



Floating boaters: Ilana Winterstein and Aaron Minnig on their Regent's Canal narrowboat



This new, two-berth floating home with double bedroom and large living area, with full-height windows and doors, is moored on the Medway, Kent. Price: £75,000
Premier Houseboats: 01634 256946



Dutch barge *Feenstra* has a double bedroom, large reception room and is moored at the picturesque Dove Pier in Hammersmith, West London. Price: £324,950
Riverhomes: 020-8788 6000



Florence is a 70ft Northwich Trader narrowboat, with a beautifully painted boatman's cabin and two double beds, moored in Oldbury, West Midlands. Price: £67,000
Kevin Rowsell: 01568 750101

of yesteryear knew how to live – as their grand homes demonstrate, says Ruth Bloomfield

The cynical view held by George Bernard Shaw, paraphrasing Hegel, was that the only thing man can learn from history is that man never learns from history. But Shaw was almost certainly not

thinking of property when he dismissed the study of the past, because Britain's cities, towns and villages reveal rich seams of homes built for the industrialists and business leaders of days gone by — not to mention sea captains and confectioners.

And these war heroes and millionaires, who made fortunes in lace, pottery — and more unsavoury trades — had one thing in common: they knew how to live.

"These people were status-orientated and used the best architects of the day and the best building materials, and that is going to stand the test of time," says Dawn Carritt, director of Jackson-Stops & Staff.

"If the detail has been retained you will find good fireplaces, staircases, doors and elegant entertaining rooms. The houses were built to show a person's status; they were a sign that he had arrived."

Britain's former naval strongholds are a great source of this kind of quality property, as homes were built inside the historic docks for senior staff.

In Chatham, Kent, for example, there is a terrace of 12 Georgian townhouses built for the master shipwright, master surgeon and other top brass. Each has six to eight bedrooms (enough room for a family plus staff) and Carritt says today they sell for between £760,000 and £1.2 million.

"It was a case of no expense spared — at the time our naval supremacy was very important. It was a visual representation of that supremacy," she adds. "They are much grander, say, than the silk-weavers' houses of the same period in Spitalfields."

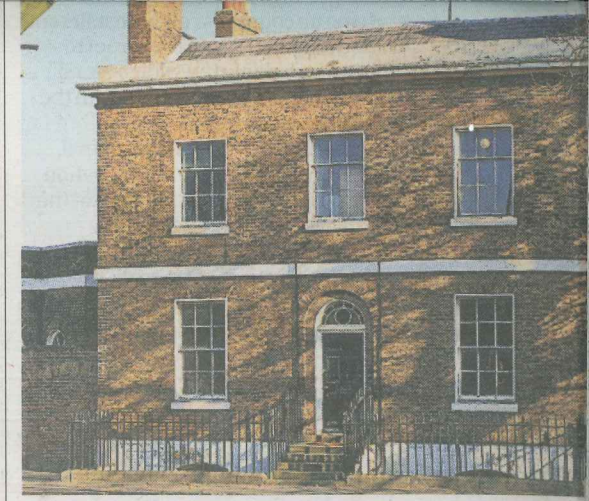
The historic dockyard at Sheerness, Kent, has a similar enclave, where Carritt is selling the former home of the shipyard boatswain, responsible for maintaining the hulls of Navy ships. This elegant, albeit in need of modernisation, seven-bedroom house is on the market for £350,000.

There are many examples — Bournville in Birmingham being the most obvious — of companies building accommodation for their staff. But Bournville was a model village for the workforce, not the bosses.

Terry's, the York-based confectioner, also built modest staff accommodation, two-up, two-downs in the suburb of South Bank. But its main factory was on Bishopthorpe Road, today a pleasing mixture of cafés and independent shops, with homes built near by for managers.

Today, according to Paul Atkinson of Hunters estate agency, the Victorian and Edwardian houses on Richardson Street, Norfolk Street and Aldreth Grove sell within days. "It is the most popular area in York," he says. "It is a suburb, but on the edge of the city centre, and people call it the Notting Hill of York."

The three to four-bedroom terraced houses sell for £250,000 to £600,000, depending on their size.



The Boatswain's House in Sheerness; below, Nelson

The salt pans along the Hampshire coast made wealthy men out of those who sailed or owned ships that exported their "white gold". Lymington was the main salt port for the trade, and streets of fine Georgian townhouses were built to accommodate salt barons on streets like Captains Row.

"They would have been for first mates and the like," explains Kevin Allen of John D Wood & Co estate agency. "The ship captains and owners would have lived on Nelson Place, where the houses are also Georgian but probably three times the size." Homes on Captains Row, most with three bedrooms, sell for about £400,000, he estimates, and those on adjacent Nelson Place, which tend to have four or five bedrooms, walled gardens and parking, for about £1 million.

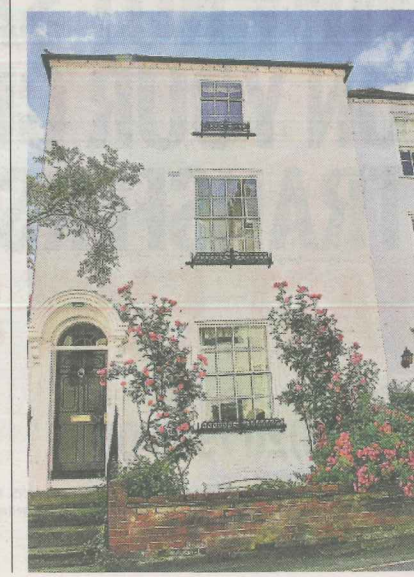
Allen believes their location within easy walking distance of Lymington River, the quay and the town centre, plus their good looks (many are listed buildings), are the reasons they remain enduringly popular, in particular among the sailing fraternity.

"A lot of buyers are people from London and the Home Counties looking for weekend retreats," he says.

Currently on the market is the Grade II listed Nelson House, a white stucco townhouse with four bedrooms and a good-sized garden. It has a guide price of £1 million.

Another street built to accommodate seafarers is Marine Parade in Penarth, Wales. Most of its imposing Victorian villas were snapped up by sea captains who worked in neighbouring Barry, transporting Welsh coal around the world.

The parade was the finest address in the town, and the families who lived there enjoyed huge reception rooms with high



A buoyant market for bespoke contemporary river homes



don't have to be a boat person to live here." O'Shea is now selling two moorings with bespoke floating homes near the sailing village of Pin Mill in Suffolk for £345,000 through estate agency Bedfords.

The houses can be built from low-maintenance materials with high levels of insulation and ecofriendly additions, such as composting toilets and water-source heat pumps. But, O'Shea says, buyers can dispense with the suggested design (above left). "It can be 120ft long and two storeys high if they want. There is no limit. Just tell us what challenge you want to set and your budget."

In Battersea, on Oyster Pier, the challenge was to design houseboats to appeal to the prime Central London market.



The result is the floating equivalent of luxury penthouses. The ten 130ft Dutch barges offer 2,000sq ft of interior space with a large outside deck. The barges and their interior designs are tailored to the owner's specifications. The show boat, *Vega IV*, (above and left) illustrates what is possible if you opt for a mooring and barge with "basic fit-out" costing £1.5 million — basic meaning state-of-the-art kitchen, luxury en suite bathrooms and high, light living spaces.

If the barges, on the market with Bective Leslie Marsh agency, aren't four-star enough, residents can also use the neighbouring hotel's facilities, including spa, gym and concierge. bedfords.co.uk/oysterpier.com

If you associate living on Britain's waterways with sitting in a cold, damp hull watching grey water swirl past then it is time for a rethink. The design features we desire in our dry-dock homes are beginning to influence the floating market.

Mike O'Shea, a houseboat designer and owner of Eco Floating Homes, is "frantically

busy" with orders for his contemporary houseboat designs, which feature high ceilings, large folding glass doors and floating terraces. "The British have a long heritage of houseboat design. We are now trying to push that and design boats with the look and feel of a house," he says. "These are really comfortable, good spaces with lots of volume. You

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