

THE MAGAZINE OF THE



President: Bill O'Brien J.P.

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ISSUE 5/05 - August 2005

BW High Rate Licences / Severn Cruise

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EDITOR'S APOLOGIES

Sorry BW! My contributors don't seem to very be positive about you in this issue. I can't think why! Anyway, thanks for all the help at Sharpness and I have seen marked improvements along the K&A with back pumping, lock landings etc.

Apologies to readers for certain imperfections in layout and graphics in the last issue. My excuse is the lack of a big screened monitor on the boat and failing eyesight, but failing motivation may play a part, especially when there is boating to be done!

2005 CALENDAR	
Council meeting	Copy date
Sept 17th	Sept 24th
<i>Nov 19th A.G.M.</i>	
Nov 26th	Dec 3th



CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

A joke?

I thought it was a joke at first – when our Vice Chairman phoned me to say BW was proposing to more-than-double the licence fee for ‘continuous cruisers’. I have seen a twinkle in the eye of BW’s External Relations Manager before and I thought he had just gone round to the NABO stand at Crick to perpetrate a wind-up.

Regretably no, the next thing I know is that *Canal Boat* magazine is asking for a comment, but I still hadn’t seen the cause of the consternation. BW had chosen to send out a press release about it before the ‘consultation’ was published. When I did see it, I was appalled at such a concoction of misused statistics, accountant-speak and disrespect for an Ombudsman ruling on shared ownership boats – as if to say: *“We have to accept it wasn’t a goal, referee, but we’re not playing any more till the opponents’ goal mouth is widened”*.

Not only that, but BW is wasting money sending this proposal to all ‘continuous cruisers’ – *“You don’t mind us charging 147% more for your licence, do you? Please reply by filling in the enclosed form”*. Are they so isolated from the real world that they have to send out over thirteen hundred forms to find out the answer? How colourful the replies are could be interesting though. It’s almost as though they want the answer ‘no’.

This is the third time in recent years BW’s bean counters have tried to

squeeze more money out of those who actually make use of the full 12 months of an annual licence, but don’t imagine they won’t try it on those who are only out for 42 days too if they get the chance. Remember the clauses in the Moorings Code to tried to make that apply to those with a home mooring?

I have always maintained that the root cause of all this dates back to when BW managed to take money for ‘end-of-garden’ moorings, on the basis of taxing water space even though you already pay to keep and use your boat on BW waters in the licence. All other mooring charges are then built on top of this, either directly or through ‘market forces’ arguments. Boaters who either don’t need, don’t want or can’t get a home mooring escape this ‘tax’ and BW is trying to redress the balance using arguments that don’t hold water any better than the Rochdale Canal does.

Rather than have this rise again from the ashes (sorry Sally!) like a phoenix, BW needs to review its entire strategy for charging boaters, through licences, moorings and, directly or indirectly, through marinas, engaging users from the very start. It is all very well consulting besuited Oxera geeks behind desks at a price, we give our advice for free!

Enough – to cruising matters

Sorry! Enough of my reactions, a more objective report to follow. In the meantime I am trying to stop it ruining my enjoyment of the K&A and the glorious memories of cruising under the Severn bridges and up the Avon Gorge.

Carole did a marvellous job organising the NABO Tidal Severn

Cruise and the ‘Bash’ that followed. I feel I am in a position to say that because I was just treated as another skipper, both by her and the other participants. In spite of the incompetence of third parties, e.g Tesco having no record of a salmon on order and pilots changing their tune at the eleventh hour, we all made the ‘short sea voyage’ without mishap and celebrated our arrival as planned.

What I did get to share in was the generosity of the tokens of gratitude from participants, including an original oil painting of Gloucester Docks, three bottles of wine, a pot plant and a copy of an American book called *Emergencies at Sea*. I don’t think she’s planning a crossing of ‘The Pond’ yet.

By the way, I can ‘unscotch’ the rumour that at the Bash, and on the Tardebigge flight before, and on other occasions since, I have been seen in non-bifurcated leg-wear. My father was a Scot and gave me a Scottish first name, but I can’t truthfully lay claim to the tartan – to answer the question the ladies usually ask. As to the question they daren’t ask, that is for me to know, and... Put it this way, it makes very comfortable cruising attire

but beware the blow- holes on ground paddles!

More thanks

I had better not forget that I have some thanks to give out. Namely to John Russell and Ken Bennell, without whom our presence at Crick would have been impossible, and Alistair Morton and, of course, Aileen Butler for Saul too. If I have missed anybody out it is because I wasn’t there, so apologies. I hope to be at the National and am pleased to hear members have offered to help so I look forward to meeting you then.

I mustn’t harp on about this high rate licence business any more, but I have tried very hard to steer NABO along a more pro-active course with BW than perhaps in the past, and all the thanks I get is what looks like a blatant challenge to alienate and divide our members, and to be frank, I was very annoyed that BW should even consider the possibility that it would be welcomed by anyone who actually knows what goes on on the cut.

Anyway, may the locks be with you. (another way of saying keep your hair on? I’ll try)

Stuart



Waiting in Sharpness Lock, nerves-a-jangle

BW PROPOSES A HIGH RATE LICENCE

At present BW have two basic licence bands, pleasure and business. The latter is rated at 2.47 times the former. Each band qualifies for discounts according to various factors, historic boats, electric drive, prompt payment etc.

Up until a recent Ombudsman ruling, shared ownership boats were split, those professionally managed incurred business rates, those managed by the syndicate themselves paid pleasure rates. The Ombudsman decided that, even with professional management, shared ownership boats were not 'business' so BW had to repay the excess fees it had collected from these owners. In his report he also reminded BW of the 2002 consultation on licensing structure that dismissed 'intensity of usage' as a driver for licence differentials.

To counter this ruling, BW proposes to review its terminology and to change the name of the Business rate to 'High Rate' in order to encompass all shared owner boats, and possibly, in order to recoup lost funds, 'continuous cruisers', on the basis of the extra wear and tear these vessels are supposed to incur.

'Modern accounting methods' are also used in terms of 'willingness and ability to pay', justifying the increase for shared ownership due having multiple earnings as finance and continuous cruisers as live-aboards and therefore not paying the costs of a domicile ashore.

Even though the paper only says continuous cruisers *may* be included, and that the principles should be considered irrespective of the size of the current differential (147%), it then goes on to give frightening examples assuming this rate of increase and that continuous cruisers would be included. Some would pay over £1000 more a year. In fact it also mentioned three and six month licences for 'continuous cruising'. Who are these for? Those who leave their marinas for the summer?

If you haven't seen a copy, visit BW's website. The proposals are also on www.nabo.org.uk. Comments to be with BW by 30th of September.

NABO Council have discussed the consultation, and, even though only two members of Council are 'continuous cruisers', one living aboard, the other not, there was unanimous disapproval of the methodology and justification used in this document.

No usage statistics were quoted for shared ownership boats as presumably no meaningful figures were to hand. However for 'continuous cruisers', i.e. owners who had not specified a home mooring on their licence application, BW quotes from a postal survey of boaters that the average number of days cruised was 177 a year, considerably more than that of a hire boat. Having recently castigated continuous cruisers for not cruising enough, how can BW not expect an exaggerated figure, and how can it assume a postal survey of boaters, often with no fixed addresses, to be representative?

Even if this figure was representative, the number of days a boater is on the move does not reflect the resulting wear and tear on the locks and banks, as the number of lock-miles covered per day for someone with no time constraints is bound to be a lot less, probably less than a third of that of a boat hirer, and generally conducted with a lot more experience and care.

The proposals also considered ‘willingness/ability to pay’ and ‘Ramsey formulae’ as modern accounting methods accepted by the Office of Fair Trading and utility regulators. Basically these are concepts that ‘justify’ widely different prices for identical products/services, e.g. seats on planes or trains. They may be valid where there is customer choice, but Council could not see much relevance to BW licence banding.

Council also deplored the leading questions in the response form. How is one to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to questions like:-

“1. Do you agree that cost impact and efficient recovery of fixed costs should constitute the key criteria for price differences between categories of user?

2. Do you agree that wider social, environmental and heritage objectives are valid justifications for particular discounts?”

By the time you read this, members of Council will have further studied the consultation and NABO may have even met with BW to discuss it, with a view to its:-

- Legality
- Moral Justification
- Practicability
- Financial benefit to BW versus the cost of closing loopholes
- Affect on the credibility of BW’s Openness and Accountability, especially BW’s respect for the Ombudsman.
- Divisive affect on the boating community.

It is difficult to argue against paying for usage in principle, provided it can be measured fairly and simply, and not applied divisively. The point about all-year usage of water points and refuse disposal is also valid, but even together they would never be worth anywhere near a 147% increase for those without moorings.

There is bound to be support for the increase from some members, especially those who believe that ‘continuous cruisers’ are all bridge hoppers and spongers. This is NOT the case, it is just that the minority who ‘continuously moor’ are the most conspicuous. Most boaters without home moorings have no need of a geographically fixed centre for their cruising and are prepared to accept the loss of security this presents. There is little to distinguish them from other private boats.

Ideally Council would like to see the whole document scrapped or rewritten forthwith with more realistic and acceptable proposals to prevent further antagonism, wasted effort and costs on both sides.

GOING BOATING? - TAKE A SUIT AND TIE

BW Monthly, the staff newspaper, proudly headlines the opening of BW Pub Partnership's first new premises, the Foxton Locks Inn, with a picture of Robin Evans and three other BW directors who are on the Partnership board, all, of course, bedecked in suits and ties. The quote from Robin claims that 'Pubs have always been synonymous with the waterways (I'm not sure Roget's Thesaurus would agree - Ed). *In the 19th century they were places where the working boaters would rest...*'

Not so now, it seems.

Tempted to try the cuisine a few days after it opened, a member of the NABO affiliated Black Buoy Cruising Club writes in his club magazine *Buoy's Own* that 'The staff were totally incompetent and we were made to feel most unwelcome. We were totally ignored on several occasions. All the other customers were dressed in collars and ties, suits etc. and we were dressed in casual gear...'

The article goes on to say that locally the pub management had let it be known that they 'only wanted the best customers'. We hear that the chef left within a week of it opening and that the twice-daily pumping out of the cesspit ensures customers don't overstay on the terrace.

Room for improvement?



MORE BOOKS ON OFFER TO NABO MEMBERS

Our Rivers Secretary has managed to secure an arrangement with the respected publishers David & Charles to supply books from their catalogue at a discount to NABO members. This will be in addition to the Imray books and charts already available at discounted prices through Stephen's marine consultancy company.

Titles now available at up to 15% discount off list price include books on a wide range of topics and interests including arts and crafts, gardening, design, hobbies, history, transport and outdoor activities.

The following may be of particular interest:

- Voices from the Battle of Trafalgar,
- Tales from the Old Inland Waterways,
- Brunel's Britain,
- The Complete Book of Knots and Ropework.

More details from Stephen Peters.



RIVERS



EA PROPOSES 8.5% REGISTRATION INCREASE FOR 2006

The Environment Agency claims to have procured funds for capital works from the Government on condition that boaters pay a larger share of the cost. The Agency's consultation methods give national user groups very little say in this, which has been a bone of contention underlying much of the discontent in recent years.

NABO does however have more representation on the Regional Fisheries, Environment and Recreation Advisory Committees (RFERACS) which are consulted and is expressing opposition through these.

Thames boaters are still sore after they were expected to pay towards improvements in the past which have never been carried out and will find this new increase very hard to swallow.

NENE REGISTRATIONS FOR MIDDLE LEVEL BOATS

One of our members enquired as to whether boaters moored on the Middle Level who wanted just a few days at a time on the Nene to go to and from BW waters needed to buy a full year's worth of Anglian registration or a Gold Licence.

Theoretically EA's monthly registration cannot be split to cover two non-consecutive periods but John Adams, Manager of Anglian Region, has replied to NABO that he has the flexibility to make an exception. Middle Level boaters can apply for this dispensation directly to the EA Anglian office but they must commit themselves as when they intend to transit the Nene and inform EA of the dates.

In his reply to this specific case he says "*Whilst I am reluctant to make ad hoc changes to our tariff of charges as this can be a recipe for chaos, I am happy to extend this accommodation to other boaters, on the proviso that a new harmonised scheme may mean that this option will be removed.*"

EA TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT ORDER

It would appear that the deadline for a decision on this by government has officially been delayed again, but, contrary to talk of it foundering altogether with DEFRA, EA is still keeping the associated harmonisation consultation going.

Craig Woolhouse, currently masterminding it for EA, regrets losing two months' progress but feels the changes DEFRA want will give a 'tighter' result which users will find more acceptable.

WATERWAYS OMBUDSMAN'S ELEVENTH REPORT

Stephen Edell's last report has just been published, future reports will be written by the new Ombudsman, Hilary Bainbridge.

During his last year Mr Edell has seen the new BW Internal Complaints Procedure taking effect, resulting in a 57% increase in his workload. However he is pleased as it would indicate a smoother flow of complaints through the system.

Not everything was straightforward however – he is still waiting for clarification of a case filed in 2002 from at least four individuals in a northern town filing a succession of accusations of corruption against a senior BW manager as well as the local MP, a councillor and the council's planning department. Complaints were also sent to the local bishop and dean, the Prince of Wales and Her Majesty the Queen. So he is at least in good company!

He ends his report by thanking BW and the complainants for their unfailing courtesy and for not subjecting him to improper pressure.

In the appendices he details nine cases, one from a farmer whose land was allegedly being flooded, two regarding craft licences, including the one regarding shared ownership as described in the high rate licences article in this issue, and the rest mainly

concerning moorings, one way or another.

A significant ruling found in favour of a person who moored a boat over a place where the bank to his field was so eroded that the boat floated entirely over his own land. After confirmation by independent surveyors, the Ombudsman concluded that BW had no right to charge him for mooring.

Apart from the farmer and one residential mooring site warden, who is not specified as living afloat as such, it would appear all cases were brought by boaters.

Since many of the cases were multiple issues it wouldn't be fair to 'score' them in terms of for and against, although maladministration or unfair treatment was deemed present to varying degrees in most of them.

Of the cases received but not investigated, one was definitely not from a boater. He was a plumber in dispute with Yellow Pages but the Waterways Ombudsman was the only one in the directory! Someone else complained in Welsh that only one page on BW's website was in that language.

About thirty cases are listed, most complainants had not gone through the Internal Complaints Procedure and were recommended to do so. Over half concerned boats or navigation.

THE MAKING OF "A VOYAGE BETWEEN TWO SEAS"

Part 3 of A PERSONAL VIEW by Stuart Sampson

MUCH SCRABBLE

At the end of the last episode, I had sipped a pint or two on the BBC in aid of 'continuity' as we filmed the *Lady Galadriel* taking Pete Morgan eastwards along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

Apart from through Chorley, the stretch to Blackburn is surprisingly pastoral, clutching the hillside after that frantic ascent leaving Wigan, passing through woods and fields, anything but the image of satanic Lancashire mills.

It was dull when we had worked up through the six locks in Blackburn, and in the failing light we met the film crew again and captured images to restore the gloom of the mill towns. The rain started and we took refuge under the canopy of a derelict warehouse for Friday night, the film crew leaving for their warm homes. Ahead was a dreary stretch through Accrington, we were running low on water, the chemical toilet was getting full and there were no facilities before Burnley. It rained and we spent a thoroughly miserable weekend killing time in order to be at Gannow tunnel for Monday morning. The log says, "Much Scrabble".

STRAIGHT CUT

There was one redeeming feature of the stretch between Blackburn and Burnley at the time, and that was the building of some new canal. The Leeds and Liverpool Canal is quite tortuous where the new Colne valley motorway was being built, and some of its loops

went too close to the railway to allow room in between for the new road. On the outward journey there was much civil engineering going on, and you could see lengths of concrete canal bed cutting off these corners, separated from the main line by piling. When we returned the piling was being removed, and the new lengths flooded. Had we been a day or two later we could have been the first craft along some new canal.

We met the crew at Gannow, a short but spooky tunnel on the approach to Burnley, and with that, the weavers' cottages and the restored warehouse, Keith, the cameraman, was in his element. We steamed back and forth, filming from the boat and being filmed from all sorts of angles. By lunchtime we reached the facilities at Burnley maintenance yard, and could lead a less restrained life again.

The Straight Mile took us all afternoon. The single eye of the camera can flatten out an engineering feat like Burnley Embankment, so a high viewpoint must be sought. To this end a hoist had been hired, with a hydraulic platform so that Keith could look down on us as we looked down on Burnley. Although we were a little late, the machine had not been set up when we came to need it, and we had soon exhausted all the other planned angles. In desperation the crew left Pete and I to search out a high building. After a long wait the walkie-talkie came to life and off we went again, once more puzzling the geese in the allotments at the

northern end. With a great thrash of water we turned to await the crew's instructions. We waited nearly an hour, during which time the hoist had actually been repaired, and my '1st Mate', Chris Warden, had been given an instant hoist driving lesson and left in charge.

The crew returned, having supped tea by the invitation of the hotel whose roof they had used. After a somewhat cool reception from Pete and I, the hoist shots were done. It was getting somewhat late by this time and I abandoned the helm to Chris to snooze off the day's frustrations.

Barrowford Locks lift you to the summit pound of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, and we met the film crew for a short lock sequence in rather nice surroundings. There are reservoirs there to supply the water to fill the locks of the western slope. We were held up a bit following some boats of mentally handicapped people. It is heartening to see these life-jacketed adults sharing the freedom and simple pleasures of the canal, and I admire those who take the responsibility for them.

The rain set us back more though, we needed good light to film in the entrance to Faulridge Tunnel, so we abandoned the boat and shot some sequences in the famous Hole-in-the-Wall Inn. A sepia print hangs in the back room of the famous cow which is said to have swum the length of the tunnel and been revived with brandy at the pub. A canal tunnel is a forbidding prospect in a boat, but for a cow, in pitch darkness and a sheer wall rising out of the water on each side, it must have been terrifying.

PUDDINGS AND PIES TO CAMERA

Wednesday brought better weather, and Pete's "Piece To Camera" going into the tunnel. If I said I knew that tunnel backwards I would not be exaggerating. Five times I backed out again for a retake, but who can blame Pete? There he was, stood on the bow facing back explaining the history of the leggers while heading for the mouth at a relentless three miles an hour. Suspended in the entrance is a beam indicating the minimum headroom in the tunnel, and as he spoke he anxiously awaited the signal to duck, before this stuck him on the back of the head. A narrow boat has no brakes, so cannot stop dead, and he knew it!

When at last we had got it right, off we went on the mile or so of subterranean cruising to get under the highest obstruction in the Aire Gap. Somehow I managed to avoid the sides, even with Keith's hand lamp shining up my nostrils, and we emerged into daylight at Foulridge, only to land the crew and reverse in again. At last we were seen to emerge and set about preparing for the great fiesta.

By now we felt that we had so much good material in those film cans that the Leeds and Liverpool might make three half-hours rather than two, but we still went ahead with the County Brook fiesta, or should I say fiasco. The idea was that where the canal crossed County Brook, Pete would say that there was no ceremony to this boundary as there was for the Equator, and I was to contradict him and emerge from the cabin with a Yorkshire pudding.

It wasn't due to the lack of an Equity card that things didn't go according to plan, it started with the Yorkshire pudding mix that the producer's assistant had so thoughtfully provided. No way would it rise in *Lady Galadriel's* oven and even when we tried the results on the swans it sank. Josie then took things into her own hands and produced a huge beautiful pudding from raw ingredients, and we tried the act. Unfortunately the Lady's oven was only big enough for one decent sized pudding, and my acting wasn't up to getting it right first go. After various attempts to disguise the missing bites from the pudding we gave up and filmed other versions of the crossing to cover the various ways we might divide the programmes.

We passed the Anchor at Salterforth too early, and filmed some evening shots beyond. Later Pete scripted the commentary, 'No need to stop far ale, we slake our thirsts on cool reflection'. This was all very well over a shot of rippling light under a bridge arch, but quite out of keeping with our true sentiments, we just had our timing wrong. We returned there afterwards for the night and enjoyed the cool reflections on the side of a pint glass.

Now that we were in Yorkshire the crew no longer stayed in hotels, and it became quite common to be caught at breakfast when they arrived. The first indication was Keith's car alarm, which couldn't tell friend from foe when he opened the tailgate. Next would be the thunder of feet on the back deck and Ken's gasps of thirst indicating the kettle should be put on. We couldn't start filming immediately, because two cars would then have to set off for the expected destination of

the day's cruise, so one could be left there and both drivers return in the other. The same car chase took place in the evenings too, but before that Josie was often preparing our dinner, giving rise to a delicious aroma from the galley. Quite often garlic was involved, and Keith and Pete drooled at the thought. Ken however would decide this was time to record some 'wildtrack', and dispatch himself to the bows, or better still the bank, ostensibly to catch some wide perspective sound, but more likely some wide perspective smell.

The upland reaches of the canal are idyllic, we would wind this way and that, absorbing open views and the bubbling cry of the curlew. Keith was on the look out for wildlife when we saw a dapper little animal like a stoat regarding us from a hole in a tree trunk. I stopped as quickly and quietly as I could and reversed. There was no need for stealth however, this little chap was determined to steal the show, and performed in front of an enraptured audience for nearly half an hour, bobbing his head up here and there amongst the grass, and showing off his latest catch, a rabbit. His sartorial elegance we found out later, was because he was a black mink. When Keith showed signs of reluctance at using further precious film stock he went down his hole, and we went on our way.

Greenberfield Locks mark the beginning of the descent, and here an underground water feeder comes from Winterburn reservoir, some eight miles away. We filmed the lock-keeper working the great stop-cock on this feat of Victorian engineering, and covered the first penning down.

Our image of temperance and sobriety took another blow when we were filmed walking into the Cross Keys at East Marton. How antisocial of us not to pass the time of day with the rest of the crew who were seen imbibing at the tables outside. The famous double arched bridge had been covered, and we lunched before setting off along Marton Pool.

The first part was wooded, so Keith and Doug wanted to capture shafts of sunlight through the trees. We lit the little stove and using wet grass, Doug produced a fair volume of smoke from the chimney. Unfortunately there was too much wind and it dispersed, but at least the viewers knew the chimney was more than an ornament.

The cut comes into the open, and ahead of you is the local TV relay mast. The canal does a sharp bend and it is behind you. After a bit you round a hill and there it is ahead again. We got quite close when Keith discovered he was missing a filter, and dispatched his assistant back to the woods on foot to look for it. He returned with it after a very short time, having crossed the neck of this huge meander.

The locks at Bank Newton and Gargrave provided more 'pretties', and we packed up in Gargrave. It was Bank Holiday weekend, so we arranged to resume in Skipton on the Wednesday. I worked the boat back to her permanent moorings there over the weekend, so I could wash those clothes I had had appeared to have been wearing for a fortnight!

AIRE VALLEY HOLIDAY

Skipton is really charming from the canal, particularly if you divert up the Springs Branch, it is very narrow, with

moored boats, and best explored on foot. However having a camera on board makes you do silly things and I took the *Lady* right up to its rubbish strewn terminus, under the glowering cliffs of the castle. We nearly marooned Keith on a small promontary, trapped between the cliffs and the deep foul waters. Getting out was no fun, there was no towpath and I had to be careful using the engine for fear of fouling the propeller. With poles and much patience we emerged from the gloom and reversed out into the main line.

Only Pete's reputation was at risk in Skipton, as he entered the Black Horse, where some of the L&L Company inaugural meetings were held. It had turned very hot, and Doug allowed us shirt-sleeves, provided our outer garments were seen abandoned on the cabin top. Even this was at times an imposition off shot, and if you are observant, at one stage in shot, I was seen in shorts and my birthday suit jacket.

We reached Kildwick that night, filming swans on the way, with Pete actually crewing and staying on board. Only he can say if it helped give him the full atmosphere, but certainly he was a good crew. Kildwick the next morning was a picture, the terraced houses with geraniums on the balconies, perched on the side of the hill, gave it a continental air. We captured this as best we could, moving on through Silsden to East Riddlesden Hail. At times our way was endangered by swimming children, such was the heat. Pete did his walkabout at the Hall, and we moored up ready for the Bingley Five-rise the next morning.

To be continued

RCR Advert

NOTICES

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.

**Argue the toss with
Robin Evans
Come to the AGM**

PLEASE KEEP A NABO NEWS ENVELOPE

The label gives your membership number and may be needed as evidence of membership when applying for discounts (e.g on page 16) or to access the members-only Website pages.

Text your waterway reports to:

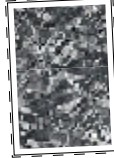
**07930 419 981
07961 001814
07989 441674**

POST FOR NABO NEWS

For issue 6/05 the editor will be afloat so please send contributions by email to news.editor@nabo.org.uk

Failing that, at least one week before the copy date to

48 Old Lane, Bramhope,
Leeds LS16 9AZ



EVENTS

THE NATIONAL

**STAND HELP NEEDED
August Bank Holiday
Preston Brook**

Even if you can only manage an hour or two it must be worth a free ticket. Please contact Aileen on 0770 3567764

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then 'quickdial':-

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032112 for Nene

03321 for G. Ouse

Also **011132** for Thames works

SEVERN ESTUARY CRUISE



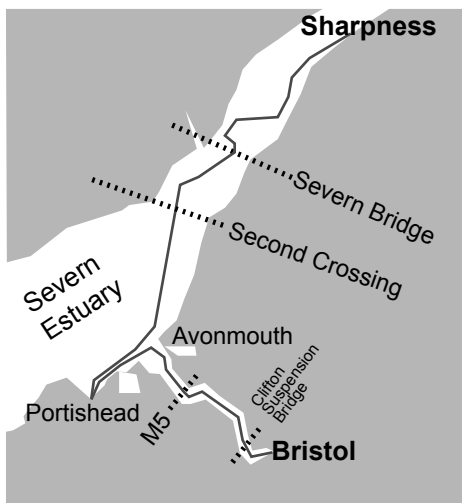
The weekend of the 16th of June was earmarked as the first reasonable neap tidal window with long enough daylight for NABO members to travel in convoy from Sharpness to Bristol. However, more important was calm weather with good visibility which in the end was there for the taking.

The journey was in two stages, from Sharpness to Portishead Marina down the Severn on the ebb tide, then up the Avon to Bristol on the flood. Twelve narrow beam boats made the trip, from a 'Dutch style thing' to a forty foot Springer. Unfortunately until the

Warwickshire Avon is linked to the Grand Union, or the Cotswolds Canals are restored, members with wider beam boats will not be able to make this passage into part of a ring.

Of the twelve, six were insured by Michael Stimpson Associates who normally required a pilot on each vessel, but as a concession to NABO, would allow one pilot per convoy. In the end the pilots would only allow convoys of two, travelling separately from the six whose insurance did not require pilotage. This meant that boats travelled on three separate tides, six without pilot on the 16th pm, two with pilotage on the 17th at 4 am. The remaining four were advised by their pilots to wait due to stronger winds and came down on the 18th.

Unfortunately the convoy was also split going to Bristol due to lock problems at Portishead, two of the four going on on the same day and the others waiting and travelling together. Once all had assembled in Bristol a social evening was arranged including a 'short straw draw' for someone to write an account. The 'winner' was Ellen Schorr on *Spuyten Duyvel*, one of the two first boats into Bristol, so we pick up her story:



Boring - flat calm and the pilot drove all the way.

A doddle - much easier than the Ribble Link.

“...We may have passed some others in our group, but upon charging into Sharpness, it appeared to us that we were the last to arrive. Stuart and Carole hailed us and gave us a big enthusiastic greeting from their moored boat, making us feel immediately welcome. As Americans we’re happy to be included.

That evening we were given our “job” for the following days’ feast – making salad. Also on the agenda was life-ring tossing practice, though to be honest we hadn’t ever taken the time to try it. We watched with mounting trepidation as each boat’s crew took turns in an exercise of humiliation. We were nearly last so had plenty of time to magnify our discomfort, however to our amazement we won the event!

The following day was to have been “Feast Day”, but, instead, the weather was gorgeous enough for those boats without insurance-stipulated pilots to take advantage of the very low wind conditions and plenty of clear skies. They set off on their adventures early that afternoon and with a great outpouring of good wishes from those left behind.

We locked out of Sharpness promptly at 4.00 am with *Nuggler* and her crew of Pat, Mike and Jemma. Sharpness Lock has a ‘holding pen’ at river level where we were told to sit until 6 am, during which time the largest ship that can fit into the enormous lock treated us to an amazing feat of seamanship, turning against a

diminishing current into the lock without nary a scratch.

Our pilot, Ken, showed up on time and we took an immediate liking to him. He took our boat since *Nuggler* had both radio and GPS, and we only had GPS with absolutely no experience of using it. He asked if we’d like to run our boat and seemed surprised when we turned the helm over to him. When we eased onto the estuary we were greeted by the smooth glassy surface I, for one, was hoping for. We completed the run down to Portishead in 2 1/2 extremely uneventful hours full of engaging conversation with Ken. “



Jemima 2 reports:-

“Arrived at Sharpness to meet all other crews, and that evening we played rescue your crew and decided that these skills should be practiced more often. The weather was hot and calm so we were looking forward to the trip.

Unfortunately the pilots were proving recalcitrant so six boats that did not require pilots went down the Severn on Saturday afternoon.

Two boats left on early Sunday morning, leaving us feeling deserted. The four boats left went down to the dock to meet the two pilots that were to

Adrenaline, sunshine, open sea, proper navigation and three magnificent bridges we’d never dreamed of going UNDER!

accompany us on Sunday evening. They arrived and with much sucking of teeth decided that we could not go as the wind was too strong. They promised to return at six thirty the following morning, leaving us wondering if we might have to wait for the next neap tide in two weeks time. A beer at the pub cheered us up and early to bed for an early rise.

Two pilots duly arrived and the decision was made to go. We had an exhilarating run down with a slight contretemps at the second bridge, with us taking a slightly different line and suddenly being left behind by K2 with the pilot on board. A gesticulation put us right and we caught up about ten minutes later. We crabbed into Portishead with the tide flowing quite fast. A period in the dock waiting for the return of the tide and an easy run up the beautiful Avon River saw us in the Bristol Docks.

We really enjoyed the trip even though it was approached with some trepidation because it was the great unknown. We had engine revs for 5 knots and did the trip to Portishead in two and a half hours. We would do it again but if only our boat was involved we would take a Pilot.“



...and from the organiser's point of view:

“Just about anything that could have gone wrong, went wrong, from Tesco having no record of my order for a whole salmon, a large gammon joint, and two extra large chickens, to the Severn pilots who, at the eleventh hour, refused to escort the contingent of twelve narrowboats. But, what did go right was the actual trip itself: we were blessed with perfect or near perfect weather, so that all the boats were able to make the passage safely, enjoyably, and within the first three days quoted as possibles. In fact, the absence of waves made one skipper describe the trip as a non-event! The social evening was a great success, more food than we could eat, with joy, laughter and euphoria all round. We feel as if we belong to an exclusive club.

We could be described as being lucky, but the unmitigated success of the cruise was solely down to preparation. I was extremely impressed by the amount of homework done by each and every skipper prior to the voyage. Certainly for those of us who went as a group of six boats without a pilot (acceptable to the insurance companies), it wasn't just a case of follow my leader. In different ways, each vessel made its own way down the river. Some had plotted the course into a GPS and used that in conjunction with looking for the transit beacons, others had photographed the beacons from the video to know what to look for, and one had downloaded

A dream achieved! A most interesting and enjoyable experience with some lovely people.

NABO's guidance notes (deemed to excellent) from the website and used them in conjunction with spotting the beacons and buoys. It goes without saying that if you take advice from every available source, wait for the right weather conditions, and follow the right course, you will not ground on a sandbank and get into difficulty as a result.

OK, so there are some of you out there who may well now wish that you had

found the courage to come with us. It was as we sat together at our party that I was asked: "Where are we going next year?" Plans are afoot, if only at the initial stage, so watch this space!"

Carole



Narrowboats under Clifton Bridge



All tied up in Bathurst Basin, Bristol

Photos courtesy of crew members and John of Stokie

FLY ON THE WALL



at Council

As you can see I escaped being swatted while away and I'm back on the wall at another Council meeting. There's no sign of that cat...probably due to the presence of four assorted dogs. Luckily for me they spent most of the time under the table amongst Council's legs!

Most of Council have been or are out boating so there were many personal experiences on the various topics up for discussion. The Ashby Canal seems to have gone for 48 hour moorings in too big a way. Quite a challenge if you need to leave the boat for a day or two. Council were pleased to hear that as a result of the General Secretary writing to remonstrate with BW they have agreed to reconsider these time limits on some sites, but they haven't specified which. Watch the News for news!

There was excited comment after Council heard about the recent National Stoppage Meeting. It seems there will be no North/South

route open next winter AND that some stoppages are scheduled for October! There have been requests to BW for a two week deferment. The elimination of the safety backlog should have meant a reduction in stoppages but it also seems that there is a reduction in dredging too.

Of course if there is less dredging you may need boats to travel more to keep canals as clear as possible. BUT NO! How about the more you travel the more you pay for your licence? BW's new licence proposals generated even more excitement and a lot of lively discussion and took the most of the meeting. Licence classification has been 'business' and 'leisure' ie making money and not. So wouldn't you think that hire companies' boats use the canals more than people who live on their boats and perhaps poodle on a few hours some days of the week and are experienced in their use of their boats and the canal.

BW state that 'continuous cruisers' boat more days than hire boats and should therefore be in the new 'high' rate licence category. This would mean a swingeing 147% increase on the cost of their licences. Surely anyone would find that unreasonable! So what does your current licence entitle you to? A year of cruising? And if the criterion is to have or not to have a home mooring, how to define that? Somewhere to moor for

six months of the year while you cruise the rest of the time? What if you stay somewhere different each time, the better to see the rest of the system? Would you pay a low licence when on moorings and a high one when cruising? And anyway wasn't the original problem continuous MOORING not cruising? These were just some of the questions and points that poured out of your Council.

After lunch Council heard another perspective from a visitor in the form of the Chairman of the Residential Boat Owners Association, Ivor Caplan. Of course they don't move about a lot but since the residential licence died they pay a leisure licence, and you assume, continuous mooring fees.

Ivor disagreed with the new categories and stated that the statistics used were flawed and the proposals need to be revised and presented again. Again watch for news in your News!

Oh! by the way, did you hear that someone had put a report in on NABO's board about my horsey friends on the K&A. Yes. they are out for boaters' blood too especially those who stop in one place too long - wished BW paid me to do that but I'm the wrong sort of fly.!

Now, before the Chairman shouts 'Zuzzer' to his dogs, I had better acquire some altitude, or should that be 'attitude'.

Byeee!



CAPTION COMPETITION

Notice on wall of pub by Stone Bottom Lock

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LETTERS



BWB against single boaters?

I regularly use our massive investment in our narrow boat on my own. It cost us a lot of money. We pay a large sum to BWB for a licence to use the facilities on the canals. Nothing special in these statements I suspect you are saying? Except that those of you who do the same will also know that BWB continue to openly discriminate against me when my trusty crew can't sail with me. There is not one swing or lift bridge within 5 days cruising of my base on the L&L that has any sort of 'swing-side' jetty, or simple mooring facility. Single boaters do not exist.

This has frustrated me for some time and so I looked back over several years volumes of popular canal magazines and the topic regularly pops up with generally little positive response from any authorities. There is however always feedback from correspondents who have tackled their local lengthsmen who privately give the impression that the lack of this facility is BWB policy to deter single boaters although none will ever comment formally.

I took it upon myself to do a bit of basic research and have now spent two very relaxing (for me) days sitting and observing the activities at a "swing bridge near me" with the following results.

Day one - a Sunday in May with good weather L&L - six hours observation - 34 boats - 11 single boaters

Day two - a Tuesday in June with good weather L&L - four hours observation - 17 boats - 8 single boaters

Most of the single boaters craft were smaller 40 ft'ish with a few GRP craft as well - most were crewed by middle aged (or older) people and on both days 3 were by women. All had differing methods of handling the bridges, but in most cases it was an undignified and pretty hazardous scramble along untendered bank-side. The perhaps not surprising thing was however that the general boat skills were far better than the crewed boats! Some of the rope work was really impressive and I learned a lot.

Could NABO have another look at this issue? I am sure its been on many agendas in the past - perhaps if all single boaters refused to pay licence fees the scale of the issue might become clear to BWB - I am sure they have no real idea of the numbers of people affected - they just assume that if a boat is registered then more than one person uses it.

Richard Carpenter
Leyland, Lancs.

Commercial Traffic

The government have suggested that the waterways should become more commercial. Some of the wide canals & rivers may be able to cope but the lack of investment since the railways 'took over' means that it will take a long time to achieve. Perhaps the railways should take more. The commercial boats are much deeper in the water than the average pleasure boat. So the much needed dredging will have to be addressed.

The canals are increasingly being used for recreation these days by many user groups such as bikers, walkers, fishermen and boaters. It is a 'natural' environment now and is very relaxing for hard working people to enjoy. Commercialisation will destroy all this.

Charles Moore

Mail Forwarding.

I read with interest the letter from H. Babbington in the May issue of NABO. We found a problem with getting our mail sent onto us whilst cruising and discovered Mail Re-Direct. This is a boat owner who had the same problem and decided to start a small business in the mail forwarding business. Geraldine Prescott runs it from her narrow boat and we have used her system for about a year. Geraldine makes a once off charge and in return she receives our mail and we simply text or email or ring her with the address which we want her to forward the mail on to- several days ahead of us when travelling. If we have the mail forwarded to a post office, we ring the PO to establish it is still in

business and obtain the address and post code. The Post Office details we usually get from an extremely good publication called "The First Mate Guide" which covers most of the canal system. We then just ring Geraldine Prescott and ask for the mail to be sent onto the Post Office-marked Post Restant. We have used boatyards, Pubs etc in the past. We have amended our driving licences, Building Societies and Banks etc, address to the Po Box which Geraldine gave us. As we are continuous cruisers, this system works extremely well for us and we wouldn't hesitate to recommend it. Mail Re Direct can be contacted on 07980871163.

Many thanks for a most interesting and informative magazine. Keep up the good work NABO!

Vera Roberts & Graham Lambden
nb Penny Peace.

Size matters

No-one but a complete nutter would suggest boat size isn't important for licensing. Further penalising the poor will benefit the rich even more than now.

Creeping 'social exclusion' has driven poor enthusiasts off the water and it must be reversed. Instead of an 18 footer licence being half that of a 52 footer it should be a quarter with a big step in the increment at 35' (half a narrow lock length). The rich don't like sharing narrow locks so penalise them.

Wide boats should be charged more and the Thames licensing of length times beam in 0.1 metre increments **ROUNDED DOWN** is vary fair. (6'10 1/2" beam = 2 m).

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

BW's fake 2003 consultation was in metres rounded up so $6'10\frac{1}{2}'' = 3\text{m}$, a 50% increase on EA. I do however sympathise with boaters who buy a 7'6" beam craft because it is cheaper than a $6'10\frac{1}{2}''$ equivalent.

Minimum length mooring fees must be banned and the confidence trick Boat Safety Scheme replaced by the European Directive

Yours till weir all locked up

Allan Moody
Croydon Canal Restoration Group

This is just one part of pages of what Allan himself seem to think is 'drivel' which also includes warnings about break-ins on moorings in Reading, aeroplane fuel tanks in magazine letters and small boats being penalised by Thames boatyards and BSS inspectors. Ed.

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



Hotel boats moored below Humgerford Lock - on 24 hour visitor moorings.

Their paying guests have to put up with this mess!

COUNTER POINTS

*Views from the
tiller dahn sarf
by Canaldrifter*

I attempted to answer some of the questionnaire in the BW consultation document on Continuous Cruiser licence increases. It seems that most of the questions can be answered 'yes' or 'no' depending on how they're understood. They seem to be a diversion from the main issues. I would like to submit my own list of questions!

I was chatting to a boater who had moored his pride and joy by the sharp bend at Dundas Aqueduct on the K&A. A hire boat approached flat out and T-boned our friend's vessel at full speed. Clang!! Repairs cost £18,000.

Our friend stated that the hire company appear not to issue maps, or give instructions about slowing down when approaching moored boats. There was no 'sharp bend' notice on the approach to Dundas, either. When the new European signs appear, I wonder whether hirers would know what a 'sharp bend' sign looks like anyway. Come to think of it, are there sharp bends in European waterways?

The National Fishing Competition will no longer be held on the Basingstoke Canal, we hear. Last time all they caught were crayfish. Now you might think this is good news for boaters. No avenue of roach poles to duck through. Not so. The canal is closed to visiting boats too. The back-pumping scheme at Woodham is hardly coping

with keeping the houseboats afloat. And next year the IWA is planning to hold its National Campaign Rally at Brookwood? 200 boats? Whoops.... nearly tumbled off me counter laughing!

I wonder whether the Basingstoke will ever re-open. A recent survey on Deepcut Flight of locks by county council engineers has revealed severe safety issues that would cost millions to put right. Of course, if they leave Deepcut to fall derelict again, they could then have a much cheaper option. Maybe a navigable canal as far as Woking and also an isolated 16 mile linear water park with one lock in it. That would suit everyone but boaters. Shame, after twenty two years of hard work by volunteers. I hope I'm wrong. But you can't maintain a canal on one fifth the budget BW get per lock mile.

What do you do about crayfish? * Apparently their only effective predator is the duck-billed platypus. We don't have any of those. The crocodiles ate them all.

Drifter

*If you catch a bucket full, using a chop bone on a string or a home made lobster pot, give them a couple of changes of tap water over 24 hours or so, you might get a few quid for them at the local chinkie - Ed

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