

Minutes of the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of The Inland Waterways Association, held at 2.15 pm on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October at The Guildhall, Lichfield

## PRESENT

121 members were present.

## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr John Fletcher, national chairman, introduced himself and welcomed those present to the meeting. He introduced and welcomed Mr Dave Fletcher, former Chief Executive of British Waterways, a keen boater and vice president of the Association, who had kindly agreed to chair the meeting. He introduced members of the national Council, Sonia Rolt, a vice president of the Association, and staff present.

## APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from: David Smith, Audrey Smith, Mary Sanderson, Jack Sanderson, Madeline Dean, Chris Pinder, Chris Coburn, Doug Beard, Molly Beard, Mary Bielby, Andrew Chappell, Carol McDonald, Richard Drake, Audrey Drake, Derek Bradley, Neil Arlidge, Stephen Foote, Lesley Pryde, Chard Wadley, Stuart Burt, Andrew Lawton, Lynn Lawton, Ben Williams, John Humphries and David Allison-Ber.

## MINUTES

Approval of the minutes of the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting was proposed by Roger Squires and seconded by Margaret Fletcher. They were approved unanimously and signed by Dave Fletcher.

## ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS

Neil Edwards introduced the Association's Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2004, and gave a short presentation of figures from the income and expenditures account.

Eric Woods, chairman of the Burton-upon-Trent National Festival, queried whether the 2004 festival had made a profit as he had not been notified. Neil Edwards confirmed that it had and called on Ian West, who explained that a profit of £40,000 had been publicised early on, and apologised if this had not been passed on to him.

Acceptance of the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2004 and the Report of the Auditors thereon was proposed by Liz Payne and seconded by Clive Henderson. This was unanimously approved.

## AUDITORS

John Reeve proposed and Roger Squires seconded that Baker Tilly be reappointed as auditors to the Association in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act 1985 and that Council be authorised to fix their remuneration. This was unanimously approved.

## ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

The meeting voted to elect the two candidates together and Julia Hones and Gillian Smith were unanimously elected and re-elected to Council respectively.

## CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

John Fletcher began his National Chairman's speech by saying that the formal written report is about 2004. Those who came to the AGM last year had already seen images of most of the main events of last year. He would give a brief report of 2004 to maximise the time for questions and follow his report with some personal thoughts on the future.

First he said that he would give some highlights from 24 pages of the Annual Report for the year ended 31st December 2004. IWA had supported a wide range of waterway restoration projects directly with advice and practical help; through grants; and by helping navigation authorities – particularly the smaller ones. IWA had extended its influence by winning the right to host the World Canals Conference in 2007 and recruited 1774 new members in 2004. Furthering promises made at the last AGM, the Association has researched the membership numbers of corporate members that are themselves membership organisations. With 186 organisations providing figures so far, IWA represents at least 59,462 supporters; this certainly enhances the campaigning ability.

IWA has campaigned on a broad range of issues. Festivals and rallies have highlighted local waterways. The Association has supported the waterway museums' funding campaign; expressed concern about the effect of insufficient grant-in-aid to the two largest navigation authorities; and gave comments to Defra on its review of British Waterways. IWA negotiated with the Environment Agency over its application for a Transport and Works Order. Along with other membership organisations, IWA complained about the state of towing paths and extracted the "Veg pledge" from British Waterways. IWA has been increasingly active campaigning for the protection of the historic built environment of the inland waterways. The formal Wild over Waterways partnership with British Waterways and The Waterways Trust has concluded and the Association has become an advisor.

The Association continues to embrace new technology especially improving e-commerce at [www.iwashop.com](http://www.iwashop.com).

Although not required by the Freedom of Information Act, many minutes of meetings of the Association's committees, as well as its governing Council, have been published on the web site, which helps to make IWA's actions and decision making processes open and accountable to its members, supporters and the public. The full annual report summarises the sterling activities of the Association's 11 regions and 36 branches

John Fletcher thanked all who undertake voluntary work for the Association, at whatever level, and also Neil and his staff, for the support they have given to that work.

John Fletcher remembered the late Ernie Pull as he announced that the Association has been the beneficiary of a legacy of the order of £200,000. For those not aware, he announced the sad news of the death that week of another activist - Ian Gall.

John Fletcher announced that the work of IWA has continued into the current calendar year, and, if there is time at the conclusion of the formal part of the meeting, he would give an informal pictorial presentation of some of this year's events.

Turning to the future, John Fletcher said that last year he commented on serious reservations about the lack of consistency of attitude within British Waterways when it comes to partnering or working with volunteers; those concerns remain. He added that none of the other threats he mentioned last year had gone away: the funding of inland waterways remains a matter of considerable concern.

Bringing members right up to date, John Fletcher reported that IWA considered its response to the current BW Licence Consultation exercise at its Navigation Committee meeting on Saturday 17th September. It did so by taking account of the additional Background Notes supplied by BW, together with extracts from their consultants', Oxera, report. The committee concluded:

1. The current Consultation exercise was ill founded and based on the doubtful interpretation of previously unpublished statistics and was 'result led'.
2. It presented questions that could be read and interpreted in two ways.
3. The Consultants employed had used an economic theory applicable to the open market. BW is a Public Corporation and is in the position of a monopoly supplier of their waterway network. The 'Ramsey conditions' cannot be applied, since it is impossible to create a truly fair system of access charging on a pseudo competitive market.
4. The economic evidence used, especially that on income was also unreliable.

The Navigation Committee concluded that there was a full consultation on the Licensing System in 2002, the outcome of which set the current rules. There has been no case made since then to prompt a move away from that agreed system of Private Pleasure Boat Licences and Business/Commercial Licences, together with the discounts that apply for Heritage Boats, Community Boats and eco-friendly craft. The Ombudsman specifically concluded that he had considered whether a higher charge was justified on the grounds that a boat uses the system more intensively, but pointed out that BW itself rejected that approach in their Consultation Update on 1st August 2002. IWA considers that an Annual Private Pleasure Craft Licence provides access to the system for the full 365 days in the year. The fact that a boater does not cruise every day is their choice, but they all have a licence which offers that facility. IWA supports Continuous Cruisers who operate within their Guidance Notes. It considers that dealing with 'Continuous Moorers' is purely a policing issue. IWA believes that the waterways are for all. That the more they are used, then the better their longer term prospects will be. [Use them or lose them!] It is fundamentally opposed to the imposition of higher charges on Private Pleasure Craft owners doing exactly what the current annual licence allows. It has responded to the BW Consultation Exercise accordingly.

Another significant worry is the consultation by the Marine and Coastguard Agency, who have not been responding to our consultation comments, on changes to the Boatmasters Licence which may be reasonable in the context of large commercial craft on very wide inland navigations, but completely fails to attempt to consider the issues surrounding those inland waterways that are under restoration by volunteers and the way in which the detailed regulation would adversely impact on volunteer operations.

On a more positive note, John Fletcher reported that the Association had allocated at least £100,000 in grant(s) for large restoration projects to commemorate the jubilee. There will be a celebratory festival at Beale Park in 2006 and other activities are planned, such as the jubilee dinner for which Beryl Arnold has booking forms.

John Fletcher reminded members that last year he commented on the various pressures on volunteers of which we needed to take cognizance. This year he said that he wished to be a little introspective and share some personal thoughts on the possible future – beyond the Diamond Jubilee and picked up many isolated comments made in his chairman's page in "Waterways" over the last three years. He said that he was aware that immediately before and during his national chairmanship regulatory and other external requirements have forced the Association to ask more of officers in local parts of the Association and in our national committees. This has created the reaction "But we're volunteers" and he is acutely aware that most members of the Association did not join, or volunteer to help, in the expectation of performing tasks which can appear more akin to

work. Perhaps this is a factor in some areas finding it increasingly difficult to recruit active volunteers. Even those volunteers who are prepared to take on “work-like” roles may have considerable difficulty keeping up to date in taxation, insurance, health and safety, media, retail, and a host of other specialisms associated with running a charity such as ours. And if that is true at branch level, it is felt even more keenly at a national level. Recruiting to some former volunteer roles is proving just as difficult – and understandably so. There was no competition to be National Chairman!

John Fletcher then examined the role of one committee chairman – that of Dr Roger Squires – Chairman of Navigation Committee. The time and effort that he puts into that role far exceeds the effort put in by the chairmen of most voluntary organisations concerned solely with navigation – and those chairmen consider themselves over-burdened! The Inland Waterways Association is a victim in two ways:

- It is a victim because its past successes puts ever-increasing expectations on its performance in the future
- It not only suffers from the general increase in regulation, and litigation prevention, but as the Association has grown in size it has become subject to more rigorous application of regulation

At national level the Association is reliant in the main on volunteers and John Fletcher commented that many members of Council, like himself, are getting older. Society in general is increasingly cash rich and time poor. All the regulation takes that scarce resource - time – not to mention the skills and/or training required.

In 60 years IWA has grown and adapted. In his first address as chairman to an Annual General Meeting, John Fletcher said that he favoured change by evolution – not revolution. Council has tried planning change on a macro scale – but the challenge still remains – even if it has successfully managed evolution on a micro scale. He said that he was now suggesting that at the very least the rate of evolution needs to increase. It has been argued that we are a responsive organisation – but increasingly our response has to be at the drop of a hat – not when a group of volunteers return from boating or holiday and feel like doing it! For that reason and those he described earlier a few more tasks have moved to being led by staff. That has now led to unacceptable pressures on our few hard-working staff. To those who suggest we find more active volunteers John Fletcher would question where to find them especially when the demands put on them will be high – and ever-increasing.

John Fletcher suggested that if IWA is to prosper beyond its diamond jubilee it needs to take a long hard look at how it delivers its objectives. In view of recent attempts he suggested that this may need an objective look from outside the organisation. An objective look may suggest change of an order and at a rate that may stretch the definition of “evolution”. However, he suggested that unless action is taken there is a strong risk that IWA will commence a downward spiral. Just as the waterways have to be “fit for purpose” so the Friends of the Waterways have to be organisationally “fit for purpose”. John Fletcher suggested that the change might not be comfortable but we are not now campaigning in the 40s 50s 60s or even 70s. John Fletcher said that we are campaigning in the 21st century and urged that we catch up. Individually we may look back with smug self-satisfaction at 60 years of volunteering but as an organisation we must look forward with an enlivened vision for the future.

## AWARDS

John Fletcher presented the Branch Achievement Award to Northampton Branch. The branch had supported two events, held excellent open meetings, contributed to campaigning by letter and by persuading MPs.

John Fletcher introduced Dave Dent, the National Awards Officer. Dave Fletcher presented the Cyril Styring Trophy to Ray and Lorrae Carter. The Peter Scott, AP Herbert Market Harbourough and Stuart Burton Trophies were presented to Dave Thompson as there had been no previous opportunity since the Campaign Rally and National Festival. Dave Dent reminded members that nominations for 2006 should be received in Head Office by March 31<sup>st</sup>. Dave Dent announced that the recipients of the Richard Bird medals for 2005 had contributed over 150 years to IWA. Dave Fletcher then presented the awards to Dave Carnell, Ron Cousens, John Fevyer, Derek Payne, Helen Whitehouse and Eric Wood. He announced that Colin Ward had been awarded a Richard Bird medal but this would be presented at a later date as he was not able to be present. John Fletcher then presented a surprise Richard Bird medal to Dave Dent, as he stood down as National Awards Officer.

## QUESTIONS

The chairman then invited questions from members.

David Stevenson queried membership and recruitment, saying that the Waterways for All initiative ten years ago had lost 7,000 members, with the National Association of Boat Owners (NABO) breaking away. NABO's membership never reached more than 2,000, meaning that 5,000 members had disappeared altogether from the scene. He suggested that many of these should be recovered and there should be in addition many more boaters today than ten years ago.

John Fletcher replied that those who left may or may not be available to return but their successors are. Many boaters and walkers are not members of IWA. The question is how to get the message across when there are many competitors. The message of what IWA is achieving and is there to achieve has not been spelt out sufficiently to non-members. It is not a matter of looking back but at looking at what the Association needs to achieve in the future. IWA has not really set aside time to consider what it wants to achieve and how. There is value in standing back and looking from outside. There is value in looking at a range of options, perhaps suggested from outside the organisation. The Association has recently taken on someone with a background in The Princes Trust and BTCV, to consider how the Association portrays itself and how it recruits.

It was suggested that WRG activities cause people to stop and enquire what is happening. Similarly, when boating, individual members must sell the Association.

Stanley Holland commented that NABO also lost members as IWA did and questioned whether emphasising the multi-use of waterways caused boaters to feel neglected.

Dave Fletcher replied that many people do not understand what IWA is and that it is in their interest and in the interest of the waterways to join the Association. Boating alone would not support the costs of running the waterways and it is the other uses that the waterways offer that justify the grant in aid from the government.

In response to a question about cycling, Dave Fletcher commented that cycling is needed but that there needs to be a balance between user groups and that cycling should not be at excessive speed.

John Fletcher thanked Lichfield Branch for providing a splendid venue and praised the catering. Dave Fletcher thanked members for attending and brought the formal proceedings to a close at 3.25 pm and John Fletcher then gave an informal slide presentation.