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AGENDA
The Column of the National Chairman

The turn of the year has once again seen major flooding, this time in the north of England. As ever, Environment Agency staff have been working exceptionally hard to try to protect those unfortunate enough to be caught up in it. Two years ago the village of Yalding, very close to my home in Kent, suffered terribly from flooding and I know just how long it takes for families to recover. It is clear that substantial work to deal with the problem is required by EA, and indeed it is being suggested that a complete rethink of UK flood defences is needed. This would be a major task, but essential to protect all those at risk.

Obviously EA needs to concentrate on flooding, and its minor navigation function is something I believe the organisation could well do without. This issue of Waterways explains in detail the reasons why IWA believes the management of EA navigations should be transferred to CRT (p16). I must make it absolutely clear, however, that IWA only advocates the transfer on the basis that an appropriate funding package is in place, such that CRT is able to maintain and develop the navigations for the future.

Our campaign is going well and I thank members who have already written to their MPs on the subject. We will be maintaining our pressure on government, while also being sympathetic to the difficult issues that EA faces.

The start of the year is a good time to look forward and begin thinking about cruising plans. IWA has events around the country in 2016 and I plan to attend many of them. Our Campaign Festival in Liverpool promises to be a real highlight and I’m greatly looking forward to it, although unfortunately I shall be going by car, not boat. Liverpool is a fantastic boating destination and my family all thoroughly enjoyed our trip there in 2012. The Liverpool Link, which opened in 2009, enables boats to enter the docks from the Leeds & Liverpool Canal and moor in the very centre of the city, an area which had become derelict in the 1980s. The inland waterways played a significant part in regenerating the site and turning it into an exceptional destination. The Campaign Festival is based at Eldonian Village and aims to further improve the western end of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal and stimulate more investment in the area. What fitting aims to help celebrate the 200th anniversary of a canal that brought such prosperity to the region.

Waterways magazine has a new editor, Sarah Henshaw, and I warmly welcome her. Sarah will bring a new approach and I’m sure she will welcome your input and ideas. So please do write to her and give us the benefit of your views and suggestions.

Have a great 2016 and enjoy our wonderful inland waterways to the full.

Les Etheridge
Liverpool unveiled as IWA National Campaign Festival

The Eldonian Village Canal Festival in Liverpool has been designated 2016's National Campaign Festival. IWA selected the event, which takes place on 11th - 12th June, in recognition of its ambitious objective to increase leisure activities on a relatively underused part of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal.

The event will also celebrate the bicentenary of the canal and is being organised by IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch in partnership with the Liverpool Culture Company, the Eldonian Housing Trust and the Canal & River Trust.

Centred on the canal around the Eldonian community centre and including the section down the locks to Stanley Dock, the Campaign Festival’s primary aim is to encourage more boats to visit this section of the canal and continue to the Albert Dock complex.

The local IWA branch aims to improve this part of the canal for visitors by providing new mooring and service facilities at Eldonian Village for boaters visiting the Liverpool Link. In addition, it is seen as a great opportunity to increase local community volunteering, with vegetation clearance, painting and rubbish removal, and work with local schools among the outreach programmes being planned in the lead-up to the festival. It is hoped local participation will raise awareness of, and respect for, the canal.

IWA national chairman Les Etheridge said: “Liverpool, with its rich canal heritage, is a worthy standard-bearer for IWA’s National Campaign Festival in this bicentennial year. Great progress has been made in recent years to open up the delights of the city to canal traffic again with the inauguration of the Liverpool Link. Our Campaign Festival aims to build on that and leave a positive legacy for the residents of Eldonian Village and all the other canalside and waterfront communities and attractions.”

Mooring spaces for the festival at Eldonian are filling up fast and the IWA’s ‘campaign convoy’ across the River Mersey into Liverpool Docks before the event is already fully booked. For more information and boat booking forms visit www.waterways.org.uk/campaignfestival.

ABOVE: The festival will extend down the locks to Stanley Dock.
BELOW: Colourful boats at a previous festival.
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Edwards-May set for second attempt at London Marathon

After injury scuppered a 2015 attempt to represent IWA in the London Marathon, David Edwards-May is on track to take on the endurance challenge later this year instead.

David was selected to run the race after IWA won a place in a charity ballot and invited volunteers interested in taking part to apply for it. However, his entry was later deferred on medical grounds.

Fortunately, he is now back in full training, covering some 146km in December alone. He hopes to clock over 1,000km in total training distance in the six months prior to the marathon, which takes place on 24th April.

David maintains his hamstrings are feeling strong again after last year’s injury, and hill climbs are now included in the training programme to help continue strengthening his muscles.

David is no stranger to endurance events, having previously participated in the Canalathon, a 33-mile event along the canals of mid-Wales. This is his first marathon, however, and he will be attending ‘Marathonfest’ in February to supplement his fitness regime. For those wishing to track David’s preparation, his Facebook page and blog will be regularly updated on day-to-day training efforts.

So far, David has raised over £1,500 towards his target of £5,000, but he is hoping to boost that figure with a renewed campaign to raise sponsorship.

Support David

Members can support David in his effort to raise funds for IWA’s campaign and restoration work in the following ways:

• Online – visit David’s Virgin Money Giving fundraising page at www.virginmoneygiving.com and key his name, David Edwards-May, into the search box
• By phone – call 01494 783453 extension 611
• By post – send a cheque payable to ‘The Inland Waterways Association’ to London Marathon, The Inland Waterways Association, Island House, Moor Road, Chesham, HP5 1WA.

To follow David’s progress and for further information about how to support him, please go to www.waterways.org.uk/marathon or contact Sarah Frayne on 01494 783453 extension 611.

Going the Extra Length

There has been success for two IWA branches in the ‘Going the Extra Length’ awards, with winners receiving certificates (and a box of biscuits) at the CRT Central Shires Volunteers’ Party in December.

IWA Lichfield Branch put forward Richard Bagley for his impressive contribution to their working parties over the last three years. His cheerful demeanour, willingness to turn out in all weathers and adaptability has made him a greatly valued member of the Lichfield team. The tasks he has undertaken include shovelling gravel, mixing cement, laying bricks, barrowring heavy materials, ground clearance, painting, and removing and replacing fencing.

The other successful nomination was the Hazelhurst Junction Bridge Project, submitted jointly by IWA North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch with Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust. This took a lot of prior planning as the bridge is a Grade II listed structure, with advice sought from Mark Clifford, CRT’s heritage adviser, on preparation methods and paint types. A 1930s BCN motorboat, Ben, was used as a work-boat so the underside of the bridge could be painted at the same time.

The preparation was particularly time-consuming as scrapings from the old paintwork had to be prevented from dropping in the canal. Patience was also needed when wire brushing the scalloped design of the parapets. The work was completed in just over a week with 14 different volunteers totalling 26 days work.

Happy 300th

2016 is the 300th anniversary of the birth of James Brindley. Known as one of Britain’s first great canal engineers, IWA’s website lists Brindley anniversary events, ideas of where to visit his work, as well as books written about the man and his canal structures.

Take a look at this extensive resource – www.waterways.org.uk/brindley.
Raffle nets £14,000 for waterway groups

WRG's Van Appeal, the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust and the Friends of Cromford Canal are among the waterway projects set to benefit from IWA's Restoration Raffle.

The raffle, which closed at the end of December, raised £14,000 – exceeding last year’s figure by nearly £1,000. All the money raised will be shared among a range of deserving initiatives, all chosen by the ticket buyers themselves.

A total of 25 waterway projects around the UK will receive a proportion of the funds, dependent on the number of nominations received.

Coming out top was the WRG Van Appeal, which will receive £2,250 from the raffle. It is a welcome addition to the campaign's total fundraising effort, bringing it a step closer to the final target of £120,000 for four new vans.

With the second highest number of nominations, Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust was this year's top waterways trust beneficiary. It will receive £1,300 towards ongoing work.

Bernie Jones, chairman of the trust, said: “This money is a real boost to our fundraising efforts. Following an extension on the fundraising deadline from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the money raised by IWA’s raffle will be going towards our Wappenshall Wharf appeal.”

With the third highest number of nominations, the Friends of Cromford Canal group will receive £1,200. John Baylis from FOC said: “The money raised by IWA’s raffle means we can go ahead and seek materials quotes for some much-needed repairs along the Cromford Canal. We are delighted to now be in a position to progress this work.”

As well as being able to nominate their favourite waterway fundraising projects, ticket buyers stood a chance to benefit from the annual raffle themselves, with 13 prizes up for grabs, including:

First prize: A one-week boating holiday on a six-berth narrowboat with Wyvern Shipping, worth up to £1,500.
Second prize: A three-night or four-night boating holiday on a four-berth narrowboat with Andersen Boats, worth up to £700.
Third prize: A weekend boating holiday on a four-berth narrowboat with Canal Cruising Company, worth £590.

All winners have now been notified. Further details of the prizes, winners and a list of the waterway projects receiving a share of the funds can be found at: www.waterways.org.uk/raffle.

IWA is pleased to have been able to support the study financially, with advice and through the commitment of local branch members over a long period. This eventually brought the project to the attention of Neil Wyatt of Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust (and who is also on CRT’s West Midlands Partnership), which resulted in the current partnership between the four organisations. There is also support for the restoration from a local residents association.

The report will be available on the websites of the four funding bodies.

Bradley Locks feasibility study

A feasibility study to consider the restoration of what will be known as the Bradley Canal was launched at a meeting of CRT’s West Midlands Partnership in November.

The study, which was funded by Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust, Birmingham Canal Navigation Society, Canal & River Trust and IWA, concludes that the scheme is practical, although significant funding will be required.

The restored canal would recreate a 1½ mile link on the BCN between the Walsall Canal and the New Main Line by restoring sections of four lost canals, including the Wednesbury Oak Loop beyond Bradley Workshops, and the nine Bradley Locks.

IWA is pleased to have been able to support the study financially, with advice and through the commitment of local branch members over a long period. This eventually brought the project to the attention of Neil Wyatt of Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust (and who is also on CRT’s West Midlands Partnership), which resulted in the current partnership between the four organisations. There is also support for the restoration from a local residents association.

The report will be available on the websites of the four funding bodies.

IWA to exhibit at Caravan, Camping and Motorhome Show

For the first time ever, IWA is taking a stand at the Caravan, Camping and Motorhome Show, to be held at the NEC, Birmingham between 23rd and 28th February.

The decision was made in recognition that many IWA members and potential members enjoy caravanning or camping holidays on top of their waterways adventures. The association hopes its presence at the show will also be a chance to meet new volunteers.

The show’s attractions include live cookery demonstrations, destination advice to plan the perfect holiday, plus a chance to have a go at towing and motorhome manoeuvring. Visitors to IWA's stand will find the waterways and the work of IWA showcased to advantage and will be offered membership at a special rate of £3 for 3 months.
Trailboat Festival heads to Chesterfield

Chesterfield Canal Festival has been named as IWA’s National Trailboat Festival for 2016. The event will take place on 28th - 29th May at Staveley Town Basin and will mark the opening of the new Staveley Town Lock and a further 300 yards of canal beyond it. The Chesterfield Canal Trust’s new trip-boat will also be officially named.

Highlights of the festival will include an illuminated parade of boats on the Saturday night and a convoy right up to the River Rother at St Helena’s on the Monday. Five trip-boats will be offering rides and it is expected that dozens of trailboats will be moored in the basin and back towards Constitution Hill Bridge. Many will be decorated, creating a really colourful spectacle.

Activities on offer will also include canoeing, learning to drive a digger, birds of prey and children’s rides. There is plenty in the way of entertainment too – belly dancers and a ukulele band among just two of the acts booked. Dozens of stalls, food and drink outlets and a real ale bar will also be available.

Entry is £3 and free for children under 12. There is free parking nearby. The whole site is accessible to wheelchairs and three of the trip-boats have wheelchair lifts. For more information visit Chesterfield Canal Trust’s website: www.chesterfield-canal-trust.org.uk

Entertainment is promised for all the family.

Try your hand at canoeing at May’s National Trailboat Festival.

Flurry of letter-writing keeps campaign in focus

More than 60 MPs of all parties have been targeted in IWA’s letter-writing campaign urging the transfer of the Environment Agency’s 500 or so miles of inland navigations to Canal & River Trust.

As 2015 drew to a close, IWA ramped up its efforts to get parliamentarians on-side by encouraging members to put pen to paper to voice their concerns. MPs letters have already landed on the Waterways Minister’s desk, and replies from the Minister are beginning to be received.

The Chancellor’s November 2015 Spending Review threw into sharp focus the difference in financial fortunes between EA navigations and those now run by CRT. Since Canal & River Trust was formed it has had a secure funding from government of almost £40million per year rising to £50m in 2015/16. The EA, meanwhile, has had its capital investment for navigation cut from £10.7m in 2012/13 to £3.5m in 2014/15 and now faces yet further reductions as Defra deals with budget cuts of at least 15 percent over the next four years.

In spend-per-mile terms the comparison is equally stark. In the year to 31st March 2015, CRT spent some £118m on ‘general waterways maintenance’, including major works, dredging and spending on routine maintenance, equating to around £65,500 per waterway mile. EA spent £11.7m, or £23,400 per mile, on capital and operating expenditure for navigation.

Information about the campaign – and how IWA members can get involved – is the main feature of this issue of Waterways (p16). Useful information can also be found on IWA’s website, and don’t forget to copy your letter to us (email alison.smedley@waterways.org.uk) so we know how many MPs have been contacted.
Former Waterways Minister named IWA Parliamentarian of the Year

Richard Benyon MP has been named IWA’s Parliamentarian of the Year 2015 at a function at the House of Commons.

The MP for Newbury, who was minister during the transfer of more than half the country’s navigations from British Waterways to Canal & River Trust, has retained a strong interest in the inland waterways. The award was presented late last year by IWA national chairman Les Etheridge. He used the awards dinner, attended by MPs and Lords interested in the waterways, as an opportunity to discuss the future transfer of navigations currently run by the Environment Agency to Canal & River Trust.

Benyon was also recently elected as chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways. IWA acts as secretariat for the APPG, which meets together, relatively informally, to discuss waterway issues and is an effective way of bringing together parliamentarians and interested parties. The role of secretariat means that IWA helps to arrange meetings, shape the agenda and keep track of the group’s members, maintaining IWA at the very heart of parliamentary discussions and thinking related to the waterways.

The association would like as many MPs as possible to know about and attend the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways, so they can encourage the government to support improvements and increase the overall profile of UK waterways. Members are being urged to tell their local MP about the meetings and suggest they go along.

IWA welcomes two new team members

Recent changes at IWA Head Office have afforded the opportunity to recruit two new assistant volunteers co-ordinators. The first is Emma Matthars, who will be looking after volunteering across the association, as well as being involved with IWA branch activities and work parties.

An enthusiastic member of the team, only three days after joining IWA Emma took part in WRG’s annual Bonfire Bash on the Uttoxeter Canal. Having jumped in feet first, Emma has since joined some of the branch work parties for Northampton and Birmingham, Black Country and Worcestershire. She is looking forward to getting involved in many more.

Emma will be particularly focused on two of IWA’s biggest volunteer activities for 2016 – Big Canal Clean-ups and the Himalayan Balsam Awareness Week and Bash, where she will be working with branches and volunteers to raise awareness of the issues, attract new helpers and support the coordination of publicity, equipment and general organisational matters.

Our second new recruit is Alex Melson, who joins from Groundwork South. Prior to that he was employed by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Like Emma, he will be working on branch work parties and WRG Canal Camps, among other activities. He has participated in several of the task parties run in December (attending the WRG Bonfire Bash before he had even officially joined us). Alex will also be offering specific support to help Essex Waterways develop its volunteering base and will be leading the Cheshire ‘Ringing the Ring’ project to replace missing mooring rings on the popular cruising circuit.

In addition, both Emma and Alex are currently in the early stages of planning and managing some new family volunteering activities for IWA.
IWA supports Cotswold Canals Trust bid

Members of the Cotswold Canals Trust and its partners are now holding their collective breath until April. On 30th November they delivered their final submission of the £15m bid towards restoring the key 4 miles of the Stroudwater Navigation to Saul Junction, known as Phase 1B.

The project would link the newly restored inland section of the Stroudwater and the Thames & Severn canals to the rest of the national network at Saul Junction, and bring outside boats to Stroud for the first time in over 70 years.

The bid is one of the largest single projects to have been considered by the Heritage Lottery Fund in recent years, and the result is due in April. If successful, work could begin almost immediately, with a target for completion of 2022.

“A significant achievement has been to keep the overall costs of the project within the levels first proposed back in 2007,” said Cotswold Canals Trust chairman Jim White.

The end is now in sight for the ten-year attempt to bring boats 11 miles inland to Brimscombe Port. However, the trust is acutely aware that the long-term aim is to restore full navigation a further 25 miles to the Thames at Inglesham.

The Cotswold Canals Trust has the support of nearly 8,000 members and will be working with seven partners: IWA, the Stroud Valleys Canal Company, Canal & River Trust, Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Stroud District Council and Stroudwater Navigation Archives Charity.

Representatives of the Cotswold Canals Trust and partners celebrate the delivery of the £15m restoration bid.

New name for APCO

The Association of Pleasure Craft Operators (APCO), the main trade association for inland boating businesses, has changed its name to British Marine Inland Boating (BMIB).

The name change, at its recent AGM in York, adopts the branding of British Marine, the marine trade association, while remaining independent. In fact, many of the members are also IWA Corporate members.

The new BMIB hopes it will better convey to the general public a sense of unity within the inland waterway marine and tourism industries and what the organisation does, after being known as APCO for 62 years.

IWA’s Towpath Walks Society celebrates its 15,000th walker

A stroll along Regent’s Canal from Little Venice to Camden has given IWA’s Towpath Walks Society its 15,000th walker.

The new participant was presented with a certificate to mark the milestone by walk leader Richard Fentiman.

IWA Towpath Walks were established in London in 1977 and have added just under £40,000 to IWA’s fundraising account during that time. Led by IWA volunteers, 2015 saw over 450 walkers pay to be guided around the capital’s waterways. There are currently five guides managing a portfolio of 19 different canal walks, each lasting just over two hours and taking place on two Sunday afternoons each month.

For details on upcoming walks visit the calendar page on IWA’s website, or call London Walks on 020 7624 3978.
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THE TRANSFER CASE

As IWA steps up pressure on the government to transfer navigable waterways managed by the Environment Agency to the Canal & River Trust, we examine the grounds for change.
I

It was Aickman’s dream – a joined-up model for managing our inland waterways that wasn’t subject to the vagaries of government. The establishment of the Canal & River Trust (the charity responsible for filling former operator British Waterways’ shoes) in 2012 went some way towards realising his vision, taking some 2,000 miles of canals, rivers, docks and reservoirs into its control, along with a 15-year government financial settlement, massive property portfolio and the flexibility to pursue and develop new income streams.

Yet, despite assurances that EA-controlled waterways would follow (over 500 miles of them in all), the government announced in 2013 that it would shelve plans until after the general election. Now, with the battle for No.10 decided and news last November that Defra’s budget was to be cut – on top of previous cuts – tackling the issue has never been more timely.

Subject to a satisfactory funding package to protect both CRT and EA navigations, the transfer would enable EA waterways to benefit from improved maintenance through long-term asset management plans, third party funding opportunities and the economies of scale to be gained from being part of a larger navigation authority. It would also offer opportunities for extension of the network, such as the Fens Waterways Link. At present, many river navigations run by EA are deteriorating due to lack of maintenance. This is no reflection on EA navigation staff, who

A fund-amental problem

The current situation is that funding for EA navigations is largely dependent on annually determined grant-in-aid from the government. Since CRT was formed it has had secure funding from government totalling almost £40m per year. The EA, meanwhile, has had its capital investment for navigation cut from £10.7m (2012/13) to £3.5m (2014/15) and now faces yet further reductions.

The EA’s own figures from February 2015 disclosed that “a minimum funding requirement of £4.25m per annum… would see a slow deterioration of overall asset condition and require a larger investment towards the end of the Spending Review period to renovate a number of assets to ensure our waterways remained open and safe”.

Based on these figures, and the forecast 2015/16 spend of only £2.2m, capital investment in 2015/16 will be less than half of that needed to maintain assets in “a slow deterioration”. At the very least, despite the efforts of EA staff this must be increasing the risk of a significant breakdown in some major assets – and, at worst, an avoidable serious failure.

The bleak assessment comes as no surprise to IWA’s national chairman. Les Etheridge says: “We have been warning for years about the funding crisis hanging over the waterways by having essential maintenance capital expenditure subject to the shifting priorities of direct government control.

“The previous government found a workable template to secure sustainable financial freedom for the bulk of our canals and rivers but unfortunately kept EA’s 500 miles of navigable waterways out of the package. Each year that goes by is widening the gap between what is needed and what is actually spent.”

Comparatively, CRT’s robust funding from government, on top of its other income streams, adds up to a compelling case for immediate transfer of management.

Who currently controls our canals and rivers?

Campbell Focus

EA at a glance

- Set up as a non-departmental public body in 1996.
- Funded in part by the government’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), with additional money raised through the issuing of licensing and permits.
- Serves as navigation authority for over 500 miles of our inland waterways, including the non-tidal River Thames, the Medway Navigation, the River Nene, the River Great Ouse and its tributaries, the River Anholme and the Rivers Welland and Glen and the Suffolk/Essex Stour.
- The agency also has responsibility for certain navigational structures on some waterways with no navigation authority. These include Elvington Lock on the River Derwent (which is the subject of a separate IWA campaign to see the lock reopened following its closure by EA in February 2014) and the entrance sluice on the River Idle.
- There are also a number of waterways managed by EA which, while not generally accessible by powered craft, are popular with canoes and unpowered boats, such as the rivers Wye and Lugg, and the Royal Military Canal. The EA currently owns two harbours (Lydney, in Gloucestershire, which is for sale, and Bye, in Kent, which gives access to the River Rother). IWA wishes to see all these waterways and associated structures included in any discussions about the transfer.
- Other responsibilities include regulating major industry and waste, treatment of contaminated land, water quality and resources, fisheries, conservation and ecology, and managing the risk of flooding from main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea.

The Medway – under EA management.

Spring 2016
WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?

Navigational issues on EA waterways
With finances constrained, routine maintenance has inevitably been compromised on some EA waterways. What does this mean for boaters? Inconvenience, delays, obstruction and, in some cases, serious danger. Here’s a round-up of just a few of the problems being faced.

Lack of vegetation management
Budget cuts have meant a reduction in the amount of vegetation management being carried out by the EA on its river navigations in recent years. On some stretches this has seen overhanging trees encroach on the navigation channel causing dangerous conditions for boats, particularly taking into account the fast flows found on river navigations, with crew or belongings in danger of being knocked into the water.

Problems are also encountered when meeting boats travelling in the opposite direction, as there is often not enough room for two craft of any reasonable size to pass without one or both ending up tangled in the overhanging branches.

In addition, there are many places where fallen trees have not been removed and have continued to grow. This has reduced the width of available channel for boats and will ultimately make the task of removing these trees significantly more difficult and expensive than if they had been dealt with in the first place.

Specific examples of where a lack of vegetation management is causing a hazard to navigation are:
- On the River Nene at Milton Park near Peterborough, between Wansford and Yarwell Lock, upstream of Yarwell Lock, downstream of Perio Lock, on the approach to the downstream lock landing at Lower Barnwell Lock and immediately downstream of Islip footbridge.
- On the River Great Ouse and its tributaries: the Old West River around Stretham, above and below St Neots Lock, between Eynesbury and Eaton Socon Lock, above Isleham Lock on the River Lark and in various locations downstream of Brandon on the Little Ouse.
- On the River Thames: upstream of Oxford, and on Dukes Cut near Oxford (the section managed by the EA).
Lack of dredging
Over the last couple of years the EA’s constrained maintenance budget has necessitated that it marks areas that need dredging with buoys. In many places there is no signage, and it is often not obvious which side of a buoy the deep water is. This has led to boats getting grounded and being unable to continue their journey until they are towed off or the river level rises. Examples can be found across EA waterways:

- On the River Thames, regarded as the EA’s flagship river, there are several locations that have seen marker buoys appear during 2015 as an alternative to dredging, such as below Benson Lock, at Shillingford and above Osney Bridge.
- A lack of dredging, ongoing siltation and low water levels are all combining to make the channel very shallow in some places on the Great Ouse and its tributaries. The downstream entrance to Brandon Lock on the Little Ouse is extremely shallow and many boats that would otherwise fit through this very short lock will soon be unable to navigate into the town of Brandon. Longer craft, which are normally able to travel up the river and turn below Brandon Lock, are having difficulties doing so due to another gravel shoal across the whole river below the lock and weir.
- There are three places on the River Nene where gravel shoals have been marked with yellow buoys. These are downstream of three locks (Denford, Alwarton and Orton), and two of these date back to at least May 2014 and urgently need dredging. In the meantime the signage must be improved as, in two cases, it is not at all obvious which side of the marker buoys the deep water is.
- On the River Ancholme a gravel shoal at the confluence with the River Rase requires dredging, as does a build up of silt in Old River in Brigg.

What does CRT know about managing rivers?
Quite a lot actually. CRT (and formerly British Waterways) has long held navigational responsibility for over 300 miles of river navigations, including the Trent, Soar, Yorkshire Ouse and the Severn, as well as managing flood control on its canals. CRT has a good track record of managing water levels on its rivers, with a control system (SCADA) in place offering potential to help further, and a good working relationship with the EA over flood management.

Add to that the impressive progress CRT has made in reshaping itself and the way it works with customers, partners and employees to deliver a sustainable inland waterway network, notwithstanding its age and original condition. Of course, this doesn’t mean IWA can’t recognise when the trust makes mistakes (our recent campaign to halt changes to paddle pawl design, that would prevent paddles being wound down with two hands, is a case in point). Yet while there remains more to do, CRT customers are already enjoying significant improvements from the government’s decision to cede responsibility to a charitable trust.
OTHER CONCERNS

• Poor communication:
  At the moment it is difficult for the EA to get navigation information for boaters added to the government website in a timely way. IWA believes that, under CRT management, boaters would find improvements in the information they receive, certainly in terms of closures and restrictions.

• On the River Nene:
  Several EA visitor moorings are unavailable, overgrown or non-existent, for example at Dog in a Doublet Lock, and at Titchmarsh Lock, where the lock landing is closed and boaters are having to use the visitor mooring instead. The newly formed Friends of the River Nene have started to address this lack of visitor moorings by making arrangements for, and setting up and maintaining, new mooring sites, but this doesn’t reduce the requirement for the EA to maintain its existing visitor moorings. In the meantime, the lack of mooring provision is deterring many people from visiting the river.

  A general lack of facilities for boaters along the River Nene makes things difficult for visitors. New facilities at Wellingborough, only recently opened, closed over winter.

• On the River Great Ouse:
  There is concern over the number of guillotine gate failures during 2015 and how the EA plans to deal with further incidents in the coming months/years. Recent failures occurred at St Ives, St Neots, Brownshill and Denver, all of which were resolved and the locks reopened after varying lengths of time. An unresolved ongoing problem at St Neots Lock requires EA staff to operate it.

  Failure of the sluice gate at Castle Mills Lock on the Great Ouse has resulted in lowered water levels between there and Cardington Lock.

• On the River Ancholme:
  Harlem Hill Lock on the River Ancholme has been closed to navigation (new tail gates required) for over two years. This closure prevents navigation on the top 2 miles to the head of navigation.

  During the 2013 tidal surge a sluice door at the South Ferriby tide lock with the River Humber was damaged and has still not been repaired. Silt is brought into the River Ancholme on each tide and remains there as the water goes out. This affects the navigable depth of the river and limits the type of craft able to use the lock.

  The moorings at Bishopsbridge are unusable

• On the River Welland
  A recent IWA campaign cruise to Spalding had to be cancelled because Fulney Lock was inoperable, despite EA’s assurances during planning for the event. This was due to siltation, which has not been dealt with by EA.

• On the River Thames
  Concern has been expressed by individuals and representatives of groups using the River Thames that its condition has deteriorated to the extent that boating is becoming unsafe. Shortage of money for repairs, lock keepers and other staff is contributing to lack of maintenance, including dredging and vegetation management. These issues are of great concern to both users and also to EA staff, who are struggling to do their jobs with ever-shrinking budgets.

“...the previous government found a workable template to secure sustainable financial freedom for the bulk of our canals and rivers but unfortunately kept EA’s 500 miles of navigable waterways out of the package. Each year that goes by is widening the gap between what is needed and what is actually spent.”

Les Etheridge, IWA national chairman.
CASE STUDIES

Fens Waterways Link

This project, which was being led by the Environment Agency and funded by the Regional Development Agency and the European Union, would have connected the cathedral cities of Lincoln, Peterborough and Ely, and provided much needed benefits to businesses, tourism and local communities, as well as to walkers and boaters. Unfortunately, all work on the project has ground to a halt due to EA budget cuts. Even the Fens Waterways Link website, once a valuable source of information about the project, is no longer being supported.

The Black Sluice Navigation had been unused for nearly 40 years when it re-opened in 2009 as the first phase of the Fens Waterways Link. Some 12 miles of new waterway were opened up but ongoing problems with Black Sluice Lock mean that it is often not available for navigation. Proposals for extending the navigation further as part of the Fens Waterways Link (which would involve a new lock to connect with the River Glen) are currently unresolved, as is any progress on the southern parts of the project.

Chris Howes, of IWA’s Restoration Committee, continues:

The Northern half of the project has seen real and commendable progress is being made.

However the southern, Fenland, half appears to have been altogether abandoned by the EA, without any other substantial organisation stepping into the breach. Unlike, for example, the Bedford/Milton Keynes link, the project hasn’t been included in Local Authority strategic development plans, so at least one opportunity to develop a part of the project through ‘planning gain’ has already been lost. To compound matters, the EA has closed a navigable section of Vermuyden’s great drain by piling across the entrance of Welches Dam Lock.

Not all the EA’s money comes from government though...

This is true. Although EA navigations are heavily dependent upon government subsidy with 65% of income coming from grant, some 35% comes from boaters through licensing fees. Considering the level of government funding is under pressure and may well reduce further, there is a real fear that boaters (and others, including anglers) will have to pay much more if new income streams are not found.

Environment Agency staff have been heard to state that “the future of the FWL will be increasingly dependent on voluntary organisations”. An alliance of IWA Peterborough Branch and the East Anglian Waterways Association has set up Project Hereward to reopen the closed section of Vermuyden’s drain and face the Herculean task of raising £2.3m.

Yellow buoys marking a gravel shoal below Alwalton Lock on the River Nene.

Welches Dam showing it piled off from Old Bedford River.
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Old Bedford River/
Welches Dam

Despite still being officially navigable, the Old Bedford River is little used and navigation has become extremely difficult due to lack of routine dredging.

Welches Dam Lock remains piled off due to leakage in Horseway Channel and issues around the structural stability of the lock. The EA closed the lock in 2006 and local waterway groups have been campaigning for it to be reopened ever since. Its closure prevents the use of one of the routes from the Middle Level to the Great Ouse and this is having an impact on the connecting waterways, such as the Old Bedford River and the Forty Foot River on the Middle Level. The opening up of this route is part of the overall Fens Waterways Link project.

John Revell, member of IWA Peterborough Branch, recently attempted two campaigning cruises on the Old Bedford River, to find out how silted it had become since the EA closed Welches Dam (and thus prevented any through traffic). The following article (edited) first appeared in the Wisbech Standard and was written by Mike Daines:

A successful attempt has been made by a March-based narrowboat to enter the Old Bedford River via the tidal doors at Salter’s Lode. Skipper John Revell negotiated his craft Olive Emily the short distance from the lock at Salter’s Lode into the shallow and muddy channel leading to the tidal doors of the Old Bedford sluice.

This was John’s second attempt that year to navigate the Old Bedford, one of Britain’s oldest artificial rivers constructed between the years 1630 and 1636 that pre-dates the English canal system by 100 years. Although still retaining a Public Right of Navigation, it hasn’t been available or used as a through navigation since 2006 when the EA, concerned about flood risk, suddenly sealed the channel with a cofferdam at Welches Dam Lock.

“This latest attempt to again navigate the Old Bedford was to show that it is still possible to access the waterway in a narrowboat,” said John. “There was enough depth of water at the start to collect more crew and we set off hoping to reach the Lamb and Flag at Welney. However, just over a mile into the trip the river became shallower and the propeller began to collect masses of cottweed, bringing us to a complete standstill. We turned around using poles and slowly made our way back to the Old Bedford sluice.

“This trip proved once more that it will remain difficult to reach Welney or Welches Dam Lock until the EA takes action to make this river navigable again. It is not rocket science. They could increase the depth of water in the river, they could dredge and they could remove the cottweed,” he added.
**The Medway**

There are, of course, EA success stories too, and none more notable than the Upper River Medway between Tonbridge and Allington Lock. The Medway has benefited from much investment over recent years and is a well-run navigation, largely due to the diligence of the waterway operations manager and his staff.

Stretching 19 miles with ten locks and associated weirs and sluices, there are approximately 700 powered vessels registered on the river, not including visiting craft. A team of ten EA employees manages its day-to-day running and maintenance.

According to the EA’s River Medway Navigation Annual Report 2014/15, the waterway’s overall capital allocation dropped from £1,982,000 in 2013/14 to £544,000. Income increased from £311,622 in 2013/14 to £371,706 (although this included an additional £35,000 to deal with extra dredging required following the Christmas 2013 flood) and the total annual costs of running the Medway navigation decreased from £566,668 to £558,837 (partly due to less reliance on contractors for vegetation management). Included in the costs of running the river are lock-keeping at Allington, dredging and tree removal, mowing and strimming of lock sites, maintenance of locks and sluices, craft registration and speeding enforcement, and the maintenance of vessels, vehicles, buildings, pump-outs and showers.

In 2014/15 two main capital works projects were undertaken on the Medway. These were urgent repairs to East Farleigh Sluice (new wheels, guide rails, lifting wires etc) and the start of construction work to refurbish Allington Lock Boathouse to convert it into a commercial office. The Upper Medway Navigation team also managed a project to build a new tug and dredger for the Medway. This £425,000 initiative was funded by Flood and Coastal Risk Management.

During 2014/15 the EA also completed the re-design of Teston Sluice, undertook minor repairs and replacements to Allington Lock (including replacement of the site’s external lighting) and addressed the osmosis on MV Eden (patrol vessel).

Sites and structures on the River Medway are inspected at least monthly and an annual inspection report produced. There are 134 assets (lock, landing stage, pump-out, weir, etc) on the Medway and at the end of 2013/14 the percentage of assets in required condition was 91.8%.

However, despite all this investment, there are currently three structures (identified as not being in required condition) which have had work postponed due to budget reductions:

- East Farleigh Lock - cancellation of the lock refurbishment
- Teston Sluice - work postponed
- Yalding Anchor Sluice - work postponed

Should any of the structures on which planned work is being deferred deteriorate further, then the lock could be closed or river levels dropped to make the weirs ‘fail-safe’ to pass floods. In these events there would be no alternative route for craft and, faced with such closures, boaters could stop using the Medway.

**What can IWA members do?**

The IWA is asking all members, especially those living in areas where there are EA navigations, to write to their MPs about the issues raised in this article. To make things easier, there’s a template letter on our website, www.waterways.org.uk, which lays out the main arguments for transfer to CRT, and asks that MPs pass on these concerns to the Waterway Minister, Rory Stewart, and urge him to facilitate a quick and efficient handover.

You can send this to your MP as a formal letter, addressed either to the Houses of Parliament or their constituency office, or contact him or her by email instead. Browse www.parliament.uk/mps for relevant contact details.

If you’re able to copy your letter to IWA Head Office for the attention of Alison Smedley (or email alison.smedley@waterways.org.uk) so we know which MPs have been contacted, that would be extremely useful. The more letters MPs receive, the more compelling our message is likely to be, so please do consider putting pen to paper to help effect real and positive change on our waterways.

**What’s the endgame for IWA?**

Our navigable waterways are currently in the ownership or control of over 30 navigation authorities, the two largest being CRT and the EA. IWA’s vision is to encourage the formation of a larger, rationalised organisation, incorporating both CRT- and EA-managed waterways, together with the opportunity for other navigations to join.

The transfer of the EA waterways to CRT would be a further step towards IWA’s long-held vision of a National Waterways Conservancy, which could offer a single licensing authority for all navigations. This would potentially provide a more sustainable, innovative and efficient inland waterway system for the two-thirds of the inland waterways currently managed by CRT and EA. The new organisation would have more clarity of purpose and the ability to partner with others with overlapping objectives in public leisure and awareness of the resource inland waterways represent.

The transfer would potentially also reduce pressure on the public purse, as the combined organisation would be freed from the constraints of government controls and able to better focus on customer requirements and effective asset management.

So far, IWA’s EA letter-writing campaign has seen more than 60 MPs contacted by constituents about the transfer issue.
Nottingham Boat Company Ltd and New and Used Boat Co have entered into an exciting new venture. Producing a fantastic new traditional barge. The interior has luxurious, traditional styling with all the comforts of a modern home. Whilst similar to the Jupiter, it will be launched as the Neptune and will boast a very high specification at a very attractive price.

This stunning boat will be available exclusively through New & Used Boat Co and launched on our Open Day at Red Hill Marina between 10am to 6pm. Call for more details.

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Nottingham Boat Company Ltd and New and Used Boat Co have entered into an exciting new venture. Producing a fantastic new traditional barge. The interior has luxurious, traditional styling with all the comforts of a modern home. Whilst similar to the Jupiter, it will be launched as the Neptune and will boast a very high specification at a very attractive price.

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www.nottinghamboatco.com
Our round-up of the best shows, rallies and other waterside events taking place across the network in 2016

April

2nd
BCN Spring Cruise
Tipton to Bradley Workshops on the Wednesbury Oak Loop to celebrate the start of plans to re-open Bradley Locks.
(www.bcnsociety.co.uk)

16-17th
Annual BCN Clean-up
The big annual BCN Clean-up, with the BCN Society working alongside IWA (Birmingham, Black Country and Worcestershire branch Waterways Recovery Group), Coombeswood Canal Trust, Dudley Canal Trust and CRT.
(www.bcnsociety.co.uk)

30th
Horning Boat Show
Norfolk Broads. Horning.
(www.horningboatahows.co.uk)

30th April-2nd May
IWA Canalway Cavalcade
Regent’s Canal. Little Venice, London.

Happening over the May bank holiday weekend, Canalway Cavalcade is a distinctive waterways gathering that has been taking place at Little Venice since 1983. Organised by IWA volunteers, it boasts a huge array of boats on the stretch between Blomfield Road, Warwick Avenue and Warwick Crescent. As well as the craft on show (many of them decorated for the pageant), there’s also a tasty selection of food stalls, a real ale bar, roving traders, canal-side pop-up shops, morris dancing, live music and children’s activities.

Admission is free.

Find out more:
Email: canalway.cavalcade@waterways.org.uk
Web: www.waterways.org.uk/canalwaycavalcade
Facebook: www.facebook.com/canalway.cavalcade
Twitter: @canalcavalcade
Instagram: @canalcavalcade

May

7th
Montgomery Canal Triathlon
(www.montgomerycanalme.uk/triath2016info.html)

13th-15th
Titford Pumphouse Rally
A repeat of last year’s successful Titford Pools cruise, plus real ale bar, stalls, music and fun.
(www.bcnsociety.co.uk)

21st-22nd
Moira Canal Festival
Ashby Canal.
(www.moiracanalfestival.co.uk)

28th-30th May
Crick Boat Show
Leicester Line, Grand Union Canal.
The major trade show of the year, 2016's event will mark the 300th anniversary of the birth of James Brindley. It also offers the opportunity to view more boats at one time than anywhere else, plus browse the biggest boating equipment marketplace with over 250 exhibitors. Save up to 20% off the gate price by booking in advance.
(www.crickboatshow.com)

June

3rd-5th
Beale Park Boat & Outdoor Show
River Thames.
(www.bealeparkboatandoutdoorshow.co.uk)

4th-5th
Leicester Riverside Festival
Leicester Line, Grand Union Canal. Bede Park.
(www.visitleicester.info/things-to-see-and-do/festivals-celebrations/riverside-festival/)

9th-12th
Russell Newbery Register Rally
(www.rnregister.org.uk/rally)

17th-19th
Middlewich Folk & Boat Festival
Trent & Mersey Canal.
(www.midwest.org.uk)

18th-19th
Foxton Locks Festival
Leicester Line, Grand Union Canal.
(www.foxtonlocksfestival.co.uk)

July

1st-3rd
IWA Ware Boat Festival
River Lee.
(www.waterways.org.uk)
**August**

**6th-7th**  
**Woking Canal Festival**  
The Woking Canal Festival will be a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Basingstoke Canal Society and include a boat rally in the centre of Woking, at Brookhouse Common. Email: wcf2016@btinternet.com.

**13th-14th**  
**Blisworth Canal Festival**  
Grand Union Canal.  
(www.blisworthcanalfestival.co.uk)

**14th**  
**LUCS Canal Fun Day**  
Union Canal. Manse Road Basin, Linlithgow.  
(www.lucs.org.uk)

**September**

**4th**  
**Angel Canal Festival**  
Regent’s Canal. Islington, London.  
(www.angelcanalfestival.org)

**10th-11th**  
**Black Country Boating Festival**  
Dudley No 2 Canal. Windmill End, Netherton.  
(www.bcbf.com)

**10th-11th**  
**Village at War**  
(www.friendsofcanalmuseum.org.uk)

**16th-18th**  
**Tipton Canal & Community Festival**  
Birmingham Old Main Line. Neptune Health Park and Coronation Gardens.  
(www.tiptoncommunityassociation.com)

**October**

**2nd**  
**Banbury Canal Day**  
Oxford Canal. Banbury  
(www.banbury.gov.uk)

**2nd**  
**Not the Festival of Water and Light**  
Birmingham Canal Navigations. Waterfront, Merry Hill, This informal gathering of boats is the successor to the Festival of Water and Light.  
(www.bcnsociety.co.uk)

**15th-16th**  
**Stourbridge Navigation Trust Open Weekend**  
Stourbridge Canal. The Bonded Warehouse, 10am-5pm. Free admission.

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28th-29th May  
**IWA Trailboat Festival**  
Staveley Town Basin, Chesterfield Canal.

IWA’s 2016 Trailboat Festival will be combined with the Chesterfield Canal Trust’s annual festival. Highlights will include an illuminated parade of boats on the Saturday night and a convoy right up to the River Rother at St Helena’s on the Monday. Dozens of trailboats are expected to be moored in the basin and back towards Constitution Hill Bridge. Many will be decorated, creating a really colourful spectacle. Admission is £3, free for under 12s.

**Find out more:**  
Tel: 01246 477569  
Email: festivals@chesterfield-canal-trust.org.uk  
Web: www.waterways.org.uk/trailboat

27th-29th August  
**IWA Festival of Water**  
Wyrley & Essington Canal. Pelsall Common.

IWA’s annual Festival of Water this year takes place in Pelsall, near Walsall, over the August bank holiday weekend. Pelsall is positioned at the very heart of the waterways network, on an extensive stretch of lock-free canal, making it the perfect setting for waterways activities of all types. Visitors can expect to see up to 200 boats, including leisure, trade, heritage and working narrowboats, as well as a wealth of smaller craft such as canoes, rowing boats, and stand-up paddleboarders. There will also be opportunities for festival-goers to get afloat on trip-boats. Shoppers, meanwhile, will be treated to a range of land-based craft stalls as well as roving traders. Admission is free. (Moorings and campsite pitches available for £35 for the weekend to include entertainment.)

**Find out more:**  
Tel: 07811 253242  
Email: event.enquiries@waterways.org.uk  
Web: www.waterways.org.uk/festivalofwater
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Passport to Pelsall

As Pelsall Common plays host to this summer’s IWA Festival of Water, we’ve got the lowdown on how best to tackle the canals of the northern BCN

It’s positioned at the very heart of our wonderful waterway network, on an extensive stretch of lock-free canal to boot. Yet Pelsall and other Black Country outposts like it are rarely visited except by the hardiest of boaters. And that’s a shame because, although an unlikely holiday destination, along these rarely-cruised ways you’ll find unspoilt rural scenery, welcoming pubs, and a wealth of history. These are canals where boats were built longer and wider because they’d never need to go through locks, where so many boats left the collieries that water moved in a ‘Black Country Tide’, where landmarks had names like Norton Springs, Jolly Collier and Rumer Hill.

We won’t pretend that the northern BCN has the universal appeal of the Llangollen. Some of the suburban stretches are uninspiring, and the channel is not always clear – but we think the positives far outweigh the negatives, and others agree. A minute’s searching on the internet, be it on boating forums, blogs, Facebook or Twitter, will find numerous enthusiastic accounts: “a picture of rural isolation”, “one of our favourite trips of all time”, “the views are stunning”, and “it felt like a privilege to be exploring these neglected backwaters”.

Rural charm on the northern BCN.
With more boats than ever congregating on the area for the IWA Festival of Water in August, we hope it’ll encourage members to cruise a system that is often rewarding, sometimes frustrating, but without doubt, always fascinating.

Approaching Pelsall

Pelsall Common itself is situated on the Wyrley & Essington at its junction with the Cannock Extension. The ‘Curly Wyrley’ begins at Horseley Fields Junction, just east of Wolverhampton – an unprepossessing start to your journey as this is a largely urban environment which has benefited from few renewal or regeneration projects. We are of the view, however, that it provides an important route to the interesting Northern Reaches of the BCN, and merits greater investment – not just for the benefit of the enthusiastic boater, but for the local community too.

Endeavour, if you can, to choose a warm, sunny day for your cruise! It will prove very difficult indeed to form a positive impression of the canal with cold rain dripping onto your nose from your anorak hood as you steer a lonely course from the tiller, while the crew take shelter in the cabin below.

Next, give up any idea of cruising this route at 4mph. It is important to recognise the limitations of the ‘road’. Some stretches have become quite shallow now, and much of the bottom of the canal is littered with potential prop-fouling materials – more likely to be disturbed by a gung-ho approach. 2mph is a more realistic average.

Be clear in your mind of your preferred stop for overnight mooring. The BCN Society has some good recommendations on its website, including Lane Bridge, the visitor moorings at Sneyd Junction, Brownhills close to Tesco and, of course, Pelsall Common itself, where depth is best adjacent to the Finger Post pub. In an ideal world such pre-planning wouldn’t be necessary, but it does enable us to enjoy lesser used waterways.

Finally, try not to be put off by the appearance of unmitting ‘grey’ in the guide books, signifying the extent of urbanisation in these parts. The towpath is generally in good condition and shielded by trees and hedges, providing the much talked-of (but no less important for that) green corridor – and in time, this breaks out to become a wholly rural canal in a quite unknown part of England. Expect to see early purple orchids, the pretty blue wild geranium, and patches of the now seemingly less common pink Ragged Robin.

Tickets please

Our top tip for members hoping to make the Pelsall meet? Book early. Reserving a spot, whether for a tent or boat, can be done by filling in the form overleaf or on IWA’s website (www.waterways.org.uk/festivalofwater). Pitches cost £35, including access for two people to all the evening entertainment.

The event takes place over the August bank holiday weekend from Saturday 27th – Monday 29th. The festival will be open from 10am-6pm Saturday and Sunday, and from 10am-4pm on Monday.

For more information visit IWA’s website or call 07811 253242. The website also has details of how to book a trading space or, if you’d like to help out, volunteer opportunities.

Further details

• IWA Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire Branch, www.waterways.org.uk/birmingham
• IWA Lichfield Branch, www.waterways.org.uk/lichfield
• BCN Society, www.bcnsociety.com
• Canal & River Trust (West Midlands), 0303 040 4040, enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk
• IWA Lichfield Branch, www.waterways.org.uk/lichfield
• IWA Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire Branch, www.waterways.org.uk/birmingham

Other maps and guides

• Pearson’s Canal Companion: Stourport Ring
• BCN Society, www.bcnsociety.com
• Canal & River Trust (West Midlands), 0303 040 4040, enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk
• IWA Lichfield Branch, www.waterways.org.uk/lichfield
• IWA Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire Branch, www.waterways.org.uk/birmingham

IWA’s deputy chair, Ivor Caplan, explains why boaters’ 2016 cruising plans should include a visit to the Black Country’s labyrinthine canals...

I occasionally hear from boaters whose cruise onto the BCN consists of a quick dash from Wolverhampton Top Lock along the Main Line to the safety of Birmingham’s Brindleyplace, before heading off into the country. Well this is the year, whether heading for the Pelsall Festival of Water or not, to explore the northern parts of the BCN and discover their unique character.

The main attraction is the sheer choice of routes. In fact, the system is so complex it’s quite possible for boaters to actually get lost! Yes, a map is recommended, but don’t let uncertainty deter you from exploring the remainder of the many arms which fed the industry of the Black Country.

Then there is the variety of scenery, from industrial areas that recall the commercial heritage of these waterways to some surprisingly rural views. A summer evening at Anglesey Basin just below Chasewater Reservoir is one of the most peaceful waterways experiences. In contrast, a mooring at the end of Walsall Town Arm or at Brownhills is not as quiet but gives ready access to shops and hostelries.

Our favourite spots on the northern BCN? The end of the Cannock Extension to experience a real surviving boating community, Longwood Boat Club at the top of the Rushall Locks for a good welcome, and Tame Valley with its more ‘modern’ engineering and views of a congested motorway system while cruising slowly above. However, I’m sure you’ll come up with your own list after visiting these canals in 2016.
We quizzed Stuart and Marie Sherratt, organisers of the BCN Society’s explorer cruises, about places to moor, equipment to bring and – of course - top pubs to visit en route to Pelsall.

The BCNS is currently planning a week-long Explorer Cruise to end at the Festival of Water in August. Details will be advertised on the society’s and IWA’s websites in due course or you can email bcns.explorercruise@gmail.com.

Favourite mooring: Pelsall Common itself has been a favourite stopover for us and all our explorer cruisers so far. The collieries and blast furnaces are long gone – these days it’s a beautiful and scenic nature reserve.

Top pub: The Manor Arms on the Daw End branch is an old and quaint little pub right on the canal with good hand-pulled ales. Its unique feature is that it has no bar counter – one of the very few pubs left in the country that can claim this.

Best photo opportunity: Any of the in-line lock flights, like Rushall, Perry Barr or Ryders Green, which are so typical of the BCN system, often through nice, secluded green corridors.

Hidden gem: Anglesey Basin, with easy access to the popular Chasewater reservoir and its various facilities, visitor centre and light railway. A ‘must’ at any time of the year.

Don’t miss: Walsall Town Basin, where all boaters who venture there receive a very friendly Black Country welcome. The town has excellent shopping, regular markets, many good pubs, a very interesting leather museum and a classy art gallery.

Essential equipment: A boat hook and a good knife will be helpful, as well as plenty of patience!

A word on services: There’s a pump-out at Aldridge Marina (private, not CRT card) but no diesel or gas on the northern BCN – the nearest is at Tipton (specifically, Caggie’s Yard on the New Main Line, below Factory Locks). However, all other facilities, i.e. water, Elsan and rubbish disposal, are readily available throughout.

Best tip for BCN beginners: Travel with others and plan your day at a slow pace.
IWA Festival of Water Boat & Campsite Booking Form
27th-29th August 2016 in Pelsall, near Walsall

Come and enjoy IWA’s Festival of Water from a fantastic vantage point. Please complete the booking form to reserve your mooring or campsite pitch. The fee is just £35 and includes access for two people to all of the evening entertainment over four evenings.

Please select from the following
☐ Boat Booking (Complete information below and boxes A & C)
☐ Campsite Booking (Complete information below and boxes B & C)

A  Craft Name __________________________
    Registration Number __________________

Type of Craft

Narrowboat
☐ Cruiser Stern  ☐ Historic Motorboat
☐ Traditional   ☐ Historic Butty
☐ Tug Style     ☐ Butty (Powered)

☐ Cruiser  ☐ Dinghy

Construction
☐ Steel
☐ Iron
☐ Wood
☐ Aluminium
☐ GRP

B  Type of Unit

☐ Trailer Caravan  ☐ Trailer Tent  ☐ Other
☐ Motor Caravan   ☐ Frame Tent

Please use your own washing facilities
Water, toilets and Elsan disposal will be available

C  Dimensions

Boats - include fenders, outboards, davits etc
Camping Units - include awning & tow hitch but exclude guy ropes

Length _______ m  Beam/Width _______ m  Draft _______ m
or _______ ft    or _______ ft    or _______ ft

Special Requests & Other Information

Please tick relevant payment method box
☐ by BACS Account: IWA Events Account, Sort code: 20-45-77, Account no: 50977470, quoting as reference either the craft name or your post code
☐ by calling IWA Head Office 01494 783453 to use a Debit or Credit card
☐ by cheque payable to Inland Waterways Association posted with this form to the address below.

Mooring / Pitch Fee £35.00 includes 2 wristbands for Evening Entertainment (4 evenings)
Additional wristbands £5.00 each
Plaques £5.00 each
(for bookings placed after 15th July, postage may be required)

Quantity  Total
☐ £
☐ £
☐ £

GRAND TOTAL £

Send your completed form to
Pelsall Booking Form, IWA, Island House, Moor Road, Chesham HP5 1WA or scan the form, save as a pdf and email to event.entries@waterways.org.uk.

On receipt of your completed form IWA will email you terms and conditions of booking. You may cancel your booking within 7 days of receipt of the terms and conditions, no response will be taken as confirmation that you are happy with the terms.
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Now the building that gave birth to IWA is singled out from other houses in the terrace by a blue plaque. “Robert Aickman,” it reads, “author and co-founder of the Inland Waterways Association lived and worked here.” Erected in September 2015, it’s a fitting reminder of a pivotal figure in the struggle to save Britain’s canals from institutionalised neglect and destruction – and the meeting on 15th February 1946 that formalised his (and like-minded colleagues’) commitment to that cause. Robert Aickman was an extraordinary man who, years after his death, still continues to court controversy and, more importantly, to inspire others. To these waterways enthusiasts, his former house at 11 Gower Street, London, remains their spiritual home.

**Quality Street**

Gower Street, which runs from Euston Station to Bedford Square, somehow survived both 20th century threats to so much of Georgian Bloomsbury – the Nazi bombings of World War II, and the Brave New World brutalism of London University. When I studied here during the late 1960s the bulldozers were seemingly at their worst, devastating the north-west corner of Russell Square and almost completely removing Gordon Square. In fact, Bloomsbury’s transformation began well before World War II, and the university’s Stalinist Senate House in Malet Street, only one road away from Gower Street, was built in the 1930s. It would later provide George Orwell with the inspiration for the headquarters of the Thought Police in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

I labour all of this destruction because it might give a clue to Aickman’s conversion to the cause of conservation, still very much in its infancy at the time. Aickman was a trained architect, as was his father – whom he described somewhat unaffectionately as “the oddest man I have ever known”. Although Aickman soon ceased practicing as an architect, he would have appreciated Gower Street’s elegant Georgian buildings, and understood the need to safeguard them against the upheaval taking place only streets away – all in the name of progress. From this perspective, assuming the mantle of saving the inland waterways would have been the logical next step for him. Well, that’s my view...

**The House**

No 11 stands at Gower Street’s southern end, close to Bedford Square, one of the finest preserved Georgian squares in London. Pertinently, it is at the heart of the publishing world, a bookish hub that
would have suited Aickman well as he embarked on his second profession as a literary agent. Aickman always believed in appearances and, in particular, in having the right address. He only rented No 11, and the upper floors at that, but just living there was enough. It was a suitably salubrious address from which to base his work as ‘Founder of The Inland Waterways Association’ – a self-given title, not entirely accurate, that he held to his end. During the years IWA worked from No 11, before moving in stages to larger premises in Regents Park Road, he never charged the association for its use.

Built in 1785, the house is spread over five floors. Aickman rented the upper floors, with a large front room which he used as an office-cum-meeting room. It was in here that IWA’s inaugural meeting took place, with Aickman elected chairman, and Tom Rolt the honorary secretary. Photos of Aickman at work in the room show him sitting in a chair with wall-to-wall books behind him – he once extravagantly claimed there wasn’t a book worth opening that he hadn’t already read. Above this was the attic, a warren of small rooms. Today the house’s fine Georgian staircase and roof lantern have been restored into one building, with no break between the top and lower floors. I suspect that in Aickman’s time there probably was one. These days the upper floor and roof attic are leased by the UK Warehousing Association.

‘Hotbeds of sexual intrigue’

When I visited the premises last year for the blue plaque ceremony, I was lucky enough to be granted access to the surrounding rooms. The first thing that struck me was just how small they were. From the attic windows, views of old Bloomsbury could have seamlessly slipped from the paintings of Walter Sickert – an artist of the Camden Town Group whom Aickman, with his appreciation of the arts, would almost certainly have known of in his earlier years.

In Aickman’s time these office-rooms had also been hotbeds of sexual intrigue, driven in part by Aickman’s own appetite for such things. In 1941,
Robert Aickman

An Overview

Robert Fordyce Aickman was born in London on 27th June 1914, the son of architect William Arthur Aickman and Mabel Violet Marsh. Literary capabilities were in his bloodline as his maternal grandfather was the prolific Victorian novelist Richard Marsh (1857–1915), known for his occult thriller *The Beetle* (1897), a book as popular in its time as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*.

It was while watching a Shakespeare production in Stratford-upon-Avon that the inland waterways first came to Aickman’s attention. Walking along the nearby canal, he was horrified to find it in a state of severe dereliction. At around the same time, he read the recently published *Narrow Boat* – L.T.C. Rolt’s account of exploring the fading canals of England and Wales with his wife Angela aboard converted boat *Cressy*. Aickman wrote to Rolt suggesting a meeting to discuss the possibility of founding an organisation to campaign for the revival of canals. Following an enthusiastic reply, in August 1945 the Aickmans visited the Rolts aboard *Cressy* at Tardebigge, and this was to prove a defining moment in his life. For the next two decades, the waterways were to be his primary focus.

Possessed of great energy, charm, intelligence and numerous London connections, Aickman was the ideal candidate to lead the fledgling Inland Waterways Association, soon gaining the support of such well-known people as MP Alan Herbert and the Earl of Portsmouth.

While the organisation went from strength to strength, Aickman’s relationship with Rolt began to deteriorate, particularly when the latter suggested that some waterways should be sacrificed to prioritise others. Rolt resigned from his IWA role in 1949, and, after a year in which the association was torn apart with rows over policy, Aickman resigned as chairman in October 1951. A few months later, he was persuaded to return to a new role of ‘founder and vice president’.

Over the following 13 years in this position, the action moved from local issues to the national stage, in particular the Houses of Parliament and Whitehall. Here, Aickman’s personal skills were directed to achieve immense impact on behalf of the association, which saw it become one of the most successful conservation organisations in British history.

Throughout his involvement with IWA, Aickman employed his considerable writing talents to produce the regular Bulletin to keep members abreast of happenings. In the literary world, he is best known for the 48 ‘strange stories’ which were published in eight volumes, one of them posthumous. His published novels were *The Late Breakfasters* (1964) and *The Model: A Novel of the Fantastic* (published posthumously in 1987).

aged 27, he married Ray Gregorson, who accompanied her husband on the famous voyage with Tom and Angela Rolt from Tardebigge to Tooley’s Yard, Banbury on *Cressy*, in the autumn of 1945. The marriage soon lost its attractions and, although they continued to live in these rooms, Aickman enjoyed adventures elsewhere. He never remarried – instead enjoying a string of casual relationships which became legendary.

Aickman, according to one of my former clients (an IWA veteran who used to accompany him to meetings with local authorities and BWB managers around the country) had enormous energy. And not just in his professional work, it seems. My source claimed Aickman frequently received visits in his hotel rooms – with seemingly little effort on his part – from endless waterways groupies who, despite his diminutive stature, heavy rimmed glasses and juvenile looks, saw him as a living hero.

Elizabeth Jane Howard

Undoubtedly his most famous conquest was his part-time secretary Elizabeth Jane Howard, the wife of good friend Peter Scott, the painter and son of Scott of the Antarctic. Scott’s marriage was disintegrating and Aickman’s relationship with Jane soon became more than a working one, with intimate encounters taking place even while Ray was working elsewhere in the flat. Aickman wrote of his new amour: “Jane Howard was so beautiful...she promoted loves and hates which through no fault of her own left some who felt fevered and wasted.” In true Bloomsbury tradition, Jane also wrote candidly about the affair in her 2002 autobiography *Slipstream*. None of this seemed to concern Peter Scott, however, who remained a good friend and in 1949 drew a portrait of Aickman that remained his favourite. In the 1970s Aickman and Scott were both still vice presidents of IWA, their names appearing in the lists with the honorary title ‘Esq.’

It was Jane, not Ray, who accompanied Aickman on his Thames cruise of 1946 – his first voyage in charge of a boat, and a trip that frequently foreshadowed scenes from Alan Ayckbourn’s chaotic boating play *Way Upstream*. Aickman was useless at steering, he did not understand engines, and never learned to drive a car. Meanwhile, Ray was left to run the IWA office on her own. The incident so shocked the Rolts that it began the long disintegration of their relationship with him.
Jane went on to have two more husbands, the last being the novelist Kingsley Amis, whom she married in 1965. By 1983 they were divorced, with Jane vowing to remain single – something she stuck to up until her death in 2014. But she always remained friends with Aickman and they went on to write a collection of ghost stories together, one of which, by her, had a canal setting.

**Tom and Sonia**

Having taken the moral high ground on Aickman’s extra-marital affairs, it wasn’t long before Tom was at it himself – and in one of the very attic bedrooms I visited. Aickman was keen to assist the boatmen and promote freight carrying on the waterways. Sonia Smith, who was married to working boatman George Smith, was invited to join the committee to represent them, particularly as she was already campaigning for the improvement of their wages and working conditions.

Committee meetings were held in Gower Street in the winter months, the summers being used for campaigning. Aickman allowed those attending who had travelled long distances to stay the night at no charge. Certainly by 1949, if not earlier, the sleepovers included Sonia and Tom sharing a bed. Despite Aickman’s hospitality, the relationship between him and Tom continued to deteriorate. By the first IWA rally in Market Harborough in August 1950 it was over. Aickman had him expelled from IWA early the following year. Soon after, Tom and Sonia left the waterways, abandoned their respective spouses, moved to mid Wales and began their new lives together by saving the Talyllyn Railway.
“Without Robert’s ‘unreasonableness’ we would have lost the Oxford Canal south of Banbury, the southern Staffs & Worcester Canal, and perhaps the Leicester Summit as well”

Back to Aickman, though, whose legacy was hailed at the Gower Street blue plaque unveiling. Summing up the very essence of Aickman’s achievement, IWA chairman Les Etheridge maintained: “Those who enjoy the waterways today owe him a great deal. Without Robert’s ‘unreasonableness’ we would have lost the Oxford Canal south of Banbury, the southern Staffs & Worcester Canal, and perhaps the Leicester Summit as well. And without his tenacity in saving the Macclesfield Canal, the restorations of the Peak Forest and Ashton Canals would have been much less likely. What a difference that would have made to the waterway network we enjoy today.”

Les went on to describe Aickman’s finest hour – the reopening of the South Stratford Canal on the 11th July 1964 in the presence of the Queen Mother. It was, he said, “a pivotal moment – conclusively demonstrating that volunteer-led restoration was a viable model for the recovery of the waterways.” At that 1964 event Aickman told the Queen Mother that he now intended to start working on the restoration of the Upper Avon Navigation, which was still in a state of dereliction. The Queen Mother vowed that, if he did, she would be pleased to formally reopen it. Ten years later, on 1st June 1974, she met her promise and the reopening ceremony was held at the Upper Avon’s new top lock. Among those in the official entourage was the Poet Laureate John Betjeman, also a...
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STOURPORT BASIN MARINA
prominent IWA member on Aickman’s persuading, and he read a poem he had written for the occasion, which concluded:

Sweet is the fluting of the blackbird’s note,
Sweet is the ripple from the narrow boat.
Your Majesty, our friend for many years,
Confirms a triumph now the moment nears:
The lock you have reopened will set free
The heart of England to the open sea.

Among Aickman’s other restoration achievements were the 35 miles of the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal with local IWA man Ian Wright. And had Aickman not been moved sideways in the political shenanigans within IWA in the mid-1960s, I like to think he would have stopped the new M6 blocking the northern section of the Lancaster Canal.

Disillusion

Despite his success, by the mid-1970s Aickman felt disillusioned by the continued antics of the BWB and attitudes within IWA to BWB’s proposed further canal closures. In 1973 he moved from Gower Street, surprisingly to a flat in the New Barbarism of the Barbican, and began a restless life. He largely confined his IWA activities to restoring the Upper Avon Navigation partnered with David Hutchings, the man on the ground, in whom he had total trust.

Finding the modern concrete jungle of the Barbican wasn’t conducive to writing his ghost stories, he moved to a flat in Earls Court three years later, and then twice more – once sharing with his literary agent Felix Pearson. Towards the end of 1980 he was diagnosed with cancer, for which he refused conventional treatment. He died in hospital on 22nd February 1981.

I would like to record special thanks to IWA stalwart Roger Squires – who knew Robert Aickman well – for all his help in preparing this article.

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Round-up of IWA branch activity

Here are just some of the recent activities carried out by IWA branches around the country. If your event isn’t included here, do let the Branch Campaign Team at Head Office know, ideally in advance so that they can assist with publicity and planning where that would be helpful. Contact Emma Matthars (emma.matthars@waterways.org.uk).

In 2015 IWA branches held a total of 297 work parties. Volunteers devoted 2,700 days to maintaining, clearing and supporting our waterways. The work of our volunteers is highly regarded and IWA North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch volunteers won a Canal & River Trust – Going the Extra Length Award for their work painting and restoring the Grade II listed cast iron bridge at Hazelhurst Junction on the Caldon Canal. IWA Lichfield Branch volunteer Richard Bagley also won an award for his outstanding commitment to Rugeley work parties in all weathers.

As well as the task party activity, IWA had two bigger campaigns that branches were actively involved in. The first was the Big Canal Clean-ups. Ten branches completed 18 days of clean-ups, attracting 130 volunteers who spent their time removing bikes, tyres and trolleys, plus an assortment of other ‘goodies’ from the water!

The second was our Himalayan Balsam Awareness campaign, which we are set to repeat this year. Branches cleared Himalayan Balsam over 17 miles of towpaths and banks across 14 different waterways. In recognition of this campaign IWA was named the 2015 winner in the Natural Environment category of the Living Waterways Awards.

2015 branch work party league table
5. Chester & Merseyside: 14 work parties
4. Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire: 22 work parties
3. Northampton: 24 work parties
2. West Country: 35 work parties
1. North Staffs & South Cheshire: 56 work parties

Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire Branch
Over the autumn, volunteers from Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire Branch worked at several locations along the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal, as well as in Stourport Basins. Activities ranged from preparing and painting the four narrow locks leading from the River Severn into the basins, lock gate and paddle gear painting, clearing vegetation and litter picking. While IWA provided the people power, CRT provided some equipment, including a dinghy to enable the clearance of vegetation and litter from the offside.

Oxfordshire Branch
Late September saw Oxfordshire Branch volunteers head to Banbury to give the lock’s white paint a fresh coat to spruce it up ready for Banbury Canal Day, which took place on 4th October. An estimated 15,000 people packed the towpath in bright autumn sunshine to explore the canal craft moored along the town’s waterway and enjoy the entertainment laid on.
Warwickshire Branch

In late October, IWA Warwickshire Branch held a clean-up on the Grand Union Canal and adjacent towpath between Gullimans Bridge, Sydenham and the ladder bridge, Althorpe Street, Leamington. The event was extremely well supported with 70 volunteers using grappling hooks to haul a variety of items from the canal bed. These included the usual selection of shopping trolleys and bicycles, a motorbike, tyres, girders, fencing panels, roadwork signs and barriers, lots of pipe, and a sundry mixture of metal and plastic. In addition, a litter pick produced over 30 black sacks of rubbish and a large quantity of needles, which were disposed of by authorised CRT staff.

IWA volunteers were joined by St Mary’s Road Residents, the Love Leamington Group, canal enthusiasts (some of whom had travelled from outside the area), Warwick University volunteers plus local residents. CRT offered excellent support by providing a large hopper and push tug, gloves, litter pickers, grapples and coordination through volunteer leader, Steve Lambert.

North Staffs & South Cheshire Branch

North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch held several work parties over the autumn at Cheshire Locks, including smartening up Lock 43. This continues the excellent work done earlier this year on locks 44 to 46 around Red Bull, and volunteers were pleased to note the support from boaters coming through who admired all the improvements made.

Meanwhile, the branch’s Uttoxeter Canal work parties continued, with attention turning to vegetation management and the removal of regrowth from the many tree stumps along the line of the canal.

Chester & Merseyside Branch

With great weather continuing into the early autumn, Chester & Merseyside Branch volunteers, working in partnership with the Eldonian Housing Association, managed to clear all the weeds and overgrowing debris from the Leeds & Liverpool terminus basin piazza. They then spent a cold day in November clearing the greenery along the wall from by the Eldonian Village Hall all the way to Vauxhall Bridge. The two wheelbarrows being used could not keep up with the rate of weed clearance!

Into December and the work party concentrated on clearing weeds and litter from the towpath linking Eldonian Village and Stanley Locks, resulting in a very satisfying and successful day.

Notts & Derby Branch

A cohort of volunteers from IWA’s Notts & Derby Branch assembled at Beeston Lock on the Nottingham Canal in late September to clean up the waterway. Despite the initial challenges of fog, 20 volunteers set off along the canal in various teams to pick litter from the canal bed and along the towpath and offside.

The sun soon broke through, and the length from Beeston down into the city centre, about two miles, was the focus of efforts. Volunteers filled the work boat with scrap, which was despatched for unloading at Trent Lane depot before returning to the fray for another load. Included in the assorted scrap were shopping trolleys, steel fencing, road signs, tyres, mattresses, over 20 push bikes, as well as a motorbike.

A boat load-and-a-half of rubbish was removed from the canal by Notts & Derby branch volunteers at the end of last year.
Northampton Branch

Working along the adopted Northampton Arm of the Grand Union Canal, IWA Northampton Branch’s aim for the winter months was to clear all of the 17 locks’ by-weirs of vegetation to enable water to flow freely from above the lock down into the next pound. Volunteers strimmed the long grass and brambles so that access could be gained to the weeds and moss in the by-weir. After lots of scraping, the end result was worth all the hard work and will hopefully help keep the pounds in water.

Milton Keynes Branch

Volunteers taking part in Milton Keynes Branch’s autumn canal clean-up in October were delighted to be joined by Mike Grimes, CRT’s new head of boating. Rubbish grappled from the Grand Union Canal and litter-picked from the banks was collected in CRT work-boats towed by IWA branch member boats. A motorbike, a complete washing machine and an electric bicycle were the better items gathered among the usual assorted metal, plastic and other rubbish. Encouragingly, volunteers reported that this was the lightest haul for some time; maybe appreciation of the canal, and regard for it as a valued heritage asset, is widening. IWA’s Milton Keynes Branch has been carrying out clean-ups for almost 30 years. It organises bi-annual events sponsored by the Wyvern Shipping Company and supported by CRT.

Manchester Branch

The annual Manchester Clean-up, organised by IWA Manchester Branch in partnership with CRT, took place over the weekend of 10th-11th October. At this successful event, a wide variety of work was carried out, including pulling rubbish from the canal, litter picking, vegetation clearance and painting. Over 30 people took part in the weekend, including staff from Marks & Spencer, supported by Percy Pig.

Based around Lock 69 and Lock 70 of the Ashton Canal in Newton Heath, by the end of the weekend 40 bags of rubbish had been collected, towpath and lockside cobbles had been weeded, and Lock 69 had been painted. Vegetation was also cut right back along a path, giving access to the canal and the fence that had been invisible through the undergrowth. The fence was then given a coat of paint.

IWA Manchester had another good turn-out in November, with three new volunteers joining the regular team. Work concentrated on the Ashton Canal’s Lock 10, with towpath and by-wash vegetation clearance and a clean-up of the cobble and coping stones. The only down-side of the day was when the lemon drizzle cake tin was dropped in the cut! Happily, the volunteers had already eaten its contents and the tin was eventually recovered.

West Country Branch

Last October seven West Country Branch volunteers collected the Canal & River Trust work-boat Usk Valley from Bathpool Moorings and moved it to Bridgwater Docks, removing debris from the canal en route. Usk Valley was used in two subsequent work parties and proved a great asset in the removal of a large amount of debris from the half-mile section of the Bridgewater & Taunton Canal from Newton Lock to Bridge 5. Among the many items removed were a shopping trolley, car parcel shelves, car components, bicycles, children’s scooters, skateboards, large plastic and oil cloth sheets, items of clothing, a mobile phone, five yellow police cones, as well as countless drinks cans and plastic bottles and several black sacks of rubbish.

Other tasks carried out at the end of 2015 included painting some of Newtown Lock’s railings in Bridgewater, vegetation removal from Firepool Lock to a point just past Taunton Town Bridge, a visual inspection of culverts and rubbish removal from the towpath between Firepool Lock and Crown Industrial Estate. Another work party centred on the Bathpool Marina area, where the facilities’ doors were spruced up with a lick of paint. In November, meanwhile, time was spent cutting back overgrowth, towpath tidying and removing rubbish.
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IWA’s Waterway Recovery Group has launched its schedule of 2016 canal camps, kicking off on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation in Essex as early as February. The week-long working holidays offer a unique opportunity to volunteer and learn new skills, while exploring amazing parts of Britain’s industrial heritage.

Volunteering with WRG is a great experience for anyone who loves being outdoors and enjoys meeting people from different backgrounds and a wide range of ages (18+). The camps attract people from all walks of life, from youngsters taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme; to waterway enthusiasts looking to make a contribution to restoring and preserving the system. No previous experience is necessary – all that’s required is a willingness to get involved and a good sense of fun.

Carry on CAMPING!

WRG volunteers have been working on our waterways since the 1960s. The camps often act as a catalyst to a canal restoration project, making significant progress in just one week. In the summer of 2015, WRG volunteers spent 2,400 days restoring the canals of England and Wales, and the group wants to do even more in 2016. That’s where YOU can help...

This year there are 35 canal camps planned on 16 different canal restoration sites, offering volunteers the chance to uncover and repair a canal basin on the Stover Canal, restore a lock on the Grantham Canal, or build a brand new bridge on the Wey & Arun. Each week costs £63, which includes food and accommodation. Read on to find out exactly what WRG has planned and how you can get involved.

Help restore Inglesham Lock

In 2015 it was all about the dirt on the eastern end of the Cotswold Canals. Volunteers spent ten days clearing the lock chamber of mud, glass, and other debris to allow for a full survey to be undertaken. In 2016 volunteers will clear the remaining silt and start repointing the lower chamber walls. Once this work has been completed, scaffolding will be installed and the demolition work can start, with volunteers removing damaged brickwork, vegetation and some very large tree roots. These will be busy fun-packed camps, and you will see lots of progress each week.

Dates:
11th-18th June
18th-25th June
25th June-2nd July
27th August-3rd September
3rd-10th September
10th-17th September

The camaraderie in the group was brilliant, everyone mucking in together and working hard. The sense of achievement at the end of the week was amazing. We enjoyed our first camp so much that two months later we returned for our second camp!“

First-time volunteers Stuart and Judi Young
Build bridges on the Wey & Arun Canal
Work has already started in West Sussex to build a new bridge over the canal with the aim of bringing 1½ miles of water back to a fully navigable state along the summit section. In 2016 volunteers will help clad the new concrete bridge in bricks (8,000 of them!) and blocks. Once this has been done, campers will demolish the old causeway, landscape the area, and create paths, seating areas and interpretation panels. The reopening of this section is planned for September, coinciding with the 200th anniversary of the canal, so there’s a lot to do before then!

Dates: 2nd-9th July, 9th-16th July

Re-water the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals
This year volunteers will be working at Forton and Meretown assisting the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals Trust’s volunteers in their work to re-water the canal. Using excavators, volunteers will re-profile the canal bed, lay geotextile lining material to make the canal waterproof and re-establish the towpath. These are highly visible sites, popular with local walkers, so it will be great to show local people what volunteers can do and that restoration work is moving forward.

Dates: 13th-20th August, 20th-27th August

Learn heritage skills on the Monmouthshire Canal
WRG volunteers have supported the Mon and Brec Canals Regeneration Partnerships ‘Waterworks’ Project for many years. The initiative aims to restore the Ty Coch Lock Flight. This summer volunteers will have an opportunity to get involved with the restoration of a lock chamber using traditional heritage techniques, including repointing and rebuilding lock walls using lime mortar.

Dates:
2nd-9th July
9th-16th July

Here’s the full list of WRG canal camp dates for 2016:

SPRING
13th-20th February – Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation
25th March-2nd April – Chesterfield Canal
26th March-2nd April – Weymoor Bridge (Cotswolds)
2nd-9th April – Weymoor Bridge (Cotswolds)
2nd-9th April – Uttoxeter Canal
9th-16th April – Uttoxeter Canal
16th-17th April – BCN Cleanup 2016

SUMMER
11th-18th June – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
18th-25th June – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
25th June-2nd July – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
2nd-9th July – Monmouthshire Canal
2nd-9th July – Wey & Arun Canal (NWPG)
3rd-9th July – Grantham Canal
9th-16th July – Monmouthshire Canal
9th-16th July – Wey and Arun Canal
9th-16th July – Grantham Canal
16th-23rd July – Swansea Canal
16th-23rd July – Grantham Canal
23rd-30th July – Cotswold Canals
23rd-30th July – Buckingham Canal (KESCRG)
23rd-30th July – Grantham Canal
30th July-6th August – Cotswold Canals
30th July – 6th August – Buckingham Canal
30th July – 6th August – Lapal Canal
6th-13th August – Stover Canal
6th-13th August – Ashby Canal
6th-13th August – Lapal Canal
13th-20th August – Stover Canal
13th-20th August – Pocklington Canal
13th-20th August – Shrewsbury and Newport Canals
20th-27th August – Shrewsbury and Newport Canals
27th August-3rd September – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
3rd-10th September – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
10th-17th September – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)

AUTUMN/WINTER
22nd-29th October – Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation
21st-29th October – WRG Forestry Camp
5th-6th November – Bonfire Bash
26th December-1st January – Christmas Camp

Save the date

To book on or request a canal camp 2016 brochure please visit WRG’s website www.wrg.org.uk. Alternatively, you can call the WRG head office on 01494 783453 ext. 604 or email enquiries@wrg.org.uk.
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PLEASE MENTION IWA WHEN RESPONDING TO ADVERTISEMENTS
Readers of Waterways are reminded that nominations for IWA's National Awards are now open. Nominations can be made by individual members or branch and region committees, and should be submitted by 31st March by post to Awards Panel c/o Head Office (see address at front of this issue of Waterways), or by email to awards@waterways.org.uk. The winners of IWA's National Annual Awards for 2016 will be announced and trophies presented at the association’s Annual General Meeting on 24th September.

The prizes are a way of recognising the amazing amount of work carried out by IWA volunteers throughout the year, and over longer periods of time too, and members are encouraged to think about who they might wish to put forward for an award. From fundraising efforts to restoration endeavours, it's time to say thank you for contributions to the work IWA simply couldn't do without additional help.

Cyril Styring Trophy
The Cyril Styring Trophy, the association’s premier award, is given to an IWA member who has made an outstanding contribution in furthering the association's campaigns. Cyril Styring was an early IWA member who, in 1950, was instrumental in setting up a new IWA branch based around Sheffield. The trophy itself is an eye-catching silver narrowboat, made in Sheffield, which was purchased by the branch in memory of Cyril, the branch’s first chairman. This trophy has been awarded most years since 1960, and past winners include some famous names from waterways history, including Sir John Smith CBE, Leslie Morton, Graham Palmer, David Hutchings and Lionel Munk.

John Heap Salver
The John Heap Salver, the association’s major fundraising award, is presented to a member who has made an outstanding contribution to raising money for IWA. The trophy, a silver salver, was provided by then IWA trustee John Heap (who subsequently became national chairman) and was first awarded at the association’s national rally at Marple on the Peak Forest Canal in 1966.

Christopher Power Prize
The Christopher Power Prize is awarded to the person, society or trust who has made the most significant contribution to the restoration of an inland waterway. The award is based on a bequest from the Power family in memory of Christopher Power, a keen boater who died very young, and includes a cash prize for the relevant restoration project. Recent recipients include Stover Canal Society, Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Restoration Trust, Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust and most recently, at the 2015 AGM, the award was given to Michael Limbrey of the Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust.

Richard Bird Medals
Richard Bird Medals are given to members whose efforts and support are considered to have brought significant benefit to the association over a sustained period of time. The initial batch of medals was provided by a legacy from Richard Bird, a volunteer with IWA London Region and at IWA festivals, who himself was awarded the John Heap Salver for fundraising in 1989 and again in 1996, not long before he died in 1997. The first Richard Bird medals were awarded in 2000, and over 100 of the medals have been presented so far.

Two other IWA awards will also be presented at the AGM, which have a different nomination route. The Branch Achievement Award is given each year to the IWA branch which, in the opinion of a panel consisting of the national chairman, deputy national chairman and chief executive, has made the greatest progress in promoting the association’s aims and objectives during the past year. All branches are considered, without need for nomination. The award consists of a silver salver, donated to IWA by former national chairman David Stevenson for the purpose in 1998.

Meanwhile, the Vivian Bulkeley-Johnson Salt is awarded each year to the person or organisation who, in the opinion of trustees, based on a recommendation from IWA’s Inland Waterways Freight Group, has made an outstanding contribution to championing commercial waterways transport in the UK.
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