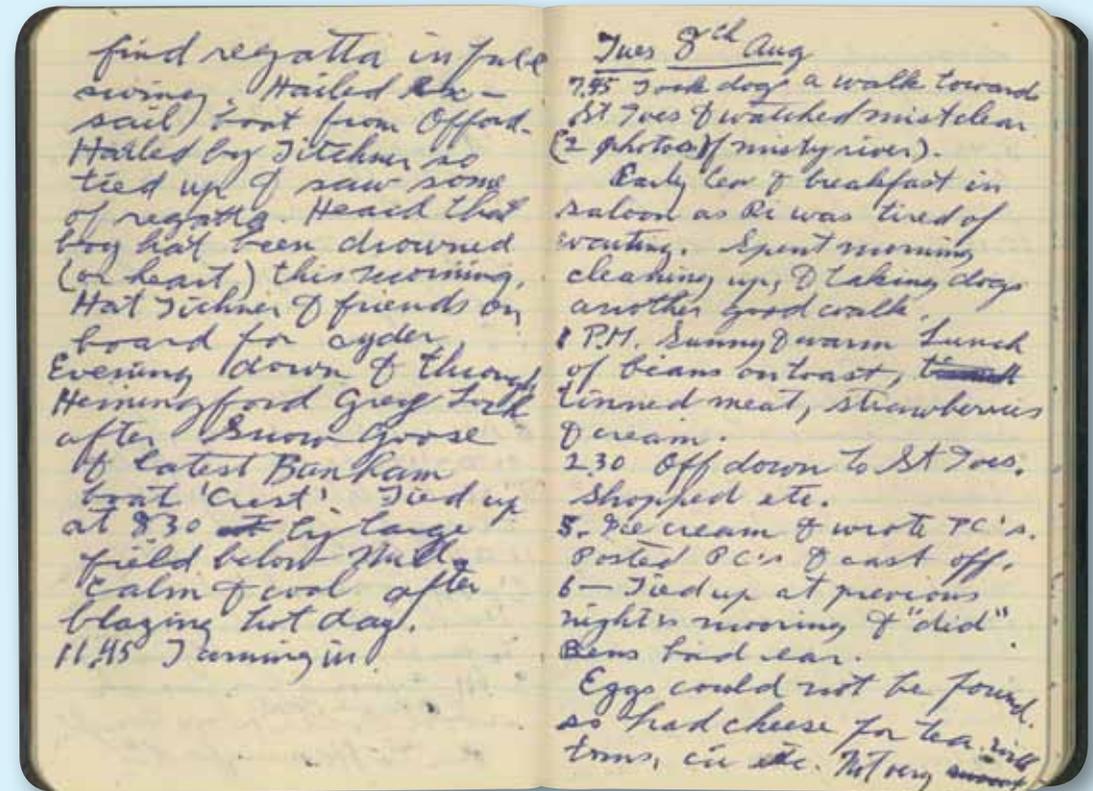
P.M. Sunny and warm. Lunch of beans on toast, tinned meat, strawberries and cream.

2.30 Off down to St Ives. Shopped etc.

5.00 Ice cream and wrote PC's [postcards]. Posted PC's and cast off.

6.00 Tied up at previous night's mooring and 'did' Ben's bad ear.

Eggs could not be found so had cheese for tea.



Diary entry for Tuesday 8th August

Mr Woodhead's holiday diary 1942-47

Tuesday 19th Damp and watery at first 12.30 Cast off as sun broke through, and up under Skinner's bridge. Pleasant paddle against breeze up through pretty part of river past Chequers Inn and ferry (Bablock Hythe). Then through meadows with a few weekend bungalows to a stretch with dense woods and higher ground on the right bank. Through North Moor Lock – rather pretty with goats. On through vast fields of dandelions and buttercups. Very pretty and expansive with tall hedges and trees in the background.

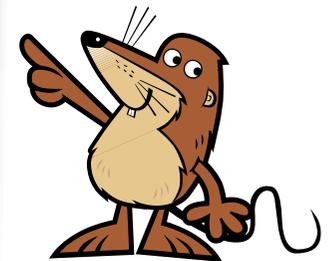
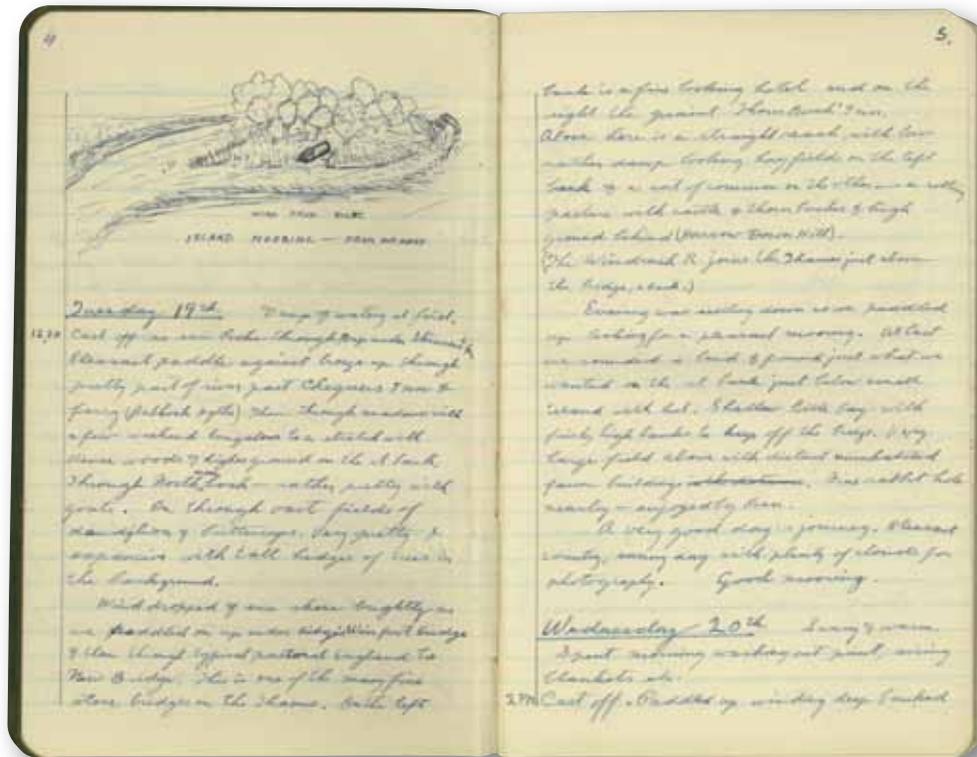
Wind dropped and sun shone brightly as we paddled on up under Ridge's Wein foot bridge and then through typical pastoral England to New Bridge. This is one of the many fine stone bridges on the Thames. On the left bank is a fine looking hotel and on the right the quaint Thorn Bush Inn. Above here is a straight reach, with low rather damp looking hay fields on the left bank and a sort of common on the other – a rolling pasture with cattle and thorn bushes and high ground behind (Harrow Down Hill).

(The Windrush right joins the Thames just above the bridge, left bank).

Evening was settling down as we paddled up looking for a pleasant mooring. At last we rounded a bend and found just what we wanted on the right bank just below small island with hut. Shallow little bay with fairly

high banks to keep off the breeze. Very large field above with distant uninhabited farm buildings. Fine rabbit hole near by – enjoyed by Ben.

A very good day's journey. Pleasant country, sunny day with plenty of clouds for photography. Good mooring.



Diary entry, pages 4-5.

 What kind of boat do you think they were travelling on?

Mr Woodhead's holiday diary 1942-47

...with boats for hire. No shops but an hotel. The whole dominated by a very tall poplar which can be seen for miles.

Banks getting lower as river curved left then right towards rather modern looking lock keeper's house at Radcoct Lock.

White water lilies about half way between the bridge and lock. Ben tried to jump ashore at lock but fell back into river. Woman worked lock. Fine flowers, well kept. On under Old Man's Bridge – a rather dilapidated foot bridge. Past 2 women and 2 Pekinese in posh camping just towing up.

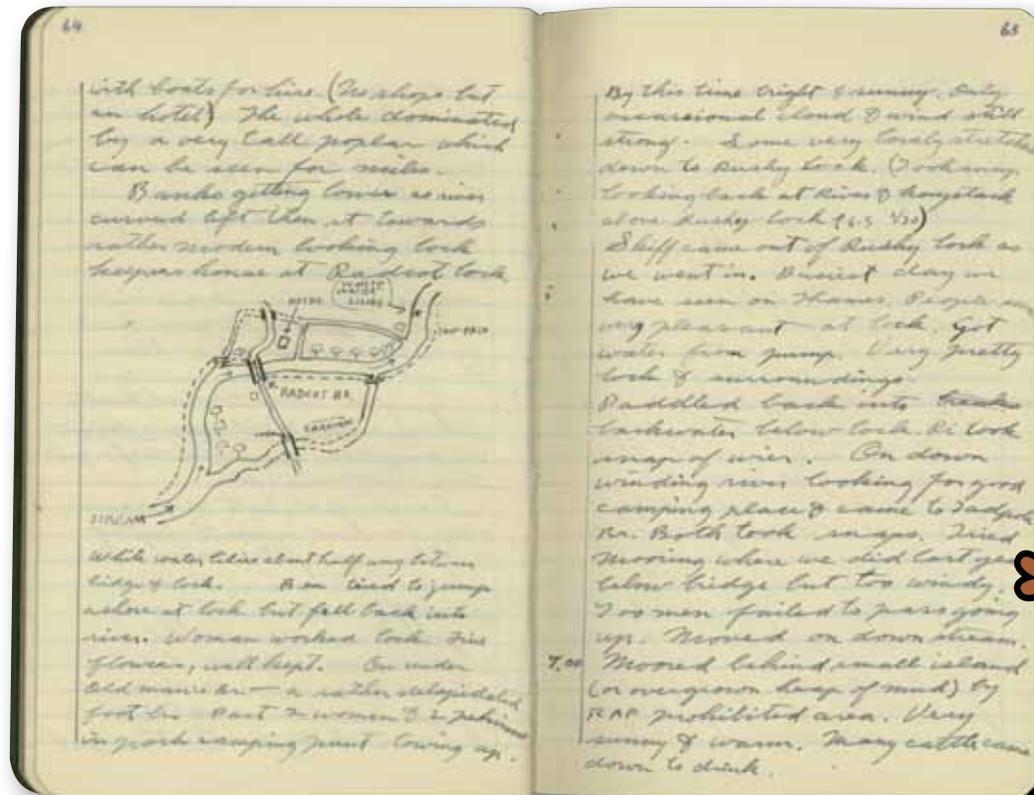
By this time bright and sunny. Only occasional cloud and wind still strong. Some very lovely stretches down to Rushy Lock. (Took snap looking back at river and haystack above Rushy Lock).

Skiff came out of Rushy Lock as we went in. Busiest day we have seen on Thames. People seem very pleasant at lock. Got water from pump. Very pretty lock and surroundings.

Paddled back into backwater below lock. Ri took snap of weir. On down winding river looking for good camping place and came to Tadpole Bridge. Both took snaps. Tried mooring where we did last year below bridge but too windy.

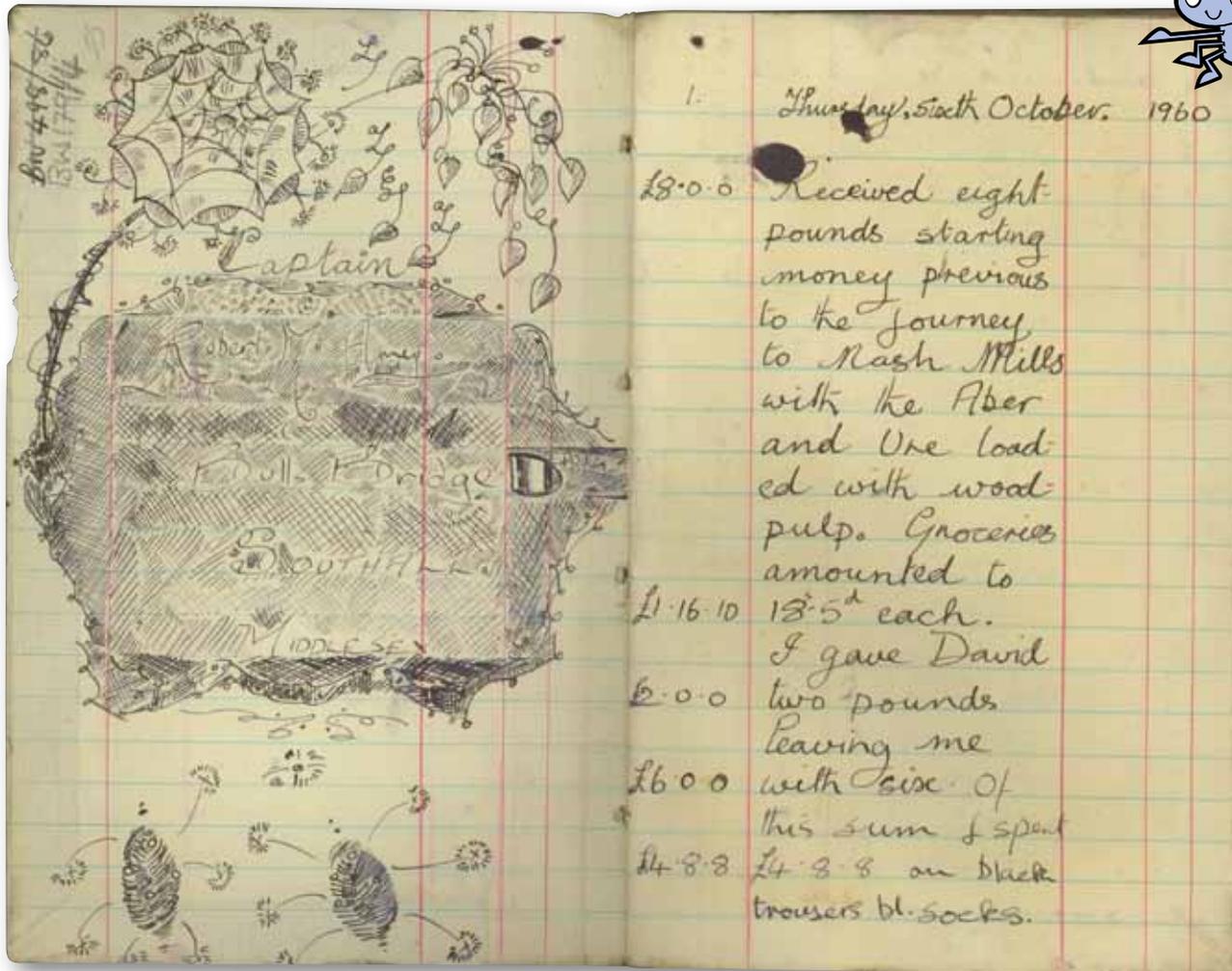
Two men failed to pass going up. Moved on down stream.

7.00 Moored behind small island (on overgrown heap of mud) by RAF prohibited area. Very sunny and warm. Many cattle came down to drink.



Diary entry, pages 64-65

Robert Amey's diary 1960



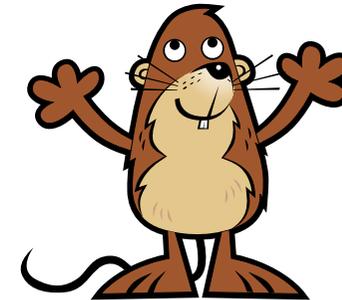
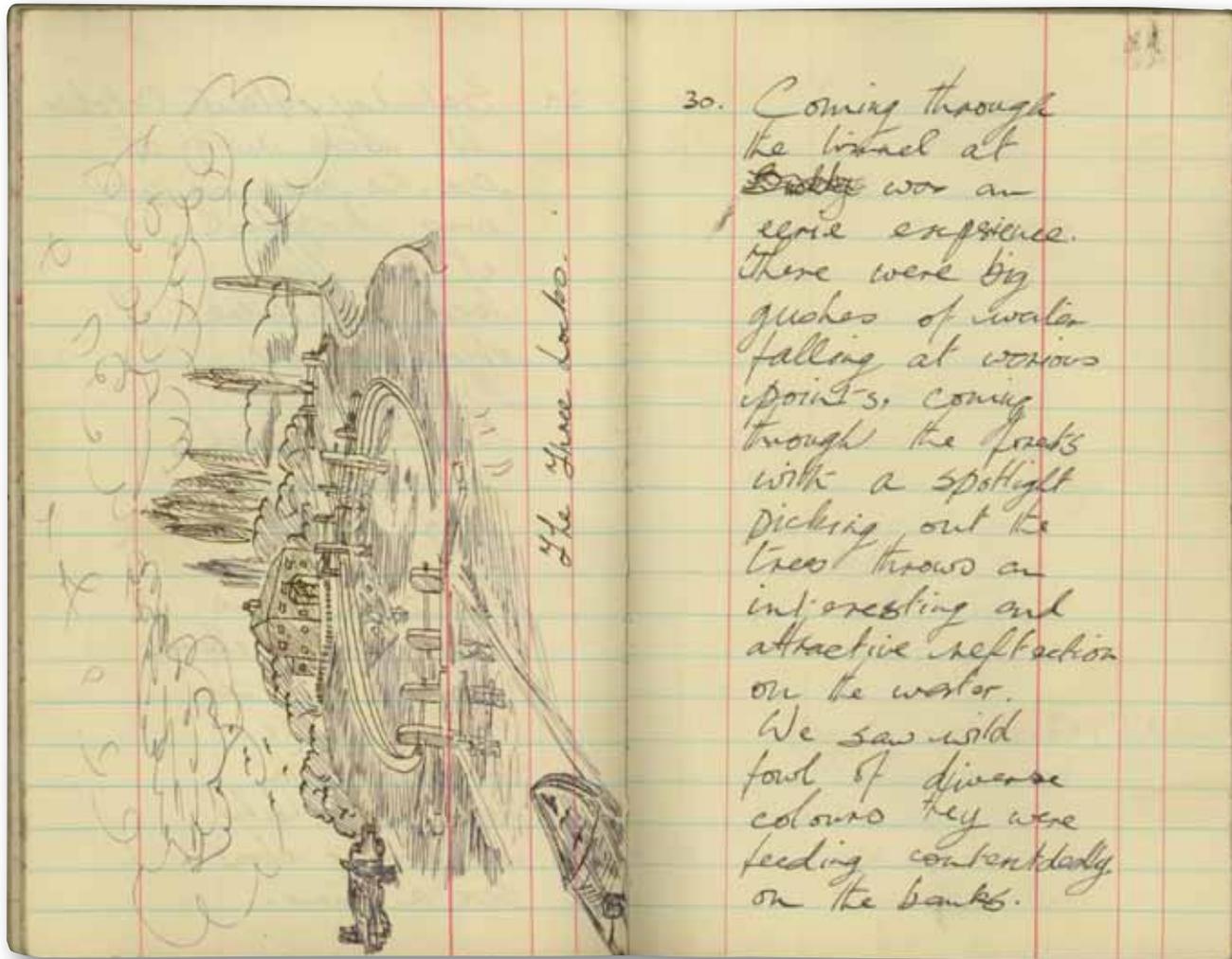
Thursday, Sixth October 1960

Received eight pounds starting money previous to the journey to Nash Mills with the Aber and Ure loaded with wood-pulp. Groceries amounted to 18s 5d each. I gave David two pounds leaving me with six. Of this sum I spent £4.8.8 on black trousers bl. socks.

The inside cover of Captain Robert M. Amey's diary of 1960

 Are you this careful with your money?

Robert Amey's diary 1960



Coming through the tunnel at [crossed out] was an eerie experience. There were big gushes of water falling at various points. Coming through the forests? with a spotlight picking out the trees throws an interesting and attractive reflection on the water. We saw wild fowl of diverse colours they were feeding contentedly on the banks.

Another page in Robert Amey's diary. He records in words and images.



Do you keep a diary? Have you ever kept a holiday or school diary?

Transcription off Fielding's notebook – 1949

July 3rd

I was fishing on the Lancaster Canal today when I noticed a movement at my feet near the water's edge.

It was a full grown Water Vole and it played about within a few inches of my feet for quite a long time. Then disappeared but came back again several times showing no fear of me at all.

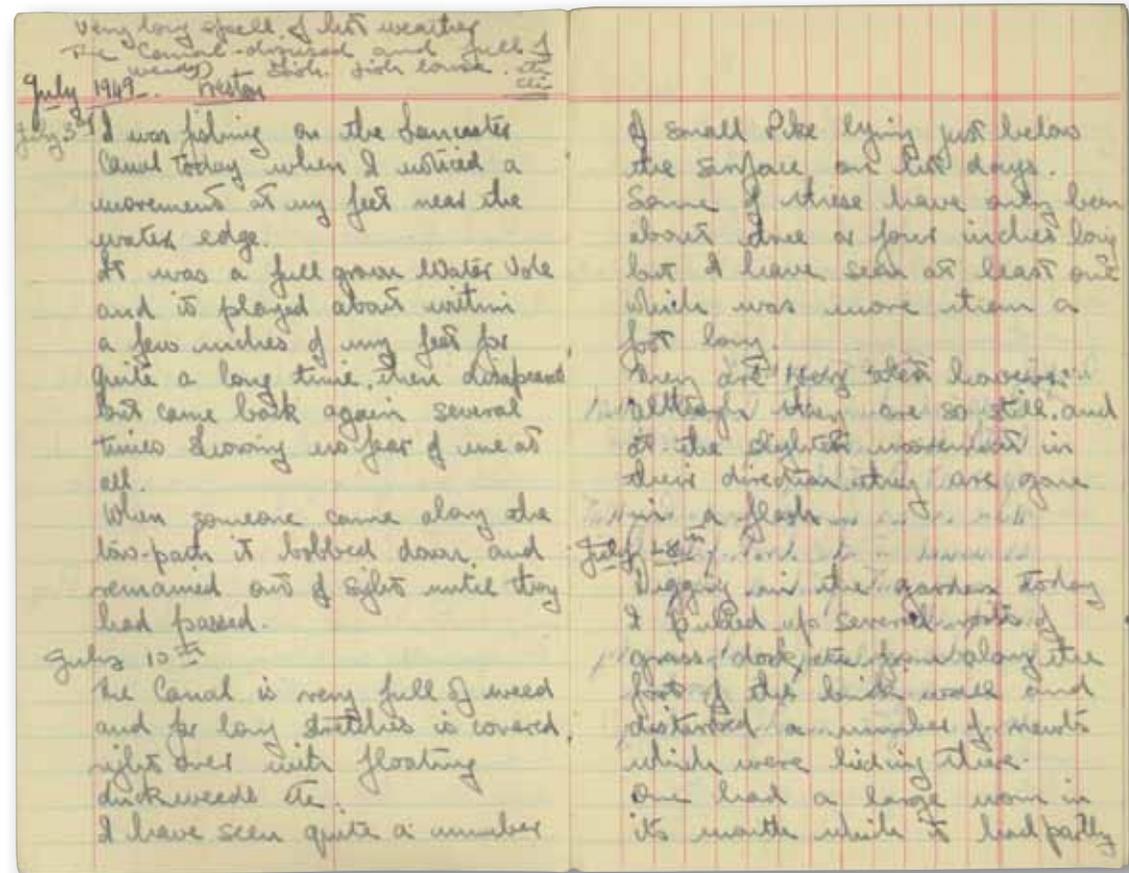
When someone came along the tow-path it bobbed down and remained out of sight until they had passed.

July 10th

The canal is very full of weed and for long stretches is covered right over with floating duckweeds etc.

I have seen quite a number of small Pike lying just below the surface on hot days. Some of these have only been about three or four inches long but I have seen at least one which was more than a foot long.

They are very alert however although they are so still and at the slightest movement in their direction they are gone in a flash.



F. Fielding kept records of wildlife he spotted on the canal trips.



Why don't you keep a record of the wildlife you spot.

Newspaper article from mid 20th century

Canal School That May Lose Its Pupils After One Day

Each night during the winter anything up to 60 alert children will crowd into a tiny hut on the misty banks of Coventry Canal, not far from the giant water-coolers of Longford Power Station, and learn to sing songs about Jesus and to write their own names.

They are the children of the canal folk—the men and women who take their boats through the network of canals that extends from the industrial Midlands all over the country.

Education for these children is a big problem. Their parents are on the move. They may spend more than a single night in one place. And although there is a special school for them at Brentford, most of them get no more than a day or so there in weeks.

Summer Tours

That is the problem that confronts Major F. Fielding, of the Salvation Army, the man who teaches the children in the little hut at Longford. He has known the canal folk since he was a boy, because his parents kept a shop near one of the canals in Birmingham.

He lives on a canal boat himself—the 16-ton motor boat *Salvo*. Outside, it is a typical boat—long, narrow in beam and gaily painted. Inside it is well appointed, with a bedroom and a meeting room for worship, where, during the summer months, Major Fielding holds his classes.

He lives on the boat the *Salvo* all through the year. During the summer he takes the children to the canal folk's camps. During the winter, she stays for the most part moored at Longford. Then Major Fielding holds his classes in the little hut, which accommodates more children than the meeting room on the boat.

Birthday Cards

Fielding helps. She visits boat women, does first-aid and helps when children are ill. And she has a card when birthdays round.

"I've not a day school," said Fielding. "We try to compensate teaching with a little reading and writing. In the winter months the children write at Sunday school. They follow in that tradition."

Fielding's pupils only one evening again on their feet up to a 20-ft. day two or three times a week. They have because of the power. The boat is in London Longford to

Canal School That May Lose Its Pupils After One Day



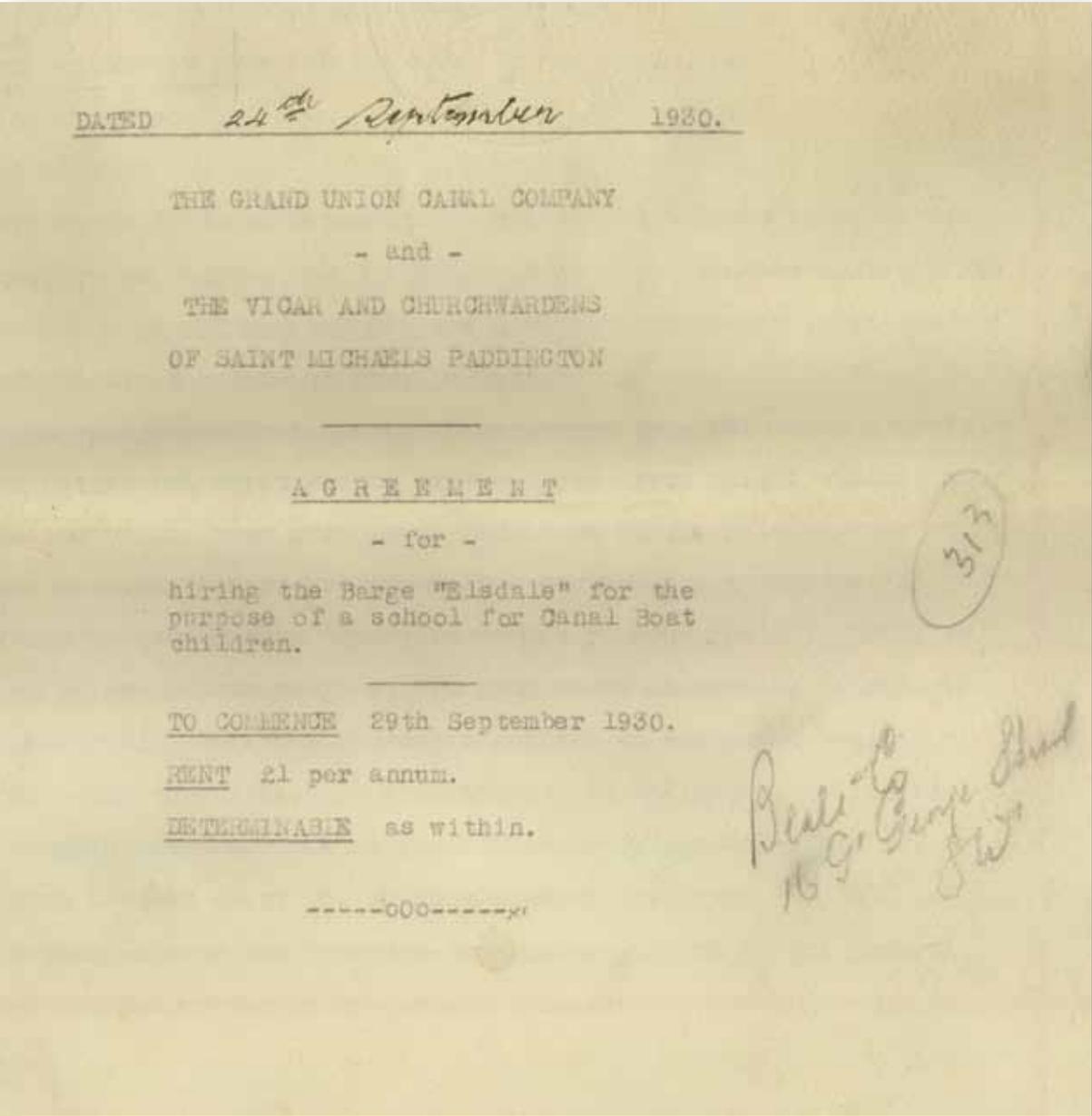
One little girl etches her own drawing while Major Fielding shows how to sketch.



Girls and boys in their Sunday best look on while Major Fielding demonstrates Bible stories on the flannelgraph. Pictures backed with felt are fixed to a felt-covered board.

A newspaper article about the difficulties of learning for boat children and how Major Fielding helped to give them some lessons when their boats were tied up.

Elsdale Agreement 1930



The front cover of the agreement drawn up in 1930 for hiring Elsdale to be used as a school for boat children.

- ? Who was the agreement between?
- ? How much rent did they have to pay each year?

School register 1951 with boat children

		For the Year 19				Corps		FIRST QUARTER														SECOND				
J. S. if Junior Soldier	Number	Date of Birth	Date first attended	No. of weeks since last time present	NAME	ADDRESS		1st Sat.	2nd Sun.	3rd Mon.	4th Tues.	5th Wed.	6th Thurs.	7th Fri.	8th Sat.	9th Sun.	10th Mon.	11th Tues.	12th Wed.	13th Thurs.	14th Fri.	1st Sat.	2nd Sun.	3rd Mon.	4th Tues.	
	1	15/11/1942	✓		Ray Badde	Boat.																				
	2	25/12/1929	✓		8. Long Pearland	Boston - Nunhead																				
	3	25/12/1929	✓		11. Shirley Pearland	JARLEY. BADDE. (NUNHEAD)																				
	4	5/11/1935			Louis Powell																					
	5	4/11/1931			12. Joan Powell	Suttons Shop. SUTTONS. CATEL.																				
	6				8. Ken Cough	Case. BLISS - Gladys.																				
	7	15/11/1924			9. Barry Spencer	Suttons Shop																				
	8	11/8/1924			6. Keith Spencer	Suttons Shop.																				
	9	16/11/1940			11. Patricia Russett	Lockport House.																				

This is a register from a school in 1951 which had many boaters' children.

Can you see where Patricia lived? How did Patricia's attendance compare with Ken's, who lived on a boat?

Waterways poster (1955-62)

This a poster from the mid 20th century warning children to be careful near canals. They are great places to visit but can be dangerous if you get too near the water's edge.

Why not try the water safety challenge at www.canalriverexplorers.org.uk to ensure you stay safe near water?

You could design your own poster for children today.

 What message would you want to give?

You don't want to scare them away from the canal but you do want them to stay safe.

