



During the second world war there was plenty of work for the working boats on the canals, but not enough good crews. So the Women's Training Scheme was born – young women who took on 72ft boats and 50 tons of cargo.

In 2017 we plan to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the start of the scheme, when trainer Eily (Kit) Gayford began her learning with working boaters Ciss and Albert Sibley, before going on to train many others as part of the Women's Training Scheme. We will recreate the regular journey (London, Birmingham, Coventry, London) made by the trainees who, shortly after the war, became known as *The Idle Women*, a nickname that has stuck ever since.

Our show, *Idle Women of the Wartime Waterways*, tells the stories of the young women who answered the call for boat crews during World War II. It will appeal to boaters and those interested in the history of the canals in particular; however the show has been enjoyed by a wide range of audiences aged 14+

We're sending you the tour pack because you are on the route that they worked and we hope that you might like to be part of recreating the journey.

Here are some of the comments our audience have made:

A really lovely evening - I never knew about these women before and was really impressed by all the background research that must have been done to bring these women to life...

Two wonderfully evocative pieces – staged in a refreshing & lively way.

Enlightening! Fascinating! Extremely entertaining! Well done.

Thanks – please do some more. Love from Pru & Tim (West) xxxx



Idle Women: Recreating the Journey is supported by:

The show

Comprises two pieces. *Isobel's War* is a solo play written and performed by Kate Saffin and *Idle Women and Judies* is a collection of poems and songs written and performed by Heather Wastie. Both have proved popular with audiences from London to the West Midlands over the summer and autumn of 2016.

Isobel's War: 50 minutes

Idle Women and Judies: 40 minutes

The total running time (with interval) of two hours provides an ideal evening of theatre in a pub or village hall. Each piece can also be presented as a standalone shorter show – often a good choice for a festival where there lots of other things on offer as well.

The finances

We are a professional company aiming to balance the need to finance the tour with making theatre available to as many people as possible, regardless of personal circumstance. To this end we usually offer free entry with a donation. We hope that you will be able to support us in this by offering your space free of charge and/or sponsoring the show. Our audience averages 40-50 most of whom will buy drinks/refreshments which will support your business or organisation. We negotiate the detail with each venue individually and for some venues we agree an admission charge payable on the door (we can offer online booking if required).

The technical bits

Space required – very flexible, ideally about 3m x 2m, but we can work in almost any corner, inside or out. We do like a space that is relatively free from distraction as the show uses an intimate storytelling style and we have a set and instruments that don't like rain.

Technical – We provide any sound or lighting equipment needed. Where possible we work with no lighting or additional equipment. We will liaise with you re a power supply if needed.

We will be travelling with two boats: an historic former working boat and a support boat. We would like to have one or both boats near to the venue where possible and practical as this offers additional interest to the audience.

Background to the stories

During the second world war the inland waterways experienced a renaissance after years of decline. Suddenly the narrow boats were crucial for the war effort. However, whilst there were plenty of boats, there weren't enough good crews. The result was the Women's Training Scheme, in which young women learned the basics of boating over two three week round trips (London-Birmingham-Coventry-London) and then did their best to replace the men who had been called up. After the war they were nicknamed the Idle Women. We'll tell you where that came from as part of the show!



About us...

Heather Wastie



Heather Wastie is a poet, singer-songwriter and accordion player who has been involved with canals for most of her life, cruising with her family on ex-coal-carrying narrow boat Laurel and, in the early days, getting involved as a child in campaigns to save them from extinction. She is The Worcestershire Poet Laureate 2015/16. Her piece *Idle Women and Judies* was commissioned by the Canal & River Trust in 2014.

As Writer in Residence at the Museum of Carpet, Kidderminster in 2013 Heather wrote poems and songs inspired by people who worked in the carpet industry which she now performs. She has recently completed work as both poet and actor for National Trust property Croome Court in Worcestershire.

See www.wastiesspace.co.uk for more.

Idle Women and Judies tells the women's stories through oral history, music and poetry. You can hear an excerpt here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1W-FetEHcE>

Heather Wastie - Wonderful performance full of knowledge and very entertaining.

(Audience review of Idle Women and Judies)

Kate Saffin



Boater, writer, storyteller and actor, Kate Saffin has lived on a narrowboat and told stories of the waterways as solo plays since 1999. She trained as a writer for stage and broadcast media at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

She adapted the waterway's classic '*Ramlin Rose; the Boatwoman's story*' by the late Sheila Stewart and has performed at canal festivals, pub gardens and Edinburgh Festival Fringe (attracting a four star review from The Scotsman). Other plays have retold the apparently true story of a brothel on a boat and a late coming of age for a pensioner who finds herself on holiday on a boat (*Finding Libby*).

Isobel's War is based on interviews and existing accounts of the young women who worked on the boats during the second world war to tell Isobel's story.

Kate Saffin's performance is naturalistic, painfully funny, poised and thoroughly on top of the material (Fringe Review on 'Finding Libby' Edinburgh Fringe Festival Aug 2013)

Our route



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Our Facebook page

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Our website

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@NB_MorningMist (Kate Saffin)