

The OwnerShips Ice Boat Show

- with added Blue Shoots!

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Held at Braunston Marina - 6th - 7th February, 2010

Tim Coghlan tells the story of this year's remarkable event – which, like so many previous OwnerShips Boat Shows, seems to survive all known winter perils

For the last three years in a row, it looked like Lady Luck had gone on holiday to somewhere warmer, leaving the OwnerShips Boat Show to face the full fury of the English winter. This was after 15 years of holding the event at Braunston Marina, in a seemingly unstoppable succession mild ones. In 2008, the event was preceded by ferocious gales and driving rain that nearly stopped the marquee going up. Then in 2009 the snow arrived on the night of the Wednesday

before, and it dunked down, bringing the Midlands almost to a halt. The marquee lorry was due on the Thursday, but hardly got out of Peterborough before getting stuck on the A14. Everyone wondered if that was it. Another attempt was made on the Friday, and they got through and erected the tent on a base of four inches of snow. OwnerShips, it transpired, had chosen what was later officially recorded as the worst winter-weekend in 20 years, with children seeing real snow for the first time in their lives.

As if this were not bad enough, in 2010 the whole canal system round Braunston was frozen up continuously for 32 days, with parts of the canals still un-passable with thick slow-melting ice for several days afterwards. It was the longest ice-up since the Great Freeze of 1963. OwnerShips boats to go on display at the Show that were not already at Braunston for their winter refit, had to be delivered by lorry and craned into the marina's working arm, which had been kept open throughout the freeze. So what's all this global warming stuff?

For OwnerShips the Show goes on! And once again

in 2010 it was business as usual and the crowds came, despite the cold. The only Crunch to be heard was the frozen ground under foot! This year OwnerShips were rewarded with their best sales weekend ever. By the close of business on the Saturday, they had had their best Saturday ever, and good Sunday sales still kept them in the frame. The final tally was 29, with further potential sales in the offing. And the sales of shares were evenly spread between new and secondhand boats. Three new *Aquahouse* Polish boats have already been ordered for 2010 delivery and serious discussions are now underway for a possible further two. Phil Capp, who was deputising for the hospitalized OwnerShips founder and MD Allen Matthews said, 'This was a very good result for us. It was simply way beyond my wildest dreams.'

OwnerShips are the largest shared-ownership fleet of narrow boats on the canals. The reason for a boat show in February is that this is the time when about a quarter of the now 104 narrow boats in the OwnerShips fleet have their winter blackings, repaints and servicing in Braunston Marina's dry docks. Boats with owners'



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1 The OwnerShips Ice Boat Show will go on!: *Despite the worst winter since 1963s, the boats got through somehow and the OwnerShips Boat Show went ahead.*

2 Ready for the Show: *Some of the eighteen OwnerShips boats attending the Show moored out on the Braunston Mainline after their winter makeover.*

3 Nose to Nose: *Eighteen narrow boats were on display with shares in all of them on offer.*



4 No smoke without a fire: The sign below the chimney says: 'There is a share in this boat available for sale... Please be aware OwnerShips does not employ salesmen.'

5 Natter-Jacks: The weekend provided a good occasion for the OwnerShips members to meet up.

6 Misty murky marina morning: Braunston Marina provided an atmospheric backdrop to the Show.

7 Poles apart: Farndon was one of the 2009 Polish boats by Aquahouse - in its distinctive cream red and black livery.

8 Devil in the detail: Would a salesman have helped?

9 Jam 'Ole jam today: The Friends of Raymond - beneficiaries of the weekend - were out in force.



shares for sale can then easily be put on display. Phil Capp said, 'Buyers wishing to purchase shares in one of a range of new or secondhand narrow boats can sign up knowing exactly what they are going to get. And meet the people who will be running them. Also if you are buying second-hand you have the chance to meet some of the people you may be sharing the boat with.' All second-hand boats were manned by volunteer owners who could take the time to show prospective buyers around, and maybe even offer a welcoming cuppa onboard. The sign on the outside of each boat said it all, 'Please be aware OwnerShips does not employ salesmen.'

With the boats well maintained, buying a second-hand share in an OwnerShips narrow boat represents excellent value. Prices start at £1,850 for the older early 1990s boats, to which there is an annual running cost of around £1,000 per share for four weeks of boating - two in summer and two in winter. It is difficult to envisage a cheaper way of getting afloat on a good sized narrow boat - with none of the hassle of looking after it thrown in as a bonus.

Amongst the boats on display were some of the semi-trad *Aquahouse* Polish newcomers to the OwnerShips fleet - one named *Torksey* which even sounded Polish. An inspection revealed their high quality fit out in ash and maple, giving it a light interior. *Aquahouse* is relatively new to building narrow boats, but has a long tradition of building high quality steel yachts. It is now diversifying into building fully fitted narrow boats, bringing in several new innovative design features. Higher density insulation material and ballasting have allowed for 6ft 6in headroom - almost unheard of before in narrow boat building. The boats all come with satellite TV plus DVD and Hi-fi and jet thrusters for improved manoeuvrability.

Phil Capp is keen to point out that *Aquahouse*, based an hour by road west of Warsaw, is not the same builder as those from the Gdansk former ship yards, now already supplying other UK distributors. Also that the boats are being made of high quality German steel, in

10 Signing 'em up: *The Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust are regular attendees at this event where several new members have been recruited over the years.*

11 Making a meal of it: *The Show offered a bar and burger bar, and both were well supported by the crowds that came.*

12 Staying out in the cold: *The NB LUCY PROJECT making its second appearance at this show, including a display of recent exciting developments for the restoration of this important historic wooden butty.*

13 Lucky number: *The Rugby Branch of the RNLI raised over £300 from their raffle of a radio-controlled model of a Severn Lifeboat.*



response to concerns expressed about Polish steel. He is very pleased with the results and the boats are also now being offered for a straight sale in the price band of £78,000 - £100,000.

Other visitor attractions were some 15 exhibitors in the large heated marquee and bravely bearing the cold outside. They included a number of canal societies whose stands were manned by volunteers, some of whom also owned shares in the OwnerShips fleet. There was a social bar and fast food eatery - again manned by OwnerShips share owners. Music was provided by *Braunston Pickle*. What indeed emerged is that there is something of a club/community spirit amongst the share owners. Meeting them again at the shows each year is like re-meeting old friends.

With today's fleet of 104 boats and over 1,300 owners, OwnerShips has steamed ahead since 1990, when Allen Mathews founded it with only one secondhand forty-foot narrowboat - at Braunston Marina. The display banner behind the sales desks said it all: *Affordable Luxury Afloat Since 1990*. The boats and the business have stood the test of time. 

NO MOANING AT THE BAR, WHEN I PUT OUT TO SEA

(Lord Tennyson)

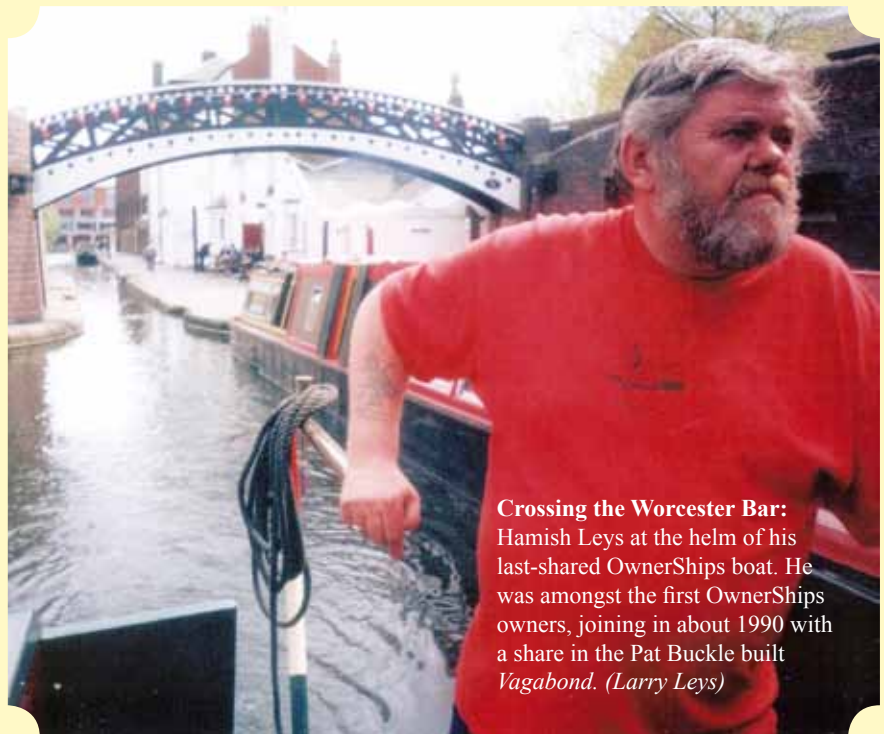
A tribute to the late Hamish Leys of OwnerShips

Sadly missing from this and last year's OwnerShips Boat Show - but still very much in people's minds at both - was the popular figure of Hamish Leys. He died some 16 months ago after losing a brave fight against cancer.

Hamish was perhaps known best as the Show's volunteer one-man barman, who for several years ran it almost single-handedly during the whole event - in the ad-Hock bar just to the left of the cholesterol food counter, which was manned by the lady OwnerShips volunteers. Buying a dram or two from this dour wee-bearded Scot was always a pleasure - with no charge for the banter-chaser. Also he didn't do weights and measures, and a gill was something only found in canal fish. 'Always err on the side of caution!' he would say as he poured you a large one.

He was also an enormous help in putting up and taking down the show. Phil Capp of OwnerShips recalls, 'He was always the first in the marquee in the mornings, then helping the ladies do the food, and the last to leave it at night to check the marquee was secure. He was a real contributor.' Hamish especially enjoyed bringing the boats to the Show from various OwnerShips bases in the middle of winter, and returning them afterwards. He loved his English canal boating - and work-permitting - would come all the way down from Aberdeen to get whatever was going. Sadly he never made retirement from his last posting as a security officer at Aberdeen University, which had been preceded variously by a spell as a lighthouse keeper, and prior to that several years in a Scottish Highland regiment.

The ancient Greeks had a saying that the greatest



Crossing the Worcester Bar:

Hamish Leys at the helm of his last-shared OwnerShips boat. He was amongst the first OwnerShips owners, joining in about 1990 with a share in the Pat Buckle built *Vagabond*. (Larry Leys)

achievement in a man's life was to be remembered afterwards with affection by his friends. If Hamish had ever had need of a 100% proof, it was at this Show. Not only had OwnerShips named one of their new 58ft semi-trads after him - the *Hamish Leys* - but it was used on the Friday before the Show by his wife Larry and family for the scattering of his ashes, with a large following of friends ashore. The ceremony involved a last-run from the Braunston Turn to the entrance to

Braunston Marina, with Larry scattering ashes here and there on the way. Things were completed at the marina entrance with her pouring a large dram of his favourite Scottish whiskey, to follow him into the Cut. Hamish's last journey had been his last wish - with no sadness of farewell, when he crossed the bar. He will be much missed by his family and friends, who had the privilege of knowing him. No one poured a better dram. Cheers!