

Pay-to-moor in London - thin end of wedge?

by
Peter Underwood



Boaters may well be about to see visitor moorings charges in London in a major departure from the principle that a boat licence pays for the provision of free moorings across the Canal & River Trust waterways

Over the summer the Canal & River Trust carried out an online survey to 'gauge the level of demand for boaters wanting to visit London's bustling waterways together with their interest in being able to pre-book a short-stay mooring ahead of their arrival'.

The Trust has collated the 1,400 responses – just over 900 of them from boaters, the equivalent of just one in 35 boaters – and is using the results to 'inform its mooring strategy for the capital'.

It says that 59 per cent of its small sample would be willing to pay for reserved moorings and it looks as if the free pre bookable moorings on Rembrandt Gardens in Little Venice, which have been in existence for two years, may be the first spot Matthew Symonds, boating strategy & engagement manager will pick to charge for reserved visitor moorings. At present the Trust says it is 'planning a different trial' and says it will be announcing more details of the changes 'in due course'.

The legal basis that C&RT claim justifies them charging for visitor moorings when free visitor mooring was central to the 1995 act and charges were specifically denied to British Waterways by Parliament is the same they call on for imposing 'overstaying fines'. The official answer is: "It comes under the part where we're allowed to charge for a service – as you know we have a form of this already where if people stay for longer on certain short-stay visitor moorings they may be charged for the service."

Of course, most boaters see 'overstaying charges' as fines and it is significant that C&RT has never been willing to see its interpretation challenged in the courts. C&RT says the survey showed that perceived pressure on mooring space was putting some



Visitor moorings at Little Venice, where double mooring is commonplace.

boaters off visiting London. Of the 27 per cent of respondents who had not visited the capital by boat, 85 per cent said it was because they weren't certain they'd find a place to moor.

The Trust claims this means there is an 'appetite for an increased range of mooring options', with 59 per cent of all respondents saying they'd consider paying for a reserved mooring.

Despite that interpretation, the survey showed that 73 per cent had visited London by boat. It also showed that two thirds of visiting boaters moored on general towpath moorings or visitor moorings, with 14% stopping on paid private moorings.

Unsurprisingly, having a safe and secure place to moor was important to 92 per cent, while having a guaranteed place to moor was important to 74 per cent.

Matthew Symonds, boating strategy & engagement manager at Canal & River Trust, said: "We've had a great response to the survey and

I'm pleased that boaters have got in touch to share their views, both positive and negative, of boating in the capital.

"Our job is to manage the finite space on the canals so that all boaters have a fair chance of finding somewhere to moor up, and in popular places like parts of London this becomes even more important.

"It looks like being able to guarantee a mooring spot will give many boaters peace of mind and encourage them to visit. Taking this into account we're planning to trial pre-bookable short-stay mooring spots at Rembrandt Gardens which will begin later in the year.

London based boaters are concerned that the Canal & River Trust's moves to create more opportunities for visitors will mean spaces for boat dwellers without a home mooring will be further eroded? National Bargee Travellers Association says that when C&RT first set out its London Mooring Strategy some members asked whether accepting the idea meant the further reduction of mooring space for bargee

travellers – a question that remains unanswered. C&RT has revealed the locations they were considering for the bookable moorings in addition to Rembrandt Gardens: Kings Cross, opposite Granary Square; Paddington Basin; Rammy Marsh (on the towpath) and Limehouse Cut on the towpath.

NBTA is vehement that if more bookable moorings are to be created, then they would need to be on the offside rather than removing current mooring space on the towpath. "We have made it repeatedly and abundantly clear that under no circumstances do we condone reduction of towpath moorings in place of bookable moorings." It is suggesting that new off-side moorings should only be bookable during summer (tourist season) months, leaving the rest of the year with extra moorings for bargee travellers. No sign of that idea being taken up by Matthew Symonds, who makes no reference to the idea. His olive branch to London boaters is a non-specific promise on extra facilities: "It's no surprise to see that boaters want to see more facilities, and we're doing what we can to find suitable places to put them.

"Boaters also want to see more mooring spaces and rings and we've worked hard to get funding to install around 3,500m of rings over the past two years, creating or improving around 195 mooring spots.

"We will continue looking for opportunities like this."

He also claims – without numbers – that: "Also high on the list were requests to reduce overstaying and better enforcement of the rules.

"We're going through the comments carefully and they will prove really useful in the development of our wider London mooring strategy, which seeks to meet the needs of boaters and others who enjoy these historic, popular waterways."

The topics also came up at the Trust's National User Forum in Birmingham where Matthew Symonds, spoke about the rise in number of boats in London, online permanent moorings and encouraging more use of under-used sections of London's 100 miles of canal and river and working with developers with canal frontage to increase permanent moorings and facilities offside as well as converting towpath space into permanent rented moorings.



Moored boats in East London's Victoria Park - 14 day spots boaters don't want to lose.



Rembrandt Garden moorings at Little Venice - bookable without charge, but now likely to be the first to be charged for.

C&RT seizes historic lightship and now faces legal action

By Allan Richards



Friends of the historic Mersey Bar light vessel 'Planet' have accused the Canal & River Trust of stealing the much loved ship from its berth in Canning Dock in Liverpool.

This follows the Trust's claim that the owner had not paid a bill of £4,256 for 2015 berthing fees. C&RT says that it intends to sell the historic vessel in order to recover the costs of moving it to an undeclared destination.

The 1960 built ship was the last manned light ship in the English Channel and on the Mersey Bar. It was purchased by Alan Roberts from Manchester music producer, Gary McClarnan for £139,000 some years ago with a further £60,000 spent converting it to public use.

Filmed

Mr Roberts was filmed climbing over railings at Canning Dock East on September 21 as his famous red light ship was towed out of the Dock after being seized by the Trust. Mr Roberts was heard to shout "Stop, stop. It's my ship, my ship" and "I'm going in lad. They've killed me. F***ing killed me." Mr Roberts, however, did not jump. Friends subsequently stated that he is undergoing treatment for a serious medical condition which, together with the drugs used to treat it, can cause depression, anxiety, confusion, hallucinations and suicidal tendencies.

No explanation

Friends also allege that the Trust's action is illegal and they will fight to recover the ship and return it to a Liverpool.

Meanwhile, the Trust has provided no explanation as to why it has failed to obtain the necessary court order to seize, move and sell the ship.



Alan Roberts protesting from the dockside as his historic lightship is towed out of Canning Dock East in Liverpool by Canal & River Trust.

Bid to exclude Nigel Moore acting as 'McKenzie Friend' in another boat seizure case thrown out by court

Another boat owner who has had his property seized by the Trust, Leigh Ravenscroft, will have his case heard next year in the high court.

This follows a failed attempt by C&RT to have the case struck out, a failed attempt to have parts of the case heard in a lower court and failure of the Trust's attempt to have another boater, Nigel Moore, barred from acting as his McKenzie friend and advocate.

Mr Ravenscroft's boat was seized by C&RT (again without a court order) and held pending payment of a sum of money greater than that which the Trust is entitled to claim under 'Section 8' legal actions.

The main issue of the case is the meaning of 'main navigable channel'. A private right of navigation exists on many rivers where C&RT is the naviga-

tion authority but boats need to be registered by way of a Pleasure Boat Certificate (PBC) if they are used within the main navigable channel.

Mr Ravenscroft's was moored against the bank of the Trent at Farndon Ferry with permission of the riparian owner and he has produced compelling evidence that the width of the 'main navigable channels' of rivers is the 'dredging width' as defined in the Fraenkel Report of 1975. This report predates the relevant legislation and provides its terminology. C&RT's argument is that 'main navigable channel' has two meanings – one is 'dredging width' as per the report but the other, for PBC purposes, is the full width of the waterway. This does not sound completely convincing, to say the least. A second issue to be decided is if

C&RT can use its Section 8 powers to seize and hold a boat as security for sums owed – at face value the answer to that is a very definite no.

The third issue is one of proportionality. It will be decided if C&RT has a duty to act proportionately and pursue remedies other than seizure where they are available. Leigh Ravenscroft's boat was seized on 26 January 2015. He made a claim on 18 May 2015.

However, the case will not be heard until sometime in 2017. It's a long time to wait for justice. One hopes that Mr Roberts and friends will not have to wait that long. One also hopes that neither party has to wait as long as, Mr Ravenscroft's McKenzie friend, Nigel Moore. He had to wait over 10 years only to be told he had done nothing wrong.

The Floater

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Why is the Boat Safety Scheme so expensive - and is it worth it?

By John Quinlan

John Quinlan, cruises in the boat he built and has CC'ed for 15 years



Most boaters would agree that a periodic check of their boat by a competent, safety oriented professional is a good thing. It generally takes less than an hour, and then comes a huge bill that in no way represents the time and effort expended. Why is this? The Boat Safety Scheme and it's certifications of boats is a requirement to use a boat on many navigation authorities waters. Even on the Middle Levels, where boats do not need a licence, they do need a Boat Safety Certificate to be legal. What actually happens is that the examiner of your choice checks out the systems with, at most, a small spanner, or screwdriver, and a manometer and his/her competence and training. They then charge you an exorbitant amount, not because they are profiteering but because the BSS scheme management charges them an exorbitant amount for the privilege of being an examiner. The boater pays up because they cannot use their boat without a BSS certificate. So let's look at how it works. Firstly, is there any guarantee that a boat is in anyway safe at the very moment it gains a boat safety certificate? No, It could be being kept afloat by nothing more than the bilge pump, have a blocked burner flue which spews out carbon monoxide when used, or many other faults which are a very direct danger to the occupants. It does not require a sound hull or decks, a smoke or CO alarm. In fact, a boat can pass even if the steerer has no means of stopping the boat even if it is heading directly at a person or object. This is not safety. So what use is the BSS? Well it makes money. I don't know where the money goes but the BSS was set up by British Waterways (now Canal and River Trust) and the Environment Agency and currently shares an address with C&RT. It is a 'Scheme' so has no need for any form of legal existence or external oversight, and scheming it indeed seems to be. Take C&RT; they set the requirements for fulfilling the the legal

Item	Description	Unit cost	VAT	Total
Initial registration full year	First registration from when accepted until the 31 March in the next calendar year	£87.50	£17.50	£105.00
Initial registration part-year	Registration from October onwards to 31 Mar.	£58.33	£11.67	£70.00
Annual registration	Follow-on annual registration	£87.50	£17.50	£105.00
Late registration administration charge	Applies to late registering examiners who apply after the deadline without prior agreement	£41.67	£8.33	£50.00
Embosser fee including returnable deposit	A £20 refund is made when the embosser is returned	£41.67	£8.33	£50.00
BSS Certification	Applies when BSSER with 'Yes' or 'Yes but...' examination results are recorded	£29.00	£5.80	£34.80
Post & Packing: letter	Letter or small packet up to 100g weight	£2.50	£0.50	£3.00
Post & Packing: medium	Letter/parcel or packet up to 500g weight	£6.25	£1.25	£7.50
Post & Packing: parcel mailed	Parcel or packet up to 2kg weight	£8.33	£1.67	£10.00
Post & Packing: Courier	Parcel or packet up to 10kg weight	£12.50	£2.50	£15.00

Compulsory attendance on training courses are required from time to time. These can be for a variety of reasons such as LPG updates, electrical awareness, IT training. Fees usually in range of £50/60 for half day course and £100/150 for full day course. BSS Training courses fees are subject to VAT at current standard rates.

qualification for the vessel under the 1995 BW act as a valid BSS boat safety certificate. They then, in fact, issue the certificate themselves under the guise of the BSS, according to their rules and incorporating their charges. This is beyond a cartel, it is a true monopoly. So, how is the extortion done. It costs money to be a BSS examiner, lots of money. There are the initial costs of training to be an examiner. Currently courses cost approximately £2,200. This does not include the cost of accommodation,

travel or living expenses. Then the yearly fees, and on top of that the 'pass' fee of £34.80 per certificate registered. Considering that the examiner actually does the registration, one wonders what that fee is actually for. Naturally the examiner adds the costs he has to pay to the BSS to his/her charges to the boat owner. Hence the big bill. Comparisons between the boat and car world are frequently meaningless but the boat safety certificate is comparable to the MOT certificate, and, indeed the BSS do com-

pare the two on their website. A MOT tester needs an exhaust gas analyser, a rolling road, and a car hoist, All capital investments that need maintenance, and, they check the whole vehicle, yet they can do the whole test, and registration for a lot less than just the registration cost of the BSS. I asked a a long term boater the question 'What is the purpose of the Boat Safety Scheme?' His instant response was "To make money for C&RT." He may well be right.



A MOT tester needs an exhaust gas analyser, a rolling road, and a car hoist, and, they check the whole vehicle, yet they can do the whole test, and registration for a lot less than just the registration cost of the BSS.

Now we have a director for repairs - just like that

Canal & River Trust has seemingly reacted to an article in September's Floater by appointing a director with responsibility for waterway maintenance to replace Vince Moran, writes Allan Richards. On September 16, it updated its executive team webpage to show Simon Bamford as director of asset delivery (waterways maintenance in plain language). September's Floater highlighted the growing number of defects on our waterways. It also recounted that C&RT had confirmed that it scheduled to fix less than 10 per cent of its outstanding defects last financial year – that's just 5,807 out of its 59,133. However, by year end, it had only managed half. Worse still the number of outstanding defects had risen by almost 3,000 to 62,379. It was pointed out that the director responsible, Vince Moran, had retired three months before the end of the financial year leaving nobody at director level to take the blame for the disaster. Now, almost nine months later, there is a new director. Did C&RT listen to Floater regarding the need for a director to actu-

ally take responsibility for maintaining our waterways and actually do something about it? Not a chance! It would be nice to think that but this appointment and that of two other directors, Heather Clarke and July Sharman, were made in July some weeks before the last Floater was published. However, it seems that Mr Bamford is very keen to take full responsibility for the defects fiasco last financial year. So keen, in fact, that he has updated his LinkedIn profile to indicate he was appointed a director way back in January – three months before the financial year end and six months before he was actually appointed. Perhaps he should have checked published board documents which show he was in his previous role

Simon Bamford, right, and his CV on LinkedIn, below.

Experience

Director of Asset Delivery
Canal & River Trust
January 2016 – Present (9 months) | London, United Kingdom

Responsible for the establishment of this new department to manage and deliver the Trust's annual circa £90m maintenance, repair and renewal programme through a team of 450 employees together with circa 500 FTE from a range of contractors and consultants and volunteers. Member of the Trust's Executive Team.

The Asset Delivery team comprises:



until halfway through the year ...

Purpose made to have sweetness built-in to the boat

The Floater takes a look at canal traders – people creating businesses on our canals and rivers. Their numbers are increasing almost daily and the chances are you will see a floating market or a sole trader on the canal this summer. Our latest trader is a boat that has been designed for just that purpose - a floating sweet shop.



By Peter Underwood

Mick and Marianne Reaney have launched Sugar Rush their new boat, this year and it is one of the few vessels purpose-built to trade – in their case as Lollipop the floating sweet shop.

Right down to the specially designed vinyl shelter that covers customers attracted to the wide array of sweets on view in the bow area and visible through wide hatches which help make trading a year-round business.

Marianne says they became boaters by chance: "Himself had a whim more than 20 years ago and we bought a boat."

"Natural progression for us really as I was in the girl's nautical training corps and Mick loved his canoe."

"We were both brought up by the sea and used to help the trawlers on occasion with their fishing nets - although we weren't allowed out to sea with them as youngsters."

"Before we were boaters Mick used to build and race his own race cars on the Auto grass circuits. Never thought he'd swap speed for four miles an hour."

After 45 years as a prototype engineer Mick had a back problem which rendered him unable to carry on.

Marianne says that as they already had a boat they decided to give trading a try.

"Although we have been trading for six years, we've had the sweet shop for just three. Prior to that we traded in hand made jewellery."

"We felt it was time for a



Sugar Rush is a purpose built trading boat - with a built-in sweet shop at the bow and a specially designed cover to shelter customers checking out the 100 varieties of sweets on offer

change and thought it would be a nice idea and we decided to open the sweet shop.

"Three years on we now have a new purpose built boat with the bow being the sweet shop now we run the business full time."

"We chose a sweet shop as it seemed that there were not enough boats with items catering for little people so we decided to rectify that and open a sweet shop."

"Now we have grown up kids and little kids who come and visit us. Lots of trips down memory lane for thee grown up kids - after all you're never too old for sweets."

Sweets are not really a practical proposition for making on a boat and the couple have a couple of suppliers from whom they buy sweets.

"We do have well over 100 different varieties of sweets all of which need weighing bagging and sealing, says Marianne."

"We heat seal all our bags to ensure freshness. This takes a lot of time especially during festival season."

"I wouldn't say it's a great living but we are semi retired. We have days when we ask ourselves what the heck are we doing but on the whole we do thoroughly enjoy our-



Open for business - as the sign says



selves.

"We have such a lot of fun with our customers and other traders too. It's a wonderful community and we feel blessed to be a part of it."

"We will hopefully continue to trade with the sweet shop for a long time to come as we have a bespoke boat specially made for us and we can trade in all weathers now."

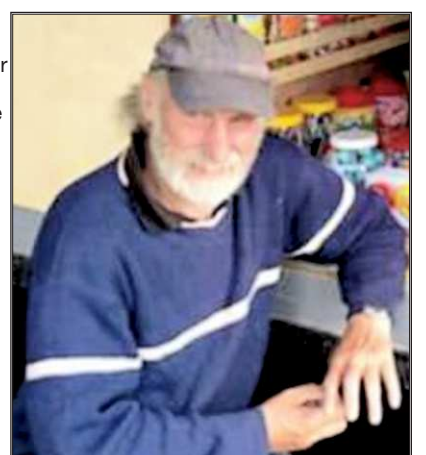
"We trade as both as solo traders and at events. We do the odd market with the float-ing traders but we mostly trade at the festivals. That said we do trade wherever we are. I post on our facebook pages where we will be and when."

"So far we have traded as far north as Manchester and as far south as Coventry however next year we are hoping to cover the south too."

"We have been boaters for over 20 years but have only been full time live-aboards since 2014. Before that we would spend about 10 months of every year aboard. We will also be cc-ing for the first time this year as before this we had a home mooring."



Marianne Reaney inside her built-in sweet shop on Sugar Rush - trading at The Black Country Boating Festival



Mick Reaney

Vulnerable woman evicted from boat ends up in hospital

The eviction of a sick woman from her boat home has resulted in her being hospitalised, according to the National Bargee Travellers Association on the Kennet and Avon.

It reports that, on September 14 Canal & River Trust (C&RT), together with police, bailiffs and a C&RT enforcement officer, seized a boat without a home mooring that was a vulnerable woman's home while she was asleep inside it. The woman, who suffers from epilepsy, was later rushed to hospital in an ambulance as the stress of the eviction had caused her condition to become critical. Boat dweller Peter John Wells, who was an eyewitness, filmed the eviction, he said: "On the morning of September 14th Corrine Rotherham, CRT Enforcement Officer, and a team of seven private contractors set off in a vessel from Bradford on Avon on the Kennet and Avon Canal.

"They were on a mission to evict a lone woman living on a boat in Bath due to a licence dispute. They arrived as she was still asleep in bed, boarded the boat and proceeded to attach their boat to hers and tow it away.

"A number of nearby boaters were alerted to the situation and a blockade was formed preventing the removal. The boaters offered to pay any outstanding money due on the spot. This was not accepted".

"Ms Rotherham decided her plan had gone seriously wrong and called for back-up, in this case four police officers and a police van with an unknown number of officers inside.



Police and private bailiffs, brought in by the Canal & River Trust gathered around the boat home of a vulnerable woman during their attempt to evict her. Kevin George Thomas of The Sheriffs Office appears to be one of the bailiffs in the photo. The other photo shows Mr Thomas serving court papers on a boater in 2014.

"By this time the woman, who suffers from epilepsy, was so distraught that she was reduced to tears. At one point she was surrounded by CRT, bailiffs and police officers against the railway wall. "Despite support from the other boaters she felt she had to escape the situation and she agreed to leave her boat. Her boat was taken to Bradford on Avon, lifted on a lorry and driven away. "Two days later she was admitted to hospital as the stress of the eviction had caused her epilepsy to become critical". Before being taken to hospital it is reported that the woman

wandered around Bath in a confused and distressed state. According to staff at a drop-in centre for homeless people, she was so ill that she was incoherent and could not explain what had happened. The following day she was found by police and an ambulance was called. Ther National Bargee Travellers' Association says that the eviction of this vulnerable boater and its drastic effect on her health raise some very serious questions about C&RT's compliance with the law regarding the safeguarding of vulnerable adults. The Association asks several

questions:
Why was there no welfare officer present?
Why were the police called?
Why did Enforcement Officer Corrine Rotherham not want to be filmed?
A spokesperson said: "There are moral questions here too: who is to blame for this unfortunate incident? Is it Corrine Rotherham, the CRT officer who enforced the eviction? Is it the team of bailiffs hired to do the job? Or is it Richard Parry, CRT Chief Executive? "Ms Rotherham has said that she hates such evictions, but if she hates the job there is a simple solution. NBTA says C&RT's



Relationship Manager Matthew Symonds claimed on 22nd September that the Waterways Chaplaincy had

been supporting the woman, but the Chaplaincy has confirmed that they were not involved at all prior to the eviction.

It claims C&RT did refer the case to their Welfare Officer Sean Williams, but unlike social housing, C&RT has no measures in place to safeguard vulnerable people in cases where health issues mean that the person at risk of eviction does not engage with the authorities. According to Mr Wells, it was apparent from his conversation with them that the bailiffs, police and Ms Rotherham all wanted to avoid any responsibility for the eviction. He said that one bailiff was clearly uncomfortable and another said that it was ridiculous and tried to distance himself from his job. C&RT currently uses bailiffs from a private company called The Sheriffs Office when they believe that a boat dweller will be resident on a boat at an eviction.

Kevin George Thomas of The Sheriffs Office appears to be one of the bailiffs in the photo. Kevin Thomas used to work for Sherlock, a trading division of Shergroup Limited, which also included Sherforce bailiffs that C&RT used until about 2014.

The NBTA says it has unconfirmed reports that the woman was renting the boat but the "landlord" failed to licence it. Anyone in this situation should make sure that the boat is licensed and should also be aware that they have very few rights. The video filmed by boater Peter John Wells, is on YouTube here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQGSVSGWOsE> and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TYzW97R5XY>

Restoration bids meet a brick wall from NW C&RT manager

The somewhat chaotic relationship of the Canal and River Trust's north western waterways manager, Chantelle Seaborn and those attempting to restore the Northern Reaches of the Lancaster Canal remains firmly in the arena of the farcical.

The milestone drama is still rumbling on with Chantelle reportedly refusing to allow the long-standing volunteers of the Lancaster Canal Society get back to work. Readers may recall the society took the best conservation advice and painted a milestone white, only to find that C&RT were apparently hopping mad as their conservation experts said it should be natural stone and banned the members from doing any other work.

The society had the paint removed but Chantelle is still refusing to let them get back to caring for and attempting to reopen parts of the Northern Reaches.

Meanwhile Colin Ogden and his Owd Lanky Boaters Group on Facebook have simply started restoration work on a privately owned section of the Northern Reaches which they plan

to have back in water for the canal's bi-centenary in 2019.

Colin says: "We had a very successful start to the restoration project at Larkrigg Farm and a team of eight volunteers started clearing the canal bed of small trees ready for our local contractor to come and take the big ones out. "We have three qualified chainsaw operatives with us, and progress was made on the first 200 yards.

"It is the first time in over sixty years the sun has shone on the canal bed and we will be there for the foreseeable future and the farmer seems agreeable to giving us permission to re water it in time for the Northern reaches Bi Centenary in 2019."

Colin added: "I have contacted Chantelle Seaborn and invited her to visit us, but, as usual, no response.

"The public response to our efforts has been very favourable but many people are asking why the Canal & River Trust seems to be so uninterested."

Clearing undergrowth at Larkrigg Farm - the Owd Lanky Boaters



The Black Country knows how to festival

THE FLOATER
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September this year saw a trio of boating festivals within a few miles of each other on the Black Country canals of the BCN. First the Black Country Boating Festival at Windmill End, at the Southern Portal of the Netherton Tunnel, then Tipton, on the doorstep of the Black Country Living Museum and finally at Parkhead by the southern entrance of the Dudley Canal Trust's tunnel. The Floater attended two out of three - and that ain't bad, as Meatloaf tells us.

Community is a much used and abused word, but in areas like the Black Country; starved of investment and hit by recession; it is the way things are made to happen.

The combination of a highly practical approach and a determination to do things for yourself gave birth to the Black Country Boating Festival at Windmill End 31 years ago and the theme runs through the festival to this day.

The man central to the operation for about half that time has been Paddy Grice, whose gruff bearded countenance can be seen in all parts of the festival site in the days before and during the event.

Many of the boats attending are local but some travel from far and wide to be at the gathering, years after year. This year there were more trading boats than before and a wealth of local traders setting up on the bank.

The Windmill End site is a curious mixture of canal junction - the Dudley No 1 sets off from here - and old industry with a pit winding



Busy boats



Boat songs from Kevin Day



Local ales

house chimney towering over the area. These days it is green and pleasant and only the canals, the winding house and rocky foundations in the grass alongside the water hint at what was once a bustling industrial heartland. Unlike many big festivals, the Black Country

Boating Festival is very much DIY, with volunteers cooking a serving excellent food, barrels from very local breweries in the beer tent and even local boaters up on the two music stages. It's easy to feel at home at this festival, wherever you come from.



Pirates



Gospel songs

Back through the two miles and more of Netherton Tunnel, up three locks and you are in Tipton, the site of the next Black Country festival.

It even calls itself a community festival and it has grown steadily in popularity over recent years, bringing in more and more boaters and boat traders as well as Tipton organisations from local evangelical churches to purveyors of pork scratchings.

Most boaters scurry through Tipton to the sheltered moorings of the Black Country Living Museum, but the town has much to offer. The festival rotates around the Fountain Inn by the bridge over the canal which serves as meeting, drinking and eating central and has excellent real ales and good value local food - including faggots.

But you are not going to starve in Tipton with Mad O'Rourke's Pie Factory and couple of hundred yards from the canal in one direction and an award-winning fish and chip shop a hundred yards in the other.



Tipton man

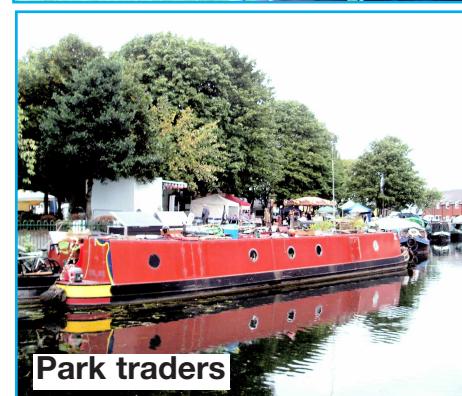
Local people flock to the Tipton Festival through the two days of the weekend and it brings together boaters who have worked for years to improve the reputation of the town as a place to moor and want to see it become a favourite stopping place with local organisations who see the canal as part of the regeneration of a town in need of a boost. Currently there are hopes that the two will come together to bring the historic Tipton Gauging House, where thousands of boats were weighed in the past, as part of an arts project.



Making music



Gauging interest



Park traders



Time for a chat



Vintage and art



Bits and beer