

CANAL BOAT DECORATION

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Introduction

This study is intended as a primarily visual insight to the decorative methods employed on a variety of inland waterways craft. The term 'canal' is used loosely as river and estuarial vessels are included. However, all the boats recorded would have used man-made waterways regularly.

The canal narrow-boat is by far the most elaborately decorated of these working craft hence its frequent appearance

in the following pages. There are two distinct types of decoration on these boats - that for the 'motor boat' and that for the 'butty', or dumb, boat. The butty boats tended to have far more decoration - probably because this is where the working boatman lived - the motor boat being generally only daytime accomodation. Sadly there are few butty boats remaining - many having been converted to motorised craft.

The motor boat is easily identified by its tiller - a piece of stripily painted bent piping; the butty by its smaller cabin and a far more elaborate rudder and tiller.

'Shortboats' were used extensively on the Leeds and Liverpool canal. Although twice as wide as the midlands narrowboat, they are slightly shorter so as to pass the locks on that canal. Like nearly all other non-narrow craft, their decoration is far simpler and owes a great deal to that found on sea going craft - rather than to the autonomous evolution of the narrow boats 'Rose and Castles'.

'West County' boats (from the West Riding of Yorkshire) are but slightly shorter versions of the Shortboat - again because of lock sizes.

Norfolk 'Wherries' possess somewhat finer lines than most barges although even less decoration (- 'barges', as a collective term, are 10ft or more in width, contrasting sharply with the narrowboat - definitely not a barge - at 7ft or less)

Yorkshire 'Keels', Mersey and Weaver 'Flats', Severn 'Trows' (or 'witch-barges' - now extinct) along with the more famous 'Thames' and East Coast barges also possess notably little decoration when compared with the narrow-boat.


REED AT BRENTFORD No.572
BOB BUSH
Canal Painter
AYLESBURY
CAPELLA

Bob Bush's superbly decorated butty 'Capella' has part of its overall livery different every time I see it.

The canal company's boats were found to receive better treatment the better they were decorated (perhaps that accounts for the poor condition of some NCB lorries today!). Needless to say, owner-boatmen - or "Number Ones" tried to out do the 'Company boats'. Possibly this is the reason why "Fellows Morton and Clayton Ltd" changed the colour scheme of their boats from a predominantly black and white livery (top+right) to a more exotic red and green (bottom+right) (The boats shown are in FMC liveries but the present private owners have obviously changed from the old company name - a good many boats show evidence of similar practices).

The earlier, white, lettering was relieved suprisingly effectively by red.









The ropework "side-strings" are designed to protect the paintwork in the event of the chimney falling.

The main constituents of the artwork on a narrow boat are: 'roses and castles' and diamond patterns. The origins of all these are somewhat obscure and this point has been gone into in some detail in "Narrowboat Painting" by A J Lewery.

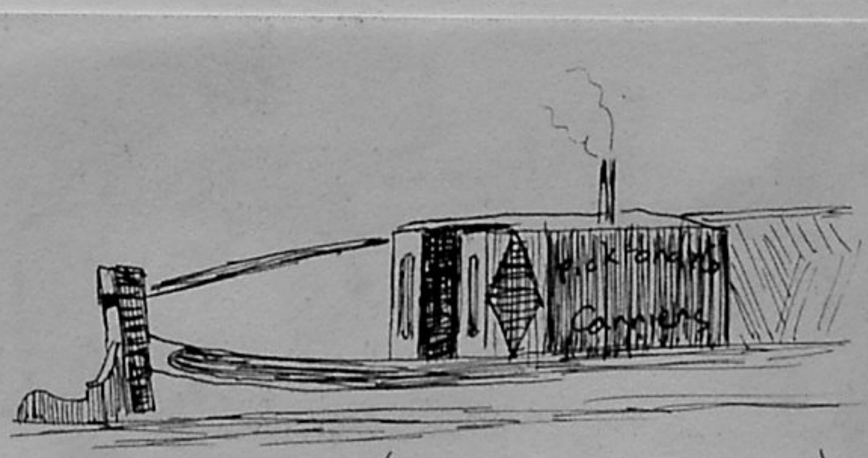
Castles, particularly, and roses are now thought to have been part of a national "fashion" in the 19th. ('Japanned' ware - the 'great teaboard school of art'). An old romantic story about ex-gypsies in Manchester being recruited for the boats has now been dispelled - chiefly on the grounds that gypsy living wagons - although very bright and colourful also - are very much more Baroque in style.

In a later appendix I have given examples of the most common rose and castle styles now in use.

Diamonds are thought to be a derivative of an old Pickford's emblem as this would have lost its significance when Pickford's switched to rail transport in the 1840's.

Evidence for this comes from a series of old engravings of Pickford's boats - all of which show a large diamond on the cabin side

Other features to be found on narrowboats are the 'spectacles' or 'mouses-ears', on the rear cabin doors and the 'compass wheel' motif usually found on the stock - or Ram's Head - of a butty's rudder.



(from an engraving)


INLAND V
HOI
CRUI
FORGET-ME-NOT





Note unusual use of cabin side for advertising.







A converted ice-breaker with traditional cabin and door panels


CANAL TRANSPORT SERVICES







Layout of motor boat cabin top.
Note 'club' on the cabin slide and
the green, flat-topped 'pigeon box' which
is opened for extra ventilation.

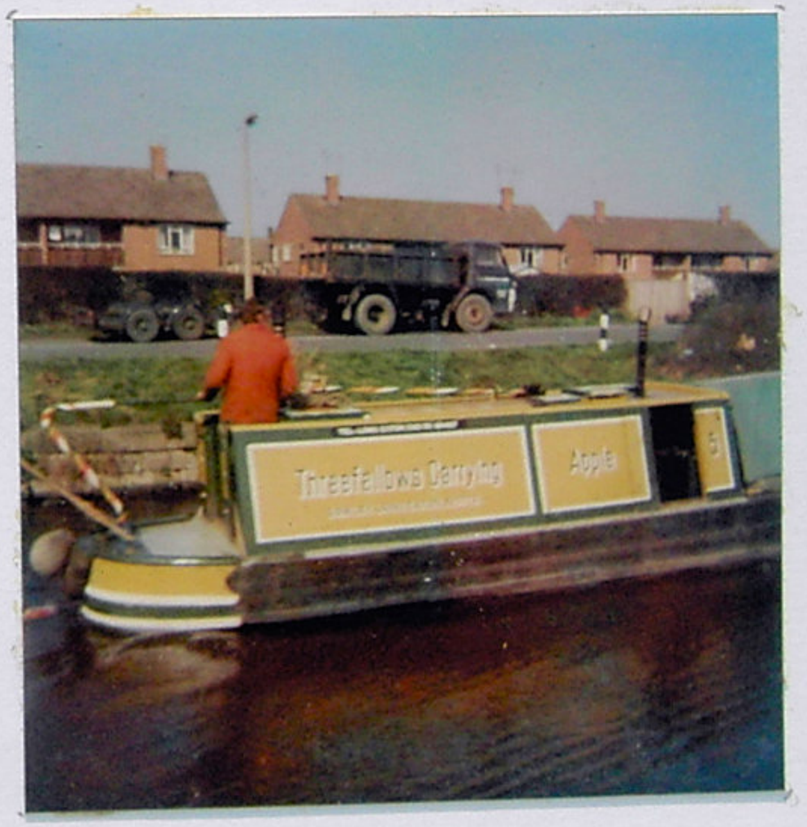


Not narrow boats but wide-boats. This type of craft - identical in style to the narrowboat - traded particulary on the Grand Union Canal near London.
Note traditional boatman's stool.






ACCo
KEPPEL


Threefallows Carrying
Apple


BOB BUSH
AYLESBURY
CAPELLA


ANDROMEDA
SAWLEY


OLLATON
C EATON


ASTL



Present day coal carriage - for domestic use.
Note diamonds on the retracted box-masts and 'stands'



Shortboats

Note the lack of the characteristics of narrow-boat painting.

The emphasis is on line work and scroll-type formations.

Primary colours are however still the main ones used but their frequency is much more restricted.



Wherries

Line work again plays a major part. One characteristic peculiar to the wherry is the white semi-circle painted on the bow.









West-Country boats are to all intents and purposes the same as short-boats when it comes to decoration. This particular example (left) was chosen as a subject because of the rather unusual lettering style on the stern.

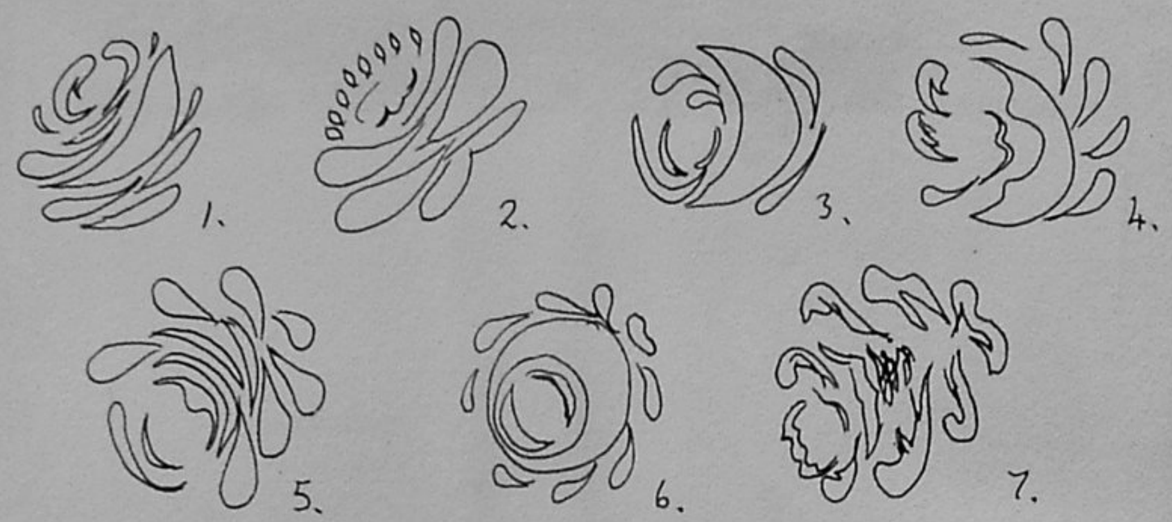
Yorkshire Keels (below left)

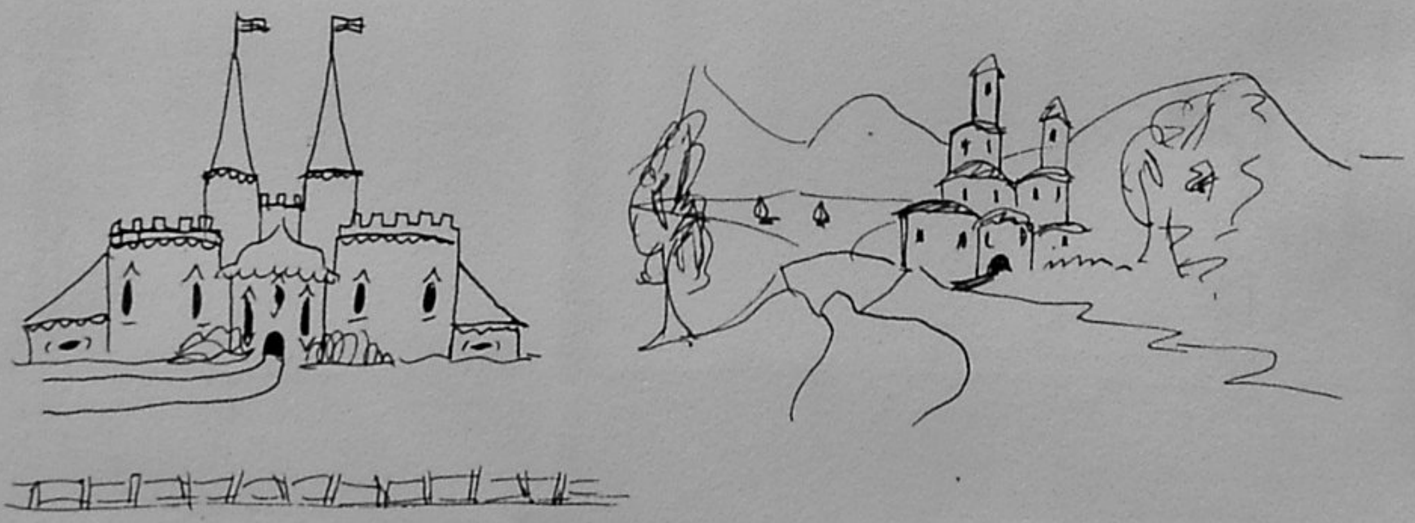
These vessels probably carry less in terms of paintwork than any other craft described with the possible exception of the every-day commercial barge (right). The Keel ('Comrade') nearest the camera is to be restored to sailing condition for 1976.



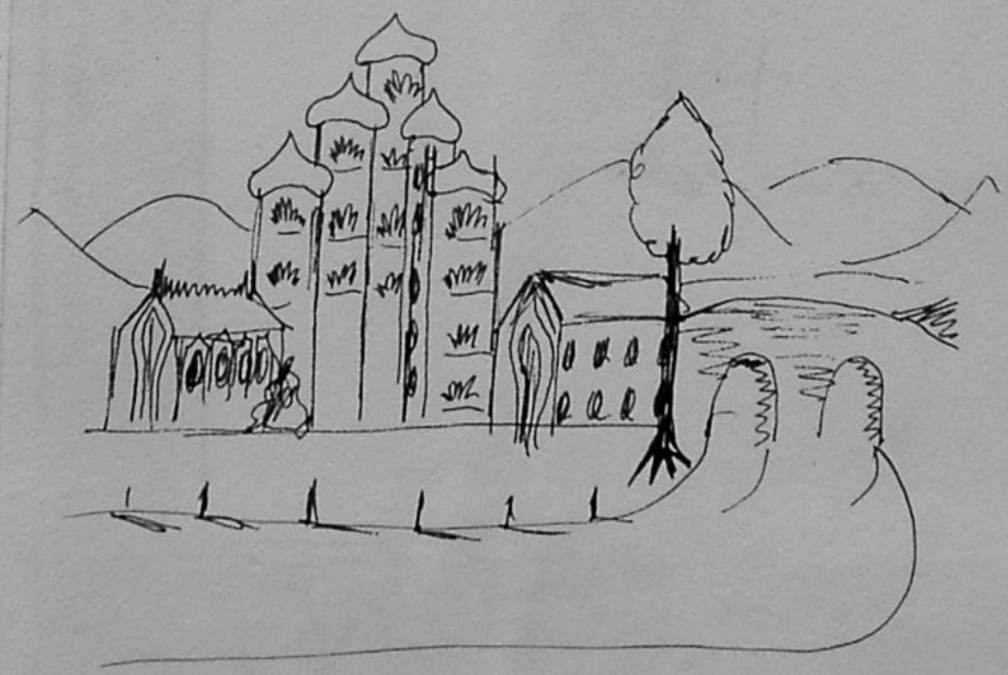
Typical commercial barge on the River Weaver

Appendix :-







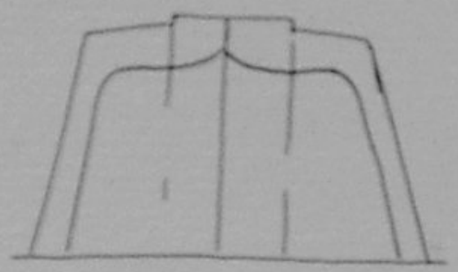


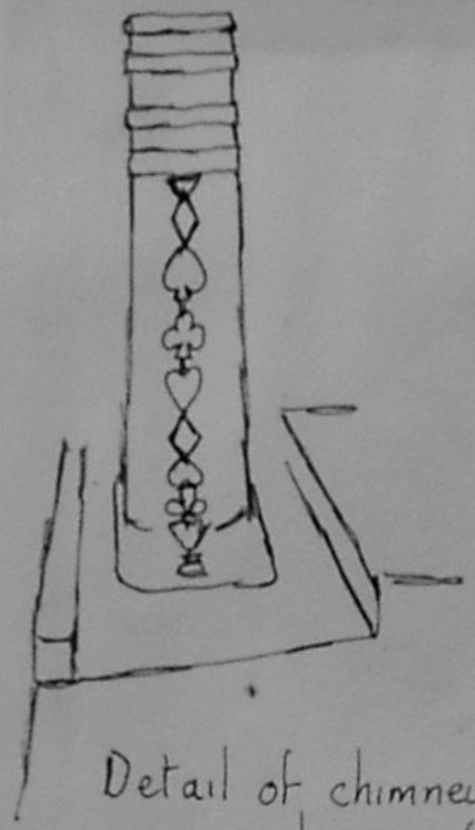




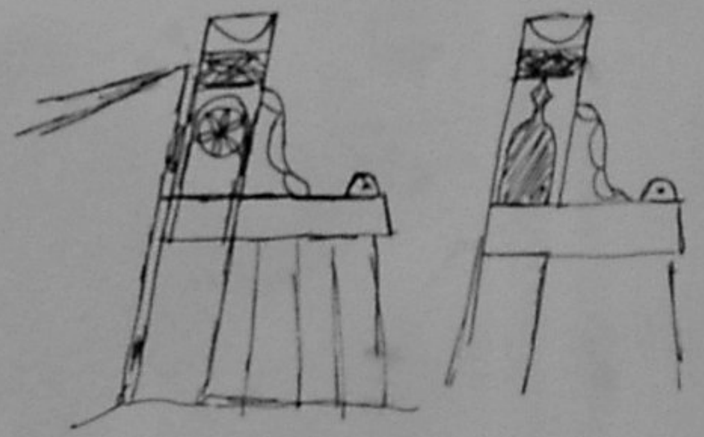


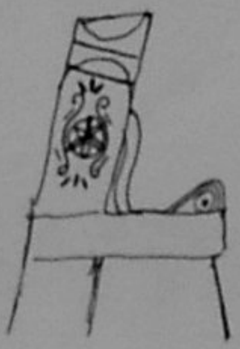
The oldest known castle
on a narrowboat cabin
(enlarged from a small engraving)



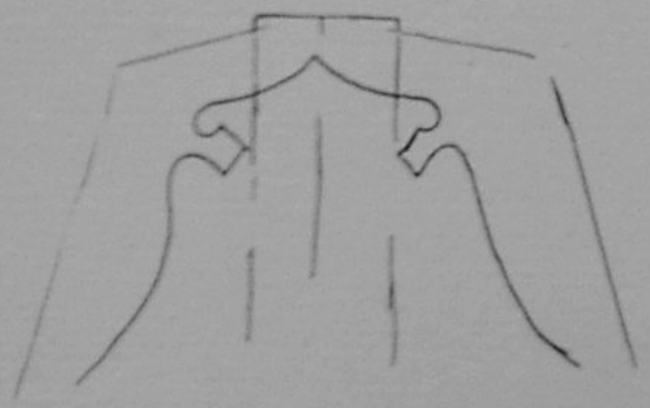


Detail of chimney chain.

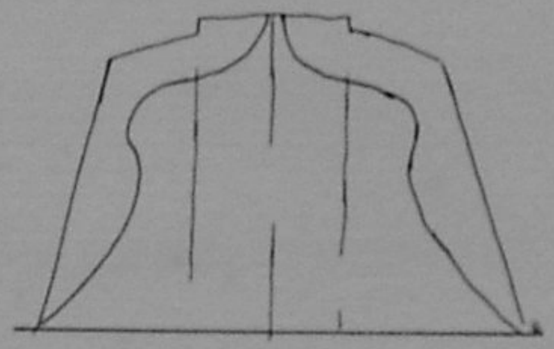


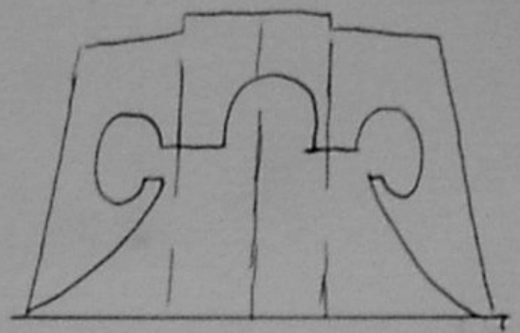


Typical 'Ram's' Head's



Spectacle designs
(mouse's ears)







Note unusual 'mouses-ears' and
the intricate design round port-lights.



A real boathorse - one of the few!



No comment.....!