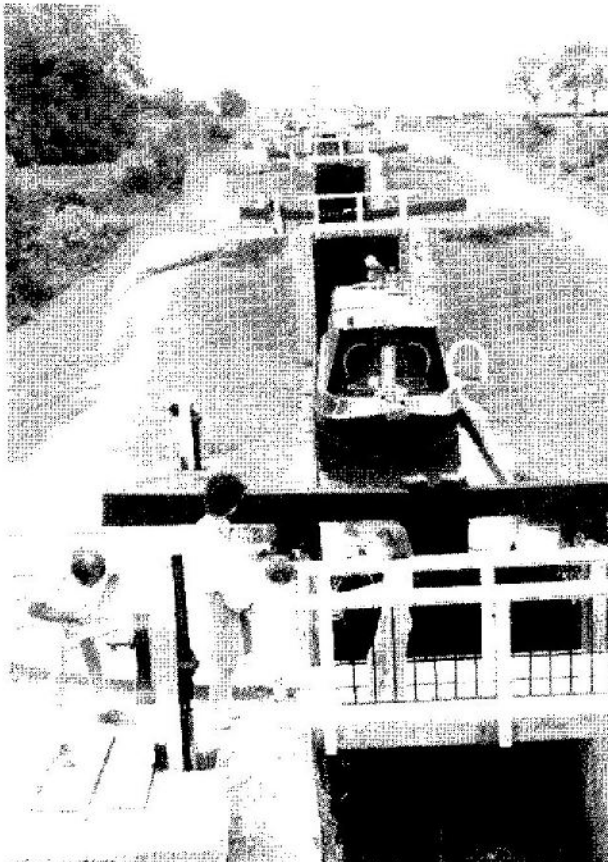




NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 96/3: May 1996



Foxton Locks

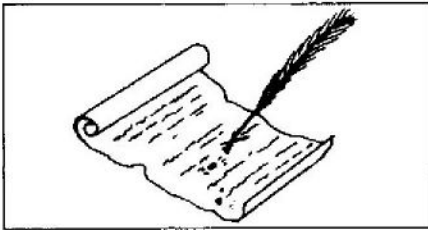
Water shortages this summer could mean restrictions on the use of lock flights like this.

BW are considering simplification of last year's stages of time restrictions, starting with the abandonment of voluntary restrictions. The first stage will be locking between 5pm and 9am. Two weeks notice of each stage should also be given.

Photo: Robin Smithett

NEWSLETTER

Editor's comment



My apologies for the long gap since the last Newsletter, but we kept waiting for events.... And then there were too many reports, which somehow had to be squeezed in....

But lots of lovely things to read. We need your help of course (could you assist Christine Denton? see page 22). Postal voting for Council members is up for discussion (page 21), and there is a special discount offer on gas detectors (page 23). Don't forget the prizes for introducing new members (last Newsletter), and to send in your tips, stories, letters and pictures - please!

Whilst every care is taken to ensure that the contents of the Newsletter 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. The products and services advertised in this publication are not necessarily endorsed by the Association.

May 1996

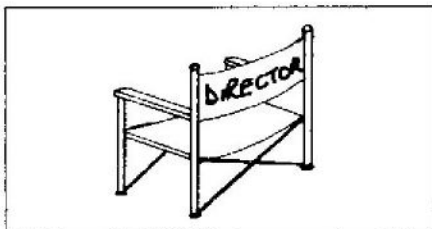
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Published by

**National Association of
Boat Owners**

NEWSLETTER

Chairman's comment



Elsewhere you will read about the latest happenings in the Boat Safety Scheme scene. As deadlines come closer things are hotting up.

It was our genuine hope that we could negotiate with BW and help put right some of the problems of the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS). Following on from March's set-to with users, it seemed that BW were going to do just that, but having been to the meeting in London on 10th May they appeared as intransigent as ever to any meaningful changes. At one point we were told that the BSS team were intelligent educated sensible people who had done a good job and would continue to do a good job, and we were also as good as told that if we used our common sense and imagination our problems would be solved. Good arguments no doubt, but somehow it did not

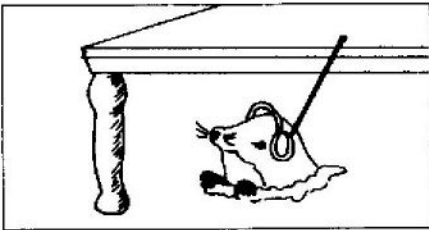
seem very convincing at the time, and seem even less so now.

What was particularly ironic was that we were using the same room in Queen Annes Gate in London as we were almost 5 years ago when NABO first started arguing about the "Boat Standards" and the BW/EA team was sitting in the same place, and I was more or less in the same place as I was then, and arguing the same points of principle and getting the same reaction from the same people. It was a sobering thought that in all that time nothing significant has changed, and if we rely solely on consultation, negotiation and promises, it is a certainty that nothing significant will change.

In general the attitude of BW and the EA continues to be patronising and arrogant, combined with a dictatorial nanny-state mentality towards the ordinary boat owner, and from Friday's experience there seems little prospect of that changing. Most of our complaints have been ignored and in my opinion we have little choice but to continue to progress them through the complaints mechanism.

NEWS

View from the Council meeting held on 20th April, 1996



Moley calling.

Interesting meeting, although Moley's hole fell in before the end and he was unable to hear it all.

Apart from telling IWAAC what they should be doing (act as a sort of Regulator like OFWAT) concern was expressed over their lack of independence from BW and that it would be a whole lot better if DOE were to provide the finance.

Boat Safety Standards were much in evidence. Following the U turns by other organisations and particularly the press release NABO sent out after their meeting with other user groups, BW appear to be trying to improve things. David Fletcher the new Chief executive has been targeted with making the scheme workable, but all that BW have done so far (in print at least) is to produce a booklet giving guidance to boaters where the

issues remain the same but are muddled over a bit. It is really little more than the usual Watford spin doctoring in the hope we will go away. Whilst there are some concessions over flue spillage tests and single strand wiring, there remains a fundamental problem that there is no discretion on examiners to depart from the checklist.

Moley thinks that as surveyors are to be able to use their discretion, and that Mr Fletcher has allegedly told our Chairman that once a boat has a BSS it is unlikely to fail thereafter (unless the boat has been altered or there is some major change in the Standards in the interests of safety), anyone seeking to become an examiner is wasting their money. No boater is going to submit his boat to a three hundred plus point checklist where there is no discretion when for a little more expense he stands a greater chance of success with a surveyor, of whom there are insufficient to certify the number of boats needed each year.....

BW must adopt a more flexible approach and divide the

NEWS

Council meeting (continued)

checklist between important safety issues and those of lesser impact. Moley understands BW might have boxed themselves into a corner because of their desire to arrange unrealistically low cost indemnity cover for examiners. If as a result there is little room for discretion, unless possibly both BW and the insurers relax their attitude, the examiner system will fail.

Lots of people have sent in their yellow forms, about 30% of the membership. This is excellent but what about you others? There is still time! Only about half the replies have yet been analysed and this has revealed members' hidden talents and lots of volunteers for rally stand staffing, leafleting and attending meetings. On that subject, NABO are to arrange some training courses to help volunteers, so don't be shy - fill in the form!

Is the Newsletter to be available on the Internet? The Editor is to be supplied with a fax modem giving access to e-mail which will save Moley time as he can just send this over the phone line and Nikki won't even have to put a disk in her machine.

Canal Societies and Trusts Representation

There is a view that canal societies and trusts are not being represented effectively at national level and have insufficient opportunities to pool plant and share expertise in areas such as grant applications. This is considered to be particularly so in the Midlands. In contrast, links with local planning authorities and BW local managers are generally considered excellent.

At the initiative of the Staffs & Worcs Canal Society, following an open meeting held on 28th April, a working group is looking at the problem. The members of the group are Mike Handford, Ann Pollard, Liz Bradley, Alan West, John Wright, Ivor Caplan, Bill Thompson and Lindy Foster. They are briefed to report back to a further open meeting on 29th September (2pm, Bonded Warehouse, Stourbridge).

If you wish to contribute your views & ideas to the debate, please contact Ann Pollard, Vice-Chairman, Staffs & Worcs Canal Society,

NEWS

Restrictions on the River Wye?

The Environment Agency has applied for an order under the Transport & Works Act to act as navigation authority for the River Wye. The draft order introduces a series of bye-laws which will restrict the right of navigation on the river.

Interestingly, the draft order does not impose a clear duty on the Agency to promote or preserve navigation on the river. It also has some gems among its clauses. For instance, the Agency has no duty to remove or even signpost obstructions to navigation, and boats moored "without lawful authority" may be removed. Although notice of this would be given, there is no appeals procedure.

Perhaps the most amazing article gives an officer of the Agency the power to demand the names and addresses of all persons on board vessels on the upper river. A false statement would be a criminal offence.

There is also a prohibition on discharges of water from boats which could effectively ban engine cooling water being discharged. This would effectively prevent navigation by many craft.

As is usual with the Environment Agency, there is no commitment to appoint representatives of navigation and boating bodies to an advisory committee.

Rumour has it that powerful salmon fishing and land owning interests on the Wye are anxious to keep boaters out. The Environment Agency is keen to keep in with the fishing lobby.

NABO has written to the Secretary of State for the Environment objecting to the draft navigation order, and asking for changes to many of its clauses.

Stop Press...GU(S) meeting

BW's David Allison addressed the GU(S) user group meeting on 21st May, giving a rather defensive talk about the introduction of the Boat Standards. His first point was to insist that anyone with any problems or misgivings should contact him for information - so get writing!

The examiner training courses are all due to start in June - and so far no less than 782 people have registered.... Surveyors will go on refresher courses too.

NEWS

Boat Safety Scheme: May update from Jon Darlington

The latest correspondence

Following the User Group meeting at the end of March at which BW/EA (EA=Environment Agency, replacement for NRA) were severely criticised for the way the BSS was being managed (as reported in the last Newsletter), BW announced that they would be reviewing the Boat Safety Scheme taking account of users' concerns as much as safety permits.

We responded with a letter dated 11th April outlining our main concerns (with appendices fully detailing our complaints, and providing practical solutions to them), pointing out that we were already taking these through the complaints mechanism but that we hoped that it would not be necessary to continue if a reasonable solution to our concerns could be found. Our main problems concerned the 320 point checklist, retrospective interpretation of standards, the constitutions of the BSS Advisory Group and Technical Committee (set up to advise the BSS Management team), and consultation on the Standards.

BW's reply suggested that all

the issues we raised, apart from those relating to the interpretation of the standards themselves, were "procedural matters" which did not warrant careful consideration at this stage.

We then replied that whilst we would of course welcome any moves to make the standards more practical and flexible where this could be done without prejudicing public safety, we certainly could not endorse the correction of only one aspect of the scheme as a solution to all the failings we perceived to exist.

Guidance notes

In response to users' criticisms BW/EA issued "Guidance Notes for Boaters" on 17th April and asked for our comments by 26th April so that a final meeting could be held on 10th May.

We were rather surprised that the Guidance Notes had the appearance of having been a marketing document hastily updated to appease users with cosmetic changes. But we now have reason to believe that the document may have been partially prepared before the user "rebellion". With our response to this document we expressed our

NEWS

Boat Safety Scheme update (continued)

concern that issuing another booklet means that anyone fitting out a boat, professionally or otherwise, will now require three documents (the blue/grey book issued last September plus the Technical Manual and the new Guidance Notes which purport to explain it). What is required is ONE document which contains all the necessary information. Nevertheless we agreed that the Guidance Notes had some merit as part of a proper review.

In our response we also agreed that the scheme should, if possible, be implemented on the published dates but warned that we are not prepared to endorse the scheme unless a real attempt is made to address the problems we have raised.

Meeting on 10th May

The meeting on 10th May was held in London and chaired by David Fletcher, the new BW Chief Executive.

What became clear almost straight away was that the attitude of the BSS Management team remains totally intransigent regarding the concept of significant risk and refuses to reconsider any of the 320 point

checklist. Indeed at my mention of the word risk, the EA's main "negotiator" on the far side of the room muttered "here we go" under his breath in a most derogatory manner. Despite giving him my immediate and frank opinion of his attitude, and getting an apology, this altercation did not help the tone of the meeting or my confidence that we were being listened to.

BW and the EA continue to think pragmatism and common sense is a satisfactory basis for requiring existing boats to comply with the BSS technical requirements rather than using a scientific basis for determining the need for such compliance. The result is that despite all the work for the Guidance Notes we are still left with a 320 point checklist and 1 cross means a boat fails.

No steps had been taken at all regarding the BSS Advisory Group and Technical Committee, and the BW/EA team did not even appear to know of our concerns.

Retrospective standards

BW/EA refused to assure us that the "standards" would not be

NEWS

Boat Safety Scheme update (continued)

retrospective, i.e. that when the "standards" are updated to account for best practice, boats with certificates complying with earlier versions of the standards will be given exemption from the amendments, unless the they are necessary to avoid a significant risk to safety or to comply with legislation. It is extraordinary that such a reasonable assurance cannot be given.

Technical manual

We were told that the technical manual is still not available and will not be available - even to the BSS Advisory Group and Technical Committee - till after it is too late to make alterations! An important document like this should have been properly reviewed by these groups. The manual will cost £50 and should be available in June.

Appeals Procedure

A draft Appeals mechanism (see page 10 for details) had been produced a few days before the meeting. One matter of principle of concern to me is that an attempt is being made to force people to go through the BSS complaints procedure (as included in the BSS "standards"

booklet) before taking their case to the Appeals Panel as set up by the BW Act 1995.

Whilst this might be considered preferable in order to prevent congestion in the appeals mechanism, it would nevertheless, I believe, be unlawful since the BW Act 1995 states that the Appeals Panel shall deal with any complaint within its remit. BW suggested that this right of direct access to the Appeals Panel can be removed if all those involved in the BSS agree to remove it. This, in my view, amounts to a suggestion that the law can be effectively nullified if we all conspire to ignore it, and is one that I consider wholly in-appropriate, particularly coming from a public body.

Conclusion

On the positive side, a number of minor changes have been made to the Guidance Notes which will make the document more useful. Probably the most significant item in the Notes is the assurance that flue spillage tests will not be required for water heaters. The Guidance Notes will be sent out to all users in June.

NEWS

BW/EA Terms of Reference for the Appeals Panel (8/5/96)

We reproduce the text of this draft document in full for your information. Jon Darlington's reactions are set out on page 9, with the BSS news.

Introduction

The BW Act 1995 states that there shall be a Standards Appeal Panel for the purpose of determining appeals. The Appeal Panel is to consist of 5 people in all, 2 people appointed by BW and 1 person appointed from each of the following:

- a) IWAAC
- b) IWA in the case of narrow-boats or other similar boats normally used in canals, or RYA in the case of any other appeal
- c) BMIF

Scope

The Appeal Panel may deal with any dispute relating to:

- a) any refusal or withdrawal by BW of a licence or registration on the grounds that the boat does not comply, or has ceased to comply with the standards applicable to it
- b) any refusal by BW of an exemption for which application is

made (see below) or any condition subject to which an exemption is granted

BW may grant exemptions in writing on such conditions (if any) as BW think fit to any individual boat or category of boat which cannot reasonably be expected to be altered or adapted or otherwise made to comply having regard in particular to its traditional construction or historical character. Application for an exemption can be made by any person or any organisation appearing to BW to represent a substantial number of owners or operators of boats which may be affected by any standards.

Procedure

Any case which is considered for the Appeal Panel must first have been through the Boat Safety Scheme formal complaints procedure as detailed above.

In the event that the BSS complaints procedure has been unable to reconcile or arbitrate a satisfactory solution, the boat owner may request that the dispute be considered by the Appeal Panel.

NEWS

BW/EA Appeal Panel (continued)

Written evidence

The boat owner (the Applicant) shall provide a written statement (Dispute Notice) setting out the reasons why the dispute should be considered by the Appeal Panel.

Sufficient information to support the Dispute Notice may have already been submitted during the normal Boat Safety Scheme complaints procedure. The Appeal Panel will not accept any further documentary evidence unless served with the Dispute Notice. The Appeal Panel reserves the right, however, to call for further documentary evidence and/or commission an independent survey of the boat in dispute.

Convening of Panel

Within a reasonable time of receipt of a Dispute Notice when all the Appeal Panel members are available, the Appeal Panel will meet to consider the dispute. Written notice of this meeting will be sent to the Applicant.

The Panel will permit the Applicant and/or the Applicant's representative to be present at the Appeal Panel meeting to

present the dispute grounds. No new evidence which was not submitted through the Boat Safety Scheme complaints procedure or with the Dispute Notice is to be given at the panel meeting and will be considered inadmissible.

The Panel will request the Applicant and/or the Applicant's representative to withdraw from the meeting whilst the Panel considers the facts and evidence presented.

The Applicant and/or the Applicant's representative will be advised in writing of the decision made by the Panel. The decision of the Appeal Panel is to be final and binding.

Costs

Each party will bear their own costs in connection with any dispute. However, where the Boat Safety Scheme complaints procedure or the Appeals Panel has commissioned an independent survey of the boat in question, the losing party will bear these costs.

If you have any comments on this procedure, please contact Jon Darlington.

NEWS

Fishing Close Season Abandonment?

The Severn Trent region of the NRA have recently sent out a consultation letter proposing that the fishing close season should be abolished in the Severn Trent Region. NABO has responded.

One point appears to need making regarding canals: although BW owns the majority of the canals, they do not generally appear to own the fishing rights. These rights were usually vested in adjacent landowners by the original enabling acts: something that BW conveniently forgets when they collect income from fishermen.

There are inevitable conflicts between canal users when using the same space at the same time, particularly during competitions where there may be a line of 30 or more (sometimes many more) fishermen with poles across the canal and tackle on the towpath.

For many of us the close season is a haven of peace where there are no conflicts with fishermen. The period from March to June when we do not have to put up with fishing opposite our boat windows, when we can cruise without coming across fishing competitions; when

we can park in the car park at our moorings, is an island of tranquillity to which we all look forward. I am sure it would be a very great disappointment to all our members if the close season is abandoned.

We have therefore strongly recommended the continuing application of the close season.

I think the fish would agree! - Ed.

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NEWS

BW Charter Mark

BW won their Charter Mark in 1994 after being assessed against the following nine criteria:

- Standards
- Information & Openness
- Choice & Consultation
- Courtesy & Helpfulness
- Putting Things Right
- Value for Money
- Customer Satisfaction
- Measurable Improvements in Service
- Planned Enhancements to Services.

Applications are dealt with by the Cabinet Office and are assessed by experienced assessors and judged by an independent panel.

To win a second award an organisation has to show excellence against the nine criteria but also demonstrate improvement in service. The award can be withdrawn if the judging panel consider that the organisation is no longer meeting the required standard.

Charter Marks are held for an initial period of 3 years, so BW's will expire next year (1997). Do they deserve to have it renewed? What do you think?

We would be pleased to receive your views and comments - for and against - so that we can formulate a NABO submission to the Minister for Public Service, Mr Roger Freeman, at the appropriate time.

Television licences for boats

You may have seen recent press announcements concerning the use of televisions in holiday homes, caravans and boats and reports of a legal ruling which has led to a change in policy by the authorities.

TV Licensing clarified the position thus: the use of TVs on board a boat or in a mobile

caravan does not require a separate licence provided that the owner has a licence for his/her home address and there is no simultaneous use of a television at the two locations.

Static caravans and other holiday properties require a separate TV licence. Happy viewing!

NEWS

BW Attempt to prevent Ombudsman from dealing with our complaint?

One of our complaints to BW is that they failed to comply with the terms of the BW Act 1995 which requires that before prescribing, revoking or amending boat standards they must allow a period of public consultation on the proposed standards, and consider any representations made by the public before publishing them and giving notice of the date on which they are to be mandatory.

We do not dispute the interpretation of the law with BW. They agree with us that such a period of consultation is required.

The proposed standards are those dated September 1995. They were first made known to the public in October 1995 when they were sent out to all boaters in their final published version with the notice of the date they were becoming mandatory. Clearly a period of consultation could not have occurred, and BW could not have considered any representations by the public, since these standards were first made known to the public at the same time that the final version was published.

Again there is no dispute that there was no consultation on the September 1995 version. BW admit it quite happily.

However, BW state that they did consult on the 1993 version of the standards and that the amendments in the September 1995 version were made as a result of user consultation "in order that undue difficulties and hardship would not be caused to boat owners" and that amendments made to the 1993 edition "in all cases amounted to a relaxation of the requirements".

However, THIS IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE.

In the September 1995 version BW removed the exemption from open flue spillage tests (standards ref. 7.1).

In the September 1995 version BW removed the exemption from the gas pipe size exemption (ref. 7.1)

In the September 1995 version BW disallowed balance pipes for petrol installations (ref. 2.13).

These are onerous additional

NEWS

Ombudsman (continued)

requirements for those affected, which if they had been amendments to already prescribed standards would, in their own right, have been subject to the consultation procedure.

These requirements were introduced by BW and included in the September 1995 standards for the first time. The September 1995 standards should therefore have gone through the consultation procedure as required by the Act. This is the substance of our complaint.

At the end of March, however, Mr Duffy, Director of Corporate Services at BW, wrote to us stating that the issue may well become one of law, "in which case the Ombudsman has no jurisdiction to determine it". He also goes on to say that "such matters are properly ones for the courts and cannot be treated as questions of maladministration."

We wrote to the Ombudsman expressing our concern that his letter effectively states that the matters she cannot investigate now include matters which are "properly ones for the courts", as well as matters which have been, or are being, considered by a

Court (as laid down in the Ombudsman's terms of reference).

To now include matters which are "properly ones for the courts" is a clear extension of what cannot be investigated.

It appears to us that the change has been proposed in order to prevent the Ombudsman dealing with our complaint regarding BW's non compliance with part of the BW Act 1995.

One of the most important aspects of the Ombudsman's role as far as we are concerned is that this route can be used as an alternative to the Courts if the complainant so desires, thus providing justice without the great expense of court costs - something which should be beneficial both to BW and to the complainant.

We also pointed out that our complaint was not a question of interpretation of statute but was a question of fact, namely, have BW gone through the procedures required by the Act?

The Ombudsman has replied that we are correct that her terms of reference state that she cannot

NEWS

Ombudsman (continued)

investigate anything that has been or is being considered by a court. However there is no suggestion that this includes interpretation of statutes or other matters which are "properly ones for the courts".

She goes on to say: "My role

is to investigate complaints from people who think that British Waterways may have been guilty of maladministration. It is entirely my own decision as to whether I have the necessary jurisdiction to do so, within my terms of reference".

Put that fire out! Put that fire out!

No, its not a quote from the air-raid warden in Dad's Army, its the application of the BW tunnel rules which require all naked lights to be extinguished.

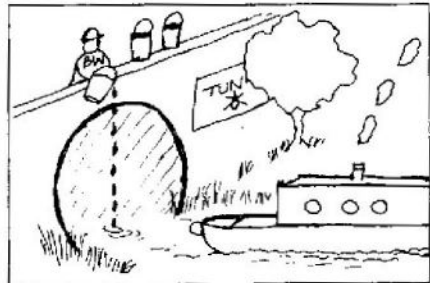
And of course if you happen to have a steam powered vessel, yes, you've probably guessed it, you have to put the fire out in the fire box. The funny thing is the steam engine doesn't work then. But don't worry, BW will use a work boat to tow you through.

No, this didn't happen on the 1st April but the 14th May when ex FMC steamer Monarch, built in 1908 but fitted with a modern steam propulsion unit, was prevented from going through the Harecastle tunnel because it had a naked light in its fire box.

The tunnel master was only

enforcing the rules at the entrance to the tunnel, and provided an alternative means by which the boat could get through, but even so if it is the policy that the rule is to be enforced like this, then surely this is nanny state mentality gone mad.

Derek Cochrane the North West Regional Manager is looking into the matter and will let us know the outcome in due course.

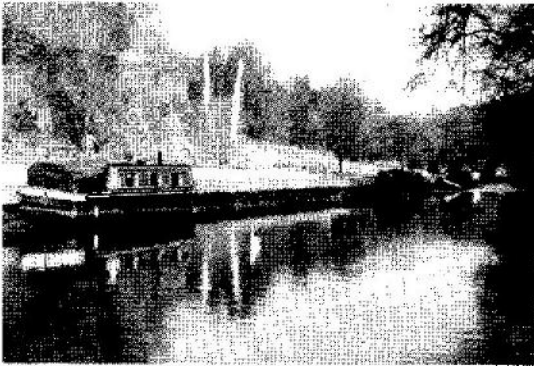


NEWS

Drama at Consall Forge: Penny Barber was there!

LOST: At Consall Forge, (River Churnet, Caldon Canal) on 4th April, over 2ft of water (in half an hour).

IF FOUND please return to Rudyard Lake, which was 66% full (that's 34% empty to pessimists) before the incident.



The automatic sluice by the weir opened because it incorrectly perceived the Churnet to be in flood. This left some boats on the lumpy bottom at thirty degree angles (NB this feels MUCH more than this) and some dangling, pulling with them mooring rings complete with a cubic one and a half foot of concrete and soil.

No-one did capsize but it wasn't for the want of trying ... All very alarming especially when you're still on your first cup of tea and haven't got dressed yet. I did what any rational person would in such circumstances - I evacuated self and dogs and paced the bank having hysterics as my home leaned over increasingly precariously despite best efforts to push the vessel out into what remained of the still rapidly decreasing channel.

Apparently the previous emergency procedure of the Black Lion landlord having acquired a key to the padlock to the sluice and "being interested

NEWS

Consall Forge (continued)

in engineering" had broken down due to the installation of a new licensee six weeks previously. BW turned up eventually after looking for "anything with the word "black" in it - Freephone canals passed on the location as "Black Road".

It is more traditional for this sluice to fail to open when there is a flood, so the incident made a change for regular moorers. As transducers are notoriously temperamental, one might expect a waterway authority that has aspirations to take on more river navigations to have looked at the problem....

Simple solutions could include an alarmed link recording what is actually happening, not just how the transducer feels about it and having two separate systems so if one fails there's only ever half the problem.

It wasn't all bad, I could walk to the prop & remove a plastic bag or two and a bit of rope without getting my feet wet, never mind arms and hands, the pub was open for brunch, the sun shone, the dogs had a good walk to Froghall, and I was floating and vertical by early evening.

Symphony Court

This tale concerns end of garden (offside) moorings. You will probably remember that for such moorings, BW will charge 50% of an equivalent local BW mooring at a basic facility score (e.g. if a local BW mooring is classified as F(location)3(facility), an end of garden mooring will be charged at 50% of F1).

This policy seems relatively straightforward (leaving aside for the moment the question of whether it is a fair policy) and you would therefore expect that when two BW moorings about half a mile apart are scored at H4 & H3 respectively, an offside mooring between them would be valued at 50% of H1.

But just such an offside mooring was recently charged by BW at 50% of D1 (representing an extra £9/m/year or a 78% overcharge). Furthermore this was the price charged for the WHOLE length of moorings irrespective of the take up by moorers - and that was after a 10% reduction after we pointed out that individual boaters could get a 10% prompt payment discount so why shouldn't these people be allowed it!

NEWS

Symphony Court (continued)

The moorings in question are those in front of the new flats (called Symphony Court) at Brindley Place opposite the National Indoor Arena in Birmingham City Centre. The moorings are owned by the managing agents for the flats. The only BW sites in the vicinity are Gas St. and Cambrian Wharf, both sites having a location factor of "H".

BW claim the charge is reasonable because of the value of the site, its high security and demand for it. BW stated that they are setting a charge that they would have charged if they owned the property!

A major point of principle is this: BW have only the powers under the Transport Act 1962 to charge for services and facilities that they provide; they cannot charge the owners of property for the enhancement their property brings to the canal, which is what BW are trying to do in this case.

The high level of security is provided and paid for entirely by the residents of the site through their management agents. BW provides nothing towards security and cannot therefore charge for

it. The question of demand for moorings is of course irrelevant as it is a private site with mooring for residents only.

BW also claimed that the high price was justifiable because there is generally a high demand for city centre moorings. However, there are empty spaces at adjacent sites, all of which have low location scores. The category of D given to Symphony Court is well out of line with these sites.

What also became clear in time was that BW had told the land owners that they would not allow any moorings at all if they did not enter into the proposed contract, thus forcing them into a corner. BW then claimed that the contract had been freely entered into by the landowner!

This example of BW refusing to allow moorings unless the landowner enters a contract at an inflated price should be sounding alarm bells with all of us. The next victim might be you; and since BW has a monopoly control over moorings who is going to stop them? As you might expect, we are pursuing the matter through the complaints mechanism.

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For the right protection for your boat
PERHAPS WE SHOULD BE TALKING

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NABO BUSINESS

CO and gas detectors

In this climate of safety, but quite outside the scope of the BSS, we should be more aware of the possible dangers from escaping gas or from carbon monoxide, especially in a confined space such as a boat.

Have you considered installing a gas detector, or a carbon monoxide detector in your boat? Or even at home for that matter?

Peter Lea has discovered that battery powered detectors are available, and has negotiated a discount for NABO members from a supplier in Lichfield.

Peter has bought a battery-operated CO detector already, and reports that it works OK. It is about 5"x3"x1.5" deep, and can be either wall-mounted or free-standing. It comes with its battery installed: this is part of the sensor and has to be replaced every two years.

The CO detector also

comes in a mains version for use at home, and the LPG gas (butane or propane) detector runs on 12V. Generous discounts for NABO members are available, see below.

Offer to members

Prices:

**Battery CO detector: £28.25
(£10.70 reduction)**

**Mains CO detector: £43.95
(£11.00 reduction)**

**Battery LPG detector: £34.50
(11.45 reduction)**

For more details and to order, please contact:

Peter Lea,

or
Denis Smith,

REPORTS

The Saga of Stourport Basin: a tale from Denis Smith

Once upon a time there was a lockkeeper named Phil at Stourport Basin whose duties included padlocking the two top locks in the evening - to avoid the possibility of the basin being drained - and unlocking in the morning subject to the level of the Severn not being too high.

Phil retired last year and in line with current cost-cutting practices BW management decided that he could be replaced with automation by installing an electronic system of sensors and traffic lights. Until the system was up and running two part time Basin Attendants were appointed.

Over winter, electricians and other contractors duly arrived on site to dig trenches etc and to install four sets of lights - two in the top basin (one each for barge lock and narrow lock) and similarly two in the middle basin. None were situated at the river entrances to the locks.

Each of the four sets had three lights:

Top light - red - Do not proceed, river level too high.

Middle light - red - Do not proceed, basin level too low.

Bottom light - green - Go.

Of course, sensors were installed to monitor basin and river levels so the lights lit up (or not) automatically.

Even before the installation commenced, boaters had the audacity to question BW management as to the possible shortcomings such as:

1. The possibility of collisions in mid flight when lights were on green.
2. There being no lights at the river entrances, a boater could innocently enter the bottom lock against a red light he could not see thereby lowering the level of an already depleted basin - an act of treason.
3. As it is impossible to read the written reasons for the lights unless you are a few feet away from them, a suggestion that only one light - a red one - was necessary seemed too simple to warrant consideration.

Sure enough, within days of the system being commissioned there tended to be louder noises than usual from boaters facing each other in mid flight but this problem was resolved by the ever

REPORTS

Saga of Stourport Basin (continued)

vigilant BW staff. They blocked off all the green lights. One down, two to go. Technical progress then played its part - the sensors failed resulting in ALL lights of ALL colours flashing on ALL over the place much to the consternation of everybody including gongoozlers.

Full circle has now been achieved with automation giving way to manual padlocking of the locks each evening and morning by the basin attendants.

BUT WHAT A HORRENDOUS WASTE OF MONEY SO FAR.....

to be continued...

User group meetings for Oxford and GU(N): Neil Walker

The region will be £3,000,000 short over the next 5 years, requiring an average net cut in spending of 20% per year.

A section of Braunston puddle bank was successfully stabilised this winter. The works revealed more instability so watch out for another major winter stoppage in the next 2 or 3 years.

A new water point in Marston Doles will be a relief to thirsty Oxford boaters. Dredging of the Welford arm has been completed, and the lower end of the Oxford Canal is to be dredged. Few major works are planned for 1996, but they include a lock rebuild at Braunston, plus a smaller scheme at Foxton and some reservoir repairs.

Regarding windows negoti-ated with BW during long stop-

pages: last year, the weekend 'window' provided on the Leicester arm was only used by 4 hire boats and 2 private craft. Stopping the contractors, filling up and draining cost £3,000. With budget pressures as they are, the provision of such windows is going to be scrutinised more closely than before.

A 55' winding hole has been provided between the top lock at Braunston and the tunnel. Will this deter those who climb up and down the locks using the equivalent of 10 years bath-water? Water resources could be a problem nationally. BW are going to increase emphasis on the THRIFT campaign, but provided average rainfall arrives this year do not envisage problems in this region.

LETTERS

Waterways Code for Anglers

David Brewin's letter in the last issue of the newsletter illustrates how the problem varies in different parts of the waterways system. He said that he could see no problem with anglers fishing opposite a moored boat. Until recently the stretch of canal where my club moors its boats was also leased by an angling club. We had the following problems:

Ground bait splattered all over the side of boats, maggots crawling all over boats, fish

hooks entangled with mooring lines, boat covers damaged (once by a grappling hook thrown to break ice), verbal abuse from anglers (one member was threatened with physical violence when he wanted to move his boat).

Happily we have now negotiated a new lease which prohibits angling along our moorings and life is so much more pleasant.

Allan Pickering, Solihull

Certificates of Compliance

I am sure you have been inundated with many similar letters to this re the above but for your information I write as follows:

I have a 1989 Springer 40ft Narrowboat and when the C of C was first suggested and planned I paid £70 for a surveyor to examine my boat and subsequently paid over £200 to sort out about five minor items (i.e. flame trap for fuel tank breather pipe, exhaust lagging etc) with the assurance from the surveyor that I would pass the C of C on completion of these

items. I actually never proceeded to obtain a C of C because of the indecision and 'changing of the goalposts' by BW. Now on the issuing of the grey book I have had to spend over £250 to sort out and comply with new gas regulations, and still have to replace perfectly good fire extinguishers at a cost of £100. Where does it all end? What really annoys me is that a motor caravan can hurtle down the roads at 60mph with a lit gas fridge and no certificate apart from an MOT test, whereas a

LETTERS

Certificates of Compliance (continued)

boat surrounded by water and cruising at 4mph is subjected to these unreasonable restrictions.

Finally, what will happen to the plethora of boats, and I use the term loosely, at present lived on with no licences and having in many cases outboard motors

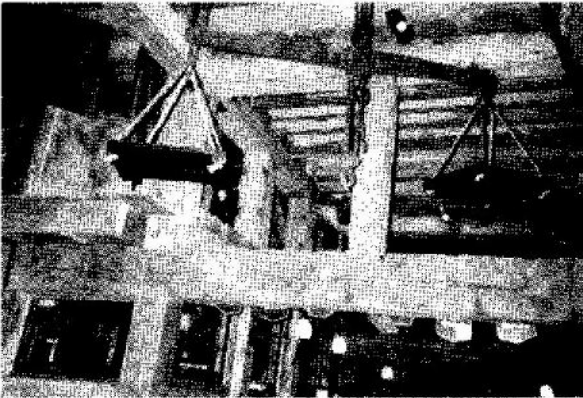
lashed to rotting tillers, these craft are particularly prevalent at the lower end of the Grand Union.

In conclusion, let us hope for a wet spring!

Philip Douetil, N/B Margaret

READERS INFORMATION

A couple of recommended pubs....



The old beams of the Water Wheel at Kidderminster (Staffs & Worcs):

This is a pleasant canalside pub, especially in summer.

Highly recommended for a meal: **The Carpenters Arms, Slapton, on the Grand Union** about 7-10 mins walk from the bridge. It also has a superb second hand bookshop in the barn alongside.

Many thanks to Mrs O M Shaw of Gt Missenden, Bucks for this information and the photo. Come on, everyone must have some pub, service or mooring to recommend!

NABO REPRESENTATIVES

Council members contact addresses

Penny Barber
(RBOA Liaison)

Phil Bland
(Rep for disabled)

Jon Darlington
(Chairman)

John Glock
(Membership Secretary)

John Griffiths
(Midlands Rep)

Roger Hancock
(Secretary)

Neil Hutchinson
(Navigation Officer/NW Rep)

Peter Lea
(Vice Chairman/Marketing)

Nigel Parkinson
(Engineering Officer)

Stephen Peters
(River Users Co-ordinator)

Denis Smith
(Rally Co-ordinator)

Andrew Sherrey
(Treasurer)

Peter Sterry
(NE Rep/Publicity)

Nikki Timbrell
(Newsletter Editor)

Neil Walker
(SE Rep)