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AGENDA

The Column of the National Chairman

The joint Environment Agency (EA) and Canal & River Trust (CRT) Working Group set up to consider the future of EA navigations is hoping to report to Government by the end of the year. As most readers will know, IWA’s long-held ambition is to see the navigations under the control of one independent body and we hope a workable solution can be found. While there have been some encouraging signs emerging recently, it is still too early to state confidently that our hoped-for result will be achieved. Key to any solution, as we have made clear throughout our campaign, is the funding, as it must be adequate to ensure the long-term future of both EA and CRT navigations.

IWA believes it is essential that money is found to achieve this, despite competing claims on the public purse. Failure to ensure adequate funding would be a false economy as delay will only increase the inevitable future costs. IWA will continue its campaign for the transfer to take place with an appropriate financial package. We will take every opportunity, including at our annual parliamentary reception in early November, to remind politicians of the many benefits our waterways provide – regeneration, recreation and health, to name but a few. Let’s hope 2017 brings the news we want to hear.

In the meantime, our ongoing work providing leadership for the waterways restoration movement continues apace. The year so far has seen a huge number of volunteers attend no less than 27 Waterway Recovery Group Canal Camps. Our Van Appeal to update WRG’s transport fleet has been incredibly well supported and we are now so near to our £120,000 target that the Appeal is closing at the end of October. Two new vans have already been acquired and the remaining two should be available to WRG soon. On behalf of IWA and WRG I would like to say a huge “thank you” to everyone who has contributed so generously.

As well as the efforts to get more canals in water there are plenty of other challenges facing our inland waterways, among them the transfer of EA navigations that I referred to earlier, continued uncertainty over the impact of HS2 and the likely need to replace the European Union as a source of regional development funds.

All these issues – and many others being tackled on a daily basis by IWA, its branches, regions and officers – need volunteers with the same spirit and determination that has always characterised the Association. If you can help in any way, please do get in touch through Head Office or your local branch. We can never have enough people fighting for the future of our inland waterways.

Les Etheridge
waterways

IWA projects commended at Living Waterways Awards

Three IWA projects reached the finals of the Canal & River Trust’s 2016 Living Waterways Awards in September, reflecting the wide range of activities undertaken by the Association’s volunteers.

The awards recognise inspiring waterway-based improvement projects across the UK and are judged through site visits by an independent panel of experts from the voluntary, environmental, arts, heritage, engineering and architecture sectors.

Commended in the Education and Learning category was IWA’s Towpath Walks. As part of its campaign to maintain public access to the waterways, IWA has been running guided towpath walks in London for nearly 40 years and has so far introduced over 15,000 people to London’s towpaths. Through a long-term collaboration with London Walks, these events are widely promoted and ranked among the premier guided walks available in the capital. Chris Bushill, a satisfied customer who nominated IWA for the award, said: “Towpath Walks have played an important role in making London’s towpaths one of the capital’s most popular open spaces. As well as introducing many people to the world of waterways, they have raised over £41,000 to support local restoration and community projects.”

Commended in the Community and Volunteering category was IWA Northampton Branch for its adoption of the 4.5-mile Northampton Arm. Since 2013 some 80 volunteers have, between them, taken part in over 70 work parties tackling a wide range of tasks such as vegetation clearance, litter picking, painting locks and clearing by-weirs.

Finally, commended in the Community and Volunteering category was IWA North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch for organising over 162 work parties since 2012. Over 200 volunteers have taken part, carrying out tasks such as painting (lock gates, lock furniture, mileposts, railings and fences); removing rubbish from the canal and litter from towpaths; hedge laying and planting; clearing weeds and vegetation; restoring a cast iron historic bridge; and controlling invasive plants.

Below: Roger Wilkinson with the Towpath Walks certificate.

Right: North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch was commended for its work parties.

Last chance to enter photography competition

Budding photographers have until 31st January to submit their entries to this year’s IWA Annual Photography Competition and be in with a chance of winning £150-worth of Imray books and charts.

The competition also offers a fantastic chance to showcase work at a national level, with winning snaps appearing on IWA’s calendars and cards, as well as other promotional material including posters and online.

For details of how to submit photographs, visit waterways.org.uk/support_us/competitions.
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**Winter 2016**
AGM reflects on 2016 successes

Efforts to reopen Carpenter’s Road and Fulney locks and developments on the River Parrett were among some of the achievements celebrated at IWA’s 57th AGM, held in Wolverhampton in September.

National chairman Les Etheridge reviewed the Association’s year with a series of slides, praising branch management and the delivery of over 350 work parties in 2016. He also delivered a progress report on IWA’s HS2 campaign, as well as on the transfer of EA navigations to CRT.

However the meeting, held at South Wolverhampton & Bilston Academy, was also a chance to look to the Association’s future. To that end the 80-plus attendees were asked to approve a special resolution to modernise IWA’s Articles of Association, the updated version of which can be found on the Association’s website. There was also a call to recruit more members over the next 12 months to ensure greater protection and restoration of the inland waterways.

In addition, the meeting recorded the re-appointment of Ivor Caplan and Gren Messham and the appointment of Jonathan Smith and Rick Barnes as nationally elected trustees. Tributes were paid to retiring nationally elected trustee, Jim Shead and to Paul Birkett, who resigned in July. All region chairmen positions have now been filled with the appointment of Helen Whitehouse (West Midlands Region) and John Pomfret (Eastern Region) in July and the AGM re-appointment of David Pullen (East Midlands Region) and Peter Scott (North East Region).

Between the formalities, members had a chance to listen to a series of presentations, join a guided tour of the Bradley Lockgate Workshop and walk along the route of the proposed Bradley Canal restoration.

The John Heap Salver, the Association’s major fundraising award, went to Waterway Recovery Group for its hugely successful Van Appeal, raising £120,000 to buy four new vans to support the annual Canal Camps programme. Coffers have been swelled through sponsored walks and the ever-popular fudge sales at IWA’s Canalway Cavalcade. The vans play a vital role in transporting volunteers and equipment on the week-long volunteering holidays and weekend digs, and will be used on projects such as the restoration of the Grantham Canal and Inglesham Lock. Two vans have been purchased already and two additional ones will be bought in time for the 2017 season.

The Christopher Power Prize is awarded to a person, society or trust that has made a significant contribution to the restoration of an amenity waterway and this year included a cash prize of £1,000 (in favour of the winner’s trust). It was awarded to Richard Dommett, regeneration manager of the Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust. He has played a leading role in campaigning and fundraising at both a local and national level and has dedicated over 14 years since retirement from British Waterways to canal restoration as a volunteer. Most recently he has focused his attention on the regeneration of the disused southern section of the Monmouthshire Canal, co-ordinating major schemes between Newport and Cwmbran, and developing community engagement and volunteering on the waterway. His prototype steel lock gate, developed in conjunction with Swansea University, is currently being piloted but has the potential to make canals cheaper to maintain and easier to restore.

Richard Bird Medals are awarded to members whose efforts and support are considered to have brought significant benefit to the Association over a sustained period of time. This year they were given to:

- Barry Robins, chairman of East Yorkshire Branch for 20 years until 2013 and now editor of the branch newsletter. Barry has encouraged more boating on our lesser-used waterways and over the years has introduced many young people to the canals, leading multiple narrowboat trips from his school.
- Graham Treagus, who has been an IWA member for nearly 50 years and has served on IWA Northampton Branch’s committee for 42 of those years. Graham is talks and social meetings coordinator and has hosted committee meetings in his home providing tea, coffee, beer and delicious cake.
IWA shares knowledge at World Canals Conference

Two IWA representatives were among 84 speakers from across the globe sharing examples of innovative inland waterways management at the World Canals Conference in Inverness in September.

The four-day event, organised by Scottish Canals on behalf of Inland Waterways International, attracted some 300 delegates who heard experts and business leaders discuss everything from sustainable tourism development to climate change.

Among that number were IWA’s North West Region chairman Mike Carter, who highlighted the community and social regeneration potential of our canals, while Dr Roger Squires delivered a talk on how UK waterways were being reworked to meet the changing needs of society.

Their talks were part of a wider ‘Waterways as a Driver for Regeneration’ theme on the second day of the conference.

IWA’s Waterway Recovery Group was also feted at the event, with an award nomination recognising its restoration efforts.

The organisation was shortlisted for the ‘Guardian’ category, and was presented with a certificate at the conference’s gala dinner on 21st September, where winners were also revealed.

It’s the first time the World Canals Conference, which visits a different waterway destination around the world each year, has included an awards ceremony. Among the finalists were a number of other UK projects, including Glasgow’s integrated water management system, the Kelpies, the Montgomery Canal triathlons, the Rochdale Canal & Bridgewater Basin Living Waterways Project, and the Waterworks project on the Monmouthshire Canal.

Readers of Waterways are reminded that nominations for national awards can be made by individual members and branch and region committees. Full details are at waterways.org.uk/information/national_awards. Nominations for 2017 should be submitted by 31st March.
Triathlon celebrates second successful year

The Olympics may have long gone, but that didn’t stop the fun and games at IWA’s Waterways Triathlon on 25th September, with 40 participants lining up to take part.

And for the first time stand up paddleboarders were included on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation route, before completing the rest of the 50km or 30km competition by cycling and running.

The event, which raises money for Essex Waterways, took place at Hoe Mill Lock near Maldon. All funds raised will support new towpath repairs along the navigation.

Bridge project benefits from IWA aid

A historic bridge over the Uttoxeter Canal in rural Staffordshire has finally been restored thanks to a three-tiered package of assistance from IWA.

The four-year project by Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust (CUCT) to restore Bridge 70 near Denstone had hit a temporary cash flow problem until IWA stepped in with short-term aid in addition to its earlier help with engineering consultancy and skilled volunteer labour.

IWA’s honorary engineers worked with CUCT to draw up the specification of work needed for the bridge restoration, while volunteers from Waterway Recovery Group mounted four canal camps to manage the encroaching woodland around the bridge, re-point the stonework, install drains and a waterproof membrane, and relay the top surface.

To fund the final stage of the restoration IWA worked with CUCT to devise a short-term finance package, enabling CUCT to complete the work and unlock a retrospective grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which paid for the project as part of the Churnet Valley Living Landscape Partnership scheme.

IWA national chairman Les Etheridge said: “We always tell societies to come and talk to us if they have a problem as we may well be able to help. The success of this arrangement for Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust is an example of IWA’s ability to help restoration projects in innovative ways.”
June Humphries 1929-2016

IWA was saddened to learn of the death on 26th July of June Humphries, at the age of 87.

An IWA member from 1960, she was prominent in waterways campaigning when her husband John became chairman of the Narrow Boat Owners’ Club (the predecessor to the HNBC), then, in 1970, IWA chairman. He resigned in 1972 when he was appointed as the Government’s Special Adviser on Waterways. In 1974 he was created chairman of the Water Space Amenity Commission, which advised the government on water recreation, and encouraged the water authorities in their responsibilities.

These years were a time of intense political activity centred on the Humphries’ Wimbledon house, where June played a crucial role in influencing MPs, peers and society figures on the future of UK canals and rivers.

A strikingly attractive lady, June and her four young daughters became a familiar sight on the canal network aboard their converted BCN tug Clevanda. Later she became part-owner of the seagoing twin-engined motor yacht Avonbay, aboard which the Humphries family spent two decades exploring the waterways of Western Europe.

June became a skilled photographer, and during her travels shot a large number of professional quality cine films that are now a valuable and historic record of canals during that period.

Everyone who remembers June will readily acknowledge her great contribution to waterways restoration. She is survived by her husband John and four daughters.

Hugh McKnight

Marathon opportunity

If the fear of piling on the pounds will spoil your Christmas pudding, IWA is offering one member the chance to get fit – while fundraising – over the festive period.

The Association has a charity place in April’s London Marathon and, whether you’re already a runner or simply fancy getting in shape for a good cause, the race number could have your name on it.

Anyone interested should contact Sarah Frayne on 01494 783453 ext 611, or email sarah.frayne@waterways.org.uk. You’ll need to write a brief paragraph on why you would like the place and how you might raise the sponsorship money.

Crossrail bows to IWA pressure

Protracted negotiations have paid off for IWA’s North & East London Branch after agreement from Crossrail over a piling dam dispute on the Bow Backs Loop.

The piles date back to 2007, when they were inserted either side of Crossrail bridge works. Yet while the new bridges were finally completed in early 2015, the removal of the dam to facilitate the complete reopening of the Bow Backs Loop has taken considerably longer. The matter was complicated by Thames Water concerns that removing the piles might disturb its trunk sewer pipes.

A decision by Crossrail to cut the piles at 1.25m below water level was deemed unacceptable by IWA, who identified this would preclude the passage of deeper draughted boats and cause an excessive accumulation of silt. Crossrail has since agreed that the piles should be cut off at 1.5m below water level instead, with work due to start shortly.

It is hoped that the whole of the Bow Backs Loop will be reopened when the Carpenter’s Road Lock restoration is completed in the spring of 2017. The local IWA branch, in conjunction with St Pancras Cruising Club, is planning a ‘Reopening Rally’ for the late spring Bank Holiday Weekend to mark the event.

Work on the restoration of Carpenter’s Road Lock, the long-awaited link between City Mill River and Waterworks River, started in July. The lock was converted to stop gates as a temporary measure for the Olympic Games. Earlier this year a £1.75m project to restore the lock was approved, with funding from CRT, £680,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, £100,000 from the London Legacy Development Corporation and £4,500 from IWA.

Winding in the Willows?

IWA is running a long-standing campaign on winding holes to improve the standard of signage, dredging and vegetation clearing at them and to determine where additional facilities could be established, among other aims.

To find out more, take a look at IWA’s new briefing note on winding holes at waterways.org.uk/windingholes.
An estimated 15,000 people and 100 boats were drawn to August’s IWA Festival of Water on the Wyrley & Essington Canal at Pelsall North Common.

The event brought life to this underused north-east corner of the BCN network, with many of the boats arriving as part of an Explorer Cruise organised by the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society.

Meanwhile, the Truman Enterprise Narrowboat Trust provided free trips for those without a craft, and on Sunday night the traditional procession of illuminated boats lit up the canal.

Pelsall Common itself accommodated still more entertainment, with Waterway Recovery Group providing digger driving taster sessions. While the heavy plant proved a treat for kids, a selection of classic cars gave older visitors a more genteel vehicular hit. Elsewhere food and drink stalls, birds of prey displays and a chance to get stuck into (and buy) waterway-themed crafts kept the festival ground bustling.

“Feedback has been incredible,” said IWA events chairman John Butler. “This event reflects a huge amount of voluntary effort, leading up to, during and following the event. I’d like to thank everyone who was involved in making this festival an outstanding success, including the people of Pelsall, Walsall and surrounding areas who came along and gave the event such a wonderful atmosphere.”

Although not restoration-focused in the manner of the Association’s midsummer campaigning festival, you couldn’t help but notice the two restorations on its doorstep. The site links the Hatherton restoration, at the top of the Cannock Extension Canal, with the Lichfield Canal project at Ogley Junction, near the Chasewater Reservoir, the source of much of the BCN’s water.

Next year’s Festival of Water will be held at Ilkeston on the Erewash Canal.
All that jazz…

Taking refuge from the rain in the beer and music tent.

Above: The Wyrley & Essington has rarely been so busy.

Below: One side effect was the disturbance by festival boat traffic of the silt on the Cannock Extension, now a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Each night the organisers had to drop special filter screens to prevent contaminated silt on the main line from reaching the arm.
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Anatomy of a Restoration

The Grantham Canal Society has benefitted from support from local IWA branches, including crossover of members, some practical help and provision of funds.

An IWA legacy to the amount of £100,000 was given in 2010 when the wall of Lock 18 collapsed.

Roy Sutton, IWA honorary engineer, advised on how best to plan for and tackle the restoration of Lock 18.

IWA has offered support putting together a successful bid from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Association has arranged insurance for Grantham Canal Society’s equipment and buildings.
This year alone five WRG Canal Camps were coordinated to help the rebuilding effort at Lock 15 (pictured).

WRG’s own tools, equipment and transport are used on camps, including new vans funded by an IWA appeal.

IWA previously assumed employment responsibility for a development manager for the Grantham restoration.

The canal was the site of an IWA National Trail Boat Festival.

IWA is a member of the Grantham Canal Partnership.
Restoration has been a pillar of IWA’s work since it formed in 1946. Today, it continues to support, advise, fund and equip restoration efforts throughout the country, including on the Grantham Canal, pictured overleaf. Over the last decade alone, the Association has been working behind – and on – the scene in all the ways already listed, but there’s much more it can offer on top. We take a look at how its multiple parts are serving restoration bodies across the board.

IN THE BEGINNING...

So you want to restore your local waterway? IWA helps groups get off the starting blocks by flagging up some of the main considerations any restoration promoter faces in the early stages of a project. Its website offers a series of comprehensive documents to help navigate some of the complicated red tape of local planning and other legislation, like the Water Framework Directive.

Once you’ve got a grip on the rules and regulations, the Association can signpost restoration groups through the challenging process of compiling a work plan for the project. This details the core tasks of feasibility, design and construction that need to be completed, breaking the project down into stages, or milestones, to make it more manageable.

Again, online guidance documents suggest a suitable order, while acknowledging that waterway restoration is not necessarily a straightforward, sequential process. The template provided can be easily amended or overlapped to suit the specific requirements of individual projects.

GETTING TECHNICAL

IWA’s Restoration Handbook is another weapon in an organisation’s waterway restoration arsenal. Each chapter has been written by an expert or specialist in the relevant field, whether that be management, waterside properties, leisure facilities, transport crossings, wildlife conservation, museum, visitor and heritage centres or water management. Drilling even deeper, separate specialist documents can advise on everything from slipway design to winding hole specifications.

IWA also has two Honorary Consultant Engineers who regularly lend advice free of charge (with the expectation that reasonable travel and subsistence expenses are reimbursed). From a couple of hours to a few days, the time they spend on projects can help restoration organisations identify the scope of work planned. They can also undertake limited investigations and submit design work to support minor engineering works.

The engineers’ wealth of knowledge covers everything from recommending contractors to the conservation of existing structures. If a restoration group needs a hand specifying requirements, preparing contract documents, selecting and inviting suitable companies to tender or reviewing reports, they can help here too.

Meanwhile, IWA’s Honorary Consultant Planner can ensure a project capably balances the needs of the environment, local economy and close population. Their brains on the legal issues associated with land use could be invaluable when liaising with councillors and the public, as well as professionals including architects, engineers, construction managers and surveyors.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Of course, other information networks exist within IWA too. The Association’s long history of waterway campaigns means it has learned a thing or two over the years. Sharing this experience with other, like-minded groups is at the heart of its restoration work. A restoration hub acts as a coordinating point for all enquiries from restoration groups and others involved in waterways restoration. The hub aims to match a call for help with someone who can provide answers or support, and draws on a panel of experts to provide the necessary expertise.
IWA has been providing site volunteers since its inception, both through local branches and its distinctive red-shirted band of Waterway Recovery Group helpers.

Waterway groups can also access a range of studies and reports that have been carried out for other restoration projects nationwide. Whenever IWA funds a report, it usually stipulates that a copy is provided to the Association, which is made available via a private online portal.

Plenty more useful documents can be found elsewhere on IWA’s site. It acts as a repository for the collective knowledge and expertise of volunteers and staff, as well as the experience of a joint IWA/CRT Restoration Working Group. In 2014, this partnership spawned the first of what has become annual workshops, focusing on the main issues facing the restoration movement. The day-long conference is a chance for representatives from canal groups to share best practice, celebrate recent successes and build new relationships.

IWA’s website also advertises relevant courses; it’s currently listing one offered by the Heritage Alliance and the Institute of Fundraising for any member of staff, volunteer, committee member or trustee with responsibility to develop and deliver fundraising activities for a heritage project.

MONEY MATTERS

Which brings us neatly onto the elephant in the room – how to raise the necessary cash for your restoration project. Here again, IWA can help in a variety of ways. Firstly, its funding toolkit, produced with CRT, is designed to help groups apply for money. You will find sections on governance, types of funding, writing applications and how to move forward once the decision has been made. It’s downloadable on the IWA website, where you’ll also find details of GrantsOnline, providing daily-updated information on Government, European and Lottery funding, as well as trusts and foundations. The cost to subscribe to this service through IWA is significantly less than the standard rate for single access.

Alternatively, take advantage of Restoration Committee’s funding updates: IWA collates and publishes news relevant to funding restoration and emails it out to funding officers and others involved in raising money for restoration.

Of course, IWA also makes money available to restoration projects directly, either through donations from local branches for projects in their area, or through grants and legacies, such as the £200,000 Tony Harrison one advertised in our Autumn issue. Elsewhere, national appeals concentrate attention – and finances – on individual projects, while the annual Waterways Restoration Raffle helps to raise at least £10,000 to spread across restoration projects throughout the country.
Just add volunteers

With funding, technical support, equipment and paperwork in place, it’s people power that ultimately drives a restoration project forward. IWA has been providing site volunteers since its inception, both through local branches and its distinctive red-shirted band of Waterway Recovery Group helpers. The organisation formally launched in 1970 as a co-ordinating body for voluntary labour right across the inland waterways network. It backs up work already being done by local restoration groups, both by providing legs and arms on the ground, as well as wheels, diggers, dumpers, pumps, mixers, winches and other necessary equipment.

For groups looking to upskill their workers, WRG’s training grant can provide up to 75% of the direct costs (ie course costs, travel and accommodation expenses) up to a maximum of £750. The criteria for the grant are set deliberately wide to encourage applications from individuals as well as canal groups who may wish to organise training for a selection of volunteers.

Where WRG really comes into its own, however, is running canal camps, typically week-long and open to volunteers over the age of 18. These ‘working holidays’ aren’t confined to the more clement summer months either – scrub-clearing ‘Bonfire Bashes’ attract over 100 volunteers, and there’s even a Christmas camp ensuring restoration efforts aren’t forgotten over the festive period.

Meanwhile, WRG’s regional groups organise weekend canal restoration ‘digs’ for volunteers, and a dedicated forestry arm is available to tackle major scrub and tree clearance. Its highly-trained, fully qualified members are available year-round too, and welcome enquiries from canal restoration groups hoping to make use of their skills.

Over the years WRG has helped to restore a significant number of derelict waterways throughout Britain. Larger projects have included the complete rebuilding of the four Frankton Locks and the three Aston Locks on the Montgomery Canal, as well as the construction of Over Basin on the Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal and the restoration of Droitwich Barge Lock in the Midlands.

Staying safe, spreading the word

And there’s more... Health and safety, for example, is something that will need to be managed as part of any practical restoration project. WRG has policies and guidance that it adheres to on work sites and which could be a useful reference, from risk assessments to accident reporting protocol. What’s more, becoming a corporate member of IWA gives advantageous rates of insurance through the Association’s brokerage scheme (detailed in Autumn’s issue of Waterways). There are currently around 200 organisations benefiting from these policies, which can incorporate cover for activities that insurers might otherwise be reluctant to include without substantially pricier premiums. Volunteer use of mechanised plant, chainsaws and motor vehicle arrangements are just a few obvious examples.

Corporate members also benefit from stands at IWA-organised events. These provide a great opportunity to engage with local communities, while this magazine and IWA’s Bulletin offer further ways to keep interested parties in the loop. Meanwhile, an online Interpretation Toolkit can help restoration groups focus their communication and PR efforts with tips on trails and guided walks, as well as websites, exhibitions, posters and other ways to deliver high-quality interpretation projects both while work is in progress and when your restoration project is complete.

For more information regarding the support and advice available to restoration groups please visit waterways.org.uk/restorationhub.
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David Blagrove MBE
1937-2016

Tim Coghlan remembers David Blagrove, the life-long waterways enthusiast who campaigned to saved the Kennet & Avon and even became a working boatman.

In January 1962, a 24-year-old David Blagrove was serving articles with a firm of solicitors in London’s Regent Street, having transferred from a company in Reading. The move initially seemed a good one, but he soon fell out with the managing clerk. When matters came to a head, David related the scene that followed in his book Bread upon the Waters: “His eyes bulged with anger and he went white with rage. ‘Get your cards!’ he shouted. I said that it was my pleasure, whereupon he telephoned the accounts department to make up my salary for a month in lieu of notice. Having done this, he made a sneering jibe at my professional competence, at which I put the waste paper bin over his head, picked up my cheque and walked out of office jobs forever.” It was to prove a momentous day, both in his life and for the inland waterways that he would serve for the next 54 years.

David already had a Plan B up his sleeve – to work as a canal boatman. To that end he immediately went to Brentford Dock, where the Grand Union Canal joins the Thames. Here, without an appointment, he applied to the Willow Wren Canal Carrying Company – an enterprise that IWA had formed in 1953 to keep commercial traffic going on the inland waterways. David already had a part-share in a former working boat, built in 1903 for carriers Fellows Morton & Clayton, and originally called Kimberley after the besieged town in the Boer War. It had recently had a major refit and been renamed Enterprise. In the summer months the boat’s hold was fitted with bus seats and used as a trip-boat on the Reading end of the Kennet & Avon Canal, with David very much hands on. The plan now was to work that boat as a commercial carrier during the winter months, subcontracted to Willow Wren. David wrote: “My boating career started that day.” For the next two years he was to go ‘Willow Wrenning’, as the boatmen called it.
Legacy
David wrote a vivid account of that first trip in Bread upon the Waters. Almost everything was new to him – he had never before ventured up the Grand Union Canal beyond Rickmansworth. Although that trip lasted only a few months, David was at pains to capture the very essence of what was to prove the twilight year of canal carrying. He never kept a diary per se, but jotted on scraps of paper, even on the back of the proverbial fag packet, and it took him years of drafts before the book was finally published in 1984.

David was to devote much of his energies throughout the remainder of his life to promoting commercial carrying on the canals. In this he was part of a small post-WWII group of people who, seeing that canal-carrying was now in terminal decline, were determined to save at least part of it. In some instances they even tried their hands at becoming working boatmen. Their endeavours in this tough life seldom lasted more than a few years, but their legacy remains in the books and other publications they wrote, the photographs they took, and the continuation today – however small – of freight carrying on the canals. David was prominent among them.

Early life
David was born in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, in 1937 and used to play on the remains of the now-derelict Wilts and Berks Canal which joined the Thames there. In the latter war-years, when not at school, he was allowed aboard the Salter’s Steamers plying the river, where he learned how to lower the funnels on approaching bridges.

However, his real interest in canals began with the family’s move to Reading in 1950, when he was twelve. In February of that year he saw Sir John Knill and John Gould trans-shipping the last cargo to Newbury. It had a profound effect on David, and later he became a key supporter of John Gould in his tireless campaigning to save the Kennet & Avon Canal.

After leaving school aged 18, David joined work parties on that canal at weekends, helping to restore locks that had not been used for years and clearing rubbish and vegetation from the canal bed. Later he was proactive in mounting legal challenges against those bodies seeking to close the K&A. On one occasion he secured a High Court injunction against the Reading Corporation for failing to carry out essential works to the canal. He even threatened to bring further action to impound the Corporation’s mace if this was not done. At the time his mother was an unamused Alderman of the Borough, who had to broker a deal with the town clerk to stop her son’s action. She later became the first female mayor of Reading.

IWA efforts
In 1958 David began steering the trip-boat Enterprise on the River Kennet at weekends, the boat he was later to acquire a part-share in. Following what he described as “an increase in salary from £0 to £10 per month” for doing this, he joined the Inland Waterways Association. He was to remain a member for almost 60 years, until his death. During that time he played several prominent roles in the organisation, including becoming the founding member of the Northampton Branch in 1968 and, for some time, its chairman. He helped to organise the 1971 National Rally in Northampton as part of the (successful) campaign to save the Northampton Arm, following the closure of the wheat trade to the mills at Wellingborough on the River Nene.
In 1981 he was elected to IWA National Council as what he described as a “general nuisance”, including being appointed national stoppage officer “because of my banging on about the stoppage situation”. He retired from the Council in 1990 and was made a vice-president, a position he held until the end of his life.

Stoke Bruerne

David took a two-year break from canals in 1964 to marry and complete a teacher training qualification. At weekends and in the summer holidays, however, he worked as a lock-keeper for the Thames Conservancy, which became the subject of another of his books, Quiet Waters By. A move to Stoke Bruerne in 1966 allowed him to rekindle his interest in canal carrying, and in 1969 he became involved with Ashby Canal Transport Section in an attempt to save the remaining traffic on the Grand Union. He bought the wooden butty-boat Elton from Willow Wren and worked it as a pair with his friend Nick Hill, who had the motor Jaguar, initially as camping-boats for children in David’s school.

The autumn of 1970 saw the end of regular traffic on the Grand Union, so David and Nick looked for other opportunities and hit upon the idea of retailing coal from their boats. One of the trips they started was regular fortnightly runs from Atherstone, in Warwickshire, to Stoke Bruerne, where David had turned part of the garden at the back of his house, Wharf Cottage, into a coal wharf, to supply his and other carriers’ needs. He acquired a small elevator – also used in the autumn for picking apples – a weighing scale, and equipment for stitching up bags. Most of this heavy work was done by himself.

Coal was supplied to the few lock-keepers still about and to people living aboard their boats or in houses and cottages close to the canal. Inevitably they ran into problems with British Waterways, which took time to resolve, and trade was halted in 1977 due to the closure of Blisworth Tunnel for major repairs.

Preserving canal customs

Once he had settled into his new life at Stoke Bruerne, David became a major figure in the local canal community. Realising that so much of the way-of-life of the old working boatmen was fast passing away, he sought to record and preserve as many of their traditions as possible. He wrote several books and numerous magazine articles on them, as well as on his other interest, the railways.

An aspect that David was particularly keen to document related to music. Some working boatmen were accomplished self-taught musicians, especially on the accordion, and pub nights awaiting orders at places like the Greyhound Inn at Hawkesbury Junction are evocatively described in Bread upon the Waters. David learnt to play the accordion and wrote songs. Many of his lyrics had a boating theme and were set to everyday tunes that were popular on the cut, including hymns. In 1972 he recorded an LP of his canal songs for the BBC’s Forgotten Sounds’ series, interspersed with recordings of former boatmen recalling their canal-carrying years. Today that LP forms an invaluable link to waterways history.

David also learned traditional canal painting, acquiring the techniques from the old boat painters who were still around. He also learnt illustrative painting, and several of his pieces appeared in books, both his own and by others – including the front cover of the first edition of his A Canal History of Braunston.

Return to canal carrying

1990 David became a founding member of the Commercial Narrow Boat Operators Association (later the Commercial Boat Operators Association). And when he retired from teaching in 1993, he was able to devote still more time to his passion when his generous patron Malcolm Burge put the restored working boats Clover & Fazeley at his disposal.

In this new venture, David was assisted by his great friend, the former working boatman Les Lapworth, and others. They became a regular sight carrying cargoes in the old way around the canals. Their crews included a number of young enthusiasts, who David and Les trained to ensure their skills were passed on to another generation.

His growing canal celebrity made David the go-to authority for radio and television. In 1998 he was an adviser on the canal-themed Morse episode The Wench is Dead, even helping to refit and repaint the butty-boat Fazeley, which featured as the fictional horse-drawn Barbara Bray in it. More recently David was a major contributor to a BBC series on the history of canals.

Later years

In 2006, the Canal Museum at Stoke Bruerne was in a perilous state due to under-funding, and in danger of closing altogether. David was among those who rallied round to the form the Friends of Stoke Bruerne Museum. Two years later the annual Stoke Bruerne at War event, now well-established, raised money for the museum, which is once again thriving.

Also in 2006, and to mark the 60th anniversary of the Association, David was commissioned by IWA to write its official history (available from IWA’s online shop waterways.org.uk/shop for £4.95). Called The Inland Waterways Association; Saving Britain’s Canal and River Navigations, the book is well illustrated, including photographs taken by David. One poignant one is of his loaned-boats Clover & Fazeley descending the Caen Hill flight on the Kennet & Avon in 1996. David was taking the boats to Bradford-on-Avon to be used in the TV film True Tilda. The canal, which he and others had fought so hard to save, had finally reopened in 1990. David captioned his photograph: “A sight that many believed impossible in the period 1950-1970.”

In June 2014 David was awarded the MBE in recognition of his services towards the restoration of UK waterways. He died of cancer on 12th August 2016 and is survived by his wife, Jean, and two daughters.
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It had always been our dream to cruise the entire connected waterway system, and so as soon as was possible we took retirement and set off. Some nine years later we’ve done what we set out to do. Admittedly, we could have completed it quicker, but we’ve been enjoying ourselves! Along the way we have met so many lovely people, visited wonderful places and had our fair share of interesting experiences, of which our cruise down the Thames Estuary certainly ranks highly.

Boating through the Thames Barrier was something we had always wanted to try, and since these things are often more fun shared with others, we got in touch with St Pancras Cruising Club, which we knew often organised adventurous voyages. They replied to say a Barrier cruise was out of the question in the short-term, but that they were leading a trip to Gravesend in June instead. Were we interested? Here I have to shamefully admit to rushing to my map book, not being entirely sure where Gravesend was in relation to the Barrier. Having ascertained that it is, indeed, the ‘other’ side, we asked if we could join them and were fortunately accepted.

LIMEHOUSE DEPARTURE
In due course all the convoy’s boat crews met at the Cruising Association’s club house in Limehouse Basin for a briefing and a chance to get to know each other. Afterwards, IWA’s Roger Squires spoke about Dartford Creek and the Cray Navigation. He had taken a boat up there as part of a Jubilee cruise in 2012, and wondered whether any of us would be prepared to take our craft there too to help maintain the right to navigation – he didn’t think anyone had been up since. Along with three other boats, we said yes.

The next morning we went out through Bow Locks and down Bow Creek onto the Thames, joining the river opposite the O2. It was raining as we started but the weather soon improved and, after a very interesting trip, we finally arrived in Gravesend in brilliant sunshine. Mooring arrangements were fairly complicated, with all the boats tying up on the shore side of the pier until the ferry stopped running, at which point some would move to the other side. It was decided that the four boats going up the creek would breast up until they set off and, on their return, moor up channel-side.

UP THE CREEK...
The plan was to set off on a rising tide, enter Dartford Creek, go first up the Cray Navigation, turn at the old wharf, head back to the junction and cruise nearly as far as the abandoned lock, where there was room to turn. We would then return to Gravesend and join the others for a pub meal. But you know what they say about best laid plans....

Everything started off well. We arrived at the entrance to the creek at just the right time (namely, when there was enough water to get in!). Roger was on the smallest boat, Panacea, and was leading the way, while we were the third boat. We hadn’t got as far as the junction with the Cray Navigation when Panacea came to an abrupt halt – something had fouled her propeller. We all stopped (not that easy on a tideway!) and discovered the
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first problem – Panacea’s crew couldn’t get the weed hatch open! Two chaps off another boat went aboard to help and eventually, through the application of brute force and strong language, they got it open. Only then came the realisation that five people on the stern of a very small boat was a couple too many – water gushed up through the weed hatch leading to a sudden rush of humanity to the bow!

It transpired that an extremely thick hawser had jammed around the prop. Time was getting short and Panacea was still immobile. Roger suggested there wasn’t opportunity to fit in a cruise on the Cray, but the rest of us should head along Dartford Creek to be at the turning point at about the top of the tide (we’d need the water to turn).

**TURNING POINT**

With one of the boats staying back with Panacea, the rest of us set off. Things went fairly smoothly until near the end, when we came round a fairly tight bend to find a badly moored ‘platform’ that builders had been using, and also a lump of concrete. We managed to successfully manoeuvre past, and lead boat Blesedale (45ft) finally reached the point at which we had been instructed to turn.

However, to our horror we soon realised that in the years since the last narrowboats had visited this waterway, silt had clearly built up beneath. Despite the difficulties, and by now just about broadside on, Blesedale’s crew decided to keep trying. At 57ft, however, we realised that our Deryn Du was never going to be able to make the turn. Instead, we were forced to reverse a full mile, past the obstruction, to a place where there was enough room. Anybody who’s had to reverse a narrowboat for any distance will understand our pain!

We eventually met up again with Panacea, who was now mobile but had waited for us. The other boat had already set off back to Gravesend. Our adventures had taken a lot longer than originally planned, but all three remaining craft managed to get out of the creek while there was still enough water and set off back to the others in sunset on a falling tide. We hadn’t planned to come back in the dark, but we’ve got navigation lights. At least, we had navigation lights – how typical that the first time we really needed them is when a bulb decides to go!

**BACK TO GRAVESEND**

We passed Port of Tilbury as a large car ferry was preparing to leave. It gave us quite a feeling of importance to hear over our VHF radio river traffic control halting its departure until three narrowboats had made passage down river!

We got back to Gravesend at about 10pm. By the time we had moored up it was too late for anything – we had let the others know we weren’t going to make the meal, but it was disappointing to miss out on drinks after as well!

Nevertheless, it was a super experience. While things didn’t quite go to plan, we weren’t foolhardy. We were with people who knew the river, we had been prepared to wait for a good weather forecast, we were wearing life jackets and had VHF radio, and we’d let the relevant authorities know where we were. What’s more, having always known we wanted to tackle tidal water, our trad-stern boat had been built with one or two modifications to make her more suitable, including an engine upgrade. I certainly don’t want to encourage anyone to take risks, but a trip like this is well worth doing if you get the chance and are suitably prepared.
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The first issue of the Bulletin, published 70 years ago in October 1946 for members of the newly formed Inland Waterways Association, was, frankly, something of a rush-job and regarded as a stop-gap until a more prestigious journal could be produced. Robert Aickman, who had founded the Association with Tom Rolt only eight months earlier, was concerned that the membership – which had grown rapidly to 150 individuals – should be informed of IWA's activities and made aware of the many threats to the canals. His desire was to give back something tangible for their one guinea subscription and to create a proactive membership who would report on local conditions and take action where appropriate.

The first issue was produced by the fastest and cheapest method available – by cutting a stencil with a manual typewriter and running off copies on absorbent paper from a rotary inking machine. This system was widely used at the time and surviving copies of the Bulletin are witness to their effectiveness, being still clear and legible.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?
The Bulletin was regarded as a temporary publication since the rather more ambitious plan was for IWA to launch a monthly magazine which Tom Rolt, a professional writer, was planning to edit. It was hoped this would improve the prestige of the Association, as well as helping to raise funds. Yet although the forthcoming publication was announced in the Bulletin, it was never published, partly because Tom was on a lengthy trip to Ireland (while his narrowboat, Cressy, was being refurbished) and partly because of a slightly absurd situation in which neither of the founders could agree on a choice of name.

As a practical boater, Tom wanted a workmanlike title on the lines of 'The Boater' or 'The Cut', whereas Robert petulantly refused to write for...
something that he felt sounded like a trade magazine, preferring a more grandiose title like ‘Horizon’ or ‘Voices’.

“This conflict of wills regarding our title is really most distressing,” Tom wrote to Robert. “In my opinion it is revealing the snag of having too small a council where the personal element counts to an extent that (a) members don’t vote according to their honest judgement for fear of giving offence, or (b), if they do, the member outvoted feels unconvinced and may even smell some sinister connivance at work against him.”

THE ELIZABETH EFFECT

The debut issue of the Bulletin has also secured its place in history for the additional reason that typing it was one of the first tasks assigned to Elizabeth Jane Howard on joining IWA as a part-time secretary. Then aged 24, she was an aspiring author and separated from her husband, the war hero, naturalist and painter, Peter Scott. Strikingly good looking, her presence soon shattered the set routine of life in the Gower Street apartment that Robert shared with his wife, Ray, and which doubled as IWA’s office.

“Jane Howard was so beautiful that continuous problems arose,” wrote Robert Aickman later. “Little in the way of completely normal business was possible or sensible when she was in the room... Jane’s presence had the effect of making everything else in life seem worthless and absurd beside her radiant identity.”

Even so, the work of producing the Bulletin had to go on. Robert dictated the contents (as well as letters and speeches) directly onto the typewriter (just as well, since Jane did not have shorthand). He never faltered, made a mistake or changed his mind and, even after being interrupted by the telephone or a caller, he could pick up from the point where he had left off.

Aabove: Elizabeth Jane Howard on the roof of narrowboat Beatrice with her first husband Peter Scott steering.

“Little in the way of completely normal business was possible or sensible when she was in the room... Jane’s presence had the effect of making everything else in life seem worthless and absurd beside her radiant identity.”

The Association had no money in those days; most people regarded the whole enterprise as a non-starter – a few cranks who were only going to make a fuss about something which wasn’t going to lead to anything,” Jane recalled later. “The combination of Tom and Robert, while they were getting on and approved of each other, was absolutely unbeatable because they were both highly coherent, filled with energy. Robert had the most amazing energy, he could work nearly all day and most of the night.”

CALL TO ACTION

In the first Bulletin three key waterways were identified (as they had already been at the Association’s inaugural meeting in February) as being under particular threat of abandonment: the Kennet & Avon, the south Stratford-upon-Avon, and the River Stour in Suffolk. Aickman urged all members living near any of these waterways “to do everything in their power to arouse interest in the present disgraceful condition of the navigation and our efforts to have them improved”.

Although the first issue may have been a stop-gap at the time, it turned out to be the precursor of regular newsletters to members that kept them informed about all aspects of the IWA-led fight to save Britain’s canal network and another four issues were distributed before the association’s first annual general meeting in May 1947.
Elizabeth Jane Howard decided to resign from her part-time work with the IWA after a further two years. She found Robert Aickman’s undisguised passion for her caused too much emotional turmoil in the Gower Street residence and, in any case, her first full-length novel had been accepted for publication.

A NEW SECRETARY
Aickman continued to produce the Bulletin with a variety of part-time secretaries until 1953, when Ray found that a former schoolfriend, Barbara Balch, was looking for some work. This was the start of a close and loyal working relationship that was to last for 20 years. The pattern was always the same: when Barbara arrived, Robert would merely say “hello” and precede her into the living-room/office where, without any further conversation, he would immediately start to dictate for three hours or more, without a formal break.

At about 5pm Robert would utter the single word “tea” and Barbara would go upstairs to the kitchen to prepare it. In winter, the apartment was so cold that she would delay the tea-making and warm herself over the gas ring. When she returned with the tray, Robert would relax and chat until it was time for her to leave.

AICKMAN’S INPUT
The Bulletin was now being produced on a fairly regular three-monthly basis and had grown greatly in size from the original five pages to 20 or 30 pages, totalling around 10,000 words. Each issue was packed with reports of the latest attempts by the British Transport Commission to close canals and restrict navigation, lengthy accounts of canal-busting cruises, news of IWA events and members’ successes, a regular feature comparing Government expenditure on new motorways to the minute sums set aside for the waterways, and so on.

Although Aickman’s preferred choice of title, ‘Voices’, had not been adopted, his own voice could be heard clearly in each issue. And he had his own quirky method of assembling and editing the publication. Over the preceding months he would collect all relevant correspondence and information in a large wicker basket (of the type used to hold logs for an open fire). When he decided the time was right to produce a Bulletin, he would spread out the material in little piles of subject matter across the living-room floor, and then walk around for hours on end, picking up items and dictating polished editorial copy directly onto the typewriter.

This process – a tour de force – would continue for two or three days until the issue was complete and nothing was allowed to interrupt the work. At the conclusion, Robert would take a by-now-exhausted Barbara for a sustaining meal at one of his favourite restaurants in Soho.

INFLUENCE
Not only had the Bulletin grown in size, it had also grown in influence. As Aickman had developed a large cross-party lobby of MPs who were seriously interested in the future of canals in and around their constituencies, he made certain they were kept up-to-date by sending them copies. When, in 1955, the Government set up a committee of inquiry into the waterways, chaired by Leslie Bowes, Aickman was so horrified to learn Bowes had not seen a single copy of the Bulletin that he immediately despatched the last ten issues to him.

John Smith (later Sir John Smith), the wealthy and well-connected banker who persuaded the National Trust to take on the restoration of the south Stratford-upon-Avon canal, was such an admirer of Aickman’s writing that, in 1960, he wrote a light-hearted satirical piece for a financial journal, comparing the Bulletin with “the noblest of all literary forms, the epic or saga”. He continued:
IWA Bulletin

IWA's current Bulletin – same title, same purpose

In 2010 IWA's Bulletin went digital, and is now emailed twice-monthly to subscribers, of which there are currently 11,000. Editor Marion Birch says the transition to online delivery has been a great way of bolstering one of the Bulletin's original aims – to encourage a proactive membership. She explains: “By using an electronic system for distribution we can interact with subscribers and analyse usage of our publications. We can ask for help contacting MPs or decision-makers about a campaign; we can encourage participation in our work parties; request proxy vote returns for our AGM; provide easy links to email addresses and websites through one click; and raise our profile at election time so candidates sign up to our manifesto. During 2015 our Bulletin pages on the IWA website were accessed nearly 60,000 times, so I think we should consider ourselves successful.”

For all the high-tech wizardry in distribution, however, Marion insists her method of compiling the fortnightly dispatch varies little from Aickman’s famously unorthodox process. “I would say our systems are very similar,” she laughs, “but, instead of a wicker basket, I have folders on the computer (it takes up less room). It is a challenge to get all the information together, especially matching up the right photographs with the appropriate article.”

But if compilation hasn’t changed much, content certainly has over the last seven decades. “The early years of IWA were, of course, interesting times with, literally, groundbreaking news to report,” Marion explains. “We are still writing about restoration projects, but with the expanded waterways and the substantial increase in boaters and other waterway users there is so much more information to cover. I wonder if the early founders of IWA had any idea of the impact their campaigning and direct action would have on the economy of the country and leisure pursuits of the population?”

Despite this, there’s no room for complacency, Marion warns. Recent Bridgewater Canal charges need to be brought to attention, the matter of transferring EA responsibilities to CRT has not yet been resolved and IWA needs to keep the public informed on the impact of projects like HS2 and the Boston Barrier, to list just a few recent examples. Seventy years on, today’s Bulletin continues IWA’s campaign – a dispatch from the front line of the inland waterways fight, keeping members in the loop and, wherever possible, showing ways they can lend a hand.

SUBSCRIBE
Keep up to date with all the latest waterways news by signing up to receive IWA's fortnightly Bulletin to your inbox: waterways.org.uk/bulletin.

LEGACY

When Robert Aickman decided to give up his epic struggle in 1966, it was generally thought the main battle to save the waterways had been won, even though many skirmishes lay ahead. Hugh McKnight, who took over the editorship, wrote in the issue marking IWA’s 20th anniversary: “It seems incredible that a tiny band of idealists even considered they could take on the combined forces of Authority... Who among our earlier members can fail to forget how we were savagely ridiculed for our belief that pleasure boating on the waterways would soon develop into a national pastime, and that hire craft would grow into a flourishing industry?”

The IWA Bulletin – originally published in 1946 as a stencilled stop-gap, and which transformed over time into a smart, printed magazine with photographs – played a key role in bringing about this change in national policy, though at some personal cost to Robert Aickman. He estimated that the 70 issues he produced were the equivalent of six or seven full-length novels – and this over a period when he had been unable to find time for his own professional writing. Later he published seven books of mystery stories, which established an international reputation as a fantasy author that survives to this day.

FROM BULLETIN TO WATERWAYS

The Bulletin was eventually renamed Waterways and evolved into this magazine. Issue No 1 (and those of the following few years) were written by Robert Aickman and the one you are reading today is No 254 in direct lineage. The April 1976 edition (issue No 116) saw the new name and also a format change from booklet to its present A4 magazine style.

Meanwhile, the current Bulletin (or ‘Head Office Bulletin’) was launched in February 1996. Before this there had been intermittent newsletters for IWA officers and committee members, plus a few that were more widely distributed. The new Bulletin succeeded all these occasional (and largely internal) newsletters.

“The central and continuing theme is the struggle of Mr Robert Aickman to rescue the ravished waterways of England from the bestial clutch of the British Transport Commission. As in all epics, there are fabulous digressions... but Mr. Aickman remains a combination of Odysseus and Mrs Pankhurst, tenacious, unquashable, and vocal, a figure of heroic stamp. Meanwhile, the main battle to save the waterways had been won, it was generally thought the struggle in 1966, it was generally thought the
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As the Christmas holidays approach, Alison Smedley has advice for hardy souls who hope to keep cruising in winter.

There are some definite advantages to boating in winter – you’re unlikely to find yourself in a queue for locks, even on the more popular waterways, and the weather can be lovely (after all, it can be pretty wet and horrible in the summer sometimes too). There’s nothing quite like spending Christmas or New Year afloat to add a more exciting element to the festive season and to burn off some calories after all the Christmas parties.

However, there are a few things that boaters should bear in mind, especially if you’ve not been cruising in wintry conditions before.
SAFETY

Our most important advice is to take extra care when working locks and stepping on and off the boat in rain, ice or snow, as surfaces are likely to be slippery. Wear shoes with a good grip.

You also need to be vigilant if boating in the dark, or in thick fog, and allow plenty of time, particularly when operating locks.

Even if you don’t wear a lifejacket the rest of the year, it can be a good idea for winter boating, particularly if boating after sunset or in very cold temperatures (immersion in cold water is more likely to lead to life-threatening situations). It’s always a good idea to wear a lifejacket if boating on rivers or larger waterways.

KEEP WARM

Make sure you’ve got plenty of warm clothes, waterproofs, food and supplies for hot drinks on board. Nothing beats a cozy cabin at the end of a cold day’s boating, so whatever type of heating your boat has, make sure you set off with plenty of fuel. While chances are you will be able to stock up at a boatyard or from one of the various trading boats that sell solid fuel, diesel and gas, you don’t want to get iced in somewhere without enough to keep you warm.

Never be tempted to block up your cabin ventilation, however cold it is outside, due to the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

With diesel heaters, it can be a good idea to clean out the fuel filters before winter, and with solid-fuel stoves autumn is a good time of year to get the flue brushes out and sweep the chimney.

ICE-BREAKING

Boating through ice can be fun – there’s a lovely distinctive tinkling sound when breaking through relatively thin patches. It’s important to take it steady past moored boats and be extra careful if passing GRP or wooden boats. Breaking ice at the sides of the boat (from the bows) can be helpful if you are concerned about any damage to moored boats.

When the ice gets a bit thicker you will find it difficult to steer round bends as the boat will keep cutting through the sheet in a straight line. You will need to stop and manually break the ice (using a boat pole) in front and to the side of the boat in the direction you want to turn, and on the opposite side at the back of the boat.

When the ice gets to a certain thickness it’s probably time to tie up and call it a day! If you get stuck in thick ice, use boat poles to break the sheet manually in front and behind the boat, and you can then take a run up at it to break through a bit more. Afterwards, find a sensible place to tie up until it thaws.

If you do have to moor up to await a thaw, don’t forget to drain down the water systems, including the water pump, if you are leaving the boat.

Never be tempted to block up your cabin ventilation, however cold it is outside, due to the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Wonderful sunrises on clear days can make winter boating a joy, but beware of ice on the gunwales, roof and handrails when you set off, which can be treacherous.
FLOODS

Rivers, and even some canals, can be affected by strong flows and flood conditions – just remember what happened last Christmas in the north of England. If there is heavy rain before you set off, or once you are underway, you will need to keep a close eye on conditions and plan ahead to identify safe locations where you will be able to moor up until water levels reduce.

The Canal & River Trust issues stoppage or restriction notices when flood locks are brought into operation or when a navigation is closed due to flood conditions. You can sign up to receive emails advising you of stoppages and restrictions on particular waterways, or you can check this information at any time on CRT’s website: canalrivertrust.org.uk/notices.

Meanwhile, the Environment Agency issues Strong Stream Advice whenever flows reach a level that could be hazardous to boaters on its navigations. When Strong Stream Advice is in force, red flags, signs and warning lights at various lock sites are activated.

Up-to-date information on any strong stream warnings in force on Environment Agency navigations can be obtained by telephoning EA’s Floodline Information Service on 0845 988 1188. EA operates a messaging system to inform boaters by telephone message, text or email, to advise when Strong Stream Advice has been issued or cancelled. You can sign up for these on EA’s website for Anglian waterways (gov.uk/check-river-conditions-and-closures/anglian-waterways) and for the River Thames (riverconditions.environment-agency.gov.uk).

BOATING IN THE DARK

With shorter days at this time of year, you might well find yourself boating through the dusk and into the night.

Boating in the dark (and indeed boating all through the night) is allowed under CRT bylaws, and by most other navigation authorities, but most hire-boat companies prohibit it. If you are on a hire-boat holiday this winter you will need to make sure your schedule allows for you mooring up before it gets dark.

There’s nothing to stop privately owned boats cruising through the night, and it can make an otherwise uneventful stretch of waterway much more interesting! But do be extra careful – allow plenty of time and make sure you are prepared before you set off.

Ensure your boat has a good headlight, as without it you won’t see where you are going and could cause damage to your own or other craft. If it is difficult to see which way the canal goes ahead of you, use the towpath as a guide as you are more likely to see its bank in low light levels. Should you come across a boat coming the other way, be aware that your headlight might dazzle its crew (and vice versa), so be prepared to turn your headlight off if you think it will help the oncoming boat.

While a headlight alone is sufficient on the narrow canal system, on larger waterways, rivers and freight waterways navigation lights are also required. These should consist of a masthead light (not a headlight), a red light on the port side and a green light on the starboard side, along with a white stern light. Detailed information about requirements for navigation lights on different waterways can be found on IWA’s website: waterways.org.uk/boating/navigating_your_boat/vhf/navigation_lights.

Try to consider moored boats and the people who may be on board – especially if boating late into the evening, through the night or very early in the morning. Sound travels on the water, so avoid having to shout to your crew, and slow well down past moored boats (even slower than you would when boating during the day) to minimise disturbance. Head torches are great inventions and extremely useful when boating in the dark, especially when operating locks.

Night boating on rivers or larger waterways can bring other challenges, and you will need to be on the look out for weir signs and navigation channels that may not be so obvious in the dark.
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**WHAT’S SUP?**

It’s one of the fastest-growing sports in the country, having made the incongruous leap from sunny California to the canals of Blighty. We chat to **ANNI RIDSDILL SMITH**, director of Maldon’s Frangipani Stand Up Paddle School, about its burgeoning popularity and why boaters shouldn’t be nervous about sharing the space.

**Can you briefly explain what SUP is?**

Stand up paddling is one of the fastest-growing water sports in the UK. You stand on a specially designed board, put on a lightweight, easily detachable velcro leash and hold a single-bladed paddle with both hands. You move the paddle from one side of the board to the other as you steer through the water. Most people can master the basic strokes in just an hour or two!

**Why has it become so popular in the UK?**

The basics of SUP on flat, slow-flowing/non-tidal water can be mastered very easily and can be enjoyed by people of all ages and various levels of fitness. It is a very sociable activity and a great way for families and friends to have fun and explore our beautiful waterways.

**Is it just for frustrated surfers, or will people who already enjoy the inland waterways, either by boat or kayak, get a kick out of it too?**

Haha, no! Many of the people we teach have never been involved in any kind of water sports before. All are welcome and it is worth a try to see how you get on. Don’t let age put you off. One of our paddlers is well into her seventies and our children love paddling too.

**Do you need a licence from Canal & River Trust or the relevant navigation authority to SUP on our canals and rivers?**

Yes. You always need to check before you paddle as to what licences or special permissions you need in order to paddle on the water in question or portage across adjacent land. Membership of British Canoeing gives you access to 5,000km of waterways but it does not cover all of them and you may need to purchase a separate licence for your trip. To paddle on our local Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation we purchase annual licences from Essex Waterways Limited. It is really important to do your research and buy the relevant licence for your water use as it costs a fortune to keep these, often ancient, waterways open for us all to enjoy.

**What advantages does SUP have over narrowboating and other more traditional ways of getting out on the water?**

We are not narrowboaters but we love seeing them and chatting to their owners. The great thing about SUP is that you can launch and paddle relatively easily and quickly, giving you the flexibility to move about on the water.

“Don’t let age put you off. One of our paddlers is well into her seventies and our children love paddling too”

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**Paddleboarding at Hoe Mill on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation.**
explore new places. It is extremely relaxing and peaceful – but on a SUP board you can’t put the kettle on to make tea!

How much experience would someone need on a board before heading out on our canals or rivers for the first time?
Please do not underestimate the need to know what you are doing before venturing out onto canals and rivers on a SUP board. We recommend that you invest in some proper tuition from a recognised SUP school. For example, as a British Stand Up Paddle Association (BSUPA) approved school, we run courses for beginners (BSUPA Level 1 Ready to Ride) and for those who wish to explore (BSUPA Level 2 Ready to Tour) or race (BSUPA Level 2 Ready to Race). Check out BSUPA.org.uk to find your local approved SUP school. We advise our students to never take a SUP board into a lock or over a weir, to wear decent footwear when portaging and to take precautions against Weil’s disease.

How did you get into SUP?
Our friend, Drew Woods, runs a SUP school on the River Hamble and he kept telling us to have a go. On the last day of our holiday in Lanzarote a few years ago we had a family lesson with Christian Diaz of SUP Lanzarote and that was it, we were hooked instantly. When we got home Drew sorted us out with SUP boards and paddles – then there was no looking back.

Tell us a bit about Frangipani SUP – why, when and how was it set up?
We live on the banks of the Blackwater Estuary and there is water all around us. Friends and family kept asking us if they could ‘have a go’ on our SUP boards and we soon realised that if we wanted to teach other people, we needed to know how to do so properly. We set up Frangipani SUP Limited as a family ‘lifestyle’ business at the end of 2013 and are now reaching the end of our third full season of teaching and guiding as a British Stand Up Paddle Association (BSUPA) approved school. In 2014 we set up our now very active membership hub, for which we organise paddles twice a month at weekends during the season. We have over 20 different SUP boards and many different styles of paddles that members can use, enabling them to paddle without the need to invest in their own kit until they know exactly what they want. Over the winter we organise ‘hub in the pub’ socials and dinners too.

How has IWA supported you?
We have been corporate members of IWA since we set up the business and we have been warmly welcomed and supported ever since. The folks at Essex Waterways Limited have been completely brilliant to work with. They have helped and encouraged us at all levels within their organisation and they work tirelessly and patiently to keep our beloved Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation in safe working order.

Stand up paddleboarders were, for the first time, able to compete in IWA’s Waterways Triathlon in Essex this year. Did you enter?
That’s such great news and we helped IWA to promote the triathlon for the first time to SUPers. We were already booked onto the River Stour Trust’s ‘S2S’ two-day paddling event on the River Stour that weekend, so sadly we couldn’t enter. Incorporating SUP with other sports into competitive events is gaining in popularity and helping to introduce people to activities they have perhaps not tried before.

What makes the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation such a special place to SUP on?
You are right; it is such a special place. Where do we start? The beauty of its rural stretches takes our breath away. Its history is fascinating and we have met and befriended some lovely waterway users and local organisations along the way, including the good folks at the Sandford Boating Club, Blackwater Boats, Maldon Angling Society and the Maldon and Dengie Canoe Club. The navigation pumps life through our beautiful countryside, it changes every day, and it gives us so much joy. We can paddle on it all year, in all weathers. It’s reliable and constant. It flows through our lives.

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BRANCH FOCUS: NOTTINGHAMSHIRE & DERBYSHIRE

As it prepares to host IWA’s Festival of Water in Ilkeston, 2017 looks set to be a busy one for Notts & Derby Branch. Chairman Mike Snaith profiles its many commitments

The Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Branch covers some of our most beautiful East Midlands waterways. The Trent Navigation forms the main spine, with broad canals leading off and connecting to the rest of the network. The Grand Union (Leicester section) heads south, the Trent & Mersey and Erewash canals lie to the west, while the Nottingham Canal is more central.

Restoration projects abound in this branch, and active support is given to the Derby & Sandiacre Canal Society, Friends of the Cromford Canal and the Grantham Canal Society. In the case of the former, there is much happening behind the scenes. Steady progress is being made on the Cromford too, after successful dredging and restoration of the Cromford section to run the trip-boat Birdswood. Finally, volunteers on the Grantham are all hands to the pumps rebuilding locks 14 and 15, having received £830k from the Heritage Lottery Fund to set up a Heritage Skills Training Centre canalside at Woolsthorpe. The longer term plan is to use the skills gained to restore the remaining two locks of the (seven-lock) Woolsthorpe flight, giving boats on the currently restored ‘A1 section’ full access to the lock-free 20-mile pound. What a sight this would be! The idea is so enticing that WRG has been very active on the project, with several canal camps this year providing training and much support. We are extremely grateful for all the work it does.

Tackling the Trent

Undoubtedly, however, our biggest claim to fame is that the most underused commercial waterway in the country, the Trent Navigation, runs through the heart of the branch. In many areas commercial vessels can be anathema to leisure boaters, but here there is room for all and we have quietly campaigned within the planning frameworks of Nottinghamshire County and Nottingham City Councils to promote waterborne freight. Local development frameworks, waste recycling and mineral plans have all been targeted and amended so that waterborne freight is at the forefront of consideration for transport needs.

At the same time we promote the River Trent as a cruising route and are working with CRT and other branches within the region to encourage greater use of it. Some of the reaches between Nottingham and Newark are the most scenic of the waterway’s entire route from head of navigation to its estuary in the North Sea.

Socials and fundraising

The branch has an active social programme with illustrated talks at the Poppy & Pint at West Bridgford, Nottingham during winter months, and outdoor walks and visits once the days get longer. We also do our best to wheel out the exhibition boards at local festivals, the main event being...
**BRANCH AT A GLANCE**

**Formed:** 1974, initially as the Nottingham Branch

**Local waterways:** River Trent (Cromwell Lock to Derwentmouth), Erewash Canal, Nottingham Canal and Trent & Mersey Canal (from Derwentmouth to the Dove Aqueduct). Restoration waterways include the Grantham Canal, Derby & Sandiacre, and Cromford Canal.

**Membership:** 461

**Claim to fame:** The most underused commercial waterway in the country, the Trent Navigation, runs through the centre of the branch.

**Find out more:** waterways.org.uk/nottingham

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the Nottingham Canal Festival each October. Here the merchandise – Christmas cards in particular – seems to do well. Last year we even managed to persuade a day-hire company to lend a craft to us, which we ran as one of the festival’s trip-boats. A very effective day’s fundraising resulted.

To further bolster our fundraising we hold an annual Lock Wind, which sees volunteers operate the lock on behalf of passing boaters in the hope of a donation. This usually takes place at the first lock, Derwent Mouth, on the Trent & Mersey Canal. It’s a great day out for volunteers and much appreciated by boaters.

The funds raised go to a variety of projects, mostly local but some national. We have made significant donations to the WRG Tools Appeal in the past and the current WRG Van Appeal – the 2015 Lock Wind alone raised £500 for this cause. Locally we support the Grantham, Cromford, Derby and Chesterfield canal restoration projects, donating funds towards the purchase of bricks and raw materials, trip-boats, interpretation panels, mileposts and even a small aluminium work-boat.

We are also fortunate in having the Newark Heritage Barge project on our patch, and have donated funds to aid the purchase and re-plate the hull bottom of the last known Trent (dumb) barge in original condition, the **Leicester Trader**. It’s only when you see the job up close that you realise the scale of the task of accurately bending and fabricating metal plates, then welding them in place across the length and breadth of the gracefully curving hull. You also begin to appreciate the true skills of some of the people working on the project. With good leadership and the right volunteers the results can be outstanding. They may not be paid, but volunteers are priceless.

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**Work parties**

Perhaps what gets our members most active during the year are work parties. We usually organise two canal clean-ups and the odd ‘Balsam Bashing’ foray. We work closely with the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association and aim to clean that waterway before the start of the summer season over a two-day blitz. Then, later in the autumn, we turn our attention to the Nottingham Canal. It is truly amazing what you can fish from a canal, from shiny motorbikes and bicycles, to shopping trolleys, safes and assorted furniture. But what really sticks in my mind was the huge cigarette vending machine hauled out of the Nottingham Canal, and the trophy from Wolverhampton Boxing Club. When the latter was returned to the club its members were very grateful – albeit bemused by its unlikely travels.

It must be acknowledged that sustaining past activities and covering new ground require lots of people to get involved. So much more could be done to protect and restore if we had just a few more hands on deck, especially at committee level after several recent retirements. If this sounds like something you could help with, we’d love to hear from you.

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"They may not be paid, but volunteers are priceless"
IWA at Work

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.

It’s been a busy 12 months. IWA branches will have carried out in the region of 350 work parties by the end of this year. Since May alone, West Country Branch has enticed volunteers to take part in more than 64!

CLEAN-UPS

Northampton Branch has also been tremendously successful of late, attracting a wide range of volunteers to participate in sessions along the canal and river. In September they were again joined by a group from Nationwide in Northampton. Together they worked on the River Nene Town Moorings, tackling vegetation clearance and litter picking. A total of 12 bags of rubbish were filled, alongside a haul of the ubiquitous shopping trollies and bicycles.

Meanwhile green-fingered Milton Keynes Branch blitzed the Pump House garden and forecourt to remove weeds and dead planting, replacing them with new plants donated by Lionhearts Cruising Club.

OTHER WORK

Earlier this year Suffolk County Council received a provisional funding agreement of £77m from the Department for Transport for three Upper Orwell crossings in Ipswich. Deemed a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project by the Secretary of State for Transport, IWA Ipswich Branch provided comprehensive feedback to the public consultation, making specific comments in connection with each of the options proposed.

North East London Branch, meanwhile, embraced its education role with a stand at Angel Canal Festival recently, distributing leaflets about the local area, sharing maps of the national waterways as well as IWA membership forms. They were rewarded with a serenade of canal tunes played on the concertina.

Finally, a day of hard work and focus at Rode Heath near Sandbach by IWA North Staffordshire and South Cheshire Branch resulted in the installation of 30 mooring rings and cleared overgrowth around existing rings. It gives a 150-metre length of mooring along this stretch of the Cheshire Ring, with rings at 5-metre intervals. As part of the ‘Ringing the Ring’ initiative, over 100 rings have been installed, as well as clearance of overgrowth around existing ones at Anderton, Middlewich, Wheelock, Rode Heath and Bosley.

BALSAM BASHES

Work parties supporting IWA’s annual Himalayan Balsam removal campaign came to a close in August. It was gratifying for IWA Warwickshire Branch to note that activities from previous years have led to a significant reduction in the invasive species. They continued their efforts at Myton Fields in Warwick, filling about 50 bags in just one day, which were collected and destroyed by Warwick District Council.

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.
This summer WRG volunteers spent a massive 18,000 volunteer hours on site laying bricks, relining canals, clearing vegetation and uncovering our industrial past. 2016 has seen some major achievements within the canal restoration movement – Dave Evans and his team of volunteers, supported by NWPG and WRG, have recently opened Compasses Bridge on the Wey & Arun Canal and, in the Midlands, Bridge 70 on the Uttoxeter Canal has finally been completed after four years of hard work by Caldon and Uttoxeter Canals Trust and WRG. These successes can only motivate the canal restoration movement and inspire us to do still more in 2017!

Elsewhere on the system progress has been just as impressive. There’s been a huge move forward in the restoration of Inglesham Lock on the Cotswolds Canals. The project, funded by an IWA Appeal in 2010, has seen 4,000 volunteer hours spent there this summer. Volunteers have repointed and repaired damaged brickwork below the waterline and installed scaffolding to allow safe access to the higher levels of the lock chamber walls. The WRG excavator was then used to remove coping stones, allowing for sections of the lock chamber to be taken down to sound brickwork. In September IWA’s Honorary Consultant Engineer, Roy Sutton, and a team of volunteers visited the site to install profile boards so that rebuilding work could start.

Significant steps have now been taken to rebuild a section of the south wall and WRG will be returning to the site next year.

Meanwhile, 3,200 volunteer hours were spent restoring Lock 15 on the Grantham Canal. Throughout 2016 volunteers from the Grantham Canal Trust and CRT Heritage Trainees have been slowly rebuilding the lock chamber walls. In July, WRG volunteers spent four weeks laying thousands of bricks to help raise the level of the chamber wall, followed by several large concrete pours. It is hoped that the coping stones will be back on Lock 15 by 2017 and volunteers can move down to Lock 14 – the next to be restored.

WRG volunteers also took part in an archaeological dig on the Stover Canal, uncovering more of a recently discovered tramroad at Ventiford Basin. The tramroad was constructed to move granite from quarries on Dartmoor down the coast for shipment. The tramroad and canal linked up at Ventiford Basin – and from there stone was carried by barge to Teignmouth. In 2017 WRG volunteers hope to be returning to the site to continue restoration work of the canal basin.

Finally, WRG has worked with the Lapal Canal Trust to start repair work on the canal wall at Harborne Wharf. This project is important to the Trust and it is hoped the work will demonstrate progress to the local community and unlock further funding. During the week volunteers repaired a section of the canal, cleared vegetation and improved access along the towpath.

In November WRG has its annual Bonfire Bash. This year we are working on two canals – the Chesterfield and Cromford on the 5th/6th November. At Chesterfield, the focus will be on scrub bashing, while at Cromford work will continue on the new towpath installation started by WRG NW in July at Ironville.

This year’s Christmas Camp is on the Cotswold Canals from the 26th December-1st January. It’s the perfect way to work off your Christmas dinner with plenty of vegetation clearance, bonfires and other winter activities. Book online at wrg.org.uk.

Looking forward to 2017

Restoration groups have been invited to express an interest in hosting Canal Camps next year and WRG is now arranging site visits to see what projects would benefit most. 2017 is already shaping up to be a busy 12 months, with lots of bricklaying projects on the Grantham and Cotswold canals and interesting archaeological initiatives on the Stover and Monmouthshire canals.

Canal Camp dates and a brochure for 2017 will be available mid-December. Email enquiries@wrg.org.uk with your name and address if you would like to receive one. Find out more at wrg.org.uk or call 01494 783453 ext 604.

WRG has also been helping out on the Monmouthshire Canal this year.
To advertise here please contact Laura Smith  
☎ 01283 742956  l.smith@wwonline.co.uk

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Chesterfield trailboat travesty

I have just received our copy of Waterways and it has some interesting articles. However, the news item about the IWA Trailboat Festival is amazing in that there appeared two, almost identical, photographs of the event in the magazine, and not a trailboat to be seen.

As a regular attendee at these events, and also twice a part-organiser of them, this is incredibly disappointing. Trailboaters put in a great deal of time, money and effort to support these events and IWA’s own magazine barely mentions them. Of course, the opening of Staveley Town Lock was an important part of the event, but so were the numerous boats with their flags during the day and the illuminations at night.

Maybe next time...

Jane Pilgrim
via email

Thanks for getting in touch and giving us an opportunity to remedy this oversight with some pictures of the boats here instead. IWA’s Trailboat Festival is an important part of the Association’s calendar, and we’re pleased to publicise next year’s event well in advance, taking place on the Ashby Canal at Moira, in the heart of the National Forest, from 27th-29th May 2017. Ed.

Aickman article

I much enjoyed Tim Coghlan’s article in the spring issue as it contained some new information about Robert Aickman and his Gower Street apartment, but I think he allowed his imagination to run away with itself in his follow-up letter in the autumn issue.

I know of no evidence to support his statement that Tom Rolt was “certainly involved in an adulterous relationship with Sonia by 1949, much of it going on at Gower Street in sleepovers following IWA meetings”. This is a great injustice to Tom and Sonia, both of whom had a correct, moralistic attitude towards sexual relationships, as illustrated by Tom’s outrage in 1947 when he learned that Robert Aickman had invited Elizabeth Jane Howard on a week’s river boat holiday.

Furthermore, there seems to have been little opportunity for these “sleepovers” since Tom and Angela were away on Cressy from May until the late autumn 1949, engaged on their second attempt to reach Llangollen. They then returned to moor for the winter at Gayton. The breakdown in the formerly friendly relationship between Tom and Robert was starting to emerge when Tom wrote from Gayton his first letter of resignation as IWA Hon Secretary.

In late 1949, Robert invited Tom and Angela to stay at Gower Street to discuss tactics before a crucial meeting they were to hold with the Kennet & Avon Branch, but his offer was rejected. Tom claimed to have “other arrangements which would mean a late return and it would be straining hospitality to park ourselves on you on such occasions as this”. Tom and Angela did not stay again at Gower Street after this.

There is further information about Robert Aickman’s wife, Ray Gregorson, in my book, Race Against Time – How Britain’s Waterways were Saved. She had a traumatic childhood experience when her mother left to live with the family chauffeur, a relationship that ended in a suicide pact. After marrying Ray, Robert wrote to Audrey Linley (the woman whom probably he should have married) explicitly stating that he had married Ray not for love, but out of sympathy. Audrey was desperately upset and feared the worst as she said Robert had always deplored the ‘Noah’s Ark’ aspect of marriage – the way married couples are expected to appear everywhere together!

David Bolton
via email
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