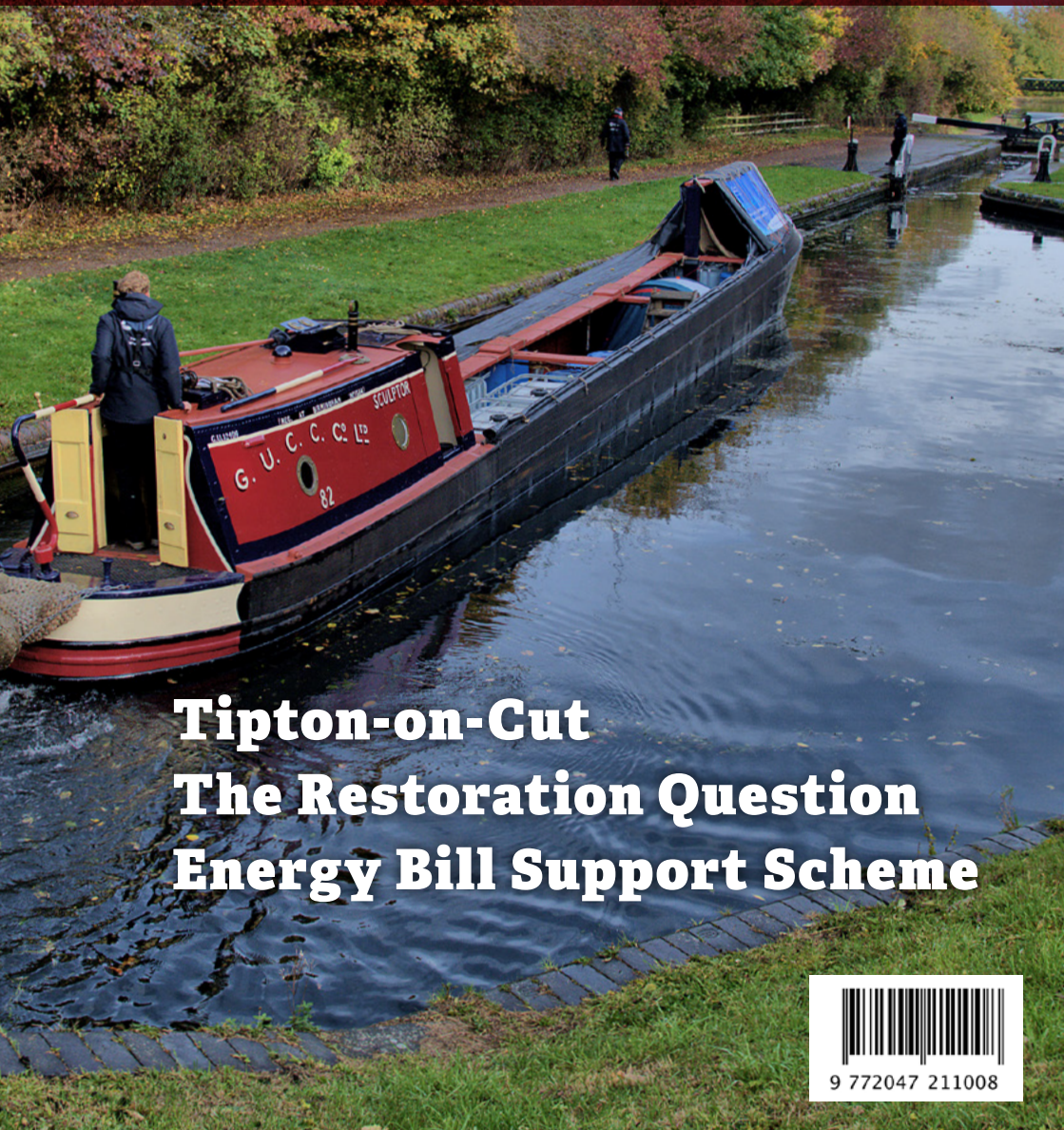




NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners
Issue 2 April 2023



Tipton-on-Cut
The Restoration Question
Energy Bill Support Scheme



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NABO News

The magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners

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Articles, letters, photos and cartoons are most welcome. Please email your contributions to nabonews@nabo.org.uk or post to the Editor by 29th April 2023.

Cover photo

Factory Locks, Tipton ©Photography by Kev Maslin

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



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Last November, in a Commons debate Michael Fabricant (MP for Lichfield), made an impassioned speech in support of the Canal and River Trust, volunteers and their efforts to maintain and restore the network. However, there was a distinct warning in his summary of what is to come:

The only guillotine acceptable to boaters

Editor **John Sadler** asks which canals are going to be allowed to decay?

'Everyone here realises the importance for the Canal and River Trust to have some idea of what its grant will be after March 2027, when it terminates. It needs to plan which canals remain open. [...]we need some certainty. I am a little disappointed, though I understand the reasons why the Minister could not give certainty today. I am sure that "forthwith" means not a year or two years from now. I am sure that "forthwith" does not even mean three months from now. I hope that "forthwith" means that within a few weeks we will learn precisely what grant the Canal and River Trust will be given. Once it knows that, it can plan ahead. Only by planning ahead will we be able to maintain such an important element of our national heritage.'

We are now at the three month definition of 'forthwith', we still don't know what the grant will be in 2027 and consequently which canals will remain open. It must be very disheartening to volunteers who have donated hours of their time to be faced with

the threat of closures to the network.

The government had the idea of Hiving Off River and Canal Expenditure (HORCE), creating the Canal and River Trust to implement a single strategy, high risk development plan. Did anybody in Government do a risk analysis? The number one question should have been, what happens if CRT doesn't manage to raise sufficient funding? I understand that CRT have had to spread awareness of the pleasures of life by and on the water, but where is the return on investment?

Walkers, cyclists and fishermen are being encouraged to enjoy the canal network, good publicity but CRT needs income. The analogy of a National Trust for the Waterways doesn't really work, The National Trust has always made sure it has the necessary funds to maintain a property, before accepting responsibility. The government's CaRT before HORCE approach did not facilitate the gradual growth of a network with adequate funding.

That has left CRT in the position of having to support an ageing network and its reservoirs with insufficient resources. With the additional pressure of the resources required to combat climate change, it is difficult to see a way forward if government support is reduced or declined other than by reducing expenditure.

I really must put in a plea to stop the derogatory comments between various groups of boaters. We have an enormous task ahead of us to keep the waterways preserved for the future, this will be made much more forcefully if we speak with one voice. There are good, selfish and thoughtless people in all walks of society, let's not attribute bad behaviour to any particular group. We are all boaters, we need to ensure the canals remain in water.

The only guillotine acceptable to boaters

Photo: John Sadler



By the time you read this, we hope that there might just be some clarity about the future funding of both CRT and the Waterways part of the EA—I say “we hope” as it has all been so delayed, and the opinion being expressed in both organisations is that they expect a very miserable outcome.

At the same time, the very basis of CRT is under review, and its precise role as a charity with (of course) charitable status is being questioned. In truth, this latter query comes as no surprise to many of us who are involved with running other charities, where we are aware that a charity must be transparent in how it operates, and certainly cannot be under the control of government—or, indeed, another charitable organisation. Many of us found it hard to see how CRT could operate as a charity if it remained under the ultimate control of government. Of relevance, by going into the Companies House website, one finds that CRT’s official Company Type: is “Private Limited Company by guarantee without share capital, use of ‘Limited’ exemption”. Clearly this all needs to be urgently sorted out—either CRT is a charity, or it isn’t!

Of course, the whole model introduced by David Cameron at the time when CRT was created was to move organisations such as British Waterways out of government funding, with the objective that ultimately the CRT as a charity would be able to raise sufficient money from other sources. The assumption was that after 15 years CRT would have become self-funding, after which it would be acceptable for it to receive no further direct government subsidy. On this basis, therefore, CRT should at that point indeed require no further support

from government coffers, providing a rationale for announcing any cessation of funding following the current review!

This flawed model that could never work

However, as we and other boating organisations said at the time, the entire model was fatally flawed. The whole concept that this bright and shiny new charity would somehow raise over £50m per year to replace the government funding was a farce—in practice, the income actually generated by CRT from external



Talk to your MP now!

Chairman **Mike Rodd** hopes to inspire some much needed campaigning.

sources has been on average just over £1m per year—less than 2% of that required.

Additionally, any of us who run charities know only too well that we can indeed raise money for well-defined projects with clear people-focused objectives, but certainly not for routine “housekeeping” such as maintenance, fixing broken lock gates or dredging canals—regardless of how valuable these assets are in terms of their historic importance and/or their contributions to tourism.

There can be little doubt that, quite correctly, CRT is working on how to cope with such a potential reduction in funding. We see and hear this in many ways; Richard Parry, CRT’s Chief Executive Officer, has (again entirely correctly) been preparing us to face this situation, by warning that they will have to reduce their expenditure wherever possible. So we have already seen winter works being cut back and, of course, we boaters (as their softest of targets)



Previous protest chaos
© Photography by Kev Maslin

have already seen a huge increase in our licence fees, with the present consultation very obviously aimed at seeing how much more they can squeeze out of us. Mr Parry has also stated that they will simply not be able to maintain all the present canals for which they are responsible, and this clearly implies that some canals will be neglected and left to go back to how they were when they were first restored. Probably the major, well-used canals (Grand Union? K&A?) will survive, whereas many smaller, less used ones, could well be allowed to slowly die.

So, what does this all mean for NABO and other boating/boater organisations? The IWA's Chief Executive states "Our waterways benefit millions of people in the country, and it is essential that government continues to invest in them to ensure that these benefits can be maintained and increased." To address this, IWA have launched a campaign [#ProtectOurWaterways](#), which clearly we must support. We urge all our members to get involved.

See: protect@waterways.org.uk

Does your MP know about CRT's funding model?

Additionally, NABO has already embarked on an extensive campaign to contact all those MPs who have a waterway in their constituency.

This has proved to be most interesting! Although we have received a fairly standard response from many of them, generated, we assume, by the Office of the Minister responsible, a few MPs have come back to us, clearly previously unaware of the situation. Indeed, many had not grasped the original concept of moving the canals away from Government management by the creation of CRT, and hence had no idea of how the canals and, indeed, rivers, are managed. As a past chair of the K&A Canal Trust, this doesn't surprise me in the least, as many long-term boaters still call us—rather than CRT—when they have a problem with the canal!

Clearly, we now need to launch a meaningful campaign, aimed at as

many canal users as possible and get them in turn to put pressure on their MPs and any contacts they have with members of the House of Lords. Also, we need members to ensure that their local waterways groups are fully aware of the emerging situation. The amazing numbers we now have signed up to our various social media channels give us a good idea of where to start. To this end, one of our new members, Steph Maton, has published an article in this edition—see page 14—suggesting how we should start the campaign.

But above all, do talk to your MP, asap!!! We simply cannot let the loss of a relatively small amount of funding (given the overall budget to be announced as this NABO News appears) to cause our amazing waterways to go back into the state they were in before we and our predecessors all got together to restore them. And remember, it was folks like us—and the organisations that

we are part of—who did the original restorations, not some ill-informed government minister!!

Let me end by praising CRT — now there's a change!—for all the extensive winter work they are busy completing on **my** canal—the little Mon & Brec down in South Wales! On the other canal, where I skipper a public trip boat for the K&A Canal Trust, we appreciate the dredging undertaken around Hungerford, although we were somewhat surprised that this relatively un-problematic section was prioritised, when we still have problems even getting our trip boat though very badly silted sections further upstream. As they say, however, "Every little helps!" We are also immensely grateful for the work being undertaken on the main K&A water supply system, based at our historic Crofton Pumping Station—so it's really good to be able to end on a positive note.

I wish you all happy boating!

In the sunshine on the Monmouth and Brecon Canal
Photo: Mike Spokes



Fly on the wall

Observes proceedings at the Council meeting in March



NABO Calendar 2023

The Council meetings in 2023 will be on: 22nd April (The Junction Inn, Norbury Junction), 17th June (by Zoom), 2nd September, 7th October (by Zoom) and 18th November (after the AGM).

Members are welcome to attend; please just let the General Secretary or Chair know in advance (contact details inside front cover).

Currently the best outcome for the Defra subsidy seems likely to be a reduced grant which will be presented to CRT for the next ten years. A discussion then ensued on the continual statement by CRT that there is a difference between the Home Mooring and a Continuous Cruiser licence. Whilst NABO's intervention corrected the License consultation FAQs to reflect this, other areas of the CRT website continue to incorrectly reference the Continuous Cruiser licence. It was pointed out that CRT are entitled to charge different rates for different classes of boat, which they do by size at the moment.

It was also pointed out that the government's Fuel Grant was still not available to continuous cruisers, despite CRT offering to help. A letter will be sent to the Attorney General about the interpretation of the 1995 BW Act with respect to the fuel grant. The pressure arising from NABO's extensive use of social media has been successful and will be continued.

The chair brought into the discussion the issue of CRT's status as a charity which is in doubt. CRT are optimistic that they will remain a charity but there are several issues that arise from this including the lack of transparency about board selection which is required of a charity. There are many implications attached to the resolution of this problem although Richard Parry is

confident it will be resolved soon.

We continue to put pressure on CRT to restart their Heritage group. It was reported that Braunston Stop House is under threat again. Navigation Yard in Northwich is being sold as there are apparently no other viable proposals even though an active campaign group have tried to submit them. Everybody was requested to keep their ears to the ground on future disposals of land or buildings. Please advise nabonews@nabo.org.uk of any rumours or facts.

The outcome of CRT boater's survey of facilities, has been published in the recent Boaters Update. It is clear that showers and washing machine etc will not be replaced when they breakdown. It is obvious that where private facilities exist close to CRT's, eg. pumpouts, they could be closed. Money will be saved.

It was thought that CRT's discrimination might be the root of the problem with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and the application for winter fuel grants.

The question of water quality arose from a request on the BCN to test for phosphates which encourage plant growth. The waterways are designated under law as EA's responsibility for water quality. This will be referred to the chair of Navigation Advisory Group (NAG).

Gas Cylinders

Calor have withdrawn some of the smaller sizes. BSS is very aware of the problem and have raised the issue with Calor and are meeting them. Some of the 'alternatives' have

different dimensions and are not generally available adjacent to the waterways.

Other equivalents are available but at a larger cost. Calor's reasoning is that the small bottle turn around is very long which makes it uneconomical. Clearly Calor is trying to get out of the small bottle market.

Meeting with Matthew Symonds

Symonds admits that consultations are about how much money they can get from the boating community. Unfortunately he has gone on sick leave. We hope he returns soon. The next meeting is at the end of April.

Regular Regional meetings

We are aware of these from the CRT Events page and will advise council of notices. At a meeting with Tom Freeland, West Midlands Customer Service Manager, it was agreed that the Birmingham moorings consultation was rushed and would be reconsidered. The West Midlands Forum meeting was considered for a Zoom meeting as many cannot make face to face. No result, it's still a physical meeting.

Regional Representatives reports

It appears that there is general demotivation. Basic services are being done but without enthusiasm. This is a natural consequence of financial pressure.

Media & Publicity

It was noted that a response to a FOI request indicates CRT are not basing mooring restrictions on historic data.

It was suggested that a campaign of direct action might produce results. The type of direct action was discussed. It was suggested that smaller actions would lead to a na-

tional effective response.

Facebook has an additional new moderator, Peter Rendall. There are about 3500 followers. It was recognised that Social Media is a good place to keep things on the boil. Instagram is also taking off.

Social Media was agreed as the way to go forward. The Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs and the Inland Waterways Association are looking to run campaigns and activate their memberships very similar to the Save Our System campaign of 2010.*

The website gets less hits than Facebook and Twitter but complements social media. .

National user groups

We no longer have a representative on the Navigation Advisory Group.

There has been no progress on a replacement. This was raised with NAG who said that they were looking for different skills.

Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) the main thrust of the meeting was on the Calor Gas Issue mentioned above. This has been passed to BSS Technical Committee for immediate action.

The National Inland Navigation Forum continues to provide a useful meeting place which creates a good platform for organisations to work together.

The next All Party Parliamentary Group for Waterways meeting is to be held on 28th March and will discuss the influence of the waterways on the environment. All are welcome to attend.

*This led to an Early Day Motion:

That this House notes that the UK inland waterways are a national treasure which have significantly improved in recent years; shares the Government's view that the waterways nevertheless need new investment; further notes that nearly half of the money that British Waterways needs to maintain the network comes from its property portfolio; further notes that funding cuts in British Waterways' grant-in-aid from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs mean that the shortfall British Waterways faces in the money it needs to properly fund its waterways is increased to about £40m; believes the inland waterways should be treated as a national park; supports the Save our System 2010 campaign launched by the Inland Waterways Association; and further notes that the funding shortfall should be reinstated and the property portfolio protected so that it can provide a secure funding stream to ensure that the inland waterways can continue to be enjoyed by millions in years to come.

Wales and Southwest Mike Rodd



No regional meetings have taken place over the last few months to replace the late-planned meeting just before Christmas—which so few people could attend that it was cancelled! On the very positive side, extensive winter work on both the K&A and the Mon & Brec has taken place. To our surprise also some extensive dredging has been undertaken on the K&A. As this took place where we run one of our K&A Trust's public trip boats—right in the middle of our extensive number of Santa trips, it caused some concern! Fortunately the dredging contractors were extremely helpful and worked with us so that their operation did not affect our trips. On the Mon & Brec the best news is that most of the vegetation cutting-back has taken place and the bridge holes especially should be much easier to negotiate!

Anglian waterways Peter Early



The most surprising news this month has been the increase in Registration Fees, Licence Fee in CRT parlance.

Two years ago, to coincide with our move from canal to river, the EA announced a new fee structure based on length and width plus a 'standing charge'. Although for our widebeam the increase was fairly minimal for many small boats would have increases of over 200%. Indeed some narrowboats would see their fees decreased whilst the shorter but fatter neighbours would pay more. Such was the backlash, not just here on the Great Ouse but also the Thames and Medway Regions, that the EA relented and agreed to a 10% increase over 3 years; that is 4%, 4% and 2%.

So the big surprise is that they have stuck to their word and our licence for 2023 is just

Around the regions with NABO's regional reps

4% higher than last year, unlike the increase in a CRT licence this year and likelihood of even higher next year, at least for certain categories of boaters.

All we need now is for the EA to adopt the same online renewal process as CRT or even sub contract it to them. I'm sure they would welcome the charge they could levy. Unfortunately not so our mooring fees which see an increase of 10.5% for 2023, the Great Ouse already having some of the most expensive moorings outside London. Bizarrely though our electricity cost has been reduced to 24p a unit and diesel, with our mother's discount, is £1.12 a litre.

So a bit swings and roundabouts. Our marina owners obviously see a bright future for boating in the area as they have just installed another new pontoon, the second in two years. However I guess the knock-on effect of the small increase, despite the expectation of a much larger increase in 2025, will be even more reduced maintenance.

Many boaters over here complain about the locks, the lack of preventative maintenance, the planting of wild flower beds, and the obsession with Health and Safety signage when the real on-going problem is the continuing closure of visitor moorings, often for things that could be sorted relatively easily. New visitors to the river will immediately see that two of the three lengths of visitor moorings at Denver are closed, and have been for well over 2 years. This is due to subsidence, repairs being hampered by the piling in places being asbestos.

The closure also of all the permanent moorings on the Northern side has put extra pressure on the remaining mooring with some of the displaced boats moving there, albeit with only limited overstay. A few miles upstream, one of our favourite moorings, Brandon Creek, was closed last month. No reason has been given but I assume it is because a lot of the wooden fendering and capping for the piles is rotten or missing.

It is a great pity that the EA don't embrace

volunteers as I'm sure this could be replaced over the course of a weekend by a determined work party. The long length of moorings at Littleport Station were reopened last Autumn and they certainly are a 5 star job and probably will outlast me! But the popular moorings at Queen Adelaide, a useful spot if Ely is full, remain closed for the third year.

Don't let any of this dissuade you from visiting our lovely river. The opportunities for 'wild' mooring might be limited but there are plenty provided by the Great Ouse Boating Association which you should join.

West Midlands Peter Braybrook

At the West Midlands Forum Meeting CRT presented a series of lectures with slides explaining their work and plans for the future.



The Hydrology manager referred to last year when temperature records were broken during the July heatwave which created problems for the Trust.

He explained what CRT are doing to preserve as much water as possible in the waterways system and the role that volunteers and boaters can play in helping too, to counteract the impact of prolonged dry weather periods.

The complexity and relative costs of water supply were explained and the affect of electricity price increases on the cost of pumping water. The affect both underground water resources and back pumping to mitigate lock usage depletion.

Data are collected from Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system by telemetry, outstations installed at various locations enable the water management team to monitor and control water resources. Ultimately this may mean having to limit the hours in which boats can travel through locks. On a weekly basis modelling is undertaken to help decide when canals may have to have restrictions on navigation.

CRT has had to comply with new water abstraction legislation. A seven year program of data gathering and justification of water use (at



Photo John Sadler

a cost to the Trust of £250k), was invoked before applying for licences. The licences will impose regulation on the use of water on the regions canals.

Over 100 projects have been managed in the West Midlands, repairing lock gates, paddles sluices, culverts and dredging. Some large projects are delivered by external companies whereas the general maintenance priority projects are largely handled by the in-house team. Several requests came from the audience for spot dredging on the Walsall canal and winding holes on the Shroppie. Environmental work was covered in a very interesting presentation of the work going on to comply with legislation and protect native plants and livestock against invasive species. A biological way of removing pennywort from our canals was shown to be more cost effective than traditional mechanical methods.

In summary the meeting showed the professional way in which the canal network is being managed, how an 18th century system is being engineered to fit into the 21st century.

Welfare Officer's Report Ken Hylins

I have now renewed my links with the gypsy travellers, my original contact with them had left their service.

I have also forged links with Macmillan Cancer Support, making them aware of the difficulties one can have, as a marina based boater, in accessing long term care without a postcode. Continuous Cruisers having the additional problem of regularly moving. Without access to mains electricity presents a big winter problem if away from the boat.

This subject is, as some of you know, close to my heart. Communicating with all parties builds up my contacts and extends NABO's profile; enabling me to help boaters at a very stressful and uncertain time. Assistance can be provided either by referring them to Macmillan or dealing with the respective managing authority.

I have also forged similar links with the British Heart Foundation (BHF), initially to service a boater's needs. I have had personal experience

of this situation, as many of you know. The BHF link again broadens NABO's profile and allows much needed support of members.

I am at present supporting two members with the advanced stages of cancer, managing to secure a long period of overstay so they can obtain chemotherapy treatment. I also have regular conversations with them, during which I can offer support and often share my experience with them.

The other area in which I have been active is that of Canal and River Trust's discrimination against an elderly boater. He had been put on a restricted licence, as nobody thought to look into the reasons. This unpleasant situation, you will be glad to know, has been resolved and he will now get reasonable adjustments and the respect he deserves. Finally I have been contacted by another elderly boater who needs support in dealing with disability issues, which I will investigate.



The Licensing Controversy

Much of CRT's online presence still talks about a "Continuous Cruising licence" As we all know this does not exist and by continuously making reference to it further misleads the public.

Types of Licences

As defined on CRT's website, only the following types of licence can be applied for.

- A Pleasure Boat Licence ("standard boat licence") for either 3, 6 or 12 months is required to navigate on Our Canals & Rivers. You will need a home mooring for Your boat for this licence type.
- A Rivers Only Licence is valid for 'River Waterways'. These are defined in Schedule 1 of the British Waterways Act 1971, as amended. A Rivers Only Licence constitutes a "pleasure boat certificate" for the purposes of the Act.
- A Continuous Cruising licence does not need your boat to have a home mooring. This licence is either for 6 or 12 months and You'll have to follow Our 'Guidance for Boaters

Without a Home Mooring.'

- A Gold Licence, allows you to travel on Our Waterways and Environment Agency (EA) navigations in England & Wales.
- Short Term licences for periods of 1 month or less are for boats visiting Our Waterways for short term visit

It's as stubborn a term as the 'boating season' (although this isn't costing boaters money) as is the use of the term a Continuous Cruiser licence by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

A recent look at the Canal and River Trust's website seems to show that now, at least, it offers the correct description.

Licence Prices

Fill in the details below and click Find Prices to find your licence price

When should the licence start? *

April 2023

Licence Type *

Please select:
 Canal and River
 River Only
 Gold

Reaction To Cuts

The IWA is deeply concerned about the threat to our waterways posed by funding cuts with, for example, Canal & River Trust and Scottish Canals financial situations being especially critical.

Despite being recognised in the government's Environmental Improvement Plan, the condition of the waterways continues to deteriorate while government funding is decreasing.

Canals and rivers are valuable assets which can contribute to the country's economic recovery, help to mitigate the impacts of climate change and enrich the lives of local communities, as highlighted in our [#WaterwaysforToday](#) report. Ongoing funding is therefore critical if we are to not only save the waterways for today, but also for the future.

History tells us that without boats travelling along them, waterways silt up and become dirty rubbish tips. Without proper maintenance reservoirs, aqueducts, and embankments deteriorate, resulting in communities being put at increasing risk of water damage from a failing infrastructure. The added threat of climate change will only worsen the situation as severe flooding and breaches become more commonplace.

IWA is calling on national and local government to fund all waterways at a level that keeps them as major assets that can continue to contribute to the economy, peoples' health and wellbeing, and coping with the climate crisis.

IWA will

- Raise awareness of the threat through national, local, and social media.
- Petition to protect our waterways from the risks funding cuts will create.
- Ensure Members of Parliament and local politicians are fully aware of the benefits of the waterways and the threats to them.
- Arrange high profile events and activities including waterways festivals, towpath stalls.
- Be ready to work with government to offer knowledge and expertise and solutions to improve and maintain our waterways both now and in the future.
- Collaborate with communities and organisations that share our passion for the waterways



Previous protest chaos at the Mailbox, Birmingham
Photo: Andrew Denny Waterways World

to widen support for the campaign.

- Continue to provide practical assistance in the maintenance and improvement of waterways.

The waterways of today would not exist without IWA who, over many years, ensured that they were saved and enhanced. Millions of hours of volunteer time and effort along with lottery funding have been invested in revitalising the waterway

IWA will not let that network fall into disrepair again.

David Pearce, Chief Executive of IWA, states "Our waterways benefit millions of people in the country, and it is essential that government continues to invest in them to ensure that these benefits can be maintained and increased".

To join the campaign and help to [#ProtectOurWaterways](#), contact protect@waterways.org.uk

Together we can do it!

HOW TO MAKE NABO'S VOICE HEARD

Recently-joined member **Steph Maton** explains what brought her to NABO



I am a very new recruit to NABO having followed their Facebook posts as I became increasingly frustrated by some of the seemingly inexplicable decisions made by CRT.

I am a live aboard boater who, as a Brummie, has never been far from a canal even when I lived in bricks and mortar. I have been a campaigner for most of my adult life, working as a public servant in education.

I wondered whether NABO would be the right “home” for me as I believe that direct action is often the only way to draw attention to a cause and to give ordinary citizens a voice. I am delighted to report that I have found a very welcoming and forward thinking “home” for my need to take action. I have grumbled for too long to my partner, fellow boaters and those who walk the tow path anywhere near our boat, however, I never feel comfortable grumbling but not doing anything about that which has caused me frustration and consternation.

It turns out that NABO are keen to welcome some new blood with fresh ideas and to consider taking our concerns to CRT with a collective voice.

I can't pretend to fully understand all the intricacies of CRT policy and their political decisions

but one thing I do have a clear understanding of is the impact some of their inexplicable decisions have on a range of boaters.

The straw that broke my peaceful retirement and pulled me back to action, is the proposed changes to the moorings in the Birmingham City Zone, so here I am—bolshy from a Birmingham narrowboat.

We have spent many happy weeks in Birmingham city centre enjoying the focal point of our wonderful second city. Millions of pounds have been spent on a canal interchange where I would not have ventured in my teens, but where there is now a national tourist attraction. CRT seem to justify their proposed mooring changes by identifying a range of difficulties faced by boaters and their own workers. However, never has our visit been spoiled by a lack of moorings, confusion over where we can moor or for how long and I have never been particularly aware of overstaying boats. When I read the CRT rationale for their “consultation”—The dictionary definition of *consultation* is the act of discussing something with someone or a group of people **before** making a decision about it.

I was curious—was I oblivious to such issues? I decided to send off a Freedom of Information request. The conclusion drawn from their response is that their rationale for the “consultation” is non-existent. It could possibly be a ploy to extract yet more income from boaters or

some wider agenda.

I understand Leeds is next in line for such restrictions and we know that locally we are now restricted at Tardebigge, Alvechurch and Worcester. Where will this end? What is their long term aim behind these restrictions?

I want to encourage like minded boaters to come together and take small but well publicised actions where moorings have been altered for no clear reason. Let's ensure that CRT know we are not going to roll over when we are not properly consulted or considered when they make arbitrary decisions. I would like to develop this single issue as our starting point for action and then build a direct action community within NABO in readiness for the next campaign.

I have a dreadful foreboding that there might be much bigger issues ahead and we need to be ready and organised to face them in a speedy and constructive way.

If you would like to find out more, be involved in any way or have more



ideas to add please get in touch.

If we have the necessary support we will build community based groups in local areas who will then be part of a day of action which we will publicise on social media and in the relevant newspapers with a formal letter and notification to CRT, appropriate MPs and Ministers.

Should there be no support for this, I will be taking action in Birmingham—just me and my placard next to my boat—on a legal mooring!

The overcrowded moorings

Photo Roy Stokes

Gas Street Basin

Photo Sharon Wells



To moor or not to moor

MOORINGS UNDER REVIEW

Liverpool Link updated charges 2023



It's not the leaving of
Liverpool that grieves me...

Photo Sharon Wells

Canal and River Trust (CRT) has contacted all customers with an existing mooring booking in place for Salthouse Dock, from or after 1 April 2023, to inform them of a price change to their booking.

CRT said that it is proud to be able to offer passage through the city's historic waterfront and provide moorings in the heart of Liverpool in the great, historic docks. However, as a charity, it is facing soaring costs and must address the budget shortfall to safeguard navigation.

This means they are amending the rates of services provided within Salthouse Dock from 1 April 2023. This attempt at retrospective charging on existing bookings met with much consternation, causing boaters to cancel bookings or pay the extra fees. After much opposition, it looks like the retrospective aspect has been dropped, creating new difficul-

ties of restoring cancelled bookings and repayment of additional fees.

From 1 April 2023, the first 7 nights within Salthouse Dock will be charged at £10 per night (previously free), with any extra nights thereafter charged at £25 per night (previously £20). This now applies to all new customers and booking is compulsory. The charges will continue to include access to the services provided on the pontoons, including electric hook-up, water and refuse facilities. For example, a 7-night stay in Salthouse Dock will now cost £70. A 10-night stay will now cost £145. A 14-night stay will now cost £245. Pump out or Elsan disposal is not included.

CRT apologises that they haven't been able to communicate this sooner or implement the changes to the booking system prior to this year's bookings; and for any problems this may cause. Through a recent business planning review the current projected annual cost of electricity alone at these moorings has risen to £35k the decision has been quickly taken to revise mooring prices to help meet this increasing cost. The change also brings the pricing in line with our other pre-bookable moorings and remains significantly cheaper than other local mooring options.

Having enjoyed two previous visits to Salthouse Dock (albeit free), I don't think the additional charge would deter me from enjoying the trip into Liverpool and a stay in the docks.

Following a few complaints CRT have reversed their decision to make the charges retrospective. It's not certain how a refund or re-booking will be administered.

Oxford

Here we go again. Oxford moorings were restricted to 2 day all year round with no consultation, just quietly done.

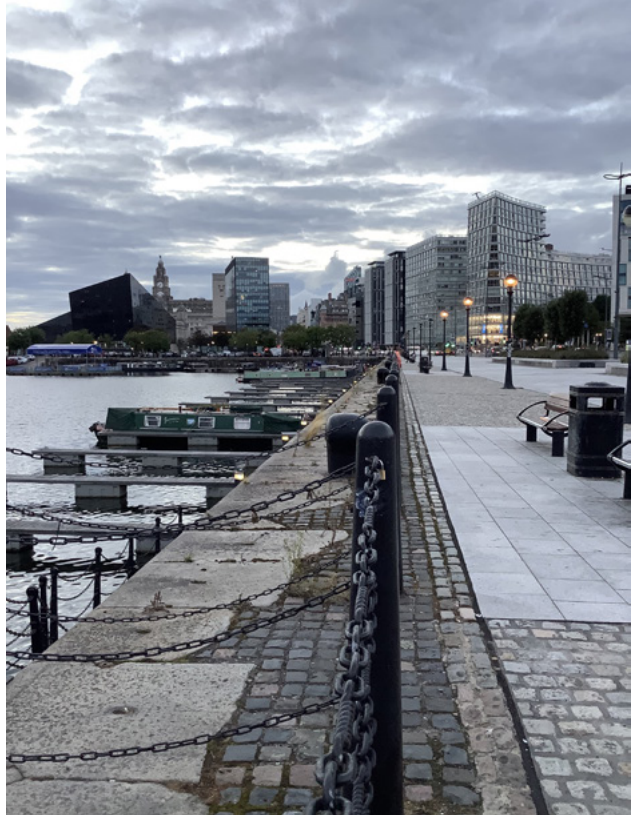
Again, CRT's justification is to 'simplify'. So simplified that this winter there were hardly any boats mooring in the lovely city of Oxford. As a very experienced and well respected 'leisure' boater who is out on the canal, covering a lot of mileage throughout the year has observed, why is CRT so anti-boater at the moment?

Changes at Alvechurch

Canal and River Trust is looking to trial some changes to the visitor moorings at Alvechurch, moving the visitor moorings northwards to accommodate operational moorings and formalise the community trip boat mooring.

The Worcester Birmingham & Droitwich Canal Society have applied to the Trust to formalise their home mooring near the bridge to facilitate the successful and safe operations of the trip boat 'Cecilia'.

At the same time, the Trust has been assessing operational sites, and have identified the importance of reserving space at Alvechurch with good access to the canal for loading materials. The area immediately north of Cecilia's proposed mooring is ideal for this. The land adjacent to the visitor moorings is not a public facility and is locked to prevent unauthorised use.



Proposed changes are:

- Designate the mooring immediately north of Bridge 60 as a home for Cecilia.
- Designate the mooring alongside the access point as a reserved mooring for Trust operational and maintenance craft.
- Extend the visitor moorings to the north to ensure that no mooring spaces are lost for visitors to this popular area.

CRT will be trialling the changes on site from 24th April until the end of October. If you'd like to give feedback on the proposals, please send your comments to enquiries.west-midlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk

View from Salthouse Dock
Photo Sharon Wells

EA Getting Tough

Boats on the River Thames can be registered by calling 03708 506 506 or gov.uk/government/collections/river-thames-boat-registration-and-application-forms

A boat-owner from Gainsborough Green in Abingdon has been convicted of failing to register his boat for use on the River Thames.

Environment Agency officers discovered Trevor Cox, of Gainsborough Green, had no legal registration for his 4.4m vessel, Zimalda, moored at Wilsham Road, during routine checks. They attached a warning notice to the boat in August last year, requiring him to comply with the law within 14 days.

It is a criminal offence to keep, use or let for hire an unregistered vessel on a waterway.

A month after the first visit, the Environment Agency wrote to Cox after officers found the boat had been removed from its moorings and was still unregistered. The letter warned him to register the boat inside a week or enforcement proceedings would begin. A navigation enforcement officer also spoke to him on the phone in a call where he stated he wouldn't pay the fee.

Oxford magistrates' court was told riverside inspections by officers revealed Cox had skipped the annual £92.94 fee, determined by the length and width of the boat. Including costs and surcharge, he was required to pay a total of £574.94—more than six times as much as the registration fee.

Colin Chiverton, an environment manager at the Environment Agency, said:

We were as patient as we could be with Cox, who flat-out refused to pay a fee that goes straight towards the upkeep of our rivers to support

navigation. If you don't pay your car tax you get fined—it's exactly the same with boats on the Thames.

Our enforcement teams are out now along the river, checking registrations for 2023. If anyone has a boat on the Thames and has yet to register it, I advise them to do so now—it's easy to do. The message is clear—pay the fees or a potentially much larger fine.

Similar to excise duty for road vehicles, boat registration fees allow the Environment Agency to manage and maintain more than 600 miles of inland waterways across England, keeping them open and safe for thousands of boaters.

Trevor Cox entered a guilty plea at Oxford magistrates' court on 24 February 2023 of breaching the Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010. He was fined £166, and ordered to pay costs of £250, a victim surcharge of £66 and his outstanding boat registration fee of £92.94 for 1 January to 31 December 2022.

Owners of powered or non-powered boats, including paddleboards, must register their boats annually with the Environment Agency for use on the non-tidal River Thames.

Boat-registration on the Thames starts on 1 January every year. Any boats found on the water after that date, without having registered, may be liable to a fine.

In a single patrol along the Bray Reach in February 2023, Environment Agency enforcement officers served 78 notices on vessels for non-registration.

Energy bills support scheme

The Gov.uk web site, claims '900,000 more households to benefit from £400 of government energy support', with a qualifying section on eligibility.

So it's under review. As winter relaxes into spring it should become less of a problem but it will still affect off grid liveaboard boaters.

The Energy Bill Support Scheme—Alternative Funding (EBSS-AF) went live for the UK. Sadly in spite of extensive efforts by all boater organisations fronted by the NBTAs, to get the Minister and the Deputy Director General BEIS / ESNZ to accommodate mooring-based and itinerant boat-dwellers in the scheme, this demographic—including people on moorings and all land-based travellers—are specifically excluded from the scheme.

The situation is fluid, and a little dependent on local councils. I have seen some claims online that liveaboards have been successful in claiming energy bill support, both for council tax and non council tax contributors. At least a start.

The original government information has pictures of a park home, a narrowboat, a care home and a cow shed...

To check eligibility and apply for the £400 of support, people need to search for "Apply for energy bill support if you do not get it automatically" in the search bar on GOV.UK or in an internet search engine.

Eligible homes

You may be eligible to apply if your main home is:

- a residential park home
- on a boat on a permanent residential mooring
- on a permanent Gypsy and Traveller site
- part of a heat network without an electricity meter
- in social or private rented accommodation which has a business energy connection or a communal electricity supply
- off the mains electricity or gas grid
- in a care home or assisted living facility and you pay for some or all of your care (directly or through loss of pension or other benefits)
- in a separate domestic home within a non-domestic property (such as a farmhouse or a flat above a shop)

Who cannot apply

Most households get the £400 support automatically. You do not need to apply if you or your landlord:

- has a domestic energy meter
- pay your bills directly to an energy supplier (such as British Gas or EDF)

You cannot apply if you've already had Energy Bills Support Scheme payments. This is 6 automatic monthly payments or prepayment meter vouchers of £66 or £67 from your energy supplier, from October 2022.

If you think you should have got a payment but have not, contact your energy supplier.

You also cannot apply for a discount if you live:

- in purpose-built student accommodation
- in a care home where all your fees are paid by the local council or NHS
- on a boat as a continuous cruiser (currently under review)
- on a non-permanent caravan or mobile home site (currently under review)
- in accommodation provided by your employer (such as seasonal workers, 'service occupiers', security guards, building caretakers)
- in a building where you are acting as a property guardian
- in business premises, such as a pub or hotel, where your address is the same as the business address

Energy bills support scheme

Beware of scams—the Government will never contact you directly and ask for bank details.

Further Information

www.gov.uk/apply-energy-bill-support-if-not-automatic

www.gov.uk/apply-alternative-fuel-bill-support-if-not-automatic

Customers who do not have online access can call 0808 1753 287

www.bargee-traveller.org.uk/energy-bills-support-scheme-court-cases-started/

action.gypsy-traveller.org/page/123517/action/1

An appeal has been made on discrimination grounds to the Attorney General Rt Hon Victoria Prentice KC MP

Dear Mrs Prentis,

Energy Support Grant-Discrimination

As Attorney General, I understand it is your role to provide impartial legal advice to the ministers of HM Government.

Currently the Department of Energy and Net Zero are responsible for the current energy bills support schemes. These are, I understood, intended to support those who are living "off grid" i.e. not connected to the main electricity and gas network. There are many who live on boats in such a situation. Those who have a fixed residential mooring can apply for the grant but those who do not but cruise the waterways continually are excluded. These include retired folk on fixed incomes, coal boat operators, haulage and towage contractors, missionaries, waterways chaplains as well as those who have chosen an itinerant lifestyle as "bargee travellers". This has been covered by the press with articles in The Guardian and Observer under the headline "Left out in the cold: the Boaters locked out of fuel support". They are locked out because the website for the Alternative Fuel Payment (AFP) reads "Who cannot apply..... You cannot apply if you live: . . . on a boat as a continuous cruiser (currently under review).

I believe that this discrimination against one part of the boating community arises from a misconception that that the Canal and River Trust (CRT) licence "continuous cruisers" differently to other boats. This is not in fact the case as s17(c) of the 1995 British Waterways Act, which deals with the licensing of boats on CRT waters, provides this reason for CRT to refuse a license:

(c) either—

(i) the Board are satisfied that a mooring or other place where the vessel can reasonably be kept and may lawfully be left will be available for the vessel, whether on an inland waterway or elsewhere; or

(ii) the applicant for the relevant consent satisfies the Board that the vessel to which the application relates will be used bona fide for navigation throughout the period for which the consent is valid without remaining continuously in any one place for more than 14 days or such longer period as is reasonable in the circumstances.

The licence to use the boat on Canal and River Trust's waters is exactly the same for those with moorings and those without. It is only reasons for refusal that differ.

Those people who live on boats are in as much need of support as any other household in the country.

Please advise the Secretary of State for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy that the continued exclusion of these folk from the support that they need (AFP) is unlawful and arises from misinterpretation of the Statute. I am hopeful that this will enable the current review of the issue to be completed quickly so that these households will get their entitlement before the Local Authorities responsible for this "discretionary" payment run out of money.

Tipton-on-Cut

Come wi' me, bab, wum to Tipton-on-Cut,
the real Little Venice, reisty and wild as the midden in August.
We'll glide along Telford's fabled waterways
on board *Summat in the Waerter* or *Our Wench of Brum*.
Or like Lady Godiva, we'll trot in on an oss
who's guttling clover at the edge of the bonk.
We'll goo straight to the sweet cabbage heart of 'local':
shout 'oiright' to blokes lugging spuds in their allotments,
yawning in the dark to call centres and factories;
we'll flirt with Romeos, grooming at *Tip'N'Cut*,
sunning emselves to creosote fences down the tan shop.
We'll blow a kiss to ower bostin native wenches:
owd uns, young uns, all dolled-up,
white as bingo-china or brown as the cut,
some wi' their babbies and some wi' their bargains,
some salwaar'd in blue-pop and cherryade silk.
Come, let's raise a toast to Aynuk in *The Fountain*
or *Noah's Ark* wi' its pairs of china dogs and brass osses.
We'll ate faggits and pays, batters, baltis,
crack ower molars on *Sanjay's Black Country Scratchings*
then goo three rounds, bare-knuckle, in the Jubilee Park
wi' a lad the spit of the Tipton Slasher,
whipping off 'is trackie top in the randan,
wet wi' sweat the flavour of Banks's.
If we win, we'll give thanks at the Holy Fires Baptist,
the hallowed ground of the Tipton Ladies,
the mosque all gemmed up gold and fairyлит,
pay ower respects, wi' the owd boys,
at the crumbling altar of the BDF Steelworks.
Love, we'll gather the finest gifts of the region:
an anchor, a cow pie, a tumbling pigeon,
that metal oss that prances by the railway crossing,
a wammel in every hue under the sun!
Then we'll nightowl away in knees-up splendour:
kaylighed, singing *Oh Tiptonia*
as we lie on ower baltied bellies on the towpath
to sup the moon, like the head of a pint,
from ower cut.

From Black Country
Chatto & Windus, 2014

Glossary

wum home

cut canal

oss horse

guttling chewing

bonk bank

Aynuk Enoch traditional
Black Country comedy
character

pays grey peas

Tipton Slasher famous
Tipton bareknuckle
boxer

randan fight

Banks's Banks's Bitter

wammel dog, especially a
mongrel

kaylighed drunk

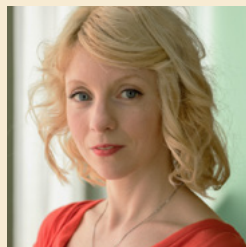


Photo: Adrian Cox

Liz Berry was born
and brought up in the
Black Country, and now
lives in Birmingham.
Black Country was a
Poetry Book Society
recommendation, winner
of the Forward Prize for
Best First Collection,
and received a Somerset
Maugham Award and the
Geoffrey Faber Memorial
Award.

Liz's latest book *The
Home Child* has just been
published.

Her narrowboat *Lizzie* is
moored on the Shroppie.

“State of the Nation” speech for the canal system

A picture of where the Canal and River Trust stands, summarised from guest speaker Richard Parry’s words at the HNBC meeting in March 2023.

Richard Parry gave tributes to the boaters present for their contributions which showed their passion about the waterways.

He said that at the 10th year anniversary, the concept of Canal and River Trust taking waterways out of government control has proven to be successful. There is a huge amount to do, but Parry suggests that CRT have the right approach, that growth in volunteering and involving more people in the waterways is seen as success. We face the toughest future in the history of the waterways.

There have always been financial challenges, but those in the next few years will come from rising construction and energy costs, and salaries. Emerging costs from the Building Remediation Act are an unknown but large risk. Income increase at 2% is not remotely matching outgoings increasing at 10% and many contracts do not account for inflation.

Cutbacks are in progress to account for losses. Reports are an attempt to keep boaters informed as to where money is spent, with approval sought. Surveys over the last year have tried to establish the main users of the network.

Around one thousand people responded to a consultation about Customer Service Facilities, which will be reduced as they are a major expenditure. A core set of facili-

ties will be available and supported at suitable intervals, with showers, washing machines and “some other facilities” not included. The current survey on boat licences aims to assess responses from boaters, and whatever the result, licences will be raised to make up the income shortfall. The survey will examine the cost of licences for widebeams and other boats with and without a home mooring.

Water resources are an important issue for the canal network; critical for boating. The early part of 2022 left reservoirs part full, exacerbated by the dry summer and ongoing repair work. The Leeds and Liverpool Canal water level suffered badly last year and led to restricted navigation.

Since last year all water extraction licences have been brought under the Environment Agency licensing system. There has been a technical problem at support level. The EA is imposing conditions that will make it more onerous to extract water. Some decisions will be appealed, but in general the transfer to EA was successful.

Since the near-failure of the Todbrook Reservoir there has been a huge amount of focus on safety and creation of industry standards. CRT has the oldest reservoirs in the country, which coupled with location makes them some of the highest risk sites. Parry said that CRT is con-

scious now of the level of investment required, not just for reservoirs, but also canals as affected by climate change. The current expenditure of £25m pounds a year is likely to increase.

Once reservoirs are assessed as safe, the money will be used to tackle safety of embankments, cuttings and culverts. This will form the major infrastructure expenditure which needs £25-30m per year extra, just to stand still.

There is a major lock gate replacement plan, caused by the similar times of the restoration and reopening of canals. Todbrook Reservoir is currently the major expenditure, over budget because of planning delays, inflation, and reservoir regulations. Work is now moving forward. Other major projects include Harthill, supplying Chesterfield. Reservoir engineers inspect and issue a report on the safety and construction of reservoirs, which CRT has to legally comply with. There is small bit of good news: Kier is now not the only contractor. JM Bentley will cover the north, and a second tier of smaller companies will compete on cost. Creation of better project management and cost control will improve maintenance of the network.

Parry went on to repeat that income is not keeping up with expenditure. Fundraising made some progress in the first ten years, but is believed could be improved by employing a fundraising director. What is now £7-8m per annum needs to increase to £25m in the next decade. The fifteen year government grant through the Defra has allowed a good start, but because of climate change and inflation it is insufficient to allow progress. It is set to decline as a result of inflation, and there is no resolution of what will happen when the agreement comes to an

end. If the grant is cut, the existing network of two thousand miles of canals and supporting reservoirs will still be there, and a risk to the local population.

With lack of investment there will be no benefit to the millions of people who now enjoy the waterways, walkers, fishermen, boaters, or to the ecology. Without being too alarmist Parry stated that government doesn't seem to understand that without investment the network will deteriorate beyond control.

Pension provision for employees is still required. Private borrowing expanded CRT's capacity to do more. It created more income but has to be repaid. The case which will be presented to government has been prepared by the same advisers employed by the government, using the same methods, with benefits shown to be returned in excess of investment.

There is a £4.6bn social welfare and £1.5m economic benefit to keeping canals open. There should have been a grant review in year 10, but Defra missed the target. CRT expects a review "within weeks" and a decision shortly after. Defra "stopped listening" around Easter last year, maybe they had no answers to CRT's case. They have suggested the best option they will offer is a continuing lower than inflation grant that will decline further in five years.

The rate of decrease is unknown, any reduction will badly affect the network. CRT will not be able to support and maintain the same size network as we currently enjoy. Parry admitted that it is not in great condition now, but will get worse if the Defra grant is reduced.

CRT will continue to try to get support from government. Parry said that he pointed out to government ministers that the biggest single thing they could do to support

their 'access to green country' plan is to keep the canal network open. This would benefit the most deprived and assist with 'levelling up'.

A sustainable future plan will be created, depending on the outcome

of the grant review. Whatever else happens, there will be a general election before the end of the grant agreement, so work will continue to inform politicians of all parties. We will continue to build our case.



Questions arising from the presentation.

- It was confirmed some facilities will go, eg showers, washing machines and maybe some disposal sites where there is easy access to alternatives, not necessarily owned by CRT.
- The increasing cost of maintaining reservoirs was mentioned, having to act on the findings of reservoir inspectors. RP gave cost indications of ~£20m for Toddbrook—although it has in fact already cost £37m, this figure may include specialists fees. Hartshill is expected to cost another £10m pounds, or thereabouts, to bring up to the required standard.
- CRT are expecting a great growth in fundraising over the next 10 years from the new fundraising director! The graph showing this predicted income just rose and rose off the page! Unlikely, I suspect during a period of austerity.
- There are apparently 'challenging' times ahead. Parry thinks that Defra will give them another 10 years of grant but at a reduced rate. We should know in the next few weeks, how many times have we heard that?
- Parry commented he was sure the problems arising from charity status and the ONS will be resolved with CRT retaining charity status. One positive of this being finally sorted is that maybe Defra will no longer be able to intervene on some aspects. David Orr with his housing association background has come across this problem before and has been very helpful to CRT's resolution of the problem.
- Parry said, yet again, that the new owners of listed CRT properties will look after them. He added that any money raised from sales of listed CRT property is not allowed to be spent on canal maintenance but had to be invested instead.
- It sounds very much like CRT have decided to charge Continuous Cruisers more for their licence from an answer he gave about how roving traders would be treated. If they are without a home mooring, they will be charged like Continuous Cruisers.
- Displaying your licence—not necessary as long as the checker can see your boat reg. number. But display it if you can!

They doth restore too much, methinks—or do they?

THE RESTORATION QUESTION

Paul Monahan ponders the pros and cons of historic boat ownership

I jointly own (with my wife) a motorised, shortened, rebottomed and converted ex-horseboat, so why should I write this? In mitigation, I hope that some will remember that we also used to own, load, and work in trade, a reasonably tidy pair of unconverted ex-GUCCC boats, but keeping and using three boats eventually proved just too testing—and expensive.

It is important to say that it is not my intention to upset my many

boatbuilding, repairing, and restoring friends, nor do I wish in any way to belittle their work, or lose their friendship. I recognise their skill, craftsmanship and dedication—even if I cannot emulate it.

I also try to differentiate between ‘preservation’, ‘conservation’ and ‘restoration’. Each term has a specific meaning but, for our purposes it is sufficient to consider them as a sliding scale from ‘preservation’ (which seeks to keep all the original fabric,

‘T__’ in Coventry Basin
1988

Photo Diana Monahan



not necessarily in working order) to 'restoration,' which can include replacing much of the original material, but 'in the spirit of the original.' This article is not intended to include wooden boats, which are very special and very important. We all know that these need regular maintenance, including replacement of timbers.

Why is an old boat special?

There are as many answers to this question as there are owners, but most would agree that there is more to them than just 'any old iron.' In the early days of pleasure boating, ex-carrying boats provided a cheap way, often the only way, to get afloat.

Gradually that changed; now old boats can be more expensive than new, and the cost of the careful and skilful maintenance required far exceeds any increase in resale price. However, owners of old boats clearly do not equate 'price' with 'value,' or we would not be doing this work; so there must be another factor in play. Part of this, at least for ourselves, is to be able to experience the canal system in a way as close as we can to how the canals were used in the past; to learn exactly why strapping stumps or holding-back pins were placed where they are; to open gates with a mast line; even to work a loaded pair through a lock flight using a long line.

We will never be able to recreate some aspects of boating life, but to understand properly the workings and traditions of the canals can only increase our enjoyment of them. The second major factor is that by looking after an historic boat we can pass on an irreplaceable piece of history to future generations, so that they in turn may be more able to understand the ways in which these boats and the canals were built and used. To achieve that aim, these boats

need caring for.

What is this restoration, anyway?

When carrying boats were built, the design life of the boat was perhaps thirty years. Even the youngest are now over sixty years old, with the ex-Grand Unions approaching ninety and many Fellows's over a century. Obviously therefore, any old boat will need significant maintenance.

There is often talk of 'restoring' a boat, but how much is too much? Again, everyone will have a different answer, but I think there are three ways to look at this:

- As cheap as possible
- As new as possible
- As good as possible.

There may be times when the only realistic option is the first; one hopes that this is seen as a holding stage until a more appropriate job can be done. The second option is that preferred by some; it is the one which is likely to give the longest time until further work is needed, but at what cost to the history of the boat? New steel is necessary at some times and in some places, but it can happen that the character of the boat—that indefinable 'something' which makes it special—is lost forever if whole sections are replaced with new.

The last option—as good as possible—is for me the only one. Yes, it will be the most expensive, but I have already argued that 'price' does not equal 'value' and that is especially evident with ownership of historic craft. It would be inappropriate to cite examples of what I see as good or bad practice, but perhaps a story of one of our boats would help.

Some years ago, I was winding the motor in Coventry basin, when a smartly-dressed middle-aged woman remarked to my wife, who was stood watching on the bank, "That's the 'T__' ain't it." Unexceptional, but

the boat's cabin was newly painted with no signwriting! Astonished, my wife asked how she knew, and was told, "Me Dad put those dents in the back end, got stemmed-up goin' round the Parks at night." We invited her on, where she explained that the drawer in the tables-cupboard had been removed and a hanging-rail installed so that she "could hang up my long dresses." The next surprise was when she told us about the drawing-pin holes above the bed-hole where she had "put up my Beatles posters." Trivia perhaps to some, but what a fascinating glimpse into the life of a

teenage girl on the boats in the early 60s, and all this only came about because of the dents remaining in the counter.

We are so pleased that this boat, which became near-derelict in the years after we sold it, has been reborn after some of the most painstaking and detailed conservation work. As much as possible of the original has been retained, and the boat is now back in regular trade. The dents, the drawing-pin holes and the dress-hanging rail are still there to delight both the current owner and future generations!



Essential Facilities

CJ Green would like to get rid of her rubbish and fill with water

As boat owners or, as Canal and River Trust like to call us, customers, what services do you require? What facilities would you consider to be essential?

I ask you because the minimum standard for Customer Service Facilities (CSF), is due to be announced before the end of January. Now I'm all for consultation but I worry about the phrase minimum standard as it has connotations of 'No More!'

Before you call me cynical, I'd like you to think back to early 2022. You may remember that in March CRT stated all CSFs would be inspected and only after the inspection concluded would any necessary refurbishment work begin. The findings were originally due by the end of August, got delayed and then van-

ished into the ether and a National Consultation announced instead. In the mean time, although CSFs continued to be repaired, any proposed refurbishments were put on hold.

In November, following a number of complaints about broken Elsan disposal points. I noted 33 CSF notices on the CRT website. Whilst the majority of issues were repaired within 7 days, several remained out of order months after the initial notice. For example, both the Elsan disposal point at Cowley on the Grand Union and the facilities at Camp Hill on the Grand Union were still closed after being vandalised in early March and they remain shut as I type.

So back to my initial question. What facilities do you consider essential? I assume everyone will agree that clean drinking water is the top

CRT can be contacted through canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us/ways-to-contact-us

Or you can email the National Operations Property Manager Stephen.Bosworth@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Consultations canalrivertrust.org.uk/national-consultations



Caught in the wild; a working water tap

Photo: Roger Kidd



Boater's facilities at Litherland

Photo: Christine Johnstone

of the list. Water points should have standardised fittings, be in good working order and have enough pressure so you can refill your tank within the allotted time frame and maybe even have a shower while you are at it; especially since it's looking increasingly likely that showers will not be included as the minimum standard.

Rubbish disposal is surely another essential. How many times have you sorted out the recycling from the detritus only to find when you do finally reach a rubbish point, the skips are overflowing and there's no separate recycling bins? I mean if we want to help Save the Planet then surely CRT need to up their game? There's no point boasting about Green Credentials or the possibilities of Electrical Charge Points if you can't get the basics right.

At present I'm on the Middlewich Branch and there is nowhere along this lovely canal to dispose of rubbish. The nearest places are on the Shroppie at Calveley & Nantwich or

on the Trent & Mersey at Wheelock & Anderton). I acknowledge this is a rural canal, which makes refuse collection tricky, but there is road access above Cholmondeston Lock—where you will also find the only water point on the branch. It would make sense to locate a bin store here especially since the one at Barbridge closed 'temporarily' in March 2020 and has never re-opened.

This is where we come in. For the new minimum standard to work then the facilities provided must meet boaters' requirements. It is important we report any faults immediately to the Canal and River Trust using their online Contact Us form so repairs are undertaken quickly.

If you know of any outstanding issues then why not email the National Operations Property Manager directly? After all he may not be aware of the matter when it remains unresolved. Together we can turn a minimum standard into a maximum benefit for boaters.

Rita the mooring meter maid

48 hours to... **Ian Hutson** is in a corporate spin

When was the last time you felt positively welcomed, felt yourself to be the focus of Canal Company efforts? When was the last time you just heard some good news? Perennially increasing licence fees, “administration charges”, overstay “charges”, booking restrictions, a refusal to deal in cash, cancelled “winter works”, Defra funding that’s looking increasingly like an ancient memory... and, we’re told, it’s all our fault.

The Canal Company as a corporate system manoeuvres more sluggishly than the biggest of oil tankers. Industry at large learned the bitter lessons of “outsourcing” decades ago and yet CRT are ploughing on, throwing away in-house skills and experience, hiving off ever greater portions of their work and of public money to the world of additional third-party profit margins, scant control, and ill-written long-term contracts.

Sensitive as ever and with insolvency hanging in the air, CRT announce a raft of new appointments with £100k+ salaries, pensions, health insurance, company cars and—insensitivity of insensitivities—even discounted staff boat licences. Not for hands-on roles, but for “diversity” and “communication”, building an empire of laptop-based things that they feel familiar with rather than of the real-world things that they should know about, such as dredging.

Anglers, ramblers, and lumpen lycra-skinned velocipedists are welcomed with open arms and wide smiles. The estimates of public “vis-

iting” the towpaths put even the most rushed arithmetic to shame. Boaters meanwhile are made to feel increasingly guilty for cruising the system and akin to some sort of low-grade persistent criminal if they have the temerity to moor up. We’ve got “green spaces”, but the only thing that boaters are increasingly finding is fewer and fewer mooring spaces.

Hundreds of moorings removed on the say so of the minor political classes, charges introduced so that folk in newly built houses won’t have to suffer the fragrant company of those for whom £10-£25 per night is out of the financial question. What moorings do somehow, miraculously remain are being cut and cut again in terms of time boaters are allowed to spend on them. The fourteen day mooring will soon be consigned to history. Seven days, five days, three days, a slippery slope leading inexorably to two days and then one day maximum, faux-consultation by faux-consultation.

Does this in any way benefit boaters? Does it 'eckaslike. So who do these restrictions benefit? Is it really pure happenstance that a one-day mooring has up to fourteen times the “overstay charge” potential and thus fourteen times the available profit margin of the more correct fourteen day mooring time? Who could possibly want such potential in place before signing a contract? Hmm... I wonder. Does anyone know of any such company—perhaps even one with a ripe reputation—that has already dipped its toe experimentally into mooring enforcement? Answers on a postcard please. Or on the back of a parking ticket.



Rewind

Issue No 1 2008

Howard Anguish reviews NABO News from 15 years ago.

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS



As mentioned last month, here are some points raised in the membership questionnaire from 2008 which may still have relevance in 2023. Some NABO members felt that NABO “tilted at too many windmills” and the questionnaire asked if NABO should identify those issues that Council should focus most of their energy.

Additionally, perennial issues like licensing, volunteering for Council, and useful skills possessed by members which could be useful to NABO. The responses certainly allowed members to give thought to how many issues were tackled by NABO. I also remember that there were additional issues under discussion at the time requiring internal housekeeping—a useful guide for any organisation and one which may be worth repeating occasionally in an organisation such as NABO.

Share boating BW were rumoured to be consulting with APCO about changes to licensing in relation to shared ownership boats, which appeared to conflict with a recent Ombudsman’s ruling against BW’s policy of charging shared ownership boats private rates when they were wholly owned with no commercial interests. NABO asked to be included in the consultation process and, as the

council member and a share boater, I recollect that we persuaded BW not to go ahead with this potential unfair increase in licence charges.

Mooring tendering BW were also firmly committed to changes in their procedure for allocating moorings, from an existing and well-established waiting list system, to a tendering process, leading to opposition by boat owners.

Despite protests from boat owners and especially from NABO, BW had issued a consultation process timetable, set out in this edition; this led to NABO advising members some points to ponder if they wished to contribute to the consultation process, which was expected to issue its conclusions in early October 2008.

Help! Despite much encouragement and pleas from the current NABO chair, he was again issuing a call for someone to come forward to take up the reins as chairman when he steps down later in the year, so he again set out many of the varied duties involved, and pointed out the dangers of NABO becoming rudderless if no-one steps forward before the upcoming AGM later in 2008.

Finally, an interesting invitation from Adrian Stott, with an invitation to NABO members to participate in a scheme, already set up by the DBA. The national scheme exists allowing its members to purchase propane at a healthy discount from normal retail prices. DBA were keen to get a view on whether NABO members would be willing to join. I was unaware of this scheme and wonder if many NABO members took advantage of the offer?

What should we concentrate on?

- Mooring auction issues
- Red Diesel
- More Central Government funding
- Control of Vegetation
- Lobbying MP’s & Licencing authorities
- Work with other boating organisations and societies
- Possible merger with IWA/RBOA
- Vandalism issues
- Practical advice to members
- Customer Service standards
- Canal Maintenance
- Dredging (or lack of)
- Recycling
- NABO News

Put on Back Burner or Scrap

- NABO Web Site—reduce or scrap
- Crime reporting
- Boat Safety Scheme issues
- Local Navigation issues
- Red Diesel

Letters to the Editor

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

More regulations to make the mind boggle

Having read the latest report from our Chairman concerning the production of a proposed IET-sponsored guide to electrical systems on board I am somewhat exasperated. Under the heading “240 volt standards for boats” the Chairman says the document is designed to be readable by those with limited technological knowledge. He then continues to refer to on-board use of Lithium-based batteries. It seems, therefore that this proposed publication will cover all AC and DC systems.

In the emailed briefing recently received we are told that the draft guidance extends to more than 200 pages!!

What such a set of guidance will do to the complexity and cost of a Boat Safety inspection, I shudder to think.

NABO members expect the Association to be on their side, not consorting with the Chairman's previous employer.

Incidentally, although the topic refers to 240 volt AC, the actual nominal voltage is 230 volts and has been for many years. Perhaps the IET boffins need to be informed!

Stephen Peters (Past NABO Council member)

Response from Chairman Mike Rodd

I was sad to read Stephen's message. As he knows I am a professional Electrical Engineer and also was a qualified home electrical wiring installer. I own and maintain a narrow boat and also maintain a 50 seater public trip boat. I worked as a Director of my Professional Institution, then the IEE (now IET) and have always been a supporter of their internationally-recognised Wiring Regulations which keep us and our homes and offices safe. But not our boats!!

My personal concern relates to the increasing extent of AC being used on boats and in most cases being treated as if it was as non-dangerous as 12V. I also became aware of the horrendous issues with Lithium-based batteries! I was aware of the various EU and USA electrical standards,

but they are largely unreadable and certainly ignored, at least on most private boats. Also, it was clear to me that most of the DIY books covering electrical systems in boats are thin on detail—and in some cases are simply wrong! I quietly asked around and found that many knowledgeable boaters, most boater organisations, boat insurers, etc shared my concerns. Hence my personal approach to the IET—whose regulations only apply up to the point where we plug in our AC feeds to our boats. After their careful assessment of the needs for guidelines, they agreed to undertake this work and retained some very experienced experts to draft the book. We also invited an extensive group of interested persons to oversee the text and, at a recent meeting of this group, were very positive. The text will soon go out for external assessment.

Mike Rodd

Upcoming meetings:

Navigation Advisory Group

12 April 2023, 10:30am to 3:30pm TBC

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

Disabled Boater Forum

19 April 2023, 4pm to 6pm online

Canal and River Trust West Midlands User Forum

11 May 2023, 6pm to 8pm, Venue TBC, potentially online

Navigation Advisory Group

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

Disabled Boater Forum

21 June 2023, 4pm to 6pm—online

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