

Maritime activity

Since the last meeting of the Harbour Board activity on the water for the Waterways team has remained at a high tempo.

At the end of September there was South-Easterly gale that blew up the river, 18 of the boats that were still on moorings broke free and ended up stranded at various points around the river, some being total write-offs. The team were heavily involved in the recovery of many of these boats, as an estimate, over £300,000 worth of damage was caused.

Two weeks later there was another gale, this time from the South-West which fortunately did less damage but there still was some done.

At the time of writing this report, Storm Bert is blowing through with 65 mph winds up the river from the South. Update: A steel yacht broke away from its' mooring and ended up against Starcross pier. Graham Manchester and I towed it back to another mooring.

In the river the team have now started the process of winterising the moorings that we service for our customers, we are strongly urging our customers to take up this offer because we have found that by bringing ashore the mooring buoys and associated tackle and doing the cleaning and servicing in the workshop where at least it is fairly dry (under a leaking roof) if not warm in a building without any insulation, this is still preferable to doing the same task at sea in March when the weather outside can still be challenging.

We are still working our way through the servicing of the Aids to Navigation, there is an attached report from Graham Manchester on this topic.

The moorings barge we use for most of our work afloat is as you are aware chartered to us by an owner who has now told us that he wishes to sell the boat. He has offered us a 'first refusal' option which we are exploring, I shall update members at the next meeting.

A new dedicated Waterways Engineer has been appointed. This position has been vacant since our previous engineer retired late last year. This is a three-year appointment, and the incumbent will be working three days per week primarily looking at maintenance projects on the canal gates, hardstands other infrastructure improvements that will require capital expenditure bids.

Canal Manager report

During the late summer and Autumn period some yachts which have been at Turf for years were falling into disrepair. These were asked to leave the canal and get repairs done at other boatyards. Subject to satisfactory "out of water" surveys then returning to canal would be considered.

There are still boats in other canal locations which have been in the water for years and not lifted out for hull maintenance. Vessels over 20 tonnes would need to go to other boatyards for lifting out however not all boats are seaworthy: some don't have working engines or rudders. In addition, the Canal team have had to pump out bilge water in some customer's boats and continue to pump out an 80T vessel weekly.

This season's winter storage for boats at Turf and the Exeter Basin has been completed.

During October & November there were three convoy Saturdays and two craning Saturdays with just over 20 boats lifted on the hardstand. Due to short staffing additional members of the Harbour team assisted the canal team with these events.

The canal workboat Margaret R has also been lifted out for winter maintenance. In addition to the regular maintenance there are various additional repairs including work to the wheelhouse.

Also, a replacement boat with a marine electric outboard has been ordered to replace the Canal blue dory which has a two stroke outboard.

Coastal Workboats at Water Lane are due to launch two new build vessels and the racing yacht “Big Spirit”. The grounded Marie Claire at Gabriel’s Wharf is also planned to be lifted out at the same time. This section of Water Lane will be closed to vehicles for an extended period and pedestrians will not be permitted access during the boat lifts. There will be diversion signs in place on this section of canal.

The next planned projects are the completion of Double Locks pontoon decking with a GRP mesh and tree maintenance works along various section of the canal. We do not anticipate completing all the canal tree works before the next bird nesting season.

In addition, there are various canal works that will need revenue or capital funding; these include refurbishment works to the lock gates at the Kings Arms and Turf. Upgrades to the old the marine electric and water outlets for boats at the Basin & Turf will need further funding consideration.

The Canal team are currently two full time operatives and one part time casual operative. One full time member of staff is currently off work due to shoulder injury.

The Canal Manager has attempted to recruit an additional part time casual operative however there are still concerns regarding the numbers of staff present most days and the need to get outstanding maintenance works completed. At the time of writing only one canal operative was present at work.

Canal operatives are required to have multi-disciplinary skillsets including boat skills, boat craning, civil works, plant, and machinery qualifications. Canal working is a more specialised type of role compared to other general roles. For this reason, resourcing new staff with appropriate qualifications, skills and abilities is difficult.

Canal Operatives need to be reactive to unforeseen issues including boats sinking or fallen trees after storms. In addition, they are required to assist with various harbour operations.

In-house training takes a considerable amount of time and planning. We rely on one or two personnel with a suitable number of years of experience to train new personnel.

The future operations of the Exeter Canal will require experienced and knowledgeable staff and succession planning is a key issue to ensure this.

Colin Acton

Harbour Patrol Volunteers

During 2024 we had a team of ten, dedicated volunteers who give up their time during the summer period (mainly over weekends) to provide harbour patrols on the River Exe and Approaches. We ran 39 patrols with the assistance of one or something two volunteers which accounted for 118 volunteer hours. Without this support we would have been unable to deliver regular weekend patrols with the existing number of staff.

The patrols have mainly consisted of advising users of the bye laws particularly in relation to the speed limit. As a result, we have seen a marked decrease in speeding and anti-social behaviour at peak periods over the previous three years. The patrols have also included responding to May Day calls, recovering swimmers and water sports users in distress, assisting broken down craft, recovery of vehicles and wrecks from the estuary.

All the volunteers go through an induction period and undertake volunteer training. Exeter Port Authority is an RYA Powerboat Training Centre, and all volunteers are working towards or hold an RYA Level 2 Powerboat Award. On the 19th of October we ran an end of season training evening with the volunteers which also allowed us to gain feedback on the role. As a result, we have updated the EPA Volunteer Development plan.

During 2025 we hope to deliver a number evening patrols in good weather. We also have developed links with the Exmouth Community Police Officers who are keen to accompany us on some of the patrols.

Aids to Navigation

Exeter Port Authority is the Local Lighthouse Authority for the Exe and there are fifty-one aids to navigation on the Estuary and Exe approaches. We aim to service all of these on a regular basis. This includes lifting navigation marks and where necessary changing blocks, chain, painting, and general repairs. The positioning is also reviewed, and lights tested. Trinity House also carries out two inspections per year to review this work.

A number of these aids to navigation are coming to the end of their lives. We are in a process of maintaining or where necessary replacing them.

In November 2024 we have fifteen aids to navigation that we wish to fully service prior to the start of the 2025 season.

Graham Manchester

licences for small passenger carrying vessels.

Exeter Port Authority issue two types of licences for operators of small passenger carrying vessels. Small passenger carrying vessels are only licenced to carry a maximum of 12 passengers within categorised waters such as the confines of the river Exe.

Holders of such licences can operate in the Exe between the 1st of April and the 30th of October. This year however, we have issued a winter licence for the Topsham to Turf ferry.

The first licence we issue is for the boat.

Small passenger carrying vessels must have a seaworthiness certificate signed by a competent person, a boat surveyor for example. The vessel must also have an 'out of water' survey every five years. The boat must have sufficient lifejackets and other safety equipment to the list that is given by the authority. Operators must also have public liability insurance for at least £5M.

The second licence we issues is the Boatmen's licence.

Applicants must hold a valid First Aid certificate, a VHF radio licence, and a Recognised powerboat qualification such as the RYA level 2 certificate. Applicants that are not experienced in the river Exe are normally taken out and competency checked by the Harbour Master.

Boatmen's licences are valid for 5 years and in 2024 6 new licences were issued.

Alan Harwood

End of season report from the Topsham Ferryman

The Topsham Ferry season has been a mix of highs and lows, it continues to be a privilege to help provide this popular service to both local customers and visitors to Devon.

Just under 7500 customers, 2400 bicycles and 280 pet dogs have been carried across the river Exe on the ferry this year.

Over 54% of bicycles were electric motor assisted, these bicycles have enabled a growing customer base of both young & old folks who would not have otherwise used the Exeter ship canal cycle trail to travel to Exeter basin, Double Locks Inn, Turf Lock Inn and further on to Dawlish and the Starcross ferry to Exmouth.

During July & August, approximately 60 cyclists travelled on the ferry whilst on holiday from Europe who were cycling long distances from channel ports to Devon and Cornwall.

Wildlife enthusiasts have enjoyed using the ferry service to view a seal that has regularly been feeding by the canal bank side ferry causeway and bird watchers have used the ferry crossing to view black swans & their cygnets, shelduck, osprey, purple heron, king fisher and many other bird species.

Due to bad weather conditions more ferry operating days were lost than last year and during the period of pollution off Exmouth the ferry service was much quieter due to lack of customers in the area.

I am looking forward to next year and meeting my local and visitor customers again helping them to enjoy all that our beautiful area has to offer.

Already I have been receiving messages regarding cycling and walking groups who wish to use the Topsham ferry and have been answering their questions about certain dates and time the ferry will be operating.

It has also been a pleasure to help look after visiting craft to Topsham quay and to help our wonderful environment look well kept by Topsham swing bridge and the ferry causeways adjoining mud flats and reed beds.

John Kent

EV Dirac Project

Having suffered significant delays with the production, EV Dirac, which was originally intended to be operational in mid-June, is finally operational. Albeit it is still only running on electric power. The hydrogen is now being fitted after Christmas. The vessel left the Marina under her own power on 26th of November.

She will be with us for a very limited testing period, before going back to Fareham for the hydrogen fit out. The plan is currently that Dirac will return to us in late Spring and be based in Exeter as a demonstrator vessel.

The money raised from the Port Authority's involvement in the project has been invested in the new electric boat at the canal basin and to electrify the old patrol boat which is to be used by the 'Friends of the Exeter Ship Canal for their voluntary patrolling role.

Nick Stone

Incident Statistics

From September to December, we have recorded the following incidents

Incident type	Number
Sinkings	2
Groundings	1
Collisions	
Speeding vessels	13
Machinery failure	
Engine breakdown	
Injury afloat	
Vessels adrift	5
Swimmers in the main channel	1
Navigation errors	2
Capsized vessels	4
Man overboard	
Vessels parted from moorings	21
other	

Grahame Forshaw

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