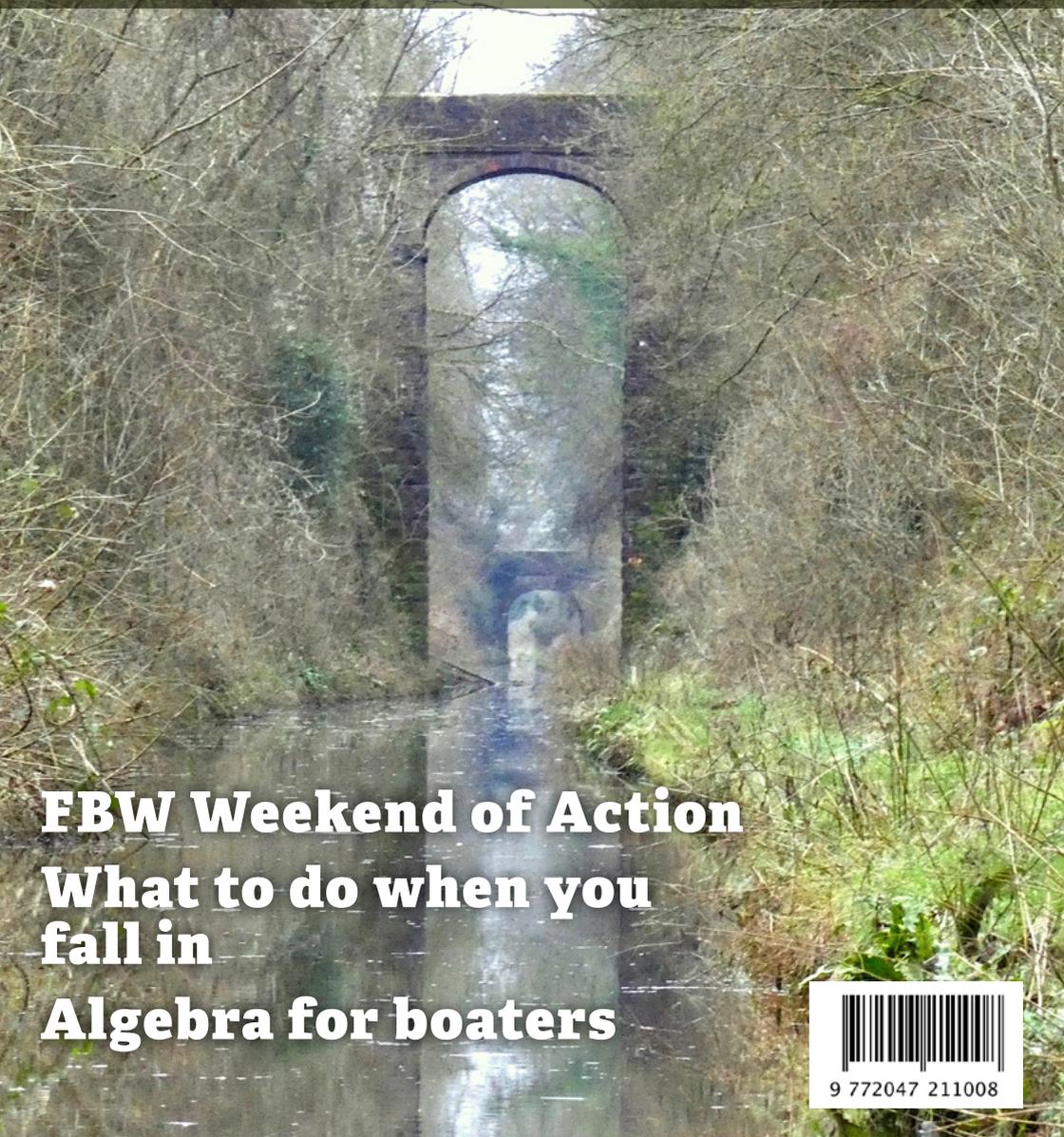




NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners
Issue 1 February 2024



FBW Weekend of Action
What to do when you
fall in
Algebra for boaters



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NABO News

The magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners

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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 or post to the Editor by March 9 2024.

Cover photo

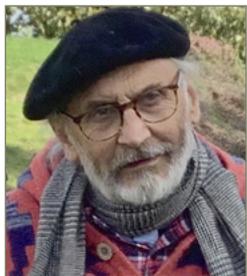
This month's cover is taken on the Shropshire Union, photo by Sheila Hurst. Please email your photos for the front cover of NABO News to the Editor, as JPEG attachments, ideally portrait format with a file size of 2MB or larger.



NABO News is published by the
National Association of Boat Owners
61 The Granary, Stanstead Abbot, Ware SG12 8XH

Editor: John Sadler Production: Chris Pink

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I made a road trip last year to Scotland, spending the first night at The Kelpies, by the canal, and returning after a few days further North to the Falkirk Wheel. Of course I had to experience the canal lift. In the speech that accompanied the trip we were informed that every penny generated by the attraction was reinvested into Scottish Canals.

According to Michael Matheson of the Scottish National Party, British Waterways was an organisation that sat in the background and did little but manage a bit of the infrastructure in Scotland. Campbell Christie was the

I quote this as an example of how a public service body has adapted, with no structural change, to a more holistic approach to community support. A very good public body that is making a real difference in communities, particularly in deprived areas, that uses assets and unlocks them in a way that results in much greater benefit. Because of the economic development approach that has been taken, an area has been opened up that people would simply not have gone to previously. We have to encourage more of our public bodies to do that.

According to Civil Society, in 2022 Canal and River Trust saw its assets



A tale of two countries

Editor John Sadler goes north

chair of British Waterways when the UK Government decided to abolish it, leading to the creation of Scottish Canals which, under Christie's leadership, transitioned into Scottish Waterways and became an economic development organisation, using canals to develop potential. This started with The Falkirk Wheel project which led on to the Kelpies and significant investment in Springburn, an area of North Glasgow.

grow by 18% to £1.04 billion but I don't see the same degree of praise for its constructive use.

In response to one of our Letters I invited a comment from Richard Parry, it was a lengthy reply and is printed in full in the letters section. NABO has no wish to be seen to be bashing CRT but in return for our support, on behalf of all boaters we will challenge injustice and questionable decision making.

It seems that there is an element of secrecy in the day to day operations of CRT. What we don't know we can't criticise. I do sympathise with the problems caused by the reduction in



funding when facing increasing costs but that demands more efficiency, fewer overheads or less maintenance. It's brutal but any business that I've worked in, when faced with reduced turnover, the first economy is staff reduction. It's one of the largest overheads. I have only noticed recruitment in the case of CRT, perhaps they are very confident in reversing the Government's decision. But quite honestly, looking at the queue of organisations demanding extra resources, the NHS, the Post Office, the Armed Forces and Local Government to name but a few, I can't see CRT being high on the list.

Spring is around the corner and boaters will soon be thinking of travelling. What excitement will Spring and Summer bring?

We do need to protect our cut by careful usage and campaigning to enjoy what is one of the UK's greatest assets.





As I write this, there's a beautifully clear blue sky from which the sun is streaming in through the portholes, warming the boat even though outside there's a smattering of snow on the towpath.

The canal contains plenty of water and there's boats going past so no stoppages at the moment, all seems well with our watery world. There will, I'm sure, be plenty of appealing wintery canal photos in the coming days now that the greyness has lifted.

Looking back, looking ahead

Chair **Anne Husar** reflects on a sunny winter's day

Difficult to maintain the message that all is not right with our watery world. So much easier to simply do what boating you can, while you can, rather than keeping an eye on what is really happening across the waterways, the wider picture. But days like this we can take a breath, appreciate what we've still got.

A friend with a great interest in the old working boats recently reminded me of Fred Heritage who, along with his wife Sadie, we were honoured to know. As well as being considered a 'real' gentleman, he was also a 'real' boatman. His knowledge of the canals, along with that of the experienced lengthsmen at the time, served the system so well. Today, enthusiastic volunteers have their place but, in an historic system whose workings have not substantially changed over 200 years, the accumulated wisdom of experienced boaters and skilled on-the-ground workers, the few who are left, should be taken seriously and acted upon. Their early warnings that would in

the past have meant the probable avoidance of large scale, expensive repairs, are even more necessary in these constrained times? "Wait 'til it breaks" should have no role in the protection of our waterways.

Continuing with a look back to the past that has implications for the present, NABO is currently supporting a member in an ongoing dispute with CRT about mooring his boat. Nothing unusual about that you may think but this involves an Act from 1793 enabling the Gloucester and Berkeley Canal to be built. Now better known as the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal, CRT's legal department may be about to delve in to some of its history, leading to our boater being allowed to moor without hindrance. However this is resolved, it is thanks to our knowledgeable council member Peter Braybrook who remembered the provisions of this still in statute Act. We have a talented team on council!

Not so far back, the Fund Britain's Waterways' steering group (FBW) met in January and discussions were lively about how to progress in 2024. One of the main campaigning events will be timed to coincide with the next FBW Westminster flotilla in the first week of May along with the yearly Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice. Other events supporting the cause will be happening over all the waterways during that bank holiday weekend so if you're out and about on your boat, please keep an eye open for something to join in with. The other way you can help spread the word is by having leaflets and stickers on board ready to give out to gongoozlers and others on your travels this year. Email me to arrange delivery, every little helps!

Finally, thanks to you all for supporting and helping with NABO's work and here's to a productive year for our waterways in 2024.

Do residential berths still deserve their reputation for being as rare as hen's teeth? Perhaps not.

For many years mooring providers, whether CRT—including their ex-subsiary BWML now Aquavista—or private marinas, have turned a blind eye to liveaboards on a residential mooring. Largely gone are the bad old days when BW would measure electricity consumption on their moorings to root out liveaboards, and boaters skulked about to avoid detection. But liveaboards on many moorings even now struggle to open bank accounts, insure their vehicles, obtain boat insurance that recognises them as a liveboard or have passports and credit cards delivered. More important, they struggle to register with local doctors, which could account for the poor health outcomes of many boaters.

There are now about 15,000 people living afloat in the UK, some 7500 boats. But there are only an estimated 1000 residential berths—defined as onewith residential planning permission, affording the same legal rights to services as bricks and mortar households. The remainder are a combination of continuous cruisers and those unofficially living on leisure berths with the authorities unaware or turning a blind eye.

But it doesn't need to be that way. In the mid-2000s, the Waterways Ombudsman found against BWML for providing liveboard berths—BWML had issued invoices classing the berths as residential when no permission existed—and demanded they 'regularise' the berths, obtaining residential permission or requiring liveaboards to leave the marina. To their credit, BWML submitted successful planning applications and regularised the berths they had been providing to liveaboards as

residential rather than leisure. This then made it much easier for other marinas to do the same as the recent precedent was established for a substantial number of residential berths within a marina.

So why aren't more marinas and linear mooring providers providing full residential berths and why isn't CRT? Cost for one, not so much for the boaters—currently, as long



Residential moorings are here to stay.

So why not support them asks vice-chair **Rob Neff**

as the boat occupies three different berths within a marina during any 12 month period, the berth provider pays business rates on the residential berths—but rather the cost to the marina.

Local authorities impose a charge called a Section 106 agreement for new dwellings, which amounts to £6000 to £10,000 per dwelling, as a contribution to providing school places, doctor surgeries, libraries and other services. Marinas obtaining residential berths have to argue the toss with the local authorities pointing out that average occupancy of a boat is 1.3 people versus say 3 in a house, the vast majority of boat occupants are above school age unlike in a house, which can bring the cost down to about £1500 a berth. Still an expensive proposition for the marina but with the benefit of full residential status for the boater.

In a nutshell, yes, genuine residential berths are still rare, but not so much as in the past.

And why doesn't CRT apply for residential berths for those without a home mooring that wish to remain in an area? That's a whole other story.



Fly on the wall

Observes proceedings at the Council meeting in January.

Patchy WiFi presented problems for the Zoom meeting. Initially chaired by Anne and taken over by Rob when communication became impossible.

The meeting opened with discussions on the CRT licence Increase and surcharges. CRT's response to NABO's enquiry was that CRT will set fees as they see fit.

Autocrats in charge

Anne Husar has had contact from Matthew Symonds asking to publish the notes of their meetings as a result of an FOI request. It was thought by council that CRT are acting very autocratically.

The increases are also affecting charities like the K & A Society. The extensive increases in both CRT's mooring (30%) and licence fees (20%) for nine public trip boats run by volunteers to raise funding for maintaining features on the K&A Canal, which include the Crofton Pumping Station and the canal museum has resulted in the K&A Canal Trust questioning whether they can continue to run all the boats.

Campaigning in 2024

Fund Britain's Waterways are organising actions over the May Bank Holiday weekend. It appears by CRT's attitude to FBW that it does not understand this movement is to their advantage.

IWA are continuing to provide secretarial support, literature is being updated and re-printed. IWA are updating the associated website.

It was suggested to request stories about the effect on people's lives which we can then promote in the interest of persuading Members of Parliament to take an interest. It was also noted that contact has been made with Fiona Bruce, MP for Congleton, who wants to raise fuel cost issues in Parliament. We have no update from Danny Kruger MP on his action to get liveboard boaters a fuel support grant.



Fiona Bruce MP, who speaks on fuel cost issues in Parliament

Calor are listening

Calor will bring small cylinders back into the market. It will take time to get back to full service as replacement bottles are procured. In the short term it is looking promising. It was reported that they have 3-6 kg to sell now. We will follow up this issue with the Boat Safety Scheme to get a story from them.

Online mooring and riparian rights

A discussion on the general understanding that one can moor anywhere with the landowner's permission took place.

It was noted that are some specif-

NABO Calendar 2024

The Council meetings in 2024 will be on:

16th March 2024

Zoom

18th May 2024 at

Tamworth Cruising Club

13th July 2024

Zoom

14th September 2024

Zoom

16th November 2024 after

the AGM

AGM, 16 November 2024

at Tamworth Cruising

Club

Disabled Boater

Forum

14th February 2024

Online

ic exceptions to the general rule but it was not known whether CRT had any statutory power to regulate off-side mooring where they are not the landowner. If legal advice is required we will seek it in the future.

Meetings with CRT are taking place this month or early next month. One question to be raised will be the costs of fundraising and overheads associated with that, particularly high salaried staff.

Stoppages and Winter Works

We need to analyse the stoppages on the Leeds and Liverpool and some southern canals. There is serious concern about the condition of reservoirs which could impact the Leeds and Liverpool Canal and the Peak Forest Canals until 2026. The popular Cheshire cruising ring would also be affected.

NABO on social media

Thanks were given to Robert Neff who has now taken on Facebook management. It was reported that there was a lack of response from CRT to tweets. It appears that CRT do not want any transparency. The number of followers on Instagram is growing.

Our Welfare Officer has been very busy supporting numerous members around the regions. GDPR prohibits reporting of individual cases.

Mike Rodd reported that he represented NABO on EA's recently renamed and re-organised National Waterways Forum (NWF) and their Thames Waterways Forum (TWF). For the NWF, with now nearly 40 member organisations, he had attended their annual 1-to-1 meeting with senior EA officers at which he had stressed the concerns of the boater representative organisations that they felt largely ignored by the EA staff. Given that these bodies represent one of their major income

generating streams, this seems totally wrong. He also attended a meeting of the present boating organisations on the TWF where he and others stressed their concerns about the recent extensive documents essentially saying that volunteer members should be "nice" to EA officials. He also repeated that the EA waterways had seen major reductions in their funding and that there are also tensions between EA's staff lock keepers and the volunteer lock keepers, the EA staff being supported by their Trade Union.

Any other business

Anne noted that the **Navigation Advisory Group** appears to have become the National Advisory Group. Minutes are published. We have no representative on this group.

BSS Technical Committee: Mike Rodd had a meeting of the Electrical Sub Committee. The recent publication of the IET Small Craft Electrical Guidelines is selling well and covers many of the issues that the committee have been discussing.

The development of **St Pancras Hospital** in London is currently the subject of a planning application which could impact on the local canal. Planning objections are best coming from individuals.

CRT's privacy policy has completely revised. It is so different that it will take a huge effort to analyse. There are concerns about transparency. It appears that CRT legal department have a hand in what they will give under FOI requests and also regulate the issues that go to the Ombudsman.

Robert Neff has approached his colleagues in the marina industry to try to get transparency from CRT about funding. He wants to get some independent opinions. He will report back on whether they can improve communications.

The IET electrical guidelines can be found at shop.theiet.org/electrical-safety-for-small-craft

Wales and Southwest

Mike Rodd



Never have we seen the level of the Kennet and Avon canal so high and overflowing in many places. Up on our east end, the canal also runs parallel to the river and its many tributaries, so cross-flooding can occur at many places. Our Hungerford public trip boat was rescued one night when it was found to be high up on the wharf side, the canal being at least a foot above its normal level. Our public trip boat at Newbury has seldom been able to leave its moorings because of the high flowing currents in the canal.

Of course, as a result of all the high winds and flooding literally dozens of trees have come down and in many places the canal has been totally impassable, effectively closing it for many lengthy periods. In truth, though, CRT seems to be doing their utmost to keep things under control and most planned winter work has continued, fortunately also including repairing a lock where our Hungerford boat has had to cope for three years with broken paddles.

On the Mon & Brec likewise it has been a very wet and windy time but fortunately being alongside the River Usk, any especially high levels on the canal are avoided by regular overflow exits into the river. My wife and I usually spend the week after Christmas on the canal but this year several trees were down and with few boats moving, this was not a high priority to be sorted out by CRT. But most planned winter work has been taking place. Unfortunately for us but not for the canal, this involves sections either side of our mooring being closed off, so no serious cruising for us until mid-March.

Avon and Severn

Helen Hutt



The main news from the region is, of course, the New Year floods. After a

Around the regions with NABO's regional reps

smaller flood in early November and incessant rain for almost two weeks around Christmas, the result was inevitable: the highest flood for four years, only half a metre lower than the devastating event of 2007. Fortunately, though, this flood subsided quickly, so there was less sticky mud left on flat surfaces. On the other hand, the amount of debris washing down the rivers seemed worse than usual!

The Avon is out of action as a through-route for boats, possibly until March, due to repairs to Binton Bridges which were held up because of the floods. But when the river does reopen, boaters will be able to use two new visitor mooring sites, below Pershore Lock and adjacent to The Valley, Evesham.

The River Severn will be closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays until 1 April and there are warnings of flood debris around some bridges, but otherwise there are no planned winter stoppages affecting boaters.

River Trent

Nick Roberts



Did January see the 'biggest flood ever'?

A nerdy review!

As the flood waters of recent days begin to subside, just how 'big' was that flood on the Trent? It certainly did a lot of damage to people's homes and other damage and disruption, but in terms of 'biggest ever'; it seems not, except maybe at Torksey? It's dangerous to talk of 'ever' as this amateur can only see what records are available 'online'. They only go back the last 50 years or so but do include events like the 1947 floods. That flood put Gainsborough and other towns and villages under water; these days those areas are now much better protected.

It's probably also true that how much prop-



erty gets flooded probably depends on the duration of the high flood levels. The extent of damage isn't just reliant on how high, or how fast the river goes but also how long it sits at those high levels allowing the water to find its way over banks and up drains, flooding property further from the river.

What we can see online are the flow rates in the river at North Muskham, just above Cromwell, where records go back to the 1960s. Here, this 2024 flood peaked at a rate of $742\text{m}^3/\text{s}$ —an Olympic swimming pool every 5 seconds—on 5th January. Checking back since these records started, there have been two occasions when this was significantly beaten and rates exceeded $900\text{m}^3/\text{s}$, one in 1977 and one in 2000 so does this year's come in third?

The other measurement that can be seen online are the Environment Agency Flood Gauges with nine of them on the navigable section between Shardlow and Keadby. These largely give a 'highest recorded reading' prior to this event as November 2000. While it hasn't yet shown online, this last flood **did** exceed that level, but

only at Torksey where by the 5th January in the morning there was around 5m more water than normal and still rising. From Torksey Viaduct looking downstream toward Gainsborough the course of the river was almost invisible looking more like a lake. It got very close on other gauges but from information online it didn't exceed the 2000 level anywhere else.

As for the affects of the flood, coming as it did in the winter months it didn't really affect the Trent boating community. We can say we certainly got flooded and that Torksey Lock area probably had higher levels than records show going back to at least 2000 but nothing much has moved here on the river since October.

No disasters on the tidal and nothing I'm aware of on the non tidal except a couple of electric or hydraulic problems with water on the locks and the pontoon visitor mooring at Dunham has apparently been lifted off its rails. For landlubbers, the Trent Port pub on Gainsborough Road bridge was closed by flooding and the west side flood banks between Gainsborough railway bridge and Gainsborough Road bridge overtopped and started to flood the sacrificial flood land designed to protect Gainsborough.

Both Gainsborough and Dunham Bridges were closed to traffic and the little used flood gates at West Stockwith lock were closed to protect the Chesterfield Canal, although as it is quite high above normal Trent levels, the river still needed to rise the best part of another metre before they were going to do anything.

So, as the EA reminds us, no two flood events are the same but in terms of 'biggest ever' the statistics suggest this was perhaps the third biggest since the 1960's. Nevertheless, however we look at it, we have certainly had a lot of water for over three months!

More information trentlink.org.uk



NABO at the user groups

Environment Agency Forum

Mike Rodd reports

Mike had his annual one-to-one meeting on behalf of NABO with leaders of EA's National Waterways Forum.

The main thrust of the session was to make it very clear to the EA that having expanded the Forum's membership, shortened meetings and self-determining the agendas etc, they were in serious danger of neglecting the views of their prime income generators besides government: the boating community. All boating bodies realised only too well that the EA is already un-

derfunded, and this will only get worse, thus to get additional voluntary support, as well as have access to the freely offered expertise, it was essential the boaters started feeling that the EA actually valued their input.

The issuing, for example, of their totally ridiculous and over-the-top multi-page document spelling out how the organisation's representatives must behave towards EA personnel was a totally unnecessary put-off and Mike felt it should be ignored.

Membership News

A new look for NABO web site

This went live in mid-January and the transfer of the membership database will follow. In this period any changes of address or membership status must be notified by email.

The transfer is a complex task and will take place in stages over several days. Members will receive an email, with new sign in credentials when their account goes live on the new site. All data will be transferred except passwords and avatars. The web site will always have an item telling members what stage we are at and what to expect.



NABO SUCCESS

Calor 'U' turn—your Council member David Fletcher had an early Christmas present with an announcement from Calor sent via email to distributors that they have listened to concerns and will be reinstating the 3.9kg propane and 4.5kg butane cylinders.

A rewarding announcement for all his work on this. There is no date for this, but Calor are saying they are waiting on a new supply of cylinders. So, hang on to the old ones and we will provide any update we receive. If you manage to buy one or your dealer has stock, please let us know.



BCN Society

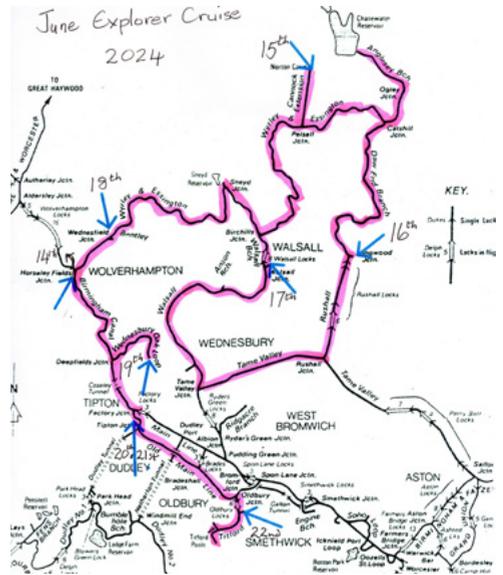
An update on Explorer Cruises

If you were considering taking part in an Explorer Cruise this year May is fully booked and June is rapidly filling up. It has been a great year for the Explorer Cruises booking up so quickly.

If you or someone you know is interested please get in touch asap. bcns.explorercruise@gmail.com

The BCN Society, a Company Limited by Guarantee, is a registered charity (1091760) first formed in 1968, which exists to conserve, improve and encourage a wide range of interests in the 100 mile network of Birmingham and Black Country waterways known as the Birmingham Canal Navigations.

For information take a look at the website bcnsociety.com



What a Load of Rubbish

Norbury

The rubbish point at Norbury has been removed to Norbury Wharf but is only accessible during Norbury Wharf's business hours. Consequently the two rubbish bins at Gnosall have been over-used and bags left adjacent to them. The council has responded by removing the two rubbish bins and erecting a dog waste bin. Next one is south at Wheaton Aston or north at Tyrlay.

Stone

The rubbish point at Stone has also been removed apparently due to access problems.

Leeds

CRT Facilities have been removed at Leeds and showing no signs of being replaced.

NABO needs to monitor this trend.

Please let us know of rubbish or elsan/water point removals that lead to non-compliance with CRT's policy, see here: canalrivertrust.org.uk/refresh/media/original/48107-customer-service-facility-policy-statement-2023.pdf

New battery technology.

Sweden's new sodium-ion battery shocks the electric vehicle industry!



Northvolt, a Swedish battery company, claims to have achieved a breakthrough with its new sodium-ion battery technology. Northvolt has recently announced this game-changing technology in its research and development, and it plans to start mass production soon. What makes this technology so special is that the performance seems to be at least as good as those based on lithium, but without the associated dangers and lithium-sourcing issues.

Further information: <https://northvolt.com/>

FBW weekend of action

For further information about Fund Britain's Waterways contact: info@fundbritainwaterways.org.uk

Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) Declares a May Day Bank Holiday Weekend of Action

Several months after launching at the end of June 2023, FBW has created an impressive coalition of member organisations totalling well over one hundred, representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways. A public petition has attracted close to 50,000 signatures.

Three well-reported Campaign Cruises in Birmingham, Gloucester and past the Palace of Westminster on the Thames have substantially raised awareness of the challenges facing our canals and rivers and the need for action.

The plans for 2024 include an important weekend of action over the May Day Bank Holiday weekend (4 to 6 May 2024) to highlight the impact of insufficient funding for Britain's 5,000 miles of inland waterways.

The weekend of action is planned to take place across the country on waterways managed by different inland navigation authorities. It will coincide with IWA's annual Canalway Cavalcade at

Little Venice in London, which this year will be themed around Fund Britain's Waterways.

May Campaign cruise

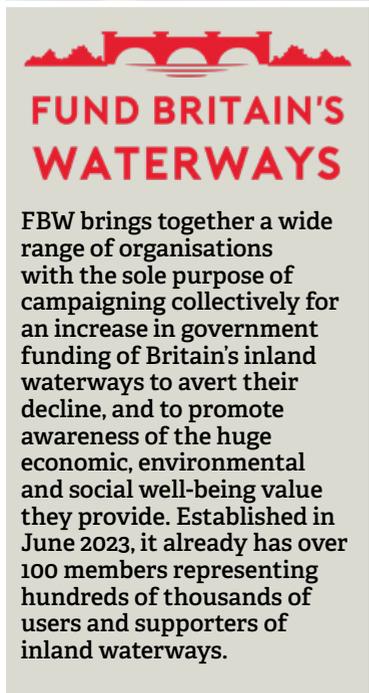
Boaters attending Cavalcade are invited to join a Campaign Cruise past the Houses of Parliament on Wednesday 8 May, as the culmination of the weekend of action.

Parliamentarians will be encouraged to view the event and express their support for the continued maintenance of the waterways to enable them to keep on delivering economic, health, environmental and well-being benefits.

It is hoped that activities taking place across the country over the weekend will attract local and national media attention, building up to the Westminster Cruise on 8 May for which FBW will be aiming for national coverage.

Is there a boating group local to you that could help?

FBW are looking for local groups to organise events during the weekend of action to spread the word that waterways need to be properly funded to stop them from falling into decline. Events can be as simple as a few boats gathered together at a "public" location where flyers can be handed out and people be encouraged to sign the FBW petition or get more involved. If you or your organisation could arrange an event over the weekend, please contact Hazel Owen by email on hazelowen.awcc@outlook.com or by phone at 07929 204811. Please also contact Hazel if you can help promote the FBW cause at any events that you are involved in throughout the year.



FIRE!

Peter Early encourages us to think about fire safety

Being fairly close to the main road we get used to the sirens from the emergency services so on hearing them the Thursday morning before Christmas when having breakfast we thought little of it.

However, going into the bedroom to dress we could see a long stream of black smoke being blown across the marina by the strong wind. Going outside we could see flames and smoke from a serious fire further down our pontoon with Fire and Rescue in attendance. Unfortunately, the boater was found dead inside.

Whilst we won't know the cause of the fire until the inquest it did make me think about Fire Safety which most of us probably only pay lip service to. We live in a space that is full of far more flammable stuff than a bricks and mortar house. Wooden walls, wooden ceilings, gas bottles.

OK, we all now have CO monitors but in the case of a fire they won't sound until it's too late. So you need a smoke detector, even better two smoke detectors, one in the living area near your stove and cooker and one in your bedroom. And think about your exit route. We never lock our doors when on board but I can understand boaters who do, not every mooring being secure like a marina. So can you open it easily, in the dark, possibly smoke filled?

In our marina fire the two nearest boats needed to be moved out of danger. One was liveaboard so moved quickly, the other was towed away by another boater. But, walking along the pontoon the way some boaters tie their ropes is weird and

wonderful. So can your boat be released quickly in an emergency?

We all have fire extinguishers but they should only be used to allow you to exit the boat. The small 1kg extinguishers we have are not suitable to fight a well established fire. And when it becomes visible to the outside it will be well established. Most marinas will have fire fighting equipment readily to hand but use it with care. The minute you open a door or break a window to fight a fire you let oxygen in which further fuels it.

One final point, only about 60% of the boats in our marina are liveaboards. Other moorers, seeing the posts on Social Media were understandably anxious to ensure their boats were safe. Our fire happened in the early morning before any marina staff came on duty so make sure you have contact phone numbers for your neighbours.

Useful Reading

boatsafety.scheme.org/stay-safe-advice/fire-safety-for-boats/assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/628780b2d-3bf7f1f422c883c/Fire_Safety_on_Boats_v4_-_Web_accessible.pdf

A boat fire in Bradford-on-Avon last year, thankfully no-one was killed but a boater lost his home

Photo: Maggie Dorman



Cold snap forecast

It's still winter say **River Canal Rescue**

More information:
rivercanalrescue.co.uk

Boaters are beginning to look forward to the new season's boating. Maintenance and servicing will make that smoother and, hopefully, trouble free. Here's some seasonal advice from RCR.

De-winterising

Check and close any water taps left open throughout the winter, replace the plug in the water heater, if removed, and switch the water pump on. Test the system for leaks or issues, and open and run water through each tap. Start with those closest to the pump and work through to the one furthest away—this will push any air locks through the system. Drain any water in the tank and refill with fresh drinking water.

Check the functioning and safety of LPG and electrical systems, fire extinguishers and escape hatches.

Servicing

Check the oil level and condition, you'll be able to see whether the engine needs a top-up or service—the latter if the oil's black.

Service your engine on a yearly basis or every 250 running hours, whichever comes first. This reduces the possibility of excessive wear and tear in the engine internals.

Change all fluid filters and check the air filter. Even if they're clean, it's good practice to change them so they work well for the coming season. After the service, run and test the engine to check for leaks and its performance.

Fuel: Water in the fuel is one of

the biggest causes of breakdowns and poor engine performance, so before running the engine, check water trap filters and remove any excess water. If water is present or there are signs of diesel bug—black dust or jelly, dip the tank to identify its severity and treat with a fuel treatment or have the fuel polished accordingly.

If you do not have a water trap filter, check the main fuel tank using a clear plastic hose. Drop it into the tank, being careful not to disturb the fuel and when you feel the bottom, place your thumb over the end to seal it and withdraw the hose. This should produce a tank sample, showing the amount of water present, plus an indication of any diesel bug.

There is debate around sticky fuel—a change in fuel density that appears to clog up injection pump racks, injectors and filter head plungers, and block fuel filters. At RCR, we believe it's linked to a change in fuel and fuel treatment additives. A strong smell of turps signals a sticky fuel problem. If this happens, overhaul the injectors and/or pump, empty the tank and refill with fresh fuel.

Bolts and terminals: Check the bolts on couplings, engine mounts (only adjust the bottom bolt) and prop shaft are tight, and clean off any corrosion on battery terminals. Check the fan belt for tightness and wear—cracks and fraying are a sure sign it needs replacing—and gearbox oil levels.

Check the stern gland, a traditional stern gland should leak, but

if it's leaking too much, it probably needs adjusting and greasing. If this does not resolve it, it needs repacking.

Cooling system: Check the antifreeze level. If it's low, it could be due to a leak—make any necessary repairs and top-up. Run your engine's up to running temperature, if there's a gauge, or for around half an hour. Check the cooling system for leaks or escaping steam and if something is found, ensure jubilee clips

are tight. If a split pipe is evident call out a qualified engineer. Finally put the engine into gear and check the control lever operation, it should move freely with no tightness or 'grabbing', grease the ends and check for fraying, replace if required.

Deck clearance: Clear deck drains of any leaves and debris—it will reduce the amount of water that enters the bilge and prevent rust occurring within the gunnels.



Responses to climate change

All boaters must have noticed the amount of closures caused by fallen trees, not to mention landslips induced by heavy rain. We have been warned by climatologists that the continued warming of the planet is likely to result in more extreme weather events.

That also applies to long periods of heat in the summer, which some may welcome. Whatever our personal preferences are, long dry spells will raise the risk of uncontrollable brush fires. The Trust's contractors have, on the whole, been responding quite quickly but what amounts to reactive maintenance is not the best solution for navigation. Especially when we are looking at more extreme weather events.

I see that CRT recognises responses to climate change will affect the already critical financial situation. Not many boaters are experienced enough with a chainsaw to volunteer to help, post collapse, but I'm sure that we've all seen trees that have been weakened and likely to fall in an upcoming gale. Couldn't we pre-empt the damage, cost and inconvenience by alerting CRT teams in the manner of long gone lengthsmen?

The idea of volunteer lengthsmen (or women) could solve a number of problems, a similar scheme for minor roads has received some government funding. Agreed responsibilities and training could result in community involvement and a wider understanding of the value of the canal network and carbon reduction.



Photo: ministrip/photopondanda.co.uk

A subsidised biofuel, which will help decarbonise the waterways, has been given the green light for more widespread use on leisure boats by the UK Government. Leisure boaters looking to reduce their carbon footprint while cruising will be able to take greater advantage of a government managed subsidy on hydro-treated vegetable oil (HVO), after the Department for Transport (DfT) agreed that the benefit can apply to fuel used for onboard domestic purposes, as well as for the propulsion of vessels. Comments were made in the House of Commons about encouraging the use of greener fuels. The Government encourage the use of renewable fuels through the renewable transport fuel obligation, which incentivises the use of low-carbon fuels and reduces emissions from fuels supplied for use in transport and non-road mobile machinery.

Taking the Waters

A boaters' guide to how and where to fall in

Paul Monahan shares his experiences

It is probable that others have fallen in more often than I have, but I can claim to have fallen into many of the better class of canals in the country. Such experience has helped me write this guide. Firstly, the important bits:

- 1 Locks are dangerous
- 2 Moving boats are dangerous
- 3 Moving propellers are extremely dangerous
- 4 Canal water is always cold, usually muddy, and often contaminated
- 5 Under the water is a lot of silt, probably containing sharp objects and entanglements
- 6 You might not be able to get out by yourself
- 7 If later you have flu-like symptoms, seek medical help as you may have Weil's disease (leptospirosis). Tell the doctor that you have been in contaminated water.

The right answer is not to fall in—but it happens. Do take safety precautions: non-slip surfaces, sensible footwear, do not jump/step further than your ability permits, be aware that handrails and footboards do fall off gates, and do consider wearing a lifejacket. I know that this invites derision from certain people, and I agree that you are unlikely not to find the bottom, but what happens if you are knocked unconscious as you fall?

Too many people have died from the consequences. Definitely always wear a lifejacket on large rivers or tidal waters. Finally, do try to keep your mouth shut on the way in; I have never found any canal water fit to drink.

Technique.

Since, by definition, falling in is involuntary, you may not have much choice about the mode of entry. Feet first may be conventional, but makes for a deeper descent into the silt, as does head-first, but with a much more unpleasant (and possibly terminal) landing. Bottom-first may seem to offer advantages, but landing on a protruding sharp object can be so very painful. Due consideration and much practice confirms that the usual cartwheel descent is the most effective, should one have the time to consider options.

A further refinement is to enter the water whilst astride a bicycle (the New Cut, near Church Minshull; the towpath suddenly sloped towards the water, I followed the slope.) This can have advantages if the bottom is soft (the canal, not yours). It is possible to keep pedalling despite the rising tide and, provided one remains upright, to remain dry on the upper half.

Choice of Venue.

Again, the place of entering the water is unlikely to be optional even if one is going in to clear the blades on a carrying boat (which does not have a weedhatch). A friend of mine was helping us move our loaded pair up to Gas Street Basin when we caught a coil of wire on the blades at Salford Junction. He quite happily volunteered to go in to clear it—in January!

In general, the BCN cannot be recommended for impromptu immersion; possibly Anglesey Basin



might be alright but is not one I can vouch for. Certainly, I would not wish to enter the water (again) in Gas Street Basin, the new main line at Tipton or even the north Stratford at Hockley Heath. I would never wish to go anywhere near the water at the top of the West Brom Eight (2 feet of water and three feet of the filthiest black silt ever seen) or anywhere near the old Chemical Arm (phosphorus burns in air, remember). Fortunately, I have never fallen in anywhere near these two grot spots.

To quote from my late friend David Blagrove's song, 'The 'Orrible Trip'
*"He fell off the gunnel in Netherton Tunnel
 The words that he called me were shocking
 He went up to his chest in the BCN's best
 And he smelt like a sewerman's stocking."*

Further afield, the southern GU is reasonable in parts; near the Fishery is quite clean, although deep to the bank and difficult to climb out—Bonus: nearby pub.

I am reliably informed by Herself that the Ashby near Market Bosworth is a reasonable place for a dip; shallow enough to be warm in summer, if a little muddy. It was not easy to haul the aforementioned reliable correspondent out and onto the boat!

Voluntarily? Perhaps!

When naught but a youth, I often swam in the Thames above Reading and can even remember the official cordoned-off lidos near Caversham Bridge. This was of course before the river became such a well-used part of the sewerage system—although the Kennet even then looked a funny colour after the Foundry Brook joined it below Fobney lock.

I remember that many years ago a young actress with Mikron volunteered to go in to clear the blades on 'Tyseley'.

Mike, Mikron director, accepted with some alacrity and watched as she entered the water, while trying to suppress his sniggers. Very soon, there was a surprised shriek of, "What are all these pieces of tissue paper in the water?" then an exit like a submarine missile, quickly followed by the sound of a shower running and furious scrubbing. 'Tyseley' was moored just by the outfall from Barnhurst sewage works into the Shropshire Union!

There can be better places; if you venture to the very end of the navigable section on the Basingstoke, this is a pleasant spot to conduct an underwater examination of the sterngear: chalk-stream fed with clean water, gravel bottom and very rarely disturbed by boats.

Final advice about falling in? Don't do it.

Photo CRT
[youtube.com/
 watch?v=SVBq35oT-SU](https://youtube.com/watch?v=SVBq35oT-SU)



DIARY OF A GONGOOZLER

Beautiful psychopaths

Steve Teratsia treads warily around some feathered friends

With your permission I'd like to cut right to the chase today as this subject really rattles me.

Swans. Or as I like to call them, the hooligans of the waterways.

Don't get me wrong, I absolutely adore them and would never wish them any harm, despite them being the evil messengers from Beelzebub.

I'm just flummoxed as to how a creature so stunningly beautiful can also be such a psychopathic, hate filled hissing monster. They give off this peaceful air of serenity and aloofness until they get within a yard of a human, and then instantly become spiteful mentalists in the blink of an eye.

I've lost count of the times that I've had to perform a complete 'U' turn on the towpath after spotting one, and just given up any thought of photography on that stretch.

"They can break a man's arm with their wings" goes the old wives' tale. Well they can certainly break this man's heart when I see them waddling along the canal side puffing their chests out like steroid fuelled bodybuilders.

Another favourite quip I get from people is "They'll only get aggressive when they have their young with them". Look, I walk past people with children every day and not once has a bad tempered parent lurched at me in Tesco with the intention of biting my unmentionables.

One wag on Facebook told me that the trick is to wait until one comes close then slowly hold your arms out until he tilts his head, and he will now allow you to gently pick him up and cuddle him.

That's not as crazy as it sounds, as I have actually handled a swan some years back when I was into fishing.



This normally graceful beast had clumsily got caught in my line, which had a breaking strain of around 20lb. I couldn't break it off without either harming the swan or leaving him with the line wrapped around his neck.

So, I gently and very nervously began reeling him in like a fish. Another angler on the opposite side of the lake made no attempt to assist, just sitting there to enjoy the unfolding spectacle. This swan was completely apoplectic with rage and the sound of his hissing and spitting will haunt me for all my days. But... as I got him within arm's reach he just gave in. Petrified, I had one hand in a chokehold just under his head and the other unwinding the line from around him. Success, but by far the most frightening part was releasing him. Thankfully he just turned and waddled off back to the water's edge in a bit of a confused state, but by that time I'd already sprinted like Usain Bolt in the opposite direction.

I think geese too deserve a dishonourable mention. Not really as pretty as swans but a heck of a lot more aggressive in my opinion. They're greedy beggars too, if they suspect you have something edible on your person then you're fair game for a mugging.

My first hand experience of this was on the Dudley Canal at Halesowen around 2012. I was an HGV driver back then, delivering scissor lifts and cherry pickers around the country. I'd just dropped a machine off at an industrial estate which backs on to the canal. It was a nice sunny day so decided to stay a little while and have my packed lunch next to the water.

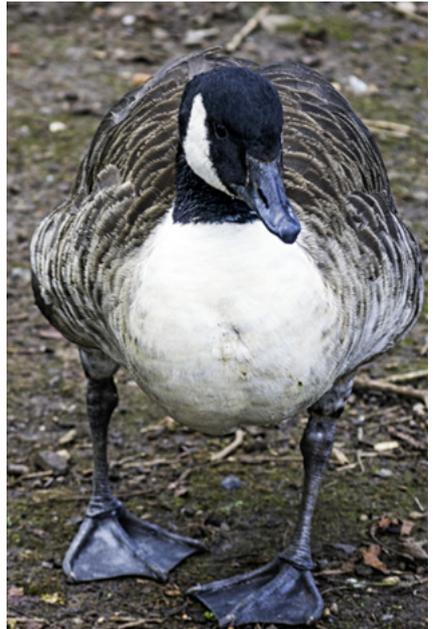
All was going well until a massive goose trundled towards me, honking like an oncoming goods train. He seemed cute so I naively threw him a piece of Hovis wholemeal bread from one of my butties. That was my first mistake. Within a nanosecond around half a dozen of his mates had rocked up and surrounded me. I was now trapped in what looked like a fight scene from West Side Story.

It was at that point I made my second and biggest mistake... I chucked a bit more bread out in an attempt to placate them.

This just sent them into a complete feeding frenzy, even trying to wrestle my Tupperware sandwich box from my grasp. In the end I hurled all the remaining contents at them including a Mister Kipling French Fancy that I was really looking forward to, and sprinted back to the safety of my truck whilst they squabbled over their ill-gotten spoils.

I do have other avian tales of woe to tell but I'll save them for another day. In the meantime I hope you've all revelled in a little slice of my misery.

Happy boating... And above all stay safe!



Poetry Junction



Emma Purshouse is an award winning writer and performer. She was a narrowboat dweller for about eight years, continuously cruising the waterways. She often uses Black Country dialect and accent in her work. Her poetry collections are published by Offa's Press and Fair Acre Press. Her first novel *Dogged* is published by Ignite Books. For more information or to book a workshop, performance or talk go to www.emmapurshouse.co.uk.

Easy Life... is it boat and *Boaters Hair Report* appear in the collection *Close*, published by Offa's Press.

Emma is also currently involved in Wolverhampton Literature Festival. Most events for the festival happened over the weekend of 2nd to 4th February. She performed as part of the Fringe Room at Arena Theatre, and will be MCing the Poetry Slam on Friday 9th February. For more information about the festival go to wolvesliteraturefestival.co.uk

Emma's Photo: Lamont Paul outsideleft.com
Off the Radar Photo: Sharon Wells

Easy life... is it boat

Emma Purshouse

There are a lot of us here, out of sight,
off the radar. We work, some of us.
Pay taxes, some of us. We much prefer
the mud, the open door or side hatch,

close proximity to bird song. Brown water
more appealing than city streets.
The rock of a boat more comforting
than the stasis of buildings. All sorts.

Suited and smart, scruffy and dreadlocked,
the old school boaters making a living
selling rag rugs and roses and castles
to those folk who care for such things.

Our dogs are here too, the quiet, the yappy.
Running free, while we fetch and carry,
deal with our own muck. It's all
jerry cans and generators, ropes, plants,

pegs, hooks, condensation, mice in winter,
chainsaws, coal buckets, ash. Visitors
who didn't show their faces, or come around
when we lived on land at the arse end of town.

Boater's Hair Report

Emma Purshouse

Sunday—light, fairly fluffy,
wafting in a warm breeze.

Monday—needs a comb through
but still a fair bit of movement
like the branches of the weeping willow trees.

Tuesday—tied up on top of head,
wisy bits allowed to hang.

Wednesday—scraped back into plait.

Thursday—hat

Friday—Warning. Stay on boat

Saturday—find water point.
Early evening showers make for shiny hair
and socializing later.

Sunday—should anyone ask
see previous week's forecast.

The no home mooring equation

Algebra, a boater's maths lesson by Ian Hutson

Winter. It's the best of times, it's the worst of times. Most scrofulous peasants pick up the coin tossed in their begging cap, hoist up their filthy rags and run home to hibernate in bricks and mortar until springtime.

Boaters—the full-timers—lead a slightly more complicated life. They have to resolve the “No Home Mooring” equation.

In short, and not to put too fine a point on it, before we can moor up and go inside to put a pot of gruel on the stove we need to know that :

$$[(CW + MN/MW + D + C + L + K + F + Wa (Wi < Gale Force + I = 0) \text{ times } N + (WiFi + MoSi / \text{Acceptable}) + \text{NotShadShouldSuSolCoFSP} + \text{TPSFD} + \text{SeACicol} \text{ and } \text{ASBNLWFo-BbM} = \text{Absolutely} + (\text{any of } MoRi \text{ or } Armco = 1) \text{ AND } (\text{both of } NTCTbri \& \text{NTCTb} = 1))] / ((Mi + Ra = 1) + (Spla \text{ AND } Sunpla = 0)) \text{ when } (TTSFP = \text{Yes or Probably}) + \text{NUDT} \text{ but only for } 14dmax = WC\&RTbHwm? \text{ except on alternate Tuesdays or when six other boats have arrived there before you because you just had to have that second coffee before setting off AND bearing in mind LKRS just in case.}$$

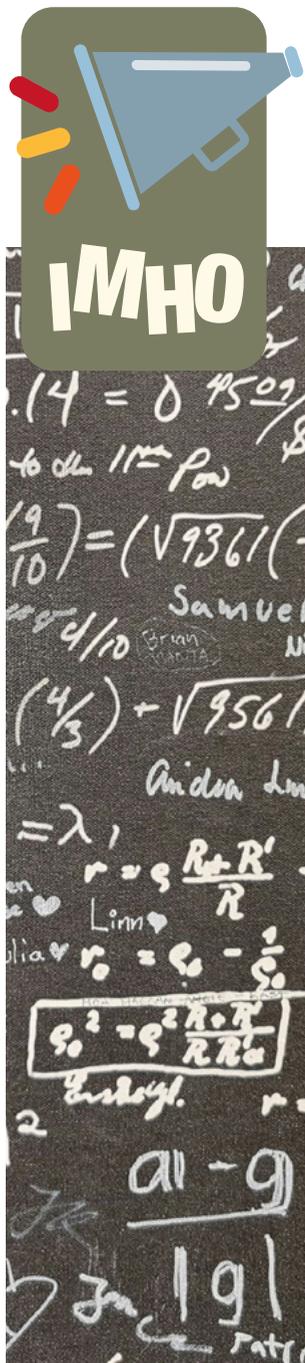
As the boater in England's deep mid-winter cruises along, passing a cheery word with cheery-word-passing anglers, waving a bobble-hat to show unity with rambles, overtaking keen cyclists who are mindfully sharing the space, wondering at the chemical marvel that is Lycra, he or she is deep in formulaic thought.

This is why most full-time boaters look bewildered and on the verge of tears as they cruise.

It is not uncommon in winter for a lightbulb to appear over a boater's head and for them to decide on a mooring spot after a lovely cruise—only for them to then wait long and loud about having forgotten the eminently forgettable factor TDMRhFSAaWC. [The Damned Mooring Ropes have Frozen Solid Again as We Cruised].

Not to mention LBbW [Life's Better by Water]. Even though L is (still, just) B on Water.

CW: Cruising Wishes. **MN:** Mooring Needs. **MW:** Mooring Wishes. **D:** Diesel. **C:** Coal. **L:** Logs. **K:** Kindling. **F:** Food. **Wa:** Water. **Wi:** Wind. **I:** Ice. **N:** Neighbourhood. **LKRS:** Last Known Reliable Spotting. **Mi:** Mileage. **Ra:** Range. **14dmax:** 1995 Waterways Act. **WiFi:** availability of WiFi signal with which to receive 'Have You Forgotten To Cruise?' emails. **MoSi—**Mobile Signal. **NotShadShouldSuSolCoFSP—**Not Shadowed Should Sun Come out For Solar Panels. **TPSFD—**Towpath Suitable For Dog. **SeACicoI—**Service Area Close (in case $I >= 1$ and you have to walk an Elsan cassette there.) **ASBNLWFo-BbM =** Area Suitable, Boat Not Liable to be Wheel-Free and on-Bricks by Morning. **Spla:** Stoppages Planned. **Sunpla:** Stoppages Unplanned. **MoRi:** Mooring Rings. **Armco:** Armco. **TTSFP:** Towpath Too Sloppy for Pins. **NTCTbri:** Not Too Close to Bridge Holes. **NTCTb:** Not Too Close to Bends. **NUDT:** Not Under Doggy Trees. **WC&RTbHwm?:** Will C&RT be Happy with me?

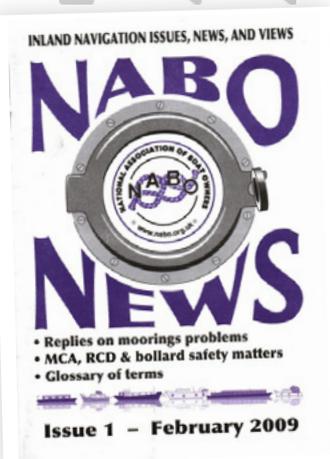




Rewind

Issue No 1 2009

Howard Anguish reviews NABO News from 15 years ago.



Firstly, may I wish all readers a very happy and prosperous New Year and happy boating in 2024.

Stop Press be assured. The new year of 2009 started on a positive note with a brief Stop Press announcement that British Waterways had confirmed that there was no National Policy restricting return times on BW Visitor moorings. Within reason, you can return whenever you like, unless local signs say otherwise. This was in spite of what some patrol officers and wardens may be saying.

The Vice Chairman, Stuart Sampson, gave a summary of a January 2009 meeting at the House of Commons where a delegation from waterway interest groups heard Ann Macintosh, Conservative MP, and brought her up to speed with current issues. This meeting also included a debate about whether there should be a National Waterways Authority. It was emphasised that this Authority would act without destroying the individual character of the canal network and would become a part of the Communities and Local Government organisation rather than DEFRA as at present. No doubt this issue would be debated as the year progresses.

Stuart also reported on the Second Customer Standards meeting, recently held, the continuing discussion centred around the contentious provision of bollards which has gone ahead despite matters of concern being raised by user groups such as NABO and IWA. This issue

was ongoing and raised an interesting aside from a BW draft note where BW stated “Locks are the single most dangerous thing that BW offers its customers”.

Also, during this meeting, Tony Stammers, BW’s Head of Safety, gave an outline of how BW tackled its Risk Assessments and raised a difference of views between BW and a number of meeting delegates about the safe handling of a boat in a lock and that in some locks—especially narrow locks—the use of ropes could raise additional risks, rather than the opposite—especially when in the hands of inexperienced boaters.

This led to a general discussion of ropes and their uses and a suggestion that that the panel should visit a lock to see demonstrations of how ropes and bollards can help. Maybe in future issues of NN we will hear the outcome of such a visit.

In the “Points to Ponder” an anonymous contributor points out that British Waterways were telling anyone who would listen how strapped for cash they were and asks then why have they insisted in fitting bollards at all locks (they describe it as the “Lock Bollard fiasco”). It was suggested that at such a time it must be hard to justify the spending of an extra £100,000 of licence fee cash and whether this extra outlay may adversely affect any bonuses that BW staff may get in 2009. It also suggests that BW’s plea for more funding might sound a lot more credible if they looked after the money, they already had a little more carefully. An object lesson for present CRT managers to consider??

NABO News back issues are available online at nabo.org.uk/nabo-news-back-copies/

Letters to the Editor

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

Should boaters be lobbying Government for better funding for CRT instead of criticising them?

My point of view is that the 'small' things that CRT gets wrong, failures in information, failures in administration, not proof-reading signage and 'simple' mistakes are evidence of more general lack of care and attention to detail and carelessness. Why would I want to support an organisation that repeatedly can't get these basics correct?

And big stuff does go wrong too, most notably in recent times, Todbrook. [Sic Toddbrook]

Then CRT have had to set aside £7M from their property income for repairs to a development that is a fire risk, following the closer scrutiny of these issues after Grenfell. It's a one-off cost and CRT are far from alone [in] this, but you might reasonably suggest that this is indirectly where your licence fee increases are going for the next year or so instead of to the upkeep of the waterways.

Overall performance of the property ventures is pretty opaque still. We get the net figures but don't really know whether individual schemes are successful or not. We are met with a wall of secrecy if we ask. After the question of how well CRT spends what money it has, I have a bit of sympathy with the rumoured NBTA position of why should we fundraise in favour of an organisation that at best does boaters few favours and mostly sees them as a cash cow?

Funding for CRT was from the outset based on an assumption of grant reducing to zero over time and eventually reaching "self-sufficiency". The upcoming reduction in DEFRA funding can hardly be called a surprise when you've had over a decade's notice it was coming! But apparently CRT made few plans to deal with it.

And far from being un-generous with the latest offer, DEFRA have offered a continuing funding package much greater than might have been expected.

Anyone with an ounce of financial literacy could

see the CRT funding model was predicated on substantial increases in boating charges over the long term. Now we are seeing the squeeze and it will not stop in any foreseeable future.

Asking Government for more is unrealistic when you consider the state of public services and general Government debt after COVID. If there is more money to be spent by Government, the NHS comes first. CRT is peanuts by comparison, but if more for CRT means a few less cataracts corrected or another person dying due to lack of effective psychiatric support I'm good with CRT going without.

The fact is many boat owners are relatively well-off middle-class people with decent resources and asking the Government to soften their boat licence fees will not get very far or attract much sympathy versus other causes. At the other end we have significant numbers of boaters, often liveaboards, on relatively low incomes, some of who are just about getting by, but some of whom may well eventually be threatened with homelessness because they increasingly can't afford increasing fees and other essential boating costs. There will I suspect be another group in the middle who will just decide to sell up and put their leisure time and expenditure elsewhere.

How far have things to go before people will acknowledge that the CRT funding experiment has not worked? Just acknowledge what I think is the reality; that we are into a period of managed decline of the CRT waterways, whoever runs them. The finances show little else is possible and while the increases in boating fees are painful for many, they still only amount to firefighting in terms of long-term finance.

What do you suggest you might ask? Well, I'm not very sorry to tell you that a year after the event, I say that selling up my boat and moving off was a good decision with no regrets. In the words of Spike Milligan's parody: "The boy stood on the burning deck, whence all but he has fled.—Twit!"

Simon Robbins

A Response from Richard Parry

The Trust has a dedicated team, committed volunteers and experienced long-term contractors working throughout the year, and particularly in the most challenging conditions in the winter so the network can be open in the better weather, delivering more investment in repairs and maintenance work than ever. For this winter's works programme, we are spending more than £50 million to carry out 138 large-scale works across 47 waterways—replacing worn-out lock gates, inspecting tunnels and aqueducts, and repairing centuries-old masonry and brickwork, together with a host of other important heritage and conservation tasks. There never is (and never has been) sufficient funding or time to do all the works we would want to do given the demands of such old and well-used infrastructure, so we prioritise carefully. I too share the frustration when I see an error on signage or a stoppage alert, but please don't let it undermine the scale of effective work that happens day in day out to help keep the network available and safe for boaters and others to use.

I agree that it's important for us to keep boaters updated. We publish an annual Boater Report which goes out with licence renewals setting out the information about our finances (and other performance measures) of most relevance to boaters and our comprehensive Annual Report & Accounts is always available on our website, setting out in detail our finances and adding colour to the work we do to support navigation. We welcome the support of our boating advisory groups, which offer insight and feedback on boating-specific areas of the charity, and our governing Council includes a heavy representation of boaters. Elections to appoint four private boaters and two boating business representatives have just taken place and we look forward to welcoming each to our next Council meeting in March. We issue regular press releases and talk regularly and openly to the waterway media to share what we're doing and respond to a large number of Freedom of Information requests every year.

Since the Trust launched in 2012, our waterways have become more self-sufficient, with the proportion of income coming from self-generated sources larger than ever. We believe we've met

or exceeded the expectations for the new charity in diversifying income, but the wider context in which we operate has changed since the Trust was set-up, with extreme weather becoming more common and regularly causing substantial damage to our 250-year-old canal network. The scale of the investment needed in our reservoirs driven by independent inspectors and mandatory under the Reservoirs Act, has vastly exceeded previous estimates considerably stretching our funds. The latest storms and consequent flooding, which we'll all have seen on the news in recent weeks, has caused damage right across the country; as water levels recede, we are counting the cost to our network.

We firmly believe that Defra's review of our grant did not take this changing environment into account and, subsequently, the long-term settlement they have offered is not enough to prevent the canals from going into a managed decline at some point in the next ten years. We will do everything we can to mitigate that but the scale of the financial shortfall building up over time makes it very difficult as things stand. We continue to explore ways to innovate to enable us to make the funds go further and the growth in volunteering and the active involvement of partner groups is helping us to do more work within the funds available.

It was not the case the Trust was expected to achieve self-sufficiency; the agreement in 2012 describes a path to 'reduced dependency' which the Trust has successfully achieved. Grant would have been around 40% of British Waterways' revenues 20 years ago and it is less than 25% of total revenue at the Trust today, continuing to decline year-on-year as other income grows. The Trust manages key national infrastructure, including water supply and flood defence assets, and has many statutory responsibilities that it is obliged to deliver. This makes it appropriate that government has an ongoing role in keeping these waterways safe (for communities around them as well as the millions of users) and available to deliver the significant benefits that we have proved they deliver.

Defra has acknowledged in its own (very brief) published report that the government is getting value for money through the current funding commitment it makes to the Trust. Their relatively modest funding helps us save the NHS alone

around £1bn a year by improving public health—and the network, on the doorstep of millions of people, is ready-made to meet key government targets around access to nature, not to mention the jobs supported and vital wildlife corridors, essential for biodiversity, that our canals sustain. The importance and value for money of our canal network is being heard by many in Westminster, but we need to continue making the case up to and beyond the forthcoming general election. I'd like to thank all who have joined our campaign to #KeepCanalsAlive or have participated in the Funding Britain's Waterways campaign and the events they have organised to fight for the canals alongside us.

One of our other funding cornerstones is our income from property and other investments. This continues to outperform market benchmarks and generates considerably more income than we get each year from boat licences and moorings. Specifically, on our property development joint ventures, since the formation of the Trust they have delivered over £40m of income for the waterways and have produced an average return on our investment of approaching 15% per annum; our property performance is consistently ahead of expected market returns as independently measured. As a joint venture partner, we have made prudent accountancy provisions for the potential cost of building repairs whilst, at the same time, actively pursuing the recovery of any costs from those who are liable.

Boaters provide important income—around one

fifth of the Trust's total revenue—but of course boaters alone couldn't afford to pay the total cost of the network; similarly, the network as we know it wouldn't exist without boaters. So the other sources of income are both essential, and justified given the breadth of other benefits delivered. While we know that any increases in boat licence fees are not popular, we are having to raise money from all our income sources, and we are asking boaters to pay slightly more. We will support those struggling with finances wherever possible—including directing them towards benefits that are often available for those living afloat on low incomes. There is support available, and we encourage boaters to get in touch if they're having problems.

I acknowledge that the long-term funding situation, compounded by the increased costs we're facing due to the network's age and vulnerability, is challenging for everyone who cares for the nation's canals, after their miraculous recovery and renaissance 250 years after many were built. However, as the charity charged with the custodianship of these nationally important places, we are doing all we can to keep canals alive and would value the support of NABO and its members.

Right now it would be easy but mistaken to pour scorn on the Trust when, whatever the perceived flaws, the much bigger existential funding challenge demands that we all come together in common cause.

Richard Parry CEO, Canal & River Trust

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