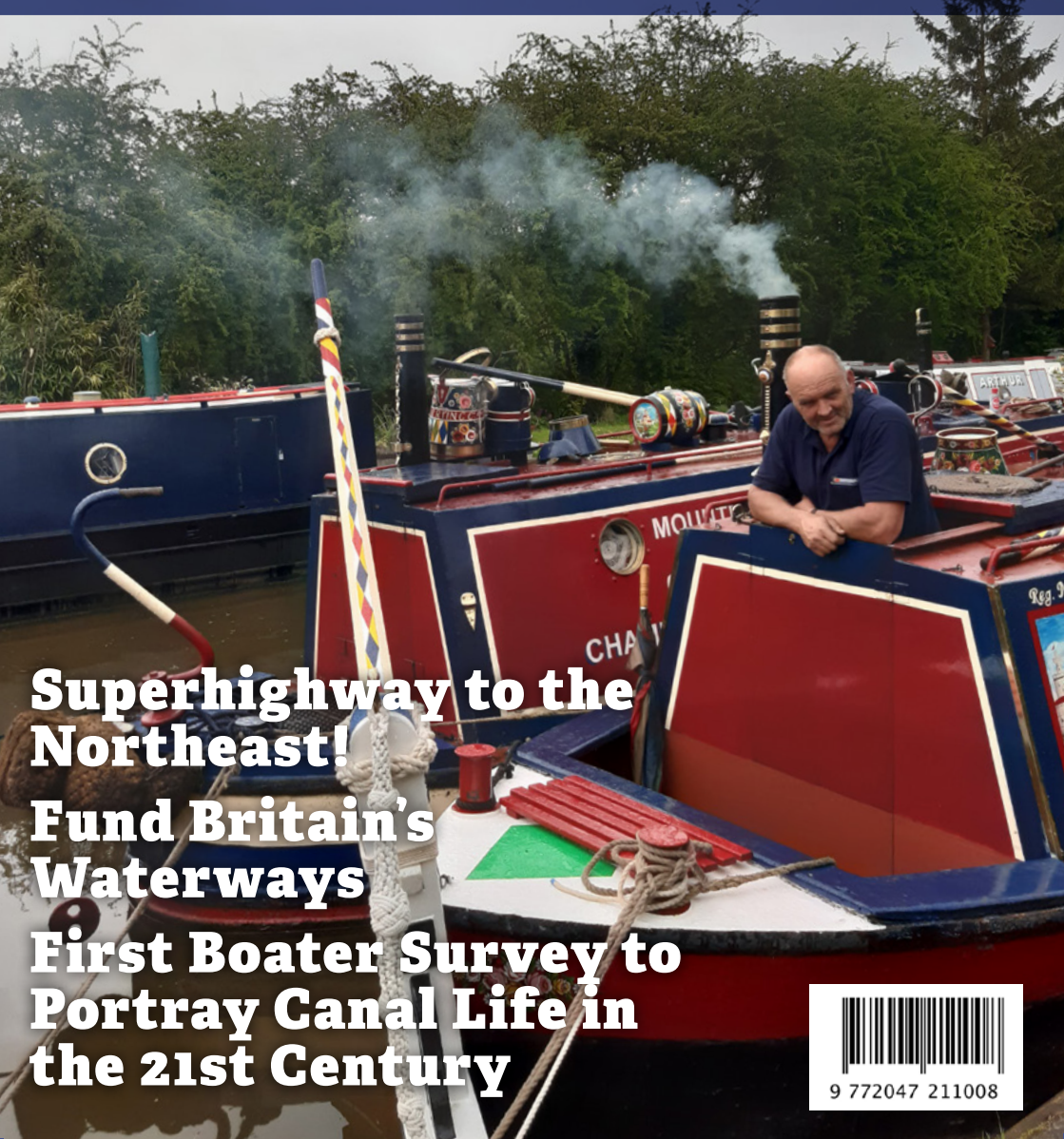




# NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners  
Issue 3 June 2023



**Superhighway to the  
Northeast!**  
**Fund Britain's  
Waterways**  
**First Boater Survey to  
Portray Canal Life in  
the 21st Century**



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# NABO News

The magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners

Issue 3 June 2023



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## Next NABO News copy date

Articles, letters, photos and cartoons are most welcome. Please email your contributions to [nabonews@nabo.org.uk](mailto:nabonews@nabo.org.uk) or post to the Editor by 16th June 2023.

## Cover photo

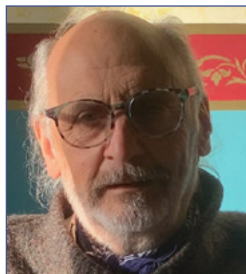
Richard Chamberlain relaxing at Norbury Festival onboard Admiral Class narrow boats Mountbatten and Jellicoe. Photo by the Editor

Please email your photos for the front cover of NABO News to the Editor, as JPEG attachments, ideally portrait format with a file size of 2MB or larger.



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I hope everyone had a good Easter break. The days are lengthening even if the summer warmth is a little slow in arriving. We took the opportunity for a couple of weeks' trip down the top end of the Staffs and Worcester Canal as far as Cookley and back. The scenery was splendid although the canal was very quiet.

## Where now for Dr Foster?

Editor **John Sadler** reflects on CRT spending in Gloucester Dock

Although we have to support CRT in its management of the waterways and heritage I think we can fairly question some of the expenditure decisions. Maybe if we knew more of the reasoning behind them we would better understand.

For example, there was a lengthy mooring suspension in operation in Gloucester Docks. There was to have been a massive winter dredging operation to remove the silt deposited last summer. A winter dredging operation is said to disturb the fish less. The Sharpness canal supplies Bristol with a large portion of its water supply, so even when the River Severn is low, water has to be pumped into the canal and the docks become a settling pool. One would hope that Bristol Water contributes something towards the £500,000 dredging cost, but we don't know.

Imagine how surprised I was to learn that CRT is boosting greenery and nature and providing shelter for fish in the docks by installing floating reed beds in Victoria basin. This was to supplement beds already set up in the Barge Arm last year. The new fish habitat under the shelter provided, now have a summer

dredging to cope with now boaters are to be allowed to moor again.

One would hope that Gloucester Council is contributing towards these splashes of colour from reeds, sedges and yellow flag irises surely not intended for boaters' enjoyment! There may be sound ecological reasons for this but we don't know what they might be.

Will the work be ready for the next Tall Ships gathering? That usually attracts 10,000 plus visitors to the Docks and subsequently the city.

Both the National Association of Boat Owners (NABO) and the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) are very concerned about the level of funding being made available to all our inland waterways by government (national and local). Recently Mike Rodd Chair of NABO wrote to a number of people suggesting a meeting of organisations involved with the inland waterways. IWA as part of its campaign Protect Our Waterways was planning to do the same. NABO and IWA have joined forces in arranging an initial meeting for interested parties.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the single subject "funding for the inland waterways" with the aim being to agree the need for joint action to influence government. Collectively the waterways family can demonstrate much more with politicians than we can individually. The more organisations that sign up, the better. An initial meeting was set up by for 5 May the preliminary results of which are included in the Users Forum Reports section under Fund Britain's Waterways. This initial meeting was intended to be short and totally to the point. Hopefully, when other organisations sign up there will be more detailed meetings at which actions can be agreed.

Here's to Summer and enjoyment of canals,



Whilst we can only hope for better news by the time you read this, it is evident that both CRT and the EA will receive, at the very best, a reduced level of government funding once the current tranche of grants expires. Recent meetings with the leaders of CRT have made it very clear that they are certainly actively planning on how to cope with this situation. Our NABO Council is fully aware of how serious this will be for all our boating members and of course for the whole waterways network throughout the UK.

However, we are also fully aware that we represent only a relatively small proportion of active boaters. What is worrying is that, talking to many committed boaters, we find that there is either a total unawareness of the present looming situation, or that they are so busy keeping a low profile, they are not

keen to be involved in any formal representative structure.

Your Council thus believes that it is essential to try to pull together all the existing organisations and groups that have an interest in seeing the canals and rivers continue to be the wonderful (and, in many cases, absolutely unique) assets that they are. Without them, the industrial revolution would never have



## We need to unite to save our legacy

Chairman **Mike Rodd** explains how NABO is looking to join with the other waterways organisations.

taken place here, but their enduring legacy lies not only in their history, but also in their ongoing contribution to tourism, commerce, leisure

The Editor Passing Through  
Gloucester Docks 2019  
Photo: Sharon Wells



*[Many MPs] responded by saying that they had no idea of how the waterways are funded, and indeed, had not realised how and why CRT had been set up.*

and wellbeing! To this end it seems vital that all boating and canal related organisations should present a united front to Government.

We have already written to every MP with a canal or river in their constituency, and the responses have been fascinating—and very revealing! Of course, many of them simply asked the relevant minister for a standard response, but others responded by saying that they had no idea of how the waterways are funded, and indeed, had not realised how and why CRT had been set up. It was also very worrying that, when questioned in Parliament as to if and when CRT would know about the funding, the responsible (?) Minister's reply clearly demonstrated that she did not even know what CRT is!!

Your Council therefore agreed at their recent meeting that the only viable option at present is for CRT to continue, and that we all need to get together to present a united approach to the current problems. Of course, we don't always agree with the policies and actions of every other relevant organisation but, given that there really is no alternative to CRT, it seems to us that a unified stance on this key issue is vital, and that all of us should approach our MPs and publicly support CRT's continuing funding, while continuing to consult with one another. As a start, we have contacted any waterways related organisation that we can think of suggesting this

approach. The IWA has wholeheartedly supported this initiative, and has agreed to host a virtual meeting of the chairs of any such organisation which will have taken place when this issue reaches you. Watch this space!

Yes, we at NABO have always described ourselves as a "critical friend" of CRT and yes, of course, we are sometimes not supportive of their actions if we consider that these are contrary to the interests of our boating community. But again I say, there is no alternative, one cannot envisage any Government proposing to move CRT back into Defra, or for it to become a part of the EA's waterways operation. It was also clear from recent talks with the EA that any merger with CRT is definitely off their agenda. I have to confess that I have always felt that any CRT deal would be subject to their taking on EA's waterways obligations, but I am clearly proving to be wrong on this, from both sides.

On the EA front, however, there are some positive moves. Tony Riley of the Thames Motor Boaters Association (TMBA), acting on behalf of the boater representative groups on the Thames (including NABO), had worked closely with the EA to structure an agenda for the most recent meeting of the Thames Navigation Users Forum (TNUF). Previous meetings had been very much a matter of EA "preaching" to attendees, with endless reading of presentations, whereas we were looking for more fruitful consultations. As a result, the EA had prepared excellent pre-meeting documentation for our latest meeting, and the attendees could get down to detailed discussions. What a truly excellent change in attitude, and it really appeared that, for the first time EA staff were actually seeking input and help from the various

boating groups. It was clear however that these are early days. The new folk running the EA are concentrating on much detailed planning, without necessarily taking full cognisance of previous work.

Following hot on the heels of the above TNUF meeting, there was a second meeting of the newly formed “National Waterways Forum”, a large new body with over 30 delegates from literally any organisation with an interest in the waterways run by the EA.

The initial meeting, a few months ago, was dominated by lengthy introductions by all members, and then (as with TNUF) a series of “read” presentations from EA staff, all really lecturing the delegates, telling them what the EA was going to do! Although these had been envisaged as annual meetings, many delegates felt it essential to consult more frequently, and this was (reluctantly) agreed by the EA. In the interval between the two Forum

meetings, one-to-one sessions were held between most of the representatives of the various member groups and EA staff. Whilst better structured, this second meeting once again had no supporting paperwork, and largely comprised endless presentations by EA staff. Nevertheless, and most importantly, feedback from the one-to-one meetings had helped determine the EA’s priorities for immediate action. Lots of great ideas—but we await action!

So, we are entering a really critical stage for the funding of all our waterways. We have to be rational and accept that—given other pressures on the Government—the waterways cannot be high up on their agendas. But all of us who boat, or work on, or simply enjoy the waterways, must do everything we can to ensure that they continue to be such a special and integral part of the wonderful land we live in.

With at last some serious sunshine, I wish you all happy boating!

Jellicoe and Mountbatten at  
Gnosall C’Fest 2022  
Photo: Sheila Hurst



# Fly on the wall

Observes proceedings at the Council meeting in April



**T**he charity status of Canal and River Trust was resolved by removing Defra from the board of trustees. No news on Braunston Stop House; asset selling continues.

No response from the Attorney General to a letter protesting live aboard boaters not receiving energy subsidies. See page 12 for Calor gas news.

In the absence of a decision on future funding by Defra, the question was asked what should we be doing to urge adequate financial support? It is quite likely that the Environment Agency(EA) will also be subject to funding cuts. Nick Roberts as a guest at the meeting put forward the suggestion that CRT is the body with the authority and ability to run the network even if it doesn't have the resources. It was suggested that one of the ways CRT could display their competence was by seeking ISO 9001 approval. In the board meeting of January 2020 it was stated that to support the Grant review, the Trust would work towards formal ISO Certification to ISO 55001 with improvements to their quality management systems in accordance with ISO 9001 although they would not seek formal ISO 9001 Certification. Benefits of the Trent Link were discussed with Nick Roberts. We would like to see greater cooperation between CRT and boating organisations. We are often critical of CRT's spending priorities without knowing rationale behind their financial decision making.

Regarding consultations and tri-

als on mooring times, such as in Birmingham, Worcester and Milton Keynes, it was felt that changes should be data driven. Some recent 'Census' results have been withdrawn due to mismanagement of data by the consulting company.

## Regular Regional meetings.

There seems little interest in the South West, with few attendees from the boating community. The recent West Midlands meeting was well attended and vocal, particularly concerning charges for events. There were presentations on fishing, ecology and hydrology (showing some water quality measurements were recorded).

## Stoppages and winter works.

Last year many planning group constituents were disgruntled about the handling of stoppages, especially the effect on hire fleets and traders. First draft for next year has been reviewed with 40 projected works sent back for clarification, some dependent on third parties. The programme coordinator is leaving.

On the media and publicity front Facebook and Twitter have been busy. There have been discussions on the possibility of closing one of the three Pennine crossings; the recent licence consultation and on other issues. In a response from Richard Parry it was suggested that boaters as an easy "cash cow". NABO membership has increased, probably because of the discussions on Facebook. Instagram has 70 followers, Twitter approximately 2,000 and Facebook 3,800.

## NABO Calendar 2023

The Council meetings in 2023 will be on: 17th June (by teleconference), 2nd September, 7th October (by teleconference) and 18th November (after the AGM). Members are welcome to attend; please just let the General Secretary or Chair know in advance—contact details inside front cover.



## Wales and Southwest Mike Rodd



On the 28th of March Canal and River Trust(CRT)) held its' South West Annual Public Meeting of their Regional Advisory Board, led by the outgoing chair, David Hagg.

The popular CRT Director, Mark Evans, gave a crisp summary of the work undertaken over the past twelve months, highlighting the key projects and partnerships, and he then outlined CRT's priorities in the South West and what they hoped to achieve in 2023. This was followed by a presentation on the work being undertaken by the CRT volunteers led by David Fearn, well-known for his work on the K&A.

Sadly, the number of people who attended the meeting was very low and NABO seemed to be the only boater representative organisation which bothered to be there. This must be of great concern to CRT given the current issues

## Around the regions with NABO's regional reps

regarding the future funding of CRT. CRT needs all the support it can muster by displaying their achievements to interested parties.

### East Midlands Regional Representative

NABO wishes to thank Peter Lawson-Braleay for his work as East Midlands Regional Representative. Peter has, sadly for us, tendered his resignation but will remain a NABO member and will continue to support our future endeavours and campaigns for the preservation and continued good future of our waterways. Any members who would like to volunteer for the role of East Midlands Regional Representative please contact one of the NABO Council.



## Welfare Officer's Report Ken Hylins

There has not been a lot of activity in regard to boaters needing help but I have been giving advice on various welfare issues to boaters who have contacted me by phone.

One of the members of a boater family I have been helping with illness has sadly passed away. I have visited the surviving partner, offered our condolences and will be supporting her through this traumatic time. I will be negotiating with Canal and River Trust(CRT) and helping her to continue her life on the canal.

One of the other issues which has been drawn to my attention is the number of boaters who are being put on six month licences. There seems to be a nonchalance generated by CRT of its severity and a lack of understanding of its severity by affected boaters.

It seems that no consideration has been given by CRT about weather conditions, individual cir-

cumstances or even financial difficulties caused by the current crisis.

There is one case of a boater moving sufficiently to comply with the regulations and yet receiving a six month licence. I am monitoring various mooring matters and discussing the implications with the boaters concerned. I have advised them to join NABO who will offer support if required.

As well as updating our current contacts, part of the responsibility of being welfare officer is increasing the size of our network and increasing our sphere of contacts.

In order to extend our range of influence contact with Age Concern will be made, hopefully to create a symbiotic relationship where we can be a reference point for them and they can be a reference point for NABO with disability issues, which I will investigate.

## NABO at the user groups

### EA's Thames Navigation Users Forum

On Wednesday 19th of April NABO attended a meeting of Environment Agency's Thames Navigation Users Forum held at Reading, with internet access also possible.

On behalf of the boater representative groups on the Thames, including NABO, Tony Riley of the TMBA had worked closely with the EA to structure an acceptable agenda and to avoid recent meetings of the EA which had been very much EA preaching to attendees with endless reading of presentations. Instead, the EA had

prepared excellent pre-meeting documentation and thus the attendees could really get down to detailed discussions. What a truly excellent change in attitude, and it really appeared that for the first time that EA staff were actually seeking input and help from the various boating groups. It was clear however that these are early days as the new folk running the EA are concentrating on much detailed planning and sadly often not taking cognisance of previous work.

### National Waterways Forum

The National Waterways Forum is a very large body with over 30 delegates from literally any organisation with an interest in the waterways run by the EA.

The first meeting, held a few months ago, had been dominated by lengthy introductions to all members and then a series of read presentations from EA staff, once again preaching to the delegates. Although these are intended to be annual meetings, many delegates felt it essential for another meeting to be held and this was reluctantly agreed by the EA, hence this second meeting.

Between the 2 Forum meetings one-to-one sessions had been held with representatives of the various member groups and the EA staff.

Whilst better structured, this second meeting once again had no previous papers prepared and was largely, once again, EA staff talking to endless presentations.

An important aspect was though feedback for the one-to-one meetings which had led the EA to determine priorities for their immediate action.

Lots of great ideas but we await action!

### Fund Britain's Waterways

In May IWA National Chair, Les Etheridge, chaired a meeting of waterways organisations to discuss the threats to our waterways caused by a level of government funding which is already inadequate and appears likely to be cut even further. The meeting was jointly initiated by IWA and the National Association of Boat Owners (NABO).

The organisations present all agreed on the need for joint action to influence national and local government, through a new campaigning group 'Fund Britain's Waterways'. It was heartening to see the waterways family starting to come together in their desire to take concerted action.

In his opening remarks, Les Etheridge covered the funding challenges facing the Environment Agency (EA), Scottish Canals (SC) and Canal

& River Trust (CRT). EA has been given half of the revenue and a third of the capital figures they consider necessary.

SC estimate that there is over £70m of outstanding works on the Lowlands Canals plus urgent needs on the Crinan and Caledonian Canals to keep them navigable. CRT are still waiting for the long promised announcement about future funding. CRT are already suffering from their funding not being inflation linked with monetary cuts almost certain to be imposed in the near future.

It was agreed that the outlook is bleak and not just for these three major navigation authorities. The meeting agreed that this impacts on the general public as well as boating businesses and boaters.

## Angel Canal Festival postponed for 2023

### From a statement by CRT

The difficult decision to postpone this year's Angel Canal Festival hasn't been taken lightly, and is part of a wider review of what we are able to do as a charity in challenging times.

Although supported by thousands of volunteers, donors and boaters, the economic climate, together with continuing cut in real terms of the Trust's Government funding, has forced the charity to focus all available funds on the core purpose of protecting and preserving the canal network.

We know the decision will be disappointing for many, but as a charity, we must focus all our

available funds on ensuring the integrity of the canal network.

Having a safe and functioning canal network is essential—in London, our canals benefit millions of people each year who visit the towpath to experience nature and the wellbeing benefits of being beside water, and thousands of people who live on or use the canal for boating. We've informed Islington Council and other stakeholders on the Regent's Canal that Angel Canal Festival will not take place in 2023, but that it hopes for the event to return in 2024 with an event sponsor that can help fund the community-led canal celebration.

## Gnosall C'Fest 2023

14 -16 July 2023

A three-day community festival along Gnosall's beautiful canal, a stretch of the Shropshire Union.

There will be, a floating market, presentations by local canal societies, boat trips, local canal history display, historic boats.

### Trade Boats

- Aquilo – Canal Chandlery
- Emily Bronte – Blacksmith
- Forget me Not – Wood fired pizzas
- Francesca Leah - Painted ware
- Gordanneus – Handmade wooden signs & gifts
- Islonian – Coffee boat
- Jellicoe – Hand painted canal art
- Jenny – Hand made ceramics and wood chimes
- Jenny Wren – Fair trade clothing and accessories along with handcrafted items
- Kimberley - Vintage/ Antique items and Modern crafted items
- Lazy Dayz – Painted canal ware
- March Hare - Handmade and Upcycled goods
- Quintet – Home made cakes, tea and coffee
- Silver Mist – Jewellery and wood burnt gifts
- That's Driculous – Cheese boat

Organised by Gnosall Towpath Restoration

[www.gnosallcanalfestival.co.uk](http://www.gnosallcanalfestival.co.uk)



Traders at Gnosall 2022

Photo: Sheila Hurst

## The Calor problem

In February Calor announced plans to streamline their small cylinder range to put them in a better position to service their wider cylinder customers who use them to provide their home heating and hot water.

Specific groups who use the 3.9kg propane and 4.5kg butane cylinders, particularly boaters and caravanners, expressed the need for more time to convert their facilities to use the alternative sizes in the market.

To support these customers, Calor will, subject to availability, continue to exchange and refill serviceable 3.9kg propane and 4.5kg butane cylinders, phasing them out of supply over a longer period. The cylinders will still be discontinued from their range, but the limited extension will give customers additional time to source an alternative way to power their onboard facilities.

There is a limited number of in-service cylinders and this stock will be available in exchange for an empty cylinder only at Calor's Distribution

Centres. Customers will need to phone their nearest centre to check if they have stock, place an exchange order, pay for the gas and obtain an order number prior to collection. *Ed: Mostly not accessible by boat!*

The decision to immediately discontinue the Cube, 6kg Lite Propane and 12kg Butane cylinders will go ahead as planned.



## Huddersfield Canal—open or closed?

A rumour has been circulating that Standedge Tunnel on the Huddersfield Narrow could be closed at the end of May because Network Rail are working on the railway and CRT won't be able to use the access tunnel for duration of the work. However, the CRT stoppage information does not indicate that there is any problem affecting navigation. Their information is as follows;

"A limited number of passages have been released to allow customers to book ahead for the year. From the 27th March we have availability on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and have released one passage each way on these days, From the 3rd April this will increase to two passages each way.

Boats will set off from Marsden to Diggle between 8.30am and 10.30am, and will set off from Diggle to Marsden between 1pm and 2.30pm. At least three working days' notice is required. Once you have decided which passage you wish to book, simply log in (or register) to the online

licensing portal then go to the Bookings section. If you don't have access to the internet don't worry, you can still call CRT on 0303 040 4040 or call into your local waterway office where they will happily book your passage for you.

Marsden to Diggle—Boats are asked to moor just past lock 42E on the day before passage and not to proceed past the second railway bridge until after 5pm. This is to avoid collision with the Standedge Visitor Centre Passenger Vessel which will be operating past this point until 5pm.

After 5pm boats can moor at the tunnel entrance ready for their passage the following day. Passage preparations will start at 8am the next day. Boat dimensions maximum length 70' (21.34m), maximum width 6' 10" (2.08m), maximum height above water 6' 2" (1.88m), maximum draught below water 3' 3" (0.99m). More detail on boat sizes is available in the navigation notes which can be viewed or downloaded from the CRT website."



# Energy Bills Support Scheme

Applications for support are still not achieving a consistent result.

In spite of extensive efforts by boater organisations, Gypsy and Traveller organisations, and even by Canal & River Trust (CRT) to get the Minister and senior Government officials in the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (now called Energy Security and Net Zero) to include itinerant boat dwellers in the scheme, they have been specifically excluded. Also excluded are itinerant vehicle and caravan dwellers. The Government web page for the scheme says that the grant is “under review” for both communities, but there is no information on the reasons for the review or how long it will take.

But that is not the whole story. We are hearing that there appears to be no standardisation in approach to boater applications by the local councils who are charged with giving out this government money. Consequently, some boaters are successful, others are not, with no obvious reasons as to how these outcomes are arrived at. Complaints

to the BEIS or the council involved are taking weeks to be replied to. Councils are blaming the fact that their computer systems don't talk to those of the BEIS. CRT are putting out a press release about their efforts to resolve the impasse.

Boat dwellers eligible for Legal Aid are now in the initial stages of judicial review proceedings against the Government. The National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA) has contacted several law firms in order to signpost people who wish to issue claims. If you are on a low income with less than £8,000 savings, you may be eligible for Legal Aid.

If you wish to take the Government to court, please contact the NBTA for the list of lawyers, or contact Community Law Partnership on 0121 685 8595 (this is a new number). Make sure that you keep a screenshot of the rejection message when the web form on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) fails your application. This is your “decision” for judicial review proceedings to take the Government to court.

## Support Grant Scheme

The grant scheme is now open for applications for boaters on residential moorings that pay council tax, either 'upfront' or in the payment to the marina owner.

[www.gov.uk/get-help-energy-bills/offgrid-park-mobile-care-home](http://www.gov.uk/get-help-energy-bills/offgrid-park-mobile-care-home)

## NBTA guidance on applying

[bargee-traveller.org.uk/itinerant-boat-dwellers-locked-out-of-energy-grants-guidance-on-what-to-do-next/](http://bargee-traveller.org.uk/itinerant-boat-dwellers-locked-out-of-energy-grants-guidance-on-what-to-do-next/).

[bargee-traveller.org.uk/energy-bills-support-scheme-court-cases-started/](http://bargee-traveller.org.uk/energy-bills-support-scheme-court-cases-started/)

Bradley Workshop  
Photo: Sharon Wells



## In the heart of the Black Country

Bradley Canal Restoration Society (BCRS) is a group working towards the restoration of the Bradley Canal, from the Bradley Locks Workshop to the Walsall Canal at

Moorcroft. The BCRS are holding a Bradley Canal Festival, a free Open Day at the Canal and River Trust Workshops, Bradley Lane, Bilston, WV14 8DW on Saturday 17th June 2023. Attractions will consist of boat trips, canoes, stalls, historic working boats, guided tours of the route of the proposed canal re-opening, and free tours of the lock gate workshop.



## To moor or not to moor—Moorings under review

### Update on Llangollen moorings

**Tom Freeland**, Boating & Customer Service Manager West Midlands, Canal and River Trust

Thank you for all of your feedback and good ideas in response to our consultation on changes at Llangollen town and basin moorings.

We've now finished the consultation, taken everything on board, and shared our response on our website at [canalrivertrust.org.uk/aboutus/wherewework/westmidlands/llangollenmooringstrial2023](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/aboutus/wherewework/westmidlands/llangollenmooringstrial2023). We're looking to run the following changes as a trial this year:

- Adjust the pricing to £12 per boat per night—including full access to electricity—to allow us to recover our costs
- Provide four 5-day moorings for those needing to stay longer—on pontoons in the basin nearest the feeder
- Improved signage and leaflet on site for greater

er clarity on costs and stay times.

- No other changes to the moorings—all other moorings will remain at 2-day stay, with the same number of berths available, and the charge will continue to apply overnight only
  - Trial to run from 1 May to 31 October
- While the trial is running, we'll be looking into how we might progress some of the other ideas, including metered bollards, flexible payments and stay times, and managing the approach through the narrows.

We'll review all of these and let you know our next steps by 17 October at the latest. We'd welcome your feedback during the trial, please send your responses to [enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk) or call 0303 040 4040.

## Changes at Alvechurch

CRT will be trialling changes on site from 24 April until the end of October. If you'd like to give feedback on the proposals, please send your comments to [enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk)

### Moorings at Llangollen

Photo: Roger Kidd



## Fishing the waterways:

The Canal and River Trust host learntofish introductory taster events called Let's Fish! supported by local angling clubs, between March and October each year, suitable for adults and children aged six or over.

There will be a free Let's Fish! events taking place in Nottingham between Wilford Street Bridge 10 and Wilford Street Footbridge 9.

- Monday 31 July 2023 08:00 until 16:30
- Monday 14 August 2023 08:00 until 16:30
- Tuesday 29 August 2023 08:00 until 16:30

Further details about the event can be found on the Let's Fish! section of the Canal and River Trust website [canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoythe-waterways/fishing/letsfish](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoythe-waterways/fishing/letsfish)

There will be a mooring restriction in front of the Magistrates Court between 8am and 4:30pm, while this event takes place. If you are in the area on this day please follow any advice or requests given by the event organisers.

## Lock camping on the Thames cancelled

In a rather sudden announcement that will disappoint many as we move into camping weather, the Environment Agency have taken the decision to close all the campsites that they run at the Thames locks while they conduct a review into their management of them. The lock sites that were offering campsites are:

- |   |          |   |         |
|---|----------|---|---------|
| ■ | Rushey   | ■ | Eynsham |
| ■ | Shifford | ■ | Days    |
| ■ | Pinkhill | ■ | Hurley  |

The review is being led by the Thames Area, with specialist support from colleagues in their Legal Services, Estates and National Navigation teams. It will examine all aspects of their management of the sites to ensure we have suitable arrangements in place to meet their statutory and legal obligations—primarily those relating to health and safety of course, but also taking

into consideration their responsibility to ensure that they utilise the commercial opportunities of their sites in the most appropriate, practicable and profitable ways they can as required by the Government's Managing Public Money framework.

It is possible that the review will require significant changes to how they manage their campsites if they continue to operate them at all. We hope to be able to keep you updated as the review progresses. If possible, EA are hoping to reopen as many sites as they can this season, but this is dependent on how long the review takes, its findings, and what resources and timescales are needed to implement them.

EA are writing directly to customers who hold licences for long-stay camping at Shiplake and Hurley locks and will also communicate this decision to their wider customer base.



## Revival of the Stafford Riverway Link

The one and a half mile navigation to connect Stafford Town Centre to the Staffs and Worcester canal at Baswich was originally opened in 1816, and remained navigable until the 1920s. Its main purpose was to carry coals, lime and merchandise although later it became popular with leisure boaters.

The Stafford Riverway Link is a Community Interest Company, formed to reinstate the navigation into Stafford. A massive amount of work has been completed since its inception in 2016. 90% of the building materials have been donated by local businesses.

The project is looking to complete excavation and construction of the basin entrance. A roving bridge will need to be constructed to connect the basin to the Staffs and Worcester canal. Once a new lock has been constructed in the basin, passage will be via the rivers Penk and Sow to create a link into Stafford town centre. The company is appealing for volunteers to help finalise the project. Everybody can help, if fit and healthy on construction or, if able to negotiate, by communicating with Councils, Canal and River Trust,

the Environment Agency and others. The group is also desperately in need of a secretary or admin assistant.

**More information:** [staffordriverwaylink.co.uk](http://staffordriverwaylink.co.uk)

The entrance lock and basin

Photo: Sheila Hurst



# CRT ‘Water Safety Zones’ contradicted by historical moorings on the River Lee

Claims the National Barge Travellers Association

The River Lee is one of the largest rivers in London and has long been a multiuse space shared by all kinds of craft. In recent years, however, CRT has emphasised the rights of some river users over those of others.

This has become particularly evident as the Trust attempts to force through bans on mooring on the site of its so-called “Water Safety Zones” near two rowing clubs. These two zones—one on the Lower Lee, running through Hackney and Tottenham in east London, and the other further North in Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, will prevent boaters from mooring in these locations for the 14 days which apply elsewhere on the waterways.

The National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA) represents live-aboard boaters in Britain and has been campaigning against these zones since CRT attempted to enforce them without consultation in early 2021. CRT claim that these zones are merely the enforcement of ‘existing rules and regulations’ and that these ‘no moorings zones’ have historically never been moored. However, historical research clearly shows that this claim is false.

The Lee Navigation is among the widest waterways in the country and there is scant evidence that moored boats cause collisions. Boats and large barges have been using and mooring on the Lee for many years, includ-

ing in the exact places where CRT wants to ban moored boats. Judging by photos from this period, this section of the Lee Navigation, near the former power station, has been used by considerably larger boats than tend to operate on the river today. Not only this, but Lee Rowing Club, some of the most vocal proponents of the “Safety Zones”, operated on the navigation during these years, when timber and coal barges were evidently on the water too. The waterways have been shared for some time and it’s unreasonable that this should be changed now.

CRT claims that more “no mooring” sites are necessary for the safety of other canal users, such as rowers and kayakers, as they say collisions with powered boats have risen. However, a Freedom of Information request to CRT by the NBTA revealed that the number of collisions between rowers and powered boats has actually fallen in recent years. In addition, if liveaboard boaters have to travel further to find a mooring, then there will be increased traffic in the very spots the CRT are focusing on.

It also seems unlikely that today’s rowers have it worse than those of the past. The protagonist of Jerome K Jerome’s classic 1889 novel *‘Three Men in a Boat (To Say Nothing of the Dog)’*, notes: “I determined to go in for rowing proper and joined one of the Lea boating clubs. Being out in a boat on the river Lea, especially on





*Saturday afternoons, soon makes you smart at handling craft, and spry at escaping being run down by roughs or swamped by barges; and it also affords plenty of opportunity for acquiring the most prompt and graceful method of lying down flat at the bottom of the boat so as to avoid being chucked out into the river by passing towlines."*

CRT continues to claim that canal boats and liveaboard boaters have not been able to moor in its "Water Safety Zones", for the benefit of other users. Clearly, there have been large craft sharing the river with others for some decades now. Sharing the space, open dialogue and educating all river users on safe navigation seems a far better route to ensure safety, rather than unfairly targeting one user group.

An example of CRT's determination to destroy these historical mooring sites took place on 2nd February 2023 when CRT began removing mooring rings and historic bollards in east London, giving moorers less than 24 hours notice. In a text message requesting the owners remove their boats, CRT claimed that the towpath at Marshgate Bridge 15, near Homerton, was already a 'no mooring' zone so they had no need to provide a suspension notice and that the boats were blocking navigation. Frankie Perry was moored in the spot opposite Matchmaker's Wharf when

she received a text at 3pm on 1st February telling her that the mooring rings and bollards would be removed at 9am the next morning.

"It didn't occur to me that there were any mooring restrictions in place: there were no signs, it's not by a bridge or bend, the navigation is wide, and there were mooring rings to tie up to. I find it very disappointing that the Trust is using its resources — to which our licence fees contribute — to actively remove mooring rings when there is so much infrastructure within the London network in need of repair or improvement."

Exactly one year earlier, a member of Lea Rowing Club was photographed in broad daylight removing four safety bars from the bank just outside the club upriver in another so-called "Water Safety Zone". The club is one of two rowing clubs that lie within these Zones which have been pushing CRT to implement mooring restrictions for years. These bars were designed to help people out of the water in an emergency. Rather than prosecuting for criminal damage CRT released a statement saying they "have informed the Rowing Club that such actions are unacceptable."

The NBTA argue that they are further evidence of CRT's plans to prioritise leisure over living on Britain's waterways.

Boaters continue to moor alongside some of the 'No Mooring' Safety Zone sites on the lower River Lea in Hackney  
Photo: NBTA

# There and back again

Paul Monahan's notes from a short journey



Boats Assembled by Tower Wharf, Chester

**N**ot for us the headlong four-days-to-the-Port dash; we took a whole leisurely week, with several stops on the way. Readers will be familiar with the route, so I will not give details, but just a few highlights. We went north via the Trent & Mersey and returned south via the Shropshire Union, as we had not been on either canal for a few years and wanted to see some friends on the way.

One of the delights of boating at this time of the year is that moorings can usually be found even in the most popular places, and so it was that each night we tied more or less where we wanted. This moorings policy did go somewhat awry when, hoping to tag onto an afternoon passage north through Harecastle without having made a booking, I found that nobody else had booked either, so all the volunteers had gone home at 1pm! Fortunately, the south end of the tunnel makes quite

a pleasant place to moor, even if lacking in the local amenities of the northern end. We were joined by several friends and their boats ready for the first northbound passage next morning.

After the tunnel passage, we started down the Cheshire locks, working together with another boat and using both paired locks where possible, arriving in Middlewich to tie above Kings' Lock in the late afternoon. After a day for visitors in Middlewich, we travelled to Chester where we tied near Tescos on the very convenient, if slightly noisy, visitor moorings. The next day an old friend on his newly restored motor arrived in time to join us down the Northgate staircase and we moored with all the other boats at Tower Wharf.

A slack day in Chester was spent visiting the archives to do some research and visiting the Albion, one of the finest street-corner pubs to be found anywhere. Sadly, the old landlord has passed away, but the pub is now run by his widow and daughter. The character remains exactly the same, typified by the collection of WWI memorabilia and such wonderful slogans as "family-unfriendly pub", or "proper food, beer and customers only".

The next morning the boats processed as if in a parade. All went smoothly save for the deeper drafted boats bouncing over a culvert which allegedly had been rebuilt without leaving enough depth. On arrival, and after much boat juggling in the usual gale, invited craft were lined up in the top basin.

An enjoyable weekend ensued, blessed by the finest weather of the month, and enlivened by events run each evening for the benefit of the boat crews, with interesting talks by speakers including Richard Parry and the Head of Collections for the museum. There was the boaters' quiz, which was made more entertaining by half the room lighting having failed. Despite having a Braille specialist in our team of (only) six, we were just beaten by the team which had nine people and lights over their table! A special event during the weekend was the organised trip by vintage bus to the Rossfield Road store, where the artefacts and boats deemed especially worthy of preservation in their unaltered state are now kept in a controlled environment. Museum staff and volunteers were on hand to talk about the work there.

On Sunday afternoon, those boats intending to leave the museum during the following week were ousted from the top basin, as the pontoon bridge would not be opened again after Sunday. This was not explained at the time, but any visitors on Bank Holiday Monday would see only a near-empty basin instead of the boats which they may have hoped to see. With nowhere suitable to tie outside the museum, we left on Monday, as did many other boats, some via the Ship Canal.

Our return was via the Shropshire Union—up the South?—and the Staffs and Worcs. Once again, not all went to plan; there was a storm with gales and torrential rain as I was steering above Hack Green, but with nowhere suitable to stop I continued, comforted somewhat by the cabin range keeping the lower half warm. Much more seriously, Diana tripped on the towpath at the top lock of Audlem, gashing her knee badly on a sharp brick edge, which necessi-



Top Basin, Ellesmere Port

tated a visit to A&E. After a fruitless search for a nearby taxi, a kind friend offered to collect us and take us to Whitchurch Minor Injuries Unit. This was followed by a referral to Shrewsbury Hospital (thanks again to our friend for transport), a night in an hotel in Shrewsbury and a taxi back to Audlem. With Diana able to stand and steer in reasonable comfort (five stitches but healing nicely, thank you for asking), we returned to base without further mishap and a mix of mainly good memories, but mostly with a feeling of relief at having avoided more severe injury.

Next trip to Braunston!

Lower Basin, Ellesmere Port



# Superhighway to the Northeast!

Is the tidal River Trent an underused resource?

**M**any inland boaters are fearful of the reputation of the River Trent although there are good reasons to use the water superhighway:

- The north – south route is around 100 locks shorter than crossing the Pennines.
- The locks are probably easier with many manned and electric.
- There are fewer boats, with easier moorings in some majestic and unique waters in the Northeast.

Inland craft can use the Trent to visit the delightful Fossdyke and Chesterfield canals, continue up to York or Ripon, or use the “back-door” to the three Pennine crossings and complete some of the most challenging and memorable navigation rings on the system. Yet numbers of visiting inland boats were dropping prior to 2022.

To encourage boaters to safely navigate the tidal section of the river the Facebook Group Trentlink was formed in late 2021 with the aim of increasing the number of inland boats using this much maligned waterway and thus encourage visitors to the quietest of the CRT Regions. By the end of 2022, Trentlink had enrolled 1,200 boating members. Up to 900 folk were visiting the Group in single days, and by seasons end an estimated 70% plus of inland craft on the river had a somebody on board who was a member.

The “Annual Lockage Report” issued by CRT in January, suggests that while the average number of boats using locks around the whole CRT system in 2022 was around

5% less than in 2021, with four of the six CRT Regions showing significant drops. The two regions that are connected with the tidal Trent, “Yorkshire and the North East”, and “East Midlands” both had headline numbers showing slight increases in numbers.

While the Report carries insufficient detail to verify that this was due to the tidal Trent use, our own monthly figures (which we only started to collect in May 2022) also suggest the tidal Trent did better than the rest of the UK system. Perhaps, more encouragingly, the lock keepers reported that those numbers were comprised of far more visiting boats than in previous years.

NABO recorded the number of boats passing through each lock in the nine months to February 2023:

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <b>Cromwell:</b>                                    | <b>1,430</b> |
| <b>East Midlands average for 12 months = 2,593</b>  |              |
| <b>Torksey:</b>                                     | <b>1,201</b> |
| <b>West Stockwith:</b>                              | <b>629</b>   |
| <b>Yorkshire and NE average for 12 months = 906</b> |              |
| <b>Keadby:</b>                                      | <b>606</b>   |

Perhaps given the various problems on the Chesterfield and the Stainforth and Keadby canals last year, this has to be considered a success. We can do better as word gets out that the Trent is not as scary as canal folk believe.

The Trentlink Group was formed on the principle of not only increasing the number of boats traversing the North East and Midlands, but



also improving the experience of those boats' crews. The effectiveness of making more information available can be judged by boater's confidence and by a reduction in the real, and the perceived, incident rate on the river. Imagined incidents are the source of most of the scare stories that do the rounds of chit chat around inland locks and marinas although some are true or have an element of truth. Only by being seen to reduce such incidents will the river's reputation improve, although the canal media like to drag up stories from their archives occasionally to spice up the narrative.

The problem with the myth debunking intention is that there are no official records of anything going wrong on the river in previous years. Canal and River Trust (CRT) have kept no records of any issues unless occurring at the locks. There are plenty of stories of boats going horribly aground for days at a time, breaking down and grounding on steep banks allowing the boat to flood, grounding on invisible sandbanks or having to go to anchor because the engine packed up.

Every local has a story to tell... For sure, all these things have happened but how serious, how often, and most importantly WHY they went wrong is far less clear.

With no incident records or investigations one can't identify causes or trends. Improvement cannot be verified. An educated guess is that groundings are the primary concern, which can be caused by breakdowns or navigation errors. So Trentlink asked boaters and observers to report if they had a problem or saw a problem. We asked at locks. We trapped a significant number of these occurrences in 2022, probably not all, and folk didn't always want to share what had gone wrong, but it has given us a baseline to work to....



Locking Down  
Photo: Nick Roberts

### Injuries

To my knowledge nobody was injured on the tidal Trent in 2022

### Groundings

We learned of about 20 significant groundings last year. (Significant in that the craft was damaged, needed to be pulled off by another boat, or lifted off by the next tide.)

But those groundings give some trends worthy of review:

- Only one was due to a breakdown.
- Only one got stuck for more than a single tide (stuck for four days after grounding on a high tide)
- Ten were on Dunham Dubs bend! (Including a "Dunkirk little ship" that was damaged, and the CRT contracted dredger returning from working in Newark)

## Navigation information on the tidal River Trent

A skipper's guide to the Yorkshire and Trent commercial navigations written by ex-NABO chair Stuart Sampson was published in NABO News Issue 3 May 2022, available on our website; [nabo.org.uk/index.php/reference/nn-back-issues-2](http://nabo.org.uk/index.php/reference/nn-back-issues-2)

A "Skippers Guide to the Tidal River Trent", based largely on information presently held in Trentlink has been drafted and is currently under review by CRT.

Trentlink Facebook page\* [facebook.com/groups/666937220961360](https://www.facebook.com/groups/666937220961360)

A series of three guides by The Boating Association are publications for navigation of the Rivers Trent and Ouse by small craft. Produced as booklets with handdrawn sketches and aerial photos of the rivers, they clearly mark the key navigational hazards and give recommended courses along the rivers. They also include introductions giving advice to those navigating the rivers for the first time.

[theboatingassociation.co.uk/index.php/store/#!/Publications/c/2703498](http://theboatingassociation.co.uk/index.php/store/#!/Publications/c/2703498)

Please note: The Boating Association is a voluntary organisation and the information given is based on the best information available to them and on the many years experience of their members.



- Only one was on the "Red Line" on The Boating Association Trent Chart\*, in August when water levels were well below normal.
- At least one cruiser damaged his props because of overtaking the "Flood" unknowingly.

### Breakdowns

Vague figures from River Canal Rescue (RCR) suggested that prior to 2022, they had calls from "one or two boats every month that had grounded on the tidal Trent following a mechanical failure". I find this figure surprising in that even more incidents would have occurred where RCR was not called. That seems an unlikely figure for boats having mechanical problems. But this year, I'm only aware of the one grounding due to mechanical problems.

This is probably not because boats are suffering fewer mechanical issues, but because there has been a

### Cruising The Tidal Trent

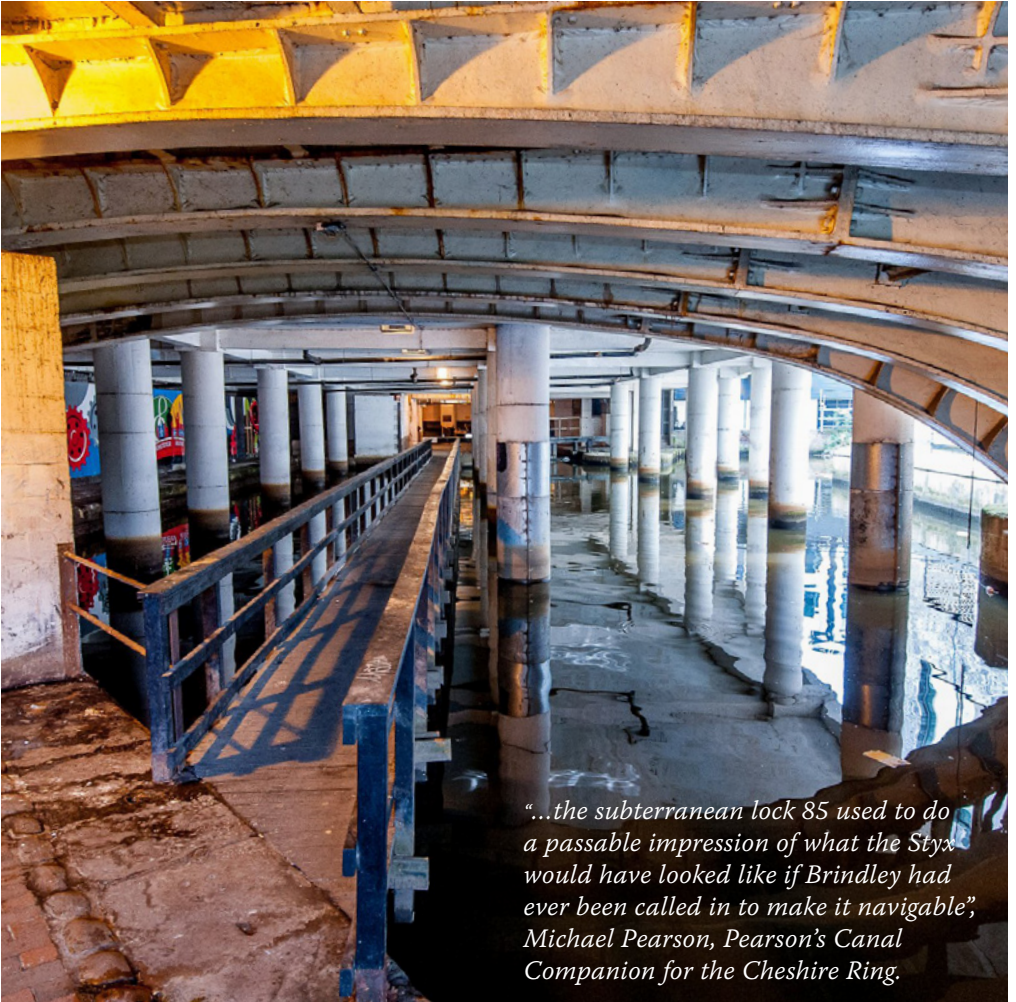
Photo: Drew Melbourne

significant increase in the number of boats "buddying"—staying in close convoy with another similar speed boat or boats on the river—so if one boat suffers a problem, it is quickly taken in tow to the next lock. Drama avoided.

I'm aware of only one boat using their anchor because of mechanical problems in 2022—and it was quickly underway again.

With help from CRT and The Boating Association new "Virtual" flood level gauges are now available at each of the tidal locks to help skippers of "low power" craft better decide if the river is safe for navigation. CRT are exploring the potential to include the tidal stretch of the Trent as part of its web based "Water Level and Strong Stream Warning" system alongside the two regions of the Trent already covered.

# The entrance to Manchester



*“...the subterranean lock 85 used to do a passable impression of what the Styx would have looked like if Brindley had ever been called in to make it navigable”,  
Michael Pearson, Pearson’s Canal Companion for the Cheshire Ring.*

Photo: Mike Poloway CRT

Works to the Rochdale Canal this winter have cost £400,000 and include new handcrafted lock gates for Lock 85 as well as other masonry repairs.

Before work started a fish rescue was carried out by specialist contractors to carefully move the wildlife that lives in the canal to another part of the canal water. Essential works to sev-

eral other locks along the 200-year-old Rochdale Canal have also taken place this winter and are part of Canal and River Trusts’s ongoing work to ensure the nation’s historic waterways can continue to be navigated by boats and remain vital green spaces that are free to visit and benefit the millions of people who have a canal on their doorstep.



# Life afloat

## The first boater survey to portray canal life in the 21st Century

The Boater Census can be read online here: [canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/boating-news-and-views/boating-blogs-and-features/boater-census-survey-2022](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/boating-news-and-views/boating-blogs-and-features/boater-census-survey-2022)

The Canal and River Trust (CRT) has published the results of its first-ever Boater Census of the 35,000 licensed boats on the charity's 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales.

The Census is intended to offer a snapshot of life on the waterways in the 21st century, 250 years after the network opened to navigation. The census data will help inform the Trust's work and that of others, such as health service providers and local authorities, to make sure boaters are considered and their needs are met through decision-making, policy and services.

Almost 11,500 boaters, around a third of current boat licence holders, responded. The split between boaters with and without a home mooring, at 76% and 24% respectively, is broadly representative of the makeup of boats on the Trust's network.

The typical boat on the Trust's waterways is a steel narrowboat with fixed beds for two people and pullout beds for two people or more. While most use gas for cooking (89.8%) and a solid fuel stove (66.8%) for heating, over half the respondents have invested in solar panels (59.3%). Cassette toilets (57.5%) are the most popular, followed by pumpout (33.8%), with a minority choosing composting loos (8.8%). 31.9% of respondents have experienced mechanical problems with their boat in the past 12 months.

The Census asked boaters about the challenges they faced due to living on a boat. Accessing important

services is a theme, with respondents having issues accessing health services (31.7%), financial services (16.3%), and financial help such as benefits (11.7%). Additionally, 21.7% report challenges around education and work.

Many boaters report that their day-to-day activities are limited because of a long term health problem or disability. The 2021 Census of England and Wales indicates that 17.8% of the population are disabled people. The Boater Census suggests that this proportion is somewhat higher within the boating population, with 14.7% of respondents saying they are limited a little and 6.3% saying they are limited a lot. Most respondents receive a pension or pension credit (70%), and smaller numbers receive a range of other types of benefits or support.

Pets are popular on boats, with 47% of respondents saying there is an animal on board. And it is a case of top dog, with 75% of that number specifying a canine companion(s) compared to 29.6% owning cats and 4.4% naming another animal. In contrast, just 5% of respondents say there is a child under 16 living aboard.

Matthew Symonds, national boating manager at CRT said: "Thank you to every boater who responded to the Census, the data you have provided is extremely valuable. There are more boats on our waterways than at any time in their history and it is more important than ever that we, and other agencies, understand the needs of the boating community."



“Boats have been integral to canals since they were first dug 250 years ago. Once busy freight routes, used by working boats and the working families that lived on them out of necessity, canals are now popular spaces for leisure boating and recreation, with some people living aboard, either through choice or out of financial hardship or other vulnerabilities.

“From the conversations we have on the towpath, we know that some boaters face specific challenges, for example around employment, accessing financial services and support, registering with health services such as doctors’ surgeries, or boating with a disability. The Boater Census has provided us with the data we need to illustrate the work we do to other organisations who may not be familiar with the practicalities of life afloat and will add strength to our arguments that boaters need targeted support.”

The Boater Census was designed with input from boater representatives on the Trust’s Council to help understand the different needs of those who live on their boats and those who use them for leisure. The anonymous online survey was open for ten weeks and boaters took part by completing a questionnaire online or over the telephone. Invitations to take part were sent to current licence holders by email, text message or post, and they were asked to complete one survey per boat. Roving traders were included but other business boat licence holders were not.

Boaters were asked about the issues and challenges they have experienced due to living on a boat. The results include a large amount of qualitative data, which will be analysed section by section and published in a separate report in summer 2023.



### Reservations and Limitations

Although the response rate to the Census was relatively high, the Trust is highlighting that some questions were optional, and some boaters may have preferred not to answer some of the more personal questions.

For example, the question about the relationships between the people living on a boat had a low response rate and received far more responses from couples and families compared to single boat dwellers—89.3%, 8.2% and 0.3% respectively.

The Trust is aware that some vulnerable boaters are overall less likely to have responded and may have preferred not to answer some of the more personal questions about health, disabilities, living arrangements, benefits, and the challenges they face. With most active welfare cases relating to people who live alone on their boats, it is likely that there are many more single boat dwellers than these survey results suggest, and they probably include the boaters who face the most challenges in their lives.

Jo, Matt and Billy Beau

Photo:Suki Dhanda/The Observer

# Heritage signage worth preserving

Sharon Wells investigates the signs of a mystery in Staffordshire

**T**here has been much discussion on social media regarding CRT's corporate blue plastic signage, which is not always popular within the boating fraternity.

This got me thinking about what is 'in keeping' within the structural heritage of our waterways, and last year I began documenting with photographs the traditional name signs on the locks along the Staffordshire and Worcestershire (Staffs and Worcs) Canal. For anyone who isn't familiar with the signs, they take the form of black lettering centred on a white background, hand carved from wood. The typeface is a serif font, consistent with the age of the canals, and is very clear to read. In contrast to many of the CRT signs which are in a type height that is illegible from a distance.

I can hear an argument coming which will undoubtedly centre around CRT's new blue signs being easy to maintain. The 'traditional' Staffs and Worcs Canal signs require maintenance by repainting at intervals in order to preserve the wood. There is probably some finickiness involved in picking out the black lettering, although being carved there is a recess to follow with a brush. CRT seem to care so little about their blue signs that some were mounted with double-sided sticky tape, only to be blown off the mounting posts in the first strong wind.

The Staffs and Worcs Canal was declared a Conservation Area in

1969, with the intention that historic buildings and structures be retained and improved sympathetically. With the current climate of striving for a corporate identity image, it is important for many of us that traditions are not lost along the way. There are many artists living and working on the water (CRT might say "making their lives better by water"), who make carved signs, some laser cut, some hand cut. Why not make use of their skill and keep tradition alive at the same time?

Earlier this year when I continued to photograph the Staffs and Worcs Canal lock signs, I noticed that Marsh Lock has a plaque commemorating the artist responsible for most of the signs which were replaced in the 1980s. It reads 'Name boards for 33 locks on this canal carved by RG Cox 1983-88'. I remembered sharing the locks out of Chester a few years ago, with a boat named Vulpes. Robert Cox, owner at that time told me that he was a sculptor, frequently Artist in Resident in 'Nature in Art' near Gloucester. A little online research and a telephone call established that he was the 'RG Cox' of the carved lock signs. Robert has family links with the boating world that go back many years as his great grandfather, Thomas Lawton, owned the Albion Boat Dock in West Bromwich. Three of the four boats Robert owned and built were named after his great grandfather. The last one was Vulpes No 4.

**Robert Cox** has been a freelance graphic designer & illustrator for over forty years. Inspired by nature, especially plants and flowers, he has called on design skills and a lifetime of experience in the use of traditional carving tools. His work has been an evolving journey, taking in carved wood sculpture for public and private collections, public works, and traditionally carved signage. He will have an exhibition from 1 to 29 July at 'Gallery at 12', Eccleshall, Staffs, where his work is always on show. [www.robertcox.co.uk](http://www.robertcox.co.uk)





# Perils of Hebden Bridge

Caroline Green has a rude awakening



A bit of a list on  
Photo: Caroline Green

**O**n the 28 of April 2023 we left Sowerby Bridge at 9.30 along with another boat both travelling to Hebden Bridge on the Rochdale Canal.

We got through the first three locks including Tuel Lane with no problems at all and the on duty V-lockies were excellent. We then proceeded towards Hebden.

The navigation is extremely shallow with a large number of semi-submerged boulders but we were expecting that having been forewarned. We did not expect however, that lock 5 would only take one boat at a time due to subsidence. This lock only had one ground paddle working, there was a sign asking that you have patience when filling the lock. It took 45 minutes to get each boat through. Don't forget we are used to

travelling slowly but to take an hour and a half to do one lock uses a lot of patience.

Lock 7 also has subsidence but luckily both upper paddles were operational. We arrived at lock 8 just before 3pm to find a notice attached to the bottom gate advising that the pound between locks 8 and 9 has been losing water due to 'vandalism'. Therefore, the paddles of both locks would be padlocked shut at 3pm. Although attributed to 'vandalism' lock 8 has been known to leak for some years, so corporate vandalism maybe?

Luckily we got through and tried to moor in the pound. Both boats got beached several times trying to access the moorings but six hours after setting off we were moored up, albeit at a slight angle.

When we awoke next morning, the slight angle had increased and made getting on and off the boat more difficult. We realised that lock 8 leaks so badly that, even with the paddles padlocked shut, water had continued to drain from the pound where we were moored. That, coupled with the lack of depth, meant we were effectively sitting on the bottom. As the day progressed the water levels continued to drain. We couldn't let water through from lock 9 as the paddles were padlocked shut.

CRT were contacted and assurances were made that water was being brought down. At no point during the day did any member of CRT arrive on site.

By 6pm it became apparent that our boats were actually in danger of sinking as they were listing so badly. The water level had dropped by over 18" so we contacted CRT again. They were adamant that water had been coming down all day and couldn't understand why it hadn't refilled the pound.

Eventually the on-call staff member came to look at lock 9 and discovered that the culvert (or bywash) was in fact blocked with debris. He had to clear it so water could start to reach the pound. He also told us that only about 25% of the water that had been let down from the summit had reached us. The rest would have diverted into the river!

By about 8pm we were level again and no longer had to take a leap of faith to get back onboard the boat. However in the morning the levels were slowly dropping once more.

Who knows what lies ahead?



# The nuisance of single-handers

Ian Hutson gongoozles on a lock gate

**W**e've all helped a boat only to then watch hitherto unseen crew members appear, fresh as a daisy and oblivious to the work that they ought to have been performing.

There *are* clues that allow you to recognise genuine single-handers. Centrelines neatly arranged, tangle-free, one to each side of the boat, with the ends within easy reach of the waggelstick area; sometimes two mooring lines at the bow and two at the stern, already attached, safely stowed, ready for swift deployment port or starboard. If they don't have the black eyes, slapped cheeks and septic scratch marks that are the hallmark of a close-knit family that's been stuffed into a boat for an entire wet Bank Holiday weekend then they're probably single-handed.

So, how best can you be of genuine, altruistic, *welcome* assistance? Often 'by keeping out of the way and not interfering'; single-handers have their own routines worked out. There are though still some things that you can do to remind yourself of those rose-tinted years as a Boy Scout, helping aged pedestrians to cross the A1 during rushhour.

With mooring manoeuvres, *if there's a breeze threatening to whisk the single-hander's boat away on an unaccompanied world cruise, and only then*, offer—early in the process—to take a centreline and act as anchor until they have other things tied on. Then leave them to it. Keep cheery conversation to a minimum—they'll be busy. Vanilla, inoffensive phrases such as 'gosh, you're *gorgeous*' and 'those oilskins

you're wearing would look better on my cabin floor'; while not recommended as such by the author, can break any awkward social ice without being too much of a distraction from the business at hand.

Help in half-measures at locks is confusing and counterproductive; the best options are *all* or *almost nothing*. Offers to work the single-hander *entirely* through a lock, while deliciously guilt-inducing, are generally snapped up. If you do take this option, look to the boater for *their* preferences requests for half a paddle first please and suchlike, and take care that you stay as alert and focussed as you would (*should*) when working your own boat through. This option allows them to avoid clambering up and down the wet, slimy ladders—the most dangerous part of the solo locking process. You will earn their love, and probably their Facebook details.

The "almost nothing" option is just that, and is mostly for passing pedestrians—those not halfway across the second lane of the A1 just opposite Colsterworth OAP Home and with one wheel of their walker stuck in a cat's eye—but it still means the world to a single-hander. Offer to close the gates so that they can simply cruise away instead of re-mooring and traipsing back just for that one housekeeping task. Closing lock gates after use is the one, and really only one, procedure in which single-handers might otherwise significantly delay *The Nice People* queuing for the same lock.

That's it, IMHO; *all* or *almost nothing*. Solo boaters don't often mind which.





# Rewind

Issue No 3 2008

Howard Anguish reviews NABO News from 15 years ago.

*'... I was thinking very recently that there are 30,000 boats on the network and if each one of those is worth £30,000, that is almost £1 billion worth of investment that people have in the existing networks involved with BW. We cannot allow the network to fall away and to become non-functioning, because this is such a huge collective investment by boaters and so must always be a priority...'*

If that was a huge number in 2008, think what it must amount to in 2023! It demonstrates, in stark numbers, what is at currently at stake and why NABO must do all it can to keep the network viable.

BW had set out its comprehensive Customer Service Standards (CSS) for comments and criticism. NABO had responded, together with a survey of members; additionally many other boat owners had responded individually. As a result, comments had been received by BW and a summary, in the form of a scatter chart, was set out highlighting a preponderance of comments in the Low Performance/High Priority Category of the summary. To date in 2008, no response had been received by NABO

I attended the **Spring Waterway User & Special Interest Group** meeting at BW Hatton. The wide ranging meeting covered many items of interest— such subjects as angling, cycling, rambling, horse boating, commercial boat operators, IWA, RBOA, historic boats, and NABO concerns. Agenda items included the recently published CSS, lock paddle gearing and the determination of a reasonable force needed

to operate them safely, lack of dredging, location of pinch points on the system, and the gauging of boats on the various waterways. Because of strong feelings concerning the publication of these CCS without detailed dialogue with boating user groups, (including NABO), BW agreed to set up a Review Panel to oversee monitoring, review progress and recommend additions and/or modifications to the standards. NABO looked forward to having a representative on that panel.

BW had recently published a draft policy document setting out proposals relating to all moorings that are not designated long-term moorings. These proposals were BW's first draft proposals, sent to NABO among other interested groups, and led to the structured mooring designations with which we are all familiar, (and which are still being frequently monitored and amended by CRT). At the time, there was great concern about who would take responsibility for monitoring and enforcement, and I remember discussions about "Parking Wardens", which thankfully did not materialise. Access to popular attractions and shopping facilities were under consideration and, of course, consideration must be given to genuine "overstayers" at all designated moorings.

Sounds familiar from the "Your Say" section of NABO News?

*"Customer usage may well drop off if vegetation is not maintained appropriately. We have seen many places this year where mooring and walking on the towpath is very difficult due to overgrown vegetation, discouraging use."*

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 accurate.

## The state of the Heartbreak Hill locks is no joke

I'm not sure whether this notice is genuine, or a passing boater's sense of humour! But it does indicate the state of disrepair of many locks on the network. The picture was taken at lock 50 on the Trent and Mersey Canal, one of the paired Cheshire Locks, often referred to as "Heartbreak Hill".



Of the 26 paired locks only half are now fully working as paired locks. Of the remaining 13 paired locks only one of each pair was working. Three of them had at least one broken paddle, and were unusable. Most of the nonworking locks are already permanently abandoned. The rest are in such a state of disrepair that they are unlikely to ever be reopened.

At least CRT (or some other outraged boater) has removed the sign saying "Lock Closed" at lock 47, which I posted about last year. The obviously abandoned lock has a tree growing in the middle of it, so anyone with any sense would be aware that the lock was unusable.

*Dean Hawkey*

## Boater access to health care

I am writing to let you know about our ongoing work looking at healthcare access and London's boat dwelling community.

I am a boater myself, and the project, funded by University College London, has involved input from over 100 continuous cruisers, including 18 in-depth interviews, and collaborations with a boatdwelling photographer and illustrator. The project can be seen at [www.navigatingthesystem.co.uk](http://www.navigatingthesystem.co.uk)

We currently have an exhibition of the work at

UCL Urban Room in London's Olympic Park, a digital version is viewable on the 'exhibition' page of the website (desktop view only).

We also have a 'resources' page where we point people towards other useful research and relevant internet pages.

Though the work focuses on boaters in London due to funding restraints, it is, we hope, also more broadly relevant, and we do link to other great projects completed in other parts of the UK.

If there are any other useful resources you think we should be linking to that would be great, and do let me know if you have any questions. We're always open to collaboration and we're trying to make the project as inclusive as possible.

*Joseph Cook, PhD Researcher—UCL*

## Audlem Mill canal shop

Prodded by the request in latest NABO news, there was a strong local rumour at the end of 2022 that CRT were preparing to sell the Audlem Mill Canal Shop building. They allegedly backed off when the current tenant told them he was in the process of trying to sell the business.

*Dave Martin*

## Upcoming meetings:

### Navigation Advisory Group

16 June 2023, 10:30am to 3:30pm

Editor: I tried to access the minutes of previous Navigation Advisory Group meetings from the CRT website—they are not available.

### Disabled Boater Forum

Wednesday 21 June 2023 12—2pm

Wednesday 16 August 2023 6—8pm

### Trust Board Meeting

25 May 2023, 8:30am to 1pm

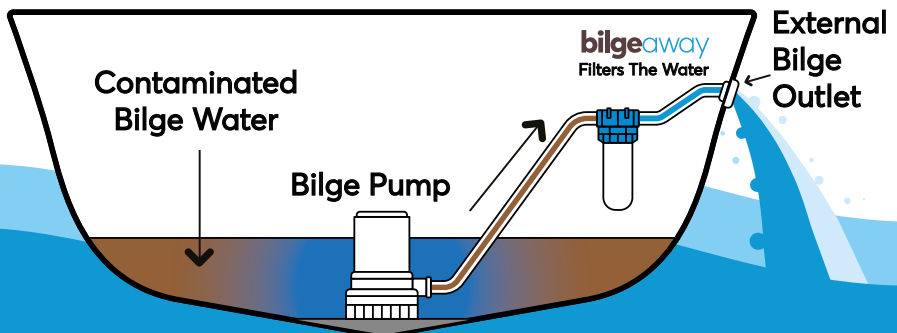


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