

JUST WON'T GO AWAY THE FLOATER

Issue 8

May 2016

The only paper for boaters produced by boaters

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New Mooring Strategy for London to 'manage high number of boats' promised

Trust's hard line despite mass protest

... and a 30,000 petition
... and critical documentary
... and C&RT council critic

Peter Underwood
rounds up a month of protest

The chorus of protest grows louder and wider but the Canal & River Trust seems to be giving mixed messages about liveaboard boaters without a home mooring.

As a petition to government and C&RT calling on them to acknowledge 'boats are homes' approaches 30,000 signatures, hundreds of boaters turned up to take part in the mass protest of 150,000 people in London, and the BBC produced a sympathetic documentary about a liveaboard family, a newly elected member of the Trust Council says: "I believe that C&RT management are not behaving in a fair and equitable manner."

None of which seems to be having much impact on Richard Parry's management team, and National Bargee Travellers Association's Secretary and Legal Officer Nick Brown reports that a meeting with C&RT's Head of

Legal, Jackie Lewis, Head of Boating Mike Grimes and boating liaison manager Matt Symonds: "didn't go well, they conceded very little, if anything."

Now The Trust has announced plans to develop a London Mooring Strategy aimed at 'better provision and management of a range of facilities and mooring types in London.'

It says it wants to, 'manage the high number of boats in London and to mitigate the environmental impacts on the waterways and neighbours' as well as ensuring 'fair sharing of water space' enabling a 'wider range of boaters' to visit London, to make more money from waterways in London, support tourism and 'ensure the mooring strategy contributes to the Trust's aim that London's waterways help to transform neighbourhoods and enrich people's lives.'

All of which will be treated with a high degree of suspicion by many London boaters who already see C&RT as attempting to gentrify the city's waterways and drive as many boaters as possible onto commercial moorings

Coming just after Nick Brown's meeting, the new strategy may well have been in the minds of Trust managers when talking to the National Bargee Travellers Association.

Nick Brown says: "They are sticking to their interpretation of what is 'bona fide navigation' and are not minded to compromise. In fact they said that their professional standards require them to do this because they believe themselves to be right."

He says the meeting confirmed:

- that it is not required to engage in a progressive journey
- that 10 miles is not enough (this is per the Davies case).- that there is still no clarity on what is enough.
- that they accepted that "locality" and "area" are not used as terms and only "place" is valid
- that they are still not moving in relation to kids in school
- that they don't have an Equality Officer after all.- that they don't have an equality policy after all
- that they will only provide "reasonable adjustments" to people with disabilities for (possibly short) finite periods of time.
- that they do not accept that they have to honour requisitions from people with disabilities for reasonable adjustments if they don't consider

them reasonable.

Nick Brown also reported that C&RT would not be issuing 6-month restricted licences from May this year. that the consequence is that they will be issuing many Section 8s thereafter. he said: "So we are both lining up for a god-almighty fight."

This interpretation was swiftly challenged by C&RT which insisted six month licences were not being cancelled and that they still wanted to work with boaters without a home mooring.

Matthew Symonds said: "I can clarify that there is no change whatsoever to the six month restricted licence being offered to boats that aren't quite meeting the movement requirements to allow them an opportunity to show an improvement."

"We're really keen to work with each boat owner opting to continuously cruise to ensure they can achieve a pattern of movement that allows them to meet the guidance going forward. Similarly, the guidance for boaters regarding distance remains the same."

"Over the past year our emphasis on communicating more with continuous cruisers has shown positive effects."

Continued on page four



Photos of the anti austerity march by Victoria Crabbe and the NBTAs



Missed key targets - safety, repairs and employee trust

Well before the glossy annual report comes out, Trustees on the C&RT board know that the Richard Parry team has missed four vital targets, including issues vital both to staff and boaters. Allan Richards looks at what is going wrong.

By Allan Richards



Just how well is the Canal & River Trust performing – even on the basis of the measurements it has chosen to be judged upon?

The Trust's financial year ended in March and it will be months before its annual report but it will be fascinating to see how it deals with four areas where its board has already been told that C&RT will fail to meet targets.

The charity company sets itself yearly targets called Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), with progress reported every two months to its board members using a traffic light system. At January's meeting, trustees were informed that, out of the 15

KPI's being monitored, just six were 'on track' – green. Five were yellow - behind interim targets. Four more were red - so far behind interim targets that no possibility existed of the yearly targets being met.

So what are the four failures? Bearing in mind the Trusts almost pathological fixation with Health & Safety, many will be gobsmacked to learn that accident frequency rate (AFR) is double its target and instead of the ambition to reduce accident rates from the previous financial year, the sorry state of affairs is that accidents are up 50 per cent.

Worryingly, figures provided by Julie Sharman (Executive Head of Asset Management & Performance) show volunteer accident rates are over four times higher than employees' or contractors'.

An example of a volunteer accident contributing to these figures has been provided by C&RT as follows:

'South East Waterway – A volunteer slipped on an external door mat at Stoke Bruerne Museum resulting in a broken hip. The premises inspection procedure has been reviewed and the mat which should have been only used internally has been removed'.

An associated Key Performance Indicator related to Public Safety – 'Proportion of injuries directly associated with infrastructure' is showing yellow because the interim target has not been met.

The second failure is 'brand awareness'. This is the percentage of people who, when surveyed, are aware of the Trust. The 'actual' fig-

Riddor AFR (12 Month average) December 2015	
Employees	0.28
Volunteers	1.21
Contractors	0.26
Combined Rate	0.35

Many will be gobsmacked to learn that accident frequency rate (AFR) is double its target and instead of the ambition to reduce accident rates from the previous financial year the sorry state of affairs is that accidents are up 50 per cent.

ure for 2014/15 was 30 per cent. The target for last year was raised to 35 per cent. However, C&RT trustees have been told that this target is unachievable.

Despite all C&RT's recent marketing initiatives, including a TV campaign, 'brand awareness' is showing a decline (from 30 per cent to 29 per cent) rather than the marked increase planned. An associated KPI – 'percentage of people surveyed who say they are likely to support the Trust' is showing yellow ... The third failure is 'employee engagement score' - a measurement of staff morale and confidence in the Trust.

How this is actually measured is not known. Suffice to say, however, in 2014/15, 46 per cent of employees were 'engaged'. The target for 2015/16 was revised upwards to 48 per cent but the Trust now confirms the actual 2015/16 figure to be less than the previous year – just 40 per cent.

That's a massive drop and may be due to C&RT's attack on its poorly paid employees' future pension provision.

This 'initiative' will result in some workers being significantly worse off, both in the near future and also upon retirement. What will be really galling for workers is that employees were assured that pensions would be safeguarded under the Trust. On the positive side (for some at least), C&RT will be about £700,000 per year better off ...

The fall in 'employee engagement score' has already produced one casualty. C&RT are advertising to replace Nigel Cadman, its Head of Human Resources. Mr Cadman joined C&RT some 18 months ago

with significant experience of working in highly unionised environments. His job is now advertised at £90,000 plus benefits. The final failure is of particular concern to boaters.

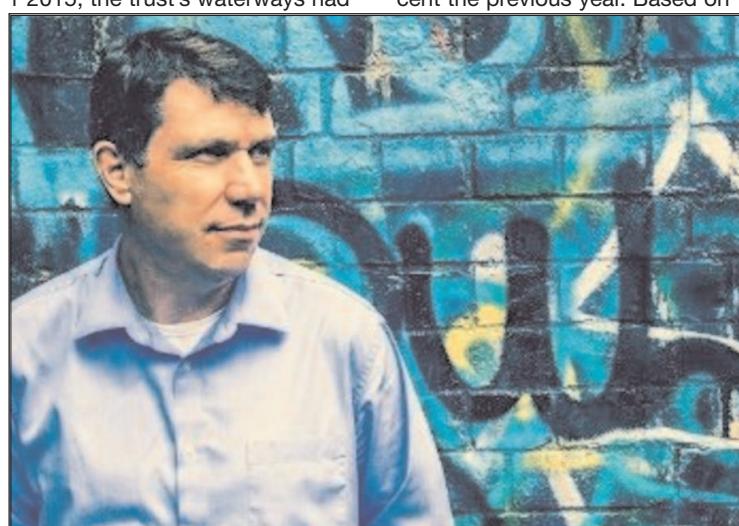
BW transferred its waterways to C&RT's care with a massive maintenance backlog. Back in 2007 BW estimated this to be in the order of £200m.

A report by KPMG, which cost the taxpayer £800,000, found that the BW's estimate was reasonable. It also found that the backlog would grow due to chronic underspending on the waterways.

In terms of the number of defects that constitute this backlog, C&RT has yet to provide current figure. However, it is known that, on April 1 2015, the trust's waterways had

some 59,133 outstanding defects and twelve months previously 50,579. With a rapidly growing backlog and no viable plan to reduce it, C&RT now concentrates on fixing just 4,000 to 5,000 'high priority defects' each year. These are defects which the Trust says must take precedence due to safety or customer service issues. So instead of a KPI giving a clear indication of how it is tackling its rising maintenance backlog C&RT has a rather meaningless one which shows how successful it is in fixing just the small proportion (less than 10 per cent) of defects targeted for clearance each year. In the 2014/15 financial year it only managed to fix 81 per cent of high priority defects compared to 85.6 per cent the previous year. Based on

information already published, this year C&RT will be lucky to manage 70 per cent. C&RT's chief executive Richard Parry has told his board: 'As reported in November, we will not meet the year-end target in some areas, reflecting the ambitious goals we have set ourselves and the difficulty of achieving year-on-year change in some areas. For the year ahead a more considered approach will be taken such that all targets are realistic.' However, even if the goals that C&RT set themselves were to simply repeat 2014/15 performance, they would have failed:-Accident Frequency Rate up 50 per cent. 'Brand awareness' down 1 per cent. 'Employee engagement score' down 6 per cent. High Priority Defects cleared down 20 per cent. One is left wondering if the 'realistic targets' set for 2016/17 will be less than the 'actuaries' achieved in 2014/15!



Nigel Cadman - on his way after 18 months with employee trust falling.

Measure	Actual 2014/15	Plan 2014/15	Actual 2013/14
WATERWAYS			
No of High Priority Customer Service or Safety related Infrastructure Defects cleared (% of identified programme)	81%	90%	85.6%
Combined Employee, Volunteer and Contractor RIDDOR Accident Frequency Rates (accidents per 100,000 hours)	0.23	0.20	0.29

The Floater

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Handmade pens are the stock-in-trade of this boating couple

The Floater takes a look at canal traders – people making a living 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 second trader is The Pen Maker's Boat - the business of James and Debbie Ward which is already making a mark at floating markets around the country.

 By Peter Underwood

What turns an estate agent and one-time chef into a floating pen-maker? That's a question for James and Debbie Ward, aged 46 and 47 who have been married for 25 years next year, and are setting out on a new life and new business aboard the narrowboat Lois Jane.

James says that a few years ago he was considering his options: "The timeline went something like... look at converting a chapel in West Wales into a restaurant, spend several years researching B&B's and gites in France with a view to emigrating, a lust for a peniche on the French waterways until we realised that we didn't have 200k to spend and couldn't even afford to fill the diesel tanks on a suitable boat!"

"Then we started looking into the UK inland waterways with a view to saving until 2020 (from 2011) to buy a boat. Then I wake up in the middle of the night and tell Deb 'we're going to the bank tomorrow to extend the mortgage'."

"A month later we had a boat, three months later notices were handed in, four bedroom house rented and contents condensed to a small van and we left the marina to become continuous cruisers. Initially for our belated 'gap year'!"

James says the gap year turned into two and even though interest rates stayed low and meant we had some income from their rented house they were still several thousand short for their yearly budget.

"The choice was either go back to the house, stay in a marina for the coldest six months or try a business from the boat," he says, but why pens?

"Logic should have dictated that I went back to my catering roots and used my couple of decades of experience there, and it probably would have been the path we took if we needed a bit more money."

"After filling several notebooks with ideas - you wouldn't know it but I'm a bit of a thinker - I came up with woodturning."

"Start up costs were doable, and more importantly storage space wasn't too extreme."

"I was wandering by the boatyard in Alvecote when I saw Ade, the master craftsman and wooden boat builder, and I thought I'd



Trading at Blisworth - which James says was one of his best events last year.



The pen making work goes on at the stern while Deb sells from the bow - that's their boat dog Dudley on the towpath

be cheeky and ask if he had any spare old timber that I could practice on.

"He was just about to put a lump of tarry old side planking onto the fire to steam bend some new timbers. I couldn't believe that this old oak from an historic old joey boat was about to go up in flames."

"After scraping the pitch and rotten wood out all that was left was enough timber for a small dish and a couple of pens. I'd been watching videos on youtube how to make them."

"Ade sorted me out a couple more pieces to work on, again from Joey boat Birchills, I was honest with Ade and said if they were

any good I would try selling them and I'd make sure that some of the money went back to him and the boat owners to help with the restoration.

"Trialling my wares on Facebook in the run up to Christmas it was soon evident that pens made from historic boat timbers, exotic imported hardwoods and colourful acrylics and resins was where I was heading and The Pen Maker's Boat was born."

"Knowing that the very real alternative may be going back to a house and a seventy hour working week as an estate agent is a great motivator."

"I see living on a boat as an

absolute gift to learning new things. Moor in the middle of nowhere and you have practically zero distractions - I still can't play the guitar though."

James makes every pen on the back of the boat, and each one has its own unique number and corresponding web page so you can see where it was made and lots more information about the materials and process.

Is it a living and do you enjoy it, I asked him?

"No not a living, it's a great supplement but the potential is only ever going to be about half of what we need."

"On warm sunny days nothing is better. However a

tough long days it is quite satisfying. Best in 2015 was Blisworth with close to 60,000 visitors over two days."

They travel the system - this year is from Chester to Milton Keynes and all places in between. "Hopefully next year we'll spend some time back in London and trade from Rickmansworth (another great festival) to Bath," he says.

That makes them liveaboard continuous cruisers - so how does he get on with C&RT and its new crackdown?

"At the moment CRT do seem to be surprisingly helpful to traders. I guess they must see us as an asset. It is tough though seeing them make concessions to allow us to stay an extra two days on a 48hr mooring over Easter weekend when they seem obviously against the larger CCing community."

"You don't need a sledgehammer to crack a nut. C&RT seem to think they need a steamroller! I'd prefer that CRT concentrate their actions specifically against boaters who break the law and not their seemingly ever-changing rules and guidance for boaters without a home mooring."

"I'm also concerned at the rate at which CRT appear to be passing responsibility of the repair of the towpaths to the cycling charity Sustrans, who build non-boater friendly towpaths and the onus on local authorities to 'adopt' their local canal, as many of these authorities seem to very anti-boater notably Berkhamsted who want to restrict boaters to 48hr stops all year round instead of the 14 days that the law allows."



Together in business James and Debbie Ward



London mooring is under microscope

Continued from page one

"This has included getting in touch early to let boaters know when they haven't been moving enough to meet the terms of their licence, sending out information packs when people take up a continuous cruising licence, and sending text messages to overstaying boats to see if they need any help."

"As always, we want to support boaters to be able to stay on the water, but we have to be fair to everyone to ensure the fair sharing of moorings."

Head of Boating, Mike Grimes, chimed in with an email to Nick Brown saying: "I think there must have been some misunderstanding on your part during the meeting as I was, and remain, clear there is no change at all to the six month restricted licence and when it will be issued."

Nick says: "Our notes, of what was said in the meeting and what Mike Grimes is saying, of CRTs policy, do not concur. Nor is there consistency between CRTs policy and the next part of the conversation that referred to the anticipated impending rise in section 8 notices and the poli-

cies of CRT to engage in a deliberate "dribbling out" of the enforcement litigation as a strategy to avoid a class action." All this comes after the April 16 mass protest that saw just over 200 boat dwellers march to Downing Street to attempt to hand in a petition signed by nearly 30,000 people against the Canal and River Trust's policy that the NBTA says threatens travelling boat dwellers with eviction.

Along with protesting against evictions, the demonstrators called for more mooring rings and more facilities such as water taps and sewage points.

A spokesperson for National Bargee Travellers Association said: "Due to Canal River and Trust's policy, people are leaving their way of life as travelling boat dwellers. Many in our community feel that the C&RT is trying to force us off the waterways. We are under increasing strain due to the C&RT's policies."

"C&RT doesn't have a set distance or way we must move. They deal with us inconsistently, refuse and restrict our licences without giving us clear reasons and

threaten people with eviction." Stella Ridgway, recently elected boater representative of C&RT's national Council has now intervened, saying on Facebook: "There is a lot on mainstream media at present about liveaboards; particularly those with children. I believe that C&RT management are not behaving in a fair and equitable manner.

"For liveaboards, it is all very well to say take a mooring, but when those moorings aren't available and you do move within the terms of your licence with no patrol notices, emails etc and you find out six weeks before your licence runs out that you may lose your home because you haven't satisfied the board, when custom and practice tells you it has been OK, this is the frustration - changing the perceived goalposts.

"I shall be having this conversation with the Boating Team, because we need to think outside the box, offering extended periods of stay in an area during term times if children are not home schooled, creating another sort of licence." The Canal & River Trust is setting out its plans to develop a London Mooring

Strategy to address the unique challenges and opportunities of boating in the Capital.

The announcement on the new London Mooring Strategy came on the last day of April in a press release which claimed boating in the capital, 'has become more challenging as boat numbers on London's waterways continue to grow.'

"It is clear that a plan of action that covers all aspects of London moorings, developed with waterway users, is necessary to make a significant difference," said C&RT, adding, "A London Mooring Strategy will allow the Trust to take a look at how to manage these issues, as well as make the most of opportunities that will help the charity maintain the waterways for the benefit of boaters and other users.

Matthew Symonds, is quoted saying: "London's waterways are some of the busiest in the country and we need to manage the finite space effectively. We need to face the challenges head on, as well as taking advantage of the opportunity to develop a really world-class waterspace that people will be able to visit and



enjoy. We'll be working closely with those who use the Capital's canals and rivers to make sure we hear everyone's views and make well-informed decisions."

The Trust says it has been gathering information from various groups, including its Navigation Advisory Group,

the London Waterway Partnership, national boating organisations and other key stakeholders and promises a programme of workshops for interested parties over the coming months with a target date of next year for some conclusions.

Are some boaters more equal than others when it comes to facilities?

A key part of the argument made by many boaters in London is that the facilities are inadequate for the number of boats and there certainly seems to be a discrepancy – as far as we can tell.

It seems the Canal & River Trust is not exactly sure and seems to have no idea whether there are more or fewer than five or ten years ago.

The Trust supplied some basic data currently being reviewed and updated monthly as part of a facilities review it is carrying out but told The Floater: "We're doing a big data cleansing exercise and have had to update a lot of the records to get the current data accurate..."

The public relations team added, when asked for comparative numbers: "There is a study from 2006 but this didn't include actual numbers, and this data has now been updated to be accurate as at the present day."

C&RT's current figures for London seem to tally broadly with a survey carried out by the National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA) with both agreeing there are, for instance 20 water points in the London Region but the NBTA recording that 25 per cent were out of action. London boaters hit by a lack of water, rubbish and toilet facilities have been protesting claiming more facilities have been removed.

A tow-path gathering in late March at Stonebridge in Tottenham saw increasing

frustration amongst boaters when almost 70 members of the community battled the wind and rain to come together to discuss their options.

The NBTA claims the necessities for living a decent life on the water are being taken away, and boaters feel that their plight is ignored. It says access to facilities is now being removed and restricted, and boaters are 'increasingly forced to endure primitive and unsanitary conditions'.

Pointing to a surplus of £39.4 million made by C&RT in 2014/15, and the Trust's reserve fund of £660 million, the NBTA says the charity can easily afford to install more facilities for boaters, but instead it has demolished water taps, toilet facilities and rubbish points at Waltham

Cross. C&RT is now restricting the opening hours of the toilets and showers further up the Lee in Stonebridge, despite attempts by the NBTA to negotiate to try to prevent this.

With just 13 elsan points, three of them out of use and 20 water taps, with five of them broken, the lot of the 3,500 boats in London compares badly with those on the rural Shropshire Union Canal with eight water points, eight elsan points, three user operated pump-outs, 14 toilets and four showers serving perhaps a third of the number of boats, with many more non-liveaboards using that canal. London boaters argue that more and better facilities spread more equally across the region would also result in



Brand new facilities at Marsworth already broken. (Picture Molly Berry)

boats becoming better spread out and less focused around the handful of current service points.

Suburb / Area	Lock / Junction / Point	Bridge	Tap	Miles	Elsan	Miles	Toilet	Pump Out	shower	bin
Watford	Cassio Bridge Lock 78	168	tap		0		0	0		
Rickmansworth	Batchworth Lock 81	173	tap	2.5	Elsan		Toilet	?		bin
Harefield	Coppermill Lock 84	177	tap	2.5	0		0	0		
Cowley	Cowley Lock 89	188	tap	6	Elsan	8.5	0	0		bin
Bulls Bridge	Bulls Bridge Junction	21	tap	4	0		0	0		
Southall	Norwood Top Lock 90	204	tap	2	Elsan	6	Toilet	0		bin
Brentford	Brentford Gauging Locks 100	209	tap	3	multi		Toilet	Pump Out		bin
Greenford	Black Horse Bridge	15	tap	5	0		0	0		
Little Venice	Bridge 3c	3c	tap	7.5	Elsan	13.5	Toilet	Pump Out		bin
Kings Cross	St Pancras Lock 4	31	broken	3	Elsan	3	0	0		
Angel	City Road Locks	39	tap	1	0		0	0		bin
Victoria Park	Old Ford Lock 8	54	tap	2.5	Elsan	3.5	Toilet	0		bin
Limehouse	Rail Bridge 7	7	tap	1.5	broken		broken	broken	broken	broken
Bow	Locks		broken		broken		broken	0		
Hackney Wick	Old Ford Lock 10	Footbridge	tap	1.5	Elsan	1.5	Toilet	0		bin
Tottenham Hale	Tottenham Hale Lock 17		broken		0		0	0		
Tottenham Hale	Stone Bridge Lock 16	0	tap	5	Elsan	5	Toilet	Pump Out	Shower	
Ponders End	Picketts Lock 15	30	broken	1	0		0	0		
Pondres End 2	Ponders End Lock 14	33	tap	3	0		0	0		
Enfield	Rammy Marsh lock 12	40	broken	0.5	0		0	0		
Waltham	nr Waltham Town Lock 11	41	broken		broken		broken			
Action lock		0	0	0	Elsan	0	0	Pump Out		
			Total 15/20		Total 10 / 13		Total 7/10	Total 4/5	Total 1/2	Total 8/9

From Watford in the West to Waltham in the East this is the result of the National Bargee Traveller's research into available facilities across the London region.

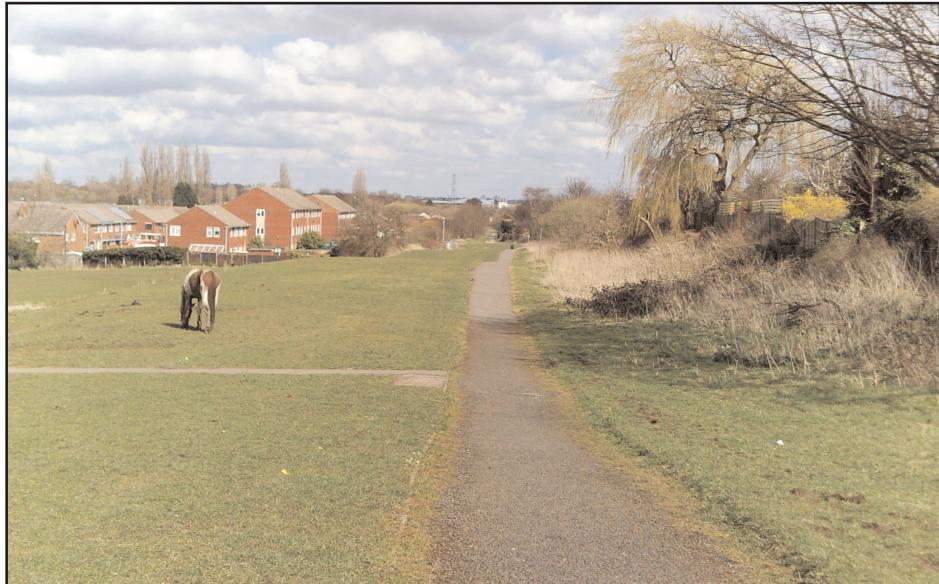
Buried canal may be unearthed if £7.5m is found

Visitors on the Spring Cruise of the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society took a long stroll along the route of a Black Country canal which was shut and 'buried' in the 1950s but could be given a new lease of life if a £7.5 million restoration project gets the green light.

The new initiative aims to raise support to restore the Bradley Arm Canal which was largely filled in after closure about 65 years ago.

A study concluded last year that full restoration was feasible at an estimated cost of £7.5m.

The report was commissioned by the West Midlands Waterways Partnership of the Canal & River Trust (CRT), the Inland Waterways Association, the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society and Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust. Restoring the canal, which includes a flight of nine locks has attracted some local attention after a pub-



Regular dips in the footpath show where the lock flight once carried boats.

lic meeting and BCNS stalwart Dave Pearson, who conducted the walk down the buried lock flight, is an enthusiast, having helped archaeologists excavate some of the buried locks some years ago. He is convinced the locks can be restored as they are largely intact beneath a grassy slope

The Bradley Canal, also known as Wednesbury Oak Loop runs from the Birmingham Mainline Canal near Coseley to Bradley. The restored section would start near CRT's Bradley workshops and continue down to Moorcroft Junction creating a through route from the Wolverhampton Level

of the Birmingham Canal main line to the Walsall Canal and the Tame Valley Canal.

Canal & River Trust is enthused about the community benefits of a restoration, talking about 'a valuable wildlife corridor' and a recent upsurge in interest in the industrial heritage of the Black Country'.

After the Bradley Canal was closed in the 1950s it was infilled with the exception of the bottom two locks and the final reach to the Walsall Canal. Dave Pearson admits the restored canal would probably not see a lot of boats as, other than central Birmingham and the main routes in and out, the Birmingham Canal Navigations are sadly under used.

He is convinced, however, that the interest among the public generated by a restoration would benefit the whole area.



Above: A short pound still in water between infilled locks at the bottom of the Bradley flight. Below: A faded map of 1783 showing how the canal links with others on the BCN.

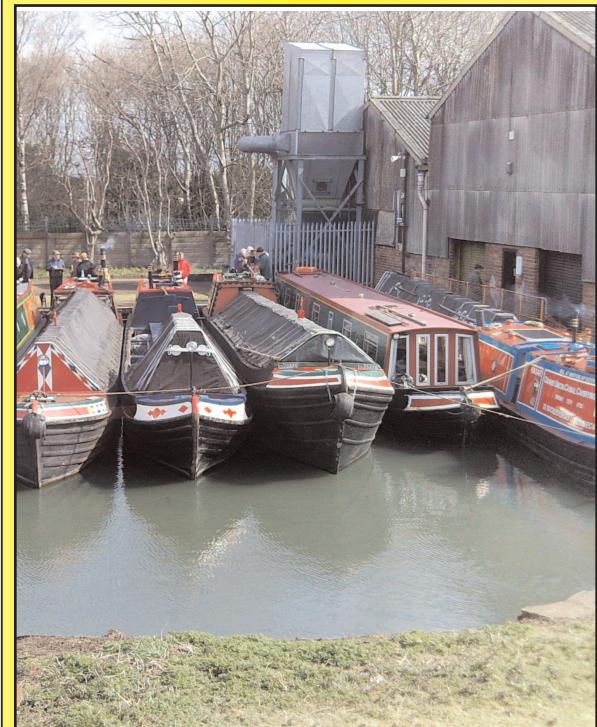


Illustration 2
Bradley Canal System 1783

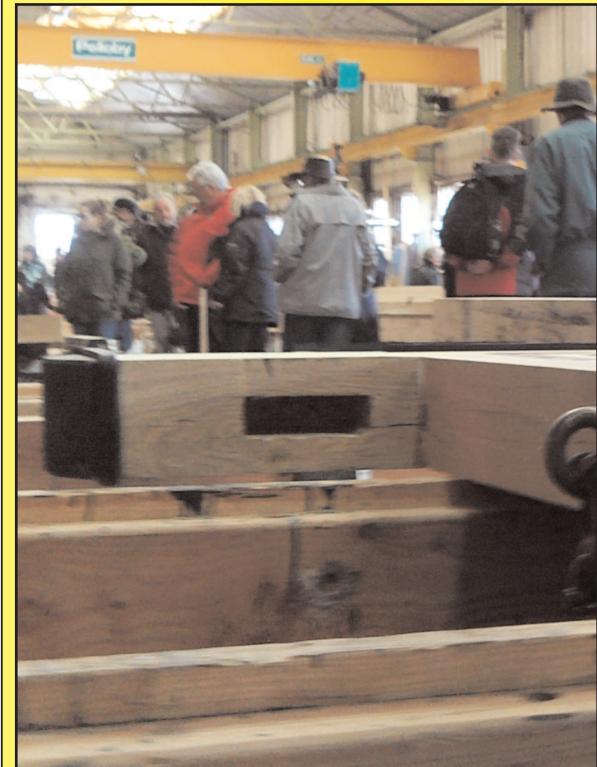
BCN reveals a fascinating corner on Spring cruise

The Birmingham Canals Navigation Society is a very down to earth group, with more in common with the practical approach of working canal people than the committee members of some high-flown waterways organisations, writes Peter Underwood.

It's 2016 Spring Cruise was an example of that interest in the practicalities of canals with a journey from Tipton to the Bradley lock workshops on the dead-end Bradley Arm – a shallow and little used offshoot of the BCN mainline. With more than 25 boats attending, many of them former working boats with deep drafts, the journey up the shallow arm was slow but fascinating as one of the guests aboard our boat, Blackberry Way, long time BCNS stalwart Dave Pearson waxed lyrical about the industry which lined the banks in his



Black Country childhood and before. Considerable juggling of the many boats in the basins around the lock workshops meant everyone had a chance to see some of the fascinating work done in the lock workshops – now one of just two in the country producing lock gates both wide and



narrow. Alongside the old skills of working green oak and steel fittings there are some innovations with polymer replacing some under water parts previously made from Elm.

After returning to Tipton many participants got together for a meal at the recently opened Gongoozler restaurant at the new Dudley Tunnel visitor centre.

Taking over the EA's Great Ouse - a big headache for C&RT?

There have been mutterings about the Canal & River Trust taking over the Environment Agency navigations from the time C&RT was launched. More recently, various individuals and associations have been saying that C&RT should take over the Great Ouse, writes John Quinlan.

The problem is, you don't just get the river and infrastructure, you get things like the staff, the licensing rules, and the history. Ultimately whether such a takeover happens probably has more to do with the transfer of such things as pension rights than anything to do with the river itself: the government have already said once that it cannot afford to transfer the EA navigations to C&RT. The Great Ouse navigation runs from Bedford to Kings Lynn. The stretch from Bedford to Earith is not in great condition and has its fair share of problems with flooding in the winter and shallows in the summer, but that is normal for the river.

In summer it's quite pretty running through places such as St Neots and St Ives. There are few narrow-boats to be seen as GRP boats are the predominant species. They are much more acceptable, being shorter and broader, as there are, like many rivers, very few mooring spaces.

Narrow boats are not popular with the local boaters as they occupy a proportionately large amount of the mooring space.

Eventually the water in the Great Ouse runs out, and back in, at Earith as it is tidal, fed and emptied by the New Bedford River. However that is not the end of the Great Ouse. Though Earith lock blocks the tidal flow the river winds its way to Popes Corner and meets up with the River Cam, the main tributary which is actually providing most of the water beyond Earith.

It proceeds up to Ely and Littleport where much river straightening has taken place, and on to Denver Sluice.

Denver Sluice is one of the main water controls in the area. This is important as, in times of potential flooding of the Cam in Cambridge, the sluice is opened, and due to the very small river fall between Cambridge and Denver, the river is emptied near Denver. Yes, boats are deliberately left high and dry to avoid flooding in



The same Great Ouse mooring in the summer, above, and winter, below



Cambridge.

Denver Sluice is the point where this section of the river becomes tidal, and every tide brings in silt, banks of it sit outside of the sluice and it is only regular dredging that keeps boat traffic able to move. Just a few tides can replace the silt that has been dredged out. Most visiting boats only navigate the half mile or so north to Salters Lode lock and escape into the Middle Levels. I have not ventured further as it is really the province of sea going boats.

Naturally C&RT would not be

responsible for deciding anything to do with flood control, that would remain an EA responsibility and C&RT would simply do what they were told, but that is the same situation as with pollution control, EA take the lead role. So, should C&RT take over the Great Ouse navigation, as some of the boaters there are clamouring for?

The Great Ouse navigation, with its flooding and practically constant dredging requirement is a money-eater. Relatively few craft actually navigate the waters

except on sunny weekends when captain's hats and barbecues are the predominant sights as boaters swarm out of the marinas to the few moorings.

It's not great for visiting boaters who wish to explore the area as practically all moorings are 48hr, and many are far from any form of public transport.

I'm sure that C&RT would like the kudos of taking over an EA river navigation. However this really may not be the best place to start.



Denver sluice, with the lock on the right, above, and, above right, the silt bank beyond the lock has to be constantly dredged

Scissor lift cuts canal route

It took a little while but eventually C&RT managed to extract one of the larger and more unusual obstructions to block a canal. A scissor lift, designed to open up to provide a working platform was stolen from a local Black Country building site, allegedly by a team of youngsters who managed to lose it in one of the narrowest and most difficult parts of the Dudley No 2 Canal – the route from Netherton Tunnel towards Stourbridge.

West Midland Waterways Manager, Ian Lane, takes up the story: "The machine in question, a scissor lift, was stolen from a local construction site and taken on to the towpath and tracked along for some distance. "We can only presume, but we believe it had been stolen to sell rather than to just dump as we feel this would have been done a lot sooner and there appears to be a certain degree of care taken in its movements.

"From looking at the marks on the towpath it appears that they managed to get it to this location where the towpath narrowed and as they manoeuvred it around, they lost control and it went in.

"Unfortunately, as I'm sure you are aware, this location is in a very deep cutting with a towpath that has limited access for vehicles.

"This rules out virtually every normal procedures for removing vehicles as cranes and large vehicles cannot be used. We have also investigated the option of floating it, but this again was deemed not suitable." Despite that the assembled experts eventually managed to haul it out using a combination of planks, a small digger and ropes – and published an video of the extraction which you can find on The Floater's Facebook page.

