



# NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners  
Issue 5 October 2021



**Let's talk rubbish**

**Messing about in les bateaux**

**The green revolution and boating**



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# NABO News

The magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners

**Issue 5 October 2021**

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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 November 20<sup>th</sup> 2021.

## Cover photo

This month's photo was taken on the Kennet and Avon by Paul Kennard, while enjoying a hire boat holiday.

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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It's been a busy summer on the waterways as many people decided on a 'staycation' instead of holidaying abroad, with hireboat companies reportedly fully booked.

Unfortunately, those who decided to head north had their travel plans disrupted by a series of stoppages on the Macclesfield, Peak Forest, Leeds and Liverpool and Rochdale canals. Further south those on the Leicester Section of the GU and the South Oxford did not fare much better. The lack of maintenance brought

## Canals full of boats, but frustrations galore

Editor, **Peter Fellows**, includes a roundup of members' photos.

Ian Hutson meets one of CRT's boat spotters (see page 21)



lock failures and a lack of vegetation management resulted in many members sharing photos of overhanging trees with lines of sight obscured,

encroaching reed beds and places where the canals were narrowed to one boat-width. I've included a selection of their photos in this issue.

The issue of CRT's revised terms and conditions rumbles on, with letters from members agreeing with NABO's stance and Mike Rodd further questioning aspects of them in his Chairman's column. Mike is also delighted that the EA has made a U-turn in employing the car parking company to manage Thames moorings, but is concerned that the waterways maybe becoming 'Disneyfied', like Forestry England's Westonbirt National Arboretum, in an attempt to broaden their appeal to a wider audience to secure further Government funding.

Rubbish features in this issue, with members sending letters about the lack of facilities in some areas and photos of overflowing bins, but Helen Hutt has some sympathy for CRT, noting how difficult it is for the Trust to prevent fly-tipping by the general public.

Elsewhere in this issue, past NABO Chairman, Stuart Sampson, writes about his experiences of boating in France and Paul Monahan calls for the correct terminology when describing the language of the waterways. John Devonald surveys the furry and feathered friends that accompany many boaters and also examines the options available to boaters when diesel fuel is phased out in a few years' time. Mark Tizard reviews what has been happening to CRT's London strategy and its plans for the River Lee and Ian Hutson continues an occasional series of articles with a wry look at CRT's boat spotters.

NABO's AGM will be held at Tamworth Cruising Club in November and the Council members look forward to seeing you there.



At last we were able to have a real NABO Council meeting and it was such a pleasure to meet our new councillors physically! It is amazing how we have coped over the past year, especially with so much going on in both CRT and the EA—but nothing can replace a face-to-face discussion. With the AGM coming up in a few months, we do have an urgent need to recruit someone to take over Mark Tizard's roles as General Secretary and Vice Chairman. Sadly, Mark has sold his beautiful boat and will be stepping down from the Council. He has made a huge contribution to our work in so many ways.

### Those Terms and Conditions

CRT's current revisions to the Terms and Conditions for boat licences continue to dominate many of our discussions.

Whilst CRT has moved part of the way towards taking on board our comments (and our legal advice), there are still several issues on which

we cannot concede. Your Council is thus working up a crisp summary of our concerns that will be sent to CRT and widely publicised within a few weeks. This is important, as we are convinced (on the basis of legal advice) that there are issues that will cause problems in the near future for many boaters. For example, we cannot agree with CRT on whether

## Are we about to witness different licences for continuous cruisers?

Chairman, **Mike Rodd**, believes that this is what the new words in CRT's terms and conditions are saying, even though CRT denies this.

there are now different types of licences for continuous cruisers. CRT says that we are incorrect in claiming that there are, and that they have

Eight members of the Council (left to right); David Fletcher, Peter Fellows, Anne Husar, Helen Hutt, Mike Rodd, Peter Braley, John Devonald and Peter Braybrook



*CRT says that they have made no substantive changes, but neither we nor our legal advisors believe this.*

made no substantive changes, but neither we nor our legal advisors believe that this is what the new words are saying. The worry is that once this gets established, will CRT then start setting different charges and requirements for those with home moorings and those who continuously cruise? And what happens if (like many) you have a home mooring and then also go cruising for a good part of the year? As another example, we are also deeply concerned that the T&Cs essentially imply that CRT's volunteers are in charge of any boats passing through locks being operated by them. This cannot be right, as both the MCA and most insurers clearly state that the ultimate responsibility for a boat and the safety of those on it lies with the Boatmaster (in the case of an MCA-registered boat) or the person at the helm for other boats.

#### **U-Turns: Progress on the London Consultation...**

More positively, CRT's London consultation, which would have resulted in new mooring restrictions on the River Lee, has suddenly taken a U-turn, following an external review of the proposals.

And—surprise, surprise—one of the conclusions from the independent review was that the boating community should be consulted before future changes are proposed. Oh dear—how very obvious!

#### **...and mooring enforcement on the Thames**

In these days of U-turns, we have also been delighted to see the EA's

change of direction on the non-tidal Thames, where it has withdrawn its contract with the car-parking company, District Enforcement.

The Environment Agency has said that this followed "a review that subsequently identified issues with our internal procurement processes that were not undertaken correctly". We and the other Thames boater representative organisations that we have been working with are naturally delighted—and trying not to grin too widely or even hint at saying "We told you so!" NABO's concern has always been that this approach to mooring monitoring and enforcement by using a car-parking company could set a pattern to be adopted by CRT in the future. It's still quietly worrying, though, that the very same company has been retained by those developing the revised proposals for the River Lee! Ouch!

#### **Finding funding**

Both CRT and EA are coming up to their respective government funding exercises within a few years, following the (then) Prime Minister's plan some years ago to get rid of government quangos, taking them out of government into self-supporting, possibly charitable, operations.

As we know, one early transfer was BW (then part of the EA) to become the CRT charity, with government funding promised for 15 years; this will soon come to an end. As a result, we are seeing both organisations spending considerable effort (and funds!) on ensuring that our waterways are not (mistakenly!) seen as being of value only to the limited number of (apparently!) rich boaters who can afford to own a boat, or others who can afford to hire one. Addressing this pressure to become self-sustaining, both CRT and the EA, which is responsible for many non-tidal rivers, including

the Thames, are now trying to ensure that their waterways appeal to a much wider audience. Of course, all canoeists, kayakers, paddle boarders, etc. are required to pay a licence fee, but that is relatively small and often ignored—or it is paid through boater representative organisations as a part of their membership package. The bulk of the fees coming to CRT and the EA are from those who own or hire powered boats.

It was interesting that the Forestry Commission was also targeted by David Cameron at the same time as BW—unsuccessfully, however, maybe due to public opposition? It was nevertheless clear, even then, that it too would have to become far more self-sustaining, attracting significant new supporters and visitors and hence increase its own direct income and lessen the load on government funds. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? I recently visited Westonbirt, the wonderful National Arboretum in Gloucestershire, which is managed by Forestry England, a division of the Forestry Commission. Forestry England was first formed as Forest Enterprise in 1996, before devolving to Forest Enterprise England in 2003 and then rebranded in 2019. And what a transformation has taken place since our last visit, about five years ago! Huge new car parking, a new entrance hall with scooters and wheelchairs available for hire, and beautiful newly laid high-quality paths. One leads up to the expanded Visitor Centre, around which there are now various facilities for children to play on, while parents and families enjoy the pricey food court offers. Oh, and of course, the entrance fee is much higher than before—now there's a surprise! Fortunately, the wonderful trees remain for those who wish to get away from all the slick 'visitor destination' site layout. Does it work? Well, I

don't know what the actual finances look like, but I have never seen so many families there and the car park was packed. What was once a wonderful quiet place, close to nature, is now clearly also a very popular destination for families and friends wanting a day out with all mod cons. You even have to pre-book a specific entry slot. Would I go again? Well, it was a convenient meeting venue I guess. But I would certainly have some concerns if this sort of vision

*The revised T&Cs imply that CRT's volunteers are in charge of boats passing through locks operated by them. This cannot be right.*

for our historic and unique waterways, with their amazing working examples of the pinnacle of British engineering and the cornerstone of the industrial revolution, were to lead to their 'Disneyfication'!

#### **But back to what we do best**

Anyway, having just had a wonderful three weeks on our boat on the Mon & Brec, it was just amazing to be back on this most lovely and precious canal.

This was despite my wife's unscheduled plunge into the cut, having tripped into a hidden pothole in a heavily overgrown mooring—quickly followed by me, diving in to rescue her glasses—and despite the almost complete lack of both tow-path and offside vegetation cutting. Back home, our K&A Canal Trust trip boat in Hungerford, on which I am a volunteer Boatmaster, is back in business, so we are once again generating critical income for the Trust. Happy boating!



# Fly on the wall

Observes proceedings at the September Council meeting

**F**or the first time since November 2019's AGM, I buzzed down to the Tamworth Cruising Club to keep a compound eye on eight Council members gathered to meet face-to-face.

Everyone was pleased to see each other after so long and, for Council members who have joined since then and have only heard each other's voices during teleconferences, it was good to put faces to the voices.

They kicked off with a discussion of outstanding issues with CRT's new terms and conditions. These issues have not all been addressed in the revised T&Cs, issued in June after NABO's objections the previous December. Council members will draft another letter to CRT explaining why NABO considers these proposals to be illegal under the 1995 Waterways Act. But CRT has responded to the majority of NABO's 20 complaints about the quality of the GDPR and privacy policies and it has made changes. Three issues remain and NABO will write to the Information Commissioner's Office about these. Also CRT should not require a boater's agreement to the T&Cs as a condition of issuing a licence—insurance and a BSS certificate are the only requirements.

In London, following numerous protests from boaters, the proposed 'safety zone' on the River Lee has been abandoned and a rethink is underway. If a proper consultation had taken place, with boaters' views taken into account, it would have been clear from early on that the propos-

als could not have worked.

It seems that two organisations may be interested in renting the stop-house at Braunston. Apparently CRT's newly revised Heritage Advisory Group met for the first time in April, but no minutes of the meeting have been published. The advisory group says that it will provide a strategic overview but not deal with individual issues, such as the stop-house. After an initial refusal following a Freedom of Information request, CRT has now agreed to produce a list of buildings that it has sold.

Reports from across the network suggest that refuse facilities are under increasing pressure, with overflowing bins on the L&L, the South Oxford and Grand Union among many others. Some have been caused by the contractor missing collections—another example of the current lorry driver shortage? Council members had some sympathy for CRT as the incidence of non-boater waste fly-tipping at CRT refuse stations is increasing. This is a difficult and expensive problem for CRT and reflects wider societal problems with waste disposal. A trial using a rubbish boat to collect larger waste items is planned for the K&A.

NABO will write to Calor about the shortage of gas cylinders in some parts of the country. Some boaters who have a vehicle are buying refillable cylinders and visiting self-filling stations away from the canals. It is about a third of the cost of exchanging Calor cylinders at boatyards, but NABO does not recommend this practice on safety grounds.

Byeee....

The next Council meeting will be a teleconference in October, followed by a face-to-face AGM at Tamworth Cruising Club in November (Kettlebrook Road, B77 1BS).

Members are welcome to join in the meeting; please just let the Secretary or Chair know in advance (contact details inside cover).

The two remaining dates for Council meetings in 2021 are therefore October 9th and November 13th (after the AGM).

# Let's talk rubbish

As a CRT Boaters' Rep, **Helen Hutt** has seen several complaints about overflowing skips and bins this summer, and indeed has reported a couple herself.

**A**ll credit to CRT though, for dealing with every incident immediately a report was received. In at least two cases the contractor had missed a collection but despatched a lorry within hours. As to the cause . . . well, that's another matter. From the cases I know about, it's not boaters who are to blame for filling the bins and then dumping rubbish on the ground when the bins are full. It's members of the general public who, apparently, cannot be bothered to dispose of their unwanted items responsibly, and see a CRT-sponsored skip as an easy, free option.

CRT already spends over £1m a year on refuse collection, and this figure is increasing due to the scourge of fly-tipping. What's to be done?

Siting the bins in a locked compound is one possibility but experience shows that people just chuck their stuff over the top, or leave it outside the compound, or borrow a key from a boater. CCTV might identify offenders but does CRT have the resources to pursue them? Taking the bins away completely would provide a huge saving but would lead to even more serious fly-tipping—not to mention very disgruntled boaters!

There seems to be no workable solution to one of society's biggest problems. Just keeping on top of it seems to be the only way so, please, if you see an overflowing bin, report it immediately. Don't just bleat about it on social media! Use the 'contact

us' form on the CRT web site and email the relevant regional team, eg [enquiries.eastmidlands@canalriver-trust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.eastmidlands@canalriver-trust.org.uk).



The first photo (above) taken at 11am, when the problem was reported. The second (left) at 3pm after the contractors had done a first sweep. The skip was replaced the following morning. Photos: Helen Hutt

A member wrote to NABO: "We are at present heading into Liverpool. The lack of CRT boaters' bins on the route is deplorable. From Anderton Boat Lift services to Salthouse Dock in Liverpool, there is only one set of bins at Bridge 35, Moss Bridge near Burscough—a total of 49 miles on CRT waters. This was the state of the bins at bridge 35. The other route from Marple services is the same, with a total of 59 miles on CRT waters without bins."



# Summer on the canals

With intrepid NABO explorers, **Anne Husar, Helen Hutt** and the three **Peters; Fellows, Braley and Braybrook** (to say nothing of the dog)



Minsworth before the bridge (yes, there's a bridge)



On the Grand Union near Birmingham



Spot the sign



Grand Union Leicester Line



The South Oxford Canal



Grand Union South of Birmingham

# Disappointment on the Leicester Line

This summer, both Peter Braley and Helen Hutt travelled the Leicester Line, about two weeks apart—and both had a series of unwelcome experiences which they reported independently to CRT.

They included poor lock functionality, extended stoppages, poor or invisible signage, a serious lack of water and excessive vegetation growth. Nothing new there, perhaps—but when they all came together in the space of a few days it made a boater's life very frustrating.

However, all credit to CRT, their concerns were taken seriously. Peter subsequently met and had a useful discussion with East Midlands Manager, Phil Mulligan, at the Crick Show, culminating in an arrangement for one of Phil's team to go out with Peter on his boat to experience first-hand some of the issues he raised. These included signage obscured by overgrown vegetation and channels narrowed by an explosion of reeds and overhanging trees.

A few days later, Helen had an extremely detailed (nearly 3,000 words!) and informative email response from Wayne Ball, Area Operations Manager. It contained precise explanations of problems encountered at four locks between Derwent Mouth and Leicester and what action



Friars Mill moorings, Leicester

Photo: Helen Hutt

had been taken. Also included was what action would be taken with regard to misleading signage at Friars Mills moorings, information on weed and reed control, reasons for the acute water shortage and much more besides.

Too much to print in full in NABO News but Helen would be pleased to share her account of her frustrating journey along with Wayne's full response with any NABO member who may be interested; just email her at [helenh@nabo.org.uk](mailto:helenh@nabo.org.uk)

Helen says: "At the time, I told CRT I wouldn't be cruising this way again any time soon. Now I have some hope that things will improve and I will return to the city of my birth and the countryside of my childhood!" Only time will tell.

## GPs refuse to see nomadic patients

Friends, Families and Travellers conducted a mystery shopping exercise which found that 74% of GP surgeries broke NHS England guidance by refusing to register a nomadic patient in March and April this year.

A further 17 GP surgeries did not answer the phone despite receiving calls on three different dates and times from the mystery shopper.

Lydia, a liveboard boater, outlined her experience "My partner and I are

liveboard boaters, when I became pregnant, my husband tried to register with a GP, to see how achievable it would be for me—but without me having to deal with the stress. We cruised across 3 or so cities, trying to register with 5 or more GPs. No one would take my husband without evidence of a fixed address."

The full report is at [www.gypsy-traveller.org/news/locked-out-74-of-gps-refused-registration-to-nomadic-patients-during-covid-19-pandemic](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/news/locked-out-74-of-gps-refused-registration-to-nomadic-patients-during-covid-19-pandemic)

## Winter moorings

This year, CRT's winter moorings are divided into eight price bands that reflect each site's relative attractiveness (location and nearby facilities), level of demand and pricing in line with long-term moorings and private mooring operators.

The order has been reversed with Band 1 being the lowest priced and Band 8 the highest. Compared to last year, 64 sites have dropped a price band or have a price freeze and 42 sites have a price rise. Moorings will be available from 1st November to 28th February 2022. You can browse the available sites on the boat licensing website. Permits will be charged at a 'per metre, per month' rate, and you can book moorings in increments of one month. A list of sites and prices is at [www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/winter-moorings](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/winter-moorings). Bookings start on 1st October at 6am on a first-come, first-served basis. For further information, call CRT customer services on 0303 040 4040 or email [wintermoorings@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:wintermoorings@canalrivertrust.org.uk).

## Winter stoppages

71 stoppages are due to take place before Christmas and 94 are scheduled for the New Year.

Three will span the Christmas period. Larger works include essential maintenance at the Anderton Lift, new lock gates on the Bingley Five Rise locks, replacing gates on the Wigan Flight and repairing locks and a bridge at Stoke Bruerne.

The full list of stoppages can be downloaded from [canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/report/winter-notices.pdf](http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/report/winter-notices.pdf).



Photo: Chris Pink

## Waterways Ombudsman report

The Waterways Ombudsman, Sarah Daniel, and the Waterways Ombudsman Committee have issued their Annual Reports for 2020/21.

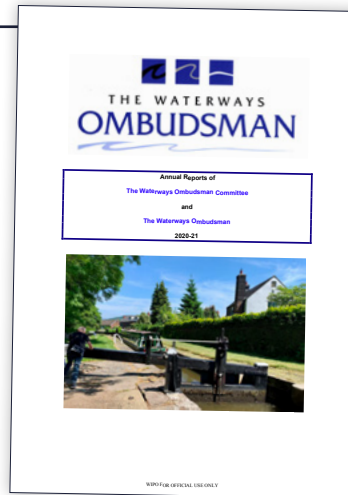
During the year, she received 77 enquiries about the Trust, a substantial rise in number from to the previous year when there were 41. The number of premature complaints more than doubled on the previous year's number to 34. Ten new investigations were opened and the number of complaints resolved was eight.

Of these, three were upheld in part, one was settled and four were not upheld. A goodwill award was proposed in one case which was partly upheld, which the complainant accepted. In the upheld complaint a goodwill award and apology was required.

As before there was a very diverse range of complaints, the majority about boating issues. The common thread was communication

problems. The Waterways Ombudsman scheme deals with complaints about the Canal & River Trust and the Avon Navigation Trust, which are referred to the Ombudsman after completion of the Trust's own complaints process.

The report is available online at: [waterways-ombudsman.org/media/1191/woc-annual-report-2020-21.pdf](http://waterways-ombudsman.org/media/1191/woc-annual-report-2020-21.pdf).



## What's in a name?

What we might be tempted to refer to as a long-handled gardening tool with a spatulate metal blade, **Paul Monahan** wants us to call a spade.

The inland waterways have a rich, colourful and expressive vocabulary all of their own, which is an important part of their history.

Unfortunately, this is being lost as more and more people use terminology associated with motor-cruisers and sailing boats, or even cars—as in 'driving' the boat (as opposed to the horse or steam engine, which would be correct) and 'parking'. 'Nearside' and 'offside' are similar imports from the world of wheels; it should be 'inside' and 'outside', from the position of the towpath, please.

Motoring expressions can sometimes be excused as the result of lack of knowledge, but yottie-speak is often used by those who really should know better. The RYA does not avoid blame as a consequence of its introduction of 'helmsman's' courses and certificates but, sadly, certain commercial magazines do not escape either. One of their regular contributors peppers his reviews with such choice blue-water terms as 'pulpit', 'dodger', 'sole-plate', 'prow' and many other unwanted fugitives from the deep. Possibly the most irritating is 'helm'. I hope prior to every issue that he will have used the phrase: "the helm was helming at the helm", but thus far I have been disappointed.

Every part of a canal boat has its own name as does every item on it and sometimes this agrees with nautical terminology, but that should never be assumed. For example, there are no ropes on a canal boat—rope is what you use to make

something else; lines, strings, snubbers, snatchers or straps. Even words specific to canal boats are often misused; 'cratch' is a good example. The trapezoidal wooden board at the front is not the cratch; that is a 'deck-board'. The cratch refers to the whole structure.

Consider too the regional variations. Would you recognise only the word paddles, or would you talk of sluices, slackers, ranters, cloughs (jack, screw, box, or scissor) or even types? Pounds, pools or reaches? Gates or pointing doors?

Please, let us all keep alive the language of the waterways; as George Orwell said, in 1984, "If the words do not exist, it is impossible to express an idea".

Driving the barge 'Success' with Krystyna helming the helm with lots of rope. Krystyna steering the butty 'Success' with a fine display of ropework; swansneck, top plait, bottom plait, kicking strap and ellum fender.

Photo: Roger Kidd (geograph.org)



# Companions on the cut

John Devonald surveys our furry and feathered friends afloat

**D**o you remember a few weeks ago we had lovely sunshine and warm evenings? I do ... just!

Anyway, I was sitting out on the canal on my boat watching the world (and boats) go by when a very handsome tug-style boat came along. The thing that caught my eye was the cage on the front deck with an African Grey parrot preening itself within. It brought back memories of a small oil tanker I worked on that had an African Grey as the ship's mascot. It took great delight in informing you it had the world's biggest... well, you know what sailors are like, it wasn't polite!

This got me thinking about the pets we keep on our boats and how it differs from people who live in houses. Dogs are probably the most popular non-human companion on boats. Many people have them for company and as mobile security for themselves and their boats. It's a wonderful life for a dog. My old German Shepherd used to love coming out with me on the canal, which brings me on to another observation. You would think that the majority of dogs on boats would be small breeds, just because of the lack of space, but a surprising number I see are large. Labradors, German Shepherds and Retrievers are quite common and there is a plethora of medium sized dogs like Spaniels. One lady I know who lives on a 30-foot boat has a Rottweiler that would have Mike Tyson crossing the road to avoid it, it is so big. Whenever I see it, it brings meaning to the observation: "Where does it sleep?"

"Wherever it wants to!" He's actually a great big softy and, as someone once said: "There's always room for a dog."

Then we have cats. I see many more cats on boats than I would really expect as I always thought they needed their own territory. If you are moving around it must get confusing for them but, from the numbers on boats, especially continuous cruisers, it obviously isn't an issue. Personally, I'm not sure about cats as pets as I haven't quite worked out who owns whom. They look at you as though you are hardly worth their effort unless it's food time. Don't bite my head off cat lovers, I can't help it if I am firmly in the dog camp! I expect it must be just as wonderful a life for cats as it is for dogs. Different places to explore, new rats and mice to catch, half eat and bring back the remains as presents. Lovely.

So onto the more unusual pets I have seen on boats. Let's start with fish. I know one boat that has a tank with goldfish. I suppose you would have to be careful about tropical fish in case your batteries go flat and you end up losing the heating, but I'm sure there are people who successfully keep them on boats. I do love watching fish and I can see them being therapeutic for some people. Don't they put them in dentists waiting rooms to calm people down before the smiling fiend is let loose on their molars? I also wonder if fish get seasick being sloshed around as the boat moves. I might have to ask David Attenborough about that!

Parrots we have mentioned and I have seen a few on boats over the

*"One lady who lives on a 30-foot boat has a Rottweiler that would make Mike Tyson cross the road to avoid it."*

years. Funnily enough I've never seen budgies, but there must be people who have them as pets on boats. I would have thought they would be an ideal companion for boat life, not least because of their small size. What about other birds? Oh yes, chickens. Someone passed me with a chicken coop on the roof of their boat. I presume they put it on the towpath when they moored so the chickens could have a root around in the dirt. Fresh eggs as well, yum.

Now I'm starting to struggle. I've never seen or heard of people keeping reptiles on a boat although I'm sure a nice python would be a good security asset! I'm guessing power is again the issue with having to have heat mats and lights but someone somewhere has got to have a thriving Komodo Dragon on board.

Other pets that don't seem to be common on boats are rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters or any of the caged rodents. Maybe they are there but people just don't mention them and they don't get taken for walks, so it's not obvious you have them. Perhaps it's because they are seen to be a child's pet. Everyone I know who has a hamster has it because a little person wanted it. Us adults remember how much their bites hurt when we were children and wanted hamsters ourselves!

I'm sure there are many different and unusual pets on boats that I haven't even thought of. Why don't you send me pictures or comments



about your pets and I'll do a follow-up article showing the diversity of companions on the cut.

My companions I hear you ask? Well I didn't really but I'm going to tell you anyway. I have carnivorous plants consisting of Venus fly traps, Pitcher plants and Sundews. They aren't very affectionate but you do have to feed them and they help the spiders to keep the fly populations in check. They keep the spider population in check as well if the spiders get too close!

I'd still rather have another dog though.



# Strategy, what strategy?

Mark Tizard shares some thoughts on mooring in London.

For several years, CRT sought views via the Boater Relationship Group and subsequently, when this collapsed, it facilitated meetings that resulted in the publication of its London Strategy document in June 2018.

This outlined the actions that CRT would take to address congestion in London. A key outcome was improved information and communication for boaters in the area. The principle conclusions were:

- More general towpath mooring and limited offside moorings outside the Regent's Canal area;
- Increasing the number of short-stay visitor moorings;
- Increasing the monitoring and management of towpath and visitor moorings and
- Major improvements to facilities—six new water points, nine new rubbish disposal areas, four new pumpouts, six new Elsans.

Since this was launched with great fanfare in 2018 very few of these changes have been implemented.

So in late 2020 CRT decided to try again. It launched yet another consultation to address what it saw as the increasingly unmanageable number of boats. NABO's response was simple: why not implement the 2018 proposals in full and assess their success before launching yet another consultation? Results were promised early in 2021. In April 2021, CRT launched its new safety scheme which, when implemented, would restrict or ban mooring on substantial areas of the River Lee. This caused a furore among London boaters, resulting in a substantial

local press campaign and two protest flotillas. A key outcome was the obvious breakdown in communication between CRT and its principle customers, boaters. CRT put its proposals on hold and launched a process of stakeholder engagement with independent facilitators to manage the process. This will result in the creation of a facilitated Lee Navigation Forum, not unlike the Boaters Relationship Group that was disbanded.

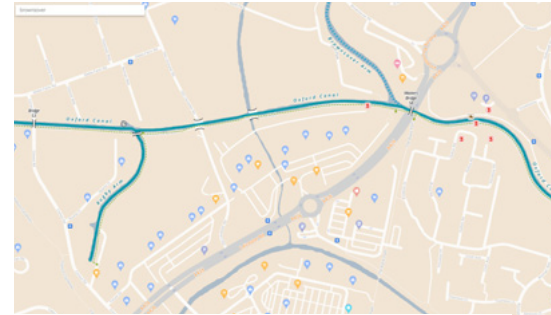
Meanwhile, as discussions continue, CRT says that it will seek to enforce existing mooring regulations more vigorously in the area by outsourcing monitoring and reporting to a car parking company, District Enforcement. This might have much wider future ramifications for boaters should CRT decide to expand the outsourcing of enforcement to a third party. Elsewhere District Enforcement earns its fees from the penalty payments it recovers.

What of the wider London Strategy, initially due to be introduced this Spring then deferred to this Autumn? There are obviously challenges ahead given that I believe that the water safety zone proposal was thought to be one of the easier proposals in the pipeline. In my mind we need a carrot and stick approach. CRT should demonstrate its commitment to improving facilities as promised in 2018 by giving a greater financial priority to them, dredge to the edge where currently mooring is difficult and enforce against those that moor inappropriately.

Nearly time for a new consultation I hear you cry—after all, it's nearly two years since the last one.

# Rugby's missing bridges

Helen Hutt has been investigating



along one side of a nature reserve and eventually ducks under the M6 and out into open countryside. The site of Bridge 54 remains elusive but I can report that Bridges 55, 55A (new), 56 and 57 are up here, alive and more or less well, spanning the still-in-water-but far-from-navigable canal.

I've cruised the North Oxford many times, frequently stopping at Brownsover for a Tesco shop, to fill the water tank or to catch a train. The bridge sequence here goes: 53, 53A (footbridge), 58 (carrying the A426), 59 and 66. I often wondered what happened to the ones in between.

Two aqueducts between Bridges 53 and 53A are, confusingly, numbered 54 and 55; but let's leave them out of the equation for now!

Whilst moored here for a few days in September, I took time out to investigate. Firstly, I discovered the old canal arm which runs northwards from Bridge 58, accessed from the adjacent footbridge 53A. What a delightful and charming walk it turned out to be! The old towpath runs



But what of the six missing bridges between 59 and 66, less than a mile apart? Presumably 60 stood where now a footpath stops dead on either side of the canal; it ran between Clifton-on-Dunsmore and Rugby. A little further on, the OS map shows a disused railway line. Presumably this crossed the canal at Bridge 61, although there is now no trace of it. Then there is a 'nip' where Bridge 62 could have been, at the junction with a feeder canal which now houses moored boats. Spanning this arm you can just about see Bridge 63 and there was once a second bridge, No 64, about half a mile further up. Back on the main canal, another railway line once crossed near Clifton Wharf and the wall of—I assume—Bridge 65 still stands by the towpath.

So there you have it! Another canal mystery (almost) solved.

# Messing about in les bateaux



NABO ex-chair  
**Stuart Sampson**  
describes boating in  
France.

Just before the recession, Carole and I had plans to have a barge built and emigrate to European waters. However the promised value of our home in Yorkshire shrivelled up so we bought a flat in Lichfield, which we could lock up and leave, and saw our beloved boat, Sulaskar, depart from Barton Marina on a low loader to an address in France we had absolutely no knowledge of.

I am sure as boat owners, readers will empathise. When we caught up with her, we found our little ship floating on the river Yonne in Burgundy, filthy and in need of reconstruction after the journey. Once settled, it was a very strange feeling at first waking up and finding the coffee jar where we expected, but emerging to 'Bonjour' rather than 'Good Morning.'

French navigable rivers and canals were under the management of one authority, VNF, so when we left the UK there was no need to consider multi-authority licences like the Gold Licence. Our full year's Liberté navigation permit, the *vignette*, was barely a third of the BW licence at the time, partly because they charged by area rather than length. Since then VNF has adopted length charging so there is less saving to be

enjoyed for narrow beam type boats. One thing you do get in on British waterways is free visitor moorings and facilities that are not provided by VNF.

Most of the navigable waterways in France are concentrated in the top right quarter, where commercial traffic still plies. The closer to the Belgian border, the bigger the gauge and the less emphasis on the *plaisancier*, the leisure boater. Commercial barges carry grain, aggregate, scrap metal and other bulk cargoes. We have however found considerable camaraderie between vessels over seven times as long as they are wide and barge crews will come out on deck to photograph us.

The standard gauge of the French 'narrow' canals is just about double ours in every dimension. Barges of this size are just about commercially viable for carefully chosen cargo types and routes, such as barley from the Champagne region to the breweries of Belgium. There's also it seems a desire to raise the level of the 'Îles de France' at the expense of surrounding country so barges carrying aggregate converge on Paris.

The one big difference between British and continental cruising is that in Europe you are not ex-

pected to alight at locks. Where commercial traffic runs smaller locks are automated. These locks are fairly consistent but the means of introducing yourself to them varies widely. The crudest, and presumably earliest, are plastic tubes dangling over the water which you reach up to and pull or twist on your approach. Fairly easy from a barge with lots of deck but tricky for small boats in the wind.

Easiest are pairs of infrared beams across the water. Vessels approaching break the outer one first without having to slow or divert. Sadly, I guess too many ducks used this method too so almost all beams lie abandoned, superseded by radio zappers. Beams are still used at the lock mouths.

The *telecommanderies* vary widely; the problem is detecting whether the boat is approaching upstream or downstream. Simplest is a single button box you press when passing the 'ICI' sign with its short range aerial. Fine, but you have to back up if it doesn't work. Others have two buttons: *Montant* (up); and *Avalant*

*"A big difference between British and continental cruising is that in Europe you are not expected to alight at locks."*

(down), leaving the boater to decide. Bother if you get it wrong. Buttons and sophistication multiply until you get something that has to log into the lock and uses up its battery charge before the day is out.

It all adds to the fun. Success is usually accompanied by an amber flashing light. A red stop light will stay on if the lock is in use. A green

Commercial barges  
All photos: Stuart Sampson





Tube Gibbet



The zapper has an ear splitting sound which we attempted to moderate with the cork!

light will accompany it while the lock sets itself. When the red light goes off you can enter. Once in the chamber, all gate and paddle operations start when a rod in the lock wall is lifted. There is another rod to pull in case of emergency, which stops everything. Larger locks capable of penning several barges are controlled by a human *éclusier* to save arguments.

Further south and west there are more pleasure-oriented waterways, where locks are manned and the traffic includes hire cruisers and hotel boats. Management of these is increasingly being devolved to local authorities or tourist boards. The River Somme is run this way too.

Moorings and facilities are not usually owned by VNF but provided by private enterprise or local authorities. Some are free to encourage visitors, but many charge, either for the mooring or based on your use of hook-up and/or mains water. If you want to overnight for free it is possible on commercial canals at locks, providing you give commercials priority.

Mooring on-line is not advisable unless it is well out of the way and your lines are anchored to something capable of withstanding the draw of barges travelling at full speed. You shouldn't expect them to slow but many do. Normally mooring is to bollards rather than rings, but in France there is much less bother with undesirables letting craft loose.

When we first arrived, it seemed the locals hadn't discovered the

*“Once in the chamber, all gate and paddle operations start when a rod in the lock wall is lifted.”*

joys of extended cruising—day and weekend cruising from boat clubs but rarely much further than that. The main pleasure users were the Dutch and Belgians in steel cruisers, and quite frequently sailing craft en route to the Mediterranean, from as far north as Scandinavia. The French are boating more now.

I am afraid my interest in the political side of waterways was retired when I left NABO, so I am no expert on the relationship between VNF and the users. My French isn't up to it, so I rely on the Barge Association (DBA) to champion our cause at meeting level. On a day to day basis, when things go wrong the little white van usually arrives quite promptly after a phone call. Most towpaths are fit to drive along and lengths and water levels are usually inspected daily where commercials ply.

We haven't been boating this year because of Covid restrictions, so I can't answer first-hand the question many will ask: “How has Brexit affected continental boating?” We used to cruise for four or more months a year and arrange *l'hivernage* (winter mooring), at different locations including Champagne, the Loire valley and close to Strasbourg in the Alsace. Now we have a more or less permanent base half way between Paris and Calais which will be more convenient if we are limited to three months. We have also made limited forays into Belgium and Germany and even had to use the Rhine; an experience I won't want to repeat.

## Has CRT forgotten to peruse nine-tenths of the data?

Ian Hutson shares some thoughts on boat spotters.

Ever received one of those passive-aggressive, thoroughly patronising, incredibly annoying “Have you forgotten to cruise...” emails from CRT?

“Why gosh! Yes! Something's been nagging at me for a while now that I just couldn't put my finger on and then your email arrived and I remembered! Cruising! So that's why I'm on a boat...”

Nobody knows exactly how often, or with what regularity, the towpath walkers walk the towpath and I suspect that rural ‘cowpat’ areas are patrolled less frequently than the ‘cor blimey guv, my old man's a dustman’ places, such as London.

Not long ago The System apparently logged me just twice during my cruising in a six-month period, once either side of Cholmondeston Lock (albeit headed in opposite directions and weeks apart). I duly received my passive-aggressive (but mostly just plainly-aggressive) “we assume all boaters without a home mooring are highly reluctant in matters of cruising” email.

The presumption was that I hadn't moved other than a few hundred yards. Rural though Cholmondeston may be, those two sightings were most certainly not from just two patrols of that stretch of canal by the spotters, and yet CRT ignores the data from the patrols in-between when I was positively seen to not be there.

Every patrol of any and every stretch of canal on the entire system from Tewitfield to Taunton always collects one of two cold, hard facts

about every boat's position. A boat is seen or it is not seen—i.e. logged where moored or where positively not moored and thus—by an odd rule of science called ‘Cold Hard Spatial Reality’—unarguably located somewhere else.

That I was also apparently not seen by any other patrol anywhere else is probably rare but not too surprising because I cruise on a totally toss-of-a-coin whim, and towpath walkers—well, who knows what they do?

Our meeting is never guaranteed. It is also immaterial; CRT still knew positively that I'd moved at least the distance covered by those intervening Middlewich Branch patrols.

There's no need for extra staff or even for changing the way sightings are logged. All that is needed is to regard not seeing a boat on any particular patrol as a positive item of hard data.

The Big Throbbing Electric Brain at the (stone-cold) heart of CRT's system could then use equally cold logic and think to itself: “Hmm—we patrolled Canals A, B, C & D, and he wasn't seen there, so he must be on Canals E, F, G or H where we didn't patrol this week—or else in a marina dry-dock out of sight, or on the Canal du Midi, or bobbing about in the water at the base of the Trevi Fountain in Rome—and they're all X, Y or Z miles distant from his last known position and/or none of our business, so perhaps I won't send that email...”

Maybe the Chairman's nephew could undertake the necessary software changes.



## TECHIE'S



## CORNER

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

Some of you will have seen NABO's bulletin on sustainable boating in the future and our decision to push hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) as the best solution for boaters.

This article is to put some flesh on the bones of the bulletin article and the reasons we have come to this decision. I will mainly be discussing electric and HVO as other potential fuels, like hydrogen and fuel cells, are really just non-starters at present.

## The green revolution and boating

John Devonald peers into his crystal ball.



Green has become one of the most important topics over the last few years with the Government making promises to cut carbon footprints, plastic waste and emissions. We have seen political demonstrations, the results of climate change in the weather, and the rise of the electric car as the future of motoring in the UK. Inland waterways users are going to be caught up in this spiral towards the green future so we need to try and move this in a direction that we boaters are comfortable with, both in the 'green' aspect and the financial implications.

As mentioned, the future of motoring is electric. The government has said no new diesel and petrol cars will be allowed after 2030 and many manufacturers will soon make only electric and hybrid cars. Some people think the future of boating on the inland waterways will mirror this, with hybrid and electric boats

gaining ascendancy. There are boat builders successfully making these now and I'm sure they will become more commonplace over the years. However, we in NABO cannot see this becoming the practical way forward for us to support in the present economic and social climate.

We have no idea what the future holds for us. The Government could ignore the boating world as being not big enough to warrant looking at, or we could get caught up in a total ban on the sale of diesel to anyone; we just don't know. The IWA has come up with its 'green future' document and CRT is in the process of writing its own, which will be interesting reading when it is published and we have added our own view to the discussion.

The obvious future would seem to be electric. The technology is out there and well tested, but as you dig deeper, the impracticability of full electrification on the canals and rivers is almost insurmountable. First, what parallels can we draw with the car industry? Well, not so many actually. Cars have a finite life, 15 or 20 years after the Government implements its 'no more internal combustion engines' policy. Most of them will have been scrapped and the fuel industry won't make enough to keep petrol stations open, so that will hasten their demise. Boats last much longer. Even ignoring heritage boats, there are many from the 70s and 80s still going strong and will be for many more years. You cannot expect boaters to replace perfectly good boats, which in some cases are their homes, with new ones costing in excess of £100,000. It's just not going to happen.

The alternative would be converting your boat to electric. I have been told that the cost to do that to a conventional boat would be in



### *The obvious future would seem to be electric...*

excess of £15,000 and looking at my own boat I can well imagine it. My engine space is tiny with no room for a battery bank, even with the diesel engine removed. It would have to be structurally modified to fit the batteries where my bedroom now is. Not ideal as I would have to totally reconfigure my accommodation.

Electric cars are designed and built to certain standards. The batteries are designed to take fast charges safely, so in modern cars you can get to something like 80% charge in 30 minutes and also charge them overnight off a home charger. Boats

### *...but the biggest obstacle to electric boats is charging. How can you charge up when on the cut?*

have no such standards. A battery bank is what the builder decides to put in, be it lithium, lead acid, AGM or whatever. In most cases, charging comes from 16-amp bollards and a full charge takes a long time. An all-electric trip boat in our marina uses both a 32-amp and a 16-amp supply to fully charge its battery bank overnight, which brings us nicely onto the biggest obstacle to electric boats: charging. How can you charge up when on the cut? There is talk from some quarters about a massive electrification of the waterways, with power bollards springing up at all the popular moorings so people can recharge their boats. In an ideal world that might be a feasible proposition, but CRT is struggling to maintain the present system, so any electrification would have to be government financed. I do not see why it would do that for a relatively small number of boaters when they haven't yet done anything for people with electric cars who don't have drive-ways on which to recharge them. If it happens, they will be so few and far between as to be practically useless,

Cory switches its traditional Thames tugs to biofuel [corygroup.co.uk/media/news-insights/cory-switches-iconic-thames-tugs-biofuel-part-net-zero-drive](https://www.corygroup.co.uk/media/news-insights/cory-switches-iconic-thames-tugs-biofuel-part-net-zero-drive)

Photo: Cory Group

*NABO has concluded that HVO as a direct replacement for diesel fuel will allow the continuation of boating as we want it.*

except as eco-points like the London moorings. An electric canal system is going to limit people to marina moorings and short trips within the range of the battery bank. How the 5,000 or so continuous cruisers will manage in this situation is questionable as even the biggest solar array is not going to stand a chance of keeping the batteries charged, except maybe in mid-summer.

Along with electric, let's look at hybrid boats. These will work. You have batteries and when they become depleted you either have a small diesel generator to recharge them or you plug into a power point. Figures from testing show this to be more efficient than a conventional narrowboat and you have the ability to run emission-free when going through cities and locks. Of course, the problem with hybrid boats is you still need diesel. In the event of a total diesel ban they are rendered as obsolete as a conventional boat.

At NABO, we have come to the conclusion that only a direct replacement for diesel fuel is going to allow the continuation of boating as we want it. HVO fits the bill. It is a paraffinic diesel fuel that can be used as a direct replacement for mineral diesel. It is a fossil-free, low carbon product made from 100% renewable waste, residues and vegetable oils. It gives sizeable reductions in greenhouse gas and exhaust emissions. It also significantly reduces nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions and particulate matter. As HVO has no fatty acid methyl ester (FAME) content, it significantly reduces the risk

of microbial growth (diesel bug) and water ingress to which standard diesel products can be susceptible. This means you have less exposure to fuel contamination and less risk when storing it for long periods of time. From one of the websites promoting HVO, the benefits of this fuel are:

- FAME-free, fossil-free and sulphur-free;
- Year-round performance and exceptional cold-weather performance;
- Up to 90% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions;
- Shelf-life of up to ten years compared to one year for mineral diesel;
- A simple step towards 'net zero' with no capital expenditure requirement;
- 100% hydrocarbon, sustainable, renewable and biodegradable;
- Clean burning, reducing particulate build-up and engine wear;
- Drop-in alternative for mineral diesel (conforming to EN15940) and approved by numerous original equipment manufacturers;
- Produced from renewable and sustainable sources.

Of course, what we are really interested in are its green credentials and the fact that it is a direct replacement for mineral diesel with no machinery modifications. Also, it doesn't cost too much more than mineral diesel at 10–15% more expensive.

To summarise we really cannot see a downside to HVO except the higher cost. There is already a fuel boat on the Thames supplying it and its introduction means no huge expense to CRT, the Government, marinas and, most importantly, us boaters. Therefore it is NABO's choice for the future and we hope other organisations will agree and join us in promoting HVO for sustainable boating.

## Rewind

Issue No 5, 2006

Howard Anguish explores NABO News from 15 years ago

**Chairman's Column.** One for the 'Where did things go so wrong department'? Stuart Sampson, Chairman, comments about members he met on a recent cruise bemoaning the scarcity of the 'lesser spotted lengthman'.

This led to a telling comment which I quote: *'one hears, at least once a year, that there is a breach or catastrophic failure somewhere on the system. This isn't confined to BW; the collapse of Osney Lock bullnose last year (2005) shows it happens to the EA too. Immediately it jumps to mind that if the waterways were properly inspected, a 'stitch in time might save nine'.*

My only comment: 'At least once a year!' Oh, how I wish that this was still the case! CRT take note.

Further comments in his column refer to issues of speed and noise—especially the *'nasty little petrol generators... deliberately placed far from the offending boat, hence as near to you as possible'.*

Despite being well discussed over the years I have been boating—nearly 50 years—neither of these issues ever seem to be resolved. A purely biased view, but I wish more boaters would concentrate on learning the basics of boating and boating etiquette and worry slightly less about making their new boats match their houses as closely as possible. Let's start a campaign 'Bring Back Boatmanship'. How about it, Council? (Rant over)

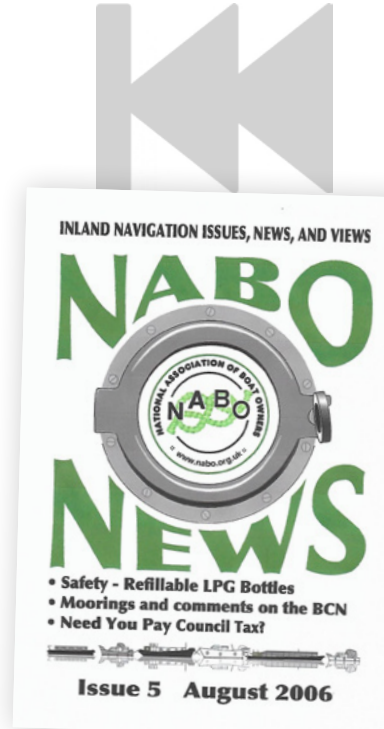
**Why fear the BCN?** A fascinating and comprehensive article extols the virtues of the BCN in all its glory, a less well known but historically

significant part of the waterway network.

Even more relevant today, Stuart Sampson sums up his article with an appeal for boaters to spend more time exploring this under-visited part of the system. *'Obviously I am appealing here to the canal enthusiast, but the area has much for others too, concerts and theatre in central Birmingham within a short walk of your floating accommodation. Restaurants and shopping too, and more retail therapy at Merry Hill. The Black Country Museum is a must. If you want to escape congestion, get away from lines of unauthorised residential boats or other on-line moorings, or you feel the challenge has gone from boating, try boating the BCN properly, not just rushing through as fast as possible. We need to keep reminding the planners and powers-that-be that canals were dug for boats.'*

**Rivers** During June 2006 the River Thames catchment received only 31% of its normal rainfall with a significant decline in river flows.

This led to an application for a Drought Order for London and NABO joined in the call for boaters to use water wisely, reiterating the appeals for care and consideration when boating the Thames, with a number of ways in which boaters could help in keeping the unnecessary use of water—especially when using locks—to a minimum.



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

### New national park

I found the piece on a new national park interesting. As a boater, I find the idea of making the canal network a new national park very appealing if this would have a separate managing authority, solely charged with maintaining navigation, the canal infrastructure and boating services. It is clear that the current CRT model based on creating wellbeing projects in order to secure government funding will gradually, or not so gradually, marginalise boaters and there will never be sufficient funds allocated to provide preventive maintenance to keep the canals open for boating, and CRT will go on selling the family silver until it is all gone.

The idea floated at the time of CRT coming into being was that canals could use the National Trust model, with funding being raised from donations and licence charges. This was clearly flawed as all the canal users except boaters expect free access to the canals at all times and the Friends of the waterways seem to be few and far between. The problem would be in the allocation of funding to two bodies for the canal network rather than one and, as the Government may view dealing with one authority for canals as one too many, the idea would surely be kicked out into the long grass on the canal towpaths.

*Stuart Clarke*

### Farewell

Sadly, we have sold our boat NB 'Break-Away' and as we have moved on in a different direction, membership of NABO is no longer appropriate for us. We now find canalling too strenuous and, no longer being able to maintain the boat as well as I would wish, have decided it's time to give up. The continued lack of maintenance and frequent failures on the system have contributed to this and, to us, there seems a different atmosphere around the inland waterways than there was 30 plus years ago. It has been our pleasure

to be joint members from the early days and still believe that NABO is the only national organisation with boaters' interests of primary concern. As a voluntary organisation it is quite remarkable what so few of you have achieved. Regrettably the continued existence and influence of NABO is ever more important. We thank you all, past and present, for all your hard work on our behalf and wish you every success in the future. Take care, stay safe and enjoy your boating.

*Terry Lomas, Membership No. 406.*

### Birmingham towpaths

Here in Birmingham our superb high speed cycle tracks (a.k.a towpaths) have developed some serious faults with large cracks appearing on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal close to Bournville and University Railway Stations. The damage occurred in April last year with CRT making a 'temporary' repair about two months later. This is now getting worse.

Another 'temporary' repair was made to the towpath by Selly Oak winding hole about ten years ago! Also, a section of the towpath by Bristol Road Bridge has disappeared! I think CRT has lost the plot and need to get their priorities right. Given that some of the lycra clad cyclists seem to think that they are competing in the Tour de France, it won't be long before a serious accident happens. Has similar deterioration been seen elsewhere?

*Mike Russell, Gas Street Basin*

### T&Cs (1)

What you are doing on CRT's proposed new terms and conditions is terrific. All boaters owe you huge thanks. It is all too typical of bodies these days to try to slip in changes under the radar which often seem uncontentious. A huge eroding of trust results.

*Robert Neff, Mercia Marina*

### T&Cs (2)

Many thanks for all your work. A brief reply on your request re CRT's T&Cs: Yes, absolutely I agree that this is an important matter for NABO to concentrate resources on and continue monitoring and holding CRT to account. I was flabbergasted to read what they had put in after the consultation. My suspicion is that no other boaters' organisations would check this and call it out, and it is so important to many, potentially very many, individual boaters who stand to lose their homes and lifestyles when these nasty little changes will be used to catch them out in the future. Whether it's down to incompetence or deliberate attempts to change the T&Cs in CRT's favour—who knows, probably a combination of both—it needs timely intervention and rigorously calling out every time. I don't think IWA or RBOA have the will to do this, and my feeling is that this isn't NBTA's strength either. I have always seen this holding of BW/CRT to account as one of NABO's biggest strengths and the main one which I bang on about to other boaters when given the chance.

Thanks and best wishes

*Ellen Dexter*

### T&Cs (3)

The clause 11.2 which is causing concern to NABO regarding the statement that boaters must follow the instructions of volunteers is something that as regular boaters we would be concerned about. The employment of volunteers by the CRT is an admirable community initiative which has huge benefits for both the organisation and waterways users. However in our experience, the ability and competence of those volunteers assigned to manage the passage of boats through locks in particular is very variable. Whilst they may have undergone training and supervision to undertake their volunteer role, as with any job, the ability of people to carry out their assigned tasks varies considerably. Employment of volunteers has to include access to the scheme by anyone who meets basic criteria. As a health professional with more than 40 years' experience in the NHS and latterly working in the community as a Specialist Community Public Health Nurse (HV) I often recognise when

people I meet may have challenges to their physical and mental health. This has been the same when we have encountered CRT volunteers who may find decision making a challenge or have difficulties with communication. The assumption that instructions must be followed from a volunteer who may have very limited boating experience, or other compromises to their cognitive ability, is very alarming.

One of the issues we had recently was with double locks on the Grand Union canal when, if there is only one boat going up in the lock, opening the paddle a small amount on the side the boat wishes to exit allows the water flowing in to gently bring the boat to the side of the lock without getting off and handling ropes or excessive use of the engine. The paddles can then be fully opened to speed up filling of the lock and the boat doesn't get bounced around at all. This makes a much smoother passage for all those on board. We have encountered volunteers who insist on opening both paddles fully straight away "because that is the way they do it", despite our request for them not to do this. This means the boat can be tossed all over the place which is unnecessary and uncomfortable for those on board as well as potentially causing damage.

We also encountered a volunteer who was supposed to be assisting our passage down the Hatton Locks but whose inability to be proactive in seeing what needed to be done next or make decisions impeded our journey rather than helped it. When faced with a half full lock and a boat going up and a boat going down—he just stood and looked at it leaving us to decide who had right of way. He spent a lot of time just standing muttering to himself.

Two small issues which were not a matter of life and death but I am sure other boaters will have the same concerns raised by NABO; and the issue about insurance is valid. The owner or skipper should be in charge of their vessel at all times. I can understand both sides of the argument, however, because we do meet boaters whose lack of experience or understanding leads them to poor decision making as well and a CRT volunteer is in an ideal position to help put things right and give advice. Once again, it may be a question of semantics and how CRT has worded this clause which needs to be reviewed.

*Liz Sargent, NB Inglewood*

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