

THE BOATER
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
of
BOAT OWNERS

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Whilst every care is taken to ensure that the contents are factually correct, we accept no liability for any direct or consequential loss arising from any action taken by anyone as a result of reading contained in this publication. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association.

From the Chairman

I was delighted that our AGM confirmed that NABO is moving in the right direction and should remain a campaigning organisation. Such an organisation must, however, have a strong membership base if it is to retain credibility with navigation authorities, ministers and government departments. It must be seen to truly represent a significant number of those eligible for membership.

Thus far, NABO has done well in the credibility stakes in its relatively short life. Its views are actively sought and then listened to. The problem is that the majority of boat owners are apathetic; they will complain to their peers but when it comes to standing up to be counted, they are conspicuous by their absence. The NABO membership is made up of those who want to support an organisation which is actively pursuing their interests; they are prepared, to a greater or lesser extent, to get involved. But significantly increasing the size of the membership base is crucial to continued success.

Council are addressing this issue and will make every effort to increase NABO's profile in the coming year but we need the direct help of all existing members with the recruitment effort. Some members are doing sterling work in this area but I would appeal to everyone to try and recruit new members whenever the opportunity arises. Spare membership application forms are available for the asking.

May I take this opportunity, on behalf of Council, of wishing all members and their families a happy new year. May you find plenty of water under your keel in 1993.

AGM Report

NABO's second AGM was held in Birmingham on 28th November and elected its committee (now to be known as the Council). All are committed to continuing the Association's work and to providing the highest quality of representation for members.

The meeting confirmed that the direction in which NABO was going was the right one - it should continue to be a lobbying organisation seeking to protect and enhance the interests of boat owners on Britain's inland waterways and should not become a social club. The Association's work on the BW Bill was particularly praised but it was recognised that there was a great deal more to do and that the coming year would undoubtedly be a busy one.

NABO had established a sound financial base and a recommendation not to change the basic membership fee of £8.00 was accepted. The Association had been fortunate in receiving a significant number of generous donations from the members, both in money and equipment. The size of the

membership base was, however, a cause of some concern and all members were urged to take every opportunity to recruit other boat owners. Recruitment would receive a high priority from the new Council.

Resolutions were passed which changed the name of the Management Committee to Council and which introduced a form of family membership (Reported elsewhere).

Following the official AGM business, a lively and wide ranging debate took place.

Report on the first Council meeting

The first meeting of the Council was held on the 5th December 1992, at The Port 86, Hockley Port, Birmingham.

Dave Green welcomed the new council members. It was regretted that Peter Lea was unable to attend as he was involved in a serious accident on route to the meeting.

The Council elected its Officers and other posts as listed on page 18.

Reports were received from the following Council members:- Treasurer, (see page 3), Membership Secretary, and Regional representatives.

Other topics covered were:- The BW Bill, (see page 11), Moorings, (see pages 7 to 10) Customer Charter, AGM, (see page 1) and Boat Standards (see page 4).

The council spent some time discussing our response to BW's consultative document on towpath cycling (see page 12)

It was decided to draft a paper on the need for increased funding for BW, which will be discussed more fully at the next meeting.

The idea of a NABO campaigning "rally" in 1993 was considered to be impractical as NABO lacks the resources, particularly Council members' time.

The date of the next Council Meeting is Saturday 16th January 1993 at Hockley Port. Members are welcome to attend as observers, but if you wish to attend as an observer could you please let Dave Green know.

Family Membership

At the AGM it was agreed to introduce a Family membership (in response to a number of requests).

How it works:

The first member of a household will pay the full subscription rate which is currently £8.00. Any additional member of the family who wishes to join can do so at a cost of £4.00 each. Each member will have full voting rights, but only one copy of each publication will be sent to each address.

Any person joining as a family member with any existing member, will have the same renewal date as that member. The subscription fee will remain the same, however long the membership has left to run. For example, an additional member who joins in March will have to renew in October if that is when the original member joined. The renewal notice will be asking the members to renew their family membership.

Households currently having two members who have joined independently before the AGM will continue the same i.e. receiving two copies of each publication. (as they have each paid the full subscription rate).

Financial Report

Our funds continue to be healthy with a bank balance of £4,947 at 4th December. £3,751 of this is the advance proportion of membership fees. We have almost doubled the budgeted 30th November bank balance.

The main reasons for our strong position are:-

1. £851 donations (None budgeted). Thank you VERY much for your generosity.
2. Travel costs in connection with BW Bill being deferred.
3. Many economies in office services and printing costs being heavily subsidised by sympathisers.
4. Membership being higher than budgeted at several stages.

The room and PA systems for the AGM cost £88, the raffle (Prizes donated, thank you very much) raised £47 towards this. Our auditor just charged travel of £40.50.

At the AGM the Council were asked to consider Life Membership as a means of building up funds and direct debits for annual subscriptions to give an increased renewal rate.

Life Membership was discussed at the Council meeting on 5th December. It was rejected on the grounds that it was unlikely to be advantageous in the long term unless the charge was prohibitively high. To set a realistic figure, we would have to obtain actuarial calculations on likely life spans of members and make predictions on the future costs of servicing members - difficult with a young organisation whose service could develop in a variety of directions over the years.

I am researching direct debits - it may not be possible yet for us to be an operator of direct debits. The Council does not feel that standing orders are a good idea - there is an enormous amount of administration when the level of subscription changes. The present renewal form inviting donations and purchases of stickers is generating substantial additional income.

The Council no longer has ready access to the computer that contains the membership records database and prints the address labels for all communications with you. We decided that both the quality and security of this information is too valuable to be anything other than 100% within NABO's control and ownership. You will therefore shortly be the proud owner of a portable computer and printer.

Authority has been given for expenditure of up to £700 for a system that will satisfy NABO's requirements for at least the next five years. There remains and will continue to remain considerable records and correspondence produced and stored on Council member's own computers.

If you require more detailed financial information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Penny Barber, Treasurer.

Its those Boat Standards again

Draft 5 of the standards has now been issued with no major changes. There is one change however which is...yes!...the name "Certificate of Compliance" has been changed to the "Boat Safety Certificate"! It is reported that in a quiet graveyard in Watford, there is a small grave marked by a 14 foot high green white and black headstone which has this simple discreet inscription in 2 foot high lettering "CofC R.I.P". Sad, don't you think?

Still, Draft 5 will (according to BW) form the text of the Harmonised Boat Standards subject to the outcome of EC notification. A Boat Safety Pack (similar to that which was prepared for the IWA Festival at Wakefield), using the text of draft 5, will be made available at the Earls Court Boat Show on the joint stand which BW, NRA and Broads Authority will have.

A consultation meeting on the check list for the standards is due to be held at Earls Court on the 13th January 1993. NABO will of course be attending.

The Moorings Revolution

Following on from their victory in the End of Garden Moorings case, BW have pursued their dominant position, cutting across the moorings consultation process, by issuing a press release on the 23rd November to the effect that they would recover a fee of 50% of their class 1 mooring charge from all off side moorings and would recover all outstanding invoices previously issued. This press release and our response to it are set out below.

The amount BW will ultimately charge offside moorings depends on the new method of pricing their own moorings. though *this* is still subject to consultation (see page 8 for details); so you still have the opportunity to make your views known to NABO - and we will ensure they are reflected in the consultation meetings. Of course, you can comment to BW direct, in which case letters should be sent to Jim Kelly, British Waterways, Willow Grange, Church Road, Watford WD1 3QA

Remember that virtually all linear moorings will be affected, either directly or indirectly, by the BW Moorings pricing system.

The following press release was issued by BW on the 23.11.92. (Ref:NR 215/92) :-

"Unauthorised off-side Moorings"- The way ahead.

"BW announced today that henceforth charges for offside moorings, known as 'End of Garden' and 'Farmers Field' moorings, will be 50% of the cost of an equivalent basic BW permanent home mooring in the vicinity. This decision was made following the recent judgement in the County Court and consultation with interested consumer bodies and is in line with the basis of charging for these types of moorings for upwards of ten years.

To be fair and consistent to all boat owners Waterway Managers will now ensure that all boats on unauthorised offside moorings will be contacted about the issue of the mooring permits. Applications of the charges will be as follows:

1. Where invoices have been issued, but are pending, boat owners will now be required to pay. Some outstanding invoices account for lengthy periods of mooring and in these cases Waterway Managers will consider phasing payments on an individual basis if settlement of the complete sum in one payment would cause financial hardship.

2. Where invoices have been issued at rates above 50% of the cost of an equivalent basic BW permanent home mooring in the vicinity, Waterway Managers will revise them downwards. Where invoices have been issued at rates below 50% they will be payable at the rate issued, but future charges will be revised upwards to the 50% level from the

date of renewal. In those circumstances boat owners will be advised of the adjustment by the Local Waterway Manager before renewal is due.

3. Where boats are moored against property not in their possession Waterway Managers will approach landowners initially with a view to arranging for them to enter into standard mooring agreements is that they would include the mooring permit element in with their own charges as a single charge and there would be no separate invoice for British Waterways.

4. Where a landowner does not sign a moorings agreement or the boat owner is in possession of the land alongside the mooring they will be approached direct by Waterway Managers and advised that if they wish to continue mooring at that site after the first renewal of their pleasure boat licence following the 1.4.93, they will be required to pay a mooring charge at the rate of 50% of the cost of an equivalent basic BW permanent home mooring in the vicinity.

Waterway Managers will advise boatowners in advance of implementation of the initiative and of actions they will take should boat owners default on payment of mooring fees.

NABO NEWS RELEASE (28.11.92)
Moorings Consultation

The National Association of Boat Owners deeply regrets the announcement by British Waterways on 23rd November that they will charge 50% of the cost of an equivalent basic BW mooring to all End of Garden and Farmers Field moorings, and will recover outstanding amounts invoiced in prior years.

On 2nd September British Waterways announced that as a result of the resolution of the "End of Garden" moorings case, the way was now cleared for consultation on a wide ranging moorings policy.

A consultation meeting was subsequently arranged for the 24th October at which NABO strongly opposed the application of 50% of British Waterways basic mooring charges, and was supported by an overwhelming majority of other "user" groups represented at that meeting. British Waterways said they would look at the matter again.

However, in circulated notes of the meeting, British Waterways misrepresented the views of NABO and the general mood of the meeting on this issue, and also failed to mention that British Waterways would look at this matter again.

NABO believed that the meeting of the 24th October was only an initial discussion which would be followed by a draft policy document and further discussions. A second meeting had even been arranged for the 15th December.

The recovery of past charges was not discussed on the 24th October, but was to be raised by NABO on the 15th December.

British Waterways have by the announcement of the 23rd November, abandoned the consultation process on this issue, and have yet again thrown the whole concept of meaningful consultation, not to mention their integrity, into doubt.

Report on the Moorings Meeting 15th December

The second consultative meeting on moorings was held in BW's new Midland and South West Region Headquarters at Fazeley. All interested parties fielded a one person team, these being:

Giles Baker (IWAAC)
John Baylis (IWA)
Janice Christianson (RBOA)
Jon Darlington (NABO)
Ken Dodd (BW)
Tony Mason (AWCC)

The meeting started with an acrimonious discussion regarding the application of 50% of the class 1 charge to all offside moorings, and in particular the degree of consultation that there had been on this point before BW issued their press release on the 23rd November. Ken Dodd was of the opinion that full consultation had occurred, and that reasons for the 50% had been given. NABO pointed out that in fact no reason has been given other than that where charges have previously been made, 50% was the most common rate. NABO expects justifiable reasons for this charge.

The point was also made that there was no discussion on the 24th October about recovering back charges which the Board are now doing. (How they intend recovering the back charges is outlined in their press release on page 5)

Whilst NABO, RBOA and IWA thought the 50% figure should be looked at again, the AWCC considered it to be perfectly acceptable and even went so far as to warn BW that if they reduced the charge some of their member clubs would sue the Board! (Apparently in order to recover what they would then consider to be overcharges in the past). Well done AWCC!!

The meeting went on to discuss the charging basis for their own moorings. The last newsletter outlined the basis of charging, and this was developed in the meeting. NABO proposed a method for evaluating site specific and location factors.

The meeting adopted our suggested scoring system for site specification factors but not site location factors. The reason for not doing so soon became obvious.

It was made clear that the Board would only accept a form of pricing structure which would allow them to continue increasing mooring prices to the level the market would bear. This, it was claimed, was necessary as they had a duty to maximise income. NABO and the RBOA pointed out that as they have an effective monopoly of the canal system, income maximisation is inappropriate. The effect of such a policy will be a tendency to price out the less well off boater, who will almost certainly have no alternative but to sell his boat. Giles Baker's view was that BW is not in a monopoly situation, neither is it a social service, and if poorer boaters were priced out, so be it.

This state of disagreement was the position at the end of the meeting and we now await BW's proposal for dealing with location factors. Another meeting will be arranged, but in the meantime NABO will continue pressing for a fair structured system of pricing which is not open ended.

Details of a mooring classification as far as it has got are given below.

Moorings Classification System

This system is fairly complex and will not be exciting reading, but it is your opportunity to be involved in the consultation process.

If you would like to comment on the moorings classification system, please write to Jon Darlington at 111 Maas Road, Northfield, Birmingham B31 2PP or phone on 021 475 6273. Your views will be taken into account at the next consultation meeting.

1. A Suggested Moorings Classification Table.

Site Location	Site Specification					
	A	B	C	D	E	
1	100	90	80	70	60	High
2	90	80	70	60	50	
3	80	70	60	50	40	
4	70	60	50	40	30	Low
5	60	50	40	30	20	

High Low

An example of how the grid might be used is that if an A1 price is agreed, (say £0.50p/ft) a C3 site would be 60% of the A1 figure (ie 60% of 50p = 30p/ft).

The grid system was accepted in principle by BW and the users on 15th Dec. The users felt a grid A-E by 1-5 sufficient. BW thought A-E by 1-7 more appropriate. NO NUMBERS OR WEIGHTING (ie relative valuation) BETWEEN SITE SPECIFICATION OR SITE LOCATION FACTORS WERE AGREED.

The example grid shown above shows equal weighting between site location and site specification factors. BW are likely to want a higher weighting on site location factors which include demand.

2. Site specification factors:

	Maximum	Score
Security	25	
Car Parking	10	
Position	15	
Depth/Edge	15	
Access Path	5	
Water	10	
Elsan	10	
Other Facilities	10	
	----	----
Total	100	

3. Scoring Classification for site specification factors

	Points scored	Grid points
A	81-100	50
B	61-80	40
C	41-60	30
D	21-40	20
E	1-20	10

4. Site Specification factors are:

	High	Low
Security:	fenced, locked supervised	full public access
Car parking:	locked, next to boats	none
Position:	Private offside basin	busy tow path
Depth/Edge:	hard edge & top	gang plank
Access Path:	hard smooth surface	muddy & uneven
Water	to each boat	10 mins cruise + turning point
Elsan	on site	10 mins cruise + turning point
Other Facilities	refuse, toilet, pump-out, telephone power on site	nothing on site

This site specification scoring system was agreed at the meeting subject to practical testing, with the exception that THE GRID POINTS ALLOCATION WAS NOT AGREED since this will depend on the weighting between site specification and site location factors.

THE REST OF THE SYSTEM HAS NOT BEEN AGREED, but is included for your information, and in particular so that you have the opportunity to express your views which will be put to the next consultation meeting.

5. Site Location Factors.

	Maximum	Score
Local environment	40	
Closeness to cruising	40	
Ease of Access	10	
Demand	10	
	----	----
Total	100	

6. Scoring Classification for site location factors

	Points scored	Grid Points
1	81-100	50
2	61-80	40
3	41-60	30
4	21-40	20
5	1-20	10

7. Site Location factors are:

- Quality of local environment (high/low)
- Closeness/remoteness to variety of cruising.
- Easy/difficult to get to by road.
- high/low Demand/popularity of site.

The Wooden Canal Craft Trust

The objectives of the Wooden Canal Trust are to restore historic wooden craft and to put them to work on worthwhile projects. Their first restoration project, Harry Grantham's "Forget me Not", is now in its final stages beside the Ashton Canal.

They have recently acquired "Southam", a butty built in 1936 by Walkers of Rickmansworth for the G.U Canal Carrying Company. Little is known about the history of "Southam", and the Trust is appealing for information about her working days and her subsequent career, motorised and converted, as a pleasure boat.

The Trust hopes to launch a major fundraising and publicity campaign, and would like to hear from anyone interested in helping with this. Contact Chris Leah at the Wooden Canal Craft Trust, 41 Travis Court, Royton, Oldham. OL2 6YX.

BW Bill - Update

The Bill is still awaiting its second reading debate which is predicted to be early in the new year. It seems that ratification of the Maastricht treaty has disrupted the passage of the BW Bill through the Commons along, with many other Bills.

The NABO Council would like to thank all members who have written to their MPs. If you have not written yet, there is still time.

Replies to the questionnaire sent out with the Lobbying Pack have enabled us to start a list of MPs who could help us.

The Council also wrote on behalf of NABO to all MPs, the response again has enabled us to identify those who may be sympathetic to boat owners' views. The responses we have received from them quite often comment on the number of people that have written about their concerns. We plan to contact these MPs again shortly.

Chris Smith, Shadow Secty. of State for Environmental Protection writes, after outlining their worries about the BW Bill, "We shall press the promoters to address these concerns and to make specific commitments to do so at second reading stage. Unless such commitments were forthcoming, we would advise colleagues to oppose the Bill". The Liberal Democrats are also concerned and their Transport Spokesman stated that unless the Bill is sufficiently rectified, they as a Party would have no choice but to vote against it.

There is a worrying development however in that Ministerial responses to MPs enquiries give support to the BW Bill, despite acknowledging that by tradition the Government remains neutral on the specific provisions in a Private Bill. For example, they state "Some of the more strongly worded claims made about the Bill by its opponents have naturally worried ordinary boaters. Some of the proposals to which they object are intended to improve safety on inland waterways, some are intended to enable BW to improve their efficiency, some are preceded in - or indeed borrowed from - legislation that already applies to other statutory undertakers or public bodies, some reflect comments made by the Environment Select Committee or the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. In principle there is nothing alarming about these objectives."

Such a statement is misleading as a reply to an MP's enquiry concerning NABO's objections, all of which are specific, attacking blatantly unreasonable powers, and do not detract from any reasonable requirement for safety or efficiency. Anyone who has any doubt about the validity of our objections need only look at the clauses we object to. NABO is preparing a response to this ministerial statement which will be circularised to MPs identified as interested in waterways issues.

NABO has had two meetings with BW and their Parliamentary agents, the last being on the 3rd December, with the result that draft amendments suggested by us are being considered. Whether or not they are implemented is still to be seen, but at least the suggestions are being taken seriously.

If the Government support the Bill it will almost certainly become law, but there is still a reasonable chance that some of the more onerous parts of the Bill may be changed in the Committee stage.

British Waterways consultative document on cycling on towing paths

NABO believes that cycling on towing paths can lead to conflict with other users. For this reason NABO believes that BW should not actively encourage cycling on the towing paths under its management.

In order to make it possible to enforce byelaws and control cycling, however, NABO believes that cycling should be permitted subject to a permit system. Permit fees should be so set as to recover all the administrative costs of the permit system but should not include the costs of policing.

Enforcement of permit conditions should be an important function of BW staff although it must be emphasised that the greatest nuisance is caused by motorcycles using the towing paths and that effective action in this area is urgently needed.

Where towpath improvements are required in suitable places to facilitate cycling, it may be that funding could be sought from the Department of Transport and local authorities. It is emphasised, however, that making paths more attractive to cyclists also makes them more attractive to illegal motorcyclists.

It is suggested that an offence of "dangerous cycling" be introduced.

Turning to specific points raised in the BW cycling policy document, we do not accept the statement that "... there are strong arguments relating to the practicality of charging for open access recreation." This applies to walkers but it is a perfectly reasonable proposition to charge for access with a vehicle (ie a cycle).

We are wary of the idea of issuing sanitary station keys to cyclists who are likely to be paying a relatively low fee. We believe that a copy of a Code of Conduct should be issued with each permit but that it is inappropriate to include insurance since some cyclists may already be covered. Insurance could however be a condition for the issue of the permit. The idea of including such items as a bell or hooter has little to recommend it.

We believe that two permits should be issued free of charge with each boat licence.

Once again we have cause for calling into question BW's commitment to consultation. The closing date for comments has been stated to be 31 December 1992 but it is stated that the target date for confirmation of the schedules should be 1 January 1993. How can this be?

We suggest that the proposed Code of Conduct at Appendix 1 should include the following statements:

- Cyclists should, at all times, act in a courteous and considerate manner.
- Cyclists should give way to pedestrians, dismounting if necessary.
- Cyclists should pay particular care when passing moored boats.
- Item 7 should read: "Your bicycle should be fitted with a bell or hooter which you should use IF NECESSARY to alert other people of your approach."

Area Representation.

NABO would be more effective if local members who knew the area and the problems were prepared to attend the local meetings as NABO representatives and then report direct to the area representative on the Council.

In this way any local problem which has the potential of becoming a national problem can be reported direct to the Council who in turn will be able to raise it with the appropriate national authority.

User group meeting for the Oxford Canal

Attended by Harry Winter.

This meeting was typical of meetings by British Waterways, the majority of the talking coming from the "Chair". Comments from the floor were greeted with replies such as "I hear what you say" and "I will take it on board".

However in fairness to the area manager it does appear that he is trying to improve his area subject to budget limitations.

One item which should cause concern to all members is towing paths. We know boats do not require towing paths to move, but it appears that British Waterways are going to use the proposed Customer Charter as a get out.

Under the Charter they will be required to maintain all existing towing paths. It was admitted that any towing path that has fallen into the cut before the charter comes into force will not be included.

London user group meeting at Little Venice
Attended by Harry Winter

Comments on the meeting are limited. As I personally am not familiar with the area and its problems it is difficult to judge whether British Waterways are genuinely trying to solve the problems or are using the consultation process as a 'we talk you listen' exercise.

It appears that the manager has invented a new word for the English language. I couldn't find it in my dictionary! This wonderful British Waterways word "Signage". Yes we really do seem to live in the age of the signs.

Leeds and Liverpool Canal (East) Consultations

Tom Hartney, our NW area representative, has had two meetings with David Blackburn, the Manager of the Leeds & Liverpool canal (East). These meetings have been on a one to one basis, as David Blackburn likes to keep his user representatives separate. There are advantages and disadvantages to this arrangement, but the chief advantage is that David Blackburn has to listen to what NABO has to say, and his opportunities for evading the issues are limited.

Tom reports that David Blackburn is a hospitable, listening manager, with a genuine interest in his canal and its boaters.

In general, there are no acute problems with water depth on the Leeds and Liverpool canal, by BW are dredging in the bridge holes. They are also restoring the banks and towpaths with wooden shuttering back-filled with dredgings from the edge of the canal. Recycled plastic shuttering is being investigated.

Restoration of the locks at Dowley Gap and elsewhere is proceeding. BW are rebuilding with the Original stone as far as possible, and completing the work with new local stone. The result is sensitive and impressive.

There are tentative plans to develop the area around the Dark Arches in Leeds, with refurbishment of buildings and new facilities for boats. David Blackburn has offered to send copies of the plans to Tom for comment. There are also proposals for three basins/marinas in the area.

Fishing: Tom's suggestion that a sign board should be displayed at the site of fishing matches giving details of the organising club in case of any complaint was well received by David Blackburn.

There are two further meeting planned for 1993.

Fradley Consultative Meeting with BW

Pete Sterry, attended a user meeting with Stephen Goode (Manager of the T & M Canal south of Trentham and the S & W Canal north of Gailey) and representatives of APCO, NBOC, IWA, T& MCS and S&WCC. Peter reports that Stephen Goode is an approachable manager, who neglects no corner of his patch.

The meeting discussed a wide range of issues. On the subject of End of Garden/ Farmers Field Moorings, BW are writing to all the landowners concerned, inviting them to contribute, in line with current BW policy. Stephen Goode reports that 70% of landowners have so far entered into agreement with BW, and that where a landowner has spent money on creating high quality moorings, BW may reduce the expected contributions. Where no agreement is forthcoming with a landowner, BW will invoice boatowners directly from 1.4.93

Dredging is not a particular problem in this area. There is a licenced tip at Weston, and another has been applied for at Rugeley.

Stephen Goode is against BW,s policy of proliferating signs, and will only put up signs which he considers to be necessary. He has designed his own small, discreet sign for labelling facilities in the area.

BW agree that action should be taken to discourage fishing for lock landings, and have written to local angling clubs suggesting extra bailiffing. "No fishing" signs will be erected on the offside by BW (See above?). Contact the office at Fradley (0283 790236) if you have any problems; BW will be happy to act on evidence of dates, places etc.

Longer Longford Lock

At the Consultative meeting with BW at Fradley (reported elsewhere in this issue) a query was raised concerning the width of the locks in the area (Re use by working craft). The BW minutes report that Longford lock has been carefully measured and was "7 feet in length throughout". Sideways navigation only please.

VHF on the Thames.

If anyone has navigated on the River Thames between Teddington and Brentford in a boat in excess of 20m since June 1991 then Mr David Barnes would like to hear from you. The aim is to find out the number of boats which have used this stretch of the river since the new regulations regarding VHF radios have come in.

Please write to Mr David Barnes, 97 Wordsworth Rd, Hampton Middx. TW12 1EP or phone 081 041 1411, or 0831 957 903.

"BW's 'Free of Charge' Fishery Scheme"

These words are part of the title of a recent BW News Release, announcing the addition of 30 miles of fishing on the Llangollen canal to the 43 miles of Shropshire Union canal already available under the 'Shroppie Share Scheme'.

For the uninitiated the scheme works like this: the northern Shroppie and the Llangollen have traditionally been available to casual fishermen on a day ticket basis, instead of being leased exclusively to a particular angling club, as is the situation on most of the rest of the system. BW administered the day ticket system. The shroppie Share System was introduced in early 1992: any club, for a fee of £310, can acquire the right for its members to fish these waters and to organise matches there. Angling clubs retain the income from permits and matches in return for organising and bailiffing their own events. It is not exactly 'free of charge': permits cost 53p.

Steve Griffiths, NW regional Fisheries Manager, explained this experimental scheme to me, and estimates that the profit to BW as a result of the scheme is about the same as before, but it has the advantage that BW are no longer having to manage the fishery themselves.

Our discussion extended to the cost of fishing in general compared with boating on the canals. His theory about trouble-making anglers is that they are the ones that haven't bought a permit anyway, and are therefore disliked among their own kind as well. So if they throw stones at you, should you ask to see their permit? And, to be truthful, he did add a similar comment about trouble-making boaters!

Cutting Remarks by Troubledwater.

In common with all great columnists - William Hickey, Cassandra, Peter Simple, and of course, Stillwater, I prefer to hide behind a cloak of anonymity. I will confess to being a keen boater, and a founder member of NABO, but that's as much as I am prepared to reveal!

In 1948 the canals, along with other forms of transport, were nationalised, and the Government set up a body, now called British Waterways, to maintain the canal system. BW are the caretakers of an asset which belongs to, and is funded to a large extent by, the people of this country. As is common with caretakers, they labour under the false impression that they are, in fact the actual owners.

Funding for the canals has always been too low and the best way to save money, and make life easy, was either to close down all the canals, or allow them to fall into disrepair. Unfortunately, a group of vandals, called boaters, persisted in cruising the canals, and have ever since been regarded as troublemakers, and not to be encouraged.

I wonder if the higher echelons of BW are still trying to close the canals down by wasting the funding they do have. How much have we paid out for this laughing-stock of a Bill, which BW are trying to push through Parliament with all the skill of a one armed paper hanger in a dark room? How much did it cost to buy those environmental overalls, the paint-jobs for their boats, or the arrows in the tunnels which can't be seen from the back of a boat?

There are rumours that the Government wish to privatise our canal system, but you don't need to be a Norman Lamont, or even a Norman Wisdom, to realise that if the government cannot afford to fund the canals properly because of the recession, it's highly unlikely that private business will.

My complaints about BW are directed at the people at the top. The workers at canal level- the lock keepers, lengthmen etc, who put themselves out for the boaters, are a credit to the canals, but they'll never reach the top.

I would just like to conclude with an observation from the cut-

There has been much speculation by boaters about anglers and the strange things they do (and I'm sure vice versa), but the following is absolutely true. As we cruised along, the sun was shining but ahead of us, from an allotment on the off-side a cloud of smoke was blowing across the canal. As we passed through the smoke, there sitting with a handkerchief over his mouth was an angler. The smoke had been across the canal for as long as we had been on that stretch and it was clear five yards either side of him with no other anglers on that stretch. As we went past I remarked that it suddenly turned foggy, and was treated to a tirade of abuse against inconsiderate gardeners, with nothing better to do than upset anglers!

Technical Advice

In response to comments made at the AGM, Harry Winter has stated that he is happy for members to contact him if they need any technical advice. His address is on page 18 of this issue.

Canal Stoppages on BBC2 Ceefax

British Waterways' canal closures are now being listed on BBC 2 Ceefax Teletext Service.

Page 555 - Long term closures including scheduled stoppage programme works.

Page 556 - Short term closures including emergency stoppages.