



# Roses, Roses all the way!

Now in its fifteenth year, the IWA's London-based Canalway Cavalcade gets better and better. This year over 20,000 turned up with 180 visiting boats over the three days. Richard Hill reports from Little Venice.

'IT WAS roses, roses all the way,' wrote the poet Robert Browning in 1855. These words could well be used to describe this year's Canalway Cavalcade in Little Venice at the beginning of May. The island and pool at Little Venice are named in honour of Browning who lived here for part of his life. A present day resident here is the Lord Mayor of Westminster, Councillor Robert Davies, who opened the Cavalcade. "Little Venice is one of our outstanding beautiful parts of the City of Westminster," he said, "and that is why I've chosen to live here, only yards from the pool."

"You don't have to be a canal lover to recognise that the canals of London are a very special place," echoed Peter Coyne, Southern Region Manager of the British Waterways Board. "and there's great news for London," he added, "This year sees the start of a major new funding partnership involving fifteen London boroughs including Westminster City Council, The London Tourist Board, Thames Water plc, The Groundwork Foundation, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and the Environment agency, spending £30 million over the next seven years for regenerating the canal corridor."

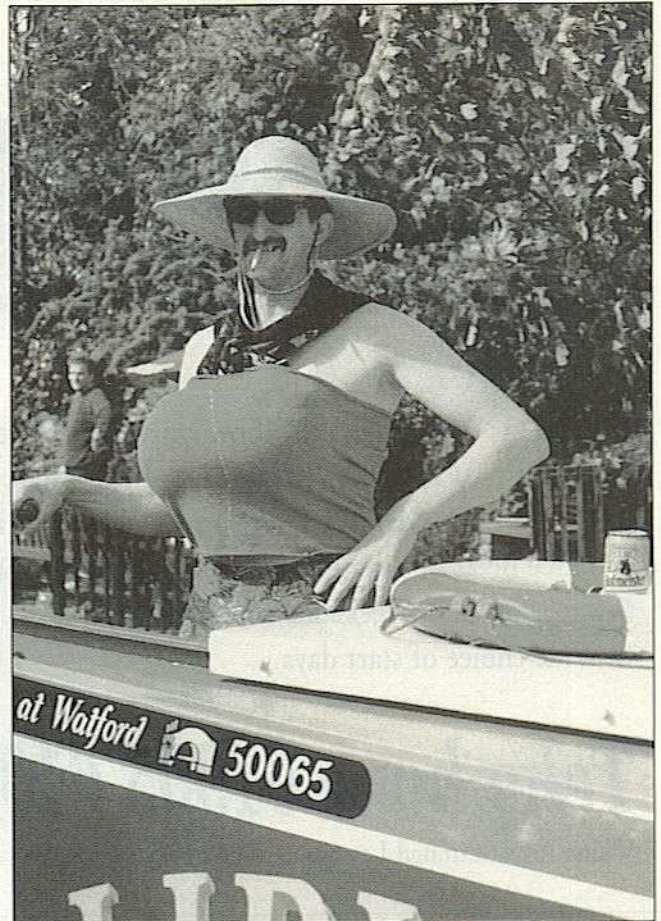
The theme of this year's cavalcade was Roses and Castles commemorating the passing of 50 years since the Roses and

Castles exhibition of arts and crafts of traditional canal life which was staged at Heals in Tottenham Court Road. One who remembers the 1947 exhibition was Crystal Hale, also a guest speaker. Crystal's father, the late Sir Alan P. Herbert, author of the water gypsies opened the exhibition. He was an MP who campaigned for inland waterways when there was little interest in the decline of canals and was the first president of the IWA.

With the new 'red rose' labour government less than 24 hours old, Crystal spoke of her hopes for the future; "I'm very much hoping that this change of government will produce a really strong waterway group of MP's who'll be able to support us whenever we need extra support." Responding to Peter Coyne's earlier announcement of funding, Crystal remarked; "I would like to see some scheme this year for coping with all the rubbish in a practical way. The streets are cleaned once a week, why can't they spend some money cleaning the canals once a week?"

This was the 15th such cavalcade to be held here, and, as ever, admission was free. Upwards of 20,000 people came to the three day event. It was a spectacular experience. Little Venice has quite a large permanent boat community, but swelled by the 180 visiting boats, the area becomes alive with an atmosphere of camaraderie and celebration.





**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The pool at Little Venice packed with boats for the 1997 Canalway Cavalcade.

**TOP LEFT:** The Lord Mayor of Westminster arrives with other VIP's aboard the *Lady Rose*.

**TOP RIGHT:** 'Paddington Armer' Chris Bennet of the Hillingdon Canal Club.

**CENTRE LEFT:** The Wars of the Roses as retold by the London WRG.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** Chris Barber took first prize in the Boat Handling Competition at the helm of *Sun*.

City canals can be likened to theatre and usually, boaters only get to see 'behind-the-scenes' - the backstage of the city. However, surrounded on all sides by a 'front-of-house' vista, Little Venice is like an amphitheatre with boats and boaters firmly centre stage and, during the Canalway Cavalcade, everyone is playing to a packed house.

Acting out their performance of The wars of the roses in the competition for the best boat decorated by a group or society, the battle was won by the London Waterways Recovery Group. First prize, for the best privately dressed boat, was awarded to Tony and Karen Jankel whose boat, the *Aunt Lucy*, underwent an imaginative transformation into a castle adorned by roses. On Sunday evening there were some bright Bobby Dazzlers in the procession of illuminated boats with first prize being awarded to the IWA boat *Jubilee*.

The boat handling competition drew many entrants including a Paddington Armer (a lady of doubtful virtue) in the shape of Chris Bennet of the Hillingdon Canal Club who entered in full drag costume. First prize was awarded to Chris Barber for his handling of *Sun*. One unlucky contestant collided with the pontoon moored to Browning's island, and the competition had to be suspended while emergency repairs were carried out.

Organising and managing the event is a mammoth task and entirely in the hands of volunteers. Chris Spencer of the Waterway Recovery Group co-ordinates the setting up and management of the site. "I would like to think we've got the right balance of traders, events and entertainment," he said. WRG volunteers in their bright red sweatshirts seemed to be everywhere. Chris explained that prior to the event volunteers had worked on setting up the marquees, electrical power supplies for traders, exhibitors and caterers. During the event, volunteers were busy keeping the site clean, directing people and answering queries. "It's a never ending task," explained Chris, and added, "The boaters think the world of the volunteers. We love the atmosphere, we work extremely hard, we play extremely hard, and certainly the public houses of the area know when the Waterway Recovery Group are around because they watch their taking's go up and their cellars emptying!"

It was a weekend for boaters to make or renew friendships with each other, and with people just visiting. Many boaters take in the cavalcade as part of a cruising holiday, some having travelled over 100 miles to be at the event. Canalway Cavalcade hails the start of the inland waterway festival calendar, an overture to the annual season of waterway festivals. ⚓