

Birmingham – an Early History

Information provided with thanks by Cath Turpin

1917

7th March

The Engineer reported that he was negotiating the sale of the motor tug boat **Birmingham** through Messers Perman and Company for £1000. He was instructed to continue the negotiations and to accept £950 if necessary.

21st March

The engineer reported that the motor tug Birmingham had been sold to the Marylebone Town Council for £950 subject to the Company paying the cost of overhauling the engine by the makers and to a commission of 5%.

4th April

The general manager informed the Committee that under notice from the Canal Control Committee, the Company were forbidden to sell any of their plant without first obtaining the authorisation of the Control Committee. The general was instructed to write to the Secretary of the C.C.C. for their permission to sell one of the motor tugs should the Company receive an offer for her.

18th April

A communication was received from the C.C.C. stating that no tugs were to be disposed of.

4th July

M.T. Birmingham. A settlement had been agreed with the Borough of St Marylebone, the final terms of sale being £925 and the payment in addition of £30 11s 5p for delivery and services of a driver in London.

The disposal of '**Birmingham**' was thus rather protracted and shrouded in red tape! During WW I, the canal system was controlled by the Canal Control Committee. '**Birmingham**' was not seen again at Tardebigge.

St Marylebone Council re-named the boat '**Tyburn**'. There is a picture (date c1935) of it towing an empty narrow boat on the aqueduct over the Great North Road. Another photograph from the Kromhout archive shows the boat towing and says it has a 40hp Kromhout engine.

1918

'**Tyburn**' was registered for the St Marylebone Borough Council on 30 July 1918 as Paddington 271.

In 1932 they had another tug built on similar lines. '**White Heather**' was built by J. S. Watson of Gainsborough and also worked on the refuse work until it finished.

1939

'**Tyburn**' passed to Thomas Clayton (Paddington) Limited in August 1939 when that company (a Grand Union Canal Company subsidiary) took over the council's fleet of barges. They also took on a 15-year contract to dispose of rubbish by barging it along the Long Level to tips at places like Yeading. (worked out clay pits, from which the clay for many of London's stock bricks had been extracted).

Thomas Clayton (Paddington) , which until 1910 was called Odell & Co. Ltd, had been handling the rubbish from Paddington for many years, but St. Marylebone had set up its own fleet of wide boats as late as 1918, many of

these being newly built craft named after birds. (Alan Faulkner, 'Claytons of Oldbury) It was also used as an icebreaker at night. (John Tapper)

1940s

Servicing and repairs in 1943/44/46 are recorded in the minute book of Thomas Clayton (Paddington) Ltd.

Servicing was carried out by The General Lighterage Company under the supervision of the Grand Union canal's maintenance engineer, Mr Cooper. On 20th January 1944, '**Tyburn**' was sent to the Bradley Forge and Engineering Co.Ltd. for general engine and hull overhaul, under the supervision of Mr Robertson of Grand Union (Shipping) Limited.

Entry dated 15/02/1944 - £2.11.7 is for 01/12/1943.

30/06/1943 - work carried out was making set of air pipes, unions and nipples.

These details are not in an account book but in memo format. The number 1511 is given at the top of each list which I think is the account number for T.C.(P.)Ltd..

In **1946** minute 613, it was reported that the tug '**Tyburn**' was overhauled by Brentside Engineering Co.Ltd. at a cost of £370.4.8d but that after only a short time in commission the crank shaft snapped and the tug was still out of commission awaiting a new shaft.

Minute 636 referred to minute 613 and reported that the tug '**Tyburn**' was overhauled by the Canal Company's engineers and a new crankshaft and components supplied. The cost of this work amounting to £236.14.1d was claimed and received from the Insurance Company on the Tug Breakdown Policy.

(minute book held at the British Waterways archive in Gloucester.)

GUCC papers from Bulls Bridge in the mid 1940s also mention repairs to '**Tyburn**'.

Account number 1511. T.C.(P) Ltd.

May 1943 repairs. Labour £9.9s.5d

June 1943 repairs. Labour £3.7s.9d Material from stock 1s/4d

Entry dated 21st July 1943 repairs to boats:

26th May 1943 £9.0s.8d

30th June 1943 £3.7s. 9d For making set of air pipes, unions and nipples – materials from stock – pipe, copper – 6s.1d

Entry dated 15th February 1944

Repairs 1/12/1943 costing £2.11s.7d and 8/12/1943, 3s.5d

1950

'**Tyburn**' remained in service until the rubbish contract came to an end on 31st July 1950.

This end was prompted by health and environmental concerns with the Ministry of Health agreeing with Paddington and Marylebone for Thomas Clayton (Paddington) to continue tipping at Yeading for just two more years from 31 July 1948.

These concerns had been ongoing for some time.

Both councils were to continue to actively seek alternative arrangements.

Thomas Clayton (Paddington)'s assets were transferred to the D.I.W.E. when the contract was terminated.

Information from BW archive, Gloucester

BW 1758.94 File-Thomas Clayton (Paddington) Ltd, Contract for disposal of rubbish 1947-1951. This mentions 'Tyburn' as being in poor condition in 1947 and in the list of craft owned by TC(P) in June 1950.

BW 207.2002 Book of Directors Minutes for Thomas Clayton (Paddington) Ltd 1942-1968. This mentions 'Tyburn' on three occasions as it is maintained, (see above) and states that at a meeting of 4th April 1950 it was resolved to adopt the proposals of DIWE and transfer assets etc. to DIWE upon winding up of the company.

It was used in general maintenance duties and as an ice-breaker. (John Tapper) and based at the former FMS wharf at Uxbridge.

1956/7

BTW records.

Letter dated 7th August 1956 – Disposal of Craft from Asst Engineer (Craft) to Divisional Engineer, Watford.

'Tyburn' was suggested for disposal as it was no longer suitable for tug duties. Engine not running.

Letter dated 18th September 1956 – Disposal of Craft from J.C. Mirfin (for Divisional Engineer) to John Bushnell Ltd, Wargrave-on-Thames (and a similar letter circulated to Maid Line Cruisers Ltd, Long Ditton - Andrews Boathouses, Bourne End - W. Bates & Son, Chertsey - T.P. Sheehy Ltd, Kingston-on-Thames - H. Sykes, Broxbourne). Gives details of two launches and one tug (TYBURN). Lying at Waterloo Road, Uxbridge. (old FMC wharf used for maintenance boats)

Tug 'Tyburn'. Steel hull, built 1909. Length 45ft, Breadth 6ft6ins
Draft 4ft.

Engine 44hp semi-diesel No 2MI Permans & Co. (not in running order)

Note: This is a twin cylinder British Kromhout engine. Possibly built under licence by day Summers of Southampton.

Permans & Co. were the agents

Undated letter in file, between documents dated September 1957 and October 1957 says that tug 'Tyburn' has been sold.

1960

Wyvern Shipping

When Major Griffin bought Wyvern Shipping from Michael Keef in 1960, he paid £900 for 'Tyburn'. He put in a Lister SL2 engine and re-named it 'Perseverance', it joined the newly formed hire fleet. The steel superstructure was removed and replaced by a timber one.

1960

'Perseverance' was fitted out as a 6 berth craft and first appeared in a brochure in 1960. During its time as a hire boat, it underwent one change in interior and deck layout. Both versions are in early Wyvern Shipping hire boat brochures, of which I have copies.

Richard Dives and friends hired 'Perseverance' in the early 1960s. I have some photos (scanned)

The Borough of Hillingdon used the boat as an educational resource at some stage, when it was still owned by Wyvern Shipping – information still needed.

1968

Reedings Primary School, Sawbridgeworth

In 1968, the PTA of Reedings Primary School, Sawbridgeworth near the River Stort, raised £900 through an educational trust to buy the boat.

(Photographs in the TES Nov 15th 1968, The Guardian and The Times, showing pupils and staff aboard this '100 year old barge'!)

Reedings Primary School used the boat as an educational resource for a number of years, due in large part to the enthusiasm of the headmaster, Mr Peter Hodgson. The children called it PERCY!

Mr Hodgson and Pam Rider (the present school secretary) have provided scanned slides and photocopied press cuttings.

1974

John Tapper. 'Perseverance' was sold to a member of Stanstead Abbots Boat Club, John Tapper. He renamed it 'Tyburn'.

1976

Sold to Jim Macdonald who owns the 'Elizabeth', a very early narrow boat conversion. He kept it at Cassio Wharf, Watford.

He put in a Lister HR3 engine (their Boat Show engine) and a larger prop as he used it commercially and at times on the river Thames. (John Tapper).

She still had the same HR3 in her when BW took her over

1981 Sold to Mike Fox In 1986 he took it to the IWA National Rally at Brentford.

In the late 1980s, moored at Uxbridge, it had a 'section 8' notice put on by British Waterways, due to non-payment of licence and mooring fees. These were then paid, but the boat another 'Section 8' notice was put on within a couple of years and the boat was put up for tender. After Simon Wain told BW the identity of the boat, they took it off the tender list.

It was removed to the BW Bradely yard and became part of the 'Friends of the Working Boats project.

At the end of 2003, the empty hull was towed down the River Severn to Gloucester. It was grit blasted and primed in Tommy Nielson's boat shed and now awaits a decision on its future.

Thanks to: Anthony Langford, Hugh Conway-Jones, Alan Faulkner, Mike Stevens, James Griffin (Wyvern Shipping), Mike Adams, Reedings Primary School, Peter Hodgson, hNBOC archive, Caroline Jones at the British Waterways archive Gloucester, Jim McDonald, Colin Paillin, John Tapper.

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