

John Bunyan Receives Highest Volunteer Honour

In the last edition we reported that 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 physical award has now been presented. The Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis, handed the award and certificate to Chris Tilney & Dawn Bell (representing her late father, Graham Mabbutt) on July 11th at Sovereigns Quay, where the announcement was made to volunteers on 2nd June, at the start of the Jubilee weekend.



The Lord Lieutenant with Christine Tilney and Dawn Bell



Dawn with the QAVS award and certificate

The JB volunteers' social on 6th November was the opportunity for the wider team to be recognised.



Rod Calvert, President of the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, and Deputy Lord Lieutenant, presented replica crystals of the Award to Dawn and Chris, and QAVS pins to volunteers.

Dawn also accepted the picture which the Trust had been hoping to give Graham as thanks for his work for the Trust. ●



Above: Rod Calvert with Chris and Dawn holding their replica crystals. Above right: volunteers enjoying the Social. Right: Dawn accepting the picture intended for Graham



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Sir Samuel Whitbread
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View from the Chair

I want to begin this time with a huge thank you to all our brilliant volunteers. We are coming towards the end of a very successful year and, once again our volunteers are at the heart of this achievement. Volunteers are our very lifeblood and without them we would not be able to achieve as much as we do.

Both of our community boats, *Electra* and *John Bunyan*, have had a hugely successful season and well exceeded the forecast number of cruises and consequently the level of income raised for the Trust during this year. Whilst we always need to reinvest in the boats to keep them in good repair and able to cruise safely, remaining profit is transferred to the Trust at the end of the financial year, enabling us to continue to build a business case for the Waterway Park and invest in projects on the ground.

Over the past 4 years, the Trust has invested around £80,000 of the income earned by the boats in feasibility work to support the business case for the Waterway Park and persuade others to invest in it and build it. Our initial investment has made a strong case for the project which, in turn, has recently successfully drawn in a further £250,000 of investment from other partner organisations. Bedford Borough Council and the Environment Agency have contributed to the Kempston landing stage. The Environment Agency and Water Resources East have invested in a soon to be published water management study which helps build the case for longer term capital investment, and, National Highways have just started work on looking at how the Waterway Park might help increase biodiversity. More investment is likely in developing the role of the Waterway Park as part of a wider cycling and walking network. All of this together is making the case for the Waterway Park as strategic environmental infrastructure much stronger so investing our own money to kick start the work has been very worthwhile.

On the ground the landing stage at Kempston is complete and in use. Whilst we commissioned contractors to do the main construction work, we must thank a dedicated team of volunteers lead by Julian Armitage who have worked extremely hard to oversee the project. During the course of this summer, they have tidied up and re-seeded the area to ensure it is a welcoming destination. Added to this, Kempston Town Council have also been active in ensuring the area continues to be well maintained for

everyone to enjoy. It's another clear demonstration of where our investment then brings in funding from others.

We are investing in new information boards in Milton Keynes and Bedford to ensure visitors to the area can read up to date information about the Waterway Park. Once again volunteers have had an active role in this and also in continuing to maintain the wood sculptures along the route of the Waterway in Marston Vale.

As well as the "hands on" activities, we always need volunteers to take on the management roles ensuring that the Trust and our enterprises are effectively governed and our finances properly managed. From Board level all the way through the Enterprise Board, the operational management teams on the boats, our project teams and everyone who helps run *Electra* and *John Bunyan* cruises – we are all volunteers.

At our last Board meeting we agreed to ensure that we work more proactively to promote and recognise the importance of volunteering. Janet Goodland who both volunteers on the *John Bunyan* and sits on the Trust Board will be leading a new Volunteering sub group which will report to the Board. We must ensure everyone of us knows they are valued and where they fit in to the bigger picture. We want to ensure workloads are evenly distributed and that we all operate efficiently. Most of all, we want to ensure all our volunteers enjoy what they do. We constantly need to grow and build our volunteer resource and will be consciously putting this at the top of our agenda for the new year. Surviving Covid and keeping the business running has been a challenge but we have emerged successful as demonstrated by this year's activities. The job now is to keep us in tip top condition as a happy and valued bunch of hard-working volunteers!

A very big "thank you" all round!

Jane Hamilton

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A Shore Base for *Electra*

Electra has had a stunning first two seasons, with 1,300 customers carried in 2021 and another 2,500 in 2022. This has involved the *Electra* Operations Team and their army of volunteers in a huge amount of work to put recruitment and training in place, plan and market the cruising programme, deliver all elements of cruising both aboard and ashore, and to keep the boat in good working order. All this has been achieved, very successfully, without a fit-for-purpose shore base. The team has been operating out of a windowless and unventilated bin store while we wait for the developer to deliver the promised waterside commercial unit.

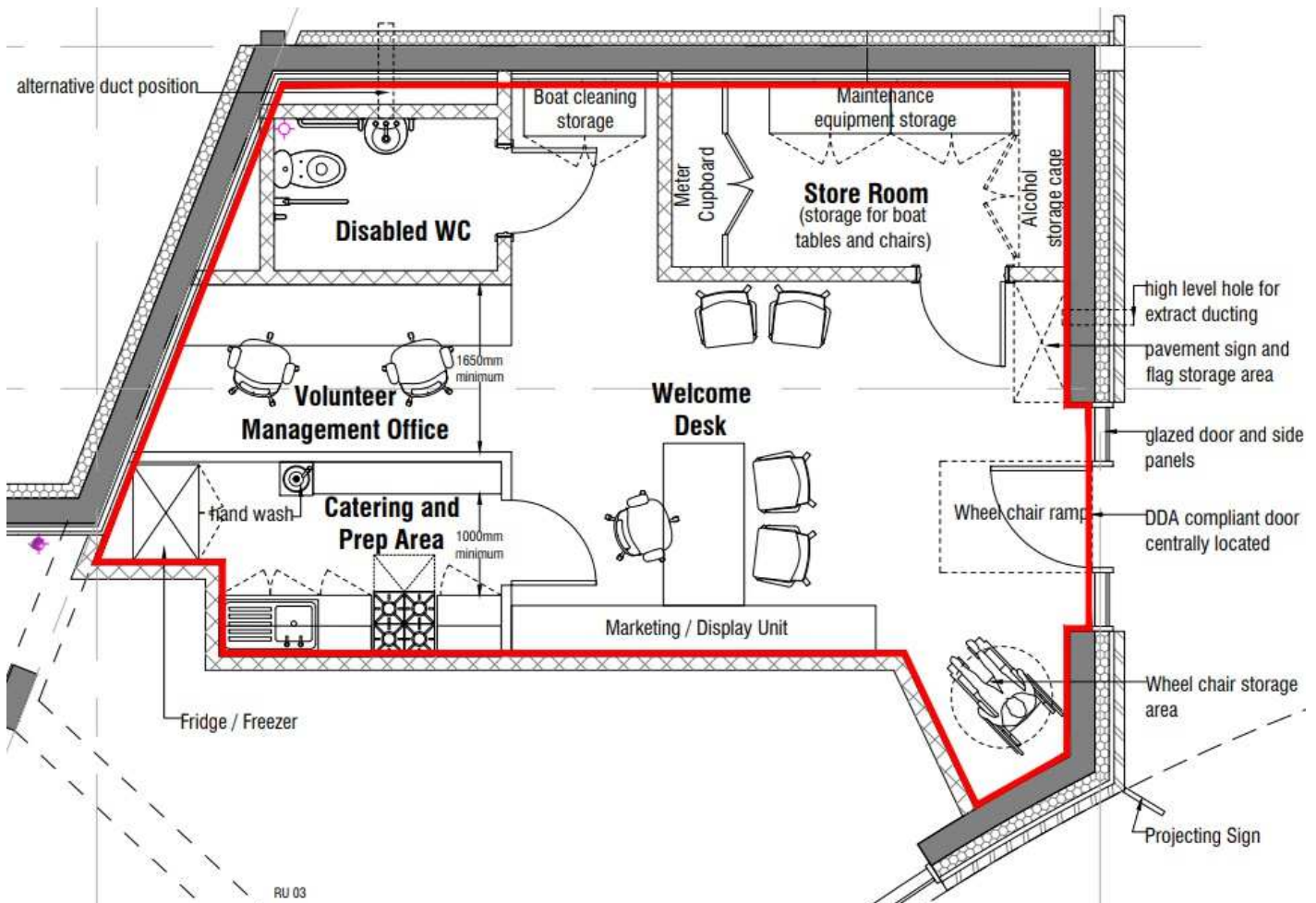
Before that we've been planning for the purpose-built space to be provided. *Electra* needs and deserves space which will provide:

- Reception space for greeting guests, with seating, an accessible toilet and wheelchair store
- Administrative space for marketing, ticket sales, meetings, and training, liaising with and rostering volunteers
- Food preparation and refrigeration facilities
- Storage for dry goods and drinks, furniture, publicity, signage and maintenance

While we can save money by building a volunteer team to do much of this work ourselves, some costs are unavoidable. Though the proposed space is compact it's likely still to cost £30-50,000. The Trust have embarked on a fund-raising programme to cover as much as possible of this cost. We're delighted to report we have landed the first two tranches of funding needed for this:

1. MK Community Foundation have granted us £10,000 towards the cost of providing plumbing and electrical services to the unit.
2. *Electra* was funded partly from generous interest-free loans from Trust members who, in the light of *Electra*'s successful first two years, have all been offered early repayment. These lenders have instead agreed to roll over at least £10,000 of the loan sum towards the provision of the shore unit.

We continue to put in grant applications to meet the rest of the cost of works over the winter, so that *Electra* can resume cruising in the new year. Anyone with contacts in funding organisations who might be interested in helping us, or if you'd like to help us yourself, don't hesitate to contact Trustee John Best at john.best@b-mkwaterway.co.uk



Landing Stage Completion

Following completion of the landing stage at Kempston Mill the team of volunteers spent the early summer re-seeding and landscaping the area. Despite the very dry conditions, much of the grass has managed to grow, improving the look of the area and helping to stabilise the banks.

The hot weather throughout August highlighted the potential benefit of the new facilities and the landing stage was frequently used by paddle boarders and canoeists as a safe and convenient entry point to this stretch of river.

Whilst navigation of the final stretch of river is difficult and shallow the landing stage has also been welcoming the first few boats up to Kempston Mill (see photographs of Grace moored at the landing stage). Reaction from the local residents has in general been very positive so we are pleased to have been able to deliver a tangible landmark at the start of our waterway.

The next stage of the project is to dredge the river enabling more boats to be able to make the trip to Kempston Mill and importantly enabling the *John Bunyan* to reach the landing stage. To facilitate this, the projects team volunteers decided to conduct river bed level surveys using a dipping staff and putting our two ablest

sufficient depth for boats to access the landing stage with a further 165 cubic metres needed to create a turning point for longer boats such as the *John Bunyan*.

This will also allow us to obtain some realistic quotes for carrying out the work, although there are still some challenges to overcome including how this will be funded. However, we are really grateful to the volunteers involved in this work as it has saved the Trust approximately £3,000 by conducting the survey ourselves which was the figure quoted to us by a commercial survey company.

Other Projects along the route

Culverts under Green Lane. Covanta have recently completed a waste to energy facility just to the northeast of Marston Moretaine and Bedford Borough Council received a substantial sum from Covanta to protect the route and allow culverts to be constructed under Green Lane. There are some problems in that the finance set aside for this now appears to be insufficient due to both the complexity of construction and inflation factors.

BMKWT engineers Graham Boyle and Tom Tagg have had discussions with Council Engineers and a Consultant from IWA to try to help the Council to resolve these issues.

Fields Road Development. The ponds along the route of the waterway which have been built to take any rainwater from the hardstanding areas in this warehouse industrial development are now completed. We are hoping to obtain as built drawings from the developer so that we can look into the feasibility of joining these up to form a useable stretch of waterway. Whilst these have been promised to us, they have not yet been received. ●



Surveying the river

men, Steve Waring and Colin Christie, into pairs of waders.

This has given us valuable information about where and how much of the river needs dredging. The initial data suggests around 70 cubic metres of material may need to be dredged in order to give

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Grace reaches head of Navigation



Grace just fits under the bridge

By a happy chance, on the day the surveying was taking place at the landing stage, NB *Grace* was attempting to reach the head of navigation, Kempston Weir. This is the point defined by the Inland Waterways Association as a Silver Propeller destination for their award to encourage use of less used waterways.

You can see that *Grace* only just fitted under the bridge, and most boats (including the JB) will not, so the IWA accepts boats as close as possible to the bridge as valid for the challenge. ●



Picture: Hollinwood Canal Society



Picture: Hollinwood Canal Society

Grace at the weir and (left) at the landing stage afterwards

Introducing...

Janet Goodland has recently joined the board of the Trust. Here she introduces herself:

I joined the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust Board in July 2022. I worked in the rail industry for 35 years, in finance, planning and project roles – including as Director, Network Development for Network Rail where I was responsible for the Thameslink project. Since then I have been a non-Executive Director at The Planning Inspectorate, and I am currently the Vice Chair of a railway benevolent charity, as well as a trustee of two other organisations.

I have enjoyed canal and river cruising for over 45 years, and I joined the John Bunyan team as volunteer crew earlier in the year. With this experience, and also the involvement with the volunteer work-



force in a charity, I have taken on responsibility at Trust Board level for volunteers – supporting, growing and developing our volunteer workforce who are vital to our future success. ●

Electra has had a busy year. In 30 weeks, they ran 264 cruises carrying over 2,500 guests. That's double the number of guests in 2021 and, at around 9.5 passengers per cruise, well towards the 12 passenger capacity.

Food cruises have been sell-outs on many days: cream teas, ploughman's lunches, fish & bubbles, curry nights, bubbles & bites on evening charters, and our special Jubilee cream tea cruises in June.

Activity Cruises have been popular too, including Explore the Canal at Great Linford and Walk, Glide & Dine with our partners The Parks Trust; Little Legs Walk One Way with our partners Canal & River Trust; and Art on the Water booked through our partners Something Less Boring.

Electra had a very busy summer, including three special weekend events: the Fenny Stratford Canal Festival, the Heritage Open Weekend at Great Linford Manor Park, and our Walk & Glide Weekend in partnership with The Parks Trust.

In July we ran summer evening charters for the first time, in August a record 600 guests came on board, and in September the popular Friday Fish & Chip Lunch cruises started again. Cruising ended in late October, due to concerns about the power supply from our batteries. We are working closely with Fischer Panda, who designed the electrical system, to explore solutions for 2023.

Community Outreach: Primary Schools

In May we ran an initial pilot Learning Partnership project with Gifford Park Primary School. They are very keen to continue the link, and we are now opening booking for phase 2 of *Electra's*

Schools Learning Partnership programme for Spring / Summer 2023. We are currently contacting the other 29 primary schools within a mile of the Grand Union Canal, and hope to work with five of them in 2023.

Sponsored Cruises

Since we started cruising in July 2021, we've run 14 sponsored cruises for diverse social groups, with 3 more planned for spring 2023. We want to build this element of our work, to give funded access to *Electra* for groups in the city that would not otherwise be

able to get on board. Over the winter we'll be looking for groups in need, for funders and for fundraisers. If you're interested in this aspect of *Electra's* work, please email Jane Wolfson

Overall, 2022 has been a spectacular second season for *Electra*: Huge thanks to the 45 active volunteers and helpers who make this happen, with support from our part-time Bookings Manager.

What we're doing over winter

Electra volunteers take a well-earned rest over the winter ... except for maintenance, recruiting, training, marketing, and planning for 2023! This winter we'll also need time for improving our electrics, and for installing a new online ticketing system to make booking simpler for customers on *Electra* - and the *John Bunyan* boat in Bedford - and for our 'back office' team.

Cruising Plans for 2023

We're currently planning a 30-week season from mid-May, with a mix of public cruises and private charters throughout the year. Firm favourites like cream teas, coffee & cake, fish & chips, and fish & bubbles, will be back on the menu, plus new food ventures working with more local food suppliers.

We will be cruising again from Great Linford Manor Park as well as from Camp-



For the Jubilee, *John Bunyan* received its QAVS. *Electra* had to settle for a cardboard cut-out of the Queen



Students from MacIntyre on a pilot cruise

Events Calendar 2023



Spring 2023	Annual Partnership Conference. To be confirmed.
Other live	events are being planned. Watch this space.

bell Wharf, and we hope to cruise more often to Fenny Stratford, with a half-day Ploughman's Lunch Cruise, and a half-day



pub lunch cruise to the Red Lion.

In September *Electra* also met 'Tiny', the small electric VW vehicle used recently to carry the football in the UEFA Women's Championships. This PR/Marketing and IT team from VW in Blakelands enjoyed their private charter team building cruise so much that to celebrate all things electric, they returned for a photoshoot with their iconic small electric car. ●

and the Deputy role, the process of selecting QAVS awardees and finally presented each of our volunteers with a commemorative QAVS pin. Both Dawn and Christine were presented with a quarter size replica of the Crystal that was presented to *John Bunyan* volunteers

The *John Bunyan* is currently undergoing its 5 yearly repaint. We hope to have JB back at Priory Marina in time for us to run some Christmas cruises. Progress is going very well. We have also worked with the MCA to have the out-of-water inspection completed, and just need the in-water inspection to be completed to be awarded another 5 year passenger certificate.



JB being repainted

Along with this the management team are busy preparing for next season, agreeing trip schedules and updated uniforms for volunteers, along with plans for training, both refresher and foundation for new volunteers.

I look forward to the new season and getting out on the river again, and continuing the trend of this season into next.

Stephen Goosey

Chair / Volunteering Director – Volunteer *John Bunyan* Boat

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As we are aware Graham Mabbutt sadly passed away in June this year. Graham was an amazing man and has done so much for both the Trust and Enterprise. Graham raised the profile of the Trust and boat in many ways. I have had the privilege to have known him since 2010 - without knowing him I would not have volunteered, as I am sure many others would not be a volunteer today. It was always a great pleasure to crew with him on the JB and he will be missed by all.

On Saturday 5th November, The *John Bunyan* Volunteers held their end of season social (see pictures on page 1). We had approx. 60 volunteers and friends of the JB present. There was an update given to the volunteers by myself, Teresa Clarke, Roger Kennedy, Steve Ashley and Colin Christie from the management team. Jane Hamilton from the Trust kindly said some words. And we then got to the main part of the evening: Rod Calvert, Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, provided a background to the role of Lord-Lieutenant

Contact Us.

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

www.bmkwaterway.org

I took over from Sue Gillibrand as Chair and Volunteer Director in June this year. I have been with the *John Bunyan* since the boat went in the water in 2013, firstly acting as one of the original boat masters (BM), then working with cabin ops to acquire the premises licence for the *John Bunyan*, and acting as the DPS (Designated Premises Supervisor), while assisting with training of volunteers mainly looking after the night training. I stepped away in 2018 to focus on other things, before returning in late 2021 to take over as DPS of both the *John Bunyan* and *Electra* boats, and returning to crewing and training roles.

The *John Bunyan* has had an extremely successful season, although slightly shorter due to the repaint planned this year. While passenger numbers on public trips were still limited to 40, an average of 75% of the seats were sold on these public trips. Going beyond the public

dedicated our volunteers are and they should be commended, especially those who stepped in at short notice to crew. Volunteer retention and motivation has been something that has been important to me, and we are hoping to increase our volunteer numbers for 2023. This season we have 2 new BMs who have passed their test, with 1 further awaiting their test. We have also approached some existing crew who would like to become pursers and they will be trained in 2023, also we have a number of volunteers returning to being active crew next year having taken a year out.

We do have a couple of vacancies on the management board and are looking for people to take on support roles to assist the management team, as well as looking for new volunteers who would like to enjoy the fresh air and the sights as we cruise on the Great Ouse, if you would like to volunteer please email:

volunteering@johnbunyanboat.org

Several highlights this year have been popular music cruises: the Motown cruises remained popular with 325 passengers enjoying the Motown & Soul Music and the addition of the Irish music cruise with Inis Eire was successful selling out within a short period of time once advertised. To support the Ukrainian refugees families, we provided a 2 hour cruise with tea and cake provided, which was highly successful. The *John Bunyan* Team would like to thank Crème Blu Lait for providing the cakes for the cruise which was enjoyed by all. During the summer we made available free places on our Tuesday afternoon EyeSpy Cruises for Ukrainian families and carried over 40 families. We operated 30 minute cruises during the River Festival; every one of these cruises was full across the weekend. The *John Bunyan* also participated in the Festival's Illuminated Boat Parade, helping to light up the Embankment with a huge number of lights!

We also cannot forget the Queens Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS), which was presented to the *John Bunyan* volunteers by the then Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire Helen Nellis on July 11th, following the announcement of the award in June. This was accepted by Dawn Bell (Graham Mabbutt's daughter) and Christine Tilney on behalf of all *John Bunyan* volunteers.

(Continued on page 7)



JB being repainted

trips, we offered charter trips with up to 50 passengers, and many of these were at full capacity. This season we have carried over 5,800 passengers on the public cruises and charters on a total of 155 cruises with 54 active volunteers at the beginning of the season and increasing to 72 volunteers at the end of the season. Huge thanks to all the volunteers who have given their time and effort to ensuring that the *John Bunyan* had a successful season.

From the number of trips planned, due to either crewing issues or the red weather warning, we only cancelled 2 trips for the whole season. This goes to show how

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