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Autumn 2014
AGENDA
The column of the National Chairman

NEWS
A round-up of the main stories from within IWA and beyond

WATERWAYS OF THE SOUTH WEST MIDLANDS

THE INTERVIEW
We talk to Chelmsford Branch stalwarts Roy and Chris Chandler

IWA NATIONAL RAFFLE
Support waterways restoration nationwide – and maybe win a major prize!

IWA AT WORK
What’s been happening around the branches

INBOX
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DIRECTORY
Who does what at IWA

TEN GOOD REASONS
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1. Campaign for properly funded waterways
2. Provide a voice for you
3. Help improve your local waterways
4. Defend the waterways from unwelcome development
5. Give practical financial and political support for waterways restoration
6. Provide expert advice for waterway managers and restoration groups
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8. Provide over 5,000 days of volunteer labour each year
9. Arrange affordable insurance for waterway organisations
10. Enable greater appreciation of the waterways

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AGENDA
The Column of the National Chairman

In June I was very pleased to attend, by boat, the Chester Campaign Festival. It was an excellent event with the local branch taking every opportunity to promote the aim of the Festival which was to restore the use of the Dee Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal, to allow safe passage for boats onto the upper reaches of the River Dee, and for a new lock in the Old Mill Race on the Handbridge side of the river. Excellent aims that, if achieved, would add a very pleasant section of non-tidal river to the connected inland waterways network. The aims were promoted throughout the Festival particularly on a boat trip for relevant dignitaries down Northgate Locks on the way to the opening ceremony. Talking to people on the trip, I was impressed to hear of the support locally for the project and the interest shown in generally improving the waterways in Chester. The other point which particularly struck me was that some of the dignitaries had not previously travelled through the city on the canal and that they were now seeing the Shropshire Union Canal in a very different light.

As an organisation do we do enough to make politicians and key local decision makers aware of the benefits and delights of our inland waterways in the way that Chester & Merseyside Branch did? I know some branches have arranged boat trips in the past but would suggest we could do more, particularly bearing in mind that politicians change and that we continually need to reinforce our message about the value and delights of the inland waterways.

Action on overstayers
The problem of finding visitor moorings particularly in some popular areas has been an issue for some time. Some people fail to respect the rules and many of us can tell stories of the same boat still moored in the same place for a lengthy, and sometimes very lengthy, period. The issue was made worse by a lack of enforcement by British Waterways and as a result time limits were ignored by some and totally abused by others. We have discussed this issue with BW and Canal & River Trust many times. Action is now being taken by CRT and this is encouraging. Whilst it has taken much longer than we would have liked, it does appear that the position in some areas is starting to improve. I welcome this and will continue to press CRT to ensure that this continues across the network. We must ensure that everybody gets a fair chance to moor at popular locations if we want to encourage people to continue using the waterways.

HS2 Petition
In May we submitted our petition on HS2 Phase 1. Our press release said “IWA does not object to HS2 in principle but the current proposed HS2 route could have an extensive negative impact on the built heritage, tranquillity and amenity value of various canal navigations, their access and enjoyment by the public and their commercial interests.” I believe all supporters of the inland waterways would back what we are aiming to achieve.

Saul Waterways Pageant
August sees the Saul Waterways Pageant, a traditional IWA boat rally being held on the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal. It is aimed at highlighting and supporting the fantastic work being done by the Cotswold Canals Trust in looking to reconnect two of our major rivers – the Thames and the Severn. Much hard work has gone into the rally in a relatively short timescale and I thank all those concerned for their considerable efforts and hope the event will be the success they deserve.

Les Etheridge
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THE FIFTY-FIFTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of THE INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION Will be held at Foxlowe Arts Centre, Market Place, Leek, Staffordshire, ST13 6AD At 2.00 p.m. on Saturday 27th September 2014.

AGENDA

1. To receive, and approve the minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting held on 12th April 2014.


3. To re-appoint Saffery Champness as auditors of the Association in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Acts and to authorise trustees to agree their remuneration.

4. To note the re-appointment of Ray Carter and Gordon Harrower, and appointment of John Butler, as nationally elected trustees for terms of three years.

5. To note the re-appointment of Paul Strudwick as Region Chairman for London Region for a further term of three years, and the appointment of Gareth Jones as Region Chairman for South East Region for a term of three years.

6. To hear an address by the national chairman, Les Etheridge, followed by questions.

By Order of the Council
HELEN ELLIOTT-ADAMS,
Company Secretary

NOTES TO THE AGENDA

Directions to the Annual General Meeting: A map and full directions are available on the Association’s web site (www.waterways.org.uk/agm) or from Head Office.

Lunch Arrangements: Lunch will be available from 1.00 pm at the Foxlowe Arts Centre to those members who have pre-booked in advance. Details are available at www.waterways.org.uk/agm. Refreshments will also be available at the conclusion to the meeting.

Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting: Copies of the minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting held on 12th April 2014 are available on request from Head Office (Island House, Moor Road, Chesham, HP5 1WA – Tel: 01494 783453 – e-mail: iwa@waterways.org.uk) and on the Association’s web site at www.waterways.org.uk/information/minutes_of_meetings/minutes_of_meetings. Minutes of the 2013 AGM, which were approved at the Extraordinary General Meeting, are also available.

Proxies: Any person being a member of the Association is entitled to appoint a proxy to attend and vote on his behalf at the Annual General Meeting. A proxy need not be a member of the Association. Forms for nominating a proxy may be obtained from Head Office, as above, to which they should be returned by 2.00pm on Thursday 25th September 2014, in order to be valid.

Subscription Rates: There are no proposals to raise subscription rates this year.

Trustees Ballot 2014: Ray Carter and Gordon Harrower retire by rotation and there is one vacancy for nationally elected trustees. Nominations were received for John Butler, Ray Carter and Gordon Harrower. Thus, there are three (3) nominations for three (3) vacancies, and no requirement for a ballot this year.

Election of Region Chairmen: The posts of region chairmen for South East Region, London Region and Eastern Region were open for election this year. There was just one nomination each for (a) South East Region, being for Gareth Jones, and (b) London Region, being for Paul Strudwick so there is no ballot this year. Paul Roper retires as chairman of South East Region and did not stand for re-election. Richard Collet-Fenson retires as chairman of Eastern Region and did not stand for re-election. This post is vacant and nominations will be sought again in the November edition of Waterways magazine.

The nomination detail for each of the above trustees is available at www.waterways.org.uk/agm/candidates

Extraordinary General Meeting

IWA’s Extraordinary General Meeting, held on 12th April, to consider revisions to IWA’s Articles of Association, approved both resolutions with large majorities. The minutes of the 2013 AGM were approved by 285 votes for and none against with 29 abstentions. The second resolution, which the amendments to the Articles was approved by 304 votes in favour, 10 votes against and just 1 abstention.

An apology

Some IWA members may have been taken by surprise to find a copy of the proxy form for the Extraordinary General Meeting held on 12th April on the reverse of the mailing sheet insert in the Summer edition (published in May) of Waterways magazine. This was due to an error at the printers (the reverse of the mailing sheet should have been blank). Both the printers and IWA apologise to members for any confusion caused.
IWA Submits HS2 Bill Petition

On 19th May, IWA formally submitted its Petition to the House of Commons against the High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Bill. IWA’s Petition summarises the position the Association has taken on HS2 Phase 1 in its responses to previous consultations and at meetings with HS2 Ltd. IWA does not object to HS2 in principle but the current proposed HS2 route could have an extensive negative impact on the built heritage, tranquillity and amenity value of various waterways, their access and enjoyment by the public and their commercial interests.

IWA’s Petition specifically mentions the following issues that need to be improved because of the impact they could have on the waterways:

- Noise reduction wherever the route crosses or approaches canals.
- Vertical deviations on canal crossings, as the Bill currently allows the route to be lowered by any amount, and raised by up to three metres.
- Waterway Design Principles. IWA wants to see good design, rather than ‘lowest cost’ design, used on canal crossings to ensure minimum negative impact at locations such as Curdworth and Colne Valley.
- Clearances for boats and towpath users around permanent and temporary works to be maintained.
- Redesign of the HS2 link line canal crossings at Fradley to avoid the canal.
- Specific attention to the HS2 underbridge over the Grand Union Canal at Saltley Viaduct, to ensure a positive space is created rather than a dark ‘hole’ everyone avoids.
- Careful design of the Curzon Street Station deck, which arches over Digbeth Branch & Ashford Lock, again to create a positive rather than negative space and to take the opportunity to put something attractive in this part of Birmingham’s inland waterway network.

The Petition submitted by IWA seeks assurance that appropriate steps will be taken to maintain the current character and environment and to minimise the impact on waterways and their associated structures where HS2 crosses and runs close to navigations. CRT seeks similar assurance and on 23rd May, submitted its Petition against the Bill. As in IWA’s Petition, CRT calls for consideration of design quality of waterway crossings, the protection of heritage assets and how to mitigate the affects of noise pollution on waterways. CRT is particularly concerned about how HS2 will affect waterways in a number of locations including the Scrubs Lane area of the Paddington Arm of the Grand Union Canal, the Curzon Street area of Birmingham and Fradley Junction.

IWA has been working with CRT to develop the Hyder Report, which proposes an alternative HS2 route that would avoid multiple crossings of the Trent & Mersey Canal near Fradley.

IWA has and continues to follow a number of routes to object to the Bill. Submission of a formal Petition is just one of these. This is an agreed Parliamentary process that provides individuals, groups and organisations with an opportunity to oppose the Bill or to seek its amendment by appearing in person before a specially-convened Select Committee in either or both Houses of Parliament.

The next step is for the Promoter’s representative, HS2 Ltd, to be provided with a copy of all the Petitions and to respond to petitioners with their counter proposals. Petitioners may then either withdraw, because they are satisfied that their concerns have been addressed, or continue with their Petition. Eventually the Select Committee will consider the specific Petition, and determine what it thinks should be done on the issues raised, before the Bill becomes law.

The principle of HS2 has already been approved by Parliament, in its second reading of the Bill at the end of April this year. The length of time it may take for the Select Committee to consider all the Petitions is not clear. IWA’s Petition has been carefully drawn up in discussion with other interested inland waterway organisations to ensure the ‘waterways voice’ is heard clearly in this difficult debate.
Festival News

SPECTACULAR National Campaign Festival in Chester

With over 120 gaily decorated craft and thousands of people enjoying the sunshine, IWA’s National Campaign Festival in Chester, which took place on 6th-8th June, was a spectacular event. Never before had so many boats, from all over the country, been assembled in the basin at Tower Wharf to support IWA Chester and Merseyside Branch’s campaign to repair and reopen the River Lock leading from all over the country, been assembled for Chester and Merseyside Branch’s campaign from all over the country, been assembled for Chester and Merseyside Branch’s campaign.

The festival was opened by the Lord Mayor of Chester, Councillor Bob Rudd, who acknowledged that Chester had been left behind in making the most of its local waterways, and promised that the newly launched Chester Waterways Strategy would be acted upon. Both IWA and Chester Canal Heritage Trust members have worked with Canal & River Trust, Cheshire West and Chester Council to develop a vision for Chester’s canal and river connection which they believe would be the catalyst for growth and regeneration in the area.

The event featured live music, entertainment, guided tours, free boat trips and children’s activities from IWA’s Wild Over Waterways. The Lyceum Brass Band featured WWI and WWII music as part of a D-Day commemoration and an RAF Spitfire delighted the crowds with five flypasts and a wing wobble.

IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch also organises regular work parties in the basin at Tower Wharf to carry out work such as painting, weeding and litter-picking. The branch has amassed over 200 volunteer hours since they started work in September 2013 and has made a visible difference to the area.

Record Breaking Attendance at Canalway Cavalcade

Record numbers of people came out to enjoy the colourful spectacle and fun at IWA’s 2014 Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice, held over the May Day Bank Holiday weekend. Over 130 boats attended, including a Dutch barge, Azolla, owned by Graeme Heap. She celebrated her 100th birthday at the Cavalcade, en route to her birthplace in the Netherlands.

At the Opening Ceremony on Saturday afternoon, Libby Bradshaw, Events Manager on the organising committee, introduced Richard Parry, Chief Executive of Canal & River Trust, and Les Etheridge, IWA National Chairman. Both emphasised the value of the waterways, the work already achieved and the necessity to continue the job of preserving them. They also stressed the need for more volunteers, not only to work to restore the waterways, but to assist in the organising of such successful events as the Canalway Cavalcade.

Councillor Sarah Richardson, Lord Mayor of the City of Westminster, welcomed everybody and thanked IWA for putting on the event. As has become the tradition at Cavalcade, she then rang the ship’s bell to officially open the festival.

The pageant, after the opening ceremony, and procession of illuminated boats on Sunday evening were very well attended with some remarkable constructions including Nelson’s Column, a replica Boris with one of his bikes and some guards from the Trooping of the Colour. There was a wonderful atmosphere amongst the crowds, throughout the three days of the festival.

The awards were presented by John Edmonds, Vice President of London Region IWA, on Monday afternoon and all the waterborne competitions and processions were supported by British Land.

The Marcus Boudier Trophy, for the best decorated privately entered boat on Saturday’s Pageant, went to Miss Matty, owned by Craig Haslam. The Graham Capelin Award, for the best entry by a boater who has not previously taken part in either the Saturday Pageant or Illuminated Procession of Boats, was awarded to Tryst No. 1, owned by Franze Progatzky.

The Westminster Trophy, sponsored by the City of Westminster for the winner of the Boat Handling Competition, was won by Ray Oakhill on Stronghold. The Roger Squires Trophy, presented by St Pancras Cruising Club in recognition of Roger’s 10 years as their Commodore, for the best novice competitor in the Boat Handling Competition, was awarded to Little Gem, owned by Franze Progatzky.

The Mike Stevens Memorial Trophy, for the ‘Best Boat’ at Canalway Cavalcade, selected from all the boat entries at the event, awarded in recognition of Mike’s outstanding contribution to IWA and Canalway Cavalcade during his lifetime, went to Nimrod, owned by Craig Haslam.

Christine Smith, Publicity Manager, said “I wish to especially thank the young people who have worked so hard supporting me with the publicity this year: Hannah and James Ranken, Lydia Collins, Gemma Bolton and Stephanie Pay. I have waited years for a TV channel to feature Cavalcade and then three came along at once!”

Jerry Sanders, Chairman and Commercial Director of the IWA Canalway Cavalcade Organising Committee said: “Attendance has been record breaking – over 32,000 people came, boosted on Monday by our appearance on BBC Breakfast TV. The traders were extremely busy and many have already booked for next year. I’d like to thank all the 100 volunteers, who helped to organise and set up the event for their hard work and dedication. It was an outstanding success.”

The Vic Trot Memorial Trophy, for the couple in the best ‘Boaters Sunday Best’ costume, was awarded to Robin and Laura Ormerod on Miss Matty.

The Cruise Electric Trophy, for the best illuminated boat in Sunday evening’s procession, went to Tryst No. 1, owned by Tim and Sue Gwynne-Evans.

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Stratford River Festival

Some 130 boats and tens of thousands of visitors attended the Stratford River Festival on 4th-6th July, which had the good fortune to be graced with fine weather. This popular annual event this year commemorated three important anniversaries: the 40th of the reopening of the Upper Avon Navigation; the 50th of the reopening of the Stratford-on-Avon Canal; and the 100th anniversary of the birth of IWA founder Robert Aickman.

Successful Trailboat Festival

Some 40 boats attended IWA’s National Trailboat Festival at Tiverton over the Bank Holiday weekend of 24th-26th May, an event which marked the bicentenary of the Grand Western Canal.

Thousands of visitors enjoyed a boat parade, hot air ballooning and a boat handling competition. In common with many events around the country, torrential rain closed the festival early on the Saturday, but sunny weather on the following two days brought back the crowds, and there was a big turnout for the illuminated boat procession on Sunday night.

The festival also provided the opportunity to celebrate the completion of repairs to the breached embankment at Halberton on the Monday, when several boats moved to nearby Sampford Peverell for a ‘Navvies Fair’, paying tribute to the workers who built the canal.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saul Waterways Pageant

Foremost among forthcoming canal festivals is IWA’s Saul Waterways Pageant over the August bank holiday weekend (24th-26th August). Preparations are well under way for this major event, being staged at the junction of the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal and the Stroudwater Navigation. Water-based competitions will include boat handling, canoeing, tug of war, best boat in bloom, illuminated boat display, best kept engine room, and three cruising awards. Land-based activities will include walking, fishing and cycling.

For further details visit www.waterways.org/events_festivals or call Head Office on 01494 783453.

Banbury Canal Day

Banbury Canal Day – this year with a Cowboys & Indians theme – is being staged on 5th October from 10.30am until 5.30pm.

Banbury Canal Day has grown from a small provincial event to one that attracts boaters, crafters, traders and visitors from all over the country. The main thrust of the day has to be the canal itself, with commercial boats booked in and water taxis to move visitors around the site.

The Mill Arts centre opens its doors for a day of entertainment, food and drink whilst General Foods Garden hosts a free folk concert adjacent to the towpath. Sovereign Wharf is the place for boat rides whilst being entertained by barrel organs as you wait to board. Tooley’s historic boatyard displays engines and boats, with a chance to watch a blacksmith at work. Hook Norton Brewery will keep the ale rolling and ample food outlets will keep hunger at bay.

For further information visit www.banbury.gov.uk/Banbury or call 01295 250340.

2015 National Trailboat Festival bound for Lancaster Canal

IWA’s 2015 National Trailboat Festival will take place at the Westmorland Show Ground, Crooklands, Cumbria, on the northern reaches of the Lancaster Canal over the weekend 30th-31st May 2015.

The festival, which is to be hosted and organised by Lancaster Canal Trust, will be part of the ‘Country Fest’ show, an annual canal-side event. Activities for the whole family, as well as a variety of food and drink providers, exhibitors, food demonstrations, trade stalls, music and dance, craft and a beer festival are planned to entertain visitors over the weekend.

IWA’s annual Trailboat Festivals are usually held on isolated stretches of inland waterway, and aim to promote the restoration or development of a local waterway, a specific feature on it, or to promote an under-used waterway. This year’s IWA National Trailboat Festival was held on the land-locked Grand Western Canal at Tiverton, in Devon, over the Bank Holiday weekend 24th-26th May (see left).
Winding Hole Survey

IWA and the Historic Narrow Boat Club (HNBC) have launched a joint project to gather information about winding holes on the inland waterways. Winding holes, otherwise known as "swinging areas" on rivers and commercial navigations, are purpose built widenings in a waterway to allow boats to turn in order to change direction of travel along the waterway. In the original canal era, winding holes evolved at places where working boats needed to turn (other than at canal junctions and arm entrances), usually in the vicinity of factories or wharves. Now, in the "leisure" canal era, traffic flows – in both pattern and total volume – bear little or no resemblance to the more predictable flows for which the original winding holes were created and located.

The project asks boaters to report, via a survey, on winding holes in the areas they know, or have boated recently, in order to identify where winding holes have been lost (or the size of boat that can use them has been reduced) as a result of siltation, overhanging vegetation, prohibiting notices or chains, or permanently moored boats. It also asks for suggestions for new winding hole locations.

The joint initiative came about because both organisations had started to look at issues relating to winding holes around the same time. IWA’s initial concern was loss of traditional winding holes following instances of them being given over to long term moorings. HNBC’s concern was loss of winding holes in the areas they know, or have boated recently. The information gathered through the results of this survey will allow a greater understanding of the geographical spread of any problems relating to winding holes, and will enable both organisations to lobby navigation authorities about these issues.

A link to the survey can be found at www.waterways.org.uk/winding_hole_survey. The survey closes on 14th November.

Welcome to Kings Lock Chandlery

IWA is pleased to welcome King’s Lock Chandlery as its latest corporate member. The company, based at Middlewich, close to the junction of the Trent & Mersey Canal and the Middlewich Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal, is the UK’s main distributor for Webasto and Vetus. Further information about their full range of services can be found in their advertisements on pages 28 and 37 of this issue.

To celebrate its support for IWA, Kings Lock Chandlery will be offering members a 5% discount on ALL prices, including fuel, pump-outs etc, for the next six months. Members just need to show their membership card when visiting the Chandlery.

For further details contact Kings Lock Chandlery, Booth Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 0JJ, 01606 737564, www.kingslock.co.uk.

IWA and ANT Celebrate Aickman Centenary

On 27th June, IWA and Avon Navigation Trust (ANT) celebrated the centenary of the birth of Robert Aickman, one of IWA’s founders, who led the campaign to re-open the Upper Avon. At 2.30pm, a small group, including representatives from IWA and ANT, gathered at Aickman Lock to mark the centenary.

The area has recently been improved by IWA Warwickshire Branch who refurbished the memorial and repainted the lock, railings, bridge and gantry. The monument to Robert Aickman was originally built alongside the lock at Harvington in 1983 to celebrate his contribution to the local waterways.

After reading Tom Rolt’s book Narrow Boat, Robert Aickman was inspired to take action to save the declining waterway network, and subsequently founded IWA with Rolt in 1946. Aickman led the campaign to re-open the Upper Avon and Southern Stratford Canal in the 1950s and ’60s, and was credited with saving the British waterways network almost in its entirety.

Richard Sanders, Chairman, IWA Warwickshire Branch, said: “The monument to Robert Aickman was built alongside the lock at Harvington which was the final lock in the restoration of navigation of the Warwickshire Avon between Stratford upon Avon and Evesham. IWA Warwickshire Branch members thought it fitting to repair the effects of numerous floods over the last 30 years. The monument has been cleaned and damaged bricks replaced and the bronze portrait of Robert Aickman burnished. In addition, over 200 volunteer hours have been spent at the lock, which bears his name, cleaning and re-painting the lock gates and the two associated bridges.”

Clive Matthews, General Manager of ANT said: “We are very grateful to IWA Warwickshire Branch for the splendid work they have carried out in the refurbishment of the Robert Aickman Memorial and Lock. The Avon Navigation has a 375-year history and the Avon was one of the first rivers to be made navigable in the country. The restoration of the Lower Avon navigation dates back 65 years and was the first restoration supported by IWA and the first of its kind in the country. The River Avon owes a great deal to Robert Aickman and the support of the IWA.”

Further celebrations took place at the Stratford River Festival over the weekend of 5th-6th July (see page 9).
Dredging on the Slough Arm

Dredging on the Slough Arm of the Grand Union Canal, which commenced the week beginning 21st April, has continued following a slow start due to silt disposal complications.

Canal & River Trust’s plan is for the main dredging to occur between Highline Boatyard and Slough Basin, a stretch that includes the location of the Slough Canal Festival. This is to be followed by spot dredging between Highline Boatyard and Cowley Peachey Junction.

The dredging got off to a slow start because CRT had hoped to dispose of the silt at a local tip, but the owners refused to take the silt when they saw the water content. As a result, the silt is having to be taken to Peterborough for disposal, which necessitated the sourcing of extra lorries and will substantially increase the overall cost of the operation.

At the end of June, the dredger was between Bridges 11 and 12. CRT intended to finish this stretch of dredging and remove the disused jetty at the terminus of the Arm before starting the planned spot dredging. CRT has said that once dredging is completed its contractors will begin weed removal along the length of the Arm. CRT also plans to spray and remove Floating Pennywort.

CRT’s dredging and weeding of the Slough Arm should improve navigation and mooring for those who wish to attend the Slough Canal Festival over the weekend of 13th-14th September. It is hoped that the work, once completed, will also encourage greater use of the Arm throughout the year.

Northampton Arm Navigation Conditions

IWA Northampton Branch has passed on information gathered through IWA members with regards to the condition of the Northampton Arm of the Grand Union Canal, a step that was taken after Canal & River Trust dismissed the need for dredging of the navigation at its South East Waterways Forum in April.

The branch has since met CRT management and agreed the following plan.

There are regular issues with pounds between locks 5-6, 6-7 and to a lesser extent 8-9. CRT already has a stoppage booked for the Arm for 24th November to 19th December with the attention of addressing these issues.

The branch arranged with Nick Wolf for him to take his working boat Aldgate down and back up the Arm in July, with CRT in attendance, to record all issues regarding defects, vegetation works and dredging. CRT defect notifications will be updated based upon the information supplied by the branch to support spot dredging activity and also leakage at Lock 17. In terms of spot dredging, CRT will include in the plan, works to undertake local silt removal in the first quarter of 2015.

CRT provided data on the proposed removal of reed growth using a heavier duty reed cutter, and these works will be phased in for late winter 2014.

IWA Northampton Branch is pleased with the plan as it represents progress in its campaign to improve the condition of the Northampton Arm.

David Blagrove appointed MBE

IWA is delighted to report that IWA Vice President David Blagrove was appointed an MBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours on 14th June.

David has been a life-long supporter of the inland waterways since growing up beside the Thames at Abingdon. He subsequently spent many years in commercial carrying on the canals and two spells as an IWA trustee, and he is an ever-enthusiastic supporter for waterway traditions, canal history and promotion of freight carriage on the waterways. A keen educationalist (David was a teacher by profession before retirement), his waterway books are widely read and he provided a column for IWA’s Waterways magazine for many years.

David Blagrove and CRT chief executive Richard Parry.

David is currently chairman of the Friends of the Canal Museum at Stoke Bruerne, and so the timing of the announcement of the honour, coinciding with the Friends’ annual family festival at Stoke Bruerne, where David has lived for many years, was highly appropriate.

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KEEPING OUR WATERWAYS ALIVE

Early 200 years after Southland Lock on the Wey & Arun Canal was built, restoration work is complete and boats can use it once again.

The official opening of the restored lock was marked by an event organised by the Wey & Arun Canal Trust (WACT) on Saturday 21st June to celebrate completion of the three-year project. More than 150 people attended the event to see Simon Carter officially open the lock and hear music from the Friary Guildford Brass Band.

The lock was originally built between 1813 and 1816 but was demolished in the 1930s when the canal had fallen into disuse and many of the bricks re-used on other local building projects. Reconstruction of the lock was a major challenge for the Trust, not just financially but also logistically as the site is located more than a mile from the nearest public road. Both of these difficulties were eased thanks to the help of local landowners with the logistics and the WACT volunteers, whose work saved £125,000. The restoration cost around £500,000.

With Southland Lock completed, the focus of the restoration work will now move northwards. WACT is working on major restoration schemes near Bramley at the northern end of the canal and near Dunsfold at the summit of the waterway.

Historic Wey & Arun Lock Reopened

On Saturday 21st June, nine paddlers in six canoes and kayaks assembled at Wharf Tavern in Hockley to replicate and celebrate Michael Fox and John Pinder’s 1957 journey that saved the Stratford upon Avon Canal from closure.

In March 1957, Michael Fox bought the required ticket and hired a Canadian Canoe from J. Vincent David Pleasure Boat Hirers, which he, accompanied by John Pinder and other paddlers, paddled along the Stratford-on-Avon Canal from Stratford-on-Avon to Hockley Heath over six weekends, leaving the canoe behind hedges during the week. This ticket was later produced as evidence to demonstrate the canal had been navigated in the previous three years when Warwickshire County Council sought to close the navigation to reduce their costs when replacing a bridge in Wilmcote in 1958. This evidence prevented the Council from closing the canal and allowed volunteers to restore it under a lease taken out by the National Trust that same year.

It is now widely recognised that the efforts of these two canoeists helped turn the tide for Britain’s neglected canals and the event in June was a fitting tribute to the pair’s foresight and endeavour. Michael Fox died on 20th June last year but his daughter Geraldine Dahlke was amongst the paddlers who were set off by John Pinder after local Canal & River Trust waterway manager Ian Lane said a few words to commemorate the occasion.

Several Stratford Canal Society members took part including Ian West, Clive Henderson and recently joined member and CRT Chief Executive Richard Parry. Two of the modern kayakers, Joe Clench and Mark Kelly from Stratford, were so keen to demonstrate the benefits of an open and restored waterway that they paddled all the 15 miles home to Stratford, arriving at 11pm that evening.

Wharf Tavern, which marked the start of the event on Saturday, was also the venue for the first committee meeting of the Stratford-on-Avon Canal Society on Monday 27th November 1956 with Messrs Fox (Hon Secretary) and Pinder. It was also reported that the previous evening a meeting took place between Robert Aickman, Don Burton, Pat Saunders and Michael Fox discussing the most effective policy that could be adopted by the Society for opening up the southern section of the canal. The canoe trip less than four months later was a crucial action.

Further celebrations of the reopening of the canal took place in Stratford over the weekend of 4th-6th July when IWA, with the Stratford-on-Avon Canal Society and CRT, shared a marquee beside the basin throughout the weekend to celebrate the history of the restoration work through pictures and home cine presentations.

Paddlers Celebrate Journey that Saved Canal

The first narrowboat in almost 80 years has navigated a newly-restored stretch on the Montgomery Canal.

The 450m length between Redwith and Pryces Bridge was completed in May by volunteers from the Shropshire Union Canal Society who have worked on the project over the past six years. The first cargo to navigate the length was a barrel of beer, the traditional offering on the completion of a canal to the navvies who would have built it.

Volunteers now plan to move on to restore the next section of the canal to Cricklethorpe Wharf.

Restored Stretch of the Montgomery Canal Opens

Paddling across Edstone Aqueduct in 1957.
WRG’s Summer of Canal Restoration

Waterway Recovery Group’s summer season of canal restoration kicked off on Saturday 5th July with over 60 volunteers spending the week working on three different projects: on the Grantham Canal in Nottinghamshire, the Monmouthshire Canal in South Wales and the Cotswold Canals in Gloucestershire.

There are 22 Canal Camps this summer, to which volunteers are invited to get their hands dirty and try something completely different. Some of the tasks lined up this year include: starting the restoration of Inglesham Lock on the Cotswold Canals near Lechlade; relining a section of the Lancaster Canal at Stainton; and, a new addition, carrying out towpath improvement work on the Pocklington Canal in East Yorkshire. WRG Camps offer volunteers a fantastic chance to learn new skills such as bricklaying, stone walling, machine operation and other restoration techniques.

Last year WRG volunteers spent nearly 5,000 volunteer days helping restore the canals of England and Wales on canal camps and weekend digs.

With more volunteering opportunities on offer this summer, it is hoped that even greater progress can be made on a number of restoration projects. To join them contact Jenny Black at Head Office, telephone 0194 783453, ext 604, or visit www.wrg.org.uk.

WRG has recently replaced its Beavertail lorry and Land Rover with a new Iveco van. The decision was made to replace these vehicles due to the strict regulations relating to the operation of Beavertail lorries and the age of the Land Rover.

The replacement vehicle, an Iveco heavy-duty, twin-wheeled van with all terrain tyres and diff-lock, was chosen as it can meet the needs of WRG with greater reliability and less cost than the Beavertail lorry and Land Rover. The purchase of the van was largely funded by the sale of the Beavertail lorry and Land Rover with the difference coming from WRG restricted funds held by IWA.

Successful Restoration Workshop

In May IWA held, in conjunction with Canal & River Trust, the first of what is hoped to become an annual waterway restoration workshop. Over 80 delegates from 40 waterway restoration projects attended, as well as key representatives from IWA and CRT.

Principle objectives were: to advise local restoration groups on what strategic support and help is available; for the groups to let IWA and CRT know what further support they might need; to further develop networking between groups; to share good practice and acknowledge success; to launch a restoration video and a new restoration guide; to promote the results of recent research carried out by the University of Northampton re-examining the benefits and the impacts of recent restorations on surrounding areas.

There were speakers from Cotswold Canals Trust, Wiltshire, Swindon & Oxfordshire Canal Partnership (covering the Wilts & Berks Canal) and the Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust, all sharing their experiences. There followed sessions on the considerations facing restoration groups, such as securing funding and maximising training opportunities.

It was announced that there would be a review of all restoration projects based on the reports produced by The Inland Waterways Advisory Council before its abolition. Questionnaires designed to record the progress of restorations will shortly be sent to all known projects.

The workshop was a success; plans to run the event next year are underway with a date to be announced soon.
Cotswold Canals Trust (CCT) has postponed the submission of its bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the restoration of the next stage of the Cotswold Canals until November 2015.

CCT is the lead partner in the next stage of the restoration of the Cotswolds Canal, Phase 1B. This phase plans to restore the four-mile section of canal from Saul Junction to Stonehouse and connect the restored canal to the national navigable waterways network.

Planned work for Phase 1B of the restoration includes the installation of new bridges at Walk Bridge near Saul, the creation of a new canal channel next to the River Frome under the M5, installation of two new bridges under the A38 and a new bridge under the main north-south railway line, and the building of a mile of new canal.

CCT members and others have been working on an HLF bid since June 2013. The Trust had planned to submit the bid in November 2014 but have postponed submission at the suggestion of HLF. This is because the restoration of the section from Stonehouse to east of Bowbridge (Phase 1A) must be substantially complete before the bid goes in and the Phase 1B bid must be transparently based on an evaluation of Phase 1A.

Secondly, the bid for Phase 1B, which will be one of the most expensive HLF funded projects in the country, must be of a high standard in all sections. This includes the engineering details and plans to manage the canal once it is open. The Trust must also show how local communities, including people of all ages, interests and abilities, will be actively involved with the project and how the natural environment, local economy and cultural heritage will benefit. This is a large amount of information to collate and will take until 2015 to complete properly.

Property Management Assistance

IWA’s subsidiary company Essex Waterways Ltd manages a substantial area of land alongside the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation, as well as a number of buildings, structures and other property. Much of the land has been with the original Navigation Company since the 1790s when the waterway was first built, and in some cases has been subject to only very informal management.

Getting unregistered land recorded with the Land Registry, determining exact boundaries and legal responsibilities with neighbouring farmers and other landowners, and checking the safety, condition and structural integrity of built structures and other assets is a time-consuming business, and Essex Waterways is looking for some further voluntary assistance in these tasks.

Some of the work will require site visits and inspections, and possibly visits to the Navigation Company’s archives at Essex Record Office in Chelmsford. However, there is also scope for desktop work for volunteers, particularly in interrogating the Land Registry website for registered boundaries of neighbouring properties and other information, which could be undertaken by one or more volunteers based anywhere in the country, so long as they have an Internet connection and some familiarity in the subject.

If you would be interested in assisting, please contact Roy Chandler (chairman, Essex Waterways) or Neil Edwards (chief executive at Head Office) with a summary of any relevant experience you may have in these areas, to discuss further.
More Freight on the Thames

Recent Port of London statistics show that in 2013 ‘internal’ waterborne freight on the Thames amounted to 5.3 million tonnes, up from 3.2 million in 2012 and 2.2 million in 2011. This is clearly good news for those of us promoting water freight but it is as well to remember that most of this increase is accounted for by one-off demand. With work on Thames Water’s Lee Tunnel nearing completion and that on their Thames Tideway Tunnel still to get under way the traffic is largely that related to Crossrail’s Tunnel work.

In mid-2013 an interesting Dutch-owned barge appeared on the Thames operating on charter to S Walsh & Sons. The Brabant Hopper, with its forward, hydraulically adjustable wheelhouse and high degree of manoeuvrability, was designed as a container ‘feeder’ barge (32 TEU) but on the Thames was used mainly on the tunnel spoil run from Beckton to the Thurrock Thameside Nature Park development by way of Cory’s Mucking wharf. Perhaps at 840 dwt the vessel was a bit small and Walsh did not extend the charter and Brabant Hopper has returned to Holland – whether or not the Dutch boatmen want it back is open to question – it has no car crane! Walsh has now acquired a 1956 Dutch-built barge of 78 x 9m and 1,160 dwt formerly the Cascade and now operating as SWS London mainly on tunnel spoil movement to Mucking.

There has been quite a gathering of smaller seagoing ships of less that 2,500 dwt very actively engaged in moving Crossrail tunnel spoil from Barking to Northfleet and from there to the Wallasea Island RSPB scheme on the Crouch River. Spill from the western section of the Crossrail tunnel is rail hauled from Royal Oak to Northfleet also for transport by ship to the two-ship discharging wharf at Wallasea. This is very much an intensive shuttle service and in a recent one-week period nine Barking-Northfleet sailings were recorded and 15 from Northfleet to Wallasea. The small ships involved are mainly Russian owned and Norwegian managed.

CRT and Freight

British Waterways could never have been praised for its approach to freight movement on the waterways and it is greatly to the Canal & River Trust’s credit that at a time of mounting concern on environmental factors, it has adopted a more positive, proactive strategy with the appointment of a freight advisory group (FAG). IWA and its freight group have always encouraged the greatest possible use of the waterways for freight movement and this may have special significance this year as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of one of our founding members, Robert Aickman.

Rather than adopt a blanket approach the FAG’s first report with recommendations wisely identifies priority routes, namely the Ouse to Selby, the Aire & Calder and the Sheffield & South Yorkshire Navigation for which viability and potential can be identified and also the infrastructure needed to remove obstacles to the use of larger barges. IWA certainly welcomes the creation for this purpose of a steering group to take this initiative forward and there are welcome signs that the Commercial Boat Owners Association, Associated British Ports, the local Enterprise Partnership and numerous other organisations and commercial interests are working together to take things forward.

IWA is strongly of the view that this should not be to the detriment of other waterways with freight potential, the Trent, Weaver, Severn and Lower Lea being obvious examples, and welcomes the FAG recommendation that they are worthy of further review, possibly with the advantage of lessons learned from the priority waterways, and that any specific opportunity for freight movement on them should be accommodated.

IWA Bulletin

Members are reminded that the Association produces a Bulletin of the latest news from around the waterways and on the Association’s activities twice per month, which is sent by e-mail to members. If you are not already on the mailing list and would like to receive Bulletin, please advise the membership team at Head Office (membership@waterways.org.uk). Bulletins are also available at www.waterways.org.uk/bulletin.

Best Ever Monty Triathlon

The 2014 Montgomery Canal Triathlon, organised by Friends of the Montgomery Canal and IWA Shrewsbury, District & North Wales Branch, was the biggest yet with nearly 300 people taking part. More than twice as many people participated in the triathlon held on 10th May than in previous years. Entrants came from across the country and were supported throughout the event by a team of volunteers.

The participant who completed the 35 miles in the shortest time was Moses Tumukende, who ran the entire length in 4 hours 48 minutes. The fastest triathlete was Jean Ashley, who completed the course in 5 hours 15 minutes, 30 minutes faster than the previous best time.

Canal & River Trust Chief Executive Richard Parry also entered the event to raise money for CRT. After he had finished the 35 mile course, Mr Parry presented medallions to entrants who had completed one, two or all three sections of the triathlon.

The Triathlon is organised to support the Maesbury Canal Festival, planned for 6th-7th September this year.
Large selection of cards, gifts, waterways books and clearance stock
at big discounts all available online

Buy at www.iwashop.com or call 01494 783453

**Christmas Cards & Calendars**

**Christmas Cards - £3.60 Per Pack**
Printed on high quality card. Supplied in packs of ten of one design. Includes envelopes. 178mm x 127mm (7” x 5”). Designs taken from original paintings and photographs are the copyright of the artist or photographer. Message inside reads “With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year”.

**Bargain Packs**
All bargain packs consist of a mixture of designs from previous years. With envelopes.

- **Bargain Pack A** Code X025 - £12.95
  60 Christmas Cards. Five cards each of twelve traditional paintings.

- **Bargain Pack B** Code X026 - £8.75
  40 Christmas Cards. Five cards each of eight traditional paintings.

**Bargain Pack C** Code X027 - £5.75
25 Christmas Cards. Five cards each of five traditional paintings.

- Designs may vary from those illustrated.

**Other cards available include…**

- **Flatford Bridge, River Stour** Code X004 - £2.25
  From an original painting by Alan Bamford. Message inside: “Season’s Greetings”.

- **Winter on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal** Code X015 - £2.95
  From an original painting by Alan Bamford.

- **Into the Mist** Code X019 - £3.25
  From an original painting by Alan Firth.

- **Winter Twilight at Cheddleton Wharf** Code X016 - £2.25
  From an original painting by David Wright.

- **Heading for Home** Code X020 - £2.95
  From an original painting by Alan Firth.

- **Gas Street Basin** Code X023 - £2.95
  From an original painting by Alan Bamford.

- **2015 IWA Calendar - £3.60**
  One month to view with space for daily notes. Twelve months from January 2015 to December 2015, illustrated with a waterway scene in a detachable postcard format. 320mm x 172mm (12.5” x 7”) approximately. Envelopes for the calendar are available separately.

**Calendar Envelope** Code X036 - £0.20

- **Flatford Bridge, River Stour** Code X004 - £2.25
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Maps & Guides

**Heron Maps**
£5.99 each (unless otherwise stated)
Includes navigation and historical information, visitor moorings, marinas and boatyards, boat hire, shops and distance markers, tourist information centres, pubs, nature reserves, parks, long distance paths, public toilets and caravan and camp sites.

- The Broads Code HM11
- Avon Ring and Droitwich Ring Code HM09 - £6.50
- Birmingham Canal Navigations Code HM16
- Grand Union: Braunston to Kings Langley Code HM17
- Grand Union: Birmingham to Milton Keynes Code HM19
- GU Canal: Stoke Bruerne to Leicester Code HM21 New
- Kennet & Avon Canal and River Avon Code HM10
- Llangollen & Montgomery Canals Code HM13
- Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Code HM15
- Oxford Canal Code HM14
- Stourport Ring & Droitwich Ring Code HM20 - £6.50
- River Thames and the Thames Path Code HM12

**Imray Maps and Guides**

- The River Thames Code IM06 - £9.95
- River Thames map Code IM55 - £6.95
- Fenland Waterways Code IM69 - £7.95
- River Great Ouse Code IM68 - £8.95
- The River Nene Code IM03 - £7.95
- Waterways of GB Map Code IM57 - £8.95

**Towpath Guides - Nick Corble**
Reduced from £12.99 to £5.00 each
- Grand Union North Code TG03
- South Oxford Canal Code TG01

**Chris Clegg’s Time Map**
Code CC01 - £4.00*
Calculate the time to cruise between places, just count the dots and multiply by 2 hours. Smaller maps also included. Laminated.

**GEOprojects Maps**
£3.00 each (reduced from £4.05)
Fold out maps that include useful contact numbers, camping facilities, long and short term mooring sites and local services.

- Lancaster Canal Code GP34
- River Nene Code GP37
- Shropshire Union Canal Code GP20
- Basingstoke Canal & Way Code GP35
- Chesterfield Canal: Code GP36
- Coventry & Ashby Canal Code GP05
- Fort William & Clyde Canal Code GP06
- GU Part 4 Leicester, Soar & Erewash Code GP10
- South Pennine Ring Code GP30
- Staffs & Worcester Canal & River Severn Code GP21
- Trent & Mersey 1: West of Burton-on-Trent Code GP23
- Trent & Mersey 2: East of Great Heywood Code GP24
- Worcester & Birmingham Canal (2nd ed.) Code GP39

**Nicholson’s Guides**

Pearson’s Canal Companions
£9.95 each
Large scale maps, with waterside town and village listings of eating and drinking, shopping and boating facilities.

- Cheshire Ring Code PE18
- Four Counties Ring Code PE03
- Kennet and Avon Code PE15
- East Midlands Code PE19 New
- River Severn & Avon Ring Code PE01
- Stourport Ring Code PE07
- Welsh Waters Code PE04
- South Midlands/Warwickshire Ring Code PE05
- Grand Union and Oxford Canals Code PE09

**Lauderette List**
Code CC02 - £4.50*
Shows towns and villages with laundrettes and directions from the waterway. Size A4, 24 pages. Softback.

- Complete Guide to the Lancaster Canal Code LC02 - £6.50

**Waterway Routes DVDs**
All at half price or less - see website
With maps and commentary, an information booklet and a fold out map.

**DVDs by VideoActive**
£12.99 each (unless otherwise stated)
Guide to the waterways (approx 1 hour)
- Cheshire Ring Code VA50
- Four Counties Ring Code VA55
- Llangollen Canal Code VA93
- London Ring Code VA117
- Shropshire Union Cruise Code VAO9
- River Trent Code VA96
- Trent & Mersey Canal Code VA77
- Kennet & Avon Canal Parts 1 & 2 Code VA101 - £18.98
- Leeds & L’pool Canal, Parts 1 & 2 Code VA100 - £18.98
- Ribble Link Code VA68 - Reduced from £14.99 to £3.50
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Early July saw crowds flock to the Stratford River Festival, an event covered in the news pages in this issue. It marked two significant restoration anniversaries: the 50th of the reopening of the Stratford-on-Avon Canal and the 40th of the completion of the Upper Avon Navigation project. Against this background, our regional feature includes these two delightful waterways, along with the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, Droitwich Canals, River Severn and the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal. We begin our journey at Tewkesbury, confluence of the rivers Severn and Avon.

Photos by Robin Smithett unless otherwise stated.
RIVER AVON

Boaters enter the Avon through Avon Lock (controlled by the Avon Navigation Trust), where the lock-keeper will point you in the direction of idyllic moorings nearby. Tewkesbury is undoubtedly one of the highlights of the entire river – a picturesque postcard English market town of half-timbered buildings, characterful pubs and cosy tearooms. Don’t miss the 12th century abbey, which boasts the highest Norman tower in England.

So this is the famous Avon you will be thinking, as you head upstream through an unchanging landscape of lush watermeadows. Actually this is the Lower Avon, restored through the efforts of Douglas Barwell in 1962; the upper river above Evesham was brought back to life by the indefatigable David Hutchings in 1974. Moor at Comberton Quay above Eckington if you fancy climbing the 981ft Bredon Hill. And why wouldn’t you, for the ascent is relatively easy and the views from the top are breathtaking. If you have energy to spare, then take the time to explore the quaint black and white villages of Great and Little Comberton before returning to your boat.

Plums and pubs are what Pershore is famous for. Plus, of course, its stately abbey, which is almost on a par with Tewkesbury’s in terms of architectural merit. Fine moorings are provided beside the recreation ground so it’s worth while stopping awhile to explore.

Fladbury and Chadbury sound like characters from an Enid Blyton tale. In fact they are gorgeously sited locks, the former The Avon Navigation was first opened in the mid 17th century following the sterling efforts of William Sandys of Fladbury. From 1717 the Upper and Lower Avons were under separate administration. Historically, the dividing point was Evesham’s Workman Bridge; later it was at Offenham, about a mile upstream. The upper river became impassable to commercial vessels in the early 1870s, while the lower section remained fully open until World War II, when it became unnavigable above Pershore.

In 1949 the Lower Avon was purchased for £1,500 by C.D. Barwell, who founded the Lower Avon Navigation Trust (LANT) “to restore, maintain and improve” the river up to Evesham, a project completed by 1962. That left some 18 miles still to be restored up to Stratford, to complete the missing link in the Avon Ring of waterways.

Enter David Hutchings, the inspirational engineer who had performed minor miracles in restoring the southern Stratford Canal for its then owners, the National Trust, over the period 1961-64. With a mixture of charismatic leadership, unbridled enthusiasm for the project and sheer hard work, his Upper Avon Navigation Trust set about what many regarded as a near impossible task, such were the engineering and technical difficulties standing in the way of the Upper Avon’s restoration. Aided by a number of amazingly generous donations, including one of £100,000 from a private individual, he set about the construction of nine completely new locks and weirs, work which required vast quantities of rock and mud to be removed. Construction work began in May 1969 and was completed in 1974. The Avon was restored – and the Avon Ring was reopened!

After that the river was administered by the two completely separate trusts: LANT operating from Avon Lock at Tewkesbury, and UANT from the old railway station premises at Harvington, near Evesham. Eventually, in 2009, they merged to form the Avon Navigation Trust, operating from Wyre Piddle.

Proposals were first mooted some 30 years ago to extend the navigation to Warwick through a further 12 miles, to link with the Grand Union Canal – completing a wide-beam route and offering a delightful cruise past Warwick Castle. Opposition from influential landowners has thus far prevented any progress being made on this project.

Nonetheless, the navigable River Avon, enjoyed by so many boaters and walkers over the past 35 years, arguably represents the greatest single triumph of the voluntary waterway restoration movement. Both LANT and UANT did a superb job in looking after the Avon, as indeed the Avon Navigation Trust continues to do today.
overlooked by a dreamy mill which has been converted into a desirable private residence. Evesham is altogether more down to earth, although its Workman Bridge, dating from 1866, is a study in elegance. Also of note is the triangular-shaped lock-keeper’s house, a short distance upstream.

Wild and remote, the Upper Avon (the boundary between the upper and lower river was for many years situated at Offenham) is thoroughly enchanting between Evesham and Bidford. The latter is a jolly day-tripper’s town, where West Midlanders come at weekends to eat, drink and make merry – much as William Shakespeare did some 400 years previously. He even immortalised the town in poetry, describing it as ‘drunken Bidford’. Alcoholic over-indulgence aside, Bidford welcomes all-comers, not least boaters who have extensive public moorings at their disposal, as well as a wide choice of pubs, restaurants and tearooms.

And so on to Stratford. To arrive in the world-famous town by boat is one of the great inland waterway experiences, right up there with crossing Pontcysyllte Aqueduct or taking a spin in the Falkirk Wheel. You can moor right opposite the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, then sit back and watch the action as folk from the four corners of the globe scurry hither and thither across the river in boats of all shapes and sizes. Who needs the theatre with five-star entertainment like this on offer for free?

The Avon is navigable for a mile or so above Clopton Bridge but for most people the river journey ends opposite Bancroft Basin, entrance to the Stratford-on-Avon Canal.
STRATFORD-ON-AVON CANAL

Leaving behind the punts, rowing boats and trip launches frenetically messing about on the Avon, the Stratford Canal begins in the marginally calmer atmosphere of Bancroft Basin where the narrowboats and trading barges gather. Leaving the tourists and gongoozlers behind, the canal sneaks furtively out of town by the tradesmen’s entrance, passing a humdrum assortment of ring roads, light industrial units and dreary retail parks. Even Stratford, famed birthplace of the Bard, has its seedier side.

Wilmcote Locks are grouped in a 3-5-3 formation. The locks are easy to work, so take the time to glance back over your shoulder at the wide-ranging views of Stratford and the Avon Valley. Wilmcote village lies just up the road from Bridge 59, Mary Arden’s Farm being the premier attraction hereabouts.

Charming and remote, the canal drifts along without a care in the world. Two impressive aqueducts – Edstone and Wootton Wawen – punctuate its sedate progress. A series of split cantilever bridges and barrel-roofed cottages define the Stratford Canal’s identity – so have your camera at the ready.

Envy the well-heeled inhabitants of Preston Bagot, Yarningale Common and Lowsonford, quiet Warwickshire villages way off the beaten track and seemingly a million miles from the tourist hotspots of Stratford and Warwick. Shops are conspicuous by their absence, but the renowned Fleur de Lys at Lowsonford caters for walkers, cyclists and hungry boaters, and boasts an extensive canalside garden to boot.

Kingswood Junction is the parting of the ways. The broad waters of the Grand Union Canal offer an alternative route into Birmingham (or down to London in the opposite direction), while the narrowbeam Stratford Canal continues on its merry way to King’s Norton. But many choose to tarry awhile here at Kingswood, for the canal environment is marvellous, with its pine-forested picnic area, old National Trust workshops and maintenance yard, and barrel-roofed lock cottage. Use this as a base perhaps for a visit to Packwood House, a glorious National Trust Tudor house just under a mile from Bridge 31.

Back on the canal, the hard work begins in earnest. The 15 locks of the Lapworth flight get the adrenaline pumping and the muscles working, amid surroundings that are never less than charming. Closely grouped at first, the chambers are increasingly spaced out at the top.
Tree-lined and secretive, the Stratford’s summit level offers a period of quiet recuperation from all that lock working. Hockley Heath provides refreshment opportunities in the form of a couple of pubs and a Chinese takeaway, while a handful of shops allows the restocking of the boater’s depleted fridge and larder. Gradually at first, Birmingham’s outer districts reach out to engulf the canal: Warstock, Dicken’s Heath, Major’s Green – romantic-sounding names for all-too-familiar slabs of dull suburbia.

Soon enough you pass through Brandwood Tunnel and negotiate the famous swing-bridge over Tunnel Lane (illegally lowered in the 1940s, it was an early campaigning success for the infant Inland Waterways Association), before the canal arrives at King’s Norton Junction and the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, some 26 miles and 56 locks from Stratford.

Where others have followed, the Stratford led, being the first successful canal restoration scheme. While the Northern Stratford Canal from Kingswood up to King’s Norton remained navigable and fully open, the southern section of the waterway was virtually derelict and threatened with abandonment by 1958.

Enter Coventry architect David Hutchings – ‘The Restoration Man’ – who succeeded in bringing about a remarkable transformation in the canal’s fortunes. Using volunteer labour and prisoners on day release, he restored the waterway to navigable status in less than six years – a truly remarkable achievement. Official reopening took place in 1964, the canal at that time being under the care of the National Trust.

In 1988 ownership of the Southern Stratford passed to British Waterways, making the canal a single entity once more. Today, of course, it is part of the Canal & River Trust empire, and a permanent symbol of what can be achieved through skilfully-led volunteer labour.

The Worcester & Birmingham Canal, as the name suggests, transports the waterway traveller from England’s second city down to the Severn at Worcester.

The journey begins at Worcester Bar where the canal swiftly extricates itself from the city centre fleshpots, executes a right-angled turn at the Mailbox and heads for the suburbs, including Edgbaston, Selly Oak and Bournville, the latter best known for the Cadbury World Visitor Centre. King’s Norton may look benign with its broad swaths of green stretching down to the canal, but boaters need to be wary of mooring overnight or leaving a boat unattended even in daylight hours, as the natives have earned a reputation over the years for occasionally being restless! Many think it far better to leave the big city behind and press on to pastures new in rural Worcestershire.

Wast Hill Tunnel stretches for 2,726 yards and is the canal’s longest. It is wide enough for two boats to pass inside, but there is no towpath, so walkers have to proceed over the top by way of a series of footpaths. Boaters emerge from their 30-minute subterranean passage to be greeted by gently undulating farmland – a welcome sight indeed.

Alvechurch is synonymous, among canal folk at least, with the major hire company that has its headquarters here. But it is a sizeable village in its own right too, and well-worth the 20-minute stroll down the hill to do a little shopping or perhaps partake of a meal at the popular Indian restaurant. For more sedentary types, canalside meals are available at the Crown by Bridge 61.
Boaters steel themselves for the big one: the Tardebigge/Stoke flight of 36 locks within the space of 4 miles. Phew! First though, Inland Waterways Association members (and others) should pause and reflect that Tardebigge is regarded as the birthplace of IWA, for it was here in 1945 that Robert Ackman and his wife Ray met Tom and Angela Rolt aboard their narrowboat Cressy, moored above the top lock for the duration of World War II. Their meeting led to the formation of IWA and a plaque beside the lock tells the story of the seminal occasion – one which probably resulted in the waterway network being saved for the nation.

Hanbury Wharf is a good place to drop anchor for a while. The Eagle & Sun is one attraction, but more importantly this is the junction with the newly restored Droitwich Junction Canal which, together with the Droitwich Barge Canal, offers an alternative route down to the Severn. If time permits, an excursion to the refined spa town of Droitwich, whether by boat or on foot, is highly recommended (see overleaf).

But the Worcester & Birmingham Canal continues through an empty landscape grazed by sheep and well-cared for ponies. Be sure to look to the horizon – the views are superb: down to the Severn Valley and over to the distant Malvern Hills. Oddingley possesses a much-photographed canalside church and an ancient manor house. This is a lovely place for an overnight mooring, despite the proximity of the mainline railway. You can let the ‘whoosh’ of passing trains lull you to sleep after a hard but rewarding day’s boating.

Offerton Locks signal the waterway’s approach to Worcester. Industrial estates and ring roads attempt to encroach, but the canal retains its identity and the towpath is reassuringly popular with dog-walkers, cyclists and runners. A succession of locks take you down to Lowesmoor Wharf – home of the Viking Afloat hire fleet and arguably the best place to moor while exploring the city.

Diligis Basin is where sleek river cruisers rub up against humble narrowboats. Opened in the 19th century to allow transhipment of cargoes between river and canal, it has a relaxed and amiable atmosphere, not compromised by modern housing developments which have sprung up in recent years. There is an air of excitement for many, as the mighty Severn awaits!

First though, Worcester – one of England’s smaller, less bustling cities – amply repays a leisurely exploration. Most people tend to start with the magnificent riverside cathedral, located a few hundred yards upstream from Diligis Basin. It was founded in 680, but the present building dates from the 12th and 13th centuries. You can simply stroll in anytime, or join one of the many guided tours.

Another historic building to savour is the Commandery, a small museum situated close to Sidbury Lock. Thought to have been founded as a hospital in the 11th century, it subsequently served as King Charles II’s headquarters during the Civil War before enjoying quieter periods as a family home.

Shopping opportunities abound in the city’s pedestrianised streets, and real-ale and cider devotees will find a host of pubs and inns in which to indulge their pleasure.
THE DROITWICH CANALS

After years of campaigning and restoration work by the Droitwich Canals Trust, magnificently supported by the Inland Waterways Association, Waterway Recovery Group and the local authorities, the Droitwich Barge Canal finally reopened for business in the autumn of 2010. Then, after a series of frustrating delays, the Junction Canal followed suit in 2011, restoring the link between the Worcester & Birmingham Canal at Hanbury and the River Severn at Hawford.

The two canals pass through peaceful Worcestershire countryside and the journey is enhanced by the opportunity to visit the fine old town of Droitwich, with its convivial pubs and tearooms. Good moorings are provided close to delightful Vines Park. Furthermore, the canal’s reopening creates a 23-mile Mini Ring, the Mid-Worcester Ring, comprising the Severn, Worcester & Birmingham Canal and the Droitwich Canals. This new ring is already proving extremely popular, not surprisingly as it is one of the loveliest little cruising circuits in the land.

RIVER SEVERN

The Severn is mainland Britain’s longest and mightiest river. It rises on the wild mountains of Mid Wales before tumbling down onto the Midland plain and flowing past quaint country towns and fine cathedral cities on its way to the Bristol Channel.

In boating circles the Severn has never quite achieved Premier League status, seldom spoken of in the same breath as the Avon, Thames or Nene. Granted, the river is prone to flooding and is often contained within high banks, but it should not be dismissed too lightly; to cruise sedately downstream to Gloucester in fine sunny weather is a memorable experience. And waiting there is the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal – an unsung gem of a waterway packed with interest (see page 26).

The head of navigation for powered craft is traditionally regarded as the confluence with the Gladder Brook, a short distance above Stourport with its riverside funfair, and locks and basins providing access to the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal.

Downstream lies Lincombe Lock, the highest lock on the river.

The junction with the Droitwich Barge Canal looms up before you reach Bevere Lock, where boaters and walkers often congregate at the Camp House Inn – a gloriously old-fashioned riverside pub that offers good food, beer, cider and secure overnight moorings in equal measure.

Worcester’s riverscape is memorable. Savour its racecourse, bridges and, most of all, its splendid waterside cathedral to the full as you cruise downstream.

The Severn by Diglis Basin is high, wide and handsome, and the current may be flowing swiftly after even modest levels of rainfall. Diglis River Locks are an automated pair; the one on the east bank is smaller. An elegant new foot and cycle bridge crosses here, built by Sustrans and Worcestershire County Council to reconnect Worcester’s suburbs, and linking the paths on either side of the river.

The Teme, one of Britain’s loveliest rivers,

THE SEVERN BORE

The Severn Bore is Britain’s most spectacular natural phenomenon. It is a large surge wave that can be seen in the estuary of the Severn, where the tidal range is the second highest in the world.

The shape of the estuary is such that the water is funnelled into an increasingly narrow channel as the tide rises, thus forming the large wave. At Avonmouth it is five miles wide, reducing to one mile at Sharpness and down to less than 100 yards at Minsterworth. The depth of the river also reduces rapidly, adding to the funnelling process.

Such is the captivating spectacle of the Bore that enthusiasts travel from all over the country to marvel at the power of the tidal surge. For further information, including bore dates and times for 2014, and best viewing points, visit www.severn-bore.co.uk.
Autumn 2014

The Severn below Worcester once boasted numerous passenger ferries. Today only one survives, that at Lower Lode on the outskirts of Tewkesbury, but you will still see the slipways where the boats were launched.

These ferry services linked small villages and hamlets on either side of the river, such as that between Clevelode and Clifton on the A38. There was also a ferry between Sandhurst and Ashleworth Quay, much utilised down the years by patrons of the Boat at Ashleworth.

Perhaps the most interesting example was the one that operated between Kempsey and Pixham, where the old ferry house still stands. The ferry here survived until the 1940s and was able to carry one or two vehicles in addition to passengers. There being no proper road approach to the Kempsey landing stage, cars had to be driven across fields to the river – an interesting experience no doubt in the depths of winter.

The last lock on the natural Severn (Gloucestor Lock being an entrance lock to the docks), and as such, the river is ‘semi-tidal’ from here to Gloucester – freshwater for most of the year, but tidal on the spring tides which overtop Maisemore Weir at Gloucester twice a month.

Riverside settlements may be thin on the ground, but hostels are come thick and fast on the next reach of the river. The Yew Tree at Chaceley Stock was once a cider-making establishment, but today it just settles for serving a good range of ales plus bar and restaurant meals. The Coal House, a mile downstream at Apperley, has pontoon moorings for patrons. Haw Bridge is a mundane structure dating from 1961 and carrying the surprisingly busy B4213 across the river. Haw Bridge has two pubs, the New Inn and the Haw Bridge Inn. The Boat at Ashleworth has become something of a Severn institution with its cool, unspoilt interior and excellent range of ales.

Above Gloucester the channel narrows and a succession of bridges, both road and rail, herald the outskirts of the city. It can seem suddenly noisy and claustrophobic after the wide open waters enjoyed further upstream.

Great care is necessary on the approach to Gloucester Lock, as the current is inclined to draw craft towards the unnavigable channel to Lower Parting. The quay wall to the left is fitted with chains where you can wait safely for the green light that tells you to enter the lock; tie up with the stern rope first, as far from the lock as possible.

Once the lock fills and the top gates open, you enter the broad expanse of Gloucester’s Main Basin. Gloucester has been an inland port since Elizabethan times but it was only with the opening of the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal in 1827 that it rose to prominence. Today the basins play host to all manner of craft, seagoing and inland.

The marvellous warehouses have been sympathetically refurbished to host, among other occupants, retail outlets, an antique centre and the acclaimed National Waterways Museum. There are sanitary facilities just past Llanthony Lift-bridge.

There is much to see and do in Gloucester, both around the docks and in the city, but when eventually the time comes to drag yourself away, the fascinating Gloucester & Sharpness Canal awaits.
The Gloucester & Sharpness Canal was built as a ship canal to bypass the dangerous waters of the Severn between Gloucester Docks and the estuary at Sharpness. Although only 16 miles long, it was a drawn out construction project, begun in 1794, taking 33 years to complete, and falling short of its proposed terminus of Berkeley. Sadly, you won’t encounter any commercial traffic on the Gloucester & Sharpness today. Pleasure traffic, though, is buoyant in the 21st century leisure age, with boaters coming from far and wide to enjoy this wide, deep, lock-free waterway.

First impressions of the canal are not overly encouraging as it struggles to throw off the shackles of Gloucester’s post-industrial sprawl. Industrial archaeologists will find compensation, however, in the remnants of the quays, warehouses, malting and mills that line the banks, all reminders of the canal’s commercial heyday.

Discounting the new high-level swing-bridge at High Orchard (which, like its counterpart at Netheridge, opens only for tall ships and the daily test run), Hempstead is the first swing-bridge to be encountered. All such bridges are automated and keeper-operated, so boaters just have to wait for the green light; although Simms, Rea and Sellars bridges are high enough that narrowboats can slip underneath without waiting for the bridge to swing, you should still wait for the green light in case a large craft is coming towards you.

Stonebench, a mile or so on, is an excellent place from which to observe the Severn Bore (see page 24). Designated visitor moorings can be busy on this canal, so boaters have to be prepared to go ‘wild’ where necessary.

The canal journeys south with distant views of the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean defining the horizon to east and west. Consider a stop at Parkend Bridge. Although long-term Gloucester & Sharpness favourite the Castle Restaurant may have closed, you can still take an invigorating stroll to the Severnside hamlet of Epney. Its attractions include fine views of the river, and a wide choice of ales at the popular Anchor Inn.

Saul Junction provides the iconic image of the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal, an endearing amalgam of swing-bridges, bustling boayard with crane and landscaped picnic areas. There’s a sanitary station, plus an information centre, cafe and trip boats in summer operated by the Cotswold Canals Trust. All that is missing is a convivial pub: for that you’ll have to follow the course of the Stroudwater Navigation down to Framilode, where the Ship Inn awaits. There’s an interesting Victorian church here too, commanding fine views of the Severn. Saul Junction is the venue for IWA’s Saul Waterway Pageant over the August Bank Holiday weekend 23rd-25th August – see page 9.
Completed nearly 50 years before the Gloucester & Sharpness, the Stroudwater was abandoned in 1954. It is of course undergoing restoration, along with the Thames & Severn Canal, as part of the exciting Cotswold Canals project which will provide a direct link to the Thames at Inglesham, near Lechlade. A short length of the Stroudwater Navigation (to Walk Bridge) remains navigable, and hosts a large new marina too.

At Fretherne Bridge the canalside factory was once occupied by Cadburys. There was for many years a regular waterborne trade between here and the company’s other premises at Blackpole in Worcester and Bournville, both on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, but this trade is sadly consigned to history. The swing-bridge here, like a number on the canal, is attended by its own bridge-keeper’s cottage unique to the Gloucester & Sharpness; these single-storey Regency houses all feature Doric-columned porticoes. Most are now in private ownership and some, sadly, are a little down-at-heel.

Frampton-on-Severn is a village crafted in heaven. Fair Rosamunde – aka Rosamunde Clifford, one-time lady friend of Henry II – was born here and gave her name to the village green. The green stretches for fully half a mile and hosts a couple of duck ponds, a cricket pitch, a wonderful variety of trees, and plenty of seats for whiling away the hours. Overlooking the green is an assortment of ancient houses, large and small, a post office stores and two pubs, the Three Horseshoes and the Bell Inn. At the far end of the green is a nice tearoom serving cream teas and diet-busting chocolate cake.

Remote and windswept, the canal traverses a Fenlandesque landscape of low-lying fields and arrow straight drainage dykes. As if to reinforce the analogy, the River Cam flows into the navigation by Cam Bridge, bringing water supplies down from the Cotswolds.

Shepherd’s Patch has a boatyard, pub and moorings, but more importantly perhaps it is the stopping off point for a visit to the Slimbridge Wildfowl & Wetland Trust. Established in 1946 by Peter Scott, son of the famous Antarctic explorer and an early vice-president of the Inland Waterways Association, it boasts the world’s most extensive collection of wildfowl, including many rare and endangered species of ducks, geese and swans from all over the globe. Open daily, it is a memorable full/half day out for adults and children alike.

You soon come upon the remains of an impressive swing-bridge, which formerly carried a railway over both the canal and the Severn. Some 21 fixed arches spanned the estuary, while a steam powered moveable arch crossed the canal. In October 1960 two oil tankers, bound for Gloucester in foggy conditions, missed the entrance to Sharpness Docks and hit the bridge, leaving only the moveable arch and a couple of arches as a reminder of a tragic accident – and as this was the Beeching era, the railway never reopened.

And so on to Sharpness, one of those magical locations – like Heybridge Basin in Essex and Glasson Docks in Lancashire – where fresh water meets salt, where inland pleasure craft come up against ocean-going vessels. The original course of the canal swings to the right where there are plentiful moorings for visiting craft. The docks lie directly ahead, beyond two swing-bridges, where you may be lucky enough to observe ships loading or unloading at the quayside. Sharpness remains a working port handling commodities such as cement and fertiliser inbound, tractors and heavy-lift machinery outbound. A Canal & River Trust information panel advises of ship arrivals and departures.

It is here in this immensely characterful place, with its rows of coastguard cottages and the ‘time-warp’ Pier View Hotel, that the memorable Gloucester & Sharpness journey comes to an end. The Severn estuary is definitely out of bounds for inland boaters, except for those who have hired a pilot and have ensured that their craft is suitably equipped to enter such challenging waters.
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How did you first become interested in waterways?
We took a Norfolk Broads holiday with Chris’ family in our late teens and enjoyed the whole experience and loved the traditional Broads cruiser. Our next waterway holiday was in the 1960s as a friend’s aunt had a small hire boat operation near Birmingham. Although the centre cockpit cruiser was a nightmare to handle, we had a fantastic time. Thereafter we took annual narrowboat holidays with a group of friends. We were hooked!

What were your first impressions of the waterways?
We always remember anchoring in Rockland Broad and watching the Norfolk sunset and next morning having breakfast in the sun with the roof slid back. The trip through the centre of Birmingham really impressed, the canals were almost derelict with loads of rubbish and the surrounds were industrial or wasteland, but the atmosphere, character and potential were all so obvious. We were taken by the canal architecture, the locks, bridges and warehouses. I was not to realise at that time that my architectural career would lead into planning and heritage conservation. That trip probably influenced our whole lives.

Tell us about your earliest waterway experiences.
Our hire boat holidays took us to the Shropshire Union and obviously Llangollen and Chester, followed by the Trent & Mersey, Soar, Coventry, Stratford-on-Avon, Oxford and Macclesfield. One year we delivered a brand new narrowboat from Market Harborough to a new base at Lower Heyford and really felt part of the canal fraternity! When our daughter arrived in 1974 we decided that it would be sensible to have our own boat. We started with a two-berth cabin cruiser which was really a sea fishing boat. We regularly trailed it to the Trent & Mersey for holidays. As our family expanded we soon upgraded to a four-berth twin cabin Norman Conquest. Our boats gradually got larger as the three children grew. For some reason each boat had scope for improvements and this became part of our waterway experience.

Where did you go on boating holidays?
When the children were young we settled for our local waterway, the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation – maximum boating with minimum car travel. There were virtually no facilities and the boat had to be launched over the riverbank.

Later on we bought a boat based on the Grand Union and we decided to take it down onto the Thames. Once on the non-tidal Thames we decided we would not return to the Grand Union. After several years we moved to the Great Ouse only to go back to the Thames some years later with a wider boat and the children demanding more action. Our boat is now based on the Norfolk Broads.

When did you first join IWA?
It was in 1974.

What led you to join?
We picked up a leaflet about IWA on one of our hire boat holidays, liked the idea of saving our waterways’ heritage and re-opening canals, so we joined. Some years later we started going to the Chelmsford Branch meetings.
When did you first become involved in IWA's takeover (through Essex Waterways Ltd) of the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation?

ROY: There is a bit of background to explain first. The Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation was in commercial use until 1972 and they were not interested in pleasure boats above Heybridge Basin. When the commercial use ceased, the Chelmsford Branch campaigned for pleasure boat use. We wanted to support this. Pleasure boats were accepted, but the Navigation Company lacked income and Springfield Basin and Lock became derelict. In 1985 we produced Springfield Basin ... and Beyond, a well-received report illustrating the potential for restoration of Springfield Basin and suggesting a New Cut to link this with the town’s rivers.

By this time I was employed as a specialist historic buildings and conservation advisor by Essex County Council and I was able to promote the designation of The Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area, a 13-mile long linear area with the Chelmsford end described by English Heritage as one of the most derelict conservation areas that they had seen! I enabled the listing of the locks and original bridges and the setting up of a Town Scheme to provide funding for their repair. I thus became very involved with the C&B.

By 1992 it was apparent that the situation was right for a restoration of Springfield Basin, but someone was needed to spearhead this. Enter Doug Beard. Together we arranged a series of partnerships to enable a very rapid restoration which would set the scene for redevelopment of the area. Doug was very skilful at fund raising and IWA took on the rebuilding of the lock and feeder stream with us both fully hands-on.

IWA Chelmsford continued to assist the Navigation by raising the funds for repairs for several locks and organising these as well as bank piling to safeguard weirs.

The Navigation Company, however, went into administration in 2003 after having diversified too far into unrelated operations. We spent the next two years trying to find a saviour for the waterway. Local authorities, navigation authorities and even water companies did not want it to close, but they would not take it on.

IWA had been campaigning to save and re-open waterways since 1946. We could not sit by and let this working waterway close. I remember Doug saying ‘do we want to run a waterway?’ My reply was ‘we don’t have a choice!’

The support of IWA Trustees was gained and Essex Waterways Ltd was formed. We took responsibility in November 2005, this just happened to be at the same time that I retired from employment.

We always remember anchoring in Rockland Broad and watching the Norfolk sunset and next morning having breakfast in the sun with the roof slid back

You must be pleased with how it has worked out, with the waterway being in a much better condition today.

Yes, I must be, especially when you consider what might have happened. Chris however regularly says that I am negative as I have to admit that there is still an awful lot to do. Our staff numbers have increased and we have a great team, but many of us volunteers are getting older.

This year, with the help of IWA, we have been able to invest in new grass cutting and weed cutting equipment after years of struggling with the life expired equipment that we inherited. This will help us enormously. We have been in operation now for nine years, we have carried out some pretty major projects and I think we have shown that we can operate a successful waterway.

We have a waterway that sees much greater use by the public, not just our boaters and canoeists but also walkers, cyclists, anglers and those just visiting.
Is it time-consuming, being chairman of Essex Waterways Ltd’s board of directors?
Yes, but probably need not be. I think we will soon be changing the format of our Board meetings to reflect this. As chairman there are other regular meetings to attend and newsletters to write.

My volunteering, however, goes beyond the duties of chairman and it is this that results in me still working a five-day week for EWL. My background in Planning and Historic Building Conservation gives me useful skills and knowledge that can be used for gaining the necessary consents for works, organising and supervising projects, negotiating planning gain and identifying opportunities.

We have therefore benefitted from schemes like the £3m Heybridge chunker replacement, Tesco landing stage, Indigo wharf moorings and Heybridge Basin north quay improvements. I have been told that I have generated over £3m in funding and assistance for the C&BN, though I have not been counting, and there is still potential out there even though grant assistance is increasingly difficult. We have just had a major electricity main cross beneath the waterway and we currently have two large sewer pipelines being bored below, and a new road bridge planned. These all require time consuming negotiations, not to mention the boundary challenges that occur along 28 miles of boundary. Then there is input to Local Development Frameworks and Local Plans so as to ensure the Navigation benefits in the future. I also get involved with our work parties.

Are you still pushing through improvements to the waterway? Tell us about them.
We are still achieving improvements along the Navigation, often through partnerships with others. For example: we have been able with the help of Essex County Council Rights of Way and Chelmsford City Council to surface nearly 4.7 km of our well used towpaths and there is more to come. Taylor Wimpey have just completed a development of 46 apartments at Indigo Wharf and provided serviced moorings for us, we are pushing them for help with the rebuilding of the remainder of the wharf. They also have planning permission for a further 52 apartments so we are expecting further serviced moorings.

Maldon District Council is proposing a Garden Suburb development of 900 houses at Heybridge and we are involved with this to ensure the flood alleviation scheme does not adversely affect the Navigation and that any associated works bring benefit.

We have just completed new toilet facilities for boaters at Paper Mill Lock and we will be starting similar facilities at Sandford Lock. We also propose improved landing stages at Hoe Mill Lock where several youth groups launch their canoes, and new moorings at Freshwater Crescent, Heybridge for the local residents use.

What are the challenges still facing the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation?
There are many! Such as meeting and satisfying customer expectations. Like most marinas in the area we have been subject to outboard motor thefts, something that is difficult to prevent, but our customers expect action.
Flood and storm damage requiring repairs and dredging and restricting access are becoming an annual problem.

Our local lock contractor has retired and finding a suitable replacement skilled in building timber gates is a big challenge.

From the general public’s perspective, few recognise Essex Waterways Limited as a volunteer lead not-for-profit company, and the more we improve the waterway, the more they seem to expect. We need to sell ourselves more.

Achieving adequate income to enable us to provide the service, maintenance and improvements that we would all like when grants are difficult and costs are rising.

Looking longer term, our popular rural moorings have no further scope for expansion, so we need to develop the potential in the underused urban areas and look off-line, if we are to meet future demand and ensure adequate income. We have identified two ideal sites for new off-line moorings and received favourable planning reactions. Making these a reality will, however, be a long and major challenge.

When did you first become Chelmsford branch secretary?

Chris: In 2010 Molly Beard, our chairman, handed over the Branch minute book to me and so I became the secretary of Chelmsford Branch of The Inland Waterways Association.

What does the position involve?

We have six committee meetings and an AGM each year so writing up the minutes and distributing them does not take up too much time. However, as we are always so busy, I am afraid they are sometimes late! As secretary there are occasions when other contact jobs and chasing are necessary.

When we took early retirement in 2005 I was Roy’s secretary for some time and that was a lot more time consuming. Roy was not very computer literate, but also very busy and many letters and documents had to be typed. So much more is scanned or sent by e-mail now and Roy has perfected all these skills.

Do you have ‘IWA evenings’?

Roy spends many evenings in his study working for EWL and so some evenings we are indeed both working for IWA.

Do you get out on the system sometimes?

Roy still works full time for Essex Waterways and my biggest regret is that we have very little time holidaying on the system. Some years we have not had a holiday at all. Every spring we put dates in our diaries for boating holidays, sometimes these have to be amended. However, we do a lot of things together, work parties, visiting sites, travelling to new places to give presentations and meeting like-minded people. I particularly enjoy our visits to our local mooring sites and chatting to our staff and regular volunteers.

What is your favourite waterway?

The Chelmer & Blackwater is a beautiful navigation that has some truly picturesque areas. We no longer have our own boat on this navigation but we enjoy walking the towpath at all times of the year and visiting the moorings and projects. Heybridge Basin can be delightful with both tranquil and hectic periods and Paper Mill Lock is a hive of activity.

As our family has grown, so have our boats. I remember crossing the lock gate walkway at Paper Mill with our baby in a carrycot to get to our island mooring and also swimming with the older children in the clear water amongst the weeds and fish. Since then we have spent many years on the Great Ouse and the Thames. We both have very fond memories of the Thames. We are currently enjoying the Norfolk Broads and I am pleased to say our children, their friends and our grandchildren are enjoying using our boat too.

What is the best thing about being members of IWA?

Over the years we have met so many wonderful people and been to so many lovely places. Our regular volunteers and the Waterway Recovery Group volunteers who give so much of their leisure time to restoring the waterways have helped Essex Waterways in many different ways, whether it is essential undergrowth clearance, demolishing bridges or displaying their building skills by repairing weirs. These people have become friends and are great to be with and are lots of fun!

Our committee members give us a lot of their time and expertise too. They are dedicated to IWA and EWL and we regard them as very good friends.
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IWA’s 2014 National Waterways Restoration Raffle aims to raise £10,000 to support a variety of waterway restoration causes by donating 100% of the profit to restoration projects run by IWA corporate members and to a moorings improvement project on the Cheshire Ring to be carried out by IWA volunteers.

The raffle gives you the option to nominate an eligible project of your choice on every ticket you purchase. After the raffle has been drawn the number of nominations for each project will be calculated and the money each restoration project receives will be in direct proportion to their total nominations. For example, a project receiving 10% of the total nominations would receive 10% of the money raised.

The nomination system provides the opportunity to benefit waterway restoration across the country. Waterway restoration can bring social, economic and environmental benefits to an area and the 2014 Waterways Restoration Raffle will support this nationwide effort.

The raffle will be drawn on 16th January 2015 at IWA’s Head Office in Chesham.

For more information on raffle prizes, restoration projects and the terms and conditions visit www.waterways.org.uk/raffle, or contact the raffle organiser Toby Gomm at toby.gomm@waterways.org.uk or telephone 01494 783453 ext 611.

A book of tickets has been included in this issue of Waterways.

If you wish to purchase more than one book you can do so online at www.waterways.org.uk/raffle or by telephone on 01494 783453 ext 611.

TIFFETS COST £2 EACH, IN BOOKS OF 5 TICKETS.

IWA would like to thank Middlewich Narrowboats, Wyvern Shipping, Cambrian Cruisers, ABC Leisure, Canal Cruising Company, Harper Collins Publishers, Waterways World, Midland Chandlers, Sir Steve Redgrave and Stone Boat Building Chandlery for their support of the raffle.


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We publish on these pages a round up of some of the branch work parties that have taken place recently. If your branch event isn’t included here, do let Alison Smedley, Branch Campaign Officer, know next time you are organising one, so that it can be included in the overall publicity for work parties that Alison is now promoting for the Association.

WARDLE LOCK IMPROVEMENTS
Shrewsbury District & North Wales and North Staffordshire & South Cheshire branches joined forces over the spring to greatly improve the area around Wardle Lock on the short stretch of the Wardle Canal at Middlewich. The volunteers held two work parties on Wednesday 30th April and Wednesday 14th May with the third unfortunately rained off. Despite this, the majority of work was completed.

Many people will recognise Wardle Lock as the former home of the late Maureen Shaw who for many years lived in the adjoining lock cottage. Over the past few years, the lock has become somewhat untidy and so the joint working parties were set up between North Staffs & South Cheshire Branch, Shrewsbury District & North Wales Branch, the Trent & Mersey Canal Society and CRT to bring the lock back to some of its former glory.

In April, 20 willing volunteers of various ages turned up on the day to lend a hand. Some travelled from quite a distance but there were also a number of local residents who had come along out of respect for Maureen and were keen to see the lock back in good shape. The team worked hard scraping down the old paintwork on both the gates and railings as well as clearing the steps on the offside below the lock of vegetation. A fresh coat of paint was put on to the locks and at the end of the day the improvement was clear to see.

In May, 16 volunteers gathered for the second Wardle Lock work party, at which the lock gates were finished off with a fresh coat of paint and, with the use of a CRT work boat, the team were able to make significant impact on the offside vegetation that had become very overgrown over the years restricting navigation below the lock entrance. So much vegetation was removed that the work boat was left full at the end of the day. In addition, volunteers collected and removed over ten bags of rubbish that had been deposited under the road bridge at the junction of the Trent & Mersey Canal and Wardle Canal. Boaters approaching the locks from the Trent & Mersey at the end of the day commented that it was like arriving at somewhere very different from what they were used to – a great example of IWA branches working together with both local canal societies and CRT.

NORTHAMPTON BRANCH
On 17th June, Northampton Branch made the most of the dry weather and its trained volunteers and set to clearing the vegetation from Lock 17 of the Northampton Arm of the Grand Union Canal. Those with strimming and mowing certificates from CRT tidied up the area to improve access to mooring bollards and the lockgates. Meanwhile, a second group walked to Lock 15 litter picking the towpath, which was in a much improved state compared to the last litter pick of that stretch.
Is your branch doing something that demonstrates the great work that our members do? If so let us know - send your story and pictures to alison.smedley@waterways.org.uk.

PETERBOROUGH BRANCH NEWS

On 5th April members of the Peterborough and Gt Ouse branches paid a visit to Horseyay and Welches Dam locks on the Forty Foot Drain in the Fenland waterways system. The visit was also attended by Les Etheridge, IWA National Chairman and John Pomfret, member of Navigation Committee. The visit was arranged to allow members to view the present condition of the channel and locks with a view to canvassing support and ideas for restoration of the route to through navigation.

The lock at Welches Dam was previously restored to navigation in the 1980s and 1990s through the efforts of volunteers from IWA and the Middle Level Watermen's Club but has been stanked off, out of use, in recent years due to excessive leakage in the Horseways channel and questions about the structural stability of the lock.

After the visit those present adjourned to Manea Parish Hall where Roger Sexton gave a presentation outlining the history of the route and identifying the problems which have arisen, leading to the present closure of the route to navigation. Professor Andrew Storrar then outlined some of the technical issues involved in restoring the route and referred to the opportunities that the proposed gravel extraction workings in the area may bring.

Subsequent to the visit the Peterborough Branch committee decided to pursue three avenues to assess the root of the problems and assess what possibilities exist for remedial action: to obtain aerial photos of the route of the channel to use crop patterns to identify the location of the leaks; to investigate a method of filling the channel in order to get a weed cutter in to clear the way to make further inspections of the banks; to hold discussions with the gravel extraction contractors to see if a source of clay suitable for sealing the channel will be forthcoming from these works.

A report on the outcome of these investigations will be prepared over the summer to allow a further action plan to be agreed. This should hopefully allow progress to be made towards restoration of the route to through navigation between the Middle Level System and the Old Bedford River, thus providing an alternative through route between the Nene and Great Ouse.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE & DERBYSHIRE BRANCH

Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire Branch joined forces with the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association and Canal & River Trust to carry out a clean-up on the Erewash Canal on Friday 28th and Saturday 29th March. The two-day event left the canal between Cotmanhay and Sandiacre, a length of about 5.5 miles, much improved after litter from the towpath and submerged and floating rubbish from the canal was removed.

ECP&DA volunteers took the lead on the Friday, when about 30 volunteers, including some IWA members, turned out to pull rubbish from the canal between Cotmanhay and Gallows Inn Lock. A litter pick was also carried out and by the end of the first day over 50 bags of rubbish had been collected.

On Friday, a very shiny motorbike was pulled out of the canal. The police were notified, came to take it away and mentioned that it had only been missing for a week. Also retrieved from the canal was a trophy with the figure of a boxer. A bit of detective work has discovered that it was presented by the Wolverhampton Amateur Boxing Club.

On the Saturday, IWA members formed the majority of the 25 volunteers who turned out for the second day of the clean up, when submerged rubbish, waterborne litter and towpath litter were once again tackled but this time between Gallows Inn Lock and Sandiacre Lock. The usual assortment of shopping trolleys, bicycles and tyres were pulled out of the canal, along with much unidentifiable and miscellaneous rubbish.
NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE & SOUTH CHESHIRE BRANCH

North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch has continued to be busy working alongside Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust and the volunteers have taken on many tasks over the spring and early summer. This has included continuation of the bridge painting project it started last autumn before the weather deteriorated. By Thursday 10th April, the weather had improved sufficiently for volunteers to continue preparing and painting the iconic cast iron bridge at Hazelhurst Junction on the Caldon Canal.

With so much work going on the branch has decided it needs a place to store its equipment. Heavy rain returned on Thursday 8th May and once again prevented painting of the bridge at Hazelhurst Junction. Instead, volunteers litter picked the area before clearing vegetation and preparing some ground for the branch’s new storage shed.

The branch was out again in May and this time visited a new location. On Friday 23rd, the branch held its first IWA work party at Congleton alongside the Macclesfield Canal near Congleton Station. This was the first work party planned as a new venture between IWA North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch, CRT, Congleton Town Council, Congleton Sustainability Group, Cheshire East Council and Northern Rail as part of a broader project to enhance the whole area around Congleton Station and the canal. It is hoped that this will encourage use of the canal, as it becomes a more attractive destination for boaters, cyclists and walkers, visiting the local town or using the railway station.

The initiative was originally started up following a meeting with the local MP Fiona Bruce, an IWA member who presented her ideas to a small group some months ago. North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch, working closely with a number of local town councillors, responded to the challenge by setting up a first ‘tester’ work party to gauge local interest in such a project and the number of local residents who turned up showed that there was indeed great local support for such an initiative.

At the end of the first work party that focused on clearing the somewhat overgrown steps between the canal and the station and cutting back overhanging branches along the towpath, the results spoke for themselves.

With endorsement from those volunteers who supported the idea of further work parties, further dates are planned in what is expected to become a new series of regular work parties working along the Macclesfield Canal between Congleton Wharf and Buglawton.

In June, the branch joined IWA’s 2014 Himalayan Balsam Campaign and hosted three work parties as part of the event with the longer daylight hours and to provide opportunities for those who work and are busy at the weekends but want to have a go at volunteering. This was on the Leek Arm and the volunteers made the most of the opportunity to hand out leaflets and let the public know what they were up to.

BIRMINGHAM, BLACK COUNTRY & WORCESTERSHIRE BRANCH

Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire Branch’s monthly work party on the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal on Wednesday 14th May saw a good turnout of volunteers returning to Falling Sands Lock, just south of Kidderminster, to finish the painting on the footbridge across the tail of the lock. As well as completing the footbridge, one volunteer litter picked along the towpath between Falling Sands Lock and the railway viaduct above Falling Sands Bridge, collecting four bags of litter. On discovering that the Himalayan Balsam growth was well advanced in this area, other volunteers decided to make a start on clearing the plant.

This proved a good decision as when the branch returned to the site for its Himalayan Balsam pull on Wednesday 11th June, the bare patches of ground they had left were now showing signs of other plant growth. This spurred on renewed efforts to work both sides of the lock and the adjoining riverbank and the removal of this later growth was completed.

Joining the branch on this occasion was a Spanish architect, Julio Lopez, who is visiting the UK to explore English systems in both the professional and voluntary sector and enjoyed the day – so he may be seen at forthcoming events.
WEST COUNTRY BRANCH

West Country Branch has held a number of events in the past few months starting with its work party at Bridgwater in May. Good weather and the help of 20 volunteers plus two CRT staff made tackling the litter along the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal all the easier. The volunteers split into four groups who started between Bridges 6 and 7 and worked along the towpaths in all directions. Another four volunteers worked from the CRT motorised flat workboat to remove floating debris from the navigation. The volunteers collected about 30 black bags of rubbish, three bikes, five road cones, a new Aldi shopping trolley, plastic sheets, carpet underlay and some traffic safety barriers, which the group managed to return to their original work sites.

On 7th June, 15 volunteers headed further south and in between the showers managed to clean-up the area and improve the stretch of the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal in Bathpool. This was good preparation for 24th June when the branch was involved in the IWA 2014 Himalayan Balsam Campaign and held a work party at Bathpool. Volunteers covered about half a mile in each direction checking for and pulling out Himalayan Balsam, which was growing in large quantities at points on the bank. It appears to be spreading from a tributary of the Old River Tone that runs parallel to the canal. This shows just how easily the plant can spread from area to area with up to 800 seeds per plant that are explosively released over a radius of up to seven metres. Volunteers removed a variety of sized plants that had stems that ranged from being millimetres thick all the way up to 8cm.

LEICESTERSHIRE BRANCH

Volunteers from Leicestershire Branch, CRT and the Aylestone Meadows Appreciation Society turned out on Tuesday 24th June to tackle the Himalayan Balsam growing along either side of the towpath of the Grand Union Canal Leicester Section as it borders Aylestone Meadows, south of Leicester. Most of the Himalayan Balsam along this stretch had been pulled or slashed by the time the heat of the hot sunny day made it sensible to stop. IWA’s Himalayan Balsam Banner was used in a mobile fashion to alert passers-by as to what was going on, being carried on a volunteer’s bicycle, with work gloves and other equipment following in the bicycle’s trailer.

LICHFIELD BRANCH

On 16th May, 14 volunteers joined Lichfield Branch’s work party at Brindley Bank on the Trent & Mersey Canal in Rugeley. CRT’s Barry Keight was there to support the work party with a welfare van, supply truck, cement mixer and the rest of the gear from the branch’s extensive ‘wish list’. Lots of work was completed over the day. The bricklaying team built the canal wall to within one brick height of the level needed, the aqueduct and ‘Bloody Steps’ railings were painted by a second team, one of the steps which has been ‘wonky’ for years was straightened, undergrowth was cleared, grass cut and litter picked.

As ever there was plenty of home-made cake for the volunteers, one of which, a passing boater, was attending his first work party. Other boaters put the kettle on for the branch and stayed for a chat. The day turned out to be both very productive and sociable.

GUILDFORD & READING BRANCH

On Sunday 11th May, Guildford & Reading Branch volunteer Verna Smith, joined 1st Wargrave Guides to help at their first work part at Garston Lock on the Kennet & Avon Canal. 1st Wargrave Guides have adopted both Sheffield & Garston locks on the K&A Canal, which are both near Theale. The group’s first work party since adopting the lock was spent cleaning, weeding, removing graffiti, putting up bird boxes and painting Garston Lock. Passing boaters were impressed to see the work that was being completed.
CHESTER & MERSEYSIDE BRANCH

Chester & Merseyside Branch volunteers started work on the Dee Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal in September 2013 and have now amassed over 200 volunteer hours. These hours that volunteers have donated to work on the canal have helped the group paint a combination of railings and lock gates at Dee Lock, Graving Lock and Bridge Lock; clear vegetation from Old Station Yard, the hard edge by Bridge 126 and Tower Wharf; complete seven litter picks; plant spring bulbs at Bridge Lock and prepare the Old Service Block for plastering and painting.

The work has not gone un-noticed by those who visit the area and now enjoy the much improved environment.

WARWICKSHIRE BRANCH

Over the last two years, Warwickshire Branch has been clearing the vegetation and obstacles from the offside path between the locks in the middle of Hatton Flight on the Grand Union Canal. The point has now been reached where it is necessary to pair back an embankment alongside the lock landing at Lock 31 in order to restore a safe pathway.

On Sunday 4th May, volunteers began the heavy labour of removing the sticky clay from the embankment at Lock 31. The clay was bagged and loaded onto the hopper, which was then transported to the other end of the pound, above Lock 30. Here it was unloaded and spread over the rubble on the offside towpath. The rubble had been previously laid as a new towpath surface by earlier IWA work parties on parts of the path that had subsided.

To prevent the embankment at Lock 31 encroaching on the lock landing in the future, a retaining wall of posts was driven into a trench, which was then filled with concrete.

LEE & STORT BRANCH

Over 20 beavers, cubs and scouts joined members of Lee & Stort Branch on the River Lee on Saturday 21st June to help prepare for the Ware Boat Festival to be held from 4th-6th July.

Tasked with the job of clearing the towpath of overhanging vegetation as well as an overgrown patch where stalls for the festival were to be positioned, the group eagerly began work cutting, pulling, sweeping, raking and moving all the debris. It was a hot day but with plenty of breaks and refreshments the beavers, cubs and scouts, with the help of their leaders, local residents and branch members, returned the towpath to its original size and removed the nettles ready for the festival stalls.

SOUTH YORKSHIRE & DUKERIES

South Yorkshire & Dukeries Branch, along with members of the Abbeydale Rotary Club, held its annual spring clean up on Sunday 13th April at Tinsley Marina on the Sheffield & Tinsley Canal.

This year the event had come to the attention of BBC Radio Sheffield who asked to feature the clean-up on their Sunday morning Treasure Hunt programme, where listeners are given clues to guess the featured destination.

The event itself was a success. Approximately 30 people turned out on the beautiful Sunday morning to clear away litter, which volunteers said was less prevalent than in previous years. About 50 bags of rubbish were collected before pie and peas were enjoyed at Tinsley Boat Club after the event.
Is your branch doing something that demonstrates the great work that our members do? If so let us know - send your story and pictures to alison.smedley@waterways.org.uk.

OTHER NEWS

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 the IWA Branch Campaign Team: Alison Smedley, Branch Campaign Officer 07779 090915; alison.smedley@waterways.org.uk
Stefanie Preston, Branch Campaign Assistant 01494 783453; stefanie.preston@waterways.org.uk

IWA branches and volunteers have joined many waterway enthusiasts in making the most of the spring and summer at water festivals and events across the country.

Over the early May Bank Holiday, IWA volunteers staged the Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice at the junction of the Regent’s Canal and Paddington Arm of the Grand Union Canal. The event received the highest number of visitors in its history as well as hosting over 130 boats.

Over the same weekend, IWA Northampton Branch held its boat gathering at the historic Nurser’s Dock at Braunston for the first time. The volunteers organised a range of entertainment including guided walks, a treasure hunt, quizzes, games and competitions, all of which were well received.

At the beginning of June, IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch hosted the equally successful IWA National Campaign Festival on the Dee Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal. Over 120 boats and thousands of people gathered to enjoy the entertainment on offer and support the branch’s campaign to restore and reopen the River Lock leading on to the River Dee.

Many other branches have also attended a number of festivals with stalls to promote the work of IWA and raise funds. (More detailed reports are published in the News pages in this issue.)
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Safeguarding the future

The last issue of Waterways highlighted the tireless work being carried out on behalf of IWA members – and indeed waterway enthusiasts in general – by people like Gren Messham (see The Interview). Like many people, I have very strong views on HS2 and the effect it would have on large swathes of the English countryside, not to mention on those whose homes and farms would be blighted forever by this controversial project. When it comes to the waterways specifically, I particularly lament the possible destruction of the rural environment around Fradley – one of the loveliest parts of the waterway network.

I would like therefore to pay tribute to Gren (and everyone else involved in IWA’s HS2 campaigning work) for working so hard to safeguard the future of our waterways for all of us to enjoy.

More power to your elbow!

Ray Prior,
Via email

See also IWA Submits HS2 Bill Petition, page 7 of this issue. Ed.
To advertise here please contact Laura Smith  01283 742971  l.smith@wwonline.co.uk
Correspond to: Laura Smith, IWA Waterways, 151 Station Street, Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire  DE14 1BG  Next issue deadline: 30th September 2014

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