# NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners
Issue 4 August 2024

## A NABO appeal for help!

## On-Board Guide to Electrical Safety

## Perils of the Ribble Link

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**Issue 4 August 2024**

## Contents


4 Editorial
5 In the Chair
6 Fly on the wall
7 **NABO News:** A NABO appeal for help!
8 On-Board Guide: Electrical Safety for Small Craft
9 **News:** Morco heaters safety recall, Vegetation cutbacks, Where have all the vlockies gone?
10 Traveller's tales
11 Climate change, Mentions in the House, The Waterways Ombudsman
12 Perils of the Ribble Link
14 A capital trip!
16 Advice from RCR
18 Electric propulsion
22 Chasing the boats
24 In my humble opinion....
25 Festivals
26 DIY service: stern glands
27 Rewind


## 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 7th Sepetember.

## NABO Calendar 2024

**The Council meetings in 2024 will be on:**
**14th September 2024 Zoom, 16th November 2024 after AGM at Tamworth Cruising Club**

## Cover photo

This month's photo is a shot by Kev Maslin © Photo by Kev Maslin. Please email your photos for the front cover of NABO News to the Editor, as JPG, ideally portrait with a file size of 5MB or larger.

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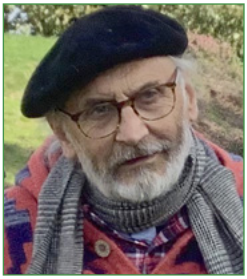


# Network at risk

Editor **John Sadler**

This month's thoughts have taken on a different perspective, that of the travelling boater.

Our local council was somewhat tardy in supplying postal vote forms, so to vote in the general election complicated arrangements were made. Travel started with a review of stoppage notices to make sure that our progress was possible and that we would be able to find a functioning Customer Services Facility. High winds have bought down a number trees and heavy rain has swollen a few rivers but, so far, we have found our way through. There is an increasing amount of locks with leaks, paddles part functional and steel cages wrapped around balance beams. Temporary repairs which will in due course require a more permanent solution.

I am not surprised at the result of the Boater Satisfaction Survey. Not all boaters could be expected to agree on specific courses of action but as they are not involved in the decision making process, other than by surveys of dubious virtue, there is very limited stakeholder support. One of the guiding principles of project management is to involve the customer and the user during development so that the end result will be supported and promoted by at least some of the stakeholders.

Ever since the creation of the IWA, disagreement has existed about the preservation of navigable canals: Tom Rolt supporting the practical approach of most used and Robert Aickman the more fanciful idea that every canal should be saved. We have come a long way since then. Commercial use of the narrow network now is virtually zero but leisure use has dramatically increased. This has led to the gradual reopening of many stretches of waterways previously allowed to close and work undertaken to restore many more. So the pressure on maintenance budgets has, and will continue to increase as waterways reopen. If there is not enough money to support the maintenance of the existing network then decisions will have to be made on priorities. I would like think that boaters and their representative organisations will be involved in those critical decisions.

The remnants of the industrial revolution have become a sort of living museum which some boaters want preserved, while other sections of the community see boat life as an alternative life style and want navigation to be preserved. The policy of disposing of non-profit making buildings is causing some concern at the loss of heritage. In a time of austerity some sales, although not desirable, are pragmatic if navigability is prioritised over heritage.

Rather than maintaining the network in the exact way it was built perhaps there is now a case for looking at alternative materials and designs which would be more economic to service. The green belt is under scrutiny and may even change colour in places, so perhaps consideration should be given to planning relaxations to allow the replacement of existing canal structures with more practical materials and designs. With the right encouragement maybe there is room for startup companies to contribute new manufacturing methods, materials and maintenance ideas. It's no use having beautiful, traditionally built, oak lock gates if the resources are not available to keep water in the canal.

# Voices for change

Chair **Anne Husar**

Expressions of dissatisfaction have featured heavily this month. The change of government brought about by the General Election may be the most momentous statement of this.

A new government means new MPs to write to. Every boater with an MP whose constituency includes any of the UK's inland waterways needs to make their concerns known. If boaters don't bother, when the condition of navigations are so crucial to them, why should anyone else?

For the navigation authorities the results of two boater surveys should surely also have hit home. The recent IWA survey asked boaters for their views on the state of the inland waterways network and how it impacted on their cruising in 2023. Their findings below echoed this year's poor CRT Boater Satisfaction survey results. The quoted downturn in the enjoyment to be had from cruising is surely a concerning one with its possible impact on future boat ownership.

## Findings from the IWA survey

The main findings, none of which are a surprise, are as follows from the IWA:

- Many locks are in poor condition, with leakage, unbalanced gates, broken mechanisms, and inoperative paddles. Swing bridges, lift bridges, and lock gates frequently malfunction, causing delays and disruptions to travel plans.
- Numerous closures, whether planned or unplanned, force boaters to alter their routes, sometimes requiring long detours.
- Vegetation along towpaths and lock sides often becomes overgrown, obstructing visibility, reducing canal width, and making mooring difficult or hazardous
- Low water levels, silt build-up, and shallows pose challenges, causing boats to ground and impeding navigation.
- Sanitary stations, waste disposal points, and pump-out facilities are frequently out of order or inaccessible, posing challenges for boater's basic needs.

## From CRT's survey:

- 57% don't believe the Trust listens to boaters (up from 48% 2023).
- 59% don't believe the Trust prioritises spend effectively (up from 52% 2023).
- 40% do not trust the Trust to look after the canal network (up from 33% 2023).

## CRT's CEO Richard Parry's response:

"Both this IWA survey, and our own annual survey of boater satisfaction,[...] confirm the importance of a focus on the basic upkeep and maintenance that directly impacts on boaters. So, whilst we're seeing record statutory spend on reservoirs, vital for navigation and accounting for a significant proportion of our major works expenditure, we must ensure that all aspects of the direct boating experience continue to be prioritised."

Change both in government and on the waterways has been a long time coming. Boaters can support and demand the improvements that are so necessary by continuing to hold those in authority to account.

Write to your MP, write to CRT, keep up the pressure!

NABO Council Meeting 13th July 2024

# Fly on the wall

Observes proceedings at the Council meeting in July.

In a lively virtual meeting the subject of CRT's response to Off side Mooring on the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal was discussed. The meeting was informed that no reply has been received from CRT, since the complaint procedure has not been completed we cannot refer the matter to the ombudsman. There should be a reasonable time limit imposed on this lack of reply. There has been further contact relating to mooring issues on the Llangollen Canal. NABO members will investigate. A new meeting date for the FBW steering group is unknown, the general election has stopped action for the present.

It appears that closures of Customer Service Facilities(CSF) are continuing, with effectively a move to encouraging the use of marina facilities. Recycling is always a problem. There were various reports about differing facilities/contractors in various area. It was reported that EA have now withdrawn rubbish disposal at locks where they were on an island. There is now no pump out facility within four hours of Molesey Lock and Mapledurham on the Thames. Mapledurham is token operated so only available at certain times. At Hurley Lock there is a notice asking for rubbish to be taken home. The reply to that is that my boat is my home.

It was noted that there is a lack of communication and we have misinformation resulting in boaters not being able to plan effectively. There is no legal obligation on CRT to provide CSF. Discussions at NAG drew the conclusion that CRT are duty bound to provide water and Elsan disposal facilities. The adoption of the IWA distances is the current thinking. There has been a list published on the CRT website however, we would like to invite boaters to report problems with CSF to NABO.

These responses will enable us to compile a clear map of CSF on the system.

We are in a position where we are unable to challenge the changes to Terms and Conditions. CRT have the legal right to charge what they want. It was noted that NBTA are organising a campaign to withhold license fees. It was agreed that we cannot support illegal actions.

The Boater Satisfaction survey indicated that less than half boaters who responded are satisfied. It was suggested that we discuss a joint response to this with IWA.

All council members should contact their new MPs. The new waterways minister is Emma Harding, MP for Hull. We will give a press release stating our views on system deterioration. It was suggested that an aide memoir be issued to encourage members to write to their new MPs. It is published in the letters Section.

Malcolm Brundell was proposed and elected to Council, there is still a vacancy. Succession planning was discussed, a system of ghosting was suggested.

There were no formal regional reports but there was a lot of information shared by council members about problems around the system. Volunteer Lock Keepers are not on the Wigan Flight following the sacking of some and resignation of others but some boaters are getting through. The River Trent has a shortage of lock keepers. Traffic was noted to be very light on the River Weaver and many other canals.

There is a problem on the Ribble link and many boats are stranded on the Lancaster Canal. CRT indicate that they will issue an update shortly and ask stranded boaters to contact them.

There have been reported problems on the Thames with breakdowns, including the necessity to hand wind some locks.

There has been no recent meeting with Matthew Symonds of CRT.

On the Llangollen there has been some fairly good management of towing path vegetation but there were reports of difficulties around the system. There is no "no mow May". We need to report difficulties because nothing will be done otherwise. It was noted that the change from Fountains to smaller contractors has not worked. Major assets, reservoirs and embankments, are

handled separately.

All NABO News copies are now backed up onto the website; is there a need for hard copies?

Council and Members should be encouraged to write individual letters to their MP.

CRT are attempting to get the roads around the Liverpool dock area adopted by the city council. This might hit CRT's budget as the City may require improvements to be made prior to handover. More heritage is being lost, see Gas Street basin planning application. Braunston Stop House is now up for auction.

# A new Council member's short biography

By **Malcolm Blundell**

I built my own Mirror Dinghy aged 15 with £78 gained from 6 weeks working summer holidays and savings. I have continued to build small boats until I ran out of space.

During my professional career boating was a passion, in all forms, from sailing in the Mediterranean, canoeing and motor-boating in large cruisers. Later in life, my wife and I took the RYA yacht-master course considering retiring at 52 then going sailing. Our circumstances prevented this and we saw an opportunity to go boating whenever we wanted on a narrowboat. We have cruised most of the system, but for the last 8 years have not wanted to leave the Thames. Our boat is based in Oxford and we manage to go boating when the River allows.

I stood for CRT council and made it through three rounds. I was then offered a position on CRT Navigation Advisory group, I was a member for seven years, during which time I helped update the boaters handbook.

I have a degree in criminology and social policy and was the head of a UK wide research and analysis unit. I also obtained an IOSH certificate in managing health and safety(H & S). I am familiar with risk assessments and understand the needs of companies to manage those risks. I take a more pragmatic approach to getting things done and see H & S as a helping hand rather than a hinderance.

I will support all types of boaters on any forum, but I am aware that some boaters do not help themselves and cause issues for waterways authorities. My approach is to discuss problems with the authority rather than take issue with them in public

# NABO appeal For help!

At our recent council meeting it was observed that most of the members are of advancing age. Whilst this accounts for the breadth of their knowledge it also creates a risk of sudden demise.

We would like to appeal to members for volunteers to ghost the more important jobs, so that somebody is available to take over if required. The Chair, Editor NABO News, Treasurer, General Secretary, Webmaster and Welfare Officer are all positions that require some training and knowledge, which the current holders would be pleased to pass on. We are also keen to recruit a Vice Chair owing to retirement.

The webmaster position is getting to be more than a one man job, so a volunteer to take over some of the day to day work would be very much appreciated. Suitable training for the right candidate will be arranged.

# On-Board Guide: Electrical Safety for Small Craft is selling well

**For more information see.**
shop.theiet.org/electrical-safety-for-small-craft

Representatives of the boating organisations involved in the preparation of this innovative guide have welcomed its successful publication.

The need for the book was first highlighted by NABO, recognising that small craft, such as those on all our inland waterways, use an ever-increasing amount of electrical equipment, with additional, sometimes complex, power requirements. The resulting—significantly increased—risks and safety concerns thus need to be fully addressed in the design, testing and maintenance of such vessels. Given the extent to which—inevitably—much of the work carried out will be done by DIY-ers and non-experts, we felt that a comprehensive guide would make life simpler for everyone, and help to keep people safe on the waterways.

A group, drawn from a wide spread of organisations such as NABO, IWA, hire boat companies, British Marine and insurers, worked with subject specialists to bring the necessary material together. The book itself was produced by the well-known Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET, formerly the IEE), contributing their experience of electrical installation requirements and their publishing expertise. The resulting publication was launched some six months ago, and has met with good sales figures, being welcomed by most users as helpful, informative and readily understood, even by non-experts.

The book is NOT—as some DIY "experts" were concerned that it might be—being adopted by the Boat Safety Scheme as specifying the requirements for their inspections! That was never the intention, although the information it contains could be as useful to inspectors as it is to owners and installers.

This innovative guide provides guidance on:

- Electrical power sources
- Protection against electric shock
- Earthing requirements
- Distribution systems
- Cable installation, conductors, terminations and identification
- System design
- Inspection and testing of electrical installations.

This publication is particularly timely, as the Boat Safety Scheme has recently been undertaking extensive work on the risks associated with the current rapid increase in the use of lithium–based batteries. It is internationally recognised that some versions of these batteries are liable to sudden and highly dangerous explosions. Some of the DIY proposals "out there", online and elsewhere, are unbelievably lethal, and many examples have already emerged of uncontrollable fires, resulting from explosions of over-heated lithium batteries. The only way to put out such fires is to sink the boat! The guide provides clear guidance on the use of such batteries—and could potentially save lives thereby.

# Morco open flue water heaters

A safety alert was issued on the 22nd April 2024 which replaced the previous one issued on the 15th November 2023.

The Safety Alert provided guidance to Gas Safe Registered engineers about a product safety concern related to some Morco open flue water heaters. The following Morco products are currently being investigated regarding a potential fire risk, the Primo 6 (MP6), Primo 11 (MP11), EUP6 and EUP11 open flue water heaters.

Any boaters affected should contact a suitably qualified Gas Safe registered engineer to carry out rectification work.

# Vegetation cutbacks

By Julie Sharman, Chief Operating Officer at the Canal and River Trust

Although it may feel like it, we are not actively observing no mow May. In fact due to the very wet winter running into spring we were late getting out to some canals as we couldn't get the mowers to run on the very wet towpaths.

Last year, we made significant changes to our mowing regime to increase biodiversity and reduce the number of cuts, which has also been in part due to financial constraints. This year after a difficult performance by some of our new contractors we amended the specification to include a full width cut at the start of the season, undertook a winter programme of removing a lot of edge veg (I know not all) as well as a full width last cut.

I've been able to get out with some boating customers this month and it's clear that the frequency of cuts on lock sides and moorings isn't enough so I am mobilising hit squads to address this now.

Your comments regarding safe access for boaters is very important to me and are a factor in the additional work mobilised. Meanwhile if you find yourself out and about and want to send me any updates or pictures I am always happy to receive them.

# Where have all the Vlockies gone?

Whatever's happening to the volunteer lock keepers (known to all as VLK's)? Last year on our travels we occasionally came across disgruntled, disillusioned with CRT, VLK's, especially if they'd been told to sign up to a rota. Understandable, they are volunteers, not employees, but this year has seen a much publicised falling out. I am of course referring to the Wigan Flight Walkout.

The Wigan flight of locks is rather similar to other flights where water retention in pounds can be problematic and heavy gates can stump the weak of arm, leg and back muscle. It gladdens the heart of many boaters to see knowledgeable VLK's ready and willing to help you through, all the time keeping an experienced and wary eye on the state of the flight.

Rumours abound as to what caused the walk out, or 'sacking' as it has been described, although quite how volunteers can be sacked is a tautological conundrum. The Canal and River Trust are staying shtum on the matter, also ignoring the fact that boaters of vastly varying degrees of proficiency wishing to use the flight are now on their own. Well almost, there are, unofficial but knowledgeable of the quirks of this flight, helpers and the occasional CRT bod that turns up, more often than not, not.

Rumour also has it that CRT are now advertising for replacements. Let's hope all that think of applying are keen enough to not be put off by the bad odour that is persistently hanging over this debacle, CRT needs all the volunteers it can entice

# Traveller's tales

The Editor afloat

I have noticed the disjointed way in which work is carried out around the network.

One would think that a team capable of digging a hole, cementing in a post and screwing a blue plaque to the post would also be able to trim damaging vegetation. We passed through a lock with substantial vegetation growing from the lock gate and more out of the brick wall of the accompanying bridge. There was a fairly new post by the bridge with a blue plaque attached explaining that life is better by water and maybe it was for the buddleja. Even a report identifying the presence of the invasive species might have helped its removal. Eventually, left long enough, serious damage will be done to the gates and bridge which will be expensive to repair.

## Stairway to Heaven

I also noticed the stairway to heaven on a lock. Maybe not so much of a problem on a bright sunny day but later in the year in poor illumination this sort of deterioration provides a significant threat to safety. No tape or any other warning was visible.

Assuming you survive that trap another one awaited while pushing the gates open, a decaying edge to slip on.

And finally on crossing the gate the last little trap.

Just in case there is a team in the area these hazards were all at the same lock: Tythorne on the GU Leicester Line.

The above were not isolated examples, another rotten step here, on Castle Lock No 6 at Nottingham. It's only a short plank held by four bolts surely it could be replaced by the average handyman?

# Climate change

After an unseasonable amount of rain we 'set sail' in June, expecting a bit of warm and dry weather. Well that didn't last too long. A period of heavy rain rain in mid July and the river Soar had a strong flow warning.

A BBC weather warning of funnel clouds also accompanied the forecast. Funnel clouds form with cumulonimbus cloud formations, bringing wet and windy weather with them, but are not classed as tornadoes unless they touch land. I've not seen any this storm infused summer although there has been some thunder and lightning. So is it a trend?

Is my memory of summers of my youth filtered to remove the storms, tornadoes, high winds and rainfall apparent today? Perhaps. Over the past forty years of boating I can recall a number of incidents that involved mooring up and waiting for flood water to recede. Travels across the rivers Severn, Avon, Trent and Soar are not undertaken without acknowledging the risk. So far we have not had a repeat experience of flood Friday, 2007 when over 200 mm of rain fell in a 'once in 200 year storm'. Hopefully an accurate statistic.

# Mentions in the House

All Change!

Following the general election there has been insufficient time for the new regime to publish their thoughts, we await some news. Mary Creagh CBE MP and Emma Hardy MP have been appointed as Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Rumour has it that Emma Hardy MP has more of a brief for flooding and perhaps navigation while Mary Creagh's focus is on environmental and wellbeing but she has a long held interest in the waterways.

# The Waterways Ombudsman

## Annual Report

The Waterways Ombudsman and the Waterways Ombudsman Committee have issued their Annual Reports for 2023/24. The Ombudsman scheme deals with complaints about the Canal and River Trust and the Avon Navigation Trust, which are referred to the Ombudsman after completion of the Trusts' own complaints process.

This is the fifth and final annual report of the Ombudsman Sarah Daniel.

During the year, the Ombudsman received 43 enquiries about the Canal & River Trust, none about the Avon Navigation Trust. Most contacts, 33, had not completed the internal complaints process and were referred back to the Trust. In addition, she received 11 enquiries about bodies outside jurisdiction and signposted them to the correct dispute resolution scheme. Seven new investigations were opened, eight investigations were closed.

Of the investigated complaints, three were upheld, one was upheld in part, three were not upheld. Five of the Ombudsman's final decisions were accepted by the complainant and the Trust completed the required remedies.

This year four of the investigations were from boaters, one from a householder, one from a business owner and one from a landowner living next to the canal. The report included summaries of all completed investigations.

# Perils of the Ribble Link

By **Bob Bolton**

I booked my crossing for the summer back in February as bookings fill up fast.

I set off at the civilised hour of 11am from Tarlton, it took about 2 hours to reach the Astland Lamp, went around it and headed up stream when an hour and a half later I spotted Savick Brook on the left. Here I moored on a pontoon for half an hour then headed to the first of 7 locks. The last 3 are staircase locks with no room to turn so had to reverse in and once up the 3, reverse out again, quick spin round and away we go. It was all done in 5 hours, a lovely cruise without any hiccups, a really very safe crossing. I recommend it!

Weeks were then spent enjoying the Lancaster Canal, lots of walks on the beach with my dog and short cruises to the next mooring, just great. Then rumours started. There was nothing on CRT's stoppage site but it was well known amongst Lanky local boaters that the Ribble Link was broken. Eventually CRT announced its closure due to a blown seal on the tidal stop gate and for me, panic set in.

I started an escape plan, first option, Glasson Basin to Tarlton. I found out the sea lock there has been broken for a year. Second option, crane out there, but it's a 36 mile cruise with no safe moorings so scrap that one. Third option, crane out at Ribble Sea Lock so I checked that site but no use due to overhead electric cables.

In desperation now I tried to get help from CRT but nothing was offered, not even support or help finding a way out, it was left to me to sort out. I used google maps and rang round to find other possible options and found there's a lift out possible at Bridgehouse Marina, Preston with transport by DCL and put back in again option at Hesford Marine Lymm. Deep pockets were needed as it cost £1,200 plus £57 transport insurance for my boat. Fingers crossed it all goes well.

*Editor's note: The overall cost will vary depending on size of boat; other marinas and transporters are available.*

## CRT's Response

The Canal and River Trust is fighting the tide to ensure that the Ribble Link in Lancashire, which connects the Lancaster Canal to the national waterways network, receives important maintenance to allow it to reopen for boats.

Engineers from the charity responded to reports of an issue with the Sea Lock Gate at the entrance to the Ribble Link. This lock gate ensures an adequate depth of water along the length of the Ribble Link, important for boats navigating to and from the Lancaster Canal.

The team from the Canal and River Trust discovered that the seal around the gate, which keeps the lock watertight, requires maintenance as too much water is being lost to maintain levels necessary for navigation. To carry out the repair they are facing the challenges of working on a tidal river with a short window each day to carry out work, and the complexities of a lock gate designed to withstand tidal conditions.

To replace the seals, the cais-

son in which the gate sits needs to be sealed off. Usually stop planks would be used to prevent water getting in, however on the Ribble Link the caisson is flooded twice daily, submerging the lock and making any form of maintenance impossible. To remove the gate to conduct repairs, either a temporary abutment must be created around the caisson to prevent tidal waters entering, or work must be conducted in short windows at low tides. This second option will require high-capacity pumps to remove the water rapidly, giving at least two to three hours of working time every day.

On Thursday 18 July, engineers from the charity will meet with contractors on site to plan the works. Planning and developing a solution is likely to take several weeks, and the Canal and River Trust will provide an update when confirmed.

Following preliminary work to reduce leaks through the seal, the gate will be lifted out and sent away for repair at the Canal and River Trust's workshop. As well as repairing the seal, the gate will get a full overhaul, with the hydraulic cylinder, pivot pins and bearings also getting attention.

The Canal and River Trust is contacting all boaters who have booked to use the Ribble Link.

Darren Thomas, senior engineer at Canal and River Trust, said: "As the link to the national waterways network, it's important that we get everything back in full working order as soon as possible. Working in tidal areas adds complexity, with less time to carry out work as the water levels fluctuate, and we're spending time carefully planning this intricate repair job. While the gate is out of the water, we're taking the opportunity to give it a thorough upgrade so it can continue to withstand the challenging conditions.

High and dry on the Ribble
Photo Bob Bolton

"We thank boaters for their patience while we carry out this work to ensure the Ribble Link is safe and look forward to reopening so boaters can navigate to and from the farthest reaches of our canal network."

The Ribble Link connects the Lancaster Canal to the rest of the national waterway network. The Link runs around the outskirts of Preston and flows into the River Ribble, which connects with the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. The idea for the Link dates back over 200 years but the proposals were expensive and a tramroad was built instead. The dream of making a navigable link between the Lancaster Canal and the rest of the inland waterway network never fully died and, after receiving funding from the Millenium Commission, the Link opened to navigation in July 2002.

Boaters can contact the Canal and River Trust's regional team on 03030 404040 selecting North West.

*Ed—in Addition to the above there is now a serious breach on the Lancaster Canal so it may be difficult for boaters to move at all.*

# A Capital trip!

By "CJ"

London Kilburn

"Don't do it!" everyone said when we told them we planned to cruise into London and along Regent's Canal. "You'll hate it; you can't leave the boat for any length of time, you'll spend forever trying to get moored, it's not safe ..."

To be honest we were a tad worried about mooring up after hearing so many horror stories from boaters who'd arrived at pre booked moorings only for boats to be occupying their designated spot. Luckily for us, all our moorings were unoccupied and apart from Little Venice being under the trees, they were good for solar and not overly noisy. When you're in a city of nearly 10 million people, realistically, nowhere is ever going to be totally silent. Expect a bit of noise and you'll be pleasantly surprised. As for leaving the boat unattended, there are lots of places across the network where it would be considered unwise to moor. London is no different but, along with the pre bookable moorings at Little Venice, Paddington Basin and King's Cross / Islington, there were plenty of other places with space to moor which I'd consider to be 'safe'. Perivale is one such spot—just watch the parakeets don't take a dump on your roof!

## Victoria Park and Hackney

To be honest the mooring congestion doesn't really start until you reach Kilburn. It's from there on in that it becomes difficult to find a space. Difficult but not totally impossible. CRT are, unsurprisingly, part of the problem. They have reduced the number of moorings available, making city dwelling boaters reluctant to move because they know it will be difficult for them to

find another space. In some places double and treble moored boats are a common occurrence. The Trust would do better to increase the total number of moorings available while enforcing the regulations regarding overstaying. The problem of urban mooring is never going to go away but it could be managed more effectively than at present.

## Customer Services

The other main problem of cruising in London is a shortage of Customer Service Facilities. It's unfortunate the water point was removed from Paddington Basin Pontoons. When you're paying £25 per night it would be handy to have access to water. The bin store at Little Venice is in a cage but the door doesn't lock.

Instead the gate separating the towpath from the road is padlocked shut but, as we witnessed, fly tippers just fling their rubbish over the railings instead. By the way it's not boaters who are fly tipping, the guy we saw came out of one of the flats across the street!

## Kings Cross

At King's Cross Eco moorings you can access electricity but nowhere to get rid of your rubbish which is a pain. Urban canals need litter bins and not just for boaters.

So would we do it again? Most definitely Yes! It's a pain having to pay for a mooring (especially when the signage states it's free for 7 days), annoying to be carting rubbish around and tiring when lock gates are so heavy you need to be the Hulk to get them to move, but it's a much friendlier side of London. People are happy to stop and pass the time of day. They're eager to help with the locks and where else can you stay in Central London for under £40 p/night? So go on, give the Big Smoke a visit. You won't regret it.

Victoria Park

Regents Canal near Little Venice

Regents Canal near Hackney

Confusing signage

# Top 10 breakdown causes

A report by **River Canal Rescue**

In 2023, RCR responded to 3335 call-outs (64 a week!) to help with issues such as electrical, fuel and engine problems, flat batteries, over-heating and gear box failures.

What are the top 10 parts that cause boaters grief, why do they fail and how much do they cost to replace? Outside the top 10 are water pumps (caused by seal failures, wear and tear, impeller break up and sheared components), morse controllers (wear and tear) and engine mounts (hitting underwater obstacles, wear and tear, age, rubber degrading, misalignment and bolts shearing).

| Incidents | Part | Reason for failure | Replacement cost (dependent upon type) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 188 | Fuel filters | Contamination. | £5—£35 |
| 186 | Cables | Wear and tear, routed incorrectly. | £20—£140 |
| 166 | Batteries | Misunderstanding around what battery to use, its electrical capacity, charging levels and lack of attention to electrical connections. | £100—£280 |
| 131 | Alternators | Misalignment, fan belt too tight, electrical faults, damp. | £70—£270 |
| 109 | Starter motors | Over-use, damp, electrical faults, over-tightening of parts. | £140—£600 (£1200 for Vetus) |
| 100 | Gearboxes | Lack of servicing and being heavy-handed. | £650—£2600 |
| 81 | Fan belts | Wear and tear | £15-45 |
| 78 | Drive plates | Hitting underwater obstacles, stern gland too tight, misaligned engine, excessive vibration due to worn engine mounts, engine revs too high. | £90—£190 |
| 73 | Fuel pumps and injection pumps | Blockages, contamination and fuel pipe degrading. | £50—£850 |
| 43 | Couplings | Hitting underwater obstacles, snapped bolts, stern gland too tight, misalignment. | £100—£600 |

Most replacement part call-outs are due to damp getting into electrical components, excessive or harsh use, vibration, accidental damage, wear and tear, the effect of pollutants such as diesel, oil or anti-freeze, old-age and parts misalignment.

### Maintenance tips

Have enough fuel to complete your journey and inspect all fuel lines and shut-off valves for leaks. Where possible obtain a fuel sample, check there's no debris floating in it, it smells like diesel and is clear and not cloudy. If it's cloudy or smells of 'paint thinners' this indicates contamination which should be dealt with immediately. Drain off any water from pre-filter housings or the agglomerator.

Check batteries are charging correctly and the charge rate from the alternator to the batteries is as it should be.

Is the morse control working correctly and the throttle/gears selecting smoothly? Stiffness indicates the cable may need renewing or has rusted.

Switch isolators from one position to another to clean contacts and spray with WD40 contact cleaner.

Inspect the stern gland, is there plenty of grease supplied to it and is the prop shaft turning freely?

Check the engine oil/gearbox oil levels (top up if necessary) and fan belt condition (replace if worn). Scrutinise coolant hoses for leaks/wear and tear (replace if required). For raw water-cooling engines, check the seacock, impeller, filter and all pipe work for leaks. Look at the engine mount bracket for signs of cracks or breaks. If they are worn replace them—if the bolts seem loose, tighten before cruising again (only adjust the bottom bolt).

Are the coupling bolts and connections tight?

Check the air filter (if dirty, replace or clean) and weed hatch seal, it should be intact and the weed hatch secure.

## A Bit of Fun

I thought that now England have come second in the football (again), we might have a new game: **Spot The Bollard**. A few shots of a very pretty re-wilded lock to get the ball rolling, so to speak.

# A view on electric propulsion

## Living on an electric narrowboat: Dispelling the myths and embracing the future

**All images and text used in this article are the property of Paul and Kay Sumpner and cannot be re-used without their express permission.**

**If anyone wants to write in support of the view above or in the support of diesel boats please supply your article for consideration to** nabonews@nabo.org.uk

Electric narrowboats are revolutionising the way we experience life on the water. As someone who has lived aboard an electric narrowboat for several years,

I'm here to share my experiences, dispel some common myths, and show you why electric propulsion is the future of boating.

### Life aboard *Old Nick*

My 58.5ft narrowboat, *Old Nick*, was built by Ortomarine and is equipped with a Vetus Serial Hybrid system, 48v 800Ah Lead Carbon batteries, and 1.92KW of solar panels.

Since its launch in December 2020, we've cruised over 2000 miles and 1500 locks, proving that electric narrowboats are more than capable of long journeys.

### Myth #1: Limited range

One of the biggest misconceptions about electric boats is their limited range. We often hear comments like "bet you need a long extension lead" and "better get back in the marina for a charge".

However, with the right setup, you can cruise for extended periods without needing to recharge. *Old Nick* has three power sources: solar panels, a diesel generator, and shore power hookup.

- **Solar Power:** Our solar panels generate a significant amount of power and during the summer we regularly achieve "Nirvana". This is our name for the state when the solar power exceeds the electric engine's consumption, allowing us to cruise without depleting the batteries.

- **Diesel Generator:** With the English weather being what it is, the generator provides a reliable backup power source. We run it strategically to minimise usage and often combine it with tasks like heating water or cooking.
- **Shore Power Hookup:** When moored in a marina, we utilise shore power overnight to recharge our batteries and keep our systems running.

## Myth #2: Not enough charging points

Another myth is that without CRT investing in thousands of electric charging bollards up and down the length of the tow path, charging an electric boat is inconvenient.

While it's true that you can't cruise indefinitely without recharging, we've found that managing our power usage and planning our trips around charging opportunities is relatively easy.

Most marinas offer visitor moorings with electric hook-up and it only takes one night to fully recharge our batteries. We often combine marina visits with grocery shopping and other errands, making the process efficient and enjoyable.

## Myth #3: Not environmentally friendly

When we say *Old Nick* is an electric boat, some people make a big thing out of "it is not an electric boat because it has a generator". I have never understood this argument. A Serial Hybrid narrowboat uses an electric motor to drive the prop, taking power from the battery bank and solar. When necessary, it has a high power, efficient diesel generator to charge the batteries.

This practical design can cut diesel consumption to a third of a normal diesel powered boat and ensures you are never left without

electrical power—even after days of rain and cloud during a normal UK summer.

When we do have to use the generator, it is far more efficient at generating electrical power than a traditional diesel engine's alternator. We set our generator to output 5KW of AC power, directly into our Victron Quattro to charge the batteries or power AC appliances.

In comparison your average diesel engine running at 1500 RPM might be outputting around 75A at 12v so only 0.9KW of DC power to the batteries. Additionally, the diesel engine with just the alternator as a load will be <10% efficient, whereas the generator with its heavier load will always be 28% efficient.

## Meeting your needs on an electric narrowboat

Living on an electric narrowboat doesn't mean sacrificing comfort or convenience. *Old Nick* is fully equipped to meet all our needs, including:

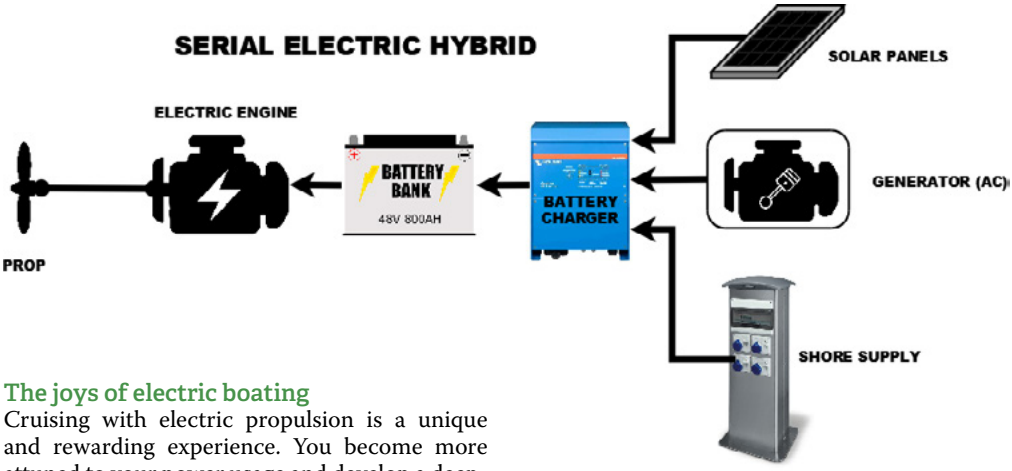
- Hot and Cold Water: A 500L water tank, 50L calorifier and an efficient AC pump provide ample water for showers, cooking, and cleaning.
- Heating: An Eberspacher diesel heater and six radiators keep the boat warm and cosy, even during the colder months.
- Cooking: Our galley boasts a full-size AC fridge, a 4-ring induction hob, a Neff oven, a microwave, and various other appliances, allowing us to cook and bake just like we would at home.

## The technology behind electric narrowboats

*Old Nick* relies on several key components:

- **Electric Motor:** Linked directly to the propellor, powering the narrowboat along and being the single biggest consumer of electrical power.
- **Batteries:** The heart of the system, batteries store the electrical energy needed for propulsion and onboard systems. ead Carbon and Lithium (LiFePo4) are the two most suitable chemistries for serial hybrid systems as they can operate for long periods with a partial state of charge (PSOC) i.e. you do not have to fully charge them to 100% every night.
- **Solar Panels:** These convert sunlight into electricity, reducing the need for generator usage and shore power hookups.
- **Diesel Generator:** A backup power source that can recharge batteries and power onboard systems when needed.
- **Victron Energy Management System:** This sophisticated system monitors and manages the boat's electrical power, ensuring optimal performance and efficiency.

It is very important that the power of the electric motor, size of battery bank, size of solar array, size of generator and size of battery charger are all matched to each other. There is no point having a big electric motor if the batteries can only power it for a few hours, or if the solar will never be able to power the motor on its own or the generator takes forever to charge the batteries.




## The joys of electric boating

Cruising with electric propulsion is a unique and rewarding experience. You become more attuned to your power usage and develop a deeper understanding of your boat's characteristics. While it may require a slightly slower pace, the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks.

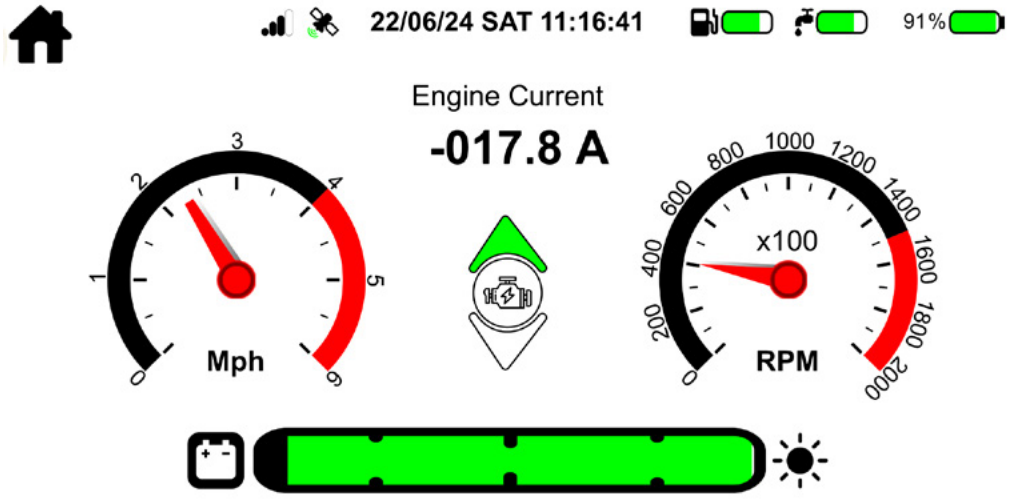
Here is a screen shot of our Ortomarine designed "Ortomate" system that measures the motor current, GPS speed and RPM to give us a "real-time" view of our power consumption. Even a slight increase in current can be measured, quickly alerting us to shallow water or something around the prop.

The green horizontal bar along the bottom of the page, indicates the amount of power being supplied by Solar and when it is all green, like below, we are in the state of "Nirvana".

## Embracing the future

Electric narrowboats are the future of boating. They offer a cleaner, quieter, and more sustainable way to enjoy life on the water. With advancements in technology and increasing awareness of environmental issues, there's never been a better time to make the switch to electric propulsion.

If you're considering going electric, I encourage you to do your research, talk to other electric boat owners, and choose a reputable builder or engineering company. With the right setup and mindset, you'll be amazed at what you can achieve on an electric narrowboat.



# Chasing the Boats

## Waterway Photography by Kev Maslin

© Copyright Kev Maslin

Kev Maslin is a Black Country lad, currently based in Tipton at the heart of the West Midlands canal network. He has a real passion for photographing inland waterways, which is just as well, as it's nigh on impossible for him to travel anywhere without crossing a canal, either with or without water.

He recalls, with some fondness, his early encounters with the Dudley No.1 Canal at Delph Locks: "Me and my mates used to go along mob-handed, each armed with just a jam jar and a little fishing net. On one unfortunate occasion one of the lads fell in, but was rescued and taken on board a passing 'barge' by its kindly owner to dry off. This curtailed our angling exploits for a while and the stickleback population of Brierley Hill was able to breathe easily once again".

Several years later he was reintroduced to the delights of the cut by a work colleague, who suggested that the colourful boats thereon would make excellent subjects for his burgeoning photography interests. Absolutely hooked, he spent the next 20 years or so as a keen waterway photo journalist, supplying pictures and feature articles to the specialist magazines and book publishers, while maintaining a lively involvement in the voluntary sector as a member of the Inland Waterways Association and as editor of the BCN Society's house magazine, Boundary Post. At one

point—he can't recall how—he ended up writing press releases for British Waterways and supplying images for its photo library.

Fast forward to the present day and Kev is as keen as ever. Still pounding the towpaths, he now specialises in photographing historic boats, and this is reflected in his regular social media contributions and the associated merchandise he produces, such as the ever-popular Historic Narrow Boats calendar, which is now in its eighth year. "What we're talking about here are largely pre World War II craft built by the likes of Yarwoods and Harland and Wolff. These boats were built to last and were carrying cargoes right up until the early 1960s—some even later than that. Fortunately a good deal of them have been acquired by individuals as restoration projects and remain in superb condition due to their sheer dedication".

He travels the inland waterways, always in search of that perfect shot. Each one is a potential calendar entry and his subjects aren't always easy to find. "Theoretically I could hang around for hours waiting for a boat to come along; particularly on my home patch around the Birmingham Canal Navigations. So I have adopted what you might call a fail safe approach. I have a large group of friends among the historic boating community who will always let me know when they are out and about. The fuel boat operators are always very helpful and publish their delivery schedules, which gives me an excellent head start". It's never a one way deal. My subjects are always welcome to a set of high resolution images in return for their help, and many have become firm friends". )

Precise navigation is carried out using a combination of Open Canal Map for pinpointing likely locations, Canalplan AC for timings and distances and, finally, Google Maps and Streetview for routing and to find suitable parking places. "And it's not just the boats themselves that make interesting subjects. I cover the whole waterways spectrum to include landscapes, events, close-ups and people. Those who know me are well aware that I'm not just there to photograph the boats when I turn up at a festival, and in fact it's developed into a little game, where the winner is the first one to snap me before I turn my lens on them. It's all good fun". "Having a five day a week job means that I mostly have just weekends to pursue my photography interest. I've always described it as a hobby that's got ever so slightly out of hand, and in recent times I've provided photographic support to the Fund Britain's Waterways group, and also taken on the role of press officer to the Historic Narrow Boat Club. In between times I organise canal walks for photographers and give Powerpoint presentations to interested groups". But none of this would be possible if it wasn't for my long-suffering wife being so understanding. She's a real diamond".

© Copyright Kev Maslin

# BSOBs

## and other abbreviations from Ian Hutson

Not 'Boats Without a Home Mooring' (I do not lack a "home mooring", I don't want one) and most especially not 'Continuous Cruisers'! The term encourages and licenses all manner of NIMBY disapprobation. It implies and then demands a narrow and singular behaviour from the group so referred to.

I have no reason to doubt that were, for example, a member of the executive of one of the more obscure faux-charities to possess a small Bentley saloon that it would spend ninety percent of its time quite legitimately parked on the roadway either outside his pied-à-terre in Kensington, or perhaps twice-weekly (three times at Christmas) in Ambleside Avenue, Streatham. The vast majority of cars spend the vast majority of their time parked, and yet we do not term their Registered Keepers 'Continuous Drivers' or 'Continuous Parkers'.

It's not dissimilar in spirit to walking through a country park or stately garden and chastising ramblers resting on the benches provided for not walking. 'Officer? Why are these Constant Walkers not walking? There are people here in breach of the Trades Description Act—they are sitting.' Many a Constant Walker has sat on a bench, peaceably sucking on that week's Werther's Unoriginal and listening to just such exchanges in re Constant Sitters.

Boats upon which folk live are by definition home. That is what makes them grate so with the not-home holiday vibe. Aboard they're doing the laundry, putting flea-powder on the cat, baking artisan breads, grinding Class B herbs, reading the newspaper, pretending that they can't hear the hire boat approaching from the stern that has suddenly gone into "flank revolutions" reverse. 'Brace yourself, Cynthia, and do try not to scream this time.'

I get the proverbial extracted by other Boaters (enough to my face, Greek and Roman gods alone know what is said behind my back) with 'oh, you're here again and/or still here, are you?' It never occurs to those snide hecklers that they see me in familiar places because it is they who are generally in those places, not me. I cruise some hundreds of very leisurely, sporadic miles each year. Not tens of miles, not thousands of miles, just the miles that I enjoy, and I do so mainly on just four different canals. I know where the moorings are good or are bad. I know where to avoid in holiday "season", and I know where I can do my laundry, buy my tofu, and best stay

out of everyone's way. I have not the slightest desire to boldly go where no man has cruised before, I leave that to those Silver Rudder Award merchants and to the U-Bend Video vloggers who enjoy such, and long may it please them.

Still, for the most part, I am to be seen moored up. No-one uses the term 'continuous moorer' without realising fully its plainly derogatory intent. Let's please stop facilitating similar derogation of boats of my stripe and feather with "continuous cruiser". I am a Bog-Standard Ordinary Boater.

## Bringing to life the Venice of the Midlands

Boat and trade entries are now being invited for the Tipton Canal and Community Festival on 21/22 Sept 2024. Simply follow the link.

free-4210357.webador.co.uk/boat-trade-entries

There will be more than 60 boats - trade, historic and private. Boat trips, stalls, children's rides and much more. The people of Tipton are really looking forward to its return after four years,

Please contact Kev Maslin on tiptonfest@gmail.com if you'd like to help out in any way.

# DIY Service

Advice from **River Canal Rescue**

**Find out more at** youtube.com/@rivercanalrescue6450

**Email what videos you'd like to see to** enquiries@rivercanalrescue.co.uk

River Canal Rescue is posting 'how to' videos on You Tube, sharing practical tips on how to keep engines and components running smoothly.

The first video covers stern glands, discussing adjustment and packing replacement (the latter when no alignment is needed).

Fronted by RCR standards and ethics executive, Kerry Horton, he guides viewers through the whole process, from how to identify when an adjustment is necessary, where to make it and why not to over tighten, to when to repack, how to remove existing packing and how to reduce water ingress during the process. Kerry's top tips are also shared at the end of the video.

Designed to complement RCR's practical guide – Narrow Boat Engine Maintenance and Repair – future videos will focus on diesel engines and their arrangements, explaining the theory behind the boat's main systems, and giving instructions on how to identify key components, how to locate faults and where possible, how to fix them.

RCR's second video 'how to align the engine to the prop shaft' was due for release in June. The team is also keen to hear what topics boaters would like covered.

# Rewind

## Issue No 4 2009

**Howard Anguish** reviews NABO News from 15 years ago.

**BW to change**. Starting in the Autumn of 2009, BW are returning to smaller "Waterway Units" rather than the current 8 Business Units, each with responsibility just for looking after the "track" in its area and its users. Business aspects would be centralised, allowing for the removal of a layer of management with up to £10 Million pounds of saving, partially offsetting the annual £30 Million shortfall. Ambitious plans indeed.

BW also announced its "**Twenty/twenty year vision",** aiming at becoming a "National Trust" for the waterways—neither a public body nor avoiding it being sold off to the private sector. The plan was pursued for a while but as history now shows, BW actually became the CRT some years later.

The chairman in his column discusses the **yearly increase in the issuing of licences** and mentions that the current system may be reaching its capacity limits despite the encouragement to build more offline marinas, so they are limiting the issuing of line side moorings, including the upward driving of moorings costs at these moorings through what is described as blatantly unfair auction practices, a subject I have touched on in previous articles.

I attended a **Waterway and Special Interest Groups (WUSIG)** Meeting at Hatton where among other issues, concern was raised about growing problems with towpath cyclists and the issue will remain under scrutiny by a special sub group which will report back at the next WUSIG meeting. Because so much time had been given to cycling problems it was decided to hold a separate meeting to discuss the ramifications involved in a BW draft consultation document setting out BW's mooring policy.

David Fletcher sets out some timely reminders about issues raised from the **BSS Technical Committee**, including advice about the operation of Fire Extinguishers, and also raises a discussion about draft regulations recently published about the serious aspects of solid fuel stove fires on boats. He particularly mentions the concern about the number of recent incidents involving wood backing tiles in the vicinity of solid fuel stoves.

Council member John Slee discusses the results of a recent **NABO Cost of Boating Survey** and sets out the results of 44 sets of data submitted by 44 NABO members. For those interested to compare present day costs with those in 2009 you will find links to the back issues of NABO News on the NABO website.

Member Fiona Slee had attended a meeting where the **vision of boating in 2020** was discussed. Discussion centered around the move to a Third Sector Trust and was summed up in her closing words. "Personally, I think the most important thing is that BW understand the issues that distress boaters and continue to work towards the most effective, economic way of "Saving Our Waterways" for the use of all sections of the community, involving as many funding streams as possible and keeping this superb national asset open for all"

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

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