

## Raising the Concrete Boat.

Glyn Phillips writes:



During the mid-1980's I was Section Inspector based at Stourport and was responsible for the Staffs & Worcs Canal and the Stourbridge Canal. Stuart Crystal Glass Works based on the Stourbridge lock flight were at the time struggling to make a profit, so tried to attract paying visitors to the site. Part of the plan was to build a wharf for passing pleasure boats so they

could moor safely and visit the site. I was in charge of the construction of the new wharf.

I had known for many years that on the site of the proposed new wharf were two concrete boats that formed bank protection and foundations for part of the glass works. It is my belief that the boats had been built in 1918 by A&H Guest of Amblecote, who was based on the Stourbridge Arm. I always thought there were three built but have only ever seen the two below lock 13 on the Stourbridge Flight. One of the boats would remain after the construction of the new wharf but the other one would have to go.

At the time I did not know how much of the boat remained as only part of it was visible. As I have an interest in boats I was curious to know how it was constructed. A&H Guest were still in business at the time so I visited their office and was able to take a photograph of a picture hanging on their wall showing one of the boats.



I may have forgotten to tell my boss that I was going to

spend time excavating the boat as this was not included in the costings. To be honest I didn't expect to find much as the boat was under some six feet of infill, with factory foundations including 12 inches of concrete over one end, and a factory discharge pipe was protruding over the side of what we could see of the boat. The excavation was to be done in a careful way in the hope of finding some useful information about the boats. As the work progressed more and more of the boat was revealed to be intact and I began to realise that there was a chance of re-

floating the boat. This did cause me a little problem because if I did re-float it how would I explain to my boss that I was now in possession of a historic concrete boat. Luckily I did at the time have an understanding boss who accepted that it was cheaper to float the boat out of the way than spend time breaking it up. It was by now realised that we were revealing an important part of canal history so I contacted the Gloucester Museum who after seeing the work in progress agreed to take the boat into their collection. By now most of the boat had been emptied of debris. The one end of the boat had been damaged at some time in its life. There was a stank built into each end of the boat which meant that with the canal water level below gunnel level the boat could hopefully be pumped out and floated, even if the front of the boat had water in it. It was quite a moment when the boat finally lifted off the bottom and floated away from what was believed to be its final resting place. I had the honour of being on the boat as it floated and shafted it out into the canal.

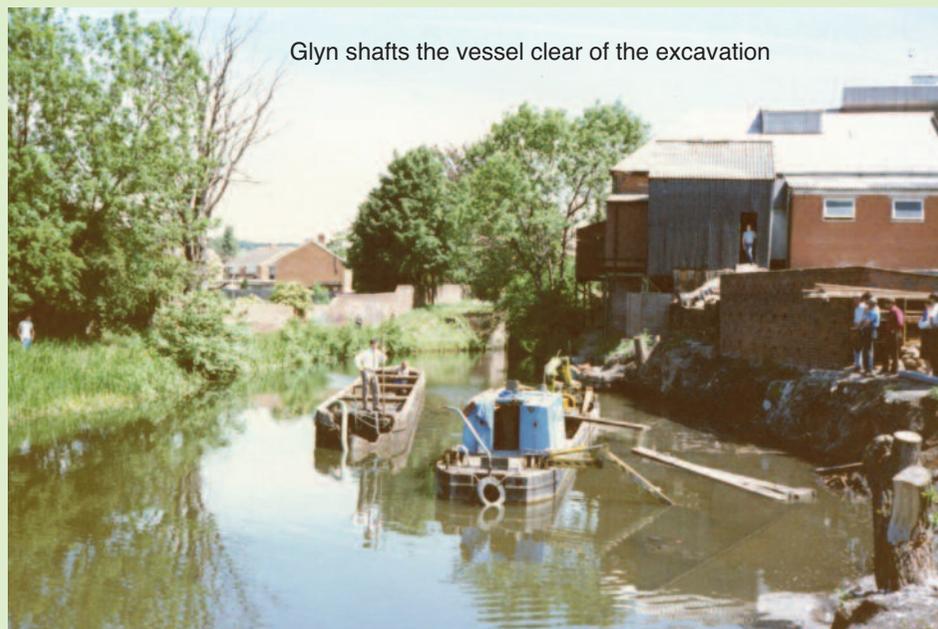
The boat was initially towed to Stourport and then taken down the River Severn to its new home at Gloucester Museum.

The boat has subsequently been taken to The Ellesmere Port Museum and recently moved into the dry store.



**Note the damaged bow**

All Photos Glyn Phillips' Collection



Glyn shafts the vessel clear of the excavation