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An artist's 50-year fascination with canal art

A VIEW OF VENICE

Circumnavigating Italy's canal city by hire-boat

CAPITAL CRUISE

Riding the tide to the Thames Barrier



8-PAGE PULL-OUT

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The perfect weekend trip

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Welcome

Writing these words during the brief calm between storms Ciara and Dennis, it is worth reminding oneself that, in spite of appearances, the boating season will soon be upon us. Doubtless you'll have spent the last few months planning your cruising itinerary for the coming year, and, as always, we have plenty of suggestions in this issue…

Our eight-page guide is devoted to the 21-mile Mid-Worcestershire Ring, which incorporates the Worcester & Birmingham, River Severn and Droitwich canals to form one of the loveliest little cruising circuits in the land. Ideal for a weekend jaunt, the ring was made possible when, after years of hard work by the Droitwich Canals Trust and other interested parties, the Droitwich Junction and Barge canals were reopened in 2011. As well as traversing pleasant Worcestershire countryside and providing the opportunity to visit their eponymous spa town, the two waterways are a shining example of just what canal restorers can achieve.

Maybe, though, you've decided that 2020 is the year to take on a new cruising challenge. If it's tidal waterways you're considering, then take a look at our account of an exhilarating narrowboat convoy trip on the Thames through central London. Last year, I fulfilled a long-held ambition to cruise this stretch too, and it was just as rewarding as I had anticipated, providing a completely different perspective of the capital. The plucky tideway boaters featured in this issue went a little further, heading out as far as the Thames Barrier and encountering some pretty choppy conditions along the way.

Or perhaps you're set on dipping a toe in foreign waters. While France and Ireland are always safe bets, an interesting alternative is to explore the islands of the Venetian Lagoon by hire-boat, including Venice. As long you don't attempt to follow the gondolas around the 'floating city's' narrow canals, it is a quite fabulous holiday. Turn to page 56 to read all about it.

So, while you batten down the hatches and wait for the worst of the rain and wind to subside, we hope we've provided you with some inspiration for when the weather finally breaks.

Finally, eagle-eyed subscribers will have spotted that we have now switched to a biodegradable wrap for mailing out copies of the magazine. The wrap is made from either potato or corn starch (the source may vary from time to time but it will definitely be biodegradable) which means it can be added to your compost heap or food waste.

Bobby Cowling, Editor

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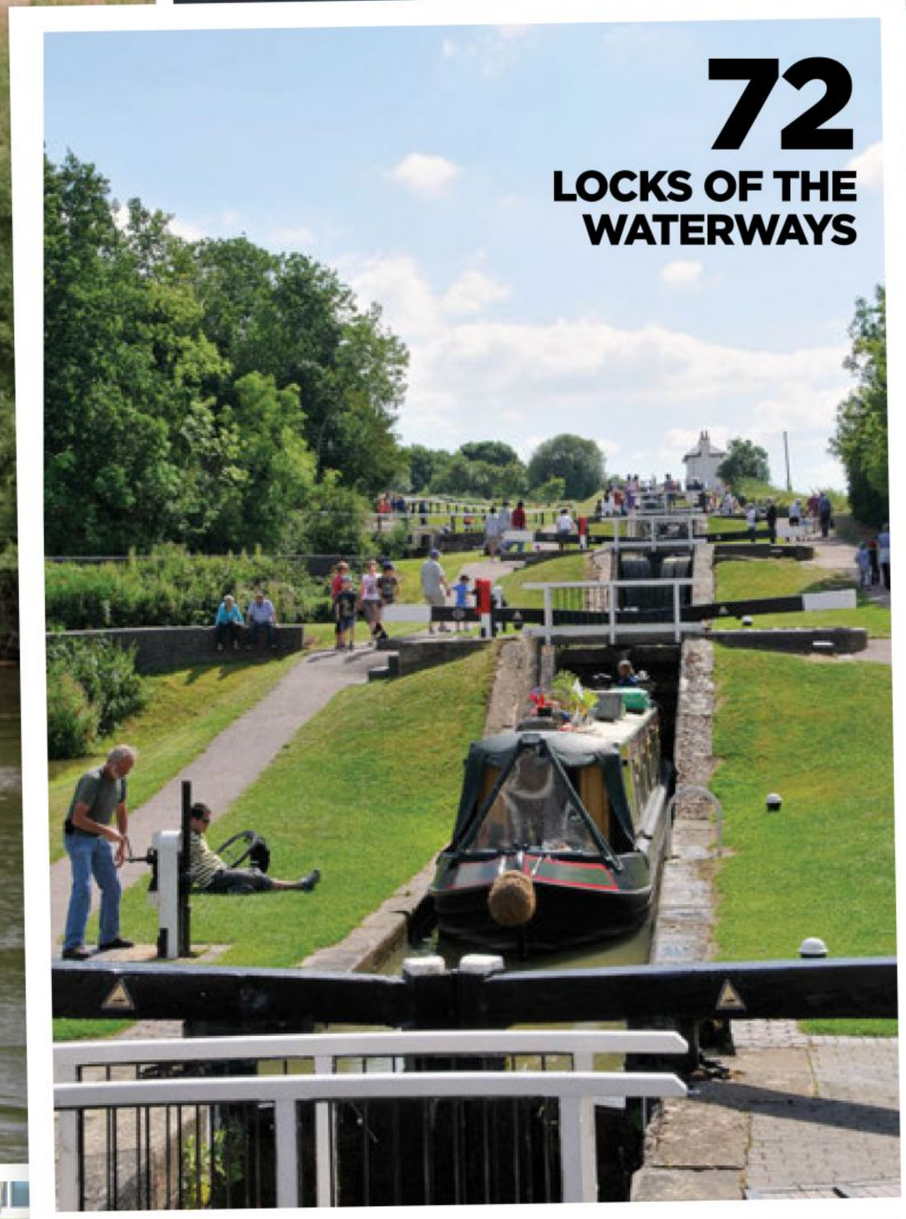








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ON THE COVER THIS MONTH...
Springtime cruising on the Droitwich Barge Canal.

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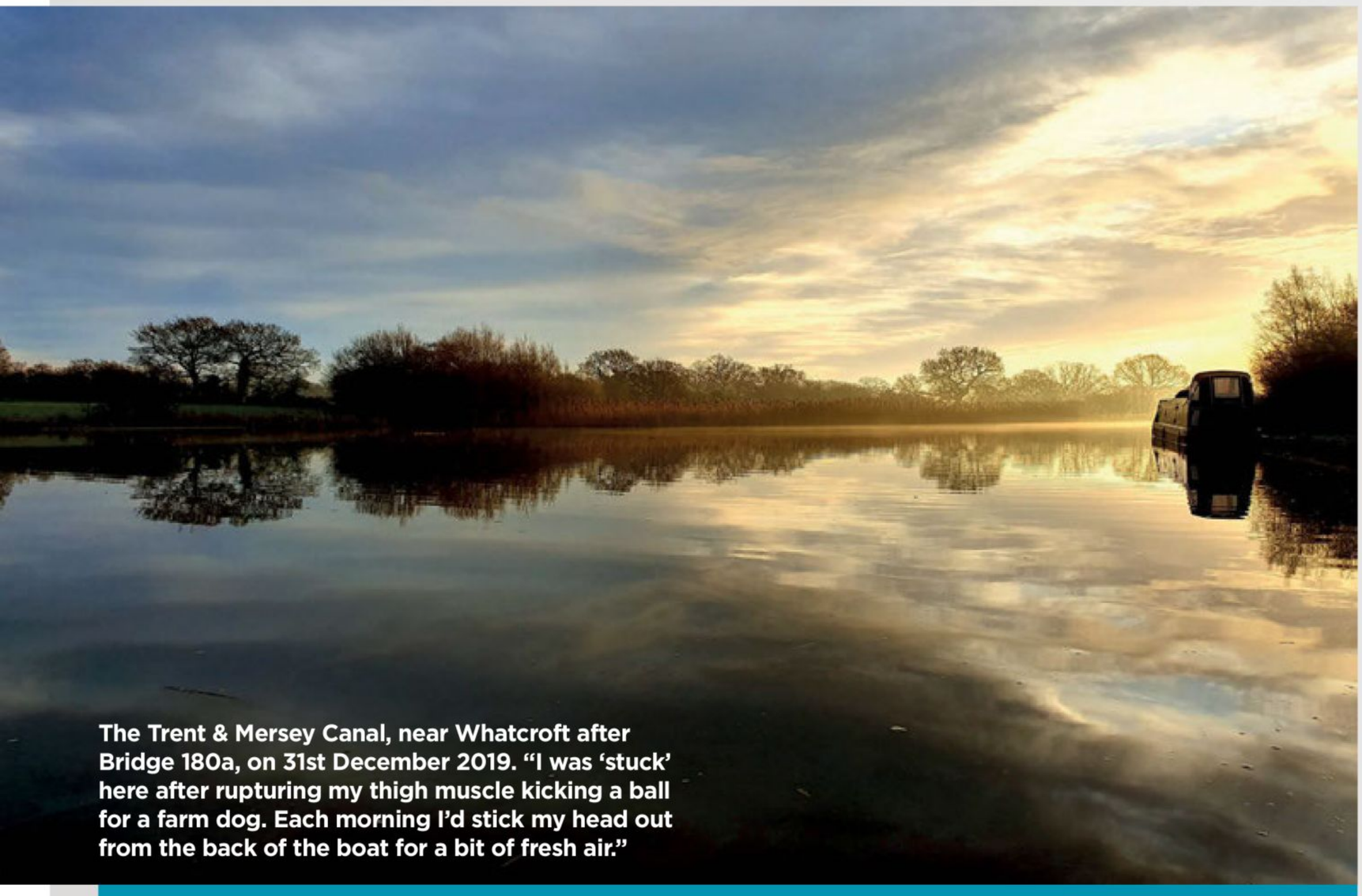


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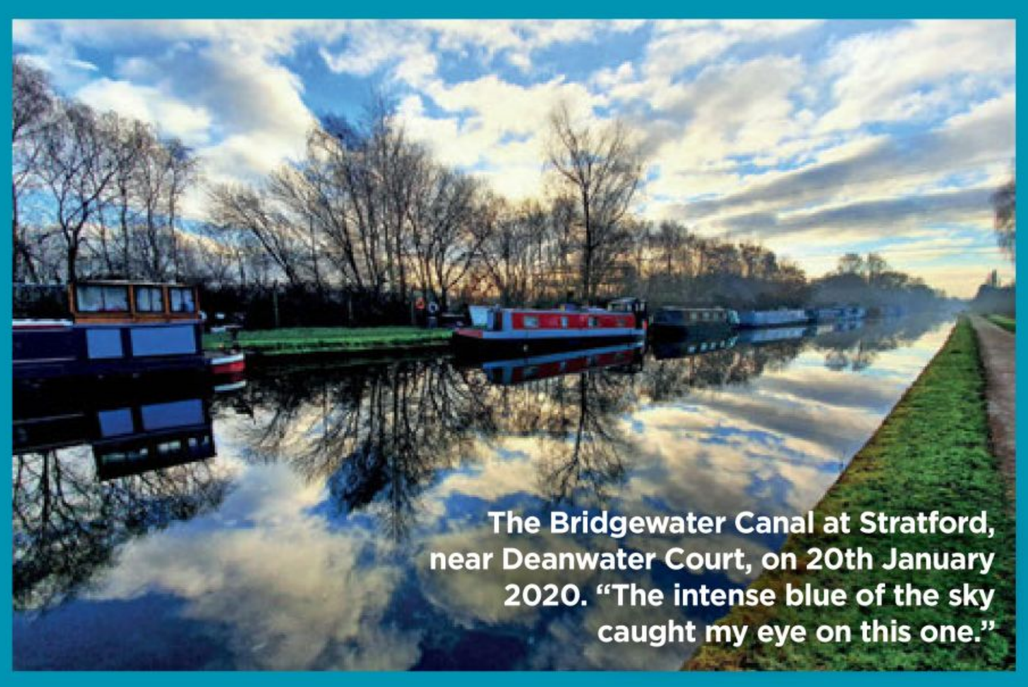
Places to go and things to do on the waterways



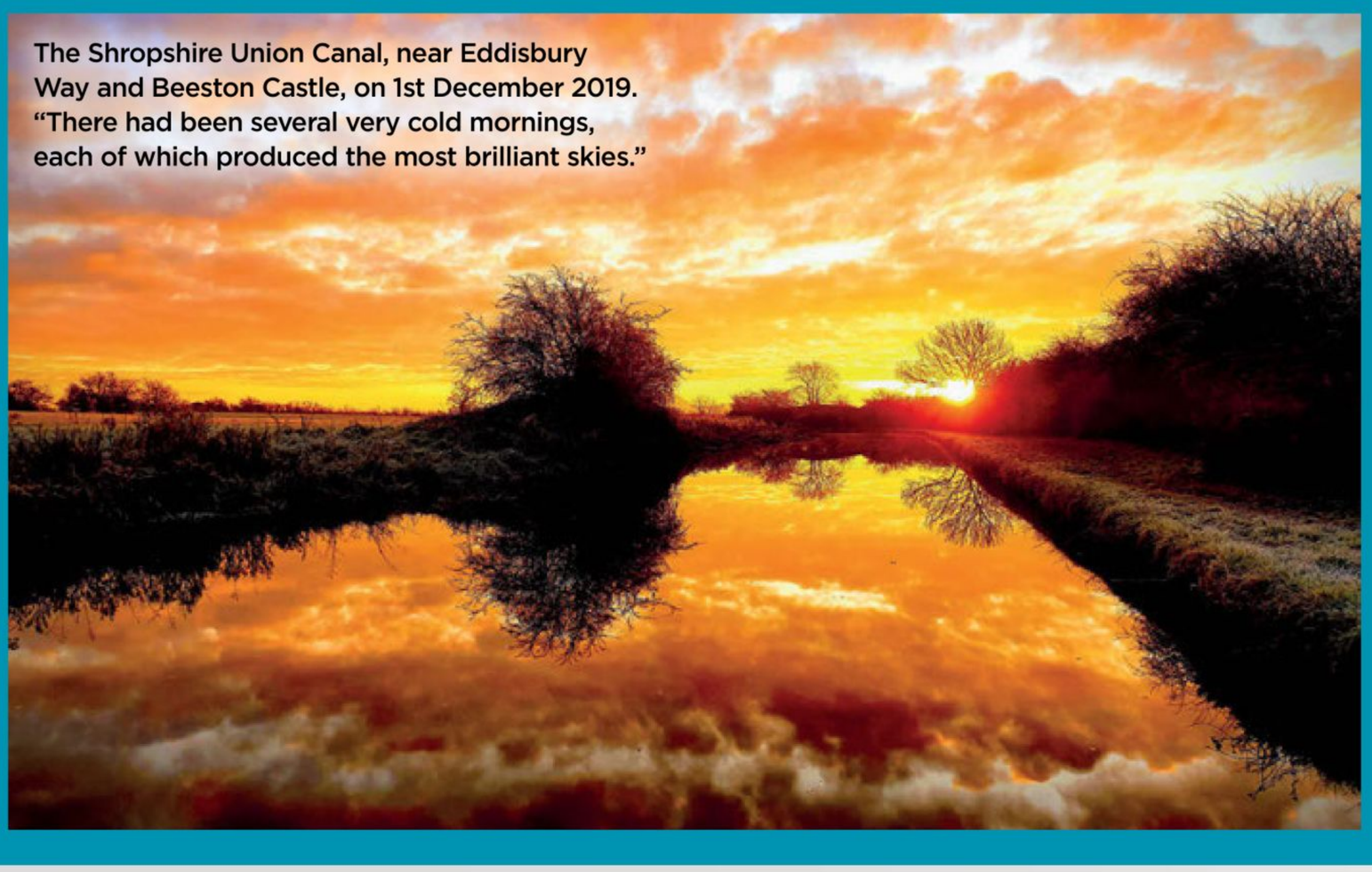
The Trent & Mersey Canal, near Whatcroft after Bridge 180a, on 31st December 2019. "I was 'stuck' here after rupturing my thigh muscle kicking a ball for a farm dog. Each morning I'd stick my head out from the back of the boat for a bit of fresh air."

FAVOURITE VIEWS

Thanks to Chris West, who sent in these striking photographs from around the network. "I'm a liveaboard boater and enjoy travelling the winding waterways of England in all weathers. Observing, and experiencing, the ever-changing seasons is one of the immeasurable pleasures of living on the water."



The Bridgewater Canal at Stratford, near Deanwater Court, on 20th January 2020. "The intense blue of the sky caught my eye on this one."



The Shropshire Union Canal, near Eddisbury Way and Beeston Castle, on 1st December 2019. "There had been several very cold mornings, each of which produced the most brilliant skies."



WATERWAYS WILDLIFE

GOLDFINCH

One of our most colourful birds – and one that's guaranteed to put a smile on the face of any amateur ornithologist – is the goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*). It was once a sought-after caged bird, its bright, tinkling song and ability to learn simple tricks making it an attractive pet. During the 19th century its numbers in the wild dropped radically, but since trapping became illegal in the 1930s its population has been increasing steadily and there are now approximately 1.2 million breeding pairs, many of which are resident in this country all year round.

The goldfinch's bright plumage makes it easy to identify – a red face, white cheeks and black hood are its most distinguishing features. It also has a buff-coloured back and sides, cream chest and underparts, and distinctive black and yellow wings. The males and females are very similar in appearance, while juveniles are much plainer.

Its beak is ideally sized for reaching the seeds on which it feeds from among the prickles of teasels and thistles – both commonly seen growing on scrubland, damp grassland and in hedgerows. Tiny, black niger seeds are regularly sold as goldfinch feed; however, sunflower seed kernels are just as popular with them.

During spring, the female builds a nest from mosses and grass; it has a deep cup for holding clutches of four to six eggs. The chicks hatch after around ten days and are fed insects by both parents before fledging two to three weeks later.

The goldfinch has one of the loveliest collective pronouns of any bird: a charm. It's a sociable species and forms loose colonies outside the breeding season, but at this time of year pairs can be seen flying back and forth from nest sites, beaks filled with food for their young.

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WATERSIDE PROPERTY

Canal Cottage, Hinksford Wharf, Kingswinford



Fans of the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal may be interested to learn that a waterside cottage and business, with 13 income-producing moorings at Hinksford Wharf, have recently come onto the market.

The four-bedroom cottage is situated on a tree-lined section of the off-side bank and has an attractive paved terrace overlooking the water. Inside, the ground floor of the property contains a dining room and sitting room with a shared central log-burner, lounge with a brick fireplace, kitchen with a Rayburn range and timber-fronted units, and sun room. Upstairs are four bedrooms, one of which has an en suite bathroom and another with a Juliette balcony. There is also a family bathroom with a five-piece suite.

Outside is a small workshop with pulley beams, a log-burner and shelving, plus a separate garage and car parking space. There is also vehicle access to the 13 narrowboat moorings along the off-side bank, and steps down to loading points. The berths have been operated on a commercial basis, and there is scope to expand the business with chandlery sales.

It's on the market for offers over £750,000. ***brutonknowles.co.uk***





ILLUMINATED RIVER, LEO VILLAREAL STUDIO



ILLUMINATED RIVER BOAT TOURS

Illuminated River, the public art commission that lit up nine of London's bridges over the Thames in 2019, has teamed up with Thames Clippers to provide biweekly evening boat tours to view the installations from the water.

The tours depart from Tower Pier on Sundays and Thursdays until 26th May, and cost £7.50 per adult. On 5th March, 19th March and 9th April, onboard commentary will be provided by lead architects from the Illuminated River team, revealing more about the design processes and technical challenges faced throughout the project.

Booking is required. Visit *thamesclippers.com/whats-on-discounts/illuminated-river*.

Walks

Sun 5th Grand Surrey Canal
Royal Navy Victualling Yard and Greenland Dock. Meet at Surrey Quays station for a 2.30pm start. £10, concession and student rate £8. IWA Towpath Walks, 020 3612 9624

Sun 12th Regent's Canal
Little Venice to Camden. Meet at Warwick Avenue station for a 2.30pm start. £10, concession and student rate £8. IWA Towpath Walks, 020 3612 9624

Sat 18th Spring foraging
Explore the Bridgewater Canal with naturalist Dave Winnard while foraging for some delicious treats provided by nature. Booking essential. Duke's Drive, Monton, Salford. Est.1761, *est1761.org/events*

Sun 19th River Thames
Limehouse, Thames and Docklands. Meet at Westferry DLR station cycle hire point for a 2.30pm start. £10, concession and student rate £8. IWA Towpath Walks, 020 3612 9624

Sat 25th Regent's Canal
King's Cross, Granary Square and Camden. Meet at King's Cross station taxi rank for a 10.45am start. £10, concession and student rate £8. IWA Towpath Walks, 020 3612 9624

Cruises

10th-13th Easter cruise
River Thames
Join St Pancras Cruising Club for a springtime cruise to the village of Hanwell for the annual Beer Festival at The Fox. Boat the long pound or Thames Tideway, part of the London Ring. Booking recommended. *stpancrascc.co.uk, vicecommodore@stpancrascc.co.uk*, 07850 753633

Courses

15th and 29th Roses and castles workshop
One-day workshops £45 per person including lunch and refreshments. The Old Stables, Bottom Lock, Audlem, 10am-4pm. Day Star Theatre, *day-star-theatre.co.uk*, *jane@day-star-theatre.co.uk*, 01270 811330

18th-19th Roses and castles workshop weekend
£75 per person including lunch and refreshments. The Old Stables, Bottom Lock, Audlem, 10am-4pm. Day Star Theatre, *day-star-theatre.co.uk*, *jane@day-star-theatre.co.uk*, 01270 811330

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APRIL MEETINGS

Thu 2nd London
'The Manchester Ship Canal' by Richard Thomas. London Canal Museum, New Wharf Road, London, 7.30pm. *canalmuseum.org.uk*, 020 7713 0836

Thu 2nd Oldbury
'South Staffordshire and the Hatherton Canal' by Ian Pell. Titford Pumphouse, Oldbury, 7.30pm. BCN Society, *bcnsociety.com*, *ann.johnson@canalrivertrust.org.uk*

Fri 3rd Nottingham
'The Leicester Line canal' by Mary Matts. Beeston Conservative Club, Beeston, 7pm. Railway & Canal Historical Society, *rchs.org.uk*

Tue 7th Alvechurch
'The history of water supply to Birmingham' by Lynn Weaver. Alvechurch Boat Centre, Scarfield Wharf, 7.45pm. Worcester Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society, *wbdcs.org.uk*

Tue 7th Bury
'Cruising the South Pennine Ring' by Alan Stopher. Whitefield Garrick Theatre, Bury, 7.30pm. Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society, *mbbcs.org.uk*

Tue 14th Ellesmere Port
'Maritime history' by Ken Pye, Managing Liverpool. Café, National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port. 7.45pm. IWA Chester & Merseyside, *waterways.org.uk/chester*

Wed 15th Lichfield
'The Purton Hulks and Gloucester & Sharpness Canal' by David Moore. Martin Heath Hall, Lichfield, 7.15pm. IWA Lichfield, *waterways.org.uk/lichfield*

Thu 16th Milton Keynes
'A trip along the Canal du Midi' by Tim Armstrong. Milton Keynes Irish Centre, Fenny Stratford. 7.45pm. IWA Milton Keynes, *waterways.org.uk/miltonkeynes*

Fri 17th Cottingham
'Water, water, everywhere!' by David Hamilton. Methodist Church Hall, Cottingham, 8pm. IWA East Yorkshire, *waterways.org.uk/east_yorkshire*

Tue 28th Derby
'The Ecclesbourne Valley Railway: a remarkable story' by Eric Boultbee. Coach & Horse, Draycott, 7.30pm. Derby & Sandiacre Canal Society, *derbycanal.org.uk*

Tue 28th Gloucester
'Bill Shakespeare, Bathurst and the band of Tewkesbury boat-builders' by John Dixon, plus AGM. Sabrina 5, National Waterways Museum Gloucester, 7.30pm. Friends of Gloucester Waterways Museum, *friendsofgwm.co.uk*

Thu 30th Chorley
'Canal heritage' by Bill Froggatt, CRT. St Chad's Parish Centre, Whittle-le-Woods, Chorley, 7pm. IWA Lancashire & Cumbria, *waterways.org.uk/lancsandcumbria*

ACTIVE WATERWAYS


Get active in Cheshire with CRT.

The Canal & River Trust is launching a new health and activity programme in Cheshire aimed at the over-55s.

Active Waterways Cheshire is a free 12-week programme (one hour per week) designed to get people out and about while learning about their local area and meeting new friends. Walks along Cheshire's beautiful canals and rivers are aimed at all levels of fitness and the routes are easily accessible for people who use walking aids or require wheelchair access.

Participants are being recruited at five locations:
- **Macclesfield** (Fairways Garden Centre, Sutton) 28th February-22nd May, 11am-12noon
- **Audlem** (Shroppie Fly pub) 27th February-14th May, 1.30pm-2.30pm
- **Ellesmere Port** (National Waterways Museum) 27th February-14th May, 1.30pm-2.30pm
- **Northwich** (Anderton Boat Lift) 26th February-13th May, 11am-12noon
- **Congleton** (Derwent Drive, Congleton) 24th February-18th May, 1pm- 2pm

For more information or to get involved visit *canalrivertrust.org.uk/activewaterways*, or contact *anika.neill@canalrivertrust.org.uk* or *emma.hicks@canalrivertrust.org.uk*.

Pull a boat for Chesterfield Canal Trust


Take part in this year's Sponsored Boat Pull with CCT.

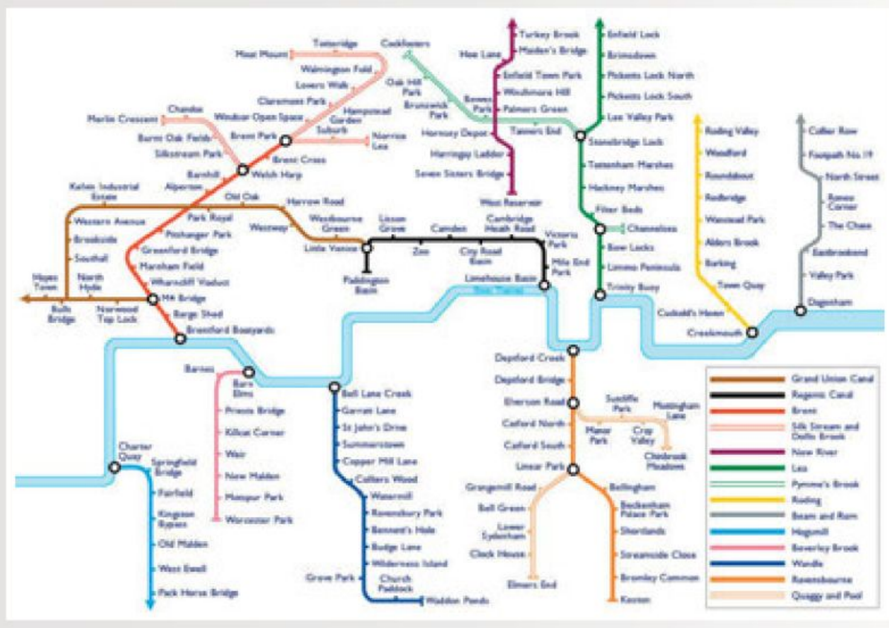
The Chesterfield Canal Trust has announced that its annual Friends of Dawn Rose Sponsored Boat Pull will take place between 14th April and 17th May this year.

The fundraising activity requires teams of volunteers to bow-haul the trust's full-sized replica Cuckoo boat, *Dawn Rose*, along the length of the Chesterfield Canal over a five-week period.

Each team pays the trust a £50 adoption fee to take part and any sponsorship money raised can be donated to a cause or charity of its choosing.

For details of how to reserve a team place, visit *chesterfield-canal-trust.org.uk*, email *dawnrose@chesterfield-canal-trust.org.uk* or call 01246 477569.

SOUNDS OF THE WATERWAYS



London Sound Survey is an intriguing online resource of historic and modern recordings from across the capital, providing an auditory insight into the everyday goings-on of life in the city.

It's the work of Ian Rawes, an urban field recorder who runs the website full-time and has curated a series of interactive sound maps, among which is London's waterways. The map is based on Harry Beck's distinctive underground design, with each line following one of the city's canals or lesser rivers. At every 'stop' is a minute-long sound file – choppy Thames waters slapping against the lock gates at Limehouse Basin, a babble of ducks and geese at Waddon Park, the engines of DLR trains at Deptford Bridge.

Elsewhere on the site are excellent-quality 1930s commentaries on the Thames and its workers, notably 'Dock Atmospheres' and 'Night on London's River', as well as modern recordings of the Thames Estuary, and a mixed media graphic of the Lea Valley incorporating sound, photographs and 21st- and 19th-century OS maps. *soundsurvey.org.uk*

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**10% relocation allowance to NEW customers, at Crick or Cropredy marinas when you sign up and pay in full for an annual berthing contract, commencing by 1st July 2020. See T and C on our website.

Rally round-up 2020

Visit a boat show or waterways festival this year with our comprehensive diary of what's on and where...



The Crick Boat Show takes place on the late May bank holiday at Crick Marina.

APRIL

10th-13th
Easter Boat Gathering
Shropshire Union Canal
National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port
canalrivertrust.org.uk/events

18th-19th
National Boat Share Show
Oxford Canal
Dunchurch Pools Marina, Rugby
boatshare4u.co.uk

24th-25th
Marsden Cuckoo Day Festival
Huddersfield Narrow Canal
Marsden, West Yorkshire
facebook.com/marsdencuckoo

MAY

2nd
Montgomery Canal Triathlon
Montgomery Canal
Newton (Powys) to Lower Frankton (Shropshire)
montgomerycanal.me.uk

2nd
Horning Boat Show
Norfolk Broads
River Bure, Horning, Norfolk
horningboatshow.com

2nd-3rd
IWA Canalway Cavalcade
Regent's Canal
Little Venice, London
waterways.org.uk

2nd-17th
Wye Valley River Festival
River Wye
Wye Valley between Hereford and Chepstow
wyevalleyriverfestival.co.uk

3rd
Venetian Marina Open Day
Shropshire Union Canal
Middlewich Branch, Nantwich
venetianmarina.co.uk

7th-10th
St Richard's Canal Festival
Droitwich Canals
Vines Park, Droitwich
strichardsfestival.co.uk

8th-10th
Liverpool River Festival
River Mersey
Liverpool
Includes the Northern Boat Show
theriverfestival.co.uk

8th-10th
Skipton Waterway Festival
Leeds & Liverpool Canal
Canal Basin, Skipton
penninecruisers.com

16th-17th
Rally of Boats at Welford Wharf
Welford Arm, Grand Union Canal Leicester Section
Welford, Northamptonshire
old-union-canals.org

16th-17th
Rickmansworth Festival
Grand Union Canal
Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire
rwt.org.uk/festival

16th-17th
Moira Canal Festival
Ashby Canal
Moira Furnace Museum, Leicestershire
moiracanalfestival.com

16th
BCNS Boat Rally
Birmingham Canal Navigations
Bradley Workshops, Bradley, Birmingham
bcnsociety.com

22nd-25th
Sleaford Boat Gathering
Sleaford Navigation
South Kyme, Lincolnshire
sleafordnavigation.co.uk

22nd-25th
Crick Boat Show
Leicester Line, Grand Union Canal
Crick, Northamptonshire
The major waterways event of the year, the Crick Boat Show offers the opportunity to view more boats at one time than anywhere else. Browse over 280 exhibitors, including boat-builders, brokers and chandlers, and don't forget to check out the live entertainment and variety of arts and crafts stalls. A Trade & Preview Day will take place for 1,000 pre-booked visitors on 22nd May, with the main event on 23rd-25th May.
crickboatshow.com

23rd-24th
BCNS 24-hour Marathon Challenge
Birmingham Canal Navigations
Finishing at Withymoor Island, Dudley
bcnsociety.com

23rd-25th
IWA Trailboat Festival
Wey & Arun Canal
Dunsfold, Goldaming
Hosted by the Wey & Arun Canal Trust
waterways.org.uk

23rd-24th
Scottish Boat Rally
Forth & Clyde Canal and Union Canal
Falkirk, Scotland
Including an 18th anniversary celebration of the opening of the Falkirk Wheel – the world's first rotating boat-lift.
scottishcanals.co.uk/events

30th-31st
Etruria Canals Festival
Trent & Mersey Canal
Etruria Junction, Stoke-on-Trent
etruriacanalsfestival.org.uk

JUNE

6th-7th
Brighouse 1940s Weekend
Calder & Hebble Navigation
Brighouse, West Yorkshire
brighouse1940sweekend.co.uk

6th-7th
Leicester Riverside Festival
River Soar
Bede Park, Mile Straight, Western Boulevard and Castle Gardens, Leicester
visitleicester.info/whats-on

17th-21st
Middlewich Folk & Boat Festival
Trent & Mersey Canal
Middlewich, Cheshire
middlewichfabfestival.co.uk

18th-28th
Lymm Festival
Bridgewater Canal
Lymm, Cheshire
lymmfestival.org.uk

24th-28th
Russell Newbery Register Rally
Aylesbury Arm, Grand Union Canal
Castle Field Basin, Aylesbury
rnregister.org.uk/rally.html

27th-28th
Chesterfield Canal Festival
Chesterfield Canal
Staveley Town Basin, Staveley
chesterfield-canal-trust.org.uk

27th-28th
Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally & Canal Festival
Grand Union Canal
Braunston Marina, Daventry
This year's event will be opened by heritage transport enthusiast and TV presenter Pete Waterman aboard historic butty *Raymond*.
braunstonmarina.co.uk

28th
Leamington Canal Festival
Grand Union Canal
Clemens Street, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire
facebook.com – search 'Leamington Old Town Ltd'

JULY

3rd-5th
Ware Boat Festival
Lee Navigation
Ware, Hertfordshire
waterways.org.uk/leeandstort

8th-12th
Henley Festival
River Thames
Henley-on-Thames
henley-festival.co.uk

11th
Aqueduct Marina Boating Event
Middlewich Branch, Shropshire Union Canal
Church Minshull, Cheshire
aqueductmarina.co.uk

11th
Evesham River Festival
River Avon (Warwickshire)
Workman Gardens, Evesham
theeveshamriverfestival.uk

11th-12th
Northwich River Festival
River Weaver
Northwich, Cheshire
northwichriverfestival.org.uk

17th-19th
Thames Traditional Boat Festival
River Thames
Fawley Meadows, Henley-on-Thames
tradboatfestival.com

17th-19th
Bristol Harbour Festival
River Avon (Bristol)
Bristol
bristolharbourfestival.co.uk

17th-19th
Saul Boat Festival
Gloucester & Sharpness Canal
Saul Junction, Gloucester
saulboatfestival.org

18th-19th
Gnosall C-Fest
Shropshire Union Canal
Gnosall, Staffordshire
cfest.gnosall@gmail.com

18th-19th
Cosgrove Canal Festival & Craft Fair
Grand Union Canal
Cosgrove Lock, Cosgrove, Milton Keynes
buckinghamcanal.org.uk

18th-19th
Bedford River Festival
River Great Ouse
Bedford
riverfestival.bedford.gov.uk

25th
Glasgow Canal Festival
Forth & Clyde Canal
Speirs Locks to Applecross Basin, Glasgow
glasgowcanalfestival.com

25th
Linslade Canal Festival
Grand Union Canal
Tiddenfoot Waterside Park, Linslade
leightonlinslade-tc.gov.uk/lltc_events

25th-26th
Gathering of Historic Boats
Shropshire Union Canal
Audlem, Shropshire
audlemmill.co.uk

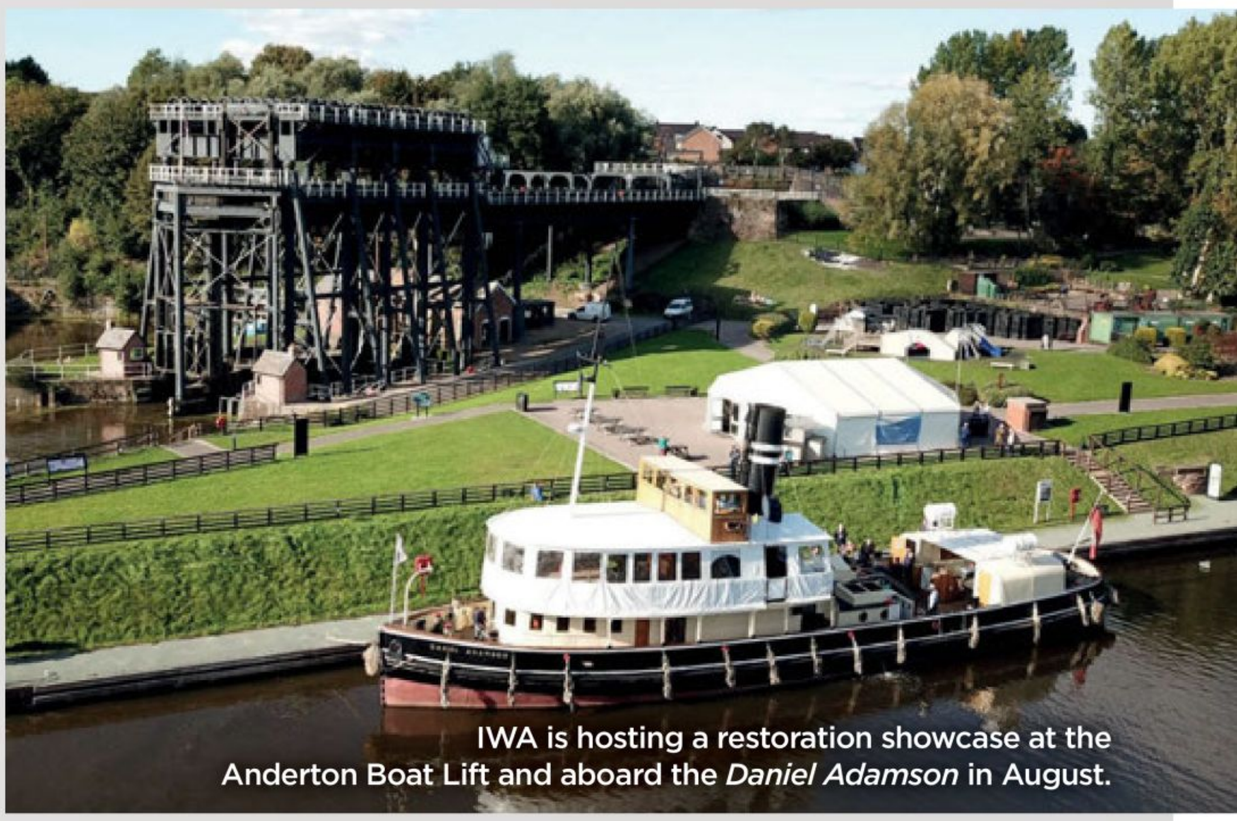
AUGUST

1st
East End Canal Festival
Regent's Canal
Art Pavilion, Mile End, London
Join the Friends of Regent's Canal and celebrate 200 years of the waterway.
friendsofregentscanal.org

2nd
Nottingham Riverside Festival Dragon Boat Challenge
River Trent
Victoria Embankment, Nottingham
dragonboatfestivals.co.uk

8th-9th
Wednesfield Canal Festival
Wyrley & Essington Canal
Bentley Bridge Moorings, Wednesfield
facebook.com/wednesfieldcanalfestival

22nd-23rd
North West Canal Restoration Showcase & Rally
River Weaver


IWA is hosting a restoration showcase at the Anderton Boat Lift and aboard the *Daniel Adamson* in August.

Anderton Boat Lift, Northwich, Cheshire.
IWA, in conjunction with CRT and volunteers from steamship *Daniel Adamson*, will be hosting an event to promote waterway restoration activities in the North West, with displays from 15 canal societies and moorings for 50 boats on the River Weaver and Trent & Mersey Canal.
waterways.org.uk/chester

22nd-23rd
Whitchurch Canal Festival
Whitchurch Arm, Llangollen Canal
Whitchurch, Shropshire
whitchurchwaterway.uk/canal-festival

29th-31st
IWA Festival of Water
Worcester & Birmingham Canal
Perdiswell Park, Worcester
waterways.org.uk/festivalofwater

SEPTEMBER

1st-30th
Totally Thames
A month-long celebration of the River Thames with events taking place across London both on and off the water.
totallythames.org

5th-6th
Leigh Canal Festival
Leeds & Liverpool Canal
Leigh Branch, Wigan
facebook.com/leighcanalfestival

6th
Thames Tidefest
River Thames
London
thamestidefest.net

12th
Aylesbury Waterside Festival
Grand Union Canal
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire
watersidefestival.org

12th-13th
Autumn Boat Share Show & RNLI Festival
Shropshire Union Canal
Overwater Marina, Nantwich, Cheshire
boatshare4u.co.uk

12th-13th
Village at War
Grand Union Canal
Stoke Bruerne, Northamptonshire
friendsofcanalmuseum.org.uk

12th-20th
Chesterfield Canal Walking Festival
Chesterfield Canal
Between West Stockwith and Chesterfield
chesterfield-canal-trust.org.uk

12th-20th
Nene Valley Festival
River Nene
A nine-day event celebrating the natural and historic assets along the Nene Valley between Northampton and Peterborough.
nenevalley.net/about/festival

OCTOBER

11th
Grantham Discovery Day
Grantham Canal
Woolsthorpe-by-Belvoir, Lincolnshire
granthamcanal.org


Venetian Marina's Open Day takes place in May.

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Red diesel reactions

I was left (almost!) speechless by Mark Langley's 'Last Word' on Red Diesel in the March issue of *WW*.

To say that boaters across Europe all pay the full duty without once mentioning the rate of duty itself is disingenuous at the very least.

For example, every drinker in Europe pays alcohol duty on their beer, which ranges from 5p to 18p per pint. Here in the UK we pay some 85p per pint – one of the reasons why so many canalside pubs have had to close.

Everyone paying taxes is fair; everyone paying different rates of tax is not.

Chris Spencer, by email

I never thought I would see *WW* campaign for increasing the costs of boating and I found the article in the March issue by Mark Langley disturbing.

He advocates that we should all welcome the proposed ban on red diesel for leisure craft, stop whinging and pay the increased cost of clear diesel. He glibly states that owners of boats with diesel engines can install two tanks but entirely ignores the substantial costs of this to every boater with a diesel engine.

Unfortunately, the floating suppliers of diesel are more likely to give up than spend a fortune on installing two separate tanks and arranging two separate suppliers, which means no further coal or gas deliveries to the boat. Mr Langley's answer is for boaters to club together to share a delivery but he makes no suggestion about how one finds a tanker driver willing to wait while a queue of boats fill up, one by one.

Indeed, there are so many flaws in his statements that it would take another full article to argue them – e.g. his appalling slur on continuous cruisers who, according to him, only do so to avoid council tax.

As we are still under EU law for at least this year, it would be nice if *WW* would campaign to get the government, or the EU, to pay these costs to ensure continuing supply of fuel, whatever the colour, to boats on the inland waterways.

Ian Lauder, nb *Badsey*

I have been a *WW* reader since its inception. I entirely agree with Simon Mitchell (Waterlines, *WW* March) and disagree with the comments from Mark Langley in his 'Last Word' article in the same issue.

White diesel sold by some boatyards is generally around 25p per litre dearer than roadside garages/ supermarkets. There is no reason why the UK has to comply with EU regulations having left it in January. The tax takings lost would be minimal and, inevitably, the dangerous practice of filling boat tanks via jerrycans would result.

I have written to my MP on this subject, although he rarely responds.

Nigel Williams, by email

Living aboard with a disability

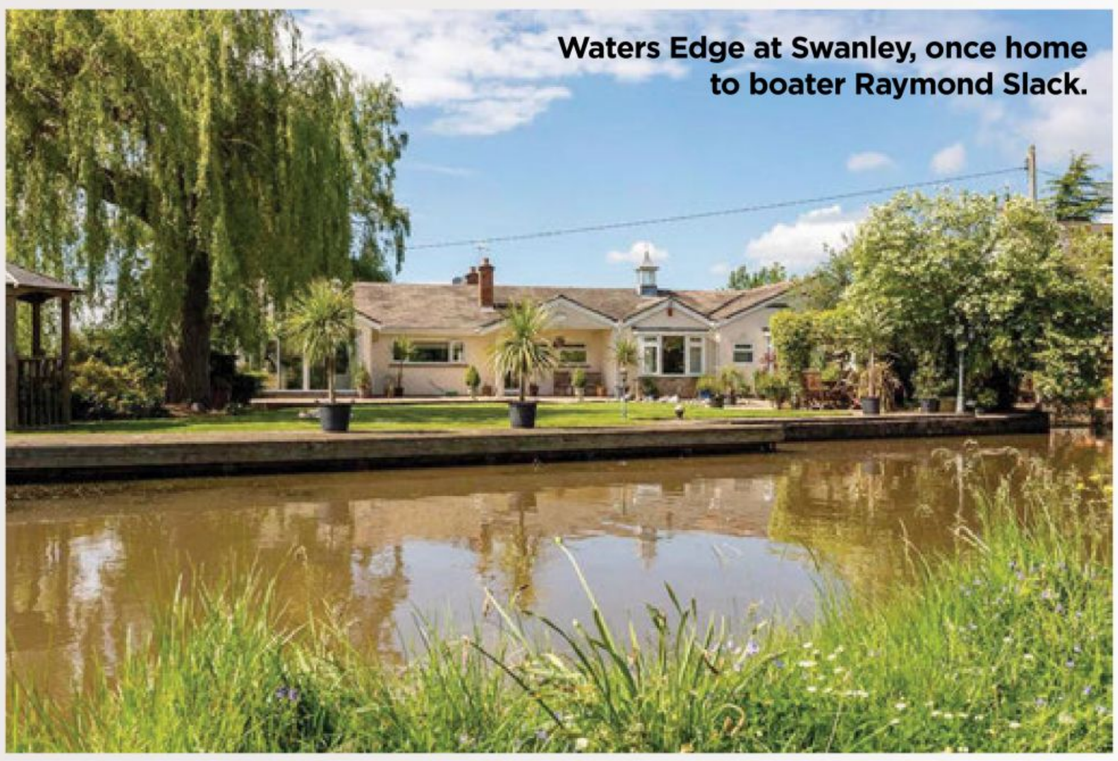
I am writing to you about living aboard a narrowboat when you have a disability. It was my husband's dream to do so and I agreed – but only once the children had finished their schooling. However, I was diagnosed with Parkinson's at the age of 50 and we ditched our plans for the narrowboat when I received this devastating news.

Now, only one teenager remains at home and last summer we enjoyed a two-week canal holiday. While at Braunston I wandered over and viewed some boats. I think I made my hubby's year when I said, "Let's go for it." Life is too short and if we get the chance to live the dream, we want to do so. Running our current three-bedroom home and garden is just too much. Living on board would see us on one level, with no garden and little cleaning to do, plus I can wake up and travel somewhere different for lunch.

We have investigated and researched, and are heading off to the Crick Boat Show armed with facts, figures and questions. We're near the top of the waiting list for a residential mooring at Tewkesbury (the perfect location for our work and medical needs), so we are quite ready.

I am now looking at how my needs can be met on a narrowboat. Perhaps you could consider investigating and running a comprehensive feature on this subject? Surely there must be companies that can help – if not, the boat-builders themselves could include this in their remits.

Trudi Phoenix, by email



Waters Edge at Swanley, once home to boater Raymond Slack.

Building background

I was very interested to read about the Waters Edge property for sale at Swanley, on the Llangollen Canal (*WW* February). May I add that this was the last home of the late Raymond Slack, who was the owner of the Taylor boat *Teal* (launched 1959) and an earlier *Teal* (also a Taylor boat). The latter was launched in 1954 and later named *Amaryllis*; it is now a major 'out of the water' exhibit at the National Waterways Museum. I wrote about this in *Waterways Journal*.

Mr Slack was also one of the co-founders of the North Western branch of the Inland Waterways Association in 1951, and the Nantwich & Border Counties Yacht Club in 1953. I doubt if *Amaryllis* ever visited Waters Edge, but there was a small dock there in which he moored *Teal.* I am not sure if Mr Slack commissioned Waters Edge, but I think that he moved there in the late 1960s,

and the original bungalow, much amended, did seem to date from that time.

Joseph Boughey, by email

The cost of bridge repairs

Your news report in the March issue of *WW* on the £30,000 damage to York's Bridge over the Wyrley & Essington Canal by two cars – presumably meeting head-on while going too fast – was distressing, as was the £1m spent last year by the Canal & River Trust on repairing bridges hit by vehicles.

Other canal bridges, mostly listed structures, are damaged by road vehicles on a regular basis. We have a favourite one at Crooklands on the Lancaster Canal whose parapet is regularly destroyed by heavy lorries failing to take a wide-enough sweep on the corner approaching it. Rarely is the culprit discovered, which means that CRT is unable to reclaim the cost of repairs from the driver or insurer.

These bridges were built some 250 years ago to meet the traffic conditions at the time: nothing larger than a cart or carriage, nor faster than a horse. Since then, canal craft have grown no bigger or faster, yet the road vehicles using the bridges have grown enormously in size, number and speed. This is not the fault of our canal system, and it seems monstrously unfair that CRT should bear the financial burden of repairs.

It is the central government that has allowed the increase in vehicle size and speed, so it should be its Highways Agency and the county highway authorities that bear the cost of bridge repairs, refunding CRT for the work. And in some places the use of CCTV cameras might catch the offending vehicles so that costs could be recovered from owners or insurers.

CRT should keep their cash for canal maintenance and let the highway authorities pay for damage caused by road users.

Oliver Barratt, Grange-over-Sands

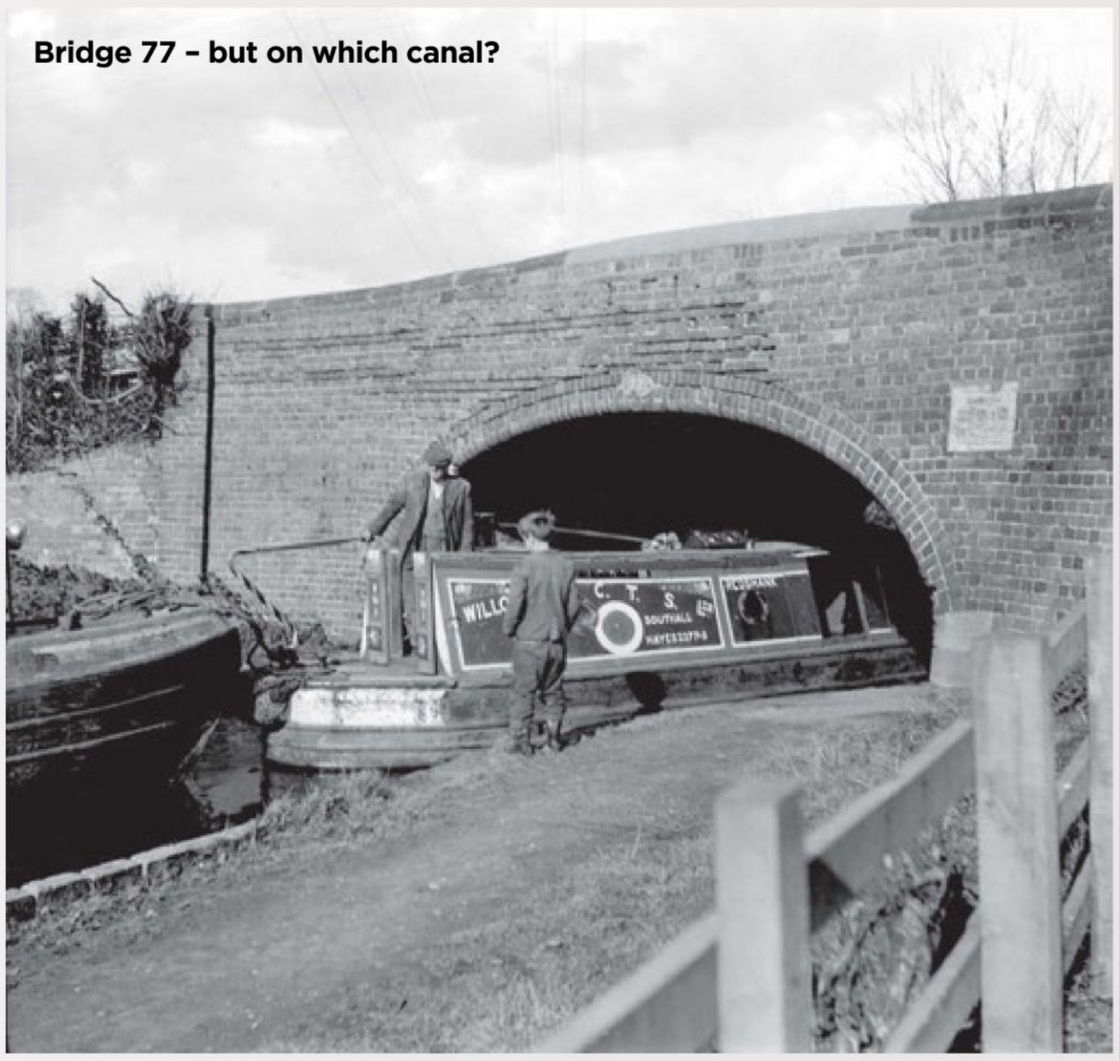
Mystery photographs

A friend of mine took hundreds of photographs of the English canals around 1970, and recently a small cache of more negatives came to light. Most I was able to place, but there are three I could not. Two are likely to have been taken within 10 or 15 miles of Coventry (the one of Bridge 77 and the boats moored up across the canal) and a third might be on the Calder & Hebble Navigation.

Are you or any of your readers able to identify the locations of any of the pictures (below)?

David Park, by email

Bridge 77 – but on which canal?



Lock gate notes

The article 'Boating through the Pain Barrier' (*WW* January) contained lots of useful advice and should therefore be applauded. I would just add a couple of extra notes.

First: a caution. The advice about opening lock gates is fine and the picture on page 46 is helpful, but readers should not be tempted to close lock gates using the same 'bottom on the beam' technique. It is important to keep the beam between you and the water. That way a sudden surge of water in the lock cannot slew the gate against you, pushing you over the edge. It is still possible to use your weight rather than your muscles to move the gate but it needs straight arms and care to avoid back strain.

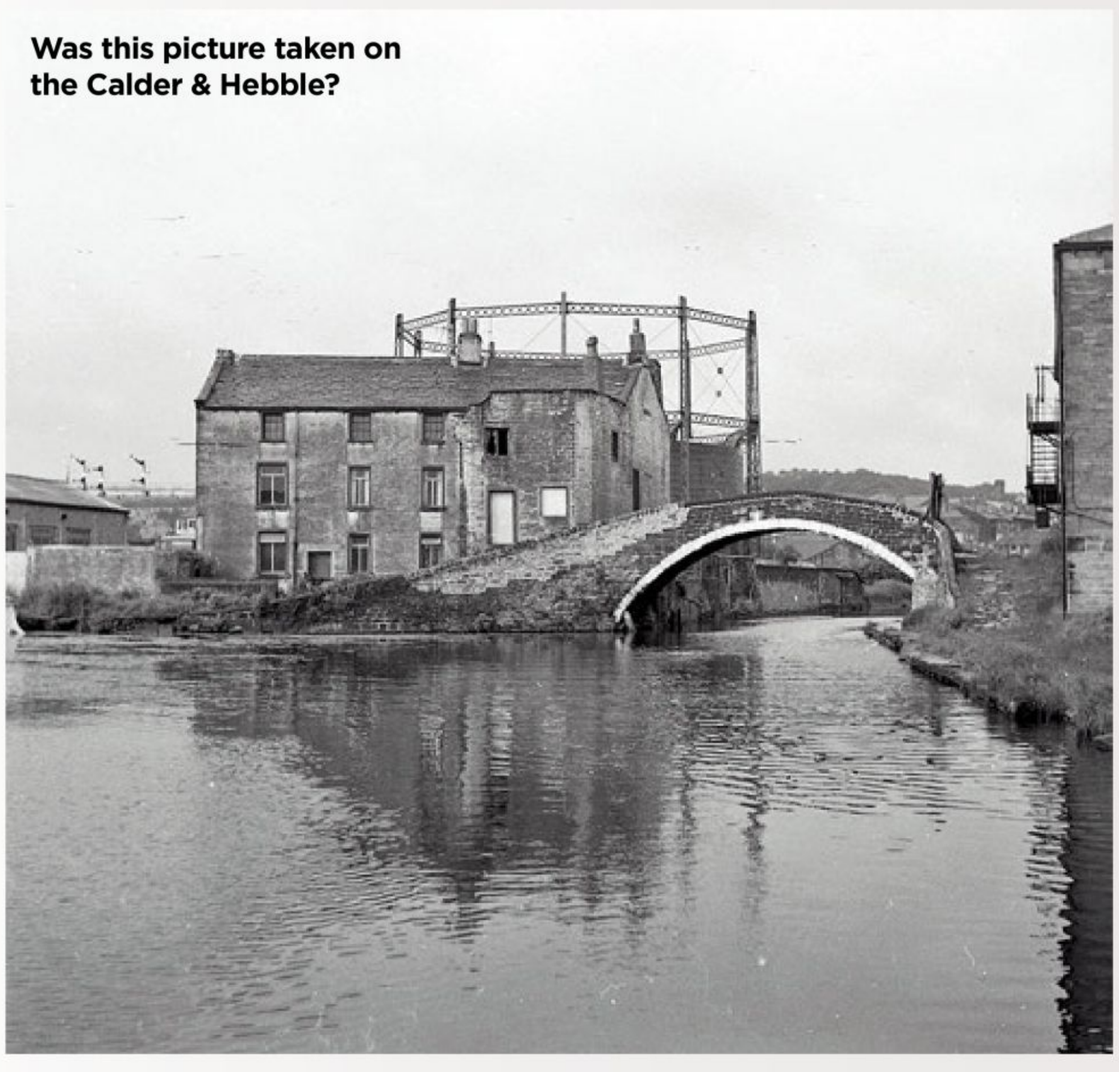
As for opening gates, with your bottom on the beam it is usually possible to feel the beam 'twitch' as the water levels equalise and the seal between the gates breaks. Reserving your effort until this moment saves a lot of useless pushing.

John Harling, Bristol

Boating in London

In response to Bill Root's letter (Waterlines, *WW* February), London's waterways are certainly busy, and it's more important than ever that people share the space fairly. The Canal & River Trust's London Mooring Strategy is all

Was this picture taken on the Calder & Hebble?



Are these boats moored across the canal near Coventry?



about making the best possible use of space for every boater.

The vast majority of canal bank is always going to be used for casual moorings and in 2019 we put in, or lined up, 0.5km of new towpath mooring rings to create new moorings sites and improve existing locations for the benefit of all those who cruise London's waterways.

Alongside this we've introduced pre-bookable moorings in Paddington (in addition to those at Rembrandt Gardens in Little Venice) as an extra service for those boaters who want the certainty of a space when they reach the centre of town. We're planning to add pre-bookable sites on the offside at King's Cross and on the Lee Navigation near the Olympic Park. Pre-bookable moorings are introduced at sites that are not allocated as casual towpath moorings so that we don't lose space for cruising boats.

We're conscious that if boat numbers continue to grow then pressure on London's waterways will increase, so additional measures may be needed to ensure the water space is managed safely and shared fairly for as many boaters as possible. Boaters played a central part in helping us develop the London Mooring Strategy and we're committed to involving them before we agree further changes.

It can feel a little bit like Tetris at times, but the capital's canals are vibrant, full of character and support a thriving community of boaters. Our aim is to meet their needs while protecting London's waterways for future generations.

Matthew Symonds, national boating manager, Canal & River Trust

Costing canals

I feel moved to respond to the side-swipe at the EU in the response letter 'Costing canals' in the March issue of *WW*.

David Holmes is right to correct the budget typo in the news article in the February issue, but he is wrong to imagine such a project could ever be fully funded by the EU. Almost all EU funding is part-funding, usually 40-60%, although this varies depending on the local economic need. National or local government and/or the private sector must provide the 'matched' funding. In the case of the Seine-Nord Europe Canal, I believe French sources are covering 60% of the cost, i.e. about €3b, President Macron having approved €2.2b of central government spend.

So, the answer to the seemingly snide question "has the EU ever financed a British canal or restoration project?" is of course 'no' on the scale of Seine-Nord Europe – not due to any bias on the EU's part, but simply because no UK organisation has ever asked. However, the answer in terms of more modest projects is readily found within the pages of *WW* and is an emphatic 'yes'.

A search through *WW* issues from January 2019 to date reveals six examples, among which are the overseas training for WRG volunteers funded by ERASMUS+, a European youth exchange programme (May 2019), the new winding hole for the Sleaford Navigation, which received EU LEADER funding (August 2019), and improvements to Titford Pools, given £1m of EU funding – 30 times more than the money provided by the Canal & River Trust.

All those connected with the above projects are to be congratulated on having the imagination and tenacity to win EU funding for the benefit of UK canals.

Paul Findlay, by email

Antiques Afloat

It was refreshing to see a new angle on canal folk art in the March issue of *WW*. While the roses and castles-style gets more than its fair share of coverage, I can't remember reading anything aimed specifically at aspiring collectors before, with guide prices on painted ware etc, or tips on picking out the genuine article from the countless modern reproductions.

The *Guardian* last year carried a photo-feature devoted to the work of 'modern master' Phil Speight, in which he lamented how canal folk art has been "turned into a souvenir thing". More articles like *WW*'s, in which the style is dignified with proper historical context and artefacts attached with price tags reflecting the craftsmanship that went into making them would, I think, help people become more discerning in future.

Alan Owens, via email



Canal holiday carbon footprint

Could any readers advise on the best way to calculate the carbon footprint of my upcoming two-week canal holiday? I've had something of a Greta Thunberg guilt complex about travel since last summer, and now use *carbonfootprint.com*'s calculator to work out how to offset flights, train trips and long-distance car journeys. However, I can't find something similar for canal cruising.

Anglo Welsh, which I've booked my holiday with, says on its website that a canal holiday has a 20 times smaller carbon footprint than a two-hour flight, but I'm curious where the data came from, and what time period it covers (one week, a fortnight etc).

Also, do there exist hire-boat operators offering their own carbon-offsetting schemes in the same way some airlines now do? I presume not, although I think they're missing a trick as holidaymakers increasingly scrutinise the green credentials of travel providers.

For readers confused about how carbon offset schemes work, I can quickly elucidate. Having calculated how much carbon you've emitted, you then buy a part-share in projects (e.g. tree planting, or installing renewable energy technology) that work to reduce carbon being given off elsewhere, typically in developing countries. The theory is that by limiting greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere in the world, you cancel out the environmental damage your own actions have caused.

Gill Franklin, via email

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HS2 confirmation draws concerns from canal restorations

The new government's confirmation that the HS2 rail project will definitely go ahead has not cleared the air of uncertainty for some waterway restorations.

The worst affected has been the Ashby Canal. Planning approval was granted nearly a decade ago for a housing estate at Measham that would have included nearly ¾ mile of restored canal, including a new town wharf and marina. The 450-home development was even officially called 'Measham Waterside'.

However, just before construction began, a revised HS2 route trampled over the development, which was halted.

Geoff Pursglove of the Ashby Canal Association was sharply critical, not simply of the route, but of several years of delay. "Without HS2 the canal and most of the major housing works would have been completed by now, and Measham would not be blighted by the continuing uncertainty."

Neverthless, he praised the developer, the Measham Land Company. "Other developers would have given up years ago, but they have stuck with it!"

The Chesterfield Canal Trust, meanwhile, has fought off HS2 proposals that would have killed its 9-mile restoration, and has come to an uneasy accommodation with the new railway over its primary route. But it still has issues to resolve, notably plans for a maintenance yard at Staveley that has stopped work on the canal channel.

"We're pleased the overall uncertainty has gone," said CCT's Rod Auton. "But we need to finalise the details we have been trying to discuss with them for over two years."

The Inland Waterways Association has expressed concern about the overall impact, including areas that do not affect navigation but will cause disruption. It has managed to extract some minor concessions, primarily over environmental issues, and vows to continue applying pressure. Phil Sharpe, a member of IWA's Planning Advisory Panel, said: "Keeping up with HS2 by reading all the reports and examining all the relevant plans has been a massive undertaking but we will continue to engage with all HS2 public consultations and to campaign for better protection for the precious environment of our navigable and restorable waterways."

Perhaps the project with the most to gain is the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust. A spokesperson said: "HS2 have agreed to replace the Cappers Lane bridge we constructed in 2006 with a new road-bridge over a local canal diversion. They will build both of these, ahead of the construction of the high-speed railway viaduct in this area."



The Ashby Canal's Measham Wharf development is on hold for HS2.



An artist's impression of Measham Wharf

CRT TO ENCOURAGE CONSIDERATE MOORING

The Canal & River Trust has begun to support one of the most popular gripes of boaters on Facebook, with a new campaign against badly moored boats.

The Considerate Mooring campaign will contact and admonish boaters who are found to have moored inappropriately, and ultimately act against persistent rule-breakers.

Examples cited include being moored up for days on a water point or lock bollards, opposite a winding hole, at a junction, in a lock flight, at a canoe portaging point, blocking sightlines on sharp bends, being persistently tied up insecurely, or mooring at a space reserved for angling.

The first occurrence will generate a polite letter to the boat-owner highlighting the problem, along with a booklet including extracts from the boat licence terms and conditions. A repeat performance will involve a sterner reminder, setting out how the bylaws have been breached.



An alternative approach to mooring.

In the worse cases, the boater will be ordered to move their craft to a specific location where it must remain until investigation into the mooring conduct is concluded, which could result in licence termination.

Canal.River.Trust adopts What3Words

The Canal & River Trust has now formally adopted the What3Words system for reporting locations. ("Where's the boat, again?" *WW* November 2018).

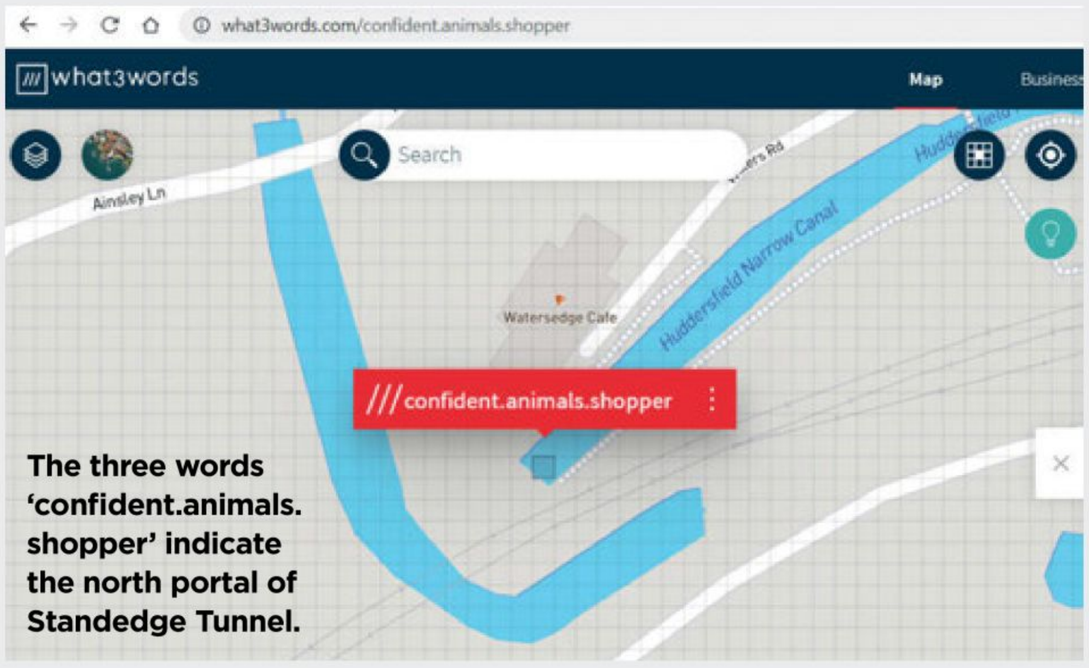
The system narrows any location on earth down to a 3m-by-3m square, with a unique combination of three common dictionary words. Using the website (*what3words.com*) or mobile phone app, you can find the three words for any location.

All CRT staff can now access the system on their computers or phones. The upshot is that if you quote the three-word location to them over the phone, for example when reporting something broken on CRT waterways, they should be able to find exactly where you are. As with web and email addresses, the words should be spoken with 'dot' in between, to minimise confusion.

It might be a little while before it becomes second nature to bank staff, but the main switchboards should now know what you mean.

The system does not yet work on CRT's website, but it is on its to-do list.

Disappointingly, there is no location for the three words 'canal.river.trust' but if you stumble on some amusing combinations of words, do let us know.



The three words 'confident.animals.shopper' indicate the north portal of Standedge Tunnel.

Yellow badges for vulnerable boaters

Boaters with disabilities or vulnerabilities are to be issued with 'Trust Aware' window badges to better highlight their extra needs.

The Canal & River Trust will give the yellow badges to boaters who have been granted an adjustment to their cruising requirements under the Equality Act 2010. This follows feedback at a series of meetings held with disabled boaters over the past year.

The badges will indicate to other boaters and towpath users that there are 'reasonable adjustments' to a boat's conventional cruising requirements. This could mean allowing overstays on visitor or towpath moorings, or reducing the required cruising range. Due to privacy legislation, however, the reason will not be explained on the permit itself. Boaters who have them can choose whether or not they want to display them – it is not a requirement.

There are currently around 240 such boaters on CRT waters, and around a further 140 applications are now being discussed.



New trip-boat for Cotswold Canals Trust

The Cotswold Canals Trust has taken delivery of a brand-new trip-boat for use on the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal.

Called *Adventure*, the narrowboat is electric powered, has solar panel charging, a passenger hoist and accessible WC. It carries a maximum of 12 passengers and a crew of up to four, has inside wheel steering, and is 54ft long by 10ft beam. It was built by Ortomarine of Droitwich, which is fast cornering the market in state-of-the-art trip-boats.

Nevertheless, the boat is somewhat different from what was originally envisaged, according to one source. We understand it was intended to be for the 6 miles of newly restored canal, the so-called Phase 1A through Stroud. However, this stretch currently lacks a full-length winding hole and has a maximum turning length of around 35ft. Because accessibility and internal space was a priority, it was decided to make the boat longer and operate it from Saul instead.

Meanwhile the trust is running its two original trip-boats, *Endeavour* and *Perserverance*, from Ebley Wharf on the restored Stroud length.



Cotswold Canals trip-boat *Adventure* on its arrival in January.



A sight that looks likely to stay.

Red diesel ban not imminent

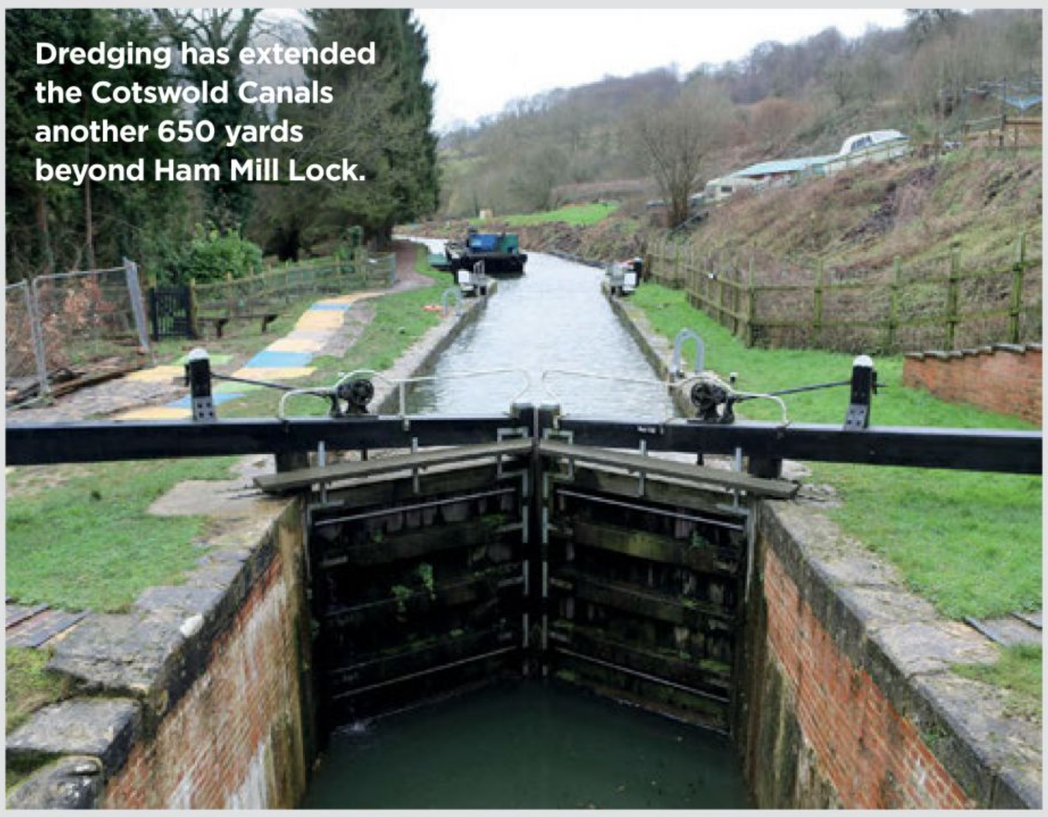
The likelihood of red diesel being banned for boaters is receding.

The European Court of Justice last year ordered a ban, and HMRC made a call for evidence on how it might be implemented. The UK is still subject to these laws, at least until the end of this year, and could in theory negotiate a post-Brexit deal that included a continued ban.

HMRC has delayed an announcement until after the budget on 11th March. However, any ban might take a year or two more to implement, to allow time for boatyards and boaters to adapt to white diesel.

Lesley Robinson, CEO of industry body British Marine, told *WW*: "We have been in continuous dialogue with HMRC and we predict the chance of any surprises for the industry is remote. The banning of red diesel in the foreseeable future is unlikely."

MIKE GALLAGHER



Dredging has extended the Cotswold Canals another 650 yards beyond Ham Mill Lock.

DREDGING EXTENDS COTSWOLD CANALS

Dredging has begun on another section of the Cotswold Canals restoration, extending the waterway by a further 650 yards beyond Ham Mill Lock to the current end of the navigation.

This takes the channel as far as it can practically go for the time being, to the base of the buried Hope Mill Lock. When the work ends it will have extended the restored length for almost a mile beyond where the Heritage Lottery Fund restoration ended at Bowbridge Lock in 2018.

Several permanent boat moorings are planned on the off-side bank of this length above Ham Mill Lock.

Next, a full-sized winding hole will be dug and piled opposite the new purpose-built Stroud Brewery, which opened in February 2019. The brewery owners deliberately chose its location for this very reason, and a new boat landing stage here is expected to be very popular in years to come. This should be finished by July 2020.

After a century of closure, with streams bringing in so much silt to dredge, the Cotswold Canals Trust has had to build an impressive dredging fleet. It now owns three mud hoppers, and has hired a fourth from the Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust.



The Baldwin Trust's latest boat, *Halseyon Days*, launched in 2019.

Appeal for Baldwin Trust

The Baldwin Trust has launched a £75,000 appeal to replace its founding narrowboat *St Clare*. Over 30 years old, the boat has incurred repeated mechanical failures and trustees have decided to retire it at the end of the 2020 season.

The charity says 2019 saw a severe downturn in its income, due to an unprecedented amount of rainfall causing the cancellation of many trips, particularly on its main operating area between Leicester and Loughborough on the flood-prone River Soar. Its December Santa Cruises were particularly hard hit.

The trust's latest boat, *Halseyon Days*, was launched in 2019 and has proved phenomenally popular, along with the older *Dandelion*. But this has only served to highlight the problems of *St Clare*.

The trust hopes the new boat will be ready for the 2021 season. As with other charity boats, its members are now considering more environmentally friendly forms of power, providing sensory facilities and improved handling techniques for severely disadvantaged people. New areas of disability they hope to reach include dementia and stroke associations.

AUDREY SMITH STANDS DOWN FROM LANCASTER ROLE

Long-standing waterways activist Audrey Smith OBE is standing down from her role as chair of the Lancaster Canal Regeneration Partnership after four years, and the organisation is now seeking a successor.

One of the biggest projects she started is the plan for a continuous towpath trail from Kendal to Lancaster, linking the existing navigation with the Northern Reaches restoration. The long-term aim is navigation, but the towpath trail is seen as more achievable in the short-term. Successes include unlocking £1.5m from the Heritage Lottery Fund for repair of the flood-damaged Stainton Aqueduct on the Northern Reaches, and raising the profile of the whole waterway locally for its 200th anniversary celebrations in 2019.

The partnership brings together five district and county councils with the Canal & River Trust, Inland Waterways Association and Lancaster Canal Trust. More information is at *lcrp.org.uk.*

It will be hard to replace Audrey, IWA chair from 1994 to 1998 and a recipient in 2018 of the association's top award, the Cyril Styring Trophy. Her family has grown up with her passion for the waterways; her late husband David was a leading IWA organiser, daughter Gillian a trustee, son Jonathan a former IWA committee member and director of the Waterway Recovery Group, and granddaughter Rhiannon a team leader on WRG camps.



Audrey Smith receiving the IWA Cyril Styring Trophy in 2018.

MIKE GALLAGHER

Lune Aqueduct drained

An all-winter stoppage of the Lancaster Canal's Lune Aqueduct has given the public a rare opportunity to see more of John Rennie's substantial construction techniques.

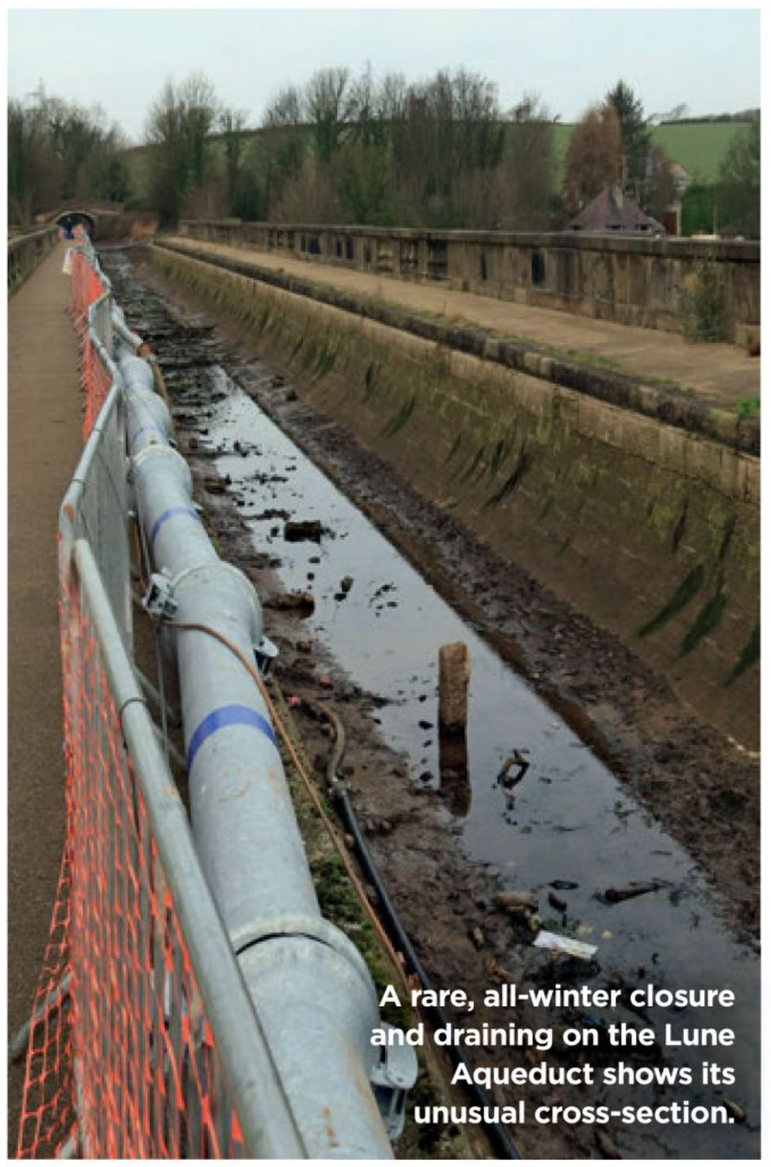
The stoppage is to reline the channel of the 300-yard embankment to the south of the aqueduct, not the edifice itself. While a half-mile stretch of canal was drained, the towpath remained open, allowing walkers to see the shape of the channel.

The work was due to finish on 13th March, but has been delayed for a month due to difficulties in controlling accumulating rainwater on the soft ground.



COLIN WAREING

Silt removal and canal bed relining on the Lune Embankment.



COLIN WAREING

A rare, all-winter closure and draining on the Lune Aqueduct shows its unusual cross-section.

Lock 14 nears completion on the Grantham restoration

As the £1m five-month partial rebuilding of Hurleston Lock neared completion in March (see page 28), another substantial lock reconstruction took place on the other side of the Midlands – and it's interesting to compare the two.

Lock 14, on the Woolsthorpe Flight of the Grantham Canal, has taken rather longer, but at substantially lower cost. This is primarily due to almost all the work being carried out by volunteers, with the benefit of an £830,500 Heritage Lottery Fund grant. This was spread over two locks. Lock 15 was completed first, while work began on Lock 14 in the summer of 2018 and should be finished this year.

Both of the Grantham locks were full rebuilds.



Nearing completion in January 2020.

Most of the work has been done by Grantham Canal Society volunteers, with the occasional help of Waterway Recovery Group camps. A key part of the HLF grant was for training in heritage techniques.

GCS is now turning its attention to Locks 13 and 12, the final two on the Woolsthorpe Flight, with a further submission for HLF support. These are in substantially better condition; it's hoped they will be repaired rather than rebuilt, and far more quickly. Once again, the labour will come from volunteers, many of whom have now had training in heritage construction from the previous two locks.



SEALANE MEDIA

Lock 14 required a complete rebuild.



A Queen tribute band will be performing at Crick.

Rocking the boat show

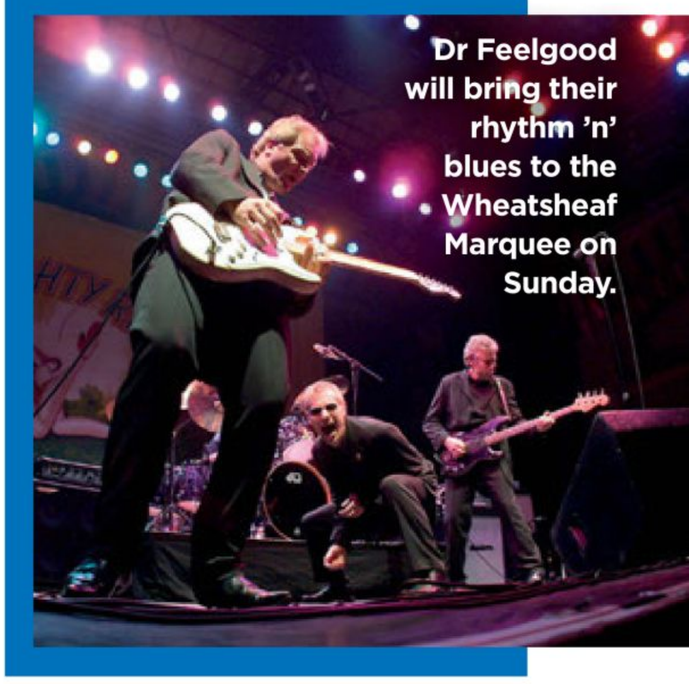
Queen tribute band Mercury and British rhythm 'n' blues band Dr Feelgood have been announced as this year's headline music acts at the Crick Boat Show.

The event, which showcases the inland waterways industry with nearly 300 exhibitors and dozens of boats on display at Northamptonshire's Crick Marina on 23rd-25th May, includes evening entertainment in the ticket price each day.

On the Saturday night, Mercury's choreographed stage show will see energetic performances of the most popular songs from Queen's extensive back catalogue, and on the Sunday night, Dr Feelgood will play all their best-known 1970s and '80s hits, including 'She Does it Right', 'Roxette', 'Back in the Night' and 'Milk and Alcohol'.

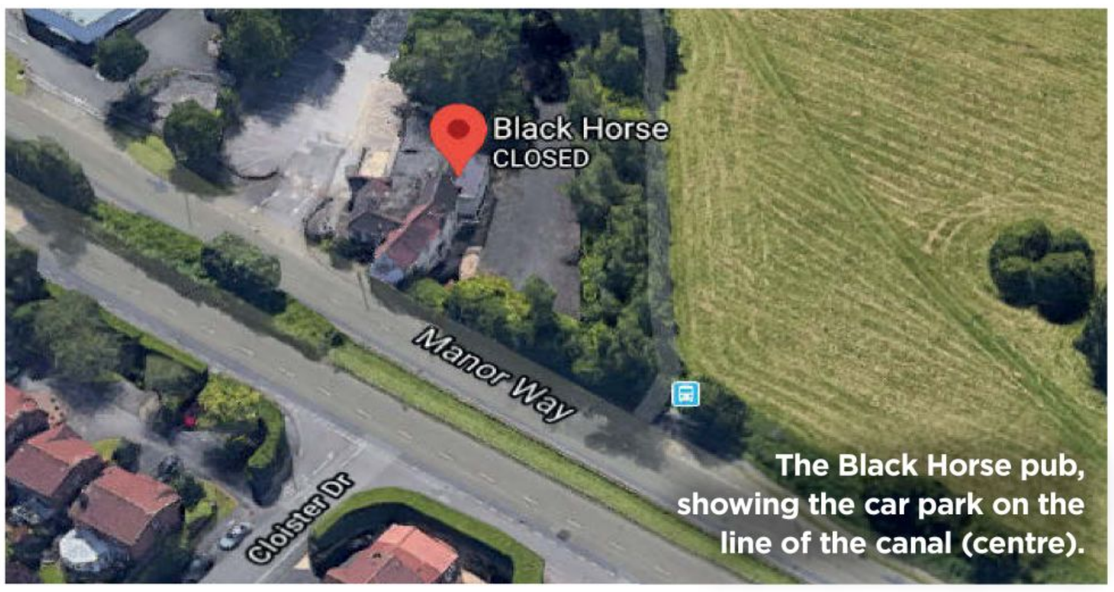
Over the weekend, 15 acts will perform an eclectic mix of live music in the Wheatsheaf Marquee from noon until night.

For more information and to book tickets, camping pitches and moorings, visit *crickboatshow.com* or call 01283 742970, Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm.



Dr Feelgood will bring their rhythm 'n' blues to the Wheatsheaf Marquee on Sunday.

GOOGLE



The Black Horse pub, showing the car park on the line of the canal (centre).

Pub reopening opposed by Lapal restoration

The Lapal Canal Trust has opposed a move to reopen a Halesowen pub, after plans were revealed to extend the use of the car park, which lies on part of the route of the canal restoration.

The Black Horse in Manor Way, Halesowen, closed in 2018. A new owner had planned to reopen it and convert the manager's flat to a House of Multiple Occupancy for six people. However, the owner withdrew the application after objections from local residents worried about the potential for anti-social behaviour. But the Lapal Canal Trust said it objected to the pub's extension of the car park, which could derail the restoration of the Dudley No 2 Canal whose route is part of the site.

The pub itself seems to have been an old boatman's establishment, appearing on Victorian maps adjacent to the canal.



Alys Fowler (centre) on *Selina Cooper* at Nelson.

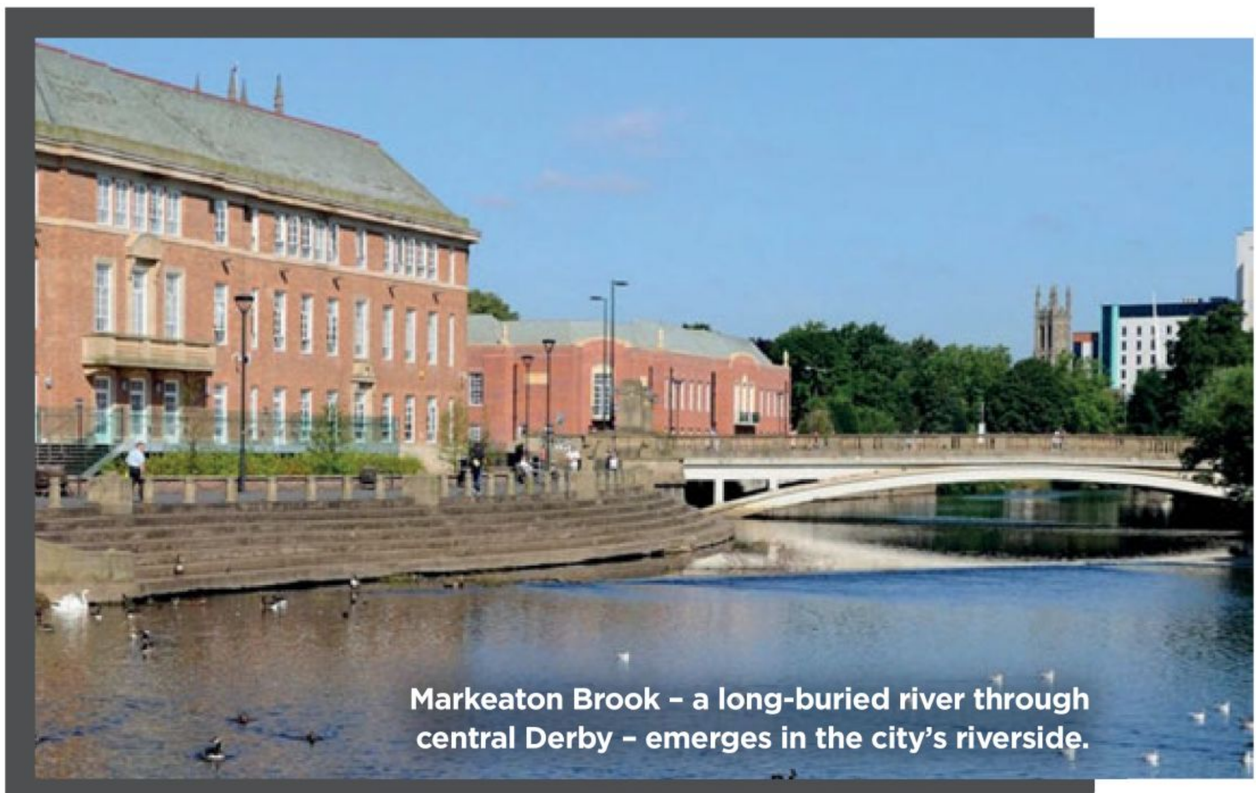
Idle Women create medicinal garden on the L&L

The Idle Women Sisterhood, a canal-based community interest company that supports women-led spaces in the north of England, has commissioned gardening columnist, writer and presenter Alys Fowler to design the UK's first medicinal herb, or 'physic', garden specifically for women and girls.

It will be situated by the Leeds & Liverpool Canal in Nelson, Lancashire, and aims to provide a living archive of women's medicinal plant knowledge. Through workshops and training, the women are designing, landscaping and planting the 2,500ft^2 site at Hargreaves Street with terraced beds for planting, and a new accessible street entrance. It is expected to be completed in September 2020.

Alys Fowler said she wanted to develop an adaptable working garden filled with useful medicinal herbs, "which would change year on year, and create an environment that is calm and reflective, open and private, and where women will feel a true sense of belonging".

Moored alongside is *Selina Cooper,* the group's narrowboat. It provides space in which women can learn, socialise, rest and take shelter. The project is funded by the Tampon Tax distributed by Community Foundation Lancashire, which last year supported a herbalist-in-residence programme.


Markeaton Brook – a long-buried river through central Derby – emerges in the city's riverside.

PROPOSAL TO OPEN UP DERBY RIVERSIDE

The Derby & Sandiacre Canal Trust's new riverboat service, due to be launched at Easter, has inspired plans to open out a long-covered river in the centre of Derby and provide more of a waterfront in the city.

The Markeaton Brook, which runs for over half a mile from Markeaton Park and emerges at Derby River Gardens, was culverted over a century ago. Few local residents know it exists.

Jon Millhouse, a chartered town planner with a practice in the city, was inspired by a talk from Chris Madge, the chair of the canal trust, who outlined progress in reopening the Derby Canal, and announced the new riverboat service, which will run between the city centre and Darley Abbey Mills.

The Markeaton Brook was covered at a time when many city rivers operated as sewers. But modern environmental standards mean it is now clean.

"Reopening it would breathe new life into the streets," Jon says. "Imagine it running down the centre of Victoria Street, overlooked by landmark buildings such as the Old Central Post Office, flanked by cafés and pedestrian walk ways, and crossed by an Amsterdam-style arched bridge at the junction with Cornmarket and St Peter Street."

Jon can be contacted at *jon.millhouse@planningdesign.co.uk*.

IWA greets new MPs

Following the General Election in December, the Inland Waterways Association wasted little time lobbying MPs who have waterways interests in their constituencies.

The association hosted a parliamentary reception on 27th January to which around 60 MPs turned up. It launched a briefing paper, 'The future of the Inland Waterways', aimed mainly at educating the influx of new MPs.

A key issue in the briefing paper is the need for adequate funding, not only for the Canal & River Trust (which in 2021 will start negotiating its new funding round) but also the Environment Agency.

Other topics include making the waterways more sustainable, helping contribute to the goal of the UK becoming carbon neutral by 2050, making residential moorings easier to find and more affordable, protecting waterways heritage, and spreading awareness of how waterways restoration can act as a catalyst for regeneration of a surrounding area.

New boat for Hargreaves

The Hargreaves Narrowboat Trust, which has operated a charity trip-boat on the Coventry Canal for over 25 years, launched an appeal late in 2019 to raise funds for a replacement for its ageing craft *The Hargreaves.*

However, just as we were about to mention this, the charity told us it has managed to land a substantial lottery match-funding grant. It can now commission a modern, fully accessible replacement, complete with zero-emission electric drive, and hopes to have it ready for the 2021 season.

Operating from an accessible mooring at Boot Bridge, Nuneaton, the charity provides free outings to people with vulnerabilities and disabilities, mostly from care homes and elderly persons groups. It has always relied on voluntary donations, without (until now) any outside grants or funding. Demand has always outstripped availability and for the last four years it has been 99% booked, seven days a week, from April to September.

The new boat will be built by Ortomarine, which has already constructed several such advanced trip-boats, including *Pamela May 2* for the Droitwich Canal, and *Adventure* for the Cotswold Canals Trust (see page 21).



HNT

The Hargreaves **at its mooring at Boot Bridge, Nuneaton. The new boat is expected to be ready for the 2021 cruising season.**

This must be the shortest appeal we have encountered! Congratulations are in order to HNT. More information is at *hargreavesnarrowboat.co.uk*.



LHCRT

Record numbers are joining the DoE scheme on Lichfield restoration sites.

Lichfield has record numbers of DoE volunteers

The Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust, which last year received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Services, says it now has a record number of youngsters taking their Duke of Edinburgh Awards as volunteers.

The trust has supported the scheme for several years, but has seen a marked uplift in new DoE recruits recently – and they are not quite sure why.

What has surprised the older members of the trust is how many of the young people are continuing to volunteer after they have done the requisite number of hours. One of them, now in his seventh year, used the skills he learned in maintaining the trust's machinery when he went on to study mechanical engineering at university.

A year ago there were six such volunteers; by October 2019 there were 11 but the number rose in February to 16, ranging in age from 14 to 19. LHCRT chair Christine Bull values their work hugely. "We all love their commitment and energy," she said.



LHCRT

LHCRT has 16 volunteers aged 14 to 19 working on its restoration sites.

MONTGOMERY CANAL GETS WELSH COUNCIL BACKING

The Montgomery Canal Partnership has received vital council support in its bid for a share of a £55m government fund for Mid-Wales.

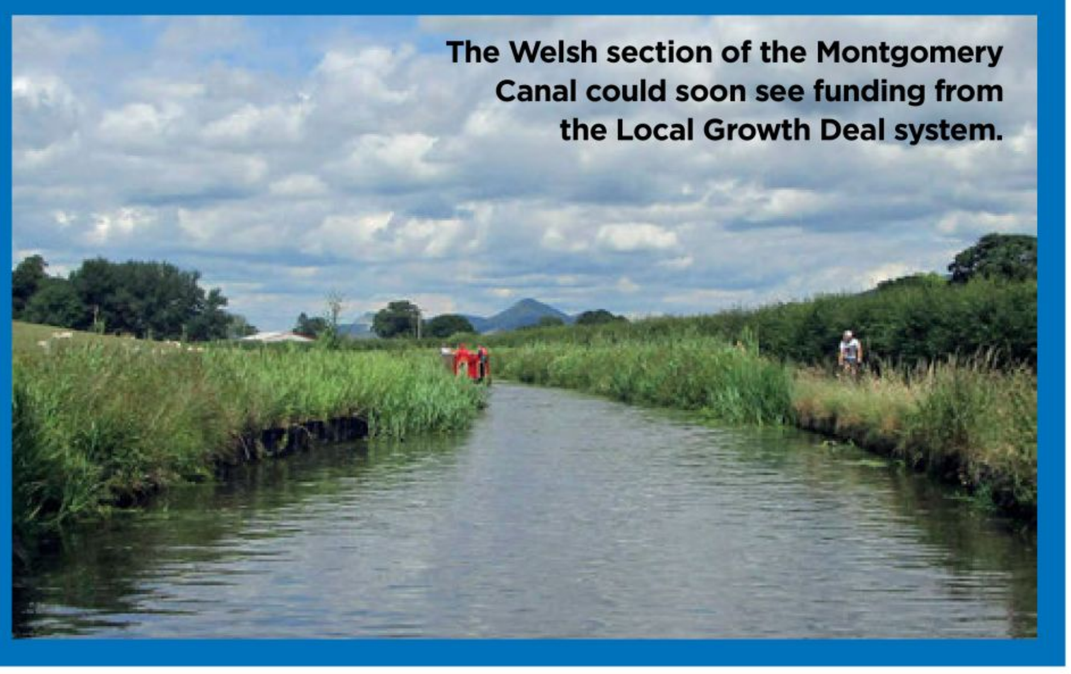
The money would come from the Local Growth Deal system, which allows councils to jointly fund enterprise projects with private businesses. The Mid-Wales Growth Deal would help deliver projects in the areas included in the southern (Welsh) half of the Montgomery Canal.

Now two key members of Powys County Council have pledged their support for the canal as a worthy recipient of some of the money. James Evans, the council's portfolio holder for economic development, housing and regulatory services, and Elwyn Vaughan, leader of the council's Plaid Cymru group, both said they would support the restoration.

They are now helping the canal partnership develop a proposal. Because the restoration is a cross-border project involving sections in north Shropshire and north Powys, it could qualify for joint support with the Marches Growth Deal.

Since the canal restoration began in 1969, more than half of its 35 miles have been returned to water. Part of the canal is in Shropshire, and Shropshire County Council has already formed a special board to coordinate its support for the canal.

The Mid-Wales Growth Deal could inspire a Welsh project board equivalent, which may speed up restoration in the Welsh section.



The Welsh section of the Montgomery Canal could soon see funding from the Local Growth Deal system.

Free cover repairs after storm

Storm Ciara brought serious trouble to most of the country in early February, although at the time of going to press we had not heard of any disasters on the scale of last November, or the Boxing Day Floods of 2015.

But one business, unable to travel around immediately after the storm, decided to breeze in with some good will. Cratch cover specialist Kinver Canopies of Stourbridge offered free minor repairs during the week to disadvantaged and low income people with storm-damaged covers.

"To anyone in this demographic who may be struggling, this shouldn't be happening. So we will try and get as many covers repaired this week as possible," said Ian Underwood, a director of the company.

"Our company is at a size where we can just afford to give a little back."

JOHN HAYNES



Job nearly done: Wappenshall Basin on the way to being cleared.

Wappenshall Basin excavated

The Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust has begun excavating the East Basin of its historic Wappenshall Wharf site.

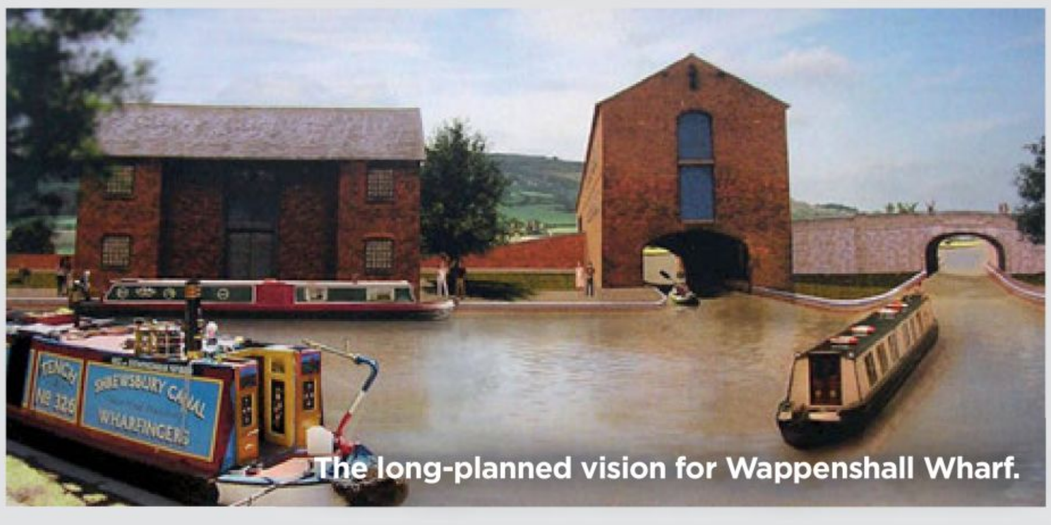
The trust signed a 125-year lease on Wappenshall Wharf in 2009 and began restoring the cluster of Grade II-listed buildings. But it has only now been able to start excavation of the basin, thanks to the generosity of local company Denso Manufacturing.

The company paid for trial holes to be dug, to check if the infill was contaminated. When it got the all-clear, it also paid for contractors to dig the basin out and remove the infill.

The site proved to be wetter than expected: a machine that was being used to grade the dug-out soil and rocks sank into the mud and had to be pulled out by an excavator.

Around 16,000m^3 of infill were removed. Brickwork and stonework lining the edge of the basin will need to be repaired and a new wall is required on the towpath side. The basin will then be lined and rewatered, something that the trust hopes can be accomplished by next year.

Wappenshall Wharf was one of Thomas Telford's final projects and opened in 1838 as a transhipment point from the Shrewsbury Canal to the Newport branch of the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal. SNCT plans to make it a visitor centre, celebrating the life and works of the great Scottish engineer, whose name honours the local new town.



The long-planned vision for Wappenshall Wharf.

SNCT

NBT



***Nuneaton* & *Brighton* will be visiting all the waterways museums in the Narrow Boat Trust's 50th anniversary year.**

Narrow Boat Trust celebrates 50 years

The Narrow Boat Trust charity is marking its 50th anniversary in 2020 by combining the usual coal runs of the motor *Nuneaton* and butty *Brighton* with a tour of several events and visits to all the major waterways museums.

Along with the regular summer coal run, which involves loading in the Midlands and delivering to regular customers on the river Thames and Kennet, the autumn coal run will this year take in the River Wey.

On the schedule will be the Black Country Museum and the National Waterways Museums at both Ellesmere Port and Gloucester in July, and the London Canal Museum for the Regent's Canal 200th event on 1st August.

Nuneaton & *Brighton* will then return to the Alvecote historic boat gathering on August bank holiday, before loading again for the autumn run to the River Wey.

Founded in 1970, NBT had its origins in an attempt by canal enthusiast Tom Henshaw to keep carrying alive on long-distance runs, at a time when British Waterways appeared to be doing its best to stifle it.

Half a century on, the charity is unique in providing an opportunity for amateurs to learn the skills needed to operate a pair of working narrowboats in the traditional fashion. While it is a not-for-profit organisation, it carries coal to sell commercially, with all funds raised going to the operation and maintenance of the boats.

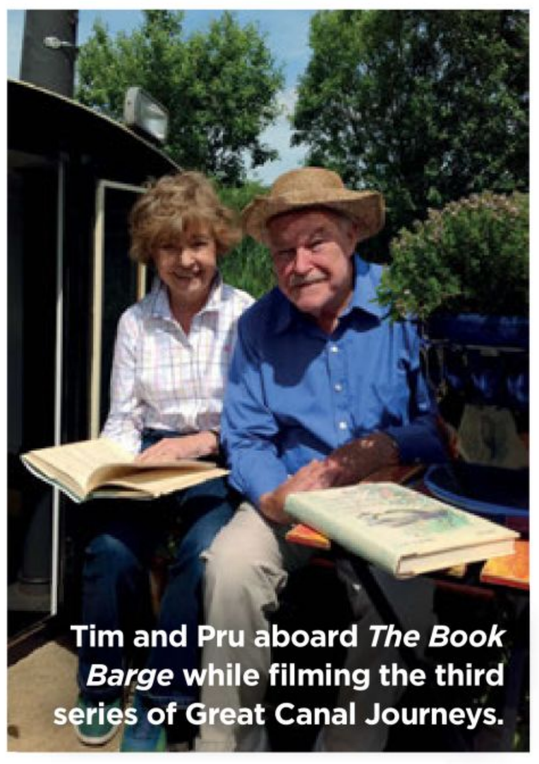
Time's up for Tim & Pru

Boating octogenarians Timothy West and Prunella Scales have ruled out another series of *Great Canal Journeys*, amid the actress's ongoing battle with Alzheimer's.

While the Channel 4 show is due to return later this year, the popular couple will be handing the helm to fellow thespian Sheila Hancock and former Conservative MP Gyles Brandreth.

Since the canal series launched in 2014, West and Scales have, according to a *Guardian* review, "elevated the humble travelogue to a touching saga of love and loss", with candid discussions about the difficulties of boating with memory loss and unfeigned enthusiasm for revisiting routes they cruised in better health in their youth.

Speaking to *WW* in 2015, West, now 85, insisted: "We just behave normally, whether the cameras are rolling or not."



Tim and Pru aboard *The Book Barge* while filming the third series of Great Canal Journeys.

In a statement confirming their decision to quit, the couple wished their successors nothing but the best: "Good luck Gyles and Sheila. Enjoy the countryside and the pubs."

CRICK BOAT SHOW

BRITAIN'S BIGGEST INLAND WATERWAYS FESTIVAL

SATURDAY 23–MONDAY 25 MAY 2020

TRADE & PREVIEW DAY IN ASSOCIATION WITH LeeSan Marine • Welfare • Leisure FRIDAY 22 MAY

CRICK MARINA, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE NN6 7SQ

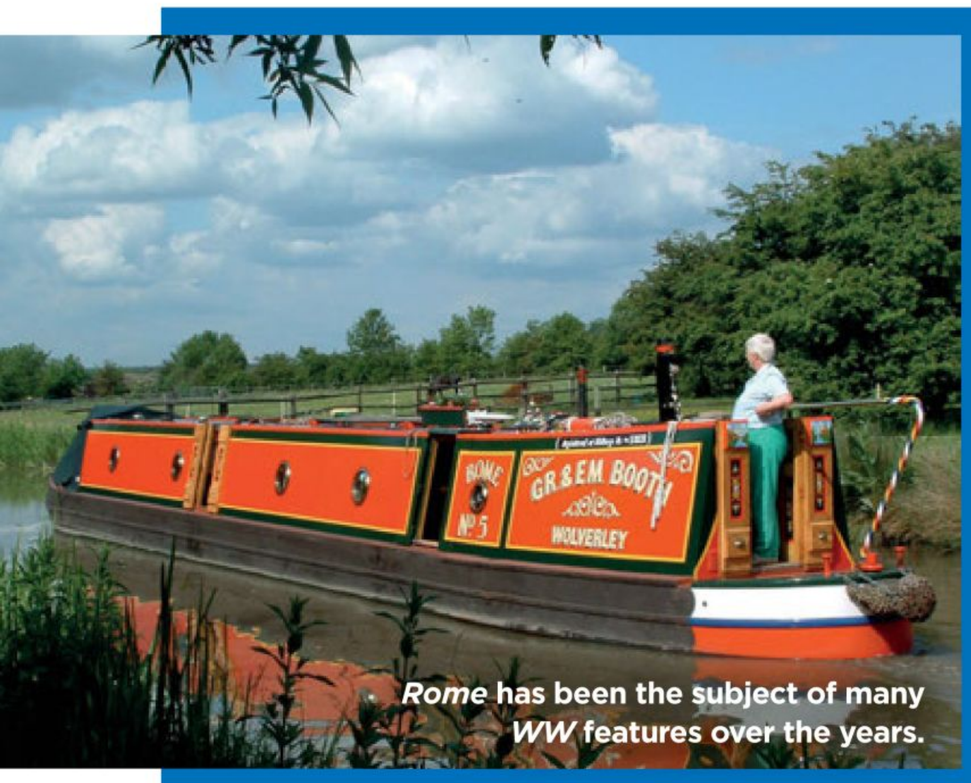
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SAVE 15% IN ADVANCE

Waterways World

Canal & River Trust

Crick Marina



Rome has been the subject of many *WW* features over the years.

WW technical consultant's boat on sale

When our technical consultant, Graham Booth, agreed to collaborate with Andy Burnett to rewrite the *Narrowboat Builder's Book*, he had no idea how much it would change his life. He went from being an architect to working as a boat-fitter and, eventually, becoming the technical editor of *Waterways World*.

The subject of the *Narrowboat Builder's Book* was his own boat, *Rome*, a 60ft traditional craft with a shell by the well-respected builder, Les Allen & Sons. Now, after many happy years cruising, maintaining, enhancing and writing about *Rome*, Graham has decided that he, and his wife, Evelyn, are getting too old to make enough use of it, so they have decided to sell the boat.

Rome has a traditional boatman's cabin and engine room with a Lister HW2 which the Booths find suits them well. These are followed by a bathroom, a double bedroom which can convert to a cosy dinette, a galley enclosed by Roman arches and a saloon with a solid-fuel stove. The technical specification includes a 230-volt circuit, an inverter and separate charger, and a solar panel.

Graham is asking around £59,500 for the boat. For more information, you can call him on 01562 850458.



Rome's dinette.

Llangollen Canal nears reopening

Boaters are gearing up to return to the Llangollen Canal, as a long-awaited rebuilding of the entrance lock neared completion in February.

Hurleston Bottom Lock was partially dismantled and rebuilt over the winter. The walls of the 223-year-old Grade II-listed lock have gradually shifted over time making it increasingly difficult for narrowboats to pass through, especially older ones that tended to be built to a 7ft beam rather than the now-conventional 6ft 10in. Instead of being long and straight, the lock has slowly bowed due to movement in the ground around it.



CRT

The Llangollen Canal was due to be reopened in March as work neared completion.

The Canal & River Trust says the work has cost over £1m and involved an archaeological survey. A new hidden concrete retaining wall was installed to stabilise the ground, before a mix of original stonework and new brickwork was put back in place to make it appear historic.

A time-lapse video of the dismantling and reconstruction can be seen at *https://youtu.be/OQIs0TCl2c0*.



Haverholme Lock: the next stage of the Sleaford Navigation restoration.

Sleaford Navigation to get a full-length cycleway and another lock restored

The Sleaford Navigation Trust is in talks with North Kesteven District Council to create a cycle route for the full 13 miles of the restoration, from Sleaford to the River Witham at Chapel Hill.

The plan would be to link up the town to Sustran's existing Water Rail Way cycle and pedestrian route from Boston to Lincoln, by laying a new path following the River Slea. It would be dependent on securing external funding – potentially from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

In addition, the trust hopes to help the council restore Haverholme Lock, the next challenge on the navigation from the current limit at Cobbler's Lock. The council owns Haverholme Lock, which it knows is in a very poor state, and has asked the trust for its help.

SNT's chair, Steve Hayes, said they are fairly advanced in the first stage of planning to rebuild the bywash, and are working with the Environment Agency towards an environmental permit.

"EA has already seen the designs for the bywash, flow calculations and detailed designs, and they are happy with them," he told *WW*.

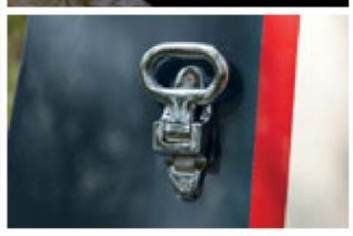
"We are looking at getting the ecology report carried out in May, and everything else approved by the end of the year. There is a possibility of the Waterway Recovery Group visiting in 2021 to carry out the work on the bywash.

"Once that is complete then we can divert the flow through the bywash and turn our attention to the lock chamber."

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Lotus stands out among the variety of vessels in Limehouse Basin.

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AN UPCYCLED NARROWBOAT

Lotus is a residential narrowboat that has been fitted out with a range of reclaimed and eco-friendly materials for a £90k budget. At its home mooring of Limehouse Basin, **Mark Langley** heads aboard...

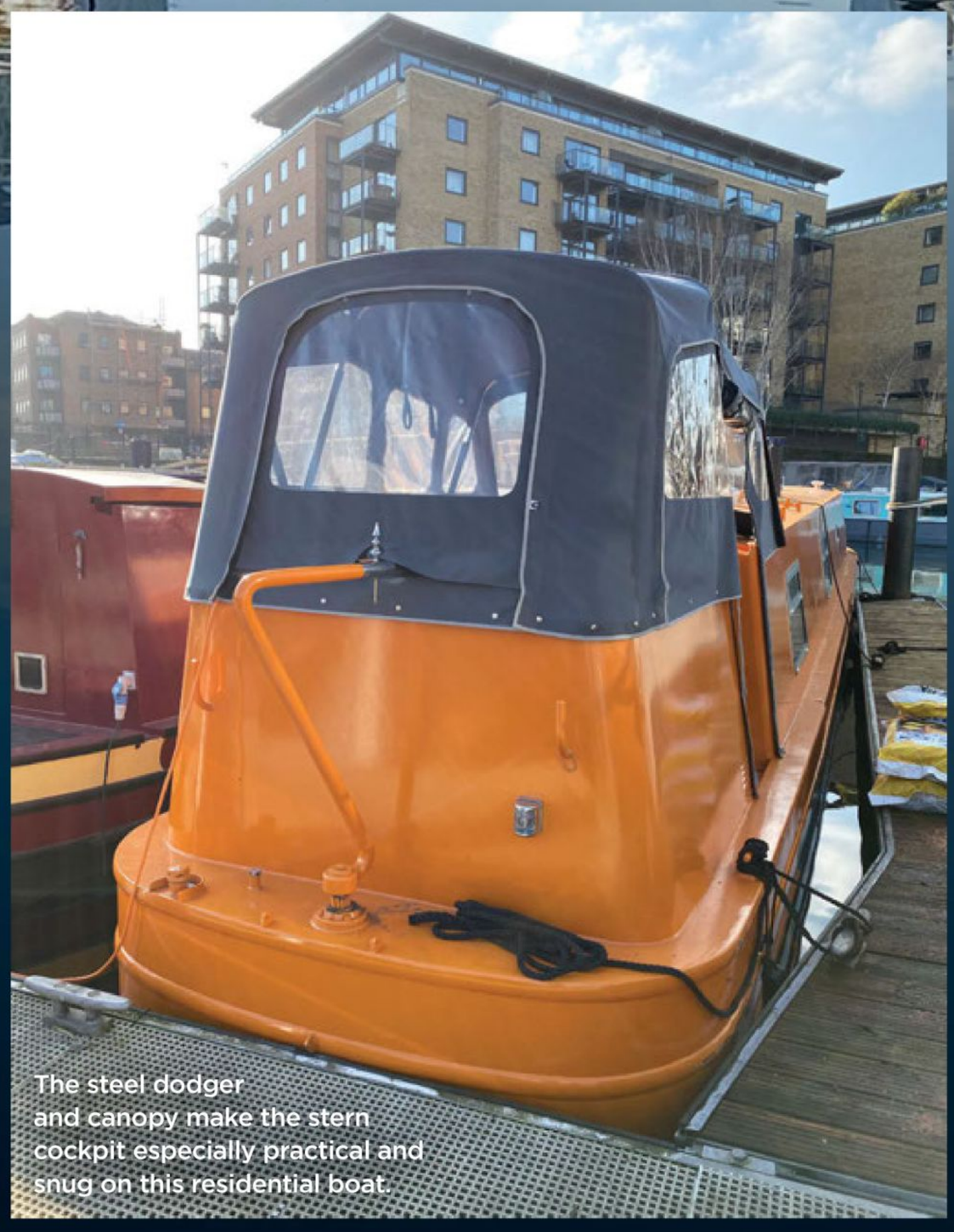
A truly bespoke new build narrowboat for under £100,000 is becoming something of a rarity. Nevertheless, there are smaller boat-builders that can still produce boats to a customer's exact requirements without breaking the bank.

Fifty-foot *Lotus* is one such example, fitted out by Samuel Roy for committed cruising and year-round residential use. Based on a brand-new hull by renowned shell-builders Colecraft, the interior is designed to give a good amount of living space, while making best use of recycled materials and an ecologically sound fit-out where possible.

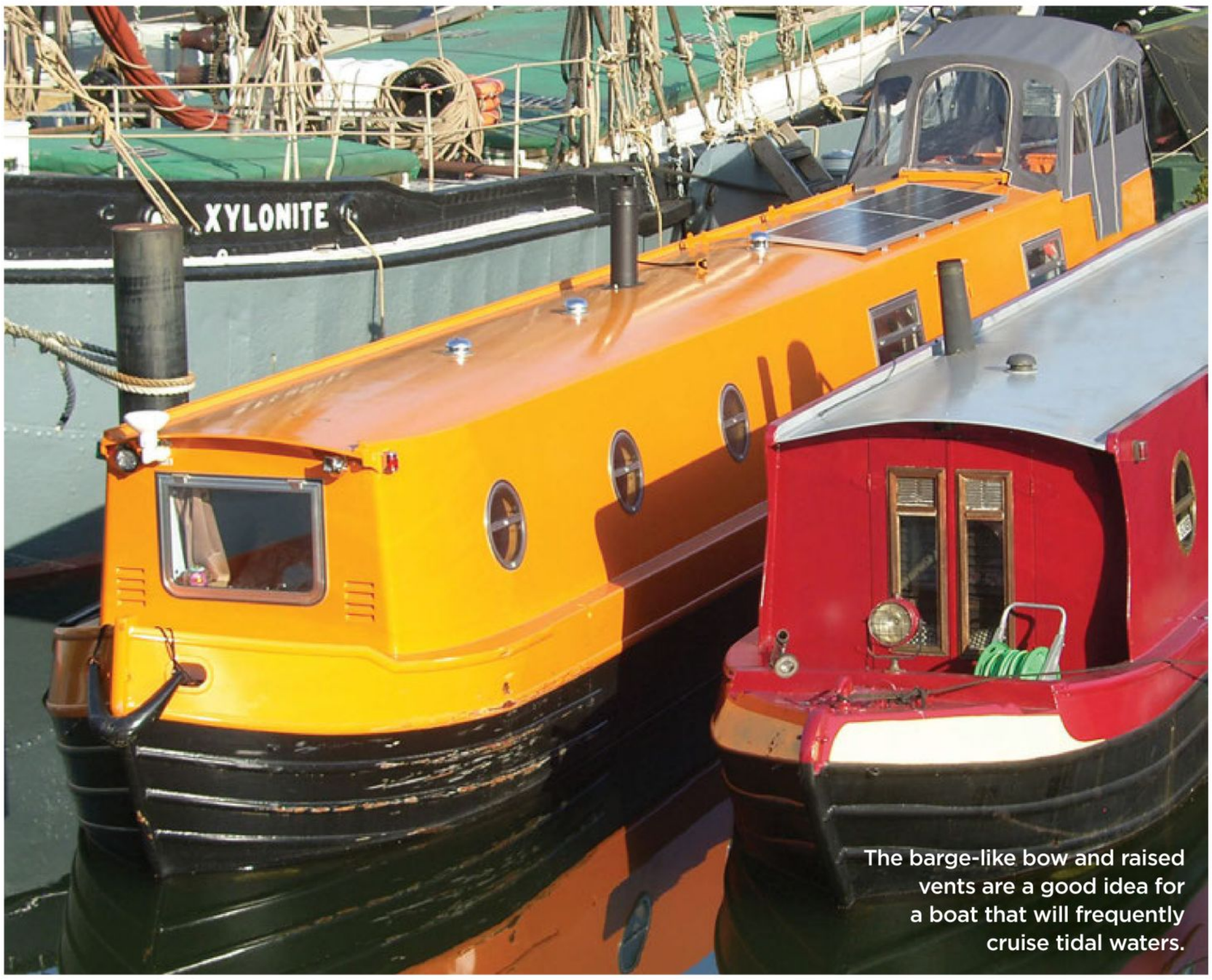
At its permanent mooring in Limehouse Basin in East London, where it just fits the available space, we caught up with the boat and its owner Diana.

Shell and exterior

The striking orange colour of *Lotus* might not be to everyone's taste but it certainly makes the boat stand out among the



The steel dodger and canopy make the stern cockpit especially practical and snug on this residential boat.



The barge-like bow and raised vents are a good idea for a boat that will frequently cruise tidal waters.

"The boat's eye-catching colour is reminscent of a RNLI lifeboat"

wide variety of craft moored in Limehouse. The tangerine paintwork is taken down to the top bend, with more conventional blacking below the rubbing strake. *Lotus* has no forward cockpit, at the suggestion of Colecraft, as this gives more useable cabin space and, for intended cruising on the tidal Thames, it makes the boat more watertight should it catch the wash of a passing Clipper. The bow has a fairly pronounced Dutch Barge-style upsweep, with fairleads to pass mooring lines through which will also help deflect wash.

The cabin roof has a series of chrome vents as well as a pair of solar panels aft to help keep the batteries topped up. Raised traditional handrails have an inner lip to aid grip, while the windows are a mix of single glazed portholes and hoppers. Navigation lights are fitted, though, like most narrowboats, they are only port, starboard and stern lights, which are those of a boat under sail. For tidal river use, a masthead (steaming) light should be fitted, so as not to rely on a flat-beam tunnel lamp. However, this would be easy to add in the future.


A four-burner hob works well with the worktop that is made from recycled slate from old snooker tables.

The aft cockpit has a solid steel dodger around the cruiser stern deck. The locker seats here provide good storage and there's also a gas locker. The whole cockpit is covered with an excellent raised canopy which has full standing headroom and lots of window panels. This provides a really good entrance on a boat that is principally a home, as it acts as a porch and makes almost the entire length of the boat useable. Even on a winter's day, it was warm from the sunlight and on many navigations it would be possible to steer with the canopy up – the tiller arm projects through a slot and visibility is good around the boat.

Galley

The steps down into the cabin are alternated, so you have to descend in a set way, but they work very well and have lots of storage underneath. As *Lotus* has a reverse layout, you enter into the light,


The galley packs in a lot of storage space, with a neat breakfast bar at the end.

spacious galley. The slate worktops here are upcycled old snooker tables and they sit on handcrafted cupboards with a blue-green painted finish.

Against the aft bulkhead is the usual pair of cupboards – one housing the electrics, the other a good-sized wardrobe. To access the lower galley cupboards, there is a mix of sliding doors and a useful corner cupboard, making the most of the space underneath. On the port side is a four-burner gas hob with a black glass base, and a separate oven/grill below. The end of the galley run to port juts out slightly, making a useful breakfast bar and also housing the large 12V Shoreline fridge.

There is a deep, white Belfast sink on the starboard side, with a neat gold-plated tall mixer tap over it. Around the room are useful shelves, as well as a set of pine-fronted drawers and a lovely reclaimed bronze splashback around the galley. Curtains run on thin brass poles, though one is a little too close to the gas hob for comfort.



Neat shelving tucks in front of the compact electrics cupboard.



Rear steps allow for lots of storage.

Saloon

The saloon is quite open, with the only fixed furniture against the forward bulkhead. There is a large sofa that can be converted to a berth, which gives good lounging space, plus a couple of stools for use at the breakfast bar. The white painted hull and cabin sides are left free of storage for now, though this could be added in the future. Having moved up from a much smaller boat, Diana currently has more storage than before, but there is room for expansion if required.

The cabin roof and floor are both in lightly treated pine, which is an unusual choice these day – more reminiscent of boats from the 1980s and '90s. However, it is ecologically sound, as the trees are rapid growing. Where plywood is



A Morso stove is the boat's primary heat source.



A large 12V fridge sits under the breakfast bar. The cupboard door against the hull side gives easy access.



A deep, white Belfast sink with a neat gold-plated tall mixer tap.



The large sofa in the spacious saloon.

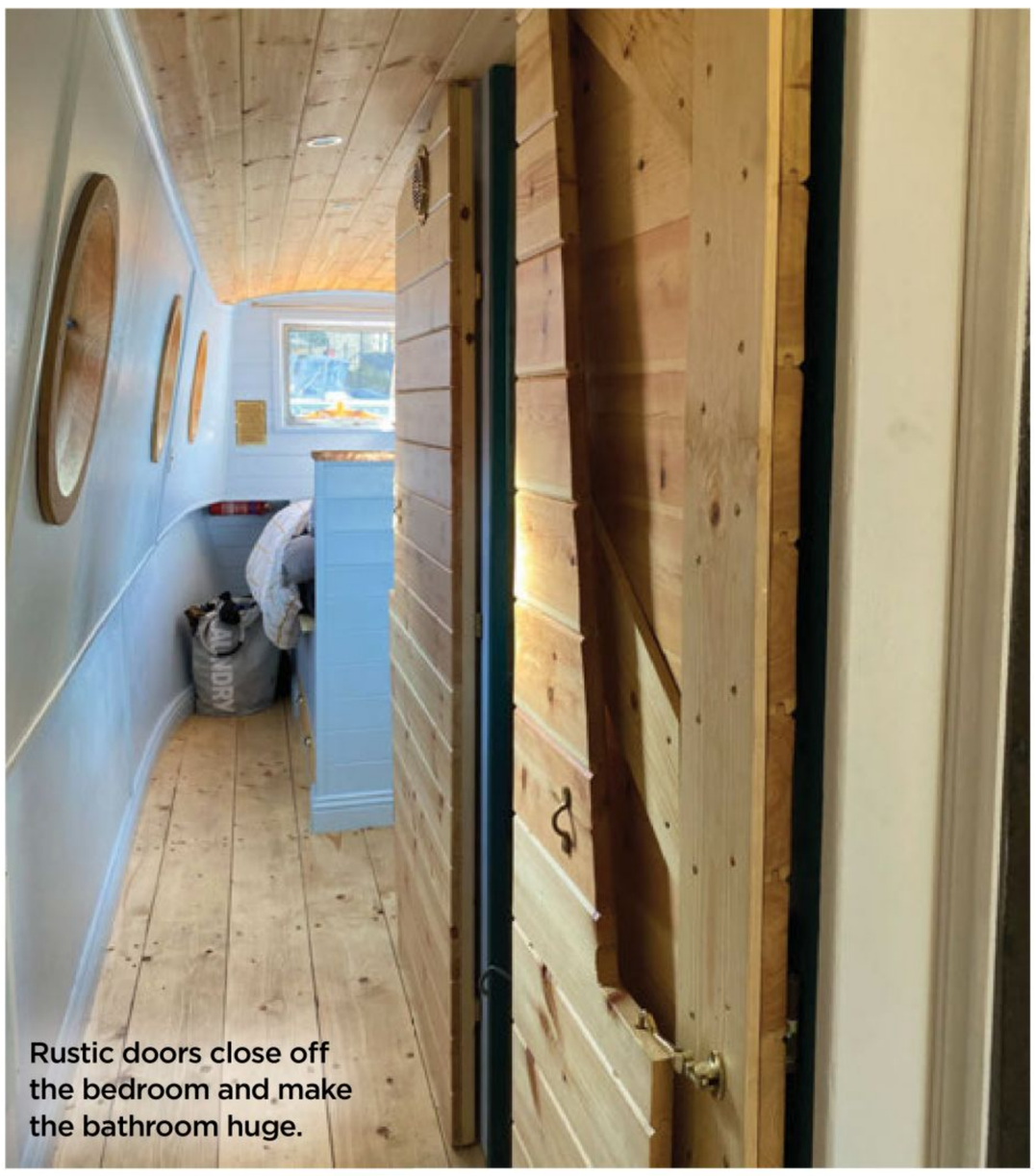
used, it is Garnica, which is better for the environment as it is made from sustainable poplar trees. The hardwood that has been used for trimming in places is recycled from other projects, while the paints and lacquers are all water-based. Warm white LED lighting makes the interior feel even more spacious, while a single side door to port gives additional ventilation.

Against the forward bulkhead is a Morso stove set in a proper hearth on the centreline, with a cupboard and shelving unit against the starboard side. The solid-fuel stove is DEFRA compliant and is the sole source of heating on the boat. This works well – though in really cold winter conditions a small 230V oil-filled heater might be useful in the forward cabin.

The corner cupboard unit has a mix of shelves, protected from the heat of the stove but dominated by a large LCD TV. This is on a moveable arm making for a very comfortable viewing angles from the sofa.

Bathroom

The bathroom is effectively walk-through but with both doors on the port side, giving



Rustic doors close off the bedroom and make the bathroom huge.

How to keep costs down when specifying a boat

Buying a new boat, especially a bespoke one, is always going to be a major investment. However, you can look to reduce the initial outlay if you can do some of the work yourself, or cope with a slightly lower specification that you can upgrade in the future. Make a list of 'essential' and 'desirable' characteristics – and be realistic with what you want to achieve. You might also find that some of the desirable things turn out to be unnecessary when you start to use your new boat.

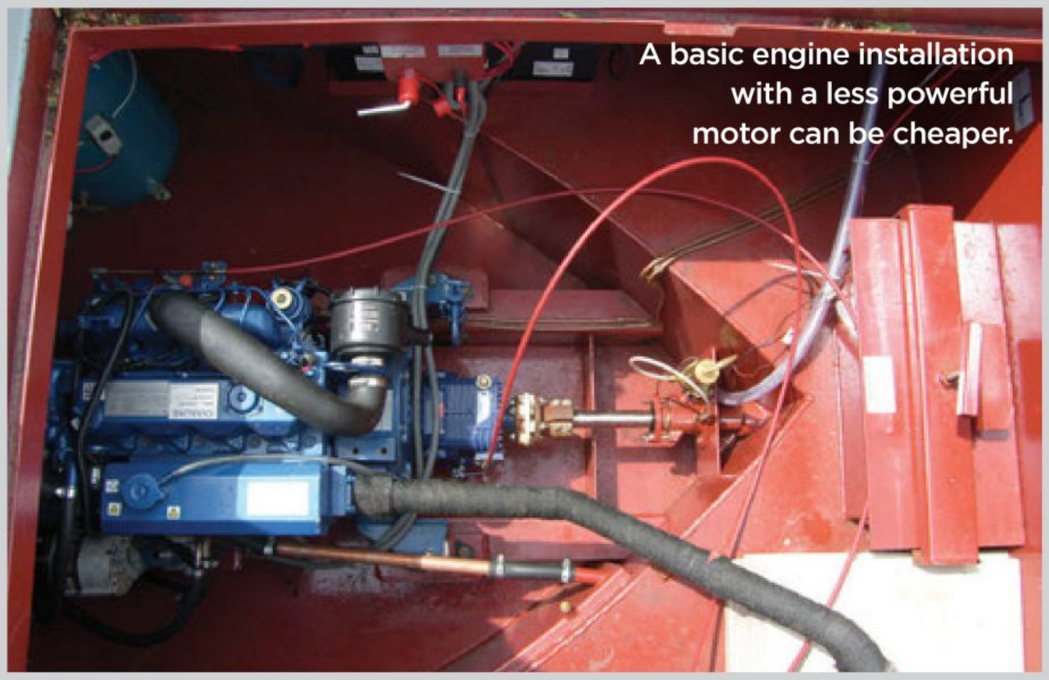
Remember that the **shell** is the boat – don't skimp here, as this will ultimately be the main determining factor of the value of your boat. The interior can always be tweaked, but it's hard to improve a shell much.

Length is important – the longer the boat, the more expensive it is. Can you cope with 50ft instead of 58ft? Or consider a much smaller boat – say 40ft, with the idea of having it lengthened to 58ft in the future.

Simple paint schemes keep the cost down, and many shiny new schemes show damage in the first five years as mill scale lifts from the steel – so the first full repaint could be when you go to town on the decoration. A well-applied single colour to the cabin, maybe with a simple lining or handrails picked out in a contrasting colour, could work well.

Keep fixed furniture to a minimum so don't over-specify lots of shelves and cupboards – a good joiner can always add these later. Remember though that most domestic furniture is too large for boats, especially narrowboats.

Soft furnishings are very pricey. Can you make do with a simple curtain, or cheap blind for a year or two, then add proper ones later (or make your own window by window)?



A basic engine installation with a less powerful motor can be cheaper.

Smaller engines can be cheaper – narrowboats in particular are often overpowered. Better a smaller engine working hard than too big a unit doing little above tickover.

Three 110Ah batteries on the domestic side may be all you need, especially if on mains power. If space is planned for more, when you replace them after five years or so, you can add extra cells. Also, use basic **open cell lead acid leisure batteries** as they are probably the most cost-effective, if you maintain them.



A simple electric system, with just three batteries, supports low-consumption and is fine if you cruise lots or have access to 230V shoreline.

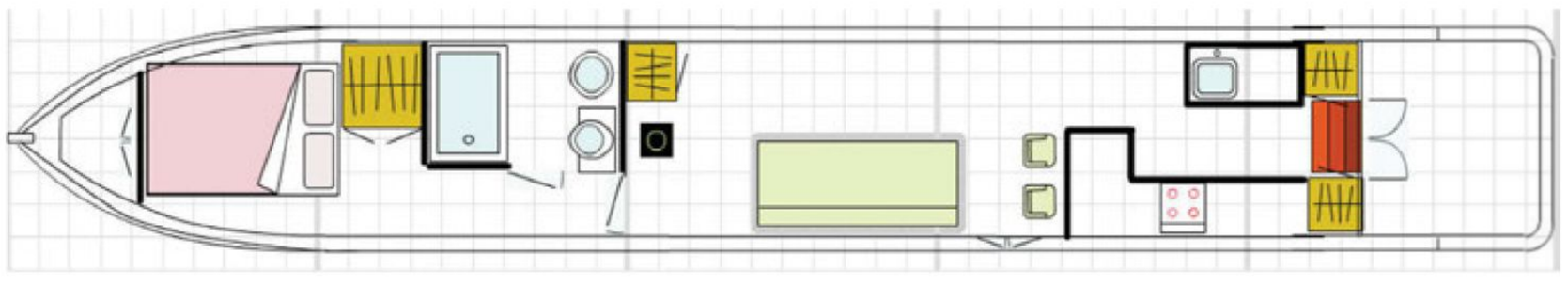


The simple composting loo next to the vanity sink.



Lighting around the bathroom mirror and the unusual tap fitting.

"The interior is deliberately rustic, making full use of the reclaimed materials"



the effect of a compartment (and some privacy during the day) while also closing off the bedroom from the saloon. The highlight is a wonderful slate tile-lined shower cubicle, complete with more gold-plated fittings and a glass panel door.

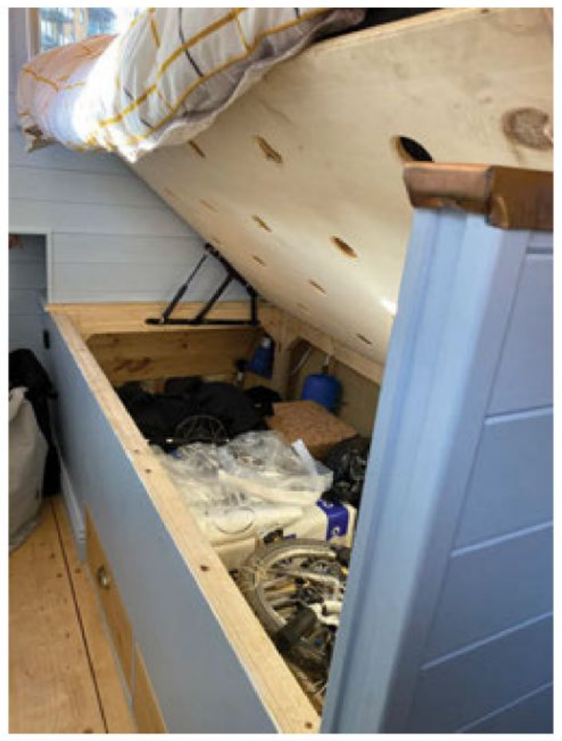
There is a good-sized washbasin, which juts out from the slate-topped cupboard it is mounted on. Touches like this, which are less homogenous than many off-the-peg boats, give the boat an air of individuality. There is good storage under and around the sink, with the bronze splashback replicated from the galley, along with the blue-green paintwork. Next to the sink is a very basic but smell-free composting loo, which uses a separate tank for the urine to be emptied ashore.

Master bedroom

The forward cabin has a large window that provides a great view out over the bow, as well as serving as the boat's emergency exit. There is a raised fixed double-berth set along the starboard side. The whole mattress lifts up on gas strut supports, giving access to a huge storage compartment underneath – to help find things, there is good LED strip lighting here as well. It also gives inspection access to the water tank, pump and pressure vessel. Thankfully, the bed base has ventilation slots as well, to avoid condensation forming in the space below. Air is also ducted into the cabin from louvres raised high on the forward bulkhead, to minimise ingress of water on tidal rivers, should the bow catch a wave.

Above the berth are some shelves, with a big wardrobe aft of the bed head providing

RIGHT: The bed lifts up, Ottoman-style, to reveal easily accessible storage space – big enough for folding bikes

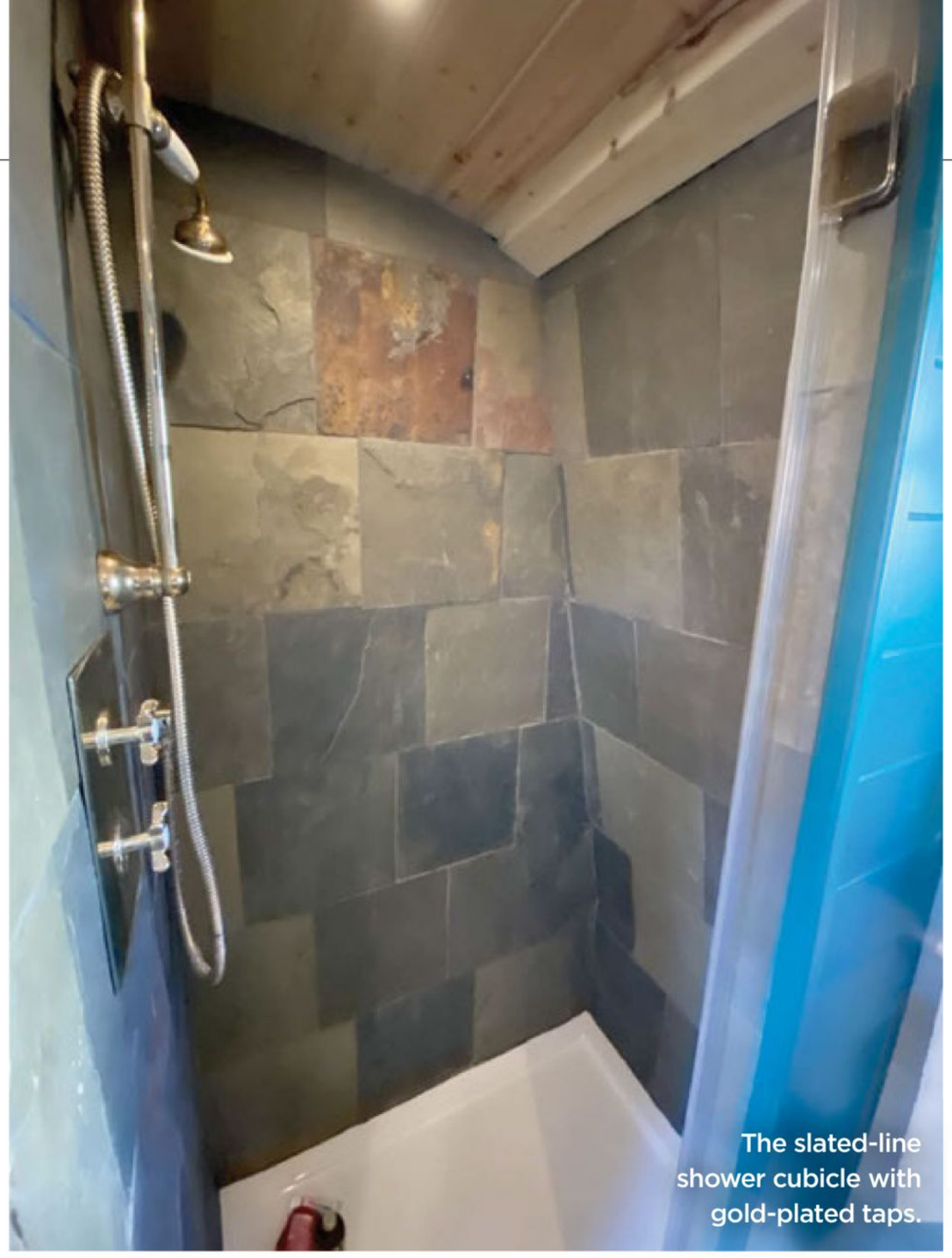




A large forward escape window floods the bedroom with light.



There are useful cupboards above the bed, while the light blue paintwork contrasts well with the pine ceiling.



The slated-line shower cubicle with gold-plated taps.

a lot of storage – including deep drawers at its base. There is a useful cupboard above the bed as well, which has bronze and brass fittings like the rest of the boat – many of which are recycled. The planking in the forward cabin is given a very light blue painted finish that works well. There is a carbon monoxide alarm in the forward cabin, in addition to one near the stove in the saloon, and there is good airflow throughout the boat with carefully positioned roof vents.

Engine and services

Despite only being 50ft long, *Lotus* has a Beta 43 engine fitted, mainly to give extra grunt when navigating tidal waters, which is sensible, given the boat's location. The main engine alternator charges a bank of four domestic batteries, with the smaller alternator supplying a single engine start battery. There is no bow-thruster fitted – and given the boat's length, one is probably not needed (and Colecraft hulls are usually very easy to handle).

The domestic batteries power a Victron EasySolar 1,600W pure sinewave inverter, which charges up to 70A from a 230V landline, and also acts as a MPPT charger from the solar panels. This is installed well in the aft electrics cupboard, which also has the low-level ventilation routed through from the aft bulkhead to avoid draughts and keep the electronics cool. Hot water is provided from a calorifier heated by the engine when cruising or a 1kW mains immersion element when moored up.

WW'S VERDICT

Lotus is definitely a boat of character. The interior is deliberately rustic, making full use of the reclaimed materials that Sam has sourced. Using new supplies of timber from sustainable sources is definitely the way to go, and the simple but effective interior makes for a comfortable home, either on the move or tied-up in London. The bright external paintwork is basically applied, but easy to touch up, and certainly makes for an eye-catching boat in the marina – reminiscent of a RNLI lifeboat.

While not to everyone's taste, *Lotus* has met all the requirements of the owner and been fitted out within budget and a reasonable timeframe. It certainly shows that cheaper boats do not have to lack individuality. It is an interesting boat with some neat quirks, which the owner and builder can be proud of.

Quasi sine wave inverters are a lot cheaper and perfectly fine if you don't need to run delicate electronics (or most washing machines).

Solid fuel or diesel stoves are a cost-effective way to heat a boat, and you can add full central heating later. Or consider utilising the engine's waste heat, which is quite an easy DIY job and gives 'free' heat when cruising.

Free-standing appliances like cookers and fridges can work out cheaper, as well as quicker for a boat-builder to fit. If you are not that much of a cook, why not just have a simple two-burner gas hob – and a combi microwave oven – especially if you will often be on 230V shoreline.



A simple linear galley provides all that is needed, with cheaper free-standing appliances.



Basic electrical system with simple inverter can save thousands.

Keep bathrooms simple with cassette loos and domestic shower cubicles cut to size. Avoid fancy tiling and use waterproof board or vinyl coverings.

Don't keep changing your mind! Once you have made a decision, stick with it unless it really won't work – or the boat-builder suggests a more sensible way of doing something. Every change usually carries a significant cost – just adding a light after the linings have been fitted may take a day of a builder's time.

What could I get off the peg for around £90,000?

Some boat-builders offer standard ranges that can be bolstered with extensive options lists. Often they are fixed layouts and can be excellent value. However, as soon as you delve into the myriad of options, the price can quickly ramp up, especially if you make changes to the standard design. However, accepting the basic specifications can make good sense, as long as future upgrades can be easily fitted.

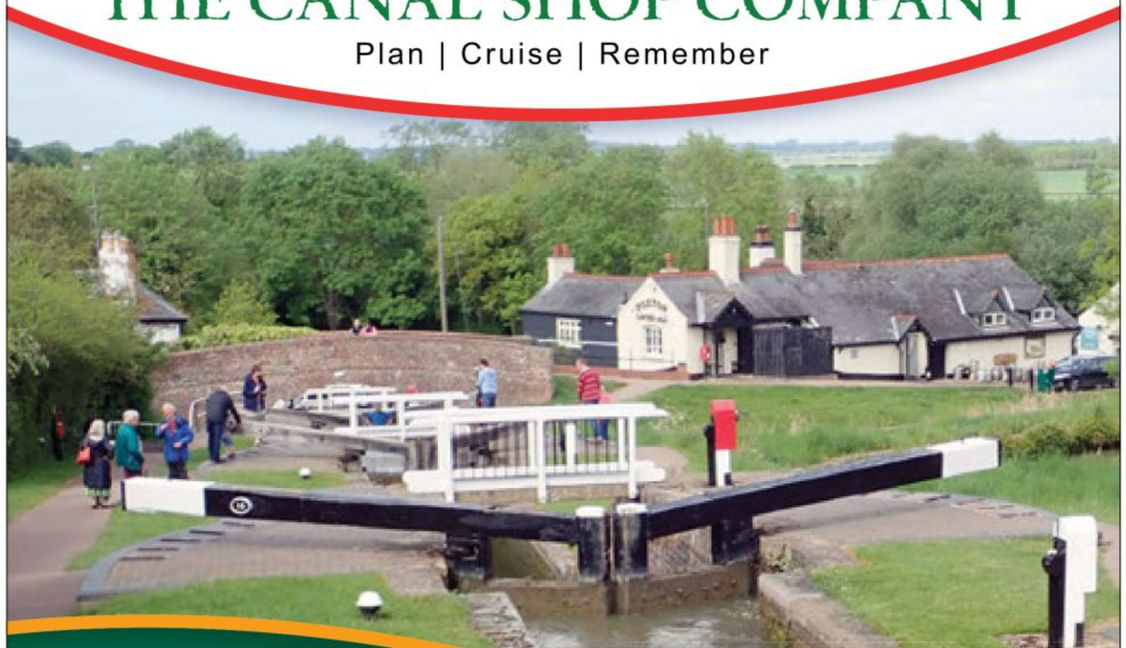


New & Used Boat Co's Hanbury *Shearwater* range is a typical of off-the-peg narrowboats, starting at £73,000 for a 40-footer, rising to £82,000 for the 50ft boat and topping out at £99,995 for the 70ft version. The specifications are quite generous as standard, with a 38hp Canaline engine, solid-fuel stove, Webasto diesel heating system, 2.5kW/70A pure sinewave combi inverter and oak or ash-faced ply lining. The interior is based around a fixed double-berth in a bow cabin, aft galley and open-plan saloon – with options to include a dinette. The options list is impressive, and shows clearly what things cost, so there are no surprises. *WW* reviewed this class of boat in December 2018.

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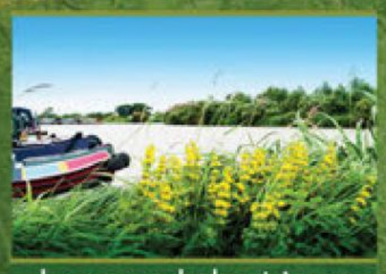
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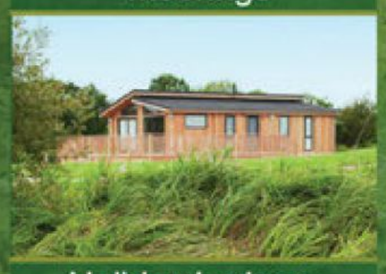
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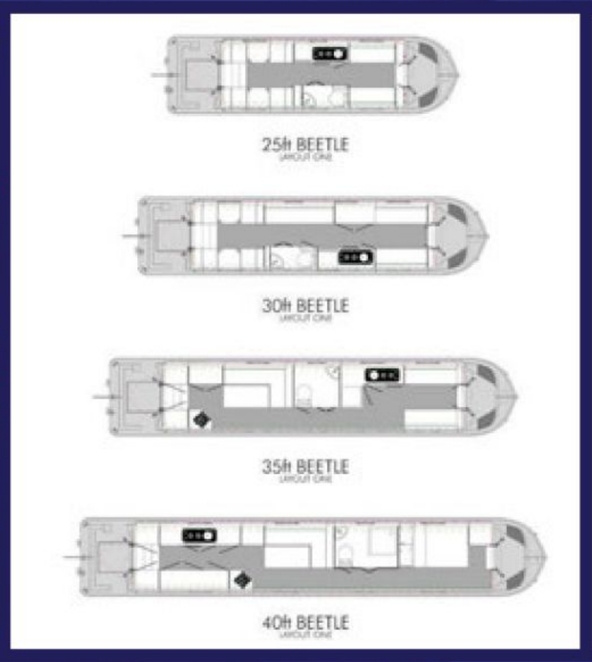


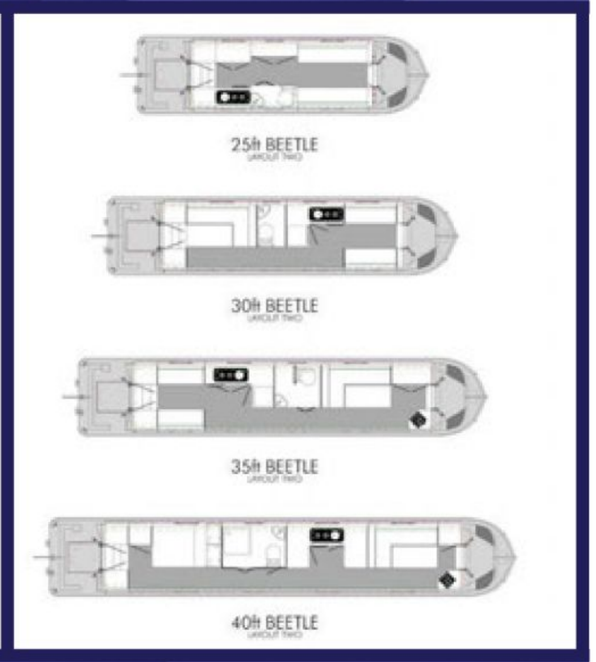












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Approaching the Thames Barrier at dawn.

TIDAL THAMES TOUR

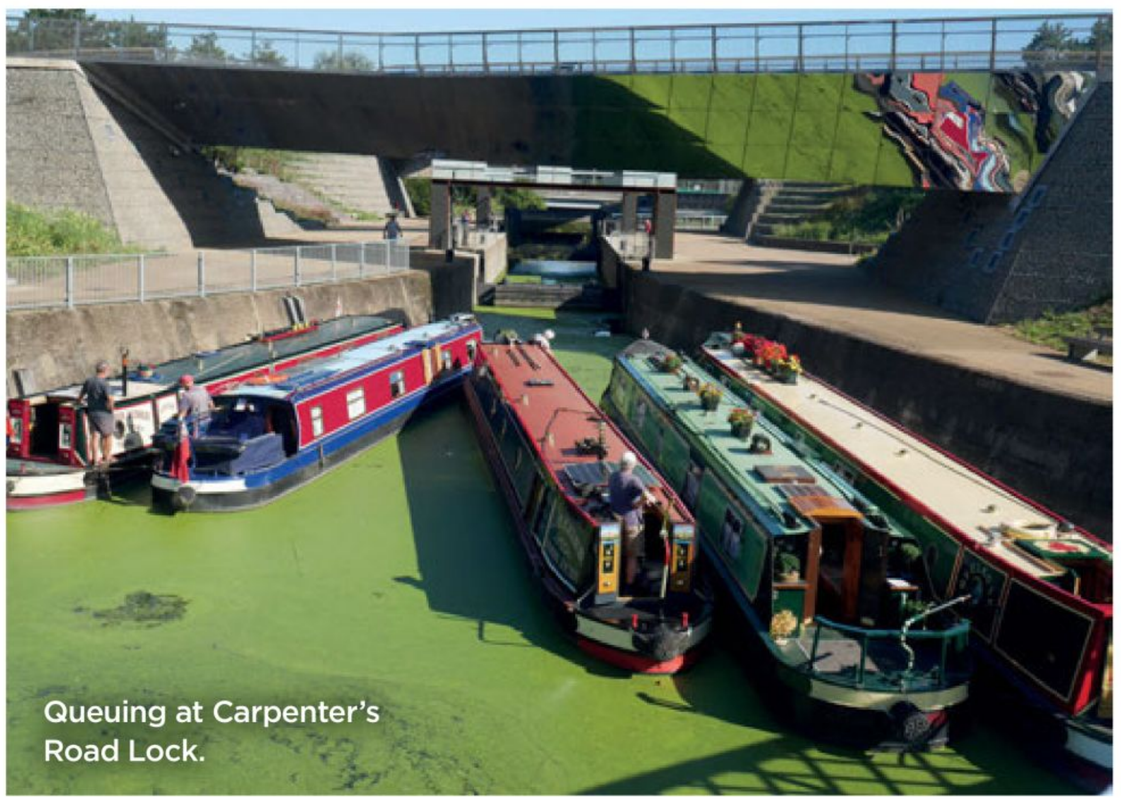
Chris Howes joins a convoy of narrowboats cruising the royal river through London

The Dover Strait may be one of the busiest sea lanes in the world but what's the busiest inland waterway in England? While boating up the River Thames in London, I wondered if I'd inadvertently found it. Leviathan barges loaded with spoil from the new super-sewer being dug under the river ploughed up and down, pushed by tugs. High-speed ferries headed in every direction, distributing their considerable washes at all angles, while high-speed RIBs added further to the swirling, heaving melee.

Rolling on the river

Around the Thames Barrier, the wash from passing craft was coming at my boat in straight lines, and it was possible to turn the craft square to each approaching wave and ride it in relative comfort. However, as we left the section of the Thames called King's Reach and moved into the Lambeth Reach, the number of passing boats increased, and the direction of their washes changed as ferries executed U-turns to get to and from the various piers.

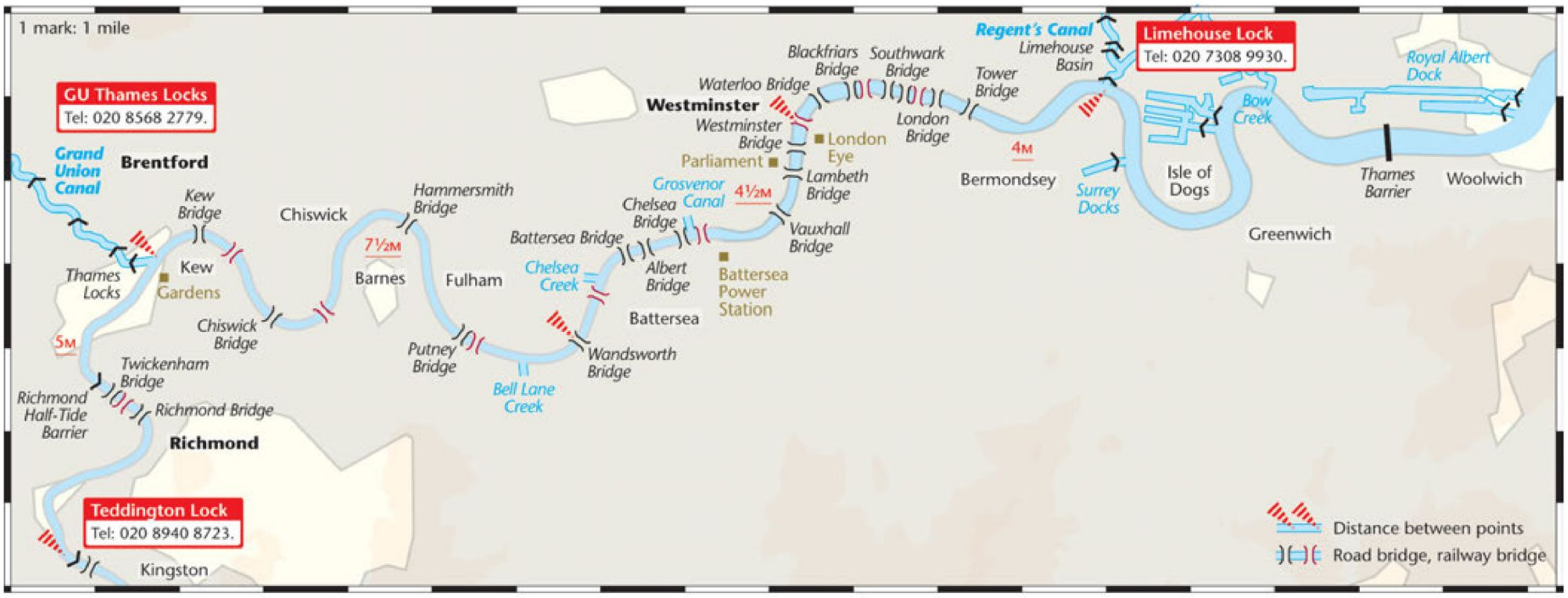
The river became a mass of heaving water, and my boat climbed one great swell – greater than any I had ever previously experienced, even when crossing the Wash (*WW* January 2018) – the bows seemingly intent on touching the heavens, until the whole front half of the boat was out of the water. Gravity then reclaimed the bows, and they came crashing down with a mighty slap, sending up a huge wave that surged into the fore-well and smashed against the (fortunately closed) front doors. Even as we were breathing a sigh of relief, the bows started to climb towards the sky again, as we rode another gargantuan swell. Three times this was repeated until Neptune's wrath appeared appeased, the waters relented and normal service was resumed.



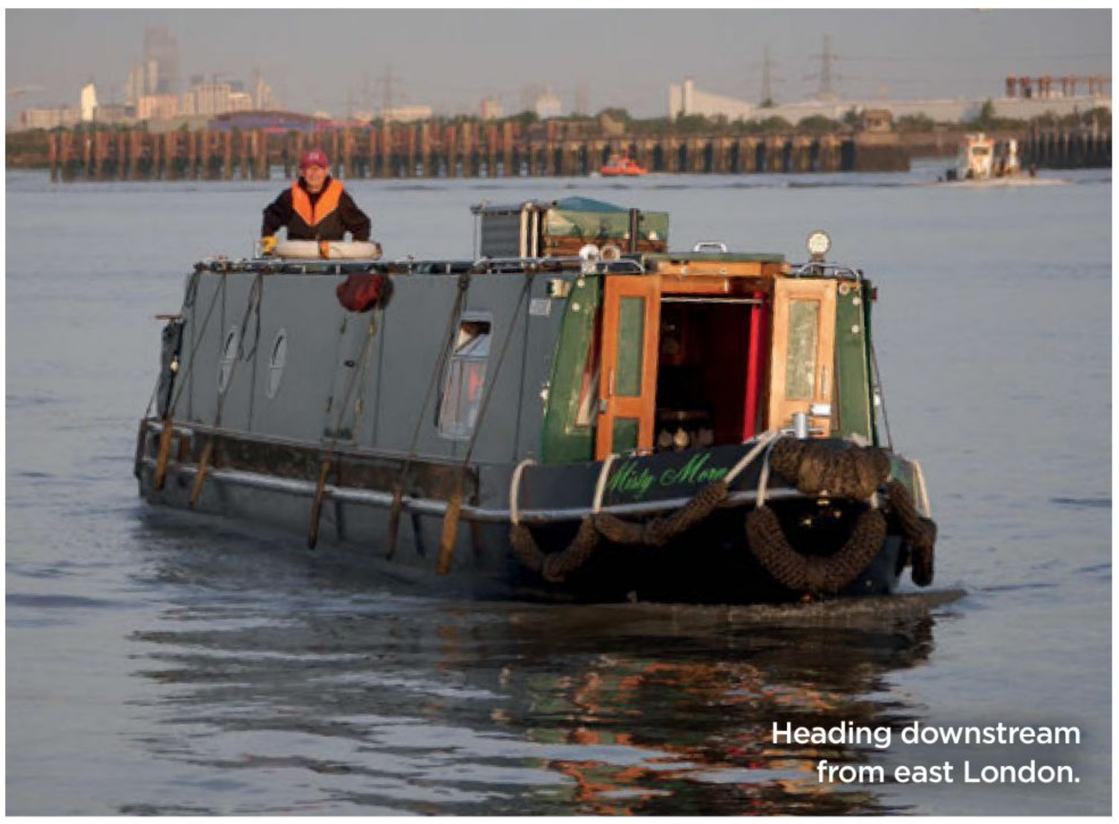
Queuing at Carpenter's Road Lock.

We passed into calmer waters under Westminster Bridge, while remembering the warning to leave 70m between the boat and the Palace of Westminster, otherwise you run the risk of machine gun fire. Gosh, this trip really was fraught with danger!

"The flotilla had been divided into six groups, each of which was led by a savvy 'mother ship' from St Pancras Cruising Club"




Boats on Limehouse Cut.


Heading downstream from east London.

Bow Back Rivers

When we had first decided to join the two-part, post-IWA Festival of Water cruise, it had all seemed so quiet and civilised. The first stage involved passing through the restored Carpenter's Road Lock next to the Queen Elizabeth Park Olympic Stadium in Stratford, east London, and cruising the Bow Back Rivers, or Stadium Island Loop as it is now called.

The 19 participating boats started to assemble below Old Ford Lock during the previous evening and it was immediately obvious that it was going to be a problem finding moorings for so many craft. Although there appeared ample space around the Olympic Park waterways, notices prohibited overnighting here at the risk of a £150 fine.

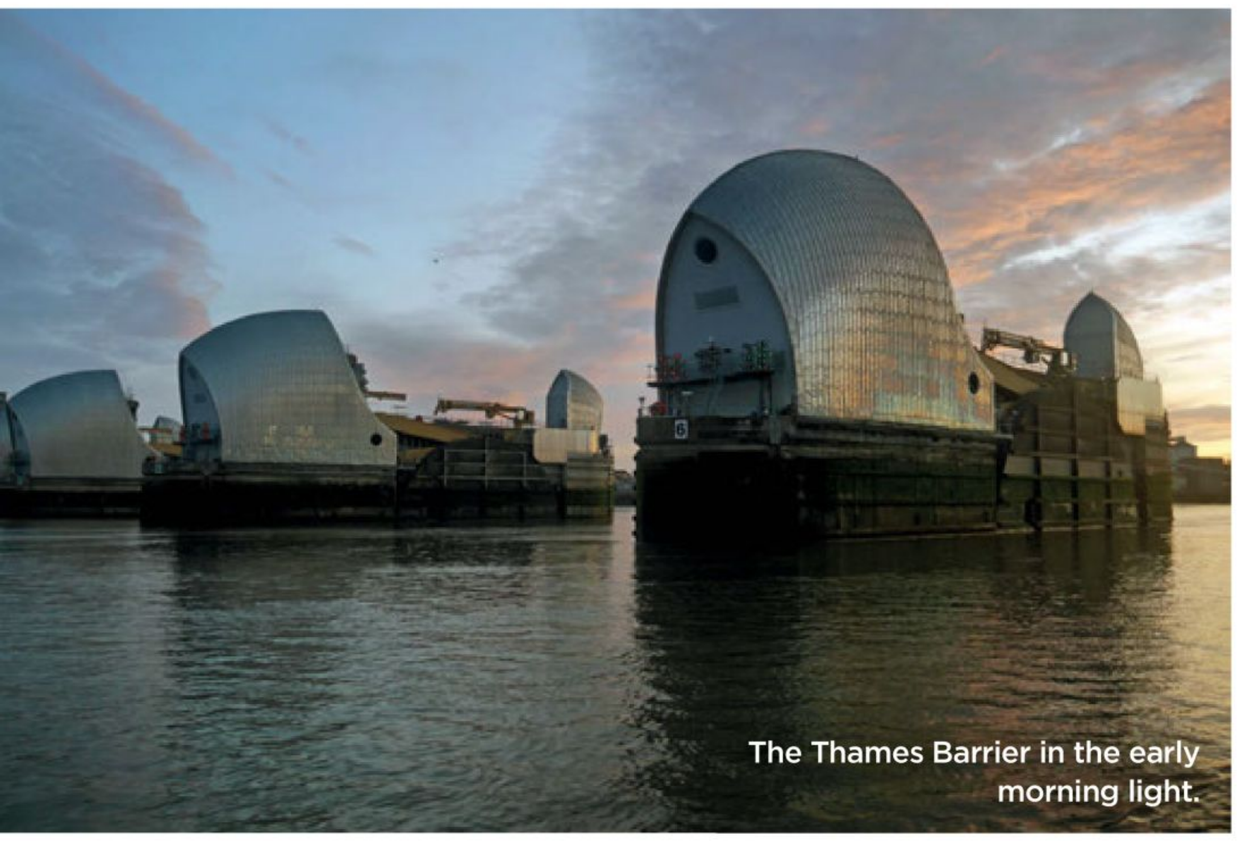
The next morning, we had to be at Carpenter's Road Lock at 10am. Unfortunately this isn't the quickest of locks to get through. Although locking started at 9.45am and continued non-stop, the last boat didn't get through until 1.25pm – an average of 25 minutes per locking!

The cruise around the Stadium Island Loop was interesting but without undue excitement and in less than an hour, we locked back onto the Lee through City Mill Lock. The Canal & River Trust lock-keeper complained that when he was sent to operate the lock he was not told that he would be assisting a 19-boat flotilla, and he hadn't brought refreshments with him. However, a beer from our fridge soon cheered him up.

Early start from Limehouse

From there we assembled in Limehouse Basin or, for those who couldn't be squeezed in, Limehouse Cut. Ahead of our tidal passage, the flotilla had been divided into six groups, each of which was led by a savvy 'mother ship' from St Pancras Cruising Club. Someone with a passion for figures had calculated that the total length of the convoy, measured end to end, would be 327m. I refrained from remarking that this was 20% longer than RMS *Titanic*!


Cruising in calm waters.



The Thames Barrier in the early morning light.



"We were warned that we could be approached by a police launch and issued with a 'stop and search' notice"



Single file on the Thames.

The timings of the trip were inevitably dependent on tide times. We were to leave Limehouse on a falling tide, pass through the Thames Barrier on the ebb, wait at Margaretness for the tide to turn, and return to either Brentford or Teddington on a rising tide.

We had been allocated third place in the first group. Sunrise wasn't until after 6am but, because of the tides, we were booked to leave Limehouse in the first locking at an eye-watering 5am.

Arriving at Limehouse Lock in darkness, I turned on my navigation lights and, because I was struggling to see where I was going, my front light. This was my first mistake and I was immediately corrected: "Tunnel lights are for tunnels, not for seeing where you are going!" Light off, I fumbled my way into the lock. The lock-keeper told me to tie off my bows; however, when I called this instruction to my wife, he immediately told me off for shouting. I was being reprimanded for a second time and it wasn't yet 5am! As if to emphasise the need to be quiet, the lock-keeper then dropped his voice before proceeding to give me instructions so quietly I was unable to actually hear them. I explained that I was hard of hearing but he walked off.

On to the Thames

We had been warned at the previous evening's briefing that the tide would be running strongly past the lock entrance from the right. I've left the shelter of a lock and entered a powerful and fast-moving tide at Selby Lock (tidal Ouse) and at West Stockwith and Keadby (tidal Trent) but I was particularly nervous about heading out from Limehouse in the dark. With a sense of apprehension, I 'gunned' my engine, pointed my bows upstream (the contrary direction) gave a single 'toot' on the horn and launched into the dark waters of the river. Our instruction had been to leave the lock "handsomely – briskly but under control". The tide initially grabbed my bows and then the whole boat. We pirouetted about our centre and then we were off on the tide, passing well clear of the threatening downstream wall.

The lights of London sparkled on our left as we crossed to the other side of the river. We had been instructed to proceed single file, two or three boat-lengths apart, keeping to the right-hand third of the river. We had been warned not to be surprised if we were approached by a police launch and issued with a 'stop and search' notice, but as far as I was aware, none of us was suspected of nefarious malintent and both the river police and harbourmaster left us alone.

We were also instructed that, should we experience serious difficulties, the protocol is to "sound the horn, put the lights on, and the steerer raise their arm to signal distress". If this situation arose, the following boat should come to the distressed vessel's rescue – but the boat requiring rescue should always provide the tow line, not the rescuer.

We'd also been warned not to open our weedhatch if our propeller fouled because in a swell the water will overtop it. We all had anchors readily deployable (not buried in a locker) and were advised to be ready to use them. Despite being the highest tide of the month, the water appeared comparatively clear of debris.

Sights of the city

Soon after setting off we were treated to a sunrise that richly repaid the early start. The waters were calm and the sky was bathed in a rich glow of yellow, orange and red. As we passed the Isle of Dogs, opposite the *Cutty Sark*, we had been warned about the deceptive nature of the flow on the outside of the bend. It had been drummed into us, "Don't point your boat at the one in front, the tide will push you onto the shore. Keep your bows 20 degrees to the left of the one in front, and stay in the middle!"

Serenely we passed the O2 Arena and glided between the two indicated piers of the Thames Barrier. When completed in 1983 it was anticipated that the barrier would be raised only on the exceptional combination of high tides, strong winds and low atmospheric pressure, which led to the 1953 flood. During the


Cruising past the Houses of Parliament.


Westminister Bridge.

entire 1980s it closed on just four occasions, but in the 2010s it has already been raised 65 times. Nevertheless, it looked stunning in the early morning light.

At Margaretness we stopped, opposite Barking Creek, and turned to face the tide. We sat treading water for nearly 90 minutes as the rest of the convoy arrived. One by one, they all turned and joined the queue waiting for the tide to turn.

Back upstream

Eventually the lead boat, *Doris Katia*, set off back upstream and we all followed like obedient ducklings. The water remained calm as we again negotiated the Woolwich Ferry and Thames Barrier. However, the volume of other river traffic steadily and inexorably rose, with increasing heights of wash hitting us at increasing frequencies. Greenwich Observatory looked stunning in the clean morning light and we passed Limehouse and Traitor's Gate at the Tower of London before shooting the right-hand arch of Tower Bridge. The iconic bridges of London were now coming thick and fast.

Some of King's Reach and most of Lambeth Reach are a confused blur in my memory, due to the wild water already detailed. However, above Westminster Bridge we were able to admire the 'Mother of Parliaments' and the MI6 building (also with a 70m armed exclusion zone).

By the time we reached Putney Bridge, the wind had completely disappeared and the sun returned. I was particularly interested in the 4¼ miles between Putney and Mortlake. This forms the course, not just for the world-famous Oxford and Cambridge boat race, but for other competitive rowing events. I've raced this water, probably ten times. In a rowing boat the work required is equivalent to lifting a bag of cement from your toes to your shoulders, 30 times per minute for 15 minutes, while maintaining perfect balance and absolute synchronisation with the other seven crew members. It was a pleasure to cruise the waters in a more relaxed manner, cup of coffee in hand and admiring famous landmarks, rather than fighting pain and exhaustion.

We passed Brentford Creek, which leads to Thames Lock and the Grand Union Canal, before the lock had been opened to river traffic.

To Teddington

As we approached Richmond Lock, the lead 'mother' boat started to slow as the barrier at Richmond was not due to be lifted until 1.45pm. Whenever I have travelled between Teddington and Richmond, the barrier has always already been removed and the Half Tide Lock closed. I now realised that this is because you are not allowed out of either Teddington or Brentford until the barrier is up. (The barrier is put in place at around half tide to hold water in the river between Richmond and Teddington, and the lock is only used to circumvent the barrier when it prevents navigation.)

The last part of the journey to Teddington was pleasant and uneventful, with the convoy bathed in afternoon sun. Approximately 11 hours after we had launched out of Limehouse into a dark maelstrom of turbulent waters, we quietly slipped out of the now gentle embrace of the tidal Thames.


Tower Bridge.


The Tower of London.

PAINTING THE **PAST**

Roses and castles artist and teacher **Tim Whitelock** describes his 50-year fascination with the artform

At the age of 12 in the summer of 1969 I joined my uncle's family for a boating holiday on the River Avon and a whole new world of inland waterways opened up to me. I fell in love with the brightly coloured decoration of roses and castles, which has subsequently given me endless hours of enjoyment as I learned to paint myself.

Working boat holiday

Our first family canal holiday followed two years later, on the Stourport Ring in a converted working boat. This still had most aspects of the original boatman's cabin, including a coal fire that had to be made up each day. In the early 1970s, before the publication of *WW* and the influx of new boaters, the Stourport Ring could be completed in a week.

It was the height of the summer and the towpaths were completely overgrown. We got lost in the long grass while having lunch and there was little chance of anyone finding us as boats were few and far between. Gas Street Basin was the only busy spot, and in those days it was still hidden away behind a small back gate. The basin was a world of its own where the painted boats seemed to belong to a different era. The many colours and patterns made me eager to learn how the designs were produced.

Water cans and *WW*

On a later cruise to Stratford-upon-Avon, we came across a boat selling traditionally painted items. By then I was in my mid-teens, I had joined the Inland Waterways Association and I saved enough money to buy one of the larger water cans. After my purchase, I became even more determined to find a way of learning how to paint traditional roses and castles.

I found a book at a well-known newsagents on Liverpool Street Station called *Canal Boats and Boaters* (1973) by D.J. Smith. It contained a chapter about canal art which gave me a starting point, but in the meantime I made a traditional cabin stool and decorated it with transfers. The transfers looked fairly realistic from a distance, until you kept seeing the exact same thing around the canals.



Roses based on the northern style and Tim's own castle design.

The uncle who introduced me to canals bought me the second issue of *WW* in 1972. In those days, it was only published once a quarter so I managed to get hold of the first issue as I considered three months too long to wait. I bought every one after that and in a 1986 there was an advert for a week's residential course in canal art at Abergavenny. I booked onto it straight away but was rather apprehensive about what I would find – school had put me off art, although I liked the idea of painting.

First lesson

Humbrol paint was recommended for the course as it was readily available and not too expensive. In those days the basic Humbrol colours could be bought in half-pint tins, which a local hardware store ordered especially for me.

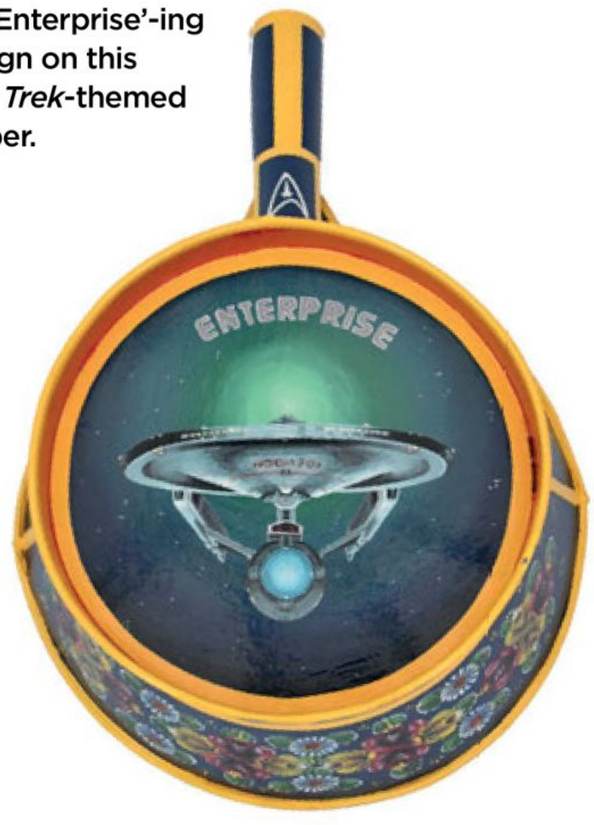
When I arrived, my initial fears soon evaporated as the course was made up of people from a variety of backgrounds – some with a

"I became hooked on canal art and found myself doing a little painting each week"

The first water can Tim bought.



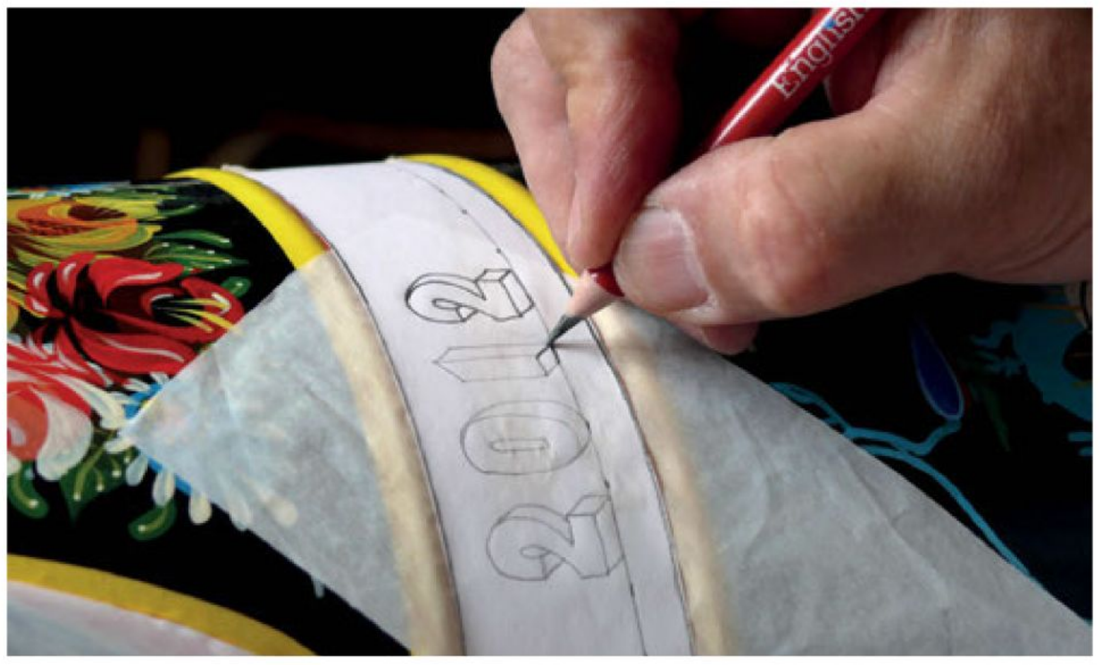
An 'Enterprise'-ing design on this *Star Trek*-themed dipper.



A small water barrel.







"I am constantly exploring new variations based on traditional themes"

direct link to canals and others, like myself, who just loved the bright colours and patterns. We had one thing in common: we were all eager to learn.

The course tutor organised a well-structured week, which included roses, daises, two castle pictures, scroll work, an evening talk from a local British Waterways representative and a trip out. As an aid, she had produced a variety of work sheets on the flower patterns, lettering and colour combinations. The castle pictures, however, were rather difficult to put down in a note form and she had been unable to find any published material at the time. *Narrow Boat Painting* by Tony Lewery was the only contemporary book on the subject but that seemed to be more about the history than detailed advice on the painting.

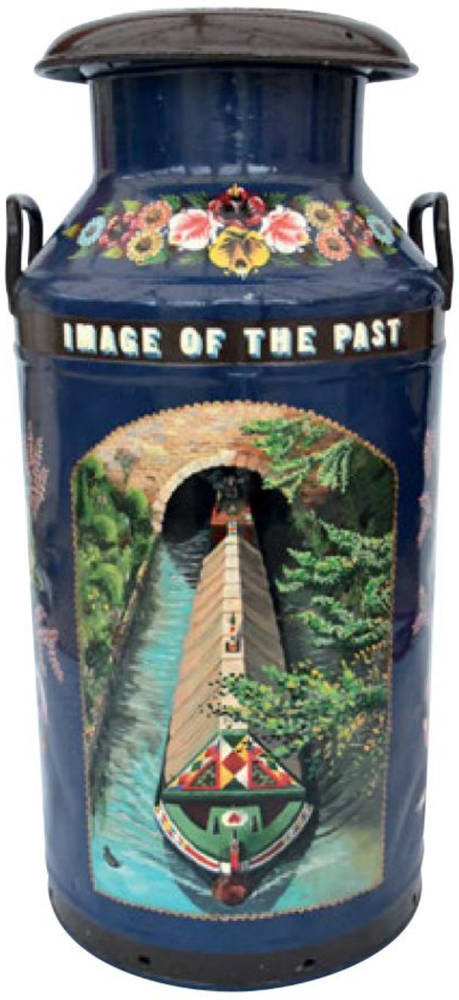
Looking back to that week's tuition, I feel fortunate that our tutor had a high respect for the traditional designs and techniques but had no connection to the waterways. This meant she was able to bring new ideas when we returned for subsequent courses over the following six years. She saw roses and castles as a 'folk art' which could be developed, like fairground art had. When you look at the way boats are decorated today, I can see her thinking was correct.

Taking note

We were also asked to bring items to paint, so I made up another cabin stool and a pair of cabin doors. I had trained as a cabinet-maker at the London College of Furniture so I made the doors from oak as I had not yet learned about scumbling as a means of replicating the grain – that was covered in one of the later courses using old beer, powdered paint and sugar. During the first week we were taken through numerous painting exercises in easy-to-follow stages which gave us time to write our own notes.

I paid special attention to my castle notes and after the course finished I re-wrote them using my BBC B Computer and sketches of my own. I was so pleased with the results, I sent a copy to the tutor who asked if she could use them on her courses, which delighted me.

I became hooked on canal art and found myself doing a little painting each week and selling items at craft shows to fund my new hobby. When our tutor moved away from canal art to fine art she put my name forward to replace her as a tutor at Knuston Hall in Northamptonshire.





TOP LEFT: **Painting a bookmark.**
TOP RIGHT: **Outlining the letters on a water can.**
LEFT: **An attractively painted milk churn.**
BELOW: **The first item Tim painted in 1986.**

By that time I had become a full-time design & technology teacher and already taught canal art as an evening class in Essex. The Knuston Hall courses were a pleasing addition and over 30 years later, they are still running.

During that time they have evolved into a variety of formats from weekends to one-day introductory courses and three- to five-day stints. This was thanks to my evening class students who wanted longer periods of painting. Knuston Hall offers full board with three cooked meals a day, which leaves plenty of time for painting. The longer courses give participants the opportunity to try out ideas of their own and it's not unknown for bits of canal boat to turn up.

Evolving art form

Since taking up canal art I have continued to develop new designs of my own. This is partly for the benefit of people coming back time and again on my courses, but also for my own interest.

I am constantly exploring new variations based on traditional themes but being careful to preserve the techniques such as simple brush strokes to build up flower patterns. These have included the use of new colours as there's a much greater variety available today than the basic primary and secondary ones of the past.

We are now in an era where the last boatpeople born on working boats are passing and narrowboating is entirely about leisure. Pleasure-boating could be around for a lot longer than commercial carrying and new ideas for decorating craft, such as sprayed-on designs or vinyl transfers, are inevitable. And who's to say there is anything wrong with these? We are just using the materials of our time, but it's always good to preserve the best of the past as we move forward.

Find our more about Tim's work at *flicknclick.co.uk*, or Knuston Hall at *knustonhall.org.uk*.


Tim's most recent piece.

FINESSE

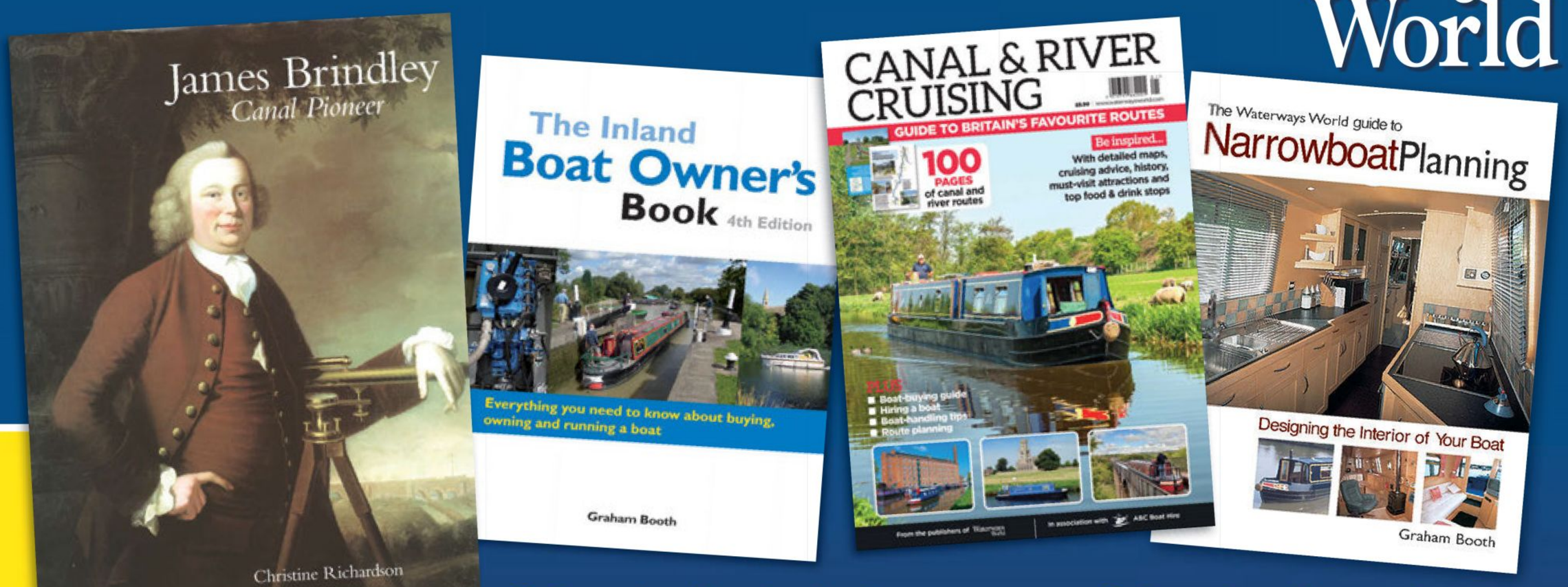
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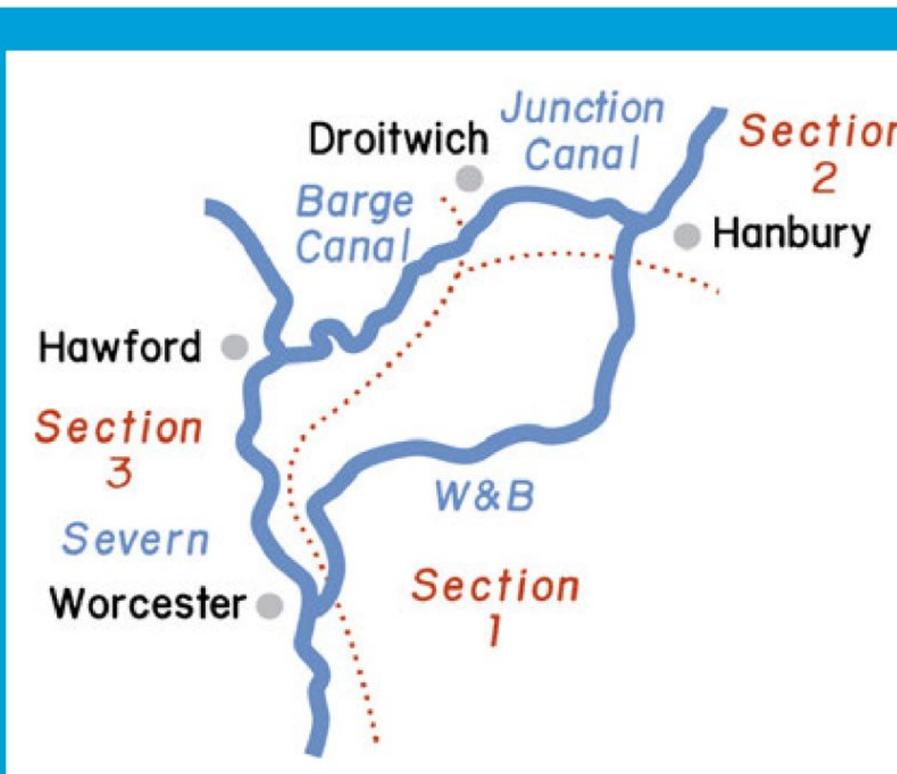


WW guide to the...

Mid-Worcestershire Ring

It's the cruising ring you can do in a weekend – including the recently restored Droitwich Canals. **Richard Fairhurst** takes a tour...





Discover...

A new cruising ring makes a compelling argument to restore a waterway. It worked for the Avon, it worked for the Ashton... and it worked for the Droitwich.

Reopened in 2011, the two Droitwich Canals join the River Severn and Worcester & Birmingham Canal to complete the ideal 'short break' waterway ring. Broad canal, narrow canal, and river, this 21-mile circuit has it all. The contrasts can be startling – within half a mile you'll pass from lovingly restored 19th-century locks to a staircase barely ten years old.

But the ring's appeal doesn't just come from its waterways. The cathedral city of Worcester deserves a weekend's exploration in itself, while Droitwich's independent shops and cafés add small-town charm. The understated Worcestershire countryside, half-timbered halls nestled in gently rolling hills, makes the perfect backdrop.

Restored canals often have rough edges at first, but these are remarkably user-friendly: the locks are pliant, the channel not too shallow. But be aware that Netherwich Basin in Droitwich, and Hawford before the junction with the Severn, are the only official visitor moorings on the restored canals. Facilities are equally sparse.

Not in the market for a weekend's ring? The Droitwich Canals are an easy detour to incorporate into longer cruises. If you're descending from Birmingham to Worcester, perhaps as part of the Avon Ring, consider going via Droitwich for a change.

In brief

Worcester & Birmingham Canal

9 miles, 16 locks

Cruising time: 7 hours

As cathedral bells toll and trains clatter overhead, the city of Worcester makes a fine start to any cruise. And the canal is right at the heart of it, rubbing shoulders with the historic Commandery as you begin the climb from the Severn Valley into the land of *The Archers*.



Diglis Basin in central Worcester.

Historic Worcester

Whether you arrive by boat, car or train, you can't miss Worcester's imposing riverside cathedral. The anchor of this historic city, linking the Severn to the foot of the High Street, it's open (free of charge) every day. The majestic vaulted roof reaches towards the heavens, and you too can climb partway there with the tower tours every weekend. Equally soaring are the voices of the young cathedral choristers, best heard at Choral Evensong at 5.30pm each day (4pm Sun, not Tues).

The pomp of the Guildhall overlooks the bustling High Street, but the finest old buildings are on New Street/Friar Street, which runs parallel. Here you'll find the 16th-century Tudor House museum and King Charles House pub, reputed to be the site of Charles II's escape after the final battle of the Civil War.

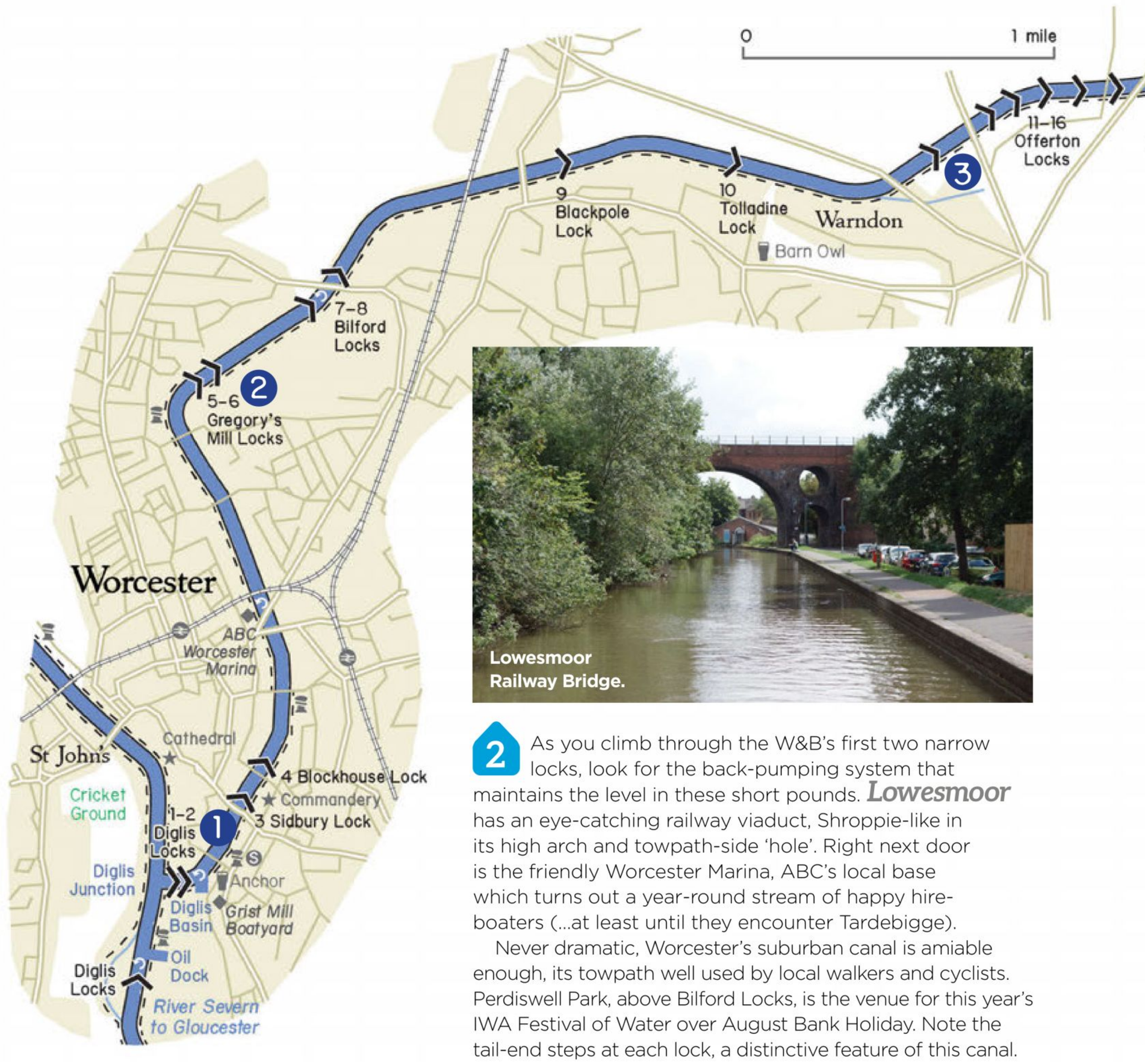
Walking back to the canal visitor moorings, you'll join the towpath at Sidbury Lock – also known as Commandery Lock after the museum alongside. This was Charles's headquarters during the Battle of Worcester, when the city's main drain ran alongside. Today, the Commandery is a museum of city life from Norman times to the 1950s. As for the drain, that's now the Worcester & Birmingham Canal.



Gregory's Mill Top Lock in Worcester.

1 Two slow-filling locks lift the Worcester & Birmingham Canal up from the River Severn to ***Diglis Basin***. Diglis is a hive of activity, its two basins bordered by the Anchor pub, Cafe Afloat, tiny chandlery, fit-out yard and dry-dock – with a microbrewery set to open soon.

Unlike the rest of the W&B, these two locks are broad. Diglis was once used for transhipment from Severn trows to narrowboats, and wide craft still use the locks to moor in the basin or for the dry-dock. The visitor moorings immediately beyond the basin are a good base for exploring the city, if a little less scenic than those on the river.



Lowesmoor Railway Bridge.

2 As you climb through the W&B's first two narrow locks, look for the back-pumping system that maintains the level in these short pounds. ***Lowesmoor*** has an eye-catching railway viaduct, Shroppie-like in its high arch and towpath-side 'hole'. Right next door is the friendly Worcester Marina, ABC's local base which turns out a year-round stream of happy hire-boaters (...at least until they encounter Tardebigge).

Never dramatic, Worcester's suburban canal is amiable enough, its towpath well used by local walkers and cyclists. Perdiswell Park, above Bilford Locks, is the venue for this year's IWA Festival of Water over August Bank Holiday. Note the tail-end steps at each lock, a distinctive feature of this canal.






A hire-boat on the Offerton Flight.

3 The six-lock ***Offerton Flight*** marks the canal's exit from Worcester. The bottom lock might be beside the Sixways rugby stadium, but by the top lock half a mile later, the air is decidedly rural – apart from the M5 motorway overhead. This is the highest point of the ring: look back for fine views over the Severn Valley, across to the Malvern Hills. Tibberton is a popular place to moor overnight, next to the canalside Bridge Inn.

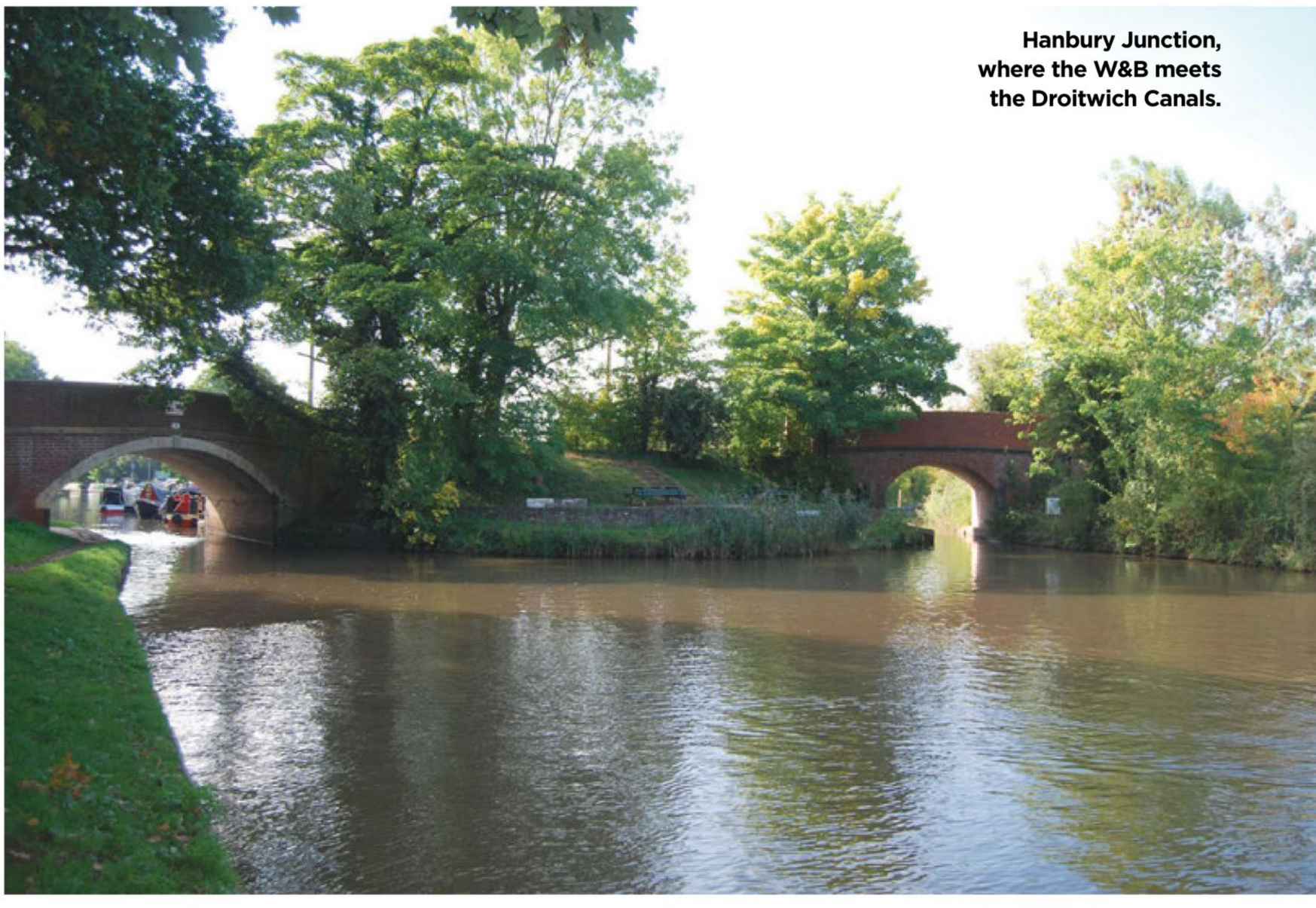

Spectacular views at Oddingley.


Oddingley is a popular mooring spot.

4 Sometimes the most memorable stretches of the canal network are those without anything ostensibly special: no towering aqueducts or landmark flights, simply a rural canal where everything is 'just so'. The Worcester & Birmingham at ***Oddingley*** is like that. To one side is the little hamlet with its 15th-century church; to the other, the railway with its old-fashioned signalbox; between them, the canal slowly winds along the gentle contour. This is an idyllic spot for an away-from-it-all mooring.

5 The W&B is a tunnel-heavy canal, but most of them are on the long pound above Tardebigge. Dunhampstead Tunnel is just 230 yards long, broad like the other W&B tunnels, and with no towpath. A mile on is Coffin Bridge at Hadzor, thought to get its unusual name from funeral processions to the nearby church!

Boats line the canal on the approach to ***Hanbury Junction***. The wharf here is the base of the New & Used Boat Co, who build a 'Hanbury' brand of boats (among others). But you may also recognise the village name as one of the inspirations for Ambridge, the setting of Radio 4's *The Archers*; in particular, Lower Loxley is said to be based on Hanbury Hall. The Eagle & Sun at Hanbury Junction may not be the model for the Bull – that honour belongs to the Old Bull at Inkberrow – but it's a welcoming pub with a good line in carvery and handy moorings.


Hanbury Junction, where the W&B meets the Droitwich Canals.

In brief

Canals through Droitwich

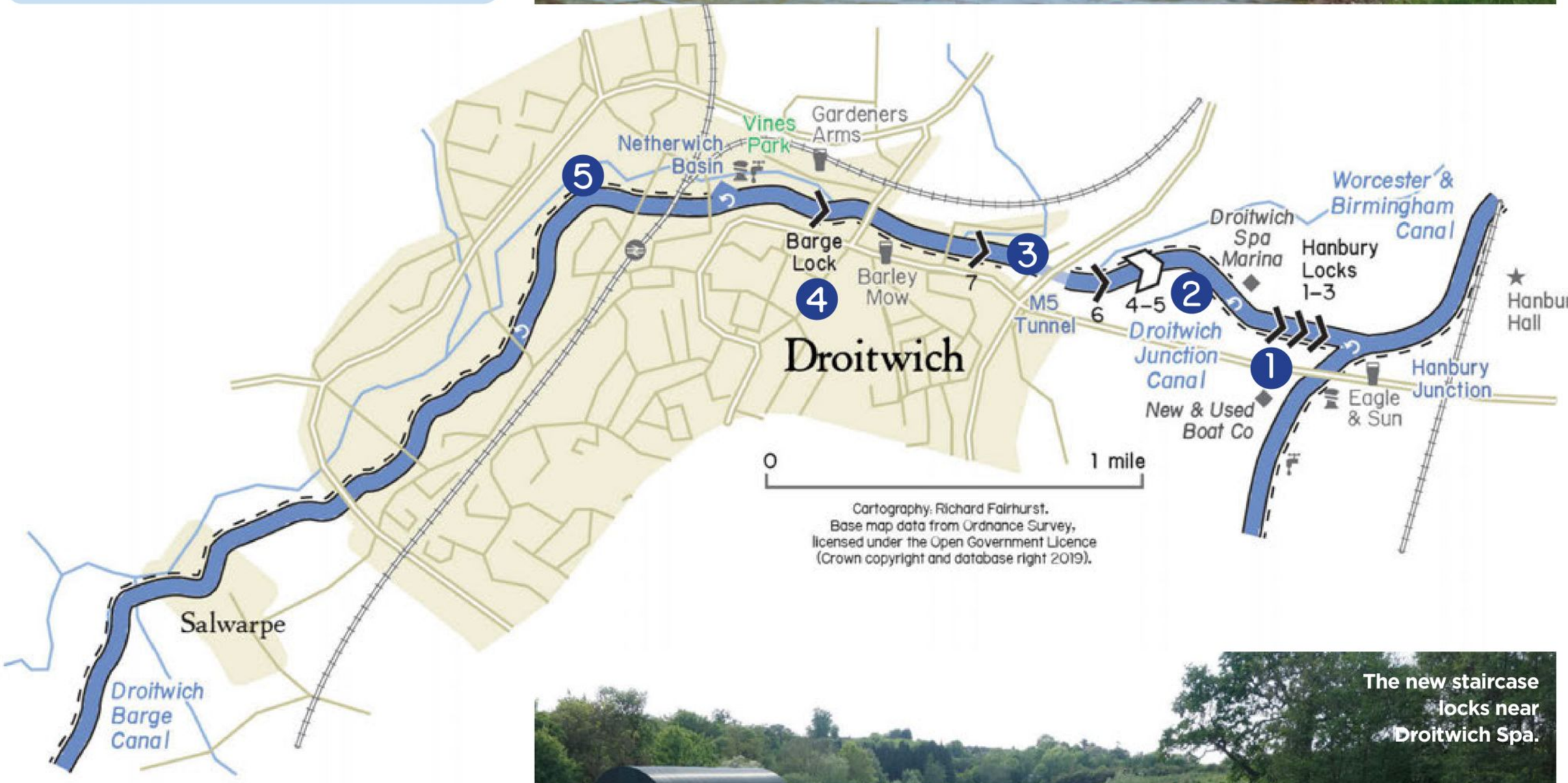
4 miles, 8 locks

Cruising time: 3½ hours

No ordinary restoration, the Droitwich Junction Canal is a unique combination of concrete new-build, painstaking heritage work, and ingenious low-cost engineering solutions. A motley succession of locks lowers you to Vines Park, the appealing green centrepiece of Droitwich's canals.



On the Hanbury Locks flight.





The new staircase locks near Droitwich Spa.

1 Droitwich's narrow canal, the Junction Canal, begins at Hanbury Junction. The three ***Hanbury Locks*** which follow are unusual in still having working side ponds, which act as holding reservoirs to minimise water loss from the long W&B pound. There are often volunteer lock-keepers on duty to assist, but if not, follow the clear signage. You may also need to prop the gates open with the supplied plank!

Restored by Waterway Recovery Group volunteers, these deep locks are pretty much all that survives of the Junction Canal, which is otherwise essentially a new-build waterway. Below them is Droitwich Spa Marina.



Side ponds are a feature of Hanbury Locks.

2 Most of the original Junction Canal was ploughed up or built over, so the restorers had to find new solutions to get boats back to Droitwich. Among these were the two-rise ***staircase locks***, attractively set in a 'pocket park' which appears to be Droitwich's prime dog-walking destination. As ever, take extra care when operating the staircase and stay clear of the central cill when descending.

There's one further lock before you reach the level of the Body Brook stream and the motorway tunnel. Don't be surprised to find one of the bottom paddles chained up – this is deliberate to stop sudden water surges in the notoriously low tunnel.



Headroom is restricted on this repurposed culvert under the M5.

3 How do you get a canal under a motorway without spending millions? You repurpose a culvert which happens to have been built just big enough in the 1970s... thanks to a sympathetic engineer in the County Surveyor's office. The old Body Brook culvert is now the canal's ***M5 Tunnel***, so low that you will have to clear absolutely everything off the roof before proceeding. (A full water tank also helps.) Because the Body Brook still flows through, levels can rise in wet periods, so check the gauge carefully. And duck!



Cruising through Vines Park.



Barge Lock marks the start of the Droitwich Barge Canal.



Droitwich

What does Droitwich have in common with the canal towns of Middlewich, Nantwich and Northwich? Salt: that's the reason for the Old English '-wich' suffix. But while Cheshire rock salt was mined, Droitwich salt was extracted by boiling the local strong brine, comparable to the Dead Sea. In fact, the town enjoyed a second lease of life in the 19th century as a spa, with the warm brine baths touted as a relaxing place to float.

There's still a saltwater lido today, and salt is being extracted from brine once again at a local farm. But the salt industry has left more subtle traces. Take Droitwich's charming High Street, full of independent shops. Not everything is quite as right-angled as you might expect – the legacy of years of subsidence as the brine was extracted.

The High Street, with adjoining Friar Street (full of pubs) and St Andrew's Street, are the heart of historic Droitwich and the most rewarding places to explore. More modern shops are clustered around the St Andrew's Square centre, including a Morrisons, but for boaters the Waitrose opposite Vines Park is the most convenient supermarket. The railway station has regular services to Worcester and Birmingham.

4 The canal channel drops into the River Salwarpe through another new lock (if approaching from downstream, watch out for the 90° wing walls) on its approach to Droitwich town centre. The ***Barge Lock***, also known as Max Sinclair Lock after the prime instigator of the restoration, marks the start of the Droitwich Barge Canal – and the first of several swing-bridges that you'll have to unlock with your CRT Yale key before passing through. These are scattered through Vines Park, a truly lovely town park enclosed by the canal and river. The centrepiece is a replica bow of a Wych barge, the old salt-carrying trows that traded to Droitwich, fittingly called *Volunteer*.



Netherwich Basin.

5 There aren't many places to moor on the Droitwich Canals except for ***Netherwich Basin***. Fortunately, it's a supremely convenient location to tie up. A set of pontoon moorings at the edge of Vines Park, it's securely tucked behind a locked gate (CRT Yale key required). Just a stone's throw away are the down-to-earth Railway Inn and the friendly, inventive Gardener's Arms with its American-influenced menu and summertime cider bar. Use this as your base for exploring the interesting town of Droitwich. Facilities are as sparse as moorings on the Droitwich Canals, but there's a water tap here and rubbish disposal nearby.

In brief

Salwarpe to the Severn

18 miles, 9 locks

Cruising time: 4 hours

Few canals feel as remote as the Droitwich Barge Canal, a reed-fringed waterway following Brindley's sinuous course along the Salwarpe valley. No villages, no pubs, no marinas, just a delightfully quiet meander down to the Severn. But there's one last treat in store – Worcester's glorious riverside.

1 After negotiating a circular railway culvert (too narrow for actual barges), the Droitwich Barge Canal leaves the town via inoffensive suburbia, mostly bordering parkland and residential estates. Unlike the Junction Canal, the Barge Canal mostly remained in water through the years of closure, so keep your eye out for surviving heritage features: a reeded-up basin once used by Wych barges, a former swing-bridge, an original Brindley-designed spillweir. The canal finally shakes off the town at Bridge 8, leading to the lovely little hamlet of ***Salwarpe*** with an almost picture-perfect canal scene – and a very sharp bend in the cutting.



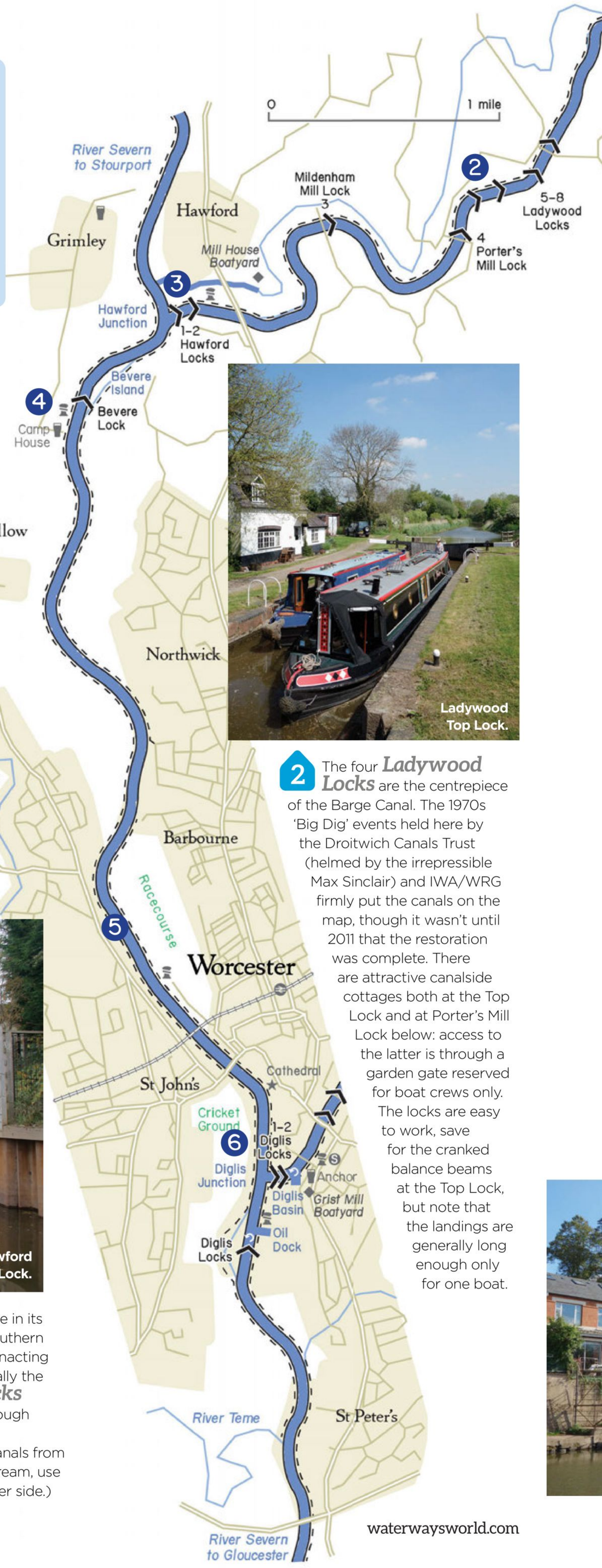
Pretty scenery at Salwarpe.



Hawford Bottom Lock.

3 The slowly winding waterway past Mildenham Mill is almost riverine in its appearance, fringed by trees and with a sharp cliff rising on the southern bank. Reed growth across the channel can make you feel like you're re-enacting *The African Queen*, so keep a careful eye for approaching boats. Eventually the new tunnel under the A449 brings you out at the two ***Hawford Locks*** down to the River Severn. There's mooring here if the river is in flood, though few facilities nearby to make it a particularly tempting stay otherwise.

(If you're travelling in the opposite direction, entering the Droitwich Canals from the Severn, the pontoons at Hawford can seem confusing. Looking upstream, use the left-hand pontoon, tying up on the canal/lockside rather than the river side.)



Ladywood Top Lock.

2 The four ***Ladywood Locks*** are the centrepiece of the Barge Canal. The 1970s 'Big Dig' events held here by the Droitwich Canals Trust (helmed by the irrepressible Max Sinclair) and IWA/WRG firmly put the canals on the map, though it wasn't until 2011 that the restoration was complete. There are attractive canalside cottages both at the Top Lock and at Porter's Mill Lock below: access to the latter is through a garden gate reserved for boat crews only. The locks are easy to work, save for the cranked balance beams at the Top Lock, but note that the landings are generally long enough only for one boat.



Worcester food & drink

Thai-on-Severn, Sidbury, Worcester
A remarkably good Thai restaurant and takeaway just beside the Commandery, a stone's throw from the canal visitor moorings. The chef's speciality, Ped Makham, tastes even better in the comfort of your own boat.

Old Rectifying House, North Parade, Worcester
On the riverside by Worcester Bridge, this relaxed restaurant/bar is our favourite for an evening out. Leave space for a pudding.


Cardinal's Hat, Worcester.

Cardinal's Hat, Friar Street, Worcester
Worcester has too many good pubs to list, but the wood-panelled 'Hat' just squeaks the top spot with real ale, Belgian beer, local Barbourne cider and coronary-inducing pork scratchings.

Francini Café de Colombia, Angel Place, Worcester
A beguiling slice of Latin America in the Midlands, this friendly café sells the best coffee in town. Head there for breakfast.

4 ***Bevere Lock*** and Island are immediately downstream of Hawford Junction. Signs instruct you to keep right – don't pass under the island bridge and end up on the weir!

Like all locks on the Severn, Bevere is keeper-operated, and the keeper will signal which wall to stop against. Wait for the green light before approaching. Severn locks have poles set into the wall which you're required to loop your bow and stern ropes around – approach slowly to get your bow rope in first, then when that's secure, use the engine to bring the stern in. (Don't worry, everyone messes it up first time.)

Below the lock is the Camp House, one of the down-to-earth historic pubs the Severn does so well. Peacocks strut around the riverside garden while boaters, walkers and locals squeeze into the nooks of the warren-like interior. There are Bathams ales, Thatchers cider and warming home-cooked food to keep you snug all night. Beware: they don't take cards!

The moorings are short but breasting up is standard practice – we've been four abreast on occasion. (There are no visitor moorings from here until Worcester Racecourse.)


Leaving Bevere Lock on the River Severn.

5 Cruising down the wide River Severn into Worcester couldn't be easier. At first, the trademark high banks restrict views but as the suburbs begin, a series of attractive riverside houses line the waterside. Look out for the new floating home in the site of the former Northwick Marina, on the east bank.

The city presents a good face to the canal, especially at ***Worcester Racecourse*** – venue of the IWA National Waterways Festival in 1999. Boathouses along the riverside launch a succession of rowing craft onto the water, the main navigational hazard on this reach. There are extensive visitor moorings by the racecourse, and though you do have to pay a few pounds, it's worth it for the river setting.


Worcester Cathedral.


Attractive waterside properties near Worcester Racecourse.

6 Bridges over the Severn are few and far between, but Worcester has three in quick succession: the modern Sabrina footbridge, the high railway viaduct, and Worcester Bridge itself, an 18th-century structure in the place of the old medieval bridge. Emerging from the arches, ***Worcester Cathedral*** looms before you, in what must be one of the finest riverside scenes in England. On the other bank is 'New Road', the home ground of Worcestershire County Cricket Club. And have you ever seen so many swans...?

Official guidance is that you should continue to the next river lock before turning 180° in calm water to enter the canal from downstream at Diglis Junction. It's not bad advice, but if the flow is gentle and you're a reasonably confident boat-handler, you can turn immediately after the junction, keeping well clear of the weir. A floating landing gives your crew access to the locks to rejoin the Worcester & Birmingham Canal – and complete the ring.

History

The River Severn has been navigated since time immemorial. Historically, Severn trows were sailed downstream, and pulled back upstream by gangs of men. But even when connecting canals were built in the late-18th and 19th centuries, the Severn itself remained resolutely unimproved and lock-free – partly due to opposition from the 'towing men' who feared for their jobs. It was only in the 1840s that work began on building locks.

Despite this, the river had become the spine of quite a canal network. The Staffs & Worcs, Droitwich, Worcester & Birmingham, Coombe Hill, and Herefordshire & Gloucestershire canals all connected local industries to the Severn. The Droitwich (Barge) Canal was actually the first, opened in 1771 principally for the salt trade, its line planned by none less than James Brindley. Wych barges, only 64ft long, were hauled by donkeys ("hanimals") rather than horses.



Ladywood Top Lock during the Droitwich Canals' wilderness years.

It wasn't until 1815 that the Worcester & Birmingham finally opened, built with narrow locks rather than its original broad specification. Its heyday was short-lived; railway competition began to bite in the 1840s. A belated response saw the Droitwich Junction Canal opened in 1854, and the locks of the Barge Canal lengthened, but to little avail.

The two Droitwich canals were formally abandoned in 1939. But the post-war Midlands restoration bug, honed on the Stourbridge Canal and River Avon, soon took hold here. The Droitwich Canals Trust was formed in 1973 amid a series of high-profile 'Big Digs'. Restoration seemed to slow frustratingly in the 1990s: restorers wryly joked that 'TBD' in the calendar of the restoration bible Navvies meant "The Bloody Droitwich" ("TBA", meanwhile, was "The Basingstoke Again"). A helping hand from local councils, the Lottery and British Waterways saw the Droitwich Canals finally reopen throughout in 2011.



The reopening of the Droitwich Canals in 2011.

DIMENSIONS

- Length 72ft
- Beam 7ft (W&B and Droitwich Junction)
- Draught 3ft
- Headroom c6ft (M5 culvert) depending on water levels

BOATYARDS

Diglis Basin Marina
Chandlery

ABC Worcester Marina, Lowesmoor Basin
01905 734160
Hire, repairs, diesel, pump-out, chandlery

New & Used Boat Company, Hanbury Wharf
01905 794445
Chandlery

Droitwich Spa Marina
07970 626807
Diesel, pump-out

WALKING & CYCLING

The ring is fully walkable, including the east bank of the River Severn. You will need to divert from the waterside at the M5 culvert, and for a short distance in the northern suburbs of Worcester around Gheluvelt Park. Unfortunately, there's no way across the river at Bevere Island short of hitching a ride on a passing boat, so you can't access the Camp House or the Severn Way on the opposite bank.

The Worcester & Birmingham Canal towpath is cyclable from Diglis to Offerton as part of NCN route 45, and from there onwards to Tibberton. North of there it's bumpy and uneven, as is the Droitwich Barge Canal towpath. There's no right of bike access on the Severn path.

But the most enjoyable walk, or ride, is in Worcester itself. Two pedestrian footbridges, at Diglis river lock and by the racecourse, provide a circular riverside promenade.

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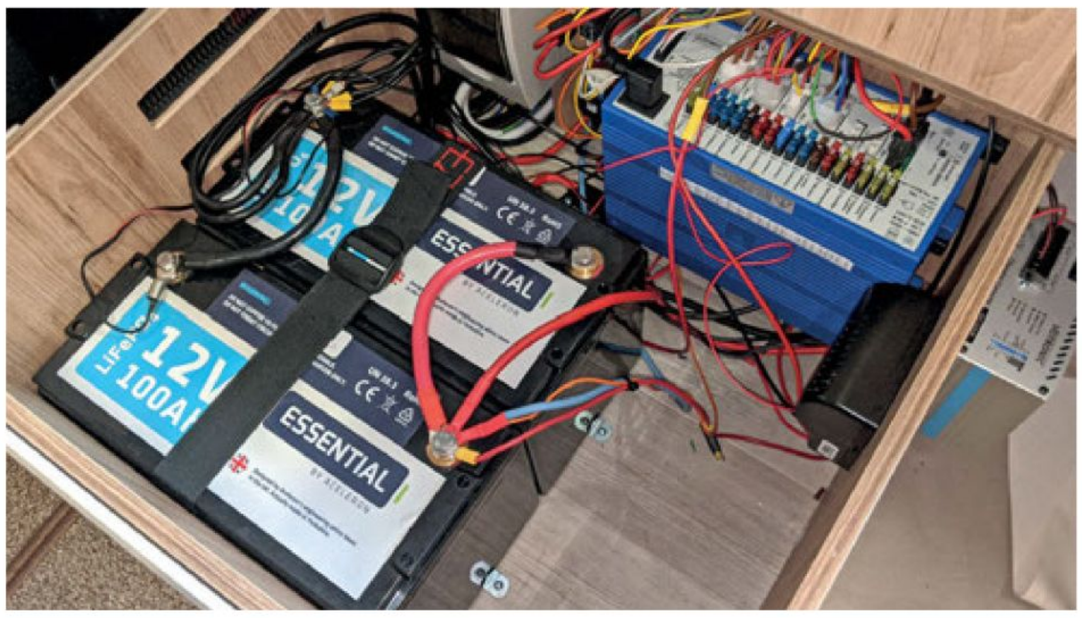
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Boats & Pieces

The latest products and ideas for boat-owners

Essential 100Ah lithium battery



Battery specialist Aceleron has designed a new type of lithium ion phosphate (LiFePO4) battery as a 'drop-in replacement' for traditional lead acid, AGM or gel units.

The new battery, called Essential, holds 100Ah, has very fast charging (only two hours), provides protection against overcharging, has a very low self-discharge rate (less than 3% a month), and can be run flat without damage. It can also fast-discharge for heavy current drain (such as the induction hob opposite). Other benefits include up to 5,000 discharge cycles and a ten-year warranty, although Aceleron estimates a 20-year life.

A bank of only two Essentials (200Ah) can offer as much useable energy as four conventional 110Ah lead acid cells (which can't discharge more than 50% without limiting their life, and are unlikely to last more than 300 discharge cycles).

The Essential is also promised to be fully repairable, upgradeable and recyclable, and designed and manufactured in the UK. "It could be the last battery you ever buy for your boat," the manufacturer adds confidently.

All this comes at a substantial premium, however – £1,099 per battery – but the company amply justifies the price.

RoadPro
(01327 312233, *roadpro.co.uk*)

Recycling Li-ion batteries

The rapid adoption of lithium batteries is increasingly raising questions about their eventual recycling. The cost of reusing the components of lithium batteries is currently around five times the price of importing the raw material for new ones, giving little incentive to undertake new recycling techniques. In addition, the design of these batteries is evolving fast, and recycling techniques are having to change with them – it's a moving target.

On the other hand, with a lifespan of up to 20 years (compared to three for lead acid), any recycling decisions will likely be overtaken by technology by the time you need to replace them. In the meantime, recycling aside, there are considerable benefits if you can afford the upfront cost.

Aceleron promises to recycle all life-expired Essential batteries, "no exceptions!" It does this by reusing all the components, from the individual cells to the battery management system, for 'second life' applications. These include smaller capacity 12V, 12Ah batteries for emerging markets, such as powering home lighting in Africa. Aceleron says it commits to 99% recyclability of all components.

Stained glass for boats

Narrowboat Glass is a specialist workshop creating artful stained glass especially for boats. It's a new business in concept, but its owner, B.J. Green, is the son of renowned stained glass artist Ruth Green.

B.J. grew up with the craft, working his way up from sweeping his mother's studio floor, learning to colour and cut glass under her tutelage, and eventually creating his own designs and starting his own company. He has a winter studio at Venetian Marina, near Nantwich, but also works around the cut from his boat *Cygnus Olor*.

"We do bow door inserts, cratch glass triangles, portholes, interior galley separators or even your pet in stained glass peeping from a window corner," B.J. tells us.

The work is exacting, detailed and takes time. His schedule is full – a project needs to be booked months in advance, and he's not afraid to decline a commission if it doesn't challenge him.

Price follows design. As a very rough guide, a porthole might be £200 to £400 depending on complexity, although the figure can fluctuate according to market conditions (for example, red stained glass uses real gold, which can change rapidly in price).

It's easiest to contact B.J. via his *Cygnus Olor* Facebook page as he moves around a lot, but he is happy to have visitors to his studio by appointment.





Left: **A CAD design for a porthole.**

Below: **The finished result.**

Narrowboat Glass
(07956 872892, *narrowboatglass.com*)

Tabletop induction hob

Induction hobs, which offer flameless cooking and wipe-clean surfaces, have begun making their way onto sophisticated narrowboats. Most of these devices are the size of conventional domestic hobs and built-in. However, the new Smart Touch Induction Hob from Lakeland is a small, portable countertop unit designed to be an add-on, not your main hob, ideal for when you're preparing large meals and need an additional cooking point.

The hob requires 230V and 2kW, either from a generator, inverter or shoreline. If you run it from your



battery bank you will probably need a 3kW inverter – it's likely to briefly draw up to 180 amps at start-up – although the cooler settings use a lot less.

It's pretty compact (12in x 15in) and has ten preset cooking modes. There's a lot of programmability and a variety of timer functions – it might take you a while to understand them all, let alone master them. For example, it can automatically bring a pan up to boiling, then reduce it to simmer temperatures for preset times.

With it being portable, you could always buy it for your house, then try it out on the boat. As with all induction hobs, it only works with iron or steel pans. It's £100 from kitchen store chain Lakeland, and comes with a three-year guarantee.

Lakeland
(015394 88100, *lakeland.co.uk*)

Easy-fit clamps

Quick Fist Clamps aren't new, but these specialist one-piece rubber clamps are still rarely seen. They are surprisingly useful for quickly lashing items away, yet releasing them immediately when they are needed.

The clamps come as pairs, and when screwed in place (either vertically or horizontally) offer almost unlimited onboard uses. They come in varying sizes – the most likely to appeal are the Standard (holding ½in to 2½in diameter objects) and Super (holding 2½in to 7½in diameter objects).

Typical uses might include narrowboat tillers and boat hooks (small) and rope coils or fire extinguishers (large). They're made from heavy duty, UV-resistant rubber and are unaffected by temperature extremes. You stretch the strap around



Standard Quick Fist Clamp.

the item being stowed and slip it over the other end. The end can be trimmed to length once you feel it's fitted right.

The Standard is £13.50 a pair, while the Super is £15, available direct from the company.



Quick Fist Clamps holding a tiller arm.

Quick Fist Clamps
(01964 779590, *quickfistclamps.co.uk*)

The Floating Gift Shop

This year started with the launch of a brand-new boat-based business, the Floating Gift Shop, which *WW* met on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal on its first week's trading.

Owner Briony told us she had wanted to live more simply, slowly and closer to nature for many years. "So, in August 2018 I sold my place in London and travelled the country looking for the perfect narrowboat. I found it in *Micaela*. I've always loved making things and I really wanted to be able to work from my new home. Becoming a roving trader seemed like a good route to explore."

Briony's gifts have a sustainable theme, with products like handmade copper candle holders, jewellery stands and hand-poured soy candles. She also stocks alternatives to single-use plastics, such as reuseable travel mugs, bamboo toothbrushes, metal straws and reuseable shopping bags. Her gift items, for both children and adults, can be used again and again.

In its first few months, *Micaela* will be based on the eastern Leeds & Liverpool Canal, but Briony plans to travel more of the network later in the year.

The Floating Gift Shop on nb *Micaela*
(07340 773294, *floatinggiftshop@gmail.com*)



A *view* of *Venice*

Why explore Italy's 'Floating City' by gondola when you can see it from your own hire-boat? **Jenny Brice** recalls a blissful two-week cruise around the Venetian Lagoon

My husband John and I have been boating for over 30 years in various-sized narrowboats, enjoying many happy family holidays right around the system. In 2005, we bought a Wilderness Trailboat to enable us to drive to almost any waterway in the UK, some not on the connected network, and start boating the very same day.

Last year this desire to see waterways further afield led us to take a two-week hire-boat holiday with Le Boat at its base close to Italy's historic city of Venice. Intending to explore the rivers Sile and Brenta, as well as the islands of the Venetian Lagoon, we booked our trip at the very beginning of the season, from late March into April, to avoid the crowds.

The boat

We hired the 38ft Horizon Cruiser, which, although not the prettiest of boats, scores high on practicality and living space. The saloon-galley area is more like that of an apartment than a boat, with a full range of services including a full-sized fridge and oven, while panoramic windows and French doors provide unrestricted views and allow plenty of light inside. The bow cabin is enormous, though the second bedroom is rather poky (there are larger versions of the Horizon available) and the shower is also spacious.

The toilet proved a revelation – just one push of a button, and, whoosh, everything disappeared. Marvellous, we thought, but where did it all go? Well, in spite of the popular tourist beaches close by, straight through a macerator and into the river, and, ultimately, the Venetian Lagoon.

We also had a fly deck with a Bimini top – these are great on yachts but the boat's designers didn't factor in the overhanging branches when approaching mooring pontoons on our route.

Setting off

Our starting point was on the mainland at Lughignano on the River Sile, close to the town of **Casier**. Having only just emerged from the British winter, we needed all the sun we could get, so down went the Bimini. From there on in, our usual driving position was from the fly deck, where we could both relax in comfort.

On the meandering route to the lagoon, we had ample opportunity to familiarise ourselves with handling the boat. After passing **Cendon**, we stopped for the night at **Casale sul Sile**, on account of its pleasant in-line mooring



near its historic church and the proximity of a good supermarket. The next day we said farewell to the Sile at Portegrandi Lock (built in 1680) to follow the channel to the lagoon.

Navigating the lagoon

The main navigation aids in the lagoon are dolphins (known as 'briccole' in Italy), which are essentially high tripods of thick wooden pilings, planted firmly in the mud. On our onboard chart, we had to follow the navigable channel as it passed on either side of these structures – a lapse of concentration and you could end up aground. If this occurred, we had been instructed to simply wait for the tide to come in; it sounded as though this was quite a common occurrence.

The main islands of the Venetian Lagoon are well known: Venice, Murano, Burano and perhaps even Chioggia. In fact, there are over 80 islands, some housing monasteries and cemeteries, others so small they hardly raise their heads above the incoming tide.

The lagoon is protected from the Adriatic Sea by a thin strip of land which runs from Lido to Malamocco, Alberoni, Pellestrina and Sottomarina, all of which have beaches that are very popular during the summer months. Moorings are limited to

"Moorings in Venice can cost over €160 a night"





San Giorgio Maggiore church on the island of Venice.



A villa under restoration on the River del Brenta.

"The main navigation aids in the lagoons are dolphins, which are high tripods of thick wooden pilings, planted firmly in the mud"

the authorised docking spaces, which in Venice can cost over €160 a night. Le Boat has three free mooring spots: **Mazzorbo**, **Vignole** and **Chioggia**. In season these would be under pressure from hirers but we used them all without any difficulties and travelled by the Vaporetti water buses all around the lagoon, a bit like a park and ride service. The canals on the island of Venice are reserved for residents, local trade and, of course, gondolas.

Travelling through the lagoon feels very much like being on a water highway – boats of all sizes whizz past at various angles, leaving a frenzy of wash in all directions. The worst are the small private taxis that seem to take a delight in cutting you up. At one point all the drawers fell open in our cabin and the contents of our fruit bowl were distributed around the floor.

Boating culture

At some of the overnight moorings, youngsters race around in the dark on small speedboats, banging and crashing over the waves. In Venice it is normal for young people to own a boat rather than a car, so the boy racer is out on the water.

On the lagoon, everything goes by boat. We saw the fire brigade in action, pumping water from the nearby canal, ambulance boats rushing to someone's aid and police-boats hurtling through the waves, all with screeching sirens. We also saw the ultimate: a hearse-type water taxi with the display of flowers firmly fixed to the coffin as it was travelling so fast!

River del Brenta

The River del Brenta is navigable from the west of the lagoon upstream to the city of **Padua**. To access it from the lagoon you need to cross a large ship canal where you are likely to meet tankers and container ships towed by tugs heading for the industrial Marghera area.

The first part of the river contains shipyards and is busy with trip-boats, which have priority at locks and bridges. There are five locks and eight drawbridges along the river, with the locks being opened by a team that will accompany you throughout your journey, although you might have to wait a while for their arrival. We only found a few small mooring areas along the river, as tying up on the bank is not allowed; also, there are no water points.



Oriago Bridge on the Brenta.

Nevertheless, the Brenta has its own unique attraction that serves as an example of 16th-century Venetian opulence, when the finest noble families built summer residences along its banks. Today, over 30 such villas still stand, many with a look of faded grandeur.

At **Stra**, another historic city along the river, we visited the UNESCO world heritage site of the Villa Pisani Nazionale. At just €7.50, it was worth the admission fee, with information boards in every room providing the history of the estate in many languages. Although the gardens are not extensively planted, they incorporate a wonderful lake in a formal tree setting. Also in the grounds are a large maze and an orangery, with its fruit being a very important export in days gone by. Unlike the busy National Trust properties back at home, we appeared to be the only visitors, even though the villa is on a par with Hampton Court.

Oriago and Padua

Due to heavy rain and high winds we moored at **Oriago** and took the bus for the half-hour ride to **Padua**, enjoying the change



Waiting at Cavallino Lock.



Doges Palace viewed from the lagoon.


Malcontenta Swing Bridge on the Brenta.


Portegrandi Lock.


Prato Delle Valle at Padua.

"There are over 80 islands, some housing monasteries and cemeteries, others so small they hardly raise their heads above the incoming tide"

of transport. Padua claims to be the oldest city in northern Italy, being founded between the 11th and 10th centuries BC. Inside its city walls, a map is an essential purchase as there are so many colonnaded streets with arcades, which, unfortunately, now house international fashion stores. We visited Piazza Signori and other squares off the narrow streets, including the largest, Prato Della Valle, which has ornamental statues situated around a moat with a central fountain. This appeared to be a favourite lunchtime spot for local office workers as well as mothers with pushchairs, glad to be out in the warm weather. We also visited the very impressive Basilica of St Anthony, which is recognised as one of the eight international shrines by the Holy See; we were pleasantly surprised to find that admission is free.

At our evening mooring at Oriago we sat watching the canoeists and rowers out on the river. The Italian method of rowing is by standing up, and it looks very good exercise. Nearby we came across a wine merchant selling local draught wine from the barrel at a very reasonable price.

Bridges and beaches

After retracing our way back along the Brenta and across the lagoon, we used **Vignole** as a convenient overnight stop. Then we made our way alongside the island of Sant Erasmo, in the direction of **Jesolo**.

These canals are much quieter than those around Venice – indeed, we only passed a few local boats and, of course, the regular Vaporetti water buses. The wildlife was plentiful, with many birds sitting on the dolphins and watching us pass by.

We arrived at **Cavallino Lock** at lunchtime, so we decided to explore its seafront, which seemed to consist of relatively new, shut-up apartments, all waiting for summer use. Even though it was a Sunday, the locals were out on the beach clearing up the debris washed ashore during winter storms.

After passing through the lock the next morning, we headed to **Jesolo** where we came across two lift-bridges obstructing our progress. After telephoning a number to communicate our arrival, ten minutes later a gentleman arrived on the scene. Luckily, we didn't immediately cast off from our temporary mooring at the handy dolphin, as he proceeded to slowly hand wind up the long pedestrian bridge. A local jogger who was waiting impatiently waved at us to proceed while the bridge was still being raised, but we hovered until it was high enough for us to safely slide under. Thankfully, the second road-bridge was operated mechanically, with ringing bells and barriers.

Quiet cruising

Beyond Jesolo, we found the route very quiet, with high trees reflected in the shallow water and only two small villages visible, thanks to their church campaniles.

At **Caposile** we turned left, back towards the hire base, and soon came across a floating bridge spanning our route and carrying fairly large road vehicles. We watched in amazement as the bridge-keeper rushed from end to end, adjusting different


Moored boats at Chioggia.


Evening at Mazzorbo.


The impressive Basilica of St Anthony at Padua.


A colourful scene at Burano.


Canals in Venice.

levers to move it. Throughout his performance the cars, vans and pedestrian traffic backed up along the road. The whole bridge was eventually swivelled for our passage, but we did wonder how much of an interruption this is to the locals during peak season.

As can be guessed by its very direct route, the **Taglio Nuova del Sile** is a canalised section of waterway stretching all the way along the north bank of the lagoon. At Portegrandi, we passed back onto the River Sile and headed northwards. We had intended to moor at the town of **Quarto D'Altino** but found another boat had beaten us to the small pontoon here. In true boating spirit, however, out came the occupants and performed a difficult manoeuvre in the fast current to create a space for us. They were Australians, and we were invited aboard for drinks, where we exchanged boating stories – a great way to finish our holiday.

Back to base

By lunchtime we had the boat back at base, and we spent our last afternoon visiting **Treviso** (not navigable) courtesy of the bus that stops right outside the marina. Thought to have been the origin of the popular Italian dessert Tiramisù, the town is rich in history, and we could have spent far longer exploring its Renaissance squares, palaces, churches and streets threaded with waterways.

We would certainly recommend a hire-boat holiday in the Veneto region, with its wonderful landscapes, abundant wildlife and medieval towns and cities. And going early in the season proved a great decision – we had wall-to-wall sunshine for the first week, with daytime temperatures of 20 degrees, although it was chilly in the evenings. Only on one day were we grounded in port, due to a forecast 30-knot wind that never materialised, but otherwise the weather and the experience proved the perfect way to shake off the dreary British winter.


Beside the Grand Canal in Venice.

"Padua claims to be the oldest city in northern Italy, being founded between the 11th and 10th centuries BC"


Gondolas on the Grand Canal in Venice.


The glass tree at Murano.

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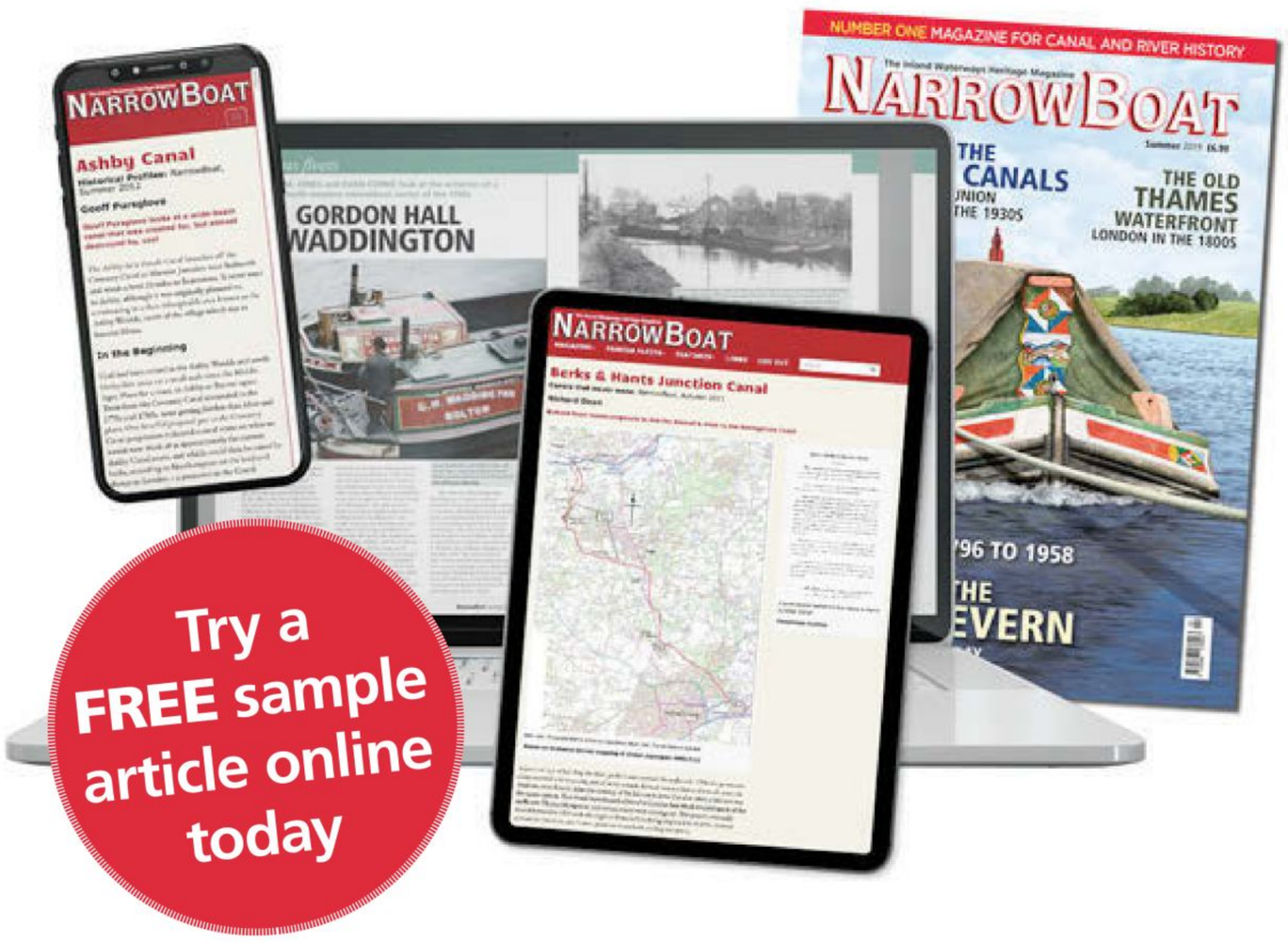
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Fly-boat to **BIRMINGHAM:** *Part 2*

John Hollingshead continues his fly-boat trip from London to Birmingham and provides a fascinating insight to life on and around the cut in Victorian England. **Roger Butler** follows the journalist's adventures...

Last month, we ventured as far back as the 1850s, following journalist John Hollingshead as he journeyed aboard a fly-boat travelling from London to Birmingham. Having left the clutches of the capital, our intrepid traveller was now enjoying the fresh air of the open countryside as he headed north on the Grand Junction Canal. Patient anglers who had bought tuppenny rail tickets from Whitechapel or Bethnal Green – "unshaven and unwashed, in ragged clothes and dirty shirts" – perched behind the towpath whenever a horse and boat passed.

Boat decoration

Hollingshead took the opportunity to inspect the faded décor of their boat; "*Stourport* was not a gay specimen of the fly-barge," although he had noted the distinctive artwork of the canals and he made some of the very first observations of what was to become known as 'roses and castles'. Red, yellow and blue were the dominant colours: "all so bright that when seen under the mid-day sun they are often too much for the unaccustomed stranger".

The two outer sides of the cabin were decorated with delicately crafted landscape paintings that included lakes, castles, sailing boats and mountains. The style reminded him of the early-19th-century 'tea-board' school of art, where common commercial work adorned tin trays, snuff boxes and other everyday items.

A Buckby can caught everyone's attention: "Our boat eclipses every other barge in the brilliancy of a new two-gallon water can which came from a bankside painter's yard. This displays no fewer than six dazzling and fanciful landscapes, several gaudy wreaths of flowers and the name of the proud proprietor, Thomas Randle, runs round the centre on a background of blinding yellow."

Top: **Hollingshead made detailed observations as they travelled into Birmingham, noting "smoke-grimed, town-stamped boys angling in the canal".**

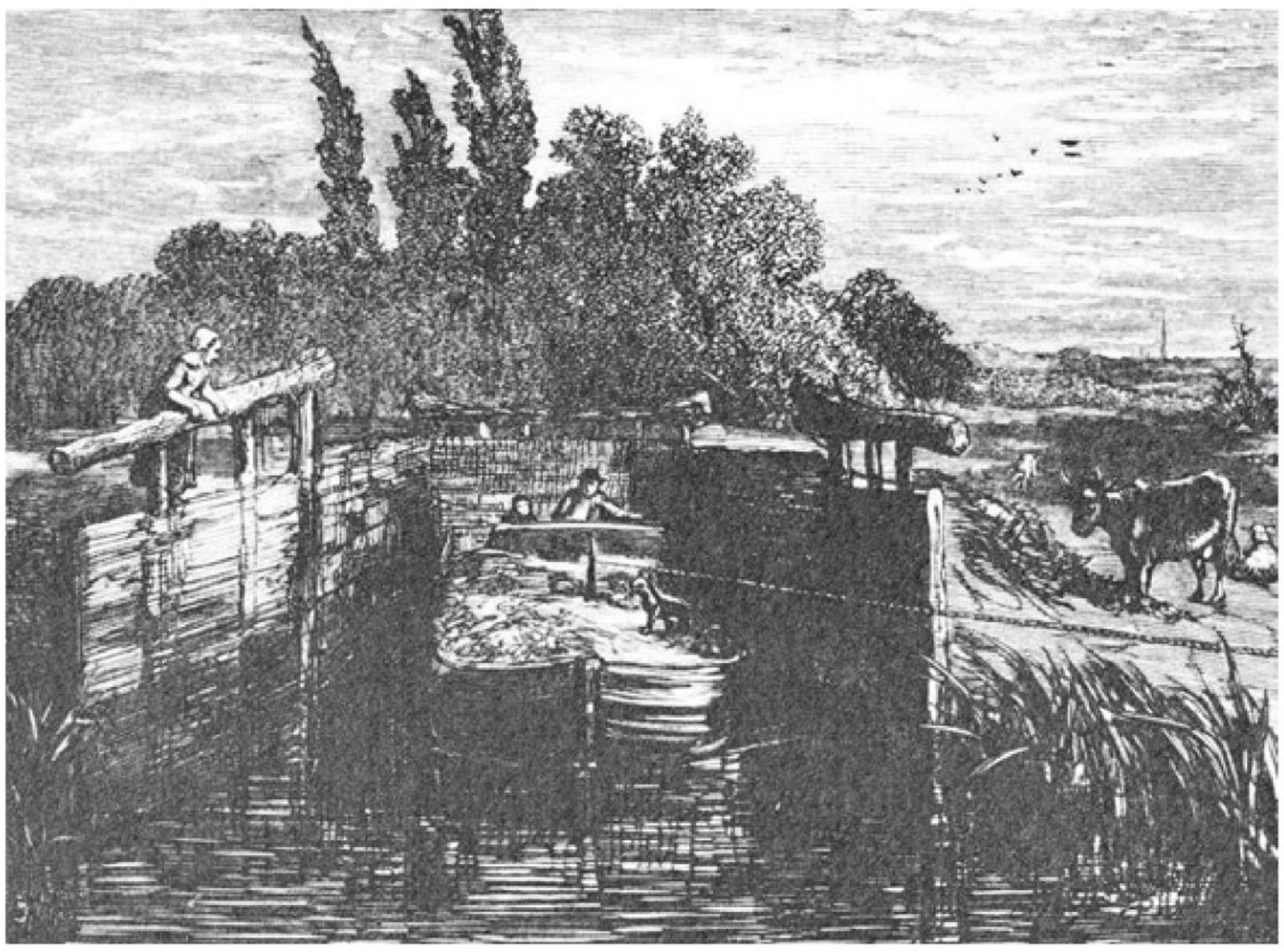
Below: **This 19th-century illustration was simply entitled 'On the road'.**

Another report from the mid-19th century mentioned an accompanying dipper "which bears witness to the fact that much of the water was drawn from the canal itself". In this respect, boat people were probably no less disadvantaged than many urban communities where piped water was sometimes limited to just ten minutes a day. But there were no sanitary facilities on board and, as a result, the towpath hedge or adjacent hidey-holes were often used as latrines.

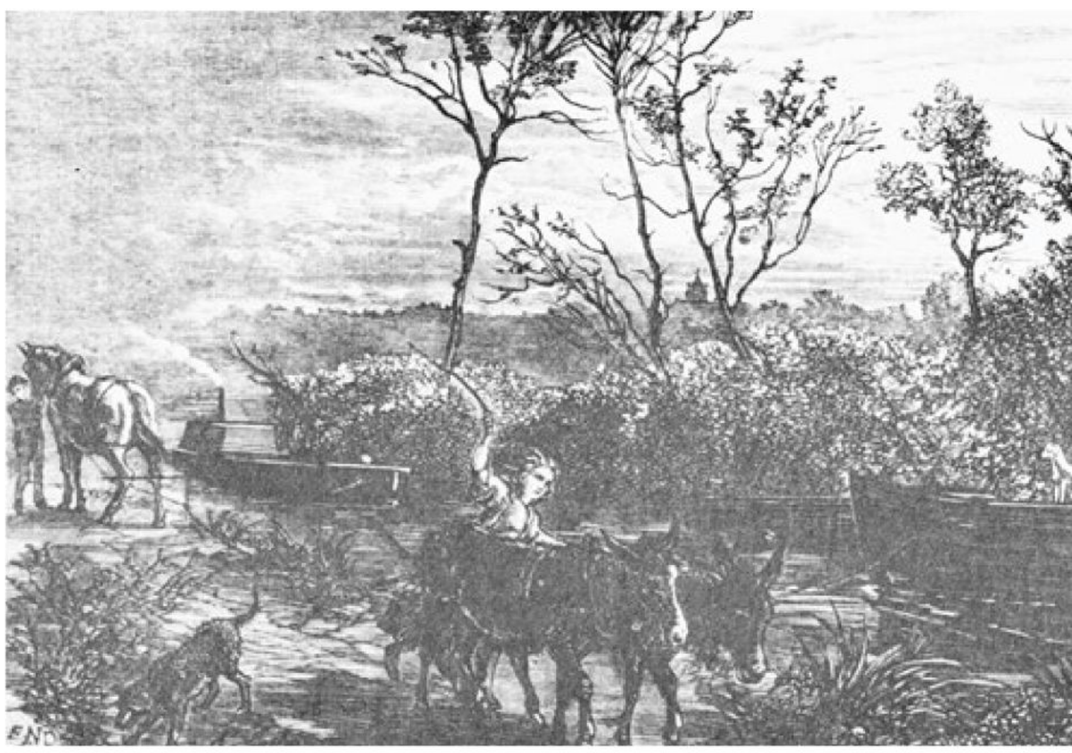
Family life afloat

The journey continued and there was time to observe









family life on the cut: "We passed a boatman and his stout sunburnt wife. Their ten children were all aged between three weeks to 12 years. The youngest are dirty, ragged and stunted in growth and sit round the cabin like pictures on a shelf; they stand in pots and pans; they roll helplessly on the floor within just a few inches of the stove. They are fretful for fresh air and amusement and are always beneath the feet of their mother."

He noted that once children reached five or six years old, the young ones were entrusted with a whip and "made useful to their thoughtless parents as drivers of the horse that tows the boat". He described tender little girls in heavy boots, slouched sun-bonnets and dusty clothes, who freely ran on either side of the rope or, worse still, right underneath the horse's legs: "Not a week passes without a child drowning in the silent byway upon which they were born. And, sadly, it occurs all too often to excite much in the way of observation."

Above left: **Note the rough-hewn lock beams in this 1880s illustration, called 'The Lock'.** Above right: **An 1880s sketch from the *Illustrated London News* depicting a hay-carrying narrowboat and its crew tied up for the night.** Right: **Hollingshead described how young children would be given a whip to drive horses on the towpath.**

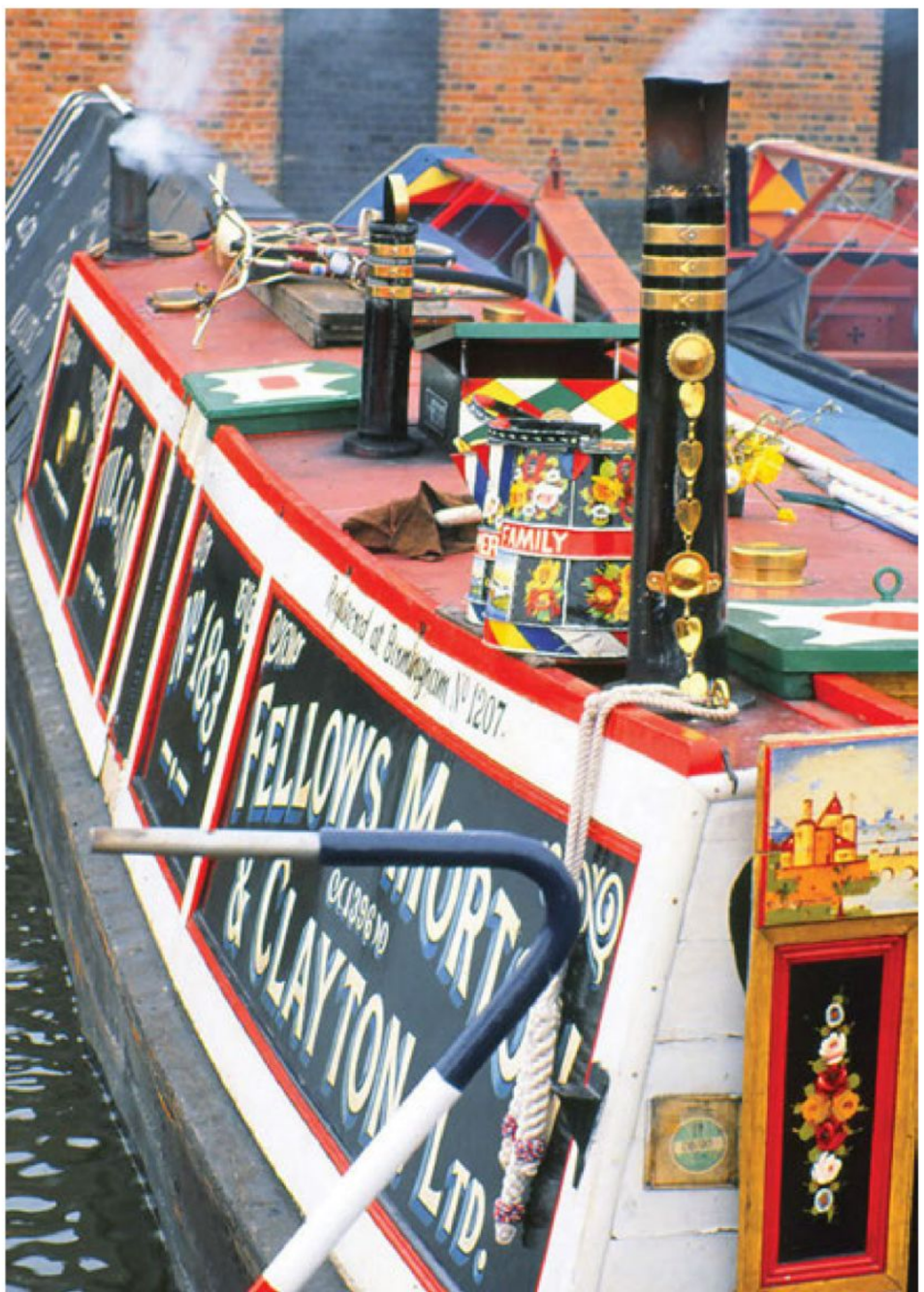
In search of a meal

Following another night of agitated lock-bumping, Hollingshead and his mate Cuddy arose from their straw-filled hold for coffee and stale bread. But they were hungry: "Where were the new-laid eggs? Where were the cottage bread and the cream as thick as paste?" The next village was an hour away but proved to be nothing more than a collection of barns with closed yellow curtains. They approached an old man with two pails of fresh milk but an attempt to barter was met with stony silence and surly contempt.

"Not a week passes without a child drowning in the silent byway upon which they were born"

At the next lock, they found a cottage with loaves of bread in the window. The door was ajar but, initially, the old lady ignored her peckish customers. "Our canal journey had brought us to a land where the ordinary relations of buyer and seller were reversed: where it was looked upon as a favour when an article was sold. We were graciously allowed to buy a few eggs and some bacon and managed to make a tolerable breakfast."

At the same time, Captain Randle was busy dishing out an early lunch for his crew. Large lumps of greasy boiled beef were served with a mountain of bread and the passengers left them to enjoy their meal without disturbance. The captain, however, seemed content and claimed to have used the same butcher for 25 years: "I can't be messed about wi'a lot o' small canalside butchers."



Left: **Hollingshead made some of the very first observations of traditional narrowboats and their decorative work, which became known as roses and castles.**

Dull Stoke Bruerne

Food remained high on the agenda as they approached Stoke

"The youngest are dirty, ragged and stunted in growth and sit round the cabin like pictures on a shelf"

Bruerne (Hollingshead spelt it 'Brewin') and the celebrated Blisworth Tunnel. The village comprised one small street and was described as "a village that does not covet the patronage of strangers". Nevertheless, they went on a wild goose chase – in search of a chicken – and struck up a conversation with a lady at her small thatched house, as Hollingshead recounts:

"A vowl, measter?" she asked, in astonishment. "What, a live vowl?"

"No, ma'am" I said, "a dead fowl, for cooking."

"Dead or alive" said Cuddy, who was now desperate for something to eat.

"I'm sure I don't know, measter," replied the old woman; "I doan't think onybody be havin' such a thing in Stoke. Ye cen try of Must'r Edwards, at the corner."

Mr Edwards shook his head but they soon stumbled across a small butcher's shop. This was only slightly larger than the boat's cabin and, since a chunk of fly-covered suet appeared to be the sole piece of local produce, they wandered on towards the local inn. Unfortunately, the sour ale failed to raise their spirits but the young girl at the bar asked about life in London:

"I suppose Lundun be very dool, now?"

"Dull!" shouted Cuddy, who wasn't impressed with the village. "The dullest street in the dullest part of the city, at the dullest time of the day, and the dullest part of the year, is a bear garden compared with Stoke Bruerne!"

Blisworth Tunnel

They continued to the tunnel and a crew member led the horse over the top while a legger, waiting hopefully by the portal, was paid a shilling to help take them through the void. A lantern was placed at the head of the boat and the narrow boards, which Hollingshead compared to tailor's sleeve boards, were again hooked onto the sides.

The passageway felt delightfully cool but water inevitably dripped from the roof and noisy springs erupted into the canal. The leggers used a well-practised tread to maintain steady progress while cooking by candlelight continued in the cabin. Singing seemed to



Above: **A Buckby can caught Hollingshead's attention: "Our boat eclipses every other barge in the brilliancy of a new two-gallon water can which came from a bankside painter's yard."**

be a tradition and the captain's son was one of a dozen boatmen who sang and echoed their way through the void. Plaintive ballads had been handed down from generation to generation and the overall effect was compared to "the moaning of a maniac chained to a wall".

They passed other boats in the dark and one paragraph described how collisions were avoided once an approaching lantern had been sighted. The leggers waited until the last moment before athletically jumping onto the side of their boats while pulling the platforms out of the way. Arms and legs threw huge spider-like shadows across the cavernous walls.

Once out of the gloom, they were again haunted by thoughts of fresh food and soon tied up at the next village. An ancient lop-sided shop was so old it might have heard the tramp of Cromwell's soldiers and, unfortunately, it proved to be "a venerable abode of stagnant commerce". They asked for butter and managed to negotiate a meagre 4 ounces. Milk was also obtained, their first for two days, before they glided through broad, deep valleys and "past mansions where slender deer gambolled by flower-bordered flights of steps".

Fine sights

Randle's son pointed to a young woman driving a horse along the towpath. She was dressed in a short-waisted, short-skirted blue cotton frock with a pair of heavy boots and a bonnet which formed a quilted cowl that hung in flaps over her shoulders. "She's the nicest gal on the whole canal!"

He then pointed again as a bridal barge passed by. The proprietor had just got married and the funnel was decorated with white ribbons. Hollingshead noticed how boatmen never missed the chance for a bit of ornamentation and, to celebrate, the cabin on *Stourport* was duly decorated with flags and ribbons.

"Now we're coming to the finest house on the whole canal!" Randle's son informed Hollingshead. This wasn't a Palladian mansion but a long, brick building that immediately reminded the journalist of a county gaol. The property was owned by a man who had made his fortune in the whalebone trade and, in order to stamp his mark on the canal, the entrance to a private boathouse was located beneath a pair of enormous whales' teeth.

The next impressive dwelling belonged to one of the largest shareholders in the Grand Junction Canal and they heard how, in winter, distressed bargemen would sometimes hover by his front door in the hope of obtaining assistance to help offset the impact of a deep freeze.

Below: **Narrowboats moored by the north end of Stoke Bruerne and Hollingshead may have seen a very similar scene back in 1858.**







"Braunston is the only place we had seen where the people on the land seemed to belong to the people on the water"

The captain shivered as he described days and nights of drifting sleet, keen wind, heavy snow and cold rain.

Welcoming Braunston

And so they arrived at Braunston. Here, at last, they felt welcome: "It was the only place we had seen where the people on the land seemed to belong to the people on the water; where everybody knew everybody else and seemed glad to see each other, and where there was proper provision for a boatman's requirements."

The towpath was alive as women chatted over garden fences or left their cabins to catch up on the local gossip. Small children ran along the towpath and a precocious young boy, dressed in a jacket and waistcoat, confidently led a horse past the working boats.

The village was filled with a cacophony of sounds and a boot-maker, tailor and hosier were all on hand to discuss deals with the boatmen. Bright blue stockings hung in a window, rows of heavy trousers were displayed outside and ear-splitting bangs burst from a dark recess when the boot-maker bashed his hammer to seal rivets.

A long, low-roofed tavern effortlessly merged into a grocery and butcher's shop. Hollingshead and Cuddy wanted to sample their best tipple and entered a long room with dusty diamond-paned windows and an enormous kitchen range. They were also able to buy several pounds of beefsteak: "A good supper was now guaranteed and we were ready to drift on under a golden moon that lit the slopes of yellow corn."

Braunston's ale, however, had taken effect and, back on board, the crew showed unusual hesitation when moving from one end of the boat to another. The captain wobbled to and fro and his face glowed like a glossy red apple, but he soon welcomed his guests into the cabin and started to prepare generous portions of steak and onions. The stove was a fiery hot furnace and Cuddy quickly squeezed back outside like a frightened salamander.

On to Birmingham

Leamington Spa was their next destination and they entered this highly fashionable town at four in the morning. Here, next to a row of small shabby houses (and, thankfully, still in the semi-darkness) they "performed a toilet, open to the observation of every gay lounger of the





WATERWAYS ARCHIVE/PETER NURSER



WATERWAYS ARCHIVE/HERBERT DUNKLEY

Above left: **Stoke Bruerne in the mid-1960s, just a month after the canal museum began to welcome visitors. Hollingshead described the village as somewhere "that does not covet the patronage of strangers".**
Above right: **Today, Stoke Bruerne is a popular canal village but Hollingshead's companion wasn't impressed.**

Right: **Hollingshead was relieved when they eventually arrived at Braunston, where the church spire was an important landmark.**
Left: **At Braunston, Hollingshead met boot-makers, tailors and hosiers who were all keen to discuss deals with passing boatmen.**
Right: **Braunston was a busy hub on the journey from London to Birmingham.**

waters". A policeman looked on in speechless wonder.

Stourport was moored alongside a warehouse soon after dawn, where a large crane swung out over the water: "We tore open the tarpaulin and landed a hogshead of sugar which, to our great annoyance, had harboured large numbers of wasps over the last couple of days."

They passed the distant outskirts of Warwick and climbed through a long staircase of locks (presumably Hatton, though this brief reference seems to imply Hollingshead was singularly unimpressed!). His observations sharpened as they moved towards Birmingham: "Past country houses where, under creaky roofs, William Shakespeare may once have drunk and feasted; past black, smoke-grimed, town-stamped boys angling in the canal; past groups of ill-favoured, smoking, half-drunken men."

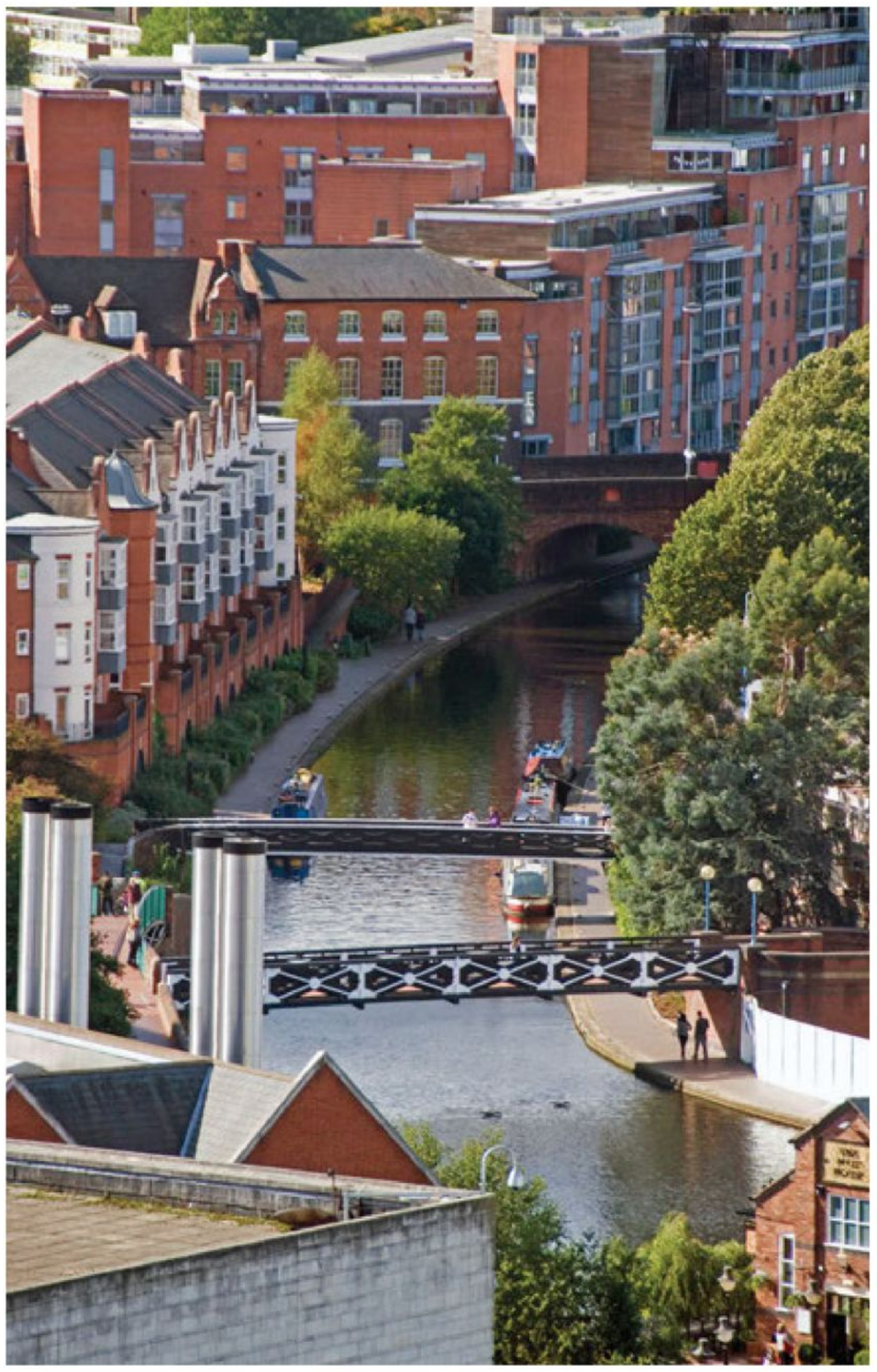
He used evocative prose to help paint haunting images of life in the smog-ridden city: "Past a towpath covered in coal dust, under a sky of smoke; past tall chimneys and dingy gas works, and down a staircase of black locks opened by a poor girl not more than ten years of age. Past groups of demon-looking men next to myriad factories which rise from sickly green pools of stagnant water; past a dozen grimy boys bathing amongst the floating dead dogs and factory scum of the inky canal."

It all sounded like a grey and uninviting end to their waterway journey but there was bustling activity by the canal warehouses in the burgeoning centre of Birmingham. Some of their canopies sailed over the water like Chinese pagodas and, behind them, the clatter of hooves and rigid wheels echoed across narrow cobbled alleyways.

"We passed groups of demon-looking men next to myriad factories which rise from sickly green pools of stagnant water"







Above: **It is still possible to glimpse the old industrial Birmingham as witnessed by Hollingshead.**
Right: **In 1858, there was bustling activity by the canal warehouses in the centre of Birmingham – Hollingshead would no doubt be surprised to see how the city's waterways have changed since then.**

A distant memory

The voyage was over and the two travellers shook hands with their new-found friends. Hollingshead signed off with a final simple sentence: "We left the romance and beauty of our three-day journey which will be to us a dream in years to come."

The author turned his hand to London theatrical work in the 1860s and made a name for himself as the manager of the Alhambra and, later, the Gaiety. He brought Gilbert and Sullivan together, introduced audiences to the cancan, launched matinée performances and became the first theatre manager to use electric lights in an auditorium.

Risqué operettas became his normal fare and Hollingshead was able to describe himself as "a licensed dealer in legs, short skirts and French adaptations". His journey along the Grand Junction Canal must have seemed a distant memory indeed!

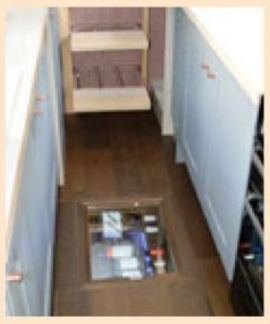
Left: **Cambrian Wharf in Birmingham would have looked very different back in 1858.**

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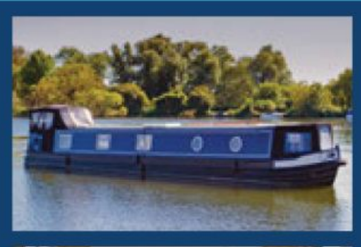
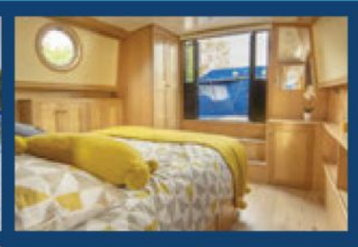
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The Power Behind The Brands

KEYED UP

So you've got the ubiquitous cork ball, but what else should be on your canal keyring? *WW* rounds up the hardware that'll help unlock the system...



ALL ABOARD

Ignition key

There's a reason narrowboat ignition keys are also known as tractor keys, says *WW* technical editor Mark Langley – they're so generic that one size, if not exactly fitting all canal boats on the system (and agricultural vehicles off it), will certainly fit a good proportion. Isuzu panels, for example, use the same ignition switch and keys, and rumour has it they can even be started with old JCB keys too.

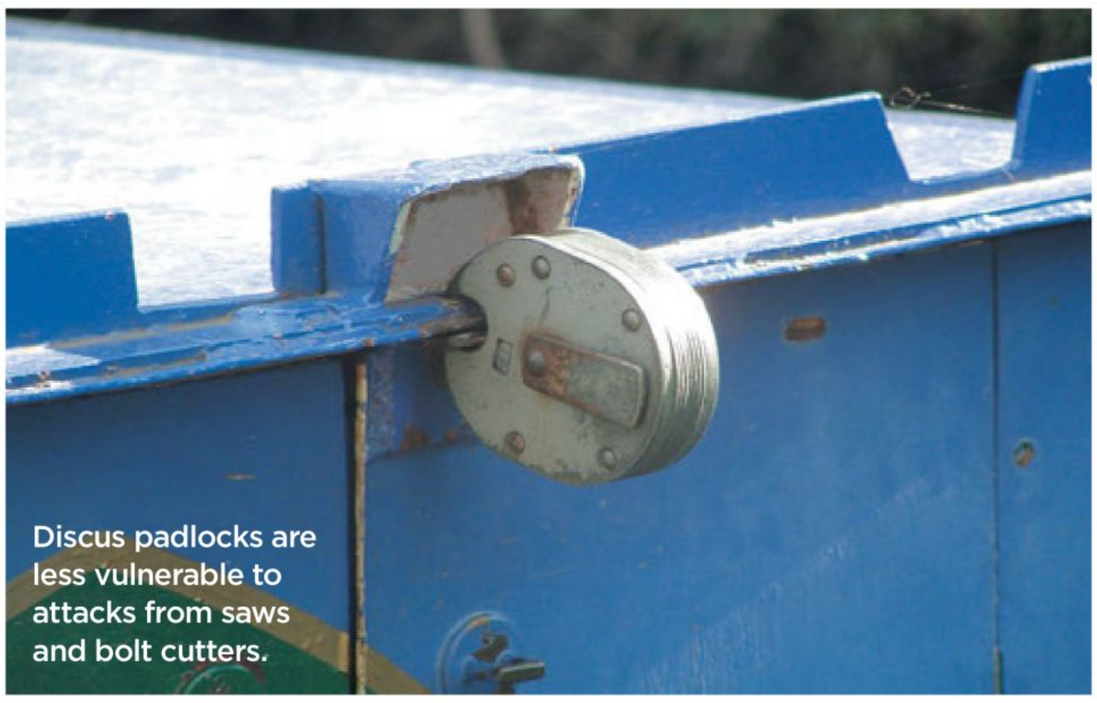
Some manufacturers are now producing more secure keys, but not all. A few are even omitting the keys full stop, and favouring a push-button panel instead. This certainly makes life easier if you're prone to losing stuff and, if the panel is inside the boat, the need for a key from a security point of view is greatly reduced anyway.

BELOW: Isuzu ignition key: one size fits all.
BELOW RIGHT: Beta Marine's keyless control panel.









Discus padlocks are less vulnerable to attacks from saws and bolt cutters.

Door keys

How much store you place on boat security will probably make the biggest difference to the number of keys you carry about with you. Doors are areas where some of the most extreme modifications on boats can be seen, from bars that can be padlocked into place across the front bulkhead to steel doors fitted in front of existing timber ones. And it's not just obvious entranceways that need securing – dog and pigeon boxes may also need extra bolts added to keep out intruders.

When it comes to padlocks, opt for discus ones, which are harder to disarm than standard open-shackle ones. Back these up with an internal lock. If you don't fancy the Fort Knox aesthetic of a steel bar, shoot bolts are less conspicuous. Whatever door or hatch security solutions you opt for, please remember to fit quick-release mechanisms. In the event of a fire or other emergency – the last thing you need is to be fumbling around for keys.

Gas spanner

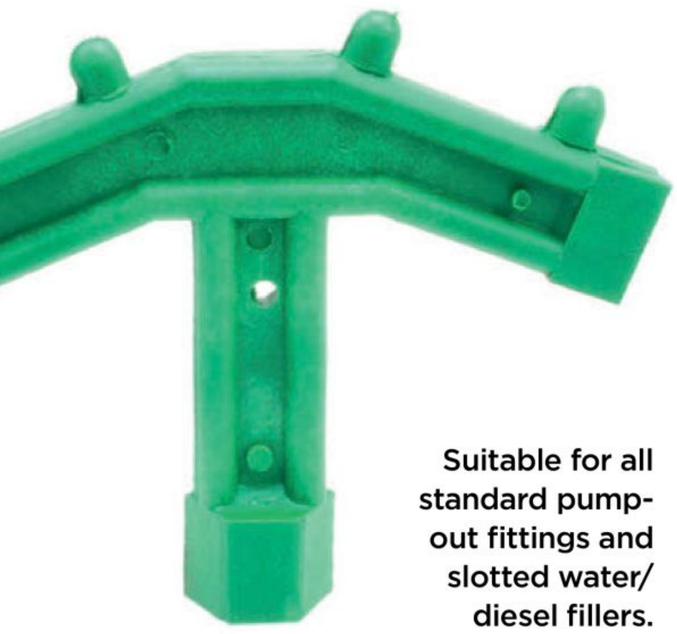
Not a key as such, but spanners are vital for accessing gas cylinders aboard when they need replacing. The physical attachment between the boat's gas system and the cylinder itself is usually a brass fitting, secured with a 30mm nut to ensure a safe seal. Tightening this up is where your spanner comes in handy, and it's best stored near the gas locker so you're not searching for the right equipment at the critical time. Although it might be tempting to save a couple of quid on a cheap spanner, forking out on one that's the exact size, reinforced around the jaws and drop forged or cast (rather than cut from a sheet of steel, the jaws of which are prone to 'spreading' with use, causing the spanner to slip) will save you hassle and knuckle skin.



Calor's heavy duty spanner (£4.99) is designed to "aid in the connection of a screw-on regulator or a standard propane POL fitting to a gas bottle".

Deck filler keys (also known as slot keys) and pump-out keys

A 50p piece will sometimes do the trick of opening slotted diesel and water fillers on deck, or any other metal tool thin enough to slide in, and with enough leverage to twist the cap open and tighten it up after. For the pump-out and rinse-out fittings you'll need a hexagonal one though, so our advice is to invest in a universal key that tackles both. You can pick up a plastic one for as little as £3.50 from most chandleries.

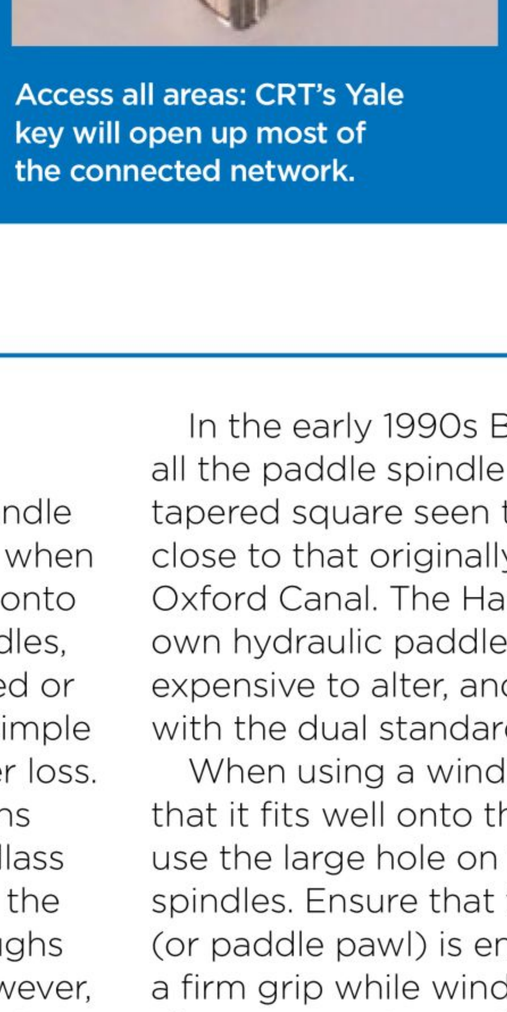


Suitable for all standard pump-out fittings and slotted water/ diesel fillers.

ACCESSING SERVICES

Canal & River Trust key (also known as a Watermate or BW key)

The CRT Yale key is a necessity for all boaters planning to navigate its canals and rivers, giving access to sanitary stations as well as some locks and moveable bridges, along with a smattering of canalside boxes housing local information leaflets. They can be purchased from CRT's online shop (*canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/boating-services/the-shop*) for £7. There's a link on the page to a map of local trust offices, where the key can be bought in person, if preferred.



Access all areas: CRT's Yale key will open up most of the connected network.

The CRT shop also sells pump-out cards (£16.35 each). These 25-unit cards allow one pump-out of your boat at any CRT facility or 25 units of electricity, as well as giving free access to showers. Electricity cards are also available, Rolec and Digi (also known as Ampy) being the most widely used. Which make you need depends on where you are in the country and local CRT offices will be able to advise further if you're unsure what to buy.



Other navigation keys

Entirely different keys may be needed to access services and locks on waterways which don't fall under CRT's jurisdiction. A good example is the Environment Agency's Abloy key for Anglian waterways, and the Yale key for one of the locks on the Middle Levels and the facilities station at March.

The latter can be picked up at Stanground Lock, where you enter the Middle Levels, for £5. The EA Abloy key can be bought from Northampton Marina (along with pump-out and electricity cards) or from EA by post.

TACKLING LOCKS

Windlass (also known as a lock key or handle)

A windlass – essentially a cranked handle with a square hole – is a prerequisite when navigating most waterways. It slides onto the square spindle fitted to lock paddles, both enabling the chamber to be filled or emptied, but also forming part of a simple security system to help prevent water loss. Historically there were some variations and alternatives to a removable windlass (e.g. fixed windlasses, handspikes on the Calder & Hebble Navigation and cloughs on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal). However, due to standardisation, or mechanisation, there are fewer alternative examples left.

Until relatively recently, different canals or navigations had slightly different spindle sizes and shapes. Tapered squares of various sizes were most common, but the Grand Union Canal had plain square spindles on all its paddle gear, still seen today on the Ham Baker paddle gear (the distinctive 1930s paddle gear fitted to the locks on the Grand Union Canal between Napton and Knowle) and the infamous hydraulic units fitted by British Waterways in the 1970s. The traditional windlass had only one hole that fitted the locks on a particular canal, and boaters simply changed windlasses according to the canal.

In the early 1990s BW standardised all the paddle spindle sizes to the tapered square seen today, which is close to that originally fitted on the Oxford Canal. The Ham Baker and their own hydraulic paddle gear proved too expensive to alter, and so we ended up with the dual standard seen today.

When using a windlass, make sure that it fits well onto the spindle: do not use the large hole on the small tapered spindles. Ensure that the ratchet catch (or paddle pawl) is engaged, and keep a firm grip while winding the paddle. These precautions will help to stop the windlass slipping. Never leave a windlass on the spindle of a raised paddle; the catch might slip causing the paddle to drop, sending the windlass flying.

Some canals have extra-large paddles, or have no reduction gearing, making raising the paddles heavy work. Long-throw windlasses are available, which have a longer shaft than standard to give a mechanical advantage. These are easier to use but clearance can be a problem on gate paddles.

Windlasses are mostly made from steel, either cast or fabricated, so they tend to be quite heavy. Aluminium alloy is also used to make much lighter windlasses, often with a polished finish, but they are more expensive and not as strong. Another benefit of steel is that it can be retrieved from the water with the aid of a magnet if inadvertently dropped overboard, while an alloy one will be lost.



The majority of locks have one of two sizes of taper – the smaller and more common BCN, and the larger Grand Union style. Many windlasses will include two holes with both settings.

For more advice on choosing a windlass, see *WW*'s 'Which Windlass?' feature in the September 2018 issue.

Handcuff key (also known as a water conservation key or anti-vandal key)



A handcuff key will come in handy on the canals of Birmingham and the North.

Handcuff keys are essential for operating locks in many urban areas, especially Birmingham and the North, in addition to a standard windlass. They look a bit like radiator keys, but with a longer barrel, and are used to turn a square peg in a round hole to release the locking bar across the post of hydraulic paddles, or the snap bolt in manual paddles, on locks where vandalism has been a problem.

They're not to be confused with a CRT key (see 'Accessing Services'), which is also necessary to unlock some mechanisms on the waterways.

Handcuff keys are named for their deployment on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, where they're also used to unfasten chains securing swing-bridges, the 'shackles' of which resemble handcuffs. You'll need one on the Pocklington Canal as well to operate all the swing-bridges.

They're available, priced £5, from CRT's online shop (*canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/boating-services/the-shop*). Be wary of the cheaper ones found online and in some chandleries, which are often ill-made and not fit for purpose.



The Calder & Hebble handspike in action.

Wey windlass and Ouse key



An 'Ouse key' on one of the slackers at Ashline Lock. The spindle is vertical and fully enclosed in the white collar.

Other lock key variations can be found on the River Wey and the Middle Level Navigations. In the case of the former, you'll need what's known as a Wey windlass – longer and heavier than the normal windlass used on CRT canals – to give the lock spindles a bit more oomph. These can be bought or loaned from the Wey's navigation authority, the National Trust, at the first lock (Thames, No 16), Stoke Lock or the trust's navigation office at Dapdune Wharf in Guildford.

Meanwhile, boating the Middle Levels will necessitate what's confusingly named an 'Ouse key' (as well as the Middle Levels Yale key mentioned earlier) to access and operate Ashline Lock, which is unmanned. This is slightly bigger than a standard windlass, and operated horizontally. So far as the Ouse itself is concerned (St Ives and upstream), an ordinary canal windlass is fine. Ditto the Nene. Note, however, that paddles are called slackers in these parts.

The Ouse key can be bought at Stanground, where you enter the Middle Levels, at manned locks, marinas and at March Library for around £12.

SIMON JUDGE

Handspike

Just when you think you've got the hang of lock hardware, you discover the Calder & Hebble... This navigation is almost unique in requiring a special handspike to operate the paddle gear on some of its locks (a similar tool is used on the Driffield). The handspike is a length (usually 3ft) of 2in-by-4in timber shaped at one end to provide a comfortable two-handed grip. It slots into a capstan-style clough, which rotates to raise the ground paddle. It's a laborious process to repeatedly remove and reinsert the handspike to fully raise each paddle, added to which many mechanisms and gates on this navigation are frustratingly obstinate. Don't expect swift passage.

Handspikes can be bought at boatyards in the area for around £10, or you can make your own from a piece of hardwood. Look for one that's relatively knot free because knots in the wrong place will compromise strength. It will also need to be shaped correctly to fit the gear on the C&H. Using a DIY implement does come with a disclaimer: it could result in injury to the user, or a bystander, if it slips or breaks in use.



Ready to tackle the Calder & Hebble with a handspike and a windlass.

If forking out on a handspike seems an unnecessary expense to navigate a single canal, take comfort in the fact it can be put to other uses after – either to deter intruders or, as reported in a 2013 issue of *WW*, as a novel country dancing prop. The South Pennine Boat Club claimed to have made history that year when the world's first Handspike Dance was performed at the organisation's rally and open day on the Battyeford cut near Mirfield. The locking tool was used instead of a traditional two-handed sword.

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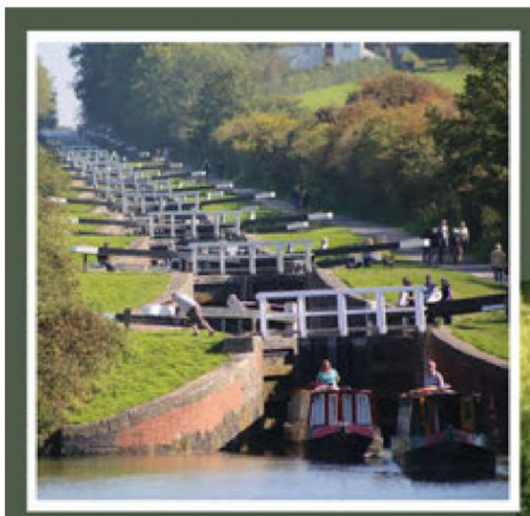


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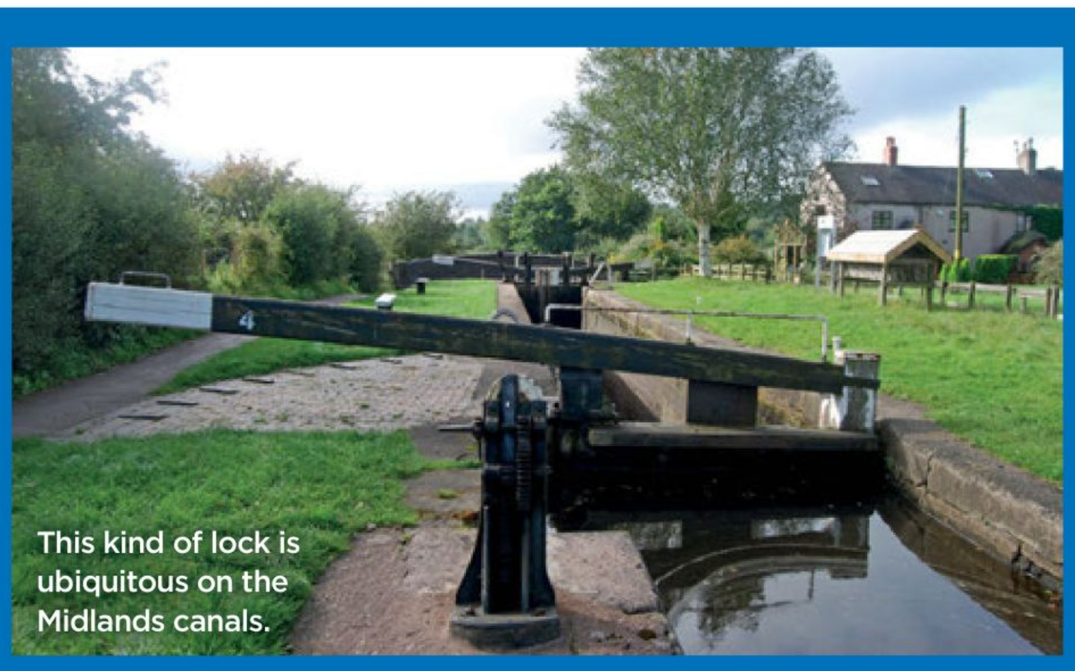


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LOCKS OF THE WATERWAYS

Andy Tidy examines the variety of lock designs around the network

The undulating nature of our country means that virtually all artificial navigations need to rise and fall with the landscape, sometimes over several hundred feet. The idea behind the use of movable water gates to create navigable pounds goes all the way back to the Romans, who used Greek know-how to build ancient canals between the Nile and the Red Sea. But it was Leonardo da Vinci who first devised and built the mitre-gated pound lock, which quickly became the standard way to move boats up and down. You could be forgiven for thinking that a lock is a lock, but within this seemingly simple design there is a surprising amount of customisation to be found on the British waterways.



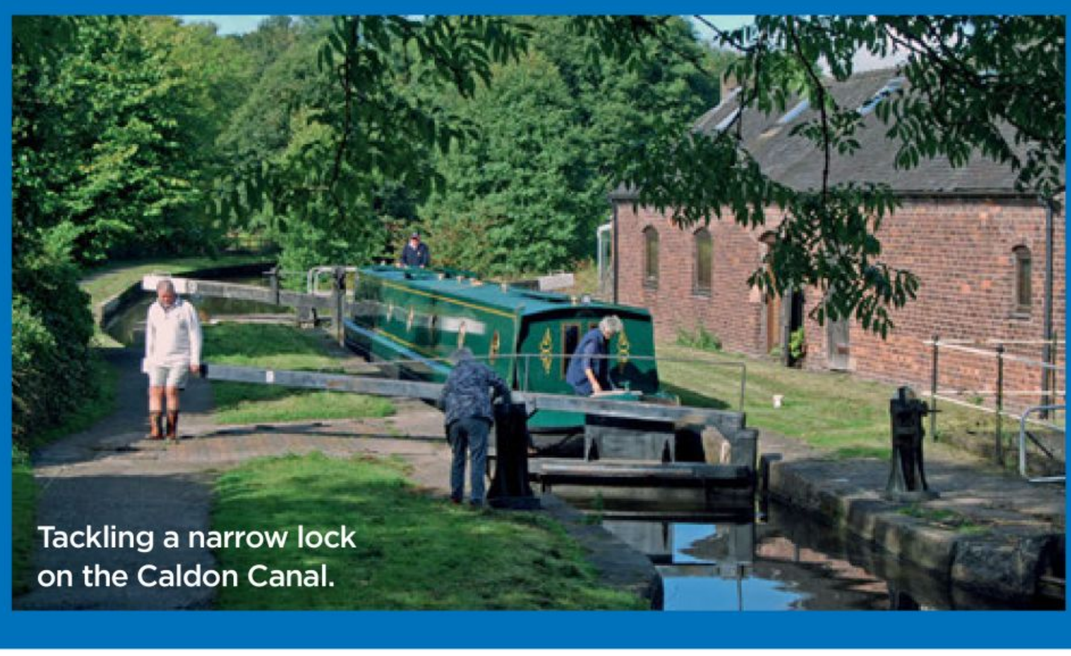
This kind of lock is ubiquitous on the Midlands canals.

Standard narrow lock

The first British locks created by James Brindley were designed for use in the comparatively water-short Midlands region and, as a result, he settled on small locks that were approximately 72ft long and 7ft wide, typically using about 25,000 gallons of water. This quickly became the standard size for the region and boats continue to be limited to these dimensions on many canals.

The depth of the locks varied enormously, with the deepest being the 13ft 10in Vinegar Lock, which forms part of the the Clayton Flight on the Ashton Canal. While it would be tempting to install a few very deep locks, this would have used a massive amount of water and the sideways pressure in the lock walls would probably have resulted in the narrowing of the chambers over time. A 12ft drop seems to have become the accepted maximum.

The smallest changes in height are the little stop locks found where canals join each other. At first glance the presence of locks with a fall of 3in or 4in appears pointless, but back when the canals were built the owners were jealous of their limited water supplies and often demanded that new adjoining canals were built a few inches higher to prevent water loss.



Tackling a narrow lock on the Caldon Canal.

Turf-sided lock

When money was in short supply some river navigation engineers looked for ways to build locks on the cheap. One way of doing this was to construct top and bottom gates, but for the section in between they would leave sloping grass banks, with vertical poles to keep boats in the central, deep water section of the channel.

The last two surviving turf-sided locks are Garston Lock and Monkey Marsh Lock on the Kennet & Avon Canal.

This arrangement was prone to erosion and, of course, tended to use a lot of unnecessary water, a combination the canal builders tried to avoid wherever possible.



Monkey Marsh Lock on the Kennet & Avon.



Beeston Iron Lock on the Shropshire Union.

Steel and iron locks

Steel locks have, on occasion, been used as an alternative way of overcoming problems with unstable ground. Thurlwood Steel Lock on the Trent & Mersey Canal was an all-steel, above-ground structure, designed to combat subsidence caused by nearby brine extraction. It proved short-lived because it was paired with a traditional lock and was slower to operate.

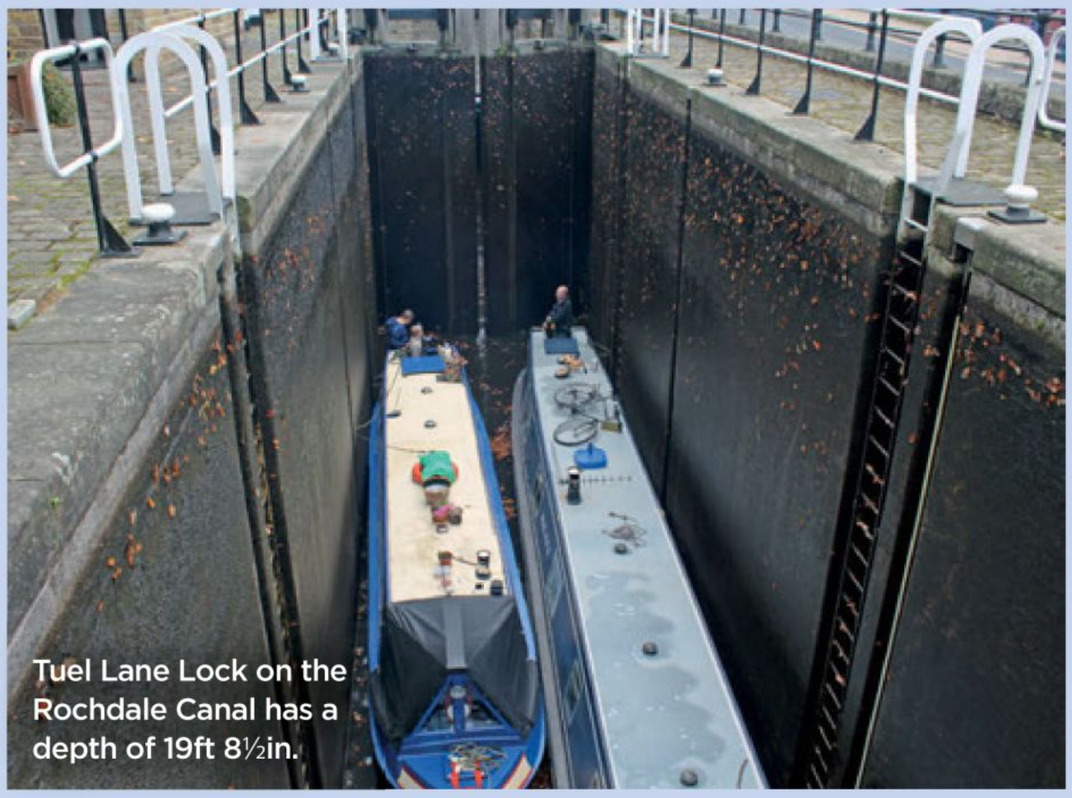
Other examples are Beeston Iron Lock, which has been combating unstable ground since 1828, and the more modern Colin P. Witter Lock on the River Avon at Stratford, which uses a steel exoskeleton to keep its sides apart.



Thurlwood Steel Lock was demolished in 1988.



Greenberfield Locks on the Leeds & Liverpool are 63ft 6in long.



Tuel Lane Lock on the Rochdale Canal has a depth of 19ft 8½in.

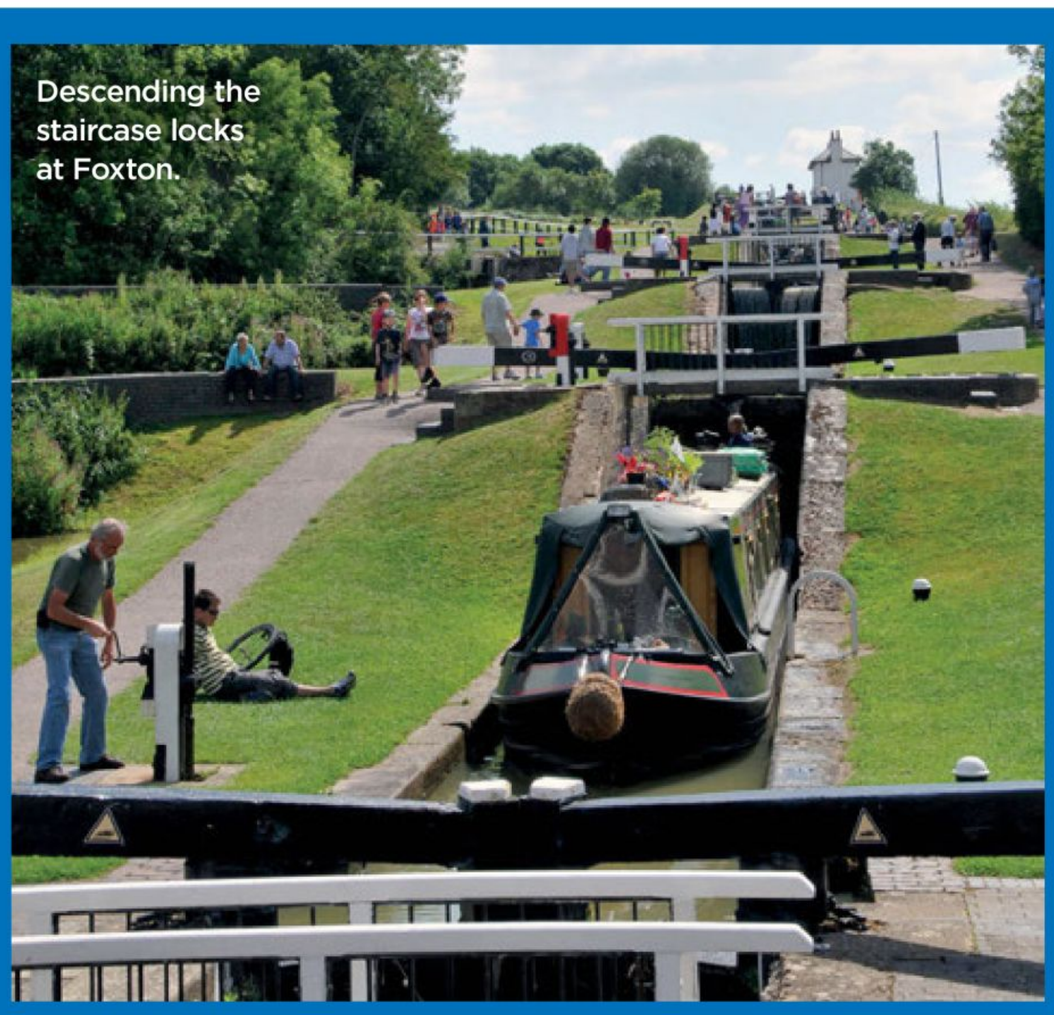
Broad and short

A broad lock is, by definition, anything that is more than 7ft wide, but the description is generally applied to locks of 14ft or more, which are wide enough to allow a pair of standard 7ft-wide working boats to pass through side by side.

That said, because the canals were all developed independently to serve their local markets, the maximum dimensions applied to the locks vary.

The type of design that continues to represent a significant limitation to modern boats is the shortened lengths used on some of the northern canals. These waterways were designed to accept the established river craft from both sides of the Pennines and, consequently, the locks on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal above Wigan are only 60ft long, and those on the nearby Calder & Hebble Navigation and the Huddersfield Broad Canal are 57ft 6in and 56ft 9in respectively. This historical anomaly limits the areas that narrowboats of a 60ft length or more can travel.

In terms of maximum depth, there are currently six broad locks with a drop of over 12ft, but all have been built to replace two old locks or overcome issues with subsidence. This list is topped by the Tuel Lane Lock on the Rochdale Canal, which uses a state-of-the-art concrete lock chamber to overcome the sideways pressure as it descends an impressive 19ft 8½in.



Descending the staircase locks at Foxton.

Staircase lock

Where the gradient becomes too steep for a traditional flight of locks linked by pounds, a chain of linked locks was sometimes built, with the bottom gates of one lock also being the top gates of the next.

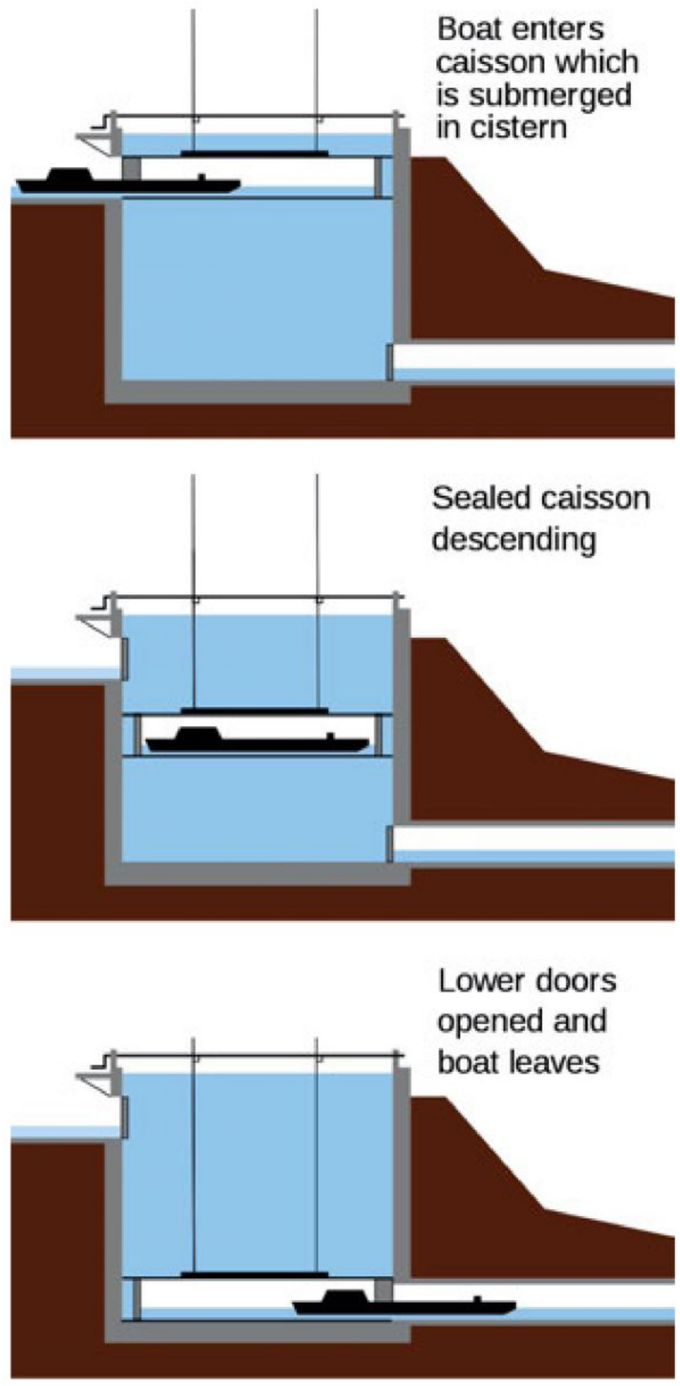
The Bingley Five Rise is probably the best-known staircase flight, but the limitations they place on boats passing meant that delays were possible, wasting both time and water.

Staircase locks offer a great spectacle of several boats going up and down a hill at the same time. Consequently, they tend to attract gongoozlers, and you can always be guaranteed an audience at Bingley or Foxton.

Submarine lock

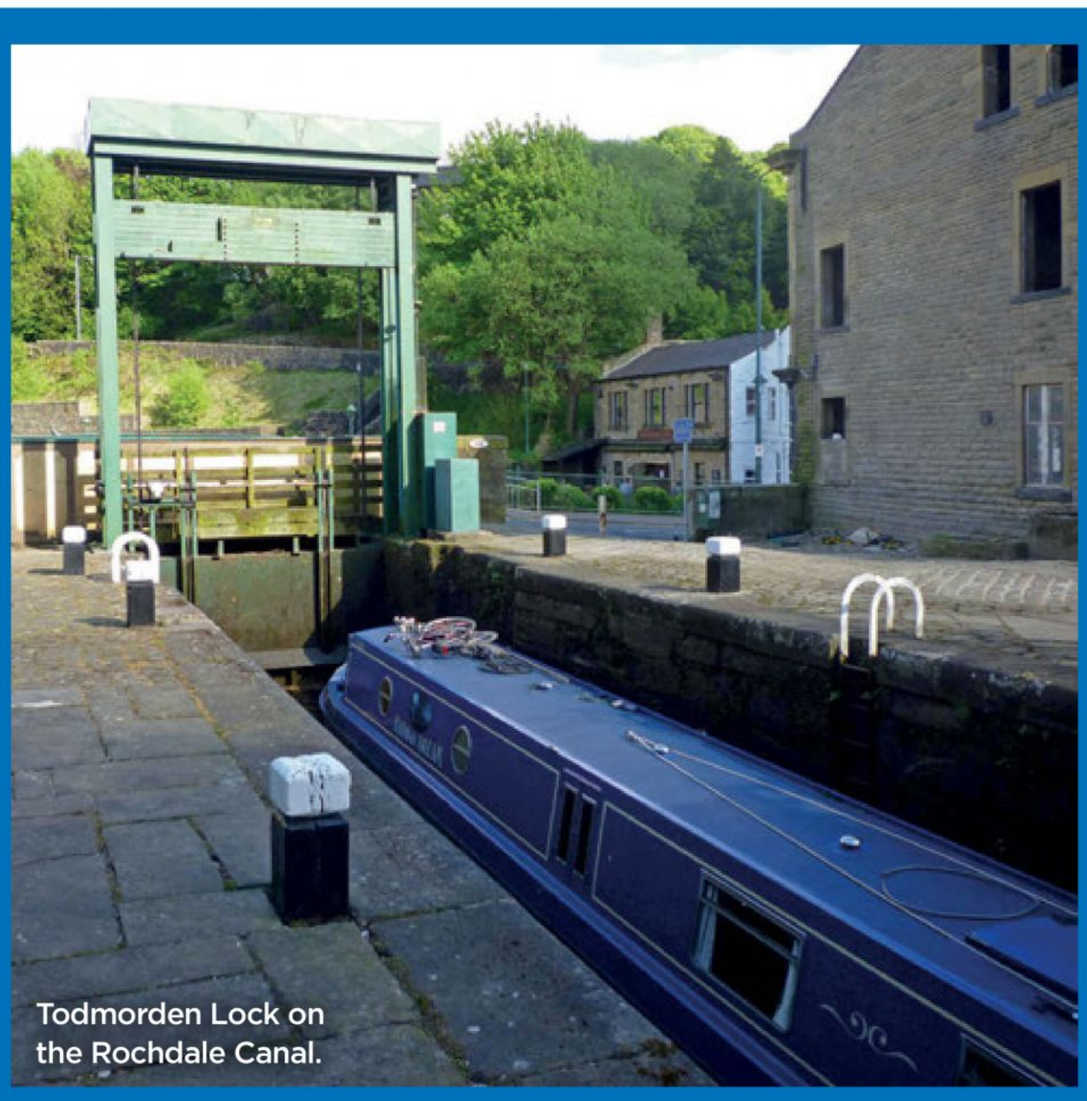
There are times you have to include the weird and wacky. The Somerset Coal Canal was in a hurry to reach a coalfield at Paulton when its builders decided to try an innovative lock design. Had it been effective it would have reduced their need for 22 conventional locks to just three of Robert Weldon's experimental 'Hydrostatick' locks.

The design was for a caisson lock, which was essentially a wooden tube into which a boat was floated and the ends sealed. The container was then sunk like a submarine, sealed at the bottom and a door opened to release the boat. Sounds like a health-and-safety nightmare? It was. The immense pressures distorted the masonry and the caisson stuck underwater on its official launch, nearly drowning the committee who went along for the ride. You won't be surprised to learn that the plan was soon abandoned and a flight of conventional locks was built instead.





Denford Lock on the River Nene.



Todmorden Lock on the Rochdale Canal.

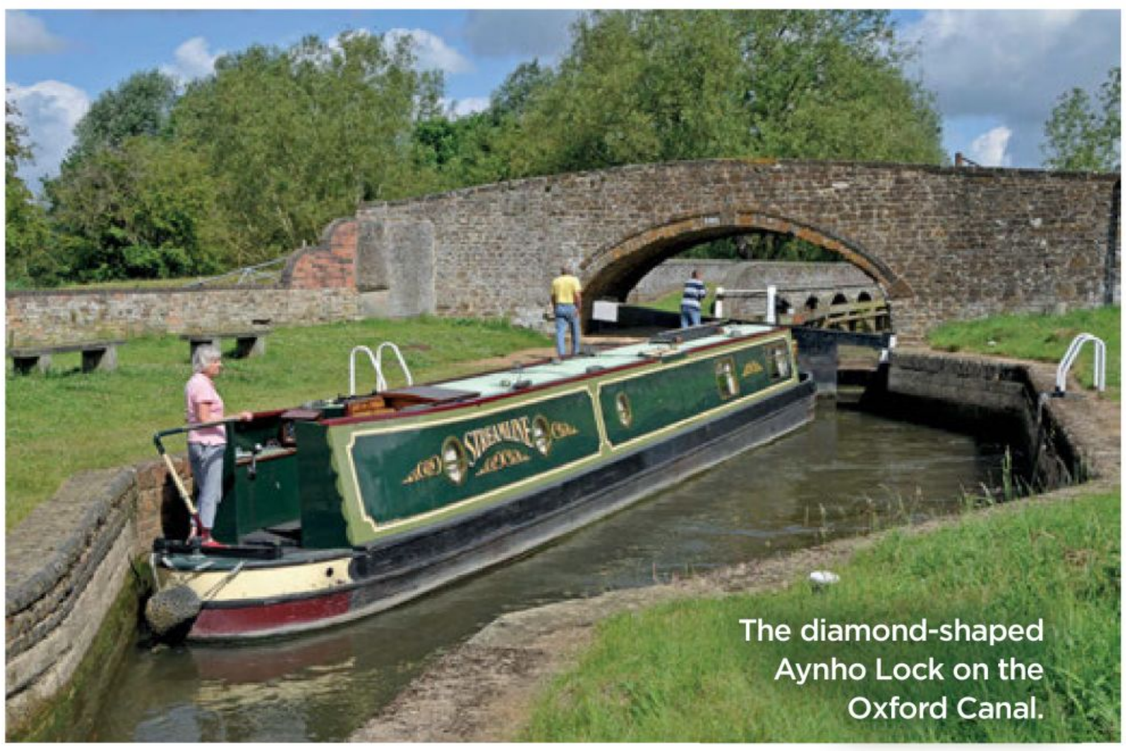


Hotel-boats in the chamber of a guillotine lock on the River Nene.

Guillotine lock

While most lock gates are either flat or mitred and hinged at the sides, there are a few which use a guillotine mechanism, hoisting the gate bodily into the air and letting the boat pass underneath. These are most commonly found on river navigations like the Nene where they help to manage the release of flood water. However, the design is also used where there is insufficient space to install more traditional gates with their extended balance beams, such as Todmorden Lock on the Rochdale Canal.

These gates are universally unpopular with boaters because the heavy steel structure has to be winched all the way up and down. This can be a long, slow process, particularly if it has to be completed without electrical assistance.



The diamond-shaped Aynho Lock on the Oxford Canal.

Diamond or circular locks

From time to time you encounter oddly shaped locks, and one example of this can be found at Aynho on the south Oxford Canal. These locks exist for one of two reasons: 1. Because the drop is small and additional water is needed to feed a deeper lock downstream. 2. Because the surrounding ground is unstable and a normal flat-sided lock could be structurally compromised.

Segmented large locks

The construction of ultra-large locks became necessary on the Aire & Calder Navigation, where long trains of Tom Pudding compartment boats were chained together and moved from coal mines to power stations. It was impractical to use standard-sized locks repeatedly, so huge chambers were built, such as the one at Pollington, which are so long you almost need a bike to get from one end to another. Clearly the use of such a massive lock for one small boat would be a huge waste of water, so intermediate gates were installed, effectively shortening the lock. Today these extended locks are only lightly used.



Pollington Lock on the Aire & Calder Navigation.

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RESTORATION WALK

HATHERTON HOPES

Andrew Denny takes a walk on a vital but currently overlooked part of the Birmingham canal restorations

Planning your walk

ESSENTIALS

Distance: 4 miles

Terrain: Level (apart from some optional scrambles) but walking boots are advised.

Starting point: Dog & Partridge pub, Queen's Road, Calf Heath WV10 7DW

Ending: Hatherton Reservoir, Coppice Lane WS11 0LW

By car: Easy to find, easy to park, the Dog & Partridge is halfway down 'Straight Mile', nesting underneath the M6. To see Hatherton Junction, park at the other end of Queen's Road, although be sensitive to local residents.

Public transport: Not easy on this route. You could get a taxi from Cannock train station, or walk from the massive shopping centre at Churchbridge.

FOOD & DRINK

Dog & Partridge, Calf Heath
A homely, dog-friendly pub that has an enviable reputation for (traditional British) food – a great starting point for your Hatherton hike.

The Fingerpost, Pelsall
A popular canalside pub near Fishley Junction at the southern end of the Cannock Extension Arm, that's known for well-kept ales and conventional pub grub.

MORE INFORMATION
The Lichfield & Hatherton Canal Trust, *lhcrt.org.uk*, email: *members@lhcrt.org.uk*

Historical context

The Hatherton Canal was a latecomer to the canal age. A venture of the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal Company – itself already 70 years old when construction began – it opened in 1841 to capitalise on the insatiable demand for coal from the Cannock area. It was one of the last narrow canals but it made up for it by being one of the most profitable too.

Just a glance at the BCN map shows how significant its location was, allowing 'black gold' to reach markets outside the Black Country far more quickly. And it lasted over 100 years, not closing until 1949 after its operation was severely hampered by mining subsidence.

In the modern leisure age its location is still significant, having the potential to draw boaters to the woefully under-navigated northern BCN.

The Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust was formed in 1989 and the title of its magazine, *Cut Both Ways*, highlights how both the Hatherton and the Lichfield canals are needed to bring the northern BCN back to life.

But, after a flurry of activity in the early years of restoration, the Hatherton section seems to have gone quiet as the trust has focused on the eastern, Lichfield project.



TOP RIGHT: The start of the Hatherton Branch Canal at Calf Heath.

BELOW LEFT: The Dog & Partridge pub. **BELOW:** Oak Lane Bridge (aka Scrawbers Bridge) is one of two that have been lowered but not flattened. **RIGHT:** The canal is a feeder to both Gailey Reservoir (on the right) and the main line of the Staffordshire & Worcestershire at Hatherton Junction (straight ahead).

THE WALK

1. The Dog & Partridge

From its junction with the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal at Calf Heath, the first 600 yards of the Hatherton are still in water and partly navigable, but cannot be reached on foot. The best place to start is the Dog & Partridge pub on Straight Mile Road. This is the point where the canal was infilled in the 1960s, after the building of the M6, which severed it and put paid to early ambitions of restoration.

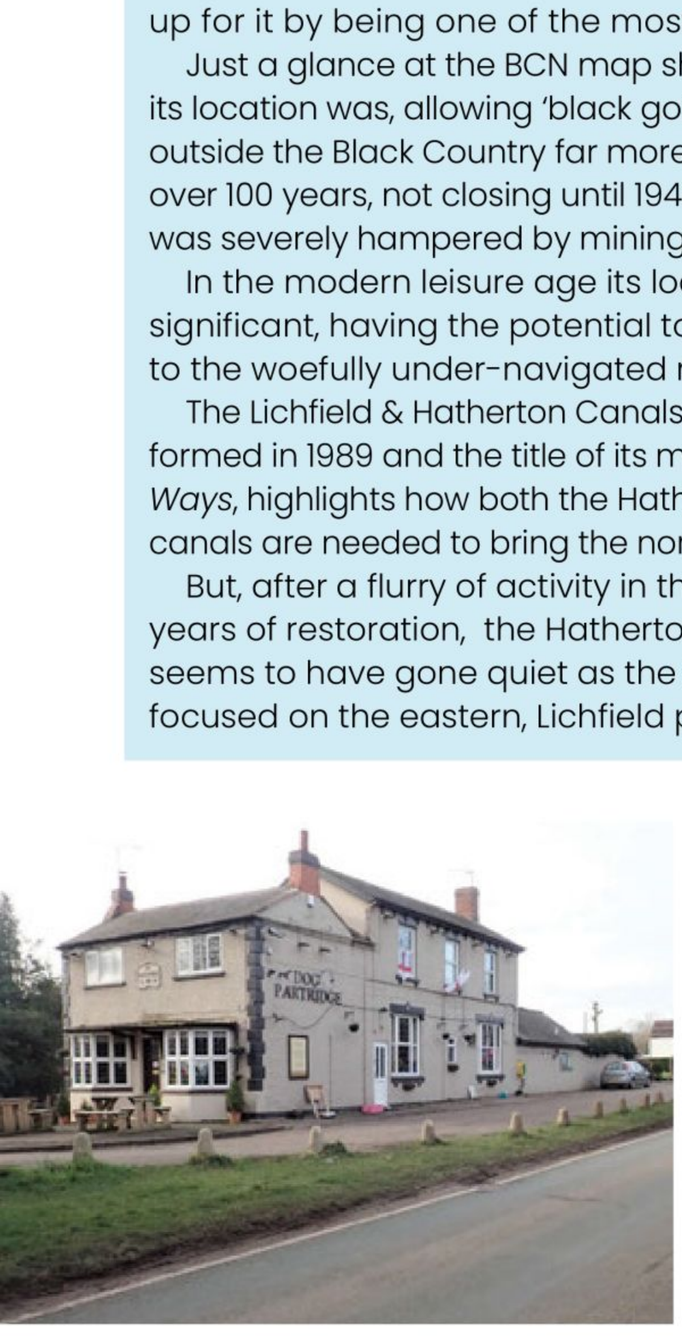
The Dog & Partridge dates back to at least Victorian times, although it was possibly not a boatman's watering hole, since it stood at one remove from the canal.

From the pub, walk east under the motorway bridge and turn immediately left down the footpath to find the old canal once again in water. Looking back at the huge M6 embankment, you can see the first daunting task of the restorers will be to tunnel under the road.

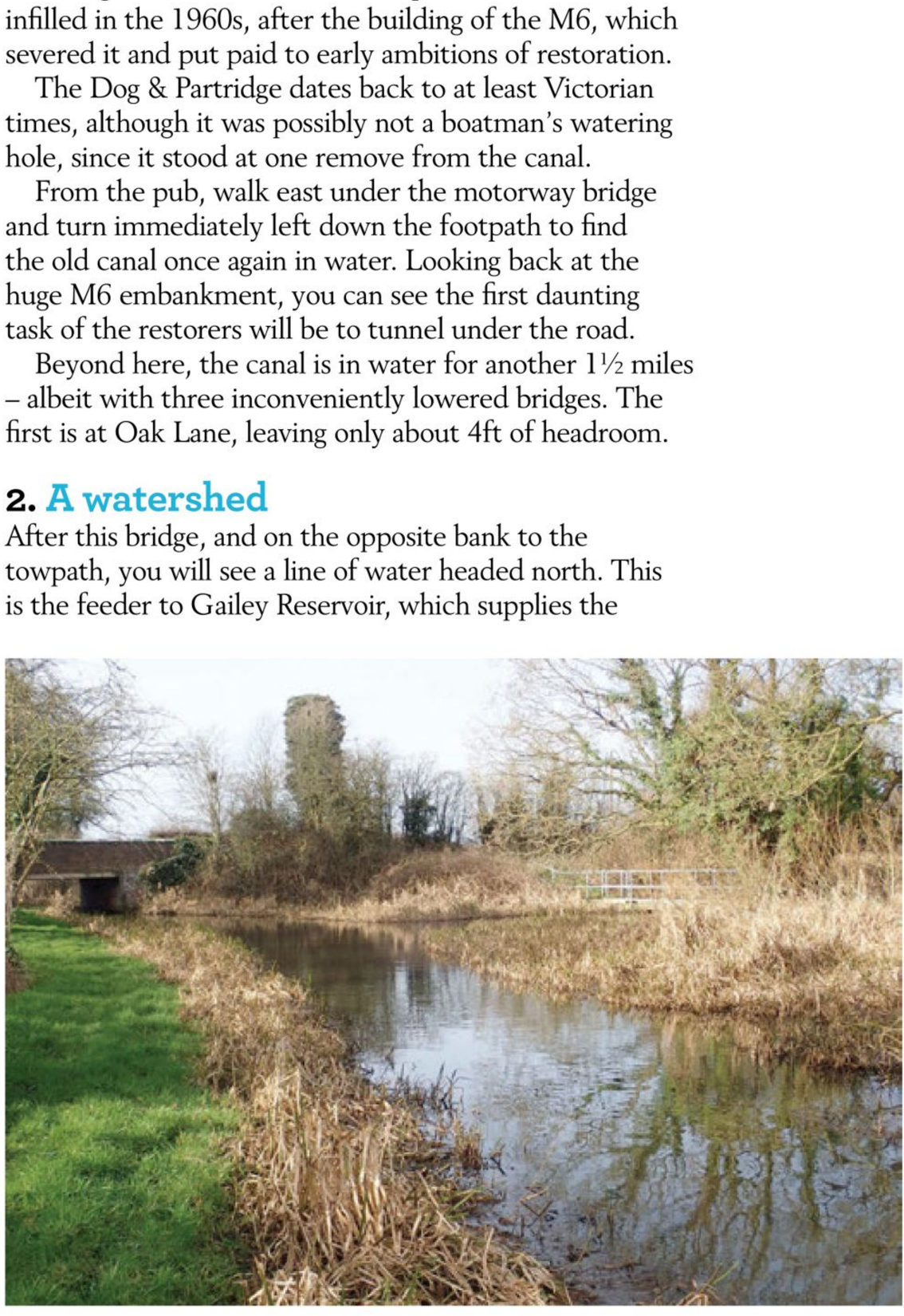
Beyond here, the canal is in water for another 1½ miles – albeit with three inconveniently lowered bridges. The first is at Oak Lane, leaving only about 4ft of headroom.

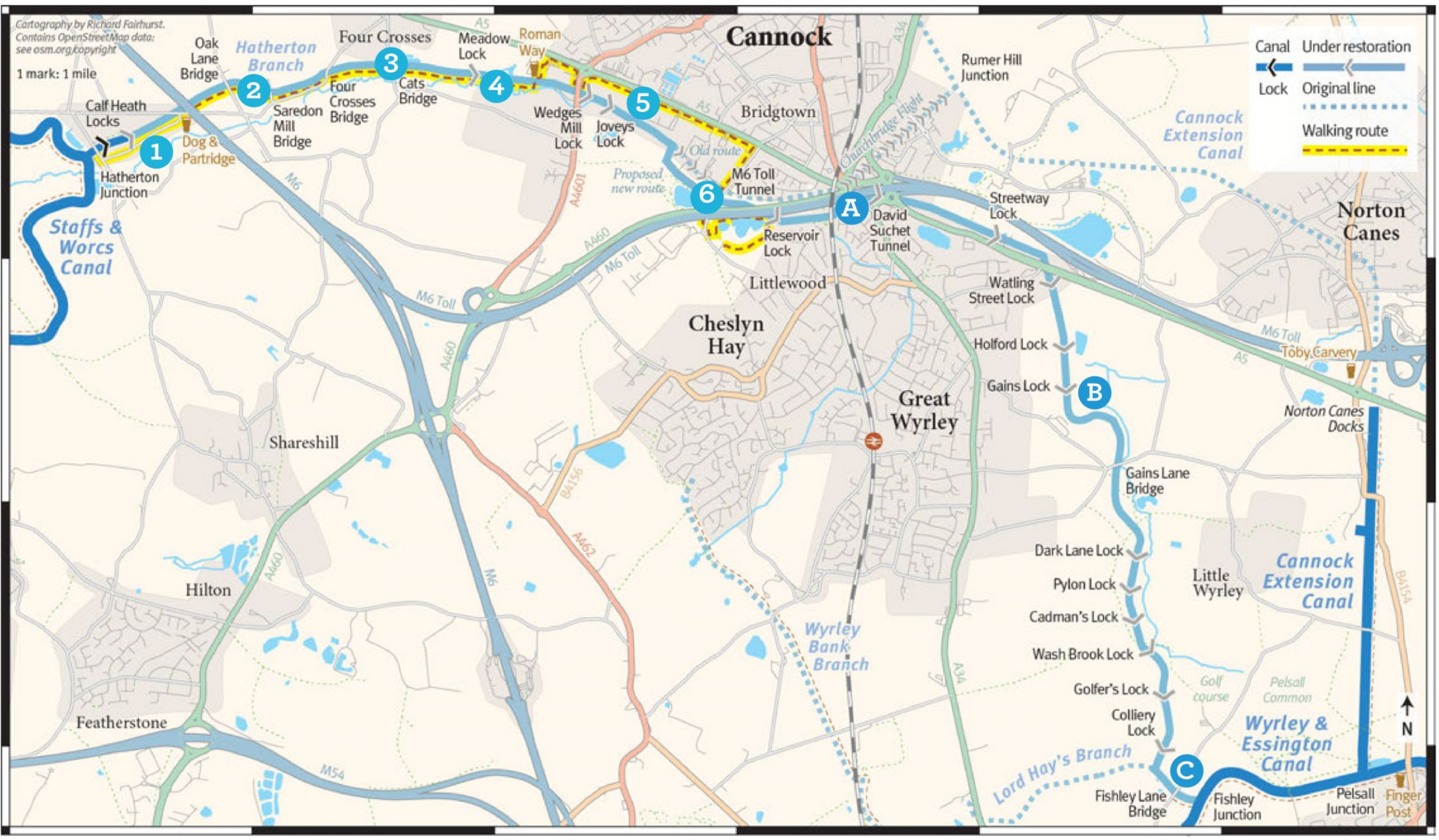
2. A watershed

After this bridge, and on the opposite bank to the towpath, you will see a line of water headed north. This is the feeder to Gailey Reservoir, which supplies the

















FAR LEFT: Saredon Mill Bridge is one of only two original bridges remaining.
ABOVE CENTRE: The sheep farm near Cats Bridge.
ABOVE: In a novel but confusing sign, the flattened Cats Bridge points the way to Oak Lane.

LEFT: The channel near Roman Way Bridge. LHCRT cuts back vegetation yearly, but does not dredge the channel.

northern Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal. This is one of England's watersheds; some of this water will end up flowing north into the Trent; the rest, headed to Hatherton Junction, will mostly run south to the Severn.

Saredon Mill Bridge, a fine canal accommodation bridge, follows 300 yards later. Beautifully restored by LHCRT, it's one of only two remaining original crossings on the canal.

Next is Four Crosses Bridge, another modern lowered road-bridge, with its sharp skew currently nursing damage from a vehicle strike.

3. Sheep farm

The next quarter-mile borders a sheep farm. Here you will find the towpath surprisingly wide and well kept. The day I walked it, I encountered the farmer who told me that when LHCRT members visited, they claimed that the towpath had always been 6m wide. "No, no, no," he said, "it was 6 *feet*!" After further research, the farmer was able to prove he was correct. Nevertheless, he gamely ceded the extra 12ft until the canal could be restored and even (so he said) erected the fence himself, pointing out that he didn't use barbed wire.

This length of canal, while undredged, continues to be







TOP LEFT: Saredon Brook where it feeds into the Hatherton Canal. **ABOVE:** Roman Way Bridge with its distinctive turnover ramp. **LEFT:** The Wyrley Brook through the M6 Toll tunnel will eventually become a navigable channel.

cut back every autumn by LHCRT volunteers, and the towpath is in good condition. It ends at the third obstacle to restoration, which was (before its demolition) Cats Bridge.

4. Coal country

Beyond here, obscured by vegetation, is what appears to be a wide section of the canal. You might think it an old canal basin but it's said to be mining subsidence. Mines threaded the landscape here, and were responsible for both the canal's creation and, largely, its undoing.

Soon you arrive at another lock, Meadow Lock, the first since the two at the junction. It has also suffered subsidence but is in good condition and should be easy to restore. Below it, Saredon Brook feeds the canal, being its primary source of water.

Another 400 yards take you to Roman Way Bridge, the only other original bridge, and also restored by LHCRT.

5. Detour

Here, we part company with the original route. The old line is now lost, submerged under assorted industrial estates for the next mile. The restoration will skirt these, instead joining Saredon Brook – and then Wyrley Brook – in a couple of sweeps southwards over the next mile.

In the meantime, we will take a detour north. Walk over Roman Way Bridge, up the path past Roman Way Hotel and turn right at Watling Street (the A5 main road). Walk to the roundabout and turn right, down the A4601 (Wolverhampton Road) for a quarter mile, to meet the chuckling Saredon Brook again. Here is where the canal would pass under the road, sharing the path of the brook.

Turn back (this was the only reason to come down here, so you can omit it if you like), return to Watling Street and follow it a further three-quarters of a mile, past the B&Q store, turning right at Walkmill Lane. A quarter-mile down, turn left into the car park of the industrial estate of Walkmill Way. Through the line of trees you might see Saredon Brook again, the future route of the canal diversion. The water will be tamed by locks and weirs.

6. Tunnels and reservoirs

At the end you'll see the mouth of the first tunnel, the one that goes under the M6 Toll. But retrace your steps back to Walkmill Way and continue on the bridge over the motorway. Head left at the roundabout, and then follow the path on the left into the park that surrounds Hatherton Reservoir.

After the canal closed, this reservoir, built to feed the whole branch, was disused for many years and was in danger of drying up. In a way, the M6 Toll was its saving, since the motorway builders expended considerable effort in turning it into a nature reserve that is now run by the Woodland Trust.

Walk clockwise around the reservoir. Towards the far end, on your left, you can see the other portal of the tunnel, and the brook (one day, hopefully, this will be the restored canal) snaking off around the reservoir and disappearing into the bushes, on its hoped-for route to the Wyrley & Essington Canal.

Complete your circuit of the reservoir and find the car park where you can arrange a rendezvous or pick up your car.

Spot visiting

Although we have ended our walk roughly halfway along the Hatherton Canal route, it's worth 'spot-visiting' the following points, either by bicycle or car, to get a full understanding of the challenges facing the restorers.

A. The David Suchet Tunnel
Lock Basin Close, Great Wyrley WS11 8JY.
When the M6 Toll Road got the go-ahead, a massive interchange of the A34 and A5 over the motorway at this point threatened to kill the restoration.

David Suchet lent his considerable profile to the protest against this, and, on appeal, the planning authorities agreed to make allowance for a tunnel to house the canal. It was duly built and named in honour of the actor. It can be seen by those intrepid and nimble enough to scramble through the undergrowth (though this could constitute trespassing, so we are not recommending doing so).

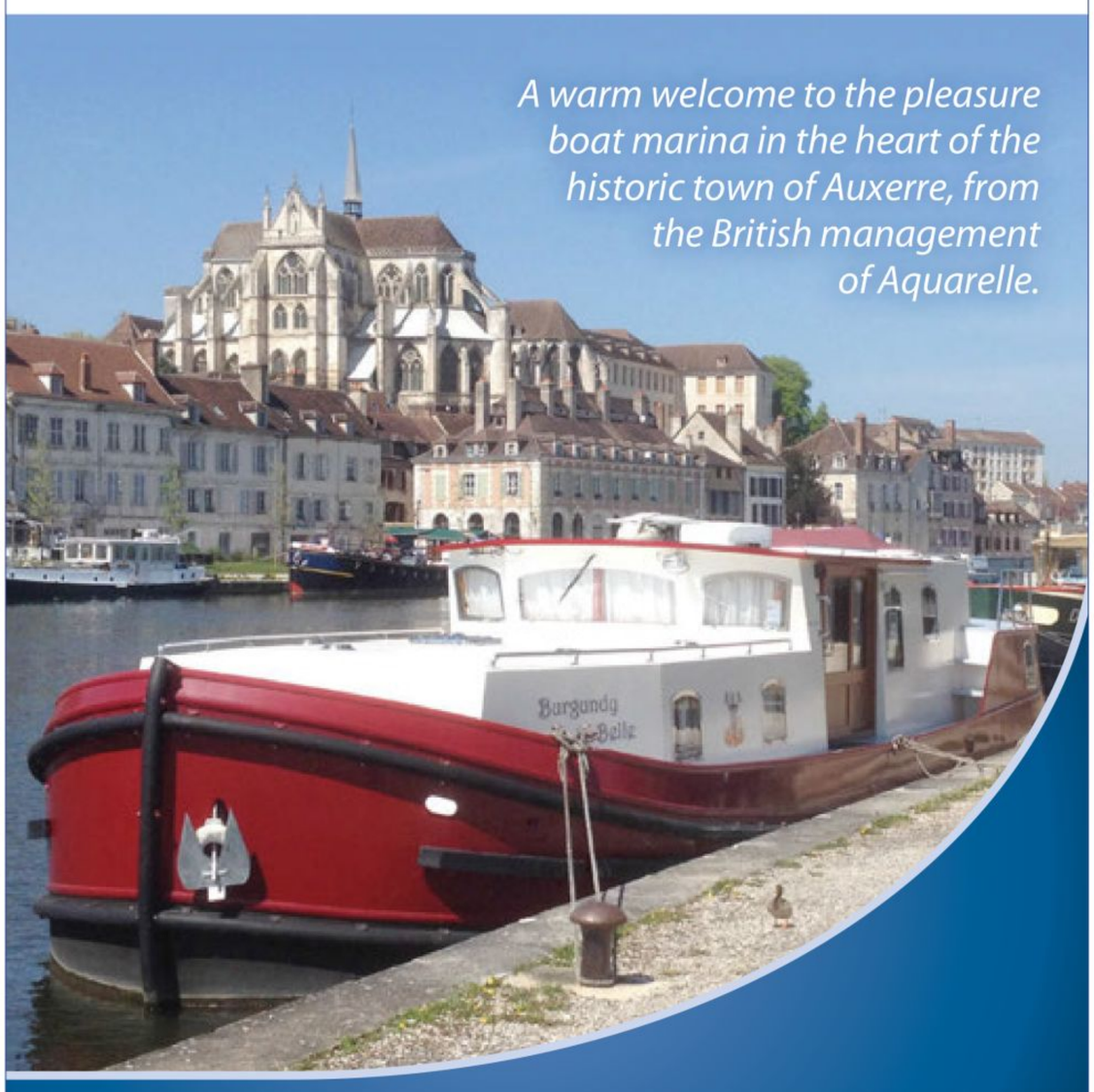
The tunnel is a remarkable structure, some 130 yards long and fully broad on what was a narrow canal. But until the restoration is completed, it will remain largely hidden and only seen from the water level. The name of the nearest road, Lock Basin Close, hints at the use that might be made of the scrubland nearby.

B. Remainder of the route
Great Wyrley WS6 6AB.
From here on the proposed route is completely new and runs over mostly empty farmland. It would rise over ten locks and 75ft to reach the Wyrley & Essington Canal at Fishley Junction. One of the few points easy to reach on its length is the junction of Gains Lane and Jones Lane near Great Wyrley. A new bridge would be built here, but there isn't much to see.

C. Fishley Junction, Wyrley & Essington Canal
Fishley Lane Bridge WS3 5AE.
The proposed route would link up with one end of the largely vanished Lord Hay's Branch of the BCN, at Fishley Lane Bridge. This structure remains, and it's just a short walk from here to the almost vanished Fishley Lane Junction of the Wyrley & Essington Canal, where a roving bridge still stands. As recently as a decade or two ago, this short remaining length of the Lord Hay's Arm was being infilled by British Waterways with dredgings taken from other sections of the Wyrley & Essington; it will, of course, need to be removed all over again.

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BOLD AS BRASS

Graham Booth provides an insight into traditional canal-boat ornamentation

Working boat families may have been fairly far down the socioeconomic scale but they were keen to show the world, and particularly other boaters, that the possessions they did have were kept in spotless condition. And what better way to demonstrate this than to have plenty of brass that could be polished to a dazzling shine?

Where did it come from?

Many of the brass items that are found on a traditional working boat started their lives in quite different locations and had quite different uses.

In the days of horse-boating, boatmen decorated the harnesses of their animals with some of the items normally seen on a heavy work horse. When steam, and then diesel engines, took the place of horses, these items were taken off the harness and used to decorate the inside and outside of the boat. Other items originally saw the light of day in some equally unexpected places.

Terrets, also known as swingers, were positioned on the collar of the horse where they formed the top knot to the harness. There are two basic types: one with bells suspended from arms, and the other with flat, geometric designs, also suspended so they could swing as the horse moved. It is said that some of the boatmen removed the clappers from the bells if they upset the horse.

The terret could have a small brass finial at the top or, for greater effect, a plume made of horsehair. Traditional working boats used terrets to decorate the pigeon box over the engine room.

Face pieces are often referred to as horse brasses and they can depict subjects as varied as signs of the zodiac, characters in Dickens' stories, famous battles and royal jubilees. They have an integral loop at the top so that four or five can be threaded onto a leather martingale or breast-strap.

Rosettes are about 2¼in in diameter with a raised centre and a metal loop at the back. More elaborate versions have a ceramic centre that can be plain coloured, or have red, white and blue concentric circles. They were originally used to embellish the ear pieces of the harness but, on a narrowboat, they are fixed to the chimney at the top of the chain.

Chimney chains are used to stop the cabin chimney being lost over the side if it strikes a bridge or low branch. Some of the most coveted were made by linking eight or ten gas mask bag clips to form a substantial chain. These clips were used in both world wars to attach the shoulder strap to the canvas gas mask bag. There must have been thousands of these in army surplus stores after the wars and it wasn't long before someone realised that they were a cheap way of acquiring a strong and decorative chain.

Oil lamps in back cabins had to be able to light the whole interior at night, yet be tucked out of the way during the daytime. The solution was to mount it on a pivoting bracket fixed to the corner of the drop-down table cupboard. Most were made up from the font (oil vessel) from a table lamp



After horses were replaced by steam and diesel engines, the harness decoration was moved onto the boats.





Above: **A chimney chain made from gas mask clips with a rosette.**
Below: **This Veritas hand-held oil lamp can also be hung from a hook or nail.**



A three-bell terret with a horsehair plume.



An unusual martingale with three face pieces.



Bed knobs come in different shapes and sizes.

"A good way to tell an original face piece is to turn it over and look for smooth areas where it has rubbed against the martingale over the years"

fixed to a candle sconce.

Hand-held lamps from the 1920s and '30s are more common and very useful in a power cut. They consist of a font with a burner and chimney on top. The side handle often has a keyhole-shaped slot in it so that it can be hung from a hook or a nail. Veritas was a popular make and there is a date number on the base – for example, 36 for 1936.

Bed knobs are fixed down the port side of the rear door frame where they catch the light from the oil lamp. The commonest shape was spherical, sometimes with a Saturn's ring, but they can also be oval or pine-cone shaped. They are generally fixed in groups of four or five and can be all the same size, or a graduated set of similarly shaped knobs.

Collecting brassware

Genuine pieces of harness decoration are not too hard to find but there are a lot of modern versions about. The basic giveaway is that they don't usually polish up to the same deep lustre. Modern three-bell terrets are also wider than the originals. A good way to tell an original face piece is to turn it over and look for smooth areas where it has rubbed against the martingale over the years. Likewise, old rosettes usually show some signs of wear.

Gas mask chimney chains are in great demand among traditional boaters, so you may have to be patient and try to build one up link by link. Some very accurate copies have been made, the only real difference being the quality of the brass. However, if you keep polishing it, it will look almost as good in a few decades.

Bed knobs are still used to renovate Victorian bedsteads so demand, particularly for sets of four in near perfect condition, is quite high. This isn't such a problem if you opt for a graduated set and don't mind the odd characterful dent. Modern copies are fairly easy to detect because they are often in pristine condition, and usually cast rather than pressed or spun.



Brass was often part of a boat's interior decoration.

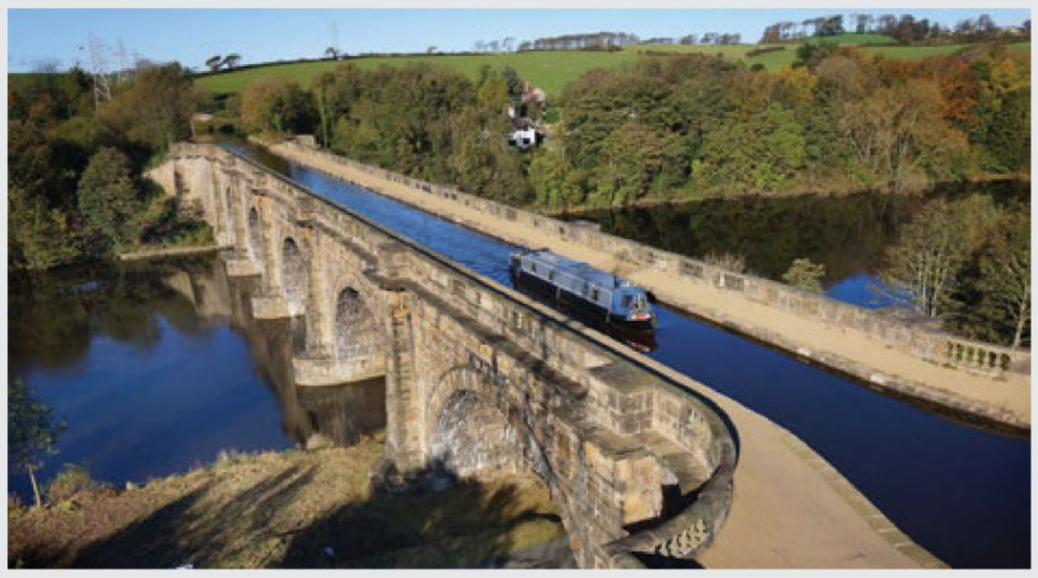
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Diesel bug clean-up

My narrowboat has fallen foul to the dreaded diesel bug. I have used a recommended additive to kill it but this has left a varnish-like residue on the bottom of the tank. Given that the only access is via the filter, how do I remove this residue and clean the system?
Barry Dallas


Diesel bug debris.

Specialist tank cleaning companies can come to your boat and slurp out the contents, steam clean the tank, polish the fuel and return it to the clean tank. This is something they are geared to do for boatyard diesel storage tanks anyway. It's fairly quick, but it can be pricey as a service for individual boaters, and many good boatyards will offer a smaller-scale version.

A DIY alternative would be to drain the tank and use a domestic steam cleaner to remove the gunk, ideally via the bottom drain. If there is no bottom drain, once the tank is emptied this would be a good chance to fit one. It will allow water to be easily and regularly removed as well (since water needs to be present for diesel bug to develop).

In the longer term consider an additional primary filter such as Fuelguard. This extracts any debris from the diesel bug and water, with the water and debris collecting in a clear bowl that can be emptied.
Mark Langley

12V or mains?

I'm buying a used narrowboat. Our last boat had both 12V and 230V electrical systems. Most of the boats I'm now looking at (especially the smaller ones) are 12V only. Are there any disadvantages to 12V only?
Paul Taylor

Twelve-volt (or even better 24V) extra-low voltage (ELV) systems make for simpler boating generally – especially charging systems. However, it is fairly easy for a qualified marine electrician to add a proper 230V system, to connect to a shore supply (or portable generator) for the times when you might need the higher voltage.

You can add inverters to get 230V from 12V batteries, but these are power-hungry devices if used a lot. Small inverters (up to 80W) can often be plugged into a suitable 12V/24V socket, providing the cabling on the ELV side is up to it. But larger inverters need dedicated wiring and more complicated integration into a 230V system.

With 230V appliances the power consumption is usually higher than equivalent 12V/24V units, since the inverters themselves have a quiescent current – the extra power drawn when in standby mode. Thus it's generally more sensible to stick with dedicated (and properly installed) low-voltage appliances.
Mark Langley

Why is my engine losing water?

After running my boat's BMC 1.5 engine up to temperature, the water level in the Bowman cooler needs topping up every time (about a litre). I then see water mixed with a little oil in the engine bilge.
John Norris



It sounds as though the head gasket has failed. This allows combustion gases to escape into the cylinder head/block joint and thus into the cooling water. The bubbles of gas pressurise the cooling water, which then gets expelled from the vent; together with any oil that has also escaped because the head gasket is no longer doing its job.

The good news is that removing the cylinder head and replacing the gasket is a reasonably straightforward task on your engine, which can be done with the unit still in the boat.
Rupert Smedley


A gas-powered incinerator toilet.

Running costs of incinerator toilets

What are the comparative running costs of gas and electric incinerator toilets? The spec sheet of one says the gas version gives about 120 'flushes' per 13kg bottle, but the electric version requires 2kWh – a 230V supply fused at 10A.

I am planning on continuously cruising with a domestic battery bank of five 100AH Relion lithium-ion batteries, a 1,250W solar array and a 5kW inverter.
John Towse

Incinerator toilets heat the contents to a high-enough temperature that all liquid is evaporated and only a small amount of ash remains after each 'flush'. Since the amount of waste to be incinerated will vary, so does the power consumption.

The LPG version consumes a maximum of 180gm of gas per 'flush'; at this rate, a 13kg cylinder would provide around 72 flushes.

The electric type is specified at 2kW

(about the same as an electric kettle) and an incineration will consume between 0.8 and 2kWh, which implies that each flush will take at least 20 minutes. This equates to between 67Ah and 167Ah per flush for a 12V system (34Ah to 84Ah for 24V).

Assuming two people each used the toilet six times a day, this gives a daily consumption rate of between 800Ah to 2,000Ah. Your 12V lithium battery bank will have a useable capacity of only around 400Ah, so the short answer is no. The energy consumption of incinerator toilets is really quite prodigious and only worth considering when shore power is available.

Rupert Smedley



If isolators are off, will solar panels still charge?

If I turn off my battery isolator switches so that there's no current drain, will my solar panels still charge the batteries anyway?

Mike Baldwin

It depends how the solar panels have been wired in.

The usual method is to connect the solar panels, or the output from the regulator, directly to the battery. This bypasses the battery isolator and so must have a separate fuse close to the battery to meet the BSS requirements.

The only way to check that your panels have been wired correctly is to follow the wiring. If your panels have been wired into the fuse board, the batteries will not be charged with the isolators off.

Rupert Smedley

Healthier hose?

When we fill up our boat's water tank, it's difficult to avoid the first 10ft or so of hose looping into the canal. That cannot be an unusual situation. Is there a health risk? Should we be giving greater thought to how we use our hose pipe? Are food-quality hoses readily available at a reasonable cost, and are they bulkier, causing storage issues on a boat?

Graham Russell



Suitable hoses should meet the latest RoHS 3 (Restriction of Hazardous Substances) regulations, which went into effect in 2019. These specify (among other things) that the hose won't leach chemicals as water passes through.

One such hose is the Copely Marine Superflat LX, available from Midland Chandlers among others, and supplied as a flat hose in a compact 20m cassette at £37.50.

However, while it is a standard recommended hose for potable water tanks, the sales line at Copely was unable to tell us whether it would be permeable when immersed in canal water – but this seems unlikely.

Hoses should also be periodically disinfected (preferably with a chlorine-based system).

Andrew Denny

Supplementary heating

I'm buying a 40ft steel narrowboat which has only a small multi-fuel stove for heating. What are my options for supplementing it?

Paul Taylor

Assuming that you already have LPG as well as diesel on board, both of these can be used for heating. The cost and upheaval of fitting an additional heating system is related to the number of components; a wet central heating system will be harder to fit than a blown warm-air system but has the added advantage that it could be arranged to provide hot water.

Both gas and diesel boilers are available to plumb into radiators; as are gas and diesel warm-air systems. Sizing the radiator load to the boiler is especially important for diesel boilers, to prevent short cycling (constant on-off cycling) and coking up. Ducted warm-air heating works well on a short boat and has the advantage of a much quicker warm-up time. Propex make a good gas-fired warm-air system with an electric heating option if you have shore power. Diesel warm-air systems are cheaper than their wet counterparts but both are generally noisier for neighbouring boats than gas heating.

Rupert Smedley

Water tank bangs

Our 650-litre stainless steel water tank is 15 years old. When filling and emptying it, the sides of the tank 'bang' or 'boom'. Are the welds likely to fail with the flexing as the water level changes?

Andrew McLaughlin

Most stainless steel tanks are quite robust, and the stress of the filling and emptying can usually be taken well by the welds. Failure is more likely to occur where dissimilar metals are in contact with the tank – such as where brass fittings are directly screwed to the tank – or where the tank itself is not adequately supported. However, you are right to keep an eye on things. Failure is more likely to be gradual than catastrophic, so regular inspection will pick up issues, though don't confuse condensation on the tank with leakage.

Mark Langley

Those noises will be produced by the flexing of the sides of the tank, and although continual bending of metal could, in theory, eventually lead to fractures, the amount of movement is probably too small.

Rupert Smedley



A stainless steel water tank: it's not unusual for it to bang when filled.

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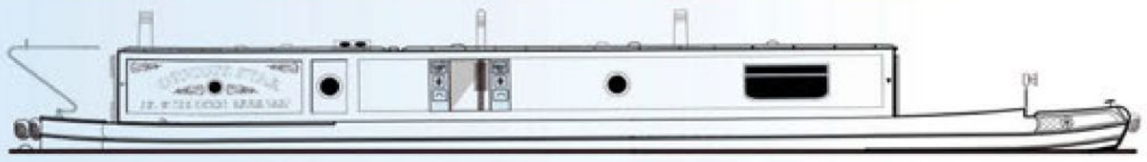
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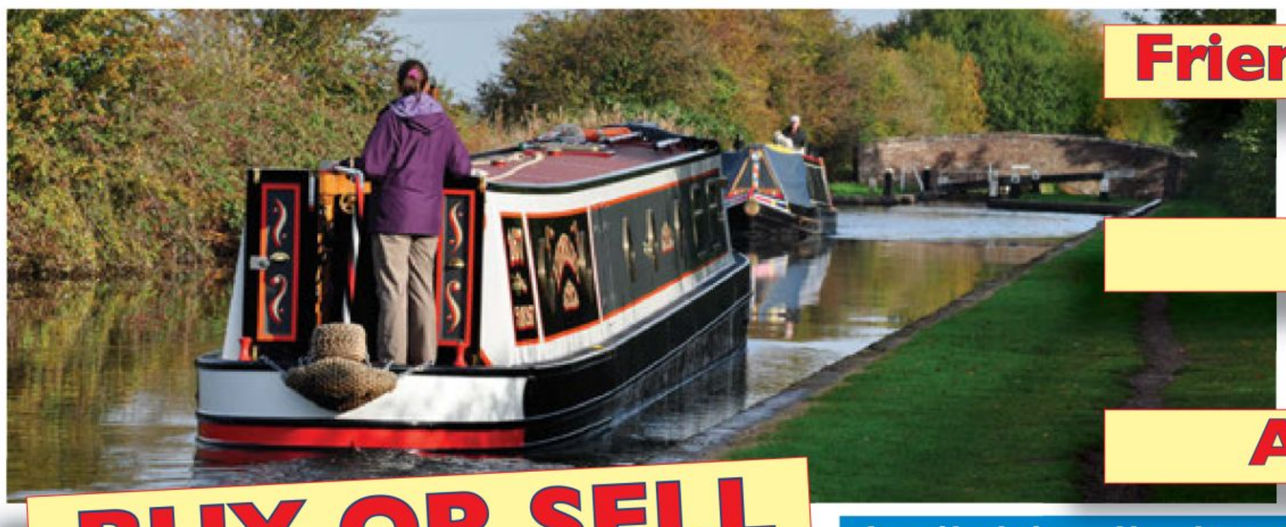
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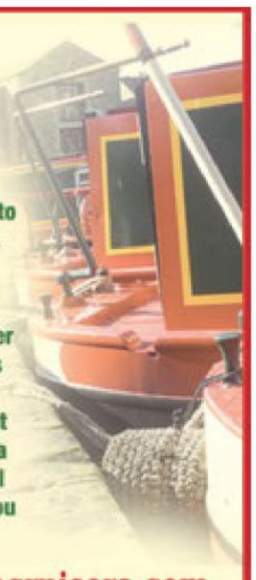


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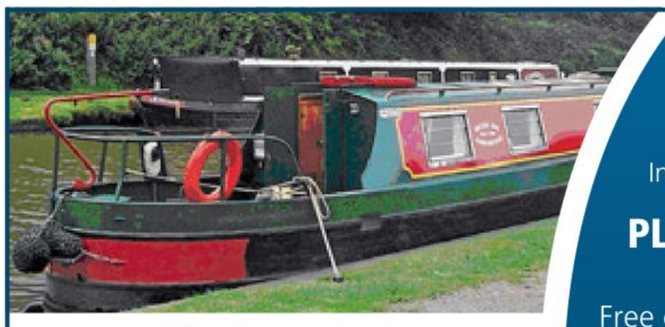
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BEANS TO QUEENS

Former Waterman to the Queen **Alan Woods MBE** looks back on a career carrying baked beans on the canals – and heads of state on his own fleet of luxury Thames boats

My earliest memory of the Thames was a cruise around the Upper Pool with my father and his passengers in 1947. It was the year he launched Woods River Cruises, the passenger service he set up with a view to exploiting the opportunities presented by the upcoming Festival of Britain (1951) on the South Bank. He ended up managing the boat services at Tower Pier for it.

But that morning, in the spring of 1947, sticks out for rather more sober reasons. As we got going along the shore, past the man-made beach, we heard a cry from an elderly attendant on the bank and followed his frantic pointing to see a bobbing head in the water. We immediately went alongside to help. The head belonged to a nine-year-old girl who, from all the water pouring into her open mouth, looked like she had already given up. Instructing us all to remain seated, Dad proceeded to haul her out of the water and administer life-saving first aid.

Canal apprenticeship

My father died in 1953, by which time I'd just started a five-year apprenticeship to get what's known as the Freedom of the River. The first years were spent working for a firm called the General Lighterage Company, and I would sometimes tow up the canals, either on the Lee Navigation or the Regent's Canal. We mainly carried timber and plywood products, but we also did beans for Heinz. General Lighterage operated from Brentford Dock all the way down to Tilbury, so it was a very good company to learn with, as you got incredibly varied work.

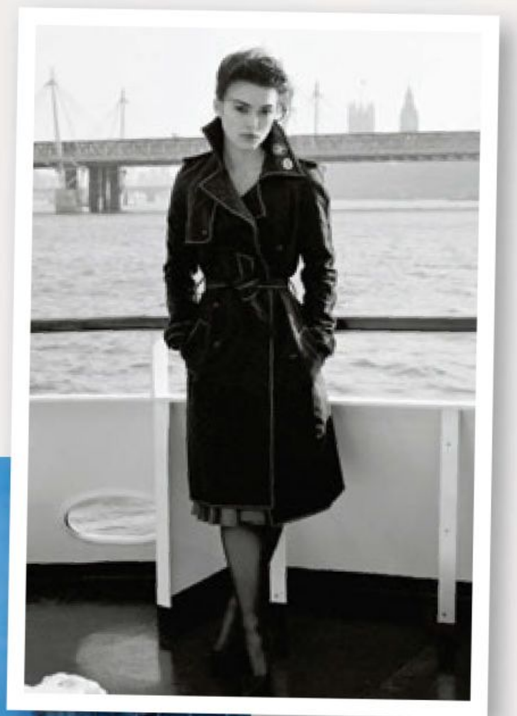
I had quite a bad accident during that period. There was a head-on collision between two tugs at Clarnico Bridge on the River Lea. As the tug hit, everyone in the front of my craft could see what was coming. Standing at the stern, however, I was completely unprepared for the impact and was thrown through the air and down into



the hold of the boat. The drop was only about 8ft, but I landed on my face and cracked a few ribs. I think that was the last time I towed on the canals before I went into National Service.

Bardot at the bar

When I came out I joined the family business full-time, which my mother had been running since Dad's death. When she developed Parkinson's I took over and carried on steadily until the 1960s, when things really started taking off and I was able to place an order for a boat called *Silver Marlin* at Thames Launch Works on Eel Pie Island. The boat was quite striking – very white and clean looking – and caught the eye of Brigitte Bardot when she was in London shooting a film. At the time the newspapers were full of her romance with Gunter Sachs, and the press were following her everywhere. She hired the boat ostensibly to escape the paparazzi, and demanded that no one else was aboard apart for a barman. I was determined to be on the boat too, so I decided I would be that barman...



The next progression was to build a restaurant vessel, and in 1973 I placed an order down in Faversham for *Silver Barracud*a, not knowing the shipyard was going bust. By the time I found out, I'd paid them £100,000 – over half the contract money – and they still hadn't got anything in the yard. I told my bank I'd go in and build the boat myself, and within a year I was able to take it upriver to do the outfitting. Although I only allowed £20,000 for the interior, I ended up spending at least £100,000, but it turned out to be excellent value. When it launched in 1977 it became the second most popular event venue in London. The boat is still part of what's now known as Woods' Silver Fleet, alongside our 1997-built flagship *Silver Sturgeon.* Between them we've hosted events for celebrities as diverse as Roger Federer, Margaret Thatcher and members of the royal family. We've even had every crown head in Europe aboard in one go, minus the Queen herself, who was having lunch elsewhere.

Boating with the Queen

I've been fortunate enough to boat with Her Majesty on many other occasions, through my role as Waterman to the Queen. Until the middle of the 19th century the sovereign regularly travelled on the Thames, either on state occasions or between the royal palaces, and the men who rowed him or her were known as Royal Watermen. The Queen still retains 24, although their duties are now purely ceremonial. On the water, we escorted members of the royal family on board the *Royal Nore*, while on-shore duties included acting as boxmen on royal carriages during state visits and royal weddings.

In December I was made MBE for services to river travel. As well as the family business, which my son now runs, I also jointly set up Thames Clippers, now an established part of the London transport system, and have campaigned for better safety standards on the river as chair of the Thames Passenger Federation. Although I'm supposed to be retired, I can't help but stay involved in the business. At the moment it's all hands on deck for the imminent launch of Woods Quay at Victoria Embankment this spring, one of only a handful of privately owned central London piers, and from which we'll be able to further consolidate our Thames presence.



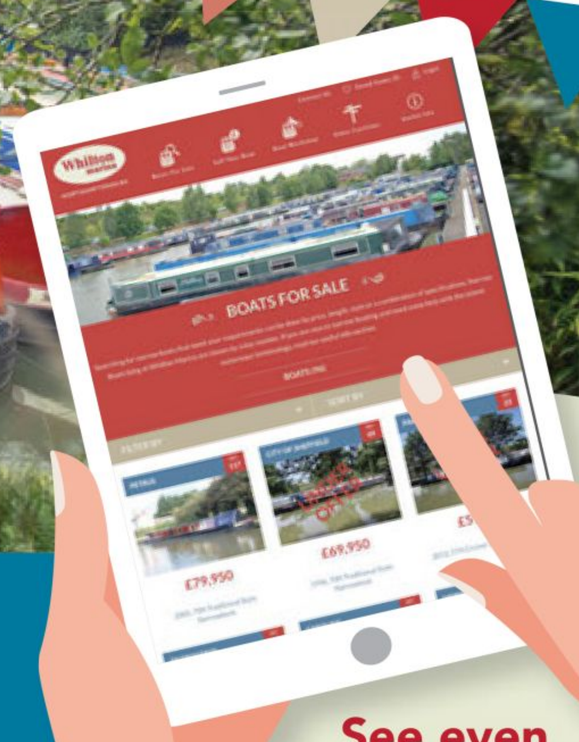
ABOVE: Keira Knightley poses aboard one of Alan's boats for a *Vogue* photoshoot in 2004. LEFT: *Silver Barracuda* cruising through central London.

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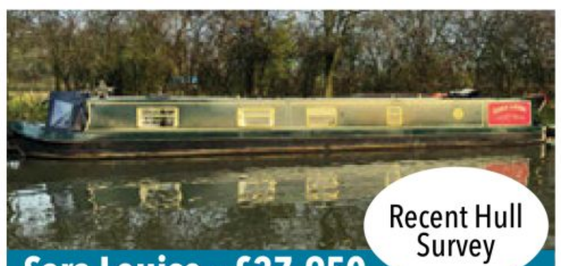
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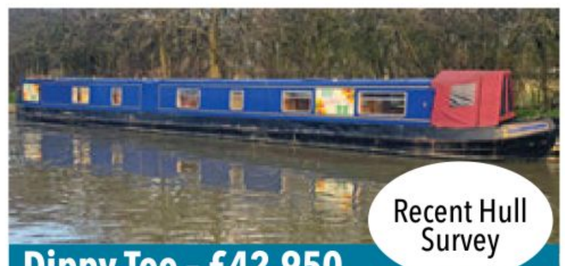
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