BOATING THE BIG SMOKE
IWA tackles members’ concerns in the capital

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AGENDA

The Column of the National Chairman

2017 will see IWA continue working to protect and restore our inland waterways, and there is going to be a lot to do. I am becoming increasingly concerned over current threats to our waterways. In October, a meeting between the Environment Agency (EA) and Canal & River Trust (CRT) recorded that: “It was agreed that an option which may need to form part of the discussion with government is the possibility that we may have to close some navigations in the future (on health and safety grounds) if we are unable to fund the repair and maintenance of the assets.” This is a very real threat to our waterways resulting from the EA underfunding that we have been campaigning about for a number of years.

IWA takes this extremely seriously. Our desire to see EA navigations transferred to CRT has always been conditional upon proper funding being provided and anything else is simply unacceptable. Volunteers from across the country have worked for over 50 years to restore derelict waterways to navigation and continue to do so. Threats of closure to currently navigable waterways cannot and will not be tolerated by IWA. Waterways provide far too much to the nation in terms of health benefits, recreation and regeneration for this to be a sensible option and we must not allow it to happen.

We will be making our arguments strongly to politicians and other relevant decision makers. Members will have the opportunity to support this work and we will be letting you know how. Your backing will be vital as politicians need to understand how highly valued our waterways are. The good news here is that, through IWA’s political work, many members of parliament are already highly supportive and indeed some are themselves IWA members.

If I take any comfort from the current position it is that CRT, unlike EA, does not want to see any closures and has said: “Keeping navigations open is our raison d’être.” IWA wants to see EA navigations transferred to CRT with the necessary funding to keep them open. That’s our wish for 2017 and we will do all we can to make that happen.

IWA’s work on restoration is being enhanced this year through the full launch of our Restoration Hub. There are details about the Hub in this issue and we hope members will support it, for example by providing their expertise, through volunteering and by helping us to fund it. There is so much good work going on across the country to restore waterways. IWA is determined to champion, support and guide this through our professional expertise, the practical work and skills of Waterway Recovery Group, our political influence and the lobbying status that recognises IWA as a powerful advocate for the waterways and their restoration.

Enjoy the waterways in 2017 and please support our work to ensure that future generations can also benefit from them in the same way.

Les Etheridge
Region chairman vacancy

Mike Carter has resigned as chairman of IWA’s North West Region for health reasons. Under IWA’s rules for the appointment of region chairmen (see waterways.org.uk/constitution), nominations for this post are invited to serve the remaining term of office (until the 2018 AGM), and should be submitted to the chief executive at Head Office by no later than Monday 3rd April 2017 along with a brief biography, autobiography or statement not exceeding 400 words, for publication as part of any ballot paper (which would be included in the May 2017 edition of Waterways).

Information for potential new trustees (including region chairmen) is available at waterways.org.uk/governance. If you would like to discuss the possibility of standing as North West Region chairman, please contact either Neil Edwards, chief executive (01494 783453), the national chairman, or any other region chairman for an informal conversation.

IWA National Awards nominations

IWA is looking for nominations for its annual National Awards. Nominations are invited from members, branches and regions and should be emailed to awards@waterways.org.uk by 31st March. Nominations should state which award is appropriate and how the nominee’s contribution relates to the award criteria. The names and contact details of the nominator and nominee should also be provided.

The award categories are as follows:

Cyril Styring Trophy – for an IWA member who has, in the opinion of trustees, made an outstanding contribution to further the Association’s campaign. This is the Association’s premier award.

John Heap Salver – for an IWA member who, in the opinion of the trustees, has made an outstanding contribution to raising funds for the Association.

Richard Bird Medal – for members of the Association whose efforts and support are considered to have brought significant benefit to the Association over a sustained period.

Christopher Power Prize – for a person, society or trust who has made the most significant contribution to the restoration of an inland waterway.

Vivian Bulkeley-Johnson Salt – for the person or organisation who, in the opinion of trustees, upon a recommendation from IWA’s Inland Waterways Freight Group, has made an outstanding contribution to the furtherance of commercial waterways transport in the United Kingdom.

Award nominations will be considered by an awards panel nominated by trustees, and recommendations made to trustees for final approval.

New chairman for waterways parliamentary group

Chris White, MP for Warwick and Leamington, has been elected new chair for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Waterways.

He takes over from Richard Benyon MP, a former waterways minister who continues as a vice chair. Also elected as vice chairs of the group were Cheryl Gillan MP, Ranil Jayawardena MP, Wendy Morton MP, John Cryer MP, Lord German and Baroness Randerson.

The group has also issued a new mission statement, which reflects the wider range of activities taking place on the UK’s waterways, particularly in terms of regeneration and restoration.

Star guest for IWA at London Boat Show

IWA gave a helping hand to the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust’s fundraising efforts by hosting an appearance by actor David Suchet, vice-president of the Trust, on its stand at the London Boat Show in January.

The Poirot star and LHCRT trustees outlined their current ‘Tunnel Vision’ campaign, endorsed and supported by IWA, to raise £1m before 2019 to install a tunnel beneath the main Birmingham-Lichfield railway line and so secure the restoration of the Lichfield Canal.

LHCRT has also benefited from other assistance from IWA recently, receiving over £4,000 in grants (£2,250 towards road signs to raise local awareness of the canals, and just under £2,000 towards costs for planning applications in respect of works at Darnford Lane).
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Call for new committee members
IWA’s marketing committee is looking for new members to support the charity’s objectives over the coming five years.

The committee currently has a fantastic mix of marketing strategists, press and publicity expertise as well as social media knowledge and is looking for volunteers who might like to join this very active, friendly group. If you have experience of direct marketing, database marketing or senior level charity fundraising and like the sound of a role on one of IWA’s central committees, please contact Aileen Stenner, marketing manager: aileen.stenner@waterways.org.uk.

IWA’s navigation committee, which monitors and responds to all matters relating to the use and maintenance of navigable waterways in England, Scotland and Wales, is also looking for new members.

Navigation committee meets every two months in the Midlands and new members are being sought with particular expertise or experience in the following areas: hire-boat/marine industry, health and safety, rural advocacy, urban planning and heritage/historic buildings. If you are interested in finding out more, or want to attend a meeting on a trial basis, please email Alison Smedley, campaigns officer: alison.smedley@waterways.org.uk.

Restoration Hub launched
IWA is stepping up the level of support offered to the restoration movement by launching a ‘Hub’ to answer enquiries from restoration groups, provide up-to-date guidance on relevant issues, and develop a broad range of online resources.

The waterway restoration sector currently comprises around 100 restoration schemes. While some are ‘resting’ or in a defining and scoping phase, others have seen major construction progress over the last few years. IWA recognised that the sheer number and variety of projects called for a more sophisticated response, and so a working group recommended the launch of a Restoration Hub, supported by full-time employees, and with three main elements to its structure:

- **SUPPORTING**: The Hub will act as a co-ordinating point for all restoration enquiries, provide up-to-date guidance on restoration issues, and develop a broad range of online resources on IWA’s website including tools such as Health and Safety training videos and case studies. The Hub is already fielding a good number of detailed enquiries from IWA branches and waterway groups and, over time, will track trends and identify patterns to further tailor the Association’s support.

- **ENABLING**: Practical assistance will continue to be provided to restoration groups through WRG Canal Camps and site visits. IWA is also improving the support provided after these visits, with written follow-up reports and further direct involvement as appropriate.

- **CHAMPIONING**: The Hub will select ‘Restoration Champions’ to provide visionary leadership and to inspire, motivate and energise projects at a local, regional and national level. It will also create a new high-level panel of people, representing the waterway restoration network across England and Wales, to encourage, promote and enable waterway restoration, galvanising the attention and support of the media, influential politicians and key stakeholders at a national level and giving strategic advice on specific issues faced by restoration groups.

National chairman, Les Etheridge, commented: “Our recent research reinforced just how important restoration is to IWA’s members and volunteers. We are determined to continue the Association’s historic leadership in this sector over the coming years as we look forward to bringing more miles of waterway back into water and restoring heritage structures to former and perhaps even new levels of glory.”

Another essential part of the Hub is a Panel of Experts who can be called upon to advise, offer experience, knowledge and time to restoration groups encompassing skills such as fundraising, engineering, environmental management, marketing and project management, among others. Over the next few months the Association is looking to grow this pool of experts. For more information, or if you would like to get involved, contact Jenny Black by emailing jenny.black@waterways.org.uk.

IWA Waterways

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CRT licence fees under scrutiny
IWA has welcomed the Canal & River Trust’s announcement that it will consult widely on a review of the structure of boat licensing fees, to take effect from April 2018.

However, the Association has also expressed disappointment that CRT will increase licence fees for both pleasure and business craft by 2.5% from 1st April 2017, having previously kept price hikes at inflation only, using the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) as a guide (currently 1%).

IWA national chairman Les Etheridge said: “No one likes a price increase, but the important point is that the current licence system gets a thorough overhaul to ensure all boaters contribute in a fair and sustainable way to the upkeep of the nation’s waterways without penalising those who play by the rules.”

He added: “It may be time to consider a radical approach – for example, on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation, which IWA manages through its subsidiary company Essex Waterways Ltd, there are no boat licence fees, with income from boaters collected through a single mooring fee. That might be hard to achieve on CRT waterways, but we shouldn’t be afraid of looking at new ideas.”

Could the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation serve as a model for a CRT boat licence overhaul?
IWA responds to Scottish Canals pricing consultation

The Association has expressed misgivings in its response to a recent consultation by Scottish Canals on the authority’s proposed pricing strategy.

Foremost among these is IWA’s view that boating is a critical activity to the sustainability and success of Scottish Canals, yet the consultation document does not appear to place any value or importance on it. IWA believes that new boaters should be encouraged by the provision of available and affordable services, moorings and facilities, particularly on the under-visited Lowland Canals.

IWA also objected that the proposed pricing strategy did not take into account significant price increases that have already been implemented for navigation licences and mooring fees (both leisure and residential) in recent years. Other concerns outlined in the six-page response are the lack of promised investment in Scottish Canals’ Living on Water initiative, and the fact that locks on the Forth & Clyde Canal are not currently available seven days a week.

Chairman of IWA’s Navigation Committee, Gren Messham, said: “The survey of facilities contained in the report shows how poorly provisioned the Forth & Clyde and Union canals are, and Scottish Canals would appear to have a long way to go to provide customer satisfaction at the level expected elsewhere in England and Wales.

He added: “IWA considers that fees on the waterways managed by Scottish Canals need to be affordable in order to increase the number of people using them, and to uphold the Scottish Government’s key aim of inclusivity.”

IWA’s full response can be found at waterways.org.uk/news_campaigns/campaigns/consultation_responses.

Moira to host 2017 Trailboat Festival

This year’s IWA National Trailboat Festival will be held on the Ashby Canal at Moira, in the heart of the National Forest.

The event, which takes place from 27th-29th May, will see trail boats assemble from all over the country and will be centred around the historic Grade II-listed Moira Blast Furnace.

Visitors will have a chance to watch a living history display, Battle of Britain flypast and morris dancing, while children will be entertained by horse-boat demonstrations, a duck race and magic show.

Meanwhile, on Monday 29th May boaters will be invited to inspect the new restoration works at Snaresstone, and receive an illustrated update on the Ashby Canal Restoration project so far.

Further information is available at moiracanal festival.co.uk.

Matthew Rogers to run London Marathon

Six-time marathon man Matthew Rogers has been named as IWA’s fundraising runner in this April’s London Marathon.

Matthew, who was chair of trustees for Friends of Cromford Canal for 15 months and a committee member for two further years, will give all money raised from the endurance effort to IWA’s Waterway Recovery Group.

Read more about Matthew’s marathon story or make a donation by visiting his Virgin Money Giving page at www.virginmoneygiving.com/wrglondonmarathon.

Programme unveiled for restoration workshop

Members are reminded that IWA and CRT are running a series of workshops to provide support for waterway restoration projects, with the first of 2017 taking place on Saturday 1st April.

The free course (including tea/coffee and lunch) will be hosted at South Wolverhampton and Bilston Academy in Wolverhampton from 10am, and the theme is ‘Fit for Purpose’.

The aim of the workshop is to ensure that local waterways societies and trusts have more support and information to assist in the development of their schemes. There will be talks on how to make organisations more sustainable, the importance of marketing and communication, building a volunteer workforce and health and safety, as well as a series of breakout seminars.

Find more information, including how to book, at waterways.org.uk/workshops.
IWA comments on Bridgewater tidal barrier options

IWA’s West Country branch has submitted its comments regarding the location and gate design for the proposed Bridgewater Tidal Barrier in Somerset to the Environment Agency.

Seven possible locations originally proposed for the barrier have been shortlisted by EA to two, of which IWA prefers the location alongside the A38 and upstream of Dunball Wharf (site 4). A tidal barrier at this site will require multiple gates, which IWA considers will ease maintenance, as one gate at a time can be raised above the high tide level for this purpose.

The Association also favours the use of rising sector gates (similar to the Thames Barrier), which would enable the penning of water above the barrier at the ‘half-tide’ level on certain occasions during the year, thus enhancing navigation on the River Parrett above the tidal barrier as far as the River Tone. This would also facilitate the reopening of the Barge Lock at Bridgewater Docks to link the River Parrett with the Docks and hence the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal.

In addition, IWA is pressing for the public right of navigation, which exists on the River Parrett from Bridgwater Bar to well upstream of Langport, to be maintained during the period of construction by providing for navigation through the temporary bypass channel that will be built as part of the tidal barrier scheme.

Bob Abbott, chairman of IWA West Country branch, said: “The key benefit of our proposals is to enable penning between 1st March and 31st October every year, bringing enhanced navigation to the River Parrett and the ability to access Bridgwater Docks. This will bring more leisure, recreation and tourism to Bridgwater and the Somerset Levels, thus helping with their regeneration.”

Urgent action needed in London, survey shows

More facilities, including moorings, must be introduced on London’s waterways soon, IWA has warned the Canal & River Trust following a survey showing a 57% increase in people living afloat in the capital since 2012.

The Association has emphasised that current facilities for boaters in London are hopelessly inadequate to meet spiralling demand from both prospective residents and visitors. It is also warning people thinking of moving aboard in the city to seriously consider the implications first.

Paul Strudwick, chairman of IWA’s London Region, said: “We can readily understand why more and more people struggling with the London housing ladder are wondering if a boat is a viable and affordable option, but we would urge them to properly assess if it will work for their personal circumstances, as the restrictions of living aboard a boat full time mean that sometimes it’s no bed of roses.

“The fact that, unless they have access to a designated home mooring, boats also need to keep moving around the waterway network to meet their licence conditions obviously makes it an impractical choice for people needing consistent access to places of work or education,” he added.

IWA is also maintaining its call on CRT not to issue ‘continuous cruising’ licences to people who cannot or do not intend to comply with the statutory requirements, and to enforce mooring rules fairly but firmly in London and elsewhere for the benefit of all in the boating community.

You can read more about IWA’s approach to London boating issues in our special feature on p26.

IWA welcomes public inquiry into Boston Barrier

An announcement by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Andrea Leadsom MP, that a public inquiry will be held into the application for a tidal barrier on the River Witham at Boston, Lincolnshire, has been hailed as “great news” by IWA.

The Association called for a public inquiry when submitting its views about the impact to safety and navigation of the proposals, and was among a number of organisations expressing concerns.

Among a list of issues addressed by IWA are a lack of detail on water flow velocities around the barrier, the proposed minimum 18m width of the coffer dam by-pass channel, the lack of information on what is actually to be put in place by the project to manage transit by water during the construction period, and the risk of collision due to excessive flows and short sight-lines with the barrier location on a bend in the Haven.

Gren Messham, chairman of IWA’s Navigation Committee, said: “The announcement will enable IWA and others to put forward the case for better provision for navigation, through re-instating the inclusion of a parallel lock and improvements to the waterfront in Boston through water level management.”
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November’s release of the preferred route for the HS2 Phase 2B project has raised further concerns for the waterways.

The updated route was published more than three years after IWA responded to initial consultations, detailing places where the rail line would negatively impact on inland waterways. Examples included the Chesterfield Canal, where the route ran over a section of already-restored canal, and the Aire & Calder around Woodlesford, where the rail route ran along and over the navigation without allowing sufficient clearance for existing commercial traffic.

IWA was pleased to note these two examples seem to have done better in the latest announcements – subject, of course, to the outcome of consultations. However, other canal crossings have come off worse, as the route has been altered to avoid difficult ground conditions or other issues.

On the Ashby Canal, for example, plans to move the route to the east of Measham in Leicestershire, avoiding the most significant impact on local manufacturing businesses and development sites, now necessitate a crossing of the Ashby Canal restoration route without providing sufficient height.

Gren Messham, chairman of IWA’s HS2 Campaign & Communications Group said: “It may be possible to lift the embanked section sufficiently to provide the minimum necessary clearance for the finished canal, which may also need diverting, or some combination of short diversion and smaller increase in route height.

“But there is a lot of work to do with HS2 to persuade them of the need to get a higher route here, which may also antagonise local people. Until it is more certain what can be done, this may blight work on the canal.”

Other concerns include the proposal to move HS2’s western leg in the Middlewich – Northwich area in Cheshire up to 800m westwards; this impacts the Trent & Mersey Canal where a single crossing now becomes three crossings on a 20m high embankment. Also on the Middlewich Branch, a single crossing has now become wider approaching the New Crofton Rolling Stock depot north of Crewe.

Meanwhile, while the new route reduces the catastrophic impact on the Chesterfield Canal near Staveley, the proposed crossing around the Norwood Tunnel will not be straightforward and requires further work. Planners still seem unaware of longstanding ambitions to open out the tunnel and raise the canal by new locks. The revised plans plough straight through this site, crossing the original route of the canal with a 13m-high embankment. The canal tunnel was the world’s longest when completed, and represents an important heritage structure.

IWA is currently preparing a response at national level to address all these issues. It is working with branches, canal societies and restoration trusts, in conjunction with CRT and other navigation authorities, to influence the outcome of HS2’s consultations.

The defining image of the HS2 railway, showing the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal, has been much criticised by IWA and other waterway organisations. In fact, the rail route does not cross the canal here, but below the lock. Another complaint is the scale, with the railway photomontage approximately a third the size of the real thing in relation to the canal.
HS2: Why it's worth campaigning

Gren Messham, chairman of IWA’s HS2 Campaign & Communications Group, says:

“I’ve often been asked why IWA is putting so much effort into HS2, compared with what we do on other things which impact waterways like developments, road improvements (especially motorways) etc. Well, HS2 was launched and is being managed as a single countrywide project, and IWA is responding to the public consultations on it in the same way. A great deal of information is provided in the public domain by HS2 Ltd, both because of the wide impact of the proposals in terms of landowners and private/public interests, and because of modern legislation around environmental impact. The government’s road programme, for example, is politically launched in a similar way, but then dealt with piecemeal and as such handled by each IWA branch’s planning officers, who do an excellent job tackling the waterway impacts of such schemes as they occur. Even large developments in a locality are dealt with by branch planning officers, as their impact is often localised, as are planning consultations.

What we have seen from our work with HS2 is that a number of common issues come up in each section where a waterway is impacted. These may include the specific route, operational nuisance issues such as noise, vibration or creation of ‘no go’ public areas through poor design, and potential temporary interference during construction whether to navigation or towpath use. We can draw on our previous local experiences for many of these, and point out how things could often, at no or very low initial extra cost, be improved with small alterations in design. Much of our previous unhappy experience of motorway schemes has been drawn on in identifying how IWA believes HS2 can be improved.

IWA’s policy on HS2, as set out in previous communications in this magazine and the Bulletin, is that it is not for us as an inland waterway organisation to say whether or not it should be built – that is the role of our elected representatives. What is our role is to identify, from our own and members’ experiences, areas where the impact of HS2 on waterways is considerable, and to the detriment of current users. We are also saying where and how we believe this impact can be reduced in a realistic way. IWA has built up and maintained its reputation as a serious and pragmatic defender of the waterways in the past by such engagement, and on HS2 is continuing to do so.”

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

In November, IWA also responded to HS2 Ltd’s consultation on two other issues. The first was a document supporting refinements to the design of the route in Phase 2A, the section from Fradley to Crewe. Specifically, IWA is pleased that the potential construction of an Infrastructure Maintenance Depot near Stone could negate the need for maintenance loops (an area of track allowing trains to be parked off the main line for repairs) at Pipe Ridware, which would have impacted the Trent & Mersey Canal. This facility could now be available in the IMD instead.

IWA also responded to a draft Environmental Impact Statement for Phase 2A. It considers embankments proposed within view and hearing of canal users above Wood End Lock, near Fradley, can be lowered to reduce visual and noise nuisance. IWA also wants to see better noise barriers on the viaduct across the canal above Shade House Lock, where trains will be travelling at full speed.

Elsewhere on the route, IWA has already successfully challenged plans for an embankment at Great Haywood, on the northern edge of Great Haywood Marina. It will now be a viaduct, opening out the view and reducing impact on the marina and its occupants.

However, the height of this viaduct has now increased, leading to greater visual and noise nuisance. IWA argues that HS2 should better protect residential marina- and canal-users at this site, at Hoo Mill and elsewhere on the route.
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As Ilkeston plays host to this summer’s IWA Festival of Water, we take a closer look both at the little-boated Erewash and how best to tackle the mighty Trent on its doorstep.

Slowly climbing the Erewash Valley by 14 locks to Langley Mill, the Erewash is a quiet but thoroughly rewarding cul-de-sac canal. Passing through a surprisingly green and pleasant landscape, it takes in some notable canalside mills through Long Eaton, Sandiacre and Ilkeston. Boaters are able to continue beyond the original end of the canal to navigate the bottom lock of the Cromford Canal to reach the extensive boatyard and Great Northern Basin at Langley Mill. Not far from here is the home of D.H. Lawrence at Eastwood, with its own dedicated museum.

A glance at a map might lead you to think that the Erewash is entirely surrounded by suburbia. In fact, it has an endearing habit of popping in and out of parkland and farmland, even in built-up Long Eaton. (Useful shops, and the popular Hole in the Wall boozer are east of the A6005 road bridge.)

As Long Eaton turns into Sandiacre, the River Erewash appears on the east; the canal will faithfully follow it until the terminus. Across the valley is the Toton Yard, once among the largest railway yards in Europe. Though a shadow of its former self today, it still hums with coal wagons and freight engines.

Sandiacre Lock, the fourth on the canal, has a dual significance. The lock cottages can be toured by the public on open days organised by the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association, founded in 1968 to save the top part of the canal from closure. Just above the lock is the very visible junction with the Derby Canal, which ran through Derby back to Swarkestone on the Trent & Mersey. An active local canal trust is working towards restoration, while footpaths and cycleways make much of the route easy to trace – starting here.

Sandiacre’s finest landmark is Springfield Mill, a lace mill dating from 1888 now preserved as apartments. One-hundred-and-sixty machines once clattered away here making the lace for which Nottinghamshire is renowned (though Sandiacre is just in Derbyshire). The octagonal chimney is visible a fair way down the canal.

A pleasant rural section, interrupted only by the M1, leads to Stanton Lock, where a slight widening of the canal marks the start of the old Nutbrook Canal. Surprisingly long sections of this still survive and can be explored via the Nutbrook Trail cycle route.
Ilkeston Festival of Water

**A POTTED HISTORY**

After obtaining its Act of Parliament in 1777, the 12-mile Erewash Canal was completed just two years later. It proved an immediate success, with high revenues coming mainly from coal carrying. Although the canal withstood road and railway competition for longer than most, it eventually closed in 1962. Six years later, the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association was formed and its restoration work led to the waterway becoming officially navigable again in the early 1980s.

Ilkeston begins at the cheerfully named canalside Gallows Inn, site of the Festival of Water. The canal largely skirts the town, but it’s worth walking in to the attractive marketplace, which hosts a vigorous street fair every October. Above Stenson’s Lock is the striking Bennerley Viaduct, a slender, low-slung, wrought-iron structure spanning the wide valley for almost 500 yards. Back at ground level, listen out for all manner of wildfowl at the Quackers community farm behind the Bridge Inn.

Though Eastwood Lock is the last on the Erewash Canal, it need not be the last on your cruise. Langley Bridge Lock was actually the first lock on the Cromford Canal, and gives access to Great Northern Basin. The boatyard and dry-dock keep it busy with boating activity, but surely not as busy as when it was the junction of three canals: the Erewash, Cromford and Nottingham.

The Nottingham Canal ran parallel with the Erewash, on the other side of the valley, to Ilkeston before heading off to Nottingham itself – where it is still navigated as part of the through-route. Like the Nutbrook, its derelict section (majority) is not a realistic restoration proposition.

Happily, this is not true of the Cromford, a highly picturesque canal into the Peak District. The Friends of the Cromford Canal, founded as recently as 2002, is actively working for its restoration – a worthwhile cause in itself, but also because it would bring more boats to the little-cruised Erewash.

Spring 2017
“Our Erewash Canal has a rich history and was a source of wealth to the Erewash Valley with the export of coal for many generations. Now canal life flows at a more tranquil pace and is popular with boaters, walkers and cyclists. What a great celebration the Festival of Water will be for everyone and we look forward to welcoming the thousands of people who attend.”

Councillor Mike Wallis, Erewash Borough Council’s lead member for culture and leisure

TACKLING THE TRENT

If you’re venturing to Ilkeston from the North of England, you’re in for a boating treat as your cruise could combine a taste of the navigable River Trent.

The Trent has been boated for millennia – perhaps since humans first arrived in these isles. For the Romans it was such an important artery that they cut the Fosdyke Canal to join it to the Witham. Then, in Anglo-Saxon times, it was the Vikings’ route into the East Midlands: a map of Norse place names in Britain shows a definite cluster around the Trent Valley.

It’s all the more surprising, then, to learn that today’s Trent Navigation is a creature of the 1920s. As late as 1907, George Westall had described the river as being in a “deplorably bad state”, so shallow that the current was corralled into narrow channels in the hope of scouring a fairway.

Enter Nottingham Corporation, envious of Manchester’s success as an inland port. It funded four new, deep locks along the river, opening in 1926. (A tidal lock had already been constructed at Cromwell, downstream of Newark, in 1911.) The effect was dramatic: tonnages rose eight-fold in a decade. Trains of 100-ton barges were worked down from Hull, carrying aggregates from riverside quarries and oil to power stations and town wharves.

TOWPATH IMPROVEMENTS

Festival-goers will benefit from a revamped stretch of the Erewash Canal’s historic towpath, officially opened last summer after a £500,000 project to improve the route for walkers and cyclists.

CRT worked on the towpath between Potters Lock and Awsworth Road Bridge to provide a clean, green route to Ilkeston’s shops, businesses and the town’s new railway station. The improvement works have strengthened the canal bank and seen a new wider, smoother path that will be more accessible for walkers, cyclists, boaters and people with wheelchairs or buggies.

It’s just the latest stretch of Erewash Canal towpath to be improved, with the five-mile section from Long Eaton to Hallam Fields also revamped in recent years.
TODAY

The tidal river is still an important freight destination, but commercial traffic is now rare above Cromwell. A 2001 proposal to build a ‘Newark bypass’, so larger boats could reach Nottingham, was never taken up. Instead, the river has become an essential part of the pleasure-boating network – both for its resident population of fibreglass cruisers, and for narrowboaters making the passage from the Midlands canals to the Yorkshire waterways, and vice-versa.

This passage isn’t without difficulties. From the safety of the Yorkshire waterways at Keadby Lock, the boater must tackle a 44-mile tidal passage to Cromwell. (Those with full-length craft, unable to pass the 61ft 8in Thorne Lock, are faced with the even more daunting prospect of a trip round Trent Falls from the Yorkshire Ouse.) Nonetheless, hundreds of crews successfully make the journey every year, and accidents are rare.

Be prepared, but don’t be alarmed. Above Cromwell, there are 40 miles of non-tidal river and canal to enjoy. Canal? Yes, because the ‘Trent Navigation’ doesn’t actually follow the river through Nottingham. Instead, it detours along the artificial Beeston Cut and the remnants of the Nottingham Canal for a city centre voyage that adds canal-scale interest to this otherwise expansive cruise. Newark, too, is a diversion from the main channel and one with quite the best-sited lock in Britain.

OUR TOP TIP FOR MEMBERS HOPING TO MAKE THE ILKESTON MEET? BOOK EARLY. Reserving a spot, whether for a tent or boat, can be done for just £30 (including evening entertainment) by filling in the form online. Please note that the maximum draught for vessels on the canal is 4’ 0” (albeit there will probably be some silted areas that might be a struggle to get through).

The event takes place at Gallows Inn Playing Field over the August bank holiday weekend from Saturday 26th - Monday 28th. For more information visit IWA’s website (waterways.org.uk/festivalofwater) or call 01635 414567. The website also has details of how to book a trading space or, if you’d like to help out at the festival, volunteer opportunities.

TRENT PLANNING

The mechanised river locks are operated for you at the most popular times; self-operation is possible at other times with your trusty CRT key. As with any large river, moorings are limited, but some pubs have pontoons for customers.

Tidal river cruising is well within the ability of any moderately experienced narrowboat or cruiser owner. Your boat does not need to be specially adapted, but you, and it, do need to be prepared. There are several musts: an anchor, attached and ready to go; lifejackets; a fully charged mobile phone; a chart book for the Trent; and a full tank of fuel. VHF radio is not required above Keadby; many strongly recommend it, but bear in mind that you need an operator’s licence to use a set. You should also take precautions to minimise the risk of engine failure: consider replacing your fuel filters and cleaning out your diesel tank. Above all, be aware of tide times. The lock-keepers at Newark, Cromwell, and the exits of the tidal river (Torksey, West Stockwith and Keadby) will readily advise you. However, don’t expect them to answer questions you haven’t asked, nor to know the capabilities of your boat or yourself.

The majority of skippers opt for a two-day transit, stopping off in the cut below Torksey Lock. There are holding pontoons just below the lock.
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From Wales to Westminster, LORD GERMAN has been championing our inland waterways for years. Here he explains how politics and a genuine passion for canals has inspired him to make a difference.

Congratulations on being named IWA’s Parliamentarian of the Year. Was it a surprise?
Yes, it was completely unexpected. I don’t think the award has ever been given to a member of the House of Lords before – it’s always gone to an MP. So I’m a first and that’s a great privilege, not just for me but the Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust too, of which I’m the honorary president.

This, alongside Richard Dommett’s award of the Christopher Power Prize, is a great tribute to the many volunteers and supporters of this restoration. They have worked so hard with IWA, the statutory authorities and the Canal & River Trust to try to reopen the canal, which is quite a big challenge.
How did you become involved with the waterways?

It started in the National Assembly of Wales. We formed an all-party group [dedicated to the waterways] in the early 2000s, when I was Minister for Economic Development in Wales. It was the potential [of waterways] both in leisure and tourism, and also in development terms, which piqued my interest. All the studies show that a working waterway has a huge impact on property value alongside it, on business development, on tourism, leisure, health and all the other stuff that goes with it. It’s this overall social and economic impact that continues to drive my interest.

I was already aware of the canals as I’d done a fair bit of boating in my youth. But it was the enthusiasm of IWA and British Waterways, as it was then, for ensuring that politicians in Wales were aware of our waterways’ potential that chimed with me. I subsequently brought this to the House of Lords and joined the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways there.

So it’s fair to say that IWA and British Waterways were quite inspirational to you?

Absolutely. IWA were very big supporters of the Welsh Assembly’s APPG for the Waterways, acting as a sort of secretariat. It meant the Association had a big hand in promoting the dialogue that took place between politicians and those engaged with the canals.

Tell us about your involvement with the Mon & Brec restoration?

MBACT is working to restore the canal to navigation from its current terminus at Five Locks, Cwmbran, to Newport; as well as its Crumlin Arm.

Whether we can succeed in getting both stretches open in one go is doubtful, but it would be wonderful to transform the Mon & Brec, which I describe as a seven-day holiday canal, into a 14-day holiday canal, all the way down to Newport.

As well as the challenge of restoring the locks, there’s also the obstacle of a road having been built over the canal, which will require a major structure to lift boats over it. This is at Cwmbran, just north of a retail park, where there are about 100 yards of canal missing. What we’re working on at the moment is a way in which we can start the process of getting design work done, and then look for funding to create this major structure. It’s a big job: as well as the design aspect, we’ve also got to work with the private sector and persuade the retail park to restructure. There’s a business interest for them too, obviously, if this waterway can become a major, go-to attraction for the public.

We’ve just kicked this off. I’ve talked to the leader of the council and we’re thinking about launching a design competition. While the Trust and the local authority agree on this, we want to get the Welsh government involved too, because they’ve sunk some considerable money into parts of development alongside the canal. We want them to be a partner in the process. Once we’ve got designs that we can take to the public, then we can start looking for funding. At this stage I have no idea what it’ll cost, but we’re talking huge amounts of money – tens of millions at least.

How is the overall restoration being funded?

From here stems my great admiration for MBACT because they have managed, with local authorities, to bid for huge amounts of money, millions of pounds, to get work done. As a result, we’ve just finished a section of four locks and a basin at Ty Coch. This will also create a small marina, and the council have built a road to it for easy access. Now the trust is bidding for the next lot of funding.

Some of the money on the restoration has been match-funded by the European Union in order to assist development further north of Cwmbran. Although that’s mainly to do with housing and communities, it obviously engages with the canal too.

We seem to be able to find money from a variety of sources. The restoration hits all sorts of buttons because the lock areas are, generally speaking, in less affluent parts of Wales, where we can get the highest levels of European funding. But there are also wealthier areas, as well as long stretches of countryside and urban centres too, so, when you think about it, the waterway cuts through a real microcosm of Britain.

Has Brexit put a spanner in the works when it comes to funding?

Well, as a Lib Dem, I’m on the side that would prefer being close to the European Union.

The restoration has supported various training schemes and even invented a new lock system, and a large amount of money for this has come
from European funding. There will undoubtedly be a black hole there, post-Brexit. But we’ve got to hold the government’s feet to the fire, because they’ve made it clear that they’re going to continue supporting our project, but only until 2020. After that, nobody knows what’s going to happen. And that’s one of the great uncertainties of the future, about where this sort of funding will come from. If you take the view I do, that waterways restoration is very much about economic opportunity, then this is just the sort of thing the EU used to support. Obviously there’s a danger now that we won’t be able to access this, but we’ll keep looking for alternatives.

You’re vice chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways. How does the organisation work and what exactly does it do?

Basically, it examines the environment in which canals work, to see whether they’re meeting their objectives, whether their future is secure, and anything to do with government policy which might affect them. We do all this in a non-partisan way, examining whether the government is paying attention and providing help where we can. It’s about working together to reach common objectives and making sure important issues don’t fall off the edge of a minister’s desk.

You’ve expanded the APPG’s remit to include restoration?

Yes, it surprised me that this wasn’t already included. It was an obvious topic because we’ve actually always talked about canal restoration. It’s an important issue because there are still huge sections of waterways in need of restorations, and reopening them is one of the functions APPG has been engaged with over the years. We’d just not put it into the remit.

How many meetings does APPG hold a year?

There’s no rule of thumb. Rather, it’s determined by the chairperson and the issues that come forward. The EA transfer is the big one, and we’ll have some debates about that. It’s very much issues-driven. Parliamentarians are very busy and no one likes a meeting for which there is no purpose.

How do you all get along?

Very well. I’m in several APPGs, and we all get along fine and meetings are rarely confrontational. Because everyone shares the same ambition with the waterways, there’s no political agenda. People see it as a common interest.

This summer CRT will be five years old. How do you think it’s doing?

I’m generally very pleased with its progress. We have a second chief executive [Richard Parry] who is
quite different from the first, but both have been totally committed to their jobs. The trust has had its teething troubles, but this was to be expected. Generally, it’s done what we hoped, which is to act as a multiplier of government funds. It has big headaches of course, particularly in London, but I think it has made a good start.

As long as the Trust maintains its good relationship with Parliament and parliamentarians, I think this bodes well for the future. CRT has got the right agenda in its head, and some very interesting people on the board. The APPG’s job is to make sure the Trust meets its own objectives.

What about the hot topic – the transfer of EA waterways to CRT?
As I understand it, talks between EA and CRT are progressing well. The division of EA’s responsibilities is quite well known and is beginning to be fixed. The issue at the end of it will be the financial settlement, and separating out what is being funded at the moment. Unpicking all this could be where the difficulties arise, but I’m told by both sides that progress is being made. It’s slow, and you can understand why, but I think it’ll get there in the end.

You mentioned boating in your youth – can you elaborate?
As a boy I was in Sea Scouts in Cardiff, which was based at the docks. I did a lot of boating during this period: sailing boats and rowing boats. I went out into the Bristol Channel and, less impressively, fell in the water quite a lot. This was all from the age of 11 until about 18 or 19.

After that came college, politics and other responsibilities, but coming back to water activity in my later days has been wonderful.

Have you ever been on a narrowboat?
I have, yes, but only short journeys. St Pancras Cruising Club once invited me on an afternoon cruise, and that was great fun. It proved to me that, even if you’re in the middle of a city, you can still get away from it all. We had a lovely trip along the Regent’s Canal – the towpath and canalsides were so busy with life while we just gently cruised on by.

Finally, have you got a favourite canal aside from the Mon & Brec?
It has to be the K&A – the bit between Bristol and Trowbridge. I have walked that route several times. In fact, I got absolutely drenched there last January [2016]. But it’s a great canal, and within driving distance from my home.
Canalway Cavalcade is almost upon us. Whether you’re making a flying visit to the festival, or hoping to extend your trip with a further exploration of London’s waterways, we’ve quizzed experts for top tips, and delved into some of the issues that have beleaguered the capital’s canals in recent years.

CAVALCADE ESSENTIALS
This year’s Cavalcade takes place in Little Venice over the May Day Bank Holiday Weekend from 29th April to 1st May. As always, the event boasts activities for the entire family, with a boaters’ gathering, a Saturday pageant, trade shows, stalls, live music, kids’ entertainment, an illuminated boat procession on the Sunday evening, a boat handling competition on the Monday, morris dancers, a real ale bar and a wide range of snack and food outlets.

As is traditional, every Cavalcade carries a loose theme, with the brief for 2017 defined as ‘Waterways Tales’. Organisers are expecting the usual imaginative interpretations. For further details about the event, including how to book a mooring or volunteer, visit: waterways.org.uk/cavalcade.
Christine Smith, Cavalcade’s deputy chairman and publicity manager, offers her tips for boaters heading to the festival...

- Plan your journey, check for stoppages, fill up your fuel tank and take your time travelling down – don’t rush, enjoy the trip
- Bring warm clothing because the evenings can be cold
- Think safety, especially if you have children on board
- Take part in the boat handling competition, pageant and illuminated procession – decorations don’t have to be sophisticated or elaborate, just fun – and enjoy the spectacle
- Be neighbourly – with hundreds of boaters in one place there are new friends to be made
- Talk to the visitors – they are interested and appreciate the friendly atmosphere. Plus, it’s a great opportunity to promote boats and boating
- Make sure your water tank is full and your toilets are empty
- Volunteer to help the IWA team – there are lots of jobs which need to be done to make sure the event runs smoothly
- Have fun!
FURTHER AFIELD
Over crowded moorings, lack of facilities, weed carpeting the channel... London’s waterways undoubtedly get a bad press. We ask boaters to paint the real picture – and find out from IWA's London Region chairman, PAUL STRUDWICK, what the Association is doing about it

BOATER RELATIONS AND BOOKABLE MOORINGS

Coral Manton says...

I’ve had a continuous cruiser licence for the past two years. Last year, as part of a research placement at the British Library, I moved my boat to London. On the journey down I often asked other boaters about mooring in the city, with most responding they’d heard it was terrible and I should avoid the place! Naturally concerned, I booked an initial two-week mooring at Battlebridge Basin, leaving me with another six weeks ‘on the cut’. So far I have not had any problems finding moorings. I breasted up for the first time with another boat at Little Venice and found the community of boaters there warm and friendly. The only issue I had was comments from another boater suggesting ‘people like me’ (continuous cruisers) take up all the best mooring places and that I should pay council tax! He soon departed but it left me thinking that perhaps relations between continuous cruisers and other boat owners in London could be improved.

Does IWA have any thoughts on this?

Paul Strudwick — IWA London Region has worked hard with CRT (and BW before it) to try and improve relationships between the different users of the London waterways. IWA was a founder member of the Better Relationships Group set up by BW and we continued to support it until the group ceased activity in 2013. Since then we have taken every opportunity to interact with all users of the London waterways, including ‘continuous cruisers’, and IWA always participates in the London Waterway Forum, which is a good discussion group and open to all.

Another of my moorings was at Rembrandt Gardens, bookable for free through the CRT website. However, this appears to be in high demand and I couldn’t secure a whole week.

Is IWA in favour of introducing more bookable moorings at other London locations?

Paul Strudwick — IWA supports the introduction of the pre-bookable moorings at Rembrandt Gardens as a small step towards encouraging visiting boaters back to London. However, there are only two moorings at this location, and IWA considers this only a very small step in the right direction. Many more mooring sites (long-term, residential and visitor) should be created, with the presumption that visitor moorings should generally be free of charge for visiting boats. IWA would expect that fees would not be imposed on any existing visitor moorings (in London or elsewhere), and that any new bookable moorings with an overnight fee would offer more than just a towpath mooring.

RIGHT: CRT’s London HQ at Little Venice, where it operates bookable moorings.

‘FAT BOATS’

Ron Howell says...

I cruised through London last March and couldn’t help noticing how many wide-beams (or ‘fat boats’, as my wife likes to call them) are moored there now. While they might make comfier liveaboards, I worry the extra space they take up on towpath moorings is exacerbating the overcrowding problem. For example, mooring abreast is no longer an option in many places.

Would IWA ever campaign to limit the number of wide-beams on the capital’s waterways, or even ban them from certain mooring spots?

Paul Strudwick — London’s waterways were designed and built for both wide-beam and narrow-beam craft. IWA supports the continued use by both types of boat, although we will be suggesting to CRT that licence fees should be charged by area rather than length as part of its consultation on licence structure changes from 2018.

We also continue to press CRT to deliver more of the opportunities for moorings identified in our 2012 report “A Proposal for Reducing Overstaying Boats in the London Area” (to see a copy of this report go to waterways.org.uk/overstayingboats).
**WEED GROWTH AND FACILITY WOES**

*Clair Butler and Iain MacTavish say...*

It is around seven years since we last boated in central London, so a visit last summer seemed long overdue. Our question to IWA reps concerns water quality there. We noticed the water is crystal clear in most areas, but with considerable weed growth. It used to be coloured with much less weed. Is it possible that an increase in waste disposal from boats has caused this change? Perhaps more boat movements would reduce the weed growth. What are IWA’s thoughts and how is the weed problem being dealt with?

*Paul Strudwick* The problem of weed growth, especially on the Lee, has been endemic for many years and is caused by nitrate run-off further up the river. The extent of weed growth is dependent on when the visit takes place and should be reported to CRT when it is found.

We also noted that boaters’ facilities do not seem to have increased to deal with the needs of a larger community. Water taps at locks (e.g. Old Ford on the Regent’s Canal) seem to be the only option. This means boats have to fill up either in the lock or on the lock landing, which is as inconvenient for craft wishing to pass through as it is for the boat being watered. [Other boaters have reported facilities at Tottenham Hale as being in a disgusting state, in particular the Elsan disposal, which had no flush and hardly any running water - Ed]. What is IWA doing to improve boaters’ facilities in London?

*Paul Strudwick* Traditionally all water points on the River Lee were located within or closely adjacent to lock chambers (usually attached to the adjacent lock-keeper’s house). This did not matter when it was a working river.

IWA London Region has lobbied hard to have CRT improve facilities but with limited success. There is a new Elsan disposal point at Appleton and pump-out at Acton’s Lock and Queen Elizabeth Park. The tap at Ponders End is being moved to a towpath location. The particular problem at Stonebridge (Tottenham) is that the Elsan and pump-out are not on mains sewage. The system regularly overfills. This situation is made worse by the closure of the facility at Waltham Cross, which is being replaced by a new purpose-built station as part of the redevelopment of the marina. New developments present us with opportunities, however, as we lobby the developer to provide boater facilities.

**OVERFLOWING BINS**

*Stuart Robertson says...*

We took our boat through central London over the August Bank Holiday. Our route was down the Lee Navigation, turning into the Hertford Union Canal by the Olympic Stadium to join the Regent’s, and then onto the Grand Union at Little Venice. We very much enjoyed the cruise through our home town, if only for the novelty of seeing places we know from a different perspective. We managed a make-shift mooring just before leaving the Lee Navigation, and were able to spend a couple of hours at the Olympic Park. Meanwhile, a night at Battlebridge Basin was also great fun, especially walking out into vibrant Kings Cross. The Regent’s Canal is a joy: St Pancras and Camden Locks, the zoo, Little Venice, all very exciting. The Grand Union has its own charm and we were treated to a glimpse of the Notting Hill Carnival as we passed through North Kensington on Bank Holiday Monday.

However, a cause for concern was the general upkeep of the canals and their facilities. There are very few places to dispose of rubbish, and any bins that are provided are overwhelmed. The result is that rubbish is left anywhere, including in the canals, which resulted in numerous trips down the weed hatch. How can IWA help improve the cleanliness of these waterways and their towpaths?

*Paul Strudwick* Lack of bins is a serious problem and IWA’s Navigation Committee is looking into this issue right now. It is our understanding that councils have removed bins as rubbish created by boaters is classified as commercial rubbish, rather than domestic, and commercial waste attracts a higher disposal charge. IWA wants to try and resolve the problem so do watch this space. IWA volunteers in London do run general rubbish clearance work parties and litter picks. Anyone who is interested in helping out should contact their local branch.
David Struckett says...

The more frequent passage of barges would ensure that ‘narrowing’ due to double and triple moorings could be dealt with on a daily basis. I have seen some barges on the Paddington branch (maintenance, I think), but they need to go through the Regent’s regularly! Is there any way of encouraging more freight through the London area?

Paul Strudwick

IWA has taken an active role in the consultation by the Port of London Authority setting its goals and priority actions for the next 30 years. We strongly support their aspiration to increase the use of the Thames for trade and we support any proposals to protect and reactivate wharves along the rivers and canals. We support the creation of the River Thames Skills Academy, as we believe training more people is key to achieving our goal of increasing freight and passenger-carrying in London by water.

We encourage the use of water transport across London for major infrastructure projects such as Crossrail and the Thames Tunnel. This century we have seen considerable quantities of aggregate carried by barge from north of Uxbridge to a cement works near Stockley Park, West Drayton. The Powerday recycling works at Royal Oak has been built with facilities to receive material by boat, but to date no traffic has started.

Paul Strudwick

IWA considers that any boat with a private pleasure licence should not be let out for monetary return in any situation. Anyone wishing to hire out their boat, or a room on their boat, should have some form of business licence and approval from the navigation authority, with the hire-boat level of boat safety examination and suitable insurance. IWA also believes that a ‘continuous cruiser’ status be denied as this licence is not compatible with business use. Such boats should have permanent residential moorings instead.

IWA would recommend anyone thinking of staying on a rental boat to check that it is properly licensed for hire or for renting rooms, that it has the hire-boat level of boat safety certificate and appropriate insurance.

Jan Swann says...

I haven’t visited London for many years, but am planning a trip with my in-laws when they come over from America this year. I’m quite keen to combine their city break with a brief introduction to the inland waterways, but it seems no hire-boat firms are operating in London any more. What’s IWA doing to encourage companies to return to the area?

Paul Strudwick

The last hire-boat base in the London area left after the Port of London Authority closed the Thames between Limehouse and Brentford to hire-boats. Hire-boaters can still travel on the tidal Thames between Brentford and Teddington, but the London Ring is now not an option for them. We have talked to the PLA but do not expect them to reverse their decision. Without the London Ring it is unlikely that hire-boats will return to the area, although of course hire-boaters can access the capital from Leighton Buzzard (but this would be an in-and-out trip).

Until then, I’ve been investigating staying on a private boat instead, namely those advertised on Airbnb. What’s IWA’s position on people hiring out their boats like this in the capital, and indeed elsewhere on the system?

Paul Strudwick

IWA considers that any boat with a private pleasure licence should not be let out for monetary return in any situation. Anyone wishing to hire out their boat, or a room on their boat, should have some form of business licence and approval from the navigation authority, with the hire-boat level of boat safety examination and suitable insurance. IWA also believes that a ‘continuous cruiser’ status be denied as this licence is not compatible with business use. Such boats should have permanent residential moorings instead.

IWA would recommend anyone thinking of staying on a rental boat to check that it is properly licensed for hire or for renting rooms, that it has the hire-boat level of boat safety certificate and appropriate insurance.

Black Prince recently ceased its London hire-boat operations.

Black Prince recently ceased its London hire-boat operations.
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Long hailed for scenery of astonishing grandeur, the 35-mile navigable waterway we know as the ‘Mon & Brec’ is mostly what remains of the original Brecknock & Abergavenny Canal. This opened in stages from Brecon southwards from 1800 onwards, but not until 1812 did it finally join the Monmouthshire Canal at Pontymoile, near Pontypool, and so provide a through route to Newport and its river wharves.

Over the years, while almost all of the Monmouthshire Canal closed, its northern sister remained as a useful water supply to the south, inadvertently preserving it for when leisure cruising began in the early 1960s. In this special feature, John Pyper recalls a halcyon hire-trip he made on the canal some 55 years ago...

Meanwhile, the Monmouthshire Canal’s 11 heavily-locked miles were less fortunate, and along with another 11 miles of the Crumlin Arm, closed in stages. However, restoration has advanced rapidly in recent years, and this Welsh jewel holds out the hope of a cascade of length openings. In the second part of our report, three leading lights of the restoration reveal their varied roles and hopes for the future...
Five years ago we celebrated the bicentenary of the Brecon & Abergavenny Canal – or, as we now know it, the Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny – and surely we can be confident these days that its future is assured. It is, however, also a time to recall that only half a century ago there was much doubt and despondency over the case for retaining ‘Remainder Waterways’ and the continued maintenance of the Brecon & Abergavenny was by no means certain. This was the gloomy background to the happy trip my wife Sylvia and I took in 1962.

Having enjoyed two inspiring holidays sailing on the Norfolk Broads, I had been keen to introduce Sylvia to the joys of boating. But Norfolk meant heading east, the wrong direction for Sylvia as her favourite holiday destination had always been Wales. So in 1961 we hired a boat from Christleton and got to Llangollen, despite being advised by a small boy we met as we approached the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct that it was “collapsing”. The towpath looked a bit shaky, but the aqueduct held up for us.

Now in 1962 we were again looking for a canal trip in Wales. Referring to Robert Aickman’s invaluable Know Your Waterways, we found a short chapter entitled ‘Detached Waterways’ in which he described the Brecon & Abergavenny Canal as “one of the loveliest anywhere”. As to its future, however, he seemed to anticipate that its best hope of survival was to benefit from “the new fashion for trailercraft”. Then we learned of a firm, Messrs Tod, which had two boats for hire based at Llanfoist Wharf near Abergavenny, and we booked the smaller one for a week in the spring.

Leicester to Llanfoist by bus involved a few changes but at last we were approaching that mountainous village perched high above the Usk Valley and, coming from the Midlands, it seemed an unlikely landscape in which to find a canal. To walk to Llanfoist Wharf from the main road would have meant a fairly strenuous climb with our luggage, so Mr Tod had kindly brought our boat, Kingfisher, to Gilwern Bridge, quite close to a bus stop, and there welcomed us aboard.

Setting off

So we embarked for an idyllic week on this most beautiful canal, which we had entirely to ourselves – we did not meet another boat during the whole week. Of course, there were a few boats moored here and there, but we saw no-one else on the move and it seemed as though we were unexpected intruders upon this sleeping beauty of a waterway. The weather was bright but chilly, the sun sparkled in our wake, and kingcups and the occasional kingfisher brightened the scene.

We headed up the canal towards Brecon and at once began to appreciate the unique character of this canal. Its construction over much of its course, on a man-made shelf halfway (or further) up a mountainside above the Usk Valley bottom, was engineering to marvel at. Now and again the canal would wind its devious way up the sides of a steep cwm (or combe) cut in the hill by a mountain stream – a most spectacular exercise in the art of building a canal on a contour in such country.

We spent a night in Llangattock and talked there to an elderly local who remembered the canal in its days of fading commerce – providing us with a
new perspective of the canal. The next day we came
to Llangynidr locks and rose into the long pound,
which extended 7 1/2 miles to Brynich Lock on the
outskirts of Brecon. Ashford Tunnel brought us to
Talybont where the original drawbridge had been
replaced by a fixed bridge so that boats could not
then navigate further towards Brecon.

We settled down on a mooring by the little
aqueduct over the Afon Caerfanell where we could
watch the steam-hauled trains from Brecon come
panting over the bridge to head up the valley for
Merthyr Tydfil. It was a delightful spot, well placed
for the very welcoming pub, and surely not many
yards from where that most eloquent of waterway
writers, the canoeist William Bliss, camped probably
more than 50 years previously. He was on an
expedition in which he took advantage of the level
waters of the canal to paddle up the Usk Valley and
then to come down on the river.

“It seemed we were
unexpected intruders
upon this sleeping beauty
of a waterway”
ON BEAUTY

In his book *Rapid Rivers* (in which he describes this canal as the most beautiful in England or Wales – and the Usk as “very nearly the most beautiful river”) he gives an account of an evening he spent beside the canal at Talybont: “I brewed myself a mug of toddy – for I had brought a little whiskey with me – and lit a pipe and sat under the awning in front of my tent looking down the valley and across the Usk at the wooded hills on the other side. The sun had set behind the Brecon Beacons, and the valley was in twilight, but the hill above Llansantffraid still held the glow.

“And as I sat there and smoked pipes and watched the glow fade from the hills and the valley deepen from twilight to dusk and from dusk to dark and the stars come out, I began to consider Beauty, and to go over in my mind what I remembered had been said about it by those who had tried to define what Beauty is.”

And his thoughts then wander off to Keats and St Augustine, the Greek and Roman philosophers, Shakespeare and Amos Cottle. In our experience a day’s boating only rarely ended in such ecstasy, but we need to remember those evenings.

The following day provided good weather for a walk up the towpath of the totally deserted canal to Brecon. Although undisturbed by boats for years, the canal seemed in good order and, of course, it still had to be maintained as a water channel to feed the navigable section beyond Talybont. In Brecon we found the railway station (now long disappeared) and caught a train back to Talybont and on up to Torpantau, the station beyond a short tunnel at the top of the valley. It was a remote and exalted spot, once the highest standard gauge railway station south of the border. A train soon appeared to take us back down to Talybont, which gave us a grand view of the mountains and Talybont Reservoir.

Kingfisher descending Lock 66 at Llangynidr. The old wooden footbridge has now been replaced by a substantial bridge with handrails positioned at the end of a newly built platform.
Mixing some rail travel into a boating holiday was something we had enjoyed the previous year, when we left our boat at Llangollen for a day while we took a train via Lake Bala to Porthmadog, where we continued up the Ffestiniog Railway. We stayed a further day in Talbybont to explore the area and then realised, as we headed back for Llanfoist, that we would be short of time to cover the southern end of the canal down to Pontymoile.

‘UNFORGETTABLE’
We had rather assumed that the best of the scenery would be in the upper reaches of the Usk Valley towards Brecon but, as we sailed on southward beyond Llanfoist, we realised that this end was even more spectacular, as that long 25-mile pound wound along the mountainside clinging to the contour ever higher above the valley floor gradually dropping away below. To be floating in a small boat at this height with a view across the valley to the range of Black Mountains, with the Sugar Loaf above Abergavenny and Skirrid Fawr, the Holy Mountain, a broken outlier to the east, was an unforgettable experience.

We did run out of time and had to wind Kingfisher at Mamhilad and miss the last three miles to Pontymoile, then the southern limit of navigation. This was rather shameful as the extent of the canal in those days should have allowed one to cruise its entire length very easily in a week. As the restoration of the Monmouthshire Canal proceeds there will be more of a challenge.

In the 55 years since that trip we have often returned to the Brecon & Abergavenny, sometimes with family and friends – on a day boat, to row a small dinghy, to walk the towpath and to take parties of pensioners on the Brecon trip boat, Dragonfly. It is a canal which will always hold a very special place in our affections.
THE MON & BREC & ME

People power is crucial to any successful restoration, and the Mon & Brec is no exception. We meet three of the project’s main drivers to show how restoration roles can offer so much more variety than run-of-the-mill monthly committee meetings...

RICHARD DOMMETT MBE
Retired engineer, vice-chairman of the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING FOR THE MONMOUTHSHIRE, BRECON AND ABERGAVENNY CANALS TRUST?
I've been a volunteer member since 2004, but worked very closely with the MBACT and local authority partners from when I was appointed waterway manager by British Waterways in 1989. This included helping to set up the Monmouthshire & Brecon Regeneration Partnership with local authorities, while also setting up the project restoration team.

WHEN DID YOUR INTEREST IN CANAL RESTORATION BEGIN?
My father first introduced me to canals when we visited the Caen Hill flight of locks. This was just before Bristol University students cleared the trees and debris from the lock chambers, before restoration began. We also had family friends with a narrowboat at Tyle Mill near Reading. Following these visits, with some friends we built two small boats and moored them at Tyle Mill, joining the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust (Newbury branch) in the process. We became volunteer lock managers looking after Sulhampstead Lock in our spare time.

It was in this capacity that I became friendly with the BW lengthsman who lived at Tyle Mill, who advised that there was a vacancy for a carpenter. I applied for the job, was interviewed, and joined BW in 1973 as part of the restoration team. The rest is history.

When the opportunity to take early retirement from BW came up, I knew I wanted to continue community engagement projects, particularly providing the unemployed with new skills. This was one of the reasons I felt the restoration project had to progress.

CAN YOU BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE DEVELOPMENT AND GOALS OF THE WATERWORKS PROJECT IN CWMBRAN?
It’s a strategic part of the restoration programme which has followed phased restoration projects that commenced in 1997, working from Newport to Cwmbran and Cwmcarn. Over the last three years it has engaged over 270 members of the local communities, mainly unemployed (some just leaving school) and steered them through Level One and Two Conservation Management Skills. Others who have been long-term unemployed have been taught skills in heritage restoration and landscaping. The project has engaged the most vulnerable people in the local society and provided a means to support hard-to-reach groups get back into the workforce.

Other retired volunteers have helped with the project and, during the summer, members of WRG, many of whom return each year to help with the restoration work.

Phase One of the project is nearing completion and the intent is to continue with Phase Two. This will include the restoration of an additional lock and aqueduct. My own interest is long-term – working with representatives from the local authority to see the canal fully restored with the engagement of the community, who we hope will later adopt sections of it.

YOU’VE ALSO MADE A DIFFERENCE ON SITE BY HELPING REDISEIGN THE WATERWAY’S LOCK GATES, WHAT MAKES THEM DIFFERENT, AND WHAT IMPLICATIONS DOES THIS HAVE FOR OTHER RESTORATIONS?

The modular type of steel lock gate looks like a traditional wooden gate but can be carried on a 4x4 trailer in component parts, assembled on site with minimal cranage, and has an estimated life of 100 years, compared with the 25 of conventional hardwood gates.

The key objectives for designing them is that they will save a large number of mature oak trees over a 100-year period. The gates can also be installed at less cost than conventional timber gates – and by volunteers with some training. Economically, it will save on maintenance costs for the authorities that own the canals, particularly where long-term restoration programmes exist.

YOU RECENTLY WON IWA’S CHRISTOPHER POWER PRIZE. ACCEPTING THE AWARD, YOU SAID THAT “ONE PERSON ALONE CANNOT DELIVER SUCH A SPECIAL PROJECT OR RESTORE A CANAL, I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED IN A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH.” CAN YOU ELABORATE?

The motto that MBACT adopted – ‘Progress through Partnerships’ – was my suggestion. Any major project needs a number of different skills and a strong committed leader. Having worked with so many different people and organisations on canal and river projects, it strikes me that if problems are encountered then a team, working together, can normally resolve the issue between its members.

FOR ANYONE THINKING OF VOLUNTEERING, WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE AND WHAT BENEFITS ARE THEY LIKELY TO DISCOVER?
For me, volunteering has always been about being able to help others in one’s own time and without personal gain. You also just have to ignore the sceptics and get on with what you believe in. Remember your family though, who will be supportive over the years and still require your attention.
Ralph Mills
WRG Mon & Brec canal camp leader

How long has WRG been working on the Mon & Brec, and how far back does your personal involvement on these camps stretch?
WRG has been involved with the Mon & Brec for at least ten years, working in partnership with the MBACT and, latterly, Torfaen County Borough Council. I’ve been joining in WRG canal camps here since 2008, only reluctantly missing the summer of 2010, when I was researching and writing my MA dissertation in Canada.

What enticed you to volunteer in the first place?
My involvement began when I was wandering along what remains of the Grand Western Canal near Wellington, then mostly a muddy, tree-lined ditch. I came across the conserved stonework of a boat lift. On one wall was a plaque telling me the structure (which never functioned properly) had been worked on by something called the Waterway Recovery Group. Intrigued, that evening I googled WRG, discovered canal camps, signed up and, a few months later, turned up nervously clutching my climbing harness. I was enticed by the promise of experiencing a different life-style to the one I was used to and by the prospect of being part of a challenge.

What does being camp leader involve?
The most important aspect is ensuring that everyone survives, unscathed, in a risk-filled environment scattered with deep lock basins, crumbling stonework, hefty chunks of masonry, loose bricks, deep, grasping mud, doubtful water and dozens of trip hazards. Not to mention active plant and hazardous materials hazards. Not to mention active plant and hazardous materials hazards. Not to mention active plant and hazardous materials hazards. Not to mention active plant and hazardous materials hazards. Not to mention active plant and hazardous materials hazards. Not to mention active plant and hazardous materials hazards. Not to mention active plant and hazardous materials hazards. Not to mention active plant and hazardous materials hazards. Not to mention active plant and hazardous materials hazards. Not to mention active plant and hazardous materials.
And then there are the challenges of ensuring everyone is memorably fed and watered, and their leisure time is filled pleasurably. Oh, and this being Britain, the so-called summer can be cold and demoralisingly wet, or hot and exhaustingly humid.

Being the person in charge means that I can’t really relax for a moment, as I watch people’s body language, listen for groans, and keep a constant look-out for their safety, from the kitchen to the transport to the great, wet, slimy trench that is the canal. To add to this, I believe in leading from the canal bottom rather than the towpath, so I suffer the same sore muscles, sun and rain-blasted skin and dribbling showers as everyone else.

What do you find so rewarding about the experience?
Leading a WRG canal camp is a mixture of all sorts of pleasures! Firstly there is the challenge of interacting with 17 or so people, initially strangers, who vary in age from 18 to 70-odd (I don’t ask), who come from a variety of backgrounds from just-out-of-school to well into retirement, and who represent diverse cultures and all sorts of walks of life.

They’ll be hugely energetic or a bit stilt, highly-experienced or might never have picked up a shovel, dead keen, obsessed, looking for something different, or there simply because they want to earn a Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award and a canal camp sounded an easy, and cheap, option (economical is right, easy it isn’t). There will be extroverts and the painfully shy, the cheerful and the testy. Meeting and melding such random groups into happy and productive teams is exciting, fun, exhausting and fulfilling, and takes me away from “normal” life for a week or two.

Another standout moment occurs at the end of each camp, when the local team express their astonishment and appreciation of how much we’ve achieved.

What do you do when you’re not working on the canal?
My background is archaeology. I’ve just completed a PhD at Manchester School of Art, in which I’ve looked at 19th-century working class material culture. So it’s natural that I should want to search for evidence of the lives of those associated with the Mon & Brec Canal in the past. Among the soil and rubble we disturb I find old bricks bearing the names of brickyards that once operated here. I collect handfuls of tiny 19th-century potsherds on site too. After a pilot project last year beside Lower Brake Lock, at Ty Coch, that uncovered a tantalising mix of finds including fragments of blue-and-white pottery, glass, iron, clay pipes and miniature tea sets, we will be carrying out an archaeological canal camp this year.

What are you ultimately hoping to achieve on the Mon & Brec?
The goal of the project, which began in 1994, is to restore to navigation a 25km stretch of long-abandoned canal from just north of Cwmbran down to Newport. It’s hugely ambitious. For example, it will ultimately involve constructing a completely new length of canal where it was destroyed by 1960s road building. I’ve mostly been involved with work on the Ty Coch staircase of nine locks southwest of Cwmbran, which I’ve seen change from a series of vegetation-covered ruins to completely functional locks. I must particularly acknowledge the efforts and commitment of the ‘locals’. After all, I just waltz onto the site for a couple of weeks in the summer, while they are there week after week, all year round.
HEIDI CAREY
Senior project officer (canal restoration) at Torfaen County Borough Council

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE?
I’ve been senior project officer since its inception in November 2012, so just over three years. Before that I was a support officer and worked in partnership with the MBACT, helping them to undertake restoration with volunteers and access funding for activities on the canal.

WHAT DOES THE ROLE INVOLVE DAY-TO-DAY?
I’m based on the Waterworks Project site day-to-day – recruiting volunteers, making sure they have a work plan, looking out for their safety and checking they have the correct equipment and materials on site to carry out the restoration.

A large part of my role is managing the project, including finances (drawing down funding at the correct time and applying for additional money where necessary) and ensuring it achieves the aims set out in the project bid. I also work with training organisations and unemployment agencies to organise additional vocational training for volunteers who require it.

HOW IS TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEERS IN RESTORATION?
Torfaen engages volunteers from all areas of the community with a focus on unemployed and young people not in education or employment. When we started the project we put together a volunteer publication and Facebook page to promote awareness, as well as attending community groups, giving talks and holding events on site. We have worked to build partnerships with local training providers who organise placements throughout the year. We also provide volunteer days for local businesses who want to help. So far we have had over 270 volunteers involved in the project.

When it started we planned to use volunteers for all of our restoration, keeping the use of contractors to a minimum, with two skilled supervisors ensuring the standard of work was kept high. This has worked well. Volunteers can participate for up to five days a week and are given on-the-job training as well as accredited qualifications in both traditional heritage and conservation skills linked to canal restoration.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE SO FAR?
Keeping the project to timescale. Initially we based our timescales on how long it took volunteers to restore Drapers Lock (which was completed as part of a pilot to prove to funders that volunteers could carry out high-quality restoration). But the project has overrun by nine months due to the enormous scale of work carried out over six locks, two side pounds and various landscaping tasks. However, it was important for us not to rush the work and to keep the standard of restoration high.

WHAT PERSONAL SATISFACTION DO YOU GET FROM A PROJECT LIKE THIS?
There is nothing better than seeing a volunteer gain confidence, learn new skills and move onto further training or a full-time role.

Seeing the canal transformed from something derelict and unloved into a location that the local community and visitors care about and take ownership of also makes the job worthwhile.

WHAT EXPERIENCE DID YOU HAVE OF CANAL RESTORATION BEFORE THIS?
Before this project I supported the MBACT in small-scale projects such as clearance works, maintenance and volunteering activities, as well as the annual WRG camps. I helped the Trust to run community canal events and supported the Crosscut Project, which was a European Partnership Project using volunteer exchanges across Europe to build a new canal basin on the navigable section of the Mon & Brec.

The Drapers Lock restoration, carried out entirely using volunteers, took place just before Waterworks Project was approved and was the first restoration programme that I managed from start to finish with the help of the canal trust.

This involved finding funding and then managing the work as it progressed.

WHAT BENEFITS WILL THE RESTORED CANAL BRING TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?
The biggest benefit will be the sense of place that the local community has gained by having the canal restored to an asset they can now use. Before the project, this canal was run down and underused. These days it is popular with walkers, anglers and cyclists. The restored section of canal in Ty Coch is situated on the urban fringes of Cwmbran. The restoration has ensured that a green corridor runs through it.

There are other benefits too: by offering training and qualifications the restoration has helped 70% of its unemployed volunteers and young people to either go into further training or find jobs.
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CANAL CAMP
PROGRAMME LAUNCHED

Waterway Recovery Group is excited to launch its schedule of fun-filled working holidays for 2017!

Called canal camps, the week-long programmes offer a unique opportunity to volunteer and learn new skills, while exploring amazing parts of Britain’s industrial heritage. They also act as a catalyst to canal restoration projects, making significant progress on site in just one week. Working together, WRG volunteers can achieve such great things as building a canal basin or entirely new section of waterway, restoring a flight of locks, removing tonnes of rubbish or even rebuilding a bridge. This summer our volunteers contributed over £400,000 in volunteer hours towards restoring the canal network of England and Wales!

WRG attracts a wide range of volunteers and its friendship with the French volunteering group REMPART and other European volunteers continues to grow. Over 20 international volunteers from Spain, Italy, Germany and France attended a canal camp in 2016. In addition, WRG helped 58 Duke of Edinburgh Award students complete their gold award.

This year we have 28 canal camps planned on 13 different restoration sites, offering volunteers the chance to rebuild a weir on the North Walsham & Dilham Canal in Norfolk, restore a lock on the Cotswold Canals, or repair a canal basin on the Stover Canal in Devon. We are also running a family canal camp for the first time – open to families with children aged between 8-14. So it already looks like 2017 is shaping up to be a busy year, with several new sites and big restoration projects underway. Find out what we have planned and how you can get involved...

My first camp

SUE JONES EXPLAINS WHY HER FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH WRG ON THE STOVER CANAL LAST YEAR WILL SEE HER COMING BACK FOR MORE...

I turned 60 last year and, having worked in the NHS for nearly 40 years, I wanted to do something completely different. I read about WRG and its volunteers in a Women’s Institute magazine. It sounded interesting and definitely different! After receiving the brochure, I decided to go for it and booked on the Stover Canal Camp.

On the first Saturday I arrived at the Scout Hut and was welcomed by Colin, the canal camp leader, who showed me my home for the week. Slowly all the volunteers arrived. I’m usually hopeless at remembering people’s names but within 24 hours I knew all 18! There were a mixture of ages and included students waiting for their A level results, volunteers from France and Spain, as well as seasoned WRG campers. Colin was a brilliant leader, carefully explaining each task, and ably assisted by Kym. George was our cook for the week – his food was fantastic and included lots of cake.

During the day we were kept busy on site, but there were plenty of tea breaks too! Over the course of the week I learnt how to repoint a wall and drive a digger. It was also interesting to see the remains of the old canal barges being uncovered by archaeologists. After work we went to the local swimming pool for a shower before heading back to the Scout Hut for a scrumptious meal. In the evenings the leaders planned social activities, from laser quest to a movie night. I cannot thank everyone enough for a really great time. The work that WRG volunteers do is amazing!

Find out more: Volunteering with WRG is a great experience for anyone who loves being outdoors and enjoys meeting people from different backgrounds and of different ages (18+). Each week costs £70, which includes all food and accommodation.

Spring 2017
FAMILY CANAL CAMP ON THE UTTOXETER CANAL

WRG’s first ever family camp will be running in 2017. The aim of this weekend is to introduce a new generation to the world of waterway restoration and maintenance. Situated in the rural Churnet Valley, the Uttoxeter Canal ran 13 miles from a junction with the Caldon Canal at Froghall to a terminus in Uttoxeter. Our volunteers will assist the Caldon and Uttoxeter Canals Trust with improving the canal environment, tackling invasive species and helping wildlife. The accommodation will be The Stables Bunk House, a self-contained hostel. Date: 21st-23rd July (£15 per person).

NORTHERN WALSHAM & DILHAM CANAL, NORFOLK

This is WRG’s first trip to Norfolk in several years. The North Walsham & Dilham Canal is Norfolk’s only artificial, locked sailing canal, originally built to transport coal. However, the arrival of the railways meant it was cheaper to move it overland so the canal’s main cargo became farm produce. The top section of the canal was abandoned in 1927, but the Canal Trust has made steady progress since 2000 clearing vegetation from the line and restoring a lock. In 2017 WRG volunteers will start work to restore the recently uncovered Ebridge Weir. The weir is in a poor condition with damaged brickwork and a badly cracked concrete slab, so there is lots to be done! Volunteers will use an excavator to remove the damaged concrete slab and replace it with a weed control mat and crushed stone. There may also be the opportunity to carry out repair work to Ebridge Lock.

DATES: 12TH-19TH AUGUST / 19TH-26TH AUGUST

RIVER WAVENEY, SUFFOLK

The River Waveney forms the boundary between Suffolk and Norfolk, running past Bungay and Beccles before eventually discharging into the sea at Great Yarmouth. For the first time WRG volunteers will be working at Goldeston Lock, the lowest of three locks on the navigation. The construction of the locks allowed trading wherries to navigate above the tidal stretch of the Waveney up to the head of the navigation at Bungay where there were established milling and malting activities. Over the week volunteers will remove vegetation from the lock chamber, repair the damaged brickwork using lime mortar and repoint the chamber walls.

Once work in the lock has been completed volunteers will landscape the surrounding area, and install mooring rings and fencing. It is hoped once the lock has been stabilised and access improved it will be used for educational and recreational purposes – as well as providing a mooring for the wherry Albion, which was built for and owned by the Waveney Millers.

DATE: 5TH-12TH AUGUST

SWANSEA CANAL, SOUTH WALES

The Swansea Canal originally climbed 115 metres through 36 locks from sea level at Swansea up the valley to Abercraf. Like most canals in South Wales, the lock chambers are built entirely of fairly thin courses of stone rather than the brickwork used on most English canals. Volunteers will help with the restoration of the Trebanos Locks – clearing out the chamber, repointing the walls, rebuilding the wing walls and preparing the locks for new gates. The Swansea Canal Society hopes to host IWA’s Trailboat Festival, so we should see boats back on this section by 2020. This is a great camp for all abilities, whether you are a beginner or a more experienced ‘navvy’.

DATE: 8TH-15TH JULY

LAPAL CANAL, MIDLANDS

Last summer WRG volunteers started work to repair the towpath wall at Harborne Wharf. Over the years the wall has deteriorated significantly, with brickwork missing and several sections being undermined. In 2017 we will continue repair work, strengthen existing foundations and repair damaged brickwork. Volunteers will also clear vegetation around Selly Oak Park Bridge, one of the two oldest surviving original canal bridges in Birmingham, in preparation for archaeological investigations. Once repaired, there are plans to re-water this section, creating an amenity for local residents and an area for boats to turn.

DATE: 29TH JULY-5TH AUGUST

SPRING

11th-18th February – Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation
1st-2nd April – BCN Cleanup 2017
8th-15th April – Weymoor Bridge (Cotswolds)
15th-22nd April – Weymoor Bridge (Cotswolds)
15th-22nd April – Grantham Canal
13th May – Leaders Training Day

SUMMER

24th-25th June – WRG Training Weekend
1st-8th July – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
8th-15th July – Swansea Canal
8th-15th July – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
15th-22nd July – Monmouthshire Canal
15th-22nd July – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
21st-23rd July – Family Weekend Camp - Uttoxeter Canal
22nd-29th July – Monmouthshire Canal
22nd-29th July – Pike Lock & Dock Lock (Cotswolds)
29th July-5th August – Lapal Canal
29th July-5th August – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
29th July-5th August – Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation
5th-12th August – Grantham Canal
5th-12th August – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
5th-12th August – River Waveney
12th-19th August – Grantham Canal
12th-19th August – Inglesham Lock (Cotswolds)
12th-19th August – North Walsham and Dilham
19th-26th August – Grantham Canal
19th-26th August – Stover Canal
19th-26th August – North Walsham and Dilham
26th August-2nd September – Grantham Canal
26th August-2nd September – Stover Canal

AUTUMN/WINTER

20th-28th October – WRG Forestry Camp
21st-28th October – Grantham Canal
21st-28th October – Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation
4th-5th November – Bonfire Bash - Uttoxeter Canal
26th December-1st January 2018 – Christmas Camp

To book on or request a Canal Camps 2017 brochure please visit WRG’s website wrg.org.uk. Alternatively, you can call or email the WRG head office on 01494 783453 ex 604 or email enquiries@wrg.org.uk.

IWA Waterways | 43
Its waterways are steeped in rich history and still some of the busiest on the network. We find out how Warwickshire Branch balances heritage concerns with the demands of heavy boating.

Hatton’s ‘Stairway to Heaven’, historic Stratford’s picture-postcard waterside, Hillmorton’s paired locks, Edstone Aqueduct (the longest in England) and the working-waterways heritage of Hawkesbury Junction... the jewels in Warwickshire Branch’s crown are many and glittering. Its ‘patch’ covers the old county boundary, which included Coventry and Solihull. They’re by no means the only urban centres in the area, for Leamington Spa, Warwick, Rugby and Bedworth also fall within the branch’s spread. For boaters who prefer a more rural scene, the tortuous summit of the Oxford Canal, from Marston Doles to Claydon, offers particularly splendid views.

Restoration
The branch has a rich association with restoration efforts, including the Stratford Canal (reopened in 1964) and the River Avon (reopened from Evesham to Stratford in 1974). These days the focus has shifted to the Avon Extension from Stratford to Warwick – the proposal to extend navigation upstream to Warwick, with a connection to the Grand Union Canal.

It’s a hugely important and high-profile project for the Warwickshire area. Driving it forward is the Avon Navigation Trust, which amalgamated the Stratford and Warwick Waterways Trust. ANT’s new chairman is Jack Hegarty, managing director of Wychavon District Council and chief executive of Malvern Hills District Council. His experience in local government and partnership working with other waterway trusts, notably the restoration of the Droitwich Canal, will be invaluable. A priority for the project initially will be improving navigation up to the present head of navigation at Alveston.

Work parties
As well as supporting ambitious initiatives like this, the branch is also kept busy maintaining waterways which are already navigable. This year it will be funding and installing mooring rings on either side of the aqueduct over the River Avon (on the borders of Leamington Spa and Warwick) before the summer starts.

It also holds two or three major canal clean-ups per year, which attract up to 80 participants from all walks of life, including university students, army cadets, local residents and even volunteers from local stores. Recent clean-ups have focused on Warwick, Rugby and Leamington Spa. Indeed, members will be revisiting the latter on 19th March to keep on top of the tidying. Work parties are also popular and have yielded some impressive results. Over several years the branch has been responsible for reinstating the off-side path on the Hatton flight, enabling boaters to access many of the locks from this side. Two work parties are held per year to strim and clear vegetation.
BRANCH AT A GLANCE

Formed: 1975, initially as the South Warwickshire Branch

Local waterways: Coventry Canal (Coventry Basin to Marston Junction), Grand Union Canal (Knowle to Braunston and to join the Oxford Canal at Napton Junction), Oxford Canal (Hawkesbury Junction to Bridge 141 above Claydon Top Lock), Stratford-upon-Avon Canal, Avon Navigation, Avon Extension from Stratford-upon-Avon to Warwick

Claim to fame: Antony Gormley’s statue was sited lockside at Lowsonford, on the Stratford Canal, for 12 months until May last year

Find out more: waterways.org.uk/warwickshire

with a further two visits by a smaller group to keep it tidy. Bulbs have also been planted at various locations along the flight.

Other locks that have got a look-in recently include those on the River Avon. Robert Aickman Lock was repainted in 2014 to coincide with anniversary celebrations, IWA Lock at Markcliff in 2015 and Stan Clover Lock at Luddington in 2016.

The branch has also supported IWA’s invasive species campaign with several ‘Balsam Bashes’. Successful work parties have taken place in Myton Fields in Warwick, also on the River Avon, where the pesky plant was discovered growing abundantly.

Socials, fundraisers & festivals

All work, no play would make Warwickshire Branch members very dull indeed, but they enjoy a reassuringly vibrant social life within the Association. A New Year’s dinner, held every January in a different pub along the local waterways, ensures the year gets off to a convivial start. Meanwhile, the Christmas socials each December range from quiz nights to skittle evenings, with fresh ideas always up for consideration.

In-between, the calendar can get pretty packed – there’s an annual waterway picnic in July and five or six walks per year, including to a restoration site further afield. Branch meetings hold plenty of interest too, with raffles and sales of home-made jam, IWA Christmas cards and calendars generating much-needed funds. Sales of small turned wooden items and ornaments made by the branch’s new chairman, Carole Nicholson, are also popular with members.

Branch meetings invariably feature a guest speaker too, who aims to provide an overview of a restoration or other waterway-related subject. One meeting per year is set aside for a speaker from another waterway user group, such as canoeing or fishing. Members have found this a useful way of understanding how other people use and appreciate the waterways.

Finally, the branch is successful in promoting the Association’s interests at various festival and other waterway events throughout the year. Of these, one of the biggest is the Stratford River Festival, attended with a branch stand since its inception in 2009. The event attracts up to a hundred boats, all providing a colourful backdrop to the festival, which is centred around the recreation ground. Members get involved in setting the raft for mooring boats, working closely with Avon Navigation Trust, and also spearhead the big litter clean-up early on the Sunday morning.

The branch has also forged good links with Saltisford Canal Trust and attends the national Heritage Open Days Weekend in September each year.

Rhodes Thomas Collection

For more than six years, a group of branch members have been beavering away at the Warwickshire County Records Office sorting, repairing, cleaning, digitising and cataloguing thousands of inland waterway slides taken between the 1960s and the 1980s by the late C R (Rhodes) Thomas, a local waterways enthusiast. To date, the branch has amassed some 8,000 man-hours of volunteer input on this ‘lo-viz’ project – and the cataloguing operation is not yet complete. In the next few months the branch intends to make the collection more widely available (electronically) for members to view and apply their local knowledge to fill in the gaps on some of the locations, people and events that Rhodes Thomas captured but that members have so far been unable to recognise. The collection also comprised hundreds of Rhodes Thomas’s books, which have been sold at various events to raise funds for future waterway projects, although the money is yet to be allocated.
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 (contact details below), ideally in advance so that they can assist with publicity and planning.

Ringing in the New Year

Boaters looking to cruise the Trent & Mersey in 2017 can thank Chester & Merseyside Branch for some sterling work installing additional mooring rings recently. Dutton, a popular place to overnight with stunning views across the Weaver Valley and towards the Welsh mountains, saw 16 rings installed, giving an overall length of 200m with mooring provision. Further rings were installed between Barnton & Saltersford tunnels. The work has been possible as a result of additional rings provided by CRT, in recognition of the mooring improvements already delivered by the Cheshire Ring Mooring Project.

And there have been other reasons for the branch to celebrate lately, after it was recognised for its efforts at IWA’s National Campaign Festival at Eldonian Village last year. The Canal & River Trust presented its North West Partnership Chairman’s Award to members at a gala dinner in Blackburn.

Spring cleaning

Towpaths and lock furniture have been given much-needed TLC by a number of branches recently, ahead of what’s set to be a busy cruising year. North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch have been mainly focused on Cheshire Locks, a memorial garden, and completing milepost painting up to Harecastle Tunnel. They may have fewer navigable waterways than some areas, but this hasn’t limited the activities of IWA’s West Country Branch. Recent work has included rubbish collection from Bridgwater Docks; painting railings to Barge Lock; graffiti removal on Bridgwater & Taunton Canal bridges; Himalayan Balsam pulling; inspection of the length of Bridgwater & Taunton Canal by bicycle; construction of new cabin roof; and construction of a landing stage above Firepool Lock.

Meanwhile, Milton Keynes Branch received help from students and naval cadets for their autumn clean-up of the Grand Union Canal. On this occasion, they covered the stretch from Fenny Stratford, through Linsdale, to Grove Lock, south of Leighton Buzzard. An estimated total of around six tonnes of rubbish was collected, and will be disposed of by CRT’s contractors.

Away days

Thankfully, it’s not all hard work and no play for our conscientious branches. In fact, IWA’s Ipswich Branch has organised a weekend away for both members and non-members on 13th-14th May. The trip includes a visit to Stockwood Discovery Centre in Luton, a 3hr boat-trip along the Great Ouse on board the John Bunyan, overnight hotel accommodation with dinner and breakfast, and visits to Woburn Abbey and Bletchley Park before the return coach transport. See waterways.org.uk/ipswich/quick_getaway for further information.

The GU received further attention from Warwickshire Branch, who held their latest clean-up in Warwick, centred on Emscote Road Bridge. Among curious items retrieved from the canal bed were a Vespa scooter, a gym bench, a lawnmower, a fish tank, a garage door, several large oil drums, a sewing machine, road work signs and cones, part of a car, lots of pipe, and a sundry mixture of metal and plastic.

In the past few months IWA Northamptonshire Branch has held five work parties carrying out improvements on the adopted section of the Northampton Arm. Successes have included removing fence rubbish from Lock 1; painting locks and clearing the by-pass weir and channel; vegetation clearance at Town Moorings, Northampton; filling in potholes; and planting approximately 1,000 spring bulbs to brighten up the towpath.

A productive work party was held by Peterborough Branch on 30th November. Seven volunteers carefully removed 50m of brush and overhanging trees from Horseways Channel, as part of a larger effort to reinstate Welches Dam. The north side, under EA management, is heavily overgrown and due to the amount of wildlife inhabiting the bank, the clearance had to be undertaken with hand tools and light mechanical equipment.

Finally, Birmingham, Black Country and Worcestershire Branch completed the first in a series of work parties to clear and maintain the length of Dudley No 2 Canal beyond the current navigable limit of Hawne Basin, Halesowen. The branch is particularly excited by the work as it is being carried out by a consortium of people from Coombeswood Canal Trust, Lapal Canal Trust, Friends of Halesowen Abbey (which owns land in the area) and park rangers from Leasowes Park.

Details of all IWA branch events can be found on the IWA website events calendar. If you would like to get involved or have any suggestions for future work parties please contact Alison Smedley, Campaigns Officer on 07779 090915 or alison.smedley@waterways.org.uk
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2000: BUILDING OVER BASIN
Reconstruction of the original canal basin at Over, where the canal connected with the River Severn, was the largest all-volunteer canal restoration project in the UK in 1999-2000.

First clearance work on site began in February 1998. Later in the year progress was made excavating the basin, which had been filled in when a hospital was built here in 1903. The work was carried out by volunteers from the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust and teams from WRG, who had a number of canal camps between 1999 and 2000. Up to 60 volunteers were working on the site on occasions.
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