

The Story of the Pamela May Trip Boat

The story of the Pamela May has been told before, both in the second edition of this magazine written by Sandy Laird and Roy Murphy, and in the Droitwich Canals Trust magazine *The New Wych*, in 2006, written by Ivor Caplan from information supplied by Colin Scrivener. However, I am still asked about how the Trust came to have the boat, so it seems appropriate to include the story again, particularly in view of the launch of a new fund raising drive to build a new boat as the Pamela May moves towards the end of her life.

Bernard Clements was born in 1917 in Quinton, the fourth and youngest son of John Clements, a postman, and he went to school in Rubery. He left school at 14 without academic qualifications and joined "Clements Brothers", the firm his three older brothers had started in 1930. The firm did sign writing and made advertising posters. They went on to do shop displays and stands for exhibitions. They became skilled carpenters and tradesmen, and eventually some 250 people were employed by the firm.

As the youngest brother, Bernard swept out the factory and made the tea to start with, but with his sharp mind and organisational ability, he quickly learnt the business. In the Second World War, Bernard joined the army and was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Middlesex Regiment. After the war, he joined his brothers in the family firm, and became works manager. The company was later split into two – "Clements Brothers Displays" and "Clements Brothers Exhibitions". Both companies had a loyal and devoted workforce and Bernard cared for them in return and took an interest in their personal lives. For several years, he had visited some of his former employees in rest homes and was dismayed by the lack of visitors and outside excursions that were available to them. He began organising outings from some of these homes to his garden at Hanbury. However, his dream was to take people on boat trips along the Worcester-Birmingham Canal.

When in 1994 May Ward, widow of Freddie Ward the Worcestershire fast bowler and a former employee, left him a legacy he was able to make his dream a reality. The boat was built at Hanbury Wharf by Saraband and launched on June 1 1995, blessed by the vicar of Hanbury. It was named Pamela May after Bernard's wife, Pamela, and May Ward.

Both during his active years and in retirement, Bernard "invented" things, and was always most creative. When the Pamela May was being planned, he built wooden models of the boat and the internal layout and furnishing, so that the build went smoothly. After the boat was launched, Bernard formed the Pamela May Trust in 1995. This was re-formed after his death in 1997 as a registered charity, with Bernard's son Ian, daughter Sue, and Ben Lee becoming trustees. Day to day running was undertaken by Ben Lee and a small group of volunteers who provided two hour trips totalling more than 150 trips a year for small parties of the elderly and disabled from local nursing homes and children from some local special schools.

Following Ben's death in 2005 the boat was transferred to the Droitwich Canals Trust on the understanding that it would continue to be used for its original charitable purposes, and the Pamela May Trust was dissolved. Sailings took place along the Worcester and Birmingham Canal from the Trust's mooring at Hanbury Wharf.

Droitwich Canals Trust resolved to provide boat trips for the elderly and disadvantaged, as was the case for the Pamela May Trust, but extended the aims to include:

- Booked trips for groups of the elderly and infirm, through local residential homes, clubs or support organisations;
- Trips for small groups of young people supporting the educational objectives of the Droitwich Canals Restoration Partnership;
- Public trips, publicised on regular days, subject to pre-booking;
- Public trips linked to other events or activities, environmental or education days, or guided walks;
- Trips to promote the restoration or support specific initiatives such as fundraising;
- Booked groups with special interests such as canal societies and conservation groups.

In 2006, the boat was transferred from Hanbury Wharf to Hampton Road and operated between there and Ladywood as a visual marker for the restoration and to help keep the channel open. It was also used for taking out supporting groups and in conjunction with other events such as the water festival that was held at that time.

When the Droitwich Canals were fully restored and opened in July 2011, Droitwich Canals Trust was wound up, and its assets, including the Pamela May, were transferred to the newly formed Droitwich Waterways (Pamela May) Trust.

The Pamela May has become a popular attraction for the elderly and disadvantaged, as originally envisaged by Bernard Clements, as well as continuing with many of the additional activities envisaged by the Droitwich Canals Trust.