

THE JUST WON'T GO AWAY FLOATER

Issue 9

June 2016

The only paper for boaters produced by boaters

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Did Matthew Symonds really call liveaboard boaters 'gits'? Read both versions here

C&RT bosses close ranks as 'Git-gate' row engulfs a top executive

Peter Underwood looks at both sides of Git-Gate



Mention the word 'git' to Richard Parry, CEO of the Canal & River Trust, and he gets a little hot under the collar. The reason for his polite anger is a claim that one of his senior executives described liveaboard boaters as 'gits'.



Richard Parry - 'Matthew is a very nice man.'

The top team at C&RT seem to have rallied round Relationship, Policy and Strategy Manager Matthew Symonds, whose job includes maintaining relationships with boaters, allowing his personal denial of the claim to be the only official response and refusing to carry out any investigation into the allegation. The report first surfaced on a boaters' website serving the Kennet and Avon community with an anonymous claim that when Symonds, 39, met some former colleagues in the Bristol voluntary sector he was twice asked about how his job was going and his response on both occasions was "I love it, except for all those gits on liveaboards". After a Twitter denial by Matthew Symonds that he had said anything of the sort one of the people who was there at the time wrote an open letter to the C&RT executive.

Eye witness

Yaz Brien recalled that he had met Symonds a couple of times since 2007, saying: "I enjoyed our chats as I showed you around, and we talked at length about the work that we were both doing." He then goes to speak of the meeting that triggered the 'gits' allegation: "The third time was earlier this year, as I was leaving a training session with former colleagues of yours. It was the 4th February to be exact, and we were hovering on the pavement outside the Southville Centre as you passed by and stopped for a quick hello with those that you knew. "It was this conversation that forms the source of the comments that you state, via Twitter, are "certainly not something I've ever said". But you did say them Matthew, and you said them twice. "As the group of us swelled with people leaving the training session, twice you were directly asked about your new job as Strategy and Engagement Manager at CRT, as your former colleagues were genuinely interested as to how it was going. "Twice you commented that you loved your job, 'aside from the gits on the liveaboards'. In

fact, I recollect they were the only two comments that you made specifically about your job, suggesting to me that they may have been the two most pressing things on your mind when you thought about your work. "From my previous encounters with you, I was surprised and disappointed to hear those words coming from you, however much you may have meant them in jest or good humour." Yaz says that his confidence in Symonds' ability to work fairly with all boating groups 'waned on that day', and that was why he had spoken with boat dwelling friends about the encounter. He goes on to say: "To hear now that you have publicly stated, via Twitter, 'It is not something I would ever say' and 'Certainly not something I've ever said' is even more disappointing."

Not words I said

The response from Matthew Symonds came in the form of an open letter to Yaz Brien saying he recalled him and the meeting outside the Southville Centre. He then goes on to say: "... but that's where our memories start to differ I'm afraid. I'm sure I would have mentioned that my new job was challenging and rewarding - but as I have already stated, the words attributed to me are not ones that I said - it's not even a term I generally use. "I've said many times, publicly and privately, that living on the canals can be a great lifestyle - but it's important to be aware what is involved. We're also obligated to fairly apply the rules as set down in the Act of Parliament to all boaters." He acknowledges that: "Understandably in some of the work I'm involved with feelings can run high. I know this from some of the less polite messages I have received in relation to my work. However, I personally always believe that polite and civilised engagement is the best way forward." Richard Parry, speaking to me at Rickmansworth Festival this week, insisted: "Matthew is a very nice man and I am sure he



Matthew Symonds - C&RT's Relationship, Policy and Strategy Manager

wouldn't say anything like that." It was also confirmed by the press office that the only response would be Matthew Symonds own open letter. Asked whether that meant Matthew Symonds' bosses accept his version and do not intend to investigate any further, despite requests from boaters to do so, the response was "That is correct." By that time the allegations of what has become known as 'Git-Gate' had already become a subject for boaters protesting at C&RT's Milton Keynes offices and another open letter - this time from the National Bargee Travellers Association said: "We were upset by the report of comments by your Relationship, Policy and Strategy Manager for boating, Matthew Symonds, in referring to live-aboard boaters as 'gits', especially when he has been a senior spokesperson for your organisation. "This is at a time when your policies are putting much pressure on a section of live-aboards. Many feel that C&RT views live-aboard boaters as an irritation that needs to be removed from the waterways. "It does not bode well for C&RT that a staff member with the role of managing relationships has been reported as making such a derogatory remark. "We therefore call upon C&RT to carry out an investigation into this incident, with the involvement of boater groups such as the National Bargee Travellers Association. Depending on the outcome of the investigation we demand that CRT takes action to ensure that an incident like this does not happen again." Despite that it seems clear C&RT management has closed ranks around Matthew Symonds and, as far as the organisation is concerned accepted his assurance that he didn't describe liveaboard boaters as gits.

Bid for a comprehensive London mooring strategy

Meanwhile Matthew Symonds has been setting out plans to develop a London Mooring Strategy to address what C&RT describe as 'the unique challenges and opportunities of boating in the Capital'. Following vociferous demands for more moorings and facilities the Trust acknowledges 'pressure on moorings, facilities and infrastructure'. It says: "While a number of trials have been carried out

and there have been some positive changes, for example the creation of new long-term moorings and bookable moorings, it is clear that a plan of action that covers all aspects of London moorings, developed with waterway users, is necessary to make a significant difference." According to the Trust, the London Mooring Strategy would aim: * For better provision and management of a range of facilities and mooring types

in London * To manage the high number of boats in London and to mitigate the environmental impacts on the waterways and neighbours * To help ensure fair sharing of water space * To enable a wider range of boaters to visit and navigate in London * To protect existing, and generate additional, income to maintain the waterways in London * To support a London waterway destination and

tourism strategy * To ensure the mooring strategy contributes to the Trust's aim that London's waterways help to transform neighbourhoods and enrich people's lives Matthew Symonds, boating strategy and engagement manager at the Canal & River Trust, said: "London's waterways are some of the busiest in the country and we need to manage the finite space effectively. "We need to face the challenges head on, as well as

taking advantage of the opportunity to develop a really world-class water-space that people will be able to visit and enjoy. We'll be working closely with those who use the Capital's canals and rivers to make sure we hear everyone's views and make well-informed decisions." The Trust has already started discussions with various groups, including its Navigation Advisory Group, the London Waterway Partnership, national boating

organisations and other key stakeholders. There will be a programme of workshops for interested parties over the coming months. The development of the London Mooring Strategy is anticipated to be completed in 2017. According to this year's boat survey, London has seen an increase of just over 400 boats, with numbers in the south west and south east also rising, while other areas reduced by almost the same amount.

Five years on, C&RT is still struggling with Equality laws

It is a question often asked by boaters caught up in the Canal & River Trust's enforcement process - what is the charity doing to meet it's legal obligations under the Equality Act? The answer seems to be very little. Allan Richards has attempted to get some answers.

By Allan Richards



The Canal & River Trust seems to be having some problems in coming to terms with six year old laws aimed at protecting people from discrimination of all sorts. When asked about equality policies the standard response seems to be silence.

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. However, five years after it was fully implemented, you will not find any policy document on C&RT's website showing how it intends to comply with the Act. This despite the trust twice acknowledging its need to do so. Before the Equality Act came into force there were several pieces of legislation to cover discrimination. These included, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. These older Acts were replaced by the Equality Act which also added some further requirements. The Act was implemented in two stages in October 2010 and April 2011.

In January 2014, a Mr Barry Knowles requested C&RT provide him with 'a copy of the policy made by the Canal & River Trust pursuant to the Equality Act 2010'. C&RT did not have a policy and instead provided him with a copy of British Waterways 'Disability Equality Scheme'. This scheme was launched 2005/6 and modified in 2007 and 2009. The document explicitly states that a more fundamental review was being planned for 2010 to take into account the implications of Equality Act.

In November 2014, C&RT announced the appointment of a new welfare officer, Sean Williams. The announcement stated 'The role forms part of our strategy around supporting vulnerable boaters who, due to any number of factors, may be finding it harder to cope with life afloat'. It ends 'The role will also help establish our policies on vulnerable boaters and assist in its compliance with relevant legislation, for example the Equality Act'. However, some 18 months after Mr Williams was appointed and almost four years after C&RT came into existence, a policy on equality remains unpublished.

No acknowledgement

To check if such a policy existed, albeit unpublished, a request was made under the Freedom of Information Act for the document. However, contrary to its own Customer Service Standards which state that it will advise within two working days if a full response cannot be given within that timescale, C&RT did not even acknowledge that a request has been made. An email reminding C&RT of their self-imposed standards was also ignored. On May 10, some two weeks after the request was made, an email was sent to C&RT's Chair, Allan Leighton; Chief Executive, Richard Parry; Director of Customer Services, Ian Rogers; Head of Boating, Mike Grimes; and Welfare Officer, Sean Williams. It asked if one of them would care to explain why some five years after the Act was implemented, C&RT have failed to publish its policy. On May 16, a further reminder was sent to C&RT regarding the Freedom of Information Request. It said quite simply 'Some three weeks after making this request, it remains unacknowledged and unanswered'. On May 18, a further email was sent to C&RT reminding chair, chief executive and senior man-

agers that an explanation was still awaited and the Freedom of Information Act request still outstanding. This resulted in a very obtuse 672 word reply to the Freedom of Information request which confirmed that the Trust has no policy related to the Equality Act 2010. The reply also confirmed that the trust had no policy related to vulnerable boaters and that BW's obsolete 'Disability Equality Scheme (2009)' had not been updated.

Unanswered

Perhaps embarrassed by having to admit that it has no policy the Trust reply stated that it was now planning to review the obsolete British Waterways Disability Equality Scheme (2009). This is the document that says 'A more fundamental review is planned during 2010, to take account of the implications for disability in the forthcoming Equality Act'. Just six years late then! A third email to C&RT's chair, chief executive and senior managers requesting an explanation remains unanswered. A parallel enquiry directed to C&RT's press office on May 10 did get a response but only after being chased up some two weeks later. It confirmed that C&RT was planning to carry out the review that BW planned to carry out in 2010 but gave no indication as to why a policy was not in place. Of course, a vague suggestion that C&RT will produce and publish a policy related to the Equality Act sometime in the future does not answer the question as to why it is not already in place. Is it just mind-blowing incompetence? Alternatively, is it a deliberate intention to disadvantage its customers by not having a published policy for which it might be held accountable?



Allan Leighton- C&RT Chair



Richard Parry - C&RT Chief Executive



Ian Rogers - Director of Customer Services



Mike Grimes - C&RT Head of Boating



Sean Williams - C&RT Welfare Officer

'an email was sent to C&RT's Chair, Allan Leighton; Chief Executive, Richard Parry; Director of Customer Services, Ian Rogers; Head of Boating, Mike Grimes; and Welfare Officer, Sean Williams.. It asked if one of them would care to explain why some five years after the Act was implemented, C&RT have failed to publish its policy.'

Boat numbers static - stoppages up

According to the Canal & River Trust the number of boats on its waterways remains almost unchanged but more of them are gravitating to the South East, South West and London.

The Trust claims there are 400 more boats in London, just over one per cent of the national count and numbers have also risen in the south more generally while numbers in the Midlands and points further north have fallen by around the same amount. Although C&RT removed 90 boats that were 'unlicensed or in breach of our terms and conditions' it is not hitting the original targets for reducing the number of unlicensed boats, which was below four per cent of the total. It does say it is getting closer with 4.4 per cent unlicensed - a 0.2 per cent improvement on last year. This is the seventh year the rate has stayed below five per cent but it stubbornly refuses to fall further. Mike Grimes, head of boating at the Charity, said: "I'm pleased that licence evasion continues to remain

below five per cent.

"The contribution boaters make to our canals and rivers helps fund their vital upkeep and it's important for everyone to play their part. "I'd like to thank our enforcement team for their sterling work in helping protect the income that goes towards looking after the waterways for the benefit of all boaters. "There's also an important safety aspect: if a boat isn't licensed we can't know that it's safe, which poses a risk for both the boat owner and other boaters." Preparing the ground for the current attempts to produce a mooring strategy for London, Mike Grimes says: "The national boat count also suggests that the popularity of boating in places like London is continuing to grow. We can't, and wouldn't want, to stop boats visiting but we would encourage all boaters in congested areas to share the space fairly, respect mooring and cruising guidelines and be considerate of their neighbours." Meanwhile the efforts going in to keeping the canal system in good shape seem to be less than com-

pletely successful with the list of stoppages - some of them likely to be lengthy - growing every week. They are now regularly listed on C&RT's website and many boaters cannot recall when there were so many stoppages in the so-called cruising season. This is the most recent list:

1. Rochdale Canal - Lock 36 to lock 45, Sowerby Bridge to Summit.
2. Calder & Hebble Navigation - Crowther Bridge to Salterhebble Guillotine gate.
3. Shropshire Union Canal - Lower Basin Washwall to Wide Lock Approach, Ellesmere Port.
4. Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal - Junction with the River Irwell and Middlewood Deep Lock.
5. Engine Arm Canal (Smethwick) - Engine Arm

Aqueduct.

6. Birmingham & Fazeley Canal - Lock 2, Aston.
7. Weaver Navigation - Marsh Lock.
8. Kennet & Avon Canal - Bridge 27, Padworth Swingbridge.
9. Peak Forest Canal - Between Lock 1 & 16.
10. Macclesfield Canal - Between Bridges 26 & 27.
11. Welford Arm (Leicester Line) - Fallen Tree Near Lock 1 by the wind-ing hole.



Work on the breach at Bollington - picture by Coalboat Alton

The Floater

Written designed and published by News Afloat - a unique boat-based publisher travelling on the British inland waterways. Check out The Floater website at: www.TheFloater.org The Editor is Peter Underwood and all contributions, suggestions and questions should be directed to him at: Editor@TheFloater.org or TheFloaterUK@gmail.com The Floater is published at least once a month in .pdf format as well as on the Issuu platform and a web version on the website at www.TheFloater.org Like The Floater Facebook Page here <https://www.facebook.com/TheFloater/> Join The Floater Facebook Group here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/921938364522405/> Follow @TheFloater on Twitter

Green fingers afloat bring plants galore to the towpath

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 third trader is The Plant Boat - Narrowboat Sparks - the business of Stuart Megson and Lindsay Andrews which is bringing a touch of green to canals around the Midlands



By Peter Underwood

The Plant Boat – also known as narrowboat Sparks - provides a large splash of colour and greenery along the towpaths of the Midlands where it has become a reliable source of healthy flowers, herbs and even vegetables, most of them boat-grown.

The horticultural efforts of Lindsay Andrews, 44, and her partner Stuart Megson, 43, are rooted in a real affection and understanding of growing things

The past two years have seen the business grow but it is not yet profitable enough to avoid the pair having day jobs to subsidise the trading. Stuart explains how it started: "We had been looking into alternatives to bricks and mortar and boats appealed to us, we have always used the canals for walking the dogs and I spent the first 11 years of my life with the Wyrley & Easington canal at the bottom of the garden, so I had explored a bit of the BCN as a child too. "It made sense, we love the cut and its now our home. Trading in plants was a continuation of our lives ashore. I had been selling plants for a while before buying the boat, so after a period of settling in we decided to start selling plants again. It was a no-brainer, we saw the potential of selling plants before buying Sparks and I have for a long time wanted to open a plant nursery. Now I have – it just isn't land-based." Both Stuart and Lindsay have experience in retail and gardening and, although they buy a small amount of plants in they also grow a large amount from seed and cuttings. But it is a long step from turning your hobby into a business and that business supporting you, especially on a boat.

Stuart says: "We love it, so much so we want to expand, but we have to subsidise what we earn from trading with day



Lindsay Andrews with Narrowboat Sparks in full trading mode



Another market, another display of the ever-changing range of plants grown and supplied by Stuart and Lindsay

jobs sadly. Boring I know, but for now needs must. "We will keep trading and we are expanding too, we are currently looking for a second boat, a butty, to convert into a greenhouse and sales display. Some boat traders operate as a solo business in 'hot spots' whilst others prefer using special events and floating markets. Stuart says: "We did markets in our first year, with very little towpath trade, but this year we have traded daily when we can and its been good. "There are some great trade spots around the cut, and we are also doing some of the Roving Canal Traders' Association floating markets, Great Haywood,

Merry Hill and Birmingham, as well as attending the Tipton community festival at the end of the summer too." Centred on the many canals of the Midlands, Stuart says they cover as much as they can, going on a slow meander, around as much of the BCN and surrounding waters as possible. "Obviously it is generally dictated by which markets we are booked into and then we work our cruise pattern around that," he adds. As a live-aboard and continuous cruisers how helpful or otherwise is C&RT to traders? "I was going to say "pass me my soap box" but we have not had many issues with CRT and they seem keen

to encourage traders on the cut, after all we bring something good to the table which must tick a box somewhere. "There are extended stay times over weekends, extended moorings before and after markets, but, no doubt, there is room for improvement." So what would Stuart change if he ruled the waterways? He has a little list: More 14 day moorings; More and better services including at gated moorings; Less aggro (or no aggro) for those who wish to CC and not do the entire network; Better maintenance of the cut, water levels, depth, etc.; "The list is endless, and I could go on all night," he concludes.



Growing plants is a winter and summer thing and sometimes it is cold and uncolourful work, as this black and white study of Stuart and Lindsay in winter mode shows



Space is at a premium on a boat roof

Traditional and unusual flowers mix at this floating nursery



Ready to go planters are also on offer

The range of plants is sometimes bemusing



More than a third of boaters don't trust the Trust

Almost four in ten boaters don't trust the Canal & River Trust to look after the waterways – although the charity insists on reporting that as a 'positive' as the lack of trust is marginally less than last year.

In this year's Boater's Survey 37 per cent of boaters said that they couldn't trust the charity to look after the waterways, down from 42 per cent in 2014. And it seems those who use the waterways most trust the charity least with C&RT admitting; "The survey shows that there is variation across differ-

ent demographics, with those with a home mooring or who use the waterways for leisure being most content."

The exact discrepancy is not available as C&RT refuses to release the full results and we are only allowed to know those they choose to highlight.

Those include an increase in those who say they know the Trust very or fairly well from 35 per cent to 48 per cent. The Trust claims: "This suggests that the charity has improved its communications and is being more open and transparent, and potentially indicates that people have a greater understanding of the Trust's work beyond being

simply a licence provider."

That may be a bit much to read into the fact that more than half of boaters don't feel they know the charity.

Equally six out of ten boaters don't believe C&RT has the right priorities on spending – although the press release makes much of the fact that this has risen from a sorry seven out of ten last year.

A 'working group' is now taking an 'in-depth look' at the results to see what needs to be improved upon.

Mike Grimes, head of boating at Canal & River Trust, said: "It's heartening that a growing number of boaters have faith in us to look after the waterways for their benefit, but it is



Loads of boaters but more than a third of them say they don't trust C&RT to look after the waterways

Six out of ten boaters don't believe C&RT has the right priorities on spending

clear that there is still some way to go.

"The survey also shows that there's a growing polarisation between boaters' views.

Licence holders have passionately held, often opposing opinions, and we will use the results to help us understand our customers' differing needs. What boaters all have in common is the desire to protect our canals and rivers and preserve the right and ability to navigate them.

The survey, which was sent to a third of the Trust's boat licence holders, was carried out by the independent research consultancy BDRC Continental between 25 February and 25 March 2016.

It will be repeated each year with the aim of having contacted the majority of boaters on the Trust's waters in each three-year cycle.

And the Trust's problems with numbers is not limited to boaters. When C&RT's new Marketing, Communications & Fundraising Director, Sophie Castell told members of C&RT's Council at its meeting on 8 March 2016 that the Trust had 15,000 'Friends' she made an error.

This was not so much an error of fact but an error of omission. Those present, including new Boating Council Members were told that C&RT had 15,000 active Friends at the end of January with 220

new Friends being recruited during Winter Works open days alone. What she did not say was, since joining the Trust in December 2015, the number of active Friends had actually fallen by 375 from 15,402 (end of November) to 15,027 (end of January). This came out the following day at a Board meeting where Trustees were told that it was now impossible for C&RT to meet its target of 17,000 Friends by year end. In its May edition (page 2), The Floater revealed that chief executive, Richard Parry, had informed Trustees that his team would fail on four key targets for the 2015/16 year. Now it is five!



Come aboard and experience a social experiment



Ian Horrocks

The Village Butty has become a common sight in various parts of London since last year, providing boaters across the capital and beyond with a floating venue that provides some of the flavour and function of the village hall.

In fact, it has been knocking around longer than that after James Bentley bought Vanadium with its open iron hull and put a roof on it.

Various people rented it for gigs and jam sessions and another boater, former teacher Ian Horrocks and his partner, musician and dancer Alice Cade became involved, especially in staging regular musical events on the butty.

The Village Butty emerged as a concept when James decided he wanted to sell the butty.

"Lots of people said, 'You can't do that' and one said, 'it's like our village hall'" Ian said.

"We realised that the butty had the potential to realise a dream, be part of something decent that wasn't about money.

"It is used by all sorts of waterways users and we wanted to help integrate groups that were sometimes at

loggerheads.

"The Village Butty is meant to be somewhere people can feel safe and make friends with boaters. We also want to help integrate new boaters and help inform them so that the don't damage the canals, either socially or environmentally."

The creation of the Village Butty was aided by a successful online crowdfunding event that raised enough for a new roof and £2,000 worth of essential welding. There have already been knotting and knitting events, a choir, socials for boaters growing their own vegetables, film nights, comedy nights and the boat

has hosted a handful of music gigs. The boat is registered with C&RT as a business but Ian says that, despite getting licences for a bar at various events it is still a long way from producing any profit.

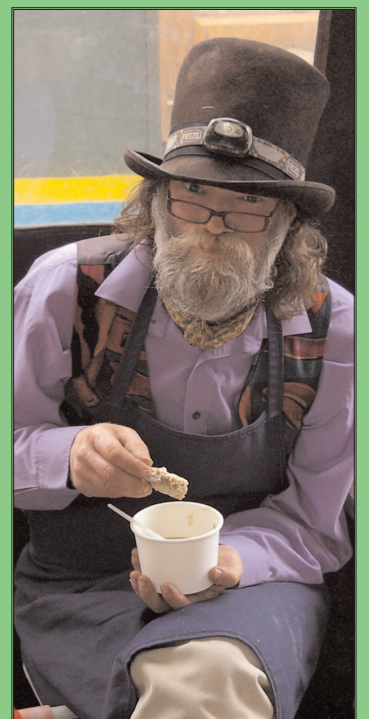
"The Trust's business people have been very helpful," said Ian, "I can't fault them."

But the future remains precarious as Ian and Alice tow the butty around London and the South East.

They would like to get involved in funded canal initiatives like the Edible Towpath concept and have hopes of securing arts funding for other projects.




Alice Cade serving from the butty's kitchen



James Bentley

Ricky's festival draws thousands and puts Parry on a tug-of-war boat

 By Peter Underwood

With tens of thousands attending, more than 120 boats and everything from a mediaeval living history display to Star Wars Troopers it is hardly surprising that Rickmansworth Festival has become one of the biggest and best boating festivals on the system.

Boaters are a key part of the festival, organised by the Rickmansworth Waterways Trust, occupying the moorings, three and four abreast between Batchworth and Stockers locks, whilst over the hedge in the town's aquadrome, there are music stages, craft and trade stalls, a funfair, a children's farm, an Environmental Fair and loads of food stalls.

They key attractions for visiting boats are probably the exclusive Friday boaters night in the beer tent and tug-of-war between working boats and tugs over the main two days of the Festival.

This year the tug-of-war was given added interest when the commentators, Chris Bennett and Adrian Bull, positioned on the roof of a narrowboat, urged C&RT



Richard Parry boarding Bream from a small tug, left, and standing on the gunwhale during the tug-of-war.



Above: Bunting bedecked boats three abreast. Below: a tug-of war as working boat engines throwing out smoke in their efforts to win



chief Executive Richard Parry to join one of the contesting boats. He did so and kept smiling whilst being ferried out on a small tug before standing on the gunwhale whilst the boat fought to drag its opponent backwards. At least Richard Parry remained dry, which is more than can be said of three participants who took a dip, including Adrian Bull in the final stages on Sunday afternoon. With working boats – including some still in business selling coal and diesel, like Mike Askin's Victoria and local fuel boat Hyperion – attracting many admiring glances and most of the visiting boats making a contribution with sometimes elaborate bunting the crowds made speedy passage along the towpath impossible. The canal itself wasn't much better with trip boats and those attempting to pass through having to weave their way through a narrow passage by the moored boats and then around the constantly moving tug-of-war boats. You have to remind yourself that this large, complex and highly enjoyable festival is entirely the work of volunteers. The level of professionalism is higher than many commercial and public organisations.



Above: Lock Jam boats and music at Batchworth Lock Below: Morris Dancing at the Aquadrome



Oxford's new rules target boating life itself - not just the rule breakers

An update on the fighting boaters of Oxford from Cassandra Bellingham, a published novelist, artist and liveaboard currently travelling the Oxford Canal

You can't read a waterways publication at the moment without realising that our way of life is under direct attack from multiple directions. It's easy to see CaRT's recent actions against CC'ers, and the multiple Public Space Protection Orders being considered around the country, and believe that this is a crackdown on those not following the rules.

To believe that is to completely miss the point.

It's not overstaying that's being targeted; it's all of the everyday activities required to live afloat. In other words, if you are anything other than a weekend boater, you are in the firing line.

The best example of this is the latest actions of Oxford City Council. Oxford has long been competing for the "Least Friendly City on the Waterways" Award. The Labour-led Council and CaRT have systematically shut down services over the last decade; leaving entire communities without access to basic provisions; and most damaging of all, seized and sold off the one working boatyard in the city.

As it approaches the 10th Anniversary of the boatyard closure, the impact of this is seen everywhere within the community. The once smart rows of residential boats that line the outer regions of Oxford are looking increasingly run down. With two year waiting lists for basic maintenance such as blacking, the affordability of aesthetic repairs is beyond the income bracket of many of those stranded in this unfriendly wasteland.

With the least affordable housing in the UK (outside of Central London), many of the residents are now stuck on decreasing public sector salaries, zero hours contracts and mooring fees routinely above £500 a month.

Added to this toxic mix is the increasing gentrification of the areas around the waterways. The average house price in North Oxford now sits comfortably above the half million pound mark. A handful of these affluent homeowners dislike being able to see the huddled masses from their windows and make frequent complaints to their local councillors. Add into the mix two local councillors with a baffling array of conflicting interests and portfolios and you have the perfect storm. Instead of recognising the disastrous impact of their Waterways Strategy, Oxford City Council is compounding its mistakes by proposing a Public Space Protection Order that will criminalize everyday activities on the waterways. As a boating visitor to Oxford, you risk a fine or criminal record for running your engine or generator, emitting smoke from a wood burner, walking or being in sole charge of more than 4 dogs, drinking alcohol on your own deck, and most impacting of all, mooring without formal



Comedian Mark Thomas joined protesting boaters on both land and water in Oxford

permission from the landowner. This last one at first glance seems reasonable, but overrides centuries of waterways byelaws and navigation rights. In Oxford alone, the land ownership is a bewildering mix of many of the town's 40 odd colleges, nature and wildlife trusts, local and county council space, and agricultural land.

Imagine trying to moor up on a sunny evening, and find the appropriate phone number to call to ask for permission to stay, or spend the night worrying you are about to be slapped with a £100 fine. Swindon, Bath and Cambridge are all proposing their own PSPOs and watching the situation in Oxford closely. If it passes there, you can guarantee it will be 'coming to a town near you soon.'

The community in Oxford has done an impressive job of mobilising and their PSPnO Campaign is receiving local and national attention.

However, with the proposed legislation due to go to public consultation in the next few weeks, the fight is far from over. They need every voice on the waterways shouting with them, if you still fancy that visit to any one of the key cities on the waterways.

To join the campaign, the Facebook page is PSPnO Say No to the PSPO, head over to [Twitter@Oxford_PSPnO](https://twitter.com/Oxford_PSPnO) or straight to the website for more information and advice on how to help. www.oxford-pspno.org.uk.



Meanwhile boaters moored on an Oxford stream are still fighting plans to use the stream as part of the city's flood defences.

As many as 18 families could be made homeless for half a year if the controversial flood channel goes ahead.

Tim Wiseman, who lives on a boat at Weirs Orchard Moorings, said there were some cheaper, and less devastating options that the Environment Agency could consider instead.

Mr Wiseman and his neighbours invited East Oxford MP Andrew Smith along to see the channel for himself and hear more about the damage the plans could have on the homes.

Mr Wiseman says the Environment Agency has claimed there are no suitable moorings so it would have to be hotel or rented accommodation.

