

The

Steerer

The magazine of The Narrow Boat Trust Ltd

Autumn 2021



SUGGESTED TRUST DONATION OF £2.00

FREE TO MEMBERS



Registered office:
23 Redway Drive
Twickenham TW2 7NT

www.narrowboattrust.org.uk

Company No. 01724935
Charity No. 288243

CHAIRMAN
Kirk Martin

kirknbt@outlook.com

SECRETARY
Charlotte Fleming

charlotte.fleming@btinternet.com

TREASURER
Henry Rayment

henry@stricklandestate.co.uk

CREWING CO-ORDINATOR
Barry Adams

sefac1@btinternet.com

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY
Ian Johnson

nbtmemb@gmail.com

STEERER EDITOR
Charlotte Fleming

charlotte.fleming@btinternet.com

Cover photo: Going down the Oxford (photo: Will Hewitt)

Message from our Chair

2021 has been quite a year for the Narrow Boat Trust and is significant in being our 'official' 50th year. The year started, of course, with work continuing of *Nuneaton* at Brinklow under the conditions of the lockdown caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. We also had, in February, the very sad news that one of our most dedicated crew members, Peter Lovett, passed away after a long illness during which he remained inspiringly optimistic for the future. Peter was always available to "fill any gaps in the crewing schedule" which was very useful for our crewing co-ordinator.

Realising that *Nuneaton* would be coming off Brinklow not only with a huge amount of work completed on the hull but also a very thorough repaint, right down to the engine room and the back cabin bilges, it was decided to dock *Brighton* at Grendon for the last week in May. Nick Lake coordinated this and you can read about this and other maintenance matters elsewhere in this magazine.

There was a further work party at Alvecote on Saturday 7 and Sunday 8 August to get *Nuneaton*, now back at our base, and *Brighton* ready for the combined autumn coal run (combined because previously to the pandemic we had managed two runs, one in the summer going clockwise down the Grand Union and back via the Oxford and the autumn run going anti-clockwise via the Oxford and returning via the Grand Union). This run almost incorporated a filming job on the Thames but in the end the terms of the contract drawn up by American lawyers and the increasing complexity of trying to accommodate the ever-changing dates and locations into the coal run made it impossible to fulfil.

I would like to thank all those who turned out for the work parties and the many days put in at Brinklow as well, especially Nick Lake for lots of preparation and painting and arranging for purchasing new cloths etc and Howard Williams who carried out the technical work on the refitted engine and all the associated rewiring, installation of batteries, etc. Many others turned up for days at a time to assist Nick and Howard in this essential work and my thanks to all of you.

I would also like to thank all those who came forward to crew the boats for our regular solid fuel, "coal", run to the Thames, Kennet and Wey. This includes not only those who crew the boats but those, who unable to commit themselves to a period of crewing, turned out for days at a time to help with loading at Braunston and later at Walton on Thames, unloading at various points on the rivers and, equally important, lock wheeling when the boats were within reach of where they live. I did a couple of days lock wheeling on the Grand Union which was not only very enjoyable but ensured that the crew were able to complete the run on time. Why not consider doing this if you fancy a bit of outdoor exercise and getting to see the boats in action? Your help is always welcome and the kettle is on!

Finally I should like to thank Malcolm Burge for his continuing support of the Narrow Boat Trust in providing us with a mooring at Alvecote – complete with the use of a convenient pub – The Samuel Barlow – at the marina, and also our patron Tim Coghlan for his support, this year as before, in allowing us to load at Braunston, and to make emergency use of his dry dock when we discovered a weak seam in *Nuneaton* (hardly surprising when you consider all that the hull had gone through during the rebottoming). Tim also presented us with a very welcome cheque for £1,000 as we prepared to set off for the solid fuel run. His generosity in this is hugely welcome and a real boost to our funds.

It only remains to wish the Narrow Boat Trust well for the next 50 years!

Kirk Martin
Chair

The Boatman's Cabin

In 1873, an account of a solo canoe journey from Leicestershire to London appeared in *The Bedfordshire Mercury*, serialised over ten weeks. It was signed simply *Red Rover*, although its author can be identified as William Hillhouse, a young Bedford school teacher. Later that year a revised version of the account was published as a book entitled *Canal and River, A Canoe Cruise from Leicestershire to the Mouth of the Thames*. Copies of the book are now extremely rare – not even the copyright libraries hold a copy – but the newspaper version can be read in the British Newspaper Archive online.

The journey took place in August 1872. The canoe was launched from Market Harborough, and thence began an epic journey along the canals and rivers of England, all the way to the mouth of the Thames, with accommodation provided by a small tent. While canoeing down the Oxford canal – in torrential rain, with leaking waterproofs and soaking clothes – the prospect of spending the night under canvas had little appeal. Luckily, the author fell in with a friendly boatman and was offered hospitality in his cabin. And here we are indebted to *Red Rover* for a lengthy and detailed account of the boatman's cabin of 1872. Much of it makes familiar reading to NBT crew – the cabins changed little over subsequent years – but it is unusual to find so detailed an account at this date; the instruction for ladies to “discard the crinoline” before entering is a reminder of the times in which it was written!

Alison Cannon

The sides of the cabin are gorgeous with landscape, and brilliant designs in red and yellow chiefly, and blue as an assistant, with, of course, green as a landscape colour. The canal-men seem to exhaust all their skill and ingenuity in decorating the cabin and its accompanying articles of furniture; there is hardly a square inch of surface either inside or outside the room that has not its vividly coloured design. Even the very cans and pails are covered with illuminations, and I verily believe that the stove, the pot, kettle, and frying-pan (for that is the usual stock of iron ware) would, if it were possible by any means, bear each its distinctive landscape. Ornamentation is certainly a strong point in a canal-boat cabin. But let us go down inside and see the domestic arrangements of this miniature home (N.B. Ladies are requested to discard the crinoline).

You will observe that your body, as you go through the door, as nearly as possible fills in the opening. Indeed, if you are at all stout you must get in edgeways. “Take care, both ends! There, I thought so.” You have commenced by putting your foot in the wooden box containing coal, and, in looking down to see what is the matter, have nearly stunned yourself by endeavouring to break a hole in the roof with your head. “Softly. You will be all right when you get fairly inside. That’s right! Here we are.” All along one side of the cabin runs a seat about 2 feet wide, of course economised by being made into a locker. This forms the couch and chairs of the establishment. Let us sit down and examine at our leisure. Don’t lean back; you remember I told you the side topples in six inches, and your back, if you try to easy-chair it, will be bent into an arch. “Look out for your knees, you sir, at the door end – if you don’t want to feed the fire with them.”

This fire, which is quite invisible - but the effects of which will soon become perceptible on your persons, for the cabin is like a moderate oven - is contained in a black thing looking like an iron tube about 7 inches in diameter, with the part about 2 feet from one end blown out to a thickness of one foot and gradually tapering each way. “Where’s the fire?” you ask. Take hold of that handle standing out from the front. Take the poker, for I daresay it’s hot; pull it - presto! There’s the fire. What you have pulled off is a large iron plate, exactly fitting one side of the swollen part of the tube, which, being pulled away, exposes the young furnace. “Why, what’s this? Upon my word it is! It’s a kettle.” Yes, it’s a kettle stuck in the fire and standing up the chimney. When the canal-man wants to boil his water he fills the kettle and crams it up the chimney like that and shuts it in. Don’t touch it. No one but a canal-man or a salamander could pull out that burning piece of metal. The bottom of the tube is surrounded by a high ring of iron made as a portion of the fireplace, and forming the fender; the upper portion passes upwards through the roof, terminates in the iron chimney-pot which ornaments the corner of the “quarter-deck.” The wear on these chimney-pots from the combined action of weather and fire is enormous – often as many as three a year being used up. Of course they are not very expensive, being merely tubes of strong sheet iron.

Opposite to the seat on which we are sitting, and extending from a few inches from the stove to the other end of the cabin, and coming out probably 30 inches, the side of the cabin is filled in, in the old bureau style of architecture, with drawers and cupboards. At the end nearest to the stove and up about 4 feet from the floor the door of a cupboard is seen, in the middle of which is the looking glass for the occupier's toilet, about 9 inches by 7. Just up above this is a nob and button. Turning the button and pulling the nob the door will come downwards, and if you let it fall it will at length stop and stand out at right angles with its former position, projecting from the bottom of the cupboard (which it thus leaves open), and at about 3 feet from the floor. This forms the only table of the establishment. The door is hinged or pivoted an inch or two from the bottom, and when it is opened wide that inch or two catches under the shelf forming the bottom of the cupboard, and it stands out and forms a continuation of the shelf. Inside this cupboard the captain of the boat keeps his stock of "crockery" and his tea and sugar. By the side of this he also keeps his teapot, if he as one - usually a half-gallon affair, and always as bright as a mirror. My cabin was a bachelor's home, and the owner disdained the use of such an effeminate luxury as a teapot. He always made his tea by taking off the lid of the kettle, thrusting in a large handful of the "fragrant leaf" and replacing the kettle on the fire till such time as it might be wanted. The quantity of tea thus drunk is enormous - my bachelor friend made no fuss whatever about drinking a quart in ten minutes; and the monstrous hunks of bread he devoured with it! Truly my "gentle bachelor's" appetite was e-gnaw-mous.



"... the only table..." (Helen MacGregor)

The last three feet of the bureau is occupied by one door, also letting downwards, the hinges being on the same level as the top of the long seat. Opening this we disclose a large recess; the door falls down and lodges on the seat, thus forming the bedstead of the period - while out from the recess aforesaid tumbles a large bundle, which contains the bed and bedclothes. The bed in my temporary home was, I think stuffed with chaff, and that too not cut to the shortest length, as I found when I laid down on it for sleep - for the pieces all seemed to stand upon end. The sheets were none of the whitest, being formed of unbleached calico somewhat at the stage of development which characterises sackcloth; but, like everything connected with the place, they were scrupulously clean. In fact, colour and cleanliness seem to be the most marked features in everything connected with the boats. The brass nobs and handles of the drawers were as bright as labour could make them, the deck, floor, and seats were spotless in their unsullied purity; the florid china ornaments plentifully disposed about the place (another prominent branch of boatman's taste) had not a speck of dirt lurking in any of their manifold wrinkles and crannies. The very stove was blackleaded from top to toe till it shewed its distorted reflection of everything around it. I don't doubt but that there are some dirty boats, inhabited by dirty families, for to suppose the contrary would be to think canal nature is uniform; but I can only say that in all the boats which I saw the same characteristics held good. I wish we could only say that of land homes in the same position as regards wealth. If poor people, aye and middle-class people too, would only learn the value of cleanliness in their homes, this would be a very different world to what it is. Cleanliness and pure air are the bitterest foes to disease of every kind, while dirt is the great enemy alike to pure air and to health. And yet these two boats, in which such perfect cleanliness existed, were carrying what, of all things, would be thought to be a dirt producer - coal. One would have thought that the circumstances were very unfavourable to perfection, but it was not so. The great secret was - get them once thoroughly clean, and then it is comparatively easy to keep them so. Never indulge in what is in some country parts called "a lick and a promise."

Canal boats are usually drawn by horses, which are attached by a long rope fastened to an upright pole fixed at the stem end of the backbone, and ornamented with mathematical designs in colours. Donkeys are of not infrequent occurrence with boats belonging to or rented by the occupants of them. In one instance I remember seeing three donkeys yoked in single file, and drawing two heavily laden boats. In our case one horse drew the two boats, each loaded with about 34 tons of coal. The total weight which this horse thus drew could certainly not be less than eighty tons, and it progressed at a rate of about a mile and a half an hour. The boats are gauged to a load of about 35 tons, and three graduated strips of copper are nailed up each side, one near stem and stern and the other amidships. By taking the average of the depths represented by these strips the weight carried is found, and as the boats are tolled so much per ton they are always gauged at the commencement of a canal.



Boat-horse and driver, K&A 2021. (Photo: Charlotte Fleming)

But I have not described the living part of the load of these boats. The stern boat was, as I said before, occupied by the captain, with his wife and one child, a little girl about four years of age. My captain was about 35 years of age, rather small and slightly built, with a very intelligent face, deeply browned by constant exposure to all weathers. His dress was of materials of which all canal clothes are made. Fustian* trousers, of a very baggy build, plush waistcoat, with fustian sleeves, a red handkerchief loosely folded round his neck, a cap of a kind of short fur, with a black peak, legs encased in thick blue worsted stockings, and feet thrust into large loose bluchers† of a special construction well fitted for the hard work required of them. Made of the thickest get-at-able leather, with inch soles studded all over with hobnails of the largest size, nothing but constant use could familiarize the boatman with the task of carrying such heavily weighted feet.

The wife was dressed in very abbreviated petticoats covered by a ditto brown frock, stockings of the same kind as her husband's, and boots of a similar but rather lighter build. Her head was enveloped in a large quilted hood, which stuck out several inches in front of her face like the old coal-scuttle bonnets of our great grandmothers, the flaps hanging all over the shoulders. A canal-man's wife helps in all the work of her husband, jumping from boat to bank, opening locks, dragging the boat through the lock-gates, and performing such laborious duties with all the zeal and energy which he shows himself. Judging from her appearance, I should say that our captain's wife was at one time rather good-looking – according to the accepted standard of canal beauty. The little girl was from top to toe a miniature edition of her mother.

(Editor's note: I had added a few paragraph breaks to the original for readability. My apologies to lovers of mid-Victorian mile-long text!)

* Fustian is a "a hard-wearing fabric of cotton mixed with flax or wool, with a slight nap" (Collins Dictionary).

† Blucher: "A high shoe or half-boot, having the vamp and tongue made of one piece and overlapped by the quarters, which lace across the instep" (Webster's College Dictionary).

The Narrow Boat Trust Limited Annual Report

Achievements and performance, 2020-2021

During the year, work on *Nuneaton*'s hull continued at Brinklow while the 2020 solid fuel run to the Thames, Kennet & Avon and River Wey was completed thanks to the loan, once again, of *Nutfield* by the Friends of Raymond together with our butty *Brighton*.

At the same time a great deal of additional work was carried out on *Nuneaton* by Nick Lake, Howard Williams and several NBT members who were able to get to Brinklow to complete jobs that were easier while the boat was out of the water. At the year-end these were not fully completed but included thoroughly cleaning and painting the engine room before the fuel tanks and the refurbished engine were fitted. In addition to a great deal of general preparation and painting, arrangements were made for the fitting of the side cloths and replacement deckboards for both *Nuneaton* and *Brighton*.

At the year-end *Brighton* was scheduled to be docked at Grendon with further work by members to get it ready for the 2021 solid fuel run including blacking the hull and painting which would include putting the name on the stern. The pair will look smarter than they have for many years.

Because of additional work to *Nuneaton* and delays caused by the pandemic, it became obvious that several events we had planned to attend in 2021 were no longer possible. However, it was anticipated that all the work would be completed in time for our combined solid fuel run in September. During the year the Chair's occasional newsletters, illustrated with photographs of work in progress, kept our membership informed of progress.

During the year 41 members were involved in 45 work party days, 14 loading (and assisting with unloading) days, 170 days on the boats (mainly the solid fuel run) and 4 additional lock wheeling days making a total of 233 volunteer days contributed. Many thanks to them all and thanks also to those who are unable to be involved but support us through their membership and donations.

An untold number of days were also devoted to administrative duties by Council and other officers.

Financial Review

The operations of the Trust produced a loss of £20,155 this year (2020 surplus of £24,281). This was entirely as anticipated as the Trust spent much of its previous operational surplus on the continuing restoration of *Nuneaton*. At the year end the outstanding commitment towards *Nuneaton* was estimated at around £9,400.

Sales and profits from the single coal run were slightly down on the double run the previous year which is very commendable. Subscriptions were slightly above the previous year following the switch to life membership of three members.

The legacy of £3,000 left to the Trust by Tom Henshaw is in a separate reserve to ensure it is used for a specific project that will be of lasting benefit to the Trust and it is currently earmarked for a set of new cloths for *Nuneaton*. All other reserves are available for use at the discretion of the Trustees/Council of Management, and we aim to maintain those reserves at a level which will enable the Trust to pay for any unexpected repairs so that the activities of the Trust can be maintained.

In accordance with the accounting policy that has been adopted for many years, *Nuneaton* and *Brighton* are included in the balance sheet at cost less depreciation and both *Nuneaton* and *Brighton* have had a book value of £1 each since 31st March 2017. The Council of Management have considered including the boats at valuation in the balance sheet but have decided against doing so on the grounds of the cost of obtaining formal valuations that could be used for accounting purposes. However, the boats were revalued in 2015 at £70,000 for insurance purposes and this is considered to still be appropriate.

We are very sorry to have to report that our former Treasurer, Peter Lovett, sadly died on 9th February 2021. Peter will be greatly missed, and the Trust was represented at his funeral

~~~~~

## **The Narrow Boat Trust Limited**

### **Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) For year ending 31 March 2021**

|                                            | 2021<br>Total<br>un-restricted<br>funds<br>£ | 2020<br>Total<br>un-restricted<br>funds<br>£ |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Incoming resources</b>                  |                                              |                                              |
| Coal sales                                 | 18240                                        | 19,301                                       |
| Subscriptions                              | 2,025                                        | 1,787                                        |
| Donations                                  | 4919                                         | 29,053                                       |
| Gift aid                                   | 1036                                         | 0                                            |
| Interest receivable                        | 13                                           | 65                                           |
| <b>Total incoming resources</b>            | <b>26,233</b>                                | <b>50,206</b>                                |
| <b>Resources expended</b>                  |                                              |                                              |
| Coal purchases                             | 14359                                        | 15,416                                       |
| Repairs and maintenance                    | 28,022                                       | 4,287                                        |
| Boat running costs                         | 272                                          | 872                                          |
| Hire of Motors                             | 750                                          | 1,185                                        |
| Tolls and licences                         | 517                                          | 1,395                                        |
| Insurance                                  | 1,513                                        | 1,295                                        |
| Travel costs                               | 0                                            | 30                                           |
| Training                                   | 0                                            | 420                                          |
| Independent examination of accounts        | 100                                          | 200                                          |
| Postage and stationery                     | 2                                            | 344                                          |
| Steerer printing                           | 470                                          | 257                                          |
| Web site                                   | 0                                            | 0                                            |
| IWA, CBOA, Zoom & Mojo subscriptions       | 296                                          | 114                                          |
| Sundry expenses                            | 87                                           | 110                                          |
| <b>Total resources expended</b>            | <b>46,388</b>                                | <b>25,925</b>                                |
| Net movement in funds                      | -20,155                                      | 24,281                                       |
| Balance transferred to unrestricted funds  | <u>-20,155</u>                               | <u>24,281</u>                                |
| Balance unrestricted funds brought forward | 37,248                                       | 12,967                                       |
| Balance unrestricted funds carried forward | 17,093                                       | 37,248                                       |

The notes on pages 10-11 form part of these financial statements.



**The Narrow Boat Trust Limited**  
 Company Number 1724935  
**Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2021**

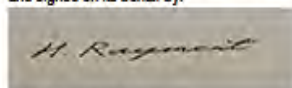
|                                                |              | 2021          |               | 2020          |               |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                                                |              | £             | £             | £             | £             |
| <b>Fixed assets</b>                            | <b>Notes</b> |               |               |               |               |
| Tangible assets                                | 5            |               | 2             |               | 2             |
| <b>Current Assets</b>                          |              |               |               |               |               |
| Stock                                          | 6            | 823           |               | 369           |               |
| Debtors and prepayments                        | 7            | 1,527         |               | 2,533         |               |
| Cash at bank and in hand                       |              | <u>18,781</u> |               | <u>38,044</u> |               |
|                                                |              | 21,111        |               | 40,946        |               |
| Creditors: amounts falling due within one year | 8            | 0             |               | 0             |               |
| <b>Net current assets</b>                      |              |               | 21,111        |               | 40,946        |
| <b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>   |              |               | 21,113        |               | 40,948        |
| Provision for liabilities                      | 9            |               | (1,020)       |               | (700)         |
| <b>Net assets</b>                              |              |               | <u>20,093</u> |               | <u>40,248</u> |
| Financed by:                                   |              |               |               |               |               |
| <b>The funds of the Charity</b>                |              |               |               |               |               |
| Unrestricted funds brought forward             |              | 37,248        |               | 12,987        |               |
| Surplus/(Deficit) for the year                 |              | <u>20,155</u> |               | <u>24,281</u> |               |
| Unrestricted funds carried forward             |              | 17,093        |               | 37,249        |               |
| Tom Henshaw Legacy Fund                        |              | 3,000         |               | 3,000         |               |
| <b>Accumulated funds</b>                       |              |               | <u>20,093</u> |               | <u>40,248</u> |

The directors consider that the charitable company is entitled to exemption from the requirement to have an audit under the provisions of section 477(1) of the Companies Act 2006.

Members have not required the company, under section 478(1) of the Companies Act 2006, to obtain an audit for the year ended 31 March 2021.

The directors acknowledge their responsibilities for ensuring that the company keeps accounting records which comply with section 386 of the Companies Act 2006, and for preparing accounts which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company as at 31 March 2021 and of its income and expenditure for the year then ended in accordance with the requirements of section 394, and which otherwise comply with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 relating to the accounts, so far as applicable to the company.

The financial statements which have been prepared in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and were approved by the Council of Management on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2021 and signed on its behalf by:



Henry Rayment, Treasurer

## **The Narrow Boat Trust Limited**

### **Notes to the financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2021**

#### **1 Accounting policies**

The principal accounting policies are summarized below. The accounting policies have been applied consistently throughout the year and in the preceding year.

##### **1.1 Basis of accounting**

The financial statements are prepared under the historical cost convention and in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard for Smaller Entities (effective January 2015), the Companies Act 2006, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS102) and the Charities Act 2011.

##### **1.2 Fund Accounting**

All funds are unrestricted, except for the Tom Henshaw Legacy Fund, and are available for use at the discretion of the trustees in furtherance of the general objectives of the charity.

##### **1.3 Incoming resources**

All incoming resources are included in the statement of financial activities when the charity is entitled to the income and the amount can be quantified with reasonable accuracy. The following policies are applied to particular categories of income:

- Coal sales exclude VAT and are recognized after the coal has been delivered.
- Annual subscriptions and one off donations are included on a cash received basis. Life subscriptions are amortized over a period of 10 years.
- Gift aid is recognized on a cash received basis due to the fact that the amount of gift aid receivable is uncertain until the claim had been prepared and submitted to HMRC for each year.

##### **1.4 Resources expended**

Expenditure is recognized on an accruals basis as the liability is incurred.

##### **1.5 Tangible fixed assets and depreciation**

Tangible fixed assets are stated at cost less depreciation.

Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write off the cost of fixed assets, less their residual value, over their expected useful lives on the following bases:

Narrow Boats - 5% per annum straight line basis

##### **1.6 Stocks**

Stocks are valued at the lower of cost and net realizable value.

#### **2 Staff costs**

No staff were employed during the year. (2020 nil)

#### **3 Trustee remuneration and related party transactions**

No trustee received any remuneration during the year.

No trustee or other person related to the charity had any personal interest in any contract or transaction entered into by the charity during the year.

## The Narrow Boat Trust Limited

### Notes to the financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2021

#### 4 Taxation

As a charity the company is exempt from tax on income and gains falling within section 505 of the Taxes Act 1988 or section 256 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 to the extent that these are applied to its charitable objects. No tax charges have arisen in the Charity.

#### 5 Tangible fixed assets

|                     | Narrow Boats |          |        |
|---------------------|--------------|----------|--------|
|                     | Brighton     | Nuneaton | Total  |
|                     | £            | £        | £      |
| Cost                |              |          |        |
| As at 1 April 2020  | 7,739        | 9,428    | 17,167 |
| Additions           |              |          |        |
| As at 31 March 2021 | 7,739        | 9,428    | 17,167 |
| Depreciation        |              |          |        |
| As at 1 April 2020  | 7,738        | 9,427    | 17,165 |
| Charge for the year |              |          |        |
| As at 31 March 2021 | 7,738        | 9,427    | 17,165 |
| Net book value      |              |          |        |
| At 31 March 2020    | 1            | 1        | 2      |
| At 31 March 2021    | 1            | 1        | 2      |

#### 6 Stock

|                  | 2021 | 2020 |
|------------------|------|------|
|                  | £    | £    |
| Coal for re-sale | 823  | 369  |

#### 7 Debtors and Prepayments

|                    |              |              |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| VAT                | 187          | 673          |
| Prepayments        | 1,340        | 1,336        |
| Coal sales debtors | 0            | 524          |
|                    | <u>1,527</u> | <u>2,533</u> |

#### 8 Creditors : Amounts falling due within one year

|                 |          |          |
|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Trade Creditors | 0        | 0        |
| Accruals        | 0        | 0        |
|                 | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> |

#### 9 Provisions for liabilities

|                                          |      |     |
|------------------------------------------|------|-----|
| Balance of life membership subscriptions | 1020 | 700 |
|------------------------------------------|------|-----|

#### 10 Company limited by guarantee

The company is limited by guarantee and consequently does not have share capital.

At 31 March 2021 131 members had guaranteed £1 each in the event of the winding up of the company.

# The Narrow Boat Trust Ltd

## Notice of Meeting

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the Annual General Meeting of The Narrow Boat Trust Ltd will be held on Zoom at 2pm on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2021 to transact the following business.

### **AGENDA**

Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting

To be agreed and matters arising.

Reports and accounts

To receive and consider the accounts for the year ended [date] and the reports of the charity trustees and auditors.

Appointment of Trustees

To re-appoint Kirk Martin for a second period of 3 years.

To re-appoint Henry Rayment for a second period of 3 years.

Members' proposed resolutions

Details will be given once proposed resolutions are received. Proposed resolutions should be sent to the Secretary ([charlotte.fleming@btinternet.com](mailto:charlotte.fleming@btinternet.com)) by noon 14 days prior to the date of the meeting (13.11.2021). A revised agenda will be issued on the NBT website Members' area by 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

Any other business

To deal with any matters raised at the meeting.

By order of the Board of Trustees of the Narrow Boat Trust Ltd

Charlotte Fleming,

Secretary

29<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

**Please note:** A separate proxy voting form and copy of this notice were included in the envelope with your copy of the magazine. The voting form does not, obviously, include resolutions that have not yet been received. Please add any such to the form by hand before returning it.

## Annual General Meeting: instructions for participants

The AGM will be held on **Zoom**, like last year.

Zoom is a communication app which is easy to download onto your smart phone, iPad or computer. It allows you to have a face to face meeting via the internet so long as a) your device has a built-in camera and either a built-in microphone and speakers or a headset and b) you have an internet connection/WiFi. Most smart phones, iPads and modern computers have built in microphones and cameras.

### If you do not already have Zoom installed:

- ⇒ Go to [zoom.us](https://zoom.us) online, and install Zoom on your computer
- ⇒ Sign up is free and it will talk you through the process; it is very simple
- ⇒ Zoom will then be installed on your device.

To make joining the meeting simpler, this year we are not asking you to pre-register for it.

### To join the Zoom Meeting, use this link:

**<https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/89387244070>**

It will also be available as a clickable link in the NBT website Members' area, along with all the AGM documents.

You may be asked for the **Meeting ID**: 893 8724 4070.

Remember to click "Join with video" and "Join with audio" in order to socialise and ask questions. Everyone but the speaker will be muted during the business part of the meeting, but you can virtually "raise your hand" to ask a question, or post it in the chat box.

### To join with a mobile phone: one tap mobile

+442034815240,,89387244070# United Kingdom

+442039017895,,89387244070# United Kingdom

Dial by your location

+44 203 481 5240 United Kingdom

+44 203 901 7895 United Kingdom

+44 208 080 6591 United Kingdom

+44 208 080 6592 United Kingdom

+44 330 088 5830 United Kingdom

+44 131 460 1196 United Kingdom

+44 203 481 5237 United Kingdom



The Long Cut, K&A  
(photo Charlotte Fleming)

Find your local number: <https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/kcXfStUGb8>

## Work on the boats

Nick Lake, Maintenance Coordinator. Photos by Nick Lake.

This year's programme of work on the boats turned out to be rather different, and certainly to a different timescale, from the one we envisaged in our report on the progress on *Nuneaton* in the 2020 edition of the Steerer. At this time last year, the majority of the steelwork had been completed, and we were optimistic that *Nuneaton* would be back in service by the spring, but as it turned out, it was early August before she finally left Brinklow. However, with the boats going nowhere over the summer, we were able to put the time to good use, and ended up having a far more productive year than we had ever imagined.

Last year's report concluded that, "There is a great deal of work yet to be done," and indeed there was.

### December 2020

While the work on the boat continued, at a reduced rate owing to the onset of winter, Dave Ross at Brinklow, with the benefit of a warm workshop, stripped down and rebuilt *Nuneaton*'s Lister HRW2.

The strip-down revealed that the main bearings and the crankshaft itself were in good condition, but the bad news was that, owing to distortion in one of the cylinders, possibly due to overheating, we would need new pistons, piston rings, and big-end bearings.

Dave was able to source original Lister pistons and rings. The cylinder heads, injector pump, and injectors were sent away to be reconditioned, and meanwhile, the cylinders were rebored. However, what we had not bargained for was that the heat exchanger, the vital component that passes heat from the engine coolant to the raw water from the canal, was found to be leaky and beyond repair. This was particularly unfortunate because heat exchangers of the type we needed are no longer something you can buy off the shelf. Dave put out an appeal on social media and, as luck would have it, came up with an almost new one that has, so far, worked perfectly.

By early January, Dave had reassembled the engine, painting it as he went, and to everyone's great relief, the engine fired first time and ran sweetly. All it needed now was a boat to put it in, but for that we would have to wait awhile.

### January

By the start of the new year, the base plate had been extended beneath the engine room, the keelson was in place, and the gunwales were finished. So the only major job that remained was to replace the section of base plate below the cabin.

At this stage, we were still anticipating the work to be finished in March, certainly by Easter, the first weekend in April. So, as there were a number of jobs that we needed to do ourselves, we made plans to get as much as possible done in the remaining three months during which the boat would be out of the water.

First of all, the entire inside of the engine room, including the bilge, needed to be painted before the engine was reinstalled – not a small job, because there was a great deal of preparation to be



*Nuneaton's engine(photo: Howard Williams)*



done before any paint could be applied. We also spotted the chance to paint the sides of the cabin bilge in the window between the old base plate being removed, and the new one being put in place, when we would be able to get at the bilge from underneath. These were the essential jobs, but we could see that, if we put our minds to it, the time before the boat went back into the water presented a perfect opportunity to tackle other jobs more easily done while the boat was on dry land.

## February



*Nuneaton*

## March

After the old engine-room wiring had been stripped out, and the paintwork degreased, we began the job of scraping, sanding, and priming, but we had not gone far before we hit a snag when the scraper disappeared into a patch of corrosion in the corner between the bulkhead and the port side of the hull and the side panel. Steve Priest "inspected" it with a sledgehammer and pronounced that, as we could now see daylight through the hull, a section would have to be cut out



Engine room panel

so they could see if the tanks needed to be rebottomed.

The job was not quite as onerous as Nick and Steve would have had us believe, but when it was done, they decided the tanks did indeed need to be rebottomed, after which we painted them. And off and on, that job managed to occupy the rest of March.

In mid-February, once the final section of baseplate had been removed, we made a start. With the days getting longer, even if the weather was not getting any warmer, we could at least work until 5 o'clock. So we had the cabin bilge cleaned up and painted within three days. We then turned our attention to the engine room, while Nick Sherratt fitted the final section of baseplate.



Cabin bilge

and replated, and a new side panel fitted between the engine room doors and the bulkhead. This meant that we could do no more work in the engine room until the welding and riveting had been done. But there was to be no respite, of course. Nick Sherratt produced the diesel tanks saying they would need draining and cleaning out,



Rebottomed and painted diesel tanks

Meanwhile, the side cloths were ordered from the Tarpaulin Supply & Repair Company in Birmingham, Steve Priest cut “ring holes” in the gunwales and fitted gunwale rings, and completed the plating to repair the engine-room corrosion. Steve and Nick also riveted in the new side panel, which would have to be painted, as would the engine-room doors, owing to the collateral damage caused when the old panel was cut out.

Although we now had yet another job on our list, we were fairly relaxed about it because any hope of having *Nuneaton* back with us by Easter had evaporated when we learned that the date for the first stage of the grit-blasting was to be Good Friday, 2nd April. And with Easter fast approaching, we had to suspend any other work to get *Nuneaton* ready.

## April

On 1st April, the Thursday before Easter, we wrapped the cabin and engine room in tarpaulin to protect it from damage during the grit blasting and two-pack spraying. One of the joys of working at Brinklow is that there is no shortage of passers-by ready to tell you, you don't want to do it like that. So observing someone struggling single-handedly to tie down tarpaulins in the teeth of a gale, was irresistible. But in spite of the advice, and the wind, *Nuneaton* was securely covered by late afternoon, ready for the arrival of the grit-blasters the following morning.



The cabin wrapped



Grit-blasting the hull

The first stage of the work was to grit-blast the outside of the hull, and this was finished by lunchtime on the Saturday. In



After grit-blasting.



Counter painted with 2-pack

In addition to the hull, we had arranged for the grit-blasters to include the top bends and the counter because, as these were to be painted anyway, it would save us a great deal of preparation time, and give a better and more resilient finish.

The second stage was grit blasting the inside of the hold and the engine-room bulkhead, and as this was done on the Friday and Saturday a week later, followed immediately by Steve spraying several coats of black two-pack epoxy paint on to the outside of the hull, and “red oxide” two-pack on the inside of the hold and the bulkhead, the engine room and cabin had to remain covered.

So, for two weeks, there was nothing we could do to the boat itself, but we collected the side cloths from Tarpaulin Supply & Repair, and arranged for Margaret Clarke at Brinklow to make up the side strings and knee strings in return for a modest donation to the Ashby Canal Association. And we

organised The Friends of Raymond to deliver *Nuneaton*'s top planks, mast box, stands, deck board and false cratch to the yard from Alvecote, while they were returning *Nutfield* to Braunston over the second grit-blasting weekend.

And it all arrived just in time because Steve Priest needed the mast box urgently so that he could align it to find the exact spot on the keelson into which to insert a cup to accept the mast-box pin, before he sprayed the hold with two-pack. But he and Nick Sherratt had the job done in little over an hour on the Monday morning.



The sprayed hold

With that job out of the way, we left Steve to carry on with his spraying, while we turned our thoughts to the side cloths. Back in January, there had been considerable discussion on how to fit the cloths to the new steel gunwales, and it was eventually agreed that the best way to do it was to drill holes through the

12mm steel, so that the side-cloth battens could be bolted down in much the same way as they would be nailed to wooden gunwales. Steve Priest offered to loan us his mag drill, and Colin Wilks manfully volunteered to use it. We had arranged for Rex Wain at Brinklow to make the battens and fit the side cloths and, as we were expecting Rex to need to do it imminently, Colin spent 27th April drilling 150 holes.

A few days earlier, on Saturday 24th April, Charlie King, the marine surveyor we had engaged after Chris Williams dropped out, had carried out a full hull survey and pronounced it, and the work done, to be good, which was a relief, although anything less would have been a surprise.

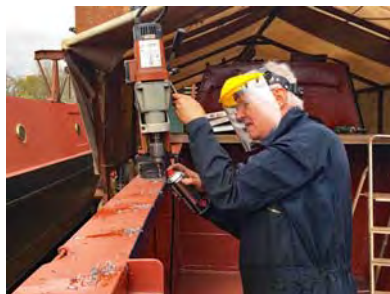
However, it was also around this time that plans changed again. It transpired that the engine could not be installed while *Nuneaton* was up on sleepers because it was too high for a forklift to drop the engine in through the top, and Rex Wain would prefer to fit the side cloths when the boat was back in the water. That would have been fine, except for the fact there was no date yet for craning *Nuneaton* back in, because it needed to be coordinated with several other boats that were not yet ready to be moved. So, as it was beginning to look more like happening in the middle of June, we resigned ourselves to a further wait, and kept on painting.

## May

By 21st May we had made considerable progress. At the fore end we had not just painted the top bends, but the cants, deck, and deck lid as well. And at the stern we had



Mast box pin and cup



Colin Wilkes and the mag drill



The fore end painted



painted the tunnel bands, cants, and deck.

We left the ram's head, knowing that Steve was going to make us a new one. He had also constructed a new "back-end bar" on the forward edge of the engine room.

Although still work in progress, the port side engine room doors had been painted to the point where Will Hewitt was able to add the letters "NUN" to the inside of the righthand door, so the name read "NUNEATON" when the doors were open, as on the starboard side.



Tunnel bands, cants and deck

But most important of all, and three months after we had started it, the engine room had finally been finished, and was resplendent in white and green thanks to the talents of Steve Smith, who painted it single-handedly.



"NUNEATON" readable again

The scene then moved to Grendon Dock, where a good turnout of volunteers put in an intensive week of work on *Brighton* to bring her up to the same standard as *Nuneaton*. This included blacking the hull, sanding and painting the gunwales, painting the top



Brighton's fore end

planks and beams, and sorting out the stacks of accumulated gubbins in the hold. We also painted the fore end and stern to match the style we had adopted for *Nuneaton* and, on the final morning, Will Hewitt restored the name on the stern top bends, which had been missing from *Brighton* for several years.

## June

The news that greeted us back at Brinklow in early June was that the date for the craning was to be the 24th, which meant cracking on to get the engine room doors and panel finished, and the gunwales painted before the side cloths were fitted.

Finally, at 10.30 on the morning of Thursday 24th June, *Nuneaton* was floating again after more



Will Hewitt restoring Brighton's name

than 18 months out of the water. But that was just the start of yet another chapter in the Brinklow story.

## July

On 5th July, the engine room top was removed, and first the diesel tanks, and then the engine were craned into position. Then followed several days of Dave Ross connecting everything up. But before he reinstalled the prop shaft, we grabbed the opportunity to paint the top of the new baseplate in the cabin bilge, a job that didn't get done back in March.



Back in the water

In mid-July two more long-awaited events took place. Rex Wain and his assistant Paul Graves fitted the side cloths – and the holes that Colin had drilled three months earlier worked perfectly. And Steve Priest fitted a new ram's head, generously paid for by a Narrow Boat Trust member, complete with brass tiller bar with a wooden handle expertly refashioned by Rex from a basic Midland Chandlers' model.



New side cloths ...

And with lockdown over, we were able to take advantage of having more pairs of hands to get the remaining work finished. We painted the engine room and cabin tops, the engine room slides, and the pigeon box. Helen MacGregor did a superb job of fixing a thin sheet of ply to the slide, so it could be painted and decorated. We painted the planks and beams, and fitted new bracing chains. Rich Greenhall cleaned and polished the cabin sides, so they virtually



... and ram's head.

matched the new paintwork on the port engine room doors and side panel. And finally, we painted the new ram's head, and repainted the "curtain" pattern on the stern bulkhead and cabin doors.

While some of us were busy with the basic jobs, Howard Williams expertly wired the engine room, which included installing a new battery box, and the control panel he had cleaned and refurbished. And with the electrics restored, the engine could, at long last, be run in the boat itself.

Rex Wain, meanwhile, was still busy on our behalf. Kirk Martin and Nick Lake had made donations in



Engine room wiring

Peter Lovett's memory to be used to provide new deck boards for the boats, which Rex set about making once the side cloths had been fitted. . However, because of the realignment and straightening carried out last year, *Nuneaton* was now slightly narrower than she had been, so in the end, it made sense for Rex to make a complete cratch, with new false cratch and boards. He also adjusted the stands so the top planks made a straight line from the cabin top to the deck board.

So, by the end of July, all that remined was to put some diesel in the tanks and some ballast in the hold.



Rex Wain with the new deck board



On the move again at last

## August

Tuesday 3rd August was a day many of us had begun to wonder if we would ever see, but at just after 09.15, with Howard Williams and Steve Smith on board, *Nuneaton* left the wharf and headed up the Stretton Arm on the first stage of her journey back to Alvecote. They arrived just before 2pm following day and, after many months apart, *Nuneaton* & *Brighton* were reunited.

## Acknowledgments

Our thanks to everyone who helped at Brinklow and Grendon during the spring and summer: Charlotte Fleming, Diana Golder, Roger Golder, Rich Greenhall, Fabian Hiscock, Helen

MacGregor, Steve Smith, Howard Williams, Anne Winterbottom, Trevor Winterbottom, and Paul Woloschuk.

## Footnote

During August, we also got a set of top cloths for *Nuneaton*. The cost of these, and the side cloths, was covered by money ringfenced from the legacy left to the trust by Tom Henshaw.

All the hard work was worth it: *Nuneaton* and *Brighton* together again at Alvecote.







Nick Lake and Steve Smith at Grendon dock



Howard Williams fitting side-cloth rings at Grendon



Rich Greenhall and Nick Lake at Brinklow



All clean, smart and shine: Nuneaton's engine room

*(All photos on this page by Charlotte Fleming)*

## COAL RUN 2021: a journey of three parts.

Barry Adams

With the completion of the repairs it was nice to get *Nuneaton* back.

We loaded at Braunston with much help from our own members and Friends of Raymond. Once the loading was finished a serious amount of water was leaking into the back cabin area. This was pumped out and Steve Priest came to have a look and found a hole that was clear of the water when empty, but once loaded was under, hence the leak. The boat was half unloaded and – thanks very much to Tim, the Braunston marina owner – *Nuneaton* was very quickly put into dry dock to enable the repair to be done. While Steve was doing the port side one, they had also found one on the starboard side (the two holes found were not in the area where all the repair work had been done). With these two fixed, the boat was taken back out to the wharf and reloaded, and the first part of the run started.

My crew and I took over at Heyford and apart from having to use the Tirfor winch to get the motor out of Shipton Weir lock, had a reasonable run down to the Thames.

Out onto the Thames at Dukes Cut, we went upstream to deliver to our lock keeper customers. Having done all the deliveries we winded and came back down to Osney Moorings for our regular drops to our customers there.



The hole in Nuneaton's port side (photo: Howard Williams)

ers

Carrying along towards Reading we did all the required drops and turned in at Reading onto the K&A. All the drops to our regular customers except for the last two were done and it was time to change captain and crew.

I went back out again to take over and finish the run down the Thames, meeting the boats at Ash Island. After the deliveries there, we carried on to Eel Pie for the next ones.

Knowing that the oncoming crew at Brentford wanted to get going asap, we left Eel Pie, went through Richmond just after the barrier was opened and made our way to Brentford. Had to wait awhile to get onto the service point but, once on there, the crew change was done and the boats were on their way back to Alvecote.

## NARROWBOAT GATHERING FOR WINTER FUEL

Tim Coghlan, Patron of the Narrow Boat Trust

With Covid-19 restrictions eased, the long-established winter-fuel loading of the Narrow Boat Trust's pair of historic narrow boats – *Nuneaton* and *Brighton* – returned to the historic wharf at Braunston, where coal, carried by canal, has been loaded and unloaded by hand for well over 200 years. Last year the quayside had to be fenced off, to keep the public away from the staff working area, so the loading had to take place at the wharf above Buckby Top Lock.

To mark the boats' return, it was decided to celebrate and make a small informal weekend gathering of former working narrowboats – the Friends of Raymond's *Nutfield* and *Raymond*, the Canal Museum at Stoke Bruerne's *Sculptor* and the Braunston Marina-based *Effingham*. So six in all – enough to make a colourful and festive reminder of the Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rallies, though the numbers mustered were small in comparison to the ninety odd boats which had attended past Rallies. These had been cancelled for two years, but hopefully they will back in full swing from next year in the traditional last weekend in June.

Whilst the loading was not publicized, the proverbial 'towpath telegraph' had spread the message, and there was a good turnout of canal enthusiasts. Amongst them was former working boatman Ron Withy, who was born on a narrowboat on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1939, and is now in his 82<sup>nd</sup> year living 'on the bank' in Braunston village. When he was born, his parents worked for Fellows, Morton and Clayton. After the company's nationalization in 1947, the family went to work for British Waterways, which took over the fleet. I knew that in his later teens Ron ran various pairs of boats for British Waterways with Charlie Powell, and then for Willow Wren with Charlie's sister, whom he married in 1961.

Standing with me on the stern counter of the *Nuneaton*, Ron announced out of the blue that in 1958 he had worked that very motor for 18 months, paired with the former GUCC wooden butty *Feltham*. Ron and Charlie had variously loaded at Brentford Dock on the Thames, tomato puree and aluminium for Birmingham, and wheat for Wellesborough. On the return runs, they had loaded coal round Coventry to bring south to the papermills at Croxley, Boxmore and elsewhere. So here was living history.

In their working days, the *Nuneaton* and *Brighton* would have carried over fifty tons of coal between them – though there is no evidence that they



Ron Withy on *Nuneaton* (photo: Tim Coghlan)

worked together, although they were both originally in the GUCC fleet and built in the mid-1930s. But with the canals now much shallower on some of the route – particularly the Oxford Summit – the load had been reduced to about 27 tons of bagged smokeless coal. This was loaded on the Friday to allow for deliveries and the use of a forklift truck, generously lent by marina-based Peter Nicholls Steel Boats.

The work was done, not by tough working boatmen and women as in the past, but by a team of six volunteers from the Narrow Boat Trust, who in just four hours, succeeded in loading those 27 tons into the holds of the two boats.

There are several different types of bagged smokeless fuel,



Loading at Braunston  
(photo: Tim Coghlan)



and loading into the boats followed a carefully worked out written plan - which was constantly referred to. The bags needed to be placed in the holds to allow for unloading-to-order by type and weight en route, so as not to require too much rearranging of the remaining loads to keep the trim of the boats.

The plan had been for the *Nuneaton* and *Brighton* to set off on their six week run on the Sunday afternoon, following the presentation of cheques of £1,000 from Braunston Marina to the Narrow Boat Trust, the Friends of Raymond and the Friends of the Canal Museum – which they had all received for many years from the proceeds of the Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally. Whilst there have been no rallies for two years, these historic narrowboats still need maintaining, and Braunston Marina's continued support is an important lifeline.

The decision to delay the departure until Sunday proved to have been fortuitous. The *Nuneaton* had only recently completed a major restoration by Steve Priest of Brinklow Boat Services. The works had included craning the boat out and then back, straightening the hull and grit-blasting it – all of which created tensions to the boat's 85 year old iron hull. Whilst the joining of the base to the hull sides was easy to check for any leaks, this could not be done to the stern counter, which sits much higher up, on what is termed the uxtter-plate.



Smiles all round following the cheque presentations of £1,000 each from Braunston Marina to the Friends of the Canal Museum, Stoke Bruerne, the Narrow Boat Trust and the Friends of Raymond.  
(Photo: Joe Bailey)

Once the boat was well-laden, that uxtter-plate became submerged, and the main joint with the stern counter was found to be very slightly leaking in several places – too much to allow the coal-run to go ahead until the leaks were repaired. Fortunately the boat was lying only fifty yards from Braunston Marina's large dry dock, built by canal carriers Fellows, Morton & Clayton in 1909 to service its steamer fleet. Steve Priest's base was not far away at Brinklow and, rung on the Sunday afternoon, he was able to reschedule to be available on the Monday. Meanwhile the boat's load had to be reduced to the point where the uxtter-plate lay above the water line, and the boat could safely pass over the dry dock sill. So, more work for the volunteers.



Phoebe Hewitt and Nigel Hollis on *Brighton* as the pair finally leave Braunston at the start of the run. (Photo: Will Hewitt).

The repair was completed by Monday afternoon. A belt and braces reweld was carried out to the whole of the joining seam, to the point where Steve had to go back to his yard for more iron welding rods. The existing weld probably dated back to when the boat was built by Yarwoods of Northwich in 1936 – so it had done good service. Once blacked and touch-dry, the *Nuneaton* was refloated, the bags reloaded and by evening the pair of boats were at last on their way south, heading for Napton and a well-earned evening at the Folly Inn.

*(This is a slightly edited version of an article that originally appeared in the November 2021 edition of "Towpath Talk")*

## A trip down the Oxford

Phoebe Hewitt

A trip down the Oxford Canal seemed to be exactly what was needed after a busy working summer for Dad [*Will Hewitt (ed.)*] and me. Lounging around on an old working pair, taking in the sights and generally having a chilled out time...

Luckily this was never part of either of our expectations. And the reality, although much more like hard work, was a whole lot more rewarding too.

After a slow start to the trip, with *Nuneaton* spending an extra day in the dock to be patched up, the crew waited on tenterhooks to set off. Alister and I hung around the marina, contemplating just how many bags of coal might need to be transferred across from one boat to the next before setting off. Turned out it was quite a few! All crew members were keen to get stuck in, however, and after a quick splash under the canal side tap to wash off the coaly remnants we set off. You can certainly imagine the relief that this coal monkey felt, once stood peacefully next to the butty ellum.

Heading towards Napton, it was during this first boating stint that one of the most magical moments of the trip happened for me. With Dad and Howard stood on the motor and myself and Nigel on the butty we boated into the darkness of night and towards the Folly pub. Sure enough, Dad wasn't going to stop for anything until the sweet smell of ale was under our noses. Those who have boated in the dark before will know the special, almost stoic feeling you get during those moments. Well, imagine that feeling tenfold when stood on the back of a silent butty, guided by moonlight and gliding alongside moored boats.

After moving up the Napton flight the next morning, I had my first chance at steering the motor. Motor steering, it turns out, is certainly not for the faint hearted, especially when faced with some of the most jaw clenching bends and bridge holes only to be found on the Oxford. Yet it left me with a wonderful feeling of pride and responsibility as we chugged past boats and through the open countryside. I couldn't help feeling slightly smug, either, at the look of shock on some faces when they saw a 20-something year-old girl at the motor tiller!

Still, it wasn't all plain sailing (if you'll pardon the pun). On a few occasions it took the whole crew's perseverance to free the deeply loaded, and deeply stuck, pair off the muddy banks of an incredibly shallow Oxford canal. I'd love to say I felt some kind of deep connection with boating tradition whilst plunging



Steering the motor: Phoebe with Howard Williams  
(photo Will Hewitt)

the pole off the butty and into the bank side to push us off the mud. I think pure frustration would be a more accurate description, though. Still, with one pushing, another revving, and a further one pulling on the shore line, we managed to free the boats time and time again. The sense of satisfaction when the boats finally did free, too, could never get old. Perhaps something of the old working boat spirit was felt amongst the four of us too – particularly once sat in front of a good pint of bitter (or diet coke) at the pub in Banbury.

Certainly, I never feel more connected to history and tradition than when travelling on a working pair. Not only that, but I also love, perhaps controversially, when past and present seem to collide as you boat underneath a motorway or alongside a rail track. Those people up there, rushing around on the motorway in their cars and lorries, they haven't got a clue! More history could be found as we passed the completely isolated lock keeper's cottage just after Cropredy, Dad telling me how someone still lived there even up until not too long ago. I have to admit though, this was somewhat overshadowed at the time by my (by this point) soggy appearance. Cycling along a dodgy towpath on a bike that is too tall for you is not to be recommended. Come to a halt and you WILL be climbing out, laughing your head off 30 seconds later.

After a few days of switching be-



That bike... (photo Will Hewitt)



Photo: Will Hewitt

tween 'getting 'em ahead' and 'stopping for an early one' we finally arrived at Lower Heyford. Although this wasn't quite as far as we'd hoped to get, it felt incredibly satisfying to have completed the best part of the trip. For myself especially, it was a privilege to boat alongside such a switched on and experienced group of guys. Never again will I cut a corner... although Dad might beg to differ. Trundling along the towpath with our gear towards the train station, a contented tiredness took over as we reminisced on the past few days. Luckily, boyfriend Hugh was on hand to help carry bags!

Despite the tiredness at the end of the trip, I knew I certainly wouldn't swap the feeling of being stood on the back of a working boat for the world. As Howard rightly put it, it's often a relief to reach the end of such a trip, yet once back on dry land you're soon itching for more.



## A Beginner's Guide to the Southern Waterways: the K&A, Thames and Wey

Charlotte Fleming

Helen MacGregor and I signed up for the longest stage of the 2021 coal run, which also had the most deliveries (plus reloading), because neither of us had done the Kennet and Avon, the Thames downstream from Reading or the Wey. You live and learn...

Joining the boats at Burghfield was easy, as the owner/manager of the moorings let me park in the yard there for the fortnight. Our first delivery, next morning, was less so: only 54 bags, but it knackered me! But we did get fitter, and by the end of the trip were shifting 150 bags almost easily.

The K&A is more river than canal. I discovered this at Burghfield lock, when Peter Clutterbuck couldn't get in close enough to pick me up and I walked miles across the fields before I could rejoin the boats. At the next lock (Garston, one of the two turf-sided ones) I got my bike out. With 8 more locks and plenty of swing bridges, it was a busy day!

That night, we moored on a lock-landing: the muddy river banks make it difficult to moor deep-draughted boats anywhere else. Helen and I swapped places next day: I steered *Brighton* and she lock-wheeled. We swung round the bends in Newbury in fine style, and delivered 100 bags to the permanent moorings at the western end of town,



Garston turf-sided lock (photo: Charlotte Fleming)

staying tied there overnight.

On the way to Hungerford next day, every boat we passed said, "The horse boat's coming this way". We met it as it came out of Brunsden lock. To get the tow-rope past other boats, someone just stood on the roof and lifted it. That's a pretty full-time job, with all the moored boats they have to pass.

We met a very enthusiastic gent at the next lock, who bought a bag of fuel and gave us a chunky donation to go with it. The next day, when we'd winded just below Hungerford and were heading back down, he lock-wheeled with Helen all the way to Brunsden lock (where we crossed paths with the horse-boat again). He got a sausage sarnie for his pains – and gave NBT another donation!

It's a great help having two people to work the locks on the K&A. Most of them are very stiff, with paddles that stick and gates that won't open – Copse lock needed two people's



Keeping the tow-rope clear (photo: Charlotte Fleming)

combined strength to move the gate. Several locks were *just* too small to take both the boats (though there was room for one boat plus a modern one), so everything had to be done twice.

The next day was less than wonderful: I got a puncture in my front tyre and only realised when it skidded on a patch of gravel coming out of a bridge-'ole and I hit the path rather hard. At least I found my windlass, where it had landed in the hedge... Then I tore my trousers on chicken wire on a lock-beam - the perfect finale.

We passed through Reading and out onto the wide rolling waters of the Thames to end our first week. Big locks, worked by electricity: oh the joy! On the other hand, there were lots of little plastic hire-boats scooting about, full of people with no idea how to drive them, nor of the dangers posed by 50 tons of steel and coal-bags looming up behind them. I chickened out of driving into locks with them and passed the tiller back to Peter. Terrifying, they are.



Not beautiful, but ingenious...  
(photo: Charlotte Fleming)

So are many of the delivery sites, with fragile wooden and GRP boats moored awkwardly, leaving the skipper little space to manoeuvre; there's usually a sluice right next to them to add to the fun. Peter manged it all serenely. We passed several very beautiful boats, and one (not beautiful!) that was ingenious: a Thames barge, which had replaced its horse with an outboard motor. The tiller was a length of 2x4.



We got through Thames lock, onto the Wey, on day 9 of our fortnight: a day when we delivered 131 bags of fuel at 6 separate drops. Ian Johnson came out to help for most of them, which was great as there was a lot of barrowing involved.

Next day we got stemmed up at Town lock. The tight 90 -degree turn into the lock wasn't helped by a dredger working right in the middle of the "pond" outside it, which only moved out of the way after we'd hit the wall. Coming out of the lock at the top, the motor went aground because a large branch was hanging down into the water directly ahead, making it almost impossible to turn. The bywash beside the lock pulled *Nuneaton's* stern onto the mud and we spent a long time hauling it off again, even after pumping all the water out of the bilges.

Ian Johnson with Peter Clutterbuck and Helen MacGregor at Thames lock on the Wey. (Photo: Charlotte Fleming)

We got stuck again as Peter tried to pick up Helen and me after Coxes lock, so I hauled the buttty to the bank while Peter freed the motor – and I got marooned on the tow-path! He eventually found somewhere to pick me up about 3 miles further on. Ah well, I needed



Coxes Mill lock (photo: Charlotte Fleming)

Parvis Wharf and walked into Weybridge to Tesco, spinning it out as long as possible when the heavens opened. Stopping at the chandlery on the way back for a nosy, we bought a copy of Alice Lapworth's book "A Horse, A Boat And You": very interesting.

Git-gaps above Thames lock meant we had to moor among the nettles and improvise a gang-plank that wouldn't take up the entire tow-path, surprised there wasn't one on board. We used one of the ladders with short planks laid over it.



Mac McConnell and the pellet "conveyor belt": an awkward delivery, Ash Island (photo: Charlotte Fleming)

the exercise.

We made it to Pyrford for the last delivery of the day, waiting for several boats to go through the lock as we needed to unload in it. Mac McConnell arrived just in time to help. It was a Monday night and – disaster! – the pub was shut. Too tired to cook, we got a Chinese take-away delivered. Seldom has food tasted so good.

We did our final Wey drops next morning, winding above the Walsham flood gates after the first and going back down to the Pelican for the last 20 bags, then moored at



HIAB fun at Walton wharf (photo: Charlotte Fleming)

Taking the scenic route around Shepperton next morning, we reached Walton wharf for reloading. The delivery lorries were waiting for us, so we got 8 tons into *Brighton* and then swapped the boats round so the next day's deliveries could go into the motor. While we waited (ages) for them to arrive, we amused ourselves watching the crew of a flat using HIABs to lift reeds and mud off it and bags of stone on.

We delivered the pellets (such as arrived – half of one order got lost somewhere before it reached us) at Molesey and Ash Island the following day, and moored below Hampton lock. Helen stayed on board for the other Ash Island deliveries next day with the new crew, while I took two trains, a tube and a bus back to Reading to collect the van. The journey took almost as long as the boats had, but it was decidedly more restful!



## A Staines Delivery

Photos and captions: Bernard and Janet Hales



Nuneaton and Brighton moored next to Enterprise, with Claire Johnston's water can on the roof. (Claire was a founder member of the Narrow Boat Trust, and the delivery was to her former home.)

The crew at work.



Another satisfied customer!

## Book and Fuel Reviews

Helen MacGregor

A chance reading of *Dry Land Sailor* by Fred Hobbs gave us the name of Geoffrey Lewis as having edited and written the foreword for it. He also edited Alice Lapworth's book, *A Horse, A Boat, and You*. Liking Geoffrey Lewis's style of writing, and reading the advertising blurb at the back of the book, I discovered that he has written many books. Among them is a trilogy: *A Boy off the Bank*, *A Girl at the Tiller* and *The New Number One*.

These three books were recommended by Nick Wolfe as good reading material for new NBT volunteers. Having now read the first two, I would have to agree with him. But more than that... It's hard to write a review of a book without giving away the plot - and to reveal the plot is an absolute no-no! So, hopefully without letting the cat out of the bag:

*A Boy off the Bank* begins in 1940, just after the outbreak of the Second World War. Although the series is fictional, Lewis writes comprehensively about working boats, their crews, their loads, their trials and tribulations, drawing on his own knowledge and experience. His characters are a joy - believable and likeable, apart from the odd baddie; after all, it wouldn't be a very good story without a baddie. Which brings me to another important point: his story-telling. It is gripping. He has many of the characters talking in dialect, which at first was a bit tricky for a Scot like myself, but after a while I began hearing their voices... And it is fascinating travelling with them around the cut, visiting so many places familiar to us.



*A Girl at the Tiller* begins just at the outbreak of peace in 1945. This one was even more gripping than the first. More excellent characters and plot. I found it almost impossible to put down.

I'm thoroughly looking forward to the third in the series, *The New Number One*. Many of the characters have become like old friends now - not something every author is able to achieve.

Geoffrey Lewis has also written several detective novels, described by Image Magazine as "Northamptonshire's own answer to Inspector Morse"; "Impossible to put down" by Choice Magazine; and "Plots brimming with unexpected twists" by What's On Magazine. They feature a D. I. David Russell and the first four titles are: *Flashback*, *Strangers*, *Winter's Tale* and *Cycle*. I'm off to order them now...!

~~~~~

Some of you will be aware that this year we stocked a new fuel from Homefire: **Ecoal**. This is made from olive stones and formed into hexagonal lumps like the standard Homefire smokeless coal. It claims to produce 30% less emissions and the usual slow burning, high heat, easy to light criteria.

We decided to try some in our endeavour to burn less coal. This is what we found:

Yes, it lights reasonably easily

Yes, it does seem to burn for quite a long time

It produces quite a lot of ash - we have a very small stove with a very, very small ash pan and it fills it up quite quickly!

Not sure it produces a huge amount of heat, but what it does do is give out a steady, non-ferocious warmth, which is actually an advantage in a very small boat like ours (18' cabin). It is also much cleaner to handle than coal. All in all, it seems to be functioning well. I also saw it for sale at Morrisons, in 10kg bags for £7. NBT sells it to members for, I think, £14 for a 25kg bag.



Ron Withey inspecting Raymond with Clare Hewitt holding the boat (photo: Tim Coghlan)



Loading at Braunston:
Barry Adams, Darren
Roberts, Rich Green-
hall and Alister Bates.