

THE FLOATER

JUST WON'T GO AWAY

Issue 5

February 2016

The only paper for boaters produced by boaters

THE FLOATER
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Flood plan threat to boat homes

MORE boat homes may now be at risk – if one version of a new flood prevention scheme for Oxford goes ahead – and it looks as if the Environment Agency proposers of the scheme were not initially aware that the 24 boat homes would be hit.

The boats, which are moored on long-standing riverside moorings on Weirs Mill Stream in the city, have become the potential victims of one part of a multi-million pound flood relief scheme. Tim Wiseman, of the Weirs Orchard Moorings Residents' Association, which represents 17 of the 24 boats moored on the stream, said "Recent flooding has badly hit local homes and businesses and it is clear that Oxford needs a new scheme to help protect homes, business and infrastructure. "However, of the three options presented, one is extremely concerning as it potentially leaves some homeless and would shatter our community and the unique natural environment here.

"The alternative options will bring the same flood protection for the local area, without this impact. We urge the authorities to



Residents of Weirs Mill Stream are trying to persuade the Environment Agency to pick a flood scheme that doesn't remove their boat homes.

progress these instead. "It is important that the Environment Agency, city and county council consider the enormous human impact and environmental damage this option will have, together with additional cost to the public purse."

The formal public consultation on the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme opened, for six weeks, in mid January. It sets out seven areas of works across the city with a

number of options to each, to develop much-needed flood protection to protect Oxford. The three options for this Weirs Mill Stream are cutting widening and straightening the Weirs Mill Stream to enable faster flow onto the flood plain; or building additional physical protection to the Abingdon Road area and constructing new culverts to enable faster flow onto the flood plain; or constructing a new channel

flowing across Iffley Meadows from the main river into the Weirs Mill Stream in order to enable greater discharge across the area. The Environment Agency claims each would be equally effective, based on hydrological modelling but the first would mean the loss of permanent residential moorings at Weirs Orchard which the boaters say represents a loss of scant affordable housing and environmentally-friendly living. At the very least it will bring about the displacement of 17 boats for up to six months during construction, and loss of around 5m of bank, effectively removing all of boaters' gardens and storage. The boaters say the first option would mean destruction of a mature orchard, the removal of an area of mature natural broadleaf woodland, and turning a natural channel into a wide, straight canal. The area is home to a diverse ecology, including otters, hedgehogs, slow-worms, kingfishers, owls



Some of the moorings on the Weirs Mill stream



Notice of the consultation posted on a fence on Weirs Mill Stream

and many other birds which would inevitably be affected, they argue. The group are also concerned that residents are already suffering 'planning blight'. "Our boats and mooring rights are purchased as a package and are sold together. As a result, sales will be harder to make and values will fall. For many, this represents our entire life-savings which are at risk," said Tim Wiseman. Neither the second or third options have any direct impact on any other local properties. Weirs Orchard Moorings are long-established, private moorings located on a back-stream which runs from Longbridges on the main river, down under Donnington Bridge, beyond the southern bypass and then re-joining the Thames downstream of Iffley Lock. The moorings, owned by Mr John Burbank and his family, date back to the 1960s and have been granted a Certificate of Lawful Use. The boats are home to more than 30 people (including visiting children), including professional tradesmen and women, journalist, artists, actor, musicians, a local GP, a psychologist, other NHS and healthcare professions, and those in the IT or charitable sectors. The youngest are in their twen-

ties, the oldest in their eighties. They have had one early victory. In the first plans the boat homes were not indicated on the EA plans but that is now being rectified - albeit with a line of dots. Tim added: "It is the unique nature of the environment here that adds much to this community and we would be shattered if we were to see it reduced to a bleak artificial landscape. The area is not only enjoyed by ourselves, our friends and family, but the many other river users such as anglers and canoeists, not forgetting the residents of those houses on Canning Crescent whose gardens come down to the river on the opposite side. "We don't want to be adversarial with the EA or local authorities, but we need them to see the impacts of this option. "I hope readers of The Floater will support us by emailing oxfordscheme@environment-agency.gov.uk and urge them to protect precious residential moorings."

Inside: latest on the battle of Thorpe Island in Norwich were more boat homes are threatened

Broads Authority offer concessions to battling boaters

By Peter Underwood

The battle to save boat homes in Norwich, where the Broads Authority were threatening 41 boaters with eviction just before Christmas seems to be taking a more conciliatory route as the planners found themselves faced with determined and very vocal opposition.

The boaters living at the western end of Thorpe Island, known as Jenner's Basin, had been threatened with criminal proceedings if they did not comply with an injunction. This was despite liveboards being present on this stretch of the River Yare since at least 1922 and the landowner having both a Covenant and full planning permission for residential moorings.

Meeting

At a meeting in the last week of January between representatives of Thorpe Island and The Broads Authority, the Authority backed down on earlier threats and confirmed that no action is planned, nor do they expect any action to be forthcoming against the moorings the other end of Thorpe Island, an area called River Green. They also do not anticipate taking any immediate enforcement action at Jenner's Basin and, subject



Above and below: Boats on Thorpe Island in Norwich.

to further negotiations, were open to the proposal to suspend enforcement for a further six months following a meeting of the authority's members in March.

Amicable

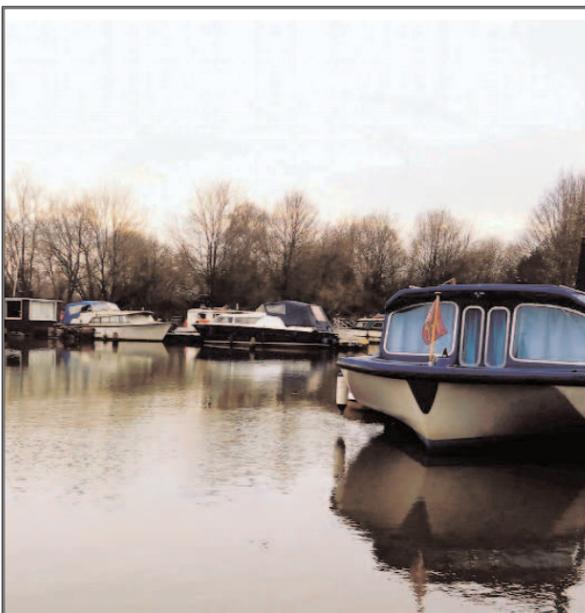
Gary Barnes who attended the meeting on behalf of the boaters said: "The discussion was amicable and we were in agreement about the need to work together to find a solution to the situation at Jenner's Basin that meets the hopes and expectations of all parties involved. "I am very confident that there is a willingness on all sides to work together in the best interests of all concerned." The campaigners, who have mounted a highly effective media

and social media campaign with thousands signing an online petition and others contributing to an online crowd-funding initiative to pay for legal challenges, have directed their fire at key officials within the Broads Authority.

Rhetoric

They defend the tactic, saying it has brought the Authority to the table but now say it is time to 'suspend the rhetoric and concentrate on the job in hand.' Gary says he is 'cautiously optimistic'.

That optimism is reinforced by the fact that planning and development consultants, Lanpro, have written to The Broads Authority about Jenner's Basin. In a letter dated 19th January 2016,



Lanpro challenge The Broads Authority version of 'the facts' and confirm the boaters' view that the moorings have full legal standing.

Alternative

John Packman, the Broads Authority's chief executive, is quoted by the local evening newspaper saying: "There is an alternative way forward and that is to submit a planning application. "An inspector did say it would be suitable for 25 boats. Is there a way of using your resources to develop a plan which we could share with the planning authority?" Gary Barnes told the meeting: "In order to do that we would need some time. I think it would be a good gesture from the authority to suspend any enforcement

action." Both parties have agreed to consider appointing an independent planner to come up with a design for the basin.

Cambridge Eviction Meanwhile an attempt by Cambridge City Council to forcibly evict Marinus Venema and his wife from their boat Moonbeam Shadow on Stourbridge Common and make them homeless, has fizzled out. With the assistance of other boaters the boat was carefully moved a few hundred yards and moored on land not controlled by the City Council, although he has posted recently on his Facebook that he is now in conflict with the River Cam Conservancy

Non transferable boat licences - but it seems no-one told brokers selling boats

Some more of the unforeseen consequences of Canal & River Trust's changes to its terms and conditions in the Spring of 2015 are coming home to roost.

One of the changes, amongst others designed to crack down on continuously cruising boats, is that licences are no longer transferable with a boat. Unfortunately it seems that nobody at C&RT made an effort to tell boat brokers, who frequently advertise a boat with a licence valid for a further number of months.

It was brought home to Norbury Wharf Ltd, a boatyard business selling lots of vessels on the Shropshire Union Canal, when the previous owner of a boat they had sold came back to them to tell them he had been offered a refund on the licence by C&RT.

Manager David Ray said: "This has just arisen as we have sold a boat advertised with a 12 month license. After I notified CRT of the transfer of



David Ray, Manager at Norbury Wharf Ltd

ownership, the original owner has had a letter to say they will get a license refund.

"The boat still has both license disks, which apparently they don't need to have returned for a license to be cancelled, but the new owner under-

stands the boat as licensed. He will now have to shell out for a new licence which he originally understood to be included in the sale.

"I have to conclude this will lead to an increase in the number of boats that are unlicensed as C&RT won't be

informed of change of ownership of boats - they are relying on people being honest, and some, especially in private sales will just decide not to say anything."

He is also puzzled by the charge for refunding a licence which, at £30, is even more than charged by the DVLA for a vehicle licence.

The information about the change is buried on the C&RT website where new owners are advised to check that the previous owner has let the Trust know of the sale. "You can do this by using our online system to register yourself as the new keeper of the boat, and update your contact details."

David added: "We are not alone in not being aware of this. We have spoken to a number of other brokers and many of them didn't know about this change. It would have been helpful if C&RT could have made brokers aware of this change."

And it seems that C&RT is not above making even more than £30 from the process with at least one case reported where the previous owner had his licence terminated at the end of the month and the new owner had to pay from the start of the same month.

The Floater

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Two thirds of winter mooring sites stay empty

Miles of empty winter moorings, some of them in the most peculiar places, have led lots of boaters to question the success of Canal & River Trust's winter mooring strategy.

Some pessimists have been led to predict that the countrywide reversion of all visitor moorings to 14 days over winter would be a casualty in the coming year as the Trust links the low take up with better availability of 14-day spots. Despite that the Trust seems to be upbeat about figures that show their winter moorings were around two thirds empty across the UK – much emptier outside London and the western end of the Kennet and Avon.

The figures released show that a total of 437 boats bought a winter mooring permit, when there was space available for 1,350 15 metre vessels. In total the 182 boaters who bought £13.50 winter moorings booked 505 months, an average of just under three months each. On the basis of an average 15 metre boat this earned C&RT £102,262.

The 126 boaters who bought £10 a metre winter moorings also spent just under three of the four available months on those moorings and C&RT earned £53,400.

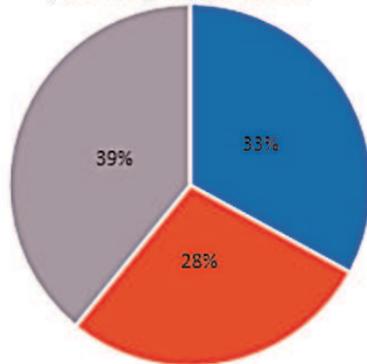
The cheapest, £6.50, winter moorings attracted 149 moorers again with an average stay of around three months bringing in £44,460 for the Trust.

A total of just over £200,000 in income from boaters for winter moor-

Winter moorings sold 2015-2016

Price band	Total permits sold	Metres sold in this price band	Total metres available in band	% metres available purchased
£6.50	149	2159	5985	36%
£10.00	126	1814	8206	22%
£13.50	182	2526	6063	42%

Of all permits purchased, percentage by price band



ings – but it could have been £600,000 and more if the total lengths available had been occupied. In the most expensive price band - £13.50 per metre per month – none were sold in the East Midlands, South Wales and Severn or North East, one in the West Midlands, just two in Central Shires, three in Manchester and Pennine region. In the North West 11 were sold and 14 in North Wales and Borders. All London's winter moorings were priced at £13.50 and C&RT sold 112 of

them along with 21 on the Kennet & Avon. In total, according to C&RT figures, just 33 per cent of the available winter moorings were actually bought by boaters. Most boaters would also say they overpriced themselves and formerly popular sites, such as Cambrian Wharf in central Birmingham have been virtually empty all winter as boaters shunned the £13.50 per metre per month cost of staying there. Combined with the positive impact of boaters

being able to revert to the default 14-day mooring on visitor moorings from November till the end of March the take-up has been predictably low. If the 14-day provision remains in place next winter – and it is part of published C&RT policy – then the Trust may well need to both reduce the number of winter mooring sites, especially in more remote spots and cut price substantially to earn more from winter moorings. Demand is low and supply is high, especially outside London.

Volunteers' corner Buckingham society wins C&RT shield



BCS volunteer leader, Athina Beckett, (second from right) receiving the Volunteer Organisation Recognition Award from the Canal and River Trust's (L-R) Miriam Linforth, John Highmore and Lee King.

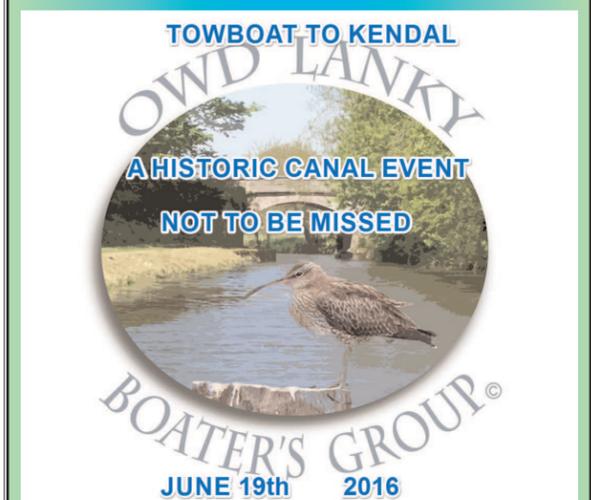
The Buckingham Canal Society (BCS) has won the Canal and River Trust South East Region 'Volunteer Organisation Recognition Award' for 2015. BCS has been hailed for its 'outstanding contribution to volunteering within the South East Waterways regions' with particular recognition for its high output levels, ambitious restoration projects and successful range of achievements within a Community Adoption Agreement at Cosgrove.

The Award includes a certificate and a shield, which the society will keep for a year.

Athina Beckett on behalf of the Society said: "This award is for all members and friends of the Society who have helped us achieve this award over the past year. I feel everyone in the Society should be congratulated and should share my excitement that all our efforts have been recognised by the Canal and River Trust."

The Buckingham Canal Society runs regular practical task work parties on alternate Thursdays and on the second Sunday of each month and always welcome new volunteers. For more information visit www.buckinghamcanal.org.uk or email information@buckinghamcanal.org.uk.

Boating by trailer



Colin Ogden, a Lancaster Canal boater has been making waves of publicity on the Northern Reaches of the Lancaster Canal.

The stretch from Tewitfield to Kendal was hacked into sections when the M6 was built in the 1960s and has yet to be restored.

Colin is now taking his Lakes motor launch Whimbrel up to Kendal canal head, following most of the in-filled section from Stainton. She will, of course, be on the trailer and travelling overload along the course of the cut.

The unique journey is planned for Sunday June 19. The following Sunday there is a national dinghy rally on the Holme section, which was last held in 1975. Colin says: "These events are aimed at raising the plight of this beautiful and badly neglected section of the northern reaches."

"We have already made headlines in a local paper, and I did a Live radio broadcast from the boat on BBC radio Cumbria."

If you have any news that might interest a boating man email the details to TheFloaterUK@gmail.com

What a lot of work!

The Waterways Recovery Group is anxious about whether we are sticking to those New Year resolutions?

Naturally enough they reckon getting outdoors and dirty on a WRG Canal Camp is still the best way to kick start your fitness campaign, learn new skills and make new friends. This year WRG will run 35 canal camps at 16 different sites providing places for up to 580 volunteers to help restore some of the country's neglected waterways. These are the Spring batch of camps, which can now be booked: **13th-20th February** Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation (Essex) Winter warming activities to help maintain this beautiful waterway including vegetation clearance and towpath improvement work. Accommodation (and beds!) on the Haybay Barge. **25th March-2nd April** Chesterfield Canal (Derbyshire) The race is on to complete the redevelopment of the canal at Staveley – including a new



40 TONNES OF RUBBISH!

Last year's BCN cleanup collected rather a lot.

lock and a 275m pound below the lock - in time for IWA's Trailboat Festival in May. Learn to blocklay on this canal camp.

2nd-9th April Uttoxeter Canal (Staffordshire) and **9th-16th April** Uttoxeter Canal (Staffordshire) Help repair a historic canal bridge back to its former glory. The work needs to be completed by May 2016 or the project will lose its HLF funding - so the Uttoxeter Canal needs your help now.

Meanwhile, on the Birmingham Canal navigations, this year's BCN clean up on April 16 and 17, will see

a return to an area not visited for many years. Based at Ocker Hill on the Walsall Canal the teams of Volunteers will clean the lower Walsall, Tame Valley Canals and Ryders Green Locks. Day Volunteers can sign on at Ocker Hill Depot from 10am, or at the Malthouse Stables in Tipton at 9am, where you will be transported to Ocker Hill. Safety foot wear should be worn as well as water proof clothing. Bring your lunch if you do not wish to purchase the lunch provided by Waterway Recovery Group.

Volunteers aid towpath repair work

A 'Herculean' effort from volunteers has helped to reopen the first stretches of flood damaged towpath along the Rochdale Canal according to the Canal & River Trust's press office.

It says volunteers supported by staff from Canal & River Trust have been out in all weather and have moved over 200 tonnes of stone and other materials – the weight of 15 double decker buses – to fill holes and long scours that were left by flood waters along the popular towpath through Sowerby Bridge, Hebden Bridge and Todmorden.

It does not mention when the canal will be open again for boats, especially with the Leeds and Liverpool Canal celebrating its 200th anniversary this year and many boaters trying to plan circular routes taking in the Aire and Calder and the Rochdale canals.

When asked, 'What about boats, can you give an estimate of when the canals will be navigable again?' C&RT said: "As you can imagine, it was a scene of devastation up on the Rochdale and Calder & Hebble. The team has been beavering away ever since Boxing Day. More details to follow in due course." But the towpath work is racing ahead. In the past week a mile and a half stretch of towpath between locks 7 and 10 has been reopened and it is expected that by the end of



Volunteers at work on the Rochdale's towpath.

the week local residents will once again be able to use the towpath all the way from Sowerby Bridge to Hebden Bridge.

Jon Stopp, a lead volunteer with the Canal & River Trust, said: "The response from the community has been fantastic. The canal is such an important part of life around here and getting the towpaths back open is really important."

"So far volunteers on the Rochdale Canal have contributed over 120 days-worth of hard work since the floods wreaked havoc. Their work fixing and repairing towpaths and clearing thick mud has been Herculean. And it's not just been residents. We've even had volunteers from the local branch of Lloyds and Halifax out helping." The work on the towpath of the Rochdale Canal continues. In the next week, the Trust hopes that work in and around Todmorden will mean that the canal towpath is once again open from there all the way to Manchester.

There is also considerable work to do on the canal between Hebden Bridge and Todmorden where the flooded River Calder washed away an entire stretch of canal bank and where hundreds of tonnes of soil, trees and debris slid down the side of the hill and blocked the canal.

The Trust has also launched an appeal to help rebuild canals.

David Baldacchino, waterway manager for the Canal & River Trust said; "The Boxing Day floods were the worst we've ever seen on our waterways and have caused major damage on both the Rochdale Canal and Calder & Hebble Navigation. The waters destroyed homes and businesses, damaged historic canals and washed away much loved stretches of towpath."

"The Trust's appeal will help rebuild and reopen historic waterways helping waterside communities, where life has been turned upside down, to recover."

Shorter times in Liverpool docks 'better for boaters'

The Trust is praising itself over its decision to change the way boaters access Liverpool's docks – although carefully avoiding the fact that it has slashed the time boaters can spend there from two weeks to one.

It claims more boaters are set to enjoy the delights of Liverpool in the Leeds & Liverpool Canal's bicentenary year, thanks to the new arrangements it's introduced.

The new procedures mean that up to six boats can travel each way along the Pier Head Canal Link every day except Tuesdays. This gives boaters more flexibility over arrival and departure days into Salthouse Dock, compared with the old system which had designated 'in' and 'out' days.

The new Liverpool Canal Link booking process, cutting back on the time allowed, has been trialled since August 2015 and was C&RT says it has been 'voted a winner by boaters using the new service', although it doesn't provide anything to back this up.

One of the undoubted advantages of the new system is that

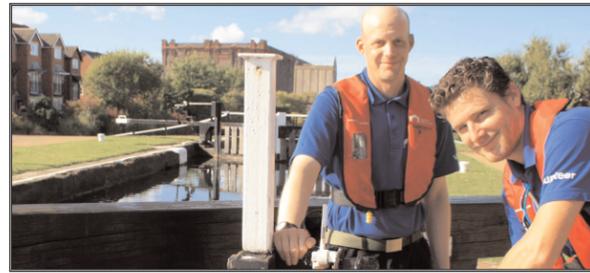
boaters can now cruise straight to the end of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal at the Eldonian Village without needing to book a passage from Aintree. This means that during popular times boaters have the alternative of mooring on the main line of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal to access the city centre.

There are 45 Liverpool Waterfront visitor berths available in Salthouse Docks, and they were rarely fully booked before the changes but C&RT says the new system 'will mean many more boaters will be able to enjoy the city'.

Steve Bergquist, customer operations manager with the Canal & River Trust, claimed: "This new arrangement is a huge step forward."

Assistance from Liverpool's cheery volunteer lock keepers is still available when travelling down the Stanley Lock flight. Lee Cox is a volunteer team leader.

He started volunteering four years ago and has even got his stepson Mark McCumiskey involved, both pictured below. Mark said: "There are loads of letters from boaters complementing us and saying how much they appreciate our help."



Boating Basics - this month - better battery connections

Taken from an article in Norbury News and research by Smart Gauge Electronics

Have you got it wrong all along?

Most boaters will complain when their batteries begin to falter and fail much earlier than they would have hoped. Well, it seems that spending a bit more in connecting the battery bank up in the right way could do a lot to improve battery life.

The reason for that is simple. The 'standard' way of connecting batteries in a bank means that the first battery in a bank comes under more pressure. Some excellent research by Smart Gauge Electronics has provided the technical evi-

dence but, put simply, the connections and cables between batteries drain some power, whether it is going in to the battery bank or being taken out.

In theory, if you are drawing 100amps from a bank of four batteries, 25 amps should be coming from each but the research shows that simply isn't true.

In fact Smart Gauge estimates on its website (www.smartgauge.co.uk) that the first battery provides 35.9 amps, the next, 26.2 amps, the third 20.4 amps and the last just 17.8 amps, half that of the first.

Exactly the same thing happens in reverse when charg-

ing with the first battery getting much more than the rest of the bank.

Further research shows that it is not necessarily the first battery working harder that fails as the others take up more of the load as it weakens, but the end result is a battery bank going for recycling much earlier than it needs to.

So what's the answer? The simplest and easiest is to take the positive and negative cables feeding power to the boat and taking a charge into the batteries from terminals on diagonally opposite corners of the whole battery bank. It doesn't matter whether you move the posi-

tive or the negative, whichever is easiest.

According to Smart Gauge this gives a much better balance with the first and last batteries in the bank providing 26.7 amps out of 100 amps and the ones in the middle 23.2 amps.

Better but not perfect. Perfection depends on getting the links between batteries as close to equal as possible.

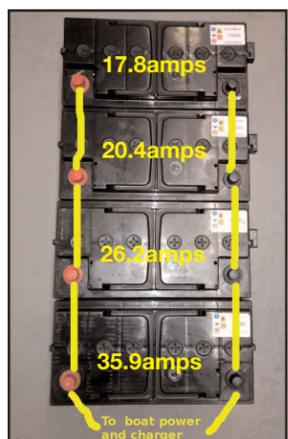
Perfection, according to the gurus at Smart Gauge, comes with two extra connecting leaders and terminal posts. This system does require exactly equal connections between batteries – so they all have to sit side by

side – and even the gurus admit that the gain in efficiency is only worth it if you have very expensive batteries or eight or more in a bank.

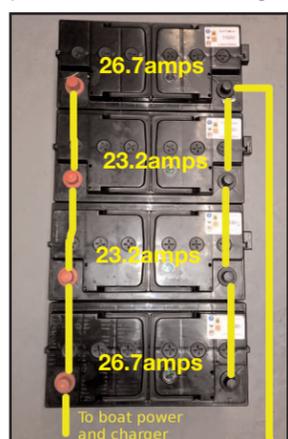
There is another 'perfect' way which first links the batteries in pairs with each pair then wired together.

The last two may be a bit extreme for most boaters but there is really no excuse for not using the second method and being much nicer to your battery bank, and your pocket in the long run, despite the initial cost of new cables etc.

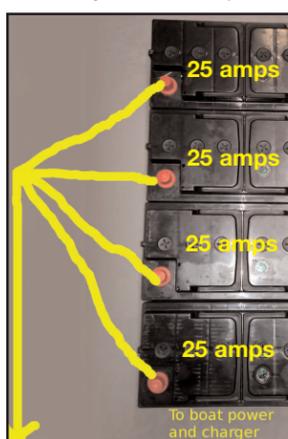
First produced for Norbury News, the magazine of Norbury Wharf Ltd



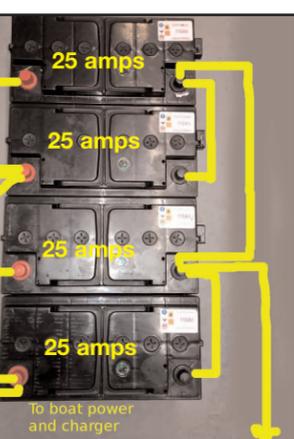
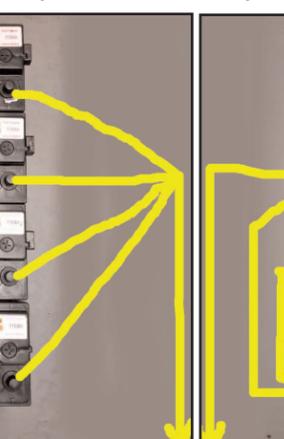
The traditional way of wiring up a battery bank - but the last battery provides half the power of the first.



One simple change and the load is spread much more evenly.



Both of these arrangements, above, provide as near as possible a perfectly spread battery load



Military veterans to work with C&RT

The UK's canals and military veterans are getting £500,000 from People's Postcode Lottery's 'Dream Fund' for a 'Heritage Heroes' project.

Canal & River Trust and Help for Heroes have come together for the first time with a plan to change the lives of ex-servicemen and women through a programme of canal restoration, transforming waterways across England in the process.

The project will train ex-servicemen or women to achieve an accredited qualification as they recruit volunteers to help transform the waterways.

It is claimed 200,000 local people will be involved through events, walks, education programmes and other activities.

Clara Govier, head of charities at People's Postcode Lottery, said: "The 'Dream Fund' gives organisations the opportunity to work on projects that they could only dream. Heritage Heroes will make such a difference to the lives of so many."

Richard Parry, chief executive at Canal & River Trust, said: "Working with veterans who have done so much to serve their nation, and with local volunteer groups, we will be restoring and renewing canals for the people and communities around them."

"The project will teach the ex-servicemen skills in land-based management and construction. Inspiring and working with volunteer as they will be rebuilding locks, restoring canal-side hedgerows, making repairs to canal heritage and getting thousands of local people to connect with their local waterway."

Susan Turnbull, head of career recovery at Help for Heroes, said: "Leaving the military and finding a new direction can be daunting especially for those who are living with life-changing injuries and illnesses."

"This project has afforded us the opportunity to help rebuild the lives of countless wounded injured and sick servicemen, women and veterans who remain highly skilled and motivated, whilst also restoring our forgotten canals."

"When an injury occurs to our servicemen and women, it can change their life instantly and, before they know it, what they thought would be a career for life has gone."

"Suddenly they are left with the feeling of 'What next?' This project will give them not only a sense of purpose, but will help develop new skills that will set them on the path for a new and purposeful career."

"A recent study we commissioned revealed that at least 66,090 service personnel will need our support now or in the future."