

THE MAGAZINE OF THE



President: Bill O'Brien J.P. M.P.

ISSUE 5/04 - August 2004

Corridor Issues / AGM & Form / New BSS

IN THIS ISSUE

3	Chairman's Column	Stuart Sampson
5	Editorial	The Editor
5	BW Unit Email	BW
6	NABO Cruises	Carole Sampson
7	Courses	
8	The Boater's Video	SS
10	Corridor Issues	Your Chairman
12	NABO at Rallies 2005	General Secretary
13	Taking the Nanny out of the BSS?	
14	Manchester Matters	Gordon Reece
16	AGM and Nomination Form	
19	Notices	
20	Rivers (Flags)	River Users Co-ordinator
21	Picture Gallery	
22	Your personal Power Station	SS
23	Brass Cleaning Thoughts	Nigel Parkinson
26	Letters	Yourselves
30	NABO Supplies	
31	Council Contacts	

2004 CALENDAR

Council meeting	Copy date
Sept 18th	Sept 25th (articles)
	Oct 2nd (CVs and AGM resolutions)
<i>Nov 13th A.G.M.</i>	
Nov 27th	Dec 4th



CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

NABO too quiet?

NABO has been reprimanded by Canal and Riverboat magazine for not protesting when the government 'unexpectedly' cut BW's Grant-in-aid, although I did in fact write on your behalf to Robin Evans with a copy to Alun Michael (DEFRA) expressing NABO's concerns about the **effects** of the cut. It is not as though BW exactly came begging for support. If the cut was due to a department 'cock-up' as C&R claim, BW would have had every right to lead a campaign flotilla of banner-flying boats past the Houses of Parliament and I am sure we would have been happy to swell its numbers, but no. I don't think we can be that simplistic, and I don't know how the editor of C&R, of all people, can expect the boating user groups to do a handbrake turn and, casting aside all doubts about BW, perform a knee-jerk protest in its defence.

Of course the cut will be bad for the waterways and we deplore it, but how bad will depend on BW's ability to make best use of what they have got. The cut may have been to fund the Iraq war, or to give money to a 'more deserving' cause. Maybe it was to recover from a budgeting cock-up.

On the other hand maybe DEFRA is taking their finger off the BW engine's start button to see if it can

keep turning on its own? I have a healthy respect for George Greener's ability to wheel and deal and I am sure that he and his board will have done more damage limitation than we could achieve with a protest, but there must be more to this than meets the eye.

DEFRA Consultation

On the 14th of July, we had to have our comments in for the 2004 DEFRA Review of BW, which gives us another avenue to make our feelings known. This took a lot of effort, but the policy work we have been doing helped shape our ideas, and, following the lines of politicians worldwide, we decided what we wanted to say and then moulded it to suit their questions. I am not including the seven page result in NABO News, firstly because it is too long, and secondly we want DEFRA to decide when BW gets to know of its content. Suffice to say there is little in it that hasn't been expressed in the pages of this magazine before.

Slow down?

Anyway, enough of political stuff and back to life on the cut. You may have seen those boat window stickers that say, 'What part of SLOW DOWN don't you understand?'. Well, the answer is the DOWN bit. We have all experienced it – 'eee', your boat strains against its ropes as an approaching boat punches through a bridgehole, 'eee' (you can transpose this down in pitch, boats other than Canaltime do it too!) 'EEE' (Time you lit the sign telling all passengers to return to their seats and fasten their seatbelts), creak, lurch, bump, 'EEE-ERRR', heel, lurch, bang! Yes, the steerer did exactly what

it says in the Waterways Code and elsewhere: 'SLOW DOWN PAST MOORED BOATS'. Too little too late, and it is not always hire boaters, there are some private boaters who think lip service to that wording is enough. A NABO sticker **accelerated** past our vessel on the Caldon the other day (if I say 'Inspector ? Morse', the owner will know who he is) and we mustn't let folks think that because we are 'Boat Owners' we reckon we own the canals too. Wouldn't it be much better if the request was worded: '**pass moored boats slowly**' or '**very slowly**', or '**dead slow**', or even '**in tick-over**'?

Of course there is something the 'victims' can do, especially those who keep their boat in one of those endless rows of on-line moorings, and that is to rig some 'spring' ropes to take the fore and aft strain of passing boats. That is only reasonable as one can't expect passing craft to crawl for miles.

When is a mooring...

...not a mooring? Still on the subject of moorings and signs, I would like to challenge BW, in particular, to define what is meant by a MOORING, as in 'Visitor Mooring'. Obviously it is not how I would define it.

Let's try: '*A piece of bank where one can safely and securely tie up any boat that can use that waterway without impeding other waterway users*'

- *Safely* implies someone can step off without jumping, twisting an ankle, or worse, in order to take lines ashore.
- *Securely* means that if no rings, bollards etc are provided then the bank is suitable for mooring pins.
- *Any boat that can use that waterway* includes wide beam where appropriate

and full working draught.

- *Without impeding other waterway users* rules out water points, narrows, lock landings, tight bends, places where ropes have to cross the towpath etc.

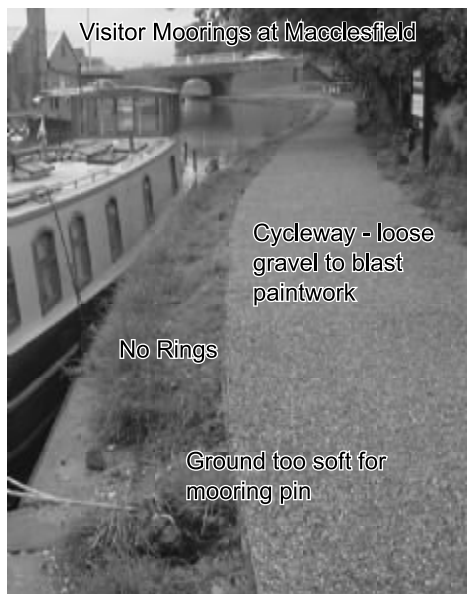
BW's jolly little bollard can be seen on many a stretch that does not meet these criteria. In fact, although the *Visitor Mooring* sign should be an invitation to tie up, it's true meaning is in fact NO MOORING – after a specified time limit that is. It is not a guarantee that the assigned bank is any easier to tie up to than elsewhere along that waterway. I think it should be.

Reports Board

At last I have been given the email addresses for BW offices, so postings are now being forwarded automatically to them. Now we shall see if this allows you to help BW look after the system and make it better for us all.

Enjoy your cruising, and your mooring!

Stuart



EDITORIAL

I have been asked to say a few words about the letter from Peter James that appeared in the last issue. In fact I was summonsed to appear before the Director of the BW legal department when I was supposed to be having a lunch break at the Corridor Issues Meeting. Luckily Nigel Johnson is a likeable person to meet face-to-face and this avoided an exchange of emails that might not have been so comfortable.

I expect Nigel will be replying in due course, but I have been asked to point out that Peter's letter was just one episode in a long running series of exchanges between himself and BW.

To tell the whole story would take up several issues of this magazine, but suffice to say one should not take everything said on the subject at face value. Certainly one has to read the legal phrasing very carefully and not jump to conclusions. Interesting reading it might make, but this is no place for a 'trial by media' and it will be very difficult to present a balanced picture, so I am reluctant to give it much more space.

What it does say to me is that BW is having to spend your licence money on fighting court battles rather than on the waterways, and this is regrettable. If there is a serious principle at stake that cannot be resolved using the Internal Complaints Procedure, please have the faith in NABO to handle it.

P.S. - I am afraid both Dot and the Fly are on holiday, so you will have to await issue 6 for their words of wisdom again

Email addresses for BW Units

If you have a complaint or query, you can now send it by email to the waterway unit irrespective of who is General Manager. The addresses to use are:-

Scotland -	enquiries.scotland@britishwaterways.co.uk
London -	enquiries.london@britishwaterways.co.uk
Southeast -	enquiries.southeast@britishwaterways.co.uk
Southwest -	enquiries.southwest@britishwaterways.co.uk
West Midlands -	enquiries.wmw@britishwaterways.co.uk
Central Shires -	enquiries.centralshires@britishwaterways.co.uk
East Midlands -	enquiries.emidlands@britishwaterways.co.uk
Wales & Border Counties -	enquiries.wbc@britishwaterways.co.uk
Northwest -	enquiries.northwest@britishwaterways.co.uk
Yorkshire -	enquiries.yorkshire@britishwaterways.co.uk

NABO CRUISE/s 2005

Have you ever fancied cruising the tidal River Severn between Sharpness and Bristol?

Would you prefer to do it with other like-minded ~~idiots~~/souls?

Would you prefer to share the cost of a pilot with others? (Only available for vessels up to 20metres in length.)

NABO is considering organising such a cruise during the summer of 2005. All the arrangements would be made for you, documentation obtained and sent to you etc., all you would need to do is to turn up at the appropriate place at the allotted time, with the appropriate insurance and boat equipment. A small fee (£10) to cover expenses and a social event on the evening after passage (or the day after that if no-one fancies any food at that time!) would be required: the pilot would be paid at the time of passage so that you wouldn't pay if you didn't get there.

At this stage, NABO is looking to gauge interest. Before expressing this, you need to consult your boat insurance documents and/or your company, to see if you would be covered, and if any extra payment or conditions would apply. If you are happy (and covered) with your company's terms, and want more information, please contact Carole, General Secretary, who will contact you in the autumn, together with a form to complete should you wish to sign up. The fee would only be payable at this point.

For further details about the passage, consult the Severn Passage guidance passage on the Members Only section of the NABO website.

Carole Sampson

Advertisement

COURSES

IWA National Festival - Craft & Boat Maintenance Workshops

33 workshop sessions covering different aspects of boat maintenance and a variety of waterway crafts have been arranged to take place during IWA's National Festival & Inland Boat Show over the August bank holiday weekend. 10 of the courses take place on Friday 27th August - before the Festival fully opens to the public, with the remainder on the three bank holiday-weekend days.

Topics covered by the courses include:

- * Diesel fuel systems
- * Charging circuits and testing the starter
- * Introduction to fender making
- * Decorative rope work
- * Sign writing
- * Stern gear and gland packing
- * Rope splicing
- * Painting Roses & Castles
- * Cabin crochet

The cost of each course is between £10 and £18 and bookings need to be made in advance. All the courses held at the National Festival at Beale Park in 2003 sold out - some of them a long time in advance. A leaflet detailing the courses is available from IWA Head Office, or by calling 0870 240 2438.

READING COLLEGE COURSES

The £10 discount is still offered to NABO members.

Full details are now on the website www.reading-college.ac.uk/marine

Diesel Engine and Boat Maintenance courses - £42 to members

Boater's Electrics and Welding for Boaters - £58 to members

Dates:-

Maintenance (Y&C) 6 & 7/11/04, 22 & 23/1/05, 19 & 20/2/05

Maintenance (NB) 25 & 26/9/04, 10 & 21/11/04, 17 & 18/2/05
5 & 6/3/05, 19 & 20/3/05, 4 & 5/6/05,
4 & 5/7/05

Electrics 23 & 24/10/04, 8 & 9 /1/05, 21 & 22/3/05,
23 & 24/4/05, 30 & 31/7/05

Welding 6 & 7/11/05

The contact is Elaine Zimmer on 0118 9675074 or Marine@Reading-college.ac.uk (term time)

Free email advice line (subject to time) as above.

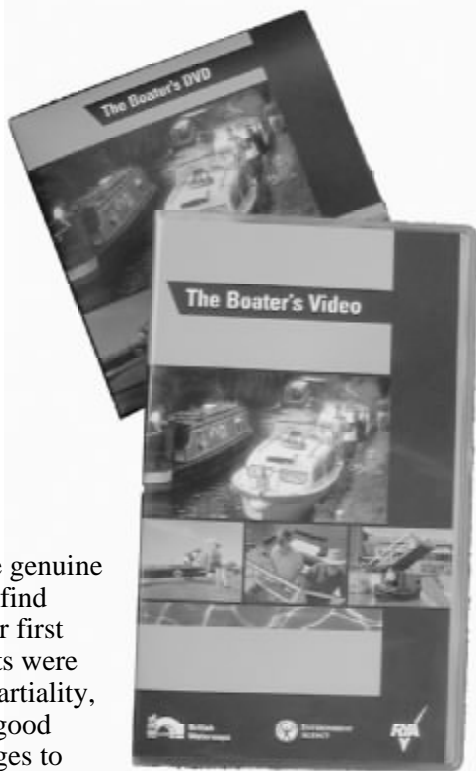
REVIEW

The Boater's Video is a joint BW, EA and RYA production. The cover details claim that watching this before you go boating will help you understand how to enjoy waterways safely, and that it runs for 40 minutes, twice the accepted attention span of the average person. When I worked putting together television programmes, deadlines and constricted time slots were the norm and certainly concentrated the mind. By those standards this was very laid back, but it is about boating after all.

The video features two families said to be genuine first-time boaters. After introductions we find them in their two hire boats spending their first night moored in Gayton Marina. The boats were from different companies, maybe for impartiality, but also of easily distinguished colours - good thinking. The plan was to start their voyages to Brentford the next day, with the help of instructors from the RYA, one family going via the Grand Union and the other via the Oxford Canal and the Thames.

However the next morning sees only one boat moored up and the other family's instructor arriving and faced with finding the absent boat. I won't spoil the story by telling you what becomes of them, suffice to say that the producers have put a lot of thought into engineering situations where things don't go according to plan, in order to illustrate points without being alarmist. However, how a family who have never handled a boat before can slip their moorings and get out of a marina without awakening the whole neighbourhood escapes me!

I have mixed views about the style of the production. Something like this has four 'tracks' of which pictures are only one. I liked the camerawork. There were low and high angle shots, even some under water, and the temptation to use video gizmos was avoided. However some animated graphics may have helped to illustrate the principles locks and the like. The other three elements to a production are 'actuality' sound, music and commentary. Although the families did have speaking parts, their personalities were not under the spotlight as on 'reality TV', nor was there any competitive element – thank goodness.



The music can make a lot of difference to a production, subtly changing the apparent pace and mood, but the 'off the shelf' instrumental stuff used here served little more than to paper over the dubbing joins, and to fill any silences. I got fed up with it, and, combined with the rather monotonous commentary, it had all the qualities that put me off sitting through videos in museums.

At 40 minutes, it would have been nice to have natural breaks, but with two 'stories' running concurrently this was not easy, nor was it possible to view it selectively. New hirers under boatyard instruction can take advantage of having more than one pair of ears and divide responsibility so each person, not forgetting the youngsters, can concentrate on a specific aspect. One can be appointed the 'Chief' and get involved when stern glands and engine care are explained, another learns helmsmanship, another lock work, and another about the boat as a living space. Afterwards they share their knowledge when time is on their side. I am not sure information comes fast enough in this video for that approach.

Would it would have helped the hirers we caught up with in Longport, who were progressing in an erratic, slow and smoky manner, obviously blissfully ignorant of their fouled blades? They had a bilge full of water having hammered the gland packing and the bilge pump fuse, and scars on their boat through having navigated the Harecastle Tunnel with this impediment. There is nothing about this common hazard in the film, nor about passing moored boats slowly, as far as I can recall. I am not sure if it explains lock operation adequately for a novice, and some of the other advice is questionable, e.g whether or not to walk down gunwales.

Unfortunately the producers sought no input from inland boating groups, where there is a wealth of freely shared experience. None of the member groups of the National Inland Navigation Forum, including NABO, seem to have been given any chance to contribute before it 'went to press'.

So, what does one expect to gain from watching this production? Is it an instructional video, a means of promoting the wonders of the waterways or a pleasant piece of casual viewing? If you are open to all three, then give it 40 minutes of your time, or perhaps more to go back and remind yourself of the points that are relevant to your future cruising. If you have limited time or patience and want concentrated information, this is not for you. Use the accompanying Boater's Handbook.

The video will be free to new boat licence/registration applicants, hire and other boat operators. Existing private boaters will have to pay £2.50 for the DVD and £3.00 for the video (VHS format)

Call 01923 201120

CORRIDOR ISSUES MEETING - July 14th

BW hold a number of national level user consultation meetings each year. The National User Group Meeting is the big one with George Greener in the chair. This is soon to be replaced by the National Consultative Committee (NCC), which will deliberate within itself before sending a select group from its membership to face BW top management.

Then there two Boating Issues Meetings and two Corridor Issues Meetings a year. The former is self explanatory.

Corridor Issues are things not specific to boating, and representatives are invited from angling, cycling and walking groups, but, as is often the case, boaters are there in force too.

I attended the meeting on the 14th of July at BW HQ at Watford and these are my impressions.

1. **Matters arising** from last meeting:-

- Railings - I now know all about BW railings design policy! We were all given an illustrated document, but there is still controversy on where fences are needed. Certainly an ongoing issue for horse boaters.
- Accident/Incident reporting - I have a draft form, but I questioned whether boaters will be confused by the word 'Visitors' in the title. It is for boaters too, and should be used for reporting antisocial behaviour, stone throwing etc as well as accidents.
- Openness & Accountability update - BW are proud of the new complaints procedure and the guidelines for local meetings. The Ombudsman selection and the setting up of the NCC are in the hands of 'legal draughtsmen' and taking a long time. One cannot argue against the attitude of doing it properly rather than quickly. BW promised that if the NCC was not set up before the next National User Group meeting was due, then the meeting would be held.
- Local Consultation - Eugene Baston had issued guidelines to local managers. This specified two meetings per region per year, spring and autumn. none in summer. Presentations to be curtailed and notes to be produced within 14 days. The document was generally accepted, but the presentation clause should be stronger and steps taken to ensure agendas of meetings were balanced so regional representatives didn't find them too repetitive.
- Restructure - BW admits it is not plain sailing and foresees another year before the troubles are over.
- Horse Boating - BW's statement in support of horse boating viewed it as OK as a cute visitor attraction, but made no commitment to it as a feasible way of travelling the network. The Horse Boating Society welcomed the statement but would like it to have been more positive

2. **Towpath Closures** (Towpath Action Group) - BW slated for overlong, unannounced and unrealistic towpath closures, e.g. walkers had to walk along the A38(T) to bypass closure at the Dove Aqueduct.

3. **Office Location** (RBOA but all of us in unison) - Deploring closure of Braunston, Little Venice etc. the opinion from the floor was that BW couldn't care less about customers and examples quoted such as the ridiculous charade getting charge cards in London etc. However the 'Shop' at Fradley was commended. Should BW have shopfronts at the likes of the London Canal Museum? Folks still deplored loss of use of traditional buildings.

4. **Waterways Code** - We were given copies of the new version, in which the distance between anglers and locks is more clearly worded.

5. **Restoration Priority** (NABO and DBA but mostly latter) - AS succinctly condemned lack of consultation regarding BW's restoration priority, particularly regarding BW's abandonment of the AINA* broad beam network vision. He blamed Robin Evans for total disregard of his views and criticised '*Waterways for 2025*' for lack of explanation of the methodology. (Interesting to note that it has examples of the benefits of completed restorations. For the K&A there was NO MENTION OF NAVIGATION!)

6. **Angler/Cyclist ID** (NABO) - I made the point about complaints being levelled at boats as they had registration numbers, but other users escaped scot free. There were some ideas mooted, e.g. Cycling permits to include a charge for a numbered bell, and numbered rod rests for anglers. The general feeling was that free cycling permits are a waste of time.

7. **PRESENTATION** by Jonathan Brickland in 'response?' to NABO/DBA item on **Vegetation Control** - We were given a fifteen minute Powerpoint diatribe on a new document for BW offices to specify to contractors how to mow towpaths, even its file size! (What did I say about office workers being out of touch?!) Somehow the audience only interrupted once! Then all hell broke loose from all fronts attacking BW's ability or otherwise to control anything from 6' high nettles to 20' high ash trees between the water and the towpath. Mowing was irrelevant - tree surgery and forestry was needed! I also quoted Bridge 104 on the T&M where the Unit Boundary was obvious from the change in weed height. So much for Robin Evans' 'seamlessness'. No wonder they make no promises regarding horse boating!

8. **A.O.B.** - none, everybody was exhausted and wanted lunch!

I came away with the feeling that perhaps NABO should mount an anti-tree-in-the-wrong-place campaign. If you see a sapling, or larger, growing between the path and the water then fell it, and if there is space, write 'NABO WAS HERE' on the stump, preferably in a poison pen!22

Product Review

WHISPERGEN - Your Personal Power Station

This is not to be confused with products of similar name. We are talking about a device imported through Victron from New Zealand and made by the Whisper Tech company.

ATTEND A RALLY FOR FREE IN 2005

Now there's an offer you can't refuse!

NABO's Council members are a small select group, and we're finding it difficult to arrange for our bodies plus the necessary equipment to be in the right place at the right time to attend rallies. So, your help is needed.

If there's a rally or boat gathering convenient to your cruising plan to which you'd like, or perhaps already planned, to take your boat, NABO might be prepared to cover your costs. NABO would enter your boat as a trade boat, wherever possible.

You would be asked:

- to obtain the rally entry form, fill in your details and then send it to Carole
- to display a NABO banner on your roof (delivered to and collected from you, with the bumpf)
- to distribute prepared bumpf to other attending boats at your own convenience
- talk to anyone passing by as necessary if you should happen to be there
- to let us know asap if for any reason you cannot attend



You would benefit from:

- a bankside mooring closer to the rally site
- free entry to the rally site for a minimum of two people
- free attendance for your boat

The only disadvantage is that you wouldn't be moored with your friends.

So, what are you waiting for? Council will consider any rally other than the National, and would appreciate entering early so as to secure the best mooring.

CONTACT: Carole, General Secretary

TAKING THE NANNY OUT OF THE BSS!

NABO has received proposals for a new-look Boat Safety Scheme – or should that be Boat Safety Service? Its tenor sounds much more caring.

It still aims to prevent potential fire-bombs on our waterways, so there will still be requirements to be met before a boat can be licensed or registered, but these will be minimal and only where there is definite hazard to others. However, for your own safety, the examiner will also check your boat for risks confined to occupants of the boat, e.g. carbon monoxide poisoning, and give you advice about curing such problems, but 'failure' in these cases will not prevent you using your boat.

The approach is different too. Instead of specific 'how to' requirements, the standards are more general goals. For instance it is no longer mandatory that your dipstick should not strike the bottom of your fuel tank. However a goal might be that your fuel system must not leak now or in the foreseeable future, and if the 12mm round steel rod you keep dropping in to measure your fuel is punching its way through the thin base of your tank you will get a failure certificate. On the other hand if your tank base is the 10 mm counter plate of your boat and you use a wooden stick, the risk is minimal. Being less specific also gives scope for new ways of achieving the stated goals.

The consultation document lists all the old check items, many with the comment '*The existing standard is no longer considered warranted in terms of known risk*'. That's what we like to hear!

We owe much to Trevor Rogers, Sue Burchett and all the other NABO members who have beavered away to get the scheme modernised. Thank you all.

Advertisement

Manchester Matters

In 2002 it appeared the visiting boaters to the Northwest and Manchester in particular would be in for a real welcome. The Anderton Lift, Ribble Link, Rochdale Canal, Huddersfield Narrow Canal would all be attractions and the 2002 Commonwealth Games was to be held at a new stadium on the Ashton Canal in East Manchester.

The future for Northwest waterways seemed bright and indeed the 'powers that be' invested a lot of time, money and effort to make the area around Manchester a safe pleasing place to moor ones boat. BW opened a new office in Castlefield. The Manchester Ship Canal Company, BW, Manchester City Council and the Greater Manchester Police all co-operated to ensure that the boaters would be welcome.

Now let's assess the up to date situation in 2004. I have been prompted to write these notes by a few telephone calls and e-mails enquiring about the facilities and safety in Manchester, one member telling me that certain fellow boaters from south of Watford considered it as a no go area!

Castlefield is as safe a place to moor a boat as anywhere in an inner city area, and indeed a lot safer than most. Water is available in the canal arms and along with rubbish, elsan point at Egerton Boat yard on the main line of the Bridgewater Canal.

It is a great shame that the new South Pennine Ring office has become a victim of BW reorganisation and down sizing.

I have had more enquiries about safety on the Ashton Canal than any other waterway, this is because of its past reputation. It is true to say the track runs through parts of urban decline that can be seen in other cities and care should be taken because of the yobbish behaviour of certain individuals. The investment in the City of Manchester Stadium, Sports City, new shopping facilities and housing is changing the whole of the area and making it much safer boating territory. This canal is a lot safer than six to eight years ago and, along with improvements to the Rochdale Nine, has made cruising more enjoyable. The GMP have helped to expand the Canal Watch scheme to the BW waters in this area and can be contacted at Bootle Street Police Station in Central Manchester on **0161 872 5050**.

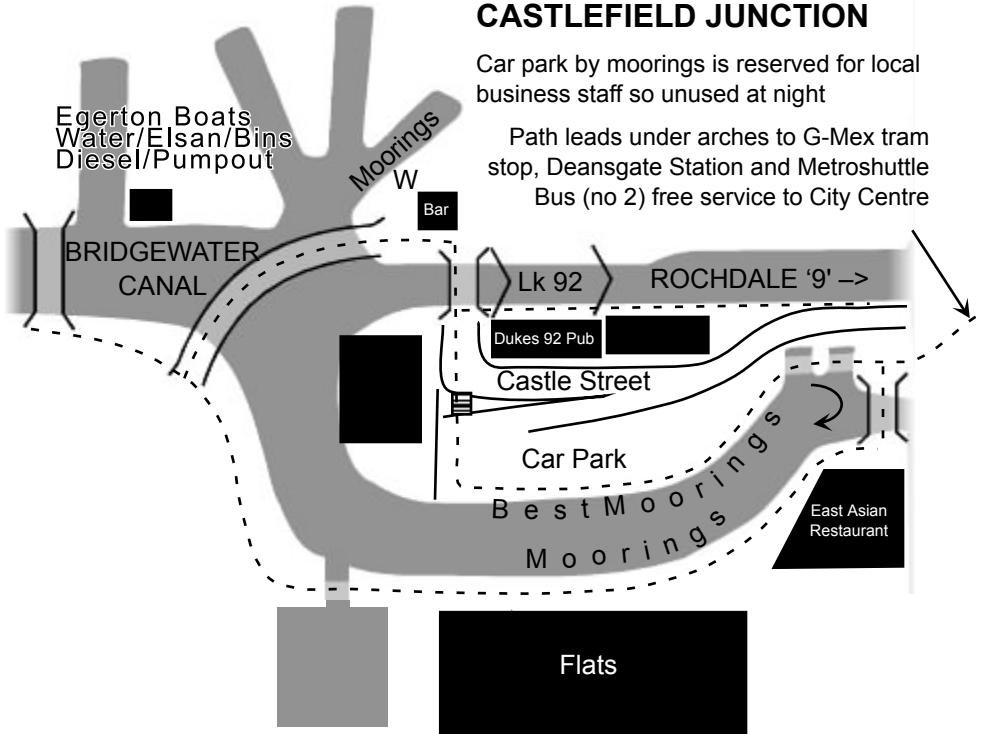
I am minded to recommend the usual guide books, Pearson's Cheshire Ring is a good start and if I might say so, Carole Sampson's First Mate Guide both give information and maps of the area.

Gordon Reece
Northwest Regional Secretary.



Do you remember this protest last autumn against the demolition of Thorn Marine on the Bridgewater Canal where Peel Holdings want to erect more housing? They still need your support. Do call in, phone for details on 01925 265129 or visit www.thornmarine.co.uk

CASTLEFIELD JUNCTION



Car park by moorings is reserved for local business staff so unused at night

Path leads under arches to G-Mex tram stop, Deansgate Station and Metroshuttle Bus (no 2) free service to City Centre

Notes: NOT TO SCALE

The tram and railway viaducts that overshadow the area have been left out for clarity. Trams do make some noise.

Towpath on south side more frequented.

Rings on moorings

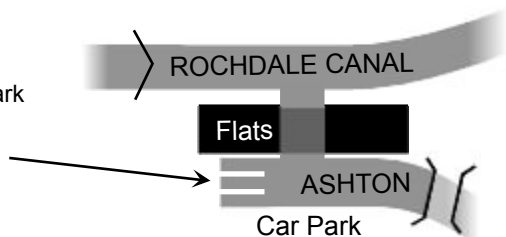
Gordon moors at Egerton Boats

DUCIE STREET JUNCTION

New jetty moorings accessible from shore only through Ducie Street Car Park (NCP)

Useful night stop to help early start on Ashton..No bother with invaders but residents in flats can be noisy

Blue pipes in evidence at moorings in 6/04 so water may be installed in future.



AGM & Nomination form

AGM & Nomination form

AGM & Nomination form

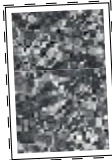
NOTICES

POST FOR NABO NEWS

For issue 6/04 please send contributions to

48 Old Lane, Bramhope,
Leeds LS16 9AZ

E-mail -
news.editor@nabo.org.uk



Going for a Burton?

If you can give us a hand manning the stand at the National Waterways Festival over August Bank Holiday at Burton-on-Trent you would be warmly welcomed

If you can commit yourself in advance Please contact Aileen

Yorkshire User Group Meetings

Carole is not likely to be in the area in October so would appreciate a member or members to attend three meetings:-

- North Yorkshire
- A&C + SSYN
- Pennine Canals

Please contact her for details if you think you can go.

Fancy being on TV?

I get numerous pleas from journalists seeking boat dwelling families for various 'docos' but they can't wait for me to make contact through this magazine. Would you like to be on a list I could give them? - Stuart.

PASSWORDS

Any guidance papers tables still protected will open with password 'Branch' (Capital B)

The members-only website section has a password, which has been sent out to on-line members via the members' bulletin list.

The User ID for the members section is the word 'member'.

If you have not been given the new word please e-mail:
webmaster@nabo.org.uk with your name and membership number to be given the password, and, if you want, to be put onto the bulletin list.

155 POSTINGS SO FAR AND RISING!

Text your waterway reports to: **07930 419 981**
07961 001814
07989 441674



RIVERS



FLAG BOOKS OF INTEREST TO RIVER USERS (AND OTHER BOATERS)

The NABO River Users' Co-ordinator is a bit of a flag "anorak" and his boat proudly wears the privileged defaced Blue Ensign of the Cruising Association (of which he is a long-standing Foundation member). His interest in vexillology (the study of flags and their history) extends to membership of the Flag Institute which has recently published its first book entitled "British Flags and Emblems".

Within its 128 pages will be found authoritative information on the form and usage of a host of flags, emblems and insignia pertaining to the United Kingdom. This includes the history and development of the Union Flag (only called a "Jack" when flying from the jack-staff of a Royal Navy vessel), how to display it, etc, Royal Standards and banners, Scottish flags, Armed Service flags and colours.

Canal boats tend not to display flags (by tradition) whereas river and sea-going craft share the legacy of naval customs which are a peculiar part of our culture (and long may they remain so!). So, our river and coastal members will be interested to learn that this new book features a large section on Flags at Sea. This includes ensigns, dressing ship, yacht club burgees and signal flags. How many of you knew that the Royal Yachting Association has a defaced red ensign and burgee used only by its officers on official duty? And did you know that there is an unofficial 4th Substitute flag for the International Code of Signals? And if you ever wondered what the NATO naval signal code flags look like, then this is the book for you.

Miscellaneous information on rank insignia for a host of organisations including the Armed Services, emergency and civilian services, national plants and mottos, and even the words to the UK national anthems together with an appendix containing national flags of the world make this an essential and fascinating book for anyone to delve into.

If the newly published book described above has whetted your appetite, you might be interested in another excellent one published two years ago entitled "Reed's Maritime Flags" by Sir Peter Johnson. This covers not only UK flag usage but also very comprehensively details the history of the flags of the USA and Germany and many other sea-faring nations. This is another good reference book to keep at the side of your bunk.

If any NABO members have questions concerning flag etiquette on boats, Stephen Peters will be pleased to lend his expert advice on the subject. He can also give you the ISBN numbers and further details of the books, and information about the Flag Institute.

Stephen Peters

PICTURE GALLERY

You may moor here for the duration of the Middlewich Folk & Boat Festival from 17th to 21st June 2004

Can you moor here or not?



We can moor on these Caldon 48 hour moorings, for as long as we like.

Sculpture trail?
(T&M
Towpath in
Stoke)



Lovely new towpath!
(Caldon)



What towpath?
Actually it is on the left.
(Lower Peak **Forest** Canal)

Product Review

WHISPERGEN - Your Personal Power Station

This is not to be confused with products of similar name. We are talking about a device imported through Victron from New Zealand and made by the Whisper Tech company.

It is a diesel-fired battery charger cum water heater, capable of about the same charging performance as an engine alternator with battery management system. Diesel fuel is burnt continuously outside the cylinders of its Stirling Engine, theoretically giving controlled combustion and a smooth flowing exhaust, and the repeated expansion and contraction of compressed nitrogen trapped inside the four cylinders converts the heat to mechanical power, driving its alternator. Surplus low grade heat is used for central heating and/or domestic water, and the exhaust gases are cool enough to keep your hand in for quite a few seconds.

The unit is designed to be the perfect answer for those with electric fridges, TVs etc. who like to tie up for a few days in the middle of nowhere without having to shatter the peace with a noisy diesel for however many hours a day. Alternatively to moor in company without annoying the neighbours.

With careful installation it can do just that, but when first installed, our unit was vying for the title of 'Whistlegen'. Somehow the burner was prone to sing like a kettle especially when warming up, but after some dedicated experimentation by the installers, involving two silencers and a fair length of extra exhaust hose, it was certainly a lot quieter outside the boat than the Eberspacher it replaced.

Mechanically it is quiet too, like a smooth sewing machine or perhaps a noisier-than-usual fridge. Close-to it sometimes makes a very high pitched whine from its pumps, like an Eberspacher, but this is usually inaudible outside where it is mounted.

It has a built-in management system that keeps track of ampere-hours in and out of your batteries, and can be set to cut-in and out to suit your power and heating needs. However it takes ten minutes or more to start and stop. It is about the size and shape of a compact washing machine, maybe a bit taller, and needs almost as much plumbing and wiring as an engine.

It is also a severe perforator of wallets, costing almost as much as a second hand boat. There are not very many fitters I know of, Kuranda Marine being the most northerly, one on the south coast doing mainly yachts and Valley Cruises where we had ours installed near Nuneaton. Having one 'retrofitted' is not the easiest task and I could not fault their service, however I am still discovering lost tools in various inaccessible places!

Sulaskar is now much better equipped for rallies, boat gatherings (when you can charge outside allotted hours), and having the computer on all day doing this magazine— the things we do for NABO!!!

Stuart Sampson

Some Thoughts on Cleaning Brass

Many of us will have faced the aftermath of winter with a sinking heart. Dull, near black brass that can only be restored to acceptability after hours of hard work and filthy fingers. This does not have to be the case.

Let me say though, at the outset, that if you want clean, brilliantly shiny brass, there is probably only one product which will guarantee this, and it will have to be utilised frequently. The answer is of course good old elbow grease!

First, what is brass, and why does it tarnish so badly? Brass is a mixture (an alloy actually) of copper and zinc, sometimes with small additions of other metals. Typically there is about 70% copper and 30% zinc. Copper oxidises quite readily in air, as does zinc. Copper oxide is black, or reddish in colour depending on which of its oxides is formed. At air temperature the most usual is the black one. Copper also forms a green chloride and a blue sulphate reacting with salt or acids in the air. Zinc also oxidises readily in air and its oxide is white, or yellow, depending on the temperature. As the two metals which react readily with the atmosphere and produce coloured products of their reaction, a steady loss of shine and polish is inevitable.

The polish on brass is of course just a very smooth surface of the bare metal - gleaming brass has only the smallest of scratches, invisible to the naked eye and no oxides, chlorides sulphates or whatever to mar the surface. Then you can see your face in it. So in order to get our brass to that old boaters' fabled standard we have to do two things:

- Get rid of the oxides etc.
- Make the surface very smooth.

Traditional products like Duraglit (now Brasso wadding), Brasso, and the other common metal polishes do this with a joint attack. They contain a chemical to dissolve the easy oxides and a very fine abrasive to smooth the surface.

Unfortunately perhaps the need for a very smooth surface limits both the extent to which the abrasive can be aggressive and the power of the chemical cleaning agent. The result is that bringing winter blackened brass back to standard is slow and hard work.

What are the alternatives?

The first thing to do is to separate the cleaning (removal of oxides) from the polishing (getting the surface smooth). There are a number of products marketed which can help us with the cleaning.

Kit Gayford (in *The Amateur Boatwomen*) writes of wire wool and scouring powder. I'm not sure if you can still buy Vim and Ajax but they are both effective, as is wire wool alone or in combination with scourers. Wire wool is a bit messy and tends to leave rusty marks all over the place as bits of wire break off and are not recovered at the end of the job.

Another product is Barkeepers Friend. This appears to comprise a mild abrasive (milder than Ajax etc.) and Oxalic Acid. This mounts a two pronged attack, like Brasso, but is much more aggressive so whilst it produces good clean brass, it falls down on the 'shiny' bit. It is effective, but as a powder can be a bit messy and it has to be washed off after use, meaning that there may be unintended consequences for your paintwork.

Amway, the pyramid distributor of cleaning products, sells a Metal Cleaner

which is similar to a paste form of Barkeepers Friend. This too is highly effective but has to be washed off afterwards. I have not found that it affects paintwork, but does tend to leave watermarks on the brass, which need to be tackled quickly.

Shiny Sinks, another, more liquid, abrasive product also has its adherents. It certainly seems to work, but I've never used it and so don't know much about it.

Cif (JIF) and all the supermarket own-brand cream cleansers work equally well, but slowly, because they are not very aggressive and do not have the chemical backing provided by an acid. As there abrasive is much less aggressive than the others above the effort needed to subsequently get a shine is also less.

Among the pure liquids, Nitric Acid is most effective. It is rather hard to get hold of, a hazardous chemical, environmentally unfriendly and certainly is not good for paintwork. It also requires extensive protective clothing to use safely. It has a use in the workshop, where, for example, it was able to clean the brass parts of my engine in short order, but it is of little use aboard the boat. Not one for the average user!

Oxalic Acid will also work, but apart from buying it as part of the proprietary cleaners, I've not discovered a source.

Some descalers also work on moderately tarnished brass, and I have found that Viakal is pretty good. It is a pale blue transparent liquid and appears to contain an acid and a detergent. It leaves a white film on the brass which is easily polished off. It is excellent at removing rain marks.

Once the Brass is clean we can set about getting a shine. Here any

polishing compound will work. These are fine abrasives, like jewellers Rouge, or Tripoli. They are normally powders and to use them they are mixed with a lubricant such as a light oil and Tom Foxon has suggested that Tripoli and meths works well. Old Boatmen of course always had meths for lighting the primus and warming up the paraffin blowlamp for the Bolinder, but unless you have a Tilley lamp many of us won't have it to hand. In that case white spirit or diesel also work. Outside of home-brew concoctions, in the commercial market the choice is really restricted to Brasso and its competitors such as Carr and Day and Martins metal polish. These are all very good at what they do, though the oil based ones are simpler than the water based products such as Q2, in that they can be wiped off rather than washed away.

Liquid Ammonia will also clean brass and you can perhaps smell it in Brasso. Unfortunately the stuff available as a household cleaner is a maximum strength solution and is eye-wateringly strong. Ammonia solution also promotes stress corrosion cracking in brass so should not be used on stressed items such as pipe connectors. It may also cause your brass mushrooms to fall apart rather rapidly if there is any residual stress left in the brass from manufacture.

I have found that on those rare hot English days my brass rag dries out very quickly and Brasso consumption rises dramatically. In this case dampening the rubbing cloth with white spirit or diesel slows the drying out to a sensible level and makes the polish last longer. In emergency, when you have run out of polish completely an old polishing rag with a few drops of diesel will rapidly revive brass that has lost its sheen overnight, but is not yet dirty.

Try sometime the difference in shine achieved with a clean polishing cloth rather than the grubby one we all seem to keep using.

After the brass is clean it is possible to keep it that way by applying either temporary or permanent protective coatings. In either case the aim is to keep the air and the rain from getting to the surface of your shiny metal.

There are many temporary protective coatings which can be used. I have seen or heard of:

Clingfilm

Oil

Vaseline

Wax polish

The stuff that is provided with a new wax jacket (Barbour etc.) for keeping it waterproof

The light oil in the polishes is not all removed by your polishing cloth, so the remaining very thin layer of oil provides some limited protection. It doesn't really withstand even a very light shower but will keep that shine overnight if there's no rain or dew.

Over winter, I use Vaseline smeared on with a cloth and it is effective for about 6 months. It has to be removed with a cloth and some paraffin or diesel before polishing but it enables me to have the brass in good order very quickly and really shiny within 2 or 3 cleanings. The small amount of mess is well worth it.

Permanent coatings are usually lacquers and the best was designed especially for the protection of copper, brass and similar alloys. Suitable for interior or exterior use it was developed by INCRA (International Copper Research Association) for the protection and prevention from

tarnishing of copper, brass and similar alloys. It goes under the unsurprising name of INCRALAC and a version is marketed in UK by Rylards, who also market paint and can be seen at shows such as Crick or the IWA National Festival. No doubt there are others. It gives a clear high-gloss finish.

Instructions for application are on the tin, but you will need first to get the brass spotless and then get all the oil and grease off the surface. Any damage to the lacquer will allow the air and rain in, causing staining and mean that it all has to be taken off and re-applied.

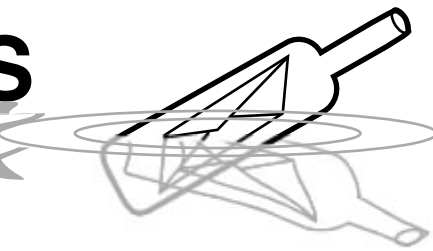
A different permanent coating is gold plate. Very expensive, and only suitable for application off the boat it certainly will solve the problem forever - provided it doesn't get scratched. This can also be applied to non-brass items.

Finally there is the radical solution, which avoids ever having to clean the brass again- Paint it. If you choose this route you will need to find the right special primer but you'll certainly save some time.

You pays your money and you makes your choice, and this has only been a short resume of things I know about- What do you use, and how good is it? Write in and tell everyone. Maybe there is a wonder product out there that will eliminate all that elbow grease?

Nigel Parkinson

LETTERS



Breath Testing on Waterways

When Barbara Castle introduced the idea of breath testing forty years ago, for the offence of drink-driving, some research was carried out which showed that blood-alcohol level was the key to the effect on the ability of the brain to think clearly, coordinate and react. The level of 80mg per 100ml was established as the point where the effect of the alcohol became comparable with other effects from medication, tiredness and stress. The "drink-drive limit" has now been accepted even when a driving offence is not involved. For example damages awarded for industrial and other accidents are likely to be reduced if it can be shown that the victim was "over the limit". Therefore the drink-drive limit should be the one adopted on the waterways.

The emphasis for driving a vehicle is on reaction time. This is less important for boating, although it is necessary to think logically and clearly in any emergency. The expression "once (or twice) over the limit" is now in common use and could be used as a basis for separating different classes of boats and waterways.

Detection has to be by breathalyser for which equipment readily is available, and where the punishment is mild, could be

administered by a waterway patrol or other official.

Punishment should relate to both class of vessel and class of waterway. Thus an individual in a rowing boat on a shallow lake is not a danger to anyone else and hardly to himself at the single drink-drive limit. At the other extreme the skipper of a large commercial craft or passenger boat in a deep and busy shipping lane obviously is a threat. The skipper of, say, a narrow boat, who was operating locks would be a danger to himself, his passengers and other craft if he were three times over the limit.

As far as crew are concerned, if a boat requires two or more for safe operation then all members should meet the same "safe" requirement, not just the skipper.

Punishments would need to be worked out on a matrix of boat type and waterway combined with number of times over the limit. Thus our lone oarsman would start with a verbal warning while the commercial skipper would face possible suspension from duty. At three times the limit the oarsman would be sent home. A narrow boater might receive a written warning at twice the limit and a ban at three times.

The old motoring offence of "drunk-in-charge", sometimes applied even when the car was parked, could not apply as boaters must be allowed to sleep it off on board after a night at the pub, when moored up.

Enforcement for offences up to where small fines apply, can be by waterway officers, but where suspension and even prison could result, the police should be involved.

This all sounds very complex, but I am not proposing the legislation! It might be best just to introduce rules for commercial craft and passenger carrying craft for the time being.

By email from lizanto@ntlworld.com

A Beak Found

Christine Turner on NB Enfor was asking about 'Parrot's beak' tool for clearing rubbish from a propeller.

Braunston Chandlery at Wharf House Narrowboats, bottom lock, Braunston had such a tool in the showroom last Friday.

I do not have their telephone number, but the proprietors are Phil and Sue Abbott.

Could you please pass on this information.

Iain and Myra

Guidelines for Continuous Cruisers

I have only just read your March NABO News. We are very pleased that NABO is alert to BW policy changes but you seem to be much less concerned about the (not very) revised BW policy on continuous cruising than we are. We spend many months of each year in England and when we do our canal boat is our home. We think of ourselves as 'live-aboards'. For us the word has no stigma but we do see it being increasingly given a derogatory spin by BW. Long may we all resist that. As Clausewitz may have said: before attacking the enemy, first discredit them as people.

Our life on the canal is becoming much harder. We feel persecuted by BW. The policy revisions don't make us feel any less vulnerable. I read the BW revised guidelines on continuous cruising and my heart sinks at the convoluted attempts at defining navigation and cruising. How does this end up meaning a one way trip around the system? How? Because that's what BW want it to mean. When words can't be given simple definitions, they reflect the unspoken intentions of the definer.

What is BW trying to do to people on the cut? Who doesn't BW like and why?

Our problem is that we don't quite fit any of the BW's categories like 'weekenders' and 'hirers' so by default we fall into the category it doesn't like.

Because of our time away from the boat we need to keep it in a marina for security. But once we are back onboard we don't need or like living in a marina and so we move onto the cut. We call it cruising - going where we chose in the directions of our choice, as suits our varied need to see family and friends, collect parts to repair the boat, deliver work to clients, etc. Life as we live it. A two way journey on the cut, not the single purpose, one-way route demanded by BW. We are not bridge-hoppers but sometimes we back-track to complete unfinished business or keep a family arrangement. There is nothing sinister in this. No intention to gain squatters rights to a canal bank or deprive other boats of a mooring spot, or engage in work or social activity which might offend the morals of BW functionaries.

It isn't just our way of life on the cut which is threatened but our use of marinas. We spend time in a marina when we need to prepare the boat to start a journey or be winterised for a lay-up. But, of course, while there we live on the boat. We have no choice. It is our home. Our usual marina, and others near us, now tell us they don't have the licence or permissions to be residential. We are not welcome any more. One marina told us that even berth holders who would like to stay on board for the weekend cannot. Residents in the nearby houses will, apparently, report the marina to the council for infringing its leasehold. And does BW defend its

Note – Views expressed in readers' letters are not to be taken as those of NABO as a whole

licence payers by asking the council to change the conditions of the marina lease? What do you think?

Perhaps BW are more at home spending their spare time helping councils identify boat owners who are infringing council tax rules with their beneficial or otherwise non transitory prima facie rateable occupation of a floating or non floating exclusive or composite hereditament, whatever that is.

Many of the long-time boat owners we meet envy our life on the cut, telling us that their dream is to take a year or three when they retire to live aboard and travel where they wish. I hope they will. However, several of our friends who have done this in the last couple of years have sold their boats and left the cruising life, unwilling to put up with the unresolved uncertainty and increasing discrimination of BW policies. I doubt these people are really the targets of BW's thrashing around, just as we aren't either, but whether we are hit by a well aimed bullet or caught by some piece of flack, it feels the same.

Please continue to oppose nonsense from BW.

Les Weatheritt

Overtaking

By observation I know this will not apply to most NABO members, but as a boater who travels slowly and therefore gets overtaken regularly by other boats may I say . . .

On rivers you can (mostly) get away with any old overtake, but on the canal, especially one that is narrow, shallow and has not had the trees cut back on the edges, overtaking is all about co-operation.

Rule 1 of this is that it is not the boat doing the overtaking that controls the manoeuvre but the one being overtaken. While they should let the boat behind pass, they have the right to choose the where-spot, then move over, slow right down and allow the overtaker to go past.

The passing trick is not always easy as the two boats will be pulled together, pushed apart and then pulled together during the overtake, but it is made easier if the overtaker does not scream past in

the middle of the canal. They should creep past on the far side.

That's the theory, but too often we get, as happened today, an 'expert boater' who first tried to intimidate us to get out of the way, then started shouting that we should let them pass now. Finally when at the winding hole they and us both know was there, we waved them round. They did scream round instead of moving over and then, with a glare, tried to cut us up onto the bank. (No chance)

Such motorway manners are not for the canals and yet some think they can do as they like. Unfortunately for them with overtaking on a narrow canal it takes two to tango and I to lead.

David Cragg.

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