

# All hands on deck at Strawberry Island

Janet Richardson visits a Doncaster club where the members take pride in doing it for themselves



Strawberry Island Boat Club president John Foster, vice-commodore Phil Jefferson, commodore Michael Oakes and vice-president Bob Brackenbury in front of the new hoist.

FOR members of the Strawberry Island Boat Club, 2012 has been a "truly fabulous" year.

Not only did they recently complete a two-year project to install a new slipway and hoist, but the sun shone on their rally weekend in mid September.

Opening the event, life member and founder member Derek Hart referred to the summer with its Olympic and Paralympic games saying: "What a truly fabulous year we have been having, it has also been a year of achievement for the club.

"From what was a wilderness 42 years ago, so much has been done and the hoist and slipway are a wonderful achievement."

Welcoming members and visiting boaters who had come to support the weekend he added: "The

Founder member Derek Hart designed the Strawberry Island logo which has been cherished by the club ever since.



amount of work the members put into creating it is quite tremendous."

The club ensign was then hoisted by two young members of the Doncaster Sea Cadets. On the Sunday a blessing of the boats service was conducted by one of the members who is a lay preacher followed by the commodore's sherry party.

## Happy club

On arrival at Strawberry Island, I was met by Michael Oakes, who has been club commodore for the past three years and Bob Brackenbury, vice-president and trustee.

Michael told me: "We have a super time, it is really a happy club.

"We are very much roll-your-sleeves-up and do-it-yourself, everything is done by the members such as cutting the grass and all the maintenance, that is why we are able to keep our mooring costs down. We keep the canal trimmed and the opposite bank too, it is all done by volunteers."

It is no wonder there is a waiting list for moorings at the club which has just over 100 boats - a good mix from narrowboats to seagoing cruisers.

The well-equipped and comfortable club house, run by a full-time steward who lives in the old lock cottage, caters for up to 90 diners in its function room and adjoining conservatory overlooking the water. A dress code is observed within the club.

Social events include the laying-up supper to mark the end of boating season and a fitting-out supper in the spring.

Although many of its members are now retired, the club remains very active in the winter; in the summer a lot of members go cruising.

## New slipway

Apart from the piling, members have done all the work themselves on the installation of the new slipway and hoist which was officially opened a couple of months ago.

This included all the welding - Michael is a retired oil rig welder - and the project was coordinated by Steve Czerwionka with the help of design engineer John Marshall.

The hoist, which was brought from Chesterfield, is already in full use and is fully booked by members until the end of November.



Instrumental to the hoist and slipway project are: Alan Hodgkinson, president; John Marshall, design engineer; Steve Czerwionka, co-ordinator with granddaughter Charlie Sue and Michael Oakes, commodore.



Then: the wilderness which was the west loop. PHOTO: SIBC



Now: moorings for narrowboats near the lock keeper's cottage.

## ABOUT STRAWBERRY ISLAND

Bob Brackenbury described the history of Strawberry Island which is situated in a loop of the Sheffield & South Yorkshire Navigation where it runs parallel with the River Don.

It apparently got its name from the wild strawberries which grew on the island, now full of allotments, and is reached from Milethorn Lane so called, it is believed, because of a big hawthorn bush and its situation a mile from Doncaster Lock.

Milethorn Lock with its lock keeper's cottage became redundant when the course of the canal was straightened in the early 1900s. This left the island, crossed by the former lock chamber and bywash, within the loop; the part serving neighbouring Cooplands Bakery and Don Valley Engineering was filled in some years ago.



An aerial view of Strawberry Island with its allotments. PHOTO: SIBC



One of the sunken barges. PHOTO: SIBC

During the war, barges were sunk in the loop to deter German invaders and when the founder members of the club first looked at the site in the late 1960s it was a wilderness.

"Our bit was never filled in," Bob explained. "The local mayor at the time, Bill Kelly, pushed the project forwards and a meeting, which was attended by Derek Hart, was held in the local museum in 1969."

Over the next two years, founding members worked to clear the site and pull the sunken barges out, starting with the east loop. The club eventually opened in 1971.

Nowadays boaters can reach the rest of the inland waterways network or the Humber estuary via Bramwith Junction where the South Yorkshire Navigations and Stainforth & Keadby Canal, meet the New Junction Canal - the last major canal to be dug - leading the Aire & Calder Navigation.

● If you would like your boat club featuring in *Towpath Talk* contact editor Janet Richardson on 01507 529466 or email [editorial@towpathtalk.co.uk](mailto:editorial@towpathtalk.co.uk)