

# HBA and the Year of the Barrow - 2007

11 February 2009

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When President Mary McAleese launched the Year of the Barrow from the deck of the Tall Ship Dunbrody in January 2007, she extended an invitation on behalf of all the groups along the river, to what promised to be a year of fun and adventure, on one of the most stunning waterways of our inland system. The HBA in turn, promised they would be there. Both sides kept their promise, and what a fantastic time was had by all. Waterways Ireland have done a great job on the Barrow navigation south of Vickerstown, dredging and putting in new jetties, and the fleet found life much easier that on our last trip down in 2005 to the Tall Ships event in Waterford. Carlow was our first port of call for the Boatmen's Reunion and it was a great day for all who attended. RTE gave it TV coverage on both the six and nine o'clock news as well as on its Seascapes programme a few weeks later. It was the start of a fantastic weekend and it was good to meet old friends as well as a few new ones. Waterways Ireland again sponsored brass plaques for the boatmen and Martin Dennany was on hand once again, to present them.

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And then there was Carlow Bridge! The weather had been good and the Spring dry so the airdraft was there! just! I was away that weekend, so it was left to the senior skipper, Theresa, to take her under. I gave the unnecessary instruction, take her out square, line her up on the centre of the arch, give her plenty of throttle, do not hesitate. I had not intended that Theresa would try to get her up on the plane, and Daniel who was temporary crew for the weekend, is still being treated for post traumatic stress. However, she was through without a scratch, whereas I would probably have clipped the arch! One or two others did make physical protest to Carlow UDC while passing under, but they shall remain unnamed to spare their blushes!

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And so on to Christy's Bash in Bagnelstown and what a great weekend that was. My lasting memory will be of 31B, on the tiller, resplendent in straw hat and bucket of tea in the free hand, making a late arrival through the moored fleet, and him doing about six knots with the fast river behind him, saluting each boat as he passed!..MICK! Mind that overhead caaa!!! Aha! good job Christy's in the business. Cormac, are you and Mick going to form some kind of elite group? Order of the (de) illumination, or something?

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And then it was back to Athy where the North Barrow Branch Athy Water Festival had to be one of the highlights of the trip. Eunice, Sandra and Bernie, (complete strangers to the HBA fleet!) were running the event and it was spectacular, with special emphasis on activities for the younger folk, all of which were free! Well done guys! I got a slight feeling that the HBA got special treatment here, but I am sure that's not true! Special mention to Mackey's Mystical Marina at Ardreich, where the fleet rested up, repaired, watered, wined etc for many weeks both going down and on the return and to Cliff and Charlie, for whom nothing was too much, our heartfelt thanks.

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Then it was a race back to Ballycommon, more later, but just to say there is no truth in the rumour that the three musketeers, Gerry, Brian and Tim, were seen arm in arm with another, even more famous Brian, (if that were possible!), marking out positions for new mooring posts along the Kilbeggan Branch!!

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