

BOATERS' SPRING FAYRE

AIN'T NO PARTY LIKE AN S BEND PARTY

Community event defending and celebrating our way of life. All boaters and non boaters welcome for a day of **music, acts, stalls and more** at one of the key sites the Canal and River Trust are trying to erase us from.



Sunday 14th May

Starting at 12 noon

North Millfields Recreation Ground
Clapton, London E5 9PB

EVENT PAGE:



bit.ly/3YwNOZg

NBTA #BOATSAREHOMES

<https://nbtalondon.co.uk/>

NOT FOR FLYPOSTING



REMEMBERING THE GREAT CANAL STRIKE A CENTURY ON

This summer will mark 100 years since the Great Canal Strike when boaters brought England's canals to a standstill in a dispute over pay and conditions. The action centred around Braunston in the Midlands where the Grand Union and Oxford Canals meet and where one of the country's largest canal carrying companies was based at the time.

In August 1923, Fellows Morton & Clayton (FMC) announced they would be cutting boatmen's wages by an average of 6.47% from the following Monday, the 13th. Within days, up to 60 boats moored up along both sides of the two canals blocking FMC's wharf. For 14 long, hard weeks, canal workers and their families took over the busiest junction on the network in one of the inland waterway's first strikes.

The workers were called out on strike by the recently formed Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU). This new union was led by Harry Gosling who was behind the famous London dock strike of 1889. He had previously been the General Secretary of the union formed by the river workers' following their collective action - the Amalgamated Society of Watermen, Lightermen and Bargemen.

In January 1922, a number of transport unions, including the Watermen's Society, joined to form the TGWU and Gosling became its president. The canals had not been unionised before, but canal workers were soon singled out as a sector needing union assistance after many years of neglect. It's said that boatmen on the canals compared notes with Thames dockers in the pubs around Limehouse and Brentford.

In just over a year, the TGWU had negotiated agreements on wages and conditions with many of the larger canal carrying companies, but the FMC at Braunston were determined to go ahead with these cuts, despite protest from the union's rep. Many of the company's 600 workers walked out.

The TGWU sent Mr Sam Brookes to oversee the strike and support the workers in Braunston. While there, he organised reading and writing classes for the strikers and their families, many of whom were illiterate, as well as concerts and church services. The boaters increased the population of the small Northamptonshire village by nearly a third and many children started at the local school during their stay.

Six weeks into the standoff, the company threatened boatmen with the sack and eviction from their homes on the boats. The union advised the workers to continue the fight. Faced with losing both their livelihoods and their homes, their protests were said to be colourful and noisy. The company employed scabs to try and unload the thousand tonnes of tea and sugar from the boats so the cargo could be delivered by road. An already tense situation escalated further when the police were brought in to oversee the transfer of cargo. Needless to say, one boat captain helped the wharf's foreman take a dip in the canal.

After over three months with no pay, the strike was finally taken to arbitration. The industrial court ruled that a 6.47% average cut was too high and instead ruled for a 5% reduction. Continued on page 2...



Boats lined up at Braunston during the strike, 1923

THE GREAT CANAL STRIKE A CENTURY ON CONTINUED...

staggered over two months to lessen the impact on workers. This was deemed a success at a time when wages across all industries were facing harsh cuts and many canal workers felt as though they'd avoided a larger blow to their already paltry incomes.

The 1923 canal strike was an important moment in the struggle for worker's rights in this country and led to many fundamental improvements in the working and living conditions of boating families. The TGWU went on to become part of the UNITE union and the actions of those 60 or so boating families shows the long history of solidarity and resistance we continue to celebrate on the inland waterways today.

BOATERS LEFT OUT IN THE COLD OVER THE ENERGY BILLS SUPPORT SCHEME

At the time of publication, itinerant boaters have still not received an energy grant from the Government, or been offered a user-friendly way in which to attain this grant. Most households across the UK are now into their fourth month of receiving help towards extortionate energy bills, yet the Government are still dragging their heels when it comes to itinerant boaters and other off grid communities.

All households in the UK were promised the £400 grant back in March last year, and an article published on the 1st April 2022 on the gov.uk website clearly states:

"If you live in a park home, houseboat or off the grid...The government has confirmed that further funding will be available to provide equivalent support of £400 for energy bills for the 1% of households who are not eligible for the discount. This includes households without a domestic electricity meter and a direct relationship with an electricity supplier, for example if you live in a park home, houseboat or you live off the grid."

Depending on how the above is interpreted, itinerant boaters could be included under either the "houseboat" or living off grid examples. Either way, it seemed like we were included as we obviously do not have a domestic electricity meter or a direct relationship with an electricity supplier and therefore meet the criteria.

Since then, the Government have released

several announcements regarding the EBSS, including an additional £200 Alternative Fuel Payment for those not using mains gas. However, none of their literature has directly referred to itinerant boaters, leaving us with a vague assumption that we will receive it at some stage in the future, via some unknown means.

In an attempt to find a good solution on how and when itinerant boaters will receive the EBSS, the National Barge Travellers Association have been in talks with the relevant Government bodies for some time, and thanks to their efforts, a work around solution is now being trialled. Unfortunately, the best solution the Government can currently offer is a perplexing arrangement whereby the applicant applies for the energy grant, knowing it will be rejected as it will not meet the criteria needed, and then uses this rejection to apply for another grant from their Local Authority. This convoluted approach is only available in four specific Local Authorities across the UK, and there is no guarantee of success.

Therefore, we still do not have a definitive answer on how or when the majority of itinerant boaters will receive the energy grant. With many boaters spending upwards of £200 a month on heating this winter, the EBSS could relieve the difficult choice between heat or food that numerous folk may be facing.

As the winter months dwindle off into Spring, we are left wondering, will we ever get help to heat our homes?

CRT SELLING OFF ASSETS...

Ever wondered where to go to buy second hand industrial grade machinery? No, not just Stanstead Abbots summer bootsale, you could try Industry Asset Services Ltd (iaservices.co.uk).

And were you to visit this industrial equipment auction site, you'd quite quickly find plenty of recognisable CRT equipment sold or on sale. Mainly boats; Piling Workboats, craning boats (and the cranes), rubbish barges, even the CRT patrol boat usually moored at Enfield Lock. But the CRT own much more than just boats, and it seems that if it can be sold, it IS being sold. There's been diggers, trailers, even replacement beams for lock gates sold off through this site.

Well why would CRT sell this stuff? The only explanation CRT gave when questioned was that it: "would usually be the case that these boats and items are surplus to the Trust's requirements or are no longer required in general."

Which sounds more like, to make/save some money. Seems fairly reasonable. Any organisation responsible for physical work and upkeep is going to need specialist machinery, tools and vehicles, and those assets will need maintenance themselves, and in some cases replacing from time to time. So CRT are selling these things because they're buying new ones right? Well, no. They are simply outsourcing work in many cases. No need to have a patrol boat if you just pay more money out to a 3rd party company to do your patrols for you...



Last year our license fees have gone up 8% and higher paid employees grouped together were paid 8% more in 2021/2022 than 2020/2021 (reported in the CRT 2021/2022 financial report).

STOP THE BOAT CULL! FUND-RAISING

Please donate as much as possible and help ensure that we are a community that cannot be flushed away.



Alternatively you can search : shorturl.at/ijmBS

BOATER'S SPRING FAYRE

We are proud to announce the Boaters' Spring Fayre community event on Sunday 14th May starting at 12 noon in defence and celebration of our way of life. All boaters and non-boaters are welcome.

At one point CRT called these areas 'water sports zones'; they then renamed them 'water safety zones'. These designated 'zones' are a part of CRT's strategy to remove places where boaters can moor. The renaming is part of a PR exercise, the restrictions they are attempting to enact inside the zones have nothing to do with safety.

Initially CRT had plans to get rid of 550 mooring spaces along the River Lea where people can stay up to 14 days at a time. But following the magnificent efforts of events, activism, resolve and resistance from the boating community to push back against the designated zones, CRT relented on the full threatened 550 mooring spaces. However, they continue to try and eliminate 295 mooring spaces, including the Clapton S bend. Boaters are making CRT feel the continuous pushback of our community by ignoring the 'no mooring' signs erected by CRT and on Sunday 14th May we will be celebrating our community's resolve at this key site of resistance.

All are welcome. Please say your going on the facebook event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/123708301052732>

Please cut out the poster on the back and put it up in your window.



We are the London branch of the **National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA)**. The NBTA is an organization open to all but run by boaters without a home mooring. We campaign for the rights of boat dwellers.