

Chair's report AGM 28th September 2018.

I look back at my last chair's report and realise now that it was written in another world. I had shortly been persuaded by Ronni that it would be a good idea if I volunteered for the committee. I had been volunteering for CRT before but that didn't fit in particularly well with my boating life so I thought, well it's all about canals and it's about trading so why not! I had been to the 2016 AGM and had left the meeting thinking that RCTA could be an interesting project and might be fun, so easily fell victim to Ronni's blandishments.

At the time Ronni rang me, I was sitting outside the pub at the end of Harecastle tunnel and took the call using my old Nokia. It soon became apparent that this trusty piece of technology wasn't going to cut the mustard if I was going to get involved and it has been a learning experience ever since. New phone, new dongle, rejoining Facebook (which I had just left thinking it wasn't much use to me) and rejoining the world of IT and admin which I thought I had left behind. Following hard on this came the next suggestion ~ would I consider becoming chair and again I thought, well I've done this before, how hard can it be? I'm sure I can do it, so yes.

Initially, being chair was very intimidating. No obvious role or responsibilities but a responsibility nevertheless. I also realised that although I have been boating for nearly 20 years, I must have been pottering around the waterways in a dream world or, more likely, worrying too much about whatever job I was doing at the time as I didn't seem to know enough about anything. Everybody on the committee seemed to know everybody else and everything there was to know about canals going back to the 1790's but not me. Fortunately, before I panicked, I realised that this was okay. As long as there was somebody on the steering committee or a member who knew what was required and could make suggestions on what to do, I would manage to get by. In other words, team work would be the answer and the cure for my early anxiety.

Unfortunately, shortly after I became chair we had a 'committee meltdown' and at one very stressful moment I thought there might only be me left. As one of our members pointed out during the furore, the committee were going through the process of 'forming, storming and norming'. We were clearly in the middle of 'storming', and would we survive to get to the 'norming' stage? My own thoughts at this time were that RCTA is important, it is a useful and valuable project, and I for one was carrying on regardless and the association will get through this. I also thought if there was one thing I could achieve as chair then that would be to ensure RCTA would become a safe place to volunteer; where people would not feel inhibited to put forward their ideas; no diktat from on high; a place where there would be respect for different points of view; and none of that now so typical and so very boring finger pointing and bickering which bedevils social media.

The good news is that I actually did not need do anything to achieve such an environment. It happens that the current steering committee members are an easy-going bunch and their default mode of operation is teamwork. If somebody is hard pushed another person will step forward to help. We have a wide range of personalities in the team from full on 'let's do this, it can only go brilliantly and hang the consequences' to 'err, just let me just cross these t's and dot these i's' and then I will think about it' (that's me). So, I would like to take this opportunity to thank every member of the steering committee for all their hard work and enthusiasm during the year. Every member of the committee has played an important part in something during the year and even if it was just a single contribution, at the time it was made it was valuable if not vital. I would like to say a special thank you to Justina Evans and Gillian Cookson who are both retiring for their valuable contributions

over the past few years. I must also say thank you to our members who have rallied round and made the year a success.

My other objective as chair was to make sure that we didn't get side-lined during the changes at CRT which were gradually revealed as the year progressed. This has been quite frustrating. Firstly, trying to sort out what the implications meant for roving traders; secondly, I think CRT have been too busy doing their own 'forming and storming' to give much thought to our agenda; and thirdly, trying to work out who to talk to or what levers to pull to make sure we would be heard. I'm a great supporter of CRT but it has been a difficult sending in emails to resolve member's issues and getting no satisfactory reply. Everything seems to get parked with no follow up and I don't think a single issue that I have raised during the year has been resolved to my satisfaction.

Fortunately, there is some good news, just as I finish my time as chair we have at last managed to arrange a meeting to discuss closer working with CRT. It will be interesting to see what happens next and I look forward to the upcoming year.

Andrew Mills.