



Preserving and Promoting Horseboating

www.horseboating.org.uk

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT, JANUARY 2010

I would like to welcome new members to the Horseboating Society and I send greetings to all our members who have continued to support the HBS. The HBS was founded in January 2001, so welcome to our 10th year. Can we make it a year so that when we reach our 10th birthday in Jan 2011, we feel we can really celebrate? We have achieved so much, but there is still much to do to just keep going or to reach more of our goals. I can give you some ideas of how you as members can help the society.

Well done to those who have taken out life membership or put their membership on standing order. This makes the task of the membership secretary much easier. If you have not yet paid your 2010 subscription, do consider a standing order or life membership. Subscriptions are due from January 1st, and forms for new or renewal of membership are on our website. The HBS membership is made up from over 100 individuals, and organisations like commercial horse-drawn passenger craft companies. We have kept the annual subscription at the same rate to encourage membership, but donations are very gratefully received. If you do decide not to renew, the committee would appreciate your reasons. Our income from subscriptions is almost immediately swallowed up by insurance and the like.

In 2009, the HBS committee meetings were held usually each month, and in addition there was the annual meeting of current or potential operators of commercial horse-drawn passenger craft. The HBS committee meetings were attended by only the main officers of chairperson, secretary, and treasurer. The three of us have worked harmoniously, and we have been strengthened by some old committee members offering to help as reps in their areas. The HBS still needs offers of help from members to attend regional British Waterways meetings to represent our interests about relevant issues such as towpath resurfacing, vegetation management, and opposing obstructions like barriers and railings etc. There are now 11 BW regions and meetings are usually held in the autumn and spring. Please contact the committee to offer to attend these meetings. You might be attending anyhow. Could you formally represent HBS while there? It is a good time to meet and network with others with waterway interests. The HBS reps - Scotland is Tim Lucey, North is Sue Day, Midlands is Jayne Bradley, South is Rick Muir.

We are a national organisation with the aim of preserving and promoting horseboating on our national network of canals (and rivers). Unfortunately most rivers are not navigable by a horse-drawn boat due to the growth of abundant trees between the path and water. Curiously there is a divide at present. In 2009, there were 5 commercial companies giving passenger rides, all in the southern half of the UK. The HBS arranges journeys on the national system, but mostly based in the northern half of the UK. Can members and reps help balance up this anomaly?

So what of 2009? As always there were highs and lows. There was an offer to members of a few dates of horse-drawn hotel boating in the spring, but the limited response from HBS members was not encouraging so it was cancelled. It was offered at short notice admittedly, but I was surprised that

with boat accommodation and food offered that we did not have a take up from armchair supporters. By contrast, members really supported our HBS annual journey on the Huddersfield Narrow, and some made great efforts to arrange to come from the south, arranging accommodation on land etc. Sadly, the east side of the canal was closed due to a leaking culvert, and some members had plans thwarted. Still, the project went well, with our treasured member Ronnie Barnes already aged 90, receiving a fabulous birthday cake at Standedge when we emerged after legging the 3 and ¼ mile long tunnel. Not only was there cake, but two barrels of beer to share with the crowd who welcomed our arrival. For our return legging event, we were honoured to have with us Paul Atterbury of Antiques Roadshow fame, and a vice-president of The Waterways Trust. He legged his stint, and gave us great photos of legging inside the tunnel. The BW manager of the Standedge Visitor Centre phoned to give HBS thanks for record attendance of public at Tunnel End. This event will really need your help in 2010 as we have exciting plans to expand it with a St. George and the Dragon theme, and a Work Horses theme.

In May, we used my boats Elland and Vixen to attend Crick Boat Show, sponsored by BW to provide advance publicity for their biggest show of the year. This gave an opportunity in the East Midlands to be involved in horseboating and filming and interviews for newspaper, radio, and TV publicity for Crick. We arrived by legging Crick Tunnel. Again we received thanks from BW, as the HBS publicity work was thought to have increased numbers at the Crick Boat Show. We are invited to attend again for 2010.

Elland continued to the Gala Weekend at the National Waterways Museum at Stoke Bruerne, members legging through Blisworth Tunnel. At the weekend, we gave horseboating demos on the locks. Then on to the Braunston Historic Boat Gathering, legging through Braunston Tunnel. Here we gave demos of boathorse harnessing at the idyllic BW Stop House Garden. We are invited to return to both events.

Maria attended the Marple Locks Festival on the Peak Forest Canal, and Robinson's horse-drawn dray offloaded two beer barrels onto Maria to carry to the festival site. Beautifully painted, but empty!

The Rochdale Canal Festival organisers asked us to make a complete passage of the Rochdale Canal "to link communities together". Easy to say, much harder to do. We started from Maria's moorings on the Ashton Canal and completed 80 miles and 220 locks before returning to her yard. Manchester city centre remains the hardest place to go horseboating, that I know. For the 10th year since 2000, Maria has done more horseboating on the national system than any other boat, excluding the commercial passenger boats that do more days on their regular plying limits. From our start in 2001, the HBS owes huge thanks to the Ashton Packet Boat Co. who own and maintain Maria, and let us go horseboating.

The last horseboating of the year was a celebration with Vixen of the 200th anniversary of the LNU, or the Market Harborough Arm of the Leicester Section of the Grand Union. What great fun it all was, and well organised. Vixen led the procession of boats, followed by the steam powered Laplander of Sean Neill. People lined the canal towpath, armed with cameras. What amazing photos they must have got. Horsepower followed by steam power then diesel power. How easy going after the Rochdale. No locks!

The plan for 2010 is to repeat most of the same journeys and events if funding can be found. In addition, we have been asked to attend some new events. See Towlines for a broad sketch of what is planned. For details, check the website for updates and amendments. Certainly HBS is now known and in demand. However we have not cracked financial sustainability at all. Waterway event organisers

tend to want to only pay for days at their events, rather than days taken to horseboat there. So we must thank BW and TWT for paying for some of our travel days. We believe that our aim is very much about being seen on the open network, rather than only doing demos at events. At many events, it is not possible to operate a horsedrawn boat anyhow, due to moored boats obstructing our towline use.

Back to how our members can help. I feel sure that some, but not all, members could help financially. From 2001-9, I have provided a boathorse(s), harness, and 7 and ½ ton horsebox, and yearly admin of the society and projects. We had an HLF grant for 3 years, 2005-8, and during that time I was paid. Early on, the Boat Museum Society applied for small grants to cover some horseboating with them with Gifford. Last year for the first time, HBS was paid directly by waterway event organisers, covering usually only days at the events, so a useful income came in, but not adequate to cover effort and costs expended. I make no apology for me personally receiving the monies raised as I continued as the contractor for HBS supplying horsepower and horse transport. I made a much greater contribution in 2009, also supplying 2 boats which I purchased in 2008, and continuing with all the co-ordinator work unpaid. I ask members to consider ways forward, whether they could help with HBS finances such as by donations, legacies, purchase of a boat or shares in a boat, sponsoring a day of horseboating (£250), acting as a fundraiser for a particular project, or seeking grants for longer term work. All ideas would be helpful. Otherwise it is a most unusual society, relying mostly on one person to provide all!

Members are helping. As committee, reps, website, crew, photographers, videographers, publicity etc. Jeff Parrott does not see himself as too far away to help. In Australia he is heading up an exciting project under the HBS banner. A book about British holidays on horse-drawn hostel and hotel boats, circa 1950-1975. The last chapter will be about horseboating today, from 1975-2010. Each chapter is being written by a different person, so some HBS members have written these already. So no excuses, Ronnie age 90 and Jeff in Australia are helping HBS. Please think what you could do for HBS in 2010! I look forward to meeting up and hearing from you in 2010. Our AGM is March 7. Do come if you can.

Sue Day