



# NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners  
Issue 4 July 2020



**COVID-19 DIARY**  
**ONE MAN WENT TO MOW**  
**PASSAGE TO THE NORTH EAST:**  
**THE RETURN**



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## Next NABO News copy date

Articles, letters, cartoons and photos are most welcome. Images in JPEG format please. Please email your contributions to [nabonews@nabo.org.uk](mailto:nabonews@nabo.org.uk) or post to the Editor by September 12<sup>th</sup> 2020.

## Cover photo

Mooring near the Packet House at Worsley on the Bridgewater Canal, by the Editor. Win a year's free membership by having your photo selected for the front cover of NABO News. Please email photos as JPEG attachments, ideally portrait format with a file size of 2MB or larger.



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**A**s this issue of NABO News was being prepared, CRT and the EA announced the resumption of boating on July 4th in England and July 6th in Wales.

#### The new 'normal'

No-one believes that everything will go back to 'normal', but it is too early to tell what lasting damage has been done to waterways businesses and the services that they offer boaters.

## Back cruising again this summer

Editor **Peter Fellows** reflects on the effects of the lockdown

David Fletcher has recorded the timeline of events as the pandemic developed from February to June and some of the effects it has had on the waterways. Despite the end of the lockdown, it is clear that coronavirus hasn't gone away and there are currently around 1,000 new infections every day. I've not seen any figures on the number of boat owners who have been infected, but a sensible assumption is that some infected but asymptomatic boaters will take to the water again in July. Although boating is relatively safe, everyone needs to be careful to wash their hands and disinfect surfaces after using service facilities, locks etc. This is likely to continue until an effective vaccine becomes available.

#### The labyrinth that is CRT's vegetation management

David has also been delving into the seemingly labyrinthine complexity of CRT's towpath mowing specifications in an attempt to clarify what boaters, with their detailed

local knowledge of individual canals, can do to assist CRT to ensure that moorings and lines of sight are kept clear of vegetation.

In Techies Corner, Tony Brooks has advice when using multi-meters to check your boat electrics. Mark Tizard pays tribute to the coal boats, whose operators have played a vital role in helping liveaboard boaters during the lockdown, and Helen Hutt records her return from the North East waterways via The Wash.

There are reports of meetings that have taken place by NABO council members with the BSS, CTR's Winter Stoppage Advisory Group, the All-party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways, and five organisations representing boaters on the non-tidal Thames – each conducted by videoconference. If your BSS examination is due, book your preferred examiner now as there is a substantial backlog to clear. There are plans reported for two more canalside developments in the West Midlands, which are likely to adversely affect heritage assets. I have also reported the most recent information from CRT on reservoir levels, some of which are considerably lower than average for this time of year. This reflects both the very dry conditions in April and May and maintenance work on dams, following Toddbrook. Boaters returning to some canals, especially in the North West, are likely to experience restricted lock opening times until there is any significant rainfall. The fallout from Toddbrook rumbles on, with a letter from engineer, Graham Aldred, about suppression of his report on the dam.

So, after months of lockdown, it's great to be able to get afloat again, but I fear that boating may be a little more difficult this summer than it has been for some time. Enjoy your cruising and stay safe.

**I**n these strange times that we're living in, our thoughts and prayers are with those tragically affected by Covid-19 and we feel for those who have lost a family member, friend or colleague, or whose livelihood or mental health has been seriously affected.

Nevertheless, even on a smaller scale, I am sure that you are all, like me, totally frustrated by the unfortunate delays in being able to get back on our boats—made worse for those of us who boat in Wales, where the Assembly seems to be continually slightly out of phase with the situation in England. I am looking forward to be able to go and check that our boat is still floating!

However, as I said in the last NABO News, going forward, our economy will look very different from the past, with our government(s) facing many horrendous difficulties in recovering from these months of deep financial wreckage caused by the pandemic. Sadly, I am very fearful that our canals and rivers will be well down all the governments' agendas in their handling of these massive financial difficulties.

And so, for CRT and the EA, bidding for at least some essential government funding, the situation could not be bleaker. No matter how important we might feel our waterways to be, as vital parts of our history and a core component of our tourist industry, they appear insignificant when looking at the ever increasing national debt and the desperate need for job creation, especially for those just entering the jobs market. CRT's situation is also going to be made worse, given its huge loss of income from its very significant property portfolio. Yes, of course we will have to get solidly behind these bids, but we will also have to accept that this situation is going

to affect all of us.

Without any doubt, we can expect to see substantial increases in the cost of every aspect of boating—and I fear that both CRT and EA will clearly look to us for increased income from all they do, from basic licence charges, through to the provision of services. I also can't see how marinas and other providers will be able to operate without, again, substantial increases in mooring fees, service charges, etc—especially as



## Hard times ahead?

NABO Chair **Mike Rodd** is concerned by what he sees in his crystal ball

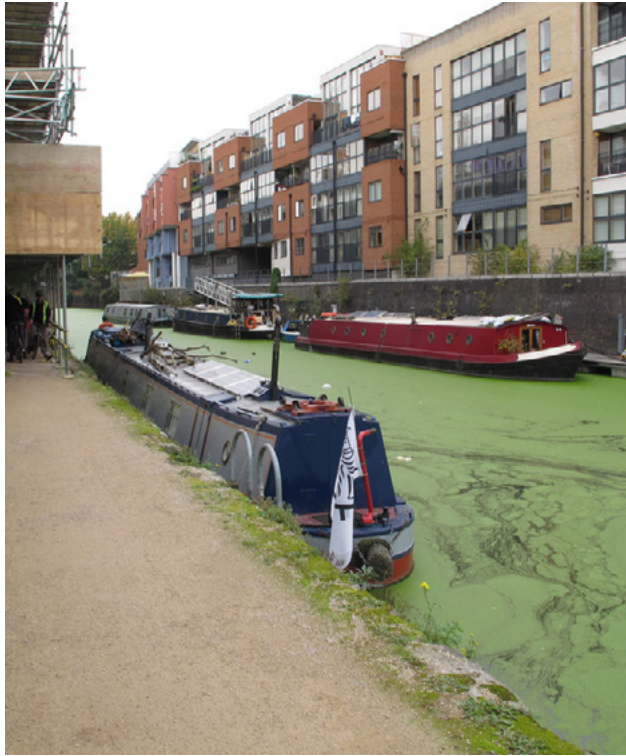
they will also in turn be under pressure from CRT and EA to pay more, wherever that can be justified.

#### More reasons for charging

I can also see that all the navigational authorities will again look very carefully at how, for example, they charge for use of their moorings.

In doing so, they will look to optimise their income by asking why, for example, (allegedly?) continuously cruising in London is still seen to be almost the cheapest way of living in one of the world's most expensive cities. The more than 6,000 boats based in London, most of which don't have a residential mooring, will undoubtedly be a target, even if new legislation is required. NABO's role will once again be crucial in these looming debates, and hence our budget for next year has a substantial allocation for legal guidance!

As we have mentioned in the past, NABO has been concerned about the somewhat chaotic situation on the Thames, where the many organisations with an interest in this high-profile and important waterway simply don't seem to be able to



Boats on Limehouse Cut  
Photo: David Hawgood

agree on how best to work with the navigational authority, the EA. The River Thames Alliance was created several years ago to address this situation by bringing together over 150 of the interested parties, and was initially supported by most local authorities and by the EA itself.

Despite the best of intentions, however, its very broad objectives seemed to make it an impossible organisation to manage, to the point where the withdrawal of several large players eventually meant that it had to be wound up.

### The Big Five

However, five organisations representing boaters on the non-tidal Thames have now agreed to join forces to encourage greater engage-

ment and co-operation with the EA.

They are: the Association of Thames Yacht Clubs, the Dutch Barge Association, the Residential Boat Owners' Association, the Thames Motor Boaters Association and NABO. We are all members of the Thames Navigation User Forum and specifically represent owners of recreational powered craft. There are over 8,000 such craft registered with EA Thames and, by way of registration and other charges, they collectively contribute almost £4 million in revenue income to the annual budget for the maintenance and upkeep of the river. This is by far the largest contribution from any source other than public funding. Joint action is already in hand to address the current issues regarding continued restrictions to navigation, particularly where they affect powered craft.

The NABO Council has continued to meet regularly via teleconferences, and the meetings have proved to be very productive and well-attended. At the last meeting, it was evident that we have met our budget target for the past year and we should also be able to cope with next year—but we do need to work hard to keep our membership numbers up (our only source of income) and also look towards engaging more members—both on Council and as regional representatives to both CRT and EA.

The latter role is vital but also highly rewarding, especially as the CRT folk are learning (as we are!) more and more how to work across the internet and phone lines, and not have so many physical meetings!

So, once again, despite these strange times for all of us, I wish you everything of the best and—for those unlucky ones who are not living aboard—I hope we all see our boats soon!

## Fly on the wall

### Observes proceedings at the Council meeting in June

Covid-19 continues to affect all aspects of the waterways and Council members held a video conference to discuss developments over the two months since the last meeting. NABO has taken part in on-line Zoom conferences held with CRT on the winter stoppage programme and the Navigation Advisory Group, the BSS committees and the EA, the last in relation to the Thames. Councillors recognised that these on-line discussions are valuable when people already know each other, but they do not have the same impact as face-to-face meetings.

CRT's winter stoppage programme is not contentious, with stoppages allowing north-south and east-west travel to take place, but the proposed closure of Stourport and Diglis locks in September and October was questioned. There are rumours that CRT will not allow volunteer lock-keepers aged over 70 to return to their duties when the lockdown is lifted, which is likely to have a significant impact on the help available to boaters on lock flights. Councillors (with the exception of Helen), like all non-liveaboard boaters, have been unable to use their boats—although Helen reported that she is only able to move vertically up and down with the changing river levels after recent storms, as the river she moors on has yet to be reopened. One councillor suggested that, until boaters are allowed to stay overnight on their boats, we could pitch a tent on the towpath!

There has been dissatisfaction over the management arrangements

for the Thames and the EA's relationship with boating organisations. Following the collapse of the River Thames Alliance, five boating organisations have been holding teleconference discussions, as a loose association, over the last couple of months to find a way to improve the situation. The relationship with the EA is good and progress is being made, but it will depend on the Government's reorganisation of the EA, which, like everything else, has been put on hold due to coronavirus.

There is a reported backlog of more than 10,000 BSS examinations and CRT and the EA are pressing the BSS to restart them so that boaters can comply with licensing requirements. But with approximately 150 examiners, doing maybe two examinations per day, it is clear that an extension to the current waiver for relicensing boats will be required.

Councillors also discussed the lack of transparency surrounding residential moorings. Some marinas allow people to stay on their boats on non-residential moorings, charging a 'heavy user' fee, and others specify a fixed number of overnight stays per year in the mooring agreement. Some just turn a 'blind eye'. So there is no consistency and there are different arrangements in different places. It all depends on the attitude of the marina owner, much like a feudal system. But residential moorings are more expensive and also require boaters to pay Council Tax, so they have little incentive to increase their costs.

Byeee until the Autumn.



### NABO calendar 2020

Council meetings are normally held at boat clubs in the Midlands area.

However, with Covid-19 they will be held by video conference in September and October. Members are welcome to attend meetings and to join in those held by video conference; please just let the Secretary or Chair know in advance (contact details inside cover).

The remaining dates for Council meetings in 2020 are as follows: September 5th, October 10th and November 14th (includes AGM).



## North East, Yorkshire & Humberside Howard Anguish

Not a lot of positive news to report for obvious reasons, and all local waterways are very quiet. However, the local waterways are starting to attract walkers once more since the exercise rules were relaxed, but no boating, even if it was allowed, because of canal closures caused by low water levels.

Pocklington Canal. Covid-19 restrictions have meant that the Pocklington Canal Amenity Society (PCAS) has suffered a big setback in its fundraising efforts this year, with all of the planned events unfortunately having to be cancelled.

It was expected that by this time PCAS should have started the major restoration work at Sandhill Lock, the next obstacle to seeing the canal fully navigable to Canal Head, but this is also on hold until the pandemic situation eases. The society has also had to cancel all this season's 'New Horizons' trip-boat activities from Melbourne—a very popular attraction for visitors to the canal and a major regular contribution to fundraising.

Driffield Navigation. Some time ago, I mentioned that there were moves afoot to develop the old Mortimers Warehouse into a community project for the town, which would also help to attract boating to the upper reaches of the navigation.

The warehouse stands in the terminal basin at Driffield, known locally as Riverhead, and had generously been offered to the community at a peppercorn rent.

Investigations have been underway to try to come up with a firm plan for the development of the warehouse. but unfortunately, after much hard work by Driffield Town Council, no suitable plans have been forthcoming, so I'm afraid it's back to the drawing board. Like Pocklington Canal, the Driffield Navigation Trust have had to put on hold any plans to offer their two trip-boats to the general public and the planned summer gala has also been cancelled.



## Wales and the South West Mike Rodd

Relatively few boats are moving on the Kennet & Avon Canal but, with the gradual opening up of the waterways, this is starting to change. There has been a surprisingly large number of lock and bridge closures, but it seems that CRT is dealing with these efficiently and quickly.



## Around the regions with NABO's regional reps

The little Mon & Brec is still dead, but winter work seems to have been completed well in time. The Welsh Assembly adopted a slightly different approach from that in England and, up to July, no car journeys involving a distance of more than 5km were allowed—effectively meaning that boats could not be even checked. It seems that this will soon be resolved and it is hoped that by mid-July all boats will be allowed to cruise. Sadly, the hire boat operators have been left in the dark as well as the private owners, with huge impacts on all their finances.

On the Bridgewater and Taunton Canal in Somerset, CRT has stated that it will not continue to operate the Bridgewater Docks, although they will continue to run the 11-mile canal. The CRT lease on the docks is coming to an end and, although it has been extended because of Covid-19 until November, they do not want to renew it from the dock's owners, Somerset

## Membership matters

David Fletcher and the Membership Team

First, we have a new postal address. The Wolverhampton PO box is gone and we have a business address; 20 Oak Grove, Hertford, SG13 8AT. This is for all paper correspondence including membership matters and cheques.

However, we ask for members' co-operation to avoid paying by bank cheque if at all possible. It may be very convenient for you to write a cheque and put it into the post, but it makes life more difficult for the membership team. If you have absolutely no alternative, please give us a call so that we know what is going on. Bank standing orders are the preference for us, but direct transfer or PayPal are good too. Perhaps someone could make the payment on your behalf? Please use your membership number so that we can identify the payment.

We continue to send membership renewals by email where we have a valid address. If it gets

rejected, we print a renewal out and pop it in the post. Otherwise, we expect that you will be opening and reading your emails. The only paper documents sent are to those very few members for whom we have no email address. Please bear with us at this time as we strive to serve you. If you get a paper letter and you do have an email address, please let us know so that we can use it.

This step-change to electronic distribution is not going to be reversed, but please rest assured that we remain committed to supporting any members who don't use the internet and similar systems. We need to use the time-saving technology wherever possible so that we can concentrate efforts on those who really need paper correspondence.

The membership team will really appreciate your cooperation to keep things going in these difficult times.

County Council. So, if nobody will take on the running of the docks, all boats will have to be removed and, apparently, boat owners have been given notice that they probably will have to move their boats, some of which are residential.

## NorthWest David Fletcher

The North West is in a sad state at the moment, with a combination of water shortage, flood damage and emergency repairs, which make cruising only for the most tolerant. On the L&L at Lock 59, Johnson's Hillocks, the canal is closed for this season due to flood damage. I was in Liverpool in the last week of June and



the visitor moorings were empty. I have heard that passages can be made on the link. The major locks on the Macc, Peak Forest and L&L are all subject to timing restrictions, so the only way to keep up with this is to check the website and make any necessary bookings. The aim is to save water so that the system can stay open all summer. The Rochdale and Huddersfield canals have a number of engineering works being undertaken in June and the hope is that they will be open in July. Tuel Lane Lock on the Rochdale is currently on timed passage.

I walked up the Hurlston Locks at the bottom of the Llangollen in June. The bottom lock repair is all finished and a few boats are moving.

Generally the towpath grass cutting is behind schedule, and I gather that a significant number of the NW team have been working on reservoirs to catch up.



## BSS examination suspension lifted

Boat Safety Scheme examinations, suspended during the Covid-19 lockdown, have resumed for most boat owners, with guidance to maintain distancing between the boat owner and examiner.

To help guide boat owners through 'new normal' preparations for examinations, the BSS has created a dedicated webpage [www.boatsafety-scheme.org/Covid](http://www.boatsafety-scheme.org/Covid). The BSS will not be able to provide examinations for boat owners who are in self-isolation or who are shielding on their boats. If their boat's BSS certification is due soon and their licence, registration, mooring or insurance depends on that certification, the BSS recommends that they talk with their navigation authority, mooring management or insurer to explain the situation.

## BSS incidents and accidents in 2019

From 1st January to 31st December, there were 50 fires and CO incidents on inland waterways, the lowest number in the last decade. In 21 of the incidents, the boat concerned was used intensively (for residential or extended use), which is a similar proportion to the previous year.

- In January, a man spent over seven hours in a decompression chamber to help detoxify his blood of CO. A generator had been running on the back deck and a flap on the cover was opened for exhaust ventilation, but it shut in the wind and the exhaust fumes entered the cabin through the door vents. Also in January, a petrol vapour explosion occurred after a boat's engine was started at a mooring. The craft then caught fire and started to sink with a man on board. He suffered a serious leg injury and was rescued by another boater.
- In March, a CO alarm activated, but the owner was asleep wearing earplugs and failed to react immediately. The crew needed medical treatment and took several days to recover. The source of the CO is not known.
- In July, a serious fire followed an explosion

on a cruiser at a river-based marina. The fire involved seven more motor cruisers as the flaming craft drifted across the moorings. It was thought to be petrol vapour ignition from a faulty fuel supply. A woman in her 60s was airlifted to hospital in Birmingham in a serious condition and a man in his 30s with less serious injuries was taken by road to the same hospital. A second woman in her 60s was taken to a hospital in Worcester. A fourth person needed treatment for burns.

- In November, a poorly installed and badly maintained solid-fuel stove was the source of CO that resulted in two people being taken to hospital in a semi-comatose state. Also in November, three alarms, in different positions within a boat, activated, likely detecting CO entering from outside. Readings on the display indicated 18ppm. There was no internal source of CO and the boat's batteries were not charging. The activations only happened when moored in a marina in very light wind conditions. The nearest sources of CO were other boats in the marina with their stoves running.
- In December, two men were found dead on a steel motor cruiser moored in York. The coroner reported that both victims were found unresponsive and there was a suspicion of CO poisoning.

## Licence evasion at 3.8%

CRT's annual national boat count in 2020 showed that 96.2% of boaters hold a valid licence (2019: 96.4%), which is the eleventh consecutive year with evasion below 5%.

There was a reduction in the number of boats sighted this year, at 33,672, down 1,568 boats on 2018/19. CRT attributes this to flooding and high-water levels in March, which prevented access to some rivers to obtain sightings, and Covid-19 restrictions, which meant sightings were not able to be made in some marinas and stretches of canal. The Trust's licence system shows that 34,435 boats held valid licences at 31st March 2020, a slight increase on the previous year (34,367). In 2019/20, CRT removed from its waters 105 boats that were unlicensed or in breach of its terms and conditions.

## NABO at the user groups

# All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways

Mike Rodd reports from May's meeting

A meeting of the APPWG was held on 14th May using the Zoom videoconferencing facility.

NABO attended as observers—the norm for such meetings. This well-attended meeting was chaired by the APPWG's Chairman, Michael Fabricant, and very appropriately focused on the need for dedicated financial support for waterways businesses.

The lead speaker was Paul Rodgers, the National Chairman of the IWA, who emphasised that most waterways businesses are highly seasonal and thus are being hit hard by the lockdown, and, unless urgent funding is provided by Government, many will fail. To this end, the IWA, British Marine, CRT and the Broads Authority are calling for the Government to provide targeted support for the inland waterways sector. They are asking for a specific financial aid package, similar to that recently announced for the fishing industry, to allow the navigation authorities to underwrite licence and mooring fees for waterways businesses this year. NABO totally supports this view and has independently approached the

Government, essentially supporting this view.

The IWA presentation was followed by ones by Richard Parry of CRT, John Packman of the Broads Authority and Brian Clark of British Marine. In supporting the views of the joint submission, they also emphasised how important it was for the waterways businesses to get back working as soon as possible. It was pointed out that it is relatively easy for people on boats to effectively self-isolate and, given that many folks would be looking for a UK-based holiday as soon as this was possible, this could be of some help in bringing at least some income to the hire-boat and day-boat companies, and to many boating related businesses, as well as to the many waterways-related charities.

After some excellent discussions, it was agreed that the event organisers would put together a summary of the views of attendees which, once agreed, would be sent to the relevant Ministers and also to the Welsh Assembly, noting that the latter was still out of phase with England on the opening up of its waterways.

## Harecastle Rescue

At the beginning of June, shortly after 11:45pm, Staffordshire police received reports of people trapped in Harecastle Tunnel. Dean Bradford, speaking to the Stoke Sentinel, said that he and two friends went through the tunnel, but took a lot longer than anticipated and when he failed to call a friend to let him know they had made it out safely, the friend got worried and rang 999.

The water rescue unit of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service sent in a powered inflatable dinghy and towed them out. Waiting paramedics checked them over and discharged them at the scene. Dean said that they would have made it out on their own in another 20 minutes or so. He added: "I go exploring all the time. We go into caves, tunnels, mines and abandoned buildings. I want to show the places that people can't usually get to. I always have a safety plan in place and do a risk assessment first. I can't apologise enough for the time we wasted and I'm very grateful for all the emergency services do. I've done some training with the fire service and my old boss saw me. He gave me a bit of a telling off."



Harecastle rescue  
Photo: Staffs Fire & Rescue  
Story: The Stoke Sentinel



## Warehouses along the Staffs & Worcs given the go-ahead

Following a Planning Inspectorate report, proposals first reported in 2018 (NABO News, Issue 5 2018, page 8) for a huge warehouse development on 700 acres of land between Gailey and Four Ashes, alongside the Staffs & Worcs Canal, were approved in May by Grant Shapps, the Secretary of State for Transport.

As a 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project', the decision was taken outside the normal local authority planning system. Known as the West Midlands Strategic Rail Freight Interchange, this 'development' will have 14 huge warehouses (of which only two will be directly served by rail), and a road network that will surround the canal and its Conservation Area. If construction goes ahead, it will destroy the rural environment and change the canal's setting, from countryside and woodland, to noise baffle-mounds and the roofs of warehouses. The present tranquillity will be replaced by traffic noise from the 24-hour operations. Despite hundreds of objections from residents, who formed the Stop Gailey Freight Hub group, it is estimated that more than 3,000 lorries and 6,000 cars and vans will travel to and from the site each day, once it is fully operational. The group says that the road network will not be able to cope with the increased traffic and a new interchange will adversely impact local villages, including Brewood, Calf Heath and Gailey.

The Staffs & Worcs was one of the first narrow canals and has remained remarkably unchanged for 250 years, with a wealth of historic structures and largely rural surroundings. That is, until recent years, when this section and parts of the canal in Wolverhampton have seen the construction of large, featureless warehouse buildings. Because the Conservation Area has already been partly damaged by industrial development (a tar distillery at Four Ashes, which subsequently became a chemical works), this implicitly justifies further development. The report states that



The Roundhouse at Gailey  
Photo: Peter Fellows

the effects on the Conservation Area would be outweighed by (unspecified) 'public benefits' and concludes that the effects on heritage are 'not significant'. The canal itself and its original accommodation bridges remain unspoiled, and the unique listed Roundhouse, plus cottage, lock and wharf at Gailey, are heritage assets that should be nationally treasured. But the Inspector's report considers the boatyard at Gailey Wharf to be 'unkempt' with 'poor quality' buildings, and the visible warehouses and traffic noise 'would not alter the heritage value'.

As a very small compensation for the last- ing damage that this construction will do to the heritage and amenity value of the canal, two unsightly pipe bridges and a concrete bridge at Four Ashes will be removed, the towpath will be resurfaced through the site, and there will be towpath access to a canalside park at Croft Lane. **The full report and Secretary of State's decision are at [infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/west-midlands/west-midlands-interchange/](https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/west-midlands/west-midlands-interchange/)**

**IWA has published Part 1 of a Waterways Heritage report at [waterways.org.uk/news/campaigns/campaigns/heritage/iwa\\_waterway\\_heritage\\_report](https://waterways.org.uk/news/campaigns/campaigns/heritage/iwa_waterway_heritage_report)**

## Birmingham planning application

An application has been made for a canal-side development of 45 apartments in Scotland Street, close to Gas Street Basin. The work will affect the setting of four Grade II listed buildings and structures, namely the canal toll office, Kingston Row, the roving bridge at Farmer's Lock, and two cranes in the canal basin. The closing date for comments and objections was 19th May.



## Cruising in the North West this summer

CRT published its latest review of reservoir holdings in June. Earlier in the year, there were above-average river flows at the beginning of March due to February's exceptionally wet weather. March started off with unsettled wet spells in the first half, with drier conditions in the second half.

Throughout April and May, nationally, rainfall was less than half the average, with northern Britain recording less than a third of average rainfall. As a result, river flows were considerably reduced, with flows in several catchments reaching an all-time low. By late-April soils were the second driest since 1961 and groundwater levels fell in nearly all locations. By May, several groups of reservoirs in the North saw double-digit reductions in holdings, which continued through June. For example, the reservoir holding for the Leeds & Liverpool was only 54% of its capacity—

far below what is needed for unrestricted use of the canal.

CRT has confirmed that the L&L, Peak Forest and Macclesfield canals will be open to navigation in July and August, but with restrictions to conserve water. Some key reservoirs are not able to operate at peak capacity due to preventative maintenance work, following the Toddbrook near-disaster. The operation of the Peak Forest and Macclesfield canals is severely hampered by the loss of Toddbrook reservoir. Over the winter, CRT has carried out upgrading and repair works to improve the water supplies from Combs, Bosley and Sutton reservoirs. It has also arranged with the EA for water to pass from Combs reservoir via local brooks into the River Goyt and then be pumped into the Peak Forest Canal. [canalrivertrust.org.uk/specialist-teams/managing-our-water/reservoir-watch](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/specialist-teams/managing-our-water/reservoir-watch)

# Diary of a pandemic

David Fletcher has been monitoring stages in the development of coronavirus and its effects on the waterways.

**JANUARY**  
**22**  
WED

Public Health England moves the risk level to the public from 'very low' to 'low'. There are no confirmed cases in the UK.

**JANUARY**  
**29**  
WED

The UK's first two hospital patients test positive for Covid-19.

**FEBRUARY**  
**10**  
MON

The confirmed number of UK patients is eight. New regulations give doctors 'strengthened powers' to quarantine people for their own safety.

**FEBRUARY**  
**23**  
SUN

Four British nationals, repatriated from cruise ship Diamond Princess, moored off the coast of Japan, test positive, bringing the total UK cases to 13.

**FEBRUARY**  
**28**  
FRI

The end of the worst week for global stock-markets since the 2008 financial crash.

**MARCH**  
**2**  
MON

Toilet rolls disappear from the shops in panic buying.

**MARCH**  
**4**  
WED

The biggest one-day increase in Covid-19 cases so far (34) brings the total to 87. Emergency discussions are held in Westminster over a possible shutdown of Parliament. The virus has now reached 81 countries, with more than 90,000 confirmed cases and more than 3,000 deaths worldwide.

**MARCH**  
**5**  
THURS

A woman in her 70s becomes the first person to die in a UK hospital after testing positive for coronavirus. The number of infected people passes 100.

**MARCH**  
**10**  
TUE

Nadine Dorries, a junior health minister, becomes the first MP to test positive for coronavirus. Six people have now died of the illness, with 373 testing positive.

**MARCH**  
**11**  
WED

Chancellor Sunak announces £12bn package of emergency support to help cope with the expected onslaught from coronavirus. The World Health Organisation officially declares a pandemic.

CRT announces that the waterways are open as normal, as a great option for time in the fresh air or a route to work. The Government takes the decision to use all available Covid-19 testing capacity to support hospital treatment. Cases rise by more than 200 in a single day, and a host of sporting events are postponed. CRT's Boaters' Update reports facilities remain open for use, and the The Government advice is for people to carry on their lives largely as normal.

The confirmed number of cases passes 1,000.

The Health Minister says the elderly could be quarantined for a period of up to four months as a precautionary measure to protect lives. Major supermarkets warn the public against panic buying.

The Prime Minister holds the first daily press briefing and urges everyone to work from home and avoid pubs and restaurants. The UK death toll rises to 55, with 1,543 confirmed cases. Crick Boat Show is re-scheduled.

The Chancellor announces the biggest package of emergency state support for business since the 2008 financial crash. The Chief Scientific Adviser warns that as many as 55,000 people may now be infected and says it would be a "good outcome" if the eventual death toll could be kept below 20,000.

Numbers dying in hospital after testing positive for coronavirus rise to 144, an increase of 40% in a day, with 3,269 confirmed cases.

The PM announces most schools will be shut down until further notice and orders all pubs, restaurants, gyms and other social venues to close for the foreseeable future. The Chancellor announces the furlough scheme. CRT's Boaters' Update reports its priority is

**MARCH**  
**12**  
THU

**MARCH**  
**13**  
FRI

**MARCH**  
**14**  
SAT

**MARCH**  
**15**  
SUN

**MARCH**  
**16**  
MON

**MARCH**  
**17**  
TUE

**MARCH**  
**18**  
THU

**MARCH**  
**20**  
FRI

**MARCH**  
**21**  
SAT

**MARCH**  
**24**  
TUE

**MARCH**  
**25**  
WED

**MARCH**  
**26**  
THU

**MARCH**  
**27**  
FRI

to support the national effort to keep people safe, following Government advice and taking the appropriate action to protect etc. etc. It will do what it can to support boaters and be as flexible as it can, regarding payment. Canals, rivers and towpaths remain open for use.

A senior NHS boss tells panic buyers they "should be ashamed". The death toll is 230, with infections exceeding 4,000. The The Government updates its guidance for people at higher risk, strongly advising them to remain in isolation at home for 12 weeks.

CRT says people may continue to use their local towpath to exercise, but should observe The Government guidance on social distancing: do not congregate, keep moving, allow space for others to pass and be very mindful of moored boats where people may be self-isolating. The PM announces the lockdown. CRT suspends the requirement to move every 14 days, initially until 14 April, to help those who live aboard. Leisure boaters are asked to stop all non-essential travel. CRT and business groups appeal to DEFRA for assistance for waterways businesses that cannot benefit from budget announcements. CRT asks boaters in high-risk categories, who live on their boat and are remaining in isolation, to let them know so that staff can provide support or assistance.

CRT says that while the towpaths remain open, their use should now be limited. If people use local towpaths for daily exercise or journeys to undertake essential work, they should avoid any stretches with boats moored against them, and strictly observe social distancing at all times, following The Government advice.

The nation claps for the NHS at 8pm for the first time.

The joint owners of the BSS allow a temporary extension to safety certificates for craft requiring an examination before 14 April. The hospital death toll passes 1,000.

**APRIL**  
**3**  
FRI

With good weather forecast this weekend, CRT reminds people that, although towpaths remain open, their use should be limited, and strictly local only. A Nightingale hospital opens in the ExCel Centre London.

The PM is admitted to hospital with Covid-19. The Queen speaks to the Country.

Just before Easter, CRT says stay at home and support the NHS, putting up banners, signs and posters to remind people that use of local towpaths should be strictly limited, with people keeping their distance from moored boats. It extends the suspension of boat movement to 18 April. Captain Tom Moore, 99, war veteran completes 100 lengths of his back garden before his 100th birthday, later raising over £30m for the NHS.

The peak of the cases in hospitals.

The death toll passes 10,000. The PM leaves hospital.

The Government extends the lockdown period to 9 May and CRT extends the suspension of the requirement to move every 14 days to the same day. It continues to urge people to follow The Government guidance to stay at home.

The BSS grants a temporary extension to safety certificates for craft requiring an examination before 11 May. EA operates assets to provide passage to essential facilities that support the welfare of residential boaters, but will not provide assisted passage at sites that can be self-operated.

CRT extends all private boat licences by one month. It reinforces The Government guidance that people who do not live aboard must not visit their boat. People who are on their boat should not cruise until at least 9 May, except to access an essential service, such as a water point.

The hospital death toll passes 20,000.

The number of hospital and care staff deaths exceeds 100. PM back at No 10.

The death count now includes those in care homes.

**APRIL**  
**5**  
SUN

**APRIL**  
**9**  
SUN

**APRIL**  
**10**

**APRIL**  
**12**

**APRIL**  
**16**  
THU

**APRIL**  
**20**  
TUE

**APRIL**  
**24**  
FRI

**APRIL**  
**25**  
SAT

**APRIL**  
**27**  
MON

**APRIL**  
**29**  
MON



APRIL  
**30**  
THU

There are 26,000 cases in the UK and 3,193,886 cases in 184 countries, which have resulted in 227,638 deaths. PM takes briefing for first time since leaving hospital, saying we passed the peak of hospital cases at the Easter weekend.

MAY  
**1**  
FRI

The Health Secretary claims 120,000 tests a day, but this included 40,000 home tests posted the day before.

MAY  
**4**

Five tests need to be met before lockdown is eased. The Government says wait a week. London Nightingale hospital put on standby, not needed.

MAY  
**5**

32,000 deaths.

MAY  
**7**

BSS extended until end July, talk of opening up lockdown.

MAY  
**10**  
SUN

PM sets out plans for ending lockdown, complaints that there is no detail. Go to work tomorrow?

MAY  
**11**  
MON

Further The Government announcements but some confusion. CRT says we can visit leisure boats but not stay overnight. BSS exemption to end in July. 14-day mooring suspended until 23 May.

MAY  
**13**  
WED

Canals open for fishing and canoes but not general navigation. CRT announces dates for opening of navigation into June but only for liveaboards.

**14**

Immunity test by Roche approved.

MAY  
**15**

Teacher unions in discussions with The Government over resumption of some year classes.

MAY  
**16**

34,000 deaths, of which 11,000 in care homes. BSS announces resumption of examinations.

MAY  
**19**

EA lifting restrictions on Thames.

MAY  
**24**

Wednesday 20. PM promises test and trace by month end.

MAY  
**25**

Dominic Cummings tries to justify driving to Durham.

MAY  
**26**  
TUE

Talk of opening shops in June. George Floyd killed in USA

MAY  
**28**  
THU

37,000 deaths in hospital and care homes.

Start of England track and trace scheme. PM says we have met the five tests.

MAY  
**29**  
FRI

The Government publishes details of local authority discretionary grants fund for small businesses, which may be suitable for waterways businesses and organisations that have been unable to access the Government grants.

JUNE  
**1**  
MON

Schools open for reception year 1 and year 6 children. Outdoor retail, markets and car showrooms open. Canals in England open for liveaboards and day trips for leisure boaters.

JUNE  
**5**

40,000 deaths in hospitals and care homes.

JUNE  
**8**  
MON

Garden centres open, 14 days quarantine for travellers from abroad, dentists can open.

JUNE  
**9**  
TUE

Plan to get children back to school abandoned until September.

JUNE  
**15**  
MON

12 weeks since the start of lockdown. Face masks mandatory on public transport and in hospitals. Churches open for private prayer. Non-essential shops open. Two-metre distancing under review in England.

JUNE  
**16**  
TUE

7-day average for deaths continues to drop below the levels at the start of lockdown.

JUNE  
**17**  
THU

Phone app for tracing does not function on iPhones and Apple will not cooperate due to security and IP issues. Now will not be ready until the end of 2020.

JUNE  
**18**  
THU

The Government downgrades risk level from 4 to 3, Covid 'in general circulation'.

JUNE  
**23**  
TUE

PM holds last of the daily briefings and announced plans for changes from 4 July. 2m social distancing rule will become 1m-plus in England. CRT announce that leisure boaters can stay overnight from the 4 July. Still nearly 1,000 infections per day.

JUNE  
**23**  
WED

43,000 deaths in UK.

JUNE  
**24**  
THU

EA announce that overnight stays on private leisure boats, commercial hire-boats and hotel boats will be allowed from 4 July. 30° weather brings out the crowds on Bournemouth and Formby beaches, ignoring social distancing rules.

# In praise of the coal boats

Mark Tizard celebrates their essential service to boaters.

**A**s a boater with some 35 years' experience, I have never known a situation where coal boats have been so essential.

Whilst all around them movements have ground to a halt, and marinas close as the pandemic tightens its grip, it's the coal boats who keep the system going. These boats have always been the eyes and ears of the waterways, reporting infrastructure faults and dredging issues to CRT. Now, in the current pandemic, with the absence of CRT's furloughed spotters, they are also able to identify vulnerable boaters.

Several of them have continued to supply fuel, even though some of their customers have suddenly found themselves unable to pay. Boaters remain a community and it's pleasing to see that several customers have contacted their local coal boat and prepaid for a bag of coal or a bottle of gas to be delivered to a boater in need.

If you are also able to, please consider doing so while the crisis continues—you don't have to be a regular customer.

In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of liveaboard boats; the majority without a home mooring. Most of these boaters are now reliant on the coal boats because the vast majority of marinas have closed.

I sincerely hope that these boaters will remember these traders once the emergency passes.

- Leeds & Liverpool**
- Ambush.....07837 428588
- Kennet & Avon**
- Aquilon .....07790 017418
- London area**
- Ash .....07778 828565
- Baron.....07534 674128
- Indus and Pictor .....07380 399996
- Leicester and Coventry**
- Callisto .....07702 031718
- Llangollen & Shropshire Union**
- Chamberlain Carrying Co .....07754 003834
- Oxford Canal**
- Dusty .....07986 18907
- Grand Union Canal**
- Jules Fuels .....07596 420220
- Peak Forest, Macclesfield and the NW**
- Renaissance Canal Carrying ..07791 345004
- Four Counties Ring**
- Four Counties Fuels.....07491 149149
- Not an exhaustive list, see [www.lock13.co.uk](http://www.lock13.co.uk) or ask your neighbours



NB Aquilon on the Kennet and Avon  
Photo: Spencer Collins



# A passage to the North East: The return journey



Staircase locks on the Chesterfield Canal'

## Part 2: From Ripon to the River Nene, via the Wash

**Helen Hutt** recounts her last great adventure after 14 years of continuous cruising

With photos by the author

I'd teamed up with another boat, Tee Jay, for the journey to Ripon, the most northerly point on the network.

Tee Jay left before me, so on the return journey I had to tackle the short canal locks alone, which was no mean feat, thanks to very leaky top gates. I really struggled at Milby Lock; I needed to put the boat crosswise in order to open a bottom gate—but then I couldn't get back on board without risking swamping the back end. Thankfully, help arrived in the form of a camper who immediately understood my dilemma as he also happened to be a boater.

On this return trip, on a sunny weekend, York was heaving so I

continued on to Naburn. Then it was back down the Ouse (yes, I did see the proverbial dead cow floating along) to Selby; although I went a bit too far beyond Selby lock before turning to approach upstream, I must say my entry was exemplary and even drew a burst of applause from the gongoozlers. By now, the basin was even more choked with weed, making mooring and getting onto the water point difficult.

After diversions to Castleford and Goole it was back onto the Trent via Keadby Lock. On the way I heard a loud clunk and juddering sound—oh no, what a place to break down! I slipped into neutral, waited a few moments and tentatively put the boat into gear again. I guess the prop had simply had an altercation with a large log, phew! West Stockwith Lock loomed—and another good turn off the river guided by Jim the lock-keeper. Why was I ever worried about this manoeuvre? After a night in the canal

basin I set off up the Chesterfield Canal—having been warned that it was shallow and weedy in places. It was both those things (with bells on) and I ran aground within the first hour. Progress was slow and it took two days to cover the 15 miles and 5 locks to Retford. I had been warned not to moor overnight in Worksop, so was aiming for a spot a couple of miles before the town, near Bridge 46. However, a shallow stretch and a tricky cross-wind got the better of me; I ran aground and, despite serious poling, couldn't get straight to set off again. A passing cyclist came to the rescue: I managed to pass him my pole so he could push the bow off, and I told him to leave the pole by the towpath and I would walk back for it. Off he went but, sod's law, it happened again—however, now I had no pole. I cleared the prop and tried setting off with a blast and fortunately it worked. Exhausted, I reached my chosen mooring place and walked back two miles to pick up my pole.

A friend joined me in Worksop; we visited the fascinating Mr Straw's House (National Trust), an Edwardian terraced property which had been left exactly as it was when the owner died in the 1920s, and then cruised to the bottom of Shireoaks locks. The next day, after delicious ice cream at Quarry Lock, half-way up the 16 single, two double and two triple staircases, we moored at Kiveton Park, the current end of the canal. It had been a glorious day, meeting lots of lovely people, and we were the only moving boat on the canal. The next day, after a walk to the Norwood tunnel entrance, we headed back down the flight to the empty Shireoaks visitor mooring. My friend went home and I stayed on the mooring for several days. Having done those magnificent turns off the river, my turn into



Shireoaks Marina for water and out again were desultory; I blamed it on the fact that the canal was so narrow. I sold a windlass to couple who had lost TWO coming up the lock below.

The canal seemed even weedier on the return journey, meaning prop clearing every mile or so and at every lock. But I was rewarded by spotting a fairly rare flower, the flowering rush or *Butomus umbellatus*—and only ran aground once. The weather changed dramatically, with heavy rain as I cruised into Retford. Two days previously I'd had a cold shower to cool down, today a hot one to warm up!

Weedy Selby Canal





Near Ranby a willow tree had come down over the canal, and CRT came out very quickly to sort it out. Thereafter, an uneventful run to West Stockwith in the rain and wind, but I felt sad to be leaving this beautiful, if challenging, canal. The

The Glory Hole at Lincoln



following day dawned fine and dry for the trip downriver to Torksey, where I had to wait in the lock for an hour for the tide to fall

before exiting onto the Fosssdyke Canal. When the moment came, the boat didn't move—the accelerator cable had come adrift. Thank goodness it happened here and not out on the river! On a lovely mooring after Torksey Lock, linnets were singing in the hawthorn bushes. I went into Gainsborough by bus and visited the splendid Old Hall. The next mooring, at Saxilby, was also lovely, as was Burton Waters, alongside a swanky new marina complex, where another boater helped me with a permanent fix on the accelerator cable. In Lincoln, I was lucky to find a 48-hour mooring before Brayford Pool, and made the most of my two days there. Passage through the town was exciting, especially the Glory Hole, an archway over the canal dating from about 1160, and the guillotine lock at Stamp End came as

a surprise. Overnight stops followed at Fiskerton Fen Nature Reserve, in splendid isolation, and Southrey, with its tiny wooden church built by locals in 1898. Then came Woodhall Spa, a lovely little town, full of wartime memorabilia. From a mooring at Tattershall Bridge, I cycled to the imposing Tattershall Castle and, the next day, to check out Kyme Eau to see if it was navigable. With a one-foot thick carpet of weed at the entrance, the answer was a resounding “no”. After one more overnight stop at Langrick Bridge, it was on to Boston, where I met my Wash pilot, Daryl, who came in with two boats that had just crossed from King's Lynn. I'd booked him to cross later in the week, but he decided tomorrow would be better, weather-wise. We left the lock at 8am, dropped anchor (its first serious deployment) at 12.30, watched seals frolicking and an impromptu display by US fighter jets and VTOLs practising firing onto the sandbanks. Over two

hours later, we set off for the very long schlepp up the River Nene, with the tide trying to overtake us, arriving at Dog in a Doublet at 8pm. The great adventure was over, sadly not matched by a dire meal at the nearby pub!

Southrey Church

Navy seals above,  
grey seals below



# One man went to mow

David Fletcher takes a trip round the specifications for mowing the towpath

Every year, CRT contractor, Fountains, cuts 24 million square metres of grass. They start in spring and cut on a flexible repeat cycle until autumn. Then, in winter, they cut the whole towpath width, from the boundary to water's edge before the new growing season.

The removal of washwall saplings or other water's edge woody growth is dealt with at this time too.

The way that mowing is specified depends on the type of towpath. They look at the local waterway character, towpath surface type, structure, width, type of edging, location and level of use when setting mowing area, width and frequency. The overall plan is to maintain at least 1.6m cut width, or 0.5m either side of a surfaced towpath. Some towpaths are too narrow for the 1.6m width to be achieved, or do not need mowing so frequently.

The mowing plan should specify that moorings, bridge holes and locks are cut to a higher specification for access and safety. The frequency of cutting may be reduced where this will not impact access or the protection of bridges or locks, to benefit wild flowers etc. The standard frequency across all areas is six times a year on all towpaths and nine times a year on high footfall areas like visitor moorings and locksides.

## Specification for mowing

To meet the need for specification for a variety of towpath types, CRT has detailed four cutting regimes, known as 'MR's'.

Two are 'cut to edge' and two

are for wide towpaths where cut to edge is not specified. At one time there were many more MRs, but the number was rationalised some years back. Don't ask why the MR numbers are as they are; it is ancient history. The colours are those used on the mapping, so stay awake and remember:

- **Blue. MR1a:** heavily used towpath. Cut from water's edge to hedge/wall or break of slope, typically 6 cuts per year.

- **Brown. MR2a:** frequently used towpath. Cut from water's edge to beyond the towpath (0.5m), every 3-4 weeks

- **Red. MR2b:** cut either side of the (defined) towpath (0.5m), leaving a waterside fringe, every 4-6 weeks. No cut to edge. Cut to water's edge on bends for visibility (including boater's line of sight around bends or at narrows) or for access to facilities etc.

- **Yellow. MR3a:** cut towpath 1.6m leaving a waterside fringe, every 6-12 weeks. Cut to water's edge on bends for visibility, access etc., as MR2b.

The specifications that apply to the towpath are mapped on CRT's GIS system. Fountains follow this detail on GPS tools and can adjust the mowing cut accordingly. CRT has made these maps public with the aim that users can understand what is going on and propose changes. You can find the page by putting 'mowing' into the search link on the CRT map. You have to zoom in and find your local area, and the mowing regime appears as a colour strip. These work on mobile devices as

well. Level of use and character of the canal varies along the length of the waterway, so it is unlikely that one specification will suit an entire canal. CRT can also produce paper maps, showing the mowing plan, so that user groups can sit around the table and review their local patch.

So, all good so far, what can the problem be?

For the two specifications of 'blue' and 'brown', this is cut to edge, and the only issue is whether this is over-cutting. There is a considerable lobby for wildflower fringes and habitat for four-legged friends, so just because it is cut to edge now, does not mean there will be no pressure to change. Following the lack of mowing this summer, CRT's inbox is filled by wild flower campaigners asking for less cutting.

There is an incomplete list below of the canals where cut to edge is mapped universally. For the two specifications of 'red' and 'yellow', these are not cut to edge. This leads to an uncut fringe growth at the water's edge which, in a good growing season, can be over two metres high. This causes loss of access to the towpath, line of sight and hidden trip hazards—we are all familiar with this. The specifications for red and yellow call for cut to edge in these situations but, in my experience, this is not done and not specified on the maps as cut to edge. As a consequence, Fountains do not do it. I observe a variation in the regions; some get it and others do not. I also think there is an issue with supervision: with their many staff changes, CRT has lost the knowledge of how this should be done to be boater-friendly. I think it is now up to users to get this knowledge back into the mowing plans. Then Fountains can get the cutting done, apply the specifications and remember where the lines of sight and country mooring

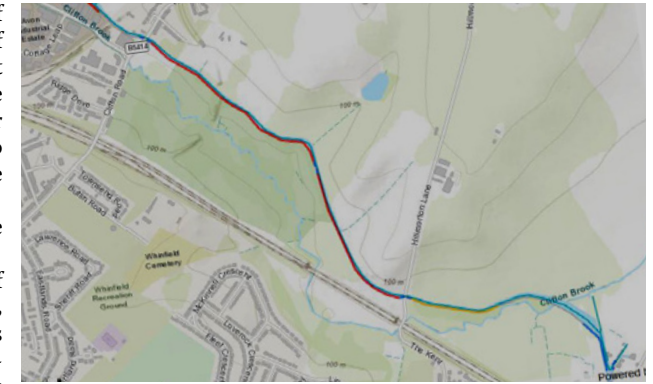


Photo: CRT



Photo: Peter Fellows



Photo: Peter Fellows

places are. CRT's own specification calls for:

- Approaches to structures, landings/moorings, winding holes and sharp bends to be kept clear





Photo: Peter Fellows



Photos: David Fletcher



of vegetation for at least 65m.

- Where tall waterside towpath plants and grass can be an issue, around a 100-metre length layby to the water's edge to be cut every 1km to allow boaters safe, informal moorings.

This means cutting to 'blue' or 'brown' for these areas. The only way this is going to happen is by getting the places on the maps. I think CRT needs help in selecting the 100m per km places. There is no promise of dredging and rings as formal visitor moorings, but we know the places where this is needed. Similarly, they need help in selecting the line of sight places. Unless CRT is told, nothing will be done.

#### Places that need more

I have spent a couple of hours looking at the maps and I can identify the places that need some focus.

These are the canals that have long pounds with no cut to edge specified, and limited evidence of mapping 'blue' for cut to edge for bridges, moorings and lines of sight. They are: the Southern GU, North and South Oxford, South Stratford, Worcester & Birmingham, K&A, Upper Caldon, Macclesfield, Trent & Mersey north side, Stourbridge, and Staffs & Worcester. Lack of bridges cut to edge is mixed. The lack of cut to edge for line of sight and casual mooring is almost universal. My 'very black list' is easy: Macclesfield and Trent & Mersey north. But the Worcester & Birmingham and Staffs & Worcester are not far behind. I cannot find any length of canal with 'not cut to edge' mowing that fully complies with CRT's specifications.

The test is easy:

- 1 Are bridge holes (and redundant bridge holes) mapped cut to edge for 65m either side?
- 2 Are known line of sight situations, on bends and at bridge

holes mapped cut to edge?

- 3 Are there long lengths of pound (more than about 1km) and mapped unbroken, not cut to edge either red or yellow? If so, where is a good place to have moorings of 100m per km?

Examples of the canals that are generally cut to edge, and therefore not a worry for this, are as follows: Huddersfield, Rochdale, Leeds & Liverpool, T&M east end, Peak Forest, Shropshire Union, Llangollen, Coventry, Ashby, Lee & Stort, BCN, and the northern GU. Unless, of course, you know different.

#### What can you do?

First, have a look at the maps for your area and see what you think. Then run the three-point test above and see what you find. Then get hold

of customer services and tell them.

Remember they need detail, not generality, and I suggest it should be in writing, or it may get lost. Then go to the user forum and ask questions, remembering that you are asking for mowing in accordance with the published specifications. Then, if you are very keen, invite yourself to CRT's annual customer service inspections and give them your input. Remember, CRT cannot handle the local detail at the national level. It has to be addressed on the towpath with the supervision of local area managers.

Finally, don't mix this up with off-side cutting, hedge cutting or reeds in the cut. These are different issues and not covered by all this. So don't confuse the good work on this one please.

Good hunting.

## Repairs to the Lancaster

Known as the 'black and white' canal, the Lancaster Canal originally connected Kendal with Preston and was built to enable coal barges to travel north from Lancashire's coalfields and move limestone south from Cumbria.

It is one of the country's few coastal canals, built as a contour canal with 41 miles of lock-free cruising—the longest lock-free stretch in the country. The Lune Aqueduct, built by engineer John Rennie between 1794 and 1797, is architecturally one of the finest aqueducts in England, carrying the Lancaster Canal over the River Lune on five semi-circular stone arches each of 70-foot span.

CRT has recently finished repair work on the Lune Embankment, costing over £1.5 million and taking six months to complete, after engineers had to face storms Ciara and Dennis and restrictions as a result of coronavirus. A 260-yard (240m) section of the canal, close to Lansil Industrial Estate, had a history of minor leakage over a number of years.

The stretch has been relined and other works included 55 yards (50m) of new piling to replace a corroded section and fenders to protect the new canal lining from accidental damage by boats.



Photo: CRT



# “Can’t really Trust ‘em!”

## Toddbrook report and resulting actions

Correspondence between [Graham Aldred](#) and CRT, following CRT's refusal to supply his report to waterway campaigner, [Allan Richards](#) after an FOI request.

**Editor's note:** The financial effects of rebuilding Toddbrook, plus the roll-on effect of increased inspections and maintenance regimes of similar reservoirs, will no doubt be felt by CRT and boaters for years to come. The practical effects of reduced water capacity and supply are already affecting boaters in the North West.

The information request referred to in the article can be found at -

[whatdotheyknow.com/request/trust454](http://whatdotheyknow.com/request/trust454)

There are three reports by Graham Aldred

Toddbrook Reservoir Dam Report', Sept. 2019

Analysis of the Damage to the Toddbrook Dam Sept 2019 additional

Proposed Modification and Repairs Feb 2020

[whatdotheyknow.com/request/640172/response/1575389/attach/3/Toddbrook%20Reservoir%20Dam%20Report%2051%20Redacted.pdf](http://whatdotheyknow.com/request/640172/response/1575389/attach/3/Toddbrook%20Reservoir%20Dam%20Report%2051%20Redacted.pdf)

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[whatdotheyknow.com/request/640172/response/1575389/attach/2/Repair%20proposal%2011.0%20Redacted.pdf](http://whatdotheyknow.com/request/640172/response/1575389/attach/2/Repair%20proposal%2011.0%20Redacted.pdf)

**D**ear Sirs,  
On 16 April 2020, you [CRT] wrote [to Allan Richards]: ‘While I can confirm that the Trust holds reports by Graham Aldred in relation to the Toddbrook Reservoir, these are being withheld in accordance with Regulation 12(5)(f) of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 on the basis that disclosure would adversely affect the interests of the person who provided the reports on a voluntary basis and has not consented to their release.

.....(It) would adversely affect the interests of Mr Aldred because it would be a detriment to his relationships with other parties about, or to whom he has supplied information. Likewise, the future supply of information by third parties to the Trust would be undermined because the Trust would not be able to maintain the necessary confidentiality that the suppliers of the information would expect. Disclosure would therefore stem the flow of information supplied, to the detriment of the Trust. I have therefore concluded that the public interest falls in maintaining this exception and withholding the information you have requested. I would suggest, given you appear to know the publisher of these reports, that you request them from him directly’.

A casual reader would be misled into believing that I have withheld my consent for the reasons given. This is not the case. I have not withheld my consent. Indeed, the CRT has never asked for it or consulted me on this matter. Suffice to say, I would have expected you to provide my reports alongside the two other reports you provided in response to Mr Richards' request. My reports are equally valid, have a wider scope and contain material that does not appear in the other two issued reports. Both the official reports which are a source of additional important information, were published much later, but the authors both reach the same conclusion as to the cause of the near catastrophe last August. The official authors have referred to my reports and quoted from them.

Part 3 of my report, alone from the other authors, constructively provides a detailed description of a safe and viable modification plan, which addresses all the failures and design errors currently at Toddbrook, some but not all of which are described or acknowledged by the expert authors. This plan deserves wide exposure beyond the CRT. It must be included along with any modification schemes that the CRT may invent which should all be critically reviewed by an independent technical panel. For this



obvious reason the three parts of my report should be published or made accessible as widely as the other reports.

I am concerned that this thread reveals more evidence of the systemic defensive antagonism at large within the CRT. I believe that the Public have a right to ask questions and hold Government funded bodies to account. The CRT are the temporary custodians of National Assets, many of which are dangerous to life and property. The CRT cannot be blamed for disastrous technical constructions installed before 2012, therefore should be open to questions. Cooperation with the general public should be straightforward and amicable. Those who live downstream of a dangerous dam are entitled to be made aware of it.

Finally you wrote to Mr Richards: ‘...I would suggest, given you appear to know the publisher of these reports, that you request them from him directly’.

I have circulated my reports to those I know who are interested in the Toddbrook incident and many will have forwarded them on, but this is a very limited circulation compared with the two other reports. I do not know Mr Richards other than, like many, through following his reasonable requests for information which are always denied. Mr

**Simon Robbins added:** Sorry but I'm going to have a little rant. What Graham Aldred's comments on the FOI request show is that CRT has no qualms about lying when it comes to these things. More to the point, the lie here is so blatant and thoughtless that it can be exposed that easily. What else do they lie to us all about? Those who say that people like myself, Allan, and others, who try to hold CRT to some sort of account, are just giving them a hard time out of some sort of angry personal grudge, please take note! It's not even that Toddbrook went wrong that really upsets me. It's the lies they tell instead of putting their hands up! Can't Really Trust 'em!

Richards was not asking me for a copy of these reports. He was asking you for information relating to causes of damage to the Toddbrook Reservoir Spillway in August 2019. In the first instance, you failed to disclose that you held my reports that were pertinent to his request. In the second instance you admitted to holding them but refused to provide them, wrongly suggesting that I had asked that they remain confidential because they would adversely affect my interests. In the circumstances, I would suggest that you immediately provide Mr Richards with these reports.

To avoid any doubt whatsoever: Disclosure of my reports will not adversely affect my interests. I consent to disclosure for the important reasons given above.

Yours sincerely,  
**Graham Aldred**



# Some thoughts on waterways reopening

Mark Tizard observes recent events



One of the bins in the carpark of the Black Horse at Greenford. The landlady, who is apparently is very pro-boater, was trying to get through to CRT and failing.



I am writing this, conscious that I have not been to the boat since the week before lockdown started. Like many, I have relied on social media, such as Facebook and the many CRT updates, to get my boating news. As time wore on, I became increasingly confused as to why CRT opened navigation on 1st June.

Perhaps it was jumping the gun, assuming that the Government was going to lift the ban by this date. Alternatively my cynical friend suggested that CRT was desperate to avoid the cost of giving boaters a free licence for another month.

Over the past few weeks, there have been several instances of uncollected rubbish, leading to overflowing bins and disgruntled boaters and public. Action was taken quickly by CRT when this was flagged up but, now that the navigation is open to all, this problem could well increase.

If you see bins that are full, please contact CRT and, if possible, keep your rubbish on board until bins are emptied or until you reach the next facilities. Hopefully, boaters will see some improvements when the new services contract is announced later this year.

There was a debate in Parliament on the restoration of the Montgomery Canal and much was made of the wellbeing effect of being by and on the canals. They are incredibly important to tourism, benefiting this sector to the tune of £1 billion in England and supporting 30,000 jobs.

Through this crisis, a lot of businesses are of course suffering, as well as a lot of charities, so hopefully these discussions will result in some positive action.

Words are all very well but deeds are more important. In the last CRT Boaters Update before the navigation was reopened, boaters were told: "We have done all our safety checks but, with more active use, we expect there will be some niggles and issues".

Then I saw pictures of a broken lock-beam that had rotted right through, followed later that day by a notice announcing the closure of the Rochdale Canal due to a 'damaged' gate.

Why was this 'damage' not picked up in any current or previous safety or maintenance checks?

I recently visited a boat where the owner was convinced that the alternator and battery charger were both faulty and that the batteries were badly discharged.

When I arrived and turned a light on, I could see that the batteries were probably fairly well-charged and, when I connected my volt-meter, it showed the domestic battery bank at 12.7 volts and the engine battery at 12.8 volts. An all-but-fully-charged lead acid-battery that has been off charge for several hours, or has had a moderate load put on it for a few minutes, will have a voltage

of around 12.7 to 12.8 volts, so that confirmed what I suspected from the light.

When I used my clamp-type DC meter, it showed both charging sources were working as I would ex-

pect but, as the batteries were well charged, it only showed a few amps in each case, so I could not test the maximum outputs.



A clamp meter for measuring current (this one is probably outside most of our budgets).

This kind of multimeter is for measuring voltage and continuity.

Normally, when this sort of thing happens, it is because the

boater's meter has a flat internal battery. When the battery is flat, these meters give all sorts of odd readings, but in this case the boater knew that and had replaced the battery.

The typical multi-meter used by boaters has a dedicated socket for measuring up to 10

## Take care when using multimeters

Tony Brooks warns of an easy mistake

or 20 amps, depending upon the meter. This is not a lot of use for charging, starting or glow plug circuits. In fact, they are a liability. If you set the leads to measure 10 amps and then connect it like a voltmeter, the meter produces smoke and suffers internal damage. This is a very easy inadvertent mistake to make. Hence I now use a clamp-type meter for DC amps but take care; many of the cheaper ones only measure AC amps so they are no good for a boat. I suspect that this boater had made this mistake and had wrecked his meter.



## TECHIE'S CORNER

Aspects of boat design, construction, equipment, facilities or maintenance



Tony Brooks has offered to answer any technical enquiries that members may have. Please send your question(s) to Tony via [nabonews@nabo.org.uk](mailto:nabonews@nabo.org.uk) and I will forward them to him. Note: Tony may use the questions and his answers without further permission to advise others.

# Rewind

Issue No 4, 2005

Howard Anguish explores NABO News from 15 years ago



**Edge to Edge** 2005 seems to have been a year of growth, particularly vegetation on both sides of the canal. The chairman mentions that, so far during the year, he has cruised more than 150 miles and noticed that whatever improvement work had been carried out during the winter was invisible from the water because of excess growth. Indeed a photo of 'Hadzor' on the Worcs & B'Ham canal, shows the towpath totally invisible

by overhanging mature trees. Let's hope that we don't return to those days using the pandemic as an excuse to do no work!

**Voyage between Two Seas** The second episode of Stuart Sampson's personal view describing the filming of this television programme, Stuart, who was skipper during the trip, tells some interesting tales about the joys and tribulations of filming, made more complicated by the underwater obstructions found along the route through the suburbs of Liverpool, not least a whole Morris 1100 lurking just below the surface near Aintree.

The film crew were insistent that the boat had to be filmed going through swing bridges with shots taken from different angles, which necessitated Stuart having to reverse through the bridges a number of times, which also incurred the wrath of the waiting local traffic! (I think we have all been there from time to time).

This episode also includes a good description of an incident needing

the use of the BWB Burscough depot dry-dock (now a listed structure and no longer in use), despite it being a Friday—Poets Day! He gives an interesting explanation of the use of this very large dry-dock, including the fight to stop water leaking out of the dock. The story continues in the next edition.

**Cat on the Prowl** Because the usual 'Fly on the Wall' was away boating, this edition instead welcomed the pub cat to give an alternative view of the Council meeting. It seems that some time was taken up by trying out a variety of NABO souvenir ball-points, but after some deliberation it was decided to defer a decision to decide the winner—important stuff! More importantly, at least to Council members, was the decision to allow them to claim half the Inland Revenue mileage allowance for using their own cars.

There was also a discussion about the appearance of 48-hour moorings on the Shropshire Union, reaching the conclusion that, although good in many ways, they did take up spaces on what used to be very good 14-day moorings.

**Where Am I?** A member's letter opened the discussion about how to identify locations on the cut and outlined the various ways in which you could give directions to your location, especially to the emergency services. Each system had merits but also had a number of drawbacks; interesting that it has taken until comparatively recently—even with the advent of GPS—for 'What Three Words' to finally come up with the answer—or has it?

NABO News back issues are available online at [nabo.org.uk/index.php/reference/nn-back-issues-2](http://nabo.org.uk/index.php/reference/nn-back-issues-2)

## Letters to the Editor

Opinions expressed here are independent of NABO policy and statements made have not been verified as true

### e-representation for NABO?

A few years ago, I brought up the subject of e-representation for NABO's regional reps, to reduce the demand to travel and reduce the time commitment. This was rejected in preference to face-to-face meetings. Now, because of the effects of the virus, Skype and Whatsapp phone conferencing have become the accepted method of contact, and will be for the foreseeable future. I feel that this opens up opportunities to perhaps get better representation in the areas where we have struggled in the past. It might give us access to the London area and the south, or entice members with knowledge of a particular area to help. This is the model I use when helping a boater at a distance and it works well.

Ken Hyllins

*Editor's note: Members can see from the list of regional reps on page 2 that NABO has vacancies in the Anglian, East Midlands, Middle Level navigations and the River Trent.*

### Electric scooters

About a year ago I sent this photo to CRT. I pointed out that, coming down the line, this was a bigger problem than speeding bikes! I said that they needed to address this before it reared its head. Last week I left my mooring to get water at Nantwich. When moored on the embankment for two nights, I witnessed three electric scoot-

### I name this boat ...

If you have spotted a boat name that made you smile, please let me have a photo to use in future issues. Here's one from Janice Steckerl.



ers, one solo and two together, all doing around 15mph! What hope is there for tranquil towpath walks in the future? Why will anyone want to risk walking them?

Brian D Jarrett



### Leicester Lockdown

CRT is in panic mode over the decision to bring back lockdown in Leicester. Even though the navigation through the city was open during the latter part of the original lockdown, providing boaters did not stay overnight, the Trust has now 'stopped all non-essential travel into and through the city with immediate effect!' From Bridge 18 right down through the city to Bridge 82—15 miles. No leisure boats or hire boats allowed, continuous cruisers are unable to travel through this area and people with boats moored unable to visit them, though all had been previously allowed during the last part of lockdown. Needless to say, the narrow towpaths remain fully open.

Keith Gudgin narrowboatworld.com July 1st



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