

BROADSHEET

Magazine of the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal Society



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Cover Photograph

Saturn Arriving at Bratch - Steve Bingham

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Editorial

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Broadsheet.

In this issue, we report on the Bratch Rally which, despite the challenges of low water levels, nonetheless drew a very positive turnout and welcomed new members. We also carry updates on infrastructure difficulties—repeated bridge damage and the effects of a dry summer on navigation. A correction to Parker-Oxspring's Reminiscence (May 2025 edition) is also included, and we are grateful to members who provided supporting evidence.

The Bradmore winter talks programme continues, with details listed in the diary section. Contributions for the December edition are most welcome by the last Friday in November.

We trust you will find this edition both informative and reflective.

Happy reading .

Max



Chairwoman's Remarks

Well what a mixed bag to end the summer on. A record breaking summer, which for many people including myself has been of the "enough now" mindset! A little bit of sunshine and warmth is pleasant but some of the really hot weather was just too much, and I admit to actually hiding in the house where it was cooler rather than face the heat. It was like the rose tinted summers of childhood where the weather was always lovely and it never rained.

Boating ended up a privilege only for those on waterways with actual water. So many stoppages where the bottom was too close to the top and attempts to conserve water by shutting waterways that were either un-navigable or were closed to conserve what water they had left. Locally there were many stoppages on the BCN. The Tardebigge flight closed for maintenance and the Wolverhampton closed to conserve water leaving the Stourbridge Arm the only local access to the Staffs and Worcs and the Severn. I feel for the hire companies and their customers looking forward to cruising a ring and having little choice on where they went. And this is reflected all over the network.

Yes we've had limited rainfall this year and it begs the question what can be done? Do our canals and reservoirs need more dredging to increase water available and lessen the impact of dropping water levels, less vegetation canalside to contribute to the debris in the navigation (not easy where the offside is not owned by CRT), leaky lock gates and the old

favourite it's a 250 year old network that needs a lot of maintenance? With dwindling budgets, higher maintenance, higher usage of the canals, weather events, dealing with vandalism and bridge strikes and cars in the cut, an awful lot is expected of a finite resource at CRT. And that's without water abstraction laws and other officialdom. I don't know what the long term forecast for rain is over the autumn and winter, but it seems that we're getting wetter winters and drier summers, and all or nothing when it comes to water. I'm not a hydrologist and I know that there isn't a silver bullet, and if there is it will no doubt cost vast quantities of money.

From the mouths of babes, our son spotted a lone metal balance beam on the way to Bratch this year and questioned why it wasn't wood like all the others. I explained that in keeping with the heritage and the aesthetic of the canal it was an anomaly. My husband remembers it being there for decades. This then led to a discussion as to where to we draw the line between conservation and pragmatism. I do not wish to see somewhere like Bratch with metal balance beams instead of wood, and the craftsmanship of creating wooden lock gates is fading into obscurity. But are there other areas of the network that would benefit from potential sympathetic modernisation? It's a contentious subject and I'd be interested in your views. Can a balance be struck?

Speaking of Bratch there is a write up in this edition so I won't go into it too much here. More boats were

scheduled to attend this year than last year, but due to the water shortages and stoppages some of the trade boats and private boats were unable to attend – either due to being unable to reach us due to stoppages or concerns about being able to return to their home mooring or the next rally. Despite this and a bit of rain there was a good turnout.

My highlight was seeing Flower bring Saturn down the locks. What a star she was, and all of the dedicated volunteers who care for Flower and Saturn and showed us some real living heritage. I was surprised at Flower's size towing the boat and another person beat me to the punch as to why she was so small (FYI she's 13.2 hands) and it was pointed out that a larger pony or horse would struggle getting under some of the bridges. Well that's perfectly sensible and why didn't I think of that!

And finally my heartfelt thanks to all that enabled the rally to be a success. The months of planning, the support from the Parish Council, CRT, Volunteers, Severn Trent and of course the Rally Committee working hard all over the weekend to ensure smooth running. I salute you.

We have a varied and interesting schedule of talks over the coming year and I hope to see you there, including some new members who joined during the rally.

Please do contact myself of the editor if you would like to share any views (or challenge mine), photos, history or anything canal related. It is your Society and the more involved you can be the better.

Hopefully see you all soon.

Rhian

The Bi-Centenary Award

Every year at the AGM we like to award The Bicentenary Medallion.

This is awarded to the person who in the opinion of the Society Members has done most to further the aims of the Society in the last twelve months.

The Bicentenary Medallion was first awarded to Mavis Waldren in 1973, so the award is an important part of our Society's history.

This is your chance to recognise the

good work that is done to support our Society aims.

It is your choice and it is a "thank you" to a member who has worked well for our Society."

Please email your nomination together with a very brief justification to Liz Osborn (dandlo.buckbury@btinternet.com or 01299 832922) before 6th October 2025.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Held on 10th June 2024 at Bradmore Community Centre

1. Apologies

- Chris Dyche
- Steven and Judith Gray
- Ivor and Joan Caplan
- Pauline Farnell
- Phil Clayton

Members present: 33

2. Minutes of the 2023 AGM

The minutes were reviewed. One correction was noted: *“David” should read “Derek”*.

With this amendment, the minutes were approved as accurate.

3. Chair’s Report

- **Membership:** 84 fully paid-up members, 20 outstanding. Work on reviewing membership benefits is ongoing.
- **Broadsheet:** A trial of distributing copies at meetings was not successful, so distribution will revert to posting. Printing quality has improved with the move to an online printer, at no extra cost.
- **Bratch Rally:** Discussion took place about moving the rally to another site. It was agreed that

Bratch remains the best location, with goodwill from all parties involved. CART has advised that no fee is required to hold the rally.

- **Pump House:** Positive discussions have taken place with Severn Trent and CART, raising hope that it may be opened next year.
- **Stourport:** Now recognised as an Inland Historic Port. Thanks were given to Angela for her involvement with the group.
- **Representation:** Members have attended most User Group meetings. Rhian has yet to meet the new Midland Region Manager.
- **CART Government Funding:** Rhian advised members to sign the petition requiring 100,000 signatures.
- **Malcolm Brain Legacy:** Funds have been transferred to Stafford Riverway Link. Planning permission has been shared with Rhian. The funds are ring-fenced.
- Thanks were expressed to all volunteers. More committee members are still needed, including members without portfolio. Nominations from the floor were welcomed.

4. Treasurer's Report

- Copies of the financial statement were circulated.
- The Malcolm Brain legacy has been paid to Stafford Riverway Link.
- A further legacy has been received from the estate of Jean Warner.
- Gift Aid income was £790.60.
- The Bratch Rally made a profit of £2 last year.
- Social event expenditure covered speaker fees and hall rent.

Bradmore's own AGM is scheduled for next week.

- **Subscriptions:** A question was raised about whether membership fees should increase. Angela noted the fine balance between increasing fees and retaining members. The matter will be discussed further at the next committee meeting.
- **Membership costs:** A query was raised about whether current subscriptions cover all costs.
- **Book income:** Julian raised a question regarding income from Jenks' books. Angela explained their treatment within the accounts.

5. Election of Officers

The following were elected:

- **Chair:** Rhian Dobbs
- **Vice Chair:** Maxwell Dobbs
- **Treasurer:** Angela Clarke
- **Secretary:** Ann Pollard

Proposed by Geoffrey Whittaker, seconded by Edwin Fasham.

Committee Members:

- Pauline Farnell
- Dave Clarke

Proposed by Glyn Phillips, seconded by Peter Whitehouse.

Auditor: Tina Westwood (ratified).

6. Presentations

- **Tony Guy Plate:** Awarded to Steve Bingham in recognition of his work and success with the Annual Rally. To be presented at the next Rally

Committee meeting or at Bratch.

- **Bicentenary Medallion:** No nominations were received last year. This year, Liz received several worthy nominations. Following an email nomination highlighting their contribution, **Rhian and Max** were awarded the Medallion for their active involvement in sustaining the Society.

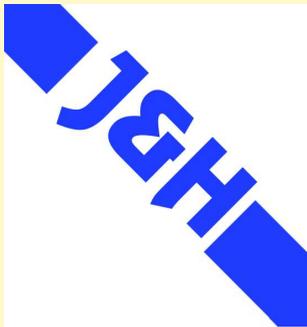
7. Any Other Business

- Julian donated the profits from his book to the Society. This is the first book published since Ian Langford's towpath guide.
- Edwin suggested holding the AGM earlier in the year.

No further business was raised.

8. Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at **8.20 pm**.



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Soggy But Safe: Sheep Rescued from South Staffs Canal

Firefighters rescued a sheep which got stuck in a canal in south Staffordshire yesterday (Thursday 28 August).

We were called at 7.30am to a canal off Botterham Lane, Swindon, following reports that a sheep had entered the water and got stuck.

Numerous appliances along with water and animal rescue teams attended the scene.

Crews used a sledge to rescue the sheep which was returned to its field. Thankfully, the sheep was not injured.

Crews left the scene at around 9.25am.



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Rally Reflections – Bratch 2025

Rhian Dobbs

As the last ropes were cast off and Ernest Thomas II slipped quietly back to The Wharf, I found myself reflecting on this year’s Rally of Boats at The Bratch.

Now in its fourth year, the rally has grown into a flagship event not only for our Society, but for the wider canal community and the local community. What began as a modest gathering has become a fixture in the calendar, a weekend that brings together working boats, waterways charities, traders, local supporters, and visitors from across the country — all united by a shared love of our canals.

This year’s rally, held over the weekend of 30–31 August, delivered everything we hoped for — and more. The weather held fair (with the exception of a well-timed shower at closing each day!), and the atmosphere throughout was happy

and relaxed, with learning, laughter, and connection.

A Living Heritage Moment

Our headline event — and perhaps one of the most memorable we’ve ever hosted — was the horse-drawn arrival of Saturn on Saturday at noon. With Flower the pony, steady and beautiful (not at all phased by the



crowds and relishing her moment in the spotlight – I'm told she stops for photo opportunities), towing the UK's last surviving Shropshire Union fly-boat into the Bratch flight, the lockside came alive. Crowds gathered and then followed them, watching history literally pass through the locks.

Guests and Gatherings

We were delighted to welcome a number of guests over the weekend, including local MP Mike Wood, Parish Councillors Martin and Daisy Perry, and representatives from the Canal & River Trust. Their support and ongoing engagement with our canal community is hugely valued.

We were also honoured by the presence of several very special boats, including Lady Hatherton — a historically significant inspection launch, lovingly maintained — and

Stewart & Lloyds Tug No.2, a striking example of British industrial canal heritage. Both drew admiration and sparked conversations about restoration, preservation, and the evolution of canal use over time.

Community at the Heart

This rally wouldn't be what it is without our partners and friends. We were pleased to be joined by Forces Veterans Afloat, whose work supporting ex-servicemen and women on the water is both inspiring and deeply important. We also welcomed Stafford Riverway Link, whose long-term vision for reconnecting Stafford to the navigation continues to inspire local and regional interest. A special shoutout to the Jam Butty who is now an institution at the rally, with people coming out just to buy their wares! They'll have a new boat next year but still the same vittles.





Photo: Tony Gregory

We had a bumper number of new members sign up on the weekend, which I think goes to show the importance of the Staffs and Worcs to everybody.

As always, our Society volunteers were the true engine behind the weekend — giving time, energy, and heart to everything from mooring support and stewarding to guiding, welcoming, and crewing. Ernest Thomas II, once again, made the perfect host boat for guests and conversation and highlighting the important work they do in the community.

Looking Ahead

We are proud of what we achieved at Bratch this year. Not just the boats, or

the talks, or even the Saturn spectacle — but the sense of shared purpose. The sense that we're not just keeping the past alive, but helping shape the future of our canals for everyone - the wildlife, the boaters, the dog walkers, the cyclists, the walkers, the runners, the waterside businesses, the paddleboarders and canoeists, the list is endless of those that use, and benefit from the waterway.

To everyone who visited, supported, volunteered, and cheered from the lockside — Thank You. The Staffs & Worcs Canal is in good hands, and with your help, it will remain one of the finest and best-loved canals in the country.

Until next year.

PHIL JONES



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Dimmingsdale Bridge Parapet Down Again!

Tony Gregory

22nd June 2025

Navigation closed.

Highway closed.

For the third time in just two years, the southern parapet has ended up in the cut.

It has to be said that CRT and their contractors Kier are now well practised in what to do next. With Keith Stevens on leave, Anthony Lampitt soon had the canal closed and measures put in place to expedite repairs.

By the end of the week, scaffolding had been erected and a dredger

and pan transported to site by road by The Rothen Group. Within eight days the canal was reopened at a reported cost of some £80,000 which is hoped to be covered by the driver's insurance company.

Ongoing discussions are taking place between Lower Penn Parish Council, South Staffs District Council and the County Highways to seek a way to alleviate this too often occurrence.

It should be noted that the listed bridge structure belongs to CRT and the highway above belongs to the Highway Authority.

Tony Gregory



DEADLINE

Do you have an article
you'd like to submit
for inclusion in
BROADSHEET ?

The deadline for
Issue 699 is
Friday 31st October 2025



Water, Water Nowhere – And Not a Drop to Spare

The summer of 2025 has brought one of the driest spells in recent memory, with less than a quarter of the usual rainfall recorded in parts of the Midlands. Unsurprisingly, the impact is now being felt across the inland waterways—both on the water itself and within the communities that rely on it.

A striking example came in August, when the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal between Stourport and Kidderminster had to be temporarily closed due to critically low water levels. Boats were reportedly stuck on the bottom between Wallfield Bridge (Bridge 4) and Kidderminster Lock (Lock 6). The Canal & River Trust (CRT) intervened by raising levels, and the stoppage was lifted around August 22nd. While navigation has resumed, boaters—especially those with deeper-drafted vessels—are urged to proceed with caution.

Closer to home, the Rally at Bratch, held at the end of August, was a success in atmosphere but not without consequence. Several boats that had planned to attend pulled out—either due to confirmed restrictions or fears of last-minute closures en route. While this didn't dampen the spirits of those who made it, it brought home how

precarious navigation conditions have become.

Anecdotally, boaters across the network are reporting slower passages, and River Canal Rescue issuing guidance on freeing boats from grounding. With feeder reservoirs running low and CRT under pressure to keep pounds navigable, concerns are growing about the system's resilience under strain.

The situation also brings to mind struggles elsewhere. On the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, new restrictions under the Water Framework Directive have removed CRT's unrestricted access to its main water source—the River Usk—even though most of that water is returned downstream. It's a stark example of how well-intentioned environmental regulation, combined with hydrological stress, can jeopardise entire stretches of historic waterway. As pressures mount, canals reliant on river feeds—like sections of the Staffs & Worcs—could face similar challenges in the years ahead.

But while it's tempting to blame climate change, doing so risks oversimplifying the issue. Britain's canals have always faced extremes—1976's notorious dry summer being a case in point.

What's changed is not the weather alone, but our ability to respond to it. Today's waterways operate under tighter regulation, reduced funding, and aging infrastructure. The problem isn't that the weather is unprecedented, but that the system's ability to cope has weakened.

As autumn approaches, what is normally a time of reflection and celebration feels a little more uncertain. Nonetheless, the rally season has reminded us of the enduring spirit of the waterways community—resilient, practical, and deeply connected to this historic network, come flood or drought.

Correction – Editor's Note on "Reminiscence" (May 2025 Ed.)

In the May 2025 edition of the Broadsheet, the Editor's note accompanying J.H. Parker-Oxspring's Reminiscence contained factual inaccuracies that we would like to correct and clarify.

Ownership of Tixall Hall: The note incorrectly stated that the Anson family (of Shugborough Hall) once owned Tixall Hall. In fact, Tixall Hall was owned by the Aston family, who acquired the estate in 1507. It later passed by marriage to Thomas Clifford, whose family retained the estate until its sale in 1845.

The Origin of Tixall Wide: The earlier note implied that the widening of the canal at Tixall Wide was an aesthetic decision by the estate owners. However, Julian Souter, in correspondence and through his research, has clarified that the widening was a negotiated

outcome due to flooding risks on the original canal route. A document titled A Proposal, found in the East Riding Archives (Ref: DDCC/146/31), details that Thomas Clifford agreed to reroute the canal across his land, on the condition that the canal be made "thirty yards broad." This document is undated but can be placed between 1770 and 1771 and predates the secondary account quoted in the original editor's note.

This correction was made possible through the careful observations of **Nicholas Bostock**, who first raised the issue of the Hall's ownership and questioned the accepted account of Tixall Wide's origins. We also thank **Julian Souter** for sharing primary evidence and further historical context, which will feature in his forthcoming book on the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal, due in 2026.

Funding Boost for Lichfield Canal Restoration



LHCRT chair, Carole Mills, gives Cllr Farrell and Cllr Cox a tour of Gallows Reach.

The Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust (LHCRT) has been awarded £200,000 in development funding by Lichfield District Council to support the next phase of its work at Gallows Reach—a key section in the restoration of the historic Lichfield Canal.

The funding comes via the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), a levy placed on new developments and used to improve infrastructure across the district. This latest award will support the delivery of Phase 2 at Gallows Reach, which will extend the restored canal from Gallows Wharf to the footpath between Tamworth Road and Longbridge Road.

The money will be used to purchase vital construction materials, including sheet piling for the banks and a watertight lining for the canal bed across the 225-metre stretch.

Once completed, the Gallows Reach section will provide a traffic-free walking and cycling route, connecting new housing developments at Cricket Lane and St John’s Grange, while also creating new habitats to support local biodiversity.

Derek Lord, LHCRT Planning and Technical Trustee, welcomed the announcement:

“This funding is fantastic news. It brings us another step closer to our vision of a fully restored canal. Gallows Reach is a strategically important site, supporting green infrastructure, sustainable transport, and the long-term goal of reconnecting the Lichfield Canal with Huddlesford Junction.”

Alex Farrell, LDC Cabinet Member for Housing, also praised the work being carried out:

“It was great to visit Gallows Reach and see first-hand the incredible progress made by LHCRT volunteers. This CIL funding will help ensure the next phase of this transformative project continues apace.”

The announcement comes as Phase 1 at Tamworth Road Narrows nears completion. Other key developments are also progressing, including the lift bridge installation and preparations for the Cricket Lane culvert, expected to start later this year.

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1 in 10 Unlicensed — This Is Enforcement

Maxwell Dobbs

The Canal & River Trust’s latest National Boat Count lands with a thud: 9.9% of boats on enforceable waters were unlicensed in 2025. In London & the South East it’s roughly one in six, even after a modest improvement from last year. It’s a number that has crept up for years—and it forces an uncomfortable question. Is this mainly about cost-of-living? Or is it more squarely a story of verification gaps, backlogs, and uneven enforcement that allowed non-payment to harden into habit?

What CRT actually reported

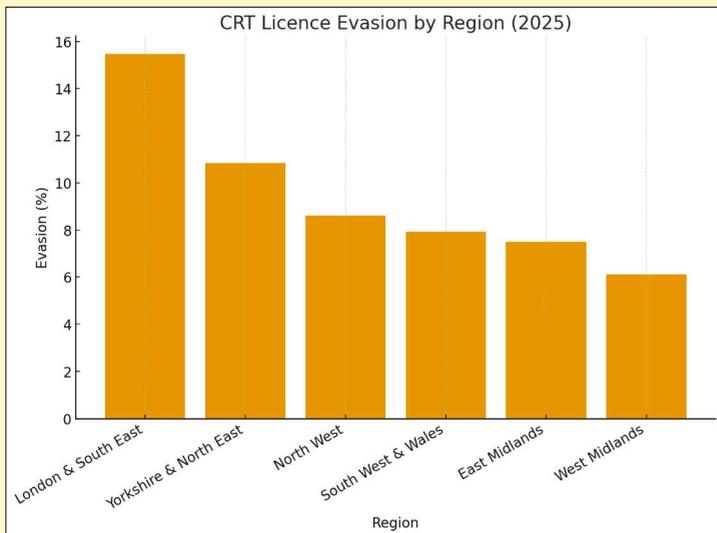
The 2025 count is a physical sighting by towpath teams. The headline: licence evasion is 9.9%, up from 8.2%

in 2024. London & South East—long the outlier—improved yet still sits at around 15.5%. Tucked into the same page is the line that matters for trend-watchers: since the last count CRT has required proof of paid home moorings, a verification change the Trust says “may be in part behind the rise.” In other words, better checking may be surfacing issues that were already there—this is not purely a new wave of hardship.

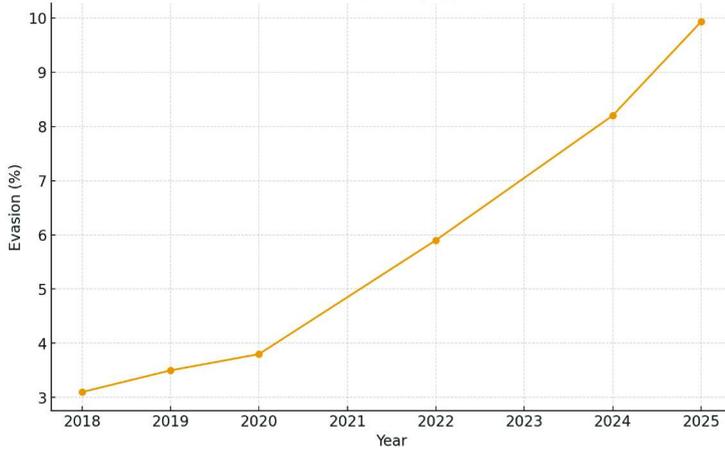
Wind back a year: the 2024 count put overall compliance at 91.8% (i.e., evasion ~8.2%) and noted a dip in boat numbers on the network. That set the stage for this year’s jump.

The drift since the high-water mark

Evasion was about 3% in 2018, the modern low point. It’s now a shade under 10%. Even without fancy modelling, the direction of travel is obvious; the debate is about *why*. If cost-of-living were the dominant driver, you would expect the priciest region to worsen most. Instead, London & South East improved while



CRT Licence Evasion (%), 2018-2025



The money now — and what may have been lost historically

What's at stake today. CRT's income in 2023/24 was £237.3 million. Private boat licences account for a modest slice of that pie, but even modest slices add up. With evasion at

several cheaper regions got worse—a result more consistent with case handling and verification effects than a simple price story.

Why “100% evasion” isn't the point—and why acceleration is the risk

You can project a line from 2018 to today and joke about the day nobody pays a licence. But the more serious behavioural risk is acceleration: if enforcement looks weak and people see neighbours not paying, conditional cooperators (“I pay if you pay”) start to peel away.

Starting at 9.9% in 2025, here are three plausible paths for 2026–2028 which could see liner growth, gentle acceleration or social contagion which suggest levels of non-payment between 12.9% and 16.3% by 2028.

We do not need 100% evasion for it to hurt: at 15–16% by 2028, the network loses millions every year (see next section). The fix isn't macroeconomic—it's visible, certain enforcement, fast data checks, and fewer places to hide.

9.9%, a conservative “top-down” approach (scaling last year's private licence income by the share of non-payers) implies roughly £3 million a year of foregone licence income at recent prices. A “per-boat” approach—using current list prices (including the 2025 +4% uplift and the phased surcharges for wide-beams and continuous cruisers) and ~3,300 evading boats—yields a £3.8–£5.0 million range. Either way, it's real money: about £0.30–£0.45 million per percentage point of evasion at today's scale.

What if earlier years under-counted? CRT's 2025 note about proof-of-mooring strongly suggests the new process is surfacing pre-existing misreporting, not creating it. If so, historic evasion was likely under-detected. As an illustrative back-cast:

- If 2019–2024 evasion was understated by 0.5 percentage points each year, that's roughly £0.15–£0.225 m/year, or ~£0.9–£1.35 m over six years.
- At 1.0 percentage point understated, think £0.30–£0.45 m/year,

or ~£1.8–£2.7 m over six years—on top of the losses implied by the published rates.

Treat this as scale, not certainty; the point is that small under-detection multiplied across the network becomes meaningful money.

Forward risk. Marry that to the acceleration scenarios and the arithmetic turns stark: by 2028, depending on the path, the annual gap drifts into ~£4–£7 million unless the curve is bent back down.

Follow the definitions—because words matter

When people say “non-compliant,” they often mean “unlicensed.” CRT’s stats are subtler:

- Unlicensed = boats sighted on enforceable waters without a current CRT licence.
- Unidentified = boats the teams couldn’t positively identify during the count.
- Evasion (the 9.9%) = unlicensed + unidentified.

That last bit matters. The gap between “unlicensed” and “evasion” is the unidentified pool; cleaning up data shrinks the second group even before anyone pays a penny. This year, CRT’s proof-of-mooring requirement is expressly aimed at improving the data.

Who isn’t paying?

The 2025 breakdown shows boats with a home mooring are more numerous and about 92% licensed. Continuous cruisers (CCs) are less compliant

(~84%), but they’re a smaller population. The result is counter-intuitive: CCs are *likelier* to be unlicensed, but home-mooring boats still make up a big share of the unlicensed total simply because there are many more of them. The fix therefore can’t be caricatured as “sort out the liveaboards”; it has to be network-wide consistency.

Safety and third-party risk

Licensing isn’t just paperwork; it’s a proxy for insurance and safety. To buy or renew a CRT licence you must have valid third-party insurance and a current Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) certificate (or exemption). A boat that is unlicensed is more likely to be uninsured or out-of-BSS—raising risks for other boaters and for the public on narrow, busy waterways. The BSS certificate itself now carries a central fee of £91.20 (set by BSS Ltd; examiners pass this on to customers), plus the examiner’s time and travel—none of which encourages people already on the margins to keep current, but none of which changes the underlying risk, either.

The cost story—context, not cause

Fees have risen, and the Trust has introduced surcharges that ramp through 2028: for instance, wide-beam surcharges step up (e.g., +16% in 2025 for over-2.16 m beams), with even higher differentials for the widest boats and additional uplifts for boats without a home mooring. Those changes absolutely increase price pressure. But the pattern of evasion—

especially the 2025 verification change and London’s improvement while other regions worsened—doesn’t look like a simple cost curve. It looks like a collections and verification story with price as an aggravating factor, not the main plot.

Is it CRT’s job to run welfare triage?

The Trust is a charity, not a regulator in the classic sense. Yet its communications increasingly emphasise welfare officers and support for struggling boaters—signposting to advice agencies, phasing, reminders, and the like. Courts expect proportionality before drastic enforcement (such as boat removal), so there is a pragmatic legal logic to this. But it also blurs roles: every pound spent on welfare-adjacent activity is a pound not spent on the crumbling fabric of the network. The more evasion persists, the more that tension will grow. (For financial context: £237.3 m total income in 2023/24, with government grant funding now flat in cash terms and declining in real terms.)

What would actually bend the curve?

If you don’t like the acceleration scenarios, the antidote is simple, if not easy:

- 1. Separate the lines.** Publish **unlicensed** and **unidentified** as distinct series, with targets for each. Aim to get **pure unlicensed below 5%** on a dated timetable. Transparency changes behavior.
- 2. Make enforcement certain,**

not loud. Short, predictable timelines from lapse to consequence; fewer protracted cases; consistent treatment across regions.

- 3. Double-down on verification.** The **proof-of-mooring** shift appears to be working; finish that job and keep documenting methodology changes so the time series stays comparable.
- 4. Target the real failure points.** BSS and insurance lapses are common entry points into unlicensed status; automate prompts, remove friction to compliance, and reserve hard enforcement for the **“won’t pay”** cohort, not the **“can’t pay”** cases.
- 5. Report the money.** Track **£ recovered, median days to enforcement outcome, and regional variance.** What gets measured gets managed—and convinces conditional cooperators to stay inside the rules.

The uncomfortable conclusion

The 2025 numbers don’t mainly tell a cost-of-living story. They reveal systems—verification, identification, enforcement—that lagged reality until the Trust tightened them. London’s small improvement shows change is possible; the national uptick shows it’s not enough yet. If norms keep slipping, evasion accelerates and the network bleeds millions that should be paying for dredging, gates, and safety. The choice isn’t romance vs repression; it’s rules with support—applied consistently—so those who won’t pay can’t hide among those who can’t.



An Ordeal By Rubbish

From the Birmingham Post, 1 October 1970

“Peter Freakley emerged mud-spattered but unbowed from a 30-hour ordeal by refuse and garbage.” So began a striking report in the Birmingham Post of October 1970, accompanied by a photograph of Freakley with rubbish heaped on the bow of his tug James Loader.

Aged just 31, Freakley was on a mission to expose the growing menace of waste choking Britain’s inland waterways. His test boat, Gardenia, was loaded with gravel to mimic a working craft, but its progress was repeatedly halted by sunken bedsteads, bicycles, timber, and coils of wire — hidden hazards lying just below the surface.

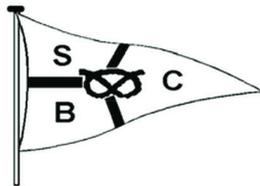
The voyage was part of a wider survey organised with canal societies to pressure the British Waterways Board. Freakley’s message was blunt: canals

built for full-length narrowboats were being neglected, their navigability compromised by industrial dumping and household refuse. The rubbish problem was so severe, he noted, that a lightweight cruiser could easily have been wrecked.

The Post’s report captured the urgency of the moment. With the chairman of British Waterways vowing to haul Midland canals into the 1970s, Freakley’s ordeal provided stark evidence that action was overdue. His protest was not just about rubbish; it was a call to recognise that these historic working routes still had a future.

Today, his mud-spattered stand is remembered as a vivid chapter in the story of canal preservation, when campaigners, armed with determination — and in this case a boat piled high with refuse — forced the issue into the public eye.

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Diary Dates

Bradmore Meetings

*A series of talks and presentations, usually waterways orientated but with occasional eclectic contributions on a variety of other subjects - open to the public free of charge.
Meetings held at the Bradmore Community Centre, Birches Barn Road, Wolverhampton starting at 7:30pm*

October 13th

Annual General Meeting

Phil Clayton - 'It is with regret' - the story of the Rattlechain Brickworks breach

November 10th

Julian Souter - Staffs&Worcs History

December 8th

Christmas Meeting TBC with Bring & Share Supper

January 12th

John Hemingway - Huddersfield Canal

February 9th

Andy & Helen Tidy - Women of the Waterways (plus jam!)

Local Events

40th Anniversary Stourbridge Open Weekend

18th-19th October Canal Street Stourbridge

Electronic Broadsheet

We are now making all future copies of Broadsheet and loose inserts available electronically. This would be by "opting in" for those members who chose to receive Broadsheet electronically.

There is no intention of discontinuing the sending out of "hard copies" to other members.

Please contact Steve Gray by email to wharfinger@blueyonder.co.uk with your name and email address if you wish to "opt-in."

Note:- email addresses will only be used for the communication of society information and will not be passed to any third party.



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