

**INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS**

**NABO**



**NEWS**

- **Notice of Annual General Meeting**
- **NABO meets Waterways Minister**
- **Narrowboat Fire - Accident report**



**Issue 6    October 2007**

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This is a collection of boaters' comments on a featured aspect of the waterways, this time part 1 of 'Notices'. Surely you can add to these!

### 2007 CALENDAR

Council meeting NN Copy date

AGM 17th Nov

24th Nov 1st Dec

## MARINE DIESEL CONSULTATION

We need to decide whether to support the IWA's suggestion that

1/ boaters still be allowed to use diesel dyed red to avoid the problems with dye in the tanks and the need for retailers to sell two types of fuel,

2/ the duty on propulsion fuel collected at point of sale would be raised to the level required by the EC - less 25% if you sign a declaration that you also use some of the fuel for domestic purposes.

This idea seems fair in principle although one may argue the toss about the discount figure. We need your views, and so does the Excise department on [www.hmrc.gov.uk/consultations/](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/consultations/) (click 'current consultations').

## BW ARRANGES MEET WITH MINISTER

It was barely minutes after meeting the new Waterways Minister himself for the first time, at Cambrian Wharf in Birmingham, that Robin Evans, BW Chief Executive, organised a ministerial handshake for NABO's chairman. However the the official introduction was to follow. Your chairman happened to have moored his boat nearby and only intended to be in the background at the time taking photos of the Minister's arrival.

NABO had already written asking the Minister's advice on the declining state of consultation between BW and users, and he may also have received a complimentary copy NABO News. Whichever, he seemed well aware of the Association and its chairman before this unofficial first encounter on September 12th.

The occasion was when Jonathan Shaw MP was making his first visit to BW waters in his ministerial capacity. He was taken on the working boat *Scorpio* to the ISIS development on the Icknield Port Loop and then back to Gas Street Basin to meet a number of 'user' representatives including the Chairmen of the IWA and NABO, on BW's corporate narrowboat *Waterscape*.



Courtesy of BW's photographer

Stuart also had the opportunity to meet Chris Elms, the lady Waterways Official from DEFRA who accompanied the Minister. Both seemed well informed and approachable, the Minister having hired a boat on the Oxford Canal in the past, which should have made the pictures even more meaningful.

Thanks must go to David Young of BW's press department for making these meetings possible and enabling all parties to put faces to names.

Following the Council meeting on September 15th, NABO has sent a second letter, asking DEFRA to put a stop to BW's moorings-to-highest-bidder trial.



## **PUT A NAME TO A FACE** *VIPs aboard Scorio*

Working clockwise round the group in the hold starting with the bearded man at the back:-

David Young - BW External Relations Press Office

Tony Harvey - BW General Manager, West Midlands

Jonathan Shaw MP, DEFRA Minister with responsibility for Waterways

Robin Evans - BW Chief Executive

Christina Elms - DEFRA Waterways Official

Anne Sanders - Jonathan Shaw's personal secretary.

## **YOU SAY**

### **NOTICES**

"I like the one that says: 'No fishing beyond the arrows', and below it are two arrows pointing outwards with only two inches in between. Slim angler needed to take advantage of this!"

# CAN YE GI' US SOME TIME?

**Simon Robbins asks.**

*“We expect to lose three members of Council this year through ill health and other perfectly understandable reasons. If you want us to go on doing the work we do, please seriously consider joining NABO's governing body by filling in a nomination form.”*

Stuart made this request in an e-bulletin recently, but it is too late now for election, but co-option is still possible.

Anyway, I thought I would add some more personal thoughts on the theme.

## **What do Council Members and Area Reps do?**

Council and Area Reps try to put forward a representative voice for boaters with the powers that be. Most of what we do (and this was of course the *raison d'être* when NABO was first formed) is about trying to represent boaters' views to Navigation Authorities. That ethos of being a “boaters' voice” is certainly why I support NABO! Does NABO offer enough opportunities for members to participate? Is it clear enough what Council does and why?

Maybe being a Council Member or Regional Rep looks like too substantial a commitment? Should we encourage the creation of other roles or ‘posts’ for members to offer their time in more modest ways?

## **Meetings, meetings and more meetings.**

Very loosely, NABO has regional reps that match the English BW regions and the main EA navigations. Most Council members double as regional reps as well as having one or more specific national briefs. That can potentially entail a lot of meetings and work just in itself. We would definitely welcome having more volunteers and supporters to help us, particularly when it comes to having backup for attending and reporting on local meetings. In some cases we would also make considerable savings in time and travel if there were more people we could turn to who were prepared to attend meetings and report back.

Many members are also members of other national and local organisations and follow matters of personal interests through those affiliations. Should we be sharing reports on local meetings and other common interests with other representative organisations? We tend to do this informally anyway through what I call the “usual suspects network” – we meet many colleagues from other representative organisations at meetings... Should we have more formal arrangements in place to take greater advantage of shared knowledge and experience?

Should we have additional “area reps” to supplement our existing structure of regional secretaries? Maybe we should consider having a Council post called “Regional and Area Reps Co-ordinator” to receive, coordinate and support area reps and any other members who would be prepared to help with this sort of work?

**NABO ISN'T JUST 'US', IT'S YOU AS WELL**

Stuart mentioned in the bulletin a couple of meetings that we needed cover for, but there are a lot more. Tony Haynes has and continues to do sterling work in the EA consultative structures for us, especially in the South East and Thames areas. Tony expects to be a lot less mobile in future so we would welcome anyone who might be interested in getting more involved, also with Safety Issues and BSS and keeping a watch on the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, things Tony also covers for us.

### **Waterways Reports Forum**

Another job Tony has championed is moderating the Reports Forum – that is one of the few jobs where having regular on-line access is almost essential. (Stuart is the one to talk to about what's involved with that if you think you could help there.)

### **NABO News Articles**

Should we report on more meetings in NABO news? If so having extra hands to write articles would be very welcome.

We would also welcome more contributions on subjects you feel like writing about for NABO News. Whether it's one off stories, reports about cruising experiences, especially positive ones, or events you've attended and would recommend to others.

### **Help recruiting members and promoting NABO**

We wonder whether we should offer a more formal recruiting pack for interested members to have to offer to friends and other boaters you meet? This would probably be a selection of membership forms and other leaflets, maybe some copies of the booklet "So you're thinking of buying a boat" to sell? Is anyone up for doing this or any other sorts of casual recruitment and promotional work?

Should we have more NABO promotional material available? Mugs, clothing? What would work best as freebies, what would you buy if we did more merchandising?

NABO has a policy of offering to pay rally fees if members are prepared to run a NABO Stall. We have the display stand and lots of literature which is kept at a storage unit in Oldbury. We can often arrange to transport it to you or to a venue (other volunteers to do that are always welcome!).

Aileen is standing down from Council shortly and we need a new Events Secretary and additional support from members if we are to show ourselves at many festivals next year. Thanks again to all those who contributed this year.

If you and friends are going to a rally anyway next year, would you be prepared to get involved just at that one event? I find these events are the most fun if undertaken as a group activity, so something to chew over with your boating friends over those long winter nights? If not helping to run our stand, then what about something less formal? If you're prepared to display NABO banners on your boat and offer literature even for a couple of hours a day..? You tell us what you fancy doing.

## **I don't use the Internet so I can't help...**

People often assume access to the Internet and e-mail is essential in order to participate in NABO. Not so! Personally I still do a lot of NABO business by the good old snail mail and telephone. The convenience of the Internet and e-mail is not disputed but people have communicated effectively for several millennia without it! Some of us who do use it, also live without it when we go boating and we seem to survive and keep functioning perfectly well! Most things done electronically can be printed and stuck in an envelope so don't let lack of access to e-mail put you off!

**So...**

If you have time and skills or areas of personal interest you think you can offer to support NABO's work and share with other members, but were scared to ask about, please don't be afraid to offer.

## **TWO REPORTS PUBLISHED**

### ***Stephen Peters has read them, or tried!***

Let it be noted from the outset – the latest BW Annual Report is not easy to read. A poor choice of handwriting script typefaces, small print and lack of contrast means that you will need very good eyesight and strong natural daylight to decipher the information within this report. So much for BW's commitment to people with disabilities. However, the report is free and contains some interesting facts, as always.

For instance, total revenue is slightly down and profit virtually nil. This is despite an increase of 6 per cent in number of boat licences issued (and a ten per cent increase in Scotland alone) and an increase in income per craft licence and from moorings.

The overall remuneration of directors and board members does not reflect the trading results – with increased salaries and bonuses being paid to executive directors and enhanced remuneration paid to the board. The ten board members appointed by the Secretary of State and Scottish Executive bring a range of experiences from their outside interests including many from the field of heritage, rail transport, leisure and involvement in Workspace Group plc; the latter could be useful when considering business barge developments.

Obtain your copy of the Annual Report from BW and ask them for a magnifying glass!

You will have no problem in reading the Annual Report from the Waterways Ombudsman. It is clearly set out with a good bold type face...

### ***Which was good news for Tony Haynes - he writes:***

This is the second annual report since Hilary Bainbridge took office. It makes interesting reading, as did the first. She explains very carefully that she cannot

deal with complaints that are not the responsibility of British Waterways. It is no good going to her whinging about a kitchen fitting company, mains water leaks, or cross channel ferry bookings, though this does happen. Neither can she comment on BW policy or overall performance.

However she is concerned about maladministration. She wants to see that BW stick to their own procedures when dealing with complaints, that they are fair to their customers, give adequate notice of changes and are 'good neighbours'. She dealt with a complaint directly, where BW had not responded at all. She puts this failure down to office and staff changes, nevertheless it shouldn't happen. She notes that BW are taking longer to respond to her enquiries this year, and again, suspects this is due to staffing problems. She identifies cases where BW's responses have been inadequate or too slow. However, she does not always find in the complainant's favour.

The number of enquiries has risen this year by 21% over last year, with a significant increase in the last quarter. Work was completed on 26 cases this year, one less than last year, out of 108 in total. However the remainder were either not relating to BW, or premature, in that internal complaint procedures were still going on, or they were not in her jurisdiction. Most complaints were from boat owners, many about moorings, though six were from neighbours of the waterways.

Individual cases reveal much. Ms Bainbridge did not uphold a complaint that breasted boats on a mooring should pay less each in fees because this would contravene established BW policy. However she recommended a small amount of compensation because there was a considerable delay in informing boaters of a policy change.

*"Vegetation Management remains an issue. The contracts in place for 2005-6 simply did not require the same level of maintenance as previously."* What will she think of 2007! She recommends that BW review their arrangements for monitoring compliance with and enforcement of grass cutting/maintenance contracts.

A riparian householder complained about moorings being allowed opposite their property because of noisy boaters. The ombudsman found that if boaters behave badly that is their responsibility, not BWs. unless there were reported cases of bye-laws being broken or anti-social behaviour. However because of considerable delays she recommended compensation, and a reed bed should be established opposite the house, with alternative moorings being provided nearby.

Apart from BW, as a public body, being good neighbours in relation to moorings, she makes interesting comments in connection with other cases. For example she is surprised that mooring pricing policy did not refer explicitly to profitability; she is concerned when boaters are not given enough notice of mooring policy changes, especially when consultation appears to be notification. *"If BW really were committed to customer service they should also want to maintain a good*

*relationship by offering alternative services."* She recommends that BW should "Write to all moorers affected by change and describe what help they might be able to give to those who wish to move to a less expensive berth." "At a time when moorings are in short supply, that might lead to prices rising above the cost of living." So she could see no grounds for criticism of BW's approach in comparing prices at similar sites.

I wonder what she would make of tendering for moorings, uneven mooring cost setting, and the 'fairness' of being on a waiting list for up to four years, only to be told that you then have to bid for that mooring against others who were not even on the list!

Hilary Bainbridge is now a full voting member of the British and Irish Ombudsman Association. Not an easy achievement. She must be getting it right.

The Waterways Ombudsman now has her own website at:

**[www.waterways-ombudsman.org](http://www.waterways-ombudsman.org)**

The full report can be found there. It is very informative and well worth the visit.

## LPG PRICES UP – AGAIN!

I'm afraid the cost of good living has gone up again.

With crude oil again at record prices globally, Flogas (the supplier to the DBA scheme) has had to put the scheme prices up again too.

The new prices are: 19 kg - £18.35                      11 kg - £11.47

These prices are per-bottle on exchange (empty for full), include delivery (but at least two bottles must be ordered at once), and are subject to VAT.

NABO members can join the scheme. Please contact me directly for information if you may be interested in joining.

*Adrian Stott*

## NABO NEWS REDUCES ROBIN EVANS'S IRRITATION!

Yes, it's true! – Thanks to this magazine Robin Evans and his wife can now rest easier after insect bites, having bought a ZapperClick as a direct result of reading NABO News. See – it's not all bad news.

## YOU SAY



"On the Staffs & Worcs, just south of the Wolverhampton flight, a sign says 'NOTICE' - I couldn't read the rest of it until I was on top of it - OF COURSE IT'S A NOTICE!"

# CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



## What is it like being chairman?

You may have some idea from my various comments over the years, but thinking back to sitting on a train from Euston to Watford with Sue Burchett, I was asking her much the same question. Would I need a suit? How much time would it take up? Can I do it without management experience?

The usual answer in cases like this is, "It's a voluntary job so it depends what you want to make of it", give or take certain obligations laid down in the Constitution like arranging Council meetings and the like. Carole helps me a good bit there. I also have to go to meetings with the navigation authorities. Some of them are just formalities, I just have to be there in case there is anything to report. At others NABO has specific interests and I have a brief.

But the majority of the time I spend on NABO business is in front of the computer or on the phone keeping 'in the know'. I can't decide whether it is a help or a hindrance being NABO News Editor as well in this respect. When Tony did it for a bit I did feel I was losing touch with you as members, particularly through not seeing your letters before they appeared in print.

Perhaps I should appear in public more? When our paths cross, the IWA National Chairman can be relied upon to fill everyone in on where he has been, which interviews he has given or which charity event he has to rush off to next – so, if you need to know anything about train travel – just ask John Fletcher!

If someone wants the NABO chairman to address their boat club or hold some sort of 'surgery', then, if it still me next year, I'll do my best to fit it in round my meetings or, more important, my boating. I am, of course, more than happy to be approached on the water. (No, despite what some have said, I can't walk on it either!)

Like Sue, I didn't want to lose touch with being a boater, so, in the middle of September at Cambrian Wharf, one minute I was emptying a toilet cassette, barely an hour later I was shaking hands (washed of course!) with the Waterways Minister.

## Protecting members' assets

What keeps bringing me up short is to think that NABO is a national organisation involving the well-being of some **£50 million** worth of assets, the combined value of its members' boats. In the commercial world that would certainly make it suit country, probably Saville Row suit country!

That's not to be for me I'm afraid, the pay isn't up to it, but the point is that boats are pretty worthless if there are no waterways fit to cruise on, or if that cruising fails to be pleasurable and affordable. NABO aims to ensure that navigation does remain possible,

pleasurable and affordable so, amongst other things, our members' investment can retain its value.

In the end we can't just do it for members without doing it for all boat owners, bringing the asset base worth a staggering **thousand million**

NABO aims to ensure that navigation remains possible, pleasurable and affordable

or more. These are the sort of numbers governments deal with! Assets for assets, Mr Evans, shouldn't I be eligible for a £133k bonus? Then I could afford to shop in Saville Row.

### **Another year**

It has certainly been an interesting year, starting out with an all-out assault on DEFRA's funding cuts and coming to an end with a shake of the hand of a new minister, assuming he is still in post when you read this – a politician in power who has actually steered a narrowboat!

Unfortunately the chairman's role doesn't just stop with being a political figurehead, there are internal affairs to be tackled as well and one of those has been the loss of Tony Haynes to the ravages of ill health. This came at time when I was looking forward to delegating the editorship of this magazine, amongst other things.

Much of the blame lies at my door, we invited him up to Yorkshire to see first hand how I tackled NABO News and one day we went out to see what sort of computer he could use. I made the mistake of combining the outing with a stroll up to Dobson's Locks between Bradford and Leeds and he realised just what he was missing through his decreasing mobility.

That lost us a good man to the lure of the waterways, although I have hopes that he might still be able to help the cause, but certainly we can't expect the vigour and application he showed when he was Vice-chairman, safety officer and general thorn in the side of the BSS and the EA navigation department. I certainly miss his contributions and now feel sadly out of touch with the goings on on the Basy! I wish him well with what cruising lies ahead and thank him for all he has done.

### **Eugene**

Another loss to the waterways is Eugene Baston as Manager, BW External Relations. Now three people are needed to do his job!



I can understand why, Eugene was like a clockwork car with an everlasting spring, which you could only stop by lifting off the ground and even then the wheels went on spinning. His other 'fault' was trying to be on everyone's side at the same time, so there were times one had to remind oneself who his paymaster was. In reality his allegiance was to the waterways as a whole rather than just their custodian.

I said back in the thick of the 'High Band Licence' debacle that Eugene was pig in the middle. and now with the 'trials' I guess he is well out of it and not before time. If there is any truth in the speculation that he under-performed at his last assessment, it can only go to show that there is something very wrong with how his seniors judge a man like that.

We wish him every success; that his new son allows him some sleep; and that we don't lose touch. We now have to 'break in' a Jonathan Bryant.

### **Keeping chugging on**

In the meantime we still chug along past the serried ranks of nettles, steering cross-legged hoping to find a working Elsan point, yet still somehow captivated.

One member shouted to me asking how I had the time to boat as well. No way will I sacrifice boating to be Chairman – sorry! What I might sacrifice in the future, however, is boating in Britain, and that **will** put a stop to me being Chairman. We are seriously considering barging abroad, so please don't regard Carole and I as permanent fixtures here.

*Stuart*

## WHERE WE ARE ON MOORINGS TENDERING TRIALS

NABO is tackling this on several fronts:-

### DEFRA

We have written to the Minister with responsibility for waterways citing ten reasons to stop the trial:-

- this is not a trial in the sense of being able to return to the previous status without lasting consequences.
- BW did no prior consultation as '*they knew what users thought*' but chose to ignore those views
- BW's poor track record of ill-conceived proposals has eroded trust that the trials will be conducted or assessed fairly
- allocating berths to the highest bidder would most likely exclude the less wealthy boater
- it is unfair to those on existing waiting lists and those uncomfortable with competitive tendering
- it is divisive by creating different classes of berth-holder on the same sites
- by taking maximum rather than average offers, BW could lead the market
- little consideration seems to have been given to what will happen afterwards in the long or short term
- the planning and implementation of the 'trial' has diverted resources from other pressing issues
- the potential exists for the 'trial' to be made invalid.

We have also asked for a meeting with DEFRA and sent background information to DEFRA's Waterway Official explaining the history, emphasising that some effects of the 'trial' will be irreversible, sealed tenders will not truly reflect market prices, and that an open auction cannot be sufficiently inclusive.

### BW

We are following up with "*Stage Two Complaint re Mooring Tenders trial: Failure to adhere to published guidance on public consultations.*" This may well involve the Ombudsman in the future, whom we hope will be expecting it, but this action is very unlikely to bear results in time to stop the trials.

### The Press

We have issued Press Releases and had good coverage on [narrowboatworld.com](http://narrowboatworld.com)

**If we are not doing enough, helpful suggestions welcome.**

## YOU SAY

### NOTICES

"Could the people who put up the signs saying 6.14373 km/hr say how we are going to know, and what happens if I'm going at 6.14373 km/hr?"

*RCR Advertisement*

## A POINT TO PONDER

### *A column for controversy*

[Caution - opinions expressed here will remain anonymous, are independent of NABO policy, and statements herein have not been verified as true fact.

Feel free to challenge anything said.

I deplore waste, be it water, food, time, effort, or money: it's down to the way I was brought up. British Waterways is guilty of four of these, but I am going to concentrate on money.

First, we hear about the fine of £50,000 - plus costs - following the deaths of two contractors on the Kennet and Avon Canal three years ago. Now, someone connected with Wild Over Waterways has been found to have fraudulently used a debit card to the value of £35,000 plus. The culprit has been sentenced to fourteen months in prison, but he had asked for forty other cases to be taken into consideration! 40 x £35,000 comes to £1.4 million, enough to pay the salaries of ten extra staff for five years, or to reinstate the abandoned, derelict double locks on Heartbreak Hill. The offences have been going on for five years or more, with the same

person authorising his expense claim forms willy-nilly. Surprisingly, that person still has a job with BW: I can't think of any other organisation where this would be the case. I can hear Sir Alan Sugar saying: "*You lost me money!*"

So, how do we think BW is going to make up its deficit? A rhetorical question. Boat licence fees are set to rise by 10% over the next three years. If I am going to have to pay more to cover the costs of BW's cock-ups, then I want greater input into how my money is being spent. Will I get it? I'm not holding my breath, but BW needs to realise that, following the Save Our Waterways campaign, boaters have discovered that they have teeth, and, once roused, they will be all the more ready to make their feelings known.

## CHUMSTON AND SLAWIT?

### *A plea for the real sound of place names*

How do the locals say 'Cholmondeston' and 'Slaithwaite'? Where is Barlick? Why is the 'Y' in Eynsham nor sounded? All these things are sent to baffle the boater who would like to blend in, or at least understand locals giving directions.

NABO News could compile a list of places that are not said as they are spelt, so if you live somewhere or know somewhere that doesn't sound as it says on the map, please add to our collection by emailing: [news.07@nabo.org.uk](mailto:news.07@nabo.org.uk) or drop the editor a line, giving the official spelling and the best spelling that really sounds as it is said locally.

## YOU SAY

### NOTICES

"The EA signs on the Thames are awful. You see 'lock this way' just as you're about to go over a weir."

## RESIDENTIAL BOATING ISSUES

### *An update by Simon Robbins*

We are still waiting for the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities' report on residential boating issues, despite assurances it would be issued any time now. My information is that the report may be an opportunity to lobby for further work on this subject from the Communities and Local Government Department in Whitehall, as it appears the report will indicate that the different navigation authorities have been unable to agree a common approach to this issue.

Do you live on a BW directly managed residential mooring?

Over the Summer in response to complaints about BW's initial proposals for regularising instances where boaters have been allowed to buy boats on moorings, a small number of residential boaters have resolved their cases by insisting that their Houseboat Certificates be re-instated and BW have eventually conceded this.

BW's initial approach to the matter was to state they were going to prohibit all future sales of boats on moorings, even though in some cases they had directly encouraged boaters to buy boats on residential moorings in this way and then endorsed the transactions, but where no Houseboat certificate existed. Houseboat Certificate holders of course would fall outside this blanket ban and have a statutory right to assign their mooring and boat. On BW leisure moorings the practice has been prohibited for many years. NABO of course supports the principle that when you have finished with your BW mooring it should usually go to the next person on a waiting list.

BW are now claiming that in a number of cases their previous unilateral withdrawal of individual Houseboat Certificates was an 'administrative error'. The issue is rather complicated and only affects a very specific and relatively small number of BW customers. The matter in part depends on local circumstances and a number of other factors and even at its peak there were less than four hundred Houseboat Certificates issued for BW moorings nationally. However it seems likely to me that as BW unilaterally withdrew nearly three quarters of the of Houseboat certificates it once issued, there may be a number of BW residential mooring customers out there of longer standing who might have a valid claim to the better mooring rights offered by the Houseboat Certificate scheme. If you think this issue might affect you please get in touch for more background and information.

### DID YOU KNOW?

BW's Annual Report for 2006/7 tells us:-

- Robin Evans's bonus has increased by 60% to £66.5k
- 268 million visits were made to BW waterways. If BW's commercialism could stretch to charging every type of visitor 27p per visit, it could manage without DEFRA's grant and any licence or mooring charges for boating!
- 30,905 boats were licensed last year

## DO YOU HAVE A FIRE ON YOUR BOAT?

### KEEP IT WITHIN THE STOVE

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) has just released its report into the fatal fire aboard narrowboat *Lindy Lou* that was most likely caused, either by an ember escaping from a solid fuel stove during stoking, or by overheating of combustible fittings or objects too close to it.

They point out that fire can spread rapidly in narrowboats as they are usually fitted out in combustible materials and are tubular (like the combustion chambers in a jet engine), often with few partitions. In this case temperatures were high enough to melt aluminium (>550°C). Also that a lot of combustible possessions, e.g. books, CDs, DVDs, alcoholic spirits, a high 'fire load', are stored in a small space in a narrowboat.

The confined floor area in narrowboats also limits the size of the hearth, which allows people to place inflammable objects too close, and embers can more easily fall on carpet, nylon types being particularly inflammable. Even plywood behind tiles is vulnerable, after prolonged heat 'pyrolysis' occurs when whatever fire resistance wood has is baked out. It only takes a tile to fail, or even the grouting, and the backing can ignite.

Boaters are recommended to fit smoke alarms and be particularly vigilant for embers if stoking up the stove overnight or leaving the boat unattended. Keep inflammable ornaments, books, cards and anything plastic well away and check all woodwork near the stove and flue for long term charring.

The idea of living with anything red hot or flaming in a steel tube full of fuel is bound to be risky unless you are sure the heat and fuel can't meet.

For further information, including the full report, visit [www.maib.gov.uk](http://www.maib.gov.uk).

An illustration from the report  
- **DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN TO YOU**



Damage sustained to the forward area of the saloon

# FLY ON THE WALL



*It was a jolly tanned Council that gathered after, or even during, their summer boating.*

*It heard that the AGM has been arranged for 17th November at the village hall at Shipton-on-Cherwell, Oxfordshire. The VIP speaker is John Edmonds, ex-trade unions leader and now a waterways champion in the Environment Agency and chairman of the IWAC.*

*There was a bit of catching up to do on what had happened over the summer (apart from curtailed boating due to flooding). Your chairman had met the new Minister with responsibility for the waterways, Jonathan Shaw AND he has been boating! Sadly his attitude to BW's mooring auctions policy was that it was 'just a trial' despite the Parliamentary Select Committee thinking the trial auctions a 'bad idea' and BW are now no longer taking entries for waiting lists.*

*BW are attempting to reduce on-line moorings but have recently had to back down over their*

*enforced moving of long term moorers at Beeston when the locals, the local authority and the local MP joined forces to protest. BW have agreed that boaters would be relocated to offside moorings as a result of natural wastage. Council also heard about house owners adjoining a towpath objecting to boaters mooring on the towpath near their property!*

*The Boaters Issues Meeting had raised the point that BW's letters to boaters, fines for overstaying, taking boaters to court and removing people and boats from their mooring had resulted in local councils having to find accommodation for the displaced people. Would it not be easier for BW to offer another mooring within a reasonable distance? BW should obviously clamp down on illegal mooring but there should be a mooring policy on relocation and maybe BW should consider not licensing more boats than there are moorings!*

*There seems to be an inconsistency around the regions on winter mooring fees and about visitor moorings being changed to 'BW Plant' moorings. Also local BW staff did not seem to be getting information from or about the national User Group meetings.*

*Council lightened up a bit with a discussion of Nabo representation*

at rallies and shows. Should NABO have a stand? Should NABO share a stand with other boating organisations? Should NABO use a professional 'rep' instead of relying on members? Could members give out packs to interested parties as they boat? Would marinas display NABO leaflets? Your views would be appreciated at the AGM or by letter to NABO News.

On the subject of the News it would be interesting to hear views other than those of the chairman, on various subjects. The News could introduce an opinion piece, unattributable if you prefer. Would you like to put pen to paper or should that be digits to keyboard?

Red diesel bubbled up once more. It looks like Customs and Excise favour keeping the diesel red but with increased duty. Might it be possible to have a rebate (25%?) if some of your diesel is used for domestic heating? Or would it be more practicable to have a differential at the point of sale in the price of diesel for heating?

Council acknowledged Tony Haynes's resignation and wished him well boating while he still can. They also heard that Eugene Baston, BW's PR man had resigned. It will be interesting to see where he goes next!

Some of you may not have realised that you can still get your reports of hiccups on the system on to the website by text or phone message. Don't stop sending because you don't have your computer on board!

Council agreed that a letter will go from NABO to support the organisation for the Lincolnshire Link.

The latest horror story from London was that it had been agreed that another THIRTEEN business barges could be moored in Paddington Basin Those of you who know it may ask WHERE? And also will they be used? How often have the current ones been used? Will they take up what are currently visitor moorings? BW as the navigation authority could refuse but they had supported the planning application to Westminster Council.

YOU know your Council is alive and active, but it decided that the boating world could be more aware of the fact via more Press Releases.

Give your views to Nabo News or at the AGM. See some of you then. I'm the one with the big eyes and wings.

Byeeeeee

Flyeeeeee



### Black is White

I understand that BW have declared that Black is now to be referred to as 'White'.

I am sure that Messrs Hales, Evans, Salem, Ms Ash and Sir Adrian Stott will welcome this unique initiative and as usual be the exclusive group that sees the obvious sense despite the entire world's opposition.

*Louis Jankel*

### Top Rope Mooring

I would like to take up the point made in the August issue of NABO News by Stuart Sampson about the growing habit of using top ropes as mooring lines.

In my view, it may be convenient to use the top rope (usually a line attached to the centre of the cabin roof or handrail) for very brief periods of maintaining control of the boat, such as on disembarking or boarding. However it should not to be used as the prime means for actually tying up. I, like Stuart with 4 decades of water under the counter, observe that this relatively recent practice does seem to be becoming more common. Indeed I believe that it is one method of mooring recommended by some Hire Boat companies.

A frightening experience that I had when moving my boat down the Napton flight a couple of years ago illustrates why this practice should be discouraged.

With my boat's 20 tonnes displacement a lot of water has to move past the hull in restricted channels, such as approaches to bridges, locks and on the main line in most of the Southern Oxford! The fact is that the movement of the body of water can cause a draw down at the channel edge by several inches even at very slow speeds. The action causes water to be sucked

away from the bank together with anything sitting in it...like a boat! The effect is amplified if the channel is shallow at the edge. The result is to roll the boat towards the bank to an extent that will depend on the height difference between the centre of the hull's underwater cross section and the point at which the rope is acting on it, the greater it is the greater the tendency for the boat to roll. The height of the point of attachment on the bank will have little influence. In the incident I refer to I saw the bit of the boat where the bottom joins the side! The effect was probably extreme as this boat was a very shallow drafted 30 footer with a lot of air draft.

Stuart's surmise that the sinking of the boat at Kennet Mouth in the fast flowing Thames flood water might have been the result of "top rope mooring" may well be justified, as rising water will also tend to push the boat's hull out from the bank causing it to roll.

*Bernard Hales*

[I was watching someone using a mooring pin and top rope to hold his boat in a lock queue to save walking with it. He spent his time walking back and forth with a hammer instead as the pin kept pulling out!- Ed]

### Vandal Gallery

Ellen and I are still prowling northern waters and are heading toward the Ribble after a pleasant week on the Weaver. Since we've been in all sorts of places, including the Runcorn Arm and the Rochdale, we have had a few encounters with young criminals-in-the-making (arguably, the process is already complete in too many cases).

The camera is often an effective deterrent, but we've found we don't always get the photos we want. That got me to thinking

particular trouble spots on a web-based database keyed to towns, locks, bridges, etc. What might be even better is the possibility of posting digital photos of the perpetrators as well, when these are available. That could serve three functions: (1) alerting other boaters to particular mischief-makers they ought to keep an eye out for, (2) providing "mugshots" that could be used to help identify those mischief-maker's to police in case other incidents occur, and (3) pinpointing trouble spots for law enforcement to focus upon.

Setting up such a database is well beyond my skills, but I'm wondering if it's something that NABO might embrace and implement - assuming it's not illegal. Anything boaters can do to take the initiative in protecting and defending themselves ought to have vigorous support within the boating community; without it, we'll all continue to be victimized by the anti-social -- and often criminal -- behaviors too often on exhibit, particularly in urban areas.

*Harvey Schorr*

[Minus the photos, the Waterway Reports Forum does this - Ed]

## In reply to Sir Adrian

Thanks for publishing my letter on the moorings auction issue in NABO News. I was pleased that you published Sir Adrian Stott's well-written missive giving a very different viewpoint. I'm no old-fashioned socialist. I have been in business all my life and I recognise the merits of free, competitive markets. But in spite of some persuasive arguments I still believe Sir Adrian to be mistaken.

His analogy between a physical queue for tickets and the moorings auction is flawed. The one thing they have in common is that the processes are not governed by law so much as unwritten protocol and established behaviour. This is evident in the practice of queuing; well-established and accepted social convention makes us

regard queue jumping as unfair and the same convention involves our acceptance that a "wicket" may close before we reach it.

"The mooring waiting lists are no different", Sir Adrian says. I beg to differ. Urgency of need is not necessarily reflected in ability to bid high. To reverse his example, the very wealthy boater who would like that spot nearer the pub will always beat the person with a more urgent need but more modest means. The essence of my counter-argument to Sir Adrian lies in three points: the concept of fairness, the appropriateness of auction and the waterways culture:

**Fairness:** The idea of fairness relies not only on the law but on traditions, conventions, and cultures that help form our views and expectations. The law is objective (relatively so); fairness is subjective. Sir Adrian's arguments are very legalistic (BW owes nothing to those on the list; joining a list didn't give you special rights). If those who joined the list did so without benefit of a legal agreement, then he is right. This doesn't make BW's action fair. BW's *raison d'être* is to serve the interests of waterway users; if a majority of waterway users see BW's action as unfair then it must be judged unfair. There are many examples of actions by governments and commercial organisations that are legal but seen by a majority of those affected as unfair. The poll tax is a particularly well-known example.

**Auction:** Even in a free market the auction is a particularly brutal (though highly effective) means of managing supply and demand. It is appropriate in many markets but I question whether it is so in this one. Private marina operators with more demand than supply are generally content to quote prices and operate properly regulated waiting lists. Morgan Cars have operated a well-run waiting list for years – those on the list understand that they run the risk of an increase in the published

price but are served in strict order; it is impossible to sell your place on the list, but there's nothing to stop you auctioning the car once you've got it: "fairness" then in both primary and secondary markets for a capital asset. Most marina waiting lists and Morgan's list are well-run with documentation and a legal agreement when you join. BW's lists, evidently, have been an all-too-typically slipshod exercise with no protection for those joining them. Caveat emptor indeed!

**Culture:** Almost all boaters and many other users recognise that a unique "culture" is associated with our waterways. We are not just consumers of related services and users of "heritage" assets – many of us see ourselves as part of a community. The action proposed is of a kind that questions and, if implemented, changes that culture. I think it highly probable that a majority of us will resent that.

This letter is long but I must address Sir Adrian's two remaining arguments. He identifies the issue of the person buying his first boat. The problem is correctly identified but moving to mooring auctions is not the right solution. The EFRA sub-committee on BW (see P.8, August NN) makes clear why this is so; please read the last two summary points: I won't repeat them here. I also struggle a bit with the logic that it's OK for BW to abandon folk on waiting lists and hold their own auctions while they "(rightly) won't let you pass your mooring on to a [boat] buyer".

Sir Adrian believes "*the waiting list approach ... is unfair, because it gives priority to people who have time to wait and thus by definition do not have an urgent need*". This is a classic non sequitur. It is simplistic and disingenuous to say that those on a waiting list "*have time to wait and thus by definition do not have an urgent need*". Those on a waiting list do not control how long they must be on it and

some, perhaps many of them have few other options but to wait. For every person wanting that "spot nearer the pub" there are others whose hopes will have been shattered by BW's action because they set their hearts on a particular mooring place for a variety of good personal reasons. Now they are back at "square one", and if their means are modest, back there with little chance of success in the newly-introduced auction.

Finally, I must include a word of encouragement for NABO. Most of Sir Adrian's letter is at least polite and sticks to his arguments. But you should not take too much regard of the cheap jibe which he included, sadly, in his final paragraph. I haven't seen much evidence of NABO "*insisting on its inappropriate 'council housing' approach to moorings*". And I would suggest that Sir Adrian's phraseology is outdated. The need for affordable housing is a hot topic and, moreover it is a need widely recognised, even by the very wealthy (if only because they need the rest of us to be around!); hence the housing association movement has replaced and improved upon the old "council house" model. Is this relevant to the moorings auction issue? Well, you can be the judge of that.

Roger Brown  
NB "*Don't Panic*", *Crick Marina*

## **Opposed to sealed tenders**

In the August NABO News, the Chairman described me as "a fervent supporter of the tendering process". I am not.

In BW-speak, tendering involves sealed (confidential) bids. I am opposed to this secretive and damaging process. What I support, and believe NABO should too, is open auctions.

The market price for something is defined as the highest price anyone will pay while knowing what everyone else in the market

is willing to pay. An open auction, in which every bid is made public as soon as it is placed, reveals the market price by allowing anyone wanting to win the auction to bid just slightly over the highest bid made so far, until no-one wants to make a higher bid. It cannot result in anyone paying more than the market price, nor can it increase the market price (although it seems some people mistakenly believe it can). The open auction is thus ideal, and the most fair approach, for disposing of moorings. It gives everyone the chance on every mooring, and lets everyone know what is going on at all times.

The sealed bid (tender) approach is very different. Its bids are kept secret, so no-one knows what others are willing to pay. If you want to win the auction, you cannot bid slightly more than the highest bid so far, because you don't know what that bid is. To be sure of winning, you have to bid very high, but even then you won't know how high will be high enough. This unkindly penalises those who really have to get a mooring right away by making them tender, and pay, well over the odds (and above the market price) out of fear of losing the auction.

The sealed bid process is not only unfair, it is also completely at odds with the openness-and-accountability principle BW had adopted and boaters had welcomed.

Sealed tenders will not result in the boater who most needs a mooring getting it (even though he might have been willing to pay more if he had known what the highest competing tender was). It will not produce evidence of what the true market price is (because that requires knowledge of what others would bid in an open competition). However, it will viciously make some desperate boaters pay far too much.

BW's original proposal was to use open auctions. However, IWA bludgeoned it into changing to sealed tenders. I'll leave you

to imagine why IWA would support such a cruel and destructive approach.

I urge NABO to ask BW to change back from tenders to open bidding, or, as second best, to carry out a parallel or subsequent trial using open auctions to dispose of mooring vacancies.

*Adrian Stott*

## Reeds to rule?

Is this a new way for BW to stop us mooring where we want to? Surely there are enough "reed

beds" along the towpath and on the off side already. When they get established, they grow very large and then cast themselves adrift to re root elsewhere, assisted by the bows of passing boats. If BW really want to see masses of reed beds, just look at any disused canal.

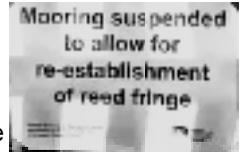
Whilst on the subject of rubbish in the canals, I have just reported a GRP cruiser sunk near Bridge 26 on the Macclesfield Canal. It is shedding oil all over the canal as well as having rubbish from the boat floating in it's vicinity. I have been informed it has been moored there sometime and obviously abandoned. Yobs have broken all the windows and have been busy stripping it of anything that floats and throwing the stuff into the cut. The next thing is they will set fire to it. Presently it is capable of being refloated and towed away, but once fired, no chance! As it sports registration plates, why didn't BW contacted the owner and threatened to take the vessel away?

*Graham Lambden Nb Penny Peace*

[Photo courtesy of Roger Olve and NarrowboatWorld]

## Nikki Trimbell

Sue Burchett asks that NABO pays its respect to Nikki who died two months ago. She was a keen waterways and NABO supporter.



## WHY I'M FED UP TO THE BACK TEETH WITH BW

**Part two of the saga by Jim Hutchinson.  
In the first part we left you with...**

### **The Annual Hassle**

*Each year there has been a hassle when I came to renew the licences and mooring fees for the two boats. There were four lots of correspondence and four separate payments for the two boats. So I thought I would try to simplify matters. I basically wanted to pay for both licences in July and both moorings in August. I had no difficulty in making a similar arrangement with the insurance company. I receive two invoices for the two boats and make a single online payment each August. What could be simpler?*

**...and asked if the answer would be in the next episode? Here it is:-**

*Dealing with BW is a Kafka-esque nightmare. Here's a sample of the conversations I have had over the years:*

---

*Me: Can I pay for both boat licences on one cheque?*

*BW: Each boat has to have a unique customer number. This means we have to send out a different bill for each boat.*

*Me: But don't lots of boaters have more than one boat?*

*BW: Yes, but they all have to have separate bills for each boat. (Think of the expense of this duplication)*

---

*Me: (Every year) You've charged me double for the mooring fee for the butty.*

*BW: Discounts only apply to licences not to moorings.*

*Me: (patiently) Yes I know. But this is a special arrangement for an historic butty. If you look on my file you'll see there's a letter about this from Matthew Routledge.*

*BW: Can we get back to you?*

*Me: I'll send you another copy of the letter. Do you think you could keep it so that I don't have to have this conversation next year?)*

*(sequence repeats – seemingly indefinitely)*

---

*Me: Thankyou for the revised invoices but I notice you've applied the discount to the motor, not the butty. (Thinks: Does she know the difference?)*

*BW: (Some incomprehensible rigmarole about the computer not being able to apply discounts to moorings)*

*Me: Would it be simpler if I transferred the ownership of the butty to my son and you simply charged him half the fee?*

*So I did, but now the confusion is doubled – My son first tries to explain, then I call and have the same conversation. Every year we go through a similar routine!*

---

*Me: Thankyou for your letter explaining that because of a computer failure/new system etc. you will not be issuing licence demands for three months. When I finally do get the invoices for both boats, could you make the start dates the same?*

*BW: Er... (The answer, after much to-ing and fro-ing was no – but I forget the exact reasons given.)*

---

*Me: My son tells me that he's received an invoice for the mooring for a full length boat. If you consult your records, you see that we've a concession etc. etc.*

*BW: Sorry. Just pay the half.*

*Me: But I think I'd better have a new invoice for the correct amount.*

*BW: We'll send it. (more postage and expense)*

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### **The mysterious extra moorings**

*One day I happened to look up the mooring fees for Cowroast on the Waterscape Website. (This was when it was still run under the auspices of BW). I found that to my surprise there were two of moorings at Cowroast – Cowroast Lock and Cowroast A moorings. Furthermore there was a £5 per foot per annum difference between the two rates. Aha! I thought. I'm obviously nearer the lock, so my mooring fee ought to be considerably reduced. I phoned up the local office and said, "What's the official designation of my mooring – Cowroast A or Cowroast Lock?"*

*“Cowroast Lock,” I was told. “In that case, I think I’ve been overcharged.” I was told they’d get back to me. When they did, they said they had the remotest idea where the division had arisen. As far as they were concerned, there was only one rate for Cowroast and that was the higher rate. Whoever compiled the list on Waterscape had made a mistake. I pointed out that if a Tesco’s employee had wrongly labelled a tin of baked beans I would be entitled to buy it at the advertised price. That argument didn’t work!*

### **The double breasted (sic) boats episode**

*Last July, out of the blue, came another letter asking for a 100% mooring charge for the butty. Here we go again, I thought. Someone has forgotten all about my agreement with Matthew Routledge. I expected that several phone calls would sort the matter out as had happened so often in the past. This time it was different. BW was, it seemed, applying a brand new set of rules for “double-breasted” boats and since I didn’t meet the criteria for any exemption, I’d have to pay the full fee. I will say, however, that I was most impressed by the swift and efficient way my complaint was dealt with.*

*At the first level, the local moorings officer had not been properly briefed to explain BW’s new breasted-up boats policy to me and the local manager upheld the decision of the local office.*

*At the second level, my complaint was dealt with by James Froomberg, a director who had no direct responsibility for, or line management of, the local levels. I was further impressed by the fact that he took the trouble to come out to the boats and see for himself the context of my complaint and secondly that he phoned me at home to let me know of his decision. The upshot of a very protracted negotiation was that James Froomberg judged that BW had not followed the correct procedures and that as a consequence I was to retain the 50% discount.*

### **The saga continues**

*On two consecutive days in April 2007, I received two letters from BW. The first one asked me to apply for a mooring for Hampton and asked for the moorings fee calculated at 100%!! In spite of the adjudication, in spite of the fact that BW had instructed the Milton Keynes office to note that Hampton was granted a 50% discount, in spite of the fact that there must, by now, be a fat dossier containing all my grievances, Pauline Ardis had forgotten or ignored all this and gone ahead and charged the full rate.*

### **Electricity shock**

*The following day I received a second letter addressed to the moorers of Berkhamsted Marina(!) That’s a new one on us – there is no such place (unless BW has plans to designate the moorings a marina and demand more cash from us in the process). BW informed us that we had not acted on a safety report on our electricity supply commissioned by BW a full eighteen months earlier. There were faults to the installation which needed to be remedied and might have affected the safety of the boaters, but BW sat on this report for a year and a half before telling us there might be a problem.*

*Again BW barged in at the deep end – threatening instant disconnection of the service and calmly informing us that it would cost £40K to put right.*

*The boaters obviously want to rectify any faults but will not be bullied by BW. BW, for their part, MUST follow the correct procedures when dealing with its customers and MUST inform boaters immediately of any safety issues as soon as they come to light.*

*I was not involved in the discussions with BW over the electricity supply, but I’m pleased to report that a fair and sensible solution to the problems has been resolved. We have rectified some of the faults on our installation, set up a third party insurance scheme and agreed to have an annual inspection report*

commissioned. What disturbs me most about this episode is the effect the letter had on several vulnerable and elderly residential boaters at Cowroast who depend on a secure electricity supply.

### **Back to the moorings once again**

At the beginning of July I received mooring and licence demands for 2007/8. At last, I thought, I could pay a single bill for the two licences and the two moorings, with the 50% discount for the butty as had been agreed. The office at Milton Keynes had obviously no knowledge of the past correspondence. The following mistakes were noted on the application form:

(a) there was no attempt to harmonise the mooring dates for Owl. I should be paying 11/12ths (because Owl's mooring runs from August to August) of the mooring fee so that next July all the dates for moorings and licences run from July to July.

(b) I was being asked for a new insurance certificate for Hampton. This is not necessary, because, if somebody had looked at the file, he or she would have realised that the boat has a perfectly valid certificate.

(c) the butty was described as an "unpowered craft" with a 50% discount

(d) a 50% discount had been applied to the licence fee of Hampton – something I'd never asked for!!

I was about to go on holiday so I sent off a cheque for the amount BW demanded - less the 50% discount for the butty to which I am entitled, crossed out "unpowered", added the insurance policy number to the application form and waited to see what happened next.

Yesterday (24th July) I received a phone call from Janet Ling, the new moorings officer at Milton Keynes, who informed me that there was a mistake on my application and that I owed another thousand odd pounds. She seemed vague when I asked her to give me the details, but it soon became evident that she had absolutely no knowledge of the 50% mooring discount or any of the correspondence relating to my breasted up butty. Aaaaaaagh!!

The inefficiency, waste of time - mine as well as BW's, stress, hassle lack of management and hopeless internal communications makes me wonder if, in the current management speak, British Waterways can be deemed "fit for purpose".

## **DO YOU MOOR YOUR BOAT IN THE PORT OF LONDON?**

### **asks your London Secretary, Simon Robbins**

Boaters in London are attempting to compile a database of charges being made by the Port of London Authority under its River Works Licence scheme under aegis of the Ancient Moorings Organisation (AMO) following a meeting in September. This is the charging regime that affects many moorings on the tideway up to Richmond and is supposed to be a licence charge for creating and administering mooring structures in the tideway, and hence is a significant element of mooring fees. There are continued complaints that charges are far from transparent and that there are major discrepancies in approach. If you want to know more about this or participate in this survey please contact David Beaumont, he also of the Barge Association or myself.

Contact David at david@thistleworth.com, or if you don't have e-mail phone me or send me a note and I will put people in touch with each other

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