

WELCOME

PHEW! I'm just putting the finishing touches to our bumper November edition which includes the finalists for our Volunteer of the Year Award and your chance to vote on page 4. It's going to be very difficult as they would all be very worthy winners.

Talking of reader participation, there's still time for you to take part in our online survey – see details on page 58 – you could win £150 cash in our free prize draw.

And could 16-month-old Noah Couchman be our youngest reader? He is the grandson of Chris Dixon, the manager of the new White Mills Marina where the basin was

due to be filled by cutting through to the River Nene shortly after we went to press, see story on page 55.

We have been inundated with reports of late summer events, apologies if we missed yours this time. I enjoyed Grantham Canal Society's Discovery Day and will feature this in our December edition.

That reminds me that we are now less than two months from Christmas and if you're looking for inspiration for presents with boaters in mind, our gift guide starts on page 60.

Happy hunting! *Janet*

TOWPATH TALK

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Boating with the boss

Janet Richardson joins Canal & River Trust chief executive Richard Parry for a trip on board historic working boat *Barnet*.

THERE wasn't a cloud in the October sky as I walked along the towpath below Cosgrove Lock to meet Richard Parry and Lee Wilshire – a new member of CRT's Navigation Advisory Group.

You could have been forgiven for thinking it was mid-July rather than the Indian summer we have been enjoying in recent weeks.

Our conveyance for the day – former BW working boat *Barnet* – was formerly used by Laurence Hogg's Canalscape organisation in the West Midlands and was on its way to London where its new owner works as an architect and planner.

Lee has designs on giving the 72ft 'large Woolwich', built by Harland & Wolff in 1936 and originally operated by the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company, a new lease of life as a recycling boat available for use by the London Waterways Project volunteers. Having collected *Barnet* from Wolverhampton, he has been gradually cruising south down the Grand Union Canal, mainly at weekends.

Our destination was Fenny Stratford where Lee was due to be joined by his father for their next stage of the journey towards Berkhamsted.

Having crossed the Iron Trunk Aqueduct, Richard soon took over the tiller for the first stage of our trip, the countryside giving way to modern canalside apartments at Wolverton. As we wove our way around Milton Keynes – it was hard to believe we were only a mile from the city centre – the sun dappled through the trees of the parkland either side of the canal.

I also took my turn – my first stab at steering a working boat – although most of the time at tickover as we passed anglers and moored boats, several of



A countryside view from the Iron Trunk Aqueduct. PHOTOS: JANET RICHARDSON

the occupants sharing pleasantries with Richard and even snapping photos.

Bigger picture

After stopping for a welcome cup of coffee at the Black Horse, Great Linford, Lee took over the tiller and I had a chance to have a chat with Richard. I started by asking him if he had been on all the canals in the CRT network yet?

"I have probably visited most of the canals now although I have not been on a boat on all of them," he replied.

These include those isolated from the network such as the Pocklington and Swansea canals and the River Slea and he recently took part in the Mon & Breck canalathon.

"The bigger canals you tend to do in chunks," Richard continued. "I have been boating on the Trent & Mersey, Grand Union, Staffordshire & Worcestershire and the BCN Challenge but have not been on the big rivers such as the Trent and Severn."

Looking at the bigger picture, Richard was due to meet new Waterways Minister Rory Stewart in mid-October and was hoping to come away with more clarity about where this Government sits on the transfer of the Environment Agency's navigations.



Passing through parkland and moored boats just a mile from Milton Keynes city centre.



Canalside apartments in Wolverton.



Lee Wilshire and Richard Parry mooring at Fenny Stratford.



Richard takes over the tiller.



Taking my turn.



Barnet carries the last BCN gauge number 2393 issued on its 75th birthday in 2011.

and it is something we welcome and accept as part of our mentality." But he added that a big part of that will be with planning authorities. On the subject of the 'auction' of winter moorings, 165 – £87,000 – had been sold on the first day.

Recycling scheme

While Richard took the helm once more, I learned more from Lee about his plans for *Barnet* which he has bought with his partner and hopes to bring into active use in the spring.

A boater for some five years, he has been involved with the Canal & River Trust since completing a university project which came off the back of a previous project with boaters and CRT.

As he is a planner and architect by profession, this was an architectural project – advocating the entrepreneurial use of canals as unique places which still have value in 21st century London.

Following the success of a scheme for a recycling barge which was a Low Carbon Entrepreneur 2014 finalist attracting funding of £20,000, Lee's idea was to take some of the hopper barges from CRT and site them around the network. These could then be converted into movable recycling centres.

"This boat is an extension of this; it will enable us to do bigger things in London, promoting the canal as a viable piece of infrastructure as well as a leisure thing," he explained. "It seems incongruous that CRT's bins are emptied by road. This boat hopefully will help us do some of the stuff like that."

Lee's other boat is his home – an affordable way of living in an expensive city – and he has the Genesis of an idea to invest money made from the lease of affordable residential moorings into running a boat like *Barnet* for community events and programmes. "The boat has got a bit of character and is a really nice vehicle for engaging people. If I can support that in my own little way, that would be fantastic," he added.

At the time of going to press, *Barnet* was nearing Watford.