



# NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners  
Issue 5 October 2023



**Boat Licence Fee  
Changes**

**Energy Bill Support  
Scheme**

**NABO AGM**



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# NABO News

The magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners

**Issue 5 October 2023**



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## Next NABO News copy date

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Articles, letters, photos and cartoons are most welcome. Please email your contributions to [nabonews@nabo.org.uk](mailto:nabonews@nabo.org.uk) or post to the Editor by November 2023.

## Cover photo

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Happy Days: just north of Bratch Locks on the Staffs and Worcester, Photo © Steve Teratsia.

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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I have now finished my summer cruise and am pleased to say back at my home mooring. It's hard not to sink into a depression, Autumn on its way, lack of funds, increasing structural failures, lack of dredging, looming canal closures.....

I started to think about the reasons behind the current demise. The system started at Wordsley, so that the Duke of Bridgewater could extract more coal from his mines and distribute it to a larger group of customers. The idea soon caught on as manufacturers saw the increased profits. The birth of the industrial revolution. All went well until the advent of the railways, offering faster and ultimately cheaper deliveries. Canal use began to decline along with the profits.

Tom Rolt bought his narrow-boat Cressy in 1939, converted it to

prioritise which canals could be kept open to preserve their way of life. The dispute led to Rolt being rather dictatorially ejected from the IWA.

With the introduction of CRT the canal network ceased to be a business and was designated a charity. That should have brought about a complete change to the business model. Although aided by government for a time, it was instructed to become a self-financing organisation.

A model is only as good as the assumptions it's built on; it can be a house of cards built on faulty predictions. The modern network is for the benefit of walkers, runners, cyclists, fisherman, canoeists/kayakers, paddle boarders and boaters.

So a lot has changed since the original formation of the IWA. There is now a plethora of organisations representing the interests of a vastly expanded group of users. Those users should be seen as customers, listened to and drive the income for CRT. In return for which they are entitled to expect good vegetation maintenance, a supply of unpolluted water in the canal, a navigable network and value for money.

The Government claimed 11 years ago the Canal & River Trust was launched on a wave of support "The new charity will give people who visit and love the waterways a greater role in making them cleaner and more beautiful than ever". "Every penny donated by the public to the Trust will be spent directly on conserving, restoring, and enhancing the waterways." and yet we face canal closures again, I find it quite hard to say it's been an unqualified success.

The fundamental questions of what to preserve, how to maintain what we have and where the funds come from needs to be reviewed by a team that includes all the user 'communities'.

Enjoy the canals while you can....

## Autumn reflections

Editor **John Sadler** meditates on the latest symptoms of decay and failure.

a home and travelled 400 miles. He then wrote "Narrow Boat", about his travels, published in 1944. The fact that it has never been out of print indicates the passion for canal life. It's publication led to the meeting with Robert Aickman and the formation of the Inland Waterways Association (IWA), a fighting force for the maintenance of the network.

In 1947, under the post-World War II Labour government, Britain's canals were nationalised, later to become British Waterways. The IWA started its campaign but Aickman began to have policy disagreements with Rolt. Aickman wanted to campaign to keep all of the waterways open as leisure resources, whereas Rolt had sympathies with the traditional canal workers and believed it necessary to



**A**s we highlighted in the last edition of Nabo News, a major part of our Council's work is currently dedicated to supporting the vital and ongoing "Fund Britain's Waterways" campaign.

At NABO's instigation, and with over 70 organisations now on board, this initiative is being led by a small steering group with membership from NABO, IWA, AWCC, British Marine and the RYA, under the chairmanship of Les Etheridge, IWA National Chair, which meets every few weeks and is actively planning an ambitious programme of events. The support of the IWA is proving vital, as they have generously committed some of their paid staff to the programme, enabling us to undertake a far wider range of activities, to reach out more widely than would otherwise have been feasible. Whilst IWA are generously picking up their own staffing costs, contributions have been made by the Royal Yachting Association, the Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs, NABO, and the IWA.

It is important to reiterate how vital this programme is. As you will now know, the government has made some concessions in extending the grant to CRT, some level of funding will continue to be given. However, the amount is not indexed and is actually scheduled to decrease rapidly, ultimately, to zero, over the next few years. So, what is being done to bring this to the attention, not only of those in power, but also of the wider public?

- The seed funding from our member organisations is being used to produce campaign materials. Copies of window stickers can be downloaded from the FBW website [waterways.org.uk/fund-britains-waterways/fbw-resources](http://waterways.org.uk/fund-britains-waterways/fbw-resources), do you have yours?

- A widely distributed petition (with almost 50,000 signatures already) is being circulated, and is planned for presentation to the Prime Minister early next year. Please sign it if you have not already done so [waterways.org.uk/fund-britains-waterways](http://waterways.org.uk/fund-britains-waterways)

- The first public event was held on Sunday 13th August with a campaign cruise in Birmingham with nearly 50 boats filling the canal outside the Mailbox. There was extensive press and media coverage, the BBC and ITV, local radio stations and several national newspapers, particularly the Guardian, all helping to swell the petition numbers getting the message across to MPs etc.



## Fund them or lose them.

Chairman **Mike Rodd** feels the pressure mount as the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign gathers momentum.

- A follow-up event to the Birmingham cruise was held at Gloucester docks by an offshoot "Fund Gloucester Docks", on the 30th September. [waterways.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Rally-Flyer.pdf](http://waterways.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Rally-Flyer.pdf)

- Crucially, we are attempting to engage with members of both Houses of Parliament. We and/or our member organisations have written to most of them, and where possible have held direct discussions. What is notable is that there is huge ignorance of how the waterways are funded, and how crucial government support is!! Attendance at the various Party Conferences was initially muted, but it was felt that the costs involved in show-

ing a powerful presence were too high and, quite frankly, the advice we were given was that most senior MPs attend only briefly. The feeling is that we would do better to approach them more directly. Again, there is considerable scope here for individuals, as well as groups, to make their voices heard.

- The next major event will be another campaign cruise in November, this time to the Palace of Westminster. This will be similar to the one in January 2007, which also sought to effect changes in Government policies. Thirty-one boats played a crucial role in that venture, and most of them have already agreed to be involved this time around too.

I do understand, however, that some boaters may feel conflicted about this initiative. We are, sadly, encountering some objections—mainly from boaters who are deeply concerned by the present sad state of the canals and hence feel that they cannot support CRT in any way. Regrettably, this includes some very well-known TV personalities, as well as some organisations claiming to represent liveaboard boaters.

I do have to say that—from my own experience on both the K&A and the Mon & Brec—I can fully understand people's reservations. I have never seen the K&A so desperately overgrown, such that in places our public trip boat cannot pass another largish boat without going aground. And every time I take our volunteer-run trip boat out from Hungerford we are delayed by up to 30 minutes by a lock that has had a broken top gate paddle for almost three years.

Nevertheless, we are between a rock and a hard place! As we have repeatedly said in the past, whilst NABO is deeply concerned that

CRT is not currently maintaining the canals effectively, there is simply no "Plan B"—and certainly no possibility of a return to the days of BWB!! We simply have to appreciate that CRT is here to stay, and that we need to get them funded effectively, or things will simply go from bad to worse! They need proper funding if there is to be any hope of the system being properly cared for.

**However**, there is going to have to be a quid pro quo in all of this! If it is primarily through the goodwill and the concerted efforts of boaters that proper funding is made available to care for the waterways, then in return we have to convince the bodies who receive that funding (including, of course, CRT) that they need to get their act together to keep our waterways in an acceptable condition.

And a vital component of that is that they should listen to those who know the waterways inside out, use them most, and understand them best—largely, those self-same boaters! This isn't any sort of NIMBY-ism—we want the waterways and the associated facilities to be in peak condition for the well-being of all those who enjoy and depend on them—but we are uniquely positioned to offer help and advice, and the fruit of our experience.

With the current cost-of-living crisis and the fall-off in staycations now that Covid restrictions have gone, the waterways-based businesses and the tourist industry have enough of a battle on their hands right now, without being further undermined by visitor experiences being ruined by poor upkeep of the basic infrastructure. It's in ALL our interests to get this sorted!

Nevertheless, I hope you have all enjoyed a good summer on your boats—it's a wonderful waterways world out there!



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# Membership matters

David Fletcher and the Membership Team

## Logging In To NABO

Many of you sign into the web site from time to time to access NABO News, to update your membership details, or to renew membership.

Occasionally we find that members fail in this process, and this is usually because they are using the wrong sign in credentials. The most common error is to use an email address as user name. We know all this because tracking false logins is an important part of security on the web site and we can see the user name used and the number of attempts. After 3 incorrect attempts, you are locked out for short while. This is a safety mechanism to stop repeated attempts by computers or individuals trying to break in. We always block IP addresses from countries known to be in the cyber war areas, or those who attempt repeated false sign ins. We have almost no web traffic from abroad.

The commercial software we use is reliable and the number of times sign in is blocked though software error is very small, perhaps twice in ten years. So if this happens to you, it is most probably your credentials, not the computer's. The Captcha software can be a bit of a nuisance, but it is there to do a job, and effectively prevent computers trying to sign into membership.

Why don't we use email addresses as user names? Because it is more secure not to, but if you choose to use it at sign up, so be it. We remind you of your user name in renewal correspondence so you can find it there. Your password is your secret, and the admin cannot see it. All they can do is reset it to something else if you so wish. You can do this too but you need to sign in first, a bit catch 22.

If you have forgotten your details, there are routines for recovery, but this involves you receiving an email to the address we have on record. If you ask for a password reset and don't get an email, it is either in spam, or perhaps you have changed your email and didn't tell us. Occasionally we have trouble with BT and Outlook emails and personal email domains, who do reject emails for no reason and don't tell us.

We don't use two factor sign in at the moment. This is used by banks and the like to send a code to a mobile phone to be entered to gain access. The software is in place if we change our minds but we judge this to be unnecessary at this time.

Finally, if you are having problems, do drop us an email and we will try and sort it out.



## Welfare Officer's Report

### Six month licences

Ken Hylins reports

On attending the last council meeting there was concern about the increase in six month licences being issued across the network. I am also finding this is the case when boaters contact me.

I am concerned about these increases so please contact Canal and River Trust|(CRT) to

discuss why you have been put on such a licence if you feel it is unjustified. I can be contacted on the NABO platform to give help and guidance to resolve these issues.

I can also contact CRT on your behalf to resolve such issues.

# Fly on the wall

Observes proceedings at the Council meeting in September.

## NABO Calendar 2023

The remaining Council meetings in 2023 will be on the 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.

The first item in the agenda was a discussion about the progress and activities in the current campaign

## Fund Britain's Waterways

Mike Rodd reported that there are meetings of the steering group every two weeks and the IWA Chief Executive is giving good leadership from his position of long experience of waterways.

- A Birmingham protest cruise from 12 -14 August was held and attended by over 40 boats, including Peter Braybrook's. David Fletcher was there on the bank.
- A petition, currently with approx 42,000 signatures, will be presented to Downing Street. It is necessary to get the message out as widely as possible.
- A website is set up within the IWA website.
- A cruise to Westminster is planned for November depending on permissions. A large amount of effort is being put into the Westminster cruise. There will not be lobbying at the political party conferences as this is very expensive.
- It was reported that the situation with EA is even worse than with CRT. The EA funding has been very much reduced.

It is envisaged that Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) will be a very long term campaign and will include approaches to opposition parties.

After discussion it was agreed to continue doing what we can to get the message out.

## Calor Gas situation

A NABO Report and discussion on action. A survey, which has been extended has already received many responses.

On the inland waterways the main problem now is availability of 13kg propane. It was concluded that Calor is an untrustworthy company and we need, as a community, to get away from them. It is surprising that British Marine are not more active as many hire companies and marinas are unaware of the problems.

There are shortages of bottles in various places. There is a real concern that boaters are doing dangerous things. Some pictorial evidence has been submitted to CRT but there appears to be little enforcement action taking place to stop it. We encourage CRT to take notice and investigate the extent of the problem. Photos help and can be submitted to the BSS who will be able to identify non-compliant arrangements. Some larger 19kg cylinders are available readily from builders merchants but do not fit on many boats. Self re-filling is a becoming a real safety problem. It was suggested that a social media post can be produced.

David suggested that Flogas is a real alternative and available form B & Q and other garden centres, although these are generally not next to canals.

## Fuel payments for continuous cruisers.

CRT have persuaded the government to use their data on continuous



cruisers. The payments of £600 roll out from this month. Liveboards on leisure moorings still appear to be excluded. Traders might be included but so far CRT have resisted this. This will be taken up with Matthew Symonds at the next meeting.

### Meetings with CRT

**Boaters Rep Meeting:** There has been no recent meeting. The next one is 12 October and NABO will join on line.

**Regional Meetings:** There have not been any. We expect a West Midlands forum to be arranged for November.

**CRT Stoppage and Winter Works programme:** This has now been published and will be updated regularly. It was noted that there is still not notice of dredging which is sporadic and comes up without notice. David asked for details which he will share with the Historic Boats Association who are active in getting canals dredged.

**Media & Publicity:** There is a lot of communication about facilities that are not working and infrastructure failures such as paddles and locks. The Fund Britain's Waterways details are going out. Anne reported that we have passed the 4000 members on Facebook. Instagram has 81 followers.

**Welfare Officer's Report:** Ken Hylins is dealing with cases concerning bereavement and benefits. He has also had dealings with Cheshire East Council concerning Council Tax. He is also helping with a case of licence restriction because of lack of movement. This particular case mirrors movement that Ken has done himself.

There was a considerable discussion about continuous mooring and

the need for enforcement. It was noted that CRT's sightings often do not reflect the true movement of boats.

There have been very few formal meetings. with the EA Mike Rodd emphasised worries about funding.

Particularly the Thames has had serious cutbacks.

### User groups

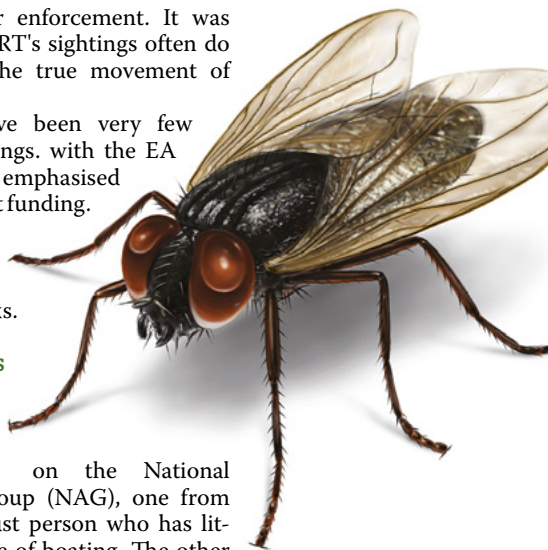
There have been two new appointments on the National Advisory Group (NAG), one from a K & A Trust person who has little experience of boating. The other new member is a woman who has been a continuous cruiser on the Mon & Brec. Anne said that she is now moving about the system.

### A new chair for the BSS

It was reported that the new Chair of the Technical Committee of the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) is making an impact and is prioritising matters, particularly electrical matters.

There is an electrical subcommittee concerning the complicated issues of significant electrical 240V installations. The new IET document will be published in November. NABO will attend the BSS AC later in the month. It was asked how many fires are due to the electrical systems. This is unknown. The question is risk.

The troubles that are evident in the use of gas bottles and electrical systems will fuel the argument to move the inspection interval to two years or less.



## The Calor Gas problem

# NABO and Calor

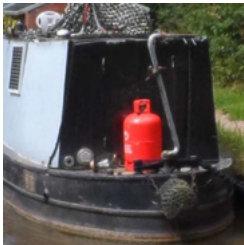
### Calor's official details

Calor Gas Limited,  
Athena House, Athena  
Drive, Tachbrook Park,  
Warwick CV34 6RL

### Calor Gas Survey

We sent a link last month for a survey on Calor gas. [smartsurvey.co.uk/s/N2P3BF](https://smartsurvey.co.uk/s/N2P3BF)

We have about 1600 responses at the moment but the bulk are from the coastal fleets. NABO has paid to extend the survey for another month to try and get the number up over 2000 for something more statistically meaningful. Please take part if you are affected, with any issues with Calor.



How Not to Do It

**W**e continue to work on The Calor gas situation, coordinating with other user groups to share information and apply pressure.

The small 3.9 and 4.5kg cylinders are virtually unobtainable, and the 6 and 13 kg propane are as rare as hens teeth. Retail outlets rarely get what they need and are fed up with answering the phone to customers ringing around in search of a refill.

Last month we wrote to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) setting out the position on both the small and larger bottles. The complaint is similar to that of two years ago during lock down. CMA respond to the volume of complaints so you have had difficulty getting gas, please write to CMA here [www.gov.uk/guidance/contact-the-cma](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/contact-the-cma)

Amongst a number of suggestions, we asked CMA to consider if Calor are a fit and proper company to sell bottled gas.

Our advice is still to move away from Calor if at all possible. It is very clear that Calor have no respect for the way they have cornered the market for boating, and are incapable of meeting the market demand. Their only way forward is to collectively move to other suppliers. It may appear expensive to move to say Flogas, and pay another bottle hire, but remaining with Calor will in our view just get more problematic and expensive.

If you are a big user, the best solution is most likely to buy at least one of the special user refillable bottles. A high cost, but the gas is cheaper.

But there are other impacts.

From observations this summer we are alarmed at the number of boats storing gas bottles in a manner not compliant with BSS requirements. We estimate that are 500 boats on the system in this condition. Are boaters stock piling for the winter? We have asked CRT to consider and will be pushing this issue at BSS and regular meetings. The rules are very simple. Boats have to comply with the BSS safety requirements all the time, not just when being inspected. Putting a 6kg bottle in a locker sized for 3.9kg is dangerous. Carrying extra cylinders, either full or empty on the fore or aft deck is also not allowed and dangerous for everyone. BSS makes no restriction between a full or empty cylinder. All must be stored in accordance with the requirements.

We have seen from BSS meetings, a steady increase in the examination failure rates. Navigation Authorities are concerned and are thinking that boaters cannot be trusted to maintain their boats between examinations. This moves quickly to shortening the current 4 year period. Naturally we are alarmed because this could easily result in a doubling of BSS costs for all. A widespread problem with gas bottles on deck plays straight into this discussion. Do boaters not know, or not care about their safety and that of others? We can be sure that there is a direct link between boaters who do not take proper care over safety issues, and the future of BSS costs for everyone. If we think costs of safety compliance are high, the alternative could be the costs of an explosion.

# A little history

What the Government said when CRT was launched.

**A** £1bn deal to transfer England and Wales's canals and rivers to a new charity is a good deal for the taxpayer, the Government said.

Environment Minister Richard Benyon announced on June 12, 2012 that the new Canal & River Trust will receive £1.26bn-worth of funding over the next 15 years.

The deal will see England and Wales's 200-year-old network of canals and rivers pass from public ownership to a new body dubbed the 'national trust for the waterways'.

The Holyrood Government has decided Scotland's canals stay in public ownership.

## The Defra press release, June 12 2012

More than 2,000 miles of historic canals and rivers across England and Wales are being handed over to the Canal & River Trust today in a move to get communities more involved in their local waterways.

The new charity, whose Patron is the Prince of Wales, will give the 10 million people who visit and love the waterways a greater role in making them cleaner and more beautiful than ever.

To mark its launch, the Trust has unveiled its first appeal, 50 projects across the nation that will breathe new life into towpaths and riverbanks. By pledging money or time people can get involved in projects such as creating new habitat for rare water voles, planting linear orchards for people and wildlife, and restoring neglected towpaths.

The Trust aims to build upon



Canal & River Trust

the public passion for the nation's canals which rescued them from dereliction and decline in the last century, through increased fundraising, volunteering and community involvement.

Defra is helping the new charity get off to a great start by committing to a landmark, 15-year grant funding agreement as the bedrock to help the Trust maintain its waterways. In addition, the Trust is funded through commercial income including money from its waterside property dowry, boat licences and moorings. Every penny donated by the public to the Trust will be spent directly on conserving, restoring, and enhancing the waterways.

Minister for the Cabinet Office, Francis Maude, said:

"This Government is determined to deliver public services in different, better ways and that's just what this new charity will do. The Canal & River Trust will empower the very people who know British canals and waterways the best to get involved in how they are run.

This is the Big Society in action - and because it's also the largest single transfer of a public body into the charitable sector, it's also a major milestone in our programme to reform quangos."



“Right since its first appeal there is no mention of maintaining navigable waterways, it may be easier to raise funds for a fish bypass than regular maintenance.”

## Moorings under review

## To moor or not to moor

CRT's pricing methods & winter mooring fees, a warning from **Jess Good**.

I used to have a permanent mooring and because my neighbours and I loved it so much, no one ever left. CRT assessed it as 'no churn' and said that the price was too low because no one ever left. Well, dear reader, I did eventually get 'churned off' by the price hikes CRT brought in, from £2k to £12.5k in 16 years!

Now I'm up North ccing, and for the last 2 years I booked winter moorings in my gritty working class hometown. The sole reason— it's near my elderly parent's house. There are no permanent moorings in this town so I cc in the summer and moor here for the winter. 2023 would have been the final winter to book our winter mooring; my father is dying in a nursing home, the house will be sold in the spring and my mother is moving to Scarborough. We will continue to cc up here because we love it.

In 2021 I paid £400 for my winter mooring, it was in Band 1. Barely anyone ever booked that site and we were alone apart from an overstaying leisure boat that had been there so long it was on Google Earth. He eventually got a section 8 (after 4 years) and we towed him to a boatyard where he remains on hardstanding, peacefully rotting away.

CRT noticed I'd booked this winter mooring, deemed it too cheap and moved it up to the next Band.

In 2022 I paid Band 2 £600 (with a discount—it would've been about £660). That year there were 3 of us, all winter. Yes dear reader, we made

some friends. It was awesome, we shared a coal delivery, we helped each other. But the whole winter mooring was full of unlicensed boats so, before we could moor, we had to call CRT. They sent down a couple of workers to ticket and encourage them to move on. They didn't seem happy about the task. CRT noticed I'd booked the same winter mooring, deemed it too cheap and moved it up to the next Band.

It's now 2023 and I have checked the winter mooring price list. That same winter mooring is now in Band 3, £880. More expensive than at a posh town on the same canal near Leeds, which this town is not, and the same price as some much more desirable moorings down South (eg Broxbourne). To add insult to injury CRT have moved it! For the past two years, this winter mooring has always been on the 48 hours visitor mooring which is gated, floodlit, offside and private, with paving to walk down to get to it from the main road. It seems however that CRT can't be bothered to move on the unlicensed boats that are filling the 48 hours (aka 48 months) moorings, so instead they've moved the winter mooring. It is now accessed down a muddy path, through woods which are pitch dark at night and opposite a noisy factory where the whining extractor starts up at 7am. If I really didn't give a stuff and there was room, I may as well join the others, stop paying my licence and spend this winter on that secure and private mooring!

Decision made, this winter I'll be saving my £880 and ccing. As will my friends. And now CRT has an extremely expensive winter mooring site in a gritty Northern town that probably no one will ever use again. The moral of this story is, if you spot me on your mooring, be warned! My presence will make it so expensive, you'll all have to leave.

Postscript: In case you're wondering how we knew the boats were unlicensed in 2022, they were owned by young local kids who told us themselves that all but one didn't have a licence. I didn't bear them any malice, instead I saw this as CRT mismanagement. We tried to help and encourage them to cruise, we explained how it works, how you can get a Section 8, but they'd been there for ages without any issues so why should they listen to us? The sad thing is we thought two of them would actually have paid to moor there that winter, they asked my partner how to do it, but not now they've put the prices up. The kids aren't rich, these boats are their

hobbies. If CRT wants to encourage young people onto the waterways, then how is this helping them or any of us?



## Llangollen Moorings

Tom Freeland, CRT Boating & Customer Service Manager, West Midlands, gives an update

Following all of your feedback and good ideas in response to our consultation on changes at Llangollen town and basin moorings. We've now finished the consultation, taken everything on board, and shared our response on our website at [canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/west-midlands/llangollen-moorings-trial-2023](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/west-midlands/llangollen-moorings-trial-2023).

The following changes are running as a trial this year:

- Adjust the pricing to £12 per boat per night—including full access to electricity—to allow us to recover our costs.
- Provide four 5-day moorings for those need-

ing to stay longer—on pontoons in the basin nearest the feeder.

- Improved signage and leaflets on site for greater clarity on costs and stay times.
- No other changes to the moorings—all other moorings will remain at 2-day stay, with the same number of berths available, and the charge will continue to apply overnight only.
- Trial continues to run from to 31 October.

While the trial is running, we'll be looking into how we might progress some of the other ideas, including metered bollards, flexible payments and stay times, and managing the approach through the narrows.

We'll review all of these and let you know our next steps by 17 October at the latest. We'd welcome your feedback during the trial, please send your responses to [enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk) or call 0303 040 4040.

## Energy Bills Support Scheme

Matthew Symonds, Canal and River Trust's national boating manager, announced: "After months of talks with the Government, we're de-

lighted that we have been able to secure support with energy bills for those liveaboard boaters who don't have a home mooring.

### In contrast to:

### NBTA Statement on Partial Energy Grant Victory

The Department for Energy and Net Zero has finally made the Energy Support Scheme—Alternative Funding Grant available to around 7000 liveaboard itinerant boaters with boats registered on Canal and River Trust waters—below is a short statement from the National Barge Travellers Association about this development.

Pamela Smith, Chair of the National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA) said:

"After the great efforts of the NBTA and others—including the National Association of Boat Owners, Friends, Families and Travellers, Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group, London Gypsies and Travellers, and the Canal & River Trust—in campaigning for the energy grant, 7000 boaters without home moorings on Canal & River Trust waters are now finally able to receive the £600 grant.

Together, boaters have fought hard for our

community and won a victory here. This grant is not a gift from the government, but the result of concerted action and pressure to hold them to their word. The NBTA celebrates that effort and demonstrates what communities like ours can do when we come together and organise for recognition and protection of our way of life.

However, many people—including itinerant boaters on non Canal & River Trust waters, some liveaboards with a home mooring, and those living itinerantly on land—remain excluded, despite the grant being promised to every household in the UK. Of 900,000 people thought to be eligible for the grant, around 700,000 are still in limbo. The NBTA will continue to communicate with the government in support of and in solidarity with these communities to ensure that the government truly delivers on that promise."



## Just to show that Parliament supports off-gridders

There was an attempt in the House of Commons to introduce Clause 39, a regulation to extend the duties of the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority (GEMA) to the distribution and supply of fuels utilised for off-grid home heating.

The regulation was to provide for GEMA to apply a cap on the price of fuel supplied for off-grid home heating proportionate to the cap applied in respect of on-grid homes. This new clause sought to extend the duty of Ofgem to regulate off-grid fuels utilised for off-grid home heating and to ensure that a cap was applied to off-grid home fuels proportionate to the cap applied for on-grid homes.

Alas, it was rejected along party lines.

## Towpath Titter

A. Marshall

After the demise of Audlem locks a CRT spokesperson said: "We believe the problem of rot has been caused by the constant immersion of the post in water. We have alleviated this problem on the T&M by closing Toddbrook for several years and thus ensuring the posts stay dry.

The problem at Hassal Green will therefore not occur again this century, and we are planning to divert all the water from the Llangollen into the reservoir to bring the Shroppie to the same standard."

After a short pause he added: "Aren't the towpaths looking nice?" just before being flattened by two electric bikes and a six year old on a motorised scooter.

## Changes at the IWA

Professor Sarah Niblock has resigned her position as Chief Executive of the Inland Waterways Association after only three months in the job. Her work will be covered by volunteers, along with the Trustee team, in the short term.

IWA National Chair, Les Etheridge, said "IWA would like to thank Sarah for the very positive contribution she has made during her employment. This will ensure that the very important work to Protect Our Waterways, and our leading role in the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign, will continue to progress without pause. Nearly 90 organisations have now united to lobby and persuade national and local government that the benefits provided to the public by our canals and navigable rivers must be maintained without erosion through lack of investment. Many millions of people rely upon and value our inland waterways, and we must ensure they are protected."

Sarah said "It has been a pleasure working



with the IWA staff and volunteers, I am appreciative of their professionalism and delighted to have helped to bring about the media impact and strategic input which will serve IWA well in delivering its future campaigns. It became very clear to me that the scale of the challenge facing IWA along with so many other charities is significant in these times. I sincerely wish IWA every success for the next 77 years and beyond."



## The Towpath Code 14 July 2023

Canal & River Trust introduced the Towpath Code on the 14 July 2023, a simple, easy to understand guide for how to share towpaths thoughtfully and considerately.

**Remember: Share the space, Drop your pace, It's a special place.**

The following applies:

Pedestrians have priority

Cyclists must slow down for others.

Take extra care when passing people, pets and wildlife.

Respect people using the waterway for activities like angling, boating or paddle-sports.

Wheelchairs, mobility aids, cycles and legal e-bikes are allowed.

E-scooters, motorbikes, modified e-bikes and other unauthorised vehicles are not allowed.

Keep dogs under close control and clean up after them.

Take litter home.



Editor

“Major improvements observed? Don't all shout at once!”

Photo: CRT



# Now it's your turn...

## The Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Boat Owners

**Nominations** must reach us as soon as possible. Please send the General Secretary any **Resolutions** you wish put before the AGM meeting with the names of proposer and seconder as soon as possible.

Please send to:  
[gensec@nabo.org.uk](mailto:gensec@nabo.org.uk)  
or by post to;

**Peter Braybrook**  
122 Coopers Gate, Banbury,  
Oxfordshire, OX16 2WD

Now is the time for you to join the dedicated souls that make up NABO Council and stand for election for 2023–2024, so you can have even more say in what we do.

The Council meets around seven times per year and the work is rewarding and interesting... and occasionally frustrating. You'll learn what goes on behind the scenes and make new friends into the bargain. If you feel you might be out of your depth, worry not; one of us will act as your mentor to help you with the few formalities.

Don't be shy!

### **Nominations**

Please complete the nomination form, photocopy it if you would rather keep your NABO News intact, and then return it to the General Secretary as soon as possible.

### **Resolutions**

Please send the General Secretary any resolutions you wish put before the AGM meeting with the names of proposer and seconder as soon as possible.

The AGM will be held at Tamworth Cruising Club (Kettlebrook Road, B77 1BS).

Please email [gensec@nabo.org.uk](mailto:gensec@nabo.org.uk) for further information

### **In relation to nominations, the NABO Constitution states:-**

**Only full members are eligible to be nominated for election to, or to be members of, the Council.**

**Any member seeking election or re-election to the Council who is, or has at any time in the previous 12 months, held any position of influence or authority in any organization which is involved with the inland waterways, or has any personal interest which is likely to affect their dealings with outside bodies on behalf of the Association, shall declare their interest at the time of being nominated for the Council.**

**Any member seeking election or re-election to the Council shall declare the full circumstances and current status at the time of being nominated for the Council if he or she is, or has been at any time in the previous six years:**

- convicted of any criminal offence,
- involved in or threatened with litigation,
- involved in or threatened with formal insolvency proceedings,
- or the subject of a formal inquiry.



# Nomination form for the NABO Council

Nominee

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Email:

Boat name:

Signature and Date:

Proposer\*

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Seconder\*

Name:

Address:

Tel:

In 80 words or less, please tell members why they should elect you to NABO Council and any declarations required by the Constitution:

Send to: PETER BRAYBROOK, [gensec@nabo.org.uk](mailto:gensec@nabo.org.uk) or 122 Coopers Gate, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX16 2WD  
to arrive as sson as possible

\*If you don't have anyone to propose and second you, don't worry, just phone one of the Council members and we can sort that out for you.

Please use the space on the nomination form for necessary declarations, or include an attached sheet.

# Government plans for the waterways

An excerpt from **Michael Fabricant's** passionate speech to Parliament

November 2022

**A**bout half of the trust's planned asset spend is now on reservoir safety. It has added about £70 million to its priority expenditure over five years. Despite those pressures, it has been very effective in developing its own income sources to reduce dependency on future Government funding. Its endowment has grown ahead of benchmarks, and it has found innovative ways to grow income.

The Trust has built strong partnerships with others, such as the People's Postcode Lottery, a long-term funder, acting as a delivery partner with the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Transport, important public agencies such as Sport England and Natural England which recognise the tangible benefits the Trust can deliver. In 2021–22, the Government grant fell, having made up nearly 40% of the Trust's total income before 2010, projected to decline to 20% by 2027.

The Trust remains fully committed to reducing the share of its funding coming directly from Government over the long term and is continuing to work in partnership. That transition has to happen at a pace that reflects the reality on the ground; securing the investment our waterways need must be the priority. Without that, their future is at risk, the trust's ability to maintain them is jeopardised, and millions could stand to lose the enjoyment of such a wide-reaching and essential



national asset—what I referred to as a national treasure and part of our national heritage.

For those who live on boats, for businesses that depend on waterways and for the services and utilities that need to be carried out on well-maintained towpaths, the effect will be even more devastating. The decline and deterioration of the waterways is an unthinkable outcome for the nation and the communities we represent. ITV reported from a narrow boat, whose owner painted a bleak picture of what life on the waterways could be like. She said: "Without that top layer of money coming in, the canals will go to rack and ruin; become muddy ditches, nobody will want to walk along them, anglers won't be able to fish and boaters will have nowhere to go."



Editor

“What a shame, no-one was listening”

She compared the prospect of the decline of our canals—so central to our industrial heritage—with letting the Tower of London fall down.

Our canals are no longer simply remnants of our industrial past; they are a significant contributor to our modern society and an integral part of our national infrastructure and heritage. The Minister needs to confirm the timeline for these vital decisions, so that the Trust is able to plan the vital investment in our

waterways for the longer term, and to give reassurance to the millions who care so passionately for them. That the Government remain committed to the future of our national canal network must be made clear. Underfunding our canals would be a false economy; once they begin to decline, their demise may become inevitable and their benefits may be lost, as they enter a vicious circle, falling into ever worse neglect and disrepair.



## Join us in the fight

Fund Britain's Waterways calls on Government to stop inland waterways falling into disrepair



**FUND BRITAIN'S  
WATERWAYS**

**C**RT's government grant is fixed at its current level of £52.6m per annum until 2027, which already puts CRT in a difficult financial situation. Because of high inflation, the increasing impact of extreme weather resulting from climate change, and the substantial additional funding needed for reservoir maintenance funding for day to day repairs will be restricted.

The decision by government to further reduce CRT funding threatens real cuts in maintenance, potentially leading to decline and even closure of some waterways.

Although it was CRT's funding which provided the impetus, we are only too well aware that inadequate funding is by no means confined to CRT and is risking the whole waterway network. FBW will therefore be campaigning for all navigation authorities to receive appropriate funding.

The IWA is giving its full support

to FBW and is providing the secretariat and administrative functions. Our National Chair Les Etheridge is chairing the steering group, which comprises representatives of the Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs, British Marine, IWA, NABO and the Royal Yachting Association.

FBW already represents hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways, and membership will be broadened to include any organisation or individual with an interest in using or supporting inland waterways whether canal, river, tidal river or estuary.

### Fund Britain's Waterways

Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) is a coalition of organisations representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways. We are campaigning for national and local government to act now and protect the public benefit and natural capital of our waterways.

Join the fight to [#FundBritainsWaterways](#) by signing our petition. With your help, our canals and rivers may stand a better chance of securing desperately needed funding.

**Sign the Petition**

**Download the window sticker**

<https://waterways.org.uk/fund-britains-waterways/fbw-resources>

# Changes to licence fees

CRT licence fees to increase above inflation for the next five years.

The consultation report can be found at [canalrivertrust.org.uk/national-consultations](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/national-consultations), alongside an equality impact assessment.

The Canal & River Trust's Boater Report 2022

The Trust produces a Boater Report to show how the charity generates income, and how the money is invested in the network: [canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/boating-news-and-views/boating-blogs-and-features/boater-report-2022](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/boating-news-and-views/boating-blogs-and-features/boater-report-2022)

The report for 2022/23 will be published next month.

Canal & River Trust is announcing changes to future boat licence pricing following a consultation with boaters. Alongside growth in income from other commercial and fundraising activity, the changes will help support the long-term future of the 2,000 miles of waterways that the charity manages across England & Wales.

The Trust has announced that boat licence fees will need to rise above the baseline inflation rate for each of the next five years. In addition, the Trust is announcing the introduction of a surcharge for boats that continuously cruise and an increase in the surcharges for wide beam boats to reflect the greater utility they receive.

Richard Parry, chief executive at Canal & River Trust, said: "Our canals are facing some daunting challenges and, if we don't act now, the future could look bleak. The government recently announced significant cuts to public funding for the canals over the years ahead, whilst high inflation rates and the ageing infrastructure has seen the cost of caring for canals rise.

"We're re-doubling our efforts to grow volunteering further and to increase funds raised across all our activities, from all our users and supporters, so we can deliver the additional ongoing investment that the network needs. The boat licence fee represents around 11% of income, going towards vital maintenance and repairs. Whilst the scale of the investment required is in no way to be borne by boaters alone, the in-

creases from boat licences will make an important contribution."

Alongside the changes to boat licensing, the Trust continues to grow income from its property and non-property endowment, and from other commercial sources such as hosting utilities and water transfer, which together contribute over 40% of the Trust's income. The Trust is targeting a step-change in income generation from towpath users and other supporters, with fundraising income projected to grow by 10% each year—whilst other commercial waterways income, including from anglers, paddle sports and moorings, is also set to increase.

The above-inflation increases for all boat licence holders, and the new surcharges, will take effect from April 2024. Details will be announced in November using the latest inflation forecasts.

Boat use has changed over the years, with rising numbers of people choosing to continuously cruise, and to choose wider boats. Most boaters without home moorings spend more time on the waterway network, and make more use of facilities, than those with a home mooring. Wider boats take up more space on the water than their narrow beam counterparts. The Trust believes that reflecting the utility people get from their use of the waterways network, and the cost of supporting different boat use, is the fairest way to decide licence pricing—as reflected in the responses from the recent boater consultation.

The Trust has also considered whether the various licence

discounts currently offered are sustainable. From 1 April 2024, there will be a reduction in the discounts for prompt payment and for paying online as this has become the standard method used by the vast majority of boaters. The electric boat, historic boat and charity boat discounts will be retained.

Richard Parry continues: “We will continue to control our costs as far as possible given external pressures, while focusing our resources on the priority maintenance and repairs that are required to support safe navigation, and we will continue to lobby the government to rethink their short-sighted decision on our future funding.

“I recognise that these changes to licence pricing will not be popular with everyone, but the income we receive from boat licences is more critical than ever. The cost of the licence has largely kept pace with inflation since the Trust was formed and now, together with increases in income from all possible sources, we must raise the resources needed to keep the network alive for future generations, averting a return to the decline of the mid-20th century when canals fell into disrepair in the face of insufficient funding.”

## NABO Response

**We are one community liveaboard or leisure; moored or itinerant. Our long term policy has always been one licence one fee and keep it simple. It avoids the idea that there are two types of licence, which we know is not as per 1995 and that bona fide continuous cruisers (ccers) have different requirements to those previously proposed for roving moorings.**

**We have many times debated the right and wrongs of a ccer surcharge and who uses more or less, but concluded we were splitting hairs. So we came back to one fee for the system access.**

**We are not in favour of Ryanair pricing. It could lead to a plethora of charges for this and that including regions. The one thing that does attract cost for ccers is enforcement, but we're all silent on this.**

**On widebeams again, we had this debate many times but at the consultation of about five years ago this was well thrashed and concluded that area charges were excessive. Length-plus was preferred and adopted.**

**Why are CRT overturning this work now based on their recent half baked so-called consulting?**



We all steer along the same channel

# Diary of a Gongoozler

Photographer **Steve Teratsia** casts an appraising eye over canal style

**P**robably best to get this out of the way before we go any further... I don't own, or never have owned a narrow-boat, and have only ever been aboard one for five short minutes when I almost stepped straight into the Staffs & Worcs at Compton Lock. No doubt there are far less pretty places to drown, so I'll try to look upon that as a positive experience. However, my love/hate relationship with the waterways goes back some years now, ever since I took up photography as a hobby.

I tried portrait photography to begin with, but soon discovered that I had this incredible talent for making even the most photogenic of subjects look like Shrek, so I ditched that endeavour in pretty short order.

Next was wildlife... It truly pains me to go there, but suffice to say that I have around 4000 blurred and useless images of kingfishers, deer and otters.

Even trying to snap a stationary cow often resulted in one form of photographic disaster or another.

Eventually I decided on pursuing landscape photography and in particular anything that involved boats & water. Best move I ever made, not that I'm particularly great at it but it gets me to some incredibly beautiful places where I occasionally come across hidden gems.

I'm quite fortunate to live within just a few short miles of the Staffs & Worcs, Trent & Mersey and Shroppie, and occasionally I'll drive out to much more exotic and romantic locations such as Nantwich or Coventry.

Enough about me, and that's about as affable as I'll be from now on as this column is really meant to be a rant. I hope that you'll take my comments with the humour that is intended, and if any of you are on the Canals & Rivers Facebook group then you'll likely know where this is going!

My gripe today is: Male boaters who wear gaudy, over-colourful clashing attire.

Yes, you know the type... 'Poundshop Michael Portillos'. Thinking they look suave at the tiller in their salmon pink trousers, bright red shirt, striped lime green jacket and totally mismatching cravat. Oh, and more often than not topped off with the obligatory Panama hat.

I've a tip for these gentlemen. If you wouldn't wear it around Lidl, then don't inflict your dreadful fashion sense on the waterways. Besides, it makes a right mess of the colour balance on my photos. Not like you care, you attention seeking brightly hued dandies. No, you don't look at all 'flamboyant', and in actual fact you give off the vibe of a creepy uncle or an out of work faded actor. Stop it, and stop it now.

A recent incident I witnessed was that of a guy who sprang from his boat early one morning to operate a lock sporting electric pink pyjama bottoms. Now I have a bit of a dodgy ticker, and the trauma of this horrific vision almost warranted a defibrillator and the services of the Air Ambulance.

The ladies don't altogether escape from this rant either, it seems that every other boat that passes me by

there's one wearing a bright cerise top. This is a terrible faux pas, again completely destroying the subtlety of any photograph. No matter where you look on the image, your eye always seems to be drawn to their lurid knitwear.

So, if you could all kindly start wearing a little more beige out there it may actually improve my photography and could even prevent me from being stretched off to the nearest Cardiac Unit.

I thank you...



Comin' over here with their graceful necks, bad tempers and flappy wings, hissing and spitting at law abiding folk. I had a right keruffle trying to pin a Fixed Penalty Notice on them, but thankfully my GP reckons the cuts & bruises should heal in a week or so...

Photo © Steve Teratsia

# We enjoyed it really

John Sadler's summer tour

**B**ack in January, at the Boater Representatives meeting, the minimum standard was agreed for Customer Service Facilities (CSFs). A 5 hour accessibility for water, rubbish and Elsan disposal was stated.

I feel that an important point was missed, as so many CSFs are affected by misuse or equipment failure does the 5 hour premise still apply? Our cruise this year took us to the Peak Forest canal when the Wood End lift bridge failure ended our progress. Luckily we were on the Marple side. We needed to empty our Elsan and dispose of rubbish. Marple CSF has been out of commission for months although a new facility is under construction. CRT kindly provided a temporary skip a mile or so away, sadly the other side of the 16 Marple locks, only opening for 3 days a week limited our use. Fortunately, we were not tempted by the offer. Within days lock 7 was declared unsafe for passage, had we diverted for the skip we would not have been able to return home. Off to Bosley services, a 7 hour journey, luckily we made it there before the cess pit was declared to be full and the CSF out of action. Are there no level indicators on CRT cess pits? Another 24–48 hour wait for it to be emptied would have been very difficult for us.

Despite the periods of intense rainfall we seemed to have very little water underneath us, although not the deepest drafted boat around, we seemed to be aground more than usual. We expected problems along the Macclesfield because of the reservoir limitation but we had

problems getting up Heartbreak Hill. We were firmly bottomed coming out of a lock, I emptied the lock above which got us to the next lock where we were firmly stemmed up. The boat behind had decided to fill the lock despite being requested to wait by Vollies. The only way forward was to let more water down, fortunately the next pound was long enough to allow it without causing further problems.

## One hand behind your back

The number of locks with one paddle taped up is on the increase, surely we should have a target percentage for locks that are fully functional. We seem to be heading towards a system that if it's operable leave it until it's broken beyond use, then the contractors will be called.

As we were travelling down from the Macclesfield Canal towards Stoke we had a visit from my son, his partner and my grand daughter. On one of the (mostly) non-rainy days we took our boat from Stoke to Trentham. As a very active boat loving 6 year old should, she was enjoying a stretch she had not travelled before, making observations and mental notes while practicing her reading by saying the name of each passing boat.

As we passed through Trentham she asked the question "Boating Grampy why isn't there a waterfall in this lock?" She seemed a little disappointed when I told her that is how they are supposed to be, with a good seal to hold back the water while we descend. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings



### Out of The Mouths\*

**\* Definition:** said when a child says something that surprises you because it seems very wise.

Five Stoke locks and, finally, peace in Trentham lock



I'm not highlighting the Stoke area though. Here's a few more spread around our journey

Clockwise from top left: Deptmore, Heartbreak Hill, Marbury and Hurleston locks



On our return to home waters, I notice that the refuse facility at Norbury Junction has been removed without prior notice. It's quite a long way to Wheaton Aston which probably explains the amount of rubbish left by the council bins at Gnosall.

# Fiddling while the system burns?

Sue Tonius runs some water down

It's getting autumnal out there and the stoppage notices that have been an unwelcome but frequent visitor to my inbox are still coming. Reports from disgruntled boaters who have had a more than usually difficult cruise, mainly north, west and east upwards from the centre of England, are also persisting.

So, which canal to pick to have a closer look at, how about the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal, or rather more easier to write, the Staffs & Worcs?

I had been reading that this well used canal in the West Midland region was becoming very shallow, or 'undiep', as the Dutch rather literally call it. When a couple who had hired a trip boat for the day from Great Haywood to Weeping Cross were reporting getting stuck in the centre of the canal, as well as noticing how unkempt the banks were looking, I thought I'd check that CRT hadn't changed the dimensions. There on the CRT website was stated a draught of 3ft 3"/0.99m. But surely if this is correct and current as it suggests, our little day boat should not have got stuck mid channel? What have other boaters' recent experiences of the depth on this canal been, I wondered. Well, here's a few from this summer.

## Water management

A member of the Historic Narrowboat Club was out on the Staffs & Worcs with his ex working boat. Admittedly not the shallowest of crafts, he had to be pulled off with ropes for and aft at Radford, and that

was after contractors had done some spot dredging there the month before. He then became stuck again at Tixall Lock. The short journey had taken the best part of two hours, having grounded again twice mid channel and at bridge holes. This despite CRT's efforts at sending water down from Gailey that, when home time beckoned, left the canal still 4" down on CRT's proclaimed 3ft 3".

He was not alone as around the same time, another boater was ploughing the centre channel from Deptmore to Penkridge.

This year a NABO council member also found difficulties on the Staffs & Worcs, despite never having problems with this canal before in their shallow draughted boat. It was at Shutt Hill lock, near Acton Trussell, that this run of problem free cruising ran out. As was their usual method at this slightly awkward to use lock, this boater waited a few feet out for the lock to be ready, rather than tying up against the bank. They then looked for the wash of water caused by the boat then leaving the lock to float their little narrowboat further out in to the channel, but this time, nothing happened. Nowhere near the towpath, nevertheless they were stuck fast for and aft and with the judicious use of a pole simply swivelling their boat around on the mudbank they were held fast on.

Do you remember when the letting down of water at locks was something that boaters, not having to do it at all often, were a tad worried about their competence in doing? These days we are all re-

peated do-it yourselfers, having to utilise this method so very often at so many locks. So it was that some letting down of water was the only way for this boat to become unstuck and finally get in to the lock.

### Dredging management

CRT have informed the Stafford Boat Club that “the Staffordshire and Worcester Canal hasn’t advanced into their upcoming dredging programme as yet. They are reviewing plans for 2024 and beyond and the recent re-survey of the S&W in June 2023 will contribute to that, but there are a number of other projects ahead of it in priority - so the S & W is unlikely to be dredged until after 2025.2 (Hazlestrine News, 2309). Until then, for boaters using this stretch of the Staffs & Worcs, this is the new normal.

### Vegetation management

So, why my headline title? As I type, there is a weekend of angling competitions along the canal and one of the 183 Let’s Fish events arranged this

summer and autumn on a very long length of towpath where we moor. After no cutting of the towpath vegetation all year and nettles growing higher than me to wade through, these last few days have been a positive buzz of CRT activity. Employees and contractors have spent hours of their paid by CRT time clearing the towpath, checking and rechecking it was all hunky dory for the hundreds of anglers and learners to pursue their sport. Well, it’s one way of getting the towpath walkable again I suppose but...

A short while ago, CRT’s CEO, while spelling out the threats to the canal system from underfunding, also pledged to spend what money they had on maintaining the canals. To help with this laudable aim, CRT were going to cut back on community activities.

There is little evidence of this happening. Sadly for our canals, it seems that it is so much easier to ‘fiddle while the canals burn’, every year deteriorating further, than to keep the system navigable.



# Channelled

Jo Bell

A two-kingfisher day, with sparrowhawks thrown in  
and we were bickering at Kingswood Junction.

*Water won't be told, she said, you never learn.*

We settled to the first of nineteen locks.

It got between us with its own built frame;  
its greening beams that spoke  
an older argument, the slow negotiations  
of meadowsweet and pondweed.

The ratchet sound of summer winding in;  
the bargain between land and man and water  
that earns the right to pass. A can't-be-hurried  
spill of rising inches in the filling chamber,  
a measured fall through moss and diesel smoke.  
We did not speak until the aqueduct where,  
running out of land, the navvies  
simply kept on cutting through the sky.

*Carry me*, the channel says: the bridegroom engineer  
must find a way. They never learned to disbelieve.  
Water won't be told, but give it bones  
and it will take the shape you train it to.

That iron rib, grown out across the cavity of air and traffic  
took us over, laughing. We made our reckoning  
and moved on slow as marriage, slow as decades  
through a day of gentle sweat, a two-kingfisher day.

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Jo Bell is a former archaeologist who came to the canals through a heritage project for British Waterways. A boat-dweller for 20 years, she was the UK's first canal laureate. She is the host of poetry subscription service, *The Poetic Licence*: find it on Patreon.



# Rewind

Issue No 4 2008

Howard Anguish reviews NABO News from 15 years ago.



**T**his edition starts with a question for consideration for boaters as follows: Should BW legalise 'bridge hopping'—for a fee. NABO has severe doubts as to whether it could accord with the 1995 BW enabling Act, Section 17(3) as it would have to: either make any public mooring in a specific stretch a legal place to leave a boat or redefine 'navigation'.

NABO insists you cannot change the Law just for those who pay. However, if it is possible, would this be a useful source of income to improve the waterways, or will it just exacerbate the problem? Interesting that this was under consideration then and is still a hot topic today.

And what about this for topicality.

**Never mind the length, feel the width** "Why should narrow and wide beam boats of the same length be paying the same licence fee? If size matters, should this charge also apply to width? Could there be a flat rate surcharge for wide beam boats? Unfortunately BW is poorly equipped to 'model' the potential income from wide beam supplements in any detail as it does not have reliable beam information for all boats. Although there is a box for 'beam' on the licence form, licences have not been refused to those who have left it blank, so statistics are unreliable."

Another suggestion which may be worth resurrecting was a suggestion that BW might consider Loyalty and OAP discounts and asked User Groups to make suggestions for

"volunteer points" to be awarded to offset licence fees. Who should deserve them and for doing what? Do any members have any worthwhile suggestions for NABO to consider proposing to CRT?

Also in this issue, David Fletcher gave his impressions after attending a NABO Council Meeting. A couple of extracts give a flavour. 'This is all good stuff. Lots of debate around the table, all input listened to and welcomed, no bossy chair ruling the roost, and very high quality debate.

Can we attract more? I get an appreciation that NABO, though not a large group, has the benefit of short lines of communication, and can and does influence—nationally.... So we finished at four o'clock—a long session- and no wasted time. A useful day and good company. I will be back again. I could get addicted

Guess what—he did return, and within a very short time David became Chairman, and is even now still fighting NABO's cause in 2023 on Technical matters and of course with the web site! David heard this call from the chairman in 2008:-

'NABO Council is not a collection of stuffed shirts revelling in their self-importance. They are just people with a knowledge of inland boating, and a wealth of other life experience, plus a sense of humour, trying to give back something to the waterway community. I have found working with them satisfying, pleasurable and fun, and so might you if you joined them.'

Still a valid message in 2023. Please give it some thought; and consider joining NABO Council at the 2023 AGM.

NABO News back issues are available online at [nabo.org.uk/index.php/reference/nn-back-issues-2](http://nabo.org.uk/index.php/reference/nn-back-issues-2)

# Refloating CRT

Ian Hutson thinks the mountain should live with Mohammed

**S**eriously, Why Not? Flog off all bricks & mortar offices. Decant the CRT “Executive Team” and the paid staff onto office boats.

Not special order brand new boats, but boats bought on the open market, second-hand, and then converted. Perhaps fifty-seven footers to allow access to most of the system. Price range around £40,000 such as ordinary private peasant might buy. Diesel engines of course, lob a few solar panels about, choose some with cassette toilets, some with pump-out, some with composting hippie-buckets. Heating by the usual coal & logs stove with a Chinese Imperial Deluxe diesel central-heating backup for those chilly early morning starts.

No need these modern days for vast installations of filing cabinets, Victorian fax machines, and grand meeting rooms. It's all done now with mobiles and iPaddyPads and online with Zooming Cloud Gatherings. Equip each boat with a portable MiFi and a limited-data multi-user SIM card

The “Executive Team” list their number as being eleven, so we'll let them have two boats. They lay claim on their website page to one thousand six hundred paid employees so we would need two hundred office boats tops.

Is there eight million quid in the bricks and mortar (such as is left!) in order to buy the boats outright? Almost certainly. DIY maintenance, a smidgen of insurance, BSS, blacking (a team-building opportunity sure certain), a little diesel, some coal, a boat licence from them-

selves for themselves.

Home moorings? No. No need at all for that. With plenty of staff aboard each boat they can move themselves around the system easily during working hours to meet the Exec's guidelines, minimum range twenty miles (especially in London and Birmingham etcetera), an absolute maximum of fourteen days in any one neighbourhood. Juggling moving while allowing for lock queues and being held up behind stoppages planned and unplanned, finding the necessary non-closed Service Facilities as required is never a problem. One Elsan cassette per boat ought to be quite sufficient.

None of this A-B-C then back to B and then A again nonsense of course, staff could show us how it's done with the full A-Z via all of the consonants and vowels. Perhaps a system of volunteer boaters patrolling towpaths to check for compliance and gentle non-passive-aggressive emails asking ‘Have you forgotten to move your office?’, followed by warnings and short licences? There could be open days for private boaters to watch the professionals to learn how it's done properly. Proximity to water being what it is to “wellness” natch staff absenteeism would drop to zero.

This would be such a wonderful opportunity for staff to live the experience on a par with their customers. How incredibly appropriate it would be for the Canal Charity's offices to be boats on the canals themselves! Lots of boaters work afloat. Let's flog those CRT office bricks & mortar and start searching for those CRT office boats!



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