

# History of the Thames boatyards: Andrews of Bourne End

## Those Golden Slippers

*The name of Andrews will forever be associated with the 'thirties elegance of the slipper-stern launch. But the yard also produced many other memorable designs.*



*The boatyard in 1958. Photo courtesy Neil Garside*

The origins of Andrews Bourne End go back to Edward 'Ned' Andrews, a punting champion and professional fisherman who earned his living from the Thames at Maidenhead. He went on to found the firm Andrews and Sons at Ray Mead Road. At the turn of the nineteenth century the company ran a hire fleet and built electric boats and canoes for which they provided an electric charging station. A

survivor from this time is *Pike*, a cabin launch of c1899. Her clipper bow and counter stern give her a Victorian elegance, and she was one of a fleet of electric boats all named after fish except for the "flag ship" called *Angler*. Another survivor is a punt of 26ft 8in built in 1910 which was extensively renovated in 1989. One of Ned's three sons, John, had built his first launch on "slipper stern" lines for hire in 1912.

He sold and hired this boat many times, its most famous owner being John Whitten-Brown who in 1919 flew with John Alcock on the first transatlantic flight. Brown is said to have named it *Merk* after his Mercedes car and the name stuck.



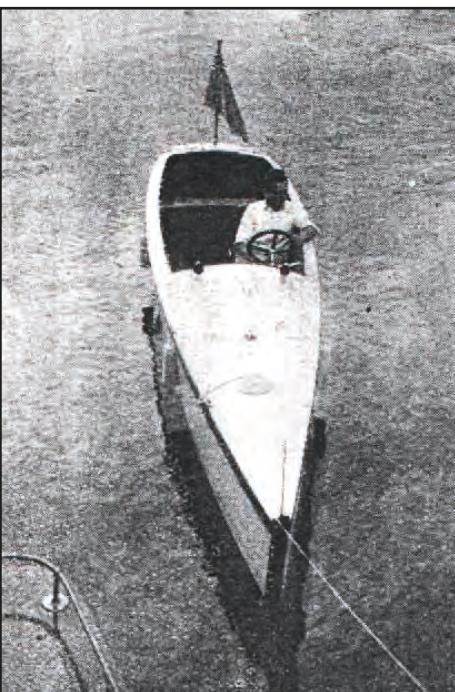
*John Andrews with Merk in 1960*

Towards the end of the boatyard's life John Andrews kept *Merk* there as a souvenir of the success of his own design and the yard's achievements.

When the yard closed *Merk* was passed on to the National Motor Boat Museum and is now at the National Maritime Museum's branch in Cornwall. The archives remain with Neil Garside.

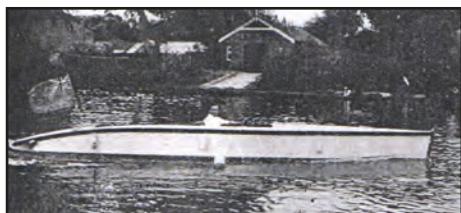
John Andrews' aim had been to design a boat that would appeal to the motorist rather than the traditional yachtsman. In 1922 he produced what *The Motor Boat* called a sports runabout.

It was a 25ft craft with a beam of only 4ft 6in. Called *Little John*, her fore and aft decks were covered by stretched canvas rather than the varnished planking we are familiar with in later models. From the side, however, her lines anticipate the later Andrews launches, and within the coaming was the typical blue and gold line. The car-style steering wheel was raked and the front seat could be raised and tilted. Fitted with a Gaines Universal 10hp engine a speed of 15.5 mph could be achieved with very little wash thanks to the extended stern. A reviewer notes of the boat displayed that year



*Little John - a sports runabout of 1922*

at Olympia: "Although the craft is unusual in appearance, particularly aft, the general result is graceful".



*Side-on her lines anticipate the Greyhound slipper*

After marriage in 1925, John went into business on his own, starting in a 60ft-long workshop at Bourne End. Following the death of his father, the Maidenhead business passed on to his brothers Fred and Harold, and the two yards shared many of the engineering components. The slipper-stern (always referred to in publicity as the sloping stern) launch evolved through the 'thirties into a style known as the 'Greyhound'.

In 1936 a hard chine was introduced so that the bottom was no longer flat, the bow had a deep 'V' section and was given a flair. The elegance of the design attracted orders from all over the world. One was built for Lord Lloyd, High Commissioner in Egypt, for use on the Nile, and another sent to India for a maharaja. Noel Renault, of the French car company, ordered one for the Seine. This was powered by a 100hp Renault engine and when the

Germans occupied Paris she was scuppered. Refloated after the Liberation she was found to be in good order.

Although they had a glamorous image, the launches with their hoods and side curtains were also promoted as being suitable for camping. One 30ft model exhibited at the Motor Show in 1934 boasted a seat aft which could be pulled out to form a comfortable double-berth 6ft long and 4ft6in wide. No doubt this appealed to customers with more nefarious intentions than cruising the upper reaches. The preferred colour for the interior furnishings and hood cover was light blue and on 30ft models the cockpit was left clear for Lloyd Loom chairs. Power was provided by a 10-20hp Austin Triton engine, and the cost was £300.

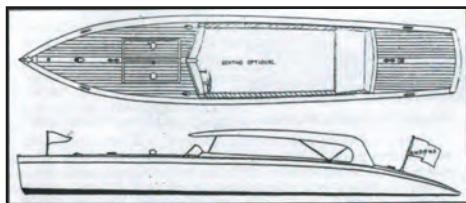


*Golden Amaryllis built for a client in the 1930s. Her slipper stern could carry a dinghy, but this was cut off when she returned to Andrews as a hire boat*

A local newspaper reporter who visited Bourne End in 1930 wrote: "There are always two or three motorboats on the stocks . . . The exclusive trade of boatbuilding has

been practised there by the Andrews family for nearly three-quarters of a century. The rain may drip and the winters be never so dreary, but inside the workshops crisply curling shavings grow ever deeper, band-saws scream and many hammers tap out their merry accompaniment.

Choice planks of Honduras mahogany are used for the 'skin' of these river Greyhounds. They are shaped and bent on a frame of sturdy English oak well-seasoned in the yards nearby. Pine from Norway decks the fore and aft parts. Six weeks of careful labour see the job completed and ready for its trials."



*Drawing of a Greyhound launch from a prewar catalogue. A 30-footer cost £350*

At this time there was no electricity supply to the workshops and the band-saws referred to were driven by belts from an old Fiat engine.

Apart from boatbuilding, the yard hired out cruisers and camping launches. A survey by *The Motor Boat* in 1935 noted that the Thames had become a popular cruising ground for hire craft, with 18 firms above Teddington Lock offering 70 boats between them. Andrews could

offer cruisers of their own build ranging from 20ft to 40ft costing from £6.6s to £12.12s a week or camping launches of 20ft, 25ft and 30ft from £6 to £9.9s.

A 30ft Andrews hire cruiser was described in a magazine article:

"There is a spacious cockpit with collapsible hood and side curtains giving every protection from bad weather. Going aft through sliding doors is the galley, which is made private through frosted glass windows, and fitted-up like a kitchen in a house with a kitchen stove, necessary washing basin and sink, freshwater tank with tap, cupboards, racks and all necessary cooking and eating utensils. Passing on through some more sliding doors we have the saloon, with sprung seating and sleeping bunks, dining table, electric lighting and cupboards for clothes etc. From here you can get out onto the stern deck and walk all round the cabin and take your cushions on the top and sunbathe. A pair of detachable steps are provided for bathing.

"Now we come to the fore cabin with two full-size sprung bunks and two portable cot berths . . . In the forepeak is the w.c. and the chain locker."



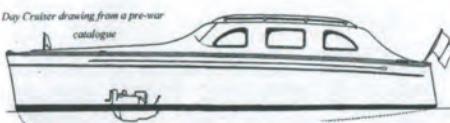
*A 30ft hire cruiser with side decks useful in locks*

Much of the information in the current article was provided in 1999 by the late Sammy Arthur who joined the company as an apprentice in 1934 and remained there for 49 years. He said: “The Old Governor, although he couldn’t stop it, was very much against slipper launches being bought and hired by other firms. He believed they should be for private persons. It is unfortunate that he never took out a patent on the name ‘slipper stern’. The story is that he had the idea of building boats in the style of an old-fashioned ladies’ shoe”.

In the mid-thirties, an 18ft 6in fast launch was introduced with a tumble-home stern. Fitted with a 20-30hp Gray engine it could achieve 18mph. If a higher speed was required a larger engine could be installed giving 30mph. At the Motorboat Show of 1938 a 25ft ‘river-cruiser’ costing £350 was shown for the first time.

Now known as a ‘Day Cruiser’, it was designed to carry six to ten people on day trips and to have sleeping accommodation for two or occasionally six people. It was powered by an Austin Thetis and special features were duplicate controls for inside and outside operation. Her beam of 6ft 6in enabled her to negotiate canal locks. A contemporary commentator wrote at its debut that its thunder was stolen to some extent by the graceful Greyhound on the same stand. Nevertheless the ‘Day cruiser’ survived.

With graceful, curved ends to the cabin sides preserving a balance with the hull, it is a classic design with many examples afloat. Our drawing shows the engine in a position where its cover would obstruct the helmsman keeping him at arm’s-length from the wheel if sitting in the conventional Lloyd Loom chair. Placing it under the fore deck would make it inaccessible.



*The Day Cruiser introduced in 1938*

At one stage of the launch’s development, it is shown partly intruding into the cabin with the two

inner panels of the bi-fold doors shortened to allow this. I have seen an ingenious solution to this problem by hinging the helm seat to the side of the cockpit.

In 1987 Bourne End produced its first 50ft Greyhound. There were eight tub chairs in the cockpit and two further seats provided under foredeck hatches which were thought to be ideal for umpires or rowing coaches. *Baby Greyhound* was powered by a 40hp Gray which gave her a speed of 16.5 mph with 12 people on board. After serving with the Upper Thames Patrol during the War, she was left to rot, eventually being lifted from the mud for restoration and a triumphant appearance at the Thames Traditional Boat Rally in 1994. Only one other launch of this size was built and that was after the war. She was *La Belle Hellene* commissioned by a member of Maidenhead Rowing Club but no longer exists.

During the War work on pleasure craft ceased. Under contract from John Thornycroft at Hampton Launch Works two boats were built for Portuguese West Africa, but these were commandeered for use in evacuating British Troops from Norway. After this Andrews were

awarded Admiralty contracts to build 25ft diesel-engined Naval tenders and 47 of these were built in all. Some parts of the now extensive workshops were let to a firm that made aircraft parts.

Although Sammy Arthur was in a reserved occupation, the Navy was badly in need of shipwrights so in 1943 he was called up. After the War he returned to Andrews and was put in charge of the building shop when the first post-war Greyhounds were built in the winter of 1945-46. They began to follow the old designs but found there were faults in them. The parts did not fit when they were faired in, and so new shapes were drawn out on the floor and small adjustments were made until they seemed right to the eye. A notable difference between slippers built pre-war and those built post-war is a shallower V in fore part of the hull profile. Also, in the earlier models the stem was often extended above the deck and squared off.

Sammy took over after boat number 303. Wood could only be obtained on licence, so at first building depended on stocks remaining from Admiralty work. Later logs of African mahogany were bought which could be sawn up by a local mill. The planks,

spaced out by sticks, were left in the yard to season for two years. The best ones were used for the one-piece hull sides destined for a varnished finish. Painted hulls often needed a piece scarfed in.

Most of the Day Cruisers were built post-war. A particularly opulent one was *Lady Marlow* ordered by a Mr Cotton, a local businessman. It boasted a mirror-lined cocktail cabinet and concealed lighting.

Boat hire remained an important part of the yard's activities and by the late 'fifties it had a fleet of 20 cruisers and 12 small launches including Whippets. The 25ft Whippet launch was introduced in 1952 without non-essential fittings "to cater for the man of limited means." This boat followed the classic Andrews launch design but had no flair to the bow section and the stern was shortened to a vertical transom. With cleats only for mooring, the price was £285. All the hire boats had "Sun" as a prefix to their names. Those bought by private owners had to change the name at the end of the season. In the late 'fifties and early 'sixties Andrews produced some transom sterned, twin-cockpit craft known as Panther launches, which were built in 20ft and 22ft 6in versions.

Some had powerful engines for water-skiing.



*Panache*, a 20ft Panther launch of 1959

Working conditions at Bourne End were hard, especially in cold weather in the corrugated iron building. "Chaps would say they had never come across a colder place anywhere in the country", Sammy recalled. Neil Garside who served his apprenticeship at the yard in the 'fifties and 'sixties remembers that in the winter of 1962-63 the much-valued teapot froze solid and fell into three pieces.

John Andrews died in August 1963, by which time the workshops and storage sheds had grown to occupy 45,000 sq ft. The business continued to be run by his widow, Gladys, and his partner R S Spoor. In the late 'sixties, with the decline in demand for slipper launches and other traditional craft, the yard took to fitting out motor cruisers on GPR hulls.

Among the final slippers to be built were two twenty-footers associated with the Andrews Sisters singers. *Dandini* and *Lady Petite II* are

unique in having half cabins – in the stern and bow respectively. (A copy of Dandini called *Lady's Slipper*, but with a forward cuddy, was built by Tim O'Keefe for the late Kit Cuthbert, a lady prominent in the TVBC in its early days.)

Experiments were made with plywood slippers and launches but they were not a success.

Reduced business could not justify the size of the premises. It used to be possible to store 80 boats over the winter, but cruisers on the Thames were now getting so large that it was impossible to get them under the beams. Finally, the yard closed on the retirement of Mrs Andrews in 1983. In 1997 the site was redeveloped for housing.

In 1985 Sammy Arthur was awarded the BEM in recognition of the special contribution he had made to boat building on the Thames. At that time, he was working part time for D B Marine at Cookham bridge. When he died in 2003, he passed on the company archives to Neil Garside. Neil used the skills learned at Andrews to build *India*, a 25ft slipper, at his Bourne End premises in 1990. He also rescued many patterns for Andrews fittings and made them available to Andrews owners. Neil writes: "Many of us who trained and worked at Andrews, in spite of the poor wages and harsh

working conditions, still hold the place in great esteem. The memories and many of the boats and designs still live on."

Sources: Neil Garside, Sammy Arthur.

Article by John Llewellyn

#### Andrews Boats on the TVBC Data Base

Slipper launches are the largest category of boats listed on the Club database and there are 129 from Andrews alone so it is not practical to list them all here with their details. Most are 25 or 30 footers and 34 of them are 30 ft.

'White Streak', a 30-footer of 1949, is the only example with original front locker seats and hinged side-tables.

The most unusual name must be 'Mrs Comfort Spratley'. Her owner spotted it on a tombstone in Bray churchyard and couldn't resist using it.

Some boats listed as by Andrews were in fact built by Andrews of Maidenhead which was a separate company. These are indicated.

Gentleman's Day launches (25ft unless otherwise stated)

'Cristobel II' c1952

'Joanna' 1966 converted to electric drive 2000.

'Josephine II' 1953

'Kingswood' 1953, rebuilt 1993-94

'Moet' 1958, said to have been built for the champagne company.

'Norrie' 1960, originally 'Swinford', believed to be on Great Ouse.

'Russell' 1957, with Vedette engine

'Sambuca' 1957

'The Day Dreamer' 1953

'Vanellus' c1955, 24ft

'Water Sprite' 1953 (destroyed by fire)

'Waterlady' 1959, restored 2012

#### Others

'Sundream' 1950, 30ft hire Whippet launch

'Dido' 37ft Edwardian style launch found as wreck and completely restored by Freebody 1983 (Andrews of Maidenhead).

'Hero' c1890, 35ft steam launch with canopy. Formerly owned by Players Tobacco Co (Andrews of Maidenhead).

'Lady Emma' 1926, 25ft motor canoe (Andrews of Maidenhead).

'Magali' c1923, 19ft 10in open launch with flat transom (Andrews of Maidenhead).

'Otto' 1930s, unpowered clinker dinghy used for hire (Andrews of Maidenhead).

'Panache' 1959, 20ft marine ply launch of the Panther class. Three 22ft 6in versions and three 25ft were built of marine ply. All with twin cockpits with centre engines.

'Sun Dot' and 'Sun Top' are examples of the 25ft economy Whippet class built in the 1950s

'Trambelle' 1956, Panther launch of 22ft 6in. Fitted with bell from a Manchester tram.