



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

## NEWSLETTER

March 1995

### Editor's comment

This is a weighty issue, full of articles for you to think about and comment on.

In the immediate future, BW are reviewing the way boating is charged for - can you see us all with 'smart cards' at the locks? And in the longer term, the DoE review of navigation functions could land us with a completely new waterway authority, with the best - or the worst - of everything in place now.

But you do have a chance to make your voice heard in shaping the future of boating - get writing!

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Published by

**National Association of  
Boat Owners**

# NEWSLETTER

## Chairman's comment

BW have just announced a change in their approach to consultation. Until now they have refused to produce a "consultation procedure" as such, but have relied on a document which contained only certain criteria from a statement of intent given to user groups (i.e. IWA, RYA & BMIF) in May 1992. When they produced their first draft of this document we pointed out that the "criteria" they had used were criteria to be adopted when formulating their consultation procedure, and were not sufficient in themselves. As you know, NABO have strenuously argued for the need of a proper consultation procedure and had even produced one for BW which was pretty well ignored. We had, despite various letters, come to a stalemate.

At the Waterway Managers' conference in January I gave a talk stressing the need for a clear consultation procedure and outlined what I thought it should contain. Audrey Smith, the new Chairman of the IWA, also gave a talk, some of it in the same vein, and it may be that some progress was made at that conference. I

would like to think so. Certainly the new procedure has now been produced along the sort of lines we proposed. It is likely that NABO can support the new procedure provided that two important omissions are rectified, namely that there is no provision for:

- (a) sufficient time to be given to user groups to refer back to their respective Councils, Management Committees, or members;
- (b) written comments to be submitted after the meeting within a timescale consistent with (a) above.

Also, BW wish to agree the consultation procedure at the National Users Group Meeting on the 21st March - just 13 days after issuing it! This is a perfect example of the sort of problem we are up against. Unless there is a change in the proposed procedure, policy can still be introduced/changed without any proper consultation. We have produced a suitable amendment for BW, and have written to other user groups asking them to support the new procedure, but to ask that fuller consultation be allowed first.

# NEWS

## View from the Council meeting held on 4th March, 1995

Hello, it's Moley again! Isn't it good to know that on the waterways there are always people around to help when you have problems. My thanks to Ratty for listening in last time.

Lots of paper to consider this time. BW are asking for views on how they should charge for licences in future. Rumour is they want to make changes from next year. Think about this one, as there is a possibility that charges will be made for more facilities, separately from licencing. Moley thinks they should be looked at together and the hidden agenda of driving up costs acknowledged or denied.

It is true that the present system is inequitable as the more you use the system the cheaper it is. BW is looking for some way of charging to reflect usage, but this would be unfair to those who have retired and have the time to cruise extensively but who probably cannot afford more. Paying for each lock by a credit card would proliferate more signs and structures to be vandalised. It would be much more expensive to run than the present system which is at least easy to

administer. Come on, put your thinking caps on and let Penny Barber know your brilliant ideas.

The Inland Navigation Forum seems to be a great success with everyone turning up and more organisations clamouring to join. As long as the dialogue keeps up it ought to be a good thing. They will be discussing the DoE Green Paper on whether there should be one Navigation Authority for the whole system. Again beware the hidden agenda! A message is contained in it that "calls on the Exchequer must be justified" and "waterways development should encourage private...investment". Is this back door privatisation? Is it the Government at it again trying to reduce public expenditure at the cost of the service itself? There may be a case for combining the two authorities, but only on the basis that it improves the system and reduces bureaucracy. Get a copy of the Paper and let us know what you think. This document could change the face of boating as we know it, for better....or worse. Don't just stand by - help NABO and others to make them get it right for once.

# NEWS

## View from the Council meeting (continued)

BW has been found guilty of maladministration! NABO has been saying so for a long time, but now the Ombudsman, Lady Ponsonby, agrees. You can at last obtain (at reasonable charge) a copy of the Waterways Standards document which has been suppressed for so long. Get in touch with BW for your copy, it is important that there is seen to be a demand. You can then test whether your piece of system is as wide and deep as it should be. If it isn't let Moley know.

Finally, this time another case of bureaucracy gone mad. After years spent restoring the Basingstoke Canal for navigation, an SSSI has been slapped on the canal restricting boat movements

to 1300 per annum. If it was not for the hard and dedicated work of those restoring the canal there would be no environment worth protecting. If, as I suspect, they vote with their feet, those involved will justifiably say they have had enough and the canal will revert to its former state resulting in the destruction of the habitat the SSSI seeks to preserve. What a waste of effort and resources! Is this typical of the "work" of environmentalists? If so watch out for the impact of the Environment Bill. Moley's very existence could be under threat! So is your right to enjoy your boating. There can be room for everyone, but it will need co-operation and goodwill. Let us hope it will be forthcoming.

## Ombudsman finds in NABO's favour

This is the latest in the 'why can't we have a copy of the BW Waterway Standards?' saga! Will it be the end of the story? . . . But from now on, you can obtain your own copy of the standards from your local Waterway office, thanks to the Ombudsman's decision.

You will remember that NABO has long been pressing British Waterways to make the standards available to any member of the public. BW has consistently refused, only offering to allow people to look at copies in Waterway Managers' offices, claiming that the document would

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### Ombudsman finds in NABO's favour (continued)

not be understood without explanations. NABO went through all the steps of BW's complaints mechanism before taking the dispute to the Waterways Ombudsman, Lady Ponsonby.

In her decision, Lady Ponsonby says, "I have come to the conclusion that British Waterways are guilty of maladministration by not making the base document 'Waterway Standards' freely available to any

User who requests a copy . . . In consequence of my findings on this matter I would request that British Waterways makes the document freely available to any User who requests a copy (subject to any reasonable charge to cover costs)."

NABO has sent copies of the Ombudsman's decision to all BW Waterway Managers, and would like to hear from anyone who experiences difficulty in obtaining a copy of the Standards.

### BW & NRA Review of Navigation Functions

A consultation exercise concerning navigation functions was undertaken in 1991, following a recommendation by the House of Commons Environment Committee that the split of navigation responsibilities between BW and the NRA should be reviewed, but nothing has been published until recently.

The long awaited consultation paper from the DoE invites all those interested in the future management of the waterways, both organisations and individuals, to provide views on the following options:

Option A: No change.

Option B: Transfer all NRA navigations to BW.

Option C: Transfer all BW navigations to NRA.

Option D: Transfer, as appropriate, individual navigations between NRA and BW.

Option E: Establish, as a voluntary and self regulatory body, an "umbrella" federation of navigation authorities to provide a forum to address common concerns and to encourage co-operation and co-ordination.

Option F: Establish a statutory navigation body with operational responsibility for BW and NRA navigations.

# NEWS

## **BW & NRA Review of Navigation Functions (continued)**

Legislation would be required for options B,C & F, but apparently not for Option D.

The consultation paper results from the Minister acknowledging (in April 1994) that further work on the review of BW and NRA navigations would provide the opportunity for waterways interests to clarify their wider concerns so that they can be considered by Government.

The Paper goes on to identify a number of objectives and policies which the DoE believes must be taken into account in giving further consideration to the future organisation of the waterways. i.e:

- Their special environmental and heritage character needs to be protected for future generations.
- Navigation is now far from the only purpose for which they are valued. Their importance to a wide range of different users needs to be accommodated and developed. Conflicts between the different objectives and users need to be satisfactorily managed.
- Public subsidy must be justified, prioritised and targeted, and

subject to control to ensure accountability and best value for money.

- Wherever appropriate, waterways development should encourage private and voluntary sector investment and participation.

- The underlying principle should be that those who benefit should meet an appropriate proportion of the costs involved.

- Any new arrangements for waterways regulation should aim to improve or simplify necessary regulations, and take the opportunity to remove bad regulations.

- Good regulations should have the aim of:

- (a) facilitating commercial activity wherever possible;
- (b) not being prescriptive or creating additional bureaucratic burdens on individuals and businesses.

The main question we are being asked is whether changes in organisation and responsibility are necessary to meet the Governments objectives, and if so which of the 6 options

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## BW & NRA Review of Navigation Functions (continued)

identified above would best achieve them?

We are not being asked for an opinion on the objectives and policies, and perhaps our first consideration should be whether we want to answer the question at all given the terms of reference!

Looking now at the options in a little more detail, options A, B and C are to a large extent self explanatory. Option D allows for the transfer of navigation functions of individual waterways or groups of waterways depending on individual circumstances. Change could be from BW to NRA, or vice versa, or to some other organisation in the private, voluntary or local authority structure, perhaps through establishment of a trust, with an appropriate transfer of resources.

Option E allows for the creation of a new umbrella body which could also be formed in any case under any of the options A-D. The body could be established by navigation authorities coming together voluntarily to discuss matters of common interest, and to increase

co-operation and co-ordination, but with each body retaining their responsibilities. It is suggested that an umbrella body for users could also be desirable, again constituted on a voluntary and self regulatory basis.

Option F would require fundamental changes in legislation and might give the new body other statutory duties such as the duty to promote recreational use of waterways. A question which seems to bother the DoE is how proper relationships can be established with smaller navigation authorities without unnecessary centralisation. In order to promote greater co-operation and co-ordination, and perhaps to provide appropriate consumer protection, the DoE suggests such a new body might be required to follow formal consultation procedures which might also reinforce its authority with Government.

If you have any comments on the review of navigation functions please send them to Jon Darlington



# NEWS

## Review of BW Craft Licensing Structure

BW have decided to undertake a comprehensive review of charging for boats on their canals and rivers, and have written to user groups as a first stage in seeking user's views. Their aim is to "produce a system that is acceptable, fair and easy to understand for users". The review will not cover levels of charging, which will remain subject to annual consultation with user groups.

BW would like to hear from you, whatever your views. We reproduce here some of the suggestions BW say they have received, and on which they would like comments.

### **Fundamental changes to the way fees/charges are collected**

- \* Charging by the use made of the system, possibly using "smart cards", as opposed to the payment of a licence fee.

- \* Different charges for different waterways. This would allow account to be taken of varying maintenance standards and popularity of the waterways.

- \* A common licensing category to allow cruising on all waterways in Britain, whether controlled by BW

or other waterway authorities.

- \* Changes in the relationship between licence and mooring fees.

- \* Changes in the basis of river registration charges.

### **Modifications to existing charges, categories and procedures**

- \* Changes to the basis of charges, such as:

- charging by length times beam, as on the Thames,

- using just a single length category.

- \* The removal of some licence categories, which are little used, such as the 1 and 3-day licence categories.

- \* New and modified licence categories, such as:

- a continuous cruising licence for boats moving around the system without a fixed base.

- haven licences: specific charges for the use of harbours only.

- a specific licence category for rowing eights,

- specific hire licence fees for day boats.



# NEWS

## Review of BW Craft Licensing Structure (continued)

- trade plate licences: specific licences for trading boats.
  - 4-day licences for visiting boats.
  - changes to the 'no use of locks' category, to also incorporate no use of swing bridges.
  - cheaper short-term licences for boats with river registrations.
  - a licence category for historic boats.
- \* Changes to licence conditions and methods of payment, e.g:
- ways of spreading payments throughout the year.
  - changes in the definition of unpowered boat length.
  - changes in the start date for hire boats.
- \* Clear guidance for granting concessionary licences.

If you have views on any of the above suggestions, or have any other ideas, either communicate them directly to BW (write to Glenn Millar, Research Manager, British Waterways, Willow Grange, Church Road, Watford, WD1 3QA, and if you can, send a copy of your letter to NABO), or write to Penny Barber who will collate a NABO response. BW have only given us to the end of April, so be speedy!

## English Nature restricts boating on the Basingstoke canal

English Nature has announced its decision to declare 27 miles of the Basingstoke Canal a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Boat movements on the canal will be limited to 1,300 p.a.

The canal authorities and the Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society, which is largely responsible for the canal's restoration, have been

negotiating with English Nature since 1990, but the decision is nearly identical to the proposals they put forward five years ago.

The restrictions on boat movements will apply to all powered boats moored on or visiting the canal, including the Society's trip boat, the John Pinkerton. The trip boat alone is expected to account for around

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### Basingstoke restricted (cont)

400 movements a year. Visiting boats which would cause the quota to be exceeded would be turned away from the canal.

The Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society says, "In our opinion, the imposition of an SSSI will inhibit the proper management of the canal, place unnecessary restrictions on boat movements, and burden the canal with unworkable bureaucratic controls." They ask everyone who supports them to write to English Nature and his/her MP, protesting against the decision.

NABO wrote to English Nature. We said we viewed the restrictions as unfair, unrealistic, and unworkable, and asked them to reconsider them. Their reply said, "The recommended level of motorised boating . . . can be regarded as a compromise between the 'naturalists' and the Canal Society", and added, "Notification of the Canal as a SSSI can be regarded as a tribute to all those who helped in its restoration". We doubt whether the 'new navvies' who put tens of thousands of hours into restoring a stagnant ditch to a navigable canal would agree.

### BW concedes to DIG

BW has made concessions to proposals put forward by the Dredging Initiative Group ("DIG").

DIG is a single-issue pressure group, formed of representatives from canal organisations. Its purpose is to get BW to maintain a navigable channel for each waterway close to its original design dimensions, or to those set out in the Fraenkel Report in the early 1970's where the original is not feasible. NABO was one of DIG's founding members.

We protested at proposals BW put forward at various user group meetings to restrict the width and depth of navigable channels on the southern Grand Union Canal (see articles in the September 1994 Newsletter and the April 1994 "Boater"). We also attacked the limited budget and low priority assigned to dredging. In December, DIG members, including NABO, met BW Regional Managers Stewart Sim and Peter Coyne to discuss BW's Standards on channel profiles and its dredging policy. DIG Chairman Adrian Stott has recently presented our case to IWAAC.

## NEWS

### **BW concedes to DIG (continued)**

Concessions made by BW are:

(1) A promise to revise the Waterways Standards to include a statement of the ultimate goal of dredging each canal to its original profile, and to consider setting a specific standard channel depth and width for each waterway;

(2) An increase in the budget allocated to dredging in the Southern Region over the next five years from £650,000 a year to £1,000,000 a year;

(3) An increase of 2 metres in the standard for the channel width of the Southern Grand Union;

(4) A promise to dredge to

original channel profile wherever this can be achieved by direct dredging. (Direct dredging is BW-speak for dredging from the bank and depositing the spoil on land behind the dredger. It requires the landowner to accept the spoil, relatively unpolluted silt, and access for the dredger. There won't be many lengths where all three can be found, so this promise is unlikely to achieve much.)

DIG's successes, although mostly in the South so far, show the value of concerted pressure by waterway groups. NABO supports DIG, and hopes it will help achieve better cruising on the whole canal system.

### **BW cuts access to tidal Thames**

Opening hours of the locks leading from BW's waters to the tidal Thames are to be shortened, London Waterway Manager Mark Bensted has announced.

Locks affected are Thames Lock at Brentford, Limehouse Lock, and Bow Locks. The cuts are being made to reduce BW

manning costs. No implementation date has been set.

Thames Lock in future will only open for two hours on either side of high tide, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. in summer and 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. in winter, compared to 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. currently. This means that on

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## **BW cuts access to tidal Thames (continued)**

some days in winter, the lock's regular opening time may be as little as half an hour. Boaters wishing to use the locks outside these reduced times must book a special passage with BW by phone, at least 24 hours in advance. These booked openings will be available during the four hour tide "window", between 5 a.m. and 10 p.m. daily. Limehouse Lock will be open the same times as Thames Lock, and with the same booking system.

Bow Locks' present opening hours (eight to twelve hours a day) are being scrapped entirely. The only way boaters will be able to use Bow Locks is by booking 24 hours ahead.

Bensted's decision follows three months of negotiation with boating interests, who all pressed for longer fixed opening hours. The campaign was led by London IWA's Ron Bingham, supported by NABO, hNBOC, AWCC, the Lee & Stort Forum, and most of the local boating organisations. We argued that his advance booking scheme made no allowances for difficulties boaters would experience in finding a telephone on the Thames or

River Lee, or finding a working, un-vandalised phone anywhere in London. Booked times would be missed through breakdowns or delays at other locks, and boats coming down the Thames could be endangered by being stuck on the tideway if they were delayed. Despite our arguments, Bensted has made no concessions on opening hours, although he marginally improved the advance booking scheme and agreed to a 12 month trial period.

NABO, in common with the other waterway groups, is disappointed by Bensted's decision, and regrets the impact this has had on goodwill.

Please let us know if you use these locks outside the fixed opening hours during the next 12 months, and if you encounter any problems - with telephones or BW. We will use the information to try to persuade BW to increase lock opening hours, but can only do so if there is sufficient demand or if the booking system fails to work as intended.

We need to know about your experiences if we are to make a case.

## NABO BUSINESS

### Consultant for NABO

We are pleased that Philip Ogden has offered to act as a consultant to NABO. His wide experience of waterways will be of great benefit to us, and as you will see elsewhere, he has already been put to work! We are very grateful for Mr. Ogden's offer of help.

### Auditor required

Prior to the last AGM, the current auditor asked if he could resign from the position. Revd. Anthony Bedell has audited the accounts since NABO started and has charged a very reasonable amount for the work he has done, but he is not a member and his other commitments make the job onerous to him.

Whilst we would not expect a member to do the work for nothing, we would prefer not to have to pay for a firm of accountants to do the audit, which would cost several hundred pounds.

So if you are a Chartered Accountant or a Certified Accountant and could spare some time, please contact Jon Darlington. The NABO Constitution does not require that you be a registered auditor.

### Canal violence

In the last issue of the Newsletter we suggested that boat clubs and boating groups should take up the White Rose Boat Club's idea of collecting information about incidents of violence on the waterways, which could then be collated centrally by NABO. It now appears that BW Midland and South West region have taken up the idea!

At the recent West Midlands Canals Forum meeting, David Green BW Manager, BCN, reported that BW has set up a 'violent incidents' log at each local office. BW will collate the reports from these logs before passing them to the police in appropriate quantities. This will enable problem areas to be identified and action plans to be determined, as has already been achieved on the Ashton Canal in Manchester. Results will not be publicised because of the adverse publicity that this would create, but information should be forthcoming in informal discussions and meetings.

To report to this log estimate the degree of seriousness, in your own mind, of any incident that you are involved in. Is it an

# NABO BUSINESS

## Canal violence (continued)

imminent threat, would a report later be sufficient, or could the event be ignored? For immediate threats contact 999 or Freephone Canals. Most events can be reported when you pass a BW canal office or on your return to base by contacting your local canal office. Please report location/canal, nature of the terrain, date, time, numbers involved, your feelings and the nature of the incident.

If you feel you want to contact David Green directly, he can be found at BW, Bradley Lane, Bilston, West Midlands, WV14 8DW or on 01902-409010. His responsibility is restricted to BW's Midlands and SW Region, and at the detail level, just to the BCN. However, don't limit yourselves to that area. Action can only be taken if the wider picture becomes known. BW will pass information to the correct manager.

## Intimidation on the canals: Chris Boxall wants your views

David Green, the BW manager for the BCN, also has a current project called 'Welcoming Waterways'. BW is becoming aware that the popularity of the canals is being limited by the 'intimidation' that people of all interests feel when on, or next to, the canals. They are concerned to eliminate, or at least reduce this 'intimidation', which might best be described as the 'feel bad factors'. Mr Green is already aware of the obvious intimidators like litter, stone throwing, thugs and selfish canal users, but he is not so aware of specific navigation problems and locations.

He is interested in soliciting

the views of as many users as possible, and NABO has agreed to collect comments from members and pass them on to him. To assist me, Philip Ogden has agreed to collate your views and ideas so please write to him at

or phone him on

We would like to hear about those aspects of canals and boatowning which make you 'feel bad' or 'intimidated' - with specific information on locations, and any solutions that you can suggest. We would also like to know about things that attract you to the canals - the 'feel good factors'.

## THE ADVERTS PAGE

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### NEXT NABO MEETING

Saturday 8th April  
at the Friends Meeting  
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## REPORTS

### **BW Chairman addresses PWG: Peter Lea reports**

BW Chairman Bernard Henderson addressed a packed meeting of the Parliamentary Waterways Group, including several MPs, on 7th February.

He said that BW was interested in lively growth in the use of waterways. He defended BW's grant, and its ability to manage recreation and navigation, and attacked the present diverse arrangements for the management of U.K. waterways as uneconomical, unbusinesslike, and hampering growth. He believes the new Environment Agency, with its stress on the regulation of pollution, is not the right place for the effective management of navigation and recreation, and that this can best be achieved by evolution towards a single authority with responsibility for all waterway recreational activities. Such an authority would need to be adequately funded.

In what could be seen as a comment on the one-sided views of environmentalists, he stressed the equal balance between conservation, the environment and navigation on BW's waters.

He highlighted the improved

liaison which is taking place at Board level between the major navigation authorities, and promised to look at ways to improve consultation with user groups at a national level.

He said that BW now had an efficient management structure, and that it listens to its customers. NABO members will have their own views on this!

Asked for an indication of future price levels now that the three year moratorium on increases has ended, Henderson refused to commit himself to further rises pegged to inflation, and pointed out that BW's grant had not increased. Henderson was previously Chairman of Anglian Water, and is known for having introduced the biggest price hikes in that company's history - reputedly 30% over three years. BW must consult user groups before bringing in higher prices, and NABO will be watching them carefully.

Henderson was also asked whether the undertakings BW gave to users and Parliament during the passage of the Bill would be honoured, now that the Bill has become an Act. He

## REPORTS

### BW Chairman addresses PWG (continued)

promised a detailed written answer, which would be circulated to all PWG members. However, BW would use its new powers to require boats to show they had a legal mooring before issuing their licenses.

Mandatory third party insurance would only be introduced gradually, and with appropriate consultation. He

could not give a specific starting date, but an 18 month implementation period was likely.

PWG members present agreed that the Hendeson gave a polished, articulate performance. This Chairman seems set to adopt a higher profile than his recent predecessors - we will have to see whether this is good or bad news for boaters!

### Report on the Lancaster/L&L canals user group meeting on 7th March: from Neil Hutchinson

The Waterway Manager reported on the 'progress' in repairing the breach at Maghull, which is on the remainder part of the L&L going towards Liverpool. Due to difficulties in getting access to the canal through a residential area, which have not yet been resolved, the stoppage is likely to extend to August 1995.

Mooring prices (matrix) on both the L&L West and the Lancaster were provided for this meeting but the matter is subject to consultation with moorers and, we are told, should be implemented in January 1996.

*\*\* Do make sure you are*

*consulted, and that you are provided with all the information you need, and if you have any doubts about the proposals contact me \*\**

A copy of the draft stoppage programme was provided at the meeting and it should be possible to look at this provisional information at your Waterway office. *\*\* Problems contact me. \*\**

There are now around 100 marina berths on the Lancaster canal and there appear to be a further 100 in the offing. Proposals for around 250 berths on the L&L are under discussion. New facilities, including sanitary

## REPORTS

### Lancaster/L&L canals user group meeting (continued)

stations, are planned for Lancaster and Burnley.

Users are reminded of the Chorley Festival on May 20th which BW are encouraging boaters to attend. Details from the BW office.

There is to be a review of swing bridges on the L & L and Terry Horan would welcome information from users so that their operation can be improved.

Plans are being made to upgrade the remainder length of the L&L. Discussion also took place on relations with fishermen, towpath and hedgerow maintenance, misuse of the Riley Green moorings, the review of navigation functions and items from the business plan. *\*\* If you*

*feel that NABO should be more involved in these discussions please let me know. \*\**

Information which is, or should be, available from your Waterway office (for your 'goody bag'):

1. "Lancaster Canal Boating Guide" provides details of facilities on this canal.
2. "Boating facilities L&L canal", information as above.
3. "Waterways Code for boaters on the L&L canal" currently being revised.

*\*\* If you find something that you think other boaters should know about, please tell me. \*\**  
Best wishes for a good season's boating from Neil H, your NW Rep.

### Chesterfield canal user group meeting on 23rd February

Peter Sterry attended this meeting and reports that Waterway Manager, Richard Mercer, is very approachable and has a good relationship with the users.

There is a problem at the end of the canal with fishermen using lock approaches. The local angling club is very concerned, as they do not believe their

members are responsible. Litter is also a problem and BW are willing to provide rubbish skips for organised litter-picks.

The major problem on the Chesterfield canal is the weed, caused by nitrates from the local river. The closure of many mines has caused the water table in the Worksop area to rise, and the

## REPORTS

### Chesterfield canal user group meeting (cont)

conductivity of the water in the canal has doubled in the last year - the effect of this on weed growth is not yet known, but it could make it worse. The NRA and English Heritage are working closely with BW in this matter.

Much work has been carried out in West Stockwith Basin, with piling, water points and a new car

park. Security for boats in the basin is being strongly opposed by the local Parish Council, who are insisting that there be unlimited access to the basin.

The Sheffield Basin Rally will be held over the weekend of 6/7/8 May. Already 200 boats are booked in, and it is expected that there will be 5 miles of boats!

### Moorings matrix meeting on 13th March: Jon Darlington

The meeting was attended by Ken Dodd, Jim Kelly, Stephen Goode, Ian Selby, Simon Ainley and Richard Dommett. The user groups represented were the RBOA, NABO, IWA and AWCC.

We went through the facility score elements where problems had been identified. It was agreed that fencing round a site under the heading "security" meant security fencing, but the majority felt it was inappropriate to specify a particular standard of fencing as this would depend on the requirement of the area. The conclusion therefore is that if the fencing isn't working, you shouldn't have to pay for it.

The question of security boat or house caused problems. One

manager said he would charge for security if there was a nearby private house - regardless of whether there was any duty on the householder to provide security. This was vociferously argued against by all users and at least one BW manager. It was made clear that the mere presence of a house was insufficient.

It was unanimously agreed that "a reasonable degree of privacy" did not apply to towpath moorings, and it was agreed that boaters should not have to pay for "a reasonable degree of privacy" if fishing was going on opposite their windows. This was met with mixed feelings from BW but they acknowledged that there is a problem. More on this anon!

## REPORTS

### In praise of BW! A BCN tour by Chris Boxall: part 2

*Continued from the Feb issue...*

Next day we worked the Wolverhampton 21. All locks were quite satisfactory but what was outstanding was the attention of the lock keepers (2 of them). They knew where all the boats were on the flight so that they were able to inform us of approaching boats. This was especially useful as we would otherwise have met a 70ft empty boat operating single handed on a blind bend. Both lock keepers were exceptionally helpful and friendly and made passage through the flight a delight. It just shows what can be done.

Since we were now back on the usual cruising routes there were other boats around. Occasionally we had to queue for locks. At the bottom of the 21 we turned south towards Kidderminster after picking up fuel at Gregory's near Autherly junction. At Stourton junction we changed to the Stourbridge canal. Again there was no trouble with locks or water. Half of the canal is rural but the attractive flight of locks is hemmed in by a mixture of industry and houses. At the bottom of the Black Delph locks

the Stourbridge canal ends and the Dudley canal begins. This is therefore the start of the BCN. However, the distinction is a bit academic as the two canals will usually be cruised as one. As we ascended the Delph locks dusk overtook us. With a clear sky looking towards the sunset the view was quite breathtaking. We were now high above Stourbridge having come up over 20 locks from the Staffs & Worcester, so we had a panoramic view of the lights.

From the top lock it was only a short distance to our overnight mooring at the Waterfront above the Merry Hill commercial centre. The transformation here is amazing. What was once the derelict back yard of the Round Oak steel works is now a large basin, say 200 yds by 60 yds, giving ample mooring. All around are restaurants, pubs, office blocks and some retail outlets that are not yet leased. The buildings are constructed in modern architectural form to give a very pleasing effect as all of this is bathed in light from myriads of orange lamps. As it was still early we took the

## REPORTS

### In praise of BW (continued)

monorail into the Merry Hill centre which was below us. To eat we chose Spino's for a Greek meal. This development shows what the canals can do for local areas. All that is required seems to be imagination and drive. The setting that the basin created for the Waterfront premises matched what one can find next to the sea in the Mediterranean.

Next day would see us back home. After the single Blowers Green lock we were back on the Birmingham level. The canal runs around the Dudley hill in open country with fine views down the valley past Merry Hill to Stourbridge. Directly past the Netherton tunnel we found another BW services location including sewage. Back on the main line we made swift progress to Farmers Bridge junction. Again I was impressed at the changes in the area. With the Indoor Arena, the Convention Centre and the improvements around Gas Street Basin, Birmingham has some facilities to be proud of. That these facilities use the canal as a backdrop brings Birmingham's canals to the attention of many people as it provides a large car-free zone in which to stroll.

As usual the Farmers Bridge locks were easy to pass through, but a large amount of rubbish assailed the eye at the Ashted locks (as usual). The final flight of locks, Camp Hill, offered no problems. Only the GU to fight through again. Curiously we had passed only 1 boat after entering Farmers Bridge locks despite all the traffic on the main line.

In all we had spent 5 days on the BCN. Problems were minimal. The cruising always interesting and usually rural. However I am sure that BW and other groups must have put a lot of effort into achieving what we benefitted from. Our thanks go to them.

The biggest difficulty was the guide book. I am not aware of a Nicholson's guide that includes any more of the BCN than the main Birmingham to Wolverhampton route. We used the 1984 edition of 'The Cruising and Walking Guide for the BCN published by the IWA. Although packed with detail and information, it lacks the clarity of Nicholson's. (*Look out for a newer edition of Nicholson!-Ed*)

As they say, cruise it or lose it.

## LETTERS

### Experiences of Mr Finch: 1

Stratford upon Avon Magistrates gave Mr Finch 2 years probation for breaking into about 30 boats, one of which was mine.

Our boat is moored on the Grand Union at Stockton BW long term moorings and he has been in our boat at least three times, and has made two attempted break-ins, the last time within the last month.

He has broken one window

and numerous padlocks to get in, and stolen trousers, baked beans and Nicholson's Central guide.

He has been known to BW for years and to offer a reward for his arrest now is a total waste of money. After all, if he goes to jail he'll be out within a year to carry on his current lifestyle, and I think it highly unlikely he will change, don't you?

Mrs J Kay

Hanworth, Middx

### Experiences of Mr Finch: 2

We applaud the publicity that you have given in the February Newsletter concerning Mr Finch and are pleased that encouragement is now being given to apprehend him (once again), but our lengthy experience of this man indicates that the problem does not stop there.

After our first break-in in June 1988 Finch was arrested and received a 2-year custodial sentence. A perfect prisoner, he was released after a year and was breaking into boats again

straight away. After a further spate of break-ins, three of them on our boat, he was arrested again, admitted all offences, and received a probation sentence, including residence at a probation hostel. As our boat appeared to be one of his prime targets, I was approached by the Lancashire Mediation and Reparation Project, who invited me to meet Finch and assist with counselling, as long as I promised not to become violent! He absconded from the hostel before the meeting could be arranged.



## LETTERS

### Experiences of Mr Finch: 2 (continued)

The next time he broke into our boat (about 18 months ago) it was apparently only 3 weeks after being released from a further short prison sentence, according to the policemen who handled the case. We took the only advice he could offer and moved our mooring to a well-protected, less accessible, mooring base.

We are sure our experience is not unique and the disruption of our main relaxation has been enormous, to the point that at one stage we considered giving up boating all together, solely as a result of Finch not being in continuous custody, because the only time we felt really happy was when we knew he was locked away.

Ignoring the value of the alcohol, food, socks, pillowcases, waterways guides and tools he has stolen from us, the cost of rectifying break-in damage has run into hundreds of pounds. Each offence has cost about the excess amount on our insurance policy and we feel that, had we claimed each time, we would now be uninsurable.

Finch is not unintelligent - he has,

we understand, been well trained for survival in both the British Army and the Foreign Legion - and it is our belief that he will only walk along the towpath drunk when he wants to get caught. Now and again he prefers a warm dry cell and regular hot food, and knows how to get it!

We think you may now understand the point we made at the start that his arrest is not the end of the story, but we wish you well in your efforts to protect boaters from this menace.

John and Dee West  
Winchester

#### *Editor's comment:*

*I can well understand the sense of frustration expressed by both these correspondents. There appears to be nothing they can do. The Police are usually sympathetic and helpful, but powerless to remove Mr Finch from the waterways for more than a short time. BW expressed the hope that by publicising his activities, he would in some way be frightened off. We can only hope it works.*

# **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  
(Boater/N'letter Editor)