

## Inland Waterways News

### Restore the Royal!

*Padraig O Brolchain*

The story of the founding of the RCAG in 1974 has been told many times: how Ian Bath called a meeting in Coolmine school, and how the gospel spread to other groups in towns along the Royal until the group covered the length of the canal.

While it all started in Dublin, there were already the seeds of activity all along the canal; the RCAG provided an umbrella. Unlike the IWAI, which was founded to prevent further closures on the waterways, the RCAG has seen its role as one of **restoration**: the early work of the Dublin Branch began with restoration work on the 12th lock at Blanchardstown.



The Branch was prominent from the start, and the work of Eddie Slane is legendary. Allen O'Leary was at that first meeting and is still an active member of the Branch. The early projects consisted mainly of cleaning, and rubbish removal, but then with the assistance of the IWAI and Arthur Guinness (who very generously provided a premises in Watling Street), a lock gate factory was established. This was no mean achievement, and led to further factories on the canal.

Along the way, as part of the activities of the Branch, a boat-house was constructed at Confey, to house weed-cutting machinery and other items to assist in the restoration work. The Confey boat-house is still being maintained by the Branch.

With the take-over of the canal by the OPW, restoration work became their responsibility, and the Branch focused to a greater degree on applying pressure for the eventual opening of the canal. At this stage it was acknowledged that but for the work of the RCAG, the Royal Canal would have been lost forever. This at least was success of a sort. However the canal was not yet open to navigation.

There now began a period of frustration, one step forward followed by two steps back. Access was denied at both ends. The Dublin Branch clearly had a strong interest in the restoration of access via the Liffey, but what could they do?

The Branch decided in 1999 to host a rally along the 70 miles that were navigable, and invited all the other branches to join in. The success of this event is now history. Attention was drawn to the canal, and things were seen to happen.

Now in the year 2000 the Branch has combined with the IWAI to (hopefully) bring some boats from the Liffey to meet boats from the Royal for a very special occasion. This event will now become part of our history, however it turns out. Let us hope that it will be a success.