

# HBA VISITS LOUGH ERNE

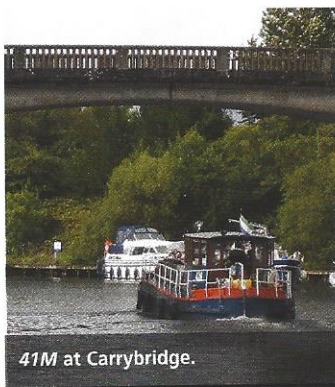
by Joe Treacy



Fleet at WI headquarters in Enniskillen

Our Royal Canal trip in 2013 was going to be a hard act to follow but murmurs were being noted regarding an Erne trip. It was, after all in 2006 that we last visited the area. The AGM in November 2013 proved there was support and the organisation could then move on confidently with planning. A quick get together produced the skeleton of a plan which listed the areas that had to be visited and also agreed that a traffic jam on the Shannon Erne canal was to be avoided. Our man on the ground, Tom Bailey, would from this point have all the local details to sort and confirm, a job he gladly handled. Participation in HBA events are not for the faint hearted as there is little resemblance to the traditional rally format. Time keeping/arranging is not one of our strong points with a relaxed atmosphere prevailing. Small groups of craft continually branch away to do their own thing and it adds to the excitement when major gatherings happen.

An aside to the event was the collection of a Bolinder engine from Tullamore and its delivery to the Waterways Ireland HQ in Enniskillen. This engine had been worked on by HBA volunteers and used as a display item initially in our HBA 10@Banagher event in 2011. The engine was

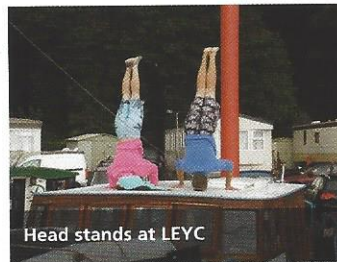


41M at Carrybridge.

then put in storage in Tullamore and early this year a plan was hatched to transport it by water to Enniskillen. The engine was loaded on a canal boat in the last week of May and appeared at the Shannon Harbour and Lough Derg Rallies before heading north with the HBA fleet.

Learning from our previous visits north and deciding to avoid any delays on the Shannon-Erne system, it was decided to start proceedings as far up the system as we possibly could. Graham Thomas of Riversdale kindly invited us to launch the event at his lovely site near Ballinamore and over a week or so in late July the boats arrived in great anticipation of the month ahead. There was a TV program being filmed on site which added to the interest of the crews and the pig roast got our event officially launched and on its way. On the Sunday of the Bank Holiday weekend, the big departure commenced, with quite a number getting to Ballyconnell that afternoon.

Belturbet was a tight squeeze for the following weekend and the



Head stands at LEYC

locals entertained us at the re-furbished train station with stories of times past. The town of course was an ideal stop-over to re-stock boats and avail of facilities. The next leg was a trip through Upper Lough Erne and beyond Enniskillen to Kiladeas where the Lough Erne Yacht Club had put their facilities at our disposal. On Saturday 16 August a visit to the Marble Arch Caves was kindly sponsored by Lough Erne IWAI followed by an interesting talk on the WW2 history of the Yacht Club site. That evening an excellent meal was followed by music etc. with many old friendships renewed in the great atmosphere. High winds delayed the trip across the

Broad Lough for a number of days but by Friday most boats had reached Belleek.

Belleek was hosting a water festival in conjunction with our visit and proved to be a very busy port of call. The town was a hive of activity and crowds walked around the harbour area to view the impressive fleet. We were treated to trips down-river to view the power station dam and were encouraged to be actively involved in the busy festival events. The trip back towards Enniskillen was again hampered by windy weather but by the final week-end everyone had gathered in Enniskillen town centre for the grand finale.

The Bolinder was off-loaded at Portora onto a truck which brought it to the HQ building for installation in its new home. Saturday morning was taken up with involvement in a Currach project by the local Cancer Support group. Our younger folk marched behind the craft as it was brought through the town to the 'Round O' for the official launch ceremony.

Some barges were moored at the limited WI jetties behind the HQ and we gathered inside for a very pleasant reception followed by some nice words in gratitude for a hugely successful month on the Erne system. To compliment the Bolinder display a video which WI had commissioned was shown and positively received. The sad good-byes were now beginning as crews prepared for the long trip down the system to their various Winter bases.

The hosting ports were all very accommodating to our fleet and of course the WI wardens and staff in general did all they could to ensure the trip went without a hitch. Some people have decided to over-winter on Lough Erne while the rest of us have travelled on with great memories.

The final total of craft participating reached the mid thirties with nearly twenty being in the older/larger category. A really remarkable event was witnessed by those involved and hopefully a



4E Locking up

return will not take as long. The HBA website in the latest news section on the 'October Updates' page, 'has 'weekly reports with pictures which were written by participants and tell more of the incidents which would normally accompany a trip like this. There is a link to the excellent video by Corish Film Productions. [www.heritageboatassociation.ie](http://www.heritageboatassociation.ie)

Finally the skippers and crews should be commended for committing to such a lengthy event at what was for some a considerable distance from their home ports. The travel to and from the Erne took time but very satisfying to return from what was another good news story for our association. In keeping with our policy of putting something back into the communities we visit, we organised a rather unique event on 21 October in Enniskillen. A group of thirty students from Portora Royal School and St. Michaels College, were treated to an afternoon drum workshop by the talented Richard Campbell of Different Drums - a loud and rhythmic session which will no doubt look well on the video being produced.

A very busy season all round and a lot of interest already in the planning of next year's event.

**Photos: Joe Treacy**

Joe Treacy is Chairman of the Heritage Boat Association and a member of IWAI Lough Derg



Sing Song in wheel-house