



Memories of the early days

LNBP Member Mike Darbie, one of the project's earliest and oldest members, recalls:-

“Sadly my knowledge of the project is quite ephemeral, and marginal, as it rapidly changed from an idea amongst friends [If I remember correctly I think that Richard had an interest in Narrowboats which predated the Project, and the roots may have sprung from a Field Studies Centre in North Wales [Aberllefenni] which we took a large number of pupils to for a week at a time] to a juggernaut the size of a real Narrowboat shell that found its way to a yard in Deptford!

“I used to work with Keith Standley and Richard Brierley, and knew Alan Till, back in the days before LNBP. Before the first boat reached the water, I was involved [in a small way] with early fundraising and was onboard the inaugural trip up the Regents Canal with the Mayor of Lewisham, Les Eytley in 1983 or 1984 I believe.

“The Project soon took on a life of its own, Richard had no children, and Keith was single, so they soon took over all the running about. They both moved on, whilst I remained at Forest Hill School until I retired 11 years ago, and we moved to North Devon”.



Brian Tidbury is a current LNBP Skipper, Executive Member, and one of the project's longest serving officials.

“In the early days of the project the boats were always kept in London over the winter in the Lyons Tetley Tea Basin on the Paddington Arm of the Grand Union near Blackhorse Bridge (Bridge 15) and the Black Horse public house in Greenford. The last trip of the year, usually in October, was bringing the two/three boats from Braunston to Greenford and the first trip of the next year was taking them back. In those days most of the project members were based in London and it was convenient to have the boats in London so that working days/weekends could be easily arranged. It was also convenient to visit the Black Horse for lunch and in the evenings!

“I have found some photos of some of these trips. The one top left shows Michael and Megan and was taken in October 1994. The crew on this trip were Thomas Tallis school who were regular users of the boats at that time. They were doing a sponsored walk along the towpath from Braunston to Batchworth using the boats as overnight accommodation. One thing I remember about this trip is that it was the only occasion that I have ever fallen in!



The photo (below) shows myself on Merlin taken 15th March 1997, don't know where for sure but it looks like Norton Junction(?). Note that the handrails are painted bright yellow to provide high contrast to help the partially sighted as this boat was intended to be used by these groups.





“The bottom two pictures show the boats in the Tetley Basin. These two pictures were taken on the same occasion but I don't when this was. In the picture bottom left the boat nearest the camera is Michael and the one bottom right shows Michael, Megan and Merlin left to right.

“I believe the chap carrying his bags over the front of Merlin is John Sheridan who did a lot of skippering for the project at that time. He later spent more time working on Tarporley, a London based community boat. I don't recall who the other gents are but perhaps others can identify them?

