NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners
Issue 1 Spring 2026

A European perspective

A scientific approach to emissions

NABO safety report

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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 1st May 2026.

NABO Calendar 2025

16 May 2026 (In person and Zoom)

25 July 2026 (Zoom)

26 September 2026 (Zoom)

21 November 2026 (In person and Zoom) and AGM

Cover photo

NB Birmingham approaching the West Coast Main Line railway bridge over the BCN New Main Line, just West of Pudding Green Junction, photo 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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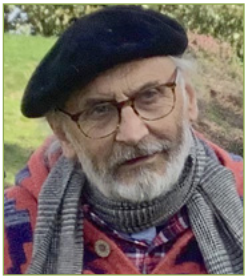


The new year is upon us

Editor **John Sadler**

One of the greatest mistakes that boaters can make is to assume that as the network has been there for 200 years it will be there tomorrow.

With continued underfunding some rationalisation of resources will soon be inevitable. Will that be a reduction of ecologists, lawyers, management, engineers or canal closures?

As a result of the near catastrophic failure of Toddbrook reservoir, legislation was introduced to force regular inspection of all reservoirs. To comply, much work has been done reinforcing banks and spillways. In some cases reservoirs have not been filled to capacity to reduce the forces on retaining structures. Although necessary for risk management, the effects of a summer drought were made much more severe by a lack of stored water and led to the closure of large parts of the network.

2025 saw four major canal breaches. Starting with the Bridgewater Canal at Little Bollington near Dunham Massey which is likely to remain closed during 2026 for reconstruction. This canal is owned by Peel Holdings, licensed separately and not maintained by the Canal and River Trust.

In March 2025 the Macclesfield Canal emptied through a culvert failure, CRT were active in quickly rescuing boats that were aground however the damage wasn't fixed until mid July following a £350k repair.

On the 17th July a breach just outside Chester closed the section of canal leading to Ellesmere Port, effectively removing access to the Manchester Ship Canal, which was the last way of getting to the River Weaver following the closure of the Anderton boat lift. Manchester? Well, the hole in the Macclesfield had been repaired but owing to water shortage it was not a viable route.

Then to finish the year we had the Christmas breach of the Llangollen at Whitchurch.

In the West Midlands we also have collapsing bridges to contend with. Last year High Bridge (the famous one on the Shropshire Union with a telegraph pole in the middle) developed some structural damage. Traffic was limited to a single lane while repairs were commenced. When I used the road above, just before Christmas, repairs were still taking place.

Brewood Bridge provides vehicular access to the town but has developed a large hole and is closed to traffic. The canal underneath has been reopened although the towpath remains closed.

Penkridge suffered a similar fate. The bywash under the lock next to the Boat Inn, has collapsed endangering the adjacent house. Emergency services have closed the road and the Staffs and Worcester canal is also closed. Fortunately none of these incidents caused injury but could so easily have done so.

Campbell Robb assured us that '…breaches of this scale [the one at Whitchurch] are relatively rare, when they do occur, they're expensive and complicated to fix', but for boaters they're a threat to property, life and certainly navigation.

Campbell has said that he wants to reset the relationship between CRT and the boating community by having open communications. Now would be a good time to start.

Fly on the wall

Observes proceedings at the Council meeting in January

The Council met on Saturday 24th January 2026 on Zoom. Penny Barber (CRT Boaters Representative and Commissioner on the Future of Boat Licensing) attended part of the meeting.

The meeting focused on reviewing CRT's Report of the Commission on the Future of Boat Licensing, with Penny providing detailed explanations of the 36 recommendations and annexes. The Council discussed various aspects including movement requirements, the 14 day rule, and concerns about enforcement and discrimination. The discussion highlighted ongoing challenges with CRT's enforcement practices and the importance of balancing boating rights with practical considerations.

NABO meeting agenda review

Andy introduced the agenda, noting that Penny would join at 10 AM, and emphasised the need to complete key items before her arrival.

Two items were discussed: NABO's treasurer Helen requested a second signatory for finance, Duncan Wright volunteered, and the deadline for NABO news submissions (incorrectly) set for March 14th. The meeting reviewed various Canal and River Trust meetings, finding the roundtable meeting with Campbell Robb in December to have been positive and promising.

Canal Trust Operations Update

The upcoming meetings with Matthew Symonds were debated, and the need to prepare specific topics for discussion. Malcolm provided updates on meetings with the Environment Agency. Penny joined to provide insights on the future of licensing report, offering to briefly explain the 36 recommendations and answer questions.

CRT boating licensing system review

Penny presented comments on the report with 36 recommendations for CRT's boating licensing system, highlighting the need for consultation and addressing concerns about CRT's consultation practices.

She said that while the report was accepted by CRT, some recommendations may face resistance. The meeting discussed specific recommendations, including the rivers only licence, the need for CRT to have powers to fine or charge boaters, and communication with overstayers.

Boating licensing and safety issues

Penny discussed issues with licensing and payment processes, highlighting cases where payments were not properly recorded or linked to licence renewals.

It was agreed that there is a need for better communication and systems. They also discussed boat safety schemes. The meeting also touched on the continuous cruising surcharge, with Ken suggesting that it could be challenged on an individual basis due to potential discrimination. Penny agreed that the reasons given for the surcharge were questionable and expressed hope for a legal challenge.

Boater complaints and CRT services

The meeting discussed issues with boater complaints and support services, Penny expressed concerns about waterways chaplains' reluctance to file complaints against CRT.

NABO clarified that chaplains are trained to be conciliatory rather than adversarial, serving people of all religions and none. Penny noted that people lose faith in the complaints process due to its complexity. Finally, they reviewed Annex 5 of the report.

Boat logbook and accessibility challenges

The meeting discussed implementing a logbook requirement for boats, with concerns raised about literacy and accessibility. Ken shared experiences of working with Canal and River Trust to address issues of discrimination and reasonable adjustments.

The importance of assessing health and accessibility needs when determining what constitutes a reasonable cruising pattern was discussed.

CRT consultation process concerns

The meeting discussed concerns about CRT's response to their report and recommendations, with Penny noting that CRT had gone silent after November and expressing worry about the consultation process.

Andy and CJ raised questions about CRT's lack of a clear timeline for addressing the issues, while NABO stated the need for a cultural shift at CRT to treat boaters as individuals rather than just boats. The discussion touched on various aspects of continuous cruising and CRT's responsibilities, with Malcolm asking about CRT's primary role, which Penny identified as maintaining and developing the navigation.

Boating regulations and enforcement discussion

The meeting discussed boating regulations and enforcement, Malcolm suggested that CRT's primary responsibility is maintaining infrastructure rather than ensuring boaters' well-being.

NABO Councillors agreed CRT's role should be educational rather than punitive, while acknowledging the need for targeted enforcement against those abusing the system.

Boater charter and CRT responsibilities

The meeting discussed the concept of a boater's charter, the challenges of enforcing it, particularly in situations like droughts or breaches.

Perhaps CRT could keep the waterways navigable while temporarily relaxing conditions during incidents. The meeting also addressed the Rivers Only licence, Anne clarified conditions under which CRT can deny licences. NABO outlined the legal basis for CRT's authority and the limitations of terms and conditions under the 1995 Act. The necessity for simplified and understandable terms and conditions was thought to be crucial.

CRT enforcement legal stalemate

The meeting discussed legal challenges to CRT's enforcement practices, noting that neither boaters nor CRT are willing to pursue costly court cases, resulting in a stalemate.

It was agreed to wait until the March meeting to develop a formal response to CRT's proposals.

Next meeting March 21st at 9.30am via Zoom.

NABO at the user groups

BSS Technical Forum

By Mike Rodd

Mike Rodd attended the February 2026 meeting of the BSS Technical Forum on behalf of NABO, held on the 3rd February at Box Moor Trust Centre.

As always a well-attended and busy meeting with the main work being to review in much detail the work being undertaken to update the non-private boat BSS requirements by examining the relevance of the present core Examination Checking Procedures (ECPs) applied to such non-private boats, as currently these are outdated by many years. The work also involved examining the 2002 requirements not covered by the Core ECPs.

There were also reports on work being undertaken by a specialised group looking at the so-called 96Volt DC threshold but in fact this group, having oversight of the ISO work being undertaken, is also looking at issues regarding both high voltage AC and DC, and its consequences for the BSS scheme and lithium battery usage. There was also a report prepared for the BSS Directors on the risk presented by lithium batteries. It was agreed by all that this area is very important to report to all boaters; given the potential number of well-used and inappropriate lithiums in use. It was agreed that there urgently needs to be information sent to all boaters.

The next meeting will be held on the 16th of June and dependent on the material to be discussed this could well be a hybrid meeting.

NABO Acting Chair commented, the requirement for a steel enclosure is included in the IET Guide of a couple of years ago. It is still not clear how BSS sees this guide, including how it might reflect the content and requirements (such as the aforementioned 'battery boxes'). With the passage of time it is no clearer how BSS view the relevance of the whole of the IET Guide to narrowboats and the like.

It's important for NABO Council to be as clear as possible around this subject. Consequences are already manifesting themselves through insurance companies and according to anecdotal evidence, the reactions of some BSS inspectors. NABO is already probing insurance companies for their position on' lithium batteries' as a result of some recent ambiguous insurance conditions centred around safety including charging regimes. It's becoming a topic that we feel we must have a position on.

A European perspective

By **Anne Husar**, former NABO Chair, with partner **Olly**

Like many, our narrowboating life began by hiring back in 2000. We lived in Norfolk and had also cruised the Broads. By 2003 we had a full length Dave Thomas sailaway brought by truck through our village and swung over the hedge by crane onto the prepared site by Olly's cabinet maker's workshops. Incongruous sight for the village but convenient for Olly, he worked on the fit out evenings and weekends.

2005: House up for sale, plans formulating to take boat to Europe, boat craned out and put in the water in the Fens, shake down cruise to Flood's Ferry Marina.

House sold quickly, we go exploring the quiet, deep waters of the Fens, discovering wonderful skyscapes, peaceful cruising, facilities and mooring opportunities few and far between.

2006: We leave the Fens for the canal system via efficiently manned and well kept locks to King's Lynn and the Wash. Here we discovered that coastal work was slow and, with only the sea to see, a bit boring. We tested our set up when the narrowboat that was with us overheated very soon in to the crossing and we towed it with no problem to Boston.

2006-2008: Cruised most of the canal system. Unplanned stoppages were rare, enabling planning to be confidently done, I don't remember the thought of 'being stuck' somewhere ever being considered. Locks were well maintained, lock sides spick and span; the canals were well staffed with skilled, knowledgeable employees; our deep draught not a problem when cruising or mooring up; facilities were all still where our Pearsons and Nicholsons maps said they would be. A Golden Age of the canals?

We spent some time on the Aire & Calder to experience commercial craft and larger locks in readiness for Europe, also on rivers including the Thames, Ouse and Trentfalls. The boat handled extremely well, we felt ready for Europe.

2008-2017: Nothing the UK's waterways could offer prepared us for European ones. We travelled on most of the waterways in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. We found that there was such complete government support for keeping navigations open for commercial use that leisure use was a bit of a sideline. France and Flanders required a very modest payment for a boat licence, Wallonia, the Netherlands and Germany were completely free.

In all countries the locks and lift bridges were either manned or remotely operated, in fact the idea that in the UK boaters operated nearly all of them themselves was greeted with disbelief. It was rare for there to be an unplanned stoppage, time's money for the commercial barges.

Mooring was rarely a problem in any of the countries we visited, apart from Germany who were less welcoming of our long boat and had many 2 day restrictions. Everywhere else didn't give a jot. The Netherlands could get expensive in a city as some charged a daily fee and we quickly learnt to tie up in the outskirts for no charge or duration limit and take our tender in instead.

We came across just one time restriction, moored outside Gent in Belgium, the lock keeper told us we had 49 days. France had a similarly laid back approach.

While we were in Europe, the traditional peniche began to be unprofitable having too small a carrying capacity. Many were 'retired' from service, along with the families which crewed them. They continued to live aboard, mooring on a canal wherever they felt they had a connection, with hardly a problem, even in and around cities. In the meantime, canals were dredged even deeper and locks made bigger. Shipbuilders began producing ever larger barges until by the time we left we were regularly mixing it with 4000 tonners.

France was different however. A very few of their northern canals were enlarged, most of the rest remained as 350ton capacity waterways and largely given over to leisure use. The French navigation authority began to increase leisure boat licence fees, some facilities were removed or closed during the winter. Some canals were 'offered' to the local authorities that they passed through to take on. This resulted in a variety of responses from no thanks = canal duly closed, to yes please = staff taken on, canal maintained. These latter LA's were not more altruistic but had appreciated the cost benefits of tourism.

2017-2019: Brexit changed everything for us and with a heavy heart we sold up (we had become Dutch residents) and returned to the UK. The first two years were spent on EA waters where we noticed more impacts from flooding and less mooring and facilities than before.

We had kept in touch with boating friends on the UK canals while in Europe and they had warned us that now CRT had taken over, we should expect to see a deterioration of the canal system. Optimistically, we hoped they were exaggerating and joined CRT waterways again in 2019.

Some immediate differences that we noticed were the now unkempt lock sides, uncared for, flaking paintwork on lock beams and difficult to use locks. Knowledgeable and skilled employees had been made redundant with volunteers taking their place. Essential machinery, tools and workshops that had been so crucial to maintenance had been sold off. All work, even grass cutting, was now contracted out.

Then there was simply being able to navigate a canal without 'ploughing', and you could forget trying to get both ends of the boat in to moor, those were the days.

A sad difference was the removal of the traditional canal sign boards that had been so in keeping to our eyes with the heritage feel of the system. Replaced by gaudy blue and white plastic horrors, they seemed to encapsulate for us the change in CRT's agenda which appeared to be, let's do anything other than navigation!

2020-2026: Planning our cruising is more difficult as unexpected stoppages spread like a rash. It remains risky to have to be anywhere for a specific date and we have added to our 'careful where we moor' list embankments as well as under trees.

We have given up relying on maps showing where and what facilities can be expected, so many have been and continue to be removed. Our licence fee has increased exponentially with no visible improvement from what increasingly looks to be nearing a point of no return for our cherished canal system. Our friends were, sadly, right.

Nouse from the Ouse

Great not Yorkshire

By Peter Early

So, the river is back in flood and no boats are going anywhere. A pity as it's that time of the year when the not-cruising blues arrive.

But we are fortunate, having what is probably the best mooring in the marina right at the end of the pontoon. Although we have a neighbour on one side, the other is an unrestricted view across 100 metres of water to the pub. But its the wildlife that makes us lucky, There is just so much at this time of the year. We wake almost every day to a large group of up to 30 coots swimming across the marina often accompanied by 2 pairs of tufted ducks with a background of several cormorants, a pair of great crested grebes, swans, and many mallards with their escorting females.

But the highlight is a lone whooper swan. Well used to humans he comes knocking a few times a day to be fed and will eat from your hand. Fortunately he has no teeth! He's not tolerated by the resident mute swans who chase him off at any opportunity but he's not bothered. There are many other boats here who will feed him.

Baits Bite Lock on the River Cam has finally reopened but there are a number of stoppages on the Rivers Nene and Great Ouse with all of these due to finish by the end of March. Unfortunately the moorings

at Denver East Bank, Toms Hole and Queen Adelaide remain closed but the Jenyns Arms at Denver Sluice should be reopened shortly. On the Relief Channel the moorings at Downham Market have been cleared of overstaying boats apart from one. With Downham being one of the few places on the River with access to shops this is welcome news, we just hope the EA can keep it clear.

Environment Change

CRT is running a 200 year-old system across a huge distance with limited funds, designed for non-propulsion boats.

By RCR

The impact of hydro-carbon contamination on the clay (which makes up the foundation of the canal bed), has not been taken into consideration, however our own research indicated many years ago, when developing the Bilgeway product, that we were likely to see more issues developing as clay consistency was impacted.

This is something that could be improved though better environmental controls on our waterways. Then there is the effect of climate—drought and then heavy rainfall are going to place any system under pressure—not easy to plan for.

Looking back to Christmas Eve —The twelve boat re-float

Overall, the CRT has a hard job to keep on top of aging and failing infrastructure with limited funds, and in this instance [Whitchurch breach], have not let financial restrictions hamper their objectives to get the impacted vessels clear of the affected area in the quickest possible timescale.

Following the Llangollen breach on 22 December, River Canal Rescue engineers were on site by lunchtime that day to assess the situation and determine what level of support was needed. In addition to the two boats in the hole, and a third boat perilously close to what has been described as a 'massive crater', 12 near-by vessels were left stranded due to the sudden water loss.

RCR managing director, Stephanie Horton, commented: "We're currently unable to help the two boats in the hole; the area needs to be stabilised, dried out and able to accommodate heavy-lifting equipment. The third boat however, was pulled to safety by a contractor using specialist machinery.

Once the CRT installed cofferdams, which are able to withstand water and soil pressure, they could then pump water into the stretch of water between the breach at Whitchurch and Grindley Brook. We were asked by the CRT to attend and oversee the re-float.

Having been advised the refill was happening on Christmas Eve, we sent six engineers to ensure the 12 stranded and listing boats could easily re-float in line with the rising water. Many vessels were listing on concrete plinths with outlets that could easily be overwhelmed once water levels rose, so engineers got into the canal and sealed holes at risk of water ingress. They also used Tirfor winches and ratchet straps to hold the boats steady, ensuring they floated upright."

After six hours, by 6.30pm, RCR had stabilised and safely re-floated all 12 boats, resulting in minimum damage to the vessels and their hulls.

Stephanie continues: "Only then were they happy to leave and enjoy their Christmas. The team pulled out all the stops to ensure all affected boats were re-floated before Christmas day, which was no mean feat."

RCR's Christmas Eve team comprised; Trevor Forman, Pete Barnett, Tushka Horton, Andy Spencer, Kerry Horton and 'PJ' Rowntree.

Watch the re-float here youtube.com/watch?v=M1MWwDoxTjA or check out River Canal Rescue's Facebook page.

A trip to remember

Crossing the Wash with **Duncan Wright**

There are a number of tidal reaches that are deemed to fall within the scope of what is considered narrowboat territory. The Ouse, The Douglas and the Thames are often used by boaters and as Strawberry Island Boat Club (SIBC) members, our summer adventures regularly will include the Tidal Trent.

There are however a few other tidal crossings that are a little more adventurous and require greater derring-do in their undertaking. These include the rivers Severn and Mersey and of course the crossing of the Wash. The earliest record I can find of a narrowboat making the Wash crossing was in 1972 when NB Ohio made the journey from Boston to Kings Lynn. Pilot Daryl Hill says he believes that narrowboat crossings of the Wash have been happening in small numbers ever since they started to be fitted with engines. The largest flotilla making the crossing prior to our own was made up of 11 boats in 2019 and again in 2020; Daryl has personally piloted over 600 narrowboats across the Wash.

Early in May 2025 a number of Strawberry Islanders took part in the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign cruise, outside the Houses of Parliament on the Tidal Thames. Five of these SIBC boats along with several other campaigners then headed north to Boston where we joined them to form a second campaign flotilla, 14 boats in all, with the intention of crossing the Wash.

It's important to plan the journey properly, weather, tide and tide time play an important role, so must be taken into account. Our first tide window, the original plan, had to be cancelled since the Environment Agency were carrying out maintenance on the Boston Tidal Barrier, through which we needed to pass. The second window opened on the 23rd of June, lasting 6 days, hopefully the weather would be favourable.

We had nothing but hot windy days in the run up to our departure. Daryl, our pilot, had already stipulated that a forecast of force 4, or 18mph winds would be the maximum acceptable. Finally, the forecast showed that Wednesday 25th June would give us the conditions we needed and word was given. A get together and sumptuous meal at the very excellent Boston Lock Cafe allowed us all to meet our leader Andrew who, with military precision, outlined the procedure for our departure from Boston, the details of the crossing, and our arrival at Wisbech. The days leading

up allowed everyone to prepare their boats for the journey, nav lights working, anchor at the ready, VHF radios charged and life jackets in good order. Many of the boats were proudly sporting their Fund Britain's Waterways livery in the form of flags and banners. This was, after all, a campaign cruise.

The morning of our adventure dawned bright, clear and calm. An expected locking out time around 8:30am subject to exact tide times and water levels. The interesting thing about Boston Lock is that it is only 45 feet long. On each rising or falling tide boats over this length only have a brief window of opportunity, when the Witham and the estuary are at a level, to pass through, with both sets of gates and the flood gates all open at the same time.

Andrew had us all marshalled at the lock in plenty of time, radio checks were carried out and we sat, rafted up, waiting for the lock keeper Ali to open up. The tide was late and tension building, but finally, at nearly 9am, we were off! A goodly number of spectators were lining the roads and bridges in Boston to watch our departure. With the outgoing tide we soon passed the Stump, Black Sluice Lock and the docks, and once beyond the Boston Barrier the buildings faded away and we said our goodbyes to Boston.

To complete the journey in daylight it's important to have an early start when crossing the Wash in a low powered craft, such as a narrowboat, since it takes place over the course of two tides. Firstly, on a falling tide you pass through Boston Docks and follow the estuary to the open sea. Once clear of the sand banks a north-easterly course is set, taking the deeper channel of the Boston Roads. Green buoys to the starboard and red to port on departure. The swell was light, the sun was shining, we were blessed with great conditions and we enjoyed seeing seals basking on the sand banks to the south.

After around 3 hours we made a turn to starboard and a southerly

Photos courtesy of Van Hinchliffe, and the drone shot from Ian Danby.

course was taken for another hour or so. Nearing low tide there isn't sufficient water to be able to steer a direct course to Wisbech, so we had to wait for the tide to turn and water levels to rise enough to complete our journey. Killing time here is best done by beaching the boats onto a sand bank. Thief Sand, which is visible only at low tide was the destination for our break. Disturbing a couple of seals sunning themselves on the sand, we gave a brief burst of power to get the bow up onto the beach, and then walked the anchor out, just in case. This gave us a break of around 45 minutes, a chance to disembark, walk the dog, and take a few photographs.

All too soon it became apparent that the tide had turned. The last boats to arrive were soon being swung around by the rising waters and were re-floated off the sand. Retrieving our anchor we climbed aboard, started the engine, and one by one the boats were backed out into deeper water. At this time it became clear there was a problem with the engine on Rum 'a' Gin, she had to be tied alongside Paradigm Shift for the second half of our journey.

The plan had been to have some food on the beach, but the problems with Rum 'a' Gin had delayed Richard and Hazel's preparations. An impromptu drive-through was organised with each boat swooping like a seagull, in turn, to snatch sausage butties from Hazel's waiting hands. It beats MacDonald's any day.

It would still be some time before the water was deep enough for us to make our approach to Wisbech. We

cruised steadily north for around an hour to the Nene Roads Buoy north of Thief Sand. Rounding it we then set a southerly course, this time with green buoys to port, towards Wisbech. We were joined for a short while by the Wisbech Port Authority pilot boat which disgorged a couple of crew members onto two of our flotilla to gain some understanding of what it is to be on a narrowboat at sea. Care must be taken on this stretch since stray currents push the boats where they will, such that at one point we were pushed far too close to a port channel marker buoy, which we gently kissed as we passed...

After an hour or so of meandering, following the Nene Roads channel, we finally entered the tidal reach of the River Nene proper. At this time the incoming tide was giving us a hefty shove inland, we quickly left behind the paired West Nene and Sir Peter Scott lighthouses, Port Sutton and Sutton Bridge, the only road crossing before Wisbech. During our approach to Wisbech town, which lies some 11 miles or so inland from the Wash, we were buzzed by some drones courtesy of The Drone People, filming us for their excellent Facebook video facebook.com/share/v/1732QcXSbQ/ Finally we entered Wisbech, winding the boats in turn we allowed the tide to carry us back to the Yacht Club for our overnight mooring; we were soon moored against the pontoon with three boats rafted up alongside. Fish and chips and a celebratory drink rounded off the day.

The following morning on the rising tide, we had to make an early start to get under the bridges at Wisbech, a steady plod at tick-over, and often in neutral, to allow water levels time to rise to get us to Dog-in-a-Doublet Lock and onto the non-tidal section of the River Nene. A TV interview with Look East and cheers! We had done it. Our Wash crossing was complete.

A NABO appeal for help!

nabo.org.uk/registration

NABO is continuing to fight battles in boaters' interest to keep the canal network open for as many people as possible. This involves discussions with the navigation authorities, primarily CRT and EA. We also lobby members of parliament for their support.

Most meetings are on line but when face to face NABO pays travelling expenses. There are other expenses attached to these campaigns which are funded by our membership fees. We really need more people to join and become active participants, it's not expensive and you get to meet people who can improve our boating experiences.

Have any of our members had experience of working with the press? We are looking for a skilled volunteer to help us publicise what being a boater on our inland waterways really means and the issues we face. If you feel you could fulfil the role and can spare a few hours a month, then please get in touch. There are already signs that 2026 will have important topics for NABO to react to and be SEEN to be reacting to, even contributing to resolving.

A scientific approach to emissions

How are we going to get to net zero? Part III

David Fletcher gets controversial with the options of doing nothing, burning "green" fuels, or simply paying for carbon offsets and letting someone else carry the burden of net zero.

Net zero is sold as a destination, but in practice it is an accounting exercise. We are told that emissions can continue, provided they are balanced somewhere else.

For inland waterways, the Department for Transport has an obvious preference: electrify everything and declare the problem solved. But policy slogans do not float boats. With current technology, full electrification is not universally practical, and pretending otherwise risks forcing expensive solutions that deliver little real benefit.

Boating is often assumed to be low carbon by default. Compared with cars or aviation, that may be true. But "low" is not "zero", and the uncomfortable question remains: what are we prepared to do about the emissions that we are emitting? Are the answers in law, behavioural, financial, or technical — or do we simply outsource responsibility and hope no one asks too many questions?

Even after every reasonable efficiency improvement, some emissions are unavoidable. Grid electricity still relies on gas. Engines need lubricants. Boats are made of plastics, paints and sealants. The easy response is to wave these away as marginal. The purist response is to demand offsets. Both are evasions in different directions.

Drax is the clearest illustration of how far we are prepared to bend reality. Burning imported wood pellets is officially counted as low-carbon, despite releasing the same CO_2 at the chimney as coal once did. We are told this is acceptable because trees grow back. The same logic is applied when we burn wood in a stove or run a diesel engine on HVO. The rules permit it — but the atmosphere does not care about the rules. (Not forgetting that coal has sulphur in the emissions too)

Canada's forests are vast and well managed, and they can supply industrial quantities of wood. That much is true. But whether the carbon came from oil, gas or timber, it still enters the same atmosphere. Counting it differently does not change the chemistry of the atmosphere.

Some substitutes are easier to justify. John Lewis running lorries on biogas derived from waste is a genuine improvement: no extra land, no new crops, no displaced food production. Unfortunately, there is not nearly enough waste-derived fuel to scale this approach to everything that burns.

HVO is attractive precisely because it allows us to change the fuel rather than the engine. But it does not scale. If all UK transport ran on HVO, we would need several times the entire agricultural area of the country growing crops like rapeseed. That is not a transition plan; it is a land-use fantasy. As a niche fuel for boats it may make sense. As a general solution, it fails immediately.

This is why land matters. Use land for fuel crops and you displace

food or housing. Use it for trees and you commit future generations to honour today's carbon debts. Use it for solar and you get far more energy per hectare, while sheep still graze underneath. When these options are compared honestly, it becomes obvious why government policy continues to favour solar, wind and nuclear. Combustion — of any sort — creates accounting contortions and long-term liabilities.

Offsets offer a seductive escape. At under £50 per tonne CO2, they are far cheaper than real infrastructure. Airlines sell them at checkout. Organisations declare themselves carbon-neutral and move on. But offsets only work if the projects are real, permanent and additional, and many are none of those. They allow emissions today in exchange for promises stretching decades into the future. That is not mitigation; it is deferred responsibility.

Tree planting in particular exposes the problem. Trees planted now may be harvested in a century. The CO_2 is released today, but the capture is spread over generations. Large emitters understand this perfectly, which is why they rely on large scale industrial forestry and not small local schemes. It works on paper, but it leaves a legacy others must maintain.

So what should boaters do? Doing nothing is tempting. Inland boating emissions are tiny in national terms and always will be. But that argument collapses the moment everyone uses it. At the same time, forcing full electrification ignores real-world usage, battery limits, and the carbon cost of ripping out perfectly serviceable systems. HVO and dry wood occupy an awkward but defensible middle ground. They are not zero-carbon, but they reduce net emissions within the current rules and avoid premature scrapping of boats. They also preserve resilience: fuels that store, heat that works off-grid, and systems that owners understand. If we are serious, we should also reopen the discussion on gleaners' licences; unmanaged wood along towpaths and in parks is a wasted resource. And then see how the electric boat technology develops.

Photo: Olena Bohovyk/Unsplash

Offsets should be the last resort, not the first. They may have a place for emissions that genuinely cannot be avoided, but they are too easily used as moral cover for inaction. Buying indulgences rarely leads to reform.

There is no single clean answer, and anyone offering one should be treated with suspicion. The only credible path is messy and mixed: reduce what we can, substitute where it genuinely helps, and offset only what remains. WE should be careful with our money and not be forced into expensive hardware that saves very little emitted CO2. Above all, we should stop pretending that clever accounting can repeal chemical reality. The atmosphere does not care whether a tonne of CO_2 came from a narrowboat, a power station, or a spreadsheet.

If inland boating is to survive the journey to net zero, it will be through proportionate, pragmatic choices — not through slogans, shortcuts, or pretending that complexity can be legislated away.

Cotswold Canal Trust update

As of early 2026, the Cotswold Canals Trust is making significant progress, aiming to fully reopen the canal by 2029. Key efforts focus on the "missing mile," with dredging, embankment stabilisation, and lock restoration (including Blender and Pike Locks) ongoing near Stonehouse. A new nature reserve is also being developed.

Latest Key Updates in 2026

- Restoration Progress: Work is ramping up near the Ocean Bridge and Bonds Mill, with a new lift bridge installed. The dredging vessel "Dudley" is active.
- Wildlife and Environment: A new nature reserve is being created, with ponds and reeds planted to improve biodiversity along the canal corridor.
- Challenges: The project is addressing asbestos near Brimscombe port and installing sheet piling to stabilise leaking embankments.
- Target: The goal is to fully restore the Stroudwater Navigation for navigation, linking the Thames and Severn Canal.

Upcoming Events:

The Trust offers guided walking tours on weekends and some Wednesdays to view restoration progress, specifically targeting the "missing mile".

FBW welcomes additional funding for the Canal and River Trust but calls for sustainable funding for all waterways.

The Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) campaign group welcomes the announcement by Defra of an additional £6.5 million of investment in the Canal & River Trust (CRT) to support repair, maintenance and long-term projects. However, whilst the additional funding will help with immediate priorities, it represents only 12% of the current £52.6 million annual grant funding to CRT, a figure which is already inadequate and which is intended to start reducing from April 2027. Neither the ongoing Defra grant funding nor the additional funds are sufficient to halt the decline of CRT's network. This is made abundantly clear by the rising cost of maintenance and repairs. The recent breach of the Llangollen Canal at Whitchurch is likely to cost several million pounds to repair.

Maintenance work over the 2024/2025 winter period cost over £60 million. Repairs to just one reservoir at Toddbrook will cost nearly £50 million. Even repairing bridges after vehicles have struck them costs over £1 million each year. Neither is CRT alone in facing problems caused by long-term inadequate funding. The Environment Agency's waterways are also deteriorating in the face of ageing infrastructure, climate change effects and inflationary pressures. There are now five indefinite closures across its Anglian waterways, which the Agency has stated that it has no plans to address owing to ongoing financial pressures. FBW has been campaigning for more than 2½ years for local and national government to take urgent action to protect Britain's inland waterways. In the last six months there have been two announcements of additional funding, firstly £500,000 from the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority for repairs to locks on the River Cam and now £6.5 million for CRT. These are very welcome indications that Government may be starting to hear the message, but what is needed is sustained, predictable long-term funding for all waterways.

For these reasons FBW repeats its call for Government to commit to a comprehensive national review of future funding plans for Britain's inland waterways.

For further information about FBW contact: info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk

Sue Tonious

Has the time come to take a pragmatic approach to canal maintenance? There is insufficient money in the bank to keep all canals open. Would it be better to have a 1000 miles of well maintained navigable canals or continue with the lottery of travelling, without knowing when or whether you will be able to return.

Looking at reducing costs it's very expensive to reduce the most costly part of the Trust, employees. Staff have to be compensated, whereas you can just close a canal. That's not quite true but a bean counter might see it like that.

The Peak Forest has some of the most beautiful stretches on the network. However it is plagued by leaks and water shortages. Perhaps we should do without it for a while to allow time for a full service. Last year safe passage between the north and south was difficult.

With the continuing restoration of canals there is going to be a greater need for water to fill them. I don't always see that consideration given sufficient prominence. With all the new boaters taking to the water we need the extra mileage to fit them in, do we also need an extra series of reservoirs?

Image BrewoodBridge

Where will be the busiest canal this year? Most of the Shropshire is open but the 'Jewel in the Crown' is unlikely to be accessible from the Hurleston end this year. With the bridge into Brewood closed for traffic until some fairly major work has been completed, there is an air of impending closure hanging over the southern SU although it's currently open. The Worcester to Birmingham has re-opened but the Staffs and Worcester is closed at Penkridge until the lock bywash has been rebuilt which will take a while. The Bridgewater canal looks unlikely to re-open before next year which will limit the number of boats going between Northern and Southern canals.

If 'ankle tags' for boats are bought in, boaters will have to travel minimum distances in accordance with their licence. There doesn't appear to be any legal redress for throwing the kit into the cut, although that may be introduced. The current tags, in use by offenders, have to be charged daily and communicate data via a base station, which needs to be within 10 metres. I've not seen one(fortunately) but would guess they require a mains supply, which not all boats will have and those that do won't be too keen on depleting their battery reserves.

It may be easier to pay the surcharge and keep moving.

NABO Safety Report

The birthday party

Waiting to cross

One guide

On their way

NABO Council has now formally submitted its report on boating and visitor safety at the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct to the Canal and River Trust (CRT) for review and further action. The report is the outcome of an investigation carried out during 2025 by three NABO Council members, prompted by the growing volume of feedback from boaters expressing concern about conditions on and around the aqueduct. While Pontcysyllte remains one of the most remarkable and enjoyable crossings on the network, many members reported that, at busy times, the experience has become increasingly stressful and, in some cases, potentially hazardous.

The investigation focused on interactions between powered craft (principally narrowboats), unpowered craft (mainly canoes and kayaks), and pedestrians, particularly during peak periods. Site visits, boater feedback, and discussions with on-site volunteers and local stakeholders all contributed to the assessment.

The report concludes that at busy times such as holidays and event periods, congestion, mixed traffic, and large groups of inexperienced users can combine to create real risks. Particular concern is expressed about close-quarters interactions between heavy steel boats and lightweight canoes, often involving novice crews on both sides. The investigation also identified increased risks to pedestrians using the narrow aqueduct walkway during peak visitor flows.

Eight distinct “interaction zones” were identified across the Aqueduct

and its approaches, with the central zones presenting the greatest safety concerns. While many individual issues might appear minor in isolation, the report highlights that repeated incidents and near-misses throughout a busy day can escalate into hazardous conditions and ill-feeling between users.

A key theme running through the report is the absence of robust, site-specific data and risk assessment. NABO Council found little evidence of systematic recording of boat movements, canoe group numbers, or pedestrian footfall, despite the site's World Heritage status and its increasing promotion as a visitor destination. The report also raises concerns about the reliance on volunteers alone for on-site safety monitoring at such a complex and high-profile location.

Importantly, the report recognises that CRT is not operating in isolation. The Aqueduct's status as a Grade I listed structure, Scheduled Ancient Monument, and World Heritage Site places genuine constraints on what can be done and how quickly. For that reason, NABO's recommendations are intended to be practical, proportionate, and compatible with UNESCO guidance and heritage protections.

Nine recommendations are set out, covering: commissioning a site-specific risk assessment; improving data collection; strengthening on-site safety presence during peak periods; introducing structured traffic and visitor-management measures; setting clearer requirements for commercial canoe operators; improving signage and guidance; and developing a collaborative, UNESCO compliant visitor management approach. Suggested timescales range from immediate actions through to longer term monitoring and review.

NABO Council believes that early, constructive action can significantly reduce risks, improve the experience for all users, and help prevent serious incidents. The Association has made clear to CRT that it is keen to engage positively with all stakeholders as these recommendations are considered.

Members will be kept informed as discussions with CRT progress.

NABO News needs a new editor

NABO Are looking for a new Editor for NABO News this year.

Some introduction to the existing setup is required so if you fancy being an editor don't delay, we will supply any training necessary.

CRT repairs to facilities

A look at how CSF repairs are progressing.

By C J

When the Canal and River Trust announced their Better Boating Plan they promised to repair Customer Service Facilities (CSFs) promptly.

very boater knows there's nothing worse than arriving at an Elsan disposal or pump-out, only to find it's not working and the nearest facility is 10 locks and 5 miles further on. Also, when the Trust introduced their 'Minimum Standards', several CSFs were removed from the network thus increasing the distance between services. NABO felt it was important to monitor repair times and we decided to use the data that CRT's online notices provided.

We recorded more than 150 CSF repairs from the end of April 2025 until the last week in January 2026. Some were one off faults while others necessitated repeated callouts. It's not clear whether these were due to different faults or because the original repair didn't solve the problem. Most repairs were fixed successfully within a week. Not ideal as 'promptly' infers 48—72 hours but still what most would consider to be an acceptable timeframe. Obviously complications like collapsed drains, severe blockages or parts requiring sourcing would necessitate a longer repair time. Several pump-outs experienced problems with electric card readers, faulty valves or lack of suction but these were usually repaired quickly. Water points were prone to freeze during the winter months (no surprise there) leading to burst pipes or leaking taps. Again repair times were reasonably quick.

Chemical toilet disposal points seem to take longer to repair, which makes sense if blocked, but we found many of the repairs exceeding 7 days

were not down to complications but rather because contractors did not get to site 'promptly'. Several notices were repeatedly updated because contractors still hadn't attended. Sometimes a notice would say 'waiting for contractor' but there would be no further update. Last year, Aylesbury Basin Elsan disposal remained closed from the 15th of May until the 21st of July. On 2nd of June the notice for Atlip (Alperton area, Grand Union), chemical toilet disposal stated "third party specialist contractors to attend due to severe blockage" yet it remained out of order until the 3rd of November. That's 22 weeks! I'm not sure whether the delay was due to contractors never attending or because it was a really big blockage!

Recently we contacted CRT about several outstanding repairs and I'm pleased to report steps are being taken to have them resolved. Castleford pump out for instance has been out of action since the beginning of July but there are now plans to install a hire pump until the collapsed drainage pipe (responsible for the prolonged repair time) can be repaired. We have also been asked to help them with the standardisation of CRT updates so that they will provide meaningful information about how repairs are actually progressing. If CRT can hold their contractors to account and repairs are undertaken promptly then they are heading in the right direction. Long may that continue.

CRT also added that one of the reasons chemical toilet disposal points take so long to repair is because of all the unbelievable stuff they find blocking them. Some of the things CRT have removed from inside the pumping chambers including tea towels, bleach bottles, mop heads, stiletto shoes, trainers, bras, cans, bottles and even a double duvet!

They also added that every couple of years the pump-out at Little Venice is being used by a boater doing an oil change. This completely ruins the hoses etc and costs around £6,500 to fix. So please, boaters, do NOT put any of these items down chemical toilet disposals or pump-outs. Apparently it's not only boaters who use chemical toilet disposals—motor home owners do too but the Trust appears to be powerless to stop this.

An analysis of boating in England and Wales

Continued from a previous issue
By **Malcolm Blundell**

Following boaters, the next largest group in Boating UK are the navigation authorities.

There are quite a number of them but the main three are the Canal and River Trust (CRT), formerly British Waterways. The Environment Agency (EA) and the Broads Authority. In Scotland the four canals all, 137 miles, are managed by Scottish Canals funded by the Scottish Government and some commercial enterprises.

There are several other smaller authorities, some are trusts, some companies and others are local councils. A navigation Authority "*is an organisation that has a legal responsibility, under an Act of Parliament or other enactment, to conserve, maintain, and control a canal or other inland navigation. Their duties typically include implementing registration or licensing schemes for boats, collecting fees, and setting navigation rules for the waterways they manage*".

This paper could not realistically examine each authority to compare and contrast the interaction with boaters and the wider community, the largest two CRT and EA will be those examined.

Canal And River Trust (CRT)

The Canal and River Trust is a charitable organisation but with legal powers and responsibilities. They look after 2,000 miles of historic canals and rivers including 2,970 bridges, 1,581 locks and 281 aqueducts. CRT is the third largest owner of listed buildings and other structures in the UK, with 2,705 in their care.

The waterways encompass seven historic parks and gardens, six battlefields, 46 scheduled ancient monuments and four World Heritage Sites, (October 2025 CRT website facts, however they are still selling off these assets).

It has a paid workforce, management and directors and a Chief Executive. It has a board of trustees. This is the governing body, composed of unpaid directors who are legally accountable for the Trust's charitable objectives, strategy, and policy.

There are also up to 50 members of the CRT Council representing waterway users, who provide strategic guidance, debate policy issues and provide a sounding board for the trustees. There are various committees and also a large group of volunteers. The paid executives also have a volunteer group of advisors known as the Navigation Advisory Group, (NAG).

CRT evolved from British Waterways and was given charitable status. They primarily receive a grant from the government but also can source their own funds within guidelines.

There have been investments made by the executives that have

been intended to secure funding for the core activities. Like many modern UK organisations CRT began to divest themselves of tools, equipment, some staff and turned to contracting out work on the canals and rivers. Budgeting became more important as did heath and safety. Paperwork became extensive and more time was consumed organising work rather than doing it.

In my opinion the emphasis on contracts and big projects came to be the norm, routine maintenance was not seen as exciting or career building and although not ignored was not given the importance of other projects.

The contract for vegetation management for example has given much concern to everyone involved. Contractors employing workers with strimmers have cut back grass and bushes, which through no fault of their own, often included protected wildflowers.

CRT has had three different logos on signage in the last 15 years, replacing almost all signage each time and paying for two of the changes.

The latest pet project is for CRT to explore the canal system with drones and AI software to find out what needs to be done and the best way to do it. I mentioned a much cheaper methodology to a still current executive and was told that they, CRT, had more than enough jobs to do without adding to the list. CRT do know what to do, using a drone will not make the problems any easier. They have the best tool available to them for free, the users of the waterways. They just need to get on and do the jobs.

CRT seem to want to do anything that gives them something to say other than "we have repaired a lot of locks and bridges" (that does not garner much publicity). In Scotland the canals were formerly managed by British Waterways but after devolution became the responsibility of the Transport Department of the Scottish government. They have similar problems as the canals south of the border.

Environment Agency (EA)

The Environment Agency is a government organisation and although it is the navigation authority for the non tidal River Thames, it also manages other waterways such as the Wey, Great Ouse, Nene, Ancholme and Medway.

The EA are responsible for regulating boat registration, enforcing safety and environmental laws, providing flood risk information, and managing flood defences, aiming to protect and improve the river's environment.

With the tidal section of the Thames, their role shifts to managing overall flood risk from the estuary and sea, while the Port of London Authority (PLA) handles navigation safety and specific environmental protection within that area.

The governance of the navigable rivers is much more difficult to define than CRT, as EA have the responsibility of flood risk and management as a primary goal. The staffing model is not specific and is not easily found in published documents. There are directors who have partial responsibility, which may include human resources but have no actual experience of any individuals role.

To be continued

Mentions in the Houses

Ben Obese-Jecty

Emma Hardy

Gavin Williamson

Gavin Williamson

Ben Obese-Jecty Conservative, Huntingdon To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when was the River Great Ouse last dredged.

Emma Hardy The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs The Environment Agency (EA) does not operate a routine dredging programme for the River Great Ouse. Dredging was last undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s, prior to the EA's establishment in 1996.

Gavin Williamson, Conservative, Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge Like so many Members of this House, I am blessed with the amazing canals criss-crossing my Constituency that are maintained by the Canal and River Trust. Sadly, two bridges in the villages of Brewood and Penkridge have collapsed, and local residents cannot use them or access them, which is causing a great deal of inconvenience. Could we have a debate in this House about the funding that the Canal and River Trust receives, because it quite simply does not go far enough to maintain these amazing heritage assets that are used every day?

Lord Patten Conservative To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the state of the infrastructure of canals and waterways in England and Wales.

Baroness Hayman of Ullock The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs The condition of the canal and waterway infrastructure is the responsibility of the navigation authorities that own them. The two largest authorities are the Canal and River Trust with 2,000 miles of waterways, and the Environment Agency (EA) with 630 miles of river navigations. The Government provides an annual grant of £52.6 million to the Trust to support its infrastructure programme, and this financial year is providing grant-in-aid of £25 million to the EA to support its navigations.

As of 31 March 2025 (latest published figures), the Trust had 81.25% of its towpaths in conditions fair to very good (target not less than 50%), 13.77% of principal assets in conditions poor to bad (target not more than 25%), and 0.58% of flood management assets (principal culverts and embankments) in conditions poor to bad (target not more than 7%).

These targets form the conditional element of the annual government grant. Trust assets are subject to a regular inspection regime by accredited inspectors. Defra officials meet the Trust's senior management team formally three times a year to discuss the Trust's work and use of the grant funding.

EA-owned and maintained navigation assets are also inspected by accredited inspectors as part of a risk based scheduled programme. Where identified, maintenance repairs on assets below the required condition are prioritised and allocated funding according to factors including sustaining navigation, public safety, and flood risk in the event of failure.

Sir Alan Campbell Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, Chair, Modernisation Committee, I join the right hon. Gentleman in praising the fantastic work of the

Canal and River Trust. I am trying to work out exactly where its funding comes from, but when I have done that, I will raise this with the relevant Department. Because of the proud heritage of canals in our country, that sounds to me as if it would make an excellent topic for a debate—perhaps an Adjournment Debate—so that other Members can contribute on this very important matter.

For the benefit of Alan Campbell: Most boaters know where the funding comes from and CRT publish their accounts.

The Government grant has been frozen at the 2022 level, which is £52.6 million a year. This represented 22% of the Trust's total 2024/25 income of £232 million. The Majority of its funding is from commercial and charitable sources, including its £1billion investment endowment. The total boating contribution, adding mooring fees and business boating income together was £51.5 million, representing approximately 20-25% of the total income, although planned above inflation increases will cause that to rise.

Baroness Hayman

Sir Alan Campbell

Canal and River Trust and the EA have no idea how many liveaboards there are on their waters, as disclosed in a written answer in the Commons.

The responsibility to monitor or record the numbers of boats and boaters on canals and waterways in England and Wales rests with navigation authorities as they manage and administer boat registration and licensing regimes for the use of their waterways.

The two largest navigation authorities are the Canal and River Trust and Environment Agency (EA). The Government has regular engagement with both authorities.

The Trust recorded 33,080 registered and unregistered boats on its waterways in its 2025 national boat survey. The Trust's boat licensing requirements do not include the number of people per boat or whether they sleep on board.

The EA records that there are just over 20,000 registered and unregistered boats on its waterways. It also doesn't collect information on the number of people who use the boats, including as their primary residence, for sleeping purposes.

National Inland Navigation Forum

The National Inland Navigation Forum is a semi-formal meeting of representatives of boating organisations across the national network of waterways. It met on 21st Feb to share concerns and strategies.

CRT has not liaised with organisations about their response to the Boat Licence Commission's recommendations. CRT are appointing a communications consultant.

According to the IWA, MPs in the All Party Parliamentary Working Group have decided they don't want non-participating observers. Openness and transparency?

CRT Council is discussing facilities closures, although without changing decisions. Apparently NABO was 'splitting hairs' when CRT's responsibilities under the Environment Act was mentioned.

RBOA and NBTA are meeting the EA's enforcement director to establish how the EA will put Article 16 in to effect which has the potential to seize boats that are homes.

Don't burn damp logs

Not just for environmental reasons

Advice for boaters on staying safe from CO poisoning can be found at boatsafetyscheme.org/CO

Boaters using damp wood and logs in their stoves could risk increased costs, stove damage and carbon monoxide poisoning.

To burn effectively, wood needs to be dried out, or seasoned, to a maximum of 15-20% water content. A fresh 1kg log with 60% moisture may be able to give out just under 2kW of heat, whereas a 1kg log dried to 25% roughly doubles the heat output to about 4kW.

You should use wood that burns easily and cleanly with a good heat output, feels dry and has a hollow sound when tapped. Suitable wood often has cracks in the end where it has dried out.

Wood fuel should be kept in a dry, well-ventilated area. Damp fuel causes the stove to run at a lower temperature, as the heat of the fire produces steam, so the stove needs much more fuel to keep the boat warm. The steam dissolves flammable, acidic tars that will cling to and block up, as well as damage, the stove and its chimney. Damaged stove installations are more likely to leak combustion gases into the cabin. Because of incomplete combustion of damp fuel wood, those gases are more likely to contain carbon monoxide. Stove flues lined with tar could also lead to a chimney fire. Any wood that feels damp and dense or has leaves attached should be avoided. Any green or white mould on the surface, or the absence of radial cracks, are signs of unseasoned wood that needs drying before use.

Beechwood fires are bright and clear
    If the logs are kept a year,
Chestnuts only good they say,
    If for logs 'tis laid away.
Make a fire of Elder tree,
    Death within your house will be;
But ash new or ash old.
    Is fit for a queen with a crown of gold
Birch and fir logs burn too fast
    Blaze up bright and do not last,
It is by the Irish said
    Hawthorn bakes the sweetest bread.
Elm wood burns like churchyard mould,
    E'en the very flames are cold
But ash green or ash brown
    Is fit for a queen with a crown of gold
Poplar gives a bitter smoke,
    Fills your eyes and makes you choke,
Apple wood will scent your room
    Pear wood smells like flowers in bloom
Oaken logs, if dry and old
    Keep away the winter's cold
But ash wet or ash dry
    A king shall warm his slippers by

This poem was written by Lady Celia Congreve (1867—1952), a poet and WW1 nurse, first published in the Times in 1930.

The Fraenkel Report

Peter Fraenkel's report on canals, often called the Fraenkel Report, sometimes documented as Frankel, was a landmark study completed in the mid 1970s that significantly influenced the future of Britain's inland waterways.

Commissioned by the government and delivered in 1976, the report assessed the condition, maintenance backlog, and future use of the UK's 3,100 km (1,926 miles) canal network under the British Waterways Board. It found a substantial backlog of deferred maintenance, estimated then at around £37.6 million (about £60 million in later valuations), and recommended a comprehensive programme of works to address safety, infrastructure upkeep, and preservation of the system.

The significance of the Fraenkel Report lies in its role as an independent, evidence based justification for increased government investment in canals at a time when their commercial viability was long in decline, having lost freight traffic to road transport. While initially controversial and delayed in publication, its findings helped convince policymakers that canals were worth preserving and maintaining not just for heritage but for leisure use, community amenity, and tourism. The report's recommendations contributed to targeted funding for restoration and maintenance projects, such as lock and aqueduct repairs, and shaped later public and statutory support for waterways as valuable cultural and environmental assets.

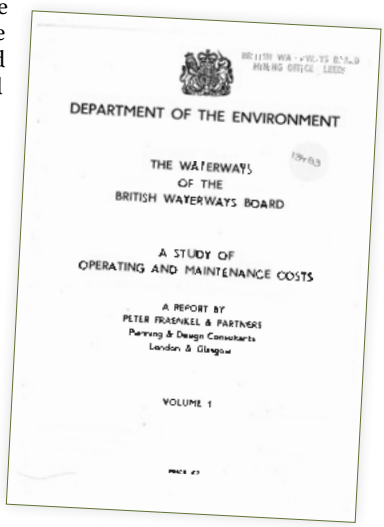
The Fraenkel Report is closely linked to the British Waterways Acts because it directly influenced the legislative and funding framework for the management and maintenance of canals. By the 1960s, many canals were in decline, facing deferred maintenance and reduced commercial traffic.

Fraenkel's assessment surveyed the state of canals and quantified the maintenance backlog. His report provided evidence to justify new expenditure and clearer statutory powers for canal preservation.

The report influenced the British Waterways Acts, which gave the Board additional powers to spend public funds on restoration and maintenance, regulate waterway usage, and protect canals from closure or infill. Notably, the British Waterways Act 1971 and subsequent amendments reflected these priorities by enabling BWB to act not just as a transport operator but also as a guardian of the heritage and leisure value of canals.

The Fraenkel Report provided the technical and financial evidence that shaped the legal framework allowing British Waterways to preserve and enhance the network beyond purely commercial considerations.

You can see the report here : whatdotheyknow.com/request/frankel_report_1975



DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

THE WATERWAYS OF THE BRITISH WATERWAYS BOARD

A STUDY OF OPERATING AND MAINTENANCE COSTS

A REPORT BY PETER FRAENKEL & PARTNERS Planning & Design Consultants London & Glasgow

VOLUME 1

Haiku

by **Duncan Wright**

The haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry consisting of three unrhymed lines with a 5, 7, and 5 syllable structure. Focused on capturing a brief, vivid moment, they often feature nature or seasonal themes.

Originating from the Japanese hokku, these poems emphasise simplicity and sensory imagery.

Spring

Locks bloom with wild moss,
Swans trace hearts in silver wakes.
Engines cough to life.

Summer

Idle ropes and sun,
Pints by decks and diesel hum.
Water holds the sky.

Autumn

Leaves swirl in our wake,
Smoke drifts low from cabin stoves.
Mist folds into dusk.

Winter

Frost along the hull,
Moonlight cuts the frozen bend.
Stillness fills the air.

My dear *nouveau grand fromage*

by **Ian Hutson**

Are you to be an illustrious free-thinker with a grasp of reality, or are you to be yet another ill-tempered adult-toddler, bashing everyone with your toy sledgehammer?

I wonder. You recently had a Member of Parliament (NIMBY Party) stumble to their feet in Westminster and warble about new powers to seize boats and impose "fines" (charges darling; you're not the Police).

So. London eh? Several others too, but it's mainly the water within suede Jimmy Choo shuffle of a "Tube" line. You know it, we all know it. The Metropolii [sic]. They're canals, Jim, but not as we know them. Loads of people live on boats in these places and they all crowd in. That's reality, and no matter how loudly you shake your mighty staff and proclaim it not to be so, it still is.

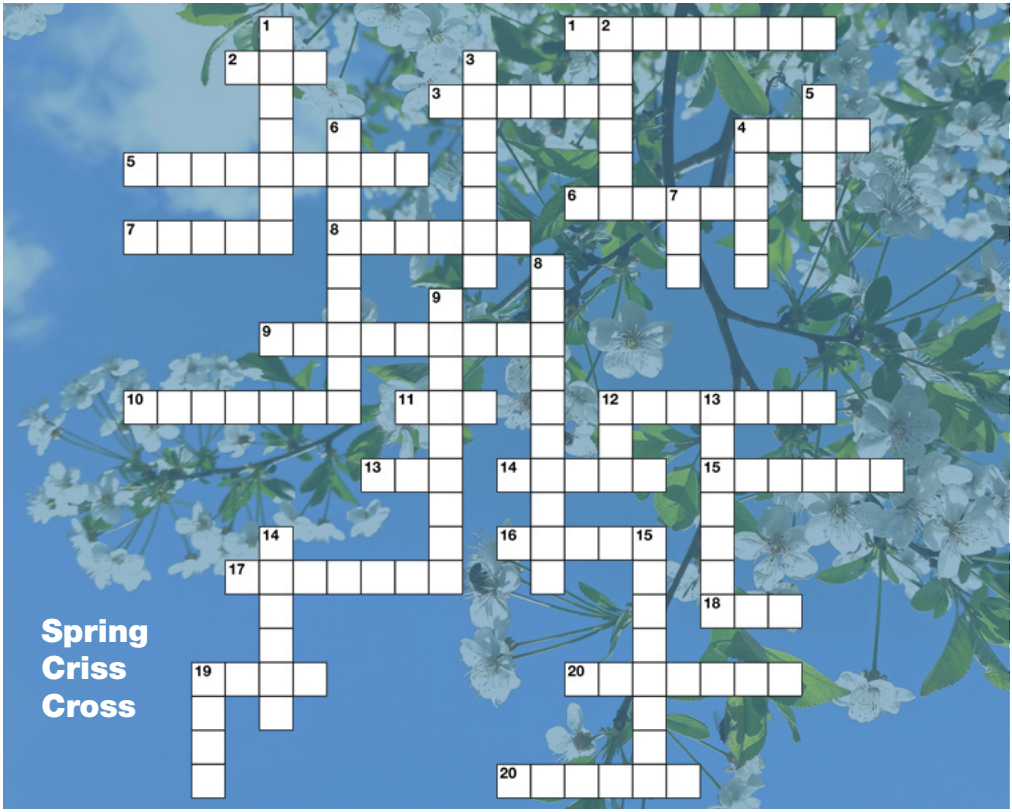
London will never be the Llangollen. Bash bash bash you go with your little hammer and still the square wooden peg remains obdurately unsuited to the circular hole, and all of the adults around you sipping tea get more fed up with being hit by tinpot Pol Pot attitudes. What the toy is trying to teach you is that one size does not fit all.

Ever heard of Operational Research Systems Analysis? Nothing to do with computers. It's to do with fresh thinking. A rather splendid definition of broken thinking is 'doing things over and over again expecting different results'. How about you think outside of the bucket? Look at what you can't change and, oh I don't know—swim with the tide. What does forcing London boats to dance to your piper each fourteen days really achieve? They all swap places twice and then back again. Zero real effect. London boats moor five deep sometimes? Not really a world-class problem, is it?

Here's an epistemological wheeze for you to try. Embrace reality. What is, is. Alchemy may be possible in CERN, but you are only CRT. The sort of people who gravitate towards London (and the other places), poor devils, don't do so for the view, the peace and quiet or the relaxed pace of life. It's a human tide that Canute himself couldn't turn.

Forget the braid on your uniform cuffs, the insignia badge on your peaked cap. Ask Parliament for powers not punitive but constructive, not disciplinarian but enabling. Devolve yourself and give the problem to those who own it. Create Metropolitan Canals "Boaters" Ltd. Give it a budget in direct proportion to the numbers of boats and give the Metropoles (is that the term?) autonomy (total responsibility) for themselves. They'll be preoccupied, you'll be happier and less out of your depth, the other ninety percent of boaters will be fascinated. Give it ten years. The Ultimate Outsourcing.

We already all know that outsourcing is CRT's only real modus. That's just one notion. If you stop thinking in the old soggy, unfriendly, antagonistic, authoritarian CRT rut there are a million other real-world non-authoritarian non-antagonistic notions available.



Across:

1 See 6 across
2, 3 down If needs must, be the one! (3,7)
3 Pre-planning needed before it happens. (6)
4 Sounds like mythological thunder maker. (4)
5 Pike food sadly.(9)
6, 1 across Enjoyable pastime, but you'll need alternatives. (6,8)
7 Cat.7-10 (5)
8, 9 across Unfortunately now all year round! (6,9)
9 See 8 across
10 De rigueur for many a towpath at this time. (7)
11 See 12 across
12, 11 across Time to go! (7,3)
13 The reason for clue 10! (3)
14 See 19 across
15, 18 across Lowly oath. (6,3)
16, 21 across Trad. English folksong, almost! (5,6)
17 Flowers from the chair of FBW? (7)
18 See 15 across
19, 14 across Winter warmers. (4,5)
20 Ugly? (7)
21 See 16 across

Down:

1 Spiky drips. (7)
2, 5 down Shorter nights. (6,4)
3 See 2 across
4 See 14 down.
5 See 2 down.
6 Brave little souls. (9)
7 See 12 down.
8 See 19 down.
9 Trumpets in spring? (9)
12, 7 down Feline danger. (3,3)
13 Talk along the cut. (7)
14, 4 down Feel antlers. (6,5)
15 A vintage. (8)
19, 8 down An impossible goal? (4,10)

Answers on page 35

Have Your Say

Letters to the Editor

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

Important announcement regarding 2026 Whitchurch Canal Festival

Further to recent posts about the Floating Traders stuck above the Llangollen breach, this response is from the Whitchurch Waterways Trust (WWT).

This is an important message to all those who attended the WWT Canal Festival last year as traders, either with a stall or a boat. Following a meeting of the WWT Trustees earlier this month we have decided that despite the calamitous collapse of the canal embankment at the end of last year, we will be going ahead with the Canal Festival in 2026 and we've set the date for the weekend after the August Bank Holiday, so Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th September.

We recognise that almost certainly the canal will not be open again past the site of the breach, and as a result we will only be able to have boats attending that are already "upstream" on the canal—sadly, I know that this will mean many of our regular floating traders will not be able to be here. At the moment, we're not sure if the lift bridge and towpath will be open by then in the direction of Ellesmere, but our WWT Chairman is working closely with the CRT and on-site contractors so that we're kept up to date with the restoration project plans and progress and can tailor our planning accordingly.

Our current plan is to use all the same spaces that we used last year for stall based traders, but with probably a much reduced number of trading boats. We want to make the Paddock area very much more of a focal point and will be planning activities and events to draw visitors that way—the area had a lovely atmosphere last year but lacked the footfall, partly due to the unfortunate late summer weather and partly because we needed to get people up there. We've learnt that lesson and will be making it work this year.

I'm also confident that we may well attract more people this year because of the national publicity following the breach, and we would like to work hand in hand with CRT to ensure they get a chance to show and tell people about the fantastic work they're doing to get the canal repaired as quickly as possible. I very much hope that you will want to come along and trade at the festival if you possibly can.

Photo: Sheila Hurst

For the floating traders, please let me know as soon as you can if you're on the upstream side of the canal and would like to attend so that we can start to work out how many spare moorings we may have. It would also be helpful if you can let me know if you're on the "wrong" side of the breach but will be interested in attending should the canal be re-opened before the end of August.

For the stall holders, I'll be sending out forms to sign up to the festival in mid February, so please drop me an email by return if you're planning to attend so that I can start compiling a mailing list.

We very much look forward to hearing from you and to seeing you later in the year,

Doug
WWT Trustee and Festival Organiser
07400 411124
canalfestival@whitchurchwaterway.uk

David Farnell, a NABO member for 37 years, reflects on facing life without a boat.

We were cruisers—not liveaboards. Moonpenny, though, was very much part of the family. We bought the shell in 1988. Every aspect of owning a narrowboat was captivating—fitting out, cruising the canals, of course, but also tinkering with the engine, tackling the rust, even emptying the cassette. The joy was undiminished after 37 years but the flesh became unwilling. We agonised long and hard but eventually decided to let go. It was time.

I found it necessary to acknowledge that some experiences would never be repeated. I made a list. It seemed to help. Here it is:

Experiences lost along with Moonpenny

That lightening of the spirits with the first chug out on to the canal.

Shedding one world and entering a secret world in an alternative dimension of time and space.

Feeling privileged cruising under or alongside frantic motorways—super-smug occasionally when the road traffic is gridlocked.

The gradual revelation of a vista coming into view round the next bend.

Watching phases of the year on the towpaths—bare branches, hoar frost, long shadows: then, in this order, wild cherry, blackthorn, pussy willow, violets, celandines, irises, wild roses, may blossom, oil-seed fields: then dusky blue sloes, hawthorn berries, and Autumn leaves.

Surrendering to the time and speed constraints dictated by canal travel.

Catching the flash of a kingfisher then watching it zoom just ahead of the boat and on to a twig time and again to watch for the approach of the boat disturbing a fish.

Drifting into perfect circles made by bridges reflected in still water and piercing upside-down landscapes.

Seeing trees' reflections break into ripples in the bow wave

Steering crablike into a sharp wind.

Meeting the challenge of an about turn.

Noting the change of canal "feel" from one day to the next. "Where were we yesterday?"

Chugging quietly into towns "by the back door" and engaging with the concrete dimension before re-joining the secret canal world.

Venturing away from the boat on foot and discovering surprise hidden locations.

Tying up after a long cold day, shutting up shop, stoking the stove, and having a half-hour read on the bed alongside a rum and orange and nibbles before dinner.

Waking up in the morning and trying to figure out which side is water and which side is towpath.

With the curtains still closed, trying to remember where exactly we are.

Early morning, creeping down the boat to put the kettle on, opening the curtains and seeing mist lying on still water.

Surprising a heron fishing from the bank.

Going back to bed to finish the crossword and watch the early movers chug by, rocking the boat.

Sharing double locks and life stories.

Unexpected communion with the crew of the next boat on the towpath.

Boating tales—unlikely commonality—eccentrics—connections—lives.

Rare, unexpected encounters with acquaintances from "normal" life either moored up or passing like ships in the night.

Sharing our joy with so many friends and family for the day or longer.

Sharing intimacies under the mind-loosening (and tongue-loosening) influence of narrowboat travel.

Making a successful rendezvous far from home.

Surprise pub nights—a football match, a sing song, quiz night, company.

A breakdown resolved.

A boater in need of assistance sorted.

Recovering a dropped mooring pin with the magnet.

Driving into the blackness of a tunnel in an act of blind faith.

Passing through the beam of light from a tunnel ventilation shaft.

Watching the headlight pick out the tunnel walls.

Seeing the circle of light at the end of the tunnel expand until the boat surges triumphantly out into quiet sunlight.

Replicating the journeys of pioneer boatmen whose livelihood was carrying by waterway.

Wondering at the human scale engineering, the ingenuity, the sheer size of the task, the low-tech elegance of the locks, and the functional grace of the structures.

Watching simple physics in action.
Appreciating first-hand the role of the canals in the industrial revolution and spotting the tell-tale clues—the worn rubbing posts and bollards, the bridges built with towing horses in mind, stables, warehouses, canal villages.

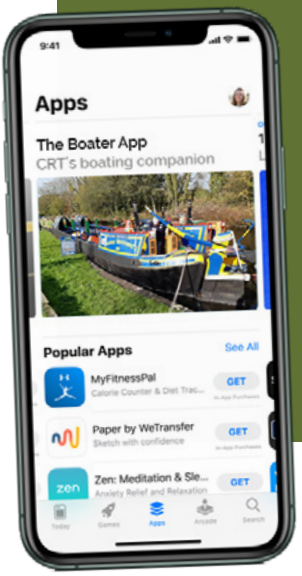
Experiences I will happily lose

Meeting a beginner at the kink in Braunston Tunnel.
Finding the destination mooring full.
Cutting fine arrival at the next Sanitary Station.
Carrying the cassette with a dodgy seal.
Floods.
Finding the water-point mooring blocked.
The rare know-all trying to rush the lock.
Happy days. Now what?

David Farnell
Ex-NB Moneypenny

The Boater's App Development

The app has had a slow start due to the complex technical specification and the amount of data sets used across the Trust, but is still on track for delivery in 2026.



If anyone is prepared to volunteer to test the app as part of its development, please could they register their interest via this form:

Boater App testing group application forms.office.com/e/21tSYBbwAQ

Come and be part of our 3-day community festival along the scenic Shropshire Union canal

- ❖Enjoy a free narrowboat ride from the festival garden.
- ❖Visit the floating market showcasing food and crafts.
- ❖Delight in offerings from local pubs, refreshments and free live music.
- ❖Learn about the history of the local canals.
- ❖Take a tour of historic working boats.
- ❖Connect with charitable and community organisations.
- ❖Participate in free activities for children.

17-19 JULY 2026

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