



MARTIN HALL

*'The idea of living in a peaceful marina is to keep yourself to yourself'*

'I'll have it,' I said. I didn't have any money, but I was pissed and it seemed a good idea at the time.

'Are you serious?' he asked.

'Yes,' I said.

The next morning he rang me and asked 'Are you serious?'

'Yeah,' I said.

I don't know why I said it.

Anyway, then I met my current partner Andree and we begged-borrowed-but-didn't-steal the money to buy the Wibbley Wobbley pub on October 25 2001.

On November 10, I went to Greenwich Market and bought a captain's uniform, which I thought would be a nice thing to wear on the boat, being as I was a captain; it had all the old medal ribbons and everything.

But I'd forgotten that, on November 11, Remembrance Day, the previous owner had arranged a reunion for old seamen who'd been on board a boat called the Vindatrix. They always had their reunion on the Wibbley Wobbley. I sent someone out to buy some poppies and stood there welcoming them, waiting for the poppies to arrive and thinking: Why are they looking at me as if I'm taking the piss out of them? The reason, I found out, was my captain's uniform. I wasn't old enough to have been in the war, but I was wearing medal ribbons.

'Well,' I explained, 'my dad was captain a couple of times.' I didn't say it was of a Thames lighter and the local darts team.

At the stern of the Wibbley Wobbley, there is a big holding tank, the size of a big room. Every day, we would turn the pump on for an hour to pump out everything that was in the holding

tank – everything from the toilets, the sinks etcetera – into the main sewage system. We decided to close the pub from the first of January to the fourth to do a bit of refurbishment and to decorate for my birthday. It was particularly cold at the time and the pipes froze up. I said to my partner Andree, 'Well, it won't matter if we're closed because no one'll be using the toilet and there won't be much water coming out of the sinks; it won't be too bad.' What I didn't realise was that the men's urinals have an automatic

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flush every 15 minutes and those pipes weren't frozen. Over the four-day period when we were closed, the large holding tank became more or less full, which made the stern go down almost to the water line.

Then I had my birthday party with 200 people on board and the music was towards the stern, so they all gravitated towards the back. The Wibbley Wobbley's stern started to go down and the water came in over the back, through a hole, down into the bilges. And if the pump's not going at that point, it will sink.

I saw that it was going and, very sensibly, asked everyone inside to move up towards the bow. So they did, and it came up because the weight of people balanced the water in the holding tank. But some idiot had called the fire brigade, who arrived with three fire engines and two police cars, and said to everyone: 'Evacuate the ship!'

I was drunk, but I told them, 'Don't do that, it'll go down.' At the same time, we were trying to get the pump working again. But someone accidentally turned it off again instead of on: there were two big, rubber switches and they pressed the wrong one.

So, as people were evacuating, it was going down at the stern again. The fire brigade wanted to use their pump to empty the contents of the holding tank into the marina. But the bloke from the lock office said, 'You can't do that because of the environmental health. You can't pump shit into the marina.' So he'd have rather let the whole thing sink with the diesel and the whole lot. Eventually, we got our pump working while all my birthday guests stood out in the freezing cold for an hour-and-a-half. We were about ten minutes away from sinking. Everyone came back on and had a good time. But then a helicopter arrived which someone had called for some reason. And the coastguard.

I'd only had the Wibbley Wobbley for two months at that point.

*The Malcolm Hardee Memorial Show (tickets on 020 8985 2424) – billed as 'five hours of comedy, music and mayhem' – will be at the Hackney Empire on Sunday February 5 from 7pm. For more details visit [www.malcolmhardee.co.uk](http://www.malcolmhardee.co.uk)*