

Royal Canal Report

By Derek Whelan



Harvest Festival
Photo: Janet Leech

OPEN BOATS

This year's Open House featured a number of new ideas incorporating our waterways heritage including: a tour of Dublin by kayak; a walk through U2's Docklands and a visit to houseboats in GC Basin. Open House, now in its 12th year attracts over 30,000 visitors to 150 events over a weekend in October each year. Boats open to the public included a Dutch barge, an old narrowboat and 2 newer live aboard barges. A barge recently imported from the UK was fitted-out at Confey on the Royal Canal and made the trip down to the Basin to take part. Over 700 visitors saw the boats over 2 days and organisers were very happy with the interest shown. This could be one event that will be repeated in future Open House shows.

COMMEMORATION SERVICE

The annual service by RCAG to remember the victims of Ireland's greatest canal tragedy will take place at St Mochta's Church, Porterstown on Friday 24 November. The tragic event occurred at the Deep Sinking within a few hundred meters of the church on 25 November in 1845 and it caused the death of 15 people who were passengers on the evening boat to Longford. This service also remembers almost 40 former members of RCAG who are recently deceased.

After the service members will walk to the commemorative plaque on Porterstown Bridge where a wreath will be placed.

CYCLE PATHS

A recent spate of building activity along the Royal Canal in counties Meath and Kildare will result in a further 27km being added to the length of cycle path available for public use by year's end. At that point 99km of track will be complete and this will include a single stretch of 72km from Moyvalley to Ballymahon, the longest continuous cycleway in Ireland. Bikes are available for hire at Mullingar for those who wish to cycle the Royal or the nearby Midland Greenway to Athlone so there should be increased tourism activities noted over the coming years along the banks and canal villages.

LONGFORD PROMOTION

The topic of tourism in the midlands prompts us to mention that Longford County Council have commissioned a new video to promote the county's tourism product. Longford is to benefit from the Centre Parks investment near Ballymahon, the

largest tourism project underway at present. There will be cycle access from the Park to the canal cycle paths so the benefits of this attraction may be spread further afield. Filming is underway on the video and it will include a barge trip.

Longford Tourism will also support the rollout of RCAG's scan tag system at various sites throughout the county. The system is already in use at a number of locks and harbours along the canal and will be rolled out further next Spring.

FINGAL HARVEST FESTIVAL

This first ever Festival on the canal banks was held in September close to 12th lock with a variety of food and local services stalls (including one from RCAG). The event got off to a busy start at noon which was fortunate as gale force winds caused an early curtailment after 3.30 on that day. Most of those who took part expressed themselves satisfied with the

turnout. Hopefully, we will see a repeat next year under better weather conditions.

HERITAGE WEEK WALKS

The group again organised a series of walks on both the Grand and Royal Canals during Heritage Week in late August; four on the Grand and five on the Royal. The walks attracted 220 participants and were guided by Niall Galway and Peter Clarke.

Peter has written a book titled 'Walking the Royal Canal' covering 5 walks which continues to be in demand (now in its second print) and which is available online through the RCAG website – www.royalcanal.ie (or the IWAI Shop -ed)



Beehive by Royal in Blanchardstown
Photo: RCAG



A HBA fleet visited Mosstown in August 2017
Photo: Colin Becker