

79M

by Ciaran Bayly



Crossing Charleville Aqueduct

EARLY YEARS

79M was the last boat built for the Grand Canal Company by the Ringsend Dockyard Company and went into service in 1939.

When the Grand Canal closed down in December 1959, 79M was one of the few barges that stayed in service that year in order to bring Guinness to Limerick and help in the de-commissioning of the company stations.

CIE did not sell off 79M in 1960, and still with the Bolinder engine fitted, she worked as a maintenance boat, more commonly known as a 'muck boat' on the canal up until 1980. In the early 1980s, the CIE maintenance department converted 79M to a dredger, re-plated the hull and installed an Atlas hydraulic crane on her bow powered by a new 72hp air cooled Deutz engine. By the mid 1980s the crew requested that the 15hp Bolinder engine that powered the boat be replaced. CIE procured a new 120hp Perkins 6354 engine, removed the Bolinder and sat the Perkins engine in its place. It only then came to light that a new gearbox would also be required, and so 79M sat in Tullamore



Pumping out in Tullamore Harbour

Harbour for 2 years waiting for a gearbox to be fitted. The boat then went back dredging the canal until the 1990s, when her crew brought her into Tullamore Harbour to have some maintenance carried out when on route to Shannon Harbour. Unfortunately the maintenance never materialised and 79M sank in Tullamore Harbour.

SALVAGE

The tale begins in early December 2013 with the announcement by Waterways Ireland that nine 'surplus barges' were being offered for public tender. As part of the tender specifications, a removal plan was submitted with the bid for 79M, which was described as 'afloat' by Waterways Ireland. It was not until February 2014 before I was notified of my 'success' and the removal of 79M from Tullamore Harbour could begin.

The following week, I travelled to Tullamore Harbour eager to see my new purchase and what I was greeted with was shock and confusion – 79M was sitting on the bottom of the harbour. A call was made to the 'heavy guns', and with the help of Robert Bayly and Michael Geraghty on the Friday of the St. Patricks weekend, 79M was refloated and pulled to the outer wall of Tullamore Harbour. Over the next 2 weekends, the team worked tirelessly and persuaded each engine to run, one after the other.

Friday 28 March saw 79M take its first voyage in over 20 years, travelling west and bound for Shannon Harbour. By Saturday evening 79M has sitting on the chocks in Shannon Harbour drydock and again I was greeted with shock and confusion – 79M had been completely re-plated! That weekend saw the boat get the treatment it had lacked for

so many years and we exited the drydock on Monday morning with 79M sporting a new paint job. 79M remained in Shannon Harbour to attend its first ever Canal Boat Rally and is now enjoying the waters of the River Shannon.


Photos: Ciaran Bayly



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