

Inland Waterways News

The Waterways Visitor Centre

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With the transfer of the canal network from CIE to the Office of Public Works (OPW) in 1986, the Shannon Navigation, the Barrow Navigation and the Grand and Royal Canals were for the first time the responsibility of a single authority. By the early 1990s the Royal Canal was navigable between Blanchardstown in Co Dublin and Mullingar in Co Westmeath; the restoration of the Ballinamore & Ballyconnell Canal (now the Shannon-Erne Waterway) in Counties Cavan and Leitrim was in progress.

The heritage and amenity values of the waterways were at last recognised and appreciated. As part of the overall optimism, a decision was taken to build a Waterways Visitor Centre to explain and promote the waterways network to the general public.

For several reasons, the centre was built in the Grand Canal Docks in Ringsend. It seemed appropriate, given the long association of the area with the commercial past of the waterways, that the basin was given a role in their new recreational future. The docklands area had been designated a rejuvenation area by Dublin Corporation and it was hoped that the Centre would help to create a water-based focus for the new developments there.

It was decided to build over the water as the OPW owned no land in the area, but had total control of the water body. The design drew its inspiration from the physical forms of the nearby buildings, most of which are large and have simple geometry. The Waterways Visitor Centre is made up of primary elements of cube, cylinder and triangle, combined with beams and columns. The choice of materials throughout reflected boat and ship design, with metal outside and timber inside.

The Waterways Visitor Centre was opened on 24 June 1993 by Noel Dempsey TD, the minister with responsibility for the OPW at that time. When it opened, the building won a regional award from the Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland (RIAI) and was short-listed for the RIAI gold medal. It was included in the list of the top ten buildings for the triennial medal at that time. In 1999 it represented Dublin in **Capitals of Europe**, an exhibition of city architecture that took place in Berlin.



The aim of the Centre is to explain the significance, in our modern world, of a network of inland waterways developed some 200 years ago. The permanent exhibition provides information on the many different aspects of Ireland's inland waterways: engineering and recreation, history and natural history, canal construction and restoration, art and literature. One of the models is a map of Ireland showing the principal waterways, including those that are closed at the present but that, it is hoped, will be restored to navigation in the future. Another is a working model of a lock, to demonstrate the engineering concepts involved. More detailed information on locks and how they work, and an account of how they developed over the years, is provided on a nearby wall-panel. Art and literature are also covered. Water has always inspired poets and painters, and the canals and rivers of Ireland are no exception.

Waterways Visitor Centre

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Opening hours

June to September: daily, 0930–1730

October to May: Wednesday to Saturday, 1230–1700