Feedback to ‘Graffiti – art or vandalism?’ article that appeared in 29 January edition of Boaters’ Update

I totally disagree with Florence Salberter and her 'sympathetic' view on graffiti. It is an eyesore and nothing else, mainly for the reason that it is a 'fad' which has lasted 30 years and shows no sign of going away. And apologists like Ms. Salberter are an integral part of the problem.

Yes, graffiti has been around for a long time, but for the most part of the 20th Century it was confined to areas of dereliction. The exceptions were the odd political statement or a plug for a fringe political party, football club or rock band which could be seen in rather more prominent places, such as on the side of an overbridge. If you look at photographs up to and including the early 1980s you will see very little graffiti.

This 'street art/tagging' rubbish came across from the States in the mid-1980s and from then on blighted any convenient vertical surface whether it was a wall, a bridge abutment or even a train. And it's still here today. No, these people are not 'artists', they are artistically and intellectually stunted individuals perpetuating a form of pop-art which had its day probably the best part of 40 years ago in the States and then slavishly copied over here for the last three of those four decades.

Since international human rights legislation precludes tying up this vermin, throwing it in the cut and macerating the worthless bodies by driving a boat over them, they should be chain-ganged and forced to remove every square inch of their 'handiwork'. With toothbrushes. Well, you did ask ;)

Having just returned from an eventful trip through Birmingham where graffiti is rife a thought occurred to me. Why not put up boards/hoardings in safe places in front of some the lovely brickwork and let the artists loose! Then when the boards are full - take them down and put up some more. That way the brickwork is preserved and the artists can do their stuff!!

Graffiti - my view is that, in the main, it's an illegal eyesore - I'd rather see the beauty of a well built wall or building than have someone else's idea of art imposed upon me. All people, young and old, should respect property that is not theirs to steal, damage or abuse.

Just looking at your debate about graffiti, from a bricklayers point of view they have just destroyed my work.

Vast majority looks awful, very occasionally a piece is moderately attractive, somewhat less than once in a blue moon a piece looks nice. It is all vandalism and should be removed as soon as is possible. So as you will note, fairly ambivalent in my view of the graffiti!
Re good graffiti. The Grand Union canal in Leamington Spa has a wonderful haiku by Basho, spray painted onto a bridge support. It's a few years old now and a bit faded - I'm tempted to pop out with a spray can and brighten it up! Here is what it looks like today (attached). The text reads:

An old silent pond
A frog jumps into the pond.
Splash! Silent again.
Matsuo Basho

I have never seen good graffiti anywhere on the waterways but it does serve a useful purpose – “don't even think of mooring here!” Maybe I'm cynical, but one of my first canal experiences as a teenager was setting off on a hire boat from Hawkesbury Junction (I think) where the lovely iron towpath bridge carried huge white letter – “Hitler was right”! That was in about 1972 and I hope it's not still there, but however good Banksy might be, I don't think there is any excuse for graffiti without the property owner's consent.

I hate graffiti. Let me make that clear. Anything that follows this statement is simply my opinion, and having been married for forty years, I'm well used to my opinion being ignored! Graffiti is not an art form but a form of vandalism. It is certainly not always idle or mindless vandalism as it is clear that a great deal of time and artistic design goes into some of it but it is always wilful damage of someone else's property. If I were to catch someone spraying ‘Kilroy woz 'ere'.

I'd waste no time in calling 101 and reporting the person. If I caught someone working their way through a likeness of ‘Sunset over Ballachulish’ I would ask him/her why, when he/she has obvious artistic talent, he/she is defacing property at his/her own cost, when that same effort could be applied to earn money from their artistry, and then I'd waste no time in calling 101 and reporting the person. The quality of the workmanship is not the important point, the important point is that the artist is deriving satisfaction from spoiling someone’s property in the name of what they consider to be art.

Heavy fines and restorative community service may help to deter the artists but I expect there would be some EEC ruling that states that a person cannot be punished for expressing himself in whatever medium he wishes. Like it or lump it, we'll be stuck with the graffiti for years to come.

There is no doubt when looking at graffiti and it is difficult not to when it has obliterated a structure, to not acknowledge the talent of some of the appliers of such graffiti, I often think if only that talent could be harvested and put to better use. However the fact remains that if they do not have the owner’s permission it is criminal damage and every effort should be made to deter it, with appropriate punishment for anyone caught in the act or found out to be the culprit later.

In the past I have dealt with problems in Milton Keynes with defacing of the Train Mural on the GU at Wolverton, the police knew who the tags belonged to but could take no action because there was no substantiating evidence as to they were the culprit. A very high percentage of it is just tags and nonsense (sometimes offensive nonsense) and I pity those who have the task and bear the cost of removing it. However I have seen some splendid art
work which I would call a mural rather than graffiti, I can recall a splendid painting of Jimi Hendrix on a wall adjacent to a lock in London.

There are places I would rather see a mural than a load of slap dash tags however how would it be managed, could it be managed, I doubt it. It can no more be policed than can general vandalism such has interference with paddles. If permission is given for a mural there is nothing to stop the ‘taggers’ coming along and ruining it once it is completed and then you are back to square one.

In my locality graffiti is often painted out which then leaves a nice blank canvas for the next vandal to come along and work on. I also wonder how do they access some of the places where graffiti exists, they obviously put theirs and possibly other people’s lives in danger, ie next to railway lines and on sides of bridges over motorways are two examples and I’ll leave with one last mystery, when is it done, I have never seen anyone applying graffiti in my locality but there is much of it, someone must see it being done or do they work in the dead of night by torch light.

Hate it, detest it. Jail the morons that do it and throw away the key!

Thought you might enjoy this pic of a couple of CRT volunteers at Burslem Port on a work party last summer. We all think the guy who did the one on the left is really talented but he is “decorating” far too much of both our restoration and your nearby canal through Stoke!
BTW what is the difference between high temperature vaporised water and steam? ("About £500 to you guv!")

Depends of what it is I would say some is art and some is graffiti I have seen some on the railway bridge along the staffs and Worcester and that is art the tags and scribble is what I class as graffiti

I'm not keen on the sort of graffiti that is shown in the canalside pic in Graffiti: Art or Vandalism. I prefer to see something more constructive, interesting and visually appealing such as a local community group Spruce Up Sandstone painted in conjunction with a local school under a fairly unappealing modern bridge in Whitchurch, Shropshire, where we are hoping we will see the canal go through one day see http://www.whitchurchwaterway.uk/drawings

Stop being so old fashioned... Gentrifying is the word... Move with the times and embrace the new... Do you really think the waterways will be here in 10,000 years' time?