

windlass

109

November 1972



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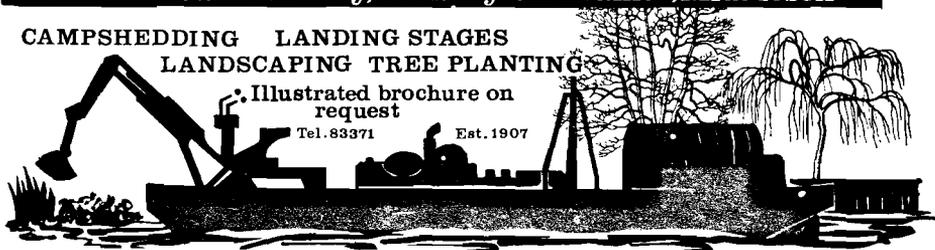
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WANTED: Market Harborough rally plaque, for a boat that did attend this first I W A rally. High price will be paid.

Also - reasonably priced folding bicycle.
Box No 109/1, via Editor.

Inland Waterways Association

London and South East Branch

The object of the Association shall be to advocate the use, maintenance and development of the inland waterways of the British Isles and in particular to advocate and promote the restoration to good order, of every navigable waterway and the fullest use of every navigable waterway by both commercial and pleasure traffic.



| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Patrons | Dame Margot Fonteyn and Sir John Betjeman |
| Branch Chairman | Iltyd Harrington, 16 Lea House, Salisbury St., London N W 8 |
| Vice-Chairman | Nigel Stevens, 52 Redcliffe Square, London S W 10 |
| Secretary | David Gibson, 4 The Ridgeway, London W 3 |
| Treasurer | Peter Heywood, c/o Lloyds Bank, 5 Ashbourne Parade, Hanger Lane, London W 5 |
| Editor | Roderick Atkin, 108A Sutherland Avenue, London W 9 2 Q P (01-289-0191) |

POUND HITS A NEW LOW

Many pounds, to be exact, on the Oxford and the Grand Union canals.

At the time of writing, the Oxford canal has been closed for several weeks, due to severe water shortages - Boddington reservoir is said to be completely dry.

More severe in its long-term effects is the strike of B W B staff on the Grand Union canal. Apparently, several sections came out on unofficial strike on the morning of Wednesday 18 October - bang in the middle of the stoppage period and thus prolonging the disruption of navigation. Sections affected were from Tring south, plus the Regents Canal and Brentford warehouse; the P L A staff were also rumoured to be out, whilst the Lee & Stort went back to await an official decision. Irreversible stoppages at Marsworth and Common Moor Locks closed down all traffic heading over the Chilterns.

EVERING NEWS, Wednesday, October 25, 1972

The issue was one of comparability of pay: the building workers' increase to £29 had been granted to B W B tradesmen, but the Board's offer to its lock-keepers, labourers and other section staff whose basic rate is £17 per week "was found unacceptable by the men". I understand that the offer was of £2, against a claim of £6. The tradesmen have joined their colleagues in the strike.

The effects of the strike may not be too noticeable in the short run, though several pounds are getting quite low. Industrial users could suffer (though one of John Dickenson's mills is also closed due to strike action!). Banks and the canal bed could deteriorate if left dry for long, whilst the currently undisturbed anglers will soon fear for their fish. Boats could be damaged, if sunk on canal-bed obstacles. Even the Mikron Theatre Company - gaining a lot of publicity at performances between Watford and Stoke Bruerne - must now meet their dates by road instead of by canal (more on their experiences next month).

Yet one must feel strong sympathy for the low-paid staff, who trade an outdoor life and a lock cottage for work in all weathers and at all hours necessary. Further, they complain of seeing their numbers steadily cut back, whilst outside labour is brought in at £60 a week for bricklaying, or on piecework of £22 a chain of hedge-laying against their own 7/- per hour.

Perhaps there's a lesson for the I W A here, too. One way of exerting pressure on waterways bodies, whether B W B or RWA, is through their informed, committed and well-organised work force. Which means the men, as well as their managers. . . Any views on this, or the strike in general? And can anyone remember an earlier strike on the waterways, at all?

COVER: Stoppage at Marsworth Photo: Tom Park

branch and routes

BRANCH COMMITTEE MEETING - October

David Gibson reported on last Council meeting, and on 'Thoughts on WSAC' - see Campaign Corner, this issue. Branch Meetings over the winter were examined, and we hope to include Peter Zivey on Continental Waterways, Charles Hadfield and Harry Grafton of B W B on Commercial Waterways, especially the Grand Union scheme. Also sessions on the Basingstoke, Wey & Arun and the Thames barges.

Branch Dinner: if you'd like one, tell Jim Street.

Branch Rallies: we hope to run two next year, at each end of the Branch area. One will be for trailed boats at Chelmsford, to encourage the Navigation Company to allow pleasure boats on the Chelmer. The other will be at Oxford, to draw attention to the poor state of the town end of the canal. Anyone live in Oxford and prepared to help run this rally?

Branch Draw: this is vital to Branch income in a year when we had to draw £500 of savings to pay for the Paddington Basin Enquiry. It will be run by Geoff Bradshaw, a brand new volunteer - Geoff hopes to get more attractive prizes than ever before, so on all counts please sell your tickets (enclosed with this issue of 'Windlass') or donate generously in lieu.

XXXXXXXXXX

working parties

Every weekend: David Hutchings needs small parties on the Avon - ring me and I'll fix you up.

NOV 18 - 19 Wey and Arun - Rowner Lock
Within easy travelling distance from

London, so let's have a big turn-out! Full scale restoration will depend on the success of current work, which tests the feasibility of restoring a lock chamber and clearing centurion trees from the canal bed. Ring Nigel Stevens (01-373-7234) for details.

Sunday Slough Arm
NOV 26 Still a remainder waterway, despite all the promises and discussions. Come to attack the trees overhanging the channel - meet at Iver Boatyard at 10.30 - ring Rod Pawsey (01-452-2401)

Stratford Canal - Lock 40
DEC 9 - 10 To build 100 ft of open bywash channel following last year's weir. That means 75 tons of concrete and 500 conblocks, to be done by Spring - a good start could beat the real cold.

next branch meeting

Topical speakers for the next two meetings are difficult to come by, since they're all busy being topical with Whitehall.

Dates are 23 November and 14 December.

NEXT 'WINDLASS' COPY DATE is late - third week in November for mid-December issue.

Contributions, photos, advertisements all welcome: there will be no January issue.

WANTED: Volunteers with alert and lively minds to serve actively on the Branch Committee. Do you want to have a say in what we do, to contribute to the IWA national and local campaigns? Our Lee & Stort man has resigned, and we need someone to take his place. The Branch has automatic representation on the Lee & Stort Development Committee, whilst the Lee Valley Regional Park is well under way. A lively type could help us to have a constructive influence in this area. Even if you don't live in North London you could still have a part to play in the Branch - please contact David Gibson NOW.

IF THERE'S NO NEWS FROM YOUR WATERWAY

- IT'S ALL COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE. . .

SILVER SWORD

Another crusading emblem has been granted to J M Lipscombe of Cranfield, in "Black Jack".

KENNET & AVON

Ray Denyer has apparently resigned from the K & A Council - I'm told in disappointment at the slow rate of progress. He's always worked very hard for his waterway - witness their Boat Show stand. Could such impatience not be tempted towards the Thames at Reading, the Oxford Rally, or even the long derelict Thames & Severn? Any answer, Ray?

CAMPAIGN CORNER

NEW CHAIRMAN FOR I W A

Lionel Munk has stepped down after his six-month stand-in period, and the new Chairman is John Heap of the North-West Branch. He should be well known to members, and his boat 'Duchess' featured in a recent Ian Nairn T V programme. Both Captain Munk and his predecessor, John Humphries, are remaining on I W A Council. It might be thought that three Chairmen in a crucial campaign year is somewhat excessive - indicating both the success of the Government's 'nobbling' and our own lack of experienced leaders. As in Council, so in our own Branch - though it's good to see fresh faces coming forward.

IN HIS OWN SPEAK. . .

"It is the motor car which offers the greatest hope to rural areas, provided it is shared more freely."

Eldon Griffiths, speaking in isolated Ely (sic),
DoE press notice, September 28.

"We are pro-bus because only the bus can preserve civilised life in our towns and in the countryside."
Eldon Griffiths, speaking at a bus operators' dinner - DoE press notice, September 25.
(Quotes spotted by Guardian Miscellany column).

I W A PETITION

This will now close at the end of December. A further copy of the petition form will be sent out with the December 'Bulletin'. We claim over a million supporters, but need to prove this by our signatures, and are still a long way from the half-million mark. Please get more signatures NOW.

'WINDLASS' FREE TRIAL OFFER!

This offer was of a free copy of the Government's Consultative Paper on amenity aspects of the water reorganisation. Not one single member wrote in for a copy! 'Windlass' Quiz: does this show:-

(a) that none of you reads 'Windlass'? (b) none of you cares about the waterways reorganisation?
(c) none of you trusts anything the Government issues for consultation?

Please write to (a) Editor (b) I W A General Secretary (c) your M P or the Minister.

"THOUGHTS ON W S A C"

On October 10th, the I W A sent to Peter Walker its paper entitled "Thoughts on WSAC". Members will remember that the original Government proposals for the ten RWAs were amended following successful I W A pressure, backed by the general public and over 100 leading organisations. This new document is intended to answer the Government's Consultative Paper, and to influence the framing of its Bill.

Powers: these must be extended to cover distribution of the promised Government grant, and the ability to lay down national policies on waterways, to be implemented by the R W As.

Specific points are that - maintenance standards must be set and adhered to
- derelict waterways must be within WSAC's scope for restoration
- waterside property should be used for amenity purposes, where appropriate
- maintenance standards must be clearly defined in the forthcoming Act

Action NOW: this is also strongly recommended. Firstly, the backlog of maintenance and restoration work is getting worse, and cannot wait for several years, whilst the new bodies are set up. Secondly, the provision of Government cash for maintenance and for the upgrading of remainder canals would be a nice indication of the Government's commitment.

"Thoughts on WSAC" is available from I W A General Office, price 20p.

THE MARCH on BRAUNSTON

LESLIE and ANGELA GREEN

It was high noon on that August Wednesday when we stepped on to the towing path at Uxbridge at Bridge 184: the March on Braunston had begun. . . It was a beautiful day, in fact they were all beautiful days, with each day presenting its own individual targets. Where to sleep at nights? How to avoid reaching canal-side pubs after closing time? How to get back on to the towing path if you strayed off it? How to navigate those parts of the towing path where age and neglect had created impediments?

Some interesting things became apparent early on our walk. First, it is much easier to walk along a canal side than on a country road. It is far less tiring. The pathway is flat, water is cooling, and the way is broken up by numbered bridges and locks. Second, and so marvellous a discovery, Life Slows Down. There is no need to hurry, except if there is fear that the next pub will be shut. Third, the scenery is always changing. From country to town, from open farmland to woods, from cows to sheep, from clear pound to muddy water. One can even imagine that the smoke ahead is not from fields being cleaned but from an Indian war party. Fourth, accommodation is difficult to find because the walker has vanished from the countryside, but when one does find a hotel one is assured of a warm welcome.

The problem of finding a bed for the night met us at Ivinghoe on the second evening. A hotel which used to provide accommodation is now under new management, whose staff greet one with a special kind of French and cater for a special clientele who do not march up the canal to Braunston. At Ivinghoe there is also a Youth Hostel with a helpful management, but since pop music, canals and ourselves do not mix, we pressed on and found ourselves a bed in a cornfield watching the stars dance by overhead. We got up when we were shivering and walked on. We thought it was midnight but in fact we walked into the dawn and got back on to the canal at Slapton, bridge 120. It was cold, we had wet feet and no breakfast, but we were masters of the dawn. We found hot tea and marmalade toast in a workman's cafe at Leighton Buzzard, after passing a number of enthusiastic young fishermen at seven in the morning. Do fish rise that early?

But every other morning was marvellous too. When one has eaten a slap-up breakfast in pleasant surroundings at places like the Eagle at Apsley, or the Swan at Bletchley (where they have a fierce-looking dog who only wants to be taken for a walk), one steps onto the towing path like the kings and queens of France may have walked in the gardens at Versailles.

From Fenny Stratford to Cosgrove is eleven miles, a long stretch where the new town of Milton Keynes is being laid out. It took us a long time to walk out of earshot of the builders. Gougers of the land, busily at work as in so many places nowadays, as if men cannot bear to leave the countryside alone. That was on Saturday, the day we never saw a pub until six in the evening. The going is rough through industrial Wolverton, but then on the way to Cosgrove one crosses an aqueduct and this is always the high point in any canal journey. In this case it was breathtaking. Cosgrove has a hotel which we remember as being set in a caraven park and staffed by a head waiter. On Sunday morning, after going under the canal through a pedestrian tunnel, we set out from Bridge 65 for Stoke Bruerne.

On Sunday afternoon, Stoke Bruerne is a hive of activity. The pub is overworked, the staff ladling out large pints and small pies, the museum crowded out with holidaymakers and those out for the afternoon, the two shops busy and imitation working boats passing back and forth through the lock, pleasure boats passing through and moored. It is here that one learns with a shock that it wasn't so long ago that there were many commercial boats passing through, but now there are no more commercial boats at all.

Coming up the canal at walking pace we usually beat the pleasure craft where there were locks but they would beat us on long pounds and we had become used to the friendly nod and the cheery wave. The master of 'Largo' even bobbed up from under his propeller to grin while engaged in stripping layers of polythene bag off it - his eighth hold-up that day, he said. After that, every time we saw a poly-

these bag we hooked it out on to the towpath.

At Stoke Bruerne we saw a craft at rest and the owner, whom we had passed and who had passed us, offered us a lift through Blisworth Tunnel if we wanted it. When one of us walked back to see if he was around, all that could be seen were his legs dangling over the stern and his head well back cradled in his arms. We could not intrude on such bliss, so we walked on and over the tunnel. The line of the waterway is marked by a series of tunnel vents which stand as if they are sentinels guarding the way of the water. We had booked a room at the Blisworth Hotel when in Stoke Bruerne and so were in no hurry. When we got there it was delightful: an old building being refurbished, right beside the railway track where fast trains thundered by. Here we had a substantial evening meal and watched television in their private parlour. A wonderful breakfast in the morning and then off on a warm bright day from Bridge 49.



That day, Monday, found our march northwards faced with its ending. There was no accommodation at Braunston. We had been happy to sleep out for one night, but middle-aged bones are not intended to be stretched too often in cornfields. So we turned aside at Bridge 11 for Kilsby. We drank our last lager at a canal-side pub, and leaving the proprietress playing crib with a customer we walked away from the canal. The signpost to Kilsby said three miles. Half an hour later a signpost said three miles and in the gathering darkness our minds turned once again to the cornfields. We even examined them and noted that one cornfield contained baled straw which could be used to build a real shelter. We passed the Watford flight and further cornfields, but at last we made Kilsby and a hotel with a wonderful hostess who gave us a lift into Rugby the following morning. When we looked out of our window in the early morning light, the country was hidden by a blanket of mist and our bones creaked in pleasure at being surrounded by civilised warmth.

Leslie Green - On the March

We have left many things out of this account. Our mini-survey of the canal which recorded 11 moving craft on Wednesday, 17 on Thursday, 16 on Friday, 20 on Saturday, 25 on Sunday and 34 on Monday. None of these genuine commercial craft. Far more fishermen than moving boats, and far more moored craft than either. We have not mentioned the scratches all down the right arm, sunburn all down the left, which tell their own story about the condition - and position - of the towpath. But what we can say, as a summing up of a wonderful holiday covering perhaps 80 miles in 5½ days, is that we are now buying a four-berth boat. But if we pass towpath walkers we shan't offer them a lift, but wave to them, and envy them just a little.

CHRISTMAS CARDS

I W A cards are selling really well, nearly double last year's level at this stage. Both designs are proving popular, though the Grand Union is ahead - who will support the Thames picture?

Paddington Basin cards are still available from 1970 - in view of our battle at the Inquiry, members may wish to order these too - and send one to the Inspector???

ORDERS: should be sent to Mrs J Humphries 21 Parkside, Wimbledon, London S W 19. Cards are 50p a packet of 10 including postage to you. Order soon, please.

Note: (1) No overprinting orders can be accepted, since it takes too long to carry out such orders;

(2) Early buyers may find some cards made too large for their envelopes by the printers. Please check, and return any too large to Miss Alexander at I W A General Office.

LETTERS; A.G. Replies

Watford, Herts

Dear Sir,

Like many other boats owned by I W A members, my cabin wall is graced by several rally plaques which not only act as a seed for nostalgia, but also as a stimulant for conversation when non-canal types come on board. They realise the extent of the canal system as shown in cast brass evidence.

However, there is an empty space on the wall. What has happened to the 1972 Little Venice plaque? Like many other people, I seem to remember paying some money and giving my address, and yet nobody seems to have received the promised item. And then there's the quality of the promised thing: like its predecessor in 1963 the latest plaque is a pathetic specimen. Does the South-East area only think in terms of brittle plastics with motifs of strange Italian vessels the like of which I've yet to see on the cut? Let's get back to reasonable rally plaques in the future. Small, metal, and with a simple design.

James Macdonald

I believe B W B imported a gondola for their Boat Afloat Show, though I didn't see it. And may we take it you're volunteering as Maker of the Plaque next time round? Ed.

Weybridge, Surrey

Dear Sir,

I read in the latest "Windlass" - with the aid of the magnifying glass so kindly provided with every copy - that next year's L & S E Branch Spring Rally would be held on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation. Not only are we to have a National Rally which a large number of boats will find hazardous or impossible to attend, but we are to have our own local Rally on a navigation where only the local or trailed boats will be able to attend; therefore ensuring that 95% of the boat owning members in the South East will not be able to attend.

Could we please have a little common sense in this matter and have the Rally in a place accessible to the general public and the majority of members?

Mike McGrath

The minute print did announce two Spring rallies, in Chelmsford AND Oxford - see Branch Committee Report in this issue. As to the print size and members' complaints: 'I am looking into this'. Ed.

Aylesbury, Bucks

Dear Sir

In recent years, I have often thought of a trip to the Cambridge area by boat, but having to cross the Wash on my own has deterred me. As the Middle Level is an alternative route, a road visit was made last year to have a look, only to find passage is not possible in its present condition for a boat drawing 2' 9". In view of this, I for one welcome the choice of Ely for next year's rally.

Assuming that the I W A intend to provide fully qualified pilots for the crossing; that suitable insurance cover is arranged; and that crews give themselves a couple of days in hand, in case of adverse weather conditions, there should be little cause for trouble.

I shall certainly be there - and if enough publicity is brought to bear on the state of the Middle Level, I might even be able to make a solo return trip some time in the future.

Bill Young

As I said before, they are mending the Breach, and to that extent the Lymm rally had perhaps succeeded before it had begun. But it was a dull rally. Partly the weather, of course, but there really were very few attractions for the public. Charging for the car park exhibited precisely the sort of meanness that I thought waterways people didn't show; if that was the only way for the rally to break even then there was something badly wrong - Northampton made £3,000 without such charges.

I disagree with Joan Clark; you really wouldn't have known there was a "Waterways Carve-Up" going on. That was of infinitely greater importance than the Breach; there will be more breaches possible through RWA negligence than ever the Bridgewater will suffer. We - of course I include myself - are quite fantastically useless at publicity: can't we find a few effective media men anywhere?

But the most awful and ominous thing wasn't the rally at all, but the reception given to Eldon Griffiths. I don't know which was the smoother, him or his Government Adviser, but I do know that he promised nothing that couldn't be evaded later, and only one thing (more money - but how much?) which showed any sign at all of a genuine change of heart. And yet the audience almost stood up and cheered, it was so pleased. I don't want to be cynical about the Minister, but Ministers have never delivered canal promises before, they always get moved to another job in the nick of time. Let's cheer when we see the Act, not now. And if we can be gulled so easily, what about our 'campaign'?

And now to next year. Ely is in fact more sensible than I knew at the time, because the Middle Level is in considerable danger of closure. Perhaps it's even worth crossing the Wash, after all. Let us hope that visitors to the rally see a campaign as well as a festival. Next year there will be lots of rallies. Let's make them big ones, but let's have sideshows and roundabouts and steam engines as well as all those appalling amateur stands. And for goodness' sake, let's remember the object of the campaign as well as the quality of the Elsan disposal.

A. G.

Berkhamsted, Herts

Dear Mr Editor,

I was either fortunate or unfortunate not to attend the National Rally at Lymm, as my holidays were booked when 'Ladyline' announced the date, later to be changed. But how many boats attend Rallies just to collect plaques, and could this be a reason why the numbers increase each year - the same phobia which attacked motorists when stickers announced that they had been "everywhere" a short time ago?

The Ely Rally, I have been told, is to keep the Middle Level open, and as such is worthy of support. But as I have already heard that a vital link lock is 35/or 40/or 45 feet long, surely this will force Narrowboat owners out into the Wash, some possibly uninsured for tidal waters, some without a pilot. I suggest that it would make headline news if disaster hit anyone in passage, and would not benefit the Cause.

Like Joan Clark, I will not be at Ely next year. I cannot accept that if I attend a parallel Rally I will have assisted in keeping the navigation open to Ely, nor will I have attended the NATIONAL Rally. I am looking forward to reading more in the next issue of "Windlass".

T.G. Park

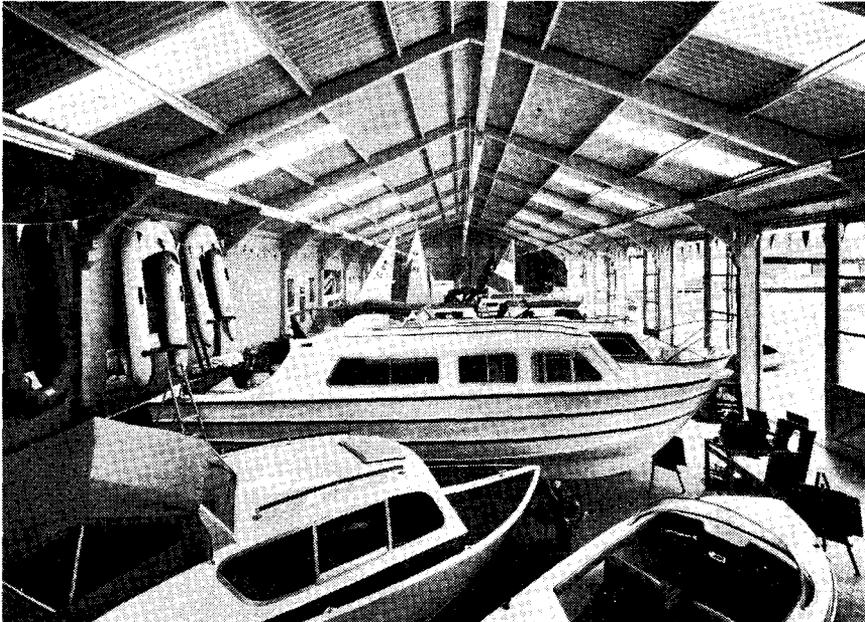
P S Yes, I collect plaques.

Information: I gather that entries for Ely via the Wash may be restricted to those procuring a pilot. A parallel rally at Peterborough would provide a focus for boats not going to Ely, though there would be no public attractions. Crews could take a 40 minute train trip to Ely, every hour on Sats, every two hours on Sunday, last trains back at ten o'clock and eight, respectively. Navigation on the Middle Level is under attack from Fenland Anglers, as well as the usual forces, and a show of strength is needed - but what about those many plaque-collectors who will not get to Ely? Editor.

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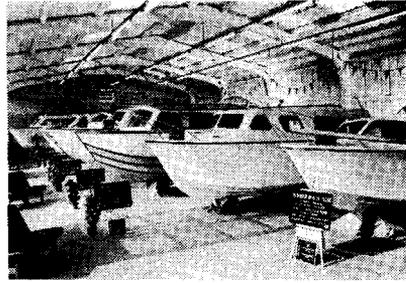
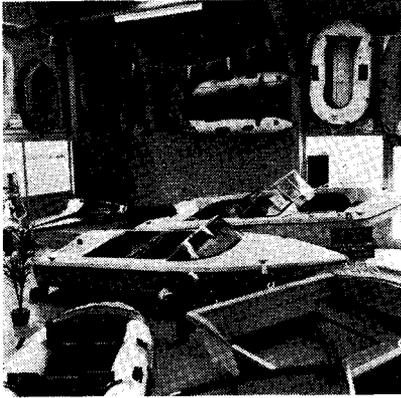
Hanbury Marina, Hanbury Road, Droitwich, Worcs. Tel: Droitwich 3002.

Mountsorrel Marine Centre, 14-20 Loughborough Road, Mountsorrel, Nr. Loughborough Leics.
Tel: Rothley 2144

The Swag Boat Centre, Barns, Lane, Stubber's Green, Nr. Aldridge, Staffordshire.
Tel: Aldridge 55448

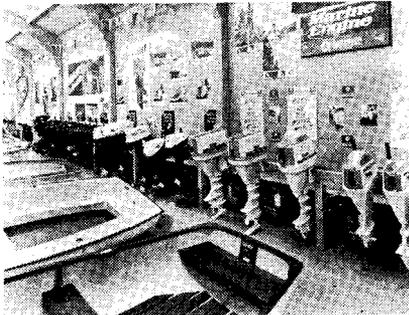
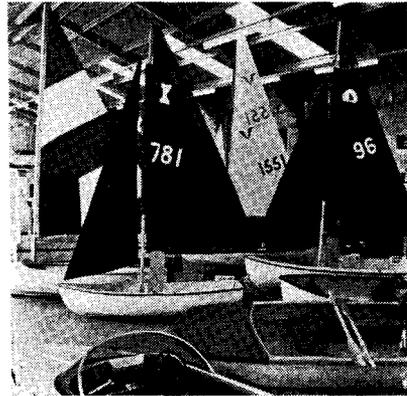
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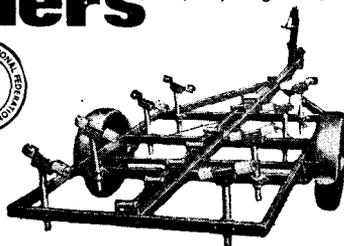
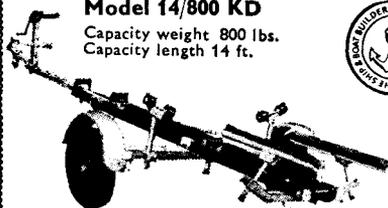
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