

## The Waterways Renaissance Awards 2007

At a prestigious evening held in March at the Imperial War Museum North, Manchester, the Chesterfield Canal Partnership received what, hopefully, will be the first of many future awards. CCP won the Partnership Category of The Waterways Trust and British Urban Regeneration Association Waterways Renaissance Awards 2007 presented to Councillor Harold Laws, Chair of the Chesterfield Canal Partnership Executive Steering Group, by Morrison Construction, sponsors of the Partnership Category.

The presentation was undoubtedly the highlight of a memorable evening spent in the company of some of the foremost names in the waterway restoration movement. It was extremely gratifying to receive congratulatory messages from several respected individuals who were attending. Their good wishes demonstrated the high regard in which the work of the Partnership and the Trust is widely held.

The evening was hosted by John Craven OBE, Vice President of The Waterways Trust, who welcomed around three hundred representatives from various organisations involved in waterway regeneration projects. Representing the Canal Partnership were Councillors Michael Storey and Sheila Place, Nottinghamshire County Council, Councillor Laws, North East Derbyshire District Council, Cathy Cooke, Derbyshire County Council, John Nuttall, British Waterways, Geraint Coles, Canal Partnership Development Manager, John Lower and David Trickett from the Canal Trust. The audience were all invited finalists for the ten available awards which has one similarity with the Oscars in that no one knows the outcome in advance.

So, following an address given by Jon Ladd, Chief Executive of BURA, a most enjoyable dinner and an introduction to the awards by Judith Grice OBE, Chair of the Assessment Panel, it was time for the business of the evening. After what seemed an age of congratulating the winners and runners-up in the first seven categories *the* moment arrived; Category number 8, Partnership. Those of us on the CCP table were not fully aware of which other organisations were also in contention for the Partnership Award. Neither had we taken much comfort from the fact that this was the Canal Partnership's first attendance at the Awards and our table was one of the furthest from the presentation area; the omens weren't promising .....

The envelope was opened and the first announcement made; Commended ...the Ashby Canal Restoration Project, h'mm. Also Commended.... Bradley Arm Canal Enhancement Scheme, oh well. Runner -up, here we go, Chesterfield...no ... Spalding Water Taxi! It was at this moment we started to look at each other with rather curious expressions on our faces. We couldn't really have won, could we? Perhaps there was another finalist besides us. Then the announcement we hadn't really expected to hear; Winner of the Partnership Category ...Chesterfield Canal Partnership. For a moment nobody moved in amazement, then, after half-hearing John Craven's description of the Project, somewhat self-consciously we all made the long journey down to the bright lights on the stage to be the centre of attention for a few minutes. The presentation was made, handshakes were accepted, photographs taken and Geraint Coles made the acceptance speech. We finally made our way back to the table still not quite believing what had happened but in the possession of a very elegant and framed certificate.

In the Panel's view the Partnership embraces all sections of society and gives empowerment to many. The relationship between the public and the voluntary sector has been crucial and has shown the value and wealth of experience that the voluntary sector can bring to a project.

So, a memorable evening which got even better when, in the following Category, Recreation and Tourism, Kiveton Waters developed by British Waterways, was adjudged Runner-up to The Falkirk Wheel. The Chesterfield Canal had scooped two national awards at one event. Omens for the future? Who knows? But what is clear from the evening is that the many projects in which the Canal Trust and the Partnership are currently engaged will provide the opportunity for the organisations to enter The Waterways Renaissance Awards again over the coming years. With Categories in Area Based Regeneration, Design and Construction, Historic Environment, Recreation and Tourism plus Partnership to enter, the A61 Corridor Development, Renishaw Restoration, Staveley – Killamarsh design work, Tapton Lock Visitor Centre and activities, the New Dawn Project and the development of the Canal Partnership with the delivery of these projects, the Chesterfield should begin to receive increased national recognition which began on that Wednesday evening in March.

As a footnote to the report above the feeling within the Canal Trust and Partnership is that the objectives sought through detailed planning and sustained hard work by many individuals over a long period of time are beginning to be realised. The vision of a restored canal and Rother Valley Link, despite some formidable obstacles to be overcome, is beginning to look increasingly achievable. In looking forward to the future, however, it is worth recalling the Canal Society and Trust was formed over thirty years ago and the Canal Partnership more than ten. During those early years the Society saw many restoration projects completed successfully elsewhere and others awarded major funding. It is only in recent years that the Chesterfield has begun to attract similar major investment with 11.5 miles of Canal including 35 locks restored since the turn of the Millennium. The Trust does not have a large membership and is not a huge or a wealthy organisation. What it is fortunate in possessing is a determined but realistic and organised management, some experienced canal enthusiasts whose expertise is readily available and a growing number of willing volunteers. Equally important is the recognition by the Canal Partnership of the Trust as a valued member.

Much of the Trust's work in the past was given to enlisting the support of the communities and organisations through which the Canal passes, of local politicians and MPs. This work still goes on and will continue. To have reached the stage at which the Trust now finds itself is a tribute to those members and friends who had the restoration dream at a time when few others did, who worked against the odds to achieve small but significant gains and then saw the momentum increase as their efforts persuaded others of the value of restoration. It has been said, with some justification, that in the past the Trust and the Partnership have not made as much of their achievements publicly as they might have done even though there was much to be proud of. In many ways it is enjoyable to know from the results obtained that the correct approach is being used, albeit quietly: but Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2007 wasn't half a wonderful experience!