

# ROYAL CANAL NEWS

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The Royal Canal was closed to navigation in 1961 and since then its' condition has deteriorated owing to lack of maintenance. Although it has not been abandoned, permission was given by C.I.E. for several low-level road bridges to be constructed across the canal, mainly by Longford County Council. In Dublin there are plans for a motorway to be built along the line of the canal. The future of the canal remains in the balance.

In 1973 an ad hoc committee consisting of representatives of the Department of Transport & Power, C.I.E. and Bord Failte was set up to consider the future of the canal. Shortly afterwards a public meeting was held in Maynooth under the auspices of the Kildare Association of An Taisce and attended by representatives of other interested organisations. There was general agreement that so valuable an amenity must be saved. Both An Taisce and the Inland waterways Association of Ireland have since requested representation on the ad hoc committee. These requests are, it is understood, under consideration. In the meantime several organizations are working to develop the canal as an amenity and towards its eventual restoration. This news-letter records some activities of these groups during the past few months.

## MAYNOOTH AND LEIXLIP

Work parties, organized by the Maynooth Development Association and the Kildare Association of An Taisce have been busy on this stretch of the canal.

In April, ninety four canoes took part in a race from Maynooth. Two miles down the canal there was portage round the 13th lock and at the Rye aqueduct the contestants carried their canoes to the river, 100 feet below, to complete the race to Leixlip. The event may become a regular fixture.

Also in April, at a Public meeting in St. Patrick's College, Douglas Heard showed his film of a journey through the Royal Canal in 1955. The film was followed by a lively discussion of problems of restoration.

In June, at the request of the

Development Association, Messer's Brendan Daly and John Mc Namara. of C.I.E inspected Maynooth Harbour and the 13th lock, accompanied by members of the association, An Taisce and I.W.A.I. This resulted in a promise by C.I.E. that the upper gates of the lock will be made water-tight and the land racks repaired this autumn, and that the extensive weed growth in the level above the lock and in the harbour will be cut at an appropriate time. This clearance could lead to the establishment of a canoe club in the town, based on the canal.

## MULLINGAR

On 30th June Mullingar Branch I.W.A.I. held a very successful meeting to which representatives of other groups interested in the canal were invited. An inspection of the canal westwards as far as Coolnahay was followed by a walk along the well-tended bank of the town section, which, unfortunately, was terminated prematurely by a downpour of rain. A most welcome meal in the Lake County Hotel was followed by a general meeting at which preservation and restoration of the canal were discussed at length

An evening meeting and film show are planned for the Autumn on a date to be arranged. Details from the Branch Secretary, Charles Nolan, Irishtown, Mullingar ,

## BLANCHARDSTOWN CASTLEKNOCK CLONSILLA

The Royal Canal amenity Group was formed in April and work parties been busy ever since clearing the canal and towpath. This section of the canal, particularly the deep cutting at Clonsilla, is very badly over grown and the towpath Impassable in places. It is planned to hold working sessions every Saturday afternoon until the Spring and new members will be very welcome. Contact the secretary Brian Thornberry, 8 Roselawn Drive, Castleknock.

The upper gates of the 12th lock at Blanchardstown are due to be repaired by C.I.E. during October, which will restore a full depth of water in the 7½-mile level to Leixlip, improving enormously the amenity value of this section.

## DUBLIN

This summer C.I.E. started to clean out the locks in the city section of the canal and repair the upper gates. With all the levels full of water the Royal Canal in Dublin has taken on an altogether different appearance. At the time of writing work has proceeded as far as the 8th lock. The opportunity now presents itself for either the Corporation or a local voluntary group to 'take over' the canal banks and develop the amenity potential of the waterside areas.

Dublin Branch I.W.A.I. has formed a Royal Canal sub-committee to collaborate with local groups to develop the canal as an amenity and to work towards the restoration of the canal from Dublin to the Shannon.

The sub-committee has prepared a scheme for preservation and restoration of the canal which has been forwarded to the ad hoc committee for consideration. Copies of the proposed scheme, which includes details of the present state of the canal, are available on request (s.a.e. please) from the secretary, Ian Bath, 39 Park View, Castleknock, Co. Dublin.

## MC NEADS BRIDGE

In March the above sub-committee learnt of Westmeath County Council's plans to culvert the canal at Mc Nead's bridge, six miles east of Mullingar. As a result of representations made to the minister for Local Government the Council were asked by the Minister to amend the plans to take account of the desirability of retaining facilities for navigation on the Royal Canal between Dublin and Mullingar. The Council agreed to this.

It is understood that C.I.E. will no longer give permission for any obstructions to navigation to be erected on any part of the waterway, pending a decision on the future of the canal by the ad hoc committee.

## ATHLONE

Athlone Branch I.W.A.I. has formed a 'Save the Royal Canal' sub-committee. They will assist wherever possible with restoration and in particular with the Longford and Westmeath sections. Contact the Branch secretary, Declan Walsh, 7 St Francis Terrace Athlone for further details.

## ABBEYSHRULE

Abbeyshrule Development Association wishes to restore the section of the Royal Canal between the 38th and 39th locks to provide a local amenity and tourist attraction, particularly for coarse fishing. There is a good supply of water into the 38th lock from higher up the canal (Balroe feeder) but at present this is being diverted into a stream. The main problem to be overcome is a breach in the bank three miles east of Abbeyshrule. At this point the canal passes through a bog and the breach has been caused by subsidence where turf has been cut too close to the bank.

Details of the Association's scheme for restoration, involving a considerable amount of local voluntary work, have been submitted to C.I.E. Whilst agreeing with the scheme proposed in principle C.I.E. have stated that it will have to wait whatever decision is reached following completion of the present investigation into the Royal Canal.

## KILCOCK

At the June meeting in Mullingar representatives of the Kilcock Community Council announced that they had started work on clearing the towpath. Owing to the extremely bad state of the gates of the 15th and 16th locks there is very little water in the levels and weed growth is profuse. It is hoped that C.I.E. will agree to repair the upper gates of both locks and follow with a weed cutting boat.

## FULL COLOUR. ROYAL CANAL PRINT

The Royal Canal Amenity Group is offering fine reproductions of the 1818 Brocas watercolour of 'Broadstone Harbour (now filled in) on the Royal Canal in Dublin, to raise money for its work. Showing canal boats loading and a view over the city, this print (approx. 18" x 14" is mounted ready for framing) may be obtained, cash with order, from Brian Thornberry, 28 Roselawn drive, Castleknock, Co. Dublin, for £2.50.

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Compiled by the secretary, Royal Canal sub-committee, IWAI, Dublin.

