



# HATHOR



£1.50P



THE STORY OF A NORFOLK PLEASURE WHERRY



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## GODDESS OF LOVE & JOY

THE STORY OF A NORFOLK PLEASURE WHERRY



Broads Authority



Hathor . November 1988. photo by Richard Denyer.



## PLEASURE WHERRIES



The mystery and romance of the Norfolk Broads should be experienced in style. It was the Victorians and Edwardians who discovered just the right formula, the perfect blend of comfort and action, of peace and excitement when they cruised the Broads in pleasure wherries.

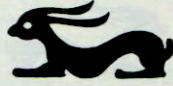
These unique and superb craft combine the sensuous pleasures of soft, down pillows and eiderdowns in cosy, dark-varnished cabins with the practical sailing characteristics ideal for the shallow winding waterways of the Broads.

By day, the ladies and gentlemen could feel the wind in their hair and, however much a novice sailor they were, could experience that wonderful thrill of freedom, completely released from the constraints of Victorian values, as their wherry slipped through the limpid waters of the Broads.

Edwardian evenings could be spent grouped around the five octave yacht piano in a saloon lit by candles or oil lamps. At night when the company retired, after the fresh air of the day, their dreams were disturbed only by the hooting of an owl or the boom of a bittern.

No one knows for certain when the idea of converting the holds of trading wherries into cabins and using the boats for pleasure cruising was first conceived. But by the 1880s the practice had become popular with Victorians in search of an unusual holiday on the Norfolk Broads.

In 1888 one firm in North Walsham was advertising a fleet of five wherries for hire to summer holidaymakers. Each wherry had two cabins, one for ladies and one for gentlemen, although the gentlemen's cabin had to double as a dining saloon during the daytime. These early pleasure wherries were humble craft. They were really just trading wherries with their holds swept out and furnished. When the short holiday season was over, they reverted to their original use of transporting goods around the Broads.



It did not take long, however, for an enterprising person to see the advantages of building a wherry specially as a pleasure craft. The hull and sail were so well adapted to sailing the broads and rivers that they needed no alteration. But the interior could certainly be made more cosy and sumptuous with varnished teak or mahogany replacing the red and blue paint of the trading wherry, and individual cabins providing more privacy.

Many of the pleasure wherries were hired out. They came complete with a crew of a skipper to sail the boat and a steward to cook and wait on the holidaymakers. Usually the steward could also sail and would serve as a mate to the skipper. There was nothing for the turn-of-the-century party to do but to relax and enjoy the scenery and wildlife of the most idyllic waterway of the British Isles.



## THE STORY OF HATHOR



The Hathor, pronounced 'Heart-or', is the only remaining Pleasure Wherry which can still be chartered on the Broads today. She is a most elegant and beloved craft with a fascinating history. She was built for two of the Colman sisters, Ethel and Helen, and launched in July 1905, but her poignant story goes back much further.

Ethel and Helen were two of four daughters of Jeremiah James Colman who established the famous Norwich mustard firm J&J Colman. They had a younger brother called Alan who was born in 1867. In June of 1896, at the age of twenty-nine, Alan began to show symptoms of tuberculosis or 'delicacy of the lungs'. Fearing for his safety, the family moved him from their town house at Carrow in Norwich to the country home at Corton on the Norfolk coast, where they hoped that the sea air would restore him.

However there was little improvement in his condition, and when, at the end of the summer he suffered a relapse, the family decided on a different treatment. It was hoped that the dry, clear air of North Africa would prolong his life, and on 20th November 1896, Alan set sail on the P&O Steamer 'Simla', in the company of his sisters Helen and Laura, bound for Egypt. They stayed at the Mena House Hotel, at the base of the Great Pyramid, and early in January, with Alan's health still deteriorating, they were joined by their father and sisters Ethel and Florence.

After six weeks confined in the Hotel, Alan grew weary and expressed a strong wish to see something of the Nile. So in mid January he was taken on board the 'Hathor', one of the 'dahabeahs' or sailing boats which were common in Egypt, and the journey up the river began. On 2nd February 1897 the Hathor reached Luxor, but Alan's health was not improving. In the early hours of Sunday 7th February, Alan passed quietly away surrounded by his sisters and father. He was aged thirty years.



This sad episode had a profound effect on the family, and some seven years later when sisters Ethel and Helen were commissioning a wherry, it must have seemed appropriate to commemorate their brother by naming the wherry 'Hathor'. Hathor was an Egyptian goddess of love and joy, of the sky and of the west - the abode of the dead.

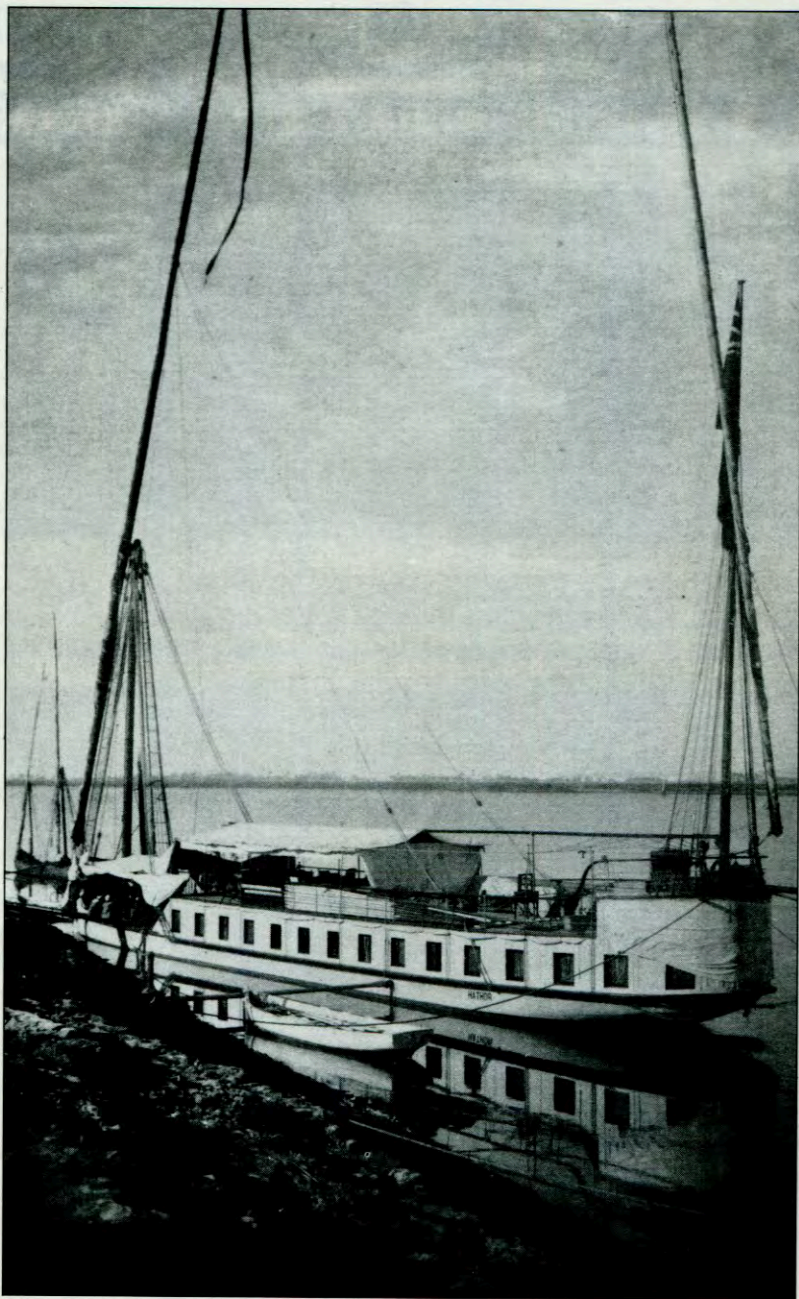
Ethel and Helen's sister, Florence had in 1898, married the prominent architect Edward T. Boardman who designed and built the house at How Hill as well as many of the prestigious Edwardian buildings in central Norwich. It was to their brother-in-law that the two sisters turned for the design of the interior of their wherry. This was to be based on Egyptian hieroglyphics and mythology. Edward Boardman's partner Graham Cotman, who was an accomplished draughtsman, visited the British Museum to study and sketch the subjects.

The famous yard of Halls of Reedham was selected to build the wherry. Members of the Hall family had been responsible for turning out some of the fastest and finest wherries ever built.

In 1904, on 8th October, an agreement was signed between Ethel and Helen Colman of Carrow House, Norwich and Daniel S. Hall of Reedham. The schedule of Conditions of Contract makes interesting reading:

'All materials and workmanship shall be of the very best description. All oak shall be English. The oak strakes shall be sawn as soon as possible, out of well-seasoned timber. All woodwork shall be free from sap and knots, and other defects, and every piece shall be carefully selected before being incorporated into the wherry. Copper and muntz-metal fastenings are to be used.

The wherry generally is to be of oak, but the right-ups are to be of teak, and the fore and aft decks are to be of red wood narrow width decking. The forepeak hatch is to be flush with the deck, and a suitable copper gutter is to be provided inside.



The dahabeah 'Hathor' at Luxor on the Nile, 1898 photo by Florence Colman.



The saloon top is to be of some hardwood to be selected, but the other portions may be of red wood deal, all properly tongued and grooved. The whole top is to be covered with one single sheet of linoleum, of best quality and the thickest substance.

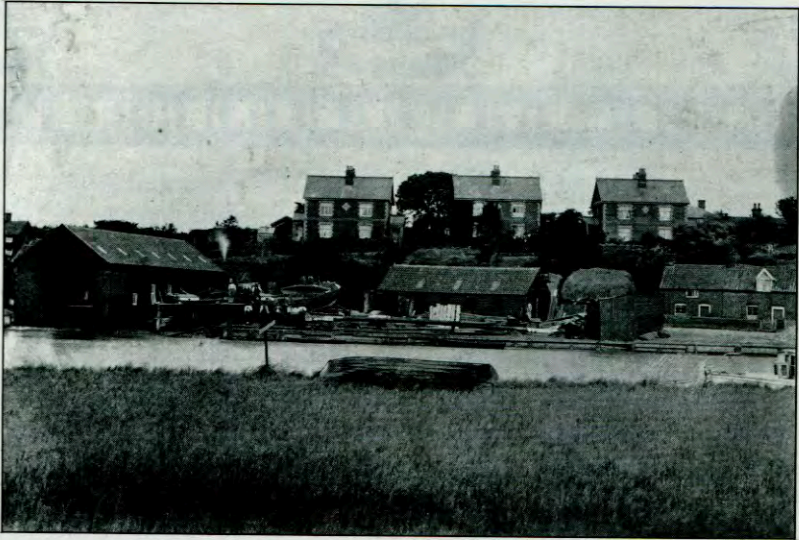
The contractor is to supply a good pitch pine mast, gaff, best white sail, and all necessary blocks, hoops, winch, 2 quants, 1 boat hook, 1 wire mainstay, and strands to gaff, 1 set of main halyards, and spring stays of suitable material, 1 cotton mainsheet, 1 manilla sheet, 1 gaff line, 1 small line, 1 head rope, 1 stern rope, and 1 spring rope. Also lead ballast for mast.

The wherry is to be 11'0" between the right-ups inside, and 29'0" between the fore and aft beams. The wherry, when in commission is to easily pass through Potter Heigham and Wroxham Bridges, when the water is at ordinary high water level. Should any inconvenience arise on this account, the Contractor shall at his sole expense so alter the wherry, that she shall comply with these requirements.'

In these days of fibreglass and plastic such specifications of traditional materials and quality workmanship make delightful reading.

The last paragraph of the specification is quite interesting. It is assumed that the two Colman sisters would require a mooring at How Hill when visiting their sister and brother-in-law, the Boardmans. However there is no mention that the 'Hathor' should be able to negotiate the old Ludham Bridge, which was lower than either Potter Heigham or Wroxham Bridges. The prospect of having to 'alter the wherry' must have ensured that the builders got this aspect right from the start. Today she needs about 7' headroom to clear a bridge.

Daniel Hall was paid £575 for building the complete wherry except the internal partitions and the fitting out. The fact that 'Hathor' is afloat and sailing today, some 85 years later, is



Reedham Quay between 1905 and 1908.  
The shed on the extreme left was built for Hathor and she was kept there until 1908 when the shed was dismantled and moved to Carrow, Norwich.  
photo by courtesy of Sanderson Marine Craft Ltd.



At the launch of Hathor, Reedham, July 1905.  
This photo, which appeared in the Eastern Daily Press, shows all the people who worked on Hathor, including Daniel Hall, on the extreme right.



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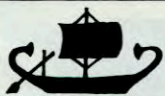
testimony to the skills of the Halls, who were always regarded as one of the finest wherry builders. Indeed the only other surviving pleasure wherry, the 'Solace', was also built by Halls, in 1903.

The contractor for the internal partitions was John Hurn, and ten detail drawings were prepared for the decoration. The wood chosen for the partitions was to be sycamore, chosen because of its light colour. The inlay work was to be in teak. This choice of wood is definitely that of an architect and not a boat-builder. No boat builder would ever have used sycamore, as it is prone to warping, wet and dry rot and woodworm, all of which subsequently appeared, making restoration work more difficult.

The inlay around the saloon was of lotus flowers in bud and bloom, with beautiful green, yellow and red-stained wood forming the flowers. The corridor was decorated with a design of lotus flowers in bud. All the rest of the interior had plain sycamore panelling with quarter-inch teak inlay set at 6-8 inch intervals. Even the interior of the coach roof was covered with plain sycamore, about a quarter of an inch thick, throughout the whole vessel.

The eight doors were individually designed, all being plain on the inside with the exception of the saloon doors. The door to the pantry is of solid teak, with louvres. Each door has a frieze at the top, with a symbol in the upper and lower panels. The Egyptian symbols include the sphinx, scarab beetles, sailing boats, snakes, frogs and crocodiles, all delightfully executed. In the upper panels of each of the cabin doors are a series of hieroglyphics with the meanings: 'joy', 'increase in power', 'life', 'good luck', 'buckle or tie', 'stability' and 'verdure'.

Many other items were not overlooked. The door hinges and door furniture were specially designed in aluminium and white metal. Cabins 3 and 4, towards the bow of the wherry, were intended for the joint owners Ethel and Helen Colman, and



were provided with bookshelves and writing desks. All cabins had small drawers, each fitted with a lock, presumably intended for jewellery and other valuables. All cabins and the bathroom had earthenware tip-up basins with a gold rim, a mirror and a separate water tank.

The wherry even had a bathroom which contained a basin, a toilet and a bath which was filled from the deck. Hot water may have been obtained from passing steam yachts, or cold baths may have been taken – the bath was little used!


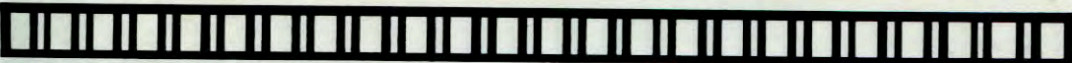
Heating was provided by a coal stove in the saloon, and a bunker was built into the forepeak for coal. The original hanging lamp in the saloon was used on special occasions. Other lighting was provided by candles. A bell push in the saloon was used to summon the steward.

From the outside, Hathor looked a typical Norfolk Pleasure Wherry, with three exceptions. Two seats were provided, one each side of the tabernacle, with the ends carved as a hawk or falcon. This is one of the symbols of the god Hórus who was married to Hathor. The positioning of these seats meant that the nameboards of the wherry could not be in the traditional place. Instead they were mounted under the doorways on either side, looking very similar to those on her namesake, the Dahabeah Hathor on the Nile. The masthead was painted in a unique design in gold, red, white and green. Finally, the yellow and black Colman house flag was flown from the end of the gaff. The flag being a most striking design of the symbol of Horus – the hawk or falcon.



The amount paid to John Hurn for the internal woodwork was £1057, nearly twice the cost of building the wherry, whilst the total cost of fitting out Hathor was £1464, almost three times the cost of the wherry itself. The final bill for the complete vessel was £2039 5s 4d – a considerable sum of money in those days.



The launch of Wherry Hathor at Reedham. July 1905 Joan Boardman, aged 3½, sets free two pigeons in the Japanese tradition, as an emblem of good luck.



## THE LAUNCH

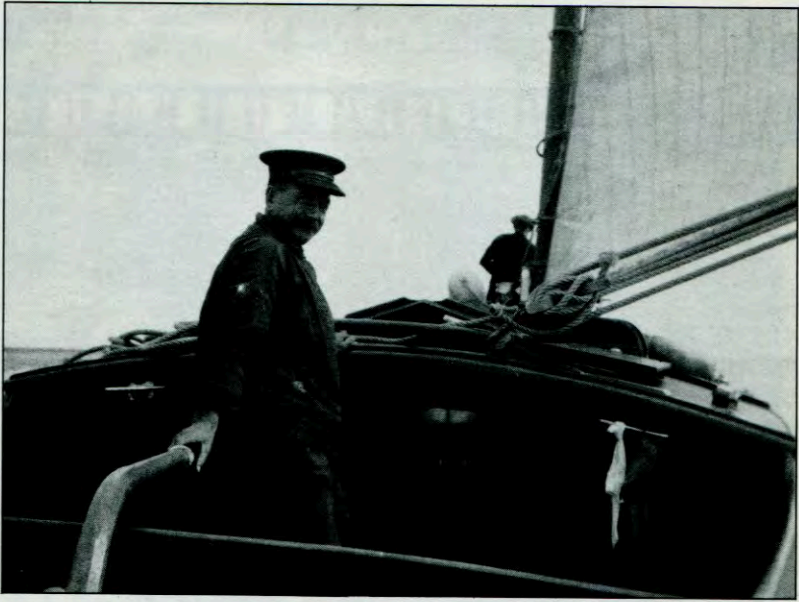


Hathor was launched in July 1905, and a contemporary newspaper report gives the details:

'An interesting function took place yesterday at Reedham, when the private wherry Hathor, which has been built for the Misses Colman of Carrow House by the well known boatbuilder, Mr D.S. Hall, was successfully launched. A numerous company came over by train and motor, and with many of the villagers turning out, quite a crowd had collected when the moment for the launch arrived. The Hathor flag was unfurled by master Christopher Boardman, who also cut the tape, and as the wherry slid down into the river, two pigeons were let loose by Miss Joan Boardman, following the custom of the Japanese who consider these birds an emblem of good luck on such occasions. As already stated, the boat has been built by Mr D.S. Hall of Reedham, with Mr E.T. Boardman acting as architect. The fittings have been entrusted to Mr J. Hurn of Norwich, the metalwork had been in the capable hands of Messrs. Charles Payne & Co, and Messrs. Trevor & Page have been responsible for the upholstery. The mast and blocks have been made by Mr Arthur Ellett, and Mr Alfred Anderson has supplied the sails, and the whole work throughout the wherry had been done in a most satisfactory manner. As soon as the launch was over the large company adjourned to the Lord Nelson Inn, where an excellent lunch was served.'

Fortunately the Misses Colmans' youngest sister, Florence Boardman, was a keen photographer and was there to record the scene. Her son, Humphrey, describes the photograph:

'It was a lovely day at Reedham in July 1905 when the launching ceremony took place. The ladies wore their summer best, ankle-length frilly dresses with lace collars and leg-of-mutton sleeves. Some wore flat-topped white yachting hats, while the elderly were in black, their parasols shading their eyes. The



Hathor in 1920 with Skipper Albert Grimes.



The Boardman family on board Hathor in 1920.



Hathor sailing across Breydon Water. photo by Humphrey Boardman.



menfolk were smart. Father was in white and the head gear varied from boaters to bowlers while the junior employees of Mr Hall wore caps.

My sister Joan, aged  $3\frac{1}{2}$  and her brother Chris, aged 2, dressed alike in pretty frocks, stand on a trestle table covered with a Persian rug. On the table is a basket decorated with ribbons and the caption to the photograph in mother's album reads: "Joan sets the pigeons free" . . .

After the launch, a few weeks of fitting out took place. These were no doubt quite hectic as the photographs of the launch show that they had not yet covered the coach roof with lino!

Hathor was ready for her maiden voyage on 2nd August 1905 - a new pleasure wherry, fully equipped to sleep six people in complete comfort, with a skipper and steward to attend to their every need.

The Colmans and the Boardmans used Hathor for cruising the Broads until 1953. When they were not using her, she was lent to friends. In some years she appears to have been used almost continuously from June till September, a skipper and steward being employed for the whole summer. In other years, she does not seem to have been in the water at all.

She was then sold to Claud Hamilton, who wrote Hamiltons Navigation Guide to the Broads. It is rumoured that he used Hathor when surveying the broads and rivers, attaching his echo sounder to her hull.

In the late 1950s, Hathor was sold to Martham Boatbuilding and Development Company. She was hired out as a houseboat to holidaymakers for most of the summer, only being sailed at the beginning and end of each season. For ten years from 1974, she sat, de-rigged without even a mast, beside the River Thurne, at Martham, a sad sight for anyone who had known her former glory.



Hathor was finally saved from this ignoble fate by her present owners, Mr Peter Bower and Mr Barney Matthews, of 'Wherry Yacht Charter', who bought her in November 1985. She was in a terrible condition, but such was the interest in acquiring a genuine pleasure wherry, that she fetched £13,500.

Wherry Yacht Charter were providing Edwardian-style holidays on the Broads, from their base at Wroxham, on their wherry yachts 'Norada' and 'Olive'. Their aim was to add Hathor to the fleet. But before that could happen, the two enthusiasts were to spend eighteen months and many thousands of pounds restoring Hathor to sailing order and re-fitting her internally.



## THE RESTORATION OF HATHOR



Peter Bower writes:

'In September 1986, we pulled Hathor out on our slip at Wroxham and began the restoration of the hull. The planking appeared sound but we had to replace twenty-one of the 4" oak frames in whole or in part, which involved stripping out most of the interior of the wherry. We attempted to repair one of the planks by letting in pieces from either side, but gave up when we could see daylight through, and so had to replace about sixty foot of oak planking. We also had to replace most of the plancea and bin strake (edge of the deck).

After a complete repaint, she was launched in March 1987, and later that year we covered the decks and coach roof with traditional brown lino, as she had been when built. We also put in a new keruing ceiling (floor) and, with a new 'duradon' sail - made by Jack Cockrill, she made her maiden voyage on 28th July 1987.

That winter we started on the internal restoration. When the firm of Edward Boardman & Son closed down in 1966, the records were passed to the Norfolk Record Office, including many of the original drawings and documents relating to Hathor.

The inlay around the saloon of green, yellow and red-stained lotus flowers was almost unrecognisable. But fortunately, the wood was stained right through, and in 1988, we were able to bring back the colour simply by scraping off the layers of grime and old varnish.

The sycamore panelling of the interior had been completely painted over, and we used gallons of paint stripper to rediscover the original. Regrettably, we had to paint the lower panels in the cabins again, as there was very little sycamore left - in a boat, the bottom of the bulkheads often get damp.



The plain sycamore of the coach roof had obviously deteriorated in the past and teak formica had been struck over it. When we removed this, the sycamore came with it, revealing the underside of the original tongued and grooved roof which still had its original primer coat on, and had not seen the light of day for 80 years. We decided to paint this white and it forms a nice contrast to the roof beams, which are oak, but clad in thin teak.

All the fittings had been removed from the bathroom and had been replaced by a basic galley with sink and mains electric cooker! Although we did not replace the bathroom, we had to completely strip and re-fit the galley so that it could be used during cruises.

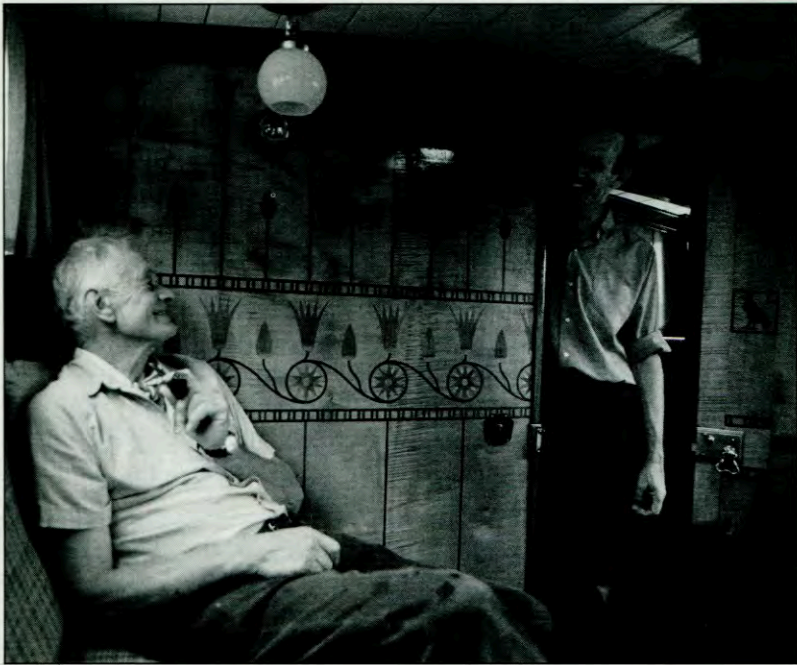
For safety reasons we did not replace the stove in the saloon, although we did fit a solid fuel stove in the traditional position in the cuddy - crew's quarters - with a back boiler and a heating pipe running round the boat.

When we bought Hathor, mains lighting had been installed throughout. We designed new lights for the entire vessel, incorporating one of the symbols for Hathor 'menat' meaning 'joy'. The lights, most of which are gas, but some are 12 volt electric, were made by the old established firm of Sugg Lighting Ltd, Crawley, Sussex.

Finally a new pitch pine mast, with the timber specially imported from British Honduras, was made up for us at the International Boatbuilding Training Centre, Oulton Broad. The mast was fitted ready for Hathor to commence charter work.'



The restoration. photo by Peter Bower.



Peter Bower & Barney Mathews in the restored saloon of Hathor.  
September 1988. photo by Richard Denyer.



Hathor started in commission with Wherry Yacht Charter in April 1988. One year later, on 6th April 1989, to coincide with the new national park status for the Broads, Wherry Yacht Charter, in conjunction with the Broads Authority, restaged Hathor's launching ceremony, with a special Edwardian ceremony at Reedham. To this ceremony were invited the descendants of the people who attended the original launch in 1905, and all the people who helped to restore Hathor to full sailing order - the only pleasure wherry available for charter on the Broads.

**For unique, Edwardian-style cruises on the Norfolk Broads, on Wherries 'Hathor', 'Norada' and 'Olive'**

Wherry Yacht Charter, P.J.A. Bower  
Barton House, Wroxham, Norfolk NR12 8TL  
Tel: Norwich (0603) 782470



Wherry Hathor. photo by Richard Denyer.



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We would like to thank Humphrey Boardman for his help in compiling this book and for allowing us to use the Boardman family photographs.

Cover photo:

Hathor sailing on River Yare, November 1988.

photo by Richard Denyer.