

THE PORTAL



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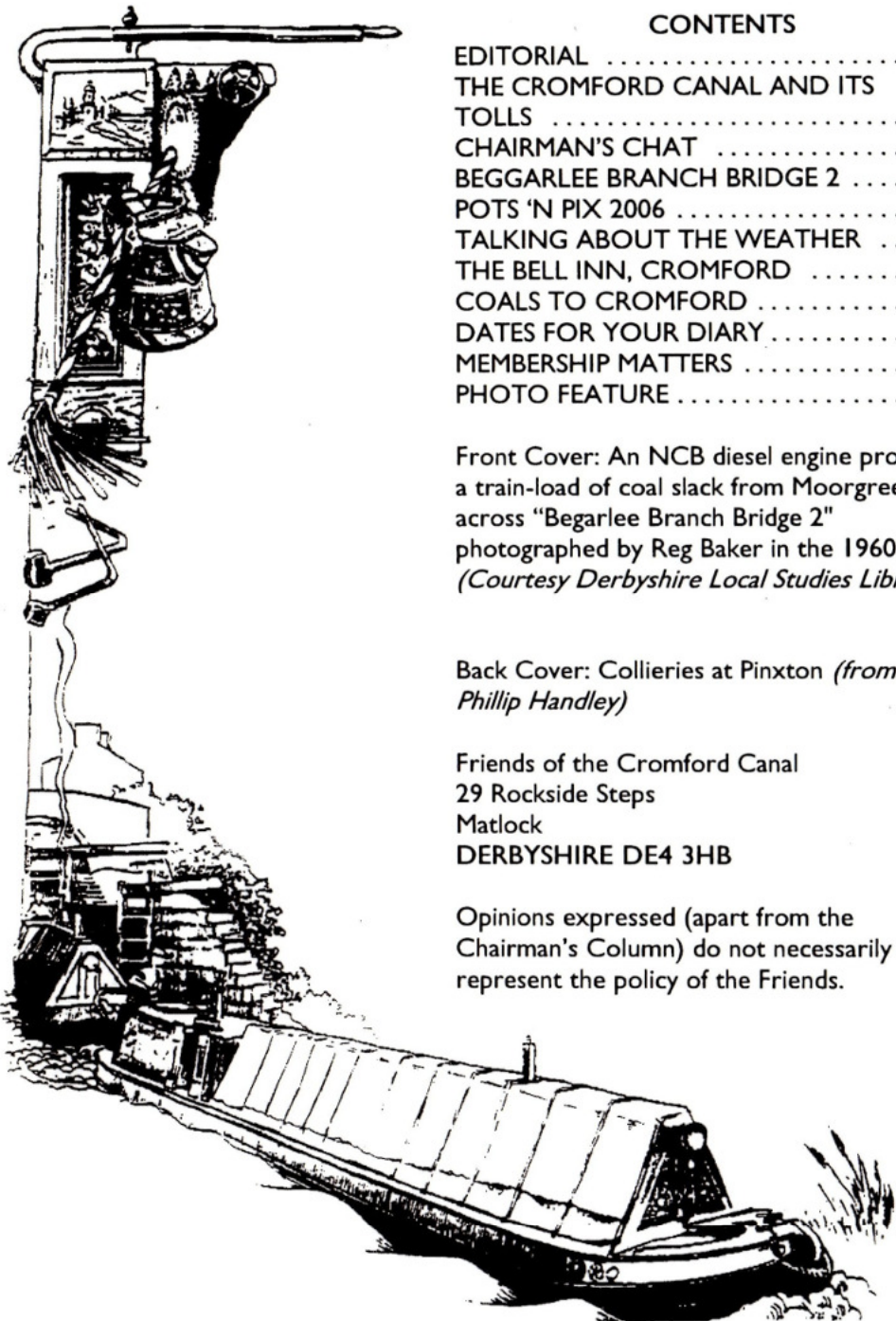
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Front Cover: An NCB diesel engine propels a train-load of coal slack from Moorgreen across "Begarlee Branch Bridge 2" photographed by Reg Baker in the 1960s.
(Courtesy Derbyshire Local Studies Library)

Back Cover: Collieries at Pinxton *(from Phillip Handley)*

Friends of the Cromford Canal
29 Rockside Steps
Matlock
DERBYSHIRE DE4 3HB

Opinions expressed (apart from the Chairman's Column) do not necessarily represent the policy of the Friends.



EDITORIAL



My job delivering Land Rover parts allows me to pick where I stop and have my lunch, as usually once I've set off with the van, I'm my own master. Favourite spots include Barton Lock on the Trent & Mersey, the car park at Carsington Water, outside the Tramway Museum at Crich, and (of course) Cromford Wharf. Here, it's possible to see all the people who enjoy using the Canal and its towpath: canoeing parties, school groups and other parties of disadvantaged youngsters for whom time by the Canal, or even in the country, is a refreshing and new experience. There are those that feed the ducks, those who walk their dogs, and there are the Walkers. These latter can be sub-divided into Gentle Walkers, who have boots but little other specialised clothing or equipment and the Serious Walkers, who come with the full panoply of equipment. This includes high-tech walking boots, special map cases (usually slung around the neck with a ribbon, and getting tangled up with the strap of their field glasses and their GPS, which tells them where they are, how fast they've walked and that if they step to one side, they'll get wet), high-tech breathable waterproof clothing, gaiters and what I can only describe as long ski sticks, with straps around the top to allow the user to carry them on their wrists. These latter (and the normal-length walking sticks that are also sported by Gentle Walkers) are telescopic, so presumably won't take an awful lot of weight but this doesn't stop the Serious Walker striding out for High Peak Junction, swinging his sticks in front of him. If there was 6" of snow on the ground, or the ground was uneven and the Serious

Walker needed to be propped up, I could perhaps understand, but on a nice, level, canal towpath??

Talking of walking reminds me that we've got a Sponsored Walk coming up: it's on October 29th and it's from Ambergate to Cromford. It's being held as part of our contribution to the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site Discovery Weekend, when we'll be operating the horse-drawn boat, having heavy horses in a dray at the wharf and in the village, having hand-wound mechanical organs on site, showing people around and presenting a display on the Ambergate to Cromford section of the Canal. There will be other craft displays with a canal theme, as well as our own Sales Stand, so put the dates in your diary.

Other dates to add to your diary are 6th November, when Patrick Morriss will be giving an illustrated talk on one of his other hobbies, entitled "Looking on the Backside" and 4th December, when our Christmas Social will take the form of a quiz - nothing too serious and with absolutely NO questions about canals, so don't get worried! Please bring your own festive fare to share on this occasion.

Finally, and perhaps more importantly in the long term, British Waterways have been hit by a funding cut because of the incompetence of DEFRA, which failed to pay out subsidies to farmers and so has been fined by the EU. This has already resulted in an announcement of another 180 job losses, on top of those from the last reorganisation. There will be protests from all the boating communities and organisations, who are unusually

unanimous in their support of BW. The situation as I write this in early October is VERY fluid - the best advice I can offer is

to visit <http://www.savethewaterways.org.uk/> where all will be revealed!

THE CROMFORD CANAL AND ITS TOLLS

from David Wilmot

Towards the end of last year, Hugh Potter, the FCC Archivist offered to let me transcribe a bundle of yellowed, stained and fragile papers as part of an exercise to decipher part of the Canal Company's toll receipts. At around seven hundred entries, compared with the six thousand or so Hugh had already tackled from those donated, loaned or otherwise found in County Archives, it seemed a modest task - until I learned that his had been a four-year stint!

The batch loaned out to me had been donated to the Friends by Stuart Griffin, and could best be described as loose leaf and fragile. Yet although the entries were often faded, the carefully handwritten leaves gave some remarkable insights in to canal's contribution to the economy of the time, both local and national. As can be seen from the copy below, each entry gave a date, boat number, steerer, owner, points of loading and unloading, plus the cargo being carried.

2531 PERMIT		CROMFORD CANAL				1836		Boat, No. 12	
John Eaton		on board				No. Eaton		Mar 26	
to navigate the under-mentioned GOODS:									
SPECIES.	Where loaded.	Where landed.	Weight by Bill of Lading.	Dry Inches.	Tonnage Weight.	Miles.	Rate per Ton.	AMOUNT. L. S. D.	
	bo. at	Portlan	Leicester	16.5	37	3	6	18.6	

2532 PERMIT		CROMFORD CANAL				1836		Boat, No. 1222	
Chas. Wigley		on board				G. W. Lewis		Mar 26	
to navigate the under-mentioned GOODS:									
SPECIES.	Where loaded.	Where landed	Weight by Bill of Lading.	Dry Inches.	Tonnage Weight.	Miles.	Rate per Ton.	AMOUNT. L. S. D.	
Goods -	Notke	Cromf.	1 1/2	12.60	1 1/2	15	30	4 11 1/2	
Flour -	2 1/2	Railway	12 1/2		12 1/2	14	1 1/4	1 11 7/8	
Goods -	20	D. H. Low	4 1/2		2	8	1 1/4	3 2	
								1 18 11 1/2	

The length of the journey along the Cromford, measured from Langley Mill tollhouse, was given along with the weight of the load verified (usually) by measurement of "dry inches" compared with each boat's registered scale of loadings draughts.

Apart from the inevitably large number of coal boat movements from the collieries served by the canal, almost entirely to the east of Butterley Tunnel and along the main line or on the Pinxton Arm, there was a significant amount of other loads in evidence. Traffic to the west of Butterley Tunnel was even more varied, with a constant stream of the boats of G Wheatcroft & Sons with their "sundries" loads virtually monopolising the canal trade in that direction.

The papers were generally dated for the mid-1830s, just after the opening of the Cromford & High Peak Railway and before the main railway system had got in to its stride. Based at the Cromford Canal's end-on junction with the Erewash Canal at Langley and levying tolls solely for the weight and distance applicable to the Cromford Canal, the toll-keepers usually recorded the places of origin and final destinations well beyond the fifteen mile length of their canal. So we see sundries being carried from London to Manchester, with tolls charged for the fourteen miles from Langley to "Railway", and large amounts of grain and flour going from Nottingham to Manchester by the same route. The Cromford and Peak Forest canals, by their connection via the Cromford & High Peak Railway, thus became an important artery of England's national transport network for a few years until the main railway routes were opened.

The example here shows 37 tons of coal being carried to Leicester by John Eaton in May 1836 on a boat owned by Thomas Eaton. There were almost as many steerers owning their own boats as those, as we see here, probably working a boat owned within the family. Wheatcroft's apart, there were no large fleet owners evident in the batch of permits I examined. Local industrialists and coal owners had a relatively modest proportion of boats in traffic on the Cromford. These included the Butterley Co Ltd, Jas Oakes & Co and John Coke Esq.

Rather surprisingly, there were very few loads of coke when compared with the amount of coal being carried. A few loads of limestone and gritstone were to be seen, along with clay and cinders. There was iron ore being brought in from Runcorn, possibly Cumbrian ore being transhipped in the Mersey then routed eastwards along the Trent & Mersey Canal; "iron" and "castings" going out from both Golden Valley and Codnor Park. Crates of pottery were also booked out from Codnor Park, some destined for London.

Inbound, there were several loads of timber, usually to places to the west of Butterley Tunnel, with Buckland Hollow showing up as an important unloading point. Here also Messrs Wheatcroft made frequent loadings and off-loadings of their "goods" and "sundries". At the head of the canal, Cromford also received plenty of the latter as well as one load of "wool" and another of "cotton". On April 29th 1836, Wheatcrofts are shown as carrying four tons of cotton the full fifteen miles of the Cromford, the original loading place being shown as Manchester. I gather from Hugh that out of over six thousand loads

examined so far, only a handful of loads of cotton have been identified as having been brought to Cromford by canal. It seems it was not a mode of transport favoured by the Arkwrights.

Getting back to the mainstay traffic of coal, the destinations of Nottingham and Leicester not unexpectedly predominate but there many loads for places along the Trent, such as Newark and Burton, Lincoln via the Foss Dyke Navigation, Grantham, Loughborough, Market Harborough and Northampton. Traffic for the London market was in evidence with some actually said to be for London but the majority, due to the punitive coal duties applied when crossing the boundaries, was shown to be intended for offloading at Aylesbury, Box Moor, Buckingham, Lady Capel's Wharf, Leighton Buzzard and Wendover.

Clearly, there is a lot we could learn from these Permits. The boat numbers and names of steerers allow estimates to be made of the duration of trips. The

collieries named and the tonnages being loaded might possibly allow us to improve our knowledge of the working periods and output of the area's collieries in the first part of the nineteenth century. We should also not forget the family historians' interests. Anyone interested in taking a deeper academic view of the data available than this rough outline provides will be welcomed by the Friends' archivist, Hugh Potter, who can be contacted at archivist@cromfordcanal.org.uk. I found the work very stimulating and hope it will be of benefit to those who wish to take it further.

This article was first published in the journal of the North East Derbyshire Archaeology Society, to whom thanks are due for permission to reprint it here.

(The original Toll Permits and other items from the Archives will be on display at the annual Pots & Pix Event at the Archivist's address on 25th & 26th November (see elsewhere in Portal for details).

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Mike Kelly

I should like to give my personal view and motivation to be so actively involved in the restoration of canals, their importance and the direction that restoration should take. The Canal Age is closely linked to, and was part of, the Industrial Revolution, for the Industrial Revolution saw production move from homes to factories when canals became the first mass transport system anywhere in the world. To the uninitiated it may not be so immediately obvious how canal

transport changed world history. It was an extraordinary transformation, the effects of which are still being felt today. And it happened in Britain.

Nowadays, we can travel the world with ease to gaze at its marvels, but we only have a dim notion of the true significance of the Pyramids of Egypt or the exotic temples of India. That they had immense significance for the people of their day is beyond question; that they can still move

us today by their sheer power, expressed in stone, is not in doubt. But they were not part of a great movement that was to fundamentally change the whole world.

The world that we know today is an industrial world. Industry has led to economic growth, and a general lifestyle which previous generations could never even have dreamed of. In terms of World History, the remains of Britain's early industries are of absolute prime importance. It is not always easy to see this, for we are standing too close. Not unlike the Egyptians of the early days of steam railways, who put mummies on the coal fires of the engines, because they burnt better! They did not see the significance of what was all around them. For many we are still too close to the origins of the canals to appreciate their significance. But as time goes by, so a deeper understanding of the importance to Britain's unique canal network is growing.

I believe the canal system was built up as part of what is arguably the most important transformation of human society that has ever taken place. And it happened in Britain.

So this must affect the way we look at canals. We should no longer be content with short term fixes, but must take a longer view. How many societies, such as our own, are making similar approaches to local authorities and wildlife trusts etc.; or going cap-in-hand for small grants to help them along; spending hour upon hour writing letters and generating interest; begging fellow members to help share the load of work, while they also keep down a fulltime job; etc, etc? We are continually having to cover the same ground already

covered by other similar canal societies. And all this is carried by part time volunteers! (God bless them) True we have the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) but their resources are thinly spread over many projects. They do encourage us and offer amounts of money to help us along; which is very much appreciated; but how much better would it be for a National, or Regional Waterways Conservation Body, that could physically, and not remotely, work with societies such as our own and take on some of the workload for us. Instead of which we continue to cover ground as lone societies and not as a composite whole.

This, as I said, is a personal view, but is it impossible to have a National, or Regional Waterways Conservation Body that could physically ease our loads? Maybe even combining BW and IWA in a similar way to that of the Countryside Agency and English Nature who are now changing as a result of a decision from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (DEFRA). A new single body – Natural England – will integrate much of the work of these two bodies into a single whole. Incidentally, I recently had communication with Sir Martin Dougherty, Chairman of Natural England (NE) seeking his advice on how to progress the restoration of the Cromford Canal and he has kindly arranged a meeting for the FCC, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT) and NE to find common ground. I will report on this in the next issue.

There is still a tendency among some people to write off canals as quaint anachronisms, of interest to no one except a few eccentrics who like fighting for lost causes, but the renaissance of the canals in recent years has strongly

disproved that. 50 percent of the population live within five miles of a canal; and recent figures from British Waterways show that the canals attract around 300 million visits each year. Angling has an estimated 4 million devotees most of whom will at sometime fish along the canals.

Many sections of canal are identified as important for natural conservation, including 65 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In British Waterways Annual Report for 2005/6 they state, *"We are the custodians of a truly impressive segment of our national heritage. Our heritage assets consist of 2,739 listed buildings, 42 scheduled monuments, over 300 miles of conservation area and thousands of archaeological sites. In addition, our waterways adjoin or bisect 5 World Heritage Sites, 8 historic battlefields and 12 registered historic parks. We rank above Network Rail, English Heritage and the Ministry of Defence in terms of numbers of listed structures – only the National Trust and the Church of England own more than we do."*

Truly then the canals of Britain are not just of passing local interest; they are monuments of World Importance, and it has fell on us to be the guardians of one --- the Cromford Canal.

Unfortunately though so many council planners of the past, Derbyshire included, have proved how easy it is to destroy our national heritage, our canals, but not so easy to restore them.

We were therefore very surprised when an unelected Amber Valley Council officer asked us to withdraw our planning application for the Smotherfly site! Yes, after over 220 walkers took part in the Pinxton Push last April to raise money for the Smotherfly planning application, an unelected officer from Amber Valley BC asked us to withdraw our application, because of objections to it. This we refused to do for: (1) We are now working with DWT and Amber Valley to address the objections (2) Time would not allow for a second planning application and (3) The site is to be bulldozed anyway even if our application was not on the table!

Here is the first chance ever for the Pinxton Branch of the Cromford Canal to see positive restoration of this important historical heritage, and yet we have to fight for it, and fight hard. With you, the reader, backing and supporting us we will save our great heritage for future generations, who will look back to our time and say, 'Thank God they did.'





AMBER FOLK

AT THE

BLACK HORSE INN



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With four or more acts every open mic. session, hear folk/ acoustic music from the Erewash Valley and surrounding area's. Bring your instruments and voices.

Trev McMaster



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www.amber-folk.com or call 07731 883178



BEGGARLEE BRANCH BRIDGE 2

Hugh Potter

The bridge of the title is perhaps unfamiliar to most Friends. It certainly was to me. I came across the name in some copies of correspondence kindly donated to the FCC Archives by Malcolm Fielding, Secretary of the South Yorkshire & Dukeries Branch of the Inland Waterways Association. It had come to light during the clearance of the old British Waterways offices at Sheffield prior to redevelopment.

The letters concern what I would have called the mineral railway bridge 47, just

below Lock 13, which carried a single track railway linking the main Erewash Valley Line to Hobsic opencast workings and Moor Green Colliery in recent years. In 1907 at the time of the Royal Commission, it carried the Midland Railway's Beggarlee Branch, and the bridge survived longer than the canal at this point. Perhaps Bridge 2 was the railway's numbering?

In 1948 the Railway Executive were proposing culverting the canal here, to avoid having to rebuild the bridge. Mr R.

Davidson of the Docks & Inland Waterways Executive in London was writing to his colleague W.H. Pryce in Sheffield asking whether "there is likely to be any pleasure traffic on the canal which would be interfered with" and whether the proposed 48in diameter concrete pipe would be sufficient to carry the water flow. It is good to read that he is inclined to ask the railway to build a proper bridge with towpath!

On 10th January 1949 Mr Pryce visited the site and agreed that the bridge urgently needed attention: "One timber pier at least is on the point of collapse, one of the beams which it holds being entirely fractured". There were however two steel girders which appeared to be "in very good condition".

The railway's estimate for replacing the railway bridge by a culvert and also removing the adjacent occupation road bridge (Marshall's Bridge 46) was £3,000. The new railway bridge nearby across the River Erewash had cost £5,000. Mr Pryce reckoned that it would cost little more than £3,000 to build a new bridge of 21ft span across the canal and towpath. He did not consider the road bridge should be demolished as it was "a perfectly good brick structure". Also the new bridge should be positioned to allow boats to enter and leave the lock easily.

Mr Pryce is obviously keen to get new traffic on the canal for he says: "I understand that in addition to the Butterley Iron Works there is also a Tar Works and the Butterley Colliery where there might be the possibility of a revival of traffic . . . I think it would be a great mistake to strangle it altogether if there is

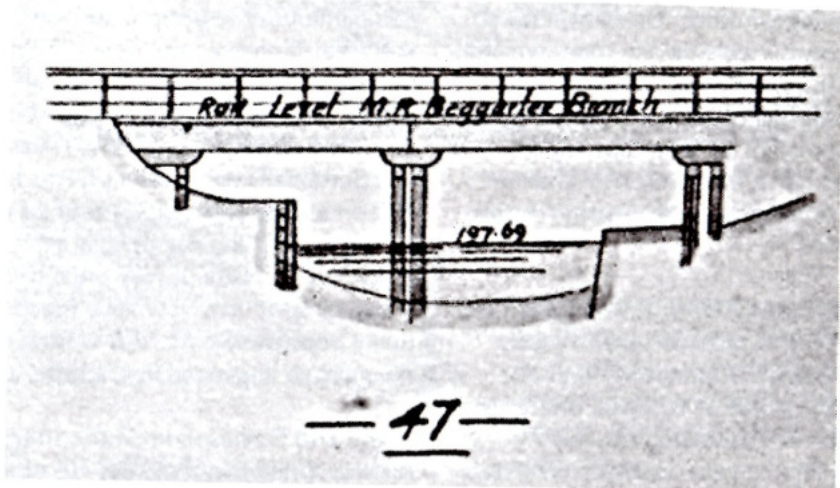
any chance of revival".

As to leisure use, he is not too complimentary about the attractions of the area: "I can see no reason why any pleasure craft, navigating in this area, should wish to proceed up this short dead end which leads to nowhere. I think if I had personally navigated as far as Langley Mill on a pleasure cruise, my chief desire would be to get away from it again as quickly as possible. It may once have been a beauty spot: it is now little more than a thinly populated slum." Ah well, some things have improved in the last 50 years!

In the end Davidson in London tells the Railway Executive that D&IWE would prefer a bridge with 15ft water width plus 6ft towpath and 8ft height "in order that the passage of maintenance craft may be possible in the future" – and judging by later photographs, this is what was built.

There is reference to a report from the Inland Waterways Association covering "a recent tour of the Northern Waterways". However, Mr Davidson comments: "It is interesting to note that the Association support the practice of excluding the general public from the towing paths. I had gathered from previous conversations with Aickman and Rolt that they thought 'hikers' should be encouraged and they were rather wrath with me for objecting." It would be interesting to read the IWA's thoughts on our canal back in 1948, but sadly I have not managed to find any trace of this report.

This correspondence and other items from the Archives will be on display at the annual Pots & Pix Event at the Archivist's address on 25th-26th November (see next article for details).

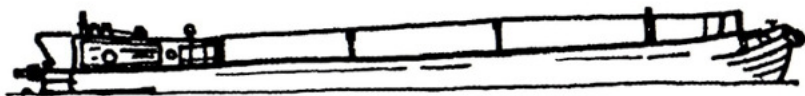


The drawing of 'Begarlee Branch Bridge 2' from the Royal Commission report of 1907. (Courtesy BW Archives/TWT)

POTS 'N PIX 2006

As usual at this time of year, our Archivist will be throwing open his doors to give you the opportunity to view the FCC Archives, as well as the chance to do some Christmas shopping at Liz Tatam's annual stoneware pottery exhibition. A 1967 film of the canal between Cromford and Hartshay will be playing, as well as a Powerpoint presentation of historic images of the canal

from the archives. You are invited to call in at Bankfield, Chase Road, Ambergate, Belper DE56 2HA at any time between 11am and 6pm on Saturday 25th or Sunday 26th November, and partake of a cuppa or a more seasonal drink! You are welcome to park there to take a walk along the canal, which runs past the end of the garden. Call 01773 852009 for more details.



TALKING ABOUT THE WEATHER

Hugh Potter

Back in 1981, our member in Hong Kong, Jeremy Ford, wrote a university thesis at Girton College, Cambridge, entitled "The Effect of Climate on the Cromford Canal 1794–1852", and during a brief visit back to his home village of Wheatcroft he made a copy of this for our archives. Jeremy analysed the number of boats passing each day for which records survive (and that is quite a few!) and related this to climatology data, and also to Parliamentary evidence on the Erewash Valley Railway Bill of 1845. Thus he was able to see how frost and low water affected traffic, and showed that although canals were a huge advance in transport over the roads that were used previously, they were susceptible to the vagaries of the weather, which the later railways were not. This answers the questions posed by Pat Morriss in Portal 17 as to whether the canal froze over. It did! Additional proof comes from the photograph of skating on the canal at Ambergate in the 1960s, which was recently donated.

The thesis highlights the problems faced by the Cromford Canal in particular in its water supplies: from the outset there was opposition from the Erewash and from the mill owners on the Derwent. The latter imposed stringent conditions on when water could be taken from the river and its tributaries. To some extent the construction of the Butterley Reservoir by the Nottingham Canal helped save the day for the Cromford – but there were still problems with lack of water as evidenced by the lighter loadings carried by the

Upper Trent Barges (the predominant type of craft using the canal east of Butterley Tunnel).

Frost caused serious problems every 2–3 years, involving a reduction or complete cessation of traffic, which had a knock-on effect in trade, creating a shortage of goods and irregular employment, bringing local hardship. As a result, stockpiling became common by those who could afford to do so.

The thesis also looks into the effect of the draining of the Cromford Sough, one of the canal's main original water supplies, which led eventually to the construction of Leawood Pump in 1849.

The Toll Permits offer a wealth of information about the working of 'our' canal, and the more that are on the database, the more information can be obtained from them. There are many more in the Matlock-based Derbyshire Record Office just waiting to be transcribed; if any Friends fancy having a go at this, then please get in touch (contact details on page 2) and I can advise on which have already been done. Likewise, if anyone would like to analyse the existing data in anyway, then I can make a copy of the data available to them.

The thesis and other items from the Archives will be on display at the annual Pots & Pix Event at the Archivist's address on 25th-26th November (see previous article for details).



A newspaper picture of skating on the canal at Langley Mill in the long winter of 1962/3.



Skating on the canal at Ambergate in the early 1960s, where the Transco depot is now sited.

THE BELL INN, CROMFORD

Freda Raphael

The *Bell Inn*, up the bank in Cromford, is one of those homely places which the great and the good (thankfully) overlook. It sits comfortably on the corner of North Street (named after the Prime Minister of the day, rather than the geographical location) its rich brick adding colour to the otherwise rather austere stone terrace. In his *Buildings of England: Derbyshire*, Pevsner notes 'the three story terraces' of North Street 'some with restored weaver's windows on the upper floors' but sniffily ignores the Bell.

Yet the Bell poses a puzzle. The terrace part is stone-built and so must date from 1771-76 when Arkwright built North Street to house some of his workforce. Arkwright is unlikely to have allowed an ale-house on the corner. He would have wanted his workers to be sober and industrious, and the social attitude of the time was that the poor should not be seen wasting time and earnings over pots of beer, although it was perfectly acceptable for their wealthy superiors to relax and drink wine.



The North Street frontage stands forward, is brick-built, and would appear to be early nineteenth-century. Certainly the 1841

tithe map indicates that the building was much the same then as today. The tithe schedule states that the building was then

the Bell Tavern tenanted by Daniel Gell, who also held the stable at the back, which is also still there today. The Wirksworth Quarter Sessions records also survive, between 1822-27, naming victuallers who were granted 'licenses to keep inns and common ale houses'. James Gell, who was, perhaps, Daniel Gell's father, is listed for every year. And so it is possible that the Bell was a pub from 1822 or even earlier.

The Gells, perhaps father, son and grandson, kept the Bell until at least 1864 when Kelly's Directory notes Peter Gell at the Bell, one of six licensed premises in Cromford. The 1848 Post Office Directory also lists six licensed premises including the Bell and the Greyhound, as well as the Red Lion in Scarthin Row, the Railway and the Cock Inn. The Directories also note that several landlords during the nineteenth-century and into the 1920s combined farming with running a pub. In 1848 Daniel Gell not only kept the Bell but was also a maltster and an ale and beer merchant. The Mees, father and son, followed the Gells at the Bell sometime between 1864 and 1887, staying on until the late 1920s. William Mee senior and junior are noted as both landlords and farmers from 1904 to 1922. It is, surely, remarkable that for at least one hundred years the Bell was tenanted by only two families.

In March 1924 Captain Richard Arkwright was forced to auction off the Willersley Castle estate to pay death duties. William Mee, who had been paying £63 12 shillings rent for his pub, stable and twenty-one acres, negotiated to buy the Bell and the land before the auction began. By 1932 William Patton was the landlord.

Early in 1955, Mr W D Bickle began drawing cartoons for the Matlock Mercury under the pen-name *Bick*. He had moved from Kettering to Matlock to be Chief Clerk at the Ratings and Valuation Department of the Inland Revenue, Golding House, Matlock. His weekly cartoons convey a man with a gentle, sociable humour. No doubt his office blotter was covered with caricature doodles of his colleagues, rather than figures and calculations. On 5th March 1955 his portrayal of the darts team at the Bell shows a motley crew of men (few women in bars in those days!), all named, and up to high jinks, led by the landlord, Fred Hilton. Today's landlord, Philip Benfield, runs a much more orderly house but the darts team still meets weekly and horror of horrors to those 1950s trad men – there's a women's team too! The men's team now meets on Monday evenings and the women's on Tuesdays. Perhaps in another fifty years they'll get round to integration.

Further sign of the times are the two boules teams, who toss their balls in the garden on the other side of the hill. Woe betide the player who misses the mark. Cromford Bank is mightily steep.

The Bell is open daily from noon to 3pm (but closed on Wednesdays), and from 7pm to midnight. Mr Benfield keeps the usual Hardy & Hansons, including Olde Trip and a monthly guest beer, plus a selection of filled cobs. The Bell itself is bigger than you would imagine from the outside, with a snug snug as well as a lounge, beyond the bar, and a function room upstairs. Make the effort to climb Cromford Bank and you'll be rewarded with a friendly welcome as well as a good pint.

COALS TO CROMFORD

- or how to be led astray when doing historical research

Patrick Morriss

Not long after the formation of the Friends, I remember some debate via Email as to how much Sir Richard Arkwright (and his successors) made use of the Cromford Canal. At the time I contributed to this debate by stating that on page 115 of Frank Nixon's book *Industrial Archaeology of Derbyshire*, David and Charles, Newton Abbot 1969 the comment was made "The first cotton mill in Derbyshire to have a steam engine appears to have been Arkwright's Cromford Mill, which in 1780 had a Boulton and Watt engine of 8 horse power to raise water to the wheel". The reference for this suggestion was given as Fritton, R.S. and Wadsworth, A.P., *The Strutts and the Arkwrights*. Manchester University Press 1958. Nixon goes on to say, "In 1792 a Boulton and Watt engine of 16 horse power was installed at the Woodeaves Cotton Mill, near Ashbourne." That as they say is another canal and another story that can wait for another day. I remember at the time it did not take long for someone to comprehensively demolish my comments about steam engines at Cromford 14 years before the canal opened. Therefore coal would have been needed to fire it I had said, – oh no there was not came the reply, so I went away and made a note of checking those "facts" in Nixon's book one day.

Recently, one day came about. Therefore, I went to search out the original Fritton and Wadsworth book to find that at the end of chapter four on page 80 the

following comments were made. "At Cromford, too, there were difficulties. In November 1777, Arkwright had made inquiries of Boulton and Watt for a steam engine to raise water for the water wheel. No order followed, but nearly three years later, he (Arkwright) took the matter up again and Watt wrote to Boulton:

"Mr. Arkwright of Cromford sent for me last night, he has built a mill and the miners have lett (sic) down his water so that it cannot move. He is much more modest than he was last time...but as he does not pretend to improving the fire engine (stationary steam engines were often called fire engines at this time) now I had little to say against him."

As by this time there were two mills at Cromford, the supply of water from Cromford Sough may well have been inadequate. Boulton and Watt supplied an engine of eight horse power."

Reading this seemed to indicate that in the writers opinions there was a steam engine at Cromford sometime soon after 1780. Having been told this concept was wrong, and that the book had been published in 1958, I decided I had better dig a bit deeper. In 1989, R. S. Fitton's book *The Arkwrights – Spinners of Fortune* was published two years after Fitton's death. The story was now explained in much more detail. Arkwright had purchased two simple atmospheric engines from Thomas Hunt of London and was attempting to obtain rotary power from these

Newcomen type engines. As early as 1781 Arkwrights experiments had come to the notice of Matthew Boulton. "I have heard of no Engine improvements at Manchester except what Arkwright has pretended to," he wrote to Watt on 7th August 1781. Sometime afterwards James Bateman, a Manchester iron founder and engine maker noted that "Mr. Arkwright's works to go by fire engine are all to pieces". By October 1783, Arkwright had abandoned his attempts to use rotary power and instead was employing his engine to replenish his reservoir by pumping back into it the water that had already passed over the waterwheel. On 20th October 1783 Watt wrote that, they had "told Mr Arkwright that the machine which he propose to erect at Manchester could not answer; but he was obstinate and the event verified our prediction."

In 1789, Arkwright inquired about a Boulton and Watt Steam engine for his mill at Nottingham and in 1791 ordered an engine of 12-horse power; this mill was sold in 1792. Apparently, Arkwright had inquired about a steam engine for his Cromford mill in 1777, Boulton and Watt were unable to give an accurate price for the engine and nothing came of the enquiry. In 1780 came the enquiry regarding the "miners letting down his water". As in 1777, Arkwright failed to respond to Boulton and Watt's

suggestions. In 1784 Watt wrote to his father in law to say " Some years ago he (Arkwright) applied to us at two different times for our advice which we took the trouble to give him, in one or more long letters, which he never had the manners to answer but followed his own whims till he threw away several 1000£s and exposed his ignorance to the world and then in disgust gave up the scheme."

Sometime soon after 1780 a steam engine was working at Arkwrights mill at Wirksworth (Haarlam Mill) this was probably supplied by Francis Thompson of Ashover, it was seen working in July 1782 by Boulton and Watt's assistant.

Therefore, no firm order appears to have been placed by Arkwright for a steam engine at Cromford. Boulton and Watt had supplied an engine for Nottingham, but this did not remain in Arkwright's ownership for long. His mill in Wirksworth had a steam engine, but not from Boulton and Watt and his mill in Manchester had experimented with a steam engine as early as 1781. The end result of all this is that the Cromford canal was not supplying coal to fuel a steam engine at Cromford in 1794 because the Cromford mill complex did not have one. I suppose they could have taken the coal to Cromford and then by horse and cart to Wirksworth though...!



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- 28th & 29th October World Heritage Site Discovery Weekend - display at the Gothic Warehouse at Cromford Wharf, horse-drawn boat between Cromford Wharf and High Peak Junction - hand-wound street organs at Cromford.
- 29th October Sponsored Walk from Ambergate to Cromford - 1000 from Ambergate.
- 6th November Talk by Patrick Morriss at Ironville Church Hall "Looking on the Backside" starting at 1930
- 4th December Christmas Social at Ironville Church Hall in form of a quiz - nothing too serious and with absolutely NO questions about canals, so don't get worried! Please bring your own festive fare to share on this occasion - starting at 1930



MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Yvonne Shattower

I hope you have all had a good summer, and have been able to take advantage of the lovely weather we had.

Membership has been quiet during the last few months, but this is often the case at this time of the year, as so many of our Members are out boating. We were

disappointed that we did not gain more new members from the leaflets that we included with the last edition of the Portal, if you have friends who you think would like to join us, please pass on our information. We still need lots of support. However, we do have a reasonably healthy list of new members, to whom we extend

a warm welcome. We hope to see you at some of the events we are planning for the future, the main one being the forthcoming World Heritage Site weekend along the Derwent Valley Mills Heritage Site. We will be at Cromford, with the sales stand, the horse drawn boat, and plenty of forms to enrol new members. Also, we are having a Sponsored Walk from Ambergate to Cromford on Sunday 29 October, pre-registration forms are available from me (it will help with organising the start if we know how many are coming) or you can just turn up on the day. Walkers' fees are £3 for adults and £2 for children if you pre-register, £4 and £3 on the day. I also have a supply of sponsor forms. Parking is available at Ambergate Railway Station, and signs will be posted to direct you to the start point. We understand that trains will be available to return you to Ambergate if you don't want to walk both ways.

Your Committee has been very disappointed with the low attendance at the recent Members Meetings. We feel that these meetings are important as they help us to keep in touch with you, we are always pleased to meet you in person, but we will have to consider the future of these meetings very seriously if attendance does not increase. Please let us know if you have any ideas as to how we could

make these meetings more interesting, even better, if you would like to become our Social Secretary and take on the hall and speaker bookings. The meetings are always advertised in the Portal and on the web site, or you can ring one of the Committee members if you are unsure about any of the dates or locations for talks. A bar and free car parking are available, and there is no admission charge for members or non members. Although most of the talks are canal based, we do have speakers on other topics as well. Bring your friends and come and join us!

We extend a warm welcome to these new members who have joined us.

Mr R Biggin, Matlock
Mr D Stevens, Thetford
Mr & Mrs I G Handley, Kirkby in Ashfield
Mr J P White, Nottingham
Ms S Mckeever, Nottingham
Mr & Mrs D Martin, Nottingham
Mr & Mrs S Charlton
110 Ripley Road, Sawmills
Mrs C Holland, Ripley
Mr & Mrs A T O Parkin, Kirkby in Ashfield
Mrs S Sinfield, Kirkby in Ashfield
Kirkby & District Conservation Society,
Kirkby in Ashfield



PHOTO FEATURE - PREPARING THE BOAT

from Ron Amner

(Editor's note: It was decided to do some repairs to the boat which is to be horse-drawn during the World Heritage Site Discovery Weekend - these pictures show the work in progress.)



A trailer makes an adequate work bench.....



The new roof's going on nicely.....



There's a nice wooden edging going on too, by the look of it.....



Who let THIS man loose with a circular saw??



Mind you, this looks nearly as bad!

