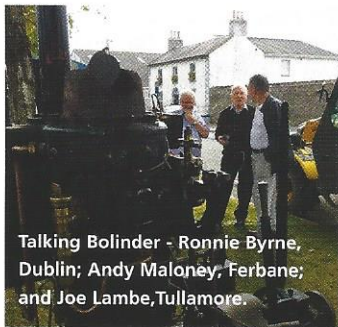


# OFFALY UPDATE

FROM BERNIE QUINN



Talking Bolinder - Ronnie Byrne, Dublin; Andy Maloney, Ferbane; and Joe Lambe, Tullamore.

## SUMMER CIC

Offaly IWAI has had a busy few months, starting with a cruise in company in conjunction with Kildare IWAI during August on the Shannon in the beautiful waters of Carnadoe, Kilglass and Grange Loughs. Local Strokestown company Wake to Wake Water Sports (Tel: 083 1911611) provided a great afternoons entertainment in Kilglass Lough for the younger crew members with their Mastercraft, towing doughnuts and banana boat.

## GRAND CANAL OFFALY FLOATING FESTIVAL

19 – 28 Sept.

Twenty two boats provided a fantastic colourful backdrop to the festival activities in Tullamore Harbour area. The festival commenced with the launch at Tullamore Central Library by Offaly County Council Cathaoirleach Sinead Dooley. Welcoming the visiting boat crews Councillor Dooley highlighted the significant importance to Offaly of the Grand Canal and its potential for tourism development, local communities and user groups should be maximised so that festivals like this can flourish and encourage more users onto the canals. She noted the



Winning Photo - Are we there yet?

work of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland in their campaign against the proposed Waterways Ireland Canal Bye-laws and that all the Councillors were delighted to be able to support the IWAI campaign. She hopes that the final bye-laws will be appropriate for use and allow Offaly County Council to build on the potential for water based tourism which is one of its priorities.

The festival offered something for everyone including kids, adults and visiting boaters with a programme covering two packed weekends including historical exhibitions, canal photography competition, canal talks, children's fishing competition, canoe demonstration, a canal focused Tullamore Rhymers night, heritage canal boats, barge cruises, raft race and a mystery bus tour to one of Offaly's hidden gems Lough Boora Parklands for visiting boaters.

Donal Boland provided a fascinating talk 'Kilrush to Liverpool & beyond' -Irelands steam powered interconnector and information network. This was followed by a presentation to the original Offaly 3 Anniversaries 2004 Committee along with the announcement of the Slieve Bloom photography competition winner, after which boats crews and guests retired to the bar to watch the hurling final and enjoy a barbeque and music night kindly supported by Hugh Lynch's.

On the final Sunday water gave way to diesel power as the Offaly IWAI working Bolinder engine was started and demonstrated by retired bargeman Andy Maloney. Andy talked the crowd through the workings of the Bolinder which was synonymous with barges in the 1930's and had a very special starting ritual and engine sound.

Marcella Corcoran Kennedy TD visited the festival during the

afternoon and after Andy's engine demonstration met some of the visiting boaters from Northern Ireland, Dublin, Kildare, Carlow and Meath and Italy.

The overall feedback from the visiting boaters was of having had a great experience in Tullamore with the varied events and welcome from the town with a commitment to return next year. Offaly IWAI conducted a survey with the visiting skippers on their experience getting to Tullamore by boat and during their stay, the results will be published and shared with Waterways Ireland, Offaly County Council and Tullamore Chambers of Commerce.

## KNOW YOUR BOAT COURSE

This year saw a record number of Lady Skippers attend the course in the beautiful restored Kilbeggan Harbour Buildings. The courses will be held again in 2015. Gift Vouchers are available at 0872252772.

## AGM AND TALK

Offaly IWAI AGM will take place on Thursday 11 December 2014 at Hugh Lynch's at 7.30pm. The meeting will be followed by a talk on the history of Ireland's famous yacht *Asgard* presented by Pat Murphy.

## BALLYCOMMON CANAL RENEWAL GROUP

Offaly and Kildare IWAI members attended in numbers the Ballycommon Canal Renewal Group Family Barbeque Day at the entrance to the Kilbeggan Line. Boaters were treated to a foraging experience on the Sunday morning with sloe berries proving popular with certain distillers who have promised to share their end product next year.

## TOURISM IDEAS FORUM

The Tourism Ideas Forum was organised by Offaly Local



Tullamore Rhymers in action

Community Development Committee and Offaly Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning SPC to facilitate high level consultation for the preparation of the Local Economic and Community Plan on the cross cutting theme of tourism.

The main objectives of the workshop were:

- (i) To examine how Offaly can further develop its tourism offering, attract new visitors and generate economic and social benefits for the whole county.
- (ii) To identify further opportunities to promote and market Offaly Tourism and develop a new model for co-ordinating tourism activity among key stakeholders.

Offaly IWAI were invited to attend this half day forum and contributed to discussions and ideas on how to develop the Grand Canal potential in Offaly.

## TULLAMORE DRY DOCK STILL CLOSED

The dry docks in Tullamore remain closed to boaters as yet another boating session ends.

Waterways Ireland advise that access to the dry dock is not possible as the lifting bridge cannot be used due to health and safety issues and that the drainage system has been compromised on the outlet side of the dry dock.

The end result is that the Tullamore Dry Dock remains closed to boaters and the local businesses who benefited from supplying services to the users of the dry dock are seeing no sign of that business in Tullamore.

Photos: John Dolan