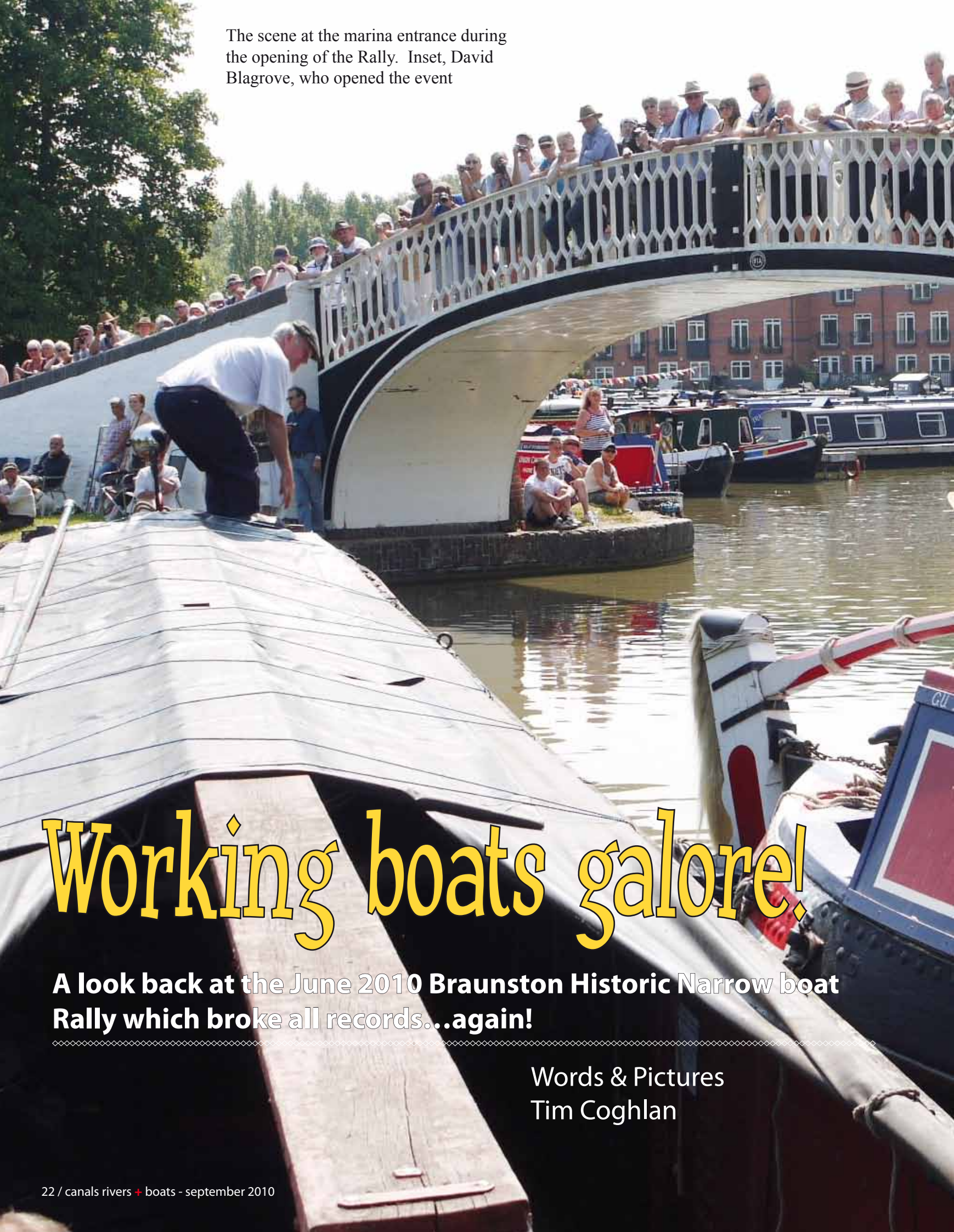


The scene at the marina entrance during the opening of the Rally. Inset, David Blagrove, who opened the event



Working boats galore!

A look back at the June 2010 Braunston Historic Narrow boat Rally which broke all records...again!

Words & Pictures
Tim Coghlan



We seem to have come a long way since our first Rally in 2003, when we were very pleased and indeed relieved to welcome 19 former working boats, mostly from the Fellows Morton & Clayton (FMC) fleet, to celebrate the re-restoration of the last surviving steam narrow boat President. This year's final tally as now agreed between all of those counting 'em in, was a record-breaking 92, making this the largest attendance of such narrow boats at any rally since the end of the working days on the canals. Indeed it is hard to imagine such a congregation of those working narrow boats ever, not even during the 1924 Boatmen's Strike at Braunston nor the famous Easter stoppage at Buckby in 1910.

They came from all parts of the English canals to this now well-established eighth annual rally. Perhaps it's the informality that attracts them. 84 boats had registered, of which three cried off at the last moment due to engine problems - not surprising when most engines are older than the boat owners. But then another 11 just turned up, two simply joining in the Saturday parade and then going home without so much as tying up in rows of boats moored sometime six deep on the canal outside the marina. Maybe they wanted get home for Sunday in time to watch England in the World Cup. Remember that?

It was all in all an awesome sight to behold, which simply thrilled the 7,000 or so visitors, some coming from as far afield as Canada, the USA, South Africa and Australia especially for the event. The real bonus was when the boats paraded, which is what makes our rally unique and so special.

Presenting a cheque to
The Friends of Raymond.





The Friends of Stoke Bruerne who brought their narrow boat, Sculptor, gets a cheque from Tim Coghlan.

To manage the growth of the event we made a number of changes this year including having four volunteer harbourmasters to manage the moorings and parades, which much reduced the good-humoured chaos traditionally associated with those parades. We also had invaluable help from British Waterways, and also our neighbours Union Canal Carriers with their life saving loan of part of their canalside moorings, which allowed us to moor another eight boats.

Everyone is now talking about over 100 boats next year, and we had those three regulars coming this year who had to cry off due to mechanical problems. We have a database of some 150 historic narrow boats in working

order, so who knows how many might come.

The highlight of the 2010 Rally was the fortieth anniversary of the last long-distance working run under regular contract on the canals. This was the so-called *Jam 'Ole Run* which ended in October 1970. That run was from what is today Braunston Marina up to Atherstone, north of Coventry to load, and then down to Southall in west London to unload at the Kealey & Tonges jam factory. Of the Blue Line fleet of five boats that made that last journey, four survive in working order - *Raymond & Nuffield*, *Renfrew* and *Stanton* – and all plan to attend the Rally. The fifth boat, the *Lucy*, is currently undergoing restoration on the bankside at Braunston Turn, which



was on the route of the daily parade, so momentarily the whole of that last Blue Line fleet was reunited. In addition, we had for the first time the *Ian* with us which was built in Braunston in 1947 for the Samuel Barlows fleet, and then went to serve in the Blue Line fleet until 1968, when it was replaced by the *Renfrew*. On one occasion they were moored end on end.

A special theme for 2010 was the rally within the rally of the GUCCC Star Class fleet of boats. Sixty six of the eighty eight that were ever built, were built between 1934 and 1936, with these boats now reaching 75 years of age in and around 2010. Several were in attendance at the Rally, including *Cassiopeia* a regular attendee at the Braunston Rallies, which was delivered on 29th June, 1935 and was 75 just two days after the Rally. Representatives of the Hambridge family who ran *Cassiopeia* between the early 1940s till 1963 were on the boat, including Jim who captained the boat 50 years ago this year. Since the Rallies were started in 2003, an astonishing fifty five surviving GUCCC boats, from its various Classes, have attended.

The Rally was formally opened by canal personality David Blagrove. Celebrity guests included Tony Hales, Chairman of British Waterways, Chris Heaton-Harris MP for Daventry, East Midlands MEP Roger Helmer, Braunston County Councillor Robin Brown, and Daventry Councillor David Griffin, who has been actively promoting the new canal link into Daventry.

Shore-side attractions included a trade marquee, and also a number of outside exhibitors including a record number of canal societies. There was also the now well-established canal artists' marquee. Entertainments included morris dancers, the famous beer tent, with music provided by a number of groups.

I was pleased how well the Rally was received. Marty Seymour of The Friends of Raymond wrote to saying: 'This was the best historic boat gathering yet.' David Blagrove, Chairman of The Friends of Stoke Breurne Museum, which brought narrow boat *Sculptor* said, 'The Rally is fast becoming one of the iconic events of the waterways calendar and to my mind more significant and closer to the spirit of the waterways than any other event. The proof of this is the number of ex-boat people who turn up and somehow inveigle themselves onto the boats.'

For me what was most pleasing was the number of boats that came which had never been before, including this year the aforementioned *Ian*. The Rally also inspires restoration projects to completion, and we had several whose owners had bust a gut to complete years of pains-taking work just to take part. My favourite this year was the *Stanton* in her smart GUCCC livery.

All profits, which exceeded £6,000, were donated as usual, to canal causes. The main recipient was the Friends of Raymond which received £2,000 for the important restoration work on their motor *Nutfield*. A number of other donations were made to canal societies attending the Rally including £1,000 to The Friends of The National Waterways Museum, Stoke Bruerne, whose narrow boat *Sculptor* took part in the Rally. A donation of £500 was also made to Braunston church, which joined in the event including a Sunday morning service in the marina.





The Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally is sponsored by Braunston Marina and *Canals Rivers + Boats* magazine, and is supported by British Waterways. Braunston Marina will be hosting the event again next year on the same last weekend in June 25th - 26th. Here's hoping we see you there, in what may well be our Century Year. BW Chairman Tony Hales, who nearly missed the boat this year for the formal opening parade (thanks to M1 traffic) tells me he already has it in his diary for next year. He wouldn't miss the event for anything!