

John Bunyan Awarded Highest Volunteer Honour



The volunteers of the *John Bunyan* Community boat have been awarded The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service – the MBE for volunteer groups, and the highest award given to local voluntary groups.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service aims to recognise outstanding work by local volunteer groups to benefit their communities. It was created in 2002 to celebrate The Queen's Golden Jubilee. Recipients are announced each year on 2nd June, the anniversary of The Queen's Coronation.

The award was unveiled on the JB, appropriately, at Sovereigns' Quay on the first day of the jubilee celebrations. Sue Gillibrand announced the achievement to a group of volunteers. She told them that "this is a very special day, and congratulations to all of us. Be proud, tell your friends and family. It's an award that's given to recognise our hard work, the hours freely given to make the *John Bunyan* community boat the success that it is. Well done to us all."

The volunteers of the JB collectively contribute thousands of hours each year to crewing the 150 or more cruises, promoting the JB at wedding fairs and other events, and organising things behind the scenes to ensure a full programme of cruises throughout the season and the smooth running of the JB, so are thrilled to have been recognised with this award.

Graham Mabbutt, former Chair of the JB management group said: "I was delighted to hear we've been awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, which is a great recognition of the hard work of our volunteers, who work to run a wonderful boat service for the people of Bedford and surrounding area. I would like to personally congratulate the volunteers for all their work over the past few years which has led to the success of the *John Bunyan* boat".

The award will be presented to the JB's volunteers by the Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis, later this year, and then two representatives from the JB will be invited to a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in summer 2023.



news

PATRON
Sir Samuel Whitbread
KCVO

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View from the Chair

It has largely been a very good start to the summer this year, particularly since we are almost fully back in business after two years of Covid! Helped by some good weather in May and June, the *John Bunyan* and *Electra* have been hosting great cruises on the Great Ouse and the Grand Union Canal. There was great excitement in early June when the *John Bunyan* Team learned that, as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations, they would be recipients of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service – a major achievement, the equivalent of an MBE. The award is highly deserved and was a cause for great celebration when the team met to hear the news on 2nd June at Sovereigns' Quay. TV cameras were there to capture the moment and, happily, the volunteers were joined by Graham Mabbutt who was key in achieving this outstanding award.

However, just three weeks later we heard the very sad news that, after a long illness, Graham had passed away. This was a terrible blow to all of us who knew and worked with him. He contributed so very much to the B&MK Waterway Trust and then the *John Bunyan* Boat. We will all miss him greatly. Kind and thoughtful memories about him poured into my inbox and I was honoured to be able to join a tribute to Graham on 3 Counties Radio. We will be ensuring that Graham's dedication, hard work and support for everyone, especially the *John Bunyan* volunteers, is not forgotten. An obituary in memory of Graham and his achievements is elsewhere in this edition.

On a happier note, the final ground works to the landing stage at Kempston Mill were completed in June including an access ramp. This enabled Trust volunteers to do the final raking and reseeding of the embankment to ensure it looks spruce for the summer. I managed to get my rake out and join the team one morning and it just reminded me of what a splendid spot it is. A heron sat on the landing stage and watched us, ducks and their baby ducklings paddled past and dog walkers stopped for a chat. The landing stage has already been used by paddleboarders and other craft and I very much hope it becomes a popular place for visitors to the head of navigation.

Whilst the mill bridge has been repaired and is now busy and back in use, this is only a short term measure. Eventually a new bridge will be needed. The Trust is supporting Bedford Borough Council in bidding to the Government's Levelling Up Fund to help cover the cost of a new

structure. We have also offered to make a contribution to ensure a new bridge is constructed at a slightly higher level, allowing craft to pass beneath and turn further upstream. This will benefit bigger boats including our own *John Bunyan*.

The draft Bedford Local Plan 2040 was published in June and continues to positively support the Waterway Park. I was very pleased to welcome the Mayor of Bedford, Dave Hodgson, to our AGM on 17th June where he explained to everyone how the Council is working to support the project. It was great to have a face-to-face AGM and see everyone in person. We are now starting to plan an Annual Partnership Conference in the autumn, having not been able to hold any events of that nature for 3 years.

So, going into the summer there is much to do. We are still awaiting the outcome of a number of feasibility studies which partner organisations are managing. The Trust needs to draw up a new Business Plan to guide us through the next three years. Much of what we set out to do 3 years ago has been achieved. The profile of the project as green/blue infrastructure has been raised. Other agencies and partners are investing in feasibility work and development on the ground such as the new landing stage, we have an updated website and a second boat in Milton Keynes! Later in the summer we hope for some positive outcomes to ongoing work but, in the meantime, it's time to take a break and enjoy some relaxation beside or on the water!

Jane Hamilton



Jane addressing the AGM (see page 3)

AGM Report



The 2022 Annual General Meeting was held at Box End Park on 14th June. It was good to be able to meet face to face after two years of Zoom meetings.

Jane Hamilton opened the meeting by reporting on the work the Trust has achieved over the last year.

Jane reminded the meeting that the Trust:

- Advocates for a new Waterway Park
- Over the past 5 years we have been developing an outline business case for the project
- Is largely financed by our social enterprise – *John Bunyan* community boat in Bedford and, since summer 2021, MK Community Boat *Electra*
- Our aim is to persuade those who can, to invest in and deliver the waterway

To be fundable as an infrastructure project for the 21st century, we must emphasise the aspects which interest funders:

- Improved water resilience from Oxford to Cambridge and into the Anglian region, including improved local flood risk management and, potentially, open water transfer between regions
- New and increased opportunities for healthy living and recreational activities
- New and direct routes for cycling and walking between Bedford and Milton Keynes
- Improved connectivity between existing rivers, canals, water bodies and wildlife corridors
- Creating a strategic sense of place for sustainable new communities

The Consortium is changing its governance in ways which will help. Instead of the chair rotating at each meeting, it will be held for two years, helping continuity. Meetings will now be quarterly, rather than half yearly, and a review of governance is underway which we hope will improve the Consortium's ability to bid for funding.

Following Jane's report, it had been planned that Mayor Dave Hodgson, on behalf of the Trust, would make a presentation to Graham Mabbutt, marking his retirement from Trust work, to thank Graham for his contribution over the years. Unfortunately, Graham's illness meant that this was not possible. The meeting, however, expressed its thanks to Graham by means of a round of applause. See page 5.

Mayor of Bedford, Dave Hodgson, once again expressed his support for the project, and reminded the meeting about what Bedford Borough Council is doing to contribute to the delivery of the Waterway. He announced the launch of the consultation on the next Local Plan, which he hoped people would comment on. He expressed the view that positive comments were extremely welcome, to balance the usual flow of objections. He hoped that members of the Trust would be pleased at the recommendations for Gibraltar Point, which include provision for the Waterway. See page 7.

The minutes of the 15th Annual General Meeting held on 24th June 2021 were accepted nem con.

The accounts had not yet been approved by the independent reviewer due to illness and holidays. It was not anticipated that there would be any problem with the approval, and the Report of the Directors and the Statement of Accounts and the Balance Sheet of the Company for the year ended 31 March 2021 were accepted nem con subject to this approval being received in due course.

The longest serving Directors who have completed a three-year term were individually re-appointed for a further three years: Julian Armitage, Beryl Bennett, James Barbour, Simon Clewlow. Each was elected nem con.

John Best gave a report on the activities of B&MK Waterway Enterprises Ltd. Including reviews from *John Bunyan* and *Electra*. See page 6.

Julian Armitage updated the meeting on the activities of the Eastern Project Group, with particular emphasis on the Kempston Landing Stage. See page 4.

The meeting concluded with a question and answer session and refreshments. ●



Mayor of Bedford, Dave Hodgson, re-confirms his support for the Waterway Park

Eastern Projects Group

Kempston Mill Landing Stage

We are delighted to be able to report that the project is now complete with phase 2 incorporating the disabled access ramp having just been finished (Julian Armitage writes).

The project has taken a number of years and was very difficult to keep within budget due to increasing prices (particularly of the steel sheet piles) and the contractor's reluctance to stick to the original contract quotation. For this reason, we decided to construct the landing stage in 3 phases.

Phase 1 in the autumn of 2021 which were the main works constructed by Land and Water Services.

Phase 2 which built the disabled access ramp, removed the spoil and profiled the banks. This was done by Martin Lockyear, who we would like to thank for their excellent work on the project.



Phase 2 in progress

Lastly phase 3 which was done by BMKWT volunteers and included the emergency repairs to the footpath, final topsoil spreading and the re-seeding of the whole area. Our thanks to Box End Water Park for the provision of a rotovator, without which the preparation of the area would have taken ages. The volunteers who helped and need our special thanks

are: Graham Boyle, Tom Tagg, Steve Waring, Chris Fox, Ian Morse, James Barbour and Alan Mayo. The overseeing of the works, the contract, the permissions from the Environment Agency and the other compliance issues were adhered to due to the diligence, attention to detail and hard work of this small handful of people. Our huge thanks go to all of them.

I really can't stress enough the importance of the involvement of volunteers and we need more, so if you are able to help, please let one of us know.

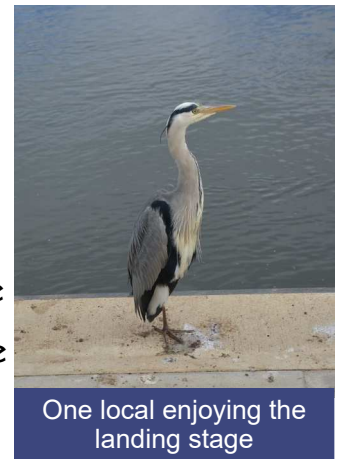
Local residents were informed of our activities at all times and our thanks also go to Councillor James Valentine for ensuring that all we were doing was understood and supported by the community.

The landing stage is now in use and proving to be popular with canoeists and paddle boarders as well as boaters, fishermen, bathers, family picnickers and ducks. Our next challenge is to find a way to allow the *John Bunyan* to turn round there. She has already visited with a limited crew.

Other Projects

The projects at Fields Road and Green Lane are being built on the route of the waterway and we are attempting to ensure that the waterway is not compromised by their construction. This could be due to the levels or the plan location of the new developments. A number of bodies are involved with the decision making here including constructors, developers, land owners and end users. Bedford Borough Council and other Consortium members are helping us to unravel this minefield.

As well as this we are drawing up a list of projects along the whole route with which we might get involved, given the resources and additional expertise. Once we have agreed these, we will prioritise them and seek Board approval on which to tackle first.



One local enjoying the landing stage



Complete, and popular with paddleboarders

Graham Mabutt (1941-2022)



Graham Mabbutt, who sadly passed away on 22nd June 2022, was a long term and key member of the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust and, more recently, a champion for the *John Bunyan* boat which has carried thousands of passengers on the River Great Ouse over the past 8 years. His death will bring a huge sadness to all who knew him. Graham was highly respected by many and he will be greatly missed by all his friends and colleagues who have been honoured to know and work alongside him.

Graham's involvement with the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust stemmed from his 12 years as a Liberal Democrat Councillor in Milton Keynes where he first supported the project. Joining the Trust in 2006, he went on to become Chair in 2011. He worked tirelessly to support the Waterway Trust until he stood down in 2015. However, in the meantime Graham had become a director of the newly established Bedford and Milton Keynes Enterprises Ltd, a social enterprise set up by the Trust to operate the *John Bunyan*. He threw himself into this role with enormous enthusiasm helping to make the new venture a huge success. He held a number of key roles with the *John Bunyan* team but he will forever be remembered as the driving force behind a whole range of popular trips, ranging from afternoon tea and fish and chip cruises to lively Jazz and Motown cruises – the latter largely stemming from Graham's great love of music.

Graham's capacity for developing new ideas to entertain passengers on the boat was legendary. The sight of the *John Bunyan* cruising the Ouse full of happy crowds is a real icon of Bedford and its riverside. Luckily his personal dedication to the boat and its volunteers did not go unnoticed. In 2014 he was one of the unsung heroes of Bedfordshire presented by the High Sheriff with an award to mark their hard work and dedication to the community.

In 2019 Mayor Dave Hodgson presented Graham with the inaugural Love Bedford Visitor's Award in recognition of the huge success of the *John Bunyan* in attracting visitors into Bedford for trips on the river.



Despite having to face serious illness Graham never gave up. He continued to work with and support the Trust and especially the *John Bunyan*. In December 2021 Graham celebrated his 80th birthday on the boat with his family. He also made a very significant contribution to setting up *Electra*, a brand new all electric boat which is now very successfully cruising on the Grand Union Canal in Milton Keynes.

In a final and most fitting accolade the *John Bunyan* volunteers received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in June 2022. Graham was there, with the *John Bunyan* moored at Sovereigns' Quay in the year of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, to celebrate this prestigious award with the team of extremely happy volunteers.

Graham's wife, Janet, sadly passed away in 2011 but he leaves behind him three daughters, Dawn, Karen and Jane, plus 7 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren.

In every way Graham leaves behind much history and a tremendous legacy. He lived life to the full and will be very sadly missed by many. He will be long remembered, leaving not only sadness but many happy memories for his family, friends and colleagues. He achieved a huge amount in his lifetime but above all he leaves a great legacy of happy smiles on the faces of thousands of passengers as they cruise the Ouse.



John Best reported to the AGM about the achievements of the *John Bunyan* and *Electra* over the last year.



He began by reporting on the outstanding performance of both boats through lockdown. How they generated funds for their operation, and managed through severely reduced guest capacity, and are now back in surplus. Neither boat needed to request funds from the Trust to stay in the black, although some annual lease payments to the Trust were suspended.

information on the BMK Waterway Park. The boats generate public donations and remit surpluses to the Trust. As cruising has resumed, so have donations. We find that cruising is good; with hospitality better; and with activities best and that excellent catering undoubtedly helps generosity. Surpluses are again projected for 22/23

Our boats are animating communities. Both boats, in different ways, engage actively with their communities. The JB has longstanding connections with business, users and Bedford Borough Council. *Electra* has connections through 8 parish councils, trusts, Rotary and sponsors. MK sponsors have allowed free cruises for community groups (eg young and old, refugees, foster families) to embed the waterway as a community asset. The JB



directly runs cruises for refugees, and offers 10% charity discount. Community partnerships at both ends will, in due course, include the BMK route.

We remain champions of waterways for all. Waterside partnerships will bring communities to the water, and with partners we can promote local projects like landing stages and eco-moorings. In MK we partner with The Parks Trust, who have championed *Electra*, and directly manage parkland along the GU Canal. A GU Waterway Park is close. Our boat enterprises and the project team, can transform our three waterways.

As we raise awareness, and have impact, waterway parks will become reality, John concluded. ●



John went on to make the point that volunteers are the lifeblood of the boat operations, as they are for all the Trust does. He congratulated the 120 trained volunteers who run the two boats. And especially the JB on winning the QAVS (see page 1). "Today the JB, tomorrow *Electra*..." he said.

Both boats are transforming the water-space. "Wherever we cruise, we transform. Whoever we cruise with is inspired. Wherever we land, we create places" John explained.

The boats are raising awareness and funding - every boat guest is offered



A community enjoying the waterside

Events Calendar 2022



23/24 July	Bedford River Festival
November	Annual Partnership Conference. To be confirmed.
Other live	events are being planned. Watch this space.

Help secure benefits for the Waterway Park by responding to Bedford Local Plan 2040 consultation

Bedford Borough Council is currently consulting on its Local Plan 2040 which sets out policies and proposals for the future of the Bedford area. The Waterway Park has been included in the Local Plan for some time but in this latest version a new site is added which can help secure delivery of the Waterway when the site is developed. See Policy HOU13 on page 58 of the Plan

<https://edrms.bedford.gov.uk/OpenDocument.aspx?id=xivh8bP%2bAJZXEaq26SnEFQ%3d%3d&name=PLAN%20FOR%20SUBMISSION.pdf>

At the time of writing, there is a direct link to the plan in the banner at the top of the home page: www.bedford.gov.uk

Submissions must be made by **29th July**. No late submissions will be considered on this occasion as time is limited to prepare the plan.

It can help the Council ensure this policy remains in the plan if it receives support from people who respond to the local plan consultation. This is what the Trust has said in response:

The B&MK Waterway Trust welcomes the emphasis that the draft Plan places on the Waterway Park as a strategic green/blue infrastructure project. In particular the Trust supports Policy HOU13 Land at Gibraltar Corner, and its reference to provision of land to facilitate the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway Park to the east of the housing allocation.

The Trust strongly supports the inclusion of the route of the Waterway Park in the Key Diagram.

Your comments can be emailed to planningforthefuture@bedford.gov.uk

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Electra volunteers by the boat

Contact Us.

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

www.bmkwaterway.org

In the last edition we included a 20 year old April fool about an oil (“a sprayfold oil” - small hint there, I think) which allegedly enabled water to flow uphill.

This prompted a reader, Peter Stephens, to draw my attention to videos by The Tim Traveller on Youtube, specifically about the “Monster of Fonsneranes”. Peter writes:



“You might already be aware that Richard Cooper of MK Citizen was nearer the bone than could be imagined – for about forty years ago the French waterways authorities DID build two “sloping locks” on the Canal du Midi (not so far from the Pyrenees); as part of the standardisation to Freycinet dimensions (38m length locks) where staircase locks make simple lengthening an impossibility, and partly to assist their growing tourist market. I recently discovered a splendid five minute YouTube (found by a search “The Tim Traveller Monster of Fonsneranes”) which shows both constructions – sadly, the newer one at Fonsneranes near Beziers was abandoned (about the same time as MKCitizen published their Poisson d’Avril joke), but the one at Montech near Carcassone is still working. And what caused the Fonsnerane “Monster” to fail? Too much hydraulic fluid kept falling from the motors onto the sloping track – should have used “sprayfold oil” for a better grip!!!”

The piece carried in Vol 20 No 1

I recommend Tim’s videos to any transport nut, or those interested in quirky borders. But, for those with less time available for this sort of thing, the concept was a barrier which fitted tightly into the canal profile and was driven up and down hill by a vehicle running on the banks. This pushed enough water in front of it to carry a boat up or down the incline. Ed.



John Best (left) and Julian Armitage at the AGM. See pages 6 & 4.

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