



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

Issue: 7/99



NABO News

December 1999

Editorial

From the next edition , I am pleased to let you know that you will have joint editors of NABO News. Two Council members, Simon Greer and Graham Till are getting together to produce the newsletter. Graham will be acting as Editor and Simon will be producing the typeset version ready for printing. Their addresses are shown on the back cover. Any contributions that you have should be send to Grahm in the first instance.

I wish them both well and hope that they enjoy the job as much as I have over the past two and a bit years.

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I am eager to see what changes they make as everyone has their own idea of what a newsletter should be.

A big "Thank you" to all those members who have taken the time and trouble to write to me; I have really enjoyed reading your letters and will miss the thud of all the mail when the postman calls in the mornings.

I think my dog will welcome the relief of not having to bark so hard at the door!

I look forward to seeing you all along the cut - I'll have more time to take the boat out now, perhaps I should think about a continuous cruising licence!

Give me a wave when you see "Thurzaway" and, remember,

NABO for Navigation

Wendy

Published by
National Association of Boat Owners

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CHAIRMAN'S COMMENT

On Saturday 20 November at the NABO AGM Peter Lea retired as chairman

Firstly, I must thank him for all the arduous effort he has put into NABO - he will be a hard act to follow! At the first meeting of the new Council I was elected Chairman. I am therefore writing this to introduce myself. I have travelled the inland waterways extensively for the last eleven years with my husband Roger. We are both actively involved with canal restoration through the Waterway Recovery Group and have taken an organisational role with the National Waterways Festival since 1989. I joined NABO at the inaugural meeting at Dudley because I felt that my lifestyle was then under threat, and I still do. I joined the Council as Minutes secretary two years ago. Becoming Chairman was unexpected and I am on a steep learning curve. My asset (possibly my only one) is not having to work for my living. How the previous chairman held down a job and served us so well is a complete mystery to me.

Like Audrey Smith, I am going to be a chairman. In my book it goes with human, and I am not known for being politically correct.

I have survived my first Council meeting. Sixteen opinionated people, all wanting their say - this includes me - makes for a long, lively meeting. We wouldn't have joined if we were yes men who enjoy the status quo. We all want to see the waterways improved, but keep our heritage intact.

The thing we are most in danger of losing is our freedom. British Waterways seem intent on carrying the nanny state to ridiculous lengths; the latest being, "what is continuous cruising?". It's bad enough coming across signs stating mooring allowed 14 days in any one year. Now BW is thinking of not allowing you and me to stay on the same identified 19 miles stretch of waterway or adjacent waterway or return within 28 days. Amongst other invasive checks BW will be looking to see if I am on the electoral role locally, or even found a friendly milkman to deliver milk. Needless to say BW will be told to do something useful with our licence money.

We heartily dislike the "Continuous Cruising" tag as it is both devious and blatantly untrue. We prefer the term "**boater**" which applies to all of us. Do you know anyone who cruises continuously? I cruise a lot but I

do stop at night and sometimes stay several weeks in one place.

A bit of good news has been received from Roger Herrington. After my summer cruise through the stinging nettles of the Staffs and Worcester canal I had some correspondence, which ended up in Canal and Riverboat. First I was told, by an underling, that there was a policy on nettle control. Then I was told there wasn't and who had told me there was! That was too good to miss, so I continued with the correspondence. I have now got in writing an assurance that future mowing and maintenance regimes will take into account control of invasive species. Also that the towpath edges will be maintained in an appropriate and safe manner. Do let us know if this doesn't happen.

Finally, I feel it would be nice if Council met more members, so I am proposing to be in The Plough at Braunston on 7 January, wearing my NABO sweatshirt. If you can't find me, I may be in the skittle room. Drag me out, a glass of fruit wine should do the trick! Tell me your news/views/problems, or just say hello.

This is all you are going to get from me this time as I have a library, that Peter has passed on to me, awaiting my perusal.

Continuous Cruising - or is it Boating?

In the previous issue (6/99) it was reported that proposals had been received from BW and the response from canal users had to be submitted by 10/12/99.

Your new Council debated the issues arising from this document and a full submission has now been made. A full transcript will be given in the next newsletter.

BW have stated their intention of introducing changes to the Pleasure Licence in January 2000. This, like the now discredited High Intensity Cruising Licence proposals, allows too little time for these contentious issues to be fully discussed in open forum. Our first request is that the date be delayed for at least three months to allow necessary consultation.

BW have proposed that 18 criteria be established to define what is NOT continuous cruising. It will only need 2 or 3 breaches of these conditions to result in action. Some, if not most, of these proposals affect the fundamental freedoms which we all enjoy on the waterways. Your Council also suspects that these proposals form part of a "hidden agenda" to again raise licence costs. The draconian proposals

also tend to undermine the intentions of Parliament when the British Waterways Act 1995 was placed on the Statute Books.

The Act defines what is 'continuous cruising'. The Act also puts the responsibility onto BW to satisfy themselves that the application for a licence for continuous cruising is genuine and also gives the remedy to BW if a licence holder does not turn out to be so.

Your Council believes that there are two issues here:

1. Continuous cruising
2. Unlawful mooring.

BW are attempting to combine these issues which, in our opinion, are completely separate.

BW state that residency is not an issue. This is rather strange as it appears that the boaters who are allegedly causing the problems for others are living aboard their boats. How can they wash their hands of this when clearly the issues are inseparable.

We also believe that the issue is one that can be solved by proper and effective policing of the people who do deliberately flout the law. NABO believes that the laws appertaining to continuous cruising and any obstruction of the towpath

are sufficient. All that appears to be lacking is the apparent will of BW to enforce the law as it stands.

NABO intends to contest any changes to the licence conditions, suspecting that further changes will soon follow to cover other issues to the detriment of the boater.

"Greasy Ocker"

NABO

meets its target!

3000 boaters for the year 2000

Well done, and
thank you to all of
you who helped us
gain our goal.

More members = more
influence with
Government, BW etc, etc.

Your Views are Wanted

Regional Rep, John Stephens, wants to know what you think about water's edge flora cutting.

He has been in contact with BW's Environmental & Scientific Services Manager as well as local Waterways managers and their key point seems to be that management is "tailored to suit local needs".

John feels that canals are man-made and important part of our industrial heritage - the wildlife are welcome lodgers but they are not the reason the canals are there and biodiversity planners must remember canals are for navigation.

Contact John with your view - his address is on the back page

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BEAR ESSENTIALS : a view of Council by a bear of very little brain

Wow! Peter Lea is going to be missed! - both his expertise and workload. You should see the crowd there is to replace him; I counted thirty legs and some were missing* Lots of new talent and enthusiasm, roaring to serve members' needs, and how to make sure navigation is top priority on the Authorities' agendas.

How best to go forward was a lively topic. How to combine being 'High-tech Whiz kids' with plain speaking and prompt action? Who wants to be inundated with reams of paperwork, when a face-to-face chat can make all clear and often solve problems or give a fresh approach. How many members contact Council by e-mail? How many phone with comments or problems? Or write? It's important to keep close contact with what is going on in the different areas; BW rules and attitude varies - do they have an overall strategy?

Grass cutting on towpaths is one example - different areas, different standards. I want to see the canal for the weeds.

Did you know that Riparian Rights apply on some canals? BW are trying to pretend they don't. I look forward to hearing more about it.

What is all this continuous cruising thing? My licence is for a whole

year. If I want to use it all year, I get cut off by the closures (could be painful!). Are BW going to issue special continuous cruisers' licences where they re-open just for holders, or crane them round obstructions? I think not. It think it is continuous mooring that people object to.

The present BW rules cover the mooring problem. Implement these BW and stop trying to increase fees by the back door.

Now they are going to discontinue the closed fishing season on canals. Our few months of peace are lost. I hope we at least manage to get a stop to fishing matches during the time that was previously closed.

There have been problems over self-pumpouts (sounds painful, again - 'Friend or Enema' one cries to the approaching nurse). It will be handy when John gets, from BW, the list of locations where this can be done. Well, I'll close now, after writing on every boater's favourite topic - well it sometimes seems like it.

**NABO council meetings can seriously damage your health, as Geoff has discovered. He had a bang with his car on the way to one, and an accident leaving his boat when setting out to the last meeting.*

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Meeting was held at the London Canal Museum and members had the opportunity of admiring the exhibits and a wonderful display of canal paintings in an exhibition.

After agreeing as correct and then signing the minutes the Chairman, Peter Lea, gave the following report:

Chairman's Report

This is my third and last chairman's report, and as I look towards 2000 I see a very different waterway system from that in which I started my boating. The old boats are mostly gone or as the author Sam Llewellyn put it, "lovingly restored to better than original condition". The people who once inhabited the system have mostly gone, too. They both have been replaced - the boats by floating suburban cottages with all the individuality of mass produced motor cars; the people - well, the increasing incidence of 'road rage' on the cut and says it all.

And what of the canals themselves? Shallow, weedy, and neglected they may have been; but also tranquil, peaceful, and unspoilt. And now? They are certainly no longer as shallow, weedy and neglected as they were; but they are also expensive,

over-regulated, over-signed, and in some areas, over-populated. In my last column in NABO News, I wrote that the waterways are "less a linear heritage site than a linear municipal garden". BW is the park management, bossing people about with petty regulations and sending out staff in peaked hats to enforce them. So long as the "keep off the grass" signs are freshly painted and the borders are trimmed, and there are plenty of people out walking the dog on Sunday, the park must be alright mustn't it?

NABO's role has changed over the last six years as well. In the beginning, nobody at BW wanted to consult their users - and they certainly didn't want to listen to us. We changed that. We scored some remarkable successes in those days, including major changes to the British Waterways Act, establishing principles of serious consultation with users, and in making BW standards and other information readily available to those who wanted them.

My predecessor, Jon Darlington, and I were among the founders of the National Inland Navigation Forum, which brings together the heads of all the national waterway user groups involved in navigation. As we got to know our opposite

numbers better, the exchange of information and the co-operation between us improved to a degree which would have been unthinkable some years ago. It is now rare for any major group to adopt a stance which has not been discussed in advance and largely agreed at the Forum. This has strengthened all of us. I have had the privilege of being one of the Forum's chairmen for the last few months.

We started talking directly to government - civil servants, MP's, and even Ministers. We persuaded them that we were reasonable people, with sensible views, not the wild men that BW was trying to paint us as. In many cases we showed them that BW were behaving wrongly or being "economical with the truth". We also established good relationships with most of the waterways press, and even managed to get national coverage on occasion.

Developing and fostering these links - with government, the press, and other organisations - has been one of our most important achievements over the past few years, and has led to NABO being universally acknowledged as one of the key players on the waterways scene.

Our work has, inevitably, become less dramatic of late. Most of the

issues we work on now are not "headline grabbers" as they were in the past. But several involve fighting the creeping tide of regulation which I referred to earlier. To be fair, much of it is not of BW's making.

A lot of my time this year has been spent in opposing proposed changes to the Recreational Craft Directive wending their way through Brussels bureaucracy. These would impose noise and exhaust emission restrictions on all marine engines, condemning to oblivion most of the vintage diesel engines that are so much a part of our canal heritage. We are arguing the case for an exemption for existing engines and craft, and I am pleased to say we have the Department of Trade and Industry firmly on our side. This battle looks set to continue through next year.

Changes to British Standards on gas installations and new Health and Safety Executive and CORGI requirements have caused major changes to the Boat Safety Scheme. The new regulations will affect existing installations as well as new fit-outs, and inevitably will mean more expensive new equipment and increased inspection fees. Nigel Parkinson and I have lodged complaints to the BSS management and BW's chief executive, and Nigel has also eloquently expounded our

position to the DETR. The underlying problem is that BW introduced an over-complicated, unsatisfactory scheme to begin with, and put in a manager who is widely considered to be incompetent to run it. They have persisted with both in the face of all our objections, secure in the knowledge that government would not intervene. The latest changes have been forced on BW, but as ever it is we boat owners who have to pay for it all.

Waterways Minister Alan Meale announced large increases to BW's grant in aid early this year, coupled with rule changes enabling it to ring-fence maintenance and repair funds and carry them forward from year to year. He also revealed that BW's long-term loans, most of which date from the 1960's and 1970's and bear interest at rates of 13% and over, would gradually be written off. I was very pleased to be present at these announcements. For years I had argued to government that these loans should be re-negotiated (as they would have been in the private sector), pointing out the lack of logic in giving BW extra money in order for it to give it back at too-high rates. At last my point was accepted, and indeed this has earned me Dr Fletcher's thanks - something I haven't had very often!

Government also rejected the proposals to convert BW into an independent trust or franchise out its operations, but it asked BW to consult on public membership. So, BW launched its much-hyped proposals for a membership scheme and a charitable trust, entitled "Partnership with the People", at London Zoo early this summer. I won't comment on the aptness of the title or the venue - but feel I must on the questionnaire that BW sent out. The way in which the questions were put made it very difficult not to endorse the plans, and so the results of the survey will be biased. It is a pity BW could not be completely straight even on something like this.

We believe that BW will not be able to offer sufficient incentives to induce 50 to 100,000 of the public at large to join its club, and most boaters and other canal enthusiasts will not wish to. We therefore think the membership scheme will fail, but will cost BW a lot of money and management time which would be better spent on our waterways. On behalf of NABO I therefore replied against it. We do support the idea of an independent charitable trust, not controlled by BW.

For many years I have urged BW and the Environment Agency to adopt joint boat licensing as a first

step towards a national boat licence. I participated in the workshop that considered various alternatives. Unfortunately, most of the ideas put forward could not be adopted because of legal constraints on the E A. The solution adopted, a "gold licence", is not ideal, but we welcome it as a preliminary step towards a better system. I recommended several improvements to the way in which the scheme will operate, and these have been accepted.

I have also been pressing BW for years to take steps to ease the plight of boaters forced to sell up by ever-escalating costs. Many of them are retired people on fixed incomes, and have been boating for decades. I felt I might have achieved a break-through, when following the annual national user group meeting in June, David Fletcher conceded that a precedent existed for granting them a licence discount. I have recently had a meeting with Robin Evans, BW's Commercial Director, and Paul Wagstaffe, Customer Relations Manager, to discuss this issue and that of attracting new boaters on to the waterways. Although there have been no concessions, we at least have an action plan to gather data on both problems, assess it, and work out targets and solutions. This is a good first step.

The Environment Agency has been

bureaucratic and unco-operative at times this year, refusing to approve plans to improve Bow Locks and refusing to even consider a canal restoration group's response to an unfairly damning paper prepared by one of its consultants. When the E A was formed, we tried to get the government to accept the inclusion of a reference to navigation in the Bill that set it up, arguing that otherwise navigation would become the Cinderella of the Agency's responsibilities. This has now happened, and I have taken the lead in urging it to review its replies in both cases and to adopt a more constructive and responsive approach to its users.

We have also worked on a host of other matters, some of national importance, some local. Geoff Rogerson, our vice chairman, has monitored the twists and turns of BW's policy on cycling and the proliferation of planned towpathcycleways. He has cast his experienced eye over the re-written, watered-down Waterway Standards, the National Houseboat Agreement, and the Kennet and Avon Conservation Plan. Sadie Dean has been pursuing the Middle Level Commissioners over their draft Bye-Laws and facilities for boaters. Philip Ogden responded on our behalf on the EA's latest Corporate Plan and kept tabs on BW's plans to improve facilities for the disabled. Stephen Peters

followed up members' concerns about lock management on the Severn and temporary mooring prices on the Gloucester and Sharpness, and is writing detailed guidance notes for narrow boaters on rivers. John Stephens started up an important project, the tow-path awareness initiative, which has the support of BW and police forces around the network. He also secured a one-day extension to the temporary visitor moorings at Stourport. Peter Foster, Simon Greer, Jim Hutchinson, and John Stephens have dealt with members' complaints and taken up the cudgels on various issues with individual waterway managers.

I have been involved in long drawn out discussions over navigable channel dimensions in London's waterways and improvements to Bow locks, and in researching and drafting advice on end of garden moorings. One of the things which gave me most pleasure was to secure a substantial reduction in mooring charges for a group of disabled boaters on the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal. I have also drafted NABO's replies on such diverse topics as:

- ♦ the government's White Paper on the future of British Waterways,
- ♦ the DETR's Code of Practice on Conservation, Access and Recreation,

- ♦ the EA's Guidelines on Navigation Restoration,
- ♦ the Commercial and Future Use of the River Nene,
- ♦ proposed residential moorings in East London,
- ♦ the Litchfield and Hatherton's fight over navigable culverts under the BNRR,
- ♦ changes to rules on applying for orders under the Transport and Works Act. This was notable in that it saw a civil servant attempt to drive a small wedge between us and the IWA. We co-ordinated our replies, and as a result NABO will from now on be a statutory consultee on matters affecting navigation.

We have all attended countless meetings on NABO's behalf. I am not going to bore you to death by listing them all, but two deserve special mention. A meeting in London to launch the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities new strategy was enlivened by the IWA, which rightly criticised the policies as inadequate and weak, and called on AINA to do better. And a Wide Waterways Workshop organised by BW looked at ways of expanding the network for wider craft.

We attended the major national events at Braunston and Worcester this year, as well as rallies at Newark and the

Wendover Arm. I must particularly thank Sue for securing our site at Worcester. Strategically placed between the beer tent and the food stalls, it was the one stand no-one could possibly miss! We got over a hundred new members from these events. Our new affiliated membership category has also been very successful, with about 25 clubs and other bodies joining. Our newsletter is now available to thousands of boaters around the country, and is sent to key people in government, the Environment Agency, and of course British Waterways. We are also progressing in electronic communication:

Mike Wooding has completely revamped and re-launched the NABO web-site.

Several other people have worked extremely hard for NABO over the year and if we have been successful it is largely thanks to their efforts. Sue Burchett, our Secretary; Roger Davis, our Membership Secretary; Christine Denton, who organised our rally stands and our Lock Working Day; Wendy Hook, our Newsletter Editor; and especially Andrew Sherrey, our Treasurer who puts in uncounted hours for us.

I would also like to thank Chris Boxall; Jon and Melanie Darlington, and Denis Smith (all

former Council Members), Tommy Gough, Mike Smith, Chris and Gill Webber, and everyone else who has given us their help and support during the year.

Council as a whole has an enormous amount to do, and the work-load is getting too great for us to deal with, working as we are. Christine Denton and John Stephens have written a very helpful paper putting forward ideas for changes to Council's structure. I don't know what solution will emerge, but I am sure Council will wish to act as efficiently as possible, while maintaining its currently excellent communication among Council members.

Looking forward, the new Council will have a number of new thorny issues to grapple with in 2000, on top of those I have already mentioned. Probably the most contentious is a paper produced by BW entitled "What Clearly is Not Continuous Cruising". This is an effort to lay down guidelines under which people who have Continuous Cruising Licences and who stay in one general area for too long may be forced to pay for permanent moorings there. It is a continuation of the attack on "continuous cruisers" which we, together with other organisations, successfully fought off last year.

It is not clear whether the proposals are aimed at people causing a nuisance when moored up (in which case the existing licence conditions and bye-laws are sufficient) or whether, as we suspect, it is just another attempt to grab more money from vulnerable boaters. They certainly give waterway managers and staff great scope to harass boats and boaters they don't like. It seems likely that Council will object to most of the proposals as they stand.

We have written to BW about the towpath audits their staff and mooring wardens carry out. We want to know what information they gather and why; where the information is kept, how a boater can check it, and how to correct it if it is wrong. We also think we, and indeed any boater, has a right to know who the mooring wardens are. Expect a few fireworks on this one.

BW has also attempted to exercise control over canal side functions or events, through the innocent sounding document "Notification & Permission for Events".

This includes some wonderful clauses, including one obliging the organisers to put up a banner thanking BW for graciously allowing the event to take place. Following user protests (which we started) the document is being re-

written and will be circulated for comment.

The dimensions of navigable channels in rivers and broad beam waterways have not been agreed, as they need to be under the Waterway Standards. Discussions are progressing - slowly - for London and the Grand Union South, and agreement on these would set a pattern for other waterways. It is quite possible, however, that the whole problem will be put in the "too difficult" bin and will have to be resolved by a Public Inquiry.

Now for some bad news. The E A have notified us that they plan to abolish the coarse fishing close season, after a short period for statutory consultation. Council will need to reply on this, even if the outcome is a foregone conclusion. BW has announced that they can't enforce a close season themselves, but I understand they do plan to bring in some controls over the timing and notification of fishing matches. We will wish to contribute our views.

Finally BW's legal department have been working on a root-and-branch revision of BW's Bye-Laws. They are now well out of date and badly need revising, but we can expect the proposals to contain many unwelcome surprises.

I would like to end by putting forward five key rules for the new Council to bear in mind next year and in the new millennium. They are:

1. Maintain, and where possible improve, contacts with government.
2. Beware of extremism in attitudes and expression. Don't alienate those whom you wish to persuade or have on your side.
3. Work in close liaison with other waterway groups. Co-operate with them whenever possible.
4. Publicise what you do and why you are doing it.
5. Keep up informal contacts with influential people.

I would like to wish NABO, the Council, and everyone who cares about our waterways all success in years to come.

I have enjoyed my years on NABO Council. Thank you all, and I wish you well.

•••••

The meeting continued according to the agenda:

The Treasurer explained that the high balance maintained in the accounts was to ensure that sufficient finance would be available to fight any battles that might become necessary. He mentioned that members have expressed a willingness to make

donations to a fighting fund if this became necessary and as a consequence there was no need to raise subscriptions, a recommendation that was accepted unanimously.

There were 13 Council members nominated for the 16 places available, so they were all elected. Peter Foster and James Mason agreed to be co-opted onto Council.

•••••

After the formal business was completed the meeting was opened to general discussion and this centred around continuous cruising, pumpouts, fishing closed seasons, the boat safety scheme and water extraction. Those present were informed that the Boat Safety Scheme is hated by the examiners even more than by boaters! They felt it had done nothing to improve safety - there were still the same number of accidents - and it was purely a money-raising scheme. It was commented that if all boats carried marine insurance the BSS could cease tomorrow.

•••••

Peter Lea was presented with a pair of lace plates with the very grateful thanks of Council and members. Thanks were also expressed to his wife, Christine, who has written all the admirable press releases issued by NABO over the past few years.

TOWPATH TELEGRAPH

BSS Changes Attitude on Flexible Fuel Pipes

Members are asked to take note of a change to the way in which the Boat Safety Scheme is now applied to fuel pipework installed in engine spaces. Many owners of river and sea-going boats were subjected to considerable expense and added danger by the previous insistence of the BSS that flexible fuel pipes would only be permitted in short lengths for connecting to engines. All other pipework had to be rigid.

In order to harmonise the BSS with European standards it was decided that the permissible applications for the use of flexible fuel hose conforming to BS EN ISO 7840 could be widened. Consequently, flexible fuel distribution and return systems are now acceptable between fuel tanks and engines to compensate for engine vibration or to take account of movement of the craft structure in severe operating conditions that may be encountered at sea.

Thank you, Europe. Common sense has prevailed at last!

Readers may well remember that when BSS was first introduced, BW stated that they needed to be in a boat safety scheme or else Europe would impose one on

us. With the benefit of hindsight and experience of the last few years, maybe that would have been better option?

Middle Level Closures

Ashline Lock - Whittlesey from 10/1/2000 to 6/2/00

Salters Lode Lock from 17./1/00 to 12/3/00

Marmont Priory Lock from 7/2/00 to 5/3/00

Hopwas Embankment

BW will be deep piling to stabilise the embankment which means that the canal will not be dewatered. The pile driving crane will be mounted pontoons which will restrict the channel and stop all boats passing. Dredging will be done during the stoppage although the towpath reinstatement will not be completed by the end of the stoppage.

Winter use of Pump outs

Card operated pumpouts are now in operation at Kinver and Market Drayton. Self pump outs can be done at Compton, Wheaton Aston, Penkridge & Stone. NABO is attempting to obtain a list of sanitary stations with pumpout or self service machines.

The Chairman of the Parliamentary Waterways Group, Bill O'Brien MP, has been receiving complaints about BW local Managers sent to him directly by waterway users. He has asked us to help make it known that, although he wishes to be kept well informed about matters of significance to the Group, he is not in a position to involve the Group in local matters other than through the relevant constituency MP.

Therefore anyone with a local problem seeking the help of Parliamentarians should first write to their local MP expressing their concerns and asking him/ her to pursue the matter locally and then, if necessary, to attend a meeting of the Group to raise the matter there, for the Chairman to pursue it should the Group so wish. The local MP should be copied with any subsequent correspondence.

Matters of significance can be raised directly with the Group in the form of a question put by the NABO representative or other affiliate of the Group at one of the Group's meetings.

For people not familiar with Parliamentary procedures, Parliamentary Groups are all-party associations of members of both chambers of Parliament with a common interest in particular

subjects, of which Waterways is but one of many. Although the Groups are run by Parliamentarians for the benefit of Parliamentarians, some, such as the Waterways Group, are supported by Associate Members who pay a subscription and are permitted to attend meetings of the Group and to put questions. NABO is an Associate Member of the Waterways Group and a representative usually attends the Group's meetings.

Richard Thomas is doing research into ex-Josher steamers and would welcome any information. He can be contacted at Thrift House,

Wanted - Representatives

Would anyone like to represent NABO on the Mon and Brec? Contact John Stephens for more details.

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RIVER REVIEW

Drownings in the UK 1998

Accidental drowning in the UK for 1998 shows an increase to a total of 568 according to a recent report produced by RoSPA . (No information is given concerning deliberate drowning but we do know that suicides are common - on average one person per week ends their life by leaping into the Thames in London.)

The data is collected from news-paper reports since there are no official statistics available and RoSPA points out that the increased incidences may result from improved data gathering rather than an actual increase in the number of fatalities.

A breakdown of the headline figure shows that 10% of drownings resulted from boating accidents (both inland and coastal). The river with the most reported drownings was the River Thames with a total of 43 followed by the Severn with 9. These are not all connected with boating and may have resulted from swimming accidents, drunken pranks and floods which claimed 21 lives.

The figures give a sobering pause for thought and highlight the need to treat water with the respect it deserves. There is more to safety on our waterways that just the Boat Safety Scheme!

Narrowboat Movements on the Tidal Thames

The Port of London Authority has

recently re-issued its General Directions for Navigation in the Port of London and our River Users' Co-ordinator spotted that the long-standing exemption from the requirement for all vessels over 20 metres to carry VHF radio had been omitted.

We have now received confirmation from PLA that relaxation which was introduced in 1993 in respect of full length narrowboats travelling between Brentford and Teddington locks still applies.

A Notice to Mariners will be published in the New Year to clarify the exemption but in broad terms there will be no requirement for narrowboats over 20 metres to carry VHF radio when making the passage between the G.U. at Brentford and the non-tidal Thames upstream at Teddington, and vice versa.

There is still a requirement for all vessels over 20 metres to carry VHF radio downstream of Brentford and this will affect narrowboats exceeding 20 metres in length in the vicinity of Limehouse Basin, Bow and the Docklands.

Gloucester Harbour Trustees

NABO maintains a close watch on the activities of Gloucester Harbour Trustees - the body responsible for navigation and pilotage on the tidal reaches of the River Severn

(downstream from Gloucester and more particularly between Sharpness and the Severn Estuary; and also the tidal River Wye to Chepstow.

We have a number of members who regularly make excursions from Sharpness into the Bristol Channel with their river-based boats and it is also possible for narrowboats to make the transit from the Kennet & Avon via Bristol to the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal (but only in the most favourable conditions by experienced masters). It was therefore appropriate that NABO should be consulted a few years ago when the GHT introduced new byelaws. We made some constructive comments which were taken into account and the new rules now apply. The trustees maintain regular contact with the stakeholders through bi-annual user group meetings.

The latest Annual report of the trustees confirms the expenditure they have committed to the plans for weirs at Gloucester to make the river more user friendly - we await the outcome of this scheme with great interest as it would undoubtedly improve navigation conditions on the river.

The trustees have also repaid a loan from British Waterways rendering them free from external debt. They receive an income from the Highways Agency to assist with conservancy and pilotage duties in connection with the recently constructed Second Severn Crossing and most of their income is expended on maintaining

and improving navigation beacons and other aids and radar watch coverage. The trustees license four pilots to guide commercial vessels into Sharpness. Traffic fell from 441 to 426 in 1998/99 and pilotage rates were reduced.

Owing to the complexities of navigating along a tidal river containing one working nuclear power station and one partially decommissioned power station together with the old Severn Bridge and the new Severn Crossing, the trustees are nominated from a broad spectrum of interests including local authorities, BW, the electricity generation company and the road bridge operator. Leisure boating interests are represented by a Mr G Clark the nominee of the Royal Yachting Association. He will be leaving in 2000 and we trust RYA will appoint someone with knowledge and experience of this formidable tidal river. The Chairman of the Trustees is a Mr Ian Walker, a former employee of British Waterways whose company, Ian Walker & Associates is paid to carry out inland waterway and estuarial navigation consultancy work. The local BW Waterway Manager, David Tyrrell is another trustee.

If any NABO member would like to attend the twice-yearly User Forum our River Users' Co-ordinator would be delighted to give details so that we can

ANOTHER OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT

Last year, the Waterways Ombudsman, Stephen Edell, investigated a complaint I had brought against British Waterways over the Mooring Matrix, as it affected mooring at Kinver.

As the investigation proceeded it became increasingly obvious to me that BW (through the Regional Manager based on input from the Waterways Manager) was making inaccurate statements to Mr Edell. At the time I believed these to be lies.

When I brought this to his attention, he defined a 'lie' as an intentional false statement, which would constitute maladministration, but to pursue the matter I would have to start a further complaint through the internal complaints procedure.

I was so concerned (even angry) that BW's senior management were making inaccurate statements without risk of contradiction, that I did make a further complaint alleging that three specimen statements made by BW during the original complaint were lies, ie wrong and made knowing they were wrong.

Not surprisingly, the internal complaints procedure did not resolve the issue which was then

referred back to Mr Edell.

Following some six months correspondence he has now concluded that whilst the statements I complained about were inaccurate, he is not satisfied that there are intentional false statements, stating in his decision:

"BW has asserted throughout that there was no intention to mislead me. Whether or not sufficient care was taken in preparing the disputed statements, I have no reason to doubt their assurances"

(It is worthy of mention at this stage that prior to this decision being made I had brought to Mr Edell's attention, a number of false statements given in the Waterways Manager's final response to this current complaint!)

However, Mr Edell also made the following statement in his decision:

"While I have indicated that I am not prepared to characterise the statements referred to above as lies, it would not be right for me to leave this case without expressing my concern about the standard of BW's responses to

the old complaint. I accept that they were honest. However, the ones referred to above were also wrong. If cases are not continue interminably, I have to be able to rely on statements being made by BW as being correct, at least unless and until they are challenged by the complainant. BW should not make statements of fact without satisfying themselves, if necessary by reference to previous files or in other ways, that they are correct."

Interestingly, Mr Edell's draft final decision (which was sent to BW prior to my seeing it) had the sentence "I expect better in future" added at the end of the above paragraph. It appear BW took exception to this sentence and I have copy correspondence from the Regional Manager to Mr Edell, stating:

".... I find the final sentence of the paragraph very disappointing, and I believe totally unnecessary"

Mr Edell replied:

"You may like to know that Mr Duffy (BW's Director of Corporate Services) has asked me to remove the last sentence from (this) paragraph and I have agreed to do so. Having said that, I stand by the proposition that BW must satisfy itself of the correctness of statements of fact which it makes

to me. It is plain that insufficient care was taken in that respect in this instance."

In a letter to me, Mr Edell said that he agreed to delete it because in his view the deletion made no difference to the substance of the paragraph.

Is it odd that BW are allowed to act in this way?

I would now like to think that BW will 'do better in future' - its credibility will be in doubt if its senior managers continue to make inaccurate statements and we, its customers would think twice before believing anything said in future.

Peter Lea's final comment from an article he wrote for the Newsletter earlier this year remains pertinent:

"BW employees, particularly senior ones, should treat all their customers - even difficult ones - with consideration and should be open and scrupulously accurate. To do otherwise will put people's back's up, engender bad feeling and cause much management time to be spent in dealing with complaints."

During his investigation of my original complaint regarding the mechanics of the Mooring Matrix, Mr Edell agreed with me that BW must provide to any moorer who

requests it, all the information required to enable the mooring charges to be calculated/checked. I urge all BW moorers to obtain this information as it applies to their specific site.

The following extract from Mr Edell's annual report for 1998/99 (recommended reading and available free of charge from Waterways Offices and BW Customer Services 01923 201120) is therefore of interest:

"Consideration of (this case) led me to think that the wording of the Criteria in the Moorings Matrix

might lead BW's staff to think that it was sufficient to send out on request less than the full information about the score under the matrix. BW replied that they had already started to prepare an updated version of the Matrix which would contain all the relevant information in one place, and that this would ensure that the underlying concepts are fully understood by their staff and better explained to their customers."

I look forward to seeing it.

Denis Smith

Visit NABO Web-site: www.nabo.org.uk

Web-master Michael Wooding wants to know what YOU want to see on these pages - and what you think will best introduce NABO to others

Water Extraction & Piling

NABO Council is concerned about water extraction, particularly on rivers. Concern was expressed about the water levels near Malvern. Will all members please keep an eye open and report any drop in water levels which may be due to water extraction to their local rep.

Piling was also discussed at the last Council meeting. If any member wishes to comment on

the way piling is being done, please contact your local rep, or write to NABO News. For instance is the line of the canal being kept, especially near bridge holes?

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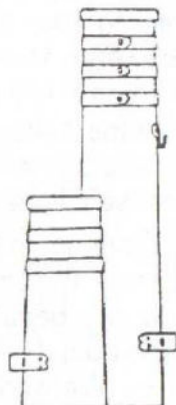
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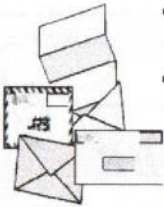
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LETTERS

Dear Editor
Brian Taber's letter
issue 5/99

Are we shufflers? We took all last winter to bring our boat back to Derby from Market Drayton. We have spent this summer getting as far as the Ashby on which canal we have spent the last two months, because it is beautiful.

We have got to know the locality, the pubs, the shops, have met some nice people and have lived on the boat three nights out of seven. We work during the week so only get to our boat at week-ends of holidays during the year.

Whilst we may not travel very far, we would like to see the whole of the system but, God willing, over the next twenty years not the next two! Like every thing else that is done on the cut we think it should be done slowly.

We certainly don't want to be stuck in a boatyard. It is not a case of dodging mooring fees it's just not what we want to do.

Brian may like the security of a boatyard. He may like to drive in and not worry about where he can safely leave his car. He may like the convenience of being hooked up to mains electricity and have a water point handy. To be able to easily empty his loo, have a pump-out and dispose of his rubbish. To

wheel his trolley round to the chandlery to get his gas and solid fuel and any bits he may need.

Perhaps it would terrify him to leave his valuable boat tied up to the towpath unattended for a week, and evenmore so, his car from Saturday morning to Sunday evening. But our style of cruising demands we take these risks. It demands we spend money, much of it on taxis on a Sunday evening, and it demands we plan ahead to ensure we can get to a boatyard that is open to give us the services we need.

Finally because of our lifestyle we need to insure fully comprehensively and that alone probably costs more than half Brian's annual mooring fee.

We don't winterise and lay up our boat, we enjoy it at every possible opportunity. I suppose we could best be described as "dawdlers" but are we to be hounded and penalised for that?

Is the petty jealousy of a few to lead to even more byelaws and regulations to curtail even further the freedom Robert Aikman and others fought so hard to establish?

Please remember we are NABO members too and we expect your support to live an cruise as we want

Jim & Rose Addison

Dear Editor

Towpath shufflers - I was rather alarmed by your reaction to this, I thought NABO Council were aware that the issue is not as straightforward as it might appear and had no idea NABO was pressing BW to strengthen their Bye-laws. I would be grateful if NABO members could note and consider the following points: RBOA do not support anyone who does not have a licence. That said, prices must be reasonable and the licensing system fairly administered.

If you live on your boat, despite BW's "residency is not an issue policy" (Feb '97, after many years negotiation) it can be hard to get a mooring if local BW staff are prejudiced or if the boater is honest to the point of possibly causing a difficulty with the local authority planning department.

BW officially don't care what you do on or in your boat BUT they can't be seen to be flouting planning law, they can't afford, if a situation is queried by the planners, for the boater to assert that BW have given full permission for residential use of a mooring.

There's also the history, BW did want to evict us all in the early nineties and many boaters are wary of approaching BW. It doesn't help if their most recent

contact is a patrol officer who is ignorant of the law, BW policies and basic psychology - not to mention customer care.

I think many of us (me included) who pay for moorings lose sight of what we are paying for - we are paying to stay put for as long as we like in one place, With known site and location conditions. We are not taking pot luck on where we tie. We are paying for security of tenure which must have some value. That value will vary from person to person but personally, even when I retire & float off around the system, I may well keep a Birmingham mooring all year round because I'm a bit of a whimp really (don't tell anyone) & like some certainty in my life.

People paying for a mooring can always stop if they wish to discover what they're paying for and enjoy the uncertainty of being without.

The legal situation is defined (after a fashion) in the '95 BW Act. It may be perfectly legal for some "shuffling". Awareness of the difficulties with this, the RBOA attempted to get BW to discuss the limits of the grey area. We talked informally about this and wrote requesting a meeting in Feb '98.

We received no reply & then BW issued all that ill-thought out unenforceable nonsense on

continuous cruising in April '98. We won a complaint to the ombudsman on their failure to reply to our letter! We also got our meeting and very useful it was too. Work on this is continuing with all user groups.

The lateness of the stoppage list doesn't help - the '97 list wasn't published until October despite our repeated requests. Boaters did get locked in quite genuinely or not knowing the navigational limits had to try to organise temporary moorings at very short notice. Of course some may have exploited the lateness as an excuse, but if it were early (we keep pressing for mid-August) the situation would be rather less ambiguous.

Then there's fantasy - our relationship with the water is an emotional one. Often in their heads people are travelling the whole system - when they just finish that engine re-build. If you point out quite how long they haven't moved any distance for, they'd be hurt and shocked.' I do think

BW's approach should be to sell the advantages of a mooring if in reality people are not moving very far - do a sales job instead of being aggressive -boaters with moorings could help with this rather than condemn the shufflers and help BW with their "divide and

rule" tactics!

If someone doesn't have a mooring and isn't continuously cruising as defined by the '95 BW act, their pleasure craft licence will be refused and their boat removed - all subject to reasonable notice being given and in line with procedures agreed with the user groups a few years ago. BW do have quite enough powers to deal with any problem and have said so on several occasions. It's a question of time as much as anything -they' d rather have customers than the problem and expense of removing boats.

Inappropriate use of the towpath and general selfish conduct is more than adequately covered in the general mooring permit conditions for pleasure craft - the wording of many of which dates back to work by RBOA and NABO on the national moorings agreement for moorings with residential planning permission. Breach of these conditions can lead to licences being refused and boats being removed. There is some work currently in draft form at BW for tackling residential boats without licences.

The dear old boat safety scheme has of course added another expense into the cost of getting a licence - money that could have been spent on a mooring may

have been diverted to compliance costs.

If these "shufflers" aren't obstructing the navigation or persistently occupying temporary moorings you want to use, what's the problem? If they are lived on, they may well be contributing to the security of your boat. By pottering about they may be demonstrating the need to keep the navigation open all year round. Remember only last year there it was proposed that your annual licence only entitled you to 13 weeks cruising.

Penny Barber

Special Projects Officer
Residential Boat Owners Association

Dear Wendy,

Having read Carole Sampson's letter in your August edition, we approached this bridge from Skipton last week with interest.

I usually leave the bridges on this stretch to my husband but decided to see if it was impossible for one person to operate as she claims.

I am 58, about 5ft. 5ins. and, as my son would say, seriously unfit. Nevertheless I jumped off, clutching my L&L handcuff key, to give it a try.

I unlocked the bolt easily but found it hard to lift as two cars sped over while I was trying. I had to jiggle it a bit to get the bolt up. This done,

with one foot releasing the catch and my back against the beam, I managed to open the bridge single-handed. It was a slow process admittedly but I did it. The bridges open from the towpath side so allowing one person operation. We have met three women running their boats alone this summer but they are restricted as to their routes because of this problem with lift and swing bridges.

Jill Noble

Dear Editor,

"Life Afloat" The RBOA has been specialising in the sort of questions asked by Mr Robinson for 35 years. People who are not yet living on their boats are very welcome to join us as Associate members.

This gives them a newsletter every couple of months and unlimited access to committee members and regional reps to ask advice. In addition we produce a booklet called "Living Afloat" which answers many common questions and includes case histories. I'm very sorry to hear of Philip Priestley's difficulties producing "Life-Afloat", we've been on very friendly terms for many years.

Our national address is P0 Box 46, Grays, Essex, RM18 SDZ.

Penny Barber

Dear Editor

This year we were able to fulfil an ambition of some ten years, namely to take our 45 foot narrowboat, Sorrel, out on to the main system for an extended holiday (it turned out to be ten weeks)

We planned to go from Bradford on Avon on the Kennet and Avon to Reading - up the Thames to Oxford - Grand Union to Limehouse - back up the Thames to the K & A and Bradford on Avon - 40miles, 358 locks and goodness knows how many swing/lift bridges - 235 cruising hours.

We had glorious sunshine most of the time and experienced such a wide variety of canals, rivers and places from the tranquil rural canals to the heart-stopping moment when we emerged from Limehouse lock onto the tidal Thames, where it rained stair- rods for the four hours up to Teddington Lock.

In a journey over ten weeks we did, of course, have some "interesting" moments; the time our starter battery died at the bottom of the Napton locks - a very busy place - and suddenly people were everywhere, hauling on a rope, fending off and moving boats to help us find a spot to moor up - all with great humour and kindness - in fact, just being 'boaters'.

Then again, at Milton Keynes Marina, the Lockhart Brothers cheerfully gave up their Saturday afternoon to take our boat out of the water to attend to our rudder and affect a temporary repair.

Wherever we went we met incredible friendliness.

Having previously contacted St Pancras Cruising Club to obtain Dr Roger Squires' comprehensive notes on travelling on the tidal Thames, we were very fortunate in being able to make contact with him again and have an introduction to the Harbour Master Fred Hills, who spent considerable time and trouble to make an effective repair to the swan neck when it came off in his hands - all part of life's rich tapestry.

However, it did allow us to have a great day in Fred Hills' company and then have the pleasure of Roger Squires on board for the trip up from Limehouse to Teddington two days - his commentary was fascinating and the Thames knowledge reassuring and it was all greatly appreciated.

Reading the logs brings back all the wonderful memories we have of those ten weeks which will never be forgotten, and to all those who up to now have only thought about doing a similar trip we say "Go for it!" To all those who made it possible, special friends made on the way, shared locks, gave lifts, delivered post, and not the least, to our daughter, Sarah, who organised our home, post and dealt with everthing, even when we were burgled - our very grateful thanks.

Peter (Andy) and Dorrie Adams
NB Sorrel

Re: Tidy Towpaths

As a romantic person I don't all ways get it right. Retribution follows swiftly'. Shortly after publication of this poem my husband had an accident. Just as Ron Bingham predicted, he found the hole hidden in the long grass at Gailey, fell backwards into the canal, hitting the front of the boat on his way down. He cracked his ribs, damaged his arm badly and lost his specs. As the author of the poem it should have happened to me'. Also if the edge isn't cut, experience has now taught me that you don't get more pretty wild flowers, all you seem to get is a dense growth of nettles, thistles and brambles. My next poem will have to be about falling into the canal

Courtesy on the Canals

In our experience, the BW "men and women in green" have been helpful and courteous. We do enjoy meeting them and have never had a problem. They do seem to be disillusioned with the management though!

Jan Eaton NB ICHTHUS

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