

Originally Identified as beached at Purton by MacGregor 1952 and Wheeler 1965, thus included as *New Dispatch*, ex *Dispatch* (1888) (1952 photo): not *Pioneer* or *Europa* (Green) by Parker in SMR484

3.5 The *Edith*

Name	P.O.R	Description	Dates
Edith	Bridgwater 4/01	Trow open	1901 -1963
	Bridgwater 1/28	Wood Motor Vessel ex K	
	1933	Trow Sc now barge	
Dimensions	L. 74.6	B. 17.1	D. 5.7
Tonnage	(1901) G 58.75 N 44.06 B.D		
Tonnage	(1928) G 77.83 N 59.08 B.D		
Tonnage	(1931) G 79.08 N 58.13 B.D		
Tonnage	(1934) G 79.50 N 45.20 B.D		
Builders	William Hurd, Chepstow		
Engines	1927 - Berguis	additional eng	1933 by Berguis
H.P.	30B	60B	1933
Official Number	111392		
First Owners	Howell George Bryant, Bridgwater (06 08 13 17)		
Changes	Renwick Wilton & Dobson, Bristol Branch (28 33)		
Fate	Registry no longer required.MNL supp. March 1960. (Farr 1971 & Barnett 2005 per comms)		

The final resting place of the *Edith* can be found within the south west quadrant of the grid reference 368300 204000 NE to a limit 368550 204350 within the parish of Hinton, Gloucestershire.

The beginning

As with all vessels, she was assigned a unique Official No.111392, which would remain with her throughout her entire working life, regardless of various owners, ports of registrar and refits, which can be sourced within Mercantile Navy lists of the period (*Edith* c.1902, *R Fitzpatrick*).

Built in 1901 for H.G Bryant of Bridgwater, as one of the last wooden Chepstow Trows by William Hurd, *Edith* was originally 44 Net registered and just short of 75ft. (MNL 1951) She was built as a ketch rigged, open decked trow which encapsulated side clothes. This configuration was further improved in 1918 with the construction of a boxed deck for greater safety and which allowed her to carry 78 Gross ton from her Bridgwater port of registry to various destinations including Newport, Cardiff, Lydney and Bristol Docks (Rowbottom 1975).



Fig 8. The *Edith*. Image: collection L P Barnett

Although as we will see, *Edith* was destined to have a long, albeit eventful life, she became no stranger to catastrophe. Indeed it was only two years from build that on the 13th July 1903, whilst under the command of Captain M Warren from Bridgwater, she collided with the landing stage at Brean Down Quarries during a raging storm and turned completely on her side. Furthermore and upon repair at Bridgwater she was once again in distress on the 8th July 1914 as she ran aground on the bank opposite the site of the Bridgwater Hospital, but as luck would have it, she re-floated without damage on the same evening tide (Sharman 1949).

With the coming of mechanisation the *Edith* was subsequently bought, unrigged and motorised with a 30 B.H.P paraffin engine in 1927 by Daniel Gower of Bute Street, Cardiff and re-registered as a motorised trow in the 1928 Mercantile Navy list.

Working life

1930 saw *Edith* in the ownership of Renwick Wilton & Co. who employed her to transport Lydney coal to its Bristol factory. Indeed it had been discovered that her rigid construction suited this trade and she thus continued to be a frequent visitor between the Severn ports of Lydney, Bristol, Chepstow and Bridgwater, carrying coal until 1950. (Farr 1972)

In 1951 we can see, via a Mercantile Navy listing that *Edith* was now in the ownership of the Bristol based and newly amalgamated Renwick Wilton & Dobson Ltd, whose head offices were located at 55 Fleet St, Torquay, under the directorship of Fredrick C Dobson. That aside, she continued to be registered in Bridgwater as having the following dimensions: Length 74.6ft, Breadth 17.1ft, Depth of hold 5.7ft, Net ton 45, Gross ton 80, 60 B.H.P.



Fig 9. *Edith's* 'K.2'. Image Tony Bolton

In 1955 and following an extensive career spanning 28 years, the *Edith's* twin engines were replaced with a specially commissioned K.2. Twin Kelvin built by George Burgius Co. Ltd. of Glasgow and bearing the serial No. 754. This engine, in turn, continued to provide propulsion to *Edith*, who at this time had continued to lead an active life within the coal trade of Ely, Cardiff, Newport and Lydney Docks to St. Anne's Board Mills in Bristol with Captain Reg Hopkins being her last Skipper.

The 1960s were not happy times for wooden craft as they were rapidly being becoming a burden of spiralling maintenance costs and lost freight to the then developing road and rail industry. That being the case, 1960 saw *Edith* registered as unwanted and finally acquired by Smiths of Bristol, whose elderly fleet also included the wooden trows *William*, *Alma*, *Spry*, *Superb* & *Emperor* and put her to work in Bristol Docks as a motorised coal lighter.(Aldridge 2003 perr comms).

1962-63 sounded the death knell for *Edith*, as she failed to obtain a certificate of conformity from the Board of Trade and Industry, a legal requirement and thereafter, spent her last days afloat as a pontoon, threatening to sink at her mooring at Pill. It was at this time her pristine K.2. engine was salvaged by a Frampton Cottrell scrap dealer and stored in barn until 1992, whereupon it was bought and restored by Tony & Pauline Bolton to serve, from 1993 to 2000, in their canal boat *Albion*. This engine can still be seen, following the purchase by Alan & Barbara Eales in 2000, providing propulsion to their canal boat *Rooster* (*Rooster*, A & B Eales).



Fig 10. The canal boat *Rooster* Image: A & B Eales

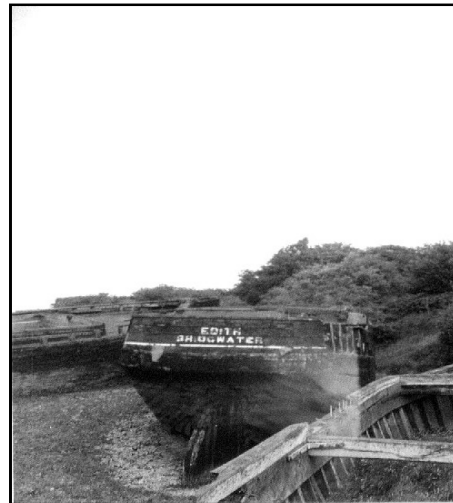


Fig 11. *Edith* hulked at Purton c. 1964 (R Langford)
Image: L P Barnett collection

The end in sight

With her engine now gone, it only remained a matter of time before *Edith* became a worthless hulk, which indeed she became and subsequently made her last trip up the Avon and Severn, to the foreshore at Purton, to conduct one last valuable service in the form of bank protection. The exact date this journey as of yet escapes the author, however, it is known that the *Edith* was still afloat in September 1962 on the Avon and thereafter, noted to be on the foreshore by David Wheeler, who drew a stylised diagram of the Purton Hulks in 1965. It is also known, that the scuttling of the *Edith* was carried out using the tried and tested method of towing her up from Bristol to Sharpness on a high spring tide and handing her over the Sharpness Dock Company who in turn assigned the task to Captain Frank Savage and his crew of the Tug *Primrose*, which included Mr Eric Aldridge and Mr Doug Monday who were put on board *Edith* in order to steer her during the beaching process (*Edith's c. 1964*, R Langford).

This was achieved by the tug and hulk leaving Sharpness twenty minutes before high water in order to arrive on site at precisely the maximum height of tide and thus with the use of a head of speed, ram *Edith* up onto the foreshore. This was then followed with a selection of permanent moorings from which purchase could be obtained using the hulk's own winches and subsequently drive the vessel higher up the bank and free from the pull of the falling tide. The beaching was finally made permanent upon the retreat of the river's water by the deliberate destruction of hull timbers, which in turn, further prevented floatation and aided sedimentation upon the next incoming tide.

As for financial gain, very little was either offered or sought. To this end vessels were often obtained by the Dock Company from grateful owners of redundant craft and run aground. This marriage of convenience in turn resulted in the lifting of the responsibility from former owners who, in light of their vessel failing to gain a Board of Trade certificate, were in possession of an unseaworthy craft and thus a liability.

This was made all the more poignant as a standing parliamentary bill stated the local navigation governing body, The Gloucester Harbour Trustees, could enforce the clearance or recovery of any lost vessel if it were deemed to be a danger to traffic at moorings, or within navigation channels.

The Purton ship graveyard was therefore a 'win-win' situation as the Dock Company could secure hulked vessels to act as wing dykes and breakwaters and thus strengthen the canal bank, whilst the vessel owner would be rid of unfit craft at very little cost. Coupled to this, the employees who beached the vessels were paid a princely sum of 17 hours pay for the task of site selection, mooring and holing the vessel and all on a 'job and finish' basis.

The *Edith* today

The *Edith* today, following 40 years of trophy hunters, scrap metal merchants, arsonists, BBQ enthusiasts, beach combers and the ravages of south westerlies within the Severn Estuary, has fared poorly considering she is one of the younger vessels than can be found upon the bank. This however is a direct result of mindless vandalism and acute stupidity that one would usually associate with a below average intelligence, who in turn has obtained a simpletons pleasure of watching this historic vessel burn to the swathe. To this end with her identity gone, Dr Parker referred to her as ...37. *Barge with metal cabin....* (Parker in SMR484).

However as to date, *Edith* can still be identified as the little trow with mass of rusting iron chain, a huge winch and engine casing that nestles under hedge at the extreme south west of the site. Plans are currently in hand for the Friends of Purton to survey this mass of metal and eventually mount *Edith's* winch as a memorial to all who sailed in her.

To wit it could be said that she is in excellent company, as she lies adjacent to the cut down Bristol barge the *Voltaic* (formally the *Sarah Macdonald*), a topsail schooner built in Perth of 1867 vintage, and she lies along side the Fred Ashmead & Sons barge, named after the nearby Cotswold town of Lister Engine fame, the *Dursley*.



Fig 12 *Edith* today Image: L P Barnett