

## Milton Keynes Community Boat *Electra* Now Launched



*Electra* finally arrived at Willowbridge Marina (just south of Milton Keynes) on 5th May. Any narrowboat's arrival and launch is an event, and this was very emotional because it signalled the end of two years of hard work to get everything in place. *Electra* glistened in the sunshine, watched by a COVID-reduced number of well-wishers.

Tuckey's lorry with *Electra* on the back arrived bang on time, and slowly, slowly, *Electra* was swung round onto the cut. Applause all round as she was gently, gently, craned in.

Fortunately, the 12 onboard chairs went onboard, so a Covid-limited number of us at least could sit on her maiden voyage up to her permanent mooring at Campbell Wharf.

Her first crew were the wonderful boat builder Gary Cole himself, with their project Manager Sue Hover. Thanks to both of them for the great way they've managed the entire project.

Delightfully, the first liquid refreshment onboard was a bottle of Prosecco, drunk as *Electra* went through Fenny Lock. It's become evident that Prosecco will be her drink of choice!

Not only did she look wonderful on the water, but she glides, almost silently, along. Heads turned, photos were taken and we experienced the start of continuous fascination from onlookers, as we heard so many compliments. It's her quietness that catches everyone unawares – walkers, boaters, herons and fishermen alike.

Days later, in stormy weather, our designer Amanda Wright oversaw the application of all the amazing graphics, so that *Electra* is now looking WONDERFUL.

All *Electra* pictures in this edition are courtesy of Gil Prince Photography, and *Electra* words are by David Wolfson.



## View from the Chair

Since the last newsletter the Trust and the Enterprise Board have been very busy on a number of fronts, hoping that by the time you read this we will be meeting face to face and able to open up our activities a lot more.

In Milton Keynes there has been a great deal of excitement. *Electra* is in the water and preparing for her first cruising season. A huge thank you to John Best, Jane Wolfson and the whole team who have helped us get to this stage including lots of advice and support from the *John Bunyan* team. In both Milton Keynes and Bedford we are still likely to face challenges in getting cruises underway depending on social distancing and other rules but a new boat is nonetheless a significant step forward.

In Bedford the *John Bunyan* team have worked extremely hard to get back out on the river offering the usual range of excellent cruises. It has been very rewarding to see the bookings coming in and to know we still have a lot of local interest and support.

A recent email from one of our longstanding and very active members, Alan Mayo, prompted me to look up from my usual position in front of a keyboard and screen and take a step back to look at where we are and what we have achieved in recent years. Despite the difficulties of the past 15 months all of a sudden the future looks far more positive. Seven years ago, with a new source of income from the JB, we were able to undertake some critical work to better demonstrate the benefits of the Waterway. We had the project re-costed and we also commissioned a flood risk management study and an economic analysis both of which pointed to significant benefits to be gained from the Waterway. We have since used these studies and other work to use in presentations, conferences and to lobby influential partners and seek their support.

During the past year Trust directors have been working hard (virtually) – joining a whole range of on-line initiatives, webinars and meetings and presenting the evidence we have built up around the Waterway benefits. Strangely it has brought us a wider audience than doing the same thing face to face. It has also coincided with much greater national and international emphasis on the environment and sustainability - something which is working to our advantage.

Until very recently our Consortium partners had not met for a year and had struggled with lack of resources and a lot of change at officer and member level as well as all the issues around the pandemic. It felt like we had lost traction. That has now changed significantly. In April a number of Trust

Directors joined the first meeting of the B&MK Waterway Consortium for well over a year. Whilst we have very much stayed in touch with Consortium partners over the last year everyone has had to deal with new and different priorities. However, since the April meeting we are all working together with a great deal of renewed enthusiasm.

The Consortium has a new Chair, Councillor Alison Graham from Central Bedfordshire, who will retain that role for a period of 2 years providing some much-needed stability and direction.

Some of our key partners such as the Environment Agency (EA), South East Midland Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) and Water Resources East (WRE) are stepping in with funding and other resources to strengthen the case for investment in the project as a whole. Exactly what we have been aiming for.

There are now 3 focussed pieces of work underway

- The preparation of a joint statement from all Consortium partners in support of the Waterway to feed into the Government as they develop a strategy for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. The statement will use our studies as evidence plus further work being funded by the EA, WRE and others.
- A major bid for revenue funding to enable the Consortium to commission expert advice on high level funding and investment opportunities for the Waterway – viewing it as essential infrastructure and looking at the potential to bring in both public and private sector money. If successful this would be a huge step forward and bring the project a great deal nearer to being implemented than it has ever been.
- Further work funded and led by the EA and WRE (at over £120k a really significant financial commitment) to properly establish the water resilience benefits of the project – a key piece of work which could help attract future funding.

If you have ever had a glance at our 2019/2021 business plan, you will see we set ourselves some clear targets over the 3-year period. We are now able to tick off many of the boxes. As well as working with our community boats and building a landing stage at Kempston Mill we have been focussing attention on key stakeholders who we believe can help most. As a result, we are now working closely with a number of influential partners and all pulling in the same direction. If we succeed

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# Name that boat: *Electra* naming ceremony



Despite a restricted number, on 28<sup>th</sup> May 30 friends and fans met to hear Pete Winkleman (Chairman of MK Dons and "Mr

Morrison, Frances Craven, Chris Bent with John Best and Steve Ashley from the Trust trading company BMKWEL.



Delightfully, Don Allison (BMK Trustee) and Sheelagh Rix (a listener to 3 Counties Radio) had both come up with the name "*Electra*", so they were asked to unveil the boat's name panel.

The whole event merited a great big shoutout and report on 3 Counties Radio. They've promised to send their reporter onboard later in the year to get the feel of *Electra* the Quiet One! It's our Cabin

Milton Keynes") declare the magic words "I name this boat *Electra*. May God bless her and all who sail in her". Fortunately he didn't use up all the prosecco(!) so we could all drink her health. Speeches from the Mayor of Milton Keynes, Pete Winkleman, Jane Wolfson and John Best hailed our new boat.

Host lead, James Clifton, who did so much to make the event – and the publicity – such a success.

Later that same day, 28 of our wonderful volunteers met each other in person for the first time ever. There was a trial cream tea and there was cake – a quite incredible edible version of *Electra*, complete with solar panels. It was (almost) a shame to eat it.



The launch party on the first short cruise after naming included key funders of our lovely boat, without whom she just would not have been possible: John Best of the Trust, with Peter Cusdin (Crest Nicholson), Julie Dawes (The Parks Trust), Ranjit Singh (Milton Keynes Community Foundation), Cllr Mo Khan (Mayor of Milton Keynes), and Val Williamson of Rotary MK.

And then there was our Management team: Jane Wolfson, Denise Taylor, James Clifton, David Wolfson, Christian Taylor, Jeremy

in our ambitions to have the Waterway properly recognised strategically as key infrastructure, we will have made a big leap forward. We will be very much on track and sooner than I thought might be possible. The next 12 to 18 months will be crucial. Keep checking our website for information on how you might help when the Government opens up its consultation on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-for-sustainable-growth-in-the-oxford-cambridge-arc-spatial-framework>

Back at the local level I continue to keep in touch with the Council to see if the work needed to repair Kempston Mill Bridge can

provide an opportunity to raise it – one of the Trust's longer-term ambitions which would enable larger craft like the *John Bunyan* further up the river to turn and eventually to reach the start of the new Waterway. Understandably the priority is to restore the essential link between Kempston and Great Denham but if a new bridge is achievable which meets our ambitions as well that would be great. We are currently supporting the Council in a bid for Government funding which could help achieve this.

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

Jane Hamilton

## Electra: Volunteers are our vital asset

Since we last wrote in BMK News, there's been a huge effort to bring together the volunteers we need to run a successful community passenger boat.

The crucial element in all this has been to make sure every one of our fourteen Skippers is fully qualified with the Certificate in



Community Boat Management. To do that, Denise and Christian Taylor have themselves been accredited as official Trainers, which means that MKCB is now recognised as an Approved Training Centre. *Electra* is the first ever all-electric boat to get this accreditation, so Denise and Christian have developed unique additional training to cover our special boat. It's in our plan to offer this to other Community Boat projects over time. So it's double congratulations: to Denise and Christian as Trainers, and to all fourteen Skippers.

But a trip boat won't work without all the other volunteers: so hats off and congratulations to our fourteen Cabin Hosts, without whom no-one would be welcomed onboard, and there'd be no cream teas (or, sorry to mention it, Prosecco).

But even then, nothing would happen without the shore crew who have planned our rostering, created social media presence (@ElectraBoatMK), taken photos, created publicity materials, planned trips, recruited volunteers (at one time 18 applications were being processed by our volunteer Volunteer Coordinators), purchased uniforms, and kept a steady stream of volunteer emails, zooms and briefings going. And then of course there is our Maintenance Team who keep *Electra* looking lovely and are doing regular small fixes and fittings. The whole Management Team has spent six weeks rapidly identifying and purchasing all the final elements of kit needed on board and by crew – everything from plates to ropes to glasses to paper towels and tools ... the list was very long.

The Management Team is urgently seeking a volunteer still to step forward to co-ordinate Marketing activities.

## Electra: Getting to know her

Now *Electra* exists, she won't be going anywhere without all our crew knowing where everything is and how everything works.

As an all-electric boat, we have to be completely sure her batteries are fully charged every day, which means two big fat power cables need to be plugged in overnight (see more information about our technical specification).

Not just that, but we carry a range of onboard kit, which everyone needs to understand confidently.

We've got a very good lift for wheelchairs, and we have to be certain we know how to use that. We've been delighted that local Rotarian (and former Paralympic archer) Val Williamson has tested our wheelchair access, so that we're confident to welcome people aboard. Because *Electra* is a narrow boat (6'10" compared to *John Bunyart's* 10'6") we know we can't take the very widest wheelchairs, which is why we've been funded to buy our own Transit wheelchair so we can lend this for the trip to anyone who'd like to use it.



The electronic till for bar purchases has been set up ready for guests – thanks to Steve Ashley for sourcing such excellent kit.

Alongside this, we've got to keep accurate records so we're legally compliant, and everyone involved has to learn the *Electra* way of doing things.

And then ... do we all know where all the points of interests are on our routes through Milton Keynes? And, how long does each trip take, allowing for other craft on the water, and underwater obstructions!

## What makes *Electra* Go?

*Electra* carries an amazing amount of power. Of course, there's no diesel or gas on board. Instead, we draw our power from a 32amp and a 16amp mains supply. Our Marina owners (MK Parks Trust) have made sure that electrical power comes from renewable energy sources.

This power charges our 48 lead-carbon onboard batteries (each delivering 2 volts). The batteries alone weigh over two tons.



Through a complex Mastervolt Power management system, these batteries deliver power first and foremost to our electric propulsion motor, which spins at a very sedate 350-500rpm in "tickover" and around 1100 rpm when we're really going fast (no more than 4mph on the canals is allowed). It's a very spooky experience to those of us used to a noisy diesel engine to be travelling in a boat where the motor is pretty well silent.

We also bring power in from our 1.2KWH solar panels, which means that on bright days our batteries get some help.

Because we're so full of energy, we can run a high specification of onboard electrics, running at 240, 24 and 12 volts.

FischerPanda, the global company who supplied all our propulsion (Bell Marine) and our power management system (Mastervolt equipment) are very clear. Either the electrics work (and they will) or they don't (there's a guarantee). No maintenance required! No touching, no interference.

In fact there are only two items familiar to traditional canal boaters: the stern weed hatch and the grease gland to prevent water coming in from the propeller. ●



## *Electra*: Telling the world all about her

*Electra* is meant to appeal to many types of users, both those who are familiar with our wonderful canals, and people who are curious to find out their charms.

So, our small but wonderful marketing team has been busy creating a whole range of approaches.

*Electra* will offer a series of public trips, available in 2- or 4- hour options. These will mostly start from Campbell Wharf in Central Milton Keynes. Warning – this is NOT the new Marina, but is from our daytime mooring on the canal main line.

We'll be offering "Walkers One Way" trips ("WOW") so guests can come for a one hour cruise to Great Linford and then walk back, or vice versa.

We're planning cream teas on some trips, and from time to time there'll be early evening "Fish and Bubbles" (that prosecco again, and of course we do have non-alcoholic drinks too!)

We think that our biggest market will come from private charters, and we're already getting busy with pre-release enquiries for wedding anniversaries, birthday parties, works trips, fun days out.

With Covid restrictions still unclear as we're writing this (mid-June) we won't advertise our trips until we know what we can reliably offer in terms of guest numbers.

All our tickets will be available via the BMK website and there are weekly news and updates on our social media channels @ElectraBoatMK ●



## *Electra*: Planning ahead

We've got a range of forward community activities planned subject to COVID restrictions of course. *Electra* will feature at these events:

Summertime (dates to be agreed): sponsored cruises funded by the Postcode Community Trust

1st August. African and Caribbean Arts and Heritage Union event in Campbell Park

7th August. Fenny Stratford Canal Festival

15th August. Fenny Poppers Festival

September: more volunteering slots will be offered for crew training (we're full right now)

18th September. Heritage Open Day at Great Linford Manor Park organised by the Parks Trust with multiple partners.

16th and 17th October. Walk and Glide Festival organised by *Electra* and The Parks Trust to enable walkers to glide every inch of our cruising route from Cosgrove to Stoke Hammond. ●

## Electra: A central part of Milton Keynes

One of the excitements for *Electra* is to make sure we become, and remain, an important part of the Milton Keynes Community.



John Best and Jane Wolfson have been working very closely with a range of partners in Milton Keynes, all of whom share our vision of *Electra* at the heart of our vibrant, diverse community. This means we're working directly with key players such as CRT (Canal & Rivers Trust), the Parks Trust, the MK Canalside Forum, MK IWA as well as parish and town councils, rotary clubs, and formal and informal community organisations. We all share a desire to make *Electra* be an important feature in the heart of Milton Keynes.



It's been very heartening that individual boaters on the canal, on all kinds of craft, welcome our presence, love our quietness and think we're bringing life and activity to the canal.

## Electra: Funding news

*Electra* has hit the water fully funded for build and setup! This remarkable

achievement has been achieved from our major sponsors and supporters, plus contributions received since March this year, to add to many others, from: Great Linford



Parish Council, Campbell Park Parish Council (second contribution), Wolverton and Stony Stratford Rotary Club, Old Woughton Parish Council, Wolverton & Greenleys Town Council. All of our founding sponsor and founding supporters are listed on the sides of the boat. We can't thank you enough.

## Eastern Projects Group Update

### Landing Stage

You will all be pleased to know that we have now agreed the design for the Landing Stage at Kempston Mill (Julian Armitage writes). This has now been submitted to Bedford Borough Council for design checking and approval, which we hope will be forthcoming in the next few weeks. We have also agreed a construct price with Land and Water and work should commence in early September, which is the building window (after birds have nested, fish have spawned and wildlife is less active). Work should take no longer than 3 weeks.

### Joint Funding Bid for Kempston Mill

The Trust has joined with Bedford Borough Council and others to help fund the development of the area. Our contribution is dependent on the bridge being replaced or raised to allow the *John Bunyan* and other similar craft to pass underneath it and turn at the millpond just upstream. The plan would be to enhance the whole area, allowing cyclists to use the "new" bridge as well as a modified bridge over the back channel, which is currently unusable by cycle traffic. This would make the riverside a destination for both Kempston and Great Denham residents

### Fields Road Phase 2

We note that further development work has started at Fields Road and are endeavour-

*(Continued on page 7)*

# Events Calendar 2021

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

## John Bunyan Update

By Graham Mabbutt

The new 2021 Cruising Season for the *John Bunyan* Boat started on Bank Holiday Monday, 31<sup>st</sup> May. Due to Covid19 restrictions we limited the number of passengers to 12, although with groups of four together we can carry up to 20. The cruises were sold out, and all the Sunday Afternoon cruises for June are all sold, a lot of the Thursday Afternoon Cruises are also sold out. A good omen for the season ahead!

We have now published our full capacity programme for July, based on the ending of social distancing by then. If this does not happen then we shall still operate the majority of the cruises but restricted to 20 passengers per cruise.

From July 1st our usual favourite cruises will be returning:

- Our regular Thursday and Sunday Afternoon Public Cruises towards Kempston and Cardington Lock from Sovereigns Quay will be back. (Sovereigns Quay is next to The Star Rowing Club, close to the Riverside Bedford leisure complex.) During the Wimbledon Period, Strawberries and Cream will be an additional menu item.
- The Thursday Walkers Special from Priory Marina to Sovereigns Quay (one way cruise) will be running.

- Our highly popular Saturday Evening Fish & Chip Supper Cruise returns, running from Priory Marina, and now it's a two-hour cruise to give time to enjoy the food, and drinks from the bar.
- Our monthly Jazz Evening Cruises with a top jazz trio, and the Motown Cruises with DJ Keith Stewart will be back on Thursday evenings.
- A new venue for our Wednesday Afternoon Tea is the Mercure Bedford Central Hotel, a lovely cruise from Priory Marina, the hotel has a fabulous view overlooking the river, a great afternoon out.
- Our premium cruise for lunch at The Anchor, Great Barford is also a monthly cruise on a Wednesday. Almost a complete day out.



In the meantime our volunteers have had updated familiarisation annual training, We are still looking for more volunteers to join our management team to help with sales, marketing, social media, boat operations as well as boat crew. Details from Sue Gilibrand - [JBVolunteer-ing@johnbunyanboat.org](mailto:JBVolunteer-ing@johnbunyanboat.org)

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ing to contact Goodmans, the developers with a view to gaining a meeting with them together with representatives from Bedford Borough Council. So far, we have not had an answer to our messages. Once again we are anxious to ensure the integrity of any future Waterway at minimal cost to any developer or the Council, who we believe have underwritten these potential costs.

### East West Rail Link

We're sure this will have an impact on us and are keeping a weather eye on developments. The Trust has submitted a response to the recent consultation to ensure the route of the Waterway is acknowledged and protected where it runs alongside the east west rail route under the M1 and adjacent to Ridgmont Station. In the longer term the Trust hopes to work closely with Central Bedfordshire Council on the detail of how this section of the route is designed to integrate east west rail, the Waterway and cycling and walking routes. Any news from members will be welcome.

## 2021 AGM

The 2021 AGM, held via Zoom, was on 24th June 2021. There were 17 members on the Zoom call and 36 proxy votes had been received. Apologies were recorded.

The Minutes of the 14th Annual General Meeting held on 30th June 2020 were accepted unanimously.

The Statement of Accounts and the Balance Sheet of the Company for the year ended 31 March 2021 had been circulated prior to the meeting. The financial director confirmed that these had been approved by the independent auditor, and they were accepted unanimously.

The following serving Directors who had completed a three-year term were re-appointed for a further three years: John Best - Stephen Ashley - Don Allison - Leigh Willows. Each was carried unanimously.

The formal business being completed, the meeting was closed at 15:10pm.

## Marking the Route

Next time you're planning to visit the Millennium Country Park at the Forest of Marston Vale, take a look at our two newly installed Information Boards (Beryl Bennett writes).

You will find them alongside our wooden carvings which were placed there a few years ago as part of the Trust's strategy to highlight this stretch of the proposed route of the Waterway at Marston Moretaine.



We would like to thank the staff at the Forest Centre for their support and help in organising the development and installation of these boards.

Also, tremendous thanks to Steve Waring, volunteer, for his contribution in making this project a reality.

We would like to acknowledge the continuing work of volunteer Stephanie Wilson who, together with Steve, tirelessly ensures the carvings are well maintained and regularly re-coated with preservative.



## Contact Us.

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

[www.bmkwaterway.org](http://www.bmkwaterway.org)

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