

AVON NAVIGATION TRUST PRESS RELEASE

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Cue fanfare, and a Royal re-run, as Trust celebrates waterways rescue

THE Avon Navigation Trust and the Canal & River Trust will have a new handle on water music when, with Bancroft Cruisers' help, they recreate the late Queen Mother's two boat trips to relaunch the Avon and the Stratford Canal as navigable waterways.

Members of The Orchestra of the Swan's wind and brass section will play aboard two floating pontoons at the July 4 event to mark the 50th anniversary of the restoration of the canal and the 40th year since the river was reopened from Evesham to Stratford-upon-Avon. Avon Navigation Trust's (ANT) VIP guests will include representatives of the Royal Engineers and Birmingham's Winson Green Prison, who both sent many teams to help with the original work.

There too will be Job Hutchings, whose father led the drive to save the canal, and Nicholas Barwell, whose pioneering dad is the Avon's local hero. They will unveil commemorative plaques.

Young Midlands industrialist Charles Douglas Barwell OBE was prompted to act when a 1948 family boat trip from Birmingham was unceremoniously halted by the choked up route. He and an army of volunteers moved heaven, and a lot of earth and mud, to reclaim the river from Tewkesbury to Evesham. Tireless Birmingham architect David Hutchings MBE, who had already spearheaded the successful rescue of the canal, went on to clear the way through to Stratford.

"They were both pioneers," comments waterways charity ANT's Engineering Director Roger Clay, who has organised the event with the support of town groups, including The Stratford on Avon Canal Society.

"The river and the canal became the life blood of the area's leisure and tourism industry. We owe a lot to both men, and to all those who supported them."

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother travelled by narrowboat to officially open the canal in 1964, and to celebrate the river relaunch in 1974.

Some of the people who were there then will be among the guests, along with representatives of organisations who supported the restorations, including the National Trust, RSC, local authorities, The Stratford on Avon Canal Society, the Inland Waterways Association and the Canal & River Trust.

The Queen Mother's two journeys will be repeated to take the groups to the unveiling ceremony and concert at Bancroft Lock at approximately 3.30pm, before boarding Canal and River Tours' new full-size barge Jennifer May to hear the moving concert by the Orchestra of the Swan, pushed along the river by Eric the tug boat.

"We were keen to have a floating orchestra because David Hutchings had the whole of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra on a floating platform of barges in 1964," adds Roger. The award winning Orchestra's Artistic Director David Curtis says performing on the river will be a first. "We've played on a train to London for Chiltern Railways, but never on water," says David.

He says the Orchestra was delighted to be asked to take part, not least because it's another opportunity to engage with the local community.

"We are keen to show everyone that we're not a stuffy bunch in penguin suits playing Mozart

Symphonies. We do wear suits, and we do play Mozart, but this shows a different facet of what we do.”

The ANT event, which will also include a specially composed poem by Canal Laureate Jo Bell, will be followed by the town’s crowd-pulling July 5 and 6 River Festival, which is packed full of free events.

PICTURE CAPTIONS

PICTURE 1: The crowds watch as the Queen Mother is taken through a lock while on her 1964 canal trip (Photo by courtesy of The Stratford on Avon Canal Society).

PICTURE 2: The Queen Mother, accompanied by David Hutchings (standing) and Robert Aikman waves to the crowds during her trip along the river which formed part of the 1974 celebration. (Photo: Guy Johnson: The Stratford on Avon Canal Society).

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. For further details, please contact Lynne Powell at Crucial PR on 01386 870154 or you can email lynne.powell@crucialpr.com or log on to www.avonnavigationtrust.org

2. Picture opportunities. The canal voyage will leave Stratford-upon-Avon’s Birmingham Road lock, and the river boat from behind the Holiday Inn at approximately 2.30pm. The floating orchestra will leave Colin Witter Lock at about 3pm. The parties will arrive at Bancroft Lock at approximately 3.30pm for the unveiling ceremony and a concert. The orchestra will move off downstream at around 5.30pm.

3. The Stratford on Avon Canal Society will be displaying its archive pictures and films from the original opening events at the River Festival. The aim of the Society is to Conserve the Stratford upon Avon Canal and promote its fullest use. For more information, visit www.stratfordcanalsociety.org.uk

4. The Orchestra of the Swan is from Shakespeare’s Stratford-upon-Avon and is Associate Orchestra at Town Hall Birmingham. For more information log onto www.orchestraoftheswan.org

5. For more information about the Stratford-upon-Avon River Festival, visit www.stratfordriverfestival.co.uk

6. For more information about the Canal & River Trust, visit www.canalrivertrust.org.uk





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