



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

NEWSLETTER

May 1994

Editor's comment

Welcome to another NABO Newsletter. One of the chief purposes of NABO is to monitor everything that is going on in connection with the Inland Waterways. We are attending more meetings, writing more letters, expanding into new areas, so it is becoming difficult to report on everything!

Once again, I am pleased to have comment on the content of the Boater and Newsletter. Now how about some comment on the comment? This issue contains lots of please for information and views, so please do write.

Whilst every care is taken to ensure that the contents of the Boater 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 anything contained in this publication. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association.

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**National Association of
Boat Owners**

NEWS

...from the Council meeting held on 7th May, 1994

The meeting opened with the reluctant acceptance of Penny Barber's resignation as Treasurer. Penny has occupied this position since the formation of NABO, contributing much hard work and enthusiasm, but the rigours of her new job are eating into her time, and she feels that she cannot devote the attention needed to the demands of being Treasurer. She will, however, remain on the Council. The Council passed a unanimous Vote of Thanks to Penny for all she has done in this arduous task. The position of Treasurer did not remain vacant for long, with Chris Barnacle leading the rush to volunteer.

Waterway Standards are to be re-drafted in September, and we have asked Brian Dice to confirm that we will be involved in discussions on this matter. We are told, however, that there will be no change in the procedure for seeing them, and that copies will not be released. They must still be read in the company of your BW Manager, whose presence is necessary to clarify any possible misunderstandings. Only one Manager, as far as we

are aware, is producing copies of his Standards for issue to User Groups in his patch, as he believes they are as useful to boaters as to BW.

It seems that boaters on the Norfolk Broads may be turning to NABO to sort out their problems. We have invited one of them to attend our next Council meeting to explain their position. Many of them own sailing boats.

Publicity and advertising were discussed at length, and it was agreed that this was a somewhat specialised subject which ideally should be managed by someone with marketing experience. There is a vacancy on the Council, so if you have this qualification, and you want to become involved in the exciting cut and thrust of waterway matters then please give Jon Darlington a call.

The 'payment for moorings' topic received a considerable amount of attention. If you pay BW a sum of money to use your boat on the canal, why should you then have to pay when you don't want to use it, especially when they are not providing any facilities? If you have problems with any kind of mooring, NABO

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Council meeting (continued)

would like to hear from you. We have a questionnaire which you can fill in to supply us with all the information.

Stephen Peters has produced a very revealing research paper on the charges for licences made by different Waterways Authorities, and if you think you know which is the most expensive you are probably right. This paper will soon be available for purchase at a modest price.

Following the imposition of VAT on fuel and bottled gas, boating is going to cost more this year, so we are asking BW to

freeze the cost of licences for the coming year. However, the new Minister responsible for Inland Waterways pointed out to the Parliamentary Waterways Group meeting on 19th April that with reduced Government funding for Defence, Hospitals and every other necessity (except possibly MPs expenses), BW cannot expect their £50m grant to be maintained.

But to finish on an optimistic note, we are looking at ways to reduce your insurance premium - a report of this will be included in the next Newsletter.

Ralph Kirkham: tribute by Jon Darlington

I am extremely saddened to have just learned that the waterway pioneer and NABO member, Ralph Kirkham died recently. The exact circumstances are not known by me, but I understand Ralph had been suffering with lung cancer.

Although I never met Ralph, he has written to me, or telephoned, on a number of occasions over matters of concern to him and to all of us boaters. Occassionally he has criticized things we have said, but

always constructively, and also with sound advice. Ralph was therefore a very great help to NABO.

Ralph was an independent thinker and believed in his independence. It enabled him to fulfil a unique role, being respected by all but without the disadvantage of being restricted by organisational constraints. I am sure Ralph will be missed by many, as he will be missed by us at NABO.

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Fishing and 50 feet *(title designed to make you read on! - Ed)*

We have questioned the practice of anglers fishing directly opposite moored boats in direct contradiction to the Waterways Code for anglers which says "People aboard moored craft appreciate their privacy, so try and fish at least 15m (50 feet) away." Most canals are rather less than 50 feet wide.

Jim Kelly, BW's Customer Relations Manager, replied that the authors of the Waterways code were thinking of those instances where both activities were taking place on the same side of the canal. It was not meant to cover the opposite side, and will have to be reworded in order to make the meaning clearer.

But the rule was drawn up for the sake of privacy. To say that the 50' rule should not apply opposite a boat is nonsense. It is neither logical or reasonable to suggest that privacy is only required along the length of a towpath, and that if a fisherman is directly opposite a boat's windows, with the float 10' away, it is not.

Fishing opposite boats is a great nuisance to boaters, and

can even be dangerous. This month's WW has a letter from a boater who has had to have fish hooks removed from his hand as a result of hooks getting stuck in his mooring ropes.

Fishermen would not be pleased if a boat moored up opposite where they are fishing, would they?

I would have hoped that the Board would have supported the principle of privacy the 50 feet rule embodied, and would ask that it is now enforced.

Jon Darlington

Warwickshire Avon Merger Latest from Stephen Peters

I attended an EGM of the Lower Avon Navigation Trust (in my capacity as a LANT member) on 16 April 1994 which had been convened to allow members to express their views about the mooted merger of the Upper and Lower Avon Navigation Trusts.

River users are faced with a situation resulting from the restoration history of the Avon, whereby one Trust controls the

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Warwickshire Avon Merger Latest (continued)

river from Stratford-upon-Avon to Evesham, and the second and older Trust controls the river between Evesham and the confluence with the Severn at Tewkesbury.

A few years ago discussions took place to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of merging the activities of both bodies, and a report was produced in 1993. However, it appears that following changes in the composition of the UANT Council (and an influx of new members!) the plan was rejected by UANT.

However, LANT still favours the idea of a merger which the report concludes would be cost-effective and simplify the

respective operations, as well as being welcomed by local authorities and users.

The EGM in April agreed on a near-unanimous vote to authorize the LANT Council to pursue the idea of a merger with UANT. Whether agreement will ever be achieved is of course dependant upon the attitude of both parties, and we await further developments.

If any NABO members have experience of navigating the Avon, and have any views on the comparison between the Upper and Lower, differences in licence charges, standards of service, etc. we would like to receive their comments.

Boating Accident Statistics: new role for Stephen Peters

I have taken on a new role for your Council, namely that of collating and recording incidents of boating accidents which are brought to my attention.

I need the help of all members to make this exercise as meaningful as possible, because many non-fatal incidents fail to get reported to the

authorities. Any member who is involved in, or witness to, or receives a reliable report of an accident or tragedy involving boats, canals, locks, suicides, etc. should forward brief details to me. It would be helpful to know if the boat involved was a hire craft and/or if it had a Certificate of Compliance with safety

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Accident statistics (cont)

standards. The information required also includes Press cuttings (with date) reporting waterway related accidents, such as the recent fire on the "Isis" at Rugby which was passed to us by a member.

BW made great play of the dangers which boats pose to user of the waterways when proposing their General Powers Bill, but despite repeated requests they have never produced any convincing evidence or statistics to back up their contentions. NRA have no information on this subject either. Only now are BW actively compiling a database of such incidents and occurrences and NABO has asked to be involved in the process so that present anecdotal evidence can be transformed into firm and reliable factual records.

Whilst on the subject of Press cuttings we would also ask members to send us copies of any Public Notices, etc concerning planned works involving waterways, byelaws, etc. It was only as a result of reading such a notice that NABO became aware of the BW Bill!

Unannounced stoppage on the Gloucester & Sharpness canal

The summer stoppage notices included by BW in the March 1994 edition of British Waterways News contained a confusing notice of a complete closure of the G&S Canal at Purton planned for the period 11 to 29 April 1994 (i.e. just after Easter).

This work had been planned for earlier in the year as part of the Winter stoppage programme, but BW had delayed the works because of commercial shipping movements at Sharpness. So, with only 3 weeks' notice owners learned that they would not be able to make the passage from the Severn to the open sea.

To compound the problem, BW failed to complete their works and the canal remained closed over the May Day Bank holiday weekend, and was not scheduled to re-open until 13 May. Boaters have thus been restricted for nearly 5 weeks - 10% of the year.

NABO has expressed its concern that BW should place the interests of pleasure boat users far below those of commercial shipping - after all we are all CUSTOMERS!

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1995 Price Rises?

BW are seeking the views of the user organisations regarding the pricing of 1995 licence fees.

You may remember that the Board has not increased fees in the last year, probably owing to the reduction in boats taking out licences.

Many boaters are still experiencing hardship and an increased licence fee would almost certainly result in more boaters giving up their boats, despite indications that the recession is ending.

We agree with the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in believing that BW "has unduly emphasised short term gain at the expense of longer term market development and revenue growth and that boat licence fees have been out of line with the market".

Recent NABO research shows BW licence fees to be the highest of all Navigation Authorities and although there are many more miles of navigable waterways, there is nevertheless a higher burden in absolute terms for boaters on BW's waterways.

In consequence of this we are

asking that both licence and mooring fees be maintained at their current levels throughout 1995.

WCCT saves graceful wooden narrowboat "Queen"

What may be the oldest surviving wooden motor narrowboat has been recovered from Denham by the Wooden Canal Craft Trust.

"Walsall Queen" was built by Hildick & Hildick in 1917 and was operated by that company until 1924 when she was sold to Harvey Taylor of Aylesbury. In 1949 she became a pleasure boat but eventually sank at Denham in September 1993.

WCCT successfully raised "Queen", and undertook a 200 mile hitch hike to get her to Runcorn, where she awaits restoration. Anyone wishing to help, or who has any information about "Queen" or Hildick & Hildick should contact WCCT at

REPORTS

Navigation Officer's News: Neil Hutchinson reports

In my capacity as Navigation Officer, North West Regional Rep. and sundry busybody, I have attended three User Group meetings since my last reports. And, in order to get the message across, without boring the pants off our readers, I propose this time only to provide the juiciest snippets of information.

Oxford canal: Manager Simon Ainley reported that there would be stoppages on the Napton flight before Christmas and on the Hillmorton flight in the New Year 1995. A draft stoppage list is awaited.

A survey of off-side moorers has taken place and invoices will be issued from August onwards. The prices are likely to be based on 50% of current BW mooring fees. I do not have an answer to "Which mooring fee?"

When asked about the provision of moorings for boats which are being weekendened, he suggested that arrangements could be made with the employees who are responsible for these moorings and who should be able to deal sympathetically with boaters' requests. He was not keen on

having this information publicised in case it got into the wrong hands. I explained that this magazine goes only to members, and that they cannot be classed in this category. Please let me know how you get on when you go to Oxford (Steve Williams and Joe Kennel are the lengthsman south of bridge 218).

Leeds & Liverpool Canal East Manager David Blackburn provided a draft stoppage list. He also gave upbeat reports on water supply, upgrading plans and a review of developments. It all seemed very promising on the L & L.

However, there is a proposal, dated April 1993, which suggests that the L & L is no longer being considered as a broad waterway by BW. Maybe those who still use wide boats will be prepared to comment on the idea of a channel width of 28'8" and a depth of 3'6" combined with a channel width of 16'3" for a maximum depth of 5'. If you are not sure what this means then either draw out these dimensions and superimpose one on the other, or obtain a copy of the plan from David Blackburn. Then ask

REPORTS

Navigation Officer's News (continued)

yourself how two boats 14'4" wide and 3'9" draft pass one another (with difficulty perhaps).

There are, however, lots of goodies to be obtained from this office - information on where to moor, facilities available, opening times (swing bridges and locks) and much more. However they are not sure where their winding holes are.

BW North West Region: Regional Manager Derek Cochrane reported on the story to date and Waterway Manager Peter Bentham provided the meeting with a further set of Standards for Standards. Copies have been asked for (and promised). This meeting also provided an opportunity to look at the entire draft stoppage

programme for the North West region. It is at the Northwich office. Two items that you should be aware of:

1. It is possible that the Barnton Tunnel may require two full winter closures (including Christmas).
2. I have asked BW to negotiate with the Rochdale Canal Co. and to liaise with BW Pennine & Potteries to provide a route into Manchester over these Christmas periods. Is this a good idea?

Want to know more? Let's hear from you.

P.S. BW are desperately looking for accidents for their statistics. Another whole new ball game, I guess! Where is it leading?

Black Country User Group meeting: Phil Bland attended

David Green, Manager, gave a brief talk about his business plan. This led to the subject of Waterway Standards, which he said he would not be able to meet, realistically, in the near future.

There were, however, several

pieces of good news to report. Firstly, the Walsall canal will be open on 25th May. 1km of this has been dredged at the expense of the Black Country Development Corporation, and a "22 carot" stretch of towpath has also been provided by them near

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Black Country Users (cont)

a local canalside development.

Dredging will take place at bridges on the Wyrley & Essington canal, with spot dredging at bad places. The use of plastic paddles will reduce water leakage; these are being fitted continuously, necessitating summer stoppages where local alternative routes are available. This will facilitate the winter replacements on the Wolverhampton flight.

Glyn Philips has been given the responsibility of water control and conservation with the charge of not letting BCN water levels fall more than 4" below weir level. A saving of £20,000 has already been achieved through fitting plastic paddles and the use of reservoirs rather than pumping.

Unfortunately, Netherton Tunnel is in need of attention again due to the bottom rising, which can cause grounding of boats over 2'6" draught (obstruction near the Netherton (west) end). Strong weed growth at Bradley near Bilston is undergoing tests for controlling substances, but this is a tricky problem as the use of chemicals is heavily restricted by the NRA.

Licence Charges Survey

Stephen Peters has recently made a thorough survey of licence charges levied by the 20 most relevant authorities in the country, and produced a comprehensive Research Paper on the subject.

The results of the survey, which can be made available to members for a nominal charge, show that the most expensive annual licence charges are those of British Waterways, followed by NRA Anglian, and NRA Thames. The cheapest are Middle Level and Port of London - neither of which charge anything!

Members will draw their own conclusions on the findings of the survey, but will they consider that the highest charges of BW can be justified simply because they offer over 2000 miles of navigation? Your views would be welcomed.

As a result of conducting this survey, Stephen Peters now has a comprehensive set of information on the licence charges and conditions applicable to virtually every waterway, and members are invited to contact him for any specific information or advice.

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User Group meeting at Lapworth on 14th April: Colin Paillin attended

Andrew Stumpf, Waterway Manager, outlined the proposed works in his area for the next year. Diglis Basin is to be upgraded and improved to Class A moorings, and the basin towpath will be improved. Plastic piling is to be given trials in soft ground. Mr Stumpf has set his own target of rebuilding the towpath between Lapworth and Norton junction before 1996.

A representative from the British Angling Association stated that rubbish on a towpath next to a fisherman is now considered to be his. If he fails to collect it he will be fined. He must dispose of any rubbish on his peg whether his own or not.

PC Jones from Bourneville Police station addressed the meeting on the subject of boat crime. 23 crimes on boats were reported to his station (out of a total of 12000) in 1993. PC Jones has tried to instigate a Boat Watch scheme, but has failed through lack of support from Boat Owners! 75% of boat crimes occur between Monday and Friday. The problem areas are Kings Norton (on no account leave your boat there unattended) and Polesworth. PC Jones has promised an increase in policing of the towpaths in his area. His direct line contact number is 021-626-4138, with an answerphone for when he is not in his office.

River Soar User Group meeting on 27th April

Leicester Marina should be up running in about 6 months time. The ex-Nantwich BW hire fleet are at present moored in Loughborough Basin, hopeful of a private buyer who can move them into the new Leicester marina.

Sanitary stations: work has started on the new shower/toilet

block at Sawley locks. The sanitary station at Kilby Bridge is open, and BW are looking at a self pump-out system at a cost of £8/10 - rather high compared to the cost of similar facilities on the River Thames (£1 for 4 minutes).

Work has started, at last, to install one ground paddle at

REPORTS

River Soar meeting (continued)

Ratcliffe lock. The Waterway Manager, Richard Sawicki, hopes to arrange a User Group meeting with the NRA to discuss the problems of the Soar when in flood. There is a possibility that the pound above Zouch lock could be lowered by 9", which would give BW more time before closing the gates at Zouch. We

await results with interest.

The local patrol officer has been busy, and his aim is to have all boats licenced - watch this space! He has received 22 complaints about speeding, but explained that it is important, when lodging a complaint, to have a witness or photograph of the event.

EVENTS

Canalfest 1994

The Devizes branch of the Kennet & Avon Canal Society is again running their popular Canalfest this year. They have offered to display NABO leaflets at this event, so if you are able to go, please do support them. It is all in aid of the K & A Water Appeal - for back-pumping equipment for the Caen Hill flight.

The Canalfest will take place over the weekend of the 16th and 17th July, at Bishop Cannings. Entry is £15 per boat (or £12 if you apply before mid June). The action takes place in a canalside field, with craft stalls

and entertainments in true "Village Fete" style - great fun whether you arrive by boat or by car. There will be a Barn Dance on Saturday evening, followed by an illuminated procession of boats. Sunday is competition day, with prizes for the best dressed, oldest, youngest etc.

Details are available from John Weller on (0380) 723235.

Market Harborough Rally

The proposed boat rally at Market Harborough has been postponed, and will now be a one-day event on Saturday 30th July, 1994.

LETTERS

Dredging on the Southern Oxford Canal

I read with interest issue No 10 of "The Boater", particularly the item on dredging. As you are no doubt aware there has been a considerable amount of work done by BW on the Oxford summit - not before time. Over the weekend 30th April - 1st May I cruised from Napton Bottom Lock (where I moor) to Fenny Compton and back, the first time since last September. I can confirm that there has been a lot of work done, but to quote a passing boater "damned sight more hedging than dredging".

The water level was as high as I have ever seen it, unsurprising after last winter, but I was disappointed by the tiller feel and the amount of bottom effect visible. True, the offside bank has a covering of dredgings for virtually the whole length and there has been extensive towpath repairs and renewal. However, the silt on the former was by no means as wide or as thick as I expected considering the state of the canal formerly and the towpath infilling appeared to be largely surplus towpath material and new stone brought in to make a nice path for walkers. Unless BW have removed

hundreds of lorry loads of silt to some other dump, I am left with the inescapable feeling that it will not be long until the channel reverts to its former state, i.e a narrow channel with the rest of the bottom rather closer to the top than indicated in the "standards". Indeed, it would not be difficult to argue that the main purpose of the exercise is in fact to provide a country walk for the Ramblers Association with a sop to boaters in terms of a minimal amount of dredging to remove the worst of the silting particularly round bridge holes and corners, then spreading the rest generally over the bed of the canal.

Inter alia with the aforementioned, why cannot BW raise a fee from walkers? I am tired of the old argument that they are taxpayers. I am a taxpayer but pay mooring and licence fees; fishermen are similiarly charged through their clubs. I accept that it would be difficult to licence individual walkers but why not a per capita fee against the Ramblers Association based on the numbers they claim to represent. With a bit of luck the idea will catch on, with the National Trust

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et al joining in, it might then be brought home to the geriatric vandals that rights have a price. I bet the claimed numbers would drop rapidly and would stop boaters being ignored as a "minority of users".

L W Wynn, Swindon

Is NABO on the right track?

I have just read issue 10 of "The Boater", and am beginning to wonder whether I have joined an appropriate organisation, or whether I am subsidising people with whom I am totally out of sympathy.

In the first place, I cannot see why anyone should object to the 72 hours mooring restriction on the Oxford canal, or the 48 hour visitor mooring restriction on the Grand Union. Surely for the bona fide cruising boater this presents no problem. What does cause difficulties are the selfish people who insist on mooring for protracted periods at popular locations. If someone is cruising, and needs to leave their boat somewhere for, say, a fortnight, then it seems to me to be perfectly reasonable for them to be expected to pay a mooring fee for so doing.

The other point on which I take issue is your espousal of the cause of the Houseboaters who are mooring illegally. They surely knew when they first bought their boats that what they are doing was against the law. It is significant that according to your report "the vast majority of people living on their boats did not register under the Moratorium", and are thus under threat of convictions and evictions. This would appear to be their own fault entirely, so why should our officers support them?

There are now many people living on boats which are scruffy and ill maintained, and whose sole occupation seems to be to shout abuse at passing boats whom they consider to be going too fast. Our boat is always operated with due consideration to other boaters, and we always slow down to pass moored boats, but we are beginning to wonder whether we are wrong to want to move our boat at all! It worries me when I see these illegal boats displaying N.A.B.O. stickers, so much so that I shall give very serious consideration to renewing membership when the time comes.

V K Wyles, Bugbrooke

NABO REPRESENTATIVES

Council members contact addresses

Penny Barber

Christopher Barnacle
(Treasurer)

Phil Bland

Jon Darlington
(Chairman)

Melanie Darlington
(Production/Distribution)

Roger Hancock
(Secretary)

Neil Hutchinson
(Navigation Officer/NW Rep)

Peter Lea
(Vice Chairman/SE Rep)

Colin Paillin
(Midlands Rep)

Stephen Peters
(River Users Co-ordinator)

Christine Potter
(Membership Secretary)

Peter Sterry
(NERep/Publicity)

Nikki Timbrell
(Boater/N'letter Editor)

Harry Winter
(Engineering Officer)