

Milton Keynes Community Boat - It's All Go



The team working hard to bring the Milton Keynes Community Boat (MKCB) into reality has achieved the funding required to build the boat.

We may not be meeting face-to-face, but a lot has been happening behind the scenes over the last few weeks in a range of areas that will enable us to run successful cruises in 2021. The big news is that we have finally made it to the starting line, with the full cost of the MKCB build now covered!

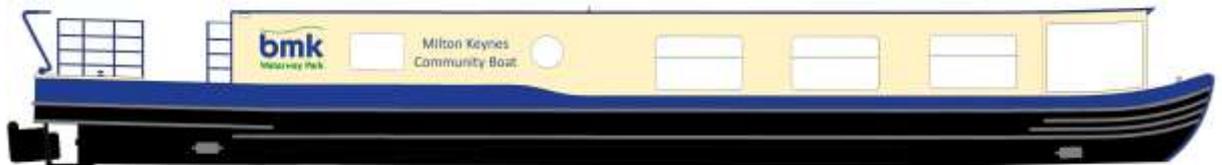
Trust Director John Best explains: The final and largest element of funding for the boat build is £93,000 from Milton Keynes Council (MKC) in the form of "planning gain" money that originates from the Campbell Wharf development and our partners Crest Nicholson who are the developers.

The discussions around the planning gain payment were complex. Crest Nicholson (like all developers) were required, as part of getting planning permission, to make several payments to MKC to make sure the new neighbourhood was supported by good facilities – usually things like schools, parks, new road junctions, community facilities, and arts. This is also known as "section 106" or "s106" money.

MKC has accepted what we've been pressing: that MK needs a community trip boat; that bringing our *John Bunyan* experience from the Great Ouse to the Grand Union in the form of an all-electric, fully accessible 54-footer is the best way to do it; that the community boat will help build the new waterside community at Campbell Wharf and a new family of dedicated volunteers; and that over time we'll be able to roll out much wider benefits all along the length of MK's stretch of the Grand Union. We're going to do a great job at all of this.

**Full funding
achieved to build
Community Boat**

MKC usually takes advice from the local parish or town council before they decide how to spend s106 funds. In this case, the planners and Crest Nicholson felt our community boat was not only an excellent facility to base in the heart of the new Campbell Wharf neighbourhood, but it could be delivered in months and start creating a buzz in the area.



What the new boat will look like

CMK (Central Milton Keynes) Town Council supports the idea of a community boat but would have preferred all community facility contributions from planning gain to go into their own pot for a much bigger, building-based community facility which will happen at some time in the future.

We've agreed with them that CMK residents will be entitled to a special 10% discount on cruise prices, and CMK Town Council will have a seat on a new Trust MKCB Stakeholder Advisory Board which will make suggestions on how we can use the boat to deliver community benefit. The Town Council voted unanimously to support our proposal and we look forward to working in partnership with them.

The Agreement commits us to deliver the boat, based at Campbell Wharf on the favourable terms offered by Crest Nicholson and The Parks Trust, for a minimum of 10 years (or we have to give some of the money back). So we'll be delivering community benefits from the boat supported by our two original partners and our main funders MK Council, MK Community Foundation, the Trust itself, and our generous members. Hopefully, we'll bring on other funders, including parishes and corporate supporters, as the project grows over time.

Now for the really exciting bit - in September the Trust commissioned Colecraft to build the boat, with a planned October start and March 2021 delivery. We have lift-off!

bmk news

PATRON
Sir Samuel Whitbread
KCVO

View from the Chair

As we move into the autumn of this challenging year, like everyone else, I find there is both good news, disappointing news and sometimes no news at all because nothing has changed! It is frustrating for everyone that we cannot run our activities at full capacity. This applies both to operating the *John Bunyan* and pursuing the Trust's activities in promoting the Waterway Park and working towards securing funding and eventual delivery of the project.

The good news is that the familiar and happy sight of the *John Bunyan* on the river in Bedford is back, albeit it with limited capacity. I would like to say a big thank you to all the team who have worked to achieve this. It feels like a small step back towards normality. A second piece of good news is that we have at last secured full funding for the new Milton Keynes Community Boat and put in an order for it – we are on the way to having a boat on the Grand Union Canal in early 2021!

The bad news is that we cannot run the *John Bunyan* at anywhere near full capacity and we simply don't know what the situation will be when the new MK Community Boat is delivered. Whether we are running trips or not boats incur ongoing costs for maintenance, licences and, in the case of the *John Bunyan*, mooring fees. Earlier this year the Trust committed to underwriting the running costs of the *John Bunyan* if the Enterprise Board were unable to generate any income through running trips. We will continue to do this but our resources are limited and we will need to monitor the situation closely. Running very limited capacity trips is a huge and welcome improvement on no trips at all!

The Trust continues to work with partners to promote the Waterway Park. We have been joining meetings and seminars on line and have started to attend a few face to face, socially distanced meetings. It is hard work to keep the profile of the project up with all the pressures which everyone is facing. However, another bit of good news is that to help raise our profile we have launched our new website (see P8). I very much hope you like the simpler and up to date feel to the site which now brings together the Trust, the *John Bunyan* and the MK Community Boat all with one click – something which has been our aim for some time. I hope you like it and find it easy to use. You will find you can now access an interactive route of the Waterway Park as well as other information and news.

Finally, one last bit of good news: we continue to work on bids for funding with some success, see P4. We've been awarded a grant from Wixamtree Trust for £3,500 towards the provision of disabled access for the new Landing Stage at Kempston Mill. The full cost of a fully accessible ramp will

be £7,000 so we are working to find the remaining 50% of the full cost. We were also successful in receiving £500 from the Canal & River Trust, Waterways Charity Appeal, for loss of income resulting from non-operation of the *John Bunyan* plus a further £2,100 from Bedford Borough Council – a discretionary grant as part of a government fund to help small business and charities affected by Covid. Every little helps!

With regard to larger scale funding we are continually working on bids. However, the majority are very dependent on us gaining support and input from partner organisations and they all have a lot of other pressing priorities in these difficult times. The Environment Agency and Water Resources East are ready to fund and initiate their £125k study on how the Waterway Park might help with flood management and water transfer. We are just waiting for confirmation from the three Local Authorities that they support the approach the study will be taking. I hope we can get this work underway in the autumn as it could be very significant in demonstrating the benefits of investing in the Waterway Park at a strategic scale.

Once again, thank you all for continuing to support us. Keep up with our news on the website. Stay safe and well. ●



A.G.M.

Our Annual General Meeting took place virtually on 30 June. 13 people joined the Zoom call and 57 proxies had been received by the deadline. None of the proxy forms showed votes against any the motions, consequently they were all carried.

- The minutes of the last meeting, and accounts for 2019-20 were approved.
- Jane Hamilton, Simon Clewlow and Drew Marchant were re-elected as directors for a further period.
- Chris Hilliard and Paul Smith were elected as directors for the first time.

We hope to be able to return to a physical meeting next year, but it is obviously too soon to plan.

The Annual Partnership Conference, which normally takes place in November, is also almost certain to be postponed or cancelled this year. ●

Head of Navigation - Kempston Mill

During the dredging project last year, we had identified a concrete obstacle in the river close to the Northern bank, just downstream of where the back channel rejoins the main river.

We were interested in trying to establish how deep this may be, how hard and also to re-measure its plan area.

One of our members, Alan Mayo, had contacted the Bedford Sub-Aqua Club, who volunteered to have a look. After a few false starts, they finally made it on 25th July and extracted a number of items from the river bed (bicycles and the like) as well as managing to chip off a sample from the concrete block. Their findings confirmed that it is large and would be very difficult to remove. In addition, the block channels the flow of water towards the Southern bank, which we had dredged to allow boats past this point. This now fast-flowing section may be maintaining the dredged depth. So if we were to remove the concrete, it is possible that the characteristics of the river may change. ●



It was raining as one of the divers checked the depth, although this might not have been a major problem for him! (above)
In other pictures, investigating the "lump", leaving after a good day's work, and the peace and quiet when all was done.



Our team have been working hard behind the scenes, applying for grants from several award-giving bodies, for many different things.

Here are some of our recent successes:



We were pleased to learn in July that we had been successful in our bid for funds to the Wixamtree Charitable Trust. We have been awarded £3,500 towards the cost of the provision of disabled access on and off boats at the proposed new Landing Stage to be sited near Mill Lane at Kempston.

The platform will include an appropriate ramp with a concrete extended slab at the foot of the landing stage. The total cost for this is estimated to be £7,000. Following an approach to Kempston Parish Councillors we were delighted to receive a further £500 towards costs from James Valentine, Ward Councillor - Kempston West.

The Landing Stage is part of the Trust's longer term ambition to facilitate a new riverside destination with improved open space and enhanced pedestrian and cycle links into Bedford for the communities of Kempston, Kempston Rural and Great Denham.

Progress has been temporarily halted due to the Covid 19 pandemic but it is hoped to recommence work in the autumn.



Another successful application was for a payment for the *John Bunyan* through the Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund. The Discretionary Grant Fund supports small and micro businesses that are not eligible for other grant schemes.

This was administered through local authorities, in our case Bedford Borough Council, and we were awarded £2,100 towards the fixed costs of operating the JB (these include mooring fees, licences, insurance etc), in the period when we were unable to operate any revenue earning trips.

Limited trips began again at the end of August, see page 5 for more details, with additional pictures on page 7.



The Canal & River Trust (CRT) have awarded £500 from their Waterways Charity Appeal, for loss of income resulting from non-operation of the *John Bunyan* boat.

The CRT say:

Thanks to donations from hundreds of people to our appeal to support small waterway-based charities, we have been able to award £31,500 in grants shared across 43 local charities based on inland waterways in England and Wales.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, these charities, which provide vital support to some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country, have seen their income drastically reduce, putting the services that they offer at risk.

Sue Wilkinson, our trustee and chair of the grants panel, said: "These very local charities do invaluable work – providing people with opportunities in life where, and when, it is needed the most – from helping tackle loneliness and dementia, to supporting disadvantaged children and young people in many different communities across the country.

"We are very grateful to everyone who has contributed to the Waterways Charity Appeal. It is thanks to you that we have been able to give some support to a number of small charities at this very difficult time. The Trust is pleased to be able to match the personal contributions made."

Renewals

As you know, we now accept payments by direct debit, card details and payment through the CAF website, as well as the traditional cheque.

You may be interested to know that, so far this year, the proportions through each route are:

Direct Debit	35%
Online payment	18%
Card details	5%
Cheque / cash	42%

As the direct debits are all received at the start of the membership year, that proportion starts high and reduces as payments made by other means come through.

John Bunyan Community Boat Launches Autumn Cruising Programme

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak the *John Bunyan* launched its 2020 Cruising Season on Bank Holiday Monday with an exceptionally good turnout of passengers cruising with us from Priory Marina on the lower river of the Great River Ouse in Bedford. An enjoyable Bank Holiday afternoon cruise in glorious sunshine was had by all passengers on board. The season will be different this year as we are unable to run any of the music or specials. We normally carry 50 passengers, but due to the social restriction distance we have had to configure the *John Bunyan* to carry 12 passengers only during our 2020 season, leaving plenty of space between household bubbles. We are "COVID-19 Safe" as per the Government and HSE Guidelines, registered on Visit England **Good To Go site**. As part of the COVID-19 restrictions you are required to wear face coverings throughout the cruise for the safety of yourself and others.

The season started on Bank Holiday Monday 31st August, with two 1 hour cruises from Priory Marina, departing at 2pm and 3.30pm. We'll be cruising every Thursday and Sunday throughout September from Sovereign's Quay along the Embankment. The October cruises went on sale in mid-September. During October we are planning a number of special cruises including a Barns Hotel Afternoon Tea and Sunday Afternoon Cream Teas. If you would like to take a cruise this autumn, a limited number of tickets is still available for the Thursday and Sunday cruises throughout September and October. To book your ticket, visit our new website www.bmkwaterway.org We are accepting bookings from household bubbles of 2 or 4 people.

The volunteers have worked hard during the pre-season period getting the JB ready for the season and with COVID-19 training to ensure the safety of the passengers.



John Bunyan - Covid-Secure

More MKCB News

Cruise Planning and Winding Holes

Now that boat building plans are moving forward wonderfully, we have started work on planning cruising schedules from Campbell Park. We know that we will be able to operate in a Covid-secure way, but we are cautious about how many cruises we will be able to offer in 2021 as the leisure market recovers. We're doing some best case/worst case scenario planning.

One of the factors we're looking at is cruise length. Existing winding holes allow us to offer 2-hour (or more) return cruises, but we would also like in due course to offer shorter 1-hour return cruises. Consequently, we have been searching for possible sites both north and south of Campbell Park. Our desk-based exercise identified seven possible sites. We viewed these from the towpath and have short-listed them down to two possible locations, one each side of our base.

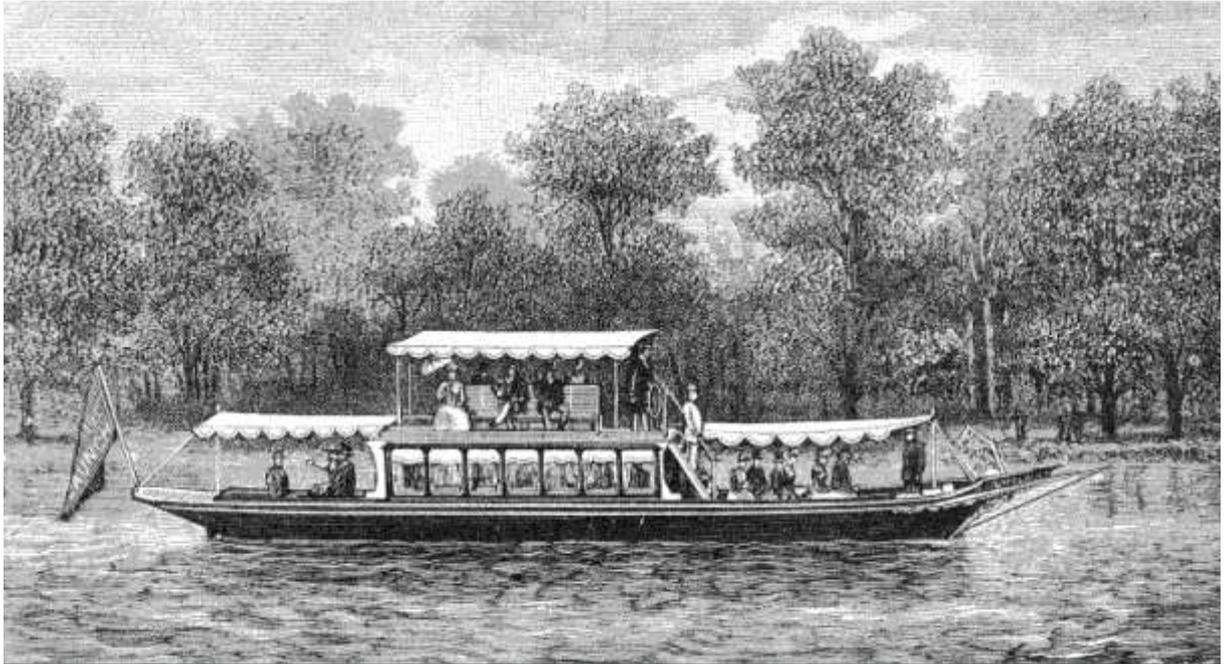
We will be guided by the IWA's winding hole specification when working up designs in more detail and will obviously need to obtain landowner approval in addition to dealing with technical, environmental, and engineering issues. The work will need to be scoped, funded and managed as a separate project by the Trust and its Partners and Stakeholders, but we hope it will be supported since, in addition to allowing us to offer 1-hour cruises, these winding holes would be available for all waterway users, improving the boating experience in Milton Keynes.

Training Update by Denise & Christian

We have now written the first draft of the COVID risk assessment for training on our boat and are just making some tweaks to finalise it. From this we have developed a procedure for carrying out the training, whilst minimising risk. All participants will be sent copies prior to training, so everyone is really clear about how it works. We have also been on the *John Bunyan* COVID training and feel quite confident that it will work well for us all.

We have recently taken our boat along the intended 'Training Route' on the Grand Union from Gayton Junction, through the Blisworth Tunnel, to the long pound, below the second lock down at Stoke Bruerne. There are enough places along the route, in a day, for each trainee to carry out all of the manoeuvres required by the NCBA course for Skippers. We certainly got some funny looks from other boaters cruising along with a stopwatch in our hands, and people were very bemused when we kept turning round!

Research shows that the MKCB will not be the first all-electric trip boat on our inland waterways



MV Viscountess Bury in her pomp

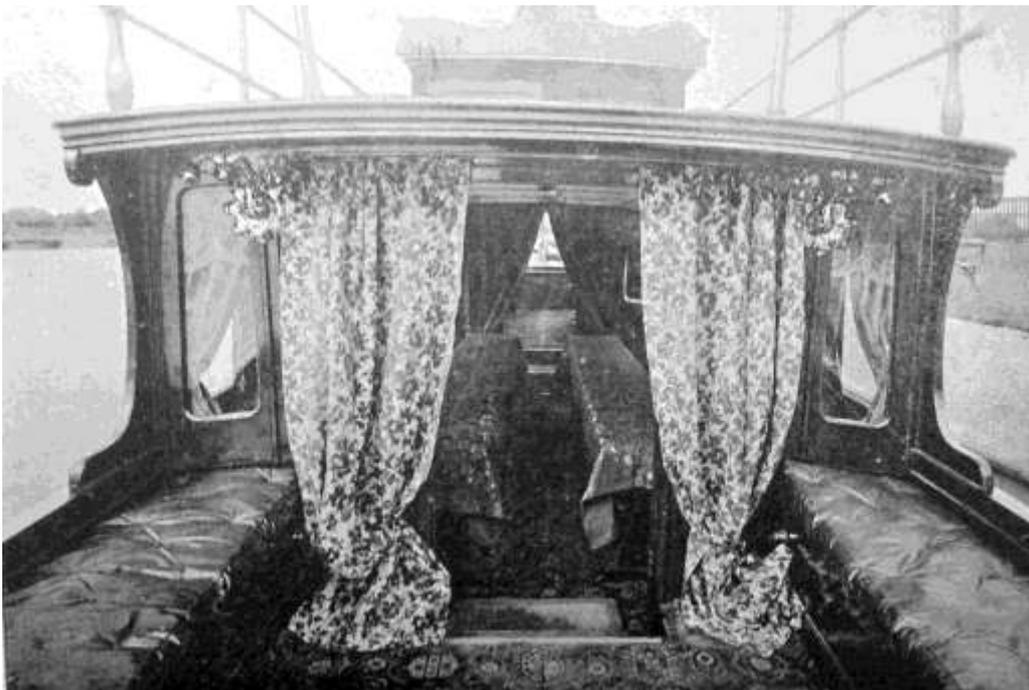
Built in 1888, *MV Viscountess Bury* was the largest of a fleet of electric launches



Viscountess Bury cruising in the 1970s

operated by the Moritz-Immisch Electric Launch Co. in which Viscount Bury was a partner. Powered by two 7.5 HP electric motors, with 200 storage batteries under the deck, she could run for up to 10 hours, at a speed of over 5 knots.

Built by W.S. Sargent & Co of Chiswick, she could host eighty passengers. Just over 65 feet long and 10 feet wide, she had a carved figurehead of Lady Sophia Bury and was decorated internally in white and gold, with red velvet upholstery. Her most notable charterer (from 1888 – 1895) was 'Bertie' Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, for trips to and from Windsor Castle.



A view of the saloon. A little more luxurious than is likely on the MKCB?

In later times, she moved to the Rivers Cam and Ouse, carrying passengers from Cambridge to Ely and back, for over eighty years. Her final resting place was in Newson's Yard, Lowestoft. Unfortunately, about twenty years ago, she was in such a bad state that only a few items were salvaged before she was broken up and burned.

These pictures are from the East Anglian Waterways Association website, where there are many more pictures and much more information about this unusual boat, and the *Enchantress*, which tried to cash in on the good name of the *Viscountess*.

See: www.eawa.co.uk/viscountess.html

Events Calendar 2020/21

Regrettably, all events are currently suspended, due to Government restrictions. We hope to meet face-to-face again soon.



The John Bunyan on her moorings, on the river and in Bedford on her first covid-era trip (pictures by Steve Ashley)



New Website for Trust and BMKWEL

You may have noticed that our website has been given a makeover. It has been completely rebuilt to give a more up-to-date look and feel. At the same time we have made a few changes.

The website is now the home of the complete BMK family. Once on the website, you will see sections devoted to the Trust, to the *John Bunyan*, and to the new MKCB. The existing JB site is still operating as usual, but will be moved to the new site over the winter.

We have taken the opportunity to simplify our web address (URL). Instead of the confusing hyphen, and org.uk address, the home of the new website is www.bmkwaterway.org.

All of the old addresses will still work for the foreseeable future, and will automatically redirect to the new site. So, there is no need for you to update your records or favourites.

Please have a look at the new site, and let us know what you think - especially if you spot any errors. For instance the name "Bedford to Milton Keynes" Waterway Park will probably have been corrected to "Bedford & Milton Keynes" by the time you read this.

As this is a complete rebuild, more little things have likely slipped through, so let us know, please, through the address on the Contact Us page.

Contact Us.

For more information and to support or join the Trust, or volunteer with one of our boats, please see:

www.bmkwaterway.org

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