

Royal Canal celebrations - opening to Shannon - Oct 2010

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Clondra, October 2010

There were great celebrations in Richmond Harbour on Fri Oct 4th, when the Main Line of the Royal Canal was officially opened by Waterways Ireland. 145 km of the canal's total 154 km has been restored, the near completion of a campaign and huge amounts of hard work by teams of volunteers and various state bodies, that started 36 years ago.

All fifteen branches of the Royal Canal Amenity (RCAG) came together for the occasion and were represented by boats in the harbour; also present were boats of the Heritage Boat Association (HBA) and the Inland Waterways Association (IWA). One, the IWA Dublin boat, made its way from the Liffey, scooting through the partially in-filled portions in Spencer Dock and under the draughted pipe at the Sheriff Street lifting bridge; very keen to win the first of the "New Triangle" plaques. Unfortunately, the HBA Fleet will have to wait for the ESB, CIE and Dublin City Council to complete their end before they too, can make the round trip via the Grand, Liffey, Royal and Shannon.

On Friday after 72M and 4E made their way under the bridge into Richmond Harbour, the HBA members on board took the time to toast the Royal and absent friends, before making their way to the marquee for the official nibbles and speeches.

Dr Ian Bath, President of the RCAG, paid tribute to John McKeown, the engineer who led the project from 1986. He and his staff, who first worked for the OPW and more recently Waterways Ireland, were committed to "the maxim that only the best was acceptable". There were many 'legends' of the Royal present. Those representing County Longford talked about what the opening of the canal to the Shannon will mean to the local community. Also there was Ruth Delany, who was on board the boat Hark in 1955, the last vessel to make its way down the full length of the Royal Canal. Former Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds was given a copy of the book "Ireland's Royal Canal" written by Ian Bath and Ruth Delany.

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Photos by Paul Martin

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