

PRESS RELEASE



For immediate release

Date: 12 May 2026

Historic Narrow Boat Club / Fund Britain's Waterways Thames Tideway Cruise, 6-7 May 2026

On Wednesday 6 May a fleet of historic working canal boats travelled along the tidal Thames to King George V Dock in North Woolwich where they had been built. Their journey commemorated the 90th birthday of the narrowboats' construction by the Harland & Wolff shipyard in 1936. On the cruise, they were joined by leisure boats dispersing from the Inland Waterways Association's annual Canalway Cavalcade Festival at Little Venice. All were flying the banners and flags of the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign.

After assembling in Limehouse Basin for a mandatory safety brief on the evening of 5 May, the flotilla locked out onto the river on the morning of 6 May. Because the Thames Barrier was scheduled for a test closure at 0945, the first of seven locks full of boats left the basin at 0600. The boats grouped for photos off Margaretness, some of them stemming the tide for three hours, and then travelled upstream to enter the King George V lock, where they were to spend the night.

All the historic boats (which included three motor boat and towed butty pairs) completed the journey into the tidal lock successfully, and a lively celebration took place that evening in a dockside pub.

Another early morning start was required on the morning of 7 May. This time the reason was the proximity of King George V Dock to London City Airport, which restricts the movement of large steel boats because of their potential effect on aeroplane navigation systems. At 0730, thirteen historic boats entered King George V Dock and manoeuvred for a photoshoot.

Cathy Haysom of the Historic Narrow Boat Club, planner and organiser of the visit, said: “Many of these boats still work full time, delivering cargo on the inland waterways of the UK. The Fund Britain’s Waterways campaign is vitally important to the owners, whose livelihood depends on the continued maintenance and upkeep of the waterways infrastructure.

As part of the campaign, and in a momentous celebration of their anniversary, these boats have returned to the King George V Dock in Woolwich where they were built, 90 years ago. The majority of these boats have not returned since they left the docks in 1936. It is a testament to their build quality, and the dedication of their owners, that so many of these boats are still in use today.”

Later in the day, the flotilla locked out and travelled in convoy upstream, displaying Fund Britain’s Waterways banners as they passed the Thames Barrier and the Royal Observatory at Greenwich. A few boats returned to Limehouse, the rest passing Tower Bridge and the Palace of Westminster before leaving the Tideway at Brentford or Teddington.

Hazel Owen, Chair of Fund Britain’s Waterways, said: “This spectacular event continued our 2026 campaign cruises which started with the Icicle Cruise to Walsall in March. Now we are heading north west, where in July our flotilla will cross the River Mersey, sailing from the Ellesmere Port Waterways Museum – which is proudly celebrating its 50th anniversary – across to the iconic Liverpool docks. Join us along the way, support the 2026 campaign cruises and help us highlight the issues facing this national heritage.”

ENDS

About the Historic Narrow Boat Club (HNBC):

The Club was formed at the 1966 Inland Waterways Association (IWA) National Rally of Boats at Marple, and is one of the oldest inland waterway boat clubs. We are a national boat club, dedicated to preserving the working heritage of our canal system, from the boats themselves to details of the waterways on which they travel.

Traditional cargo-carrying narrow boats are the largest craft designed for the narrow canal network and are often the first to pinpoint navigation problems relating to draft or beam. As an active pressure group for navigational and heritage interests, we draw attention to these issues so that maintenance can be carried out before the situation worsens to the detriment of all – boaters, anglers or other users.

About [Fund Britain's Waterways \(FBW\)](#):

FBW brings together a wide range of organisations with the sole purpose of campaigning collectively for an increase in government funding of Britain's inland waterways to avert their decline, and to promote awareness of the huge economic, environmental, and social well-being value they provide. Established in June 2023, it already has more than 160 members representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways.

Contact:

For further information contact info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk

Photographs accompanying this release:



1. Waiting for the tide, 6 May (credit: Tim Lewis)



2. Boats turning into King George V Lock, 6 May (credit: Andrew Christy)



3. Locking up in King George V Lock, 6 May (credit: Kev Maslin, Chasing the Boats)



4. Working boats manoeuvring in King George V Dock, 7 May (credit: Kev Maslin, Chasing the Boats)



5. Working boats with FBW banners (credit: Kev Maslin, Chasing the Boats)

For higher resolution images please contact info@fundbritainwaterways.org.uk