



29th April 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Tugs pull in the Crowds at Museum

Tug boats are set to pull in the Bank Holiday crowds at the Black Country Living Museum where the bi-annual Tug Boat event takes place from Saturday 1 May – Monday 3 May, 2010.

Historic canal tugs, some dating back to the late 19th century, will be making a splash over the holidays. The canals were the arteries of the Black Country and the life blood of industrial Britain, criss-crossing the region's canal network and beyond. Restored to their original splendour the tugs will capture a long-forgotten way of life on the canals.

Tugs boats will be put through their paces pulling old cargo boats, known as Joeys, in and out of the canal arm and the Museum's historic lifting bridge will open and close to let them through. Each tug is capable of pulling a train of up to 6 boats, with every boat carrying around 25 tons each. The Museum's wharf crane will transfer cargo from Joey boats onto vintage lorries.

Traditional canal crafts will be demonstrated along the tow path and include fender making, sign writing, rag rug podging and boatmans' belt making.

102 year old tunnel tug, Sharpness which used to work the Worcester and Birmingham Canal Tunnel, will moor alongside some of the rarest tugs on the canals today. Sharpness, the first motor powered tug, was built to work at West Hill Tunnel by steamboat builders Abdda and Mitchell, hence Sharpness' unusual low, sleek 'steamboat' design. Sharpness would pull a train of boats through the tunnel and then wait on the other side for her next customers. Sharpness would also work as an icebreaker and during harsh winters kept moving all night to stop the canal re-freezing.

Steve Bingham, Harbour Master at the Black Country Living Museum said:
“Building on 2008’s highly successful event – this year promises to be even bigger and better. 16 rare tugs boats, of the 24 left in existence, will attend the event and will be travelling from all four corners of the United Kingdom.

“This year the newly restored ice boat - Ross will be joining us and is travelling from Brinklow in Rugby. At over 100 years of age she is one of the oldest boats in the Museum’s fleet.”

-Ends-

Photo Opportunities:

Image attached: Sharpness

Caption: Sharpness was built in 1908 as an ice breaking tug to keep the frozen canals clear for traffic.

Photographers and journalists are invited to attend the Tug Boat event from Saturday 1 May – Monday 3 May, 2010.

Note to Editors:

This weekend the Museum’s canal is filled with historic canal tugs, all restored to their original condition and still capable of doing a job of work!

Canals were once *the* transport network of the Black Country. The Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN) criss-crossed the local area and connected to other canals beyond. One of the main cargoes was the coal that fed the hungry furnaces of the Black Country.

Back in the 1800s, horses provided the main power to pull cargo-laden boats around the canal system. Although horses remained in use, during the 1900s tug boats increased in popularity. They came in all shapes and sizes, but they all had large engines and deep draughts to ensure plenty of pulling power. Each tug could pull a train of up to 6 boats, with every boat carrying around 25 tons each.

Some tugs also doubled up as ice breakers. During the harsh winters, tugs were sent out during the night to break up any ice that had frozen on the canal. They kept moving all night to stop the canal re-freezing. The next day, with a change of crew, the same tug would be still running to collect coal or deliver goods. This is why many tugs burnt out their original engines and had replacements fitted.

Another job for tugs was pulling boats through tunnels. Before tugs were used, boaters had to push their boats and the tons of cargo through the tunnels by lying on their backs and walking along the walls (‘legging’). Two people legging a fully laden boat through the 2 mile long Dudley Tunnel would take 4 hours. A tug could do the same job in an hour and half – and with much less effort!

The boats you can see this weekend are...

ATLANTIC.....Built in 1940, 40' long, 3' draught, constructed from iron.

BITTELL.....Built in 1934, 40' long, 2'8" draught, constructed from iron.

Look out for sister tug, PACIFIC.

COVENTRY.....Built in 1935, 31'6" long, 2'8" draught, constructed from iron.

CAGGY.....Built in 1944, 44' long, 3' draught, constructed from iron.

ENTERPRISE No1...Built in 1899, 52' long, 3' draught, constructed from iron & elm.

The oldest tug on show today, 'Enterprise' was originally built as 'Count'. The boat was bombed during World War Two and salvaged by Black Country canal haulier Ernest Thomas. Refitted as the most powerful tug in Thomas' fleet, Enterprise was capable of pulling 400 tons in one go. For safety, her daily working load was less than this.

GOVERNOR.....Built in 1941, 45' long, 3' draught, constructed from iron.

Throughout World War Two and after the boat was used to pull wharf boats laden with coal from Cannock to Wolverhampton. The tug regularly pulled 200 tons at a time.

JAMES LOADER...Built in 1946, 41' long, 2'6" draught, constructed from oak and elm.

Built at Walsall by Joseph Worsey, this tug worked on the BCN until 1964. It could pull up to 168 tons of coal at a time in a train of 6 boats.

NANSON II.....Built in 1951, 40' long, 2'6" draught, constructed from iron.

OXFORD 1.....Built in 1944, 40' long, 2'6" draught, constructed from iron and timber.

PACIFIC.....Built in 1934, 40' long, 2'8" draught, constructed from iron.

Built side by side with sister tug Bittell (also at the Museum this weekend). The boat was used to pull coal down to the tube factory of Stewarts and Lloyds from the coal fields of Cannock.

SHARPNESS.....Built in 1908, 45' long, 3ft draught, constructed from iron.

This boat was built as an ice breaking tug, to keep the frozen canals clear for traffic.

SICKLE.....Built in 1936, 40' long, 3' draught, constructed from iron.

Sickle was owned by the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company, who operated from the other side of Birmingham on the Grand Union to London.

SANDBACH.....Built in 1946, 35' long, 2'9" draught, constructed from iron.

TARDEBIGGE.....Built in 1909, 37' long, 2'5" draught, constructed from iron.

VESTA.....Built in 1935, 40' long, 3'3" draught, constructed from iron.

Originally built for the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company, by 1947 this boat was part of the fleet of Stewarts and Lloyds at Halesowen. The Stewarts and Lloyds tube works was developed around the canal, with boats used for storing and transporting the finished goods. Tugs provided the power for shifting the boats from the canal side factory to the railway interchange basin

About the Museum

The Black Country Living Museum is one of the UK's leading open air museums. Attracting over 300,000 visitors each year to an astonishing 26 acre site just two miles from the town centre of Dudley, it captures and admires the achievements and culture of the region's past and the extraordinary impact this had on the wider world. With its thriving village spanning 150 years of history from c1770 to the 1920s, canal, tram way, school, public park and fairground, alongside the energy of an industrial landscape of mining, steam power, heavy metalwork and lime kilns, the Museum offers a visitor experience that few others can match. We also have one of the best fish and chips shops for miles around!

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