

Excalibur

**THE NEWSLETTER OF
THE INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION—LONDON BRANCH
WINTER 1991**

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Branch member Jon Kenny mans the Tombola on the Branch Sales Stand at the National Waterways Festival in Dudley during the August Bank Holiday weekend.

Photo: Mike Stevens

From the Editor

OUR NAME COMPETITION

Quite a few names were suggested; thank you to all who took part. But quite a lot of people said they liked the name *Excalibur* and would like to see it kept. In the end, that is what the judges recommended to the Branch Committee, who agreed with them. We felt that several of the proposals would probably have been fine if we'd been starting from scratch, but none of them was sufficiently out-of-the-ordinary to merit displacing a title already recognised by our members, and clearly with a good number of supporters. So *Excalibur* we remain. However the prize donated by Tim Lewis won't be wasted; the Committee decided to awarded it as a consolation prize to Anthony Hooper of Ilford who proposed no fewer than eight new names.

THE B.W. BILL

As I write, the 'filled' Bill with the amendments agreed in the Lords is published and the Third Reading in the Lords (almost certainly a formality) should take place soon. The First Reading in the Commons (another formality) is likely to be before Christmas and the real work there sometime in the New Year.

Eric Garland, in his Branch Chairman's notes, has responded to my question about why IWA decided not to intervene until the Commons stage. Very well, IWA followed advice, but what was the thinking behind the advice? But we need to set that question aside as history: the need now is to pull together and persuade the Commons that there are dangers in the Bill.

I hear that IWA called a meeting of people petitioning against the Bill. I wasn't there, but have heard an opinion, from somebody who was, that the meeting concentrated, almost to the exclusion of all else, on the question of BW's Boat Standards. That is certainly a real issue, and IWA's action on it, with that of the RYA, (see page 9) is to be welcomed. But it is an issue, like that about moorings, that affects only one type of canal-user, the boat-owner. As one of these myself I'm glad these issues are being addressed. But I would be very sad if, as a result, more wide-reaching dangers in the Bill were neglected by IWA. What is the point of overcoming obstacles to owning a boat if the canals become places where one wouldn't want to go?

I do think there is real danger in some parts of the Bill, which would enable BW, with its

present commercial policy dictated by Government insistence on reducing BW's reliance on grant, to exploit the canal system in ways that will kill it as a leisure amenity, whether for boat-owners, hirers, canoeists, anglers, walkers or anybody else.

BW already has powers to set up subsidiary companies. The Bill extends this to include businesses that have nothing to do with waterways, and then to sell them off. So BW could take a prime piece of their canalside land, use it as the base for a subsidiary company with no canal-related aspects and sell it off to the highest bidder. After such a sell-off, the new owners would not be bound by the environmental considerations imposed on BW in another part of the Bill.

I know that many people with small canalside, canal-related businesses are already concerned about BW's tightening financial squeeze on them. The cost and short-term nature of leases is a concern. The charges for connecting free-hold marinas to the Board's water are, according to many accounts, a scandal. The Bill's abolition of dormant rights of riparian owners will make it harder to set up new canal-related businesses on freehold canalside land. All in all, BW will be well placed to become a monopoly not only of managing its canals but also of servicing their users. Is this what we want to happen? Will this help bring about 'Waterways for all'?

I hope that IWA isn't going to react to the recent formation of the National Association of Boat Owners by over-emphasising its work for that section of its membership in an attempt to retain its 'market share'. If NABO has a role, then it and IWA should be collaborators, not competitors (which, thankfully, seems to be the way NABO wants to operate). There is plenty of scope for dual membership. After all, the vast majority of boat-owners are primarily enthusiasts of the canals themselves, and that involves much wider interests than those concerning their own boats. In the face of BW's commercial policy and the proposed Bill we must hang together, or we'll hang separately.

MIKE STEVENS

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From the Branch Chairman: Eric Garland

The BW Bill is foremost in the attention of IWA at the moment; Chief Executive Frances Hart is busy preparing our case for a petition against the Bill in the Commons. It is likely that it will go to its First Reading late this year, with the all-important Second Reading and Committee Stage in the New Year. Plan/Nav subcommittee, having discussed the Bill and sought the input of Branch members known to have strong opinions of some of their clauses in their final form, have sent their comments to General Office. If any member feels strongly about any part of this new legislation, they should write to their MP. With an election pending MPs can be particularly receptive. A copy of your letter and any reply would be appreciated at General office.

The IWA has been criticised for not objecting during the Bill's passage through the House of Lords, but they were advised by Parliamentary Agents to go for the second house undertaking: similar advice to that given over the King's Cross Railway Bill. New Parliamentary Advisors have been appointed. The new firm specialises in working with charities, but the course of action suggested has remained unaltered.

Where the Branch leads, others follow. Having made the decision that you will have four issues of *Excalibur* a year, the Branch Committee has to work out how to pay for them. The per capita payment that comes via Region will only cover the cost of just over two *Excaliburs*. Hopefully advertising and part of the proceeds of the Grand Christmas Draw will meet the balance. Perhaps you can persuade the boss/local trader/boatyard/yourself to take out an ad. At the recent national AGM much comment was passed on IWA Waterways. Although recently much improved, the opinion was that three issues annually are just not enough, and so National Chairman David Stevenson pledged that the magazine would appear four times a year. The budget, of course, does not stretch to this, so Council, like the Branch, has got to find ways to pay for the additional issue.

A plea for the IWA to be much more pro-active in future was also made at the AGM. Part of the job of the new Chief Executive is to publicise the aims and achievements of the Association and to achieve a higher profile. Perhaps if this is done and the extra magazines keep members better informed, more of you will want to come forward to get involved in IWA activities. Much of our work is of necessity reactive to other events; with more help we could become pro-active. There is certainly a lot of room for improvements, both to our image and to our waterways.

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From the Region Chairman: David Allison-Beer

My predecessor as Region Chairman, Dave Moore, told me when I took over the position that it would be very varied; enjoyable, frustrating and disappointing and often all at the same time. In my brief period as region chairman I have experienced all of these, but a matter which has given great pleasure recently has been the number of awards made to members of the region recognising their contribution to our Association and its aims.

Currently there are almost 50 awards which the IWA may make annually. A large percentage of these is for boat related activities, with the majority awarded at the annual National Waterways Festival (Rally!). A number of our active members are not boat owners, and therefore are not eligible for these. We would be a poor organisation if we did not recognise this, so there are awards for other contributions to our activities. Many of you will remember *Windlass*, the magazine of SE Region before all the branches decided to produce their own magazines regularly. Most will not have known that Dennis Couzens and his family handled much of the distribution work. Before our address labels for *Waterways* were computerised it was Dennis who coaxed the ancient addressograph to produce the labels required. He also regularly attends Navvies assembly, helping to collate WRG's magazine. In recognition of these efforts, Dennis was the first recipient of the Edie Palmer Award for contributions to the Association's administration. Although I never knew Edie I am told she would have been most amused by this award in her name because good administration was not one of her qualities!

Branch and club magazines are important in keeping all members in touch with the local activities and news. First word processing and now desk-top publishing have brought about a major change in their production quality. A few

years ago the IWA took over from a commercial magazine the annual Rolt Awards made to the best local waterway-orientated magazines. Out of the three annual awards, two were made to organisations in the SE region. IWA Chelmsford Branch Magazine and *Panchat*, the journal of St Pancras Cruising Club are worthy winners this year.

When I was a member of the London Branch Committee we spent much time attempting to persuade local people to take an interest in the Bow Back Rivers. Some of you will remember a rally at Three Mills in 1987. Unfortunately much of our effort went unheeded. Last year Kesslers International, a company based on the banks of the rivers, and the London Borough of Newham, started a clean up project which has gained much support.

When the National Waterways Festival was held a few miles further up the River Lee at Waltham Abbey in 1989 the sponsors, Volvo Penta, inaugurated the Volvo Penta Award for conservation and safety on the inland waterways. In 1990 the first winners were British Waterways and the Kennet & Avon Trust for their efforts in re-opening the canal. This year the award was made to Kesslers and Newham, with the presentation being made to them at the Windmill End Festival by IWA member Tony Baldry, who is a Minister at the Department of the Environment.

The final awards to members in the South East were those made recently by the whole membership when they elected Ron Martin, Region Vice-Chairman, and Marion Waters to Council at the recent AGM. With six members we can now claim to be the best-represented region on Council.

To all of these, congratulations: and to all of you, whatever your contribution to the IWA whether active or armchair, even if you have not received an award your support is appreciated.

FUTURE ISSUES

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February 1992	14 December 1991
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London's Waterway and the Royal Navy Connection



ROYAL VICTORIA DOCKYARD, DEPTFORD (in 1937)
The 1781-9 Rum Warehouses (left) and offices
(Museum of London)

Chatham is not really London, but Greenwich is all ours with the Venice-like scene of the Thames Barge Sailing Club rallies backed by the Royal Naval College. I first saw *Cutty Sark* in Falmouth in 1935, and well remember the despatch from the RN Officer monitoring *Gipsy Moth IV* round Cape Horn from *HMS Protector*: 'she appears to be buoyant and her skipper is handling her quite well'. Of the Central London moorings, *HMS Belfast* is the sister-ship of *Edinburgh* who bore me from Gibraltar to Malta in 1941—a great courtesy as I was only in the Army, a 'pongo' or 'brown job'. *Wellington* is now the Hall of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners, and of the Naval Reserve ships, *Chrysanthemum* is gone, *President* is de-commissioned as a commercial office. Scott's *Discovery* (not his last, which was *Terra Nova*) has now gone to her birthplace in Dundee. So, having cleared the decks as of now, let's go back a bit in time.

ERITH ROYAL DOCKYARD

The real expert, Philip MacDougall, in his *Royal Dockyards* (David & Charles 1982), finds Henry VIII building galleys there in 1512, so that it just qualifies although the land around was unsuitable

and it closed soon, leaving hardly a trace. The moorings were good, but the river upstream tricky, and much later, in 1812, came a plan for a bypass canal from Erith to Woolwich and on to Greenwich. A pity it too failed, since it would have borne the name of the Duke of Clarence, later King William IV and the Navy's champion, 'King Billie'.

WOOLWICH ROYAL DOCKYARD

To replace Erith, Henry braved the shoals and developed Woolwich and Deptford, both born in 1513 and smothered in 1869. Woolwich fathered the *Henri Grace à Dieu* (Great Harry) in 1513 and many a fine ship such as the *Nelson* of 1814, 120 guns, and had the first steam factory in any dockyard, but it could not compete with Chatham and the others. Still, where the juggernauts queue up for the Free Ferry, there is a sign 'Mast Pond'; two of the dry docks are an 'Aquatic Centre' for kids, and if the West end is a mass of gunge under 'development', the splendid Superintendent's Office (now a Community Centre) keeps its proud 1780 look. The Victorian Dockyard Church of St Barnabas was uprooted physically to the A2 but the delightful St Mary's watches over it all from its hill. Beresford Street runs

straight as a die for 400 yards, as well it might, being on the old Ropery which died in 1833, and round the corner is the truncated road romantically named 'Rope Yard Rails.

The two railway stations on the old South Eastern are still Woolwich Dockyard and Woolwich Arsenal, and East of the latter the Woolwich Arsenal Canal of 1824 still survives somehow; the river end is dead but the rest (No Fishing) graces a GLC Thamesmead estate. What an opportunity missed! There are waterways galore in the New Town; I bet even David and Elizabeth Wood can only canoe them. Still, the glorious 1720 cupola of the Deptford Dockyard's Main Store, saved when that was killed not long ago, has found a last refuge—plonked on top of the tower in the shopping centre.

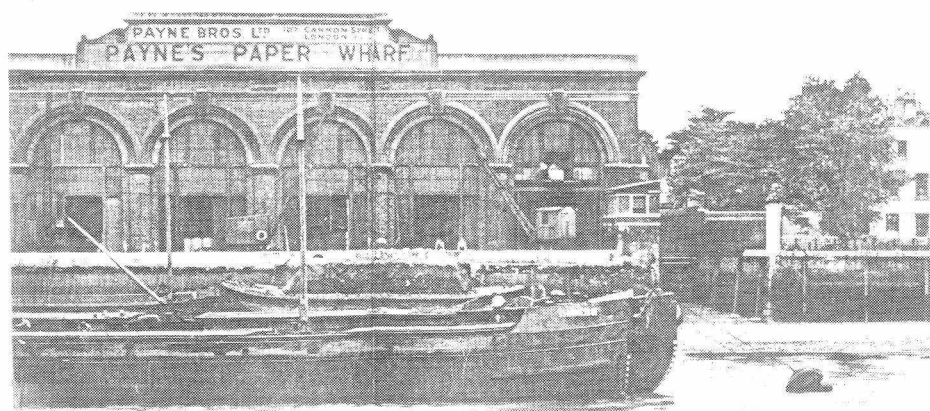
DEPTFORD ROYAL DOCKYARD

The exact contemporary of Woolwich, this was the darling of Samuel Pepys. The diarist was Clerk of the Acts to the Navy Board and trained Peter the Great—hence Czar Street. You can still see the 1513 wharf, though no longer in timber; the Master Shipwright's house of 1708 and its only

slightly older neighbour—now, perhaps inevitably Nelson House and Hamilton House; and two immense covered cast-iron building slips of 1845. In 1869 it all became the Foreign Cattle Market run by the Corporation of London, and much more recently the pulp store for Times International at Wapping. No wonder some ill-wishers tried to burn it down; why couldn't all this have been sited next to the works and a navigable channel re-opened into the old London Docks? The new 'Wapping Canal' is a developer's insult, although at least they've kept Rennie's 1811 Skin Floor in Tobacco Dock with its marvellous girders—probably the most beautiful supermarket anywhere. And the Royal Navy cocked a final snook at its predators; in a quite unprepossessing office of the 1930s kept at the Dockyard they planned the whole supply operation for the Falklands effort.

DEPTFORD ROYAL VICTUALLING YARD

Next door, though always separate, a private base opened in the 1630s. The official Victualling Office moved there in 1762 from where the Royal Mint left only



DEPTFORD DOCKYARD 1513-1869 (seen here in 1937)

Right: Original wharf (re-faced) and 'Nelson's' (Master Shipwright's) House, 1708

Left: Payne's Paper wharf, originally boiler shop of John Penn & Sons, where engines were fitted to HMS Warrior.

recently. It was honoured as the Royal Victoria Yard in 1856 but nevertheless closed in 1961. The GLC all but engulfed it in its Pepys Estate though at least it remembered the name and kept the best original buildings as private flats. The 1790 Storehouses (with the Master's stables) hold a sailing club and the Library basement was the Rum Store. A Blue Plaque celebrates the Quadricentenary in 1981 of the occasion when Drake moored up the Golden Hind there—put up by the Drake Navigators Guild of California as a compliment to his own unlicensed moorings in their area. And a fearsome array of old ship's cannon points threateningly out over the river and on to Canary Wharf; we shall no doubt need them.

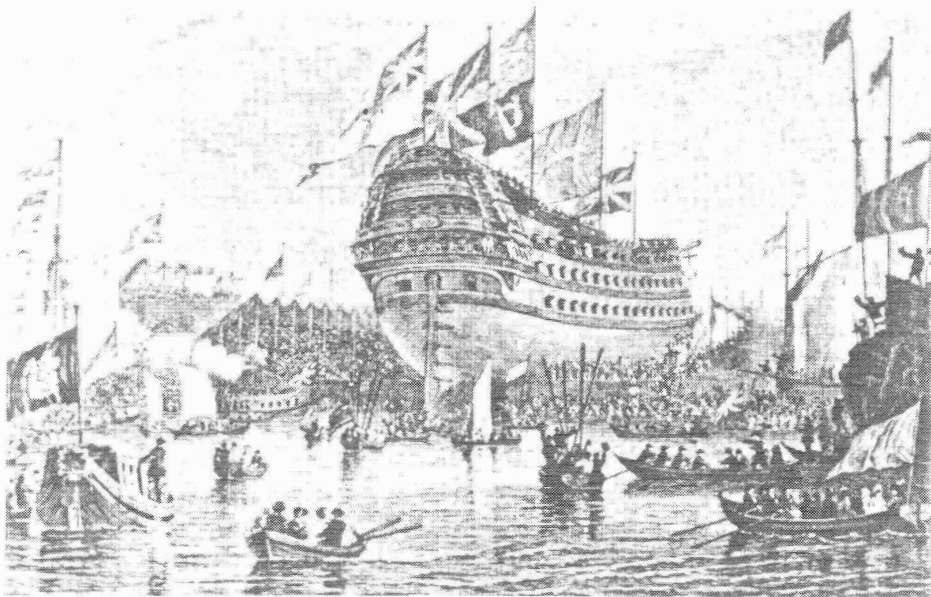
EPILOGUE—HMS WARRIOR

Almost opposite, too, is where Isambard Kingdom Brunel (also known as Islamabad B) launched his *Great Britain*, although the site is now masked by new piling and the inscription which used to remind river trippers has disappeared. The point here, however, is that both sides of the river from Limehouse to Blackwall were studded for

over a century from 1810 with civilian shipyards and engine builders and it was to them that the Navy turned in 1860 for its first ironclad, *Warrior*, then the largest warship in the world. Forget that she never fired a shot in anger and ended up as an oil wharf at the Royal Dockyard, Pembroke Dock; she has now been lovingly restored at Hartlepool and forms, with *Victory* and *Mary Rose*, the last in a remarkable trio at Portsmouth. And don't let it worry you if only the latter was actually built at Portsmouth and that *Victory* is a Chatham ship, where moreover she was re-fitted just before Trafalgar; the London Branch of the IWA can modestly claim that *Warrior* is our ship—she was built by the Thames Ironworks at the mouth of Bow Creek.

ARTHUR FARRAND RADLEY

Launch of the 120-gun HMS Nelson, built at Woolwich in 1814. One of the largest vessels constructed at that yard, she was later converted to steam. (Greenwich Local History Library)



On the Metreau

News and Gossip of London's Waterways

HILLINGDON NARROWBOATS

The community boats previously run by the London Borough of Hillingdon are now run by a separate organisation *Hillingdon Narrowboat Association*. They have four boats and are looking for people to train as steerers. Training takes place on board over two weekends and costs £55. Further details from Tim Snowden on West Drayton (0895) 442892.

BOW BACK RIVERS: MORE HAPPENS

I was going to head this item *Bow Back Rivers: the latest news*, but it surely won't be the latest by the time you read this. The Region Chairman's letter (page 4) has already mentioned the award to the Borough of Newham and Kesslers International of the prestigious IWA/Volvo Penta *Otter* award. During the National Waterways Festival in August, this was presented by Tony Baldry MP (Minister at the Department of the Environment) to Councillor Amarjit Singh (Mayor of Newham), Drew Stevenson (Chief Executive of Newham) and George Kessler (Managing Director of Kesslers International).

By the time you read this, volunteers from International Voluntary Service will have spent a week working on the Carpenters Road area, and ELRI volunteers will have started clearing rubbish from Three Mills Wall River, where Newham has also secured £90,000 Inner Urban Programme funding to renovate and up-grade the towpath. They also anticipate the return of the dredger *River of Hope* (see the Spring issue of *Excalibur*), thanks to another successful grant bid.

KESCRG, on behalf of London IWA, plan to extend their involvement with the project by means of a work camp next Summer (24 July to 9 August). This will concentrate on City Mill and Carpenters Road locks. Volunteers are welcome for anything from an odd day to the full duration. Details available from Ken Parish—0622 858329.

WEST LONDON DEVELOPMENTS

Work on the replacement of the North Circular Road aqueduct at Stonebridge Park has been postponed until January 1993.

BW and Tesco have applied for planning permission to develop a supermarket at Bulls Bridge. Branch Plan/Nav are objecting until full details of the resiting of the maintenance depot are available.

Sainsbury's have opened their new store beside the canal at Alperton. There are mooring bollards with direct access from the towpath. There is a special grid which makes it almost impossible to take a shopping trolley onto the towpath and inevitably into the cut.

The towpath supported by the sunken barges at Old Oak Lane is currently being reinstated.

A GOOD DAY AT SLOUGH

The London Branch sales stand had a very successful time at the Slough Canal Open Day on 22nd September. The event attracted over 4000 people to Bloom Park on the Sunday afternoon and the three branch members were rushed off their feet serving them. The event, sponsored by the Countryside Commission and ICI was organised by the Colne Valley Groundwork Trust with help from local organisations including both the London and Chiltern Branches of the IWA and the Hillingdon Canal Club.

LONDON GOES TO DUDLEY

The Branch sales stand also did good business at the National Waterways Festival at Dudley in August, taking over £400. In addition we are delighted to thank Dave and Carole Sullivan for a donation of over £500 raised by their Bottle Tombola at the National. Thanks are extended to Branch and London WRG members who gave their time on the Branch stand and tombolas. Regulars on the stand were this year able to see some parts of the National other than the Branch stand. Rosie Limming, Branch Sales Officer, tells *Excalibur* that over the year as a whole there has been a welcome increase in the number of members available to help on the sales stand's various outings. Further volunteers are always welcome: Rosie's phone number is on page 3.

RIVER DERWENT: THE FIGHT GOES ON

The IWA has committed a further £20,000 to the Yorkshire Derwent Legal case which is expected to be heard by the Lords in the autumn. IWA council felt that if they did not show this commitment there was a possibility that the case could not be brought and the £164,000 already committed would have been wasted. As it is, they are hopeful of winning and not having to pay this extra sum.

SURPRISE TIM!

One of this year's IWA Christmas Cards features a photograph of the Little Venice area taken by our Branch Member Tim Lewis. Tim has donated his commission in the form of packets of the cards to the Branch. If anybody wants to send Tim a card this year, one of our roving reporters suggests sending him a copy of his own card; then he can make an attempt on the record for receiving the greatest number of IWA Christmas cards all the same.

BOAT STANDARDS

One aspect of the Bill, which was already very much on BW's agenda before the Bill was introduced is the controversial matter of Standards and Certificates of Compliance. IWA has welcomed the Royal Yachting Association's initiative in putting forward an alternative set of standards. IWA has also entered into discussions with BW over the following proposals:

1. Implementation of the BW Standards should be suspended pending agreement on (a) exemptions to be allowed in special cases, (b) classification of Standards into 'essential' and 'desirable' and (c) relaxation of some current Standards.
2. From a date to be fixed when Item 1 has been agreed, the standards should be applied to existing private craft, using the 'Thames System' of self-certification by the owner, with a right for BW to make spot checks at BW's expense.
3. A cheap, fast and acceptable appeals system should be approved by and established under the auspices of the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council.
4. New craft should be formally certified by a surveyor as being built to BW Standards. Subsequently, owners would be responsible for certifying, at the time of licence renewal, that the craft remains in compliance with the Standards.

CHELMSFORD RESTORATION

IWA South East Region has committed the £825 balance of its share of the profits from the 1989 Waltham Abbey Festival, held in the National Waterways Restoration and Development Fund, for use on the Springfield Basin restoration project on the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation at Chelmsford.

KESCRG MOVES ON

KESCRG has taken delivery of a new van, in addition to their new minibus earlier this year. It was paid for with the help of a loan of £3000 from the IWA which they have to pay off by August 1992. All donations welcome, especially aluminium cans which they are collecting. Details of their next dig dates from Ken Parish, on 0622 858329.

THE LONDON BOAT SHOW

This is scheduled for 1-12 January 1992 at Earls Court, and as always IWA will be taking part. IWA HQ has asked the Branch to find some volunteers not only for staffing the stand during the show but also for setting it up before the show and clearing it away afterwards. Anyone who thinks they might be interested is invited to contact Marion Waters (phone number on page 3) to discuss how they could help.

GOING OVERSEAS? THERE ALREADY?

IWA International Committee has started to look into the possibilities of co-operating with other enthusiasts worldwide. Aims include trying to help overseas visitors enjoy our waterways, as well as providing more information on canals and waterways abroad for those wishing to explore further afield. An international meeting is planned next year in Buffalo, with representatives from the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and Belgium. The majority of IWA overseas members are allocated to London Branch and we intend to work closely with the new Committee. Branch Chairman Eric Garland recently met Jan Roden, President of the Australian Canals Society, at an International Committee meeting; a useful contact if anyone is planning a trip Down Under. By the way, the ACS latest newsletter shows that Jan's telephone number prefix has been altered; some things are the same worldwide.

THE CHATTY LOT

A recent report from Branch Vice-President and *Excalibur* writer Arthur Farrand Radley covers the work of the Branch Lecture Panel since Farrand took over responsibility for it five years ago. Since then some 80 lectures have been arranged, given by 11 different lecturers (43 of them by Farrand himself) to a wide range of organisations including a few waterways-oriented groups but many more general-interest groups like social clubs, retirement groups and women's

organisations. Farrand has continued his predecessor's policy that the purpose of the scheme is to publicise IWA and the waterways rather than to make money. In view of the minimal fees which can be afforded by many organisations asking for speakers, this is the only realistic approach. Farrand reports that the number of requests coming in is, if anything, on the increase. If you know of any organisation that would like an illustrated talk on some aspect of the waterways, please contact Farrand, whose phone number is on page 3.

THAMES VISITOR LICENCES

IWA pressure has persuaded the National Rivers Authority Thames Region to make their arrangements for Short Term Craft Registrations more boater-friendly. Firstly they will be cheaper, in line with practice in other NRA Regions, BW and other navigation Authorities. Secondly Short Term Certificates will be available on arrival at the locks at entry points to the River. Thirdly the charges will be grouped into four bands with individual boats' compliance with the 'preferred dimensions' not taken into account. Congratulations to IWA Guildford & Reading Branch member Tony Davis who, as a member of NRA Thames RRAC, has taken the leading part in the campaign for these changes.

LONDON BRANCH SOCIAL MEETINGS

After many months looking for a larger venue for Branch Socials we have at last found one, and our meetings will move to the Abbey Community Centre in Westminster from January. So there are only a couple of meetings left at the Union Jack Club. Because the main function of the UJC is to cater for service personnel, they have felt it necessary to tighten their security since the Gulf War. Members coming to Branch meetings at the UJC are requested to bring their IWA membership cards with them as identification. If you have mislaid your membership card, you can obtain a duplicate by phoning Kirsten Michaels at IWA HQ (071 586 2510/2556).

UNLOCK THE CAPITAL'S CANAL

This was the title of a two-day event for youngsters at City Road Basin on the Regent's Canal over the weekend of 5-6 October. The event was organised by BW London Canals Project Officer Robin Gray, and hosted by

Islington Boat Club with the participation of a number of other organisations including KESCRG and London IWA. Poor weather led to a smaller turn-out than expected, which had the advantage that there was hardly any queueing for the many activities available to the youngsters: canoeing, Dragon Boat racing, angling, traditional painting, rope rescue, water safety, restoration-style bricklaying, knot tying and a Canal History walk. Youngsters who completed eight of these activities were given a T-shirt. Quite a lot of them qualified several times over in the course of the weekend.

These T-shirts bore the slogan *British Waterways—Unlock the Capital's Canal*. Your Region Chairman spent most of the weekend wearing one of them which he had modified by prefixing the slogan with *Why don't...*

One purpose of the event was to launch the Board's new leaflet of the same title which features an activities map of the Regent's Canal. The leaflet has been supported financially by London's City Action Team, the London Canals Committee and the Sports Council. It is available from Robin at BW's Delamere Terrace office (071 286 6101).

NO MORE RUBBISH?

One of the last commercially active wharves on the Thames in Central London is the dock formed by what's left of the Grosvenor Canal (much of the rest now having been built over with Victoria BR Station). This is one of the wharves where London's rubbish is removed in purpose-designed barges: a necessary job well-suited to water transport. But for how much longer? On a recent visit to the rubbish wharf, members of the inland Shipping Group were told that the City of Westminster has plans to use the site for housing at some future date.

BEWARE THE BUBBLER!

It may be stale news now, but on 2 August the Evening Standard reported delays on London Underground's District Line caused by an instruction to drivers not to cross Putney Bridge when the Bubbler barge (whose job is to aerate the water of the Thames) is passing, following a collision between Bubbler and the bridge. We've heard of some excuses... Thanks to Roger Wilkinson for sending us the cutting.

Notice of Region and Branch Annual General Meetings

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meetings of the South East Region and London Branch will be held on the following dates:

SOUTH EAST REGION

Thursday 12 March 1992, 8.00 pm at AUEW House, Primrose Hill, Chelmsford.
The Region AGM will take place immediately after the Chelmsford Branch AGM.

LONDON BRANCH

Thursday 19 March 1992, 7.30 pm at the Abbey Community Centre, 24 Great Smith Street, Westminster (See map on page 15).

The Agenda for each meeting will be as follows:

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the last AGM, together with the Minutes of any Special General meetings held during the period since the last AGM.
3. Matters arising from the above Minutes.
4. Report of the Chairman.
5. Report of the Secretary.
6. Report of the Treasurer and presentation of accounts.
7. Adoption of audited accounts.
8. Appointment of Honorary Auditor.
9. Election of Committee.
10. Any other business.
11. Address by Guest Speaker or other event.

NOTE: Nominations for Committees should be in writing, signed by the proposer, seconder and nominee. Nominations must be received by the Branch/Region Secretary, as appropriate, not less than 14 days before the AGM concerned.

BRANCH SECRETARY

Marcia Davies
169 Langham Road
London N15 3LP
Home: 081-881 4688
Work: 071-236 4232

REGION SECRETARY

Mike Stimpson
149a High Street
Rickmansworth
Herts WD3 1AR
Home : 0923-721559
Work : 0923-770425
Mobile : 0831-815357

Also: Kent & East Sussex Branch AGM, Wednesday 25 March 1992 8.00 pm at The Fountains public house, Barming, Kent

Readers Write

Dear Mike,

Having read your plea for readers' letters in *Excalibur*, I am writing on behalf of myself and my husband. We enjoy reading the newsletter, and it is marvellous to know so much is being done to improve conditions around London, especially Bow Rivers, which we have promised ourselves to visit sometime.

We did make several visits to London Branch meetings, but the difficulty was the homeward journey late at night.

We made our first canal trip in 1965 when our three children were 12, 10 and 8 years old, hire for the week being £25. Since then we have had several trips on the Macclesfield Canal, explored the four Counties Ring, been up the Erewash and Caldon canals, on the River Wey and last but not least had a memorable trip from Worcester with two grandsons, going through 50-odd locks on the first day out. There wasn't a muscle that wasn't complaining when it came to crawling into bed that night! Since that first trip, prices have risen so much that we have to find other ways of enjoying the canals.

Having read *The Great Toupth Walk* by Brian Bearshaw, I thought I would celebrate my seventieth birthday last year by doing the first part of the walk from Westminster to Brentford and up the Grand Union Canal to the boundary of Greater London just South of Watford, as a sponsored walk to raise funds to take handicapped friends from a local Elderly People's Day Centre on the River Lea on *Challenger*. We are fortunate that this adapted boat is based fairly near us. My husband was a great support and two other pensioners joined us for part of the way. I should add that we did not do the whole walk in one day and that quite a lot of people thought we were mad and quite likely to collapse along the way!

We have done three river trips so far, and it is marvellous to see what pleasure these people get from being on a narrowboat and enjoying the scenery—it's a magical world to them.

When we first went on the River Lea last year it was somewhat messy in parts but the work done on it since being designated a 'Park' has made a tremendous difference and it was greatly improved this Summer. We have to keep walking as we are constantly being asked when we are having the next trip!

We did do a Sunday afternoon IWA walk from Camden Town Station to Little Venice, but

became separated from the party as we pushed our way through the packed crowds at Camden Lock, joined up with a young family, also lost, and eventually found our own way to Little Venice. Must try another IWA walk sometime.

Hoping that you get a good response from your readers and good luck to *Excalibur*. We think it is a good name and matches the tie!

JOAN & JOHN HUNTER
Ilford, Essex

A TRIP ON THE TIDEWAY

The following is extracted from a letter to Ann Hancox with an order for a London Ring plaque commemorating the writer's 1988 visit to London with his narrowboat Empress of India.

Dear Ann Hancox,

Your members might be interested in our rather harrowing experience. My wife and I had set off from our base in Worcester early in June and had worked our way (via Birmingham) to the G.U.—we left the *Empress*, for a few days' rest, at the High Line Yachting Co. base at Uxbridge.

On our return we continued down to Bull's Bridge and then followed the Paddington Arm, Regent's Canal and Hertford Union into the Lee Navigation to Ware.

Back down the Lee, we arrived in time to find that Limehouse Lock had been closed that day for its major re-build. Not to be thwarted, we consulted the lock-keeper at Bow about the practicability of entering the Thames there.

He saw no problems except the inconvenient tide times. We could either leave right away (4.30 pm) or at about the same time the following morning. He did not advocate a longer stay in the vicinity, or leaving the boat unattended, because of the risk of vandalism. In the event, we had no trouble; our boat's name seemed to conjure up a sense of nostalgia in the local community, which may have helped! Indeed one dark-complexioned youngster wanted to know if we had just come from India!

We were up early the next morning and, under the lock-keeper's guidance, we sailed through as the incoming tide pushed the lock gates open at 4.30 am. Our air-cooled Lister SR2 made quite hard work of the trip down Bow Creek and it took us a good hour to reach the Thames. My log recalls that we were thrilled to spot more than 15 herons on the factory roof-tops.

As you will have guessed, by the time we turned into the Thames proper we had lost much of the benefit of the tide and we soon found it increasingly slow going as the tide turned to run against us. As we approached Charing Cross Bridge we became aware that it would not be long before we found ourselves being pushed backwards. In some desperation, because we had not sighted anywhere where we could comfortably moor up, we finally tied up against some moored trip boats just below Westminster Bridge. There we had no choice but to sit it out until the tide turned once more. By now it was 7.30 am and the journey this far had taken three hours. We were left to our own devices for the next four hours or so, enduring a very uncomfortable and worrying time. Our problem was that we were exposed to the passing traffic on the river. The heavy wash, particularly from police launches passing up and down at high speed, caused a great deal of movement between us and our neighbours. Most of our fenders were ripped off by the surging movements and a very worrying amount of water was bursting over our bow every time. Eventually workmen who came to make the trip boats ready for their afternoon excursions helped us into a more sheltered spot and we were then able to enjoy a reasonably tranquil and leisurely early lunch.

At slack water we were able to set off once more and our only other worry was, as we set off up the Boat Race course, stopwatch in hand (!), to run aground in almost mid-stream near Fulham football ground. Happily it was not long before the incoming tide re-floated us.

Having reached this point in my account, it dawns on me that we did not in fact complete the London Ring, as we kept on going when we got to Brentford and only returned to the canals after we had cruised as far as Lechlade and back to Oxford.

May I, in conclusion, offer just one thought which might help others who may be planning a cruise round the London Ring. Our problems arose because we knew of nowhere where we could safely moor up on the river as the tide started to run against us. If there are any places where boaters can tie up and leave their boats - to shop or sight-see - could they not be given some suitable publicity? I am sure that more people would take to the River if they knew of some such safe haven(s) on the route.

BRIAN MILWOOD
Cardiff

HOTEL BOAT HOLIDAYS

I have just returned from my sixth holiday on a canal hotel boat and can thoroughly recommend this alternative to the usual d.i.y. holiday in a hire boat, of which I have experienced five. The first three hotel boat holidays were with a husband and wife (now retired) managing one boat and five passengers. The last three have been with another couple, with some crew, managing two boats and up to nine passengers. In both cases everything was in tip-top order and the meals worthy of the best hotels. Nothing is too much trouble to ensure everyone has a pleasant holiday. Should you have any dietary problem, you have only to mention it when booking and your needs will be met.

Full details of the cruises are given, so if you hate tunnels you can avoid them; and if you prefer a few locks or delight in many, there are river and canal cruises to suit your taste. You are also sent maps of towns at the start and finish of the cruise which enable you to do a little exploring either end of your holiday. Time is given to visit places of interest near the canal or just a short taxi-ride away.

Cabins are, of necessity, small but each has a wash basin, mirror, glass shaving point, towels - and a hot-water bottle! There is hanging space and other clothes can be kept in your case under the bunk. In the two double cabins, one bunk goes across the width of the boat and the other above it at right-angles. Two of the single cabins have higher bunks, with a two-step stool to help you get on and off safely. Both boats have a bathroom with flush toilet, wash basin and shower.

Meals are eaten on the butty, using folding tables, so that between meals there is plenty of room to sit and read or whatever else you want to do. There is a small saloon on the motor-boat with a good selection of books, maps, games and jigsaws. Under the Skipper's guidance you may help with the locks or just sit watching the world go by from the well-deck in either of the boats.

Guests seem to come from all walks of life and be of all ages. Some have been interested in canals for many years and may have hired, or even owned, a boat previously. Others have never been on a canal before, but all seem to end the week looking forward to coming again next year!

MRS ENID WEBB
Woolwich

The Editor reserves the right to edit any letter submitted for publication.

Waterways Events in and around London

NOVEMBER

Tuesday 26th 7.30pm	IWA Kent and E Sussex	Fountain Inn, Barming, Maidstone: <i>A view of the River Medway</i> : Gay Roberts
Saturday 30th 12.00 noon	Grand Union Canal Society	Noggin and Natter at the Paddington Packet Boat, Packet Boat Lane, Cowley Peachey

DECEMBER

Tuesday 3rd 8.00pm	IWA LONDON BRANCH * NEW VENUE *	Hillingdon Canal Cruising Club Waterloo Road, Uxbridge. <i>IWA directions for the future</i> : Mike West
Friday 6th	IWA LONDON BRANCH * NEW VENUE *	SW London area social meeting (provisional date. See enclosed fly-sheet for details)
Saturday 7th—Sunday 8th	LONDON WRG DIG	Venue to be decided
Monday 9th	IWA LONDON BRANCH * NEW VENUE *	NE London area social meeting (provisional date. See enclosed fly-sheet for details)
Wednesday 11th	IWA LONDON BRANCH * NEW VENUE *	SE London area social meeting (provisional date. See enclosed fly-sheet for details)
Thursday 12th 7 for 7.30pm	IWA LONDON BRANCH	Union Jack Club, Sandell St. (near Waterloo Stn.) Auction and Quiz
Thursday 12th 8.00pm	IWA Chelmsford Branch	AEU House, Primrose Hill, Chelmsford Christmas Social with members' slides.
Tuesday 17th 8pm	IWA Herts Branch	Hatfield Cricket Club, Welwyn Garden City Christmas Social

JANUARY 1992

Thursday 9th 8.00pm	IWA Chelmsford Branch	AEU House, Primrose Hill, Chelmsford <i>Liverpool St to the Continent—a Postcard View</i> Nigel Bowdigge
Thursday 16th 7 for 7.30pm	IWA LONDON BRANCH * NEW VENUE *	Abbey Community Centre, 34 Great Smith St SW1. Speaker to be announced
Tuesday 17th 8pm	IWA Herts Branch	Hatfield Cricket Club, Welwyn Garden City Members' slide evening
Saturday 18th—Sunday 19th	LONDON WRG DIG	Venue to be decided
Thursday 23rd 8pm	IWA Chelmsford and IWA Kent and E Sussex Branch	Gravesend Sailing Club, Canal Basin, Gravesend: Challenge Quiz
Saturday 25th 12.00 noon	Grand Union Canal Society	Noggin and Natter at the Fisheries, Boxmoor, Hemel Hempstead

FEBRUARY 1992

Sunday 2nd 2.30pm	IWA LONDON BRANCH	Regent's Canal towpath walk to Islington. Meet at Camden Town Tube Station
Saturday 8th—Sunday 9th	LONDON WRG DIG	Wilts and Berks Canal

FEBRUARY 1992

Tuesday 18th 8pm

IWA Herts Branch

Hatfield Cricket Club, Welwyn Garden City
Through the Pennines: Ted Percy

Thursday 20th 7 for 7.30pm IWA LONDON BRANCH
* NEW VENUE *

Abbey Community Centre, 34 Great Smith St, SW1. Speaker to be announced

Saturday 22nd 12.00 noon Grand Union Canal Society

Noggin and Natter at the Royal, Bulbourne

Tuesday 25th 7.30 for 8pm IWA Kent and E Sussex

Fountain Inn, Barming, Maidstone. Speaker to be announced.

FURTHER DETAILS FROM

Grand Union Canal Society

Janet Parish

0442-252519

IWA Chelmsford Branch

Molly Beard

0702-554492

IWA Herts Branch

Greta Wright

0727-860137

IWA Kent and East Sussex

Angela Meadle

0634-722661

IWA London Branch

Central London Meetings

Tim Lewis

081-530 7926

Uxbridge Meetings

Mike Stimpson

0923-721559

Walks

Dr Michael Essex-Lopresti

081-882 1337

London WRG

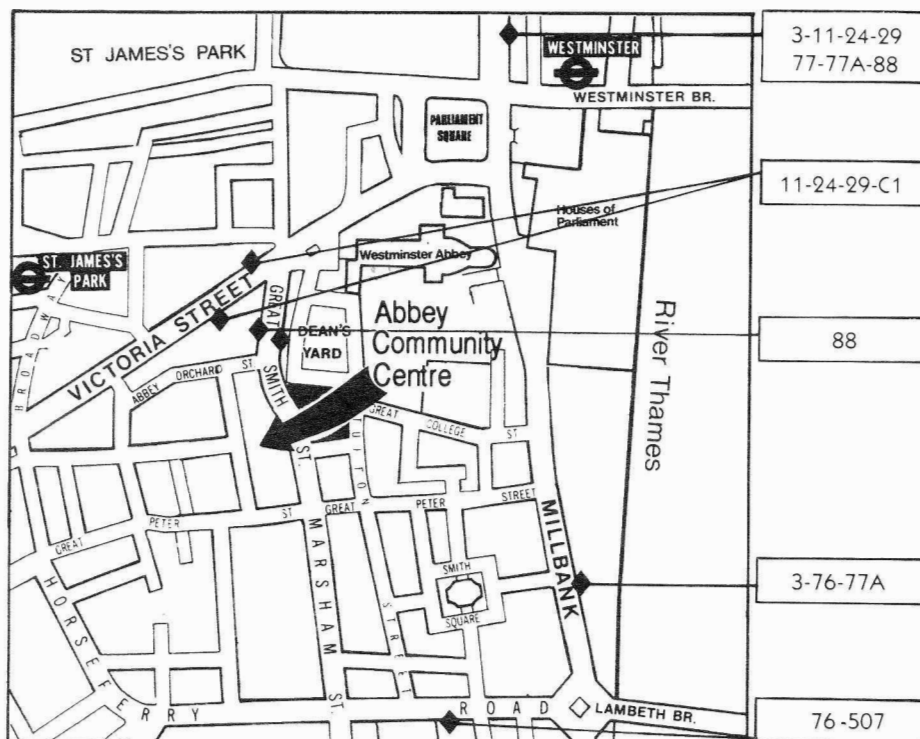
Lesley McFadyen

081-693 3266

NEW VENUE FOR LONDON BRANCH MEETINGS

Abbey Community Centre, 34 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BU

Tube: Westminster or St James's Park. Lots of bus routes nearby



Superb Selection of Prizes for our New Year Draw!

The New Year Draw is London Branch's resurrection of the Christmas Draw that used to be run by our old South East Region up to the middle 70's. The aim of the Draw is to raise additional funds for the Branch and we include two books of the 50p tickets with this issue of 'Excalibur'. As can be seen from the list below we have a superb selection of prizes to be won. The first prize is a one week spring holiday for four in one of the luxury Sovereign narrow boats operating from their new base on the Oxford canal.

At present, income is brought to the Branch by Canalway Cavalcade, Branch Sales, Canal Walks, Speaker Donations and all kinds of other donations. Since 1985 the Branch has donated most of the funds we have raised, which have amounted to over £14,000, to various waterway causes, restoration groups and canal societies, as well as community groups and major waterway campaigns.

However, the Branch also needs money to run its basic activities: for room hire for committee and social meetings; work in making representations to various authorities, monitoring planning applications and generally safeguarding our local waterways.

The Branch receives no money from General Office to do any of this work and the money received from membership fees provides just over half the cost of producing and mailing four copies of 'Excalibur' each year.

We would like to thank those companies, organisations and individuals who have helped us with prizes for the Draw. Most of our sponsors have advertisements on this page. Please sell as many tickets as you can to either yourself or your friends. We hope that you all have luck in the draw, but if you don't - please, please support those who have supported us in our Draw.

The prizes in the draw are as follows: 1st Prize - One week Holiday for four on luxury narrow boat (Sovereign Marine), 2nd Prize - Full set of narrow boat fenders or knot board (Bill Hickey), 3rd Prize - Gift voucher for £50 (Uxbridge Boat Centre Ltd), 4th Prize - Dinner cruise for two aboard 'My Fair Lady', 5th Prize - One year subscription to Waterways World (Waterway Productions Ltd), 6th Prize - Fine art waterway colour print (Alex & Jan Prowse), 7th Prize - Lunch trip for two aboard 'Jason', 8th Prize - Pewter tankard and 9th Prize - Silver bud vase or silver narrow boat (IWA).

If you can sell more tickets than we have included with this issue of 'Excalibur' more books are available from Richard Bird, 23 Porcupine Close, Mottingham, London SE9 3AE or any London Branch Committee member. The Draw takes place on 20 February, 1992 at the London Branch Social Meeting at the Abbey Community Centre, Great Peter Street, London SW1. (See map on page 15). The meeting commences at 7.30pm and the winning tickets will be drawn at 9.00pm.

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