

A Triumphant Start to Public Cruising for *Electra*

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Maybe it was coming out of lockdown that did it, or maybe it was the joy of having an all-electric trip boat on the Milton Keynes section of the Grand Union Canal. Whatever the reason, it's been hard to keep guests away from *Electra*, from the moment we started public cruises and charters at the very end of July. Even though we decided to restrict the numbers on board from our maximum of twelve guests to a Covid-safe eight, we've had over 95% of all our seats taken for all our trips in August,



James Clifton (Lead Cabin Host) welcomes our 1000th guest, Tommy Richards from Great Linford.

September, and October. That has meant that on Sunday 24th October, we welcomed our 1,000th guest onboard. That's 1,000 people who've experienced being on the canal on an all-electric boat and enjoyed the hidden delights of MK's very own 'waterway park'. And it's 1,000 people who we've been able to tell about the planned Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Park.

We ask each group of guests to fill out a form online, after their trip, and about one in five of them have replied. That in itself is a great response rate and higher than normal for this kind of feedback survey. Our wonderful guests are universally positive about their cruise and their experience. 90% are very likely to recommend *Electra* to someone they know. 90% liked or really liked the catering onboard. 90% thought our crew are extremely friendly. And a whopping 95% are likely or very likely to come

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

bmk news

PATRON
Sir Samuel Whitbread
KCVO

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View from the Chair

Since the last newsletter it has proved to be an extremely busy summer. At the local level the community boats have been highly visible on the River Great Ouse and the Grand Union Canal. It has been wonderful to see so many passengers enjoying a cruise on the *John Bunyan* and *Electra*. A big thank you to all the volunteers who have made this possible and also a big thank you to all our customers who have shown faith and confidence in our operations.

Also at the local level, after some setbacks, work on the landing stage at Kempston Mill is getting underway at long last. A big thank you is due to Julian Armitage and the team who have worked extremely hard to get to this stage despite some very difficult setbacks. I hope this will be another step towards creating a new riverside destination at Kempston Mill. Building the landing stage is something the Trust can do to help put the spotlight on that part of the River Great Ouse. At the time of writing other steps needed to open up the location for more boats are not directly in our hands. Kempston Mill Bridge is now in Council ownership and the Trust has pledged some funding towards its replacement provided that also includes raising it to allow craft to pass underneath. However the Council will need to find the majority of the funding for a new bridge from other sources and has just had a bid for some "levelling up" funds turned down.

In the last newsletter I referred to three specific tasks which the Trust and its partners are currently focussed on at a strategic level:

- The government consultation on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework has closed. Thank you to all those who took time to contribute to the exercise and support the B&MK Waterway. The Trust and the B&MK Waterway Consortium both submitted strong statements supporting the project. We were also supported by the IWA. On behalf of the Trust I also took part in a range of other related initiatives – most of them "webinars" and other on-line activities. We have all worked extremely hard to draw attention to the Waterway and its wide-ranging benefits. We will find out more in the spring of next year when a draft Spatial Framework is due to be published. I know it is not always as easy to get involved in "virtual" exercises like this but as advocates for the Waterway this is an absolute top priority for the Trust. If the Waterway is formally recognised as key infrastructure, then hopefully securing investment in it will become more of a likelihood.

- WRE and the EA have appointed Stantec to do further work on the water resilience benefits. They are now busy assessing how much water the project will need to keep it operational as a navigation, whether there are adequate supplies of water from a range of sources to meet the estimated demand and whether there is likely to be any spare capacity in supply and storage systems to help provide water for other areas in times of drought. This is in addition to evaluating in more detail the potential flood management benefits. The work involves some complex modelling and input from a wide range of partners including the Canal and River Trust, Anglian Water and links with WRE's regional water resource planning processes. Whilst there are a lot of big questions around supply and demand, it is exciting to see the work which other partners are now leading and funding taking the project further towards being a reality
- Work on seeking some revenue funding for the B&MK Waterway Consortium to commission expert advice on high level funding and investment opportunities for the Waterway. We put this on hold for a while as the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund, run by the Environment Agency, had closed to new bids. However, we hope it will open up again shortly so this work will get underway again soon.

All our activities at the local level are crucial to ensuring the Waterway is recognised and supported by local communities but we must not lose sight of our long-term goal to secure investment in the project at a strategic level. Every new piece of evidence about the benefits of a new Waterway Park helps our case. I continue to take every opportunity to meet with Consortium partners and other agencies and also aim to keep our MPs briefed and aware of what we are doing. At the end of the day the key decisions at a strategic level will be political ones.

Next year we will need to develop a new business plan. Whilst I would never expect it to be anyone's bed time reading, having a plan with clear ambitions and targets is what has driven our work forward with some very determined direction and focus. I hope by next year we will be able to tick off many of the tasks we set ourselves 3 years ago and look towards a different plan and a positive future for the B&MK Waterway.

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

Jane Hamilton

Review of the *John Bunyan* Season



The *John Bunyan* Community Boat season started slowly due to coming out of lock down earlier in the year and the lifting of the Government COVID restriction on social distancing (Steve Ashley writes).

Our first cruise of the season started with the late May spring Bank Holiday mini cruises of 45 minutes along the Bedford waterfront and embankment. Our normal Wednesday afternoon Tea cruises to Barns Hotel had to be rescheduled this season to the Mercure Central Bedford Hotel as the Barns Hotel was badly flooded over last year's Christmas / New Year period. The Mercure provided Afternoon Tea customers with spectacular views of the river from the first-floor bar area where the Afternoon Tea is served. The views are some of the best in Bedford providing views of Town Bridge, The Swan Hotel and Castle Mound.



Afternoon Tea at the Mercure Central, Bedford

The Christmas flood caused several cruises to be re-routed to different parts of the River Great Ouse, those affected are the Sovereign Quay to

Kempston with tree branches being washed down stream and lodging by the island, causing the route to be blocked.

This year the *John Bunyan* team introduced a new cruise during the children's summer holiday and October half term, Family EyeSpy cruises based on the *John Bunyan* I-SPY card aimed at young families and grandparents looking after the children during the holiday period. Good fun was had by all on board, both customers and the volunteers crewing the boat. On several of the cruises we had Alasdair Bright as guest helping to provide historical facts about Bedford waterfront and pointing out places of interest that are illustrated on the I-Spy card. Alasdair is a local Bedford historian and the illustrator behind the *John Bunyan* I-SPY card.

For our jazz cruise followers our monthly jazz cruise evenings, picking up guests at Newnham Road Steps near the Swan Hotel,

cruising along the embankment while listening to an evening of relaxing jazz music on a summer's evening, are extremely popular. This year's jazz artists who played onboard include; - Richard Exall Trio, Ben Holden Trio, Gary Wood Trio and Cool Jazz Collective

Our Motown cruises returned this year, also picking up from Newnham Road Steps, providing 2 hour cruises with guests grooving the night away to a selection of Motown and Soul Music tracks played by DJ Keith Stewart.

One of Bedford's best kept secrets is the fantastic scenery on the Anchor Lunch cruise to Great Barford from Priory Marina as the *John Bunyan* Boat cruises through the countryside with kingfishers swooping ahead of the *John Bunyan* and, along with an array of different wildlife, a photographer's dream. The passengers enjoy a buffet lunch at the Anchor Inn by the river at Great Barford and return to Priory Marina by coach.

Our highly popular Saturday Evening Fish & Chip Supper Cruises completely sold out on each of the cruises, running from Priory Marina and cruising along the Embankment enjoying the scenery while enjoying the food and drinks from the bar.

Our season draws to a close with the plan to run a couple of Christmas Festive Cruises in December dependent on the weather and river conditions, watch out on our social media and website for more details and dates.

A big thank you to all the volunteers helping to crew the *John Bunyan* Boat throughout the season and promoting Waterway Park and the Trust to a wider audience.

Work has begun on planning next year's cruise programme. 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 Gillibrand - volunteering@johnbunyanboat.org or visit the website bmkwaterway.org/johnbunyanboat to find out more.

All images by Steve Ashley.



Jazz cruises with (from left) Richard Exall Trio, Ben Holden Trio, Gary Wood Trio

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onboard for another cruise. There were a few comments about parking and disabled access: we're working as hard as we can to improve those for next year if we can. But it's wonderful to be part of a volunteering team which gets this kind of comment:



"Well done to everyone. MK is very lucky to have such a great facility that is staffed by such dedicated volunteers".

Experience the Great Outdoors from indoors on *Electra*: the Autumn/Christmas programme

Now that Autumn is upon us, and winter just around the corner, *Electra* is getting out on the gorgeous Grand Union! In the first three weeks of November we're offering late morning Coffee & Cake cruises, with both public cruise and private charter options. Then from 24 November until 12 December we'll be decorated for Christmas and offering 'Mulled Wine & Mince Pie' cruises with both public cruise and private charter options.

We tell our guests: "Wrap up well and join us on board for a warming winter drink and a tasty treat to eat. We have heating, but we also need to ensure good ventilation, so we'll be keeping the front windows open. So please make sure you dress for the outdoors, though we will do all we can to ensure you're as warm as possible indoors! The autumn and winter months are an amazing time to get outside and enjoy the crisp fresh air. November should give us



some great autumn colours— look out for rose hips, fungi and golden leaves along the banks, the sound of the poplar trees, and the sight of starlings in the sky. As we head towards December when the leaves are gone, the structure of the trees is more dramatic, and visibility along the water's edge is even better. So, there will always be lots to see on each of our cruises - all from the comfort of our indoor saloon, with your choice of hot (or cold if you prefer!) drink in hand. We can't wait to welcome you on board!"



Winter for *Electra*

After our hectic first year, *Electra* finishes cruising on December 12th. We'll start cruising again at the start of April 2022. But that doesn't mean we're stopping our work! There's a whole range of winter works to be carried out by our Maintenance Team, making sure that any wear and tear from this year is fixed. We've got great plans for increasing use of our onboard computing; we have new cruises in plan, with a range of destinations and we'll be busy promoting these. We're sourcing even more of the food and drink we sell from local suppliers. We're pleased to welcome eight new skippers and eight new Cabin Hosts currently in training for 2022.

With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year from the entire *Electra* Volunteer team.

Advertising in BMK News

We welcome advertisements in *BMK News*

Rates are:

- Whole page : £120
- Back Page: £150
- Half Page £80
- Quarter page: £50
- Eighth page: £30

Buy two, get one free! Book a place for 3 consecutive editions, and only pay for the first two. For details contact: editor@b-mkwaterway.co.uk



Landing stage at Kempston Mill

After numerous years of work planning and obtaining all the necessary permits and consents for the landing stage at Kempston Mill, followed by the pandemic, construction was finally scheduled to start in mid-September (Julian Armitage writes).

Unfortunately, the project was nearly derailed at the last moment due to escalating costs and supply difficulties for raw materials and labour which have been much publicised in the news recently. However, after some last-minute negotiation with the contractor and minor adjustments to the scope of the project, I am pleased to be able to tell readers that at long last, we are scheduled to start the construction work in early November.

The work will be carried out by specialist civil engineering firm Land & Water who routinely work with the Environment Agency and the Canal & River Trust. The contractors are scheduled to mobilise on 8th November 2021 and the work should take 3 weeks. So if all goes well, we should have a working landing stage by the end of November. Now we just need to keep our fingers crossed that the weather is kind and that the river doesn't flood during the construction phase, causing us further delay and disruption and possible increases in costs.

With the modified scope of the project the first phase to be carried out this year will involve Land and Water profiling the river bank and dredging the berthing area in front of the landing stage. Following this, they will drive the steel piles along the edge of the landing stage and finish the top

with a concrete capping beam including cast-in mooring bollards. Behind the piles will be backfilled. Over the winter the backfill will be allowed to settle, so that we can return with a local contractor and volunteers to complete the ramp and landing stage surface and ensure everything is finished in accordance with the requirements of the Environment Agency, Bedford Borough Council and of course, all boat users.

We would have loved to complete the majority of the work this autumn as per our original plan. However, with the planning permission and Environment Agency permits due to expire next spring and no sign that prices are likely to decrease any time soon, we felt that it was more important to get the main engineering work underway, even though it means completing the project later.

Despite these complications, the start of construction represents really exciting progress for the waterway project and the culmination of many years' planning. I hope to be able to include photographs of the construction work as well as the completed project in the next edition of the newsletter.



Residents' Information

We have delivered a leaflet to the residents closest to the construction site. This includes a description of the works to be carried out, who will do the work, and that some large machinery will be needed. We also provide an update on the Kempston Mill Bridge. Larger copies are on the Kempston notice board and attached to the site fencing during construction.



Below: "How the finished river edge should look"



(above) Long reach excavator on the first day of work and (below) with weeds cleared



Electra and the environment

Green power

When *Electra* was originally thought of, it was to answer a request from Crest Nicholson (the developers building the Campbell Wharf canalside area) and The Parks Trust (the marina owners). They asked B&MK if we would help put a trip boat on the water to help “animate the new development”.

We began thinking about a second hand trip boat – but it didn’t take long to discover that there weren’t any suitable on the canal network at that time. So we were asked if we could build a new boat. As soon as we discussed the conventional propulsion method for boats (diesel), we were challenged to see just how environmentally conscious we could make the boat.

Now that our all-electric boat is on the water, we are proud of our greener credentials.

Our propulsion system is based on 48 lead-carbon batteries (these don’t use rare earths like lithium), and we are very hopeful that within the eight or ten year life



Part of *Electra*'s large array of batteries sit under the stern deck

span of these batteries technology will have improved sufficiently that we can replace these heavyweight items (over two tonnes) with lighter, cheaper and more powerful ones.

Of course, we top up our power with a large array of solar panels (generating up to 1.2kWh).

The Parks Trust supply our electricity, and they use power only from renewable sources.

Our electrics also allow us to run a dishwasher on board so that we can serve food using reusable china crockery, glassware and conventional knives and forks.

Green food!

Part of *Electra*'s 'green agenda' is to reduce food-miles by buying from local businesses wherever we can. On board we serve:

- Fresh scones for our cream teas from Camphill MK Café
- Jam to go on the scones (and next year we hope the chutney to go with lunch) comes from JamMK
- Moore’s Fish & Chips in Oxley Park provide our fish and chips
- We sell our own brand of beer made for us by Concrete Cow Brewery (see back page)
- MacIntyre Bakery make our cakes for morning cake and coffee cruises
- Next year, when we get our onshore freezer space, we’ll be able to stock artisan ice creams from The Willen Ice Cream Company

We’d love to be able to claim more of our produce is from local suppliers, but so far we haven’t found a local supplier of really good clotted cream!



Winter morning coffee and cake

Next year we’re planning to work with local meal suppliers, so that we can serve a wider range of food on board. We’ve discovered that offering ‘food cruises’ is one of the best ways to entice people out to enjoy the ‘MK Waterway Park’ that is formed by the Grand Union Canal and adjoining parklands, and in so doing find out more about the plans for the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Park.

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Comments or articles for inclusion in the next edition should be sent to: editor@b-mkwaterway.co.uk

Events Calendar 2021



Regrettably, all in person events are currently suspended, due to Covid. We hope to meet face-to-face again soon. We are making plans for a members' evening, and AGM. Details to follow.

John Bunyan Calendar Available



Use this QR code to go straight to the website to order your calendar

The Calendar is available in the following sizes:

- Wall hanging A3 size £15 plus p&p
- Wall hanging A4 size £10 plus p&p
- Wall hanging A5 size £8 plus p&p
- Desktop Standing A5 £10 plus p&p

There is a short code to the website to order, which is bit.ly/jbcalendar2022
Or use the QR code above.

The 2022 *John Bunyan* Community Boat calendar is now available. The calendar shows views of the *John Bunyan* Boat and Bedford.

We will receive 45% of each calendar sold on the Ask Online charity shop.

Fancy a beer?

A Milton Keynes brewery is working in partnership with *Electra*. To let them introduce themselves:

Concrete Cow Brewery, back in 2007, was the first microbrewery in Milton Keynes and we've loved supplying the locals with our tasty brews ever since. All our beers have a Milton Keynes tale to tell, so have a little graze through our website and you may learn some interesting facts about your hometown.

Concrete Cow have chosen *Electra* as one of their "Local Hero" range. It is available at several MK outlets, as well as on board, of course.



Electra beer is a super pale ale - it's a crisp and refreshing

Pilsner style beer, best served cold and whilst enjoying a leisurely cruise on the *Electra* Narrowboat.

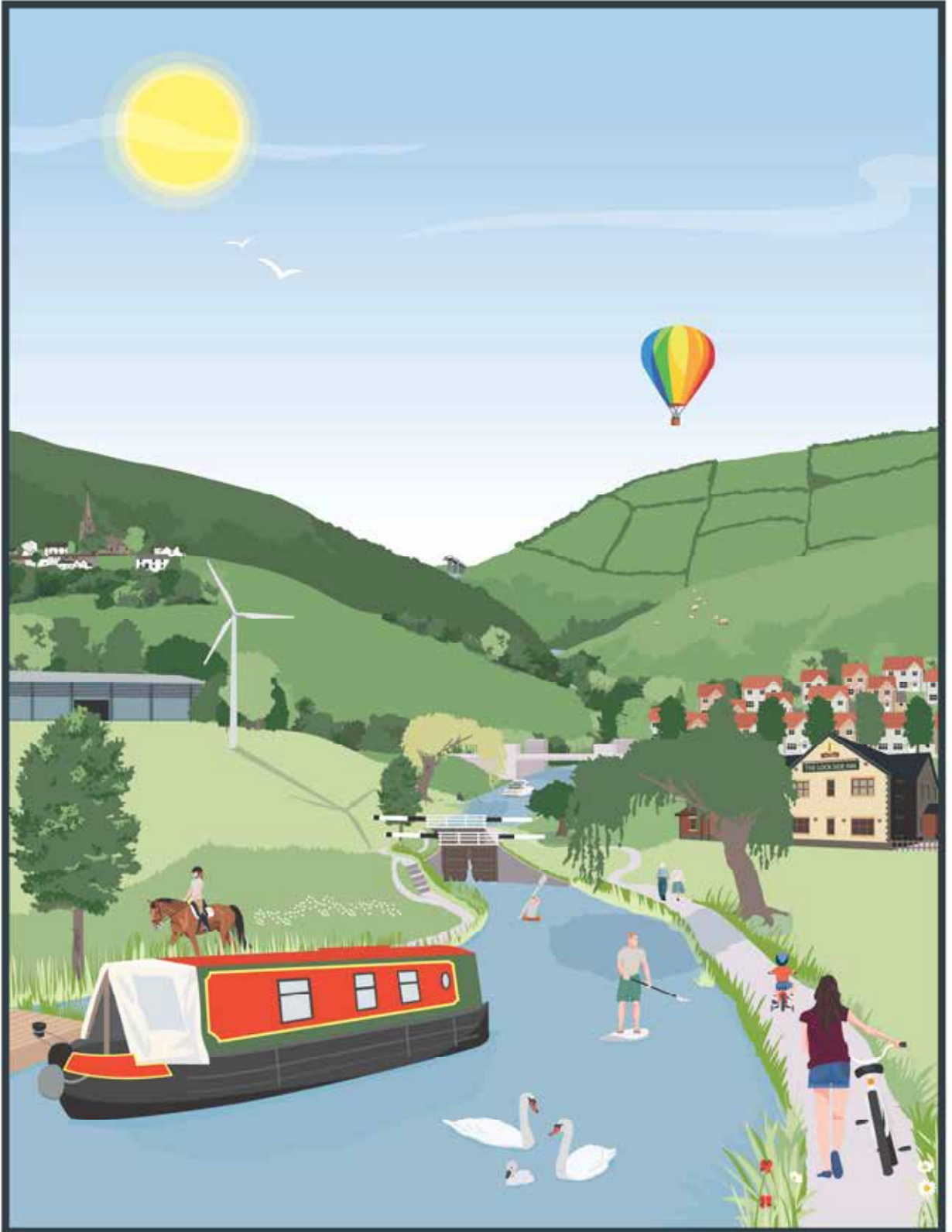
If you fancy giving it a try, go to www.concretecowbrewery.co.uk and have a look around. Free & fast local delivery, gluten free and vegan options available. National delivery is also available, but with a delivery charge.



Contact Us.

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

www.bmkwaterway.org



This picture was commissioned for the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Park Consortium from Tabitha Mary Wainwright (www.tabithamary.co.uk) to promote the Waterway Park. We like to show it, when we have space, for the benefit of new members who may not have seen it before. ●

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