



SAVING THE STEAM TUG

The volunteer-run Daniel Adamson Preservation Society reveals the remarkable story of its 117-year-old vessel and appeals for new members to join its team

Daniel Adamson is a 1903-built steam tug with a crew of over 75 dedicated volunteers from areas all over Cheshire and Merseyside. The hardworking team keeps 'the Danny', as it's affectionately known, maintained and operational so that passengers can enjoy picturesque cruises along the Weaver Navigation, providing unique views of the stunning waterway.

RESTORATION

The *Danny* was heroically saved from being scrapped more than 15 years ago by a group of maverick volunteers who then gathered more members and formed The Daniel Adamson Preservation Society. In 2015, a grant was received from the National Lottery Heritage Fund in recognition of the boat's historic status. A total of £3.8m was awarded to allow the *Danny* to be fully restored at Cammell Lairds.

Since then the *Danny* has had

a new lease of life, undertaking a variety of cruises, but the most successful and popular of these have been on the Weaver, cruising from Sutton Weaver Swing Bridge to the Anderton Boat Lift.

Operating and preserving this remarkable survivor from the steam age is no mean feat. Ongoing costs, such as coal, dry docking, maintenance, licences, insurance, advertising and training, mean every year the society faces the huge task of raising the £250,000 required to continue to run the project.

GETTING INVOLVED

Some volunteers, with an average age over 60, give up to 30 hours a week on the *Danny*, turning up come rain or shine and determined to keep the boat in steam and cruising. Not everyone is able to commit that much time, so the society welcomes anybody who can offer what they can. In the summer months the *Danny* is crewed every day by a team of skippers, deckhands,



The decommissioned Daniel Adamson before restoration.

engineers, trimmers, firemen, stewards and galley crew. During the floods earlier this year the volunteers also manned a 24-hour watch on their beloved boat.

Behind the scenes a fundraising team works tirelessly, visiting groups

such as Probus, WI, U3A and local historical societies to give their highly praised talks on the *Danny's* history and restoration to raise awareness and, importantly, donations for the project. Many groups then come and enjoy a cruise on the *Danny* or hire

it out for private celebrations at its moorings at Sutton Weaver. There will always be a need to continually seek out supporters, volunteers, passengers, visitors and donations to keep the project alive for future generations.

HISTORY OF THE DANNY



Daniel Adamson operating on the Manchester Ship Canal in 1981.

Steam-powered vessels were more common on the waterways of the north-west of England, and the relaunch of *Daniel Adamson* in 2016 recreated that aspect of the region's past. Not only is it the last surviving steam tug in existence, it's also the oldest Mersey-built ship still in operation.

Built in Birkenhead in 1903, and originally named *Ralph Brocklebank*, the boat was used to tow long lines of loaded barges to Liverpool docks. In 1922, it was purchased by the Manchester Ship Canal Company, in whose waters it began carrying passengers between Manchester and Eastham. In 1936, the tug was chosen as the MSC's official director Daniel Adamson's launch and, as well as a name change, received a radical Art Deco refit. Over the years, the boat was used to transport such dignitaries as the Danish royal family and General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The tug continued to be operated as a hospitality vessel until being decommissioned in 1984; it was then towed to Ellesmere Port where its steam engine and stylish interior drew visitors for a few years. Deterioration and a lack of funding meant maintenance stopped in the 1990s, and vandalism saw the end of its life as an attraction.

When earmarked for scrapping in 2004, Mersey tug skipper Dan Cross and former director of the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum Tony Hirst began the campaign to save the boat. It was purchased from its owner, the Manchester Ship Canal Company, for £1 and the 12-year project to bring the *Danny* back to working order began.



The boat's namesake Daniel Adamson, engineer and owner of the MSCC.

IN THE COMMUNITY

The volunteers give back to Cheshire communities and schools by offering workshops and cruises for local primary schools and placement opportunities for young engineers from Riverside College. Where possible, the team also works with the Canal & River Trust to provide well-being and music events for all ages, and with Scout, Guide, cadet and youth groups to introduce more young people to the *Daniel Adamson* story.

The society is always looking for more volunteers to join, with or without relevant skills as there is a role for everyone and training is given to all new recruits. We even manage

a couple of social events each year, so it's not all work!

Chair Keith Levin, who turned to volunteering after a career as a solicitor, said: "The *Danny* is a social project with high aspirations. It does much more than offer a service to the public; it provides a community for the people involved, which gives them confidence and friendship, and is important to those who choose to volunteer.

"Cheshire is lucky to have such a unique project. It offers a hobby for many people who may have found it difficult to find something enriching to do after their careers have finished, or for those who are younger and want to learn new skills."

Find out more

Discover more, including how to volunteer with The Daniel Adamson Preservation Society, at thedanny.co.uk.



Moored on the Weaver.

MEET THE VOLUNTEERS

Two team members share their experiences

TONY STEEL

"I became involved with the society to help the *Danny* with its present and future journey. I love history and there is nothing better than living history.

"When I first started on the *Danny*, it was with the deckhand role in mind, but within a very short amount of time I found out there was much more to get involved in. I've been a steward, head steward, first mate and helmsman, and I'm currently working towards my boat master's licence, which is being funded by the society.

"I can honestly say that I enjoy doing everything, including making rope fenders down at our base at Sandon Dock. Most of all I like being in the wheelhouse taking the *Danny* and its passengers to their destinations.

"Joining the team was easy, and from the very first day I found everyone so pleasant. I've been volunteering for two years but my involvement with the *Danny* goes back to the early 1980s. One of my most memorable moments



was seeing how well the boat has been restored for the first time. But the feeling of being on the wheel again after 34 years is unforgettable."

PETER FIELD

"I saw an advertisement last autumn for open days on a steam tug and thought it worth a visit. We turned up for the tour and were shown around all the posh bits but it was the dirty bits that interested me. We were taken down into the engine room, having donned the hard hat and embarrassing shoe protectors, and I remember being shown the boiler. I had a go at getting coal into the furnace and it seemed easy. Beginners luck I later learned! From that moment on I was hooked.

"Having signed up I attended an induction session and was treated to Bob and Allan's two-hour introduction on the prom deck on a cold winter's day. During subsequent visits on working party days I learned that everyone knew more than me about ships, the MSC, basic fitting skills, marine steam engines and making a fire - or at least they pretended they did. With my background as a BT engineering apprentice my extensive knowledge of obsolete telephone exchanges wasn't very useful but my time volunteering at the Severn Valley Railway as a guard at least gave me some knowledge of steam engines.

"When the big day came for my first cruise it was an exciting experience. The large, cold, rusty lump of a boiler came alive and warmed us up - a taste of the 44°C that was to come in the summer. When I first saw the engines run it was a scary but impressive moment, those great big heavy pieces of metal smoothly reciprocating and rotating - amazing!

"During the maintenance period, I was shown the various valves on top of the boiler and told: 'You have to come up here and turn them on and off'. I must say I didn't fancy the idea then and when I was asked to do it with 110psi in the boiler I was rather scared. Climbing up onto the narrow walkway, lying across the top of the boiler, and reaching out to the



appropriate valve wasn't easy, and rather hot. The valves for the auxiliary equipment are small and manageable but when the dreaded shout comes from the engine room, 'Main steam cracked, please', it means opening the largest and most inaccessible of the valves just a bit. The training comes back to you, though. I feel quite comfortable in the boiler room now and have started to learn duties in the engine room. This gives me the opportunity to learn other skills and to fill a vacancy in either job as required.

"I've met lots of new people, made friends and I'm starting to feel part of the team. On the *Danny*, everyone I have asked a daft question to, or asked to be shown what they do, has gladly explained and shared their knowledge and experience patiently. All volunteers are welcome regardless of existing skills, experience or age."