

Minutes of the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of The Inland Waterways Association, held at 2.00 pm on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September at the Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove.

## PRESENT

90 members were present.

## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr John Fletcher, national chairman, introduced himself and welcomed those present to the meeting. He introduced and welcomed The Viscountess Knollys DL OBE, former chairman of The Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council and a vice president of the Association, who had kindly agreed to chair the meeting. He introduced members of the national Council, and staff present.

## APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from: Andrew Chappell, Dave Carnell, Penny Carnell, John Baylis, Gillian Smith, David Stevenson, Brian Roberts, Ron Heritage, John Pomfret, Ian McDonald, Carol McDonald, Libby Bradshaw, Roger Wilkinson, Stu Carrie, Mike Palmer, Chard Wadley, Andrew Lawton, Mary Bielby, Martin Grundy, Bill Purves, Sandra Purves, Clive Henderson, Helen Henderson, Jude Moore and Robin Bielby.

## MINUTES

Approval of the minutes of the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting was proposed by Vaughan Welch and seconded by Roger Squires. They were approved unanimously and signed by The Viscountess Knollys.

## ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Neil Edwards introduced the Association's Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005.

Philip Sharpe requested an explanation of the transfer of approximately £1 million from the former Campaign Fund to the General Fund. Neil Edwards explained that combining the General Fund and the Campaign Fund to a single fund had been recommended after discussion with the auditors. Both funds could be used for any purpose so long as it was within the Association's charitable purposes, so it was felt to aid clarity by having a single General Fund, and the transfer was an accounting procedure to achieve this amalgamation.

Acceptance of the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005 and the Report of the Auditors thereon was proposed by Ian West and seconded by Roger Squires. This was unanimously approved.

## AUDITORS

Liz Payne proposed and Julia Hones 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 candidates together, and Neil Arlidge, Stuart Burt, Les Etheridge, John Fletcher, Tony Harrison, Judith Moore, Mike Palmer and John Pomfret were unanimously elected to Council to serve a term of three years.

## RESOLUTION CONCERNING MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

A proposal from Council recommending that:

(a) from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007, the subscriptions be amended as follows

Ordinary Member (UK)	£25.00
Family or Joint Adult Membership (UK)	£32.00
Overseas Single Member (Outside UK)	£42.00
Overseas Family or Joint Adult Membership	£46.00
Under 26 (For any member under the age of 26)	£18.00
Senior Citizen (UK)	£17.00
Joint Senior Citizen (UK)	£19.00
Overseas Senior Citizen (Outside UK)	£25.00
Charities, Voluntary Bodies and Navigation Authorities	£43.00
Small Companies, with up to 20 employees	£48.00
Large Companies, with more than 20 employees	£96.00
Single Life Membership (UK)	£375.00
Joint Life Membership (UK)	£480.00
Single Life Membership (Outside UK)	£630.00
Joint Life Membership (Outside UK)	£690.00
Senior Citizen (over 60) Single Life Membership (UK)	£255.00
Joint Senior Citizen (over 60) Life Membership (UK)	£285.00
Senior Citizen Life Membership (Outside UK)	£360.00
Charities and Voluntary Bodies with turnover of under £1,000	£30.00 (new rate)

(b) that monthly membership rates be one twelfth of the annual rate, rounded up to the nearest ten pence, and

(c) that the qualifying age for senior citizen membership rise to 65 (currently 60, but those currently qualifying will continue to do so).

was unanimously agreed.

## CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

John Fletcher began by saying that those who had read the whole Annual Report for 2005 and had read previous reports, would realise that the layout and detail were different – just one of the many regulatory effects on the Association.

He commented that 2005 seemed a long way away but he thought it important to comment on just a few of the events covered in the report, which is technically the year under review.

He said that there was absolutely no doubt in his mind what the most significant event was – a matter dealt with in considerable secrecy for much of 2005 - as the Association struggled to find ways of preventing the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation being liquidated and all the sad consequences that would bring. Having failed all other avenues, IWA had reluctantly set up Essex Waterways Limited to manage the navigation itself, and thereby prevent a catastrophic outcome. This brave decision seemed to have met with universal approval, if some surprise, and had involved

a few volunteers and several members of staff in very considerable additional effort. John Fletcher hoped that the long-term outcome would prove that the decision was right. When he took on the role of national chairman, this is one direction for the Association of which he had no inkling.

The arrangement of insurance that IWA undertakes, essentially for the waterways restoration world, or at least 160 “clients” therein, had also become much more heavily regulated. 2005 was just one year when IWA was able to buck the trend and negotiate premiums downwards and this saved, not only IWA, but most canal restoration societies, considerable amounts.

John Fletcher reported that, in 2005, IWA was active in:

- The red diesel campaign
- Dialogue to minimise the over-regulation which could have been caused as a result of accidents on navigations.
- Persuaded the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to reconsider its recommendations on Boat Master licences in the special circumstances which our inland waterways provide.
- Made a large number of seed-corn grants to waterway restoration schemes and was involved in advising a number of these projects.
- With other user groups IWA persuaded British Waterways to reconsider its attitude to vegetation beside waterways.
- IWA caused a significant change of attitude to the built environment of waterways.
- All the branches contributed to local discussions, and the Committee for Wales to pan-Welsh issues.
- IWA’s web sites went from strength to strength.
- There was a trailboat festival on the Chesterfield Canal, a campaign cruise on the Northern Birmingham Canal Navigations, and the national festival had moved far north for a change – to Preston Brook.
- As ever WRG was active restoring, training and helping with festivals, and John Fletcher commented that the group had more than earned its funding from the Association’s other activities to keep it running.
- The informal association of those involved in Wild over Waterways seemed to work far better than the former formal partnership!
- As ever, in an organisation approaching its diamond jubilee, IWA had lost several stalwarts during 2005 and a number had been listed in the formal report. John Fletcher said that the Association remembered them with affection and gratitude.

In 2005 IWA promised to put in place a review of IWA structures to make the Association fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

John Fletcher then turned to IWA’s diamond jubilee year, which the Association would formally review the following year. He explained that it had been a year in which personal circumstances had kept him out of the mainstream of activity for about 3 months, but, as has become his tradition, if debate dried up before the allotted time is concluded, he would show some slides of his activities since the previous AGM.

He reported that, in the Association’s diamond jubilee year, narrow boat Jubilee had been used like it had never been used before, and said that he would comment further on that later.

The trailboat festival had been held earlier than usual, at Easter, on the Northern Reaches of the Lancaster Canal. Although John Fletcher did not attend, he reported that it was a resounding success and he was intimately involved in that his late wife had organised much of the publicity and the brochure from her hospital bed with him acting as her messenger.

There was a Jubilee Conference at Lancaster University at which John Fletcher gave two of the lectures – one on Margaret Fletcher’s behalf.

The outstandingly successful Jubilee Celebration and Dinner in Stratford on Avon, organised for the Association by the Arnold family, had been held and John Fletcher expressed thanks again to them.

There had been a rather soggy, but still very successful, Campaign Festival at Brookwood – campaigning for adequate funding for the Basingstoke Canal.

John Fletcher reported that IWA’s web site had been re-launched again, and was optimistic that it would continue to go from strength to strength.

He said that he had received nothing but congratulations on the organisation of the Beale Park National Festival, and that he had, unusually, “got serious” in the opening ceremony, and would reprise part of his speech when he talked about the future.

The national festival was immediately followed by the opening of a new bit of waterway part-funded by IWA as part of its jubilee celebrations and worked upon by WRG – the new entrance to the Wilts and Berks Canal at Abingdon.

He then turned to the current AGM and as a final act of celebration of the Association’s Diamond Jubilee, he announced three new honorary life members of the Association

- Major CB Grundy MC of Longdon, near Shrewsbury,
- Mr RJM Sutherland of London W4 and
- Mr OS Turner of Streatley, near Reading

All had joined IWA in 1946, the year the Association was founded, and had remained members 60 years on.

John Fletcher told how Oliver Turner, the Association’s longest serving member recalled meeting Robert Aickman at Aickman’s flat in Gower Street and explained how he came to join IWA.

John Fletcher quoted: *‘I first became interested in the inland waterways when I was investigating the possibility of a job with the Grand Union Canal Company. Although I never did get a job with them, I decided to join IWA and have been a member ever since. Whilst I was a student in Cambridge in 1940 I bought my first boat – a Canadian canoe. I still have the canoe all these years later and my grand children now enjoy paddling it along the river Thames.’*

John Fletcher said that Oliver Turner was present at IWA’s first National Festival & Rally in Market Harborough in 1950 and also recently attended IWA’s Diamond Jubilee National Festival at Beale Park on the Thames at his invitation.

John Fletcher reported that Crick Grundy was a central figure to many IWA campaigns in the early 1960s, and managed the Southern Stratford Canal for The National Trust following the restoration led by the late David Hutchings. He is the last surviving signatory to the original Memorandum and Articles of Association when IWA was first incorporated.

John Fletcher informed the meeting that James Sutherland was an early treasurer of the Association and had accompanied Robert Aickman on his well-documented last passage of the Standedge Tunnel before its closure.

John Fletcher then invited the meeting to salute the three stalwarts.

He thanked everyone who had volunteered and supported the Association over the last year, especially Alison Smedley as she was retiring from Council.

As he moved forward to considering the future, John Fletcher stepped back to the opening ceremony of the national festival at which he appeared to gain considerable resonance when he said, and he quoted again his own words:

*“This year commentators have noted my pessimism about the future of the waterways – they haven’t heard nothing yet!*

*I would be neglecting my duty if I did not use the opportunity to alert you to the dire problems the waterways are about to face.*

*I became chairman when the waterways were enjoying their own ‘never had it so good’ years.*

*Now they face threats the likes of which we have not seen for decades.*

*The very contiguity of the system is threatened by government spending plans, where I suspect the personal ambitions of a few of the most senior politicians outweigh any detriment to the waterways which their plans might cause.*

*Previous administrations have cheerfully flaunted how many people live by or near waterways: how many work beside the waterways: how many take their leisure on or by the waterways.*

*To David Miliband and Gordon Brown I say, “Remember the numbers and be afraid.”*

*I remind them of how articulate the waterway movement has been in campaigns for the past sixty years, and suggest they should be very afraid.”*

John Fletcher brought the meeting up to date by saying that Council had recently set aside £40,000 to campaign on the singular issue of government funding of the waterways. He informed the meeting that IWA proposed a specific letter writing campaign and hoped to organise media-attention-grabbing cruises over this winter, as well as direct argument with the ministers and other government officials concerned. He reported that, during the recent Labour Party conference, it was clear that MPs had no idea of the effect of the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs’ decisions on waterways. IWA was working with the waterways press and other organisations and taking a lead in the campaign to get the message out.

He added that the Association was in the throws of reorganising itself as it promised last year and has debated at some considerable length in the branch and region officers’ meeting that morning.

He informed those present that the Association is moving ahead with revision of national committees with appointments for three years and advertising for vacancies. There will be more formalised appointments and the Association is looking for candidates, and he, at this point, gave first notice that the Association would be advertising.

He then reported on the morning’s branch and region officers’ meeting. He said that he had gone through a list of topics on the recent consultant’s report into the structure of the Association after

first explaining what he perceived to be two misunderstandings. Firstly, he explained that he envisaged Council as making strategic decisions, and, therefore, saw no reason for geographic representation on such a committee. Local representation would, however, be needed on Navigation and Restoration Committees. Secondly, he explained about branch funds, which are funds of the charity. He explained that the Association has been looking for a way forward that answered the difficulties raised by branches who viewed Head Office as taking their funds, and that the solution seemed to be for branches to bank with Head Office, with branches having their own cheque book, and Head Office having an oversight and being able to report to regulators. He explained that it was proposed to reduce the number of trustees to 'nine plus the chairmen of national committees'. The morning meeting had agreed how to stop committees becoming too powerful, and how committee members and chairmen would be appointed. There would be clear written guidelines. He envisaged the Association advertising vacancies and those selecting for committees being answerable. There was a need to maintain local representation on Navigation Committee and to increase it for Restoration Committee. It had been suggested that there was a need to have a regional structure in order to reduce apathy, but John Fletcher argued that the Association currently had regions and this in itself did not reduce apathy.

The idea of some form of branch get-together to share ideas had been suggested and welcomed. He said that branches needed a national lead on issues. He realised that national committee members and trustees needed experience of members in the branches. Instead of regions, something less formal and fit for purpose had been discussed. It had been suggested that corporate members should contribute to the local area of the Association.

John Fletcher said that Council needed to think through the issue of support for branches and how to deal with failing branches, if there were no regions. He explained that after January, Council would need to hone in on the details. Council could change the branch byelaws, but that any changes to IWA's Memorandum and Articles of Association would have to be brought to an AGM or an EGM and approved by the Charity Commission. John Fletcher said that he envisaged bringing any changes to the 2007 AGM for implementation over a one or two year period. In the meanwhile, he sought further input from members and explained that some minor and straightforward changes had already been implemented.

He continued by saying that while the Association debated its internal reorganisation it was important that it did not let its eye wander from the ball as it campaigns – campaigns for more realistic government funding and organisation of such things as the 2007 World Canals Conference, which IWA is hosting in Liverpool next June – the first time a voluntary sector organisation has organised this event either side of the Atlantic. If IWA can (and John Fletcher loosely quoted *Waterways World*) organise a festival as good as any professionally organised event, then he said that he could see only the mildest of challenges in organising a World Canals Conference better than the navigation authorities had done.

He said that there were other things that he wished to comment on in relation to the national festival, but those aspects led naturally on to the awards which are given out at the AGM, and before he commented further he would give members the opportunity to question him on the rest of his report.

He, therefore, closed this part of his speech by thanking the waterway movement in general and IWA members in particular for the very personal support he had received in the previous rather difficult seven months. He said that words were inadequate to express his appreciation, but it was perhaps most markedly felt in response to the spontaneous applause at the conclusion to the eulogy for Margaret Fletcher at her funeral.

## AWARDS

John Fletcher explained that, at Beale Park the Association received three gifts to commemorate its Diamond Jubilee, which had been brought to the AGM for members to see. He said that Harley Crossley had donated one of his oil paintings, which depicts both Anderton Lift and the Falkirk Wheel, and the Association was contemplating the best (or most remunerative) use to which it could be put.

John Fletcher reported that Brian Cassells, President of the Inland Waterways of Ireland who brought a contingent on hire boats to the national festival presented the Association with a piece of Tyrone Crystal. More recently John Fletcher had received a letter from him and his wife which is relevant, and John Fletcher read from it:

*“I want to place on record the thanks of the group for the warmth of the welcome we received at Beale Park. We were made to feel very special and very much enjoyed the experience. The formalities were appreciated by the group but all enjoyed the entertainment, stands, stalls and especially the illuminated boat procession. I know the event will remain a talking topic within our group for some considerable time. Please convey the warmest greetings and best wishes to the membership at your Annual General Meeting from all in the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland. Warmest greetings. Brian and Maree”*

John Fletcher said that Council had yet to decide where it could display this piece of crystal, but it was present for members to see that day at the AGM.

Finally, he informed members that Jane Chalk, exhibiting for the first time at the national festival this year, had presented IWA with a port-hole glass, inscribed with the IWA Diamond Jubilee plaque design. Council had decided to present it as a one-off and permanent award to an individual who had made a very significant contribution to celebrating the diamond jubilee. In all the circumstances, it was a most appropriate award, as it was to be given to the person who dreamed up, was the inspiration for and managed the narrow boat Jubilee cruise and co-ordinated the reporting thereof – **Ian Fletcher**.

Next John Fletcher announced the winners of the branch achievement award as **IWA’s North Lancashire and Cumbria Branch**. This award also had reference to the narrow boat Jubilee cruise – for a long day on *Jubilee* decidedly over and above the call of duty to get back on to timetable; to a most cost effective campaigning tool in the form of a virtual cruise of *Jubilee*, to steady and effective branch activities throughout the years; and in recognition of a Trailboat Festival that one professional commentator had said felt like a mini national festival.

John Fletcher explained that The John Heap Salver was awarded to ‘*an IWA member who has made an outstanding contribution to raise money or to produce ideas to raise money*’. He then announced that the recipient of the award was **Andy Screen** in recognition of, amongst many other things, his work in updating the chapter ‘Funding for Waterway Restoration’ of the Technical Restoration Handbook and the production of regular ‘Funding Updates’ for IWA branches and waterway societies.

John Fletcher then presented Richard Bird medals. He explained that **June Stevenson** could not be at AGM however her partner and branch chairman, Roy Cleverly, had chosen to surprise June with her medal at a recent branch committee meeting. Due to **Theo Brown**’s old age, Jeffrey Roberts, South Wales Branch chairman, collected his Richard Bird medal on his behalf. **Jean Hall** and **Joy Yeates**’ medals were collected for them by their branch chairman Tony Rymell. The Viscountess

Knollys then presented the other medals to **Peter Boyce, Margaret Pitney, John Russell, and Bill and Kay Sinclair.**

## QUESTIONS

The chairman then invited questions from members.

In response to a question from Stanley Holland on waterway funding, John Fletcher explained that IWA is a charity and must not be involved in party politics by law but by its charitable status, would fight for the waterways. The Association has to be politically astute in how it campaigns. There was a need for a significant impact on government. John Fletcher said that he perhaps needed to explain what has happened recently: firstly, the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs had mismanaged the payment of farming subsidies and HM Treasury had recommended the fine imposed by the European Union fall on the Department, but funds for farming were protected, so the cuts were falling on Natural England, national parks and the waterways. IWA now has a common purpose with those organisations. John Fletcher made it clear that it is a government, not a European, decision that the fines fall on the Department. Secondly, a spending review to 2011 has set targets as to how much funding will come out of the Department, but the agricultural part was protected. The result of these two decisions was a third multimillion-pound-cut to British Waterways' budget. The Environment Agency was also suffering cuts. However, British Waterways has admitted the effect of these cuts and IWA was therefore supportive of British Waterways. There is need for a campaign that will make it uncomfortable for ministers. One possibility might be to campaign for waterways to come out of the Department to a better managed part of government. Waterways had not always been a responsibility of the Department, but were there as a consequence of various government reorganisations. If waterways were to move to another department, government could change its stance on the waterways funding issue. In the short term, the campaign must make it politically expedient for government to change its mind on this funding issue. John Fletcher encouraged IWA members and supporters to lobby their local MPs, and in particular to focus on possible effects in their area and to ask MPs to make specific enquiries of relevant ministers within the Department. Letters sent direct to ministers were likely just to be answered by civil servants with a standard text, and go unseen by those in a position to make a difference, whereas parliamentary protocol demanded that correspondence from MPs to ministers had to be seen and signed off by a minister personally. John Fletcher added that there were ways of attracting the media, and he was confident the waterways media was behind the Association on this. He reported that Roger Squires had been looking into media raising events, and added that these could not be organised immediately, but urged members to start writing letters straightaway.

In response to a question by Peter Brown as to whether there should be a different approach to opposition MPs, John Fletcher explained that it is vital to write to the local MP and ask general questions and questions about the effect on that constituency. The protocol for ministers answering MPs was the same regardless of political party. There is a need to influence all parties as IWA did not know which party would win the next general election.

In response to a query from Gillian Bolt about targeting local councillors who were unaware of the effect of these cuts in their area, John Fletcher advised that it was the MPs and the Chancellor of the Exchequer who should be influenced. Nevertheless, there was no harm in also targeting an amenable councillor if he or she might approach an MP on the subject.

Stuart Burt commented that traditionally some had considered British Waterways as the enemy and asked whether we were moving into a new era to oppose a new enemy together. John Fletcher suggested that the navigation authorities might not have always been the culprits even if they were

blamed in the past. In Audrey Smith's time as national chairman, there was a campaign, with British Waterways' connivance, for funding for the backlog of maintenance. IWA has previously worked with British Waterways when it was willing to work with the Association for the Association's objectives. British Waterways had recently been more open about the difficulties it faces.

In response to a query about mail order sales discounts for IWA branches, John Fletcher explained that it had been dealt with extensively in the morning meeting. Neil Edwards added that the Association was in a tougher market for mail order trading generally. There was increased competition from the Internet and other charity Christmas cards. IWA's trading subsidiary company has had to be tougher to ensure it makes a profit. A loss had previously been made on discounted sales to IWA branches. Council had, therefore, freed up branches to trade in their own right and retain all the profit. Branches could now, within certain limits, order from whatever sources their officers wished, but were responsible for their own income and expenditure. The Association, therefore, made a commercial decision on that. Neil Edwards said that he would be happy to discuss any particular issues with individual officers after the meeting.

Roger Squires spoke briefly on the World Canals Conference on 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007 and invited those present to attend it. He said that there would be a gala dinner, a Mersey cruise and tours. Local volunteers would be sought nearer the time. He added that comprehensive details were available on IWA's web site, and that a few copies of the brochure were available at the AGM.

There being no more questions, John Fletcher then gave an informal slide presentation.

John Fletcher thanked the Viscountess Knollys for chairing the meeting, and members of Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire Branch for providing an excellent venue. The Viscountess Knollys thanked members for attending and brought the proceedings to a close at 3.55 pm.