

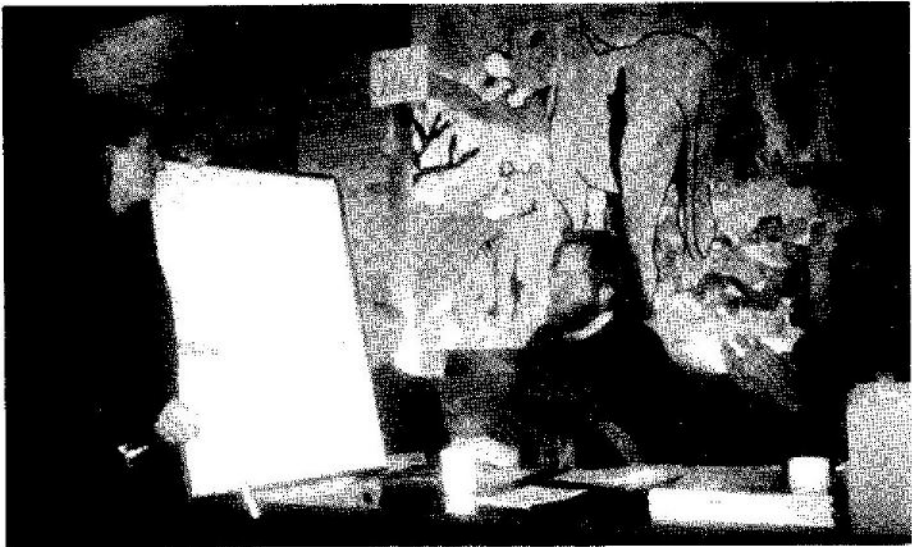


NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 96/8: December 1996

Second NABO Chairman retires



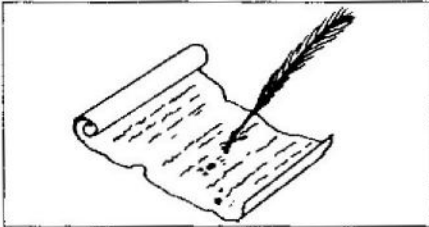
At the AGM on 23rd November, Penny Barber presented retiring Chairman Jon Darlington with a present from the Council in recognition of his tireless work for NABO over the last three years.

Peter Lea (right) takes over as Chairman following his election by the new Council.

Maybe the jungle background is significant as Boat Owners approach the next Millenium!

NEWSLETTER

Editor's comment



Jon Darlington will be furious to find his picture on the front page of this Newsletter, but he deserves a bit of publicity for his untiring, quiet, persistent work for us all. Luckily Jon is still hot under the collar about the latest news, so he isn't going to disappear!

This Newsletter has had a lot on which to report, both from within NABO and without. We have, for the first time, some guest contributors, who we welcome to our pages.

Just room to wish you all a floating Christmas and a locking New Year!

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.

December 1996

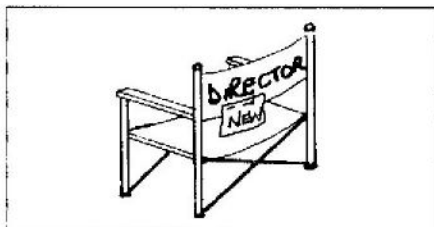
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Published by

**National Association of
Boat Owners**

NEWSLETTER

Chairman's comment



I would like to start my first column as Chairman by paying tribute to Jon Darlington. During his three years as chairman, he put a great deal of hard work and energy into the role. He always has been prepared to fight for the boaters' interests, and his knowledge of waterways legislation and regulations has been invaluable. NABO will miss him.

Fortunately, Jon is going to continue to work on a number of special projects for us, and progress our complaints to the Waterways Ombudsman. I am sure we will need his advice on key issues.

I would like to welcome four new Council members. Roger Davis has been helping NABO behind the scenes for nearly a year. He has long experience of working in voluntary organisations, combined with a good knowledge of the canal system

and considerable computer expertise. Roger is our new membership secretary.

Some of you may have seen Christine Denton at the NABO stand at a rally last summer. Christine has taken over responsibility for recruitment, marketing, and rallies. She combines charm and dynamism in equal measure.

Peter Foster has two (!) boats on the North East waterways. He will strengthen the river users' representation on Council.

Philip Ogden has been regularly attending Council meetings for the last two years. Philip is a retired engineer, and has been associated with boating since the 1950s.

Several council members are adding to their responsibilities or changing roles. Nigel Parkinson, our new Vice-Chairman, will continue to be our Engineering Officer and deal with technical aspects of the Boat Safety Scheme. Neil Walker becomes Secretary as well as Southern Representative. Neil has done a great deal of work recently on our formal representations to the

NEWSLETTER

Chairman's comment (continued)

Inquiry on the proposed River Wye navigation regulations, which will be held early next year. John Griffiths, our former Midlands representative, is taking over responsibility for the North West, while Denis Smith becomes Midlands rep in his place.

Lastly, I am very pleased and honoured to have been elected Chairman for 1997. I shall try to do my best for NABO.

NABO's "office address" for correspondence will continue to be 111 Maas Road, Northfield, Birmingham B31 2PP. Individual Council members can be contacted at the addresses and phone numbers shown on the back of the newsletter.

I believe the main priorities this year are to:

Persuade BW by any means available to honour their commitments, consult users properly, and respect users' views.

Monitor the effect of the Boat Safety Scheme on boaters and wherever possible help resolve problems.

Campaign to keep canal closures to a minimum and for the introduction of proper standards

for the notification of stoppages.

Improve co-operation between inland waterway user groups.

Further increase NABO's membership.

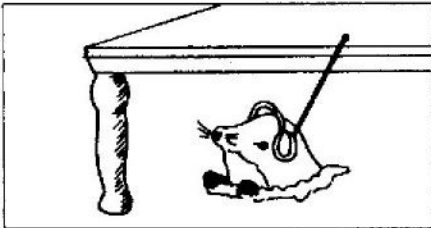
Finally, a personal request. From your letters and comments, most of you seem to think NABO does a good job. If you do, why not tell your boating friends and neighbours? The more members we have, the better - every new member helps.

Council appointments:

Chairman:	Peter Lea
Vice-C/man:	Nigel Parkinson
Secretary:	Neil Walker
Treasurer:	Andrew Sherrey
Mem/ship sec:	Roger Davis
NE rep:	Peter Sterry
NW rep:	John Griffiths
Midlands rep:	Denis Smith
Southern rep:	Neil Walker
River Co-ord:	Stephen Peters
Engineering:	Nigel Parkinson
Marketing:	Christine Denton
N/letter Editor:	Nikki Timbrell
Rep for disabled:	Phil Bland

NEWS

View from the AGM held on 23rd November, 1996



This is Moley's swansong (or should it be his molesong?), reporting from the sixth AGM.

After the usual boring bits which will be printed elsewhere in this Newsletter the meeting hotted up with an open discussion session. BW had accused NABO of being too confrontational and the meeting was asked whether we should continue to be so or should adopt a more passive role. The accusation had apparently been stirred up by an article in the previous Newsletter, which at least shows that the message is getting through.

The point was made that confrontation was the only response left to us when BW depart the processes of consultation which have been agreed and set out in the Customer Charter.

Moley thinks the whole issue

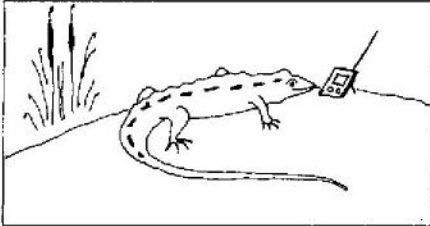
of confrontation is totally unnecessary and if BW say, as they do, that they have a duty to manage, then they ought to use modern management techniques to achieve this. This would of necessity involve consultation and discussion which is the only proper and sensible way to proceed. The present authoritarian attitude will earn them no friends and only encourage confrontation, rather than co-operation and partnership in the shared objectives which we as boaters have with BW.

When will BW learn that confrontation costs money which is much better spent on the waterways they have a duty to look after? We all know that money is in short supply and constantly being reduced by the Government. Would it not be so much better if instead of wasting it in this aggressive manner it was invested in co-operation to the benefit of all?

I hope that BW will read and take note of this final flourish. I would like to thank my readers for taking the trouble to read this over the years and wish my successor well. Happy boating!

NEWS

View from the Council meeting held on 7th December, 1996



Monitor reporting - now that Moley has returned to the riverbank, Newsletter readers will have to rely on another source for an inside view of the Council meetings.

The Council Meeting, being the first after the AGM, was largely taken up with necessary business to keep the Association functioning. Peter Lea is now Captain of the good ship NABO, with Nigel Parkinson as First Mate.

The state of relations between NABO and British Waterways was prominent on the Council's agenda. This now appears to be at an all time low. There exists the feeling that somehow British Waterways' higher management considers NABO to be a particularly troublesome trades union, rather than a representative body of many of their most important customers. As Moley reported,

we have been asked to support and indeed promote requests for more government funding for British Waterways. It must be said that the current attitude of the top management does not inspire great efforts to be made on their behalf. However, steps are being taken to try to clear the air. Let us hope they are successful.

Recruitment and Marketing of the Association are always a great concern of the Council. Fortunately we now have co-opted to the Council Christine Denton, who together with husband John has plenty of fresh ideas to attract more boaters to our fold.

The Boat Safety Scheme still manages to produce gasps of incredulity. It appears that the BSI Kite Mark of fire extinguisher fame will no longer be valid after the 31st December 1996, it being replaced by a European Certifying mark. Did anybody know, and what is more, should they be told!

A space to watch - relationships between the Environment Agency and British Waterways.

Bye for now.

NEWS

Trent News: Gainsborough Major Works, by Peter Foster

Work is being done on the East bank of the Trent, just below the road bridge at Gainsborough, during the next year.

The contractors doing the work think they can close the river to make their work easier. The tender did not say the river could not be closed because no one thought this would be considered. The work involves the Environment Agency, the navigation authority is Associated British Ports, and British Waterways is the authority for the bridge and for the locks on the tidal Trent at West Stockwith and Keadby below the bridge.

The proposal by the contractors would cut off any navigation between different parts of the canal system and leave a lot of seagoing boats landlocked up the Trent. There was no liaison between interested parties in the early days of this work.

The Trent Boating Association, whose aims are similar to NABO's in many respects, have been liaising with BW, ABP, EA and others for many years over matters of the Trent, Ouse, Witham, Soar and related canals

with considerable success, and the navigation at Gainsborough will not now be fully closed. I will be attending a meeting very shortly on behalf of TBA with the Marine Safety Agency, to work out suitable safety procedures to allow boaters adequate passage, and to allow the navigation to be closed when essential, without putting boaters at risk.

Now I am on the council of NABO I will also be able to keep you informed as well. Further news will follow in the next issue. By the way, Torksey is now closed for the major improvements to be done.

Happy boating, in whatever, wherever.

NABO Accounts

The Accounts for the year ended 31st March 1996 were published at the AGM.

The total income for the year was £12,719, of which £9,931 was from subscriptions. The surplus remaining after expenses was £3,586.

If you would like a copy of the accounts, please contact the Treasurer, Andrew Sherrey.

NEWS

Dangerous boats: revised definition from BW and EA

Since publication of the last Newsletter, BW and EA have issued a joint statement with a redefinition of "dangerous" boats. Such a boat is now defined as one which may present an apparent and immediate danger to people or property, for example from leaking fuel, leaking gas or heat-damaged cables.

A dangerous boat must be reported to the BSS Manager as soon as possible, and can also be certified as "decommissioned" if the source of danger is removed or the boat stabilised.

Boats which are issued with a BSS Failure Certificate may still apply for a licence provided the boat does not present an apparent or immediate danger.



The most significant change is that 6 months is now allowed for remedial action following the issue of the Failure Certificate. A prayer answered? - Ed.

BSS Advisory Group meeting at Fazeley, 6th November

Jon Darlington is a member of this Group, which sits in the middle of the BSS hierarchy. The Technical Committee advises the Advisory Group who are supplied with information by the Management Committee. Got that?

However, if the Advisory Group votes by a 2/3 majority for a particular action, the Manage-

ment Committee must now comply - this concession was granted with the addition of Jon's suggested proviso that there might be (explained) over-riding reasons for not doing so.

BW have also conceded that they cannot prevent BSS complaints going straight to appeal; a small but important victory.

NEWS

News in brief

Caledonian Canal funds

An additional £15 million funding is to be made available to BW over the next three years, primarily to be spent on urgent repairs to the Caledonian canal in Scotland.

K & A funds

The Kennet & Avon canal is to benefit from the largest ever Heritage Lottery Fund award of £25 million. Work on the programme of conservation and improvement will start this winter.

Closure at Knowle locks

Knowle locks are going to be closed in May next year for gate replacement. This should help with the problems of water shortage in the Knowle/Hatton/Stratford area. BW are also investigating addition water supply from the River Tame.

Steam boats in tunnels

BW have announced that steam boats will be permitted in all tunnels except Harecastle. There is concern that sparks from a boiler could ignite exposed coal in this tunnel. Until more research is conducted, it is still "Put that fire out!" at Harecastle (see *May Newsletter*).

Catch at Kings Norton

BW and Police borrowed an Alvechurch boat and cruised in plain clothes to Kings Norton junction, where some walked away leaving others hidden on the moored boat. Within 5 minutes they had caught 5 young people on the boat, which led to the arrest of their "controller" who was responsible for all thefts from boats in this area. Stolen property was also recovered.

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NEWS

Boat Safety Scheme All at Sea

Despite the Boat Safety Scheme being intended to apply only to certain inland waterways it has become apparent in recent months that its influence is beginning to creep insidiously on to the coast.

It appears that some surveyors are using the boat standards as a yardstick by which to evaluate the condition and safety of sea-going pleasure craft based in coastal marinas, etc.

Insurance surveys are being qualified by comments to the effect that certain modification work is recommended so that the craft comply with the good

practices contained in the "Grey Book". Owners will ignore such recommendations at their peril and could find an insurer less than willing to settle any claim where so-called "safety" items have not been heeded.

Owners who thought the BSS was "nothing to do with them" may suddenly find themselves faced with the same sort of expensive problems that inland boat owners have begun to encounter. And they may rue the day when their representative association pledged its unequivocal support to the Boat Safety Scheme.

BW Renege on Commitments to Consultation

British Waterways' Consultation Principles and Procedures were published in September 1995 after extensive consultation with national user groups, including NABO.

BW Chairman Bernard Henderson has recently refused three times to confirm that BW will comply with these commitments. Twice, verbally, at the last National User Group Meeting, before chairmen and vice-

chairmen of all the major national user groups, once in writing to Peter Lea.

What is so dangerous to BW in these Principles and Procedures that Bernard Henderson should publicly go back on BW's commitments in this way? Why should BW not honour these commitments? Why didn't it follow its Consultation Principles over its recent 30%+ licence fee increases?

NEWS

News from the Medway

The Environment Agency has announced that the Boat Safety Scheme will apply to craft on the River Medway with effect from 1998, a year later than Anglian and Thames Regions because of legislative changes.

Vessels not possessing a BSC will not be able to obtain a registration certificate, and failure to obtain registration recently cost 4 boat owners £100 plus £45 costs each. *See letter on p 27.*

Ceefax stoppage

Until recently, details of BW river and canal stoppages have appeared on the BBC2 Ceefax service on Pages 555 and 556. However, following a re-organisation of the Ceefax service, and apparently without consultation, publication of the information has been discontinued by the BBC.

If you now select pages 555 and 556 you will (appropriately?) find information about the Lottery!

THE ADVERT HALF PAGE

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NABO BUSINESS

Chairman's 1996 AGM speech

The past year had for the most part been relatively quiet on the political front - that is -until just recently - something I will refer to again later.

During the spring and summer we have been engaged on a membership drive which has taken up a lot of energy. We have increased membership by around 15% over the year which, whilst not as high as we would have liked, is still a respectable achievement.

A considerable amount of effort was put into the membership drive by Denis Smith who contacted most rally organisers and sent out hundreds of membership forms. He also arranged for us to attend various boat rallies round the country. Its fair to say that the Nottingham rally was pretty much a disaster for most exhibitors and the rally at Windmill End was not much better.

Peter Lea did a considerable amount of work in marketing generally, but the star prize for recruitment of actual members must go to Christine Denton who seemed to get something like 10 times as many members as

anyone else. Nobody is quite sure how she does it, but well done Christine. We are also very grateful to all the others involved, particularly those who helped staff the stand at the various events.

One particular success during the year was the amendment obtained exempting dredgings from the Land Fill Tax which would otherwise have greatly increased the cost of dredging.

Peter Lea did a superb job of campaigning on our behalf and with his letters to MPs, members letters to their MPs and the work of the National Inland Navigation Forum, the amendment was secured. It was nice to see us quoted in Hansard and it was clear we had a real influence on the outcome.

There are two long standing Council members standing down this year. We are sorry to lose Neil Hutchinson from the NABO Council sadly due to illness in his family. Neil is a firebrand who has kept us on our toes since NABO was formed. We have not always agreed, but an alternative viewpoint can be very helpful in getting an overall balance.

NABO BUSINESS

Chairman's 1996 AGM speech (continued)

Our thanks also go to Roger Hancock who has acted as Secretary and provided legal advice for the last 3 years, again his help has been very valuable. John Glock who conscientiously acted as membership secretary during the last year is the other member of Council to be leaving. The membership secretary's job is a time consuming one - particularly when the computer gives up!

One of the main areas of concern in most people's minds over the last couple of years continues to cause worries as its implementation comes nearer. I am of course talking about the Boat Safety Scheme.

During the spring we campaigned for changes and until early May we, the hNBOC and RBOA were the only user groups with serious concerns about how it would work. At that stage we got no support from any of the major national user groups and I was rather quickly removed from the RYA Inland Waters Panel as far as I can see for the heinous crime of taking a different view from that of the Panel's Chairman.

However our campaigning was obviously gaining public support largely due to the hard work of Nigel Parkinson, our almost tame engineer, Stephen Peters who looks after River Users, and Peter Lea; and in the end the other user groups also said what a shambles the BSS was. Dr Fletcher, newly appointed as BW Chief Executive stepped in and promised a full review of how the scheme was working, the result being the guidance notes which were sent out to boaters in the autumn.

This, of course did not get to the bottom of the problem and in fact the guidance notes had already been planned as a marketing exercise, and were not produced as a result of users' objections. Still, it did the trick and most of the user groups were taken in yet again and removed their objections.

We however tried to convince BW to seriously consider our objections which they sadly did not do, and we have now lodged formal complaints with the Ombudsman.

It was in this context that earlier in the year BW tried to

NABO BUSINESS

Chairman's 1996 AGM speech (continued)

prevent the Ombudsman looking at one of our complaints because they said it was properly one for the courts. In my opinion they were attempting to change the Ombudsman's terms of reference through the backdoor and it would have meant narrowing down the Ombudsman's role considerably if they had succeeded.

Fortunately the Ombudsman told BW she would decide, within her published terms of reference, what she could properly deal with. It is alarming that BW should try to put pressure on the Ombudsman in this way and also very disappointing that the waterways press did not see fit to bring this unsavoury business to the public's attention.

This is not the only bit of serious skulduggery with the Boat Safety Scheme. Recently there has been an attempt to prevent people getting a fair hearing in a BSS Appeal by creating a register of appeals on specific checklist items and thereafter any complaint would be checked against the list, and the previous appeal decision would then be applied to them without a hearing

at all. In other words an appeal would be a complete sham.

This is despite the fact the the BW Act 1995 specifically requires an appeals panel to hear each case. Needless to say we have told them what we think of that. But it again shows up that in my opinion BW cannot even be trusted to follow their own act of parliament, let alone any other agreement or policy if they think it is inconvenient to do so.

I am also extremely disappointed to state that sensible dialogue with Watford has now virtually stopped following BW's new aggressive stance as reported in the last newsletter.

BW are now refusing to commit themselves to their own consultation procedure and they are making statements that they have consulted when they have not.

They have stated that they have consulted us on the recent outrageous licence increases. Well they have not consulted us at all. As far as I am concerned it is a simple lie.

They have also stated to the waterways press that they have

NABO BUSINESS

Chairman's 1996 AGM speech (continued)

extensively consulted user groups on the licence and mooring conditions which they are introducing. This, in my opinion, is another simple lie, and obviously so, since they are refusing to let us see the proposed amendments to the conditions which we are supposed to have been extensively consulted on!! Well done BW!!

BW did not even see fit to tell their Consultees that they were changing their approach to consultation. It came as a surprise, and the manner in which it was done was in my view deceitful.

What I cannot understand is why BW have chosen the aggressive route just at the time when they should be seeking the support of boaters in their quest for additional funding.

We are very disturbed at the proposed reduction of funding for BW in 1996/97. This is a very short-sighted Government policy and will need to be reversed. We are extremely concerned that Britain's waterways should be properly funded.

Of course it is important to ensure that the physical integrity of the system is maintained, but I believe it is equally important that the freedom to use the system is also maintained. Part of that freedom is that ordinary people can afford to use the system. With the introduction of the Boat Safety Scheme, compulsory insurance and the 30% increase in licences in real terms over the next 3 years there is a real possibility that some people will be priced off the waterway.

And don't think it is going to stop at the 30%. Two senior waterways people (who would not like to be named) have warned me recently that they believe that further increases are on the cards - and that if boaters stand for it now they won't have heard the last of it.

Remember that this is not the first hike in licences in recent years. They went up substantially in real terms between 1987 and 1991. It was because of this real increase that BW agreed not to raise licences more than inflation over 3 years. The 1987 scam was called "a new deal for boaters" The 1994 Monopolies & Mergers

NABO BUSINESS

Chairman's 1996 AGM speech (continued)

Commission report says "the aim of the scheme was to effect a real increase of 15% in licence fees over the subsequent three years". They also said "The New Boat Deal led to very substantial rises in licence fees following 1987". In fact 1993 BW licences were 40% higher than the NRA Thames Division licenses.

So now they're at it again with another "new deal", and I believe they will be at it again, and again, and again until we say enough is enough. I think it is time to say that now.

BW are very keen to say they will charge what the market will bear, but as they have a virtual monopoly, the market WILL HAVE to bear whatever they are charged - and if they cannot bear it they will have to get out.

Is it right that people who have invested a lot of time and money in their boats should give them up because no one can control BW's apparent greed or regulate their charging? Is it right that BW should be able to gentrify the system by pricing ordinary folk off the waterway? - because that's exactly what they are doing.

BW say they should be free to manage. But manage what? Yes they manage the canal system, but they are also managing our boats which are our property, and they are also managing as landlords for those who live on the waterway or who have a waterway related business. BW are also refusing to commit themselves to their own consultation policy. How can they expect to manage US without meaningful consultation on changes that affect us?

BW tried bullying us in 1990 by sneaking their bill into Parliament without any consultation, and by introducing the old Certificate of Compliance without proper consultation or due regard for boaters. NABO was formed in order to stand up to that bullying, and we did. I thought we had moved a long way since then. We pushed for proper consultation - and got a sensible consultation policy after a long struggle, and now it is all being thrown away by BW senior management.

I believe NABO must stand and fight this change in policy on consultation. After all if WE don't, who will?

NABO BUSINESS

Jon Darlington: an Appreciation from Peter Lea

I would like to express our appreciation to Jon Darlington.

Jon was one of the founder members of NABO. He became its first vice-chairman, and held that office for two years. He was elected Chairman in 1992 when Dave Green retired, and has been Chairman for the past three years.

Jon has fought many battles on the boater's behalf. He was one of the team which secured major concessions from BW when the Bill was first published. He worked long, hard and successfully to fundamentally change BW's attitude to residential boats. He has represented our interests before the Department of the Environment and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. It was largely thanks to his efforts that we now have an umbrella body for all the national user groups to exchange views and co-ordinate policies - the National Inland Navigation Forum. Over the last year he has been fighting to bring some sense into the Boat Safety Scheme.

During the years I have known him, Jon has been an

impassioned believer in truth, fairness, and openness. He has fought for those beliefs with persistence, a vast knowledge of waterway legislation, and his well-honed skill at devastatingly logical argument. Unsurprisingly, this has not always made him popular with the waterway authorities - particularly those with hidden agendas, or less well disposed to boaters.

I am pleased to say that such people will not be able to take much comfort from Jon's departure from the Chair. He will continue to support NABO from outside the Council, and produce position papers and campaign on issues on our behalf. He will also continue to progress our formal complaints to the Waterways Ombudsman.

Jon has always fought unsparingly for boater's interests. He has been a good Chairman of NABO - and to me a good friend.

I would like to formally thank Jon for all his work and efforts for NABO.

Penny Barber presented Jon with a framed historical map of the B.C.N. and a Dunton windlass from the NABO Council.

THE ADVERTS PAGE

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PERHAPS WE SHOULD BE TALKING**

OPINION

Just say No! Dominic Miles on the BSS

The Boat Safety Scheme, according to the introductory preamble contained in the booklet produced by British Waterways and the Environment Agency, is supported by responsible boat owners. How do they know this? I don't recall ever being asked, and I have yet to meet any boat owning individual who has been. I object to this patronising assumption. It has the cheek to suggest that boat owners like myself who do not support the BSS are irresponsible. If believing not just that aspects of the BSS are petty and unnecessary, but that the whole scheme itself is an outrageous imposition on private boat owners that has little to do with safety, and much to do with driving out those afloat who cannot afford it; if objecting to what amounts to a new tax on boating is irresponsible, then I will happily accept the mantle of foolhardy lunatic. Winston Churchill once said, "Perhaps it is better to be irresponsible and right, than to be responsible and wrong." Quite so.

Over the next two years all owners of BW registered craft will

have to pay for a BSS inspection. Let's assume that each inspection averages out at £70. There are currently 30,399 licensed craft on BW's books. That means boat owners are being forced to stump up £2,127,930 for survey fees alone, let alone the expense of often pointless modifications. 2 million quid - every four years!

I believe that boat owners should retort simply and effectively. Faced with this act of piracy shortly to be committed against our wallets, boat owners should band together and refuse to have anything to do with the BSS. The largest chunk of BW's funding comes from the taxpayer via central government grant - and we are all taxpayers unless you neither earn nor ever buy anything other than tax exempt goods. However, the principle reason BW's chairman, Bernard Henderson, is able to receive a salary of £44,790 plus generous pension rights in return for just three days work a week is because of us, the boat owners. Canals would not be the attractive public amenity they are without boats on them. In fact,

OPINION

Just Say No! (continued)

most of them would not even exist if an earlier generation of boat owners had not campaigned vigorously in the 1950s and 1960s to dissuade various governments of that era from adopting a policy of wholesale abandonment. Boat owners are the reason our waterways' heritage survives today, and thus it is to boat owners that BW owe their very existence. Therefore you might be excused for thinking that it was time the tail stopped wagging the dog. Yet, possibly because coherent criticism of the BSS has not had much exposure in the boat-related press, certainly not on a scale compared to the surfeit of articles promoting the scheme, we seem to be meekly accepting this enforced drain on our resources with no more than an occasional whimper. We should be snarling with indignation and barking VERY LOUDLY. BW's executive are supposed to be public servants. Quite where the issuing of a 320 point ultimatum to all boat owners fits into the concept of service is something of a mystery. I hope they are not expecting a tip, though I doubt that Bernard Henderson, on a

wage roughly double the national average for just over half the work, is going to get his knickers in a twist on that point.

NABO's reasonable position at present is that some sort of scheme to cover certain particular dangers may be necessary - badly installed gas systems and petrol engines being the obvious candidates - although, as with private home owners, I believe that we should be advised rather than compelled. However, NABO's conciliatory stance has found BW willing to do no more than listen and respond with little that is concrete and a lot of warm words. The BSS juggernaut continues to roll remorselessly forward, unchanged apart from the odd cosmetic tweak. If you feel that non-compliance is too confrontational, I would argue that where all else has failed it is the only effective weapon we have.

I have heard the BSS likened to the MOT test, but when it comes to regulation, boats cannot be compared even faintly with cars. Boats do not kill some 4,000 people a year in Britain.

OPINION

Just say No! (continued)

They do not maim many thousands more. Inland boating fatalities are rare, and when they do occur, it is questionable as to whether or not they would have happened in any case, BSS or otherwise. Frankly, boats are as safe as houses - a comparison worth considering. Whilst strict regulations govern the construction of new buildings, no one has been daft enough to apply these standards to private dwellings already in existence prior to their introduction. If they did, you could kiss goodbye to a majority of homes in the country, whether that be Windsor Castle, a thatched cottage or a Victorian terraced house. No one can force you to have fire extinguishers in a home, or cut holes in doors to better ventilate the dwelling, or dictate what you may or may not store in the cellar, etc etc. You have the freedom of choice.

Imagine if a House Safety Scheme were to be implemented. Some inspector with a modicum of training (as is the case with the BSS; recently I heard of a boat owner of some 20 years experience having his craft failed on a technical quibble by an

examiner armed with all the knowledge afforded by 10 days tuition. This BW-accredited "safety expert" happened to be his local butcher! His experience did not extend beyond familiarity with a gravy boat) arrives on the doorstep and demands a fee, together with a list of requirements that could lumber the householder with a bill amounting to several hundreds of pounds, failing which the house would have to be either pulled down or sold on to someone prepared to carry out the work. There would be wide-scale civil unrest! Any government that presided over such a policy could expect have their chances severely dented at the next election, and rightly so. It is not going to happen. Yet it is this scenario that the BSS imposes on boat owners.

I imagine all of us have at one time or another sought expert advice in order to make sure our boats are safe. If anyone is in doubt, I would recommend seeking a qualified opinion for peace of mind alone. Those few who do own mortally hazardous craft are likely to be the ones who

OPINION

Just say No! (continued)

ignore the scheme anyway. How BW/EA will deal with that remains to be seen.

To sum up: the BSS is not about safety, it is an unnecessary hike in the cost of boating. It is an unwarranted assault on our liberty and an insult to our intelligence and common sense. We should wash our hands of it, by offering payment for our licences as normal, but refusing to supply any documentation relating to the BSS. If BW/EA or other navigation authority accepts the money, they have probably made a binding contract and are

obliged to grant a licence. If they return the money? I'd like to see a cash-strapped quango do that in large quantities and justify it to their political paymasters! All it needs is enough like-minded boat owners to agree on a common approach, and the scheme will become unworkable. Only then, unless the threat alone has managed to knock sense into them, might BW's executive feel obliged to seriously consult and not just pay lip service to the responsible boat owners who keep them in gainful employment. What do you think?

New Year Insurance Problems for Boaters, by Grant Henry

The New Year celebrations amongst the boat owners community may be dampened somewhat by the new regulations imposed by British Waterways. These regulations come into force on 1st January 1997 and are of considerable importance.

With so much press exposure afforded to the boat safety scheme (which all sensible people share the intentions and common sense behind) there has

been precious little mention of the compulsory insurance requirements that also come into force from 1st January 1997.

I will therefore summarise the position as I understand it to be at the date of this article:-

1. Most marinas already require you to have insurance (albeit at differing levels) if you wish to use their moorings.
2. There are over 20 regulatory bodies for our waterways. Some

OPINION

New Year Insurance Problems for Boaters (continued)

do require insurance now and some do not. It is a bit of a nightmare for all boat owners.

3. With effect from January 1st 1997 all craft utilising British Waterways navigations are required to carry a minimum of £1,000,000 (one million pounds) worth of public liability insurance cover (third party). This is a result of the implementation of the insurance clause in the British Waterways Act 1995 .

4. The I.M.O. (International Maritime Organisation) are currently investigating the feasibility of enforcing third party insurance requirements on all craft WORLD WIDE.

British Waterways intend to police these new requirements via their licensing procedure. In short, you will NOT be granted a licence for your craft unless you can produce proof of a minimum of £1,000,000 worth of public liability insurance and also if your boat is of a certain age you will need to produce your boat safety certificate.

British Waterways has published a list of authorised marine surveyors/examiners who

can inspect craft and where appropriate issue boat safety certificates.

To return to the question of insurance both premiums and breadth of cover vary alarmingly. As with third party cover with a car, this covers your liabilities if you cause injuries to someone else or damage their property. Your liability for damages payable to a third party and their costs are covered as are your own defence costs, should the case go to court. the amount of £1,000,000 cover stipulated by the law does appear to be a very sensible indemnity limit, when you consider the potential size of claims involving personal injury.

One thing to look out for in any third party cover that you arrange, is whether wreck recovery is included in the package. What many boat owners are unaware of is that should your craft become a wreck, authorities do have the right to remove any obstruction to navigable waterways, and they will undoubtedly seek to recover their costs from you, the boat owner. Therefore, do make sure

OPINION

New Year Insurance Problems for Boaters (continued)

that wreck recovery is part of your cover.

So what third party policies are actually available on the market? I obtained quotations for a small boat from various companies and brokers. Premiums varied from as low as £27 to well over £100.

One of the more forward thinking companies appeared to me to be The Basic Boat Liability Company Ltd., based in West London. Basic Boat offers a third party scheme specifically designed to meet the requirements of the 1995 Insurance Act and by a clever and innovative approach to administration and marketing they are able to offer premiums starting at £30 (£27 to RYA members). NARROW/CANAL BOATS up to a length of 23 metres can be covered for as little as £45 (£40.50 for RYA members). Basic Boat do not want sight of a boat survey report, nor do they require sight of a boat safety certificate where it applies.

Their literature is superbly simple and a very helpful director, Peter Fletcher, explained to me "Tell us who you

are, tick a box, sign a simple declaration, send us your money and we will return you your insurance certificate. If you pay by credit card you will receive your certificate within 48 working hours." It really is that straight forward, a refreshing change in this world of red tape and form filling. Basic Boat can be contacted at Royal House, 74 Dalling Road, London. W6 0JA Telephone 0181 477 5055 (24 hour brochure line).

For those of you wishing to obtain comprehensive cover which will include the statutory third party requirements it is worth contacting any of the following - St Margaret's Insurance, Desmond Cheers, G J W Direct, Hill House Hammond and others who will have advertised in this magazine.

With January 1st and the new law looming it does seem to make sense to get your basic boat insurance in place. In fact one has to ask the question : With prices at the levels of Basic Boat's, can you really afford NOT to be insured?

AN ADVERTS PAGE



Third Party Insurance

£1m from £30

Tel: 0181 477 5055

(24hr brochure line)

LETTERS

"Chairman's progress": reply to the BW view

I have received through the post a copy of a letter sent to you by BW in reply to my comments on the Chairman's progress and feel I must comment (at least to NABO) on the contents.

First, all power to BW L&L East for sending a copy on to me and to Mr Lee for taking the time to comment on my letter. In contrast, a question-naire sent to Watford, which included much of what was in the original letter to you, had 'that part referring to the chairman passed on to his office' from whence no more was heard. Obviously NABO news reaches parts.....

Now to Mr Lee's response. From this I understand that 'as the chairman received no preferential treatment' in future all NABO members can 'invite' BW staff to join them and work any locks or swing bridges they are not keen to.... In fact we know this is not quite the case.

As for the chairman visiting waterways, meeting the troops and giving deprived office staff a trip on a canal boat, I feel it is much better than him sitting behind a desk. And if it does get the grass cut (and on a different

waterway the paddles improved and oiled - one local said for the first time in memory) so much the better. On the other hand with all these bods (not taken from their normal work (?)) around to do the hard bits the chairman is hardly getting a proper boaters perspective of the canal. Given the water shortages maybe he could do just as much for company relations by touring the system on a bike instead of a boat.

Mr Lee's comment about grass cutting was wide of the mark. In fact my comment on grass cutting on the L & L was that not enough is cut near swing bridges which can mean the crew stepping into the (potentially dangerous) unknown.

Although we encountered the chairman on the L & L, it was on the North-Eastern canals that we picked up the progress again. Having overtaken him when he detoured up to Wakefield, it became a bit of a game figuring where the chairman was going next, though in this region the evidence was pretty easy to find. Of course it could be that the chairman just happened to pick a route where BW routinely spring

LETTERS

"Chairman's progress" reply (continued)

clean (including on Sundays?) while just off it they don't.

At the end of the day one must feel that the man at the top getting his hands dirty (even a little bit) is a good thing. As for getting BW staff out of their ivory tower offices (as a few seem to treat them) and actually onto the canals they are responsible for - this must be a plus. In this

context I heard a story that the boats in the BW ex-hire fleet (not sold) had been issued to certain regions. Lucky regions to get a boat to use as they wish. Unfortunately, as the gentleman told me, use is restricted to to certain levels of BW staff... Maybe BW should join NABO as boat owners.

D.H.S.Cragg, Oswestry

BW Licence checking

Having read the reports of the antics of BW in October's newsletter, I feel moved to comment on the seeming lack of checking of licences.

My home waters are the River Medway in Kent and my annual licence is a self-adhesive sticker on the outside of the loo window. When I have visited other NRA (now EA) waters, my temporary licence has been a similar sticker. But on the BW canals, my temporary licence takes the form of a green piece of paper which is impossible to stick satisfactorily to any glass window. And although my licence is not on show because it has come unstuck, to date I have NEVER been asked

to show it. This August I took part in the BCN Challenge Cruise and made a special journey to the Bilston Office to buy my week's licence, but was given the feeling that I need not have bothered as no one asked to see it subsequently.

My point is that if BW is not going to licence boats that do not have a BSC, then it will have to ensure that it has inspectors who check on licences regularly. On the Medway our licences are checked at some time each year and anyone found without a valid one is sent a summons and subsequently fined. And the penalties can be quite high.

David Ward, Hastings

LETTERS

Marina Malpractice?

One of the joys of boating is the freedom it gives to be nomadic in both style and comfort. Which means, because one has to work to pay the bills between cruises, that the boat moves from marina to marina. Not many marinas have praise for BW, (which does not worry BW in the least). BW squeezes all it can from anyone connected with the canals, and the marinas put the squeeze on the moorers. This is, I believe, called Business.

But there is one way by which marinas are putting the squeeze on the moorers which I find little short of the term "racket". If your boat is in a marina and needs some work done on it, (we are not all handyman experts unfortunately), and you would like Mr X to do it because he is known to you and has worked on your boat before, then Mr X can do the work, but the invoice must go to the marina, who then adds on a percentage, and invoices the moorer. A nice little earner for doing sweet nothing. Their excuse? "Everyone does it", I know this to be untrue.

This surcharging is practised to my knowledge at three

marinas, with different percentages, their argument being that they would prefer you to use their own engineers, and they have the right to control anyone entering their private property. They conveniently forget about the exorbitant mooring rates they charge, and the "freedom of the individual". An example of marking up was in the invoice for a routine engine service. The invoice from the marina was for £110.00, the engineer had charged £60.00! Another marina, allowing the engineer in to do the work then gets the engineer to add on 15% which he then has to forward to the marina... so avoiding all the paperwork too. Not all marinas practise such unsavoury meanness, some welcome boaters, and tradesmen too. I think they ought to have the credit they deserve.

I have also heard of a threat of legal action made by a marina, large enough to know better, against a boat mechanic who was fixing a boat on the towpath near the marina. To me this is a worrying hint that our freedom of movement and choice may slowly and quietly be eroding.

LETTERS

Marina Malpractice? (continued)

Is there a parallel situation we could use as a precedent? I contacted several caravan parks, by phone, and none of them has any dealings with fitters who work on the private caravans "moored" on their sites. I talked to a private aerodrome manager who had no dealings with owners who hired maintenance firms to work on the planes at the aerodrome. I spoke with several coastal marinas, and provided the workmen were insured, most of them showed no more interest. One big marina on the South Coast charged outside workmen £15.00 per week because they had riggers already renting sites in the marina. Not one person I spoke to practised the interference we experience

from our canal marinas.

If any NABO member has had experience of this type of surcharge I would very much appreciate details. Details also of marinas like Crick who do NOT practise such extortion. The findings could be very interesting, and will be published when complete. I feel we should expose the miscreants now before this becomes a "term and condition" written into all mooring contracts. I look forward to hearing from you.

Anne Simmons, Watford (no, nothing to do with BW)

Please send your comments to Anne Simmons via the Editor.

In Support of NABO

As I am unable to get to this Saturday's AGM of NABO - being an OAP with no transport of my own - I feel that a letter of support is the least I can do, having been a member from very early on, and having appreciated and, I'm sure, benefitted from the Association's committee's efforts

on behalf of the boaters. Your comments in the last Newsletter in regard to BW's complete about face as far as consultation and negotiation are concerned with NABO, are most depressing. Equally their announcement re licence fee increases, and I for one am quite prepared to send in

LETTERS

In support of NABO (continued)

my cheque for last year's fee plus the official inflation rate, and refuse to pay more "in the light of their exorbitant salary increases to themselves" to say nothing of "new company transport for the hierarchy etc etc." This I intend to do and I hope many others will be willing to stand up and be counted in this respect as well. My wife and I being pensioners in our late 70's and early 80's, there is a limit to the amount of active support we can give, like attending rallies and meetings.

We have cruised fairly extensively this last Summer, particularly on the Shroppie and the Llangollen, and have been appalled at the lack of dredging and maintenance being done along these lengths of canals. My boat draws only about 2ft, but on much of the canal between Hurlston and Grindley Brook I've been doing their dredging for them!! Passing other boats is a nightmare with one or other - and often both - being stuck in the mud, and trying to turn a 70ft boat round in most of the winding holes all along the Llangollen almost impossible without help from towpath walkers or other

boats..... so what is our increased licence fees going to be spent on? More bureaucracy? Apparently not on meaningful maintenance! One hardly speaks to a fellow boater who has a good word to say for BW - surely we can't all be unreasonable in our demand for better value for our money.

Perhaps its just as well that I cannot get to the AGM. I'm pretty explosive when I get started. But I do wish you all the support and success your efforts on our behalf deserve.

The Owner of Tramps Retreat,
Brewood.

Dear Letter author: we apologise for omitting your name and for not replying to you personally, but we cannot be sure from your signature... but we thank you for your support. - Ed.

LETTERS

On the Leam link

I am a (new) NABO member, and also a resident of Leamington Spa; my house overlooks the River Leam by the Pump Room gardens. Thus I have split loyalties.

My first reaction to the proposed plan to open a new navigation between Leamington and Warwick was all in favour, but the more I think about it, the less it appeals.

Apart from the fact that I have a measure of sympathy for the argument that says that this rural section of the Leam should be retained in its Victorian style, I would much rather our energies be turned to the greater plan: the opening of the Upper Avon from Stratford to Leamington.

Given the obvious importance that the Avon must have had since Tudor times and before, and the crying need for substantial new waterways today to relieve the growing congestion in the GU/Oxford conurbation, an easy route from GU to Avon, and reverse, is vital. (I know there is local opposition to this suggestion, but I feel sure that those who complain about boats below Warwick could be

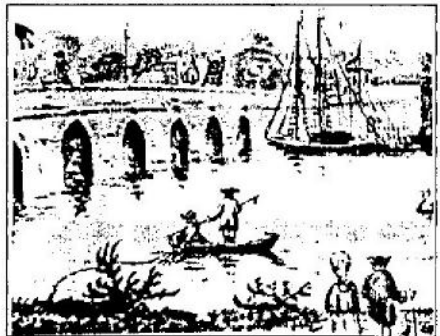
persuaded that judicious canalisation of certain parts of the river would overcome local concern.)

So, on balance I feel that the limited access from Leamington to Warwick already provided by the GU, should be tolerated (perhaps cleaned up a bit?) and all effort be directed to the Avon/GU link, which will revolutionise the use of the waterways in this part of the Midlands.

For the record I have a 62ft NB inoored at Fosse, and for the many like me moored within 15 miles of the Avon, the Avon/GU link will change everything. The same will be true in reverse, for those who already use the Upper and Lower Avons, granting easy access to the canals.

This is the greater prize!

Peter Irvine, Leamington Spa



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(Rep for Disabled)

Roger Davis
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Christine Denton
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