

# Convicts help to open a war boat museum

- Maritime enthusiast asked for helpers
- Probation service was happy to oblige

By PAUL OFFORD

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A TEAM of convicted criminals are helping get a Canvey war boat museum up and running.

Retired maritime enthusiast John Cook, 72, who is setting up the project at Smallgains Marina, off Point Road, wrote to Southend Probation Service to see if anyone could be provided to assist him.

Probation officers agreed to send down eight people to help as part of their community service.

They have been working on the Garth, a high speed Second World War armoured patrol boat, and the Vanguard, a burnt-out shell of a former oyster fishing boat, used to rescue 39 allied troops during the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940.

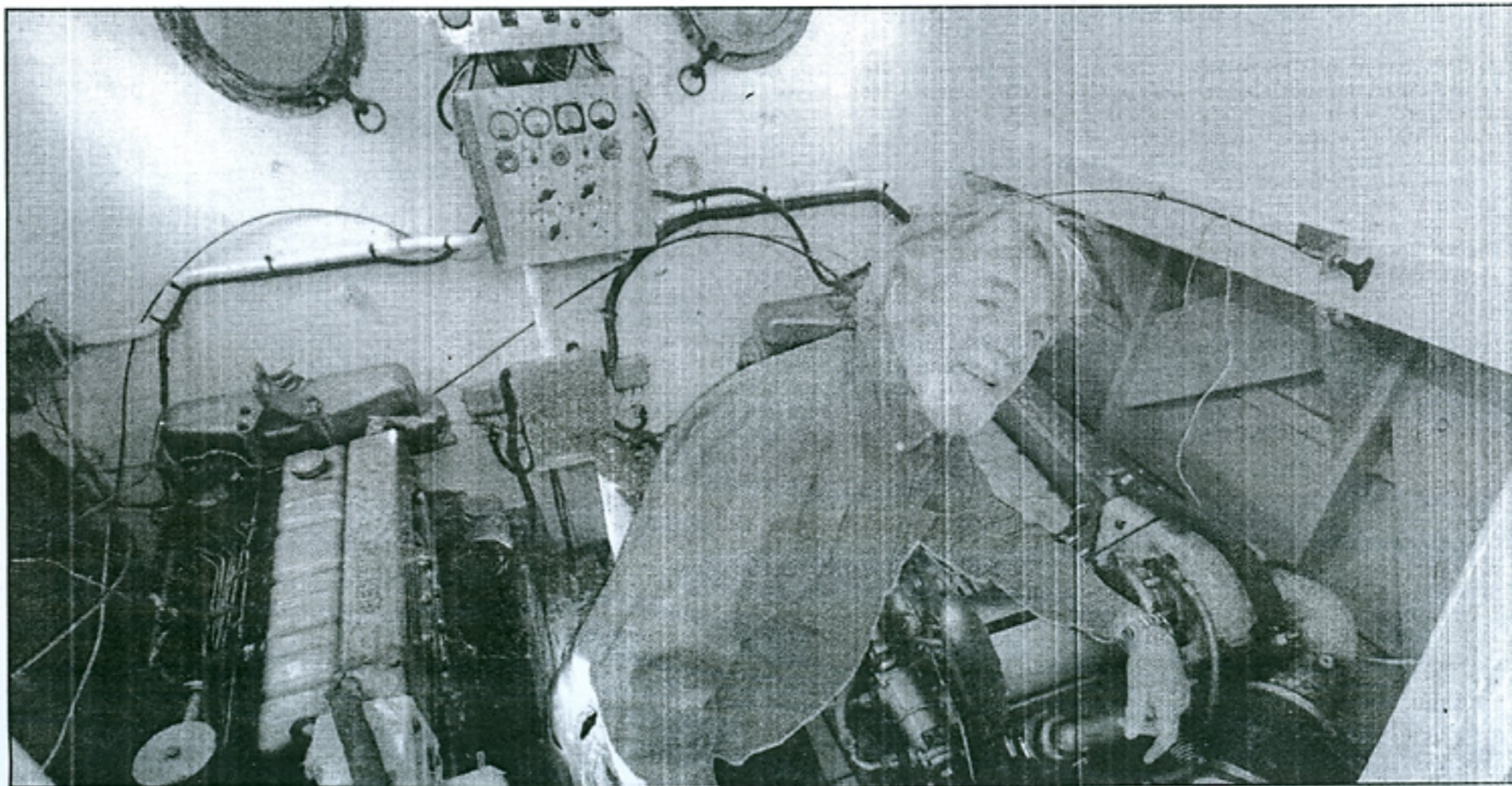
Mr Cook said: "I call them the 'naughty boys' in jest, but I have to say they have been really helpful.

"They've torn out rotten timber and the burnt insides of the Vanguard, ready for it to be moved closer to the museum, and painted the internal galleys on the Garth.

"They've also painted the museum's new clubhouse and put up a heavy flag post.

"Some of them are good mechanics. One man was even able to install a gearbox in Garth."

The community service team has been helping out for five hours every Tuesday for the last



■ Getting ready – above, John Cook in the engine room of the Garth, and right, a group of men on community service working at the marina  
Main picture: MAXINE CLARKE RCCUZ29

six weeks. Mr Cook hopes they will continue for the foreseeable future.

He added: "I insisted all along I don't want them to have to wear one of those jackets saying paying back debt to society or anything like that.

"That's the sort of thing Hitler did to the Jews to show they were different and I certainly don't support it.

"I work on the basis if you treat people as your friends, they are

friendly to you back and all of them have been really friendly."

Mr Cook plans to hold a grand opening ceremony for the museum in August.

Lynne McKay, spokeswoman for the probation service, said: "Mr Cook has sent us a very nice letter thanking us for all the good work the team has done.

"We are very happy to send people along to support any schemes that help make the community a safer and nicer place."

