NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners
Issue 2 Summer 2026

Fund Britain's Waterways

Why canals close

Welcome to Yorkshire!

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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 September 2026.

NABO Calendar 2026

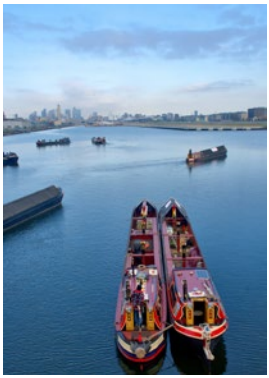
25 July 2026 (Zoom)

26 September 2026 (Zoom)

21 November 2026 (In person and Zoom) and AGM

Cover photo

Historic boats cruising King George V Dock, FBW Thames Tideway Cruise May 2026, 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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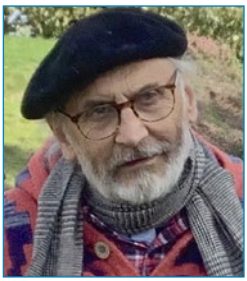


Dogs and bones

Editor **John Sadler**

Mostly, I am a dog lover but ours has recently tested my devotion. On an early morning walk he suddenly lunged at a passing dog pulling me over and cracking a rib.

That happened just before the NHS funded a minor operation I had been waiting three months for. Luckily I was in enough of one piece for it to go ahead. The surgery means no heavy work for six weeks, even if my ribs didn't complain, boating is going to to be restricted to lock free journeys for a while. It is therefore with a hint of jealousy that I read the various reports of broken paddles, lock beams, faulty leaves and damaged cills. The daily trials and tribulations of the inland waterways traveller.

Although some of these failures may be attributed to poor maintenance scheduling and have previously been acknowledged, some failures have been readily addressed. Compare the bank collapse on the Bridgewater to that on the Llangollen, while work forges ahead on the 'Gollie'. It looks like I might never be able to travel the length of the Bridgewater again in my boating lifetime. Is the Peak Forest going to be accessible? I'd love to visit that area this year and get back to base but the only answer is wait and see.

With money tight and the Government tighter still CRT are having to find innovative ways to raise funds apart from increasing licensing and mooring fees. The transfer of water from one area to another in need is one idea. This has been operating on the Gloucester and Sharpness canal for many years. The River Severn is pumped into Gloucester Docks for water to be extracted at Purton to lubricate the inhabitants of Bristol. Bi-annually the docks have a Tall Ships festival, these ships also have large keels requiring at least the docks to be dredged. Although CRT allocate millions for this they claim the operation is still profitable.

So why not do more? This is where the Grand Union Canal Transfer (GUCT) scheme starts.

The GUCT Scheme has had meetings with the main boating associations, including NABO. At the moment it looks like there is pressure from CRT to accept their proposals as least cost maximum profit. However, we are more concerned that a comprehensive study of water management and control is undertaken to highlight any potential problems from a navigation perspective.

NABO is keen that dredging is given proper consideration as an alternative to bank raising. Dredging will increase the depth of the canal whilst ensuring groundwater levels stay as they are now. It will reduce the likelihood of existing canal infrastructure being damaged during the construction phase and has less environmental impact than bank raising. But dredging will need to continue on a regular basis once the scheme is up and running to maintain depth and reduce silting. The water companies Affinity Water and Severn Trent must be pushed to agree to meet all dredging costs both during construction and after completion.

A new hand on the tiller

Chair **Carolyn Green (CJ)**

Right, where do I begin? After hiring narrowboats for several years (thanks to Tim & Pru) my hubby and I did the inevitable and moved onboard our own preloved boat in 2019 so, compared to a lot of you, I'm a relative newbie.

We don't have a home mooring but travel the length and breadth of the network – stoppages allowing. We have met so many lovely people since we started boating and although some have been forced to sell up due to health issues, or disillusionment with the current state of the navigation, we value their friendship and their extensive knowledge when it comes to all things boating.

I had heard of the IWA before moving onto our boat but felt they weren't the right fit. Don't get me wrong they do a great job promoting the restoration, maintenance and development of the UK's canal & river network but they didn't seem to represent the interests of boat owners.

It wasn't until a chance meeting with Anne Husar in 2021 that I first heard of NABO. If you've ever met Anne you will know how persuasive she can be and, before I knew it, not only had I become a member but was subsequently elected to Council to help with NABO's Social Media presence.

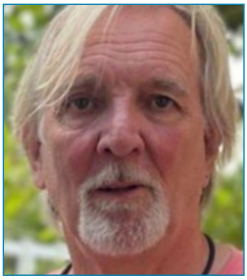
Since then I have become increasingly involved tackling the various issues facing the boating community. Whether that be faulty infrastructure, the removal of Customer Service Facilities or even the introduction of prohibitive mooring restrictions; anything that could potentially impact our members' enjoyment when out on the water.

Since becoming Chair, I have attended a National Boating Forum at St Pancras Cruising Club where, along with several other Boating Organisations, we met with David Orr, Campbell Robb and members of Canal and River Trust's Better Boating Team to discuss amongst other things, the Trust's new Transforming Boating Programme – a long term vision for boating – which we have been asked to help the Trust develop. I had my first Council meeting as Chair and attended a virtual meeting of the Fund Britain's Waterways Steering Group.

I am hoping to take part in the joint FBW/GOBA Campaign Cruise on the Great Ouse this summer, one of the few parts of the network we have yet to explore.

Just this week, working in conjunction with Try The Trent and The Boating Association, we have successfully lobbied CRT regarding the gravel bar below Stoke Lock on the River Trent which was causing serious problems for boaters, especially those travelling upstream. The lock will now be staffed until the gravel can be dredged, thus reducing the likelihood of boats grounding when entering the lock or trying to drop off / pick up crew. As the other cross Pennine routes are closed, it was important CRT realised they couldn't just ignore the problem.

I'm very proud to be your new Chair and hope to continue NABO's work to improve the boating experience for both liveaboard and leisure boaters.



Silting up at Gloucester

The problem that just won't go away

Vice Chair **Andy Williams**

The persistent silting of Gloucester Docks poses a very real obstruction to all boaters, not just narrowboats.

It is a very well documented issue and one CRT has admitted publicly and repeatedly. Evidentially, water from the River Severn supplies up to half of the daily supply for Bristol. It is pumped from the river into the docks at Gloucester, and then along the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal to Purton where Bristol Water treats it, ready for supply. Normally CRT can monitor the level of silt in the river water and only allow water into the docks when levels are low. However, during drought conditions, more water is required than usual, regardless of silt levels. So the Bristol Water abstraction doesn't just move water, and the docks act as a settling pond.

In the summer of 2022, Bristol Water took around 175 million litres of water per day from the canal. Exacerbated by the drought, the water coming into Gloucester's docks from the River Severn lead to a rapid build-up of silt which reduced water depth in the docks from the target of around 3.5 metres to less than a metre in some areas.

2025 was dramatically worse, around ten times the normal annual amount of silt entered the docks. The panel at the March 2026 public briefing also heard that the problem has worsened over the years following the introduction of new environmental regulations which limit the methods of silt disposal.

The financial consequence of this was £1.5 million after 2022, a quarter of CRT's entire national dredging budget for its 2,000-mile-long network across England and Wales. By 2025 the figures were considerably worse. CRT has now implicitly accepted the causation, operational discussions have begun with Bristol Water to examine how pumping and abstraction operations can be coordinated to reduce the amount of silt entering the docks. Ben Cottam, CRT's Regional Director for Wales and the South West, confirmed they are working with partners including Bristol Water to look at how operational changes can reduce silt entering the system.

There doesn't appear to be a stand-alone scientific or hydrological study specifically quantifying the proportional contribution of the Bristol Water abstraction to the total silt burden under normal (non-drought) conditions. The figures above all relate to acute events. The underlying baseline of how much silt would enter without the abstraction, hasn't been publicly modelled or published as far as NABO can ascertain.

More please
Photo: CRT

Fly on the wall

Peter Braybrook observes proceedings at the Council meeting in May

The meeting focused on discussing the future direction and strategy of NABO based on a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) summarised by Malcolm Blundell.

The main debate centred around whether NABO should seek financial support or collaboration with other organisations. Most members expressed concerns about maintaining independence and not appearing to be beholden to navigation authorities. Council also discussed defining their role regarding residential boaters versus liveaboard boaters, ultimately agreeing to focus on representing all boaters while leaving residential issues to organisations like RBOA. The conversation ended with discussions about updating promotional materials, with members agreeing to provide input for a new leaflet incorporating the slogan "making boating better".

Malcolm's analysis highlighted NABO's position as a national boating organisation although it needs to break through the apathy barrier and acquire more participating boating members.

Council discussed whether to try to amalgamate or collaborate with other organisations. The consensus was to avoid amalgamation but consider strategic collaboration on specific issues where common ground exists, such as renter's rights. It was agreed to refer residential boating matters to the RBOA while maintaining the ability to provide support when appropriate. The importance of maintaining independence from other organisations while representing all boat owners was stressed.

The approach to collaboration and promotional activities was discussed. It was agreed to consider employing a press officer for a short period of time to help with promotion and communication, though no final decision was made. The team also discussed updating their promotional leaflet, with CJ suggesting that everyone provide ideas within the next two days. The group acknowledged the need to move quickly on promotional materials to seize engagement opportunities before the end of the peak boating time.

Council discussed NABO's differentiating factors and strengths, with participants agreeing that their broad, generalist approach and willingness to tackle both strategic and day-to-day issues sets them apart from more niche organisations. It was considered important to maintain reputation and credibility by carefully selecting battles to fight and focusing on achievable wins, while also increasing the network of contacts. The discussion concluded with recognition of NABO's growing ability to back claims with factual information, which has helped establish credibility with other stakeholders.

Council addressed concerns about CRT's new employee availability for a meeting scheduled on the 2nd June. It was thought that the cancellation of a meeting at short notice was unacceptable for the reasons given by CRT. David Fletcher

joined remotely and shared insights about categorising new CRT employees based on their willingness to work with boaters versus following corporate policies. The team then discussed an upcoming CRT meeting, with uncertainty about the date—potentially the 10th—and attendance, as some organisations like AWCC cannot attend and RBOA wants to attend despite the topic not relating to Renters' Rights Act. Peter confirmed he could attend the re-scheduled meeting at Hatton if needed.

Malcolm reported challenges communicating with EA due to email restrictions through the Thames Waterways Forum and mentioned attending an upcoming extraordinary meeting about navigation policy on June 10th. The team also reviewed updates from the FBW meeting, including plans for campaign cruises and the closure of Furnace Vale AWCC, while addressing questions about measuring success of FBW's efforts, with NABO explaining that the goal is to secure government funding for waterways at levels similar to what was provided in 1997.

The group discussed the importance of NABO's involvement in the GUCT process, with Andy emphasising the need for formal registration as an interested party to ensure participation. It was noted that while the Canal Users Working Group provided good information, there was a lack of discussion about moorings in the consultation.

Technical issues with internet connectivity were debated. It was agreed to phase out PayPal as a payment method for NABO membership.

A proposal to create NABO banners for council members was approved, with Andy tasked to follow up on design and sourcing. The Facebook page was discussed with concerns raised about member quality and the need for better filtering criteria and questions. It was agreed to review and potentially remove inactive members who don't appear to be part of the boating community. Ken provided an update on his legal work representing NABO members, which also helps raise the organisation's profile. The Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) discussion focused on concerns about lithium battery regulations in insurance policies, with Peter noting that BSS is reviewing these issues through their technical committee.

A NABO appeal for help!

nabo.org.uk/registration

Do not assume that the network will be there without your effort

Governments of various persuasions seem to have no difficulty in funding HS2, a £100 billion vanity project. For those of us prepared to travel and live at a slower pace there is diminishing funding.

NABO is fighting battles on numerous fronts trying to keep the canal network open for as many people as possible. We are involved in discussions with CRT and EA as well as other bodies affecting the operation and continuation of navigable waterways. Sometimes we have to travel to meetings in person (expenses provided) but mostly meetings are on-line. More members would be greatly appreciated.

Press officer and NABO News editor

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.

NABO will also need to recruit a new editor for NABO News by the end of the year. Some introduction to the existing setup is required so if you fancy being an editor apply soon.

Become a member of NABO to make a difference

Full Member

This is the primary membership that covers one Full Voting Member for which the only qualification is that you are the owner of any sort of boat capable of use on the inland canals, rivers or Broads of the UK. Any or all part owners in a boat-share or syndicate scheme may also join as Single Members with individual voting rights. Cost £25 per annum.

Full Member and Family Members

This is the primary membership that covers one Full Voting Member and one family member for which the only qualification is that you are the owner(s) of any sort of boat capable of use on the inland canals, rivers or Broads of the UK. Any or all part owners in a boat-share or syndicate scheme may also join as Single Members with individual voting rights. The family member(s) are of any age who normally boats with and is associated with a nominated boat-owner who has joined as a Full Member. They are considered to be of the same household/address. Family Members are counted as Full Members as far as voting rights and membership of NABO Council are concerned. Cost £30 per annum.

Other memberships are available even to non boat owners that appreciate the work we do in preserving access to the canal network for all.

New additions to NABO reps

Bill Read
Continuous cruiser representative

My name is Bill Read and along with Brenda, my wife of 47 years, we have lived on our boat since 2018 as continuous cruisers, although we have only done just over half of the system due to us not moving far and exploring extensively. We love the life.

Prior to this I spent my working life as an Engineer Officer in the Merchant Navy, finishing as a Chief Engineer with Maersk on their Anchor Handling vessels. It was great fun and I enjoyed every minute.

I was born in Birkenhead but brought up in Ellesmere Port, living in Bridge Street in the old end of the Port, and Powells Bridge, the last original bridge before the Waterways Museum, was located at the end of the long demolished street. The buildings that now make up the Museum were my playground. Such a shame that Telford's warehouses burnt down, but a tremendous job people have made into making the museum.

Living beside the canal, and close to the Manchester Ship Canal led to my lasting interest in canals. We first hired a boat in 1995, hired most years after, and had a shared ownership in a boat for 8 years. During my leaves I also used to help as a volunteer at boatyards with hire fleets in Anderton and Middlewich where we lived.

We love the architecture and engineering associated with our canals and personally, I think CRT do a wonderful job in maintaining a used and abused 250-year-old system, but I do fear for their future with changing weather patterns and lost income, and wonder just how long the canal system as we know it, is sustainable.

I feel pleased to have been asked to represent NABO as a continuous cruiser representative, and hope to fulfil this role in a positive way.

Barry Anderson
New Anglian and Middle Level representative

Our love of narrowboat life started following a tragic event in our lives.

Our best friends, and godparents to both our young children, were killed in a car crash! What came out of this the following year was that the 45' narrowboat they had nearly completed building was transported to Chirk and completed there. Their family took the boat on but were never really into boating so offered it to our children (8 & 6) to use in perpetuity as a gift from their deceased godparents.

Over the next 4 years we travelled the 400 mile round trip from Suffolk to Chirk to use this lovely boat as many times as possible. Not only did

the children love these times but we did too and felt that our best friends' legacy had a meaning…. That we were hooked on boating!

Due to schooling and other factors (like distance) we decided that we would look to boat more locally despite that fact that it would cost us more to do so.

For a few years we hired boats, especially when holidaying abroad and continued to have great times afloat. In 2003 my wife found a company that managed 'shared ownership' boats. After some discussion we bought a share in one but had to wait 2 years until it was built as my wife required a 'teacher' share, which allowed us to have allocated weeks during school holidays.

In May 2005 I was lucky enough to be selected to skipper, along with a fellow owner, our brand new 62' semi trad narrowboat from Hillmorton to the Crick Boat Show as she was one of the showcase boats on the shared ownership stand.

Over the next 14 years we spent at least 4 weeks (and often 5 or 6) weeks every year cruising the waterways of England and Wales while gaining valuable boat handling experience and loving every minute of it.

We also decided to invest in a 35' x 12' Broads cruiser and cruised the Norfolk Broads for several years, which was different, but an equally enjoyable time on the water.

When we sold our Broads cruiser we purchased a Seamaster 30 which was a beautiful boat all decked out with genuine boating flags and highly polished boating gauges etc. We used this cruiser on the Great Ouse for a couple of years but couldn't turn down an offer from an enthusiast to purchase her from us for a very favourable price. This was at a time when we decided that narrowboats were what we loved the most so decided to sell our share in the narrowboat and have our own built.

In early 2020 we ordered our 57' cruiser stern which would be ready for launch by December of that year.

However, Covid 19 played its part and Alcedo was not launched until January 2021.

Since then, we have cruised all 4 corners of England including: Tewitfield on the Lancaster Canal via the superb Ribble Link; Bristol and the K&A via the River Severn from the delightful Gloucester and Sharpness Canal; Ripon via York on the River Ouse and Godalming on the charming River Wey.

We are both continuing to enjoy the freedom that 6-7 months cruising on Nb Alcedo is giving us, with many wonderful experiences and new locations weekly, or even daily at times. That said, we are concerned about the future of boating with the downturn in government funding for all waterway authorities. Personally, I am disgusted with how much sewage is allowed to 'leak' into our waterways without appropriate, and significant, action by previous and current governments.

Currently we're on the River Cam and looking to fully explore the Fens and the Middle Level over the new few years.

Why canals close

Understanding water level loss and what can be done to prevent canal closures during periods of drought

By Duncan Wright

Over the last few years we have experienced a growing trend towards more extreme climatic events. Heavy and prolonged autumn and winter rains followed by extended hot dry spells.

All ten of the UK's hottest years on record have taken place since 2002. 2024/5 for example saw severe flooding in late 2024, then the warmest and sunniest spring ever, which was also the driest in over 100 years. The summer months then carried on the trend, the hottest on record with four distinct heatwaves. An unsettled stormy and dull autumn followed with yet more extreme rains and widespread flooding.

These drought events are becoming much more common and it is taking a toll on the canal network, with around 20% of the canals closed due to low water levels in the summer drought last year.

Obviously, since we cannot control the weather, we must learn to adapt to this new normal and do what can be done to mitigate the impact of extreme weather, preparing the network to cope with extended hot spells. In this article I want to explore some of the causes of water loss and how water resources may be conserved and what the navigation authorities could, and indeed should, be doing to better prepare the waterways for periods of drought.

Canals depend on a carefully managed supply of water to remain navigable. During periods of drought, this balance is disrupted, and water levels can fall below the depth required for boats to travel safely. Water evaporates from the surface of any body of water due to a combination of wind, heat and humidity. Canals are, by design, long and shallow, since in most cases the engineers that designed them only built or dug the canals to the minimum depth needed for boats to transport goods from A to B. These long, shallow ponds have a high surface area to volume ratio and as a result hot and/or windy days take their toll on water levels. During a drought, when water levels drop, navigation authorities may temporarily close sections of the canal to prevent damage to the infrastructure and the environment. Several interconnected factors contribute to these closures:

Reduced water supply

The most direct cause of canal closures during drought is a lack of incoming water. Many canals rely on rainfall, reservoirs, feeder streams, and rivers to maintain their levels. In prolonged dry conditions, these sources receive far less replenishment. Reservoirs can fall to critically low levels, meaning there is not enough stored water to supply the canal network.

In 2019 the dam at Toddbrook Reservoir was dangerously close to complete failure, which would have resulted in Whaley Bridge being catastrophically flooded. Following this it was mandated that all reservoirs be risk assessed. A number of reservoirs supplying canal water have been taken out of service or had their working maximum level significantly reduced for safety or until repairs and modifications can be completed. The CRT only rarely employ reservoir dredging, so silting, in addition to lowered water levels can make a huge difference to reservoir capacity.

Furthermore CRT have allowed a number of feeder streams to fall into disuse, to all intents and purposes they are now lost. Clearing and reinstating these feeders, together with a program of reservoir dredging could help keep canals in water in times of drought.

Lock operation & water use

Locks are essential structures for navigation, however each

time a lock is used a large quantity of water (up to 200 tonnes or more on a broad canal) moves downstream. In dry periods, heavy boat traffic can drain pounds faster than they can be replenished. To conserve water, navigation authorities may restrict lock usage or close sections of the canal.

Seepage and leakage

Even in normal conditions, canals lose some water through seepage into the surrounding ground or through leaks in aging infrastructure such as lock gates, culverts, embankments and decaying spillways. When water supply is limited during drought, these routine losses become more significant and can further reduce navigable depth. Ensuring lock gate mitres are in good condition and the mitre faces are replaced when they begin to leak excessively would massively help in water conservation and loss prevention.

Protection of canal infrastructure

Very low water levels can expose canal beds, weaken embankments, and place stress on structures such as lock gates. Continued navigation in shallow conditions can stir up sediment and increase erosion, potentially causing costly damage. Temporary closures help protect the canal system until water levels recover.

Water plants

Reeds create a dense vertical structure that acts as a sieve, slowing down the passage of water and allowing suspended solids to settle out. This accelerated sedimentation results in shallowing of the waterway, a reduction of both the available water volume and the width of the navigable channel. Sediment displaced from the navigable channel becomes trapped by the reeds further accelerating the silting process, often rapidly making the margins impossible for boats to use. Additionally reeds need lots of water for growth and expel moisture from their leaves, this transpiration can reduce water levels by more than 3mm per day in hot weather. Reeds on the other hand do provide shade and a windbreak effect, so there is a reduction in the amount of water lost to evaporation, but this is a relatively minor factor compared to others.

Trees

Trees can have quite an impact on the rate of water losses. On the one hand trees provide shade and shelter, which lowers water temperature and reduces evaporation rates from heat and wind. Correctly placed trees can help stabilise embankments, thereby preventing failure. On the other hand trees need a lot of water for growth and like reeds they transpire this into the atmosphere. Many trees require around 15-20 litres of water per cm of trunk diameter per week, and thirsty trees, like mature willows can drink up to 450 litres per day, a significant amount. During periods of drought, when there is minimal ground water these trees will get the bulk of their water from the nearby canal. Tree roots can also cause damage to canal sides and the canal bed and can also contribute to embankment failure if growing in the wrong place. Leaf and branch litter also will contrib-

ute to silting. Trees become stressed during drought, and last summer saw many trees down because of the hot weather, causing yet more damage to canal sides.

Additional silting factors

Winter storms and flooding can carry significant amounts of debris into canals and feeders which contributes to silting. Building work, roadworks and changes to water run-off and drainage channels can all influence silting. Cattle trampling the off-side bank into the water causes erosion, silting and shallows which in many cases extend well out into the navigation.

Water resource priorities

During severe drought, water may need to be conserved for essential uses such as drinking water supply, agriculture, or maintaining river ecosystems. Canal water management may therefore prioritise conservation over navigation, resulting in temporary restrictions or closures.

Environmental considerations

Canals also support aquatic plants, fish, and other wildlife. If water levels drop too far, oxygen levels can decrease and habitats may become unsuitable for many species. Authorities may close canals to stabilise water levels and reduce disturbance while ecosystems adjust to the conditions.

Conclusion

Canal closures during drought are rarely caused by a single factor. Instead, they result from a combination of reduced water supply, increased evaporation, operational water losses from locks, seepage, infrastructure protection needs, environmental concerns, and wider water management priorities. Minimising abstraction licences on vulnerable waterways and ensuring that the infrastructure is in good order with minimal leaks will further contribute to maintaining water levels. One major factor which influences whether a canal is drought resilient is silting.

The single most significant act to improve this resilience is dredging. Dredging of the canal channel regularly to its full depth, removing reeds and coir margins and cutting out trees growing near to or in the canal would improve waterway capacity and drought resilience. Dredging reservoirs and re-establishing feeders would go a long way to maximising their utility and ensuring the best possible availability of water resources.

BSS Technical Forum

The Boat Safety Standards Setting Forum public consultation on proposals to introduce a new mandatory standard on smoke alarms was published on 31 December on a BS SSF dedicated page on the BSS website. For various reasons the BSS was not able to share that information at the point of publication, a situation for which they apologised and will prevent from happening again.

NABO is a representative association which has long experience of the committees and forums associated with the Boat Safety Scheme. NABO members have served on these bodies for nearly 30 years.

NABO has raised a formal complaint regarding the conduct of the recent BSS consultation on smoke alarms, specifically the consultation process, publicity, and time frame afforded to stakeholders. To NABO's knowledge, this proposal has been under consideration for a number of years and is not a time-critical intervention requiring accelerated implementation. In that context, the reduction in consultation accessibility and effective engagement time is difficult to reconcile with the need for fair and meaningful stakeholder participation.

As licence holders, NABO members expect consultations on safety standards affecting vessel compliance to be conducted in a manner that provides adequate opportunity for engagement. The combination of a shortened effective consultation window, limited visibility, and absence of apparent urgency, risks undermining that principle. We have suggested a list of improvements aimed at ensuring this situation does not continue. The smoke alarm consultation represents a significant departure from that established practice, operating on a substantially shorter effective engagement period. In addition, stakeholder awareness of the consultation was limited until relatively late in the process. The time available of 6 weeks is clearly unreasonable because it does not enable organisations and trade magazines to provide public notice and discussion.

Previous Boat Safety Scheme consultations have consistently been conducted over a period of three months. This is reasonable and accepted practice.

As a result of discussions with nominating navigation authority bodies on the BS SSF, the deadline was extended and the BSS gave the consultation a boost of publicity.

As boaters we should be looking for the requirements for the product (the smoke alarm), the installation of the product (a sort of 'Code of Practice for installation) and any requirements for ongoing maintenance of the alarm.

The personal safety of people on their boats would be a valuable side benefit of a strong uptake of the use of alarms, but the BSS is primarily concerned with third-party protection for people and property which is at the core of mandatory requirements.

Pontcysyllte Aqueduct

NABO Site Visit Report by Jacqui Lund, 6th April 2026

Members will be kept informed as discussions with CRT progress. The next meeting is with CRT on the 30th June.

Our immediate observation was how quiet it was in boating terms. We only saw two narrowboats cross apart from the trip boat, except of course for canoes. They were operating as normal in spite of the weather.

Everyone we talked with also remarked on how quiet narrowboat wise it was compared to previous years. The breach certainly has had a considerable impact on visiting boat numbers.

CRT were represented by two fund raisers and one 'ranger', all volunteers. The visitor centre was open.

The trip boat operator told us apart from the lack of narrowboats nothing had changed with the canoes He said that morning several groups had arrived at the aqueduct at the same time and all had gone on together in one large group instead of some waiting. This had caused him a considerable delay as it took 40 mins for the group to clear the aqueduct.

We also spoke with a young man who was a leader for a canoe operator. We watched him give a 10 minute safety briefing, load three canoes with first time paddlers and send them off unaccompanied. He didn't walk alongside the paddlers. He later told us he'd been doing the job for five weeks. His company caters for unaccompanied paddlers as well as accompanied. Prior paddling experience was not a factor. He said he did consider the safety briefing 'good'. He had told them about the danger of powered craft and not stopping on the aqueduct. He said that other operators had mentioned how totally different it was from last few years due to the breach. He did, however, have on his new high vis life jacket to demonstrate he was a leader! We also observed that other companies did not all use the CRT recommended high vis apparel.

The floating market was quiet too with some traders packing up early. The trip boat was busy and there was a good volume of pedestrian traffic but less overall and I overheard many bemoaning the fact that there were no boats. The towpath across the aqueduct itself remains in poor condition with the edge closest to the water having potholes and loose chippings making it slippery. When groups pass especially with pushchairs a lot of the available space is occupied, walking on the edge is necessary.

We observed no interactions between boats and canoes that caused problems, although the breech has had a significant impact on boating numbers. Any conclusions drawn from observations this year do not reflect the reality of the situation and this should be taken into consideration before making decisions.

However, the potential mix of unaccompanied first time paddlers and first time narrowboat hirers from the Anglo Welsh base is still an identifiable risk.

SUE TONIOUS

What a load of rubbish

Every time the Canal and River Trust needs to cut costs boaters pay the price. Because Government has introduced new legislation for recycling & waste collection, including food waste – something that has been in place in Scotland for donkey's years without any issues – the Trust are using these new regulations as an excuse to close bin stores across the network thus depriving both liveaboard and leisure boaters the means to get rid of their domestic waste.

Granted some bin stores are too small to take all the bins now needed so the nearest facilities will need to be emptied more frequently as they will have to accommodate the extra waste. Unfortunately this is not happening. Instead CRT are like the proverbial ostrich; head firmly stuck in the sand.

CRT apparently believe that boaters' domestic waste will simply vanish along with the bin stores. This may happen in fairy tales but here, in the real world where there are no magic wands, that is not going to happen. Instead the towpaths will become ankle deep in litter, not because boaters will actively fly tip but because they can only carry so much domestic waste onboard before attracting vermin. Birds, rodents and other animals often break into any waste sacks stored on roofs, scattering litter as they do so. Recycling waste gets blown about and food waste will definitely be targeted, not just by vermin but also domestic pets.

CRT's catchphrase "Making life better by water" will have to change. Why would members of the public donate to a charity with supposed green credentials when they are refusing to deal with increasing amounts of litter? Why would people choose to hire a boat if they will have to cart all their rubbish with them for the duration of their holiday? Hire companies already suffering in the present financial climate will lose even more revenue; some will go bust. Local communities will target boaters, thinking (wrongly) they are solely responsible for the increasing amounts of rubbish. The Government will penalise CRT financially for not keeping the waterways free from litter, boaters resentment towards CRT will increase and Better Boating will have failed before it's even started.

Stone Refuse Facilities
Photo Alan Douglas

Smoke control

Smoke control zones and boaters: a policy blind spot is becoming a problem

Tony Lacey

There is a growing sense among inland boaters that something isn't quite right. Recent developments in Birmingham have brought that into sharp focus. What was once a legal grey area is now being applied with increasing confidence, smoke control rules designed for buildings are now being enforced against boats, and not quietly.

Under the Clean Air Act 1993, smoke emissions are restricted within designated areas unless authorised fuels or exempt appliances are used. The legislation refers to chimneys "of any building", yet through a broad interpretation of "chimney", councils are now clearly including boat flues within the scope.

This is not a minor technicality. It is a significant extension of a law that was never written with residential boating in mind. Most boaters are not the problem policymakers appear to think they are. Across the network, most boaters have already adapted. Smokeless fuels are widely used and DEFRA approved stoves are increasingly common. There is a clear and ongoing effort within the community to reduce emissions and operate responsibly.

But here is the disconnect: even full compliance does not mean zero smoke.

Lighting a stove, refuelling, bringing a fire up to temperature, are normal, unavoidable stages of using solid fuel aboard a boat. During those moments, visible smoke will occur however responsibly the stove

Those residents are not assessing compliance. They are responding to visibility.

is being operated. This is where enforcement becomes fundamentally flawed.

Councils are not monitoring waterways in any systematic way. There are no routine patrols assessing fuel types or appliance certification. Instead, enforcement is overwhelmingly complaint led, driven by bricks and mortar residents who see smoke and report it.

Complaint-led enforcement

Those residents are not assessing compliance. They are responding to visibility. In effect, the trigger for enforcement is not whether a boater is breaking the rules but whether someone thinks they might be which creates a deeply uneven outcome.

Both continuous and leisure cruisers passing through urban areas are relatively insulated. They move on. They are less visible. Less likely to attract repeated complaints but liveaboard boaters with home moorings in towns and cities, including Birmingham, are in a very different position. They are static, visible and increasingly exposed. All boats are people's homes whether temporarily or permanently moored, yet they are now subject to a regime where normal, compliant use of a stove can be enough to generate complaints and potential enforcement.

Under the British Waterways Act 1995, licensed boaters have the right to navigate and, in practice, to live aboard. That right has long been understood as enabling a viable way of life on the water. But if policy is applied in a way that makes it increasingly difficult to heat a boat, particularly in winter, then that right begins to lose its meaning in practical terms.

Rights vs reality

No one disputes the importance of clean air. But good policy distinguishes between harmful behaviour and unavoidable reality. At present, that distinction is not being made. Instead, a system is emerging where laws written for buildings are applied to boats.

Compliance does not guarantee protection. Visibility, not behaviour, drives enforcement.

That is not a stable or fair foundation for regulation. If inland boating is to remain an all season viable option, then policymakers need to address this gap directly. That means recognising boats as homes in their own right and developing guidance and regulation that reflects how those homes actually function.

Until then boaters will continue to operate in uncertainty: doing their best to comply, yet potentially vulnerable to action based not on what they are doing wrong, but on how it appears to others.

That is not just a legal grey area. It is a policy blind spot — and it is widening.

Sandwell Council's guidance for boaters mooring in Birmingham
sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/3624/information-for-boaters-moored-in-a-smoke-control-area

Lock gate production in a new era

For more information about the Canal & River Trust, including how to volunteer and donate, visit: canalrivertrust.org.uk

The biggest change in lock gate manufacture since moving from steam to electric machines is scheduled for next year.

The Canal and River Trust is investing in new technology at its lock gate workshop in the West Midlands that will allow it to increase production of lock gates to keep up with the demand for replacement gates across its 2,000-mile canal network.

The new custom-built CNC machine will be the largest of its type in the UK — and the third largest in Europe — to allow for the size and scale of the canal network's bespoke oak lock gates. Built by specialist fabricators in Europe, the 'computer numerically controlled' machine is expected to be delivered to the Trust's Bradley-based workshop early next year. It replaces largely obsolete machinery dating back 60-70 years and will enable the Trust's two workshops to incrementally increase production to around 190 lock gate leaves every year, up from around 150 lock gate leaves at present.

New lock gates being produced in the Bradley workshop
Photo: Sharon Wells

Simon Turner, workshops manager, comments: "The arrival of new computer-based technology to help our craftspeople produce lock gates is the biggest update in our workshops since electrical machinery superseded steam-powered machinery which, in turn, superseded the hand tools used by the original canal builders.

"The canal network has a bow wave of new lock gates needed in the years ahead including, for example, replacing the many gates installed as part of the canal restorations around the Millennium that are now nearing the end of their working life. This investment in production will allow us to keep up with that demand, with the new machine able to precision cut the oak components needed to make the gates quickly and efficiently." The investment by the Trust of circa £750,000 was brought forward by the workshop team under the Trust's 'Spend to Save' scheme, where investment is made today to deliver future efficiency.

The Trust has two lock gate workshops, at Bradley in the West Midlands and Stanley Ferry in Yorkshire. The smaller lock gates leaves found across much of the network are mostly built at Bradley, whilst Stanley Ferry has the lifting capacity to also make the network's largest gates, notably those on larger river navigations. The new CNC machine will be based at Bradley but will cut component parts for both sites. The workshop teams will continue their skilled work to hand assemble and finish the lock gate leaves.

Building boats with new materials

A different approach to waterway craft

As alternative materials we have tried aluminium, light weight, corrosion resistant but expensive.

Formation Plastics, a company with over 30 years of experience in plastic fabrication, have developed the use of Polystone G from Röchling Industrial for the manufacture of canal boats. These vessels are not intended to replace traditional steel narrowboats; rather, they offer a different option for customers seeking a modern, practical alternative, without the high cost of aluminium.

Steel remains the traditional material for canal boat construction in the UK, with a long heritage and proven performance. High-Density PolyEthylene (HDPE) boats are not designed to compete directly with that tradition but to provide an alternative where the benefits of plastic fabrication are particularly valuable. For customers who prioritise low maintenance, impact resistance, and sustainable manufacturing, HDPE presents a compelling solution.

Unlike steel, HDPE does not corrode, require repainting, or suffer from electrolysis. This makes it particularly suitable for utility craft, workboats, day boats, hire fleets, and leisure applications where owners want a vessel that can remain outdoors year-round with minimal upkeep. The material absorbs knocks well, making it ideal for busy inland waterways, marina operations, and commercial use where practical durability is more important than traditional construction methods.

A further advantage is the sustainability of the material. Alongside virgin Polystone G sheet, both post-consumer and post-industrial recycled HDPE have been incorporated into their manufacturing process where appropriate. This allows waste reduction and makes productive use of recycled plastic streams, supporting a more circular manufacturing model. For many customers, this environmental aspect is a key part of why HDPE boats represent an attractive alternative.

The provenance of the material is equally important. Polystone G is manufactured by Röchling using high-quality polyethylene feedstock, engineered into sheet material with consistent mechanical properties and excellent weldability. This gives a reliable base material for constructing hulls and superstructures designed for long service in harsh outdoor environments. All fabrication is carried out with ISO-approved plastic welders, with the same professional standards applied to industrial products.

HDPE canal boats sit alongside traditional steel craft as a complementary choice, bringing new possibilities to inland boating rather than challenging established traditions.

Editor; *Should we be encouraging a comparison between the affects of micro plastics, bituminous products and two pack epoxy resin contaminating the watercourse?*

Further information

formationplastics.co.uk/our-biggest-project-yet/

Mooring lines

Malcom Blundell

One of the most important 'tools' to have on your boat, so well worth looking after. We take our three 'cruising' lines off the boat at the start of winter, wash in liquid soap and dry.

The boat is then tied up with an older set of mooring lines. The 'cruising set' is now ten or so years old, purchased from Eric Johns, the fender maker. His advice about the care of ropes and what to expect from them and their characteristics was outstanding. Whilst cruising the Thames the lines take quite a bit of wear and tear. Recently we noticed the fore and aft lines had a thinner but tighter thread area that was slightly less flexible. These areas correspond to where the rope meets bollards or rough edges of stone cills.The rope we use for our lines is black 16mm synthetic hemp (some call it Hempex) and it floats, thereby avoiding sinking and fouling a prop or rudder.

The characteristics as explained by Eric include being able to withstand sudden force applied to the line. Being stiff but not overly so, not susceptible to twisting and the ability to coil in a particular direction. One trait we experienced from another rope is called 'hockling', for example when a three-strand twisted rope is twisted in the opposite direction it was designed for the fibres bubble up in stress areas. This does not happen with our lines. Our stern rope of ten metres can be laid on the tiller pin in five coils, then when needed thrown at a bollard, uncoiling in a straight line irrespective of going over the bollard or not. It has the heft and stiffness to be snapped over the bollard and when ready, to be unsnapped and coiled again. When thrown to a lockeeper it unfolds in a straight line.

Those of us fortunate to have been given this guidance by Eric really know the absolute pleasure and efficiency at locks and moorings afforded by dealing with quality rope. We have recently tried to obtain more rope and as Eric has retired we tried to explain to rope suppliers what we wanted in a mooring line. It appears there are few fender makers with Eric's' skill remaining. There are only a few companies that stock quality rope. After discussion with our supplier we bought some natural coloured synthetic hemp for this coming season. It would appear that quality rope is becoming hard to source as companies have been bought out and product lines merged. Importing from other countries adds to the cost. Surprisingly fender makers alone don't create enough customers to continue certain products

Fender making as a full time job is becoming rare, Heritage Crafts list it as 'endangered'.

We would suggest the next time you replace mooring lines try asking the supplier for 16mm Synthetic Hemp with the above characteristics, you won't be disappointed.

RCR helps boaters manage rising costs

As the cost-of-living crisis continues to put pressure on households across the UK, River Canal Rescue (RCR) says its Replacement Parts Cover (RPC) is helping boaters keep expenses under control.

Included as standard with RCR's bronze, silver and gold memberships, RPC covers both the cost of specified replacement parts and labour following sudden, unforeseen mechanical breakdowns.

Last year RCR's attended 2,057 general call-outs — covering issues such as electrical faults, fuel and engine problems, flat batteries, overheating and gearbox failures — with RPC covering around £115,000 of repair costs, saving boaters significant sums.

RCR managing director, Stephanie Horton, says: "One of the biggest unexpected costs for boaters is the failure of major components. Here, we highlight the 10 parts most likely to cause problems, explain why they fail and outline the typical cost of replacement."

Part	Reason for failure	Approximate Cost
Fuel filters	Contamination.	£5 – £35
Cables	Wear and tear, routed incorrectly.	£20 – £140
Batteries	Misunderstanding around what battery to use, its electrical capacity, charging levels and lack of attention to electrical connections.	£100 – £280
Alternators	Misalignment, fan belt too tight, electrical faults, damp.	£70 – £370
Starter motors	Over-use, damp, electrical faults, over-tightening of parts.	£160 – £700
Gearboxes	Lack of servicing and being heavy-handed.	£650 – £2600
Fan belts	Wear and tear	£15-45
Drive plates	Hitting underwater obstacles, stern gland too tight, misaligned engine, excessive vibration due to worn engine mounts, engine revs too high.	£120 – £300
Fuel pumps & injection pumps	Blockages, contamination and fuel pipe degrading.	£75 – £1100
Couplings	Hitting underwater obstacles, snapped bolts, stern gland too tight, misalignment.	£100 – £800

Outside the top 10 are water pumps, typically affected by seal failure, wear and tear, impeller break-up and sheared components, morse controllers (wear and tear) and engine mounts, which can fail due to impact with underwater objects, ageing, rubber degradation, misalignment and bolt failure.

Most replacement part call-outs are caused by damp affecting electrical components, excessive or harsh use, vibration, accidental damage, general wear and tear, contamination from substances such as diesel, oil or antifreeze, plus age and misalignment.

Around 80% of RCR jobs are resolved on the same day, as engineers carry a range of common spare parts. However, return visits are often required for more complex components such as gearboxes, injection pumps, starters, alternators, morse controllers, couplings and fuel pumps. Boat-specific parts, including drive plates and engine mounts, need to be ordered.

RPC is included in all levels other than retainer, but this can be added to retainer membership for £65 per year. RPC covers up to £1,000 per claim, with a £50 excess, offering added peace of mind while cruising.

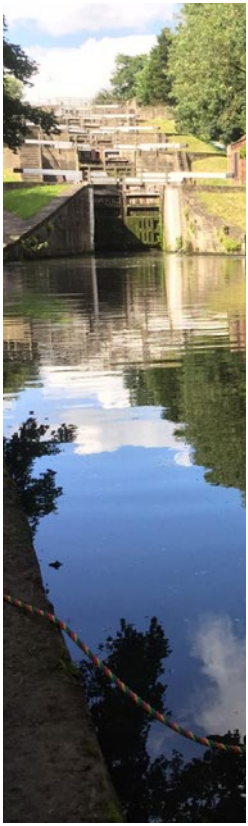
For more information, visit: rivercanalrescue.co.uk/replacement-parts

Welcome to Yorkshire!

Ian Marr

As Chair of Try the Trent, one of my favourite parts of the role is helping more boaters discover the Trent and Ouse, and (via them) the fabulous waterways of Yorkshire.

If you've ever caught yourself thinking, "Should I head north and mingle with those strange Northerners?" — you're in the right place. Let's take a quick tour of what's waiting for you.



First things first: Yorkshire is massive—Seriously, take a look at a map. North, South, East and West Yorkshire are laced with canals and navigable rivers, weaving through countryside and industrial heritage alike, ready and waiting for you to come and explore—and maybe stay a while amid our ancient charms.

You'll probably already know (or have visited) a few headline favourites: the Bingley Five Rise Locks, the Curly-Wurly (not the Birmingham one) contour-hugging meanderings of the Leeds & Liverpool above Skipton, and perhaps even the majestic Armouries moorings in Leeds. But the real Yorkshire gems are found when you push a little further. Explore the Pocklington Canal, climb the Tinsley Flight to Sheffield, use a Hebble Spike on the Calder and Hebble, or head right up to our northern reach at Ripon Basin.

And here's the best bit: the Trent really is the gateway to all these Yorkshire treats. Ally and I have our boat based in Doncaster, and by heading out onto the Trent and catching the tides down to Newark and Nottingham (then on to the Soar and Grand Union), we can be in London in about three weeks — no messing, no route-marching. So, flipping that, boaters on most of the canal network can reach Yorkshire just as easily.

One quick myth-buster while we're here: don't believe the stories about "dragons hiding in the tidal Trent". I love hearing from people after their first trip: "Why have we not done this sooner?", "It was glorious", "By eck, you don't half scoot along!"

You don't need to do it alone. Try the Trent has nearly 3,000 members on Facebook — there's almost always another boat to tag along with and share the journey. We'll point you to clear, practical information (written by river experts) on the kit you'll need, how tides work, and what's fact versus folklore.

If you're after a bigger challenge, we've also released a guide to transiting Trent Falls, not a waterfall, despite the name, but the meeting point of the two great northern rivers, the Trent and the Ouse, as they join to form the Humber, The guide is designed to help lower-powered craft (e.g., narrowboats) head out on the outgoing tide towards Trent Falls, time the turn correctly, and then let the incoming tide give you a helpful push back up the other river, away from the Falls.

One of our river experts, Nick Roberts, is currently offering convoys—he'll do the planning and coordination for you. He's so enthusiastic he's doing it for free! So set your tiller for Yorkshire and make 2026 the year you ticked off some of our outstanding locations.

So go on — grip the nettle and head towards God's Own County. I promise you the warmest of welcomes. And honestly, our pork pies and beer are hard to beat.

Bonus tip: if you use the Trent to find us, you won't even need to travel over from the 'Dark Side'. ;-)

To get your Tour de Yorkshire planning juices going and whet ya whistle... here's an alphabetical list of some of my favourites.

Allerton Bywater
close to St Aiden's nature reserve

Bingley
home to the 3 and 5 rise

Boroughbridge
classic North Yorks market town

Brighouse
famed for Wogan's loved brass band

Castleford
huge industrial heritage and rugby league mad

Doncaster
Strawberry Island Boat Club, best on the network, visitors welcome

Dewsbury
a proper old mill town

East Marton
marvellous double arched bridge

Ferrybridge
sail under the three Great North Road (A1) bridges and sense the passage of time

Gargrave
proper Dales village on the Pennine Way

Goole
like big locks–you'll love Ocean Lock

Hebden Bridge
a vibrant bohemian and funky hub. Location for Happy Valley TV drama

Heck
small village, decent boat club and cracking pub

Huddersfield
birth place of rugby league

Keldwick
a most attractive village, with the canal at the heart

Knottingley
significant glass making heritage

Leeds
moor in the centre of our metropolis

Mexborough
moor up at the Gorilla Bar along the Meccie Riviera

Mirfield
AWCC moorings at South Pennine BC, don't miss the old school dry dock

Marsden
home of the 'light' side of the Standedge Tunnel

Mytholmroyd
a clog factory–,yep Walkley Clogs

Naburn
head of the tidal reach on the Ouse

Pocklington
be one of the few to explore the Pocklington Canal

Riddlesden
East Riddlesden Hall

Ripon
Cathedral City–Appleton's in the Market Place for your pork pies

Rotherham
furthest reach of the commercial boats

Saltaire
famous for Titus

Selby
with a lock onto the tidal Ouse its the head of the small and perfectly formed Selby Canal

Sheffield
Steel City. Kelham Island Industrial Museum is a must

Silsden
nail making history

Skipton
more gongoozlers than you can shake a stick at

Slaithwaite
Sla-wit t' locals

Sowerby Bridge
UK's deepest lock

Thorne
decent boat yards and supplies.

Tinsley
'The Industry' sculpture

Todmorden
checkout the Incredible Edible

Wakefield
so much heritage, sculpture and the Rhubarb Triangle

York
our ancient 'capital'–with the oft missed Foss Navigation

Fund Britain's Waterways update May 2026

Contact

Hazel Owen, Chair of Fund Britain's Waterways

info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk

Our new website: fundbritainswaterways.org.uk

Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) plans for the main campaign cruise of 2026 to Liverpool and the campaign cruise on the River Great Ouse to Bedford, together with a round-up of this year's events so far are ways in which you can get involved.

Main FBW Campaign Cruise to Liverpool May–July 2026

After protracted planning caused by various stoppages around the country, the route of the main campaign cruise was decided.

Setting off from Strawberry Island Boat Club
Photo: Hazel Owen

The first group left Strawberry Island Boat Club in Doncaster on 12th May and will meet up along the route to Ellesmere Port with other groups from Ashby and Birmingham and other starting points. Here the flotilla will gather in late June at the National Waterways Museum, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary, before crossing the tidal Mersey to Liverpool Docks.

As the boats progress across the country they will be visiting boat clubs and events along the way to help spread the word. Please do go along and meet the campaigners if you can–they will be delighted to see you.

Campaigners River Nene
Photo:Kat On Board

June

7th–24th Ashby and Birmingham groups cruise on the Macclesfield, Peak Forest and Huddersfield Narrow Canals via Whaley Bridge to Stalybridge to attend the Russell Newbery Register Rally

7th–12th Strawberry Island group heads back down the Caldon Canal and up the Trent & Mersey Canal onto the Bridgewater Canal to Runcorn

15th–19th Strawberry Island group cruises on the Bridgewater Canal from Runcorn to Lymm

19th–21st attending the Middlewich festival

21st–30th Strawberry Island group cruises from Lymm on the Bridgewater Canal to the Trent & Mersey Canal and onto the Middlewich Branch and then the Shropshire Union Canal to Ellesmere Port

24th–1st July Ashby and Birmingham groups cruise from Stalybridge to Ellesmere Port, where boats will congregate for the safety briefings before crossing the Mersey

July

7th Manchester Ship Canal / Mersey crossing from Ellesmere Port to Liverpool (dependent on weather)

13th–1st August Some boats plan to take the Ribble Link to the Lancaster Canal

13-19 July Great Ouse Campaign Cruise to Bedford,

17-19 July The Great Ouse Boating Association (GOBA) is organising an FBW campaign cruise from St Ives to Bedford, to arrive at Bedford to take part in the River Festival at the weekend. The objectives are to draw attention to the lack of central government/Defra funding to maintain all waterways

FUND BRITAIN'S WATERWAYS

in a safe and navigable condition, to highlight specific navigation and flood risk issues on the River Great Ouse due to failing infrastructure, and to highlight water quality issues relating to sewage discharge and farm run-off. Briefings have been arranged with all the local MPs, and mayors and councillors are next to be targeted.

GOBA cruise outline plan

13th St Ives Waites & Town Quays, Nobles Field
14th Huntingdon, Huntingdon Marina
15th St Neots
16th Willington Grange Estate, an assembly point prior to arriving in Bedford
Arrive Bedford **Friday 17th July**
Participants will make their own way back in their own time.

Campaigns this Spring

On Saturday 21st March a flotilla of 25 narrowboats, including two historic working pairs, travelled along the Walsall Canal and assembled in Walsall Town Basin to be welcomed by the Mayor of Walsall. Together they made up the biggest group of boats in the basin for some time and attracted television and press coverage.

This was the annual Icicle Cruise organised by the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society (BCNS) to mark the return of spring, this year held as part of the FBW campaign. The cruise also celebrated the reopening of the Walsall Canal after an industrial cyanide spill in August 2024 resulted in its closure for 10 months. The canal itself is a case study of the revival of urban waterways, re-

Further information on the GOBA cruise

Visit goba.org.uk/navigating-for-change-2026-great-ouse-campaign-cruise/ **or by emailing** campaigns@goba.org.uk.

Video of the Harland and Wolff cruise youtube.com/watch?v=OhpekukS6yk

Flotilla at Moorcroft Junction
Photo: Key Maslin

Waiting for the Tide
Photo: Kev Maslin

generated after near-abandonment and now providing both a valued connection with surrounding countryside and a focus in the town centre overlooked by the New Art Gallery, where IWA Navigation Committee held its annual in-person meeting in support of the cruise.

On Wednesday 6th May a fleet of historic working canal boats travelled along the tidal Thames to King George V Dock in North Woolwich where they had been built. Their journey commemorated the 90th birthday of the narrowboats' construction by the Harland & Wolff shipyard in 1936. On the cruise, they were joined by leisure boats dispersing from IWA Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice. All were flying the banners and flags of the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign.

The flotilla locked out onto the river from Limehouse Basin on the morning of 6th May. The boats grouped for photos off Margaretness, some of them stemming the tide for three hours, and then travelled upstream to enter the King George V lock. On 7th May the

King George V Dock against London city backdrop
Photo: Kev Maslin

flotilla locked out and travelled in convoy upstream, displaying FBW banners as they passed the Thames Barrier and the Royal Observatory at Greenwich.

A few boats returned to Limehouse, the rest passing Tower Bridge and the Palace of Westminster before leaving the Tideway at Brentford or Teddington.

Cathy Haysom of the Historic Narrow Boat Club, planner and organiser of the visit, said "Many of these boats still work full time, delivering cargo on the inland waterways of the UK.

The Fund Britain's Waterways campaign is vitally important to the owners, whose livelihood depends on the continued maintenance and upkeep of the waterways infrastructure."

Waterway Events

Members of the FBW team participated in the Stafford Riverway Link Open Weekend on 16th–17th May and the Crick Boat Show 22th-25th May, the Etruria Canals Festival on 30th-31th May.

We wil be at the Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally on 27th–28th June and the Russell Newbery Register Rally in Stalybridge on 24th-28th June.

FBW was also delighted to take part in World Boating Day 2026 on 23rd May representing UK inland waterways. We flew the flag both through our attendance at Crick and social media coverage.

External Events

On 4th February Defra announced an additional £6.5 million of investment in CRT to support repair, maintenance and long-term projects. While obviously welcome, this one-off sum is nowhere near enough to make a significant dent in the figure needed to reverse the decline of CRT's waterways. It also does nothing for waterways managed by other navigation authorities. FBW issued a press release setting out our repeated call for Government to commit to a comprehensive national review of future funding plans for Britain's inland waterways.

FBW also issued a pre-election statement for the local and devolved elections on 7th May, highlighting the fact that 80% of local authorities benefit from a navigable or restorable waterway in their area as well as the threat to these waterways from underinvestment.

FBW Online

Fund Britain's Waterways has a new website, address above. Please do visit it and share it with your colleagues and friends. Please do also follow FBW on LinkedIn, Facebook, Bluesky and X.

Other Ways to Support FBW

Lobby your MP about the fragmented waterway network:

If you haven't already, please do write to your MP as well as local and regional politicians and mayors, highlighting the benefits of waterways, the threat to them and the FBW campaign.

Encourage as many people as possible to sign the petition.

Fly an FBW banner or flag on your boat or elsewhere; you can download FBW graphics and use one of the internet suppliers. Or email us for more help.

Support or organise an event

Please email info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk either for further information about planned events, or if you have ideas for additional events.

As always, our grateful thanks to everyone who supports the campaign in any way.

Guidance and template letters

waterways.org.uk/campaigns/waterways-for-today/lobby-your-mp

Internal and external event kits are now available. Please email info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk if you are interested in borrowing one.

Mentions in the Houses

Shivani Raja

Emma Hardy

Shivani Raja, Conservative, Leicester East asked the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps her department is taking to help increase access to nature for people living in urban areas.

Mary Creagh, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs responded: The Government is committed to ensuring everyone lives within a 15-minute walk of a green or blue space. Currently 80% of people are within this range, with this figure at 78% in urban areas. We have set out how we will make access more equitable and remove barriers to access in our Environmental Improvement Plan. This includes progressing plans to deliver nine new National River Walks across England, one in each region, to enhance access to nature. The Mersey Valley Way, which runs from Stockport into Manchester, will be the first of those nine new walks. We will identify locations for the next tranche of river walks through a competition that will be launched before the end of 2026.

The Government is also investing £1 billion in tree planting and support to the forestry sector over this parliament. Access to nature is an important part of our work both within the public forestry estate and more broadly including with the 15 Community Forests which bring trees closer to where people live. Last year (2024/25) the Community Forests created over 2,200 hectares of new woodland, with 70% of woodlands planted having full or partial public access and 8% of schemes being within the most deprived areas of the country.

Editor: *Could we point out that canals flow through many of our cities and provide excellent pathways into rural and more peaceful pastures. A small proportion of the £1 billion on offer to the forestry estates would allow proper maintenance of the woodland bordering the canal network.*

FESTIVALS AND CAMPAIGNS

An important announcement regarding the 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.

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.

For further information

Please contact Doug WWT Trustee and Festival Organiser

07400 411124

canalfestival@whitchurchwaterway.uk

Coal on the Cut

John Jackson

In a change from our usual poetry this article is about a new literary release, of interest to those who like network history.
John Jackson was born and raised in South Yorkshire. He moved down to Birmingham in the mid-eighties and took up residence in Gas Street Basin whilst working locally as a draughtsman. After acquiring the ex-FMC boat "Roach", he became a regular sight around the canals of the Midlands delivering coal to boats and canalside properties (and a few pubs). Together with Jenny, his wife, a successful business was built up and continued until retirement called a few years ago. His new book, 'Coal on the Cut', is published by Norbury Publishing and available at various canal-side shops and bookshops. It is also available at www.coalboat.co.uk
Jacko's Coal-boat Archive is on Facebook.

Two short extracts from 'Coal on the Cut' to whet your appetite:

And there she was.

The appearance of Jenny, my wife to be, into my life made quite a difference. Income had to be adjusted upwards to cover two drinks for every one previously purchased. Doubling the price of coal was not really a viable option, so greater efficiency was needed which Jenny provided.

I met Jenny at Hanbury Wharf, the boatyard she worked at near Droitwich in Worcestershire. Actually, our eyes met over the diesel pump whilst she was filling Roach up, and the rest, as they say, is history. She immediately took a week's holiday from work. Our first trip together was from the top of Tardebigge Locks on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal, all the way to Worcester, down the Severn to Gloucester and thence on the Gloucester and Berkeley Ship Canal to Purton just two miles short of the canal terminus at Sharpness Docks. She soon got the measure of how things were done; hard work in the day delivering coal and working Roach through locks, followed by an even harder evening's work in the pub. Public houses were only licensed to serve drinks up to eleven o'clock in those days, but not one of them on this trip bothered with such niceties. We were both quite astonished (and impressed) by how much the other could drink in a given time, and a favourable impression was mutually acquired. Marriage was probably inevitable from this point on.

It was not a long time before Jenny gave up her job at Hanbury Wharf and moved onto Roach with me. She had decided that this was the right move for her, and it only remained for her to inform me that this was going to happen. She clearly had the measure of me, as she broached the subject of moving in whilst we were watching a World Cup football match on the television in the Narrow Boat public house in Middlewich. Her timing was impeccable; she waited until

England were just about to score, then asked if she could move in with me. It was at this exact moment that I shouted "Yes" along with the rest of the clientele in the bar as the ball hit the back of the net. Sneaky but effective; that was that, we were now a couple.

Inevitably, changes had to be made to my comfortable existence. My bedding was thrown out for some inexplicable reason, and a new duvet and associated linen were procured. One of our customers at Hanbury Wharf gave us a new toilet, having made the assumption that my existing chemical toilet had been in constant use for some considerable time, and may not have been in pristine condition. A pattern was emerging. It transpired that my comfort and sedentary housekeeping were now to be superseded by a superior regime. We soon settled down into a pleasant existence, and Jenny quickly acclimatised herself to the whole coal-boating experience.

Il fait froid et le soleil brille. One of the few phrases that I remember from the French lessons foisted upon me by my old alma mater. "It is cold and the sun is shining." This reminder of my school days always popped into my mind when travelling down the Severn on a January morning.

Boating down the Severn on a fine winter morning with the mist rising from the water and the sun highlighting the frosty icing on the passing fields is as near to heaven as is possible to get for a mere mortal from the industrial bounds of Rotherham. The river is never busy in January or February; the feeling of solitude is wonderful, and is probably justified as there are unlikely to be any other boats moving at all on the forty odd miles between Stourport-on-Severn and Gloucester. A clear sky, icy blue, combined with rime decorated trees and birdsong takes one away from the mundane occupation of coal delivery, to an inner place of tranquillity and daydreams. This is boating at its very best. This is also waxing very lyrical. These mornings are the thing I miss the most from my boating career.

First contact communication

Ian Hutson

I was recently shown the "communication" that the Canal Company Ltd send out when they are displeased with or insufficiently amused by a boater's putative, ill-logged distance, range, or pattern of movement.

It comes in the form of an email that pops up out of the blue, entirely unheralded. To say that I was gobsmacked would stretch English understatement.

It is replete with phrases that will shock the average customer and would absolutely floor anyone even slightly vulnerable or without social support. Those who for example are of the older generations that were used to the better-behaved, more respectful, less bitter and bile-filled—more accountable—corporations of "back in the day", from when office whippersnappers addressed customers by their surname, not their first name.

'… this decision is final and will not be reconsidered or discussed further …'

'… the power to remove your boat if it remains unlicensed on our waterways.'

'… we may start court proceedings to seek an Order from the Court entitling us to remove your boat from our inland waterways and to claim our legal costs from you.'

'… we will require you to pay our costs of removing your boat from the waterways which are likely to be in the region of £6,000 – £12,000 …'

'If you live on your boat, it is likely that you will need to make arrangements for alternative accommodation …'

All completely out of the blue, first communication in re the matter. First Contact.

You don't even get a human name attached, the thing ends with 'Yours sincerely Licensing Team Licence Compliance Advisor'. Aside from the questionable legality of being "signed" by some internal job title instead of by a real person, the Canal Company Ltd meanwhile luxuriates in the targetted individual's every single detail.

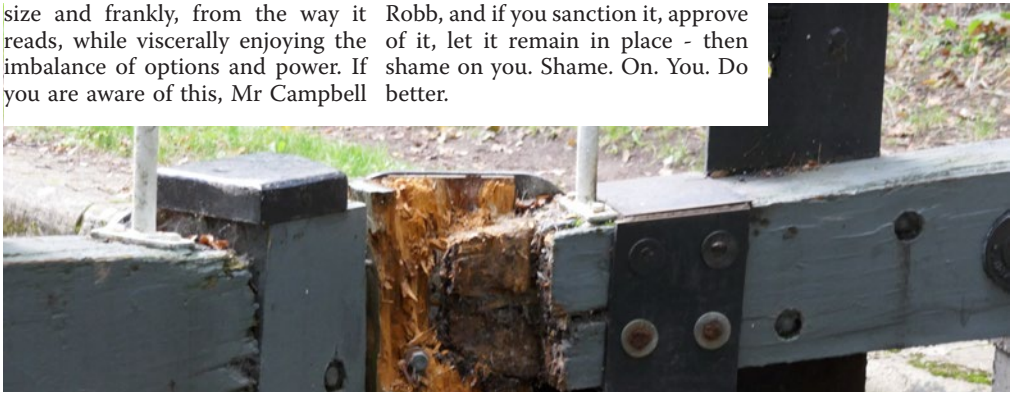
Now if that's an acceptable introductory customer service communication from an unelected monopoly led by some very comfortably-paid executives then I am a small but perfectly-formed garden gnome from the foothills of the Andes*.

*I am not.

Nothing, nothing, nothing – wallop, threat, threat, threat. The demographic of numerical dominance on the canals is one that is oft generously supplied with years, but often time under supplied with techno skills and under advised that the nameless, inhuman "job title" sending out these threats stands, in reality, on some extremely soggy legal ground indeed. This odious litany of unilateral diktat ('no appeal', 'no discussion') followed by brandishing intentionally serious socio-economic violence (£12k costs, boat removal, homelessness) hardly hints at any possibility of friendly service or co-operation amongst its Machiavellian, often bold-font paragraphs—and there are many such paragraphs, it waxes lyrical.

This is the corporate bully squaring up against the individual victim just one thirty-six thousandth their

size and frankly, from the way it reads, while viscerally enjoying the imbalance of options and power. If you are aware of this, Mr Campbell Robb, and if you sanction it, approve of it, let it remain in place - then shame on you. Shame. On. You. Do better.



Letters to the Editor

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

Fuel for free

I read your article on burning damp logs with interest. While I agree with the points made regarding efficiency, tar build-up and the potential risks associated with unseasoned wood, I wonder whether some of the practical realities of boating life deserve a mention too.

Yes, damp wood produces less heat than properly seasoned logs, but for many boaters, particularly liveaboards, the calculation is not always straightforward.

A fallen tree or branch collected locally costs nothing, whereas kiln-dried logs can be expensive. If the fuel is effectively free, reduced efficiency is not necessarily the deciding factor.

Collecting and cutting up fallen timber has long been part of boating culture. Many boaters make use of wood they come across while travelling the waterways, and I know several who have burned such fuel for decades using the same stove without major issues.

Certainly, damp wood creates more tar deposits and requires more frequent chimney cleaning. In my experience, weekly sweeping is often sufficient to stay on top of this.

The article mentions the possibility of leaking stoves and carbon monoxide. These are genuine concerns, but a properly maintained stove installation, together with a working carbon monoxide alarm, provides an important safeguard. Personally, after many years of heating with wood, I have never experienced a stove leak or a carbon monoxide alarm activation caused by burning less-than-perfect fuel.

I also enjoyed the section on different types of wood. In practice, however, many boaters burn whatever species happen to be available as they cruise. Choice is often dictated by what fallen timber can be gathered along the route rather than by any ideal fuel chart.

The advice on seasoning wood remains sound, but perhaps there is room to acknowledge the long tradition of resourceful boaters making use of locally gathered fuel and balancing efficiency against practicality.

Matt Clarkson

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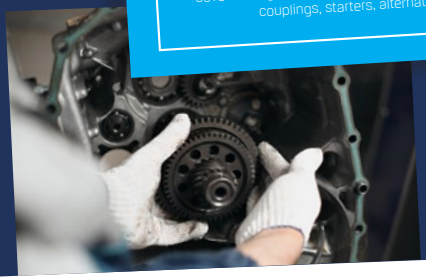

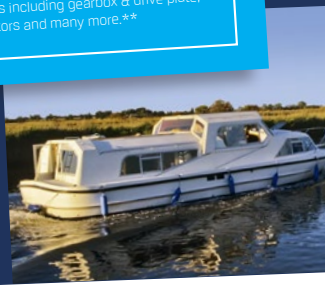

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