

## **BIRMINGHAM POST**

**25 August 1917**

### **THE TRAINING OF CANAL BOATMEN**

**WHAT IS DONE IN THE MIDLANDS** It is estimated that between 500 and 600 canal boats are lying idle in the Midland area at the present time in consequence of the large number of boatmen who have entered the military service. Efforts are being made to equip the boats for reinstatement in service and for that purpose navigators are being trained. In some districts the men are instructed in a body, but in the Midlands the practice is to put a third man into a boat and keep him there until he is sufficiently trained to take the place of the mate, who is then transferred to another boat as captain. This, it is said, is proving to be a satisfactory method, and more of the men are rapidly becoming experienced boatmen. At one time it was thought the place of a canal boatman could be filled by means of substitutes, but this was soon proved to be a mistake. Whilst no particular technical knowledge is required in the training of canal boatmen, certain qualities are necessary which an ordinary man does not generally possess. It is essential, for instance, that a boatman should know the construction of the boats of the canal he navigates, as well as the ins and outs and the turns of the stream, and that knowledge can only be obtained by experience. The men in training in this Midland district are being drawn from the Port and Transit Labour Battalion, and are selected with the greatest care as to their suitability. On the whole, they are showing wonderful adaptability. The more easily trained are those who have been watermen, and among those being brought into the Midlands are men with experience on the Mersey. Others have more to learn, but all are working with a will. It is estimated that at one time the number of canal boatmen was about 40% below pre war times, but the deficiency is being made good by the action at present being taken by the Government.

## **YORKSHIRE EVENING POST**

**20 February 1919**

### **THE BOATMEN OF LEEDS**

**STILL AT WORK ON FOREIGN WATERWAYS** Where are the boatmen and keelmen who, in prewar days, navigated their boats along the inland waterways of Yorkshire? The Rev Ferdinand Fowkes, who has charge of the North eastern district of the Boatmen's Friend Society (his "diocese" extends from the borders of Yorkshire and Lancashire to Hull) says the men, in large numbers, are navigating barges along the waterways in France, and even in Mesopotamia. So far, very few have returned, and it is anticipated that they will be amongst the last to be demobilised.

Many men have been "doing their bit" on mine sweepers, and the "Bishop" - his title is conferred not assumed - has been in France for nearly two years doing hut work. Two boatmen have won commissions.

There has been a great change in the life of the boatman since the years when sailing vessels used to come up the river to Leeds. The sailing boat has practically disappeared from local waters, and its place is taken by the train of barges hauled by a steam tug. It is claimed that in some cases the boats can beat the railway in expediting the transport of goods. For instance, a train of barges leaves Leeds every evening about seven o'clock, with about 500 tons of freight. These are towed to Goole, arriving there about three o'clock the following morning. Then a powerful tug takes them over to complete the journey to Hull, where they arrive about nine o'clock. Thus goods put aboard the barges by six o'clock in the evening can be at the disposal of the consignees in the Humber by noon next day.

The men on the boats today are the sons of boatmen and grandsons of boatmen, and are a distinct and separate class. Curiously enough, they do not fraternise with the seamen they meet in the ports. It is proposed shortly to enlarge the Canal Wharf Institute and add a cafe, where the boatmen and the men employed on the wharf may obtain refreshment.