

CORNWALL AND THE SALVATION ARMY.

Colin Scrivener writes:

Cornwall was built by Lees & Atkins of Polesworth for Fellows Morton & Clayton as a horse drawn or butty boat in 1931, registered BCN 1707, and worked in their fleet until about 1945. Bought by Ron North, she was converted with a cabin over the full length of the hold by Spencer Abbot & Co. Ltd. at their Salford Bridge dock.

The interior work and the engine installation was done by Ron and his friends. The engine, a 17hp petrol unit, came from a 1932 Morris Commercial lorry, and

was mounted in the middle of the boat. The original gearbox, propeller shaft and worm drive back axle were used, the latter having the axle shafts shortened to drive the two home built cone units fitted each side of a central gangway through the rear sleeping cabin. By using this system the **Cornwall** floated level and only drew about 16 inches, very useful in shallow canals, and had less trouble with weeds and rubbish than a conventional propeller. As petrol was strictly rationed the carburettor had been modified so that the engine would run on Tractor Vaporising Oil that was more easily available, being off ration.

By modern standards the interior was fairly basic. A large saloon at the front had two bunks each side and a central table. Cooking in the small galley was done on a three burner Valor paraffin stove with a portable oven that could be placed over one burner and the main lighting was by pressure paraffin lanterns. A double bedded cabin separated the galley from the bathroom which had a chemical toilet, a wash basin and a cast iron bath that was raised from the floor so that it could be heated by a Primus stove and the water would drain overside without a pump. Two 30 gallon water tanks in the engine room were mounted high enough to supply the galley sink and washbasin by gravity. Behind the engine room there was a cabin with a bunk bed each side over the cone units and finally the original boat cabin that was used for extra accommodation.

The boat was cruised extensively and took part in several pioneering events such as leading an IWA cruise on the northern Stratford canal necessitating the lifting of Tunnel Lane bridge. This was when I first became acquainted with the boat. In 1949 I went on a summer cruise on the Shropshire Union canal while in 1950, having spent several weeks helping maintain and repaint the boat, I went with her to the first IWA Festival of Boats & Arts at Market Harborough. The boat usually cruised with about ten people as crew, and as the North family believed in introducing as many people as possible to the canals, this number was sometimes augmented by others sleeping on the floor.

In September 1950 Ron North came to the sad decision that due to business pressures he would have to sell **Cornwall**. She was bought by the Salvation Army and was taken over by Major Fred Fielding and his wife and daughter to become the mission boat for the canal boat people.



Cornwall at Cut End on the Shroppie en route to be taken over by the Salvation Army in 1950 and re-named *Salvo*

Cutting from a National Newspaper in 1951



The Mariner Major

Major and Mrs Fred Fielding, of the Salvation Army, are taking the 70ft barge the Salvo, equipped with lecture hall and cinema apparatus, along 2,700 miles of England's rivers and canals. Here is Mrs Dale of Bletchley, going aboard with daughters Sarah, Gillian and Sheila.

*I am wondering if Mrs Dale is a boatwoman from the **Bletchley** or is from the town of Bletchley. Val)*

Canal Boat is their Floating Church

For nearly three years Major Fred Fielding and his wife Ivy, both of the Salvation Army, have made their home aboard a 72ft long canal boat so that they can get to know the men and women who spend their lives aboard the gaily painted boats that ply the canal network. They arrived as strangers among a community that has little to do with the world 'ashore'. Now the Fieldings have become the intimate friends of hundreds of canal folk and their children.

All through the winter their narrow boat, the Salvo, is moored on the canal side at Sutton Stop, a depot not far from Coventry. The sign painted along the side of the boat proclaims: Salvation Army - Inland Waterways Campaign. In fact, Mr & Mrs Fielding *are* the campaign for they are the only Salvation Army workers on the whole of the British canal network. It was because the canal people seemed to be 'left out of things' that the Fieldings - with over 20 years of Salvation Army work behind them in practically every part of the country - were sent on their mission.

For Mrs Fielding that meant giving up a normal home ashore at Carlisle and moving into the Salvo - converted into a houseboat with a line of cabins and compartments, none more than 5 feet wide. Her new home consists of a tiny kitchen 'for'ard' a bedroom and bathroom in tandem amidships and a postage stamp size living room aft.

After 3 years she is 'just about getting used to it'. The change also meant something else - it meant winning the trust of a naturally conservative group of people. "For 12 months there was one family who didn't say a word to us" said Maj. Fielding. "Now we are the best of friends". The canal folk are not easy to get to know, but once the ice is broken they are your friends for life.



Sutton Stop, where Maj. and Mrs Fielding live and work in a converted canal boat



Mrs Fielding

Films on Board

A tiny compartment in the bows becomes a club room for the children of the canal families in the summer.

“Quite a lot of them can’t read or write” said Maj. Fielding. “So we give them bible lessons with the aid of religious films. There were 32 children here for a meeting one summer evening. In fact they are here practically every evening in the summer when their parents have moored the boats for the night.”

Some distance down the towpath a small wooden hut which used to be the Canal Company’s office before the waterways were nationalised has been converted into a Sunday school and club house which is usually filled. “We help the grown ups as well.” said Maj. Fielding. “Many of those are unable to read or write, so we write letters for them and fill up forms. And then there is visiting of people in hospital, to say nothing of a number of confinements my wife has attended.

After Easter the *Salvo* will chug east for an overhaul. Then will come a summer tour of the midland canals. New places, new faces, for the most unusual mission in the country.

I was invited to help move the boat to its new mooring at Coventry and I joined her at Kings Norton to go through the Stratford Canal thus, rather sadly, reversing the original trip.

The boat was renamed *Salvo* and initially went on a mission cruise down the Grand Union Canal to Cosgrove and Bletchley but in 1951 was moved to Sutton’s Stop where she tied in the first length down the Coventry arm which became their permanent base. They also took over the old toll office which was used as a meeting room. In the next few years I visited Major and Mrs. Fielding several times on board the *Salvo* at their base at Sutton’s Stop where they did so much good work helping the canal folk.

Major Fielding never seemed to be happy with the Morris Commercial engine so in 1954, when the D&IWE were pruning all the old Fellows Morton boats from the southern fleet, he was given the *Aster*, a wooden motor boat with 15HP Bolinder engine that had been built at Uxbridge dock. I helped Bert Dunkley bring the *Aster* from Uxbridge to Coventry. I think the Major also had trouble mastering the Bolinder. I am not sure if the engine was taken out of *Salvo*.

The Salvation Army closed the canal mission in 1963 once most of the trading boats had finished. Brigadier Fielding, as he had become by then, retired and went to live in the old toll house at Norton junction where he died in the 1990’s I believe. I have never found what happened to *Cornwall-Salvo* but I last saw *Aster* as a converted residential boat on the Kennet and Avon canal near Dundas on 15th May 2003.

Colin Scrivener

MAN AND WIFE RUN A UNIQUE MISSION FOR THOSE WHO LIVE ON THE WATERWAYS

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Maj. Fielding (left) talks to a canal family near his boat, the *Salvo*.
Left to right: Miss Laura Carter, Mr and Mrs Whitlock and their children, Michael (4) and Joan (8)