

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS

NABO



NEWS

- **Inland Waterway Conservancy explored**
- **Petrol Safety**
- **Last edition by current editor**



Issue 2 – April 2010

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Contributions

I am sure the new editor will welcome articles, letters, cartoons and photos .

Images or photos in JPEG format please.

All to nabonews@nabo.org.uk.

Letters or articles on paper also welcome, typed if possible.

For now please send to General Secretary. See inside back cover for address. Please ensure we can read your name!

2010 CALENDAR

Council meeting*	NN Copy date
17th Apr	26th Apr
5th June	12th June
10th July	17th July
4th Sep	9th Oct
20th Nov AGM	
27th Nov	4th Dec

**Members are entitled to go to these meetings. Please arrange with Chairman or Gen. Sec.*

NABO E-mail Bulletins

NEW SYSTEM - See Page 9!

AN INLAND WATERWAYS CONSERVANCY

Louis Jankel explores the concept

This article is not an opinion, it simply states facts that are available within the public domain. I hope my simplification will help the reader to understand the problems and consequences of any attempt at integrating inland waterways.

The Inland Waterways Association has proposed the setting up of an Inland Waterways Conservancy (IWC) as an all-encompassing grouping of waterways under a single authority. This aspiration is rooted in the IWA founding fathers' hopes and plans (Ackerman and Rolt). The idea has a neatness and sense that should be explored, but to do so, one has to immediately take stock of what you are trying to amalgamate.

The initial IWA plan proposes combining just British Waterways (BW) and the navigation responsibilities of the Environment Agency (EA). For ease of reading the navigation responsibilities of the EA will be referred to as '*EA_n*'.

British Waterways

BW is the last of the original government golden share companies. All the other such companies were sold off to the private sector, the last in 1982, being what is now the Associated British Ports Holdings Limited (APB), which I believe is part of the Singapore Government pension fund.

Currently BW needs some £75m of government grant in aid (GiA) funding to achieve its established operations plan. This comes directly from Defra. Currently spending cuts have reduced BW's GiA to some £50m. BW is also guardian of a property portfolio variously valued at some half billion pounds. BW claims a 6% return on this investment, some extra £30m income per annum. The remaining income is from trading activities and user subscriptions. The overall figures are available from the BW website.

BW has an infrastructure (canals & locks) with a backlog of urgent maintenance work quantified in the region of £200m.

BW has floated an aspiration to move into the "Third Sector". It wishes to emulate the status of the National Trust (NT) and so to acquire the ability to raise funds on the open market – banks. To do so would mean a change in status to remove such activity from the Treasury's nett borrowing, currently denied them.

It is worth just reflecting on APB. When sold it was at the height of the Thatcher disposal of government-owned assets that was expected to generate revenue to the Treasury from privatisation. BW was not included in the great sell off because it was not considered a good investment by the free market; it is still not. BW currently has no commercial value. Even with the property portfolio, the legal requirements of keeping navigations open does not make for an economic business entity without a government annual handout. This was acknowledged by Robin Evans, who stated that the new BW must continue to receive government handouts, for the "foreseeable future".

The National Trust as a role model is unfortunate. The NT has an income that is sufficient to manage their asset maintenance needs. Over the years, it has achieved this by a policy of only taking on new assets that come with income. BW has two problems here. Its infrastructure assets are 200 years old and in a state

that reflects a disastrous government policy of under-investment since privatisation in the 1940s. What the government of the time inherited was prettyropy as the canals then had not turned a profit since the 1830s. The second problem is that the infrastructure assets actually generate almost no income other than allowing navigation to generate boat licensing or mooring fees. The income is a fraction of what is required to maintain the infrastructure and the existing customers do not have the ability to make greater contributions without a serious detrimental impact on overall numbers, resulting in even less income.

The final consideration is what does BW do if the new government takes the property portfolio away from it. It is well known that a number of property developers would pay handsomely for the cherries and a goodly sum for the whole lot. In 2008 there were serious suggestions of an open market value of £1.2bn. These portfolio assets are not to be confused with the infrastructure assets. The property portfolio includes the original wharves and depots used by the commercial canal companies. BW, one way and another, own some freeholds within Canary Wharf including some land awaiting development!

This portfolio is part of government capital and has to make a return for the taxpayers benefit. The BW Third Way proposes that the portfolio will be the golden egg in their proposed new status. This presupposes that Government would make an extraordinary gift of these properties. BW does not own any of their assets. Corporate law, by which BW is required to effectively trade, says that the assets are owned by the shareholders. The single shareholder is the Treasury and they are not known for their generosity. The infrastructure is the other significant group of assets with a book value. These are the problem ones. It warrants repeating; the infrastructure is about 200 years old, very badly maintained, and because no significant plans are even on the drawing board, quite incapable of generating any more income. Our shareholder, the Treasury, however reluctantly, also owns this poisoned chalice.

Whatever the hoped-for Third Way holds, somehow to give it any chance, a renowned and very hard up treasury is to be asked to give away assets for absolutely no fiscal benefit – they don't do things for love!

EA navigation

The EAn rivers carry a heavy burden of heritage. Here I shall concentrate on the River Thames because it supports 30% of all English registered boaters and is by far the largest financial liability within EAn.

The Thames has some clearly defined legal roles. It is a thoroughfare and must be available to anyone who wishes to use a boat upon it at all times. There is a current qualification that the boater must “register” their craft with the current harbourmaster, namely the EAn. Currently the EAn are daily waiting for new powers from a Transport Works Order. The Thames, since having been sold by Richard, the Lion Heart, for £20,000, was administered by various organisations on behalf of the purchasers, the burgers of London. Currently the Crown has deputed the Environment Agency to continue with this role.

Currently the EAn, in total, costs some £22m per annum, of which some £12m is met by a grant from Defra via the Environment Agency.

The EA has absorbed the various responsibilities they inherited from the National Rivers Authority (NRA) and before it The Thames Conservancy. Because the

Environment Agency has wide responsibilities for just that, the environment, other of their operational departments have subsumed some of the original NRA duties. The obvious example is the Flood Defence division, which includes the responsibilities for the river levels management. This has resulted in that division now 'owning' and maintaining all the weirs. The cost of this division and a number of other smaller sectors such as leisure and sports are not included within the £22m. Angling is entirely separate and again not reflected in these figures.

Since the dawn of time, the River Thames as a navigable entity – water-flow, flooding, mills, weirs, fishing and flash locks – has been integral in the managing and delivery of navigation for trade. It is no surprise that Magna Carta had much input into how the river was to be shared. In some regard we continue to respect that inheritance.

Nobody, until now, has ever considered managing the navigation of the Thames without also controlling its weirs, towpaths and all of its infrastructure.

To separate navigation from all other functions needs to be assessed.

The current economics of the EAn does not offer any support for such a plan. Flood Defence, a division of the EA, pays for some 40% of the lock keepers' wages because lock keepers are also weir keepers. To remove one function from the other would have the effect of eliminating resident lock keepers. Flood Defence could not abdicate its responsibility by asking the INC to continue the work currently shared between Flood Control and EAn both now within the body of the EA. If navigation was removed from the EA, Flood Control would expand their (out of hours) workforce to become 24:7 weir keepers and the INW would lose all that compensatory income. INW would need to find the extra money if their intention was to keep the lock staff. Many will recall the public furore caused last year when such a course of action was proposed. This is but one example of the "cost" involved in splitting out navigation duties.

The current management and staff of the EAn have the benefit of the support for the full EA services. This includes, legal advice, enforcement assistance, HR, pensions, maintenance workforce and much more. The senior management that oversees the EAn is currently paid for by the EA and is not directly included within the £22m.

This leads me into the EA tool used for the EA interdepartmental cross funding, which is where the 40% subsidy of lock staff is sourced. It is called the Matrix and has much in common with the concept in the film of the same name. To emphasise the significance of the matrix, out of the £12m total annual expenditure on the River Thames, which includes some £5m in GiA, a further £4m is supplied to the EAn budget from the Matrix. The matrix income must disappear if the EAn is removed from the EA.

The concept of removing the EAn with its local flood control is just not credible. The EA holds a government brief to deliver a national flood policy, which uses some £830m of the EA £1.2bn budget. If the Thames were to flood the damage to the nation could be incalculable. The Thames is an integrated river and administered between the EA and the Port of London Authority (PoLA) as the navigation authority for the tideway section of the river. The barrier is an EA Flood Control asset and part of the entire control of what is a very complex national natural, if heavily modified, waterway.

As you see, the idea of combining EA and BW is not that simple.

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



As we start the season thinking of our plans for cruising and boat preparation, the world of waterway politics is working overtime. This summer could see the management of the canals and rivers enter a new era.

In March BW's Board are considering their position on the proposal to move to the third sector, dubbed 2020. By the time you read this, we might have seen an announcement. Given the time and effort spent on this in the last year, one can safely assume that this will be agreed in principle. There are many details to work out, but NABO and other user groups have given their support in principle. That of course, is not the end of the story. There are others who have to agree to all this. So what is the thinking in Westminster? Well in my view it is unlikely that DEFRA is not supportive, or it would never have let BW get as far as this. The Treasury is a different matter and after two abortive raids on the property portfolio in 2009, and the money that is involved, they must be a factor in any agreement. The politicians are a different matter, and given the spring general elections, nothing will happen until a new government is in place. More of this later.

We would all like to think that this is about the grander scheme of things where we all work together for greater good of the waterways. But in reality, this is all about money and liabilities. The key questions are - should the property portfolio stay with BW?, is the annual grant good value for public money?, how can the funding gap be closed (with new money and efficiency)?, and who is responsible if it all goes wrong?

The thinking is not confined to BW.

Both the current government and the oppositions have to line up their funding cuts for the coming years. The first indication we will see will be in the budget on 24th March. DEFRA is looking for solutions that will save money, and it is not beyond possibility that we will be confronted with yet another structure managing our waters. IWA have recently announced their view on a Conservancy arrangement and there are mixed views as to whether this is a good way forward. Whether this is instead of 2020, or a logical progression is not clear. Some waterways areas have said that they value their autonomy and do not want to be part of a large structure. The debate is healthy. I just hope that we don't end up with a dysfunctional solution, because it is cheap and cheerful. Louis Jankel has been following the debate on this and has written a piece for us elsewhere in this edition. Do let us know what you think.

The funding gap is still the major issue for the waterways. If we go back ten years, a senior politician (John Prescott) saw the benefits, and there was an increasing waterways budget and even promises to eliminate the backlog of work. What went wrong? Why have we lost that willingness? I don't accept that there is no money. The tax revenues generated from the navigation part of "waterways inc" exceed the government grants. If it all stops now, the country will be the poorer financial as well as the other obvious losses. And yet we as a country find money for wars, Olympics, benefits and the NHS, even

new trains announced this week, and figures are always billions. All we need is a deal for a few tens of millions and some property, and a chance to move on. And yet the politicians may not give it. Why? My conclusion is that both centrally and locally, there is not a belief that the issue is a vote winner. We are not exerting enough pressure to force our issues up the agenda.

So returning to the politics, we have a chance to vote on 6th May or thereabouts, for MPs and Councillors. What do we want from them? What should we say to them when they knock at the door? We have put together a few suggested questions. We have to make a voice for the waterways and get others, as well as boaters, prepared to pay for it.

One of the parts of 2020 is the users input to the management and the operation of BW system. BW are considering local Waterways Committees and I think this is a very good idea to get users directly involved with how maintenance budgets are spent and how to organise volunteer efforts. There is an early start on this and you will see an article elsewhere from Richard Carpenter on what is happening in the Northwest. I would like to see this replicated all over the system.

EA have been doing this kind of thing for years on the Thames, and there is an immediate benefit of good will and common purpose. I attended a River Thames Alliance (RTA) meeting recently on moorings, and there was a very refreshing atmosphere, with a high level of debate on the issues, and a lot of agreement around the table. Interestingly for me, local authorities were present too, and with a mix of views. The star in the show is

Abingdon, who are spending money to provide visitor moorings and take the view that boaters are to be encouraged for the business good of the town, and the amenity value of the river. This is in marked contrast to Reading and Kingston who want to do the absolute minimum, better still nothing, and charge for moorings too. Why such a disparity? It has to be the politics and it needs leadership from the top to influence it.

It is no different on the canals of course. We have the good ones, like Milton Keynes and the Lincolnshire partnership to my knowledge. What is yours like? I would like to see all local authorities taking responsibility for additional visitor and residential moorings, security of the towpath, dumped rubbish, bridge strikes and foot access to the towpath. It would cost them very little and would quickly provide a business payback, and a very important sense of ownership. When iced in near a village on the Coventry, I was appalled by the amount of rubbish sitting on the ice after three weeks, If this is the way the community treats the canal, they should pay up.

Our legal discussions with BW have not moved on this month. The Legal Director had undertaken to provide more details on several issues to us by the end of February, a date set by BW. But the date has been missed and we have been promised something very soon. We thought it a poor effort in December that Sally Ash was so quick to go to the press and misquote NABO over correspondence. Funny how things come round if you wait.

I hope you had had a chance to look at the new web site. John Slee has put many hours into reworking this for us and it is very impressive. We are

working hard to keep this up to date and relevant to the current issues.

Thank you John.

This will be the last edition of NABO News edited by Stuart Sampson. Stuart has edited this since 2003, and we all owe him a great deal for spending the time, making the commitment and sharing his thoughts with us. We all wish Stuart and Carole well on their expedition to the European Canals. Council are working on the plans for editorial arrangements for April and beyond..... We take

the view at the moment that we need to publish the magazine as well as operating the web pages even though the content may overlap from time to time.

This year we have decided to take a stand at the Crick Boat Show. I will be around as will a number of Council members and wives. Do come and see us for a chat, and bring a friend that we can sign up too!

David

WORCESTERSHIRE WATERWAYS USERS' FORUM

Stephen Peters reports

The annual general meeting of the WWUF took place in Worcester in March. NABO was represented by our Rivers Secretary and Treasurer on this occasion. A low attendance meant that normal AGM business could not be transacted, so brief reports were tendered by those present, aided by a cup of tea.

The volunteer rescue organisation, Mercia Inland Rescue Association, gave an in-depth summary of recent drowning incidents in the county where trained rescue divers may have been able to prevent loss of life. It appears that the police service do not have personnel or the duty to rescue anyone who becomes submerged in a waterway; and the fire and rescue authority similarly have no expertise at their disposal. Volunteers could deploy when required but the present law forbids their intervention. Health and Safety requirements, insurance liability and a lack of will by the various agencies to change the current situation appear to be the main obstacles and MIRA is lobbying with others for the introduction of a recognised public safety diving qualification, similar to those which exist in many European countries.

Until the emergency services and rescue organisations sort out this bureaucratic mess, it seems that more lives could be lost which could have been prevented by the intervention of trained underwater divers. A sobering thought as we cruise around the inland waterways – if you have the misfortune to become submerged there is no certainty that you will be rescued.

The forum will continue to meet quarterly in 2010 and in the meantime British Waterways has arranged its own User Forum to be held on 29 April at Worcester Guildhall commencing at 7.00pm.

IMPORTANT NABO WEBSITE CHANGES FOR MEMBERS

John Slee explains the new bulletin system

Instead of all members using a login of 'member', NABO members can now register on the new website in order to choose which bulletins you wish to receive and access certain Members-only pages.

In order to register you need to already be a NABO member. The site will need your:-

First Name
Last Name
eMail address
NABO Membership Number
a choice of Username
a Password that you can remember

- First, bring up the NABO website <nabo.org.uk> and click on any of the **Members** menu choices, on the top or left hand side of the page:
- On the right hand side you will then find a **Login** menu, at the bottom of which is a **Register** link. Click on it.
- You will need to enter your First Name, Last Name and email address.
- You should choose a Username and Password that you can remember. Note that these are CaSe SenSiTiVe.
- You will also need your NABO membership number, which you can find on the envelope of your NABO News. (If you have thrown it away, don't wait for the next one, use the **Contact NABO** email form to ask the General Secretary for it. <<http://nabo.org.uk/index.php/contact-us/contact-nabo.html>>)
- Subscribe to the relevant Members Bulletins and complete the registration form as instructed.
- **You cannot yet login**, but you will receive an email to confirm that we have received your application. The email will contain a link which you should click on (or paste into your Browser) to confirm that it really was you that registered.
- One of our registration team moderators will check the details you have submitted, and then you should receive a second welcome email confirming your email address and Username. It does **not** include your password for reasons of security.
- **You can now login** and access the **Members Only** part of the website.

from David Fletcher

There are always issues cropping up from Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) and this month is no exception.

Code of Practice for Solid Fuel Stoves

About a year ago you may remember an article where we were concerned about a proposed Code of Practice (CoP) for solid fuel stoves. I won't go through the list of concerns again, other than to say it would have practically meant the end of solid fuel stoves in many boats, especially narrowboats.

NABO was instrumental in raising the alarm over this CoP. Through our representation on British Standards Institute and Boat Safety Scheme technical committees, and along with a number of other User Groups, we campaigned for significant changes.

We did not win every contentious point, but overall we can report that the CoP has changed significantly and is now broadly acceptable.

Some of these changes include:-

- The proposal on 'boatman' or traditional back-cabin installation has been accepted as impractical. The strength of feeling on this was very strong as it would have effectively resulted in the end of those stoves. They are now excluded from the CoP but it does recommend that they should comply as far as practicable.
- The stove siting and positioning of hearths is now much more acceptable. The original proposal would have been almost impossible to install any stove in a narrowboat. Some "should's" have been moved to advisory notes, such as "advisable to avoid a location near a stepped entrance" or "a central location may be preferable".
- The requirement for an internal twin walled flue pipe is now a recommendation. Single wall is acceptable.
- The requirement for twin wall insulated external chimneys and chimney adaptor collars are still included. This was one we did not win.
- A most significant change has been the operating instructions which have moved to a fairly sensible list of warnings and advisories. You will no longer be required to put out your fire overnight or whilst the boat is underway, etc.

This CoP has now been published as BS8511: Code of practice for the installation of solid fuel heating and cooking appliances in small craft.

So what does this mean for us? The new CoP is a guide for new builds, and installation of new stoves. It is not part of the BSS requirements at this time, and neither does it apply retrospectively. But that does not mean that there are no problems with stoves. Which takes us nicely to the next issue.

BSS annual report of incidents and accidents.

BSS have just issued their annual report, ten pages of facts and plans to address the issues that have been seen. The full report is on the web site if you would like to read it.

The report is based on 122 incidents in the year, but the most detail is available for the 89 on inland waterways. Of these 65 relate to fire and explosion.

The good news

CO poisoning is down.

There was a relatively moderate number of solid fuel stove related incidents,

BSS Examiners reported (only) 98 immediately 'dangerous boats' out of approximately 16400 certificates issued (0.6%). These were dangerous mainly due to gas leaks. By way of comparison, in 2008 BSS Examiners reported 107.

The bad news

Fire and explosion make up the majority of incidents and is always a significant risk on boats.

Arson continues to be the single largest cause of fire on inland boats. Although it fell in the year to 17, that figure still represents an above average level. Electrical and petrol fires are identified as the next most significant.

There is a rise in figures for sinkings, collisions and man-over-board (MOB) incidents. This is probably due to more information coming forward from new access to BW emergency call logs and reports from some insurance sources.

Of the 6 fatalities, 5 were MOB

A 2008 survey found that only 27% of boats had smoke alarms. The outcome for the seventh fatality in 2009 could have been changed by having an effective alarm.

So a few simple things here for the new season:

Check your solid fuel stove, gas system and electrical maintenance

Buy and install a fire alarm (and a CO alarm)

Don't fall in.

Have a safe year!

DON'T GET HUNG UP

and other updates on Customer Service Standards

I am quite flattered if there is a genuine desire to keep me on the BW CSS Advisory Panel even though I will be transferring all my boating interests to the other side of La Manche. I suppose there is always benefit from knowing how other navigation authorities cope with customer services and safety but I don't intend to get anything like as involved with La Voie Navigables de France (VNF) as I have been with BW. That aside, I have a few items for you.

Cill marking

There has been discussion about what to do with curved cills and the latest proposal is to put two marks on locks where a full length boat could not fit a lock if it obeyed the marking showing the downstream extent of the cill. The additional mark would show the upstream extent of the curve and would be stencilled with 'MAX' in red letters on white.

The standard still includes additional notices saying 'Keep boat forward of cill marker', which is still nonsense for boats ascending the lock, but one can assume they won't be seen by skippers steering from the stern. Needless to say those who don't understand 'Cadwch y cwch o flaen marciwr y rhiniog' will be catered for!

Lock Risk assessment

I have been sent another copy of the risk assessment for lock operation that is up to date but still unashamedly recommends '*Install appropriately located bollards where not already provided. Correct use dependent on operator competence*' as the cure for most evils. From your feedback it would seem the words '*appropriately located*' have somehow been lost in translation from the standard to the actual installation in many cases, and one still wonders if there was any user consultation as to where the bollards would be of most use.

One of the risks to BW mentioned as to be solved by the above was '*Mooring to ladder resulting in structural damage* – but did anyone consider the fact that a rope to the ladder hoop might have the most effective alignment to stop fore and aft surging and take that into account when deciding on appropriate bollard location? It appears not. There is a line in the assessment that goes: '*Operating lock - powered and unpowered vessels – Incorrect use of ropes*' and recommends: '*Advise safe use of bollards requires knowledge of hazards. Advise via handovers and boater guides*', so there is a heavy reliance on education.

Also of note is "*Operating lock - powered and unpowered vessels – Trip hazard, bollards, uneven surfaces – at risk: Customer*" which recommends: "*Length inspections identify deterioration. Visitor RA (?) . Bollard positioning - good practice guidance*" and '*Highlight position of bollards by painting to BW stds to reduce trip risk*'

Plus "*Operating lock - powered and unpowered vessels – Fall into water from boat or lockside and gate walkway – at risk: Customer*" which recommends '*Lock ladders, antislip and handrail on walkway, lifesaving equipment as appropriate (waterside risk control)*' and '*Promote wearing of buoyancy aids*'.

Anyway, BW's attitude is 'What is done is done, Use bollards if they can help'.

Education

As I think I mentioned in my last report, Sally Ash is charged with rewriting the Boaters Handbook. I feel NABO should be across this and it is one thing I would have volunteered for if I was around. It occurred to me, if Sally is listening, that it should recommend that families should not assume their chief car driver is best qualified to steer a boat, as a boat behaves more like a supermarket trolley than a car: it has no brakes; it doesn't hesitate to move sideways; and is 'controlled' (for want of a better word) from the back!

Location Identification

The meeting notes say that help in giving your location to the emergency services is still under consideration. This is also being followed up through WUSIG and Howard, NABO's representative at those meetings, covers it elsewhere.

Expenditure Priority

BW is showing quite some enthusiasm for using voluntary groups to help set priorities, and the CSS panel is no exception. Good news.

Next!

I won't be around to comment on the summer meeting but might be back next winter. In the meantime feedback is essential and comments should be addressed to Caroline Killeavy or use the comment cards. The customer service standards are on the BW website and now that the CSS panel has more or less dealt with the minimum safety items, the emphasis will be shifting to 'performance' standards.

However **please still report accidents** – and '*could have happened*' cases.

BW measures staff performance by 'mystery shopper' techniques – shades of Michelin Stars! However customer comments are important too and if you ring up a waterway office and don't get the service you should expect, don't keep it to yourself.

We recently rang the Northwest office, albeit in error, to find out about Standedge Tunnel booking procedures but the person answering didn't know where Standedge Tunnel was! Okay, it is now officially under Manchester and Pennines but the west portal was the boundary of the Northwest unit before the latest re-organisation and they should have known. This is the sort of thing BW needs help to sort out.

BW may say it is strapped for cash, but that makes it all the more important that what there is, is spent wisely and BW is now prepared to accept your wisdom. Please give it.

Stuart Sampson

That's it - I'm done

It seems I have been doing this magazine all my life, but there was a period of paid work before NABO News which also involved words, albeit the raw material of that trade being magnetic images of spoken words. It was good training as there was only one chance to get the message across – few viewers can go back for a second 'read' in a regional TV news magazine as readers can with a printed one. But even in print it has been a stimulating challenge to make the concepts of waterway politics understandable for the 'boater on the cut' and even more of a challenge to make them interesting. I can't say I succeeded on all counts and it probably got worse as I got over-familiar with the subject matter and started assuming folks knew what I was talking about!

Luckily I had the good services of Carole, not only to ensure the commas were in the right place, but also to check that it all made sense, and find all those places I had missed where organisations were referred to in the plural. 'NABO is an it' rather than 'Nabo are they' We owe a lot to her hard work with the red pen. NABO News is losing more than me.

With all due respects to the exciting developments on the website, I am sure this magazine will still be an essential part of NABO for many years to come. Even if you have web access you still have to make a conscious effort to visit the site, but when the magazine comes out of its envelope, it is there inviting you to read it.

NABO's lifeblood is making the right people understand the right things at the right time, and that includes you,

the members. This publication is the main thing you get for your subscriptions and, despite keeping production costs to a minimum, it takes about a third of NABO's turnover getting it to your door. I trust a new and caring custodian will be found for it, but I'm afraid time is running out regarding any overlapping handover.

My main interest is now getting our vessel ready for the Continent and this has meant taking more interest in the (Dutch) Barge Association. On the 20th of February I attended one of their 'Barge Buying Seminars'. When I booked it, we were still possibly going to 'go large', but I decided to retain the booking as I hoped to gain some info about Continental cruising, and if nothing else, put some faces to names in the association. The event was chaired by the DBA chairman Andy Soper who many of you will see at our AGMs as he is also a member of NABO.

The seminar was held at the Black County Museum - in the heart of narrowboat territory and where NABO celebrated its 10th birthday. Needless to say the room was still just as expensive and each of the fifty or so 'delegates' had to fork out £20 to attend. Added to travel, and an overnight, I am not sure I, personally, got value for money, but the target audience, who may have been about to commit over £100 grand each for a barge, would have found it well worth the outlay. There were items on 'How to Find an Existing barge', 'The Survey', 'The Purchase', 'Insurance', 'Getting it Home', 'Having One Built', 'Fitting out' and 'Legislation and VAT', each delivered by one or even two experts, along with discussion and

questions. Should NABO be holding events like this?

Two other activities that the DBA succeeds at, that NABO might reconsider, are an internet forum and an online moorings guide. My 'Notification emails' for the DBA forums total 1739 entries at time of writing, making a huge 'knowledge base'. Yes there is a lot of repetition and irrelevance but nothing that a good search engine can't sort out.

The online 'Moorings Guide' is impressive and shows what can be done with voluntary effort, proving what Richard Fairhurst was saying at the AGM. I have downloaded sections for the French canals and have printed them out, in case I couldn't get internet access abroad. I thought we could comb bind them in the same sort of format as a First Mate Guide. However I find that the information, just for those French canals that we hope to reach before our paper version gets too out of date, runs to 325 A5 sides and has had to be split into three books! And then there is Belgium, Holland, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria . . .

The section for the UK is, however very limited. Just a few moorings on the Thames. Obviously, being the DBA, one can forgive the lack of narrow waterways, but would there be any scope for a joint venture?

On the political side, and again some joined up thinking might be worthwhile, is the dreaded European regulations on safety.

It seems the European Commission is losing patience with the UK regarding the new regulations (TRI WV). You may remember the scare that vessels over 20 metres had to have such things

as collision bulkheads, which would effect full length canal boats if it weren't for a derogation that exempts craft that stay in UK Waters. The Marine and Coastguard Agency (MCA) oversees such matters in the UK and assures us there is nothing to worry about, provided if you don't plan to take such a boat abroad, but my faith in derogations took quite a knock with the red diesel business!

Even though TRI WV is onerous in some respects, a vessel complying with them still wouldn't pass muster in the UK even though it would be allowed on the Rhine, because of regulations in force in the UK following the Marchioness report. Yes, the English Channel is a bureaucratic barrier but for how long?

Of course the DBA has to be across all this and is fighting the application of excessive bureaucracy on pleasure vessels both abroad and in the UK. Some of its members do sail their little ships across the Channel and have to comply with regulations for both UK and European inland waters as well as for sea going.

So it is no surprise that the DBA subscription is expensive, but, as well as money, an active organisation needs enthusiasm and bargaining seems to generate it, or is it bargaining abroad that does it?

Let's hope so - maybe I'll let you know, but now back to sea toilets, training for the ICC/CEVNI tests and getting our little ship (under 20 metres thank goodness!) wearing the red duster in Bonaparte's homeland.

Adieu (till page 25!)

Stuart Sampson

RCR Advertisement

PSEUDONYM

March's Council Meeting

Almost a full Council sat down at the Waggon & Horses with a short agenda. An early finish was looked for but not achieved as the maxim 'less-to-discuss-more-time-to-discuss-it' kicked in.

There was a bit of navel gazing to make sure we know where we are going. As this hadn't been done for two years it proved worthwhile although keeping on topic seemed problematical.

It was decided that meeting our members is most important and various strategies were discussed. Richard has obtained a lightweight display stand so it is easier for us to turn up at events. We will be at Crick so please look for Council members there. Council debated how many members know that they can come to council meetings? A few turn up on occasion but more would be welcome and a lunch is provided. Just let a member of council know beforehand and you will be made welcome.

The 'Legal challenge' regarding BW's interpretation of the law is ongoing with Nabo awaiting a promised response from BW. Maybe they aren't in a hurry to sort this.

The web site is going from strength to strength and we have had a new member use it to join NABO. PayPal has to wait, probably till next winter, when John has time to sort it, but it is on his to-do list. Bulletins can now be sent out to members so a note is being sent with the next Nabo News asking for updated details.

Council were most interested in the www.whatdotheyknow.com web site. Type in British Waterways and you can see the 'Freedom of Information' requests with the replies. A very useful resource as you can see if your question has already been asked before putting in yet another request. As it is our licence money that pays for the replies it may pay to look to see if the information is available elsewhere. British Waterways website and waterscape.com are a start.

Howard is still trying to find out why Manchester Ship Canal Co. won't allow shared boats. The last reply stating that the canal is run by a private company and so not only doesn't it allow shared boats but it doesn't have to give a reason.

NABO has to give its view on the Waterways for Everyone consultation, so views were expressed and duly noted. More of this on the Nabo web site but don't despair if you haven't got internet access there should be information in NABO News.

The hunt for a new editor has produced a short list. As neither are yet NABO members the successful candidate will be monitored, so Council formed an editorial sub committee to undertake this. This NABO News is Stuart's last and the next one will be under new management. Council is forever grateful for the work Stuart has put in over many years and he is going to be a hard act to follow. I am now on my way to Madeira on mud.

Happy boating



TAKE CARE WITH PORTABLE PETROL ENGINES

says BSS

Boaters who use petrol generators and other petrol-engined power tools may need to raise their game to avoid the dangers of petrol vapour and exhaust fumes says the Boat Safety Scheme, as the numbers of incidents on inland waters linked to petrol and petrol engines rose for the second year running from one in 2007 to nine in 2009.

'We implore boaters to be extremely careful with any petrol powered equipment.' said Graham Watts, the Boat Safety Scheme Manager.

He added: *'Petrol safety has to be considered at every stage from maintenance, refueling, stowage and when in use - especially with the added danger of the poisonous exhaust gases. Boaters cannot afford to drop their guard when dealing with highly flammable fuels and toxic fumes.'*

The Scheme is worried that some boaters, and especially new entrants, may not appreciate the nature of petrol vapour and the bucket-like quality of a boat hull. It is keen for boaters to understand that if petrol spills, drips or leaks, it will vaporise and, like liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), the vapour will sink in still air and gather in the lower parts of the boat.

If petrol leaks and the resulting vapour and air mix comes into contact with a naked flame or a spark, a rapid and powerful ignition can take place that will likely endanger the person handling the equipment or anyone nearby. More people are injured in petrol vapour ignitions than any other cause of fire on boats.

- Stow any item containing petrol on open decks or in fire-resistant lockers with freely draining outlets at the bottom where any escaped vapour of petrol will drain to outside the boat. This includes equipment with integral fuel tanks or spare fuel containers.
- If you really need to carry spare petrol, only store it in containers specifically designed by the manufacturer for use with petrol.
- Don't use any bowl, bucket or other open container to carry or transfer petrol or mix in 2-stroke oil.
- Invest in anti-spill containers or spouts to allow, clean and easy, no-spill refueling – and don't forget to use them.
- Before fuelling up, and before use, check the equipment for signs of any damage or problems that could lead to petrol leaks and when fuelled, continue to check for leaks.
- Avoid refueling any item aboard the boat; take it to the bank and safe distance from any boats or other sources of ignition.
- If there is any chance that petrol vapour may be blown back into the boat, close all windows, hatches and doors before removing any tank or container caps. Also turn off all cooking and heating appliances. Avoiding sparks and do not switch on any electrical items or circuits.

- Do not refuel while the engine and exhaust is still hot, let it cool awhile.
- Before starting the boats engine, turning any switch or lighting any flame, check that no petrol vapours have entered the boat. If there's a strong smell of petrol do not assume it is OK to carry on. Open all windows, hatches, doors and covers to ventilate the boat until the smell has gone.
- Don't use petrol-powered equipment within the boat, most equipment engines produce high volumes of carbon monoxide in the exhaust.
- For the same reasons, avoid running petrol powered tools for long periods near doors, vents, windows and hatches. Never run generators close to such openings.
- After use, let the equipment cool and then check for any new signs of damage or newly developed leaks. Stow in the locker or on open deck.

The BSS has petrol safety information at

www.boatsafetyscheme.com/downloads/avoidingPETROL.pdf

In the past six years the BSS has recorded 34 incidents of fire or explosion linked to petrol engines on inland waterways and coastal boats. 31 people needed hospital treatment, including some in intensive care. In the same period, seven incidents of accidental carbon monoxide poisoning have been linked to generators and outboard motor exhaust fumes.

BACK AT CRICK

NABO returns to Crick after an absence of three years!

NABO has taken a stand at Crick Show from 29th to 31st May this year and will be represented by Chairman David Fletcher and other leading Council Members, including our Continuous Cruising representative John Slee.

David said *“We feel it's important that with all the issues facing the Waterways that we meet as many of our members and boaters we can. We have been reviewing everything NABO does in the recent months and actually talking face-to-face will, we hope, ensure we will be clear about not just current members' but all boat owner's viewpoints.”*

New display materials have been developed for the show and will be used at a series of planned events across the boating season this year. We hope to get to several boat gatherings during the year – let Richard Carpenter know of any you might be attending.

We will be showing members (and hopefully new ones) our new website and seeking comments on how we can improve it and for the less computer literate. If you are going to the show please come and say hello, if nothing else to collect some new boat stickers! We will be in the Kingfisher Marquee Stand 34.



MANCHESTER SHIP CANAL

An update from Howard Anguish

As mentioned in the last issue I have taken up the issue of the refusal of Peel Holdings to allow shared ownership boats to navigate on the Manchester Ship Canal under their Pleasure Craft Transit Rules. As you may expect with the intransigent reputation that the Management of the Canal has earned over the years, I was not expecting them to give in easily and I have to say that they haven't disappointed!

This is the exchange of e-mails I have had with them recently:

Dear Captain Gallimore

I write as the Vice Chairman of NABO – the National Association of Boat Owners - and in particular on behalf of members who share boats. It may be worth mentioning that I am also an ex ship master and dockmaster so I am aware of the problems inherent in transiting such a busy commercial waterway.

In your rules it is stated that hire boats and shared ownership boats are not permitted to transit the Manchester Ship Canal. I can understand the logic behind the banning of hire boats but I am at a loss to understand why shared ownership boats are similarly banned. I have to declare an interest as I am a shared boat owner myself in the Ownerships scheme. Each boat is totally owned by its group of owners – there is no commercial interest in their ownership and therefore they are no different to any other private boat. This fact has been recognised in recent years by British Waterways who licence them as private boats, and like any other group of pleasure boats which you may come across the background and experience of their owners can vary enormously. If it is possible for a private owner to comply with your 4 conditions as set out in the rules for transit then permission is given. I would be extremely grateful if you could explain why it is not possible to give similar consideration to shared ownership boats as described above.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Howard Anguish

After a couple of reminders here is their response:-

Good Afternoon Mr Anguish,

Your E. Mail that was sent to our Office at Runcorn this week has been forwarded to me at the Harbour Masters Office here at Eastham. I myself have not seen the other E. Mail's that you sent earlier this year, but I believe that your Enquiry is regarding the Ban on Shared Ownership Pleasure Craft on the Ship Canal.

It is the Company's Rule that these craft are not allowed on the Canal and as such, we are not obliged to justify our reasons for doing so, nor do we intend to change this rule in the foreseeable future.

Regards

Colin Chambers

Admin Assistant to the Deputy Harbour Master

As you can see it is good to receive a reasoned and helpful explanation – (not!) I will pursue this matter and report back if I get any more but for those shared owners out there who want to use the Ship Canal in the near future, don't hold your breath and think about alternative arrangements.

A POINT TO PONDER

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

A narrow point of view.

Should NABO reconsider its policy of trying to be the organisation that represents all inland boat owners? Is it like a square peg trying to fit a round hole? The shape of the gap in boater representation that needs to be filled has to be Narrowboat Owners. After all there is an organisation for wider boats and most cruisers users have representation and benefits from the Seamaster Club and river boating organisations like TBA and GOBA, which leaves the majority of canal boaters without a specific voice.

If you are a visitor on a river you can't miss how being a member of the local river association gives you benefits such as dedicated moorings and events. Nor

do you miss their partisan approach when sharing the floor with their representatives at user meetings.

It is just assumed NABO will speak up for narrowboat owners as there is nobody else, but if there is a conflict of interest or a compromise has to be negotiated, the other organisations won't hesitate to support the specific interests of their members. Should NABO swallow its pride, go with the flow, stop fighting people's misconceptions and concentrate on narrowboats?

Would this put existing members off or attract new ones? Would the constitutional change be worth it?

NORTHWEST NEWS

From Richard Carpenter

BW North West User Group.

Debbie Lumb (NW Waterways Manager) and her team held two steering meetings aimed to create a small network of boaters along the Leeds and Liverpool and Lancaster Canals.

The objective was to understand the level of funding Debbie has at her disposal for essential repairs and boating facilities and to try and help her prioritise. The next stage will be to recruit volunteers on both canals who would help with this advice and hopefully be able to communicate better with the boating community.

Richard reported that he, and his other steering group members who were made up of representatives from a Cruising Club (Lancs CC), a Hire Boat company (Shire Cruisers) and the boating Chairman of the Manchester IWA Branch, *“had our eyes opened by the level of problems Debbie faced when working out priorities”!*

If nothing else this new informal working approach, welcomed by BW, will help better communicate how things are done, and why. Debbie Lumb stated *“I sincerely hope that the information we can provide, whilst sometimes depressing due to funding, will help us all keep our focus on making our region function well for our customers.”*

With the Ribble Link over to the Lancaster Canal, and the new cut down into Liverpool itself, now fully functional, NABO want to encourage all its members to target visits to the North West to enjoy them. BW needs the visitors to justify the high costs of keeping them open so all these new closer relationships are important.

Leeds and Liverpool Short Boat ‘Kennet’

Short Boat Kennet is one of the last unconverted boats which worked on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal and is on the National Register of Historic Vessels. It has displays about the Leeds & Liverpool Canal and its heritage in its hold. The Leeds and Liverpool Canal Society which has a good number of NABO Members amongst its enthusiastic followers, has taken responsibility for the full restoration of this BW owned vessel.

She will become much busier with full interactive canal related displays and working the whole canal during the coming years. Initially though the Society is going through the process of gaining Lottery funding and urgently need letters of support for the project and its aims. Anyone interested can look on their web site www.ilcs.ork.uk and then the link to Friends of Kennet. She will be at the Skipton Waterways Festival on 1-3rd May if you get a chance to get there.

DOES ANYBODY KNOW WHERE WE ARE?

A recurring question is asked in waterway circles about how to identify a location so that any of the emergency services can find us easily when out and about on the system. As boaters we are used to being able to tell where we are by bridge numbers or names and occasionally by the names of local pubs near to where we moor, but the emergency services are not used to using such references and confusion and delay can often occur when seconds are vital. Fires and medical emergencies call for swift responses and valuable time can be lost when trying to explain your location to an emergency control centre which may be many miles away and the operator has no knowledge of the canals.

It is thought important, therefore, that standardisation of the method used should be brought in as soon as possible and to that end a number of boating organisations such as NABO, IWA and RBOA have discussed some alternatives but to ensure that a totally nationwide scheme can be formulated it is thought that this should be led by British Waterways in conjunction with the Environment Agency.

In April we have the next meeting of WUSIG which brings together many of the waterways representative organisations and I have asked BW to include this important topic on the meeting agenda so that BW can give us their thoughts on how the problem is tackled at the moment but more importantly it will start a debate on the way forward.

I invite anyone who has an opinion on this subject to let me know their thoughts (my contact details can be found towards the back of the magazine) so that I can raise them at the meeting on your behalf. The meeting is on April 21st so please let me have any suggestions before then.

I look forward to hearing your suggestions and will report back after the meeting.

Howard Anguish

PLUG SAFETY TIP

From the tender age when I first set up a train set transformer, I thought I knew how to wire a plug - until I got my technical induction at the BBC.

The instructor pointed out that, even if the cable comes all neatly cut and bared for you, you should shorten everything again except the earth wire, so it is a centimetre or so longer than the rest. This means that if you should walk off with the appliance having forgotten to unplug it and the cable is wrenched out of the plug, the live and neutral pull out first leaving the appliance earthed until the last moment.

With more and more 240V gear on boats these days that is worth knowing.



Stuart Sampson

Manchester Ship Canal

RE : Manchester Ship Canal Ban
Shared Ownership Boats

Now not being a Marine lawyer I am happy to stand corrected, Under the Act of Parliament that was passed on 6th August 1885 which was enacted to allow the building of the Ship Canal it says basically the following.....

Under such Act of Parliament the Manchester Ship Canal has a duty " *so long as a vessel is sea worthy and has all the right equipment on board and the vessel is commanded by an experienced master and crew*" to provide navigation along its canal in return for the price of the toll!

Alan Holden

n.b. Anna

L&L

Thames Troubles

As residential barge owner. I have been living on the river Thames for thirteen happy years; watching the sky change, feeding the swans, marvelling at the fish jumping, shunting back and forth in a high wind and staggering back over the gangway after a few too many in the pub. To read this any landlubber would think my life idyllic.

And so it was until recently, when the PLA decided to pursue licence fee increases up and down the river. Their bully boy tactics have so incensed me that for the first time in my life I have joined a campaign - OPLAC, (organization of PLA customers) who are challenging the new increases. There are approximately 500 residential boat owners on The Thames, (some are legal others are not!) forming a permanent community.

The type and value of the boats vary, some are for the very rich – a recent example of a £1 million boat changing hands, others provide a low cost housing option - for students, nurses, teachers, pensioners and divorcees! The Thames 'Live afloat' community is a microcosm of any London Borough where high cost homes exist alongside council flats and middle bracket homes. It is part of the fabric of London life. I, for one, do not want only the wealthy living on the river. It seems the PLA does, although personally I cannot imagine how informed buyers would not demand more security of tenure than is often on offer. And why would they be buying into a system whereby a license fee can be hiked up every five years arbitrarily and not in line with the RPI.

The PLA are assuming a lot of people want to live afloat and in the future will rush to the river like lemmings to buy houseboats. But I do not believe this is the case. When I first bought my boat, I had a friend who thought I had lost the plot and said he did not like the idea of me living on an old tin boat under a bridge and would organize food parcels! Living aboard is not for everybody.

The PLA 'modus operandi' is cute. It seems they are cherry picking certain licence holders, getting them to accept an increase, in some cases up to 300%, by threatening arbitration, (which many boat owners cannot afford) and then using it as a comparable against other residential boat owners. This behaviour is contrary to the Port of London Act section 67 (2) which states - *The consideration [for a works licence] shall be the best consideration, 'which, can*

reasonably be obtained, having regard to all the circumstances of the case,' The word *reasonably* is a central part of the remit. Also, *'having regard to all the circumstances of the case'*. There is an elderly lady near me who has been living afloat for 30 years, who cannot possibly afford the 273% increase in her fee and has told me she will have to leave her home. Where is the regard to all the circumstances of the case in her situation? It is for her that I am writing this. And for her I have contacted Vince Cable, MP for the Liberal Democrats who has said he will arrange a meeting with the PLA to discuss license fee issues and table an Early Day Motion. Vince has been

involved with residential boat owner issues since 1997 but the government has done nothing to clarify the shambolic, unfair charging system of the PLA - a monopoly organization with minimal transparency. How can a government organization justify such increases whilst trying to keep down inflation! Maybe now is the time when boat dwellers will get what they have been asking for – security of tenure and a fair deal from the PLA. I urge anyone who is interested to join the OPLAC campaign and sign - petitions.number10.gov.uk/houseboats/ and also ask your local MP to sign the EDM for OPLAC. This is a cross party issue.

Susan Penhaligon

EDITORIAL

Just a final word of farewell. I am not saying you won't hear from me again but in case you don't, I wish everybody all the best in their boating lives and that all the waterways remain open for navigation in spite of the financial worries. All power to NABO

Carole and I are off to pastures new: afloat, having just 'ticked the last box' on the connected UK system, the western Rochdale, last year; and ashore, we are moving house to an apartment we can leave in the summer. We have tried very hard to keep our volunteer activities, with NABO, and our cottage industry, First Mate Guides, separate. However I hope you don't mind me using this little space to say that we are not abandoning our loyal customers and have been working our socks off stocking up the retail outlets and the IWA bookshop so we can go abroad without guilt. Future revisions will not be by boat and how we get future editions made in down-sized accommodation* is a bridge yet to cross – They were all hand assembled in house in case you didn't know.

Just a last word of thanks to everybody who has contributed to this magazine and somehow come up with the goods by the copy date so I haven't been tearing my hair out trying to fill. Please treat the new editor with the same generosity.

May the locks be with you.

Stuart

** The downsized accommodation we have in mind is next the Lichfield & Hatherton, so we might become winter canal 'walkers' or even 'diggers' if we get it!*

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