

# John Bunyan Community Boat: 10 years of cruising



## Review of the John Bunyan Cruising season

This year the *John Bunyan* cruising season had a slow start to the season with bad weather causing extended red flags on the River Great Ouse, preventing cruising, in April & early May, coupled with the Environment Agency closing Town Lock in Bedford until end of May (Steve Ashley writes). We were able to run our normal cruises on the lower river.

During June the *John Bunyan* was part of the Bedford Kite and Motoring Festival which was a successful 2 days of short cruising carrying over 300 passengers. The *John Bunyan* supported the Kingfisher pub (formerly The Barns Hotel) providing 30 min short cruises. During the Funday Basil Hubbard, who suggested the *John Bunyan* boat name, his daughter and 4 grandchildren enjoyed a cruise with us and to mark the occasion the grandchildren were presented with *John Bunyan* pin badges.

In July this year the *John Bunyan* community boat celebrated its 10th year of operation. Launched at a boat-naming ceremony at Priory Marina on the River Great Ouse in July 2013, over the past 10 years the *John Bunyan* has become one of Bedford's top tourist attractions carrying over 65,000 passengers on over 1,300 cruises. This year we ran a wide range of public cruises covering something for everyone from relaxing Sunday cruises to Kempston, fish & chip lunch and supper cruises, afternoon tea cruises to the Bedford Central Mercure Hotel and the return of Kingfisher pub (The Barns Hotel), music cruises covering jazz, Irish and motown & soul.

Last year the *John Bunyan* volunteers received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the equivalent of an MBE for a voluntary organisation, in recognition of services to the community which was presented by the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire. Two volunteers



Basil Hubbard's grandchildren

(Continued on page 5)



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## View from the Chair

When I started work 40 years ago last month in an office above what was Argos in the Harpur Centre, I did not expect to become an adopted Bedfordian. That was definitely the case when I sat down to watch Look East on my first evening in the town only to hear the news that NIREX, the Government's nuclear waste disposal agency, had selected the old Elstow Storage Depot on its outskirts as a possible location to deposit Sellafield's unwanted radioactivity.

Thankfully, under pressure from residents and local politicians, NIREX's plans were eventually abandoned and alternatives emerged for a more neighbourly use for the site. Local government responded with a development brief and a planning consent for what has since become the Wixams new settlement. These were key moments for the future of the environment around Bedford. Indeed, had there not been the political will to nullify the original proposals and take the opportunity to replace them with a positive vision for the old storage depot I do not suppose that I would now be writing this column.



Political will for change is a key commodity especially when financial capital is in short supply, as it was at times during the development of Wixams. Funding for public projects is again under strain. However, from my perspective, the current absence of its availability is more than compensated for by the renewed political will to see the waterway park become a reality.

The Trust, having spoken with the new teams leading both Bedford and Central Bedfordshire Borough Councils after the recent local elections, is now working hard to harness a renewed enthusiasm for early progress with the scheme. Political leadership in the two authorities has come together on the back of a pledge from the Mayor of Bedford, Tom Wootton, when speaking about the new

investment plan for the Borough, to, "invest to see the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway Canal Link finally delivered".

This keenness to see progress translates into discussions about the framework for development up to and into the 2040's which will support more development to the south of Bedford. The Waterway Park is no longer seen as an optional extra but as a scheme which has a symbiotic relationship with the very successful community Forest of Marston Vale.

Contact is also being maintained with Milton Keynes Council and a recent conversation took place with Iain Stewart, MP for Milton Keynes South, who now holds the influential position as Chair of Transport Select Committee in the House of Commons.

Along with the politics along the route, the technical case for constructing the Waterway is being reviewed and updated. Water Resources East, which was constituted to plan long term for the future water needs of the East of England, includes the Waterway as one of the schemes which it will be assessing as part of its Business Plan for 2024-2028. Large housing projects in and around Cambridge are currently being recommended for refusal of planning consent by the Environment Agency simply because of water scarcity and an absence of a plan to provide a reliable water supply that does not further denigrate the chalk aquifer and streams in the region.

These situations are generating a wider political will to make change happen which in turn is creating more interest in the strategic role of the Waterway and the link it provides between the wet west and dry east of the country. Water Resources East and the Environment Agency are partners of the Trust and are looking for solutions to their problems. So, unlike my first days as a Bedford resident, when times seemed ominous, this feels like a propitious moment for the future of the Waterway. ●



JB Halloween event (see p5)

### BMK News

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## Only IWA – Protect Our Waterways

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) is the only independent, national charity dedicated to supporting and regenerating Britain's navigable rivers and canals as places for leisure, living and business.



By Sarah Niblock, CEO of Inland Waterways Association

**IWA** was formed to protect our inland waterways in 1946 at a time when they were under threat. As a result of IWA's work many navigations that would have closed remained open. Appreciation of the value of our waterways began to grow and restoration schemes got under way. We can now say proudly that since IWA was formed 500 miles of waterways have been restored and another 500 miles are under restoration.



Dee Lock, the entrance to the Dee Branch of the Shropshire Union from the River Dee in Chester

- Help with construction projects through WRG (Waterway Recovery Group) camps and weekends
- Sharing knowledge and ideas through the Restoration Hub
- Technical expertise – engineering, planning and heritage etc.
- Provision of cost-effective insurance for restoration projects

Only IWA provides this range of support to the waterways family, but now we need every member of this Trust to help to reverse this damaging decision. Restoration projects will become untenable. You know better than anyone that it is far more costly to repair and restore than to prevent decline in the first place. Here is how you can – and should – support our campaign:

- As well as being an individual society member, please join IWA. You will have access to all the benefits above and more. Your membership will help strengthen our voice to protect the network and ensure another 500 miles are restored.
- Make a one-off or regular donation to IWA towards our campaign costs.
- Sign up for our mailing list where you'll find links to our petition and how to write to your MP.
- Spread the word – please use your communication channels to engage as many of your local waterways users as possible and direct them to our website.

It will only take you a few minutes via our website [www.waterways.org.uk](http://www.waterways.org.uk), but could put the waterways on the right path for years ahead. ●



Entrance to the Old Bedford River

But, gravely, the clock is starting to turn backwards. The government has announced it's cutting its grant to Canal and River Trust, putting the network's future in peril. IWA is very concerned that without adequate funding our waterways will again face closures and the millions of hours of volunteer time spent restoring and protecting waterways will be lost.

We launched the "Protect Our Waterways" campaign in March 2023 and, by joining IWA, you will strengthen our voice.

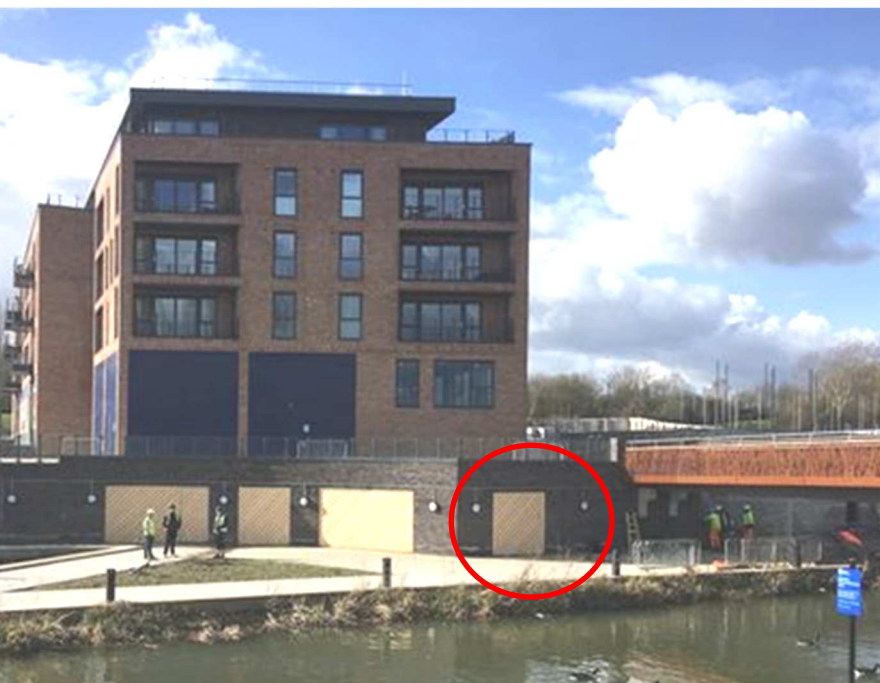
Your Trust is doing a sterling job of developing your stretch of the navigation and IWA is proud to support the work of societies across the country. Our support includes

- Educating politicians about the many and varied benefits of our waterways
- Access to expertise to guide your projects through the planning system
- Engineering and heritage expertise to call upon
- Practical Restoration Handbook - the 'go to resource' for all volunteers involved in waterways restoration.
- Help with construction costing and planning



## Electra's new Welcome Centre

Crest has given the B&MK Waterway Trust a 10-year lease on the shell of a commercial unit, at a peppercorn rent (James Clifton writes). It is located partly under the footbridge over the Grand Union Canal and forms part of their wider Campbell Wharf development in Milton Keynes.



Picture taken before shopfronts installed. The Welcome Centre is the yellow hoarding on the far right (circled)

Crest had allowed us to occupy an unused bin store on a temporary basis, before we could occupy the unit. The store had no windows or ventilation and was tucked away up a flight of stairs. Although it provided us with much needed secure storage, there were no food preparation or volunteer support facilities. Also, once the Canal Café



Electra volunteers Denise and Mike painting the blockwork walls. Mark and Geoff installing the raised floor.

started trading, they obviously needed to reclaim their bin store.

The Centre will be a front-of-house location for funders, partners and the general public, staffed on a part-time basis by volunteers. There will be an administrative space for 'back office' functions, as well as storage for supplies needed on cruises including the light wheelchair used on board *Electra*. A kitchenette will allow food preparation. The Centre also has space to hold small meetings, with a fully accessible WC.

Following successful fundraising bids by Trustee John Best, a total of £34,500 has been raised towards the fit-out.

Milton Keynes Community Foundation	£10,000
MKCC Section 106	£20,000
Parishes:	
Wolverton & Greenleys Town Council	£1,000
CMK Town Council	£1,000
Stantonbury Parish Council	£1,000
Bletchley & Fenny Stratford	£1,300
Donations	£200
<b>Total</b>	<b>£34,500</b>

Temporary works were carried out to allow urgent occupation, if the old bin store had to be vacated at short notice. The fit-out is being done by a mixture of *Electra* volunteers and construction professionals, in order to keep costs down, but at the same time ensure that the final project is of a quality that meets the Trust's high standards.

The internal finish was designed to have an industrial feel, with blockwork and concrete walls painted blue and cream, reflecting *Electra's* own colour scheme, plus a black ceiling (her hull?).

Externally, permission has been given to install a Rolec service bollard, which will allow *Electra* to recharge her batteries and refill the drinking water tank whilst moored on the nearby pontoon, as well as operating the dishwasher and passenger lift without taking power from the batteries. See p6.

The programme anticipates partial occupation by Christmas, with the final works completed by April 2024. ●



## John Bunyan Community Boat: 10 years of cruising (cont)



(Continued from page 1)

were nominated to attend a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace on the 3rd May this year. Teresa Clarke and Colin Christie were chosen and attended this once-in-a-lifetime event in glorious sunshine. It is estimated that over 7,000 people packed the 34-acre gardens.



Receiving the award

This year the *John Bunyan* community boat's operations team won the 'Raising the Profile of the Town (Team)' award, sponsored by Bedford Radio. Stephen Goosey, *John Bunyan* boat chair, said, "This is a great achievement to win the award, this shows the hard work our volunteers on the operations team puts in. However, without the wider volunteer team in all roles this would not have been possible and shows the great commitment of all volunteers on the *John Bunyan* community boat."



Graham Mabbutt Cruise Participants

The *John Bunyan* community boat this year put on a number of cruises for the community; with Bedford Rotary Club for the BRASS organisation in the town who support many different clients from a wide range of countries including Syria, Afghanistan, Vietnam, and many of the African countries.

In remembrance of Graham Mabbutt this year we held a community cruise in his name with Central Bedfordshire young carers selected from the main applicants. Twenty-six young carers enjoyed a 2-hour cruise from Priory Marina and along Bed-

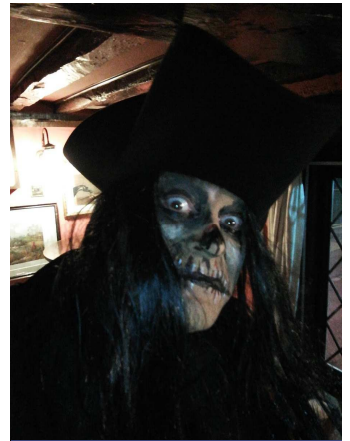
ford Embankment. All enjoyed their time on the *John Bunyan* community boat.

The *John Bunyan* took part in the Bedford River clean-up on 7th October organised by the events team at Bedford Borough Council and we provided free tea and coffee to volunteers cleaning the river. These included divers and litter pickers.

On Friday 27th October the *John Bunyan* was expected to be full of lost souls wandering the upper river recounting horrifying tales of ghosts, spectres, murders, and spirits spanning the centuries, told by the Kempston Ghost Walkers, but the inclement weather meant that this was a static event.

As this year's season draws to a close the management team are hard at work organising next year's cruising season. From the beginning of February 2024 keep watch on our website for tickets to come on sale for you to book tickets for your next year's cruises.

*John Bunyan* community boat needs your help by volunteering to help run the boat. We are always looking for people who can help with marketing, commercial, boat operations support and management. Also, to volunteer for *John Bunyan* community boat crewing. We provide full training and all we request is that you are happy to do 2 to 3 shifts per month. If you would like to volunteer, please email [volunteering@johnbunyanboat.org](mailto:volunteering@johnbunyanboat.org)



Preparing for Halloween



This could be you!





## Electra shortlisted for tourism award.

We submitted an entry into the New Business category of the Beautiful South Tourism Awards earlier this year. Following shortlisting, an assessor joined the boat on Sunday 17th September for a 4pm one-way cruise from Great Linford to Campbell Wharf.

As well as being hosted by Jane Wolfson, our former Chair, Huw Jarvis also met Denise & Christian Taylor, our current Chair and Training Leads as, coincidentally, they were the crew that day.

We have just learned that we have been selected as one of the finalists. We will find out whether we will receive a Gold, Silver or Bronze award at the ceremony in Brighton's Grand Hotel on Tuesday 12th December.

Grand Hotel on Tuesday 12th December.

## Volunteers for the Welcome Centre

As work continues fitting-out the new *Electra* Welcome Centre, plans are also progressing to recruit volunteers to staff it. They will handle enquiries from guests and local people, regarding *Electra*'s cruise details and availabilities, as well as providing information about BMKWT, the Parks Trust, the Canal & River Trust, and other local organisations active on and around the canal. The Centre will be open between 12:00 and 15:00 on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturday and Sundays, from Spring next year through until mid-December. Further details, including an expression of interest form, can be found at "Volunteering with *Electra*" from the *Electra* page on our website.

## Widening access

We're delighted that, having started with one school booking in 2022, we have had three school bookings this season – and we have two bookings and four enquiries already for 2024. Schools are choosing trips on *Electra* as a way of introducing pupils to a very special part of their local environment, finding out about local history, and discovering how battery technology can work on a boat.

We're also pleased that continuing sponsorship by ward councillors has allowed us recently to provide free cruises for stroke survivors and for people with dementia. In addition, two of the town councils we work closely with have each given £500 this year, to fund cruises for designated resident groups. We hope to build on these successful approaches next year, so that access to

cruises on *Electra* continues to widen across Milton Keynes.

In addition, the *Electra* volunteer team has chosen to run a free cruise each year in memory of the late Graham Mabbutt, who kick-started the *Electra* project (as well as being a key player in the Trust and the *John Bunyan*). We are providing this to residents of the Camphill community in Milton Keynes in November.

This season we have started collecting donations specifically towards developing our Family Specials programme, to enable people who wouldn't otherwise be able to experience being on the water to come on an *Electra* cruise. Guests have already generously donated over £1,100 and, once we know the final total, we will translate this into a number of cruises to be offered in spring 2024.

## Cruising information

Our public Christmas Cruises offer has just been launched. From November 14th, they will run on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings. The 2½ hour cruises will depart from Campbell Wharf at 11:00. A mug of delicious mulled wine for each guest will be accompanied by a scrumptious pie, filled with vegetarian mincemeat and frangipane baked by Camphill Café, served with a generous helping of clotted cream. Season's Greetings charters are also available late mornings on Fridays and Sundays, with the option to add mulled wine & mince pies, or savoury nibbles trays, or own catering – and a bit of sparkle with bottles of prosecco.

Meanwhile, our ever-popular Friday fish & chip lunchtime cruise will continue right through to mid-December.

## The numbers

From late June to the end of September, *Electra* has run 149 cruises in 128 separate crewing sessions, taking 1,489 guests on board. October bookings are good, and we were also delighted to welcome members of the Trust's board on board *Electra* on 8th October, followed by a visit to the *Electra* Welcome Centre, to view progress of the fit-out work. After the clocks go back, until mid-December, we will make the most of the weather in the middle of the day and run a single cruise most days.

Of course, none of this could happen without our terrific team of forty volunteers on the boat and on the shore! We have planned to meet in November, to review 2023 and talk about plans and wishes for 2024 – and then have a party to wind up the season in December. ●



*Electra*'s new charging post awaiting installation (see P4)

# Events Calendar 2023



March 2024	Annual Partnership Conference. To be confirmed.
Other live	events are being planned. Watch this space.

## Amazon Smile is no more. Here are alternatives.

You will recall that we have, in the past, encouraged you to do your internet shopping via sites which may donate a small percentage to the Trust.



Most recently, I have been recommending Amazon Smile which paid an easy very small percentage. Amazon Smile has now closed.

There are two alternatives with which we are registered, and they both work the same way.

They are Give As You Live (GAYL), which we have worked with for some time and Easyfundraising (EFR), which seems to be "the new kid on the block".

In each case you register with the site and choose Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust as your cause.

They each have a reminder you can install on your browser(s) so you can just click and say "yes, I want to raise a donation"

However, in both cases, Booking.com have taken themselves off the reminder. If you are shopping with them, log into the GAYL or EFR website first and go to Booking.com from there. As the amount typically spent here is quite large, the 2% is worth having. For instance 4 nights in October at the Maldron Hotel Finsbury Park (a random, but quite expensive, choice) would have raised £15.56 - more than your annual membership fee (or your share of a family sub).

If you don't want to install the reminder, you can always raise money by going to the website first, and clicking through to the retailer you want to use.

For GAYL you can sign up at <https://www.giveasyoulive.com/charity/bedfordmiltonkeyneswaterwaytrust/1114294/0> or use the QR code.

Give as you Live has raised £338.03 for the Trust at the time of writing.

The alternative is EFR. Everything works in the same way (including Booking.com requiring you to go to the EFR website first). The main thing to note is that we are Bedford *and* Milton Keynes Waterway Trust there, because their systems cannot cope with the &

You can go straight to our page at <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/bedford-and-milton-keynes-waterway-trust>

So far I am the only one raising funds for us on EFR and have raised £17.42 so far (more than half of that on a Booking.com purchase.)

Both work the same way and pay similar, but not the same amounts. As a check I looked at John Lewis and GAYL were paying 1% at the time I looked and EFR 2%. For another retailer GAYL was offering slightly more - so you may want to register with both and choose which is better each time. ●



Using this QR code will take you to Easy Fundraising where you can sign up to support us and...



... this QR code will take you to the sign-up page for Give As You Live.





### Where are we at with the Landing Stage at Kempston?

Well, it's finished but needs maintenance, which could well be where you fit in (writes Julian Armitage). We need a team of volunteers to check and preserve the landing stage so that it continues to be fit for purpose. That is – safe, in good condition and presentable with all signage in place. I am pleased to say that Councillor James Valentine has committed £1000 from his ward funds annually towards the maintenance costs.



Just at present we are lobbying all those who might help to contribute in any way they can to the dredging of the river thus allowing large boats such as the *John Bunyan* routinely to access the landing stage .

Regarding the provision of a turning circle or winding hole downstream of the bridge, this promises to be expensive and gives no guarantee of being permanent since there is a possibility of silting from the back channel. For this reason, the Board have decided not to commit funds to this at the moment, but will keep this under review with the hope that larger projects in the area will

also yield rewards / grants from other sources.

I should add that the landing stage has proved hugely popular over the summer with paddle boarders and canoeists as well as others choosing to enjoy the river during the hot weather. The local residents have generally been very grateful for our efforts. We just need to make everyone aware of the ultimate goal on which our efforts are focussed.

### Ponds at Fields Road

We are still looking to source a surveying company to conduct a land survey at the Fields Road development. Once this has been done, we will be better able to determine what pieces of work we could commit to, so that everyone is aware that a waterway is going to pass this way. We are still receiving quotes for this work and hope to agree a price and a date for this to happen. Again, volunteers are needed to help with "Holding the Staff", while the clever stuff is done by the survey company. ●

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## Contact Us.

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

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

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