



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

## NEWSLETTER

February 1995

### Editor's comment

It is good to know that we can provide a channel of communication between members - whether it be in solving a problem (see letters) or in collecting statistics (see good idea on page 14). The next idea is to publish members' small ads - an easy way to sell that unwanted gas fire perhaps? Details on page 14.

In the other direction, we are again asking for your help. If you have not already done so, it is time to pester your MP! The Environment Bill needs amendment and there is just time to add your voice to the mass protest.

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.

|                           |         |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Newsletter.....           | 1       |
| Editor's comment.....     | 1       |
| Chairman's comment .....  | 2       |
| News.....                 | 2 - 13  |
| Council meeting.....      | 3       |
| Navigation Forum.....     | 3       |
| BW Users meeting .....    | 6       |
| BW Bill.....              | 8       |
| BW Managers meeting.....  | 10      |
| NABO Business.....        | 14 - 16 |
| Reports.....              | 17 - 18 |
| A BCN Tour.....           | 17      |
| Letters.....              | 19      |
| NABO representatives..... | 20      |

Published by

**National Association of  
Boat Owners**

# NEWS

## Chairman's comment

1995 has started with a flurry of activity.

BW have held a Managers' Conference and a Major Users' Conference, at both of which NABO was in attendance, and we have had the first National Users Forum for navigational interests, jointly arranged by NABO and the IWA.

We are also still going through the turmoil of the Environment Bill (previously called the Environment Agency Bill - don't ask me why they had to change the name!). This is going through Parliament at high speed - though not as high a speed as I thought it would be. Having looked at the options, it is clear that we should support the amendments being sponsored by the BMIF, RYA and IWA. Their access to a Parliamentary Agent and other organisational resources, and the non existence of a petitioning mechanism, means that our cause is best served by supporting their amendments which have the best chance of being adopted.

Rather slower than the Environment Bill, but finally

emerging as an Act on the 16th January is the British Waterways General Powers Bill, now the British Waterways Act 1995. Most of the implications of this have yet to emerge.

What is known is that the only duty to immediately take effect on the Board is the general environmental duty. The other duties and powers are discretionary and will only commence when BW choose to enforce them.

This means that the requirements for 3rd party insurance and boat standards have not yet come into effect. The notice period for the introduction of standards of 12 months for boats built on or after 1st January 1970 (and 24 months for boats built before) will only commence when BW have got the inspector scheme up and running with the inspectors in place. It is probable that the requirement for 3rd Party insurance will come in at the same time as boat standards.

We will of course keep you informed of developments as they occur.

## **NEWS**

### **View from the Council meeting held on 14th January, 1995**

Moley, having been unable to mind his own listening equipment at the last Council meeting, asked me to give it the once over. They seem to be a fairly busy lot.

A Parliamentary Waterway Group meeting (which NABO had attended) had been given a presentation by Audrey Lees of IWAAC. It seems likely that there will be a new IWAAC strategy document in the Spring, with the emphasis on heritage. Us Zimmer frame boaters might even get looked after then! Pity is that IWAAC no longer sees its role as a watchdog to bark at those who endanger the waterways; never mind though, NABO is still here!

The Environment Bill got talked about almost as much as mooring charges, but with this Bill having passed its 2nd Reading in

the House of Lords, Council are on the ball and working with other boating groups to try and put Navigation on the new Agency's list of tasks. Glad I'm not the House of Commons postie.

Dredging also surfaced, with a BW commitment to dredge to original profiles where the silt was easy to get rid of, otherwise it'll depend on how much they can afford to tip. I thought Muck and Brass went about together.

Heard something too about a Broads rep; nearly volunteered until I found out they meant Norfolk (too near Essex for me). But there must be someone out there who could spread our message in East Anglia - write to Jon Darlington if you could help. There's a lot of boats on them Broads. - Ratty

### **National Navigation Forum**

On the 21st January the leading national user groups with a primary interest in navigation met in Birmingham at the joint invitation of NABO and the IWA to discuss their mutual interests and to see if regular meetings like this would be useful.

There was an overwhelming consensus that such a network of communication would be of great benefit to user groups. It was decided that the main purpose of the forum was as a means of communication between user groups so that we are all made

# NEWS

## National Navigation Forum (continued)

aware of events of mutual interest that come to the attention of any one of the groups.

It was also decided that the group should meet from time to time, probably quarterly, with the provision that additional meetings would be arranged if something arose which needed a quick response.

The group will not be issuing mandates on its own, and no chairman will be permanently appointed, so that each member group can act on its own behalf.

One immediate benefit of the meeting is that the group are considering the BW Act 1995 and the associated legally binding undertakings, and statements of intent.

Another immediate benefit is that the group communication network has enabled consensus on the way forward on the Environment Bill. There is general support for the IWA/RYA/BMIF amendments put forward in the House of Lords. This consensus of support will hopefully improve the chances of the amendments being passed.

The next problem on the

horizon is the DoE review of navigation which is expected to go to the Minister next week before being printed and distributed in the next two or three weeks. This may effect the whole way navigation operates and who will do the operating. Clearly a consensus view about the way forward would be better than fragmented views. The forming of the National Navigation Forum will have come just in time to help make a consensus view possible.

### **Attending organisations:**

Association of Pleasure Craft Operators (APCO)

Association of Waterway Cruising Clubs (AWCC)

British Marine Industries Federation (BMIF)

Canal Boatbuilders Association (CBA)

Commercial Narrowboat Operators Association (CNOA)

historic Narrow Boat Owners' Club (hNBOC)

Inland Waterways Association (IWA)

NABO

Residential Boat Owners Association (RBOA)

Royal Yachting Association (RYA)

# NEWS

## Background to the Forum

Some significant events of the last few years have shown the desirability for co-ordination between all boating interests on the Inland Waterways. For example, the passage of the British Waterways Bill, the introduction of boat standards, and most recently the advent of the Environment Bill.

All these are examples of "the powers that be" wielding their power without proper regard for user interests. They (BW and Government) are bodies with immense power and resources which individual user groups are unable to match. What has added to their power is the fact that there are so many bodies speaking for different navigational interests on the inland waterways. The different messages sent out by users gives Government and Navigation Authorities the idea that users don't really know what they want, and the excuse to impose their own solutions on them.

It was with this in mind that the IWA and NABO met together and explored the possibility of a Forum of national user groups

being formed, which resulted in the meeting on 21st January. For this, thanks go to Michael Stimpson who worked hard at promoting dialogue between the two groups, and to David Stevenson, who as the previous IWA chairman made the meetings possible.

It is perhaps surprising that there are so many national user groups, but each one has come about to fill a particular niche for a particular reason. Each has its own agenda, but all have an overriding common interest in navigation on the inland waterways.

Navigation is under threat from various angles. For example, we have seen BW shifting away from navigation towards developing other activities on their waterways. The removal of a significant number of "boaters" from IWAAC appears to be evidence of this change. There are even more serious threats to navigation by so called environmentalists, and the Environment Bill will leave navigation totally unprotected on the waterways currently operated by the NRA.

# NEWS

## Background to the Forum (continued)

With the future of navigation being the subject of a consultation document soon to be released from the DoE, we are potentially facing one of the most important changes to inland navigation since the passing of the Transport Act in 1968. If we are to get what is best for navigation it is vital that users agree on what they want, and are seen to agree.

There is one other matter which came to light during the NABO/IWA talks which strengthened the resolve to improve inter-user comm-

unication. Specific instances were discovered where NABO and the IWA had apparently been told very different things by BW on the same subjects. Because there was previously no mechanism for communication between users, one group could be set off against another, making all of them less effective.

The last point in favour of the Forum is that one group may identify a problem which affects us all, but which then could fail to get the attention it deserves because it is being dealt with solely by that group.

## BW Users Meeting in Watford: Jon Darlington reports

Apparently for the first time for a while, BW held a consultation meeting for the chairmen of major user groups in Watford. It was attended by IWA, BMIF, APCO, AWCC, RYA, NFA and NABO for the users and Bernard Henderson (Chairman), Brian Dice (Chief Executive), Ian Valder (Commercial Director), Stewart Sim, Ken Dodd and Jim Kelly for BW. The purpose of the meeting

was to discuss the matters of concern to users.

The first item on the Agenda was the BW Act 1995. Some concern was expressed by the Board that the powers of the Board to control moorings had been lost. This concern was shared by a number of others too (you may remember the clause which allowed BW to fine people who moored contrary to notices

# NEWS

## BW Users meeting in Watford (continued)

restricting mooring, such restrictions being for the purposes of safety or of preventing congestion). The clause was withdrawn after the House of Commons decided that it shouldn't be a criminal offence, but without penalties BW claim it is of no use to them.

The problem now is that BW intend to introduce the powers of that clause which they have lost by means of a byelaw, and are currently reviewing the byelaws generally.

We have previously asked to be kept informed of byelaw alterations and are particularly concerned that byelaws are not used to create more onerous powers than were included in the Bill. This is an area we will pursue.

The question of consultation came up with reference to the Managers Conference (see report on Page 10). It appears that consultation procedures are going to be looked at again taking into account comments made by Audrey Smith (IWA Chairman) and myself at the Conference.

The moorings matrix was also

discussed. It was decided that there was need for another meeting to clear up some of the difficulties that had arisen in the way it was being operated.

One of the questions which was discussed was which organisations should be invited to this meeting. I suggested that all areas of activity should be represented which should include residential boaters (RBOA), commercial boats (CNOA) and the historic boaters (hNBOC). There seemed to be some reluctance to increase the numbers above those that were there, which makes me wonder why the question was asked.

Another main issue to be coming up shortly is the pricing of licences. BW gave an undertaking 3 years ago to keep prices in line with inflation and have done so, but the three years expire in January 1996. They are now looking at whether there may be alternative ways of charging for use of the canals and have asked users to come up with ideas. If any of you can suggest any equitable method of charging for the use of the canals please let Jon Darlington know.

## NEWS

### **The BW Bill becomes an Act - what next? by Stephen Peters**

The General Powers Bill which BW promoted finally received Royal Assent on 16 January 1995 - and is now the British Waterways Act 1995.

It is timely, therefore, to consider practical implications of the new Act for boat owners - especially those with older craft or river boats.

The Act contains far-reaching provisions affecting land owners, houseboat dwellers and customers wishing to moor for short stay or longer term on BW waterways. But the greatest impact is likely to be felt by owners of boats on the river navigations controlled by BW.

The timetable for implementation of Boat Standards has not yet been announced but the Act does give some indication. It is likely that boats up to 25 years' old will be required to comply with Boat Safety standards in 1996. With the deadline now only a matter of months away it is surprising how many owners have so far ignored the implications. Some through ignorance, and some with the attitude "wait and see what happens". The latter attitude can

be understood when one considers the shambolic way in which the proposals were promulgated some 4 years' ago.

Owners of most canal boats will generally have little difficulty in meeting the requirements of the Standards which are based on the long-standing construction standards applied to hire craft. However, older craft may need modification work in order to comply. The biggest problems will occur with river and sea-going boats - those on the Severn and Trent, for example. It remains the case that these craft are allowed to navigate on the high seas (if their owners wish), but are considered 'unsafe' for use on inland waterways.

The problem has arisen because BW originally intended that Boat Safety Standards would be applied only to canals, and would be phased in gradually on rivers. This would have given owners the opportunity to alter their craft during refits, and would have given the marine trade time to adapt to the new regime. The first draft standards contained draconian proposals which frightened many river boat



# NEWS

## The BW Bill becomes an Act - what next? (continued)

users. It is true that the BMIF subsequently helped to reduce unnecessary requirements but the lack of an orderly and meaningful consultation process, coupled with inadequate communication, has resulted in very little prior preparation taking place. New craft are still being sold for river use without complying with the Standards. Some manufacturers even charge extra for a fire extinguisher!

So what will really happen?

Some owners have already taken the decision to leave BW waters and base larger craft in coastal marinas. Others have said they will take no action whatsoever, and will continue to use their boats without a licence. (NABO would not condone any such licence evasion.) The end result will be many disillusioned boat owners who are forced to give up their chosen leisure activity. And fewer craft will use BW waterways. It would be tragic indeed if a boat owner who had been forced to move his boat to the coast were to be involved in a fatality due to inexperience or the natural perils of the sea, but one can almost predict such an

incident occurring.

A secondary problem is likely to arise from the requirement for compulsory Third Party insurance cover. Many craft are presently not insured, and one does not generally fear the unknown presence of such craft. Many may be uninsurable for one reason or another and before such cover can be obtained owners may have to pay for expensive surveys and associated costs. What prior thought has been given to this potential problem by insurers and professional bodies?

There is likely to be a considerable flurry of activity during the next 12 to 18 months as everyone's minds become concentrated on the issues. NABO will be at the forefront of efforts to safeguard the interests of its members and boat owners in general. The small print and complex clauses and schedules of the new Act offer some hope that implementation of the legislation may not be as straightforward as the authorities hope. More of this anon!

Finally, we do not yet know how the NRA (or its successor the Environment Agency) will

## NEWS

### **The BW Bill becomes a Act - what next? (continued)**

implement the Boat Standards on its rivers, although Thames Region has announced that the Boat Standards came into force on the River Thames on 1st January this year (1995).

NABO will be seeking a meeting at the highest level to clarify the situation for owners of craft on the Nene, Ouse and Medway and other river navigations controlled by the NRA.

In the meantime, we would welcome your views and

comments on potential or real problems arising from the new legislation. And we look forward to increasing our membership amongst concerned river users throughout the country so that we can fight on their behalf.

*If you have any comments to make or problems to report concerning the new Boat Safety Standards, please contact Stephen Peters if your boat is on a river, or Nigel Parkinson if you are a canal boat owner (contact addresses on back cover).*

### **BW Managers Meeting: Jon Darlington gets a good dinner**

It was something of a surprise to me to be invited by BW to talk to their managers at their training conference near Northampton on 17th January.

The opportunity for bending the ears of all the waterway managers at once was one not to be missed, so I accepted the challenge and attended the function.

The other guest speakers were Audrey Smith of the IWA and Ken Ball of the National Federation of Anglers.

I chose to speak on the subject of consultation (why would I want to do that? I hear you ask) and having started I wondered if it was a good choice. Although there were a few friendly faces, it was clear that there were others who were less than enthusiastic.

Fortunately looking at a sea of restrained antagonism didn't put me off the dinner that followed. What surprised me about that dinner was that with the array of cutlery I started with, I don't see

# NEWS

## BW Managers meet'g (cont)

how I ended up with two forks and a teaspoon to eat my "pudding" with - I chose the teaspoon rather than using the three implements together!

Being placed next to Bernard Henderson at the dinner, I had an opportunity to find out more about him. He is a friendly, genial man with a sense of humour but he has a strong sense of purpose and seems to believe in an autocratic style of management. He also seems to be going to get more directly involved than his predecessor did. We can only wait and see how we get on in the long term.

I must confess to being surprised by the NFA chairman Ken Ball. Like many boaters I have developed a negative attitude towards anglers, but if all boaters and anglers were as reasonable and sensible as Ken Ball, there would never be another dispute between the two groups!

All in all, I think there was a benefit to NABO in attending the conference, and inviting users to speak does show a willingness on the part of BW to listen, which we should somehow try to encourage.

## Grand Union South meeting

Nikki Timbrell attended the latest GU South User Group meeting (otherwise known as Chris Mitchell's soirée) on Jan 30th at Marsworth. These events are now to take place three times a year. Attendance was good considering that BW failed to announce the time or venue!

Dredging, the main issue of the last meeting, was given a brief update. BW have decided on the profile to be used on the Grand Union - 4'6" over a 20' channel, tapering to 2'-3' at the towpath edge, and to various depths according to circumstances on the offside. Narrow canals will have a 10' channel. The dredging budget has been increased, but it will take a long time. It is, however, an improvement on the original proposals.

BW are over the moon (sorry, but they really are!) about their new Act. They are delighted that they can now have a right of access across land to get to the canal bank, and sadly also delighted that they will eventually be in a position to refuse a boat a licence if all the conditions (insurance, Safety Certificate and mooring) are not met.

## NEWS

### GU South meeting (cont)

GU(S) are first tackling the problem of unauthorised moorings. BW have had to give an undertaking that they will not refuse a licence to any boat on the system last October just because it does not currently have an authorised mooring. There are 248 boats in this category in GU(S), and the meeting was invited to come up with ideas to solve the problem of how moorings could be provided for these boats. Ideas ranged from leaving the boats where they are, but levying a charge, to designating moorings for groups of 10-12 boats, to using mooring charges to subsidise the building of more marinas - these are currently uneconomic due to BW's enormous 'connection charges'. Sensitivity was suggested in dealing with boaters (new idea for BW). Chris Mitchell has gone away to think.

A quick resumé of the engineering works in the area (currently problems with too much water!), the obligatory discussion about dog dirt, and a few local questions concluded the meeting, apart from a bit of tea and gossip.

### Mr Finch

If you moor your boat in the Midlands, you have probably heard of Mr Finch. He is an accomplished boat thief, who breaks in with the minimum of damage, takes only clothes, food and alcohol, and then moves on, sometimes walking up to 20 or 30 miles to the next boat. He is well known to the Police, but very difficult to catch. He is known to have been as far south as Marsworth and Kidlington, north to Foxton and the Ashby and Coventry canals. He also operates in the Shropshire Union area north of Birmingham, and was once arrested in Crewe. Recently (last week of January) he has been in Blisworth and Braunston.

British Waterways in Braunston, with the co-operation of the Daventry Police who are co-ordinating the search for this man, are now offering a reward of £100 for information leading to his arrest. They hope that by publicising his existence, he will at least discover that everyone is looking out for him, and will be deterred. Otherwise, even a prison sentence may only be a brief respite.

# NEWS

## Mr Finch (continued)

### Identification

Tony Finch is 5'10", balding, with scruffy long fairish hair, blue eyes and various amounts of beard. He is in his early 50s, walks with a slight limp and a stoop from the pack on his back. He nearly always wears a hat, and up to 4 layers of waterproofs. But his chief characteristics are that he is usually drunk, and smells strongly.

He breaks into boats by first trying the doors, but if he cannot break a door lock will break a window. He does no more damage than is necessary, and leaves everything tidy when he leaves. He is primarily after alcohol (whisky and rum, but not vodka or gin), but also takes food, batteries for his Walkman, binoculars, waterproofs and other clothes, but rarely anything else. He often carries his takings away in a pillowcase. If he is very drunk, he may sleep in a boat. He is very good at escaping detection, moving around at dawn or dusk, and breaking in without a sound in the early hours of the morning. The canals are his main transit route, but he does take to the fields too.

### How to protect your boat

Lights are the best deterrent, but failing that, good security. He will smash a padlock, rather than pick it, so a short shackle padlock on a metal bar is recommended. Window shutters inside or outside can be effective. Alternatively, remove all food and drink and leave a note in the window to say so (not guaranteed, but worth a try).

### What to do if your boat is burgled by Mr Finch

Please report this to the Police (either Daventry (0327) 300300 or your local Police station) as soon as possible. Keeping track of him is important.

### What to do if you see Mr Finch

Ring 999. He is a wanted man by the Police Forces of Staffordshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire, for breaking his Probation conditions. If possible keep him in sight. He is not known to be dangerous, but should only be approached if there are more than two people available to detain him. And if you succeed in getting him arrested, call BW Braunston to claim your £100!

## **NABO BUSINESS**

### **Advertising in the NABO Newsletter**

Now we have allowed proper time for members to comment on the issue of advertising in the NABO Newsletter, the Council have formally adopted the policy that advertising will be allowed. Display advertisements will be available in units of a quarter, half or full page; details of rates and copy requirements can be

obtained from the Editor, Nikki Timbrell (address on back page).

Members wishing to use the pages of the Newsletter to advertise boating merchandise for sale, or services wanted, are welcome to send a few well-chosen words to the Editor. This service is free, but a small donation would be appreciated.

### **Stone throwing: the next move**

Bill Winterburn and the White Rose Boat Club in Wakefield have come up with a good idea for recording stone-throwing and other unhappy incidents on the canals. On behalf of his Boat Club, Mr Winterburn keeps an incident book, compiled from reports sent to him on special incident sheets issued to members of the Club. He encourages members to report all such incidents to BW and to the Police, and keeps a note of when this was done (this can then be used in evidence against them!).

Mr Winterburn suggests that other clubs and groups of boaters could do the same, and then annually send a copy of their reports to NABO. We think this

would be an excellent idea, and will gladly co-ordinate a nationwide incident book. If your club or group is interested in pursuing this idea, and you would like a copy of the White Rose Boat Club's incident sheet, please contact Nikki Timbrell.

### **Environment Bill**

If you have not already done so, please could you find time to write to your MP concerning the amendments we are advocating to the Environment Bill. A sample letter was included in the last Newsletter: copy this or use your own words. There is still time before the Bill reaches the Commons.

# NABO BUSINESS

## NABO Sweatshirts - time to get fitted out for the summer

As reported in previous Newsletters, the NABO sweatshirt is now available with an embroidered logo and your boat name, as well as with printed logo (large or small). T-shirts and pennants are also available. They are good value, as the quality of T-shirts and sweatshirts used by the manufacturer is very good, and they wash and wear well!

### T-SHIRTS

Heavyweight cotton, only **£7.50** each.

*Colours:* white, red, sunflower, navy, black, grey, bottle green, emerald.

*Sizes:* small (36"-38"), medium (40"), large (44"), X-large (46"-48").

### SWEATSHIRTS

Heavyweight polycotton with either raglan or drop shoulder (please specify), only **£12.50** each, or **£17.50 with embroidered logo and boat name** of up to 15 letters.

*Colours:* white, red, sunflower, navy, black, royal, bottle green, charcoal, heather grey.

*Sizes:* small (36"-38"), med (40"), large (44"), X-large (48"-50").

### LOGOS

Logo available on both in either black or white. Please state preference for large (full chest) or small (pocket size, printed on left).

Embroidered logo (small) + boat name available on sweatshirts only.

### PENNANTS

Pennants with rope and toggle - only **£8.00**

Pale blue with black logo.

Please turn over for order form

# NABO BUSINESS

## NABO Sweatshirt order form

Please send completed order form, together with a cheque made payable to the National Association of Boat Owners, to Penny Barber,

|                                      |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Item type                            |  |  |  |
| Item colour                          |  |  |  |
| Item size                            |  |  |  |
| Logo type                            |  |  |  |
| Logo colour                          |  |  |  |
| Logo size                            |  |  |  |
| Boat name                            |  |  |  |
| Price                                |  |  |  |
| Total Price:                         |  |  |  |
| Your name, address and phone number: |  |  |  |



## REPORTS

### In praise of BW! A BCN Tour by Chris Boxall: part 1

Last October half-term I had a week spare, a boat and a crew. So where to go? We decided to do something we hadn't done before, so we settled on a lesser used part of the BCN. Our route from Solihull was the Grand Union to Spaghetti junction and then up the Tame Valley canal. Using the short Rushall canal we would connect to the Wyrley & Essington to take us on to Wolverhampton. Down the Wolverhampton 21 would lead to the Staffordshire & Worcestershire canal from where we could return to the BCN via the Stourbridge and Dudley canals.

Well, the first bit was the worst bit. The rubbish in the Grand Union resulted in several stops to clear the propeller. Nothing unusual there then! At the end of the first day we were near Spaghetti junction. We had seen no other moving boats, but it had rained for much of the day.

Next day dawned bright and clear, and good weather and clear skies were to remain with us for most of the week. We turned into the Tame Valley canal. The 13 Perry Barr locks were all in good condition except

that about 20% of the paddles did not work. There were no 'BW Aware' labels on them. One lock did give us problems because the only working paddle on the top gate was the gate paddle! One feature of the Tame Valley is its duck weed - enough by each top gate to cover the canal for some yards. This caused us no problems but the dog was confused and walked straight onto/into(?) it. Initially the canal is surrounded by industry but this quickly falls away, yielding to open spaces and housing. At Perry Barr top lock there are water and refuse facilities but no sewage disposal.

By mid afternoon we turned into the nearly straight Rushall canal. The condition of the locks and the towpath was generally good and only one pound was low. From the dryness of the lock walls it looked as though no boats had passed this way for several days. This canal is mainly rural, except near the locks. In the afternoon sun the views were very pleasant. At the top lock we passed from the Rushall to the Wyrley & Essington canal. This canal seems to take 'contouring'

## REPORTS

### In praise of BW (continued)

to the limits with wide bends to avoid 'hills' 15 ft high! By nightfall we had made Aldridge. Despite the brilliant weather we had seen only one boat - in the distance.

It's a day's trip on the Wyrley from Aldridge to Wolverhampton. Initially we passed above large gravel pits, attractive in their deep red colours, then Catshill junction which is now the only connection to Chasewater, but originally was the main line down about 30 locks to the Coventry canal at Huddlesford junction. Whilst industry is never far away the canal is principally rural until Walsall. At the junction with the Cannock extension at Pelsall there is now a large open space so it is difficult to imagine the industry that was there a hundred years ago. Then there were 2 blast furnaces, 40 puddling furnaces, 7 mills and forges, a gas producing plant and limekilns and locomotive sheds all in the immediate area (as my guide book says). Near here we passed the first boat going in the other direction for 3 days!

As we approached Walsall housing began to crowd the canal and the water became noticeably

dirtier. As we approached Sneyd junction the houses fell away again and the rural nature of the canal returned. At Sneyd there is the only sewage station we encountered in 3 days on the BCN. Definitely a bad point (*my informant says you missed some -camouflaged against vandals! Ed*) At Wednesfield junction we inspected the site of the Bentley canal. Now all that remains is the top half of the top lock. The rest has disappeared under some form of recent open cast workings or landscaping. Earth moving machines were moving over the line of locks like ants. We arrived at Wolverhampton top lock just at dusk. The basin was busy, but we wanted access to Wolverhampton's restaurants.

We had spent 3 days on the BCN. Most of the route was rural, and is to be recommended. The state of the locks was satisfactory and there was sufficient depth. The only significant problem with rubbish had been on the GU between Solihull and Camp Hill top. We had seen a total of 3 boats moving. Now I like things to be quiet, but this is empty!

*Continued in the next issue.*

## LETTERS

### **Vetus Bowprop problem solved: from a satisfied member**

Thank you so much for publishing my letter concerning the Vetus Bowprop. I was contacted by many members and the information received was most illuminating, and I would like to thank them publicly for their time and effort.

For anyone interested in the problem, namely the constant shearing of the bronze 3mm pin from the motor drive to the gear box, I have now had a modification done which gives me the safety factor and yet the reliability which I consider to be of the utmost importance to any navigational aid. The remedy was to fit an overload device rather than a shear pin. Now if the prop becomes obstructed the device will emit a sound like a loud rattler. This will tell me that I must not use it until the obstruction has been removed from the prop.

If any of our members are interested in the remedy, though I admit rather costly, I will be only too pleased to give them the address of the engineering company who gave so much time and effort to solving the problem.

I look forward to being able to use this useful aid with a degree

of confidence I had not previously enjoyed. Thank you once again for your indulgence and co-operation.

Mr J Clarke

The Old Coach House, Abberley,  
Worcs WR6 6BN.

### **Look out for your wind generator!**

A brief warning to other members of NABO. Like many other boat owners I had a wind generator to keep the batteries on my boat topped up, and unfortunately over the Christmas period this was stolen (along with its 8' pole!).

The boat was moored in the local Marina, and although the generator and pole were not padlocked they were extensively clamped, and the thieves just cut through the lead with a pair of wirecutters. So a word of warning to everyone who has one of these expensive items - padlock securely.

Philip Douetil

Pirbright, Surrey

# **NABO REPRESENTATIVES**

## **Council members contact addresses**

Penny Barber  
(Rally organiser)

Phil Bland

Chris Boxall  
(Midlands rep)

Jon Darlington  
(Chairman)

Melanie Darlington  
(Treasurer)

Roger Hancock  
(Secretary)

Neil Hutchinson  
(Navigation Officer/NW Rep)

Mij Lambert  
(Marketing Officer)

Peter Lea  
(Vice Chairman/SE Rep)

Nigel Parkinson  
(Engineering Officer)

Stephen Peters  
(River Users Co-ordinator)

Christine Potter  
(Membership Secretary)

John Rowland

Peter Sterry  
(NERep/Publicity)

Nikki Timbrell  
(Newsletter Editor)