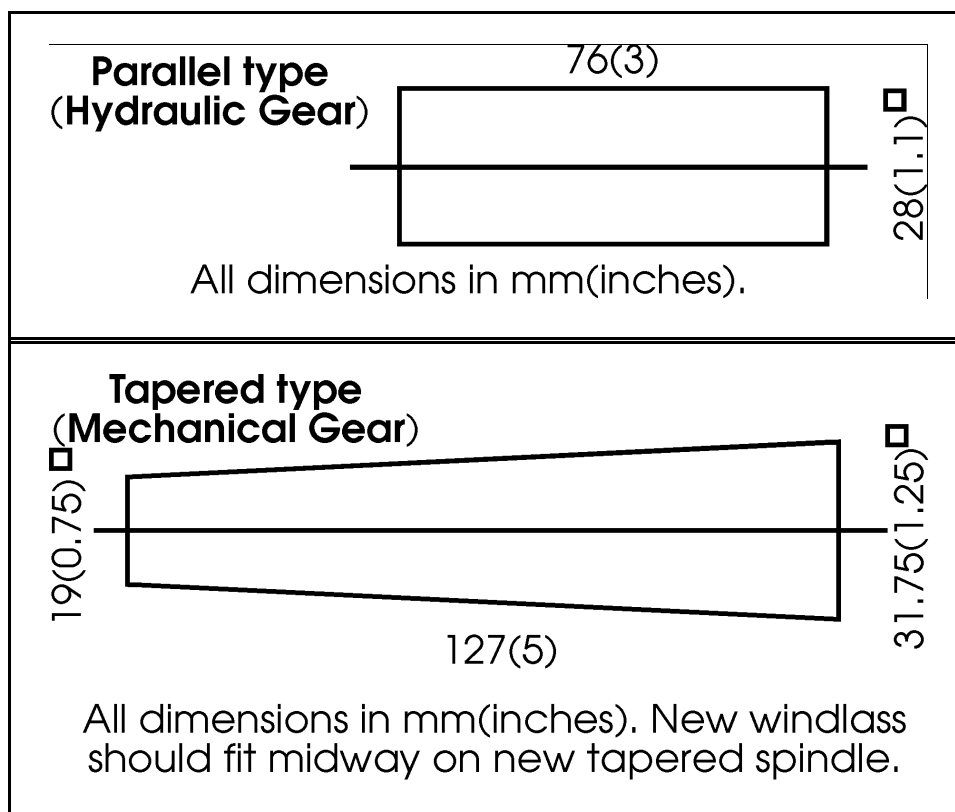


A few years ago BW decided to “rationalise” the spindle sizes on paddle gear throughout the country. Allegedly, they discovered some 150 varieties and resolved to reduce this number to two. Personally, I had always been more than happy with two windlass sizes for the majority of locks. In addition though, the Kennet and Avon had a special size and I also had what was called a Staffs & Worcester windlass to fit some very old, worn spindles on that canal and the Trent & Mersey. However, the major bugbear at the time was hydraulic paddle gear(!). The tapered spindles on this gear really were too short and people were regularly inflicting injuries on themselves when their windlasses came off unexpectedly.

Unfortunately, instead of adopting the two most widespread windlass sizes as a standard and modifying any non-standard spindles to fit, in a masterpiece of bizarre “originality” two new “standards” were decreed. One of these, the tapered type, bore a close approximation to the tapered standard then in common use - of course the taper wasn't *quite* right, it was a little steeper. The other, parallel, type was of quite new dimensions but, ironically, was close to being a slightly undersized K & A type. No one seems to admit responsibility for these decisions - perhaps someone, somewhere took an average - but it is all water under the bridge now. Or is it?

Initially there were more complaints regarding “non-standard” paddle spindles. Certainly much wear damage was been done to the new spindles by people still using old style windlasses on them, nevertheless, this *should* make windlasses move further onto the taper. Reports suggest though that the problem is that windlasses don't fit *far enough* on. Ie the tapers are too big. In order to assess this situation therefore I give the correct, new standard spindle sizes. These are taken from a BW drawing No. RY320 Revision B dated 16-11-88. If you find any variants please let BW (and me) know. This is called *customer feedback* incidentally. (They no longer have complaints!)



At risk of becoming anecdotal, at the height of the great “spindle controversy” there was even talk of everyone having to hand in their old windlasses in exchange for the new type (“New windlasses for old!”). One can speculate about the numbers involved. Let's say there were some 25,000 boats licensed at the time. Some boats only carry one windlass (the optimists) others carry a spare (I have about eight!). Let's say two per boat, that's 50,000 windlasses. Now paddle gear, about 2,000 locks, either four or six paddles to a lock. Say five, that makes 10,000 spindles. Yes BW were probably right to change the spindles rather than try and catch 25,000 customers but why not choose sizes that most of those 50,000 windlasses would already fit? In other words there may have been 150 spindle sizes but only *four* windlass sizes. Many windlasses are of course historic artifacts, there are those who will enthuse at length about the different types. Not quite my cup of tea I admit, but I sympathise with anyone who sees their interests in tradition and history being ridden roughshod over. Another bit of heritage disappears.....