

THE JUST WON'T GO AWAY FLOATER

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The only paper for boaters produced by boaters

**Unspinning
the C&RT spin
on it's annual
report -
pages two
and three**

C&RT's stealthy bid to extend overstay fines ...

... or is it just official bluff and bluster?

by
Peter Underwood



A policy of intimidation and bluff seems to be spreading through the Canal & River Trust in its dealings with boaters.

The latest example is a small leaflet which has appeared in C&RT's offices in central Birmingham and has, apparently, been distributed to a handful of visiting boats.

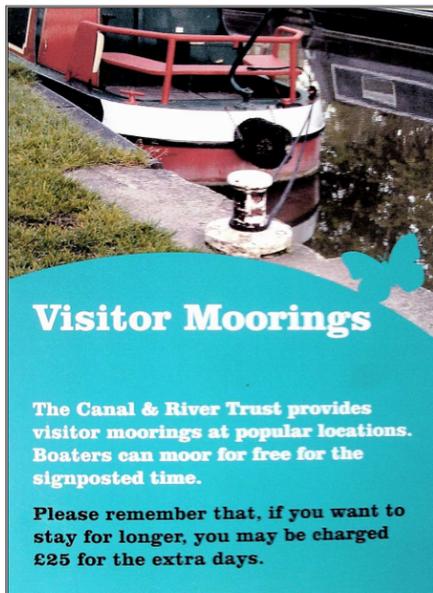
Central Birmingham is only busy at the height of the summer season, mostly with hire boats who want to moor in Gas Street. The only mooring shortage is the lack of longer term visitor moorings as most city moorings have become 48 hour in recent years.

Despite this the leaflet gives great prominence to the threat that "you may incur a £25 extended stay charge for each extra day" and goes on to imply the place is so busy boaters may need to breast up with other boats, as happens in London.

Back in the real world if two boats are moored side by side in Birmingham it is because they are travelling as a pair and even 70ft hire boats turning up late in the evening always find somewhere to tie up.

The idea of overstaying fines – which C&RT insist are charges rather than fines – was originally invented in what the South East Region insisted were 'hotspots' a few years ago – sites such as Foxton, Stoke Bruerne and some others. Signs threatening to charge £25 a day were erected and the net result has been to turn those visitor moorings into empty, unoccupied spaces for most of the year. Curiously, despite all the threatening noises made about overstaying boaters at the time, it seems C&RT has never once taken to court any boater refusing to pay their fine, sorry 'charge'.

At that stage there was no intention of using them more widely. When did that change? According to C&RT it hasn't really changed: "As to whether these will be extended across the network, there's no national strategy to implement these, it's up to the individual waterway's management of their Visitor Moorings. The Visitor Moorings would be clearly signed with the terms and conditions." In Birmingham there are no signs warning of



Front and back of a little leaflet claiming 'you may be charged £25' but the signs say nothing

charges on the recently renewed signage. C&RT's press office says that, despite the threatening leaflets: "We only enforce in areas where it is clearly signed. In Birmingham we are not actively enforcing. "The leaflets you mention are general info about VMs – as I said in my previous email, the extended stay charge is a reminder that if people stay longer than the free stay period, they may be subject to charges." Except that they won't be fined or charged because there are no warnings on the signs and the Trust admits it is not enforcing the charge in Birmingham. Despite the threat of a fine most boating organisations regard C&RT's claim to be able to fine boaters for overstaying in the guise of 'charges' as legally dubious. C&RT relies for its authority on The Transport Act of 1962 and it keeps repeating its claim that 'it's an extended stay charge, not a fine' because that legislation allows British Waterways and C&RT 'power to demand, take and recover such charges for their services and facilities, and to make the use of those services and facilities subject to such terms

Visitor Moorings

Popular places can get very busy so visitor moorings with short stay times are provided to help as many boaters as possible find space to tie up. Mooring is free for the advertised time period. If you decide you want to stay for longer, you may incur a £25 extended stay charge for each extra day you are moored. We will contact you to let you know this is going to happen if our sightings show you have exceeded the free mooring time.

Please be considerate of other boaters and people living nearby. Tie up so that as many boats as possible are able to moor. Let others moor alongside you in busy locations whenever possible and with permits, and do this as a matter of course if you're travelling in company. Remember the neighbours, please keep noise to a minimum and avoid prolonged running of the engine or generator. Don't run it between 8pm and 8am and never run the engine in gear while moored. Don't leave your personal possessions or any rubbish on the towpath. You can give us your feedback about visitor moorings at www.surveymonkey.com/s/canalrivertrust_visitor_moorings

Enjoy your stay, but please share Visitor Moorings fairly

Find out more at canalrivertrust.org.uk
T 0300 040 4940
E customerservices@canalrivertrust.org.uk
Charity number 1148792



in the latest Terms and Conditions attached to the licence. It now suggests it has the power to impose fines anywhere for overstaying, without consultation and regardless of the legal doubts over whether the courts would see them as a charge or a fine.

"In terms of where we can apply these, as the T&Cs make clear, we can apply them anywhere.

However our approach has been to target them at selected 'hot-spot' areas."

The reasoning offered by the charity is almost an admission that the whole process is a bit of a con trick aimed at bringing pressure on boaters: "Importantly, these are really intended as a deterrent – success to us looks like NOT having to levy any charges.

"The fact that we haven't had to issue a large number" is a

and conditions, as they think fit.'

It is a claim that depends on whether visitor moorings are a chargeable service rather than a provision essential to navigation.

C&RT's Press Office claims: "Visitor Moorings provide a free service for a set amount of time (24/48hrs, 7 days etc) and the extended stay charge is for use of that service beyond that period."

Boating organisations have claimed that the 'charge' is clearly a fine, directly equivalent to a parking fine and the Trust does not have the legal power to impose fines – a position that would make the Transport Act 1962 irrelevant. It is interesting that there is no known case of C&RT taking the issue to court. I asked the Trust whether it had a record of how many overstaying charges have been claimed by C&RT, how many have been paid by boaters and whether it had ever successfully pursued a claim for payment in the courts?

The Press Office response so far has been: "We're not aware of anyone being taken to court but again I need confirmation from legal. In fact the Trust tried to reinforce it's claim to be able to fine overstaying boats by including it

sign that, with additional sightings, most people follow the stay times, meaning the moorings are available for as many boaters to use as possible."

So it now seems that C&RT can threaten to fine (or charge) boaters without any evidence that a particular area is overcrowded, without informing boaters of the threat on bank-side signage and without consulting with boaters in advance.

In addition, there is no evidence of short restricted mooring times making any difference to the availability of moorings. One mathematics professor, an expert in probability theory with positions at both Birmingham and Oxford Universities has calculated that there is no advantage at all in having 48 hr rather than 14 day moorings in busy spots nor in quiet areas. There may be a small improvement in the chances of a visiting boat finding a mooring in a narrow window when moorings are moderately busy.

It seems a very narrow argument on which to base a national mooring policy.



Bank Holiday in Birmingham - plenty of spaces for visiting boats on the 48 hr spaces



Bank Holiday in Birmingham - the 14-day moorings in Cambrian Wharf are full

Unspinning the spin - the facts hidden in C&RT's annual report

By Allan Richards



C&RT's latest Annual Report may not be as upbeat as last year's, but it is open to the same criticism in failing to acknowledge the very real problems the Trust faces.

Whilst the report attempts to portray the Trust in a good light one can only really judge performance in terms of what the Trust was attempting to achieve (both in the year in question and in the longer term) and how it measured up. For its 2015/16 financial year, C&RT set itself some 24 Key Performance Indicator (KPI) targets. Despite Trustees monitoring progress bi-monthly, C&RT failed to achieve 10 of these 24 targets. Compared with five failures out of 15 KPI's set for the previous year. It would appear that under the new chairmanship of Alan Leighton failure to achieve targets is increasing in both real terms (five to ten) and percentage terms (33 per cent to 42 per cent of KPI's set).

The ten fails, coloured red in the KPI report, are:

1. Employee, Volunteer and Contractor Safety (measured as accidents per 100,000 hours worked). Accident rates were almost double the target set for 2015/16 and 50 per cent up on 2014/15. Trustees were given figure in March showing that volunteers were four times more at risk of having an accident than C&RT employees and some seven times more at risk than contractors.
2. Number of visitors/visits. The 2014/15 KPI and Annual Report (page 47) gave the number of visits to C&RT's waterways as 402 million and the average number of visitors per two week period as 4.5 million. These two figures dropped to 380 million and 4.4 million last year with the latter figure being almost 10 per cent lower than a KPI target of 4.75m. Of



Allan Leighton - C&RT Chair

course, most boaters don't believe the visitor/visit figures anyway. As has been pointed out even C&RT's reduced figure of 380m is twice that of all the National Parks combined.

3. Trust brand awareness over the last 12 months. This is less than last year and now stands at 29 per cent which is considerably less than the KPI target of 35 per cent.
4. Percentage of people likely to support the Trust. Again this is down on target - 23 per cent against a KPI target of 25 per cent.

5. Number of Friends. As already revealed in the last Floater, C&RT has just 15,800 Friends against a KPI Target of 17,000 and 'more than 11,000' claimed in the previous Annual Report. This is reflected in a fourth year of losses on voluntary income. Over the four years it has been in existence C&RT has lost a cumulative total of £4.1m attempting to attract voluntary income.

6. Carbon Emissions Plan: C&RT's electricity consumption in 2014/15 was 23.4 gigawatt hours (GWH). Its KPI target was to reduce this to 22 GWH last year but instead it has risen to 24.3GWH.

7. Heritage: Percentage compliance for all works to designated heritage assets. C&RT scored a 98.45 per cent compliance rating against a KPI target of 99.5 per cent.

8. Employee engagement score. 2014/15 was a poor year for staff engagement with a score of just



Richard Parry - C&RT Chief Executive

46 per cent. 2015/16 was a disaster! It dropped to 40 per cent (against a KPI target of 48 per cent). Perhaps unsurprisingly, C&RT did not set a boater engagement score.

9. Annual Return from non-property investments. Many boaters will be completely unaware that over the last two years C&RT has sold off over £100m of property to invest elsewhere. Unfortunately, this investment is now losing money instead of contributing five per cent of its income towards maintaining the waterways as planned.

10. Percentage of planned High Priority Customer Service/ Safety related Infrastructure Defects cleared. This is the 4,000 or so defects chosen from more than 59,000 (2014/15 figure) for clearance during the year. The 2015/16 KPI target was to achieve a clearance rate of 95 per cent. C&RT only managed to deal with 50 per cent.

The first eight failures range from near misses against target to some very significant failures. However, the final two are critical because they impact directly on C&RT's ability to maintain its waterways.

In his March Chief Executive report to the board, Richard Parry, said: "As reported in November, we will not meet the year-end target in some areas, reflecting the ambitious goals we set ourselves this year (and in the ten year strategy), and the difficulty of achieving

Schedule of KPIs for 2015/16



Bi-monthly Performance Measures	Actual 2015/16	Target 2015/16	Actual 2014/15
Employee, Volunteer and Contractor Safety: RIDDOR Accident Frequency Rate (accidents per 100,000 hours)	0.34	0.18	0.23
Public Safety: Proportion of injuries directly associated with infrastructure condition	7.8%	8%	8.5%
Ne of days of unplanned closures to navigation	630	850	925
% of planned High Priority Customer Service/ Safety related Infrastructure Defects cleared	50%	95%	81%
Users - % satisfied with experience (Towpath only, will be 50% boaters, 50% towpath visitors in 2016)	83%	70%	n/a
Ne of individual visitors to our waterways in typical two week period (over last 12 months)	4.4 m	4.6 m	4.3 m
Ne of children participating in face to face 'Explorer' educational sessions	63,944	50,000	43,586
Ne of Volunteer Hours worked	481,722	475,000	411,419
Volunteers - % satisfied / that would recommend	88%	88%	87%
Total Ne of Community Adoptions	147	125	104
% of people surveyed who are aware of the Trust - 'brand awareness' (over last 12 months)	29%	35%	30%
% of people surveyed who say they are likely to support the Trust (over last 12 months)	23%	25%	22%
Ne of active Friends/ regular donors	15,800	17,000	9,754
Carbon Emissions Plan - Electricity Consumption (GWH)	24.3	22	23.4
Annual Government Contract Performance Measures	Actual 2015/16	Target 2015/16	Actual 2014/15
Number of principal assets in Condition A - C (requirement to be above 77% threshold)	86.2%	85%	85.9%
Towpath Condition - % at Grade A - C (requirement to be above 60% threshold)	TBD	74%	74.5%
Flood Management - % of principal culverts/ embankments in Condition grades A - C (requirement to be above 96% threshold)	tba	96.5%	96.6%
Other Annual Performance Measures	Actual 2015/16	Target 2015/16	Actual 2014/15
Environment: overall environment performance measure (combining compliance, incident management and enhancements delivered)	91%	90%	90.0%
Heritage: % Compliance for all works to designated heritage assets	98.45%	99.5%	98.0%
Annual total return on our endowment portfolio (to exceed market benchmark)	14.06%	12.68%	21.3%
Annual Return from non-property investments	(3.06%)	6.64%	13.0%
Non-investment income to grow by more than CPI plus 1% (on a three year rolling basis)	2.81%	1.44%	
Routine controllable expenditure is to grow by no more than CPI minus 1%	tba	(0.56%)	
Employees - Employee engagement score	40.0%	48.0%	46.0%

Green indicates that the KPI is ahead of target
Yellow indicates that the KPI is behind target
Red indicates that the KPI target cannot be achieved

The Chief Executive's report on missed targets - ten of them rather than seven.

year-on-year change in some cases." At the May board meeting, Trustees were given the year end KPI figures clearly showing the ten 'red' fails with the chief executive's report saying '... seven of the measures tracked through the year failed to meet target, including one - the Electricity consump-

tion measure - which worsened towards the year end; the causes of this are still being investigated'. Seven? It's ten! Perhaps the Trustees are cannot see red. More likely, the Trustees realise that they are ultimately responsible for the Trust's failures and are hoping that nobody notices.

More unspinning to come

On the next page Allan Richards looks in more detail at two key elements of the failures identified in the annual report.

C&RT's has confirmed that its maintenance backlog has grown every year it has been in existence,

After diversifying a big chunk of it's investment income out of property it has actually lost money on that part of its portfolio and returns were almost 10 per cent below expectation.

The Floater

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Diversifying endowment investment loses money

By Allan Richards

When British Waterways became Canal & River Trust four years ago it was provided with a significant endowment of about half a billion pounds which provides one of its four major income streams. Historically, most of this endowment portfolio has been invested in property with, according to C&RT, the majority of income being derived from ground rents. Following, BW's losses on joint ventures, C&RT's trustees decided early on to adopt a more moderate approach to managing the portfolio. They decided to sell smaller more management-intensive assets to invest in fewer high quality ones. The rationale behind this appears to be that, whilst the Trust states it performs better than the market average on property, its net income is impacted by management and other costs related to its small value properties. Thus concentration on a smaller number of high value/low management cost properties should result on higher net income. So far so good! However, just as BW could not resist the temptation of selling off property to have a 'punt' on high risk joint ventures, neither could C&RT. It's not actually joint ventures this time around but property has been sold off to provide 'non-property investments'. C&RT's trustees justify this on the basis of risk spreading. In other words, not having all the investment eggs in the property basket. This despite claims going back over ten years of high returns, performance above the national average and resilience in recession. The strategy for a non-property investment fund was that a 20 per cent diversification away from property should be made on a 3 to 5 year



The chair of the Board of Trustees investment committee is Manish Chande
horizon. Each year, the fund should return five per cent of its value as income with the rest retained for growth. Sounds good! However, after two years and an investment of over £120m, the non-property fund, is not performing as expected. Last year the annual total return on the Trust's endowment was 14.06 per cent, comfortably above its target of 12.68 per cent. However, against a much more modest target of 6.64 per cent, the non-property investment returned -3.06 per cent. It has actually lost money and was almost 10 per cent below expectation. The chair of the Board of Trustees investment committee is Manish Chande whose own property company, Mountgrange went into administration in 2009 owing the Bank of Scotland some £60 million. Most of this has never been recovered. Oddly, some of C&RT's supposedly non-property investment has ended up in his latest property company - Clearbell. Time, perhaps, to diversify out of diversification?

Children of Chernobyl take a look at the waterways heritage of the Midlands

Some 30 years after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, members of the Black Buoy Cruising Club (BBCC) have given twelve Belarus children, aged between 12 and 15, a day out on Midlands canals. All the youngsters are either recovering from or are in remission from cancer. The trip was sponsored by Solihull Lions Club (SLC) whose generosity paid for the hire of two day boats and catering. The boats were crewed by BBCC members. The youngster's two translators, a doctor and three members of host families accompanied them on the day boats.

Others undertaking the trip were accommodated on BBCC member's private boats. From the BBCC moorings near Knowle on Grand Union Canal, the children were taken to Kingswood Junction where they had a picnic followed by a guided tour of the area. During the tour they had the opportunity to assist boats locking up the Lapworth Flight of the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. They were then taken back to the BBCC moorings for a barbecue. During this first part of the cruise, all children and accompanying staff were offered the opportunity of steering the boats under

supervision. Following the barbecue, the children then assisted the boats locking up the Knowle flight to return to the day boat base at Copt Hall Wharf. Keith Yeomans, BBCC Commodore, and wife Merle, Lions' organiser, said: "We are delighted with the success of this joint venture between BBCC and SLC. The Chernobyl Children's Project provides recuperative holidays in the UK for cancer sufferers. "Belarus doctors say that this boosts the children's immune systems for at least two years, helping them to resist, or recover from, serious illness."

Repairs list grows as C&RT miss more targets

By Allan Richards

The Canal & River Trust has confirmed that its maintenance backlog has grown every year it has been in existence . It now stands at 62,379 defects and equates to a backlog of over £161 million.

On April 1 2015, C&RT had 59,133 recorded defects on its 2,000 miles of waterways. That works out at about 30 defects for each mile of waterway. Just 12 months earlier Trust had 50,579 defects and on April 1 2013 it had 42,802.

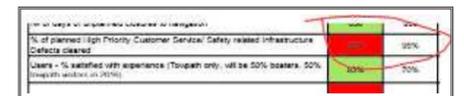
It is clear the number of defects is rising at an alarming rate. Sadly, C&RT schedules less than 10 per cent each year for remedying. These are called high priority defects. The 10 per cent or so designated as high priority defects are chosen because of their impact on customer service or safety and for the last three years C&RT has set and missed Key Performance Indicator (KPI) targets for clearing these.

In 2013/14, the Trust set itself a target of clearing 90 per cent of high priority defects during the year. It only managed 85.6 per cent.

Undeterred, for 2014/15, it made each

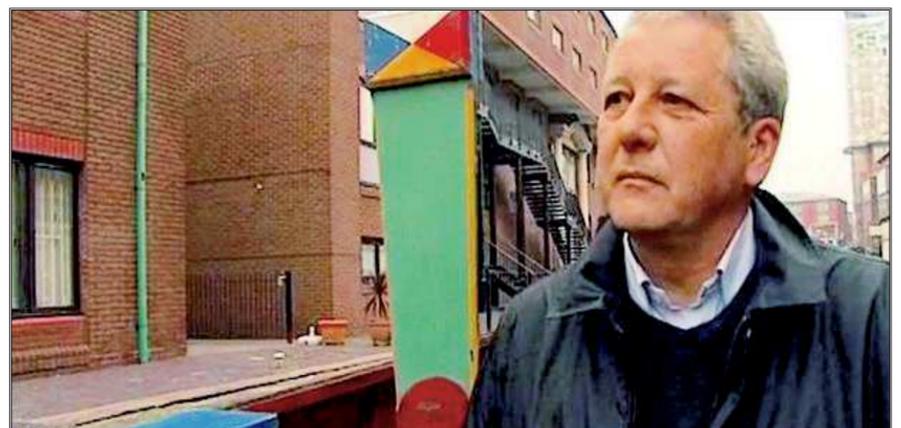
against its new KPI target of 95 per cent last year (2015/16). It was an unmitigated disaster. C&RT cleared just 50 per cent of its high priority defects. There is no mention of this in C&RT's annual report. Indeed, there is no mention in the Board of Trustees minutes.

However, as The Floater went to press, C&RT confirmed that it failed to clear half of its high priority defects in the last financial year. It admitted: "We scheduled to close 5,807 high priority customer



service / safety related infrastructure defects. We completed 2,910 which is 50 per cent"

It added that the cost of fixing the defects scheduled for clearance was just over £15 million but did not give any reason as to why it only managed to clear half or how the £7.5 million saved by not clearing them was used. Following the early 2016 retirement of Operations & Asset Management Director, Vince Moran, without replacement, there would appear to be no director to take the blame for C&RT'S abysmal record. What about the Trustees? Well it would appear that the Board of Trustees have a number of committees that provide oversight of



Operations & Asset Management Director, Vince Moran, retired but not replaced

Waterways Region publish a list of high priority defects and quarterly updates on clearance. Result - against a Trust wide KPI target of clearing 90 per cent (again) it only managed 81 per cent. No explanation was provided for this failure. Instead the Trust set a higher target for 2015/16 of 95 per cent clearance. However, Regions were no longer required to publish list of high priority defects and quarterly clearance updates. The reason for this, it appears, is that following the customer service/asset management reorganisation in November 2014, the responsibility now lies with a centralised body rather than the Regions. So how well did C&RT perform

C&RT's functions - Audit and Risk Committee, Investment Committee, Remuneration Committee, Nominations Committee and Fundraising Committee. However, the Trustees do not have an Operations and Asset Management Committee to oversee its obligations as a Navigation Authority.

The rise in the number of outstanding defects on C&RT's waterways equates directly to a decline in general condition. How can it be otherwise? Not only is C&RT failing to halt (much less reverse) the growing number of outstanding defects, It is failing to fix those few defects it targets each year. Perhaps they need a committee ...



Art and serendipity bring a floating gallery to the canal

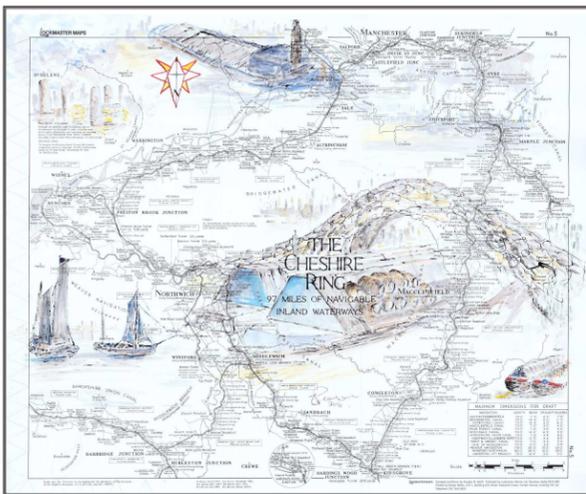
The Floater takes a look at canal traders – people creating businesses on our canals and rivers. Their numbers are increasing almost daily and the chances are you will see a floating market or a sole trader on the canal this summer. Our latest trader is the nb Hekla Pop-up Art Gallery of Lesley Pearson, backed up by husband Rob's IT skills.



By Peter Underwood

There is some sort of connection between canal lovers and art lovers – many may mock the Canal & River Trust's artistic sponsorships but you only have to look at the number of arty canal people and canal visitors to know they haven't completely misunderstood.

Rob Pearson, 62, and wife Lesley, 59, married 37 years this year, will vouch for that, as their boat-based art business attracts many of the art lovers of the waterways. The nb Hekla Pop-Up Art Gallery helps the couple live, work and trade on Hekla all year round. Rob explained: "We fancied living on a boat in our 20's but life and kids put a stop to that. We enjoyed boating on the Norfolk Broads, then our first canal holiday from Chester to the Llangollen in 1983 meant we were hooked on canals. We hired, and we spent a lot of time on friends boats, particularly three years or so helping a good friend and long term liveaboard Tony Haynes on the North East canals and rivers, where we learned an awful lot from Tony, especially on big rivers, tidal and non-tidal. "Our 3 children grew up, Lesley 'accidentally' went to Sheffield Hallam University as a mature student gaining a BA Hons in Fine Art. "She had always been passionate about art, but coming from a staunch working class Lancashire family from the mill town of Leigh, her parents insisted 'There's no money in Art! Get a proper job'. "Lesley signed on to a local village hall Wednesday afternoon art class, and after six months the teacher announced that next week would be the



Lesley's new venture - illustrated maps - above and, below, art classes at Bumble Hole were highly popular with mums and kids



assessment! "Assessment? What For?" "It turned out that the village hall class was part of an OCN qualification - we had never even heard of OCN! "So the teacher told Lesley that she had only been on the course for 6 months, but was way way better than people who had been there over two years, and she persuaded Lesley to sign on at North Notts College, on what turned out to be an experimental University Foundation Course for mature students. "Half way through they were sent off to apply to Sheffield

Hallam purely as an exercise in the Uni application process. Lesley was offered an unconditional place! "When Lesley went to the college initially, she 'dragged' our daughter Vicky along with her for moral support. Vicky had dropped out of 6th form and it looked like she would be spending her life shovelling horse poo on a pittance wage, but she signed up for a Media course, took to it like a duck to water, and ended up going to Uni at the same time as Lesley. "Vicky had spent her summers working in Summer Camps in the USA (doing horsey type stuff, of course!) and had a job lined up after her final summer in the States. Our elder son Ross had left home at 16 - under a bit of a cloud - our youngest son Mike was still at home though. "We had a five-bedroom house and were considering downsizing now that the kids had left home when, in 2009 the financial collapse hit. "The job Vicky had lined up disappeared and she moved back in. Ross was made redundant and came home like the Prodigal Son, with his partner, a Boa Constrictor, three lizards, two white rats and a pair of Manic Russian Dwarf Gerbils. Back to overcrowding. "Eventually Vicky and Ross left home again,

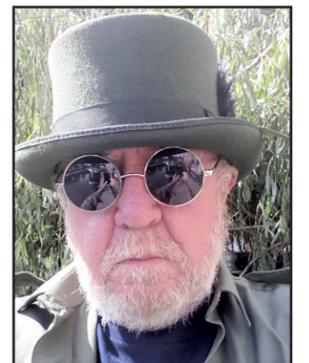
and we turned once more to down-sizing, and realised we could live our dream from our 20's and move onto a narrow-boat. "So the house went on the market, and we started pouring over Apollo Duck and visiting marinas looking for our boat to find us. "Mike was still home, so our plans included him coming with us, but as it transpired he decided against it and ended up sharing a house with his brother Ross, and we moved onto Hekla full time in January 2014. "Lesley had taken four years after her graduation to get back in to her art as something commercial from the weird and whacky Tracey Emin type stuff they did at Uni. She was a member of the Guild of Waterway Artists, and we were becoming more



Lesley

ing place that weekend. "We emailed the organisers and asked to put our name down for next year. Within half an hour Ray knocked on the boat and said someone had broken down and dropped out, would we like their place? and so we did our first 'proper' festival and it was the best trading we had had so far. "We don't especially plan our trading around festivals or floating markets, rather we have a broad range of regular events that we try to get to and fit in ad-hock pop-ups as we go along. "Generally we like to do the Norbury festival in May, which ties in with the Guild of Waterways Artists regular Easter exhibition at Audlem Mill. From there we head to Braunston where the Guild have an exhibition marquee at the Historic Boat Gathering there every June. "This year we are heading up to Liverpool for the first time to attend the Biennale art festival there, the Canal Festival at Leigh - Lesley's home town, in Mid September, then up over the Leeds Liverpool to tag on to the bi-centenary celebrations. "Between Lesley's art and Rob's software business, the boat is their sole source of income. "We have no super-duper pensions to fall back on, so we will be trading and working for as long as we can, and we enjoy it immensely," said Rob. "It can have it's ups and downs, and the weather can

be a bit of a dampener sometimes, but we enjoy the travelling, meeting new people in new places, and seeing what fate throws in our path. "For example we traded over the weekend for the first time at Gas St in Birmingham, then went to Bumble Hole and they had a Family Fun Day scheduled, and asked us if we would like to moor up outside the visitor centre. "We took the opportunity and Lesley set up a table with drawings, crayons and colouring pencils for the kids to try their hand, and it was a roaring success! So much so that they have asked us if we can return next year! "We are constantly looking out for new opportunities. I have turned my own IT skills to good use in setting up an eCommerce Web Shop for Lesley at www.jellygnomes.co.uk "Then the Guild of Waterway Artists took an interest and we set up www.artwharf.co.uk for them, and following on the theme, we registered www.wharf-mart.co.uk as an on-line shop to help all canal related traders to exploit the web markets, especially over the lean Winter months. "These sites are hosted in the cloud using my own software company's resources. "Lesley's art has largely been contemporary styled works based upon the wildlife we encounter on our travels, birds, frogs, otters and so on. People are especially attracted to her Kingfisher works. "Lately she



Rob

has started a new venture, inspired by the Lockmaster maps commonly sold at boat hire companies and canal shops, we have come to a licensing agreement with Rob Smith at Lockmaster whereby Lesley is illustrating the maps with historical and wildlife images, and she is gradually building up the portfolio to cover the entire waterways network. "It can be hard work sometimes, and living and working all year around in the confines of a 57ft narrowboat which we share with our two spaniel dogs, Tilly and Benson, but we cannot see us giving up the life and freedom we enjoy any time soon."



Rob and Lesley at Norbury, an event which spurred on their trading plans



First pop-up Skipton

Crisis for long established restoration group

All is not well in deepest Lancashire where the Lancaster Canal Trust – a long established organisation mainly devoted to the restoration of the Northern Reaches, which once linked the canal with the Lake District – is shedding members and attracting criticism from many different quarters.

The Trust has come under attack from the Canal & River Trust, over alleged mistakes in preserving heritage objects, the Inland Waterways Association for failing to work with other bodies and has even seen a rival organisation set up and working on privately owned stretches of the abandoned canal between Tewitfield and Kendal.

Most recently it decided to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, (CIO) at a cost of £800 and one Trust member, Colin Ogden insists changes in the structure of the organisation have led to many members standing down.

Colin, a boater on the Lancaster Canal, who is also the moving force of the Owd Lanky Boaters Group which has been campaigning unilaterally to get the canal restored, accuses the current leadership of the Trust of being a cabal, driving away members.

Recent months have seen three members of the executive standing down because money was spent without their knowledge and the General Secretary has been ousted.



While C&RT have banned the Lancashire Canal Trust from doing any restoration work on the Lancaster Canal Colin Ogden has restored and repainted this bridge on a privately owned land and is replacing bridge numbers.

Membership is falling and Colin Ogden says: "When everything was transferred to the CIO, the assets were transferred, but without committee or officers. "The fact that several trustees had stood down was not mentioned and the membership is falling. "Now I hear one of the new Trustees is asking members "Are you on a committee" and "what has been organised for coming events" "The speaker, senior IWA officer Audrey Smith, said nothing had been done by the Lancaster Canal Trust for some time and they must begin to work with other like minded groups. "I think the trust is heading in the wrong direction."

Meanwhile a long-standing dispute with the Canal & River Trust seems to be getting more acrimonious – and it is all about whether or not milestones should be painted. Research on the Lancaster canal has many references to milestones being painted by the lengthsmen so the boatmen could see them in the dark. The Lancaster Canal Trust, (LCT) have had a long standing policy of locating cleaning and repainting them. It even published a booklet '50 Years On' three years ago that gives a full account of this which was sent to leading members of Canal & River Trust, (C&RT) including Chief Executive Richard Parry,

Chantelle Seaborn, Head of northern region at Wigan, and several others. There is little doubt that C&RT have always been fully aware of LCT activity in relation to milestones. In 2014/15 a milestone was unearthed at Stainton by an LCT work party of volunteers. This milestone is not listed. William Froggatt, heritage officer of C&RT, was informed and the milestone painted in the usual way. The matter surfaced again later with Chantelle Seaborn declaring Lancaster Canal Trust had to have the paint removed from the milestone by their contractors at a cost of £1,300 and no work should be done by LCT on the



The disputed milestone painted by the Trust, above left, and the same stone 'restored' by the instructions of C&RT above right. Left is another milestone restored by Colin Ogden in recent weeks



Sue Cawson, a lifetime boater, liveaboard and owner of an historic boat, as well as a member of C&RT's Navigation Committee and a stalwart of the Historic Narrowboat Owners Club reckons she knows a thing or two about boating and argues that traditional techniques can be adapted for modern boating. So we have challenged her to produce some bite sized bits of advice. This month it is the simple issue of windlasses:

Being square is not a right wind-up

Sue says: "During my boating I have seen so much bad practice and interestingly coming down Buckby we had someone who was lock wheeling for us who was adamant that the two eyes on her windlass were the same when clearly they weren't."

"She kept on using the square eye on the tapered spindles, I did manage to train her in the end, but it is a regular thing that people do.

"Using a square eye on a tapered spindle damages the spindles and there is plenty of evidence of this down the GU, it is also very easy for the windlass to fly off.

"The eye of the windlass should always fit snugly on the spindle and NOT slip.

"The majority of spindles take the small tapered eye of the windlass, the exceptions are hydraulic equipment on locks and bridges, the Ham and Baker paddles on the locks between Calcutt and Knowle.

"Just occasionally you may find a square spindle elsewhere. Please do not use a square eye on a tapered spindle, it is dangerous as the windlass can slip and it also damages the spindles.



Lancaster canal until that is accomplished. Understandably the Trust asked whether this was now C&RT policy and when did this change. There hasn't been an answer and the draconian ban on working parties is widely seen as unfair and one of the factors leading to other organisations taking up the restoration away from C&RT influences.

The canal is now in a very bad state with no work being done by volunteers on tow-path maintenance etc and complaints are being made by the public.

Back in 2015 the Trust's then Public Relations Officer, Frank Sanderson was pleading by letter with Richard Parry:

"There is no doubt this has been badly handled and we should have contacted your officers before work on any structure took place. But the extenuating circumstances do warrant your consideration. "This is my opinion and not

shared by our Trust chairman, but I feel we must try and stop a situation that is already causing LCT problems and could be detrimental to Canal & River Trust. This matter can be resolved by simply asking LCT to remove the paint in an approved manner."

Despite that the sore has been left to fester with both C&RT and the reformed Lancashire Canal Trust apparently no closer to agreeing a return to normal working. Meanwhile Colin Ogden and his Owd Lanky group have been attracting national publicity for the restoration of the Northern Reaches, repainting whole bridges on private sections of the route and now looking at rewatering a long-dry section running across the fields of a sympathetic landowner. A solution doesn't seem to be in sight.

Didn't we have a lovely time, the day we went to Blisworth?

We couldn't get to Blisworth Canal Festival this year so we asked The Floater's friend James Ward who trades as The Pen Boat to provide us with a few words describing the experience from the towpath as well as some pictures. Here is his report

Ok so it's not Bangor as in the 1979 Fiddler's Dram lyrics, but I can't help singing (however badly) this opening line to joyful song on our cruise south to trade at Blisworth Canal Festival.

In my opinion, and that of many of this year's 40,000 plus happy attendees, Blisworth is the quintessential British summer fair.

Great things to do... great things to see... and great things to buy... should really be the Blisworth Canal Partnership's strapline when advertising Blisworth Canal Festival 2016. And the dusting of icing on this perfect Victoria sandwich is that it's all free, no entry charges and no parking charges.

For those who have never visited (shame on you) the festival is split into three distinctly different areas. Firstly the festival



Time for a rest



A charge this year but the two trip boats were full all day

the perfect location for local crafts and a rare breed farmyard animals. Of course, last but not least, is the canal itself with waterside bands and beer tents, boat trips and the piece de resistance (well I am slightly biased) the colourful and eclectic floating market. For Debbie and I on the Pen Maker's Boat it was an absolute bumper of a weekend, definitely our busiest to date. Sadly we were too busy to get around to see much of the frivolity during the festival opening hours but us boaters certainly know how to make up for it at the beer tent in the evenings. See ya next year Blisworth!



Behind the smile lies a serious hangover!

field with the best of British entertainment including everything from dog shows, ferret racing and rifle ranges to face-painting, candyfloss and bouncy castles. Secondly, the village itself opens it's arms and gardens for an intimate and leisurely sojourn past steam engines and cream teas on church pews to the very special gardens of Blisworth House which was



The weather was a perfect match for the icecream boat which ran out of supplies



The cheese boat - always a crowd pleaser



Early customers at The Pen Maker's Boat



RP (Richard Parry) doing a bit of PR with RP (Ronnie Payne) at the Witch Crafter's Boat and, right, chatting with Debs Ward about old boats