

PRESS RELEASE

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NATIONAL WATERWAYS MUSEUM, ELLESMERE PORT, CELEBRATES AMAZING OCTOGENARIAN VOLUNTEERS WITH 'OBE'

A new Octogenarian Boating Ensemble (OBE) at the National Waterways Museum in Ellesmere Port was celebrated by the Canal & River Trust charity on Wednesday 24 July to mark the amazing contribution of nearly 20 volunteers, who are all over 80.



Canal & River Trust

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Canal & River Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 7807276 and registered charity number 1146792, registered office address: National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port.

The Trust's national chief executive Richard Parry joined the museum's volunteers at a celebration afternoon tea on Wednesday 24 July to thank the long serving volunteers, who represent about a quarter of the museum's volunteer force.

The whole idea started as a light-hearted remark, after museum volunteer Jeff Fairweather, a retired assistant manager at The Guards Polo Club in Windsor Great Park and former HGV driver and transport manager, turned 80 on New Year's Eve last year. He discovered he wasn't alone and nearly 20 of his colleagues in the big '80 club' share his passion for volunteering at the National Waterways Museum.

The group make a vital contribution to the successful running of the museum, despite their advancing years, and collectively have contributed over 50,000 hours' service.

Like all volunteers, they bring an incredible range of skills, from IT and joinery to technology and engineering expertise, which they put to good use maintaining the museum grounds and boat collection, assisting with conservation of the extensive canal archive, caring for the period workers cottages and initiating a crochet group.

Volunteer Jeff explained: "The OBE 'Octogenarian Boating Ensemble' began as a joke with colleagues and then blossomed from there. When you start looking, it is amazing how many of us have hit the big eight zero, but we are all still keen to carry on.

"I started volunteering here in 2011, after moving to the area. I was looking for something to fill my Saturdays and never looked back. I'm proud of being part of a fantastic team of staff and volunteers operating and maintaining our heritage site, grounds, locks and boats. I was honoured to have been chairman of the Boat Museum Society and Boat Museum Trust for five years.

"You work outside in a beautiful place and it's a great way to keep physically fit and your brain active. I love it and I've made some good friends. I would say to anyone who might be considering volunteering here: it's never too late. There are opportunities for all, so, get out of your armchair, come join us and improve your health and wellbeing."

Ani Sutton, destination and attractions manager for the Museum added: "Our volunteers have a wealth of experience and knowledge which they give to our charity and pass onto the younger generations. They do a fantastic job and, in return, volunteering returns a sense of achievement, purpose and belonging.

"We loved Jeff's idea of an 'OBE' club. When we started adding up the number of years' service contributed by this select group, we thought it was only right that we shout from the rooftops about their amazing work and thank them for their outstanding contribution.

"The Trust couldn't operate the National Waterways Museum, packed full of historic boat treasures, without the support of volunteers. Our current team are brilliant, but we are always keen to hear from anyone who'd like to get involved – whatever their age!"

Among those receiving a special 'OBE' recognition were: Jeff Fairweather, Mike Turpin, Cath Turpin, Lynn Potts, Jane Lane, John Davies, Frank Perra, John Hughes, Bill Darch, Roly Smallwood, Derek Speakman, Bob Dean, Bob Thomas, Di Ascott, Stuart Gardiner, Ann Gardiner.

Known locally as the Boat Museum, the National Waterways Museum site is located at the junction of the Manchester Ship Canal and the Shropshire Union Canal. It displays a fascinating collection of historic boats, waterways artifacts and steam-driven machinery, as well as telling the story of Britain's canals.

For more information about visiting the museum, check out the website <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/places-to-visit/national-waterways-museum>. Adult tickets cost £12.95, with discounts for children, seniors and families, with tickets giving free entry for a year. The museum is open seven days a week during the school summer holidays until 1 September.

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Canal & River Trust

Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

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