



Hotel Boats honour Caen Hill Lock Keepers with top APCO award



The Hotel Boat section of the Association of Pleasure Craft Operators (APCO) has awarded their prestigious Lock Keeper of the Year award for 2014 to Bob Preston and the Canal & River Trust lock keeping team at Caen Hill Locks on the Kennet & Avon Canal.

The award was presented on Wednesday 25 March 2015 when hotel boat, Wessex Rose, ascended the dramatic flight of 16 locks at Caen Hill, through the beautiful countryside on route to Devizes. Recipients are nominated and voted for by all APCO Hotel Boat operators so that they can recognise the support they receive from the people working 'on the ground' as they take holidaymakers around Britain's inland waterways.

Hanna Rees-Jones, Chair of the Hotel Boat section of APCO, describes why they make the award: "As professional boaters we like to recognise the professionalism of navigation authority staff, especially when they give exceptional service to boaters. What makes Britain's canals unique is their living heritage of boating, distinguished from being a giant linear park by the boats navigating amazing structures such as Caen Hill.

"Hotel Boats are some of the most widely travelled craft on the inland waterways, cruising up to 1500 miles each summer season, and between them visiting almost the entire network of canals and rivers. The award is open not only to lock keepers, but to all bank side waterway staff who are judged by APCO Hotel Boat members to have given outstanding assistance to waterways users. Every nominee for this award should feel justly proud of this recognition. We are grateful for their fantastic support with maintaining our schedules as hotel boat holidaymakers enjoy the relaxed pace of the waterways and spectacular experiences of aqueducts, tunnels and flights of locks."

David and Karen Binney of The Wessex Rose Hotel Boat Co Ltd presented the award to Bob and his colleagues – including the volunteer Lock Keepers who play a crucial role at Caen Hill during the very busy summer boating season. David thanked the team for all their hard work, good humour and invaluable information; he explains, "Caen Hill locks is a fascinating part of our cruise on the Kennet & Avon Canal and Bob is always happy to answer guests questions and explain what is going on as he and the team help us through the flight."

“They are very proud of the awesome canal engineering and are great ambassadors for the area, plus extremely knowledgeable about the wildlife that lives around the locks and the unusual side ponds that supply water to the flight. The lock keepers follow each year’s cygnets by the identification rings on their legs; we and our guests aboard *Wessex Rose* love hearing their stories about the swans they watch over.”

“Our safety is paramount for the Trust’s team; their support helps maintain our schedule, whilst they impart a wealth of information about the Caen Hill flight, adding to our guests enjoyment as they experience this wonder of the waterways on their hotel boat cruise.”

Bob Preston has been working on the Kennet & Avon Canal for over 40 years, and has been a lock keeper at Caen Hill since 1991. He said: “It’s a great job to have - it’s outdoors, keeps you healthy and you get to meet people from all over the world. You get a lot of job satisfaction - Caen Hill is a beautiful place and having a helping hand up or down the flight can make someone’s holiday. The canal wouldn’t be the same without the boats on it, and we’ve got a great team of staff and volunteers here at Caen Hill who make the journey as easy as possible”



Hotel boat, *Wessex Rose* entering the Caen Hill Lock flight



Bob Preston, Lock Keeper of the Year, with hotel boat, *Wessex Rose*