

# THE PORTAL



THE JOURNAL OF THE FRIENDS OF THE CROMFORD CANAL  
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The Portal is the quarterly magazine of the Friends of the Cromford Canal.

The Friends of the Cromford Canal exist to promote the restoration to navigable condition of the whole of the Cromford Canal.

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[editor@focromfordcanal.org.uk](mailto:editor@focromfordcanal.org.uk). Pictures for The Portal or the Web Site should be scanned at 200 dpi (dots per inch) and saved to a size of 600 by 400 pixels and may be sent electronically or on disk or CD.

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# WHERE TO GO NEXT

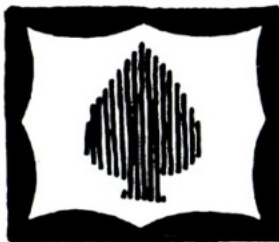


**W**ork on progressing the aims of the Friends can seem to be painfully slow at times: I'm always saying that it's going to be a fairly long time before we can put serious spades in the ground and the Committee are mindful of the fact that we run the risk of Members' enthusiasm and commitment evaporating if nothing concrete's done. However, things are moving behind the scenes and a "softly softly catchee monkey" approach may bear fruit in the next year or so. There are a couple of possibilities.

I suspect we may have enough cash in the Bank to be able to consider starting work on putting the Ironville flight of locks back into water. We have actually applied for (and been turned down for) a grant to cover all of this work, which was costed on the basis of employing contractors to get the work done within a timescale laid down by the funding provider. Without these time constraints and using specialised and skilled volunteer labour, it may be possible to get some of this

comparatively simple work done, to improve the environment of the canal in Ironville.

Another approach is to get somebody else to do the work for you. This has the wholly desirable side effect of costing us nothing, whilst earning the organisation doing it "brownie points". There are two schemes which may happen in the next year or two: the work to create a Marina at Langley Mill, following an opencasting operation, is designed to extend the bottom end of the canal and maybe perhaps replace the first lock, which was going to have to be replaced anyway, as the original is under the A610. The other one is on the Pinxton Arm, where we hear that UK Coal are working on the design for the final restoration and landscaping of the Smotherly site, between the end of the section presently in water at Pinxton and Pye Bridge. Whispers are they're intending to put a path back along the line of the canal - wouldn't it be nice if they could be persuaded to put the canal back, too?



I'm pleased to be able to tell you that the Sponsored Walk has so far raised over £1750 - this with some sponsorship money still to arrive. We've also "won" a pair of walking sticks which were found at the Cromford end of the walk - did a miracle take place and they weren't needed any more, or was their owner just too knackered to pick them up?

As the first part of our Winter programme, we've having a Christmas Getogether in Ironville Church Hall on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> December - bring you own mince pies and sausage rolls, have a drink and a natter, and see the canal as it was 30 years ago when Hugh Potter

shows us a selection of slides taken in the 70s from the collection of Len Waller, which has been donated to the Friends.

Unfortunately, the planning application for the Butterley Engineering site has gone to appeal, with the objections over the possible destruction of Butterley Tunnel totally ignored. Your Hon Engineer is working furiously behind the scenes with English Heritage and others in an effort to safeguard out interests and secure the future of the tunnel in a form in which it could be restored and used - more news next issue, hopefully!



## BOOK REVIEW "THE CROMFORD CANAL"

*by The Editor*

Books about the Cromford Canal tend to be like London buses: nothing for years, then two arrive almost at once! Our archivist, Hugh Potter, has been working on this book for some time and I was delighted when one dropped through the door just before Press date for review.

In its 128 pages, the book takes us on a walk (in historic pictures) along the Canal from Cromford to Langley Mill, with side excursions up the Leawood Arm and Pinxton Branch. The book also includes pictures of the work of the Cromford Canal Society and the

ECP&DA at Langley Mill, showing the restoration work which was done there. It's nice to see all this work acknowledged in print - without it there would be much less of the canal in existence today. The many hundreds of pictures do include some which appear on the web site - it was heartening to see that the reader is directed there for coloured pictures, as the book is in black-and-white. It has to be said that the reproduction of the pictures is very good - I know Hugh was particularly concerned by this aspect of the undertaking but his misgivings were totally unfounded.



There are many interesting pictures of the canal being used, under repair and in dereliction. It's interesting to note how virtually all the canal-side buildings have been swept away in the last 30 years or so - whole communities seem to have vanished, lost mainly to open-casting. It's also interesting to see such things as the construction work on the Transco site which covered one end of Hagg Tunnel - at least it gives us an idea of what we've got to undo!

If you haven't already got one, get Santa to bring you one, or get it from Hugh himself on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> December - see details elsewhere in this issue!

"The Cromford Canal" by Hugh Potter - ISBN 0 7524 2802 0 - published by Tempus Publishing at £12.99 and available from the Secretary or Hugh himself. Copies bought via the Friends make money for our funds!

## E-MAIL TO THE EDITOR

*(About the walk)*

**A** well organised event yesterday with superb weather and a very pleasant 15 mile trek from Langley Mill to Cromford Wharf in excellent company. The route was certainly varied. Across farmland where the line of the canal is barely discernible, along overgrown and seemingly long-forgotten walkways, diversions around various obstructions including the steep inclines of the A610 embankment and the never-ending steps around the Transco works near Ambergate. Oh, and a light railway / steam hauled train ride thrown in for good measure!

A most enjoyable affair, marred only by the fact that the last three miles into Cromford seemed more like twenty

three! But the sight of the Leawood Pump House chimney meant that the end was just around the next bend, or the next one, or ...

All in all, well worth making the 120 mile round trip to be there, not only for the event itself, but also for certain participants' jocular observations regarding a certain Mr Dominic and his ability to organise his cruising to coincide with it!

My thanks to the organisers and fellow walkers for making an "out of town" feel so welcome.

Kind regards,

Kevin Maslin



# THE WEED ON THE BASINGSTOKE CANAL

by Benny Graham

*(Editor's Note - I heard Benny recite this poem at a "do" in the summer and he's kindly given permission for me to publish it here. I do have to emphasise that this does NOT reflect the policy of the Friends!)*

**T**here's a curious little problem on the Basingstoke Canal,  
A problem that could bring you to a halt.  
After years of restoration the way could now be blocked,  
By a vegetable that isn't worth it's salt.

## *Chorus*

So it's rig for silent running boys,  
And please reduce your speed,  
Keep that engine quiet bonny lad,  
And don't disturb the weed!

This rare and noble weed was living by the waterside,  
Where no-one had suspected it could be,  
Till a bloke took off his anorak to sit out in the sun,  
And the sight he saw just filled his heart with glee.

It was the Tasteless Waterpepper that flourished by the bank,  
The botanist could not believe his luck!  
The discovery of the century, it made his life complete,  
While the boaters really couldn't give a damn!!

## *Chorus*

There were phone calls, faxes, E-Mails all flying to and fro,  
From environmentalists across the land,  
"Protect it at all costs" they said "save that little weed",  
And the whole affair got rather out of hand.

Close the navigation down, some said, to our dismay,  
When we'd fought so hard to open up the cut,  
We'd beaten off bureaucracy and all that mud and slime,  
Now a tiny little plant could have it shut.

## *Chorus*

Now I think it's time for compromise and a bit of common sense,  
So I'm sending off to Europe for a grant.  
To build a six bed mansion for meself, the wife and kids,  
And a fourteen acre sanctuary for the plant.



So let quiet be the watchword as you pass along the line,  
Don't disturb the flora round about the place.  
Keep the cut and towpath open for the people to enjoy...  
And keep a little drop of Weedol.. just in case!!

*Chorus*

## CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

*by Mike Kelley*

Our society is beginning to buzz, and yet it was only this June, at the beginning of the long hot summer that I was a little down, when committee meetings were unable to agree on basic principles of progress. Our main committee is a group of wonderful people dedicated to the reopening of the Cromford Canal, so I shouldn't have worried, and now things are happening.

On Saturday, 13 September I was able to be present at the launch of Amber Valley's first Autumn Walking Festival. We were part of that festival with our annual sponsored walk and Amber Valley helped to advertise it for us. Indeed one or two on the walk told me they had found out about the sponsored walk by the advertising Amber Valley Council did for us. I was given assurance at this meeting that next year we would get even more coverage. Our stand was there and many FCC leaflets were handed out.

The very next day was our second annual sponsored walk. With so many events taking place that same day; I was a little anxious as to what our turnout would be. So I was delighted when informed that 110 walkers had taken part, together with a host of background organisers and support. The weather was perfect, maybe too perfect for some, for with temperatures around 28 degrees it was rather warm, but better this than heavy rain. Amber Valley Tourism was there at Langley Mill

with their video cameras to see us off. Mike Harrison and Valerie Roberts were selling the FCC walk booklet they had produced and it seemed to be selling well.

We had walkers from a wide area, some even from Surrey and a group from the Ashby Canal Society. Everyone I passed, as I walked the length of the canal, was handed our FCC leaflet. Usually they were well received and many wished us luck as I handed them out. All, that is except two elderly gentlemen who I met near the dismantled Erewash Aqueduct. They were bird watchers who thought a reinstated canal would damage the bird population. This kind of misconception is a battle we have to fight. One only has to see the increase in Kingfishers on the Chesterfield Canal to know that their preconceived thoughts are erroneous.

Breakfast at the Codnor Park Reservoir was a welcome first rest. Then the railway connections over the Butterley Tunnel went perfectly, thanks to the organisers. The narrow gauge from Newlands Inn sped along to the standard gauge connection at Ripley, from where a steam engine hauled us to Hammersmith. I personally found the detour around Bullbridge/Ambergate to be the most difficult and one or two took the wrong turning there. (Something we need to note for next year) So the coffee and biscuits at Hugh Potter's house were most welcome. Thank you Hugh. The walk from

Whatstandwell to Cromford must rank as one of the most beautiful walks in the country, but especially on such a lovely sunny day, as the autumn shades begin to turn. Lovely, yes; long, very long, certainly, but even some young ones around 10 or 12 years old had made it, and some who were even older than myself. But it was worth it.

As mentioned the FCC walk book continues to sell, but now we also have a new book which has burst onto the market. It is The Cromford Canal, published by Tempus, for £12.99, and written by our very own Hugh Potter. (So put your orders in please) Not only this; but we have been invited by the Derbyshire Records Office, to research and compile the original minutes of the Cromford Canal Company into book format. This is a lot of work, but two or three of our members are taking up the challenge. Basically it will be a case of getting the microfilm on screen and transcribing it word for word, either on to paper or (probably much easier)

onto a laptop. This will then be a hardbound historical record similar to that done for the Chesterfield Canal Company.

On the 18th and 19th October there is a clean-up (not organised by us) of the last mile of the canal, to which we have been invited to help. The very next day we have a full day with the new senior management of British Waterways, namely Caroline Killeavy the new General Manager and other senior personnel. This has come about as a direct action from one of the members of our sub-committee, Peter Stone.

Then finally for October on Saturday 25th we are hosting a meeting of the Inland Waterways Association Restoration Committee. This again is a full day session. I will report the results of all these activities to you in the next edition of the Portal. Also I may have some positive development to report on the Pinxton Branch.







Walkers gather to check in at Langley Mill

*(Val Roberts)*



The check-in desk

*(Val Roberts)*



Jack Brown striding out at Hammersmith station *(Val Roberts)*

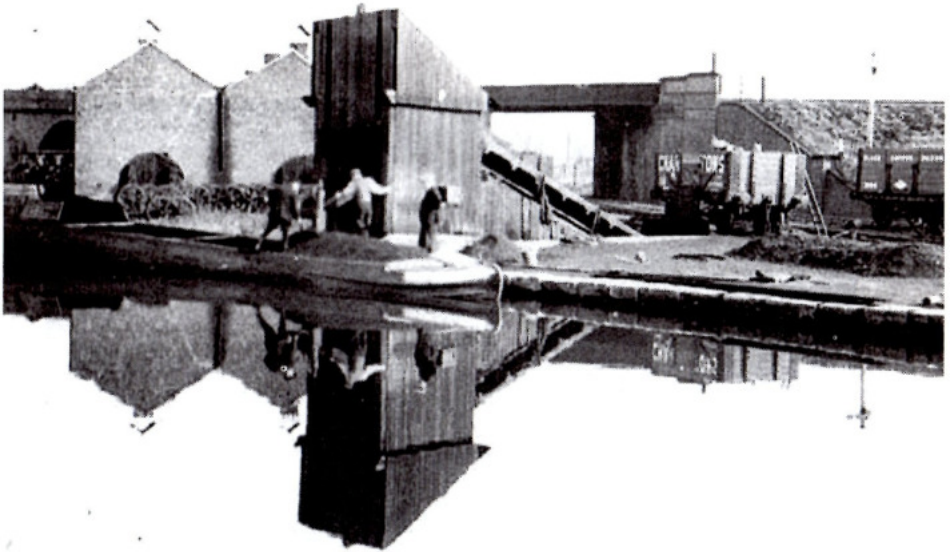


Cooling off after the walk. Are these two the owners of the two walking sticks we seem to have acquired? *(Val Roberts)*





Dick Boswell at his home in August 2003 - see article on page 17.



Loading a boat with coal from railway wagons at Barber Walker's Beggarlee Wharf, Langley Mill, where Dick loaded his boats. Traffic from this wharf had ceased by 1952.



Motorboat Mayflower and butty Excellent lie sunk below 'Langley Mill Top Lock' (13) around 1950.



"The Old House at Home" (see articles on pages 14 & 15)  
*(from a painting by Simon Waller)*



# THE WALK

by Derek Dixon

A fine Sunday morning saw over 100 people (and a few dogs) walk onto the lock side at Langley Bridge Lock. Most of them only stayed a few minutes whilst they registered their participation and pre-ordered their bacon butties and then they were off. Off on the Second Annual Sponsored Pilgrimage to Cromford. With printed notes (or the Walker's Guide) in their hands and following the well positioned marker signs, the route was easy to follow.

My companion and I left, along with a few others, about 9.30 and, as he was interested to know more about the route of the canal, I found myself giving a running commentary as we walked along. Where the canal is infilled, it is often just that, the banks and towpath can still be found usually under 6ft. of nettles. In fact one spur that has not been used for 160 years was not infilled and is still plain to see today, only the ravages of the weather and the vegetation has made any difference. After the steady climb of some 100 feet in 3 miles, half of it in the last half mile or so, we arrived at the first check point at Codnor Park Reservoir. A short break here whilst the bacon butties were devoured, then on along Golden Valley to the Newlands Inn. The narrow gauge train was soon loaded with walkers and on its way to Brand's Crossing. As the standard gauge train was not yet due, some decided to use the time to visit the church (well it was Sunday) or other exhibits on the museum site. Once on the standard gauge train, a bee-line was made for the bar and a welcome pint. At Butterley Station, Alan Calladine personally checked that carriage doors were closed and was heard to remark "that

train is full". At Hammersmith we all alighted.

After waiting for the engine to run round the train and depart back along the line, we continued the walk. Down the back of the station platform we went, across the road, and down onto the canal again. At the A610 crossing, a stiff climb up to the road, and after crossing carefully, equally steep steps down to the canal again. Now it was fairly easy going along the towpath and across the fields to Buckland Hollow, through the tunnel and along the backs of the houses along the A610 to Bullbridge. As we crossed the A610 at Bullbridge a train thundered past on the railway in front of us. A few feet further on, at the railway fence, the railway lookout asked us to wait a few seconds whilst another train rattled past. Quickly over the tracks, and three more trains passed by before we got to the top of the rise and back onto the level of the canal. A few more yards and our second checking in point, Stevenson's Car Park, and a breather. Time for a sandwich and a drink, and a chat about how it was going so far.

Off again, round the back of Stevenson's Dye Works and then up the 90+ steps (I'm sure they weren't as steep this year), down the field on the other side of the gas plant and onto the canal. Hooray, it's all level from here. Well almost, because a couple of hundred yards on is a sign telling us to go over the wall for a cup of tea. A refreshing cup of tea and a biscuit, and the latest copy of *Waterways World* still warm from the press, then away again. This time no more stops and all level. Overlooking the railway (the Matlock to London train went by), the thundering

traffic on the A6, and the River Derwent, all the way through Whatstandwell, beautiful Robin Hood, Gregory Tunnel, over Wigwell Aqueduct, and past High Peak Junction to Cromford Wharf. A final check-in and bus back home!

Thanks to the many helpers along the way; in particular Sheila, Yvonne and Hugh for checking-in, Mike and Val for

the seemingly endless supply of orange juice, Hugh and Liz for tea and biscuits, the St. John Ambulance first-aiders, Matthew for route marking, and all the walkers (over 100 again this year) who made the effort worthwhile.

See you all again next September?

## MEMORIES OF "THE OLD HOUSE AT HOME"

*by Len Waller*

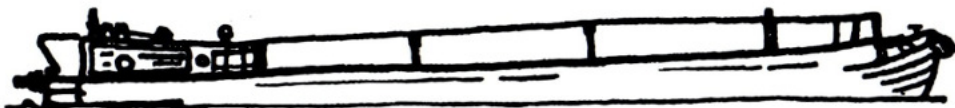
One of my earliest memories is of Sunday morning trips to "The Old House at Home" a canal-side public house on the Pinxton Branch of the Cromford Canal. I couldn't have been more than five years old. The pub was midway between Pye Bridge and Pinxton and the landlord was my uncle (and namesake) Leonard Waller.

My grandmother had a pony and trap and she and my father and an uncle made the weekly journey to the "Old House" in some style. But not by way of the towpath. Access to the pub was by a narrow lane near Wessan's timber yard at Pye Bridge which passed under an arch of the nearby railway bridge. On one occasion a train thundered over the bridge as we passed underneath it and the pony reared and

nearly tipped us out.

My uncle took over the pub in 1911. In those days there was stabling, for the horses and after the barges had left for their tourney South, night-shift miners were banging on the door by 6 am. In the 1920s there were barges belonging to Kempson's moored near Pye Bridge but they may already have been redundant. Coaling from Pinxton collieries ended during the 1914-1918 war.

By the 1970s "The Old House at Home" was "dry" owing to lack of customers. Its former location, and the whole Pinxton end of the canal branch were completely obliterated by recent opencast mining.





# MORE TALES FROM "THE OLD HOUSE AT HOME"

(from Hugh Potter)

Quite by coincidence Richard Booth sent in a cutting from Lock & Quay (the journal of Docks & Inland Waterways Executive, the forerunner of British Waterways) from 1954. It says of the Old House at Home: "The last drink was served recently following the expiry of the licence. There have been so few patrons latterly that the local magistrates have not renewed it. The licensee since 1911 has been Mr Leonard Waller. Among his regular customers at one time was an old lady of 80 who smoked a blackened clay pipe and drank her pint like any man. Mr Waller, who is now 70 and farms the land adjoining the inn, is to remain there despite the closure."

An undated newspaper cutting tells us the inn was closing on 4<sup>th</sup> April. It was owned by the D&IWE and the publican Len Waller had married the niece of former licensee, the late Henry Dawkes and took over the inn in 1911.

As can be seen in Simon Waller's painting, the canal there was above ground level so from towpath you went down 8 steps to pub and the bedroom windows were level with the canal.

Brian Gee adds: "One feature I remember was the huge outline of a shoe on one of the tables in the bar, said to have belonged to a bargee with enormous feet. The story went that anyone who could cover it got a free pint."

Going back even further, Friend Margaret Vernon's great grandfather Charles Naylor was once the landlord

of the Old House at Home. He was christened on 22.12.1839, and married Julia Grosse on 4.10.1864. He was also coal miner. He retired to live at Pye Bridge, where some of his 6 children lived. His son Harold was a photographer.

Another story was published in the Ripley & Heanor News for Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November 1959:

"On leaving at the Dog and Doublet at Pye bridge I decided to stroll gently up the canal towpath to Pinxton, via another little call at the Boat Inn, which is situated at the Pinxton end of the canal. As I ambled along the towpath my mind went back 50 or 60 years ago, when as a lad and later as a young man I knew nearly every inch of that towpath. Nearly half way to Pinxton, right by the canal, the Old House at Home used to welcome the weary travellers with a pint or two of very good ale. As I approached the spot musing, I found that it no longer existed as a pub - just a small holding.

There used to be a flat-bottomed ferry boat moored to the side of that canal, right facing the pub, for the convenience of patrons who lived or worked on the opposite side of the canal. One simply pulled at the thick hanging chain to draw the boat to either side of the canal, and as kids we thought it a treat to ferry ourselves from side to side of the canal. The landlord, or the barmaid would often rush out hurling abuse at us as we beat a hasty retreat, only to return as soon as the outraged party had gone back into the pub.

"We would also pretend to ferry very drunken men over. Three of us would pull at one bank, and just as the inebriated one was about to step ashore the three on the opposite bank would pull him back into midstream, and enjoy the flow of language that was hurled at us. "We looked on it as purely mischief, but as a young man I

received the same treatment a few times when I was scarcely sober, and I finished up in the water on one occasion when I made a desperate leap to the bank. I chuckled as I mused, but I yearned for some more of those carefree days."



## MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

by Yvonne Shattower

I hope all our Members enjoyed the lovely summer we were treated to this year; however I expect some of you will, like me, have found the heat a bit too much of a good thing at times.

It has been very quiet on the new Members front for the last couple of months, but we now have 612 active Members. Although our Membership numbers are up to 640, we lost nineteen who did not renew their Membership earlier this year. This figure will increase if those of you who have a green slip in with your magazine do not pay up!

We are planning to start regular meetings for members and their friends this winter, these will be social occasions with a speaker etc., so we hope to see some of you at these events. We will also be making greater efforts to expand our membership numbers. Next year will be a 'big push' on this issue, as the Inland Waterways Association Festival will be held at Burton on Trent over the August Bank Holiday 2004. This is one of the major waterway shows, held at different venues each year and attended by visitors from all over the country. It is, therefore, an ideal opportunity to

make our presence known countrywide and let people know that we are really serious about our project. Your Committee is already building a team to organize our display, if you would like to be involved, please contact me. We may not have the Festival so near to our area for several years, so it is vital that we make a real impact.

Talking (or rather 'writing') about the IWA Festival, I was able to get down to the event at Beale Park this year. Unfortunately it was for just one day, rather than four, but it was good to meet up with some familiar faces, and see boats there that obviously belonged to FCC Members.

Congratulations to all those who took part in the sponsored walk, Sheila and I enjoyed booking you in at the various points. I hope there weren't too many blisters the next day! After the bus left at Cromford, we found two walking sticks which are so far unclaimed. One is a wooden stick, the other an adjustable metal one. Please contact me if you know the owner, and we will get them back to you.



On Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December, our Archivist Hugh Potter will once again be putting on a display of historic photographs from the Friends archives and his own collection. His files of other historic material will be available to view, and Hugh will also be signing copies of his new book *The Cromford Canal*, reviewed elsewhere in this issue. This is

held in conjunction with a Christmas exhibition of Liz Tatam's handmade stoneware pottery. Hugh's address is on the outside back cover. Those of you who called in for a cuppa on the sponsored walk will already know it. The exhibition will be open from 11 am to 6 pm each day.

## THE LAST BOATS ON THE CROMFORD

*Hugh Potter talks to Dick Boswell of Long Eaton*

When Dick Boswell's father died in 1929, Dick began boating with his aunt and uncle, Florrie and Billy Moulds. He was just 9 at the time. Florrie was Ike Argent's mother and Billy his step father, so the two cousins Dick and Ike were brought up as brothers. At first they were working horse boats carrying coal and slack to Loughborough from Barber Walker's Beggarlee Wharf at Langley Mill. At that time Dick used to lock wheel and drive the horse. He recalls that the boats were brought down from Langley Mill to Trent Lock by one team of boatmen, then the Moulds took them across the Trent and on to Loughborough.

I asked Dick a question I have been asked myself: How did the horse boats get across the Trent when travelling between the River Soar and the Erewash Canal from Leicester, for there is no bridge as visitors to 'Trent Lock' at Long Eaton will know? Coming out of the Soar Dick recalls: "We'd get a belt on, poor old Tommy, our horse, would be almost running with our boat to get

speed up then we'd cast it off. Using shafts (long poles) they'd bring the boat well above the entrance to the Erewash Canal then they'd sheer across, still travelling in." But that left the horse on the south bank of the Trent. Two brothers, Joe and Tom Rice, used to keep the two pubs, the Navigation Inn facing the Trent and the Erewash Navigation (now the Steamboat Inn) at Trent Lock, and had a wide boat that they could shaft (ie push with a long pole) across the Trent. Onto this the boat horse stepped for its short crossing. There is a photograph of the boat in action on page 88 of Euan Corrie's book *Tales of the Old Inland Waterways* (David & Charles, 1998). From the Redhill (Soar) side, you had to shout to attract their attention. Tommy the horse, however, had his own ideas: "Little Tommy, when he gets half way across the Trent, he decides to jump over and swim the rest of the way."

After a couple of years, Billy Moulds took on the gas boats for the chemical company (Kempsons) at Pye Bridge on the Pinxton Branch. The boats were a

pair of narrowboats: the motor boat Mayflower pulling the unpowered butty Excellent. They were built by Rudkins of Leicester in 1926 and 1921, respectively, and the Mayflower had a single cylinder Bolinder engine. Dick's aunt and uncle lived on board the Excellent, whilst Dick and Ike lived on the Mayflower. The boats were painted up like other long distance narrowboats, and had all the fancy ropework: Turk's heads, swan's necks and plaiting. The boats were built like the better known Thomas Clayton boats from Oldbury, which were designed for similar work. They were wooden, completely decked over to make the hold into two huge tanks with a partition across each boat half way down the length. There was no central partition to stop side wash, but Dick recalls that the boats were not difficult to handle.

They carried gas tar from Loughborough gas works (and occasionally Kensal Green, London) to be processed at Pye Bridge. The distillation of coal to make 'town gas' left a sticky liquid residue named gas tar, from which many important chemicals could be made: naphthalene, sulphuric acid, and even saccharine. After they had pumped the boats out, Dick recalls: "me and Ike, wrapping our feet in Hessian bags, used to go into the holds with shovels. Now I ask you, was that dangerous? - no breathing masks or anything - and scrape the gas tar along the bottom to the pumps. Gas tar was quite thick, like syrup. I'm thinking back 70 years plus, I'd have been around 12 or 13."

Dick went on to run his own boats, whilst his aunt and uncle carried the gas tar to Pye Bridge until the trade ceased; exactly when is not known. With no other boats using the canal and all but the last half mile officially abandoned in 1944, the two boats were simply left to sink below Lock 13, which Dick refers

to as Langley Mill Top Lock. This is not the present Langley Mill Lock but the one that was about half a mile above it, close to where the A610 bypass now crosses the line of the canal.

With his own boats, working for the Erewash Canal Carrying Company, Dick continued to use the last half mile of the Cromford Canal, loading coal at Barber Walkers at Beggarlee Wharf for various destinations, including the mill at Sandiacre and the lace mills at Long Eaton, which were still powered by steam. Loading was a quick process once the wagons, loaded with coal from the colliery, were in place. They had bottom opening doors which dropped the coal onto a conveyor belt which transferred it into the boat, which would be gradually pushed along by hand to ensure an even load. However, unloading was not so easy as Dick and his fellow boatmen, Walter Turberfield and his son 'Pinky', had to do this themselves with shovels!

As they journeyed down the canal, they were not gauged at Langley Mill, but at Whitehouse [Stanton] Lock just below where the Nutbrook Canal used to join the Erewash Canal, then at Trent Lock. The boats were gauged to ascertain the weight of coal on board and thus the amount of toll that was to be paid (calculated at so much per ton per mile). However, Dick did not pay this personally, as it went onto the Erewash Canal Carrying Co account.

He later worked for various narrowboat companies, then on big passenger launches on the river Trent, then he skippered cruisers with groups of school children on holidays. In the early 1950s, "I finally got the water out of my veins". Since then he has returned to the canals only for pleasure on boats belonging to various members of his family.



Footnote: The regular traffic to Pye Bridge ran until the Second World War, but there is very little known about it. If any Friends had memories of these boats, or better still photographs,

Friends' Archivist Hugh Potter would be delighted to hear from you. His contact details are on the back page.

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