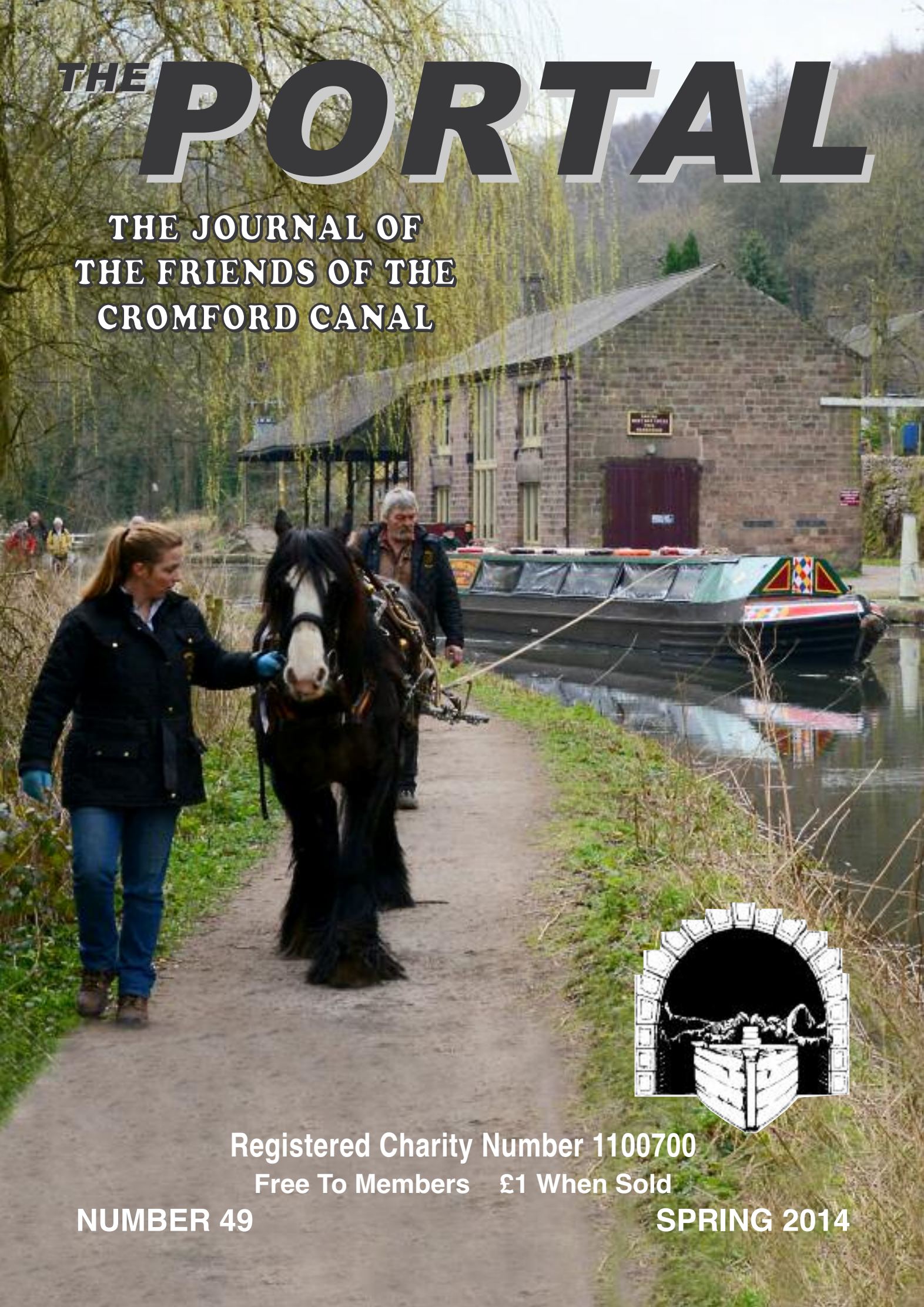


# **THE PORTAL**

**THE JOURNAL OF  
THE FRIENDS OF THE  
CROMFORD CANAL**



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**FRONT COVER:** Corinne Rose leads Chelsea the horse on the their first trial pulling *Birdswood*. This was a great success considering the steep learning curve for all concerned - not least the horse. Look out for the horse days during the summer. See page 8 - 10.

Photo: Dave Miller

**BACK COVER:** Looking over the skipper's shoulder en route back up the canal from High Peak Junction at a good speed behind the horse. Note also some of the excellent tree felling work on the offside recently carried out by Derbyshire County Council.

Photo: Vix Wilding

## The aims and objectives of the Friends of the Cromford Canal

**THE RESTORATION, RECONSTRUCTION, PRESERVATION AND MAINTENANCE OF THE CROMFORD CANAL, ITS ASSOCIATED BUILDINGS, TOWING PATH, STRUCTURES AND CRAFT AND THE CONSERVATION OF ITS NATURAL CHARACTER AS A NAVIGABLE INLAND WATERWAY SYSTEM FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PUBLIC**



## EDITORIAL

from Mike Harrison



Welcome to The Portal No. 49

The weather is improving, the daylight hours are getting longer and we are all looking forward to summer on the canal. Of course, the winter has been very wet, catastrophically so in some areas, but the good side of this is that the canal reservoirs throughout the country are now fully replenished ready for the summer. Hopefully this also means that the water supply for the canal at Cromford will be adequate to keep up the level. This is important for the operation of *Birdswood* because the bottom of this stretch of canal is still rather too near the top in places. Having said that, it is improving, both as a result of the efforts of John Barker and his fine team of volunteers removing weed, branches and large stones and also because *Birdswood* is now regularly operating along the full length from Cromford to Leawood. The best thing to keep the channel clear on any canal is the passage of boats.

Regarding *Birdswood*, there have been three significant steps forward recently. Firstly, Mike Kelley's appeal for volunteers to come forward to train as crew or masters has brought a very pleasing response. He now has a good group of enthusiastic people.

Then on March 2nd we had a successful trial run with a full load of passengers and crew, some 50 people altogether, from Cromford down to High Peak Junction and through the swing bridge, which had been almost impassable before John Barker's team's efforts, and then disembarked the trial passengers outside the Pumphouse. The boat was then turned with no trouble in the winding hole and the passengers rejoined the boat at the Wharf Shed for the return journey.

Another very pleasing development came on March 17th. We were able to try out *Birdswood* pulled by a horse. This was arranged by Nic Barfield who had a contact with local firm Arraslea Shires. Although none of us, including the horse, had any experience of horseboating, this trial went very well. The only trouble the steerer had was getting used to the surprisingly increased speed of the boat, but the whole thing is very promising. Mike Kelley has now planned several horse drawn days throughout the year.

In all this excitement, the FCC committee have not forgotten the rest of the canal. Matthew and George Rogers are planning some long-awaited work parties at Ironville locks, including a visit from Waterway Recovery Group. It will be good to get back to working at this site. It was on the locks that I was first involved with working on the Cromford Canal in 1976 with the Erewash work parties. Let us hope that this time any restoration work will be a basis for future restoration of the canal and not nullified by official bureaucracy or should that be stupidity as in the past.

Here's to a good year for the Cromford Canal.

**The press date for the Summer 2014 issue will be July 21st.**



## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

by Matthew Rogers



Well Spring appears to be putting in an appearance, the first flowers are in bloom and the coots are defending their territory! Thankfully work has taken place over the winter to hopefully ensure that we do not get a repetition of the delays they caused us last year!

So *Birdswood* is operational again for 2014. I can't begin to thank the tireless work that has been carried out by the teams over winter to keep the channel clear. From experience I can assure you that standing on the stern of a boat as the wind howls across is not the most pleasant experience. Those with more sense are tucked up at home in front of an open fire planning the summer! We have had the boat crews out training, the maintenance teams keeping everything ship shape, and the 'weeders' working to remove the branches and reeds under the close supervision of the DCC Countryside services. DCC have been busy themselves doing a lot of tree felling to open up the channel. Together we make quite a team – our special thanks to Chris Coombs and Rick Jillings for all their support. Thanks must also go to Belper Sub-Aqua who turned out to remove a large number of rocks one very cold morning – rather them than me – I just stood on the bank 'supervising'! As always we are looking for more help so if you fancy a spell paddling around give John Barker a call on 07860 632837.

Last month I did rather moan about the lack of support from the members. I'm now eating humble pie - quite a lot of you have offered assistance, especially with *Birdswood* and we have some very keen new masters and crew in training. I've also received calls from a few offering some engineering help and the preparation of an overarching strategy document. This is absolutely vital if we are going to get any funding grants for the major works. Nic Barfield is doing a fabulous job in the continued promotion of the FCC and *Birdswood* to a wider audience. If, like me, you are not yet fully up to speed with the world of Social Media, see Nic's article on pages 24-25 for details of how to follow progress on Facebook or Twitter . Without repeating myself too much we really do need your help – we are starting to see real progress so everyone - please lend a hand!

I mentioned in my last report that we are planning on carrying out investigation works at Ironville locks. We have formally met with the Canal and River Trust who own that section. They are now assisting us with the planning for clearance at lock 4. Before we can put a spade in the ground there is a lot of planning and legal stuff to get through to ensure we do not contravene any legislation but it is looking very positive. The purpose is to clear sufficient vegetation and debris to allow a detailed structural survey to be carried out to then allow us to make an informed view on the work that will be necessary to make them safe, stop logs to be reinstated and re-water a short section of the canal. We've got a long, long way to go so don't expect to see anything happen fast. We have been offered the services of the Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) again next summer and plans are being made. Thanks to Andy Botham, elected councillor for DCC, we have secured accommodation at the Wharfshed, High Peak Junction, for the first week without charge,



but we still need to sort out the second week. It was unfortunate that we could not have the Wharfshed for both weeks but there was already a booking for the last weekend and moving the WRG team mid camp is a massive undertaking. When they arrive they really do bring everything including the kitchen sink! So we are still looking for accommodation but have been given a few leads to chase up – many thanks for those.

I also mentioned in my last report that we have teamed up with Nottingham Trent University Engineering Department. In late January a group of around 55 students descended on Sawmills as part of their final year studies. Working in groups of 5 they have taken a holistic view of the stretch between the Excavator Pub at Buckland Hollow, past Lockwoods and the houses at Sawmills and including the crossing of the A610, railway and River Amber – approximately 1 mile with plenty of challenges! Under the guidance of their tutors they have considered the engineering issues and the social, economic and political impact of any future restoration. A few of us were privileged to take part in the interim presentations and they really have come up with some unique and wonderful ideas that could potentially put the Cromford Canal on the tourist map not just for the wonderful scenery, the World Heritage Site and the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution! I don't intend to tell you anymore. A number of us are attending the University just after Easter to see the final presentations and awarding a prize to the best team. The best will be shown at the AGM on the 28th April by the tutors (as the students will be preparing for their finals by then) so please come and support them. We may have met the next Brunel / Outram!

That's enough from me. Enjoy the spring and show your support to the boat crews by ensuring you tell all your friends and relatives about *Birdswood*. See you along the canal and at the AGM!

## ***RAILWAY OPEN DAY and GARDEN PARTY***

by kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. J. Cooke

at 14 Millfield, off Wilne Lane, Shardlow, DE72 2HD

**Saturday July 5th 1.00pm to 7.00pm**

in aid of

**THE FRIENDS OF THE CROMFORD CANAL**

(Registered Charity No. 1100700)

**Barbecue, Train Rides, FCC Sales Stalls and Tombola  
Tea/Coffee and Cakes available**

Bring your own picnic and folding chairs if desired

**Adult Admission Ticket £3 entitles you  
to ride on the trains. Children free**

**Tickets available at the AGM and other social meetings or  
£4 by post from FCC Sales or pay at the gate on the day**





## TO CHATSWORTH BY CANAL

### FCC Archivist Hugh Potter does some more digging at Chatsworth

Friends may recall the short article in Autumn 2007 *Portal* when I referred to written evidence that the Duke of Devonshire's head gardener, one Joseph Paxton, shipped some plants back from India in 1837. The journey between London Docks and Cromford was undertaken by canal and records in the Chatsworth Archives from around that time refer to payments to Wheatcroft & Sons, the canal carriers based at Cromford. Before the network of railways was completed some 10 or so years later, this would be the obvious choice for transport of heavy but delicate cargoes.

Imagine my excitement therefore when I learnt that what appeared to be a piece of a packing case with the words ". . . Chatsworth by Canal to Cromford" elegantly painted on it had been found. It had been used as packing between floor boards and is broken into three pieces along its length.

This, I thought, must be part of one of the very packing cases used for Paxton's shipment. But it seems that is not necessarily the case as Chatsworth Photo Librarian Diane Naylor, who kindly provided the picture below, tells me that whilst researching the re-presentation of the Sculpture Gallery her colleague Charles Noble found that some of the sculptures had been transported to Chatsworth via the Cromford Canal.

An extra tantalising story she heard a few years ago when writing a book on the Chatsworth Villages was that ice was transported from Chatsworth House to the Cromford Canal. No reason why was given and it could well have been just hearsay.

Whatever, there is no doubt that this particular piece of packaging contained something that came by canal – the question now is what – and what else did Chatsworth ship by the canal?



An intriguing piece of packing case. Photo © Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth.  
Reproduced by permission of Chatsworth Settlement Trustees.



## BIRDSWOOD UPDATE a progress report

from Mike Kelley  
Boat Operations Manager



## READY FOR THE SEASON

My appeal for more volunteers in the last *Portal* had a good response; we now have thirty three volunteers on our list. This does not mean we do not need YOU, there is always room for more. As you know, without such volunteers this project would have not got off the ground; as it is we are now up and running.

The winter has not been a 'quiet season', far from it. There have been numerous training sessions, not only to bring the crew up to the standard required by the Maritime Agency, but also to train up three new volunteers who are seeking to obtain their Boat



Steerer Kelley  
concentrating on  
the job in hand.

Colin D Smith





Master's Licence (BML). John Barker and his group of 'weeders' did a great job in clearing out the dead water plants and debris left behind from recent tree felling.

Then there has been the maintenance required to keep *Birdswood* running well and all spick and span, and that is a lot more than just polishing her lovely brasses. If you come along I am sure you will say, she looks beautiful. But this does not happen by itself, it is all down to people who are willing to give their time to a project they love.

There is also a lot of paperwork, or should that be computer work! All thirty three need to know what days they are on duty, so it needs planning well ahead; not to mention the dozens of phone calls from people who want to book a cruise, and the dozens of daily emails. I'm afraid all this was getting a little too much for me, so the trustees asked for a boat management team to be formed, which is great. We are now in the process of forming such a team from among the boat volunteers, so that the duties can be shared and I can step back a little to let them take over.

Until recently we had never tested just how many people *Birdswood* will carry. Yes, she is insured for 45 passengers, but due to the shallow water we never dared to take that many. So we had a Volunteer Day when people came along knowing they were there to test this out. The boat was full, the water deep (by Cromford standards!) and we set off for Leawood Pumphouse. And we got there OK. The passengers alighted, we wined her around while the boat was light and picked them up again at the Wharf Shed and set off back. It went very well.

Editor



Later we had our first horse boat trails. For all of us this was a very gratifying occasion. See also pages 8 - 10. I think I am right when I say there are only four places in England where the public can experience a horse boat ride; well now there are five.

Chelsea is a horse from a company local to Cromford called Arraslea Shires ([www.arraslea.co.uk](http://www.arraslea.co.uk)). This mare had worked at logging and fieldwork including agricultural shows, demonstrations, forestry, wedding work, carriage driving tuition, long-reining, event days, corporate promotional and film work, but no previous horse boat experience. Well you have to start somewhere, so training days were arranged for the boat skippers. We are now proud to say the horse boat is up and running for all days when Leawood Pumphouse is in steam, so we will bring the public to the steam pump by horse, let them look around and then take them back. This is something I have dreamed of for a very long time.





## BIRDWOOD HORSE TRIAL REPORT

by Corinne Rose of Arraslea Shires

Dave Miller



When Mike Kelley asked us to try pulling a narrow boat along the Cromford Canal we were very interested in lending a hand, as working horses are now a dying breed (especially heavy horses) and it's nice to think we are treading in the footsteps of our forefathers. Not only us as horse handlers but the horses too, so we thought it would be lovely to be a part of two bygone activities coming together - heavy horses and canal boats.

At Arraslea Shires we use our horses to work the land, doing chain harrowing and logging, and we also do horse-drawn weddings and carriage driving tuition. We even have people coming to stay in our log cabin to enjoy just looking at our Shires and Clydesdales. But 17th March was going to be our first boat-pulling day. We decided to use Chelsea, our 15-hands Shire X Dales mare, as the towpath passes under a low bridge on route (*Lawn Bridge - Ed.*) and one of our bigger horses wouldn't have fitted!

On the day, Chelsea was put to the boat and away we went. The first few hundred yards were very different for her. Hauling the boat makes her pull unevenly because the tow rope is at an angle, so she had to get used to that as well as it being a very heavy pull at the start until *Birdswood* gets underway. After that, it was quite easy for her to pull. We



now know what the wooden bobbins along horseboat traces are for: they're not just for decoration but serve to stop the traces rubbing. So bobbins are something we'll be getting before our next trip out on the canal.

Chelsea enjoys working and being in the public eye, and with all the photographers there she was in her element. And she loved the carrots people brought for her at the end of the day.



Corinne leading Chelsea towing *Birdswood* on the first trial run from Cromford Wharf

Dave Miller

We learned a lot from the trial and can now say we pull a boat with our horses... and there are not many people who can say that these days! And we're looking forward to working with the Friends of the Cromford Canal to provide successful horseboating days with *Birdswood* throughout the coming season. So see you all down at Cromford Wharf!

Arraslea Shires are based in the pretty village of Alderwasley, just three miles from Cromford. They offer carriage rides around the quiet local lanes, logging and harrowing demonstrations, carriage driving lessons, and long-reining tuition. They're also available for film work and corporate promotions, as well as operating a Victorian carriage for horse-drawn weddings.

**Call Corinne on 07980 555708 for more details  
or visit [www.arrasleashires.co.uk](http://www.arrasleashires.co.uk)**





## CHELSEA WINS A PLACE ON THE CROMFORD TEAM

by Nic Barfield

Thirteen-year-old Chelsea was the star of a successful horse-drawn passenger boat trial on the Cromford Canal on Monday 17th March. The sturdy Dales Cross Shire mare pulled 70-foot heritage narrow boat *Birdswood* from Cromford Wharf through High Peak Junction to Leawood Pump House at a quicker pace than ever achieved under motor power. And then she hauled the 21-tonne boat back again - all without undue effort.

Chelsea will be the key player on the Friends of the Cromford Canal team that is bringing horseboating back to this previously unused waterway. Chelsea's owners Lance and Corinne Rose of Alderwasley-based working horse specialists Arraslea Shires are new to horseboating, too, so Monday's outing was a steep learning curve for all concerned.

Hugh Potter



Chelsea getting into her stride approaching Lawn Bridge

With trials concluded satisfactorily, the FCC has just announced 14 public horseboating days for the 2014 season:

**Easter Sunday 20 April, Easter Monday 21st April**  
**Bank Hol Sunday 4th May, Bank Hol Monday 5th May**  
**Sat 7th June, Sun 8th June**  
**Sun 6th July**  
**Sat 2nd Aug, Sun 3rd Aug**  
**Sat 4th Oct, Sun 5th Oct**  
**Sat 1st Nov, Sun 2nd Nov**

These special days are in addition to narrow boat *Birdswood's* weekly Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday motor cruises. Full details of trip times are at:

**<https://www.facebook.com/Birdswood>**

In addition, schools in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire can enjoy the *Birdswood* horseboating experience on Tuesdays 24th June and 8th July. The boat can seat up to 35 pupils plus teachers and helpers. Contact Schools Liaison Officer Judy Berry at [schools@cromfordcanal.org.uk](mailto:schools@cromfordcanal.org.uk) for details.



# A CROMFORD HISTORY

Book Review by Hugh Potter

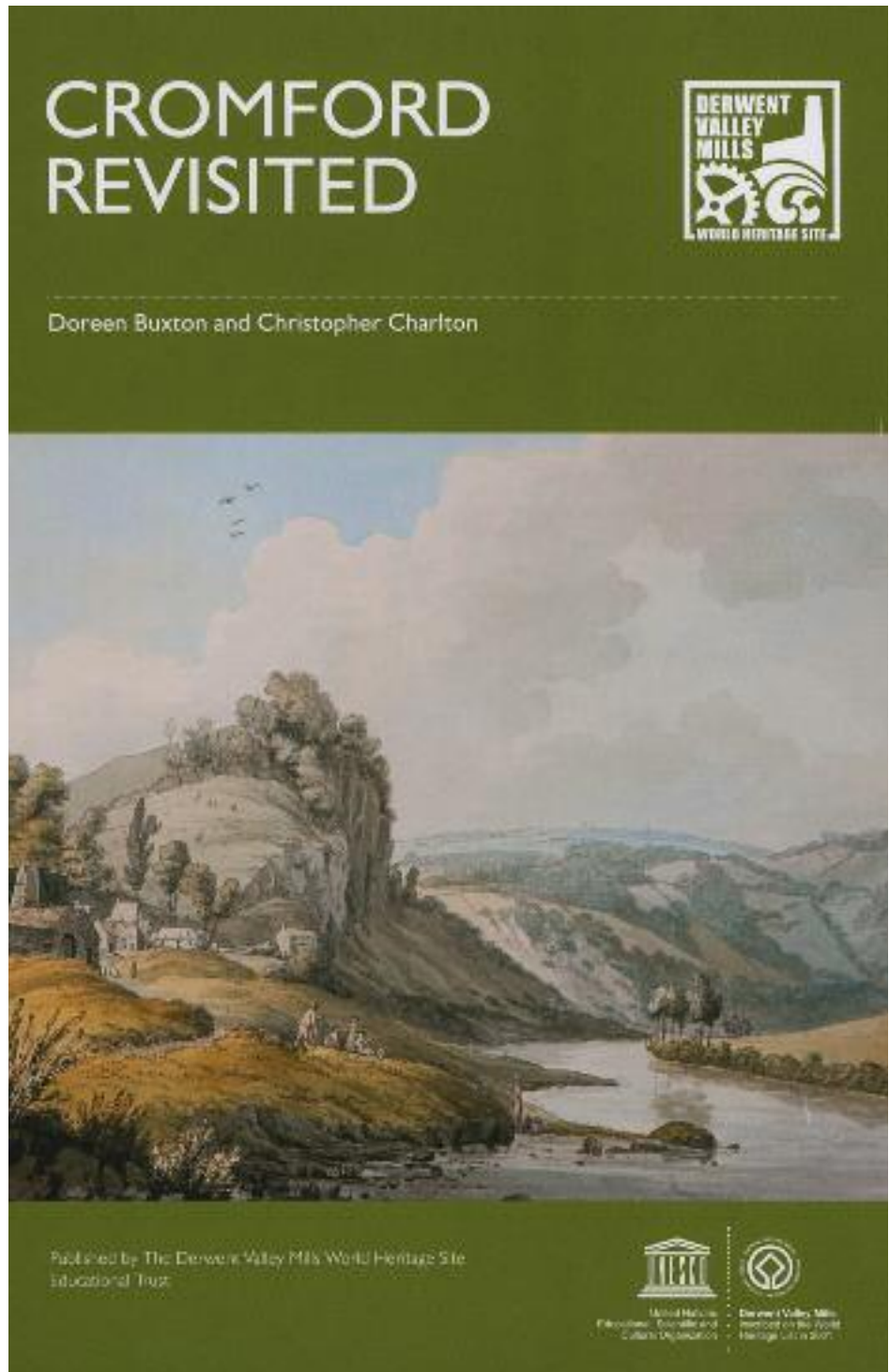
The Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site has published a long-awaited book about the development of Cromford as an industrial village. The original concept was for a simple picture book with captions, but this has grown into the 200-page fully illustrated Cromford Revisited by Doreen Buxton and Christopher Charlton, on sale locally at £18.

It covers in great detail the story of the village that Richard Arkwright transformed by the introduction of his water-powered cotton-spinning mills and the houses for the families that he needed to work in them.

It was, of course, also to become the terminus of the Cromford Canal, not primarily for the cotton industry but for lime and limestone, which was exported from local quarries, and particularly for the import and distribution of coal.

Although a relatively minor contributor to the village's development, the canal and its primary carriers the Wheatcrofts get a fair mention, as do the other forms of transport - the turnpike roads and the railways.

For anyone who wants to know more about why 'our' canal is in a World Heritage Site, why it ended up exactly where it did (its wharves could have been by the river at Cromford Bridge if Arkwright had had his way), or the story of the many fascinating buildings of Cromford, as well as some of the families who lived in them, I thoroughly recommend this book.







# THE BOATMAN'S CABIN ON BIRDSWOOD

by the Editor

The economics of water transport have always meant that the boatmen had to work long hours for very modest wages. This situation was aggravated when the railways came in the 1840s, meaning competition for trade which in turn meant a reduction in the tolls the canal companies could charge. One of the results of this was that the boatmen could no longer afford to keep a house ashore, but were forced to live permanently on their boats with their wives and families. This in turn led to a standard design of boatman's cabin, developed over the years into the most efficient layout to make best use of the very restricted space. This design and layout has been used on all long distance working narrow boats, both horse drawn and motorised, from the end of the nineteenth century up to the 1960s when the last working narrow boats were built.

The FCC trip boat *Birdswood* is a genuine former working narrow boat with an interesting history (see *Portal 45*). When the boat was extensively rebuilt in 1995, the work included a new boatman's cabin which was accurately built to the correct layout by knowledgeable enthusiasts. This now provides an additional interesting attraction to passengers, particularly children, who are amazed by how the boat people lived. My picture shows the cabin interior after it has been prepared by Val, Vix and Daniel ready for the new season's visitors. The aim is to illustrate not only the efficient layout but also the boater's love of sparkling brass, ribbon plates and as much decoration as possible to brighten up what was in reality a dirty, mundane and hard working life, particularly for his wife and children. It really was amazing how immaculate the cabins were kept, even when carrying coal. When you come on board for your trip this year, the crew will be pleased to allow visits to the cabin and answer any questions you may have. It is easy to see why many boaters buy brasso in litre tins!





## A SUNDAY ON BIRDSWOOD

by Sarah Burkinshaw (a recent *Birdswood* volunteer)

The passengers climb down into the boat from the bow end; a couple come down the steps, chose seats half way down the hull and sit side by side. The seats are not generous, neither is the leg room between their seats and the little table in front of them, so this couple, sitting side by side, look a bit squashed. Later on, they looked warmer than the rest of us. At the beginning of the cruise they looked unsure.

We are on board *Birdswood*, a traditional 72 foot narrow boat, lately of the Birmingham Navigation, recently delivered to a closed stretch of the Cromford Canal. We are in the hold where once coal and iron strained so hard against the riveted iron hull that chains were fastened across its width to stop it bloating beyond 6 foot and 10 inches. We are in the open air, autumnal and damp.

*Birdswood* was made in 1938 to be towed behind a powered boat. She was an all-rounder, pointed at bow and stern, to be towed up or down the cut; she could carry any cargo provided just 9/10th of an inch of her hull showed above the water. You'd think that the ripples of a cast pebble would sink her. She ran errands, keeping tandem behind powered boats, carrying freight between railways and Birmingham ports until, in 1957, she gained her independence. In 1957 the stern end of the boat was converted into a 'Boatman's Cabin', so she and her boatman could set out on journeys lasting more than one day; now she could leave the Birmingham Navigation and navigate the waterways of England and Wales.

The Boatman's cabin is still there, on the return journey we'll take the passengers to marvel at it and tell them stories of endurance and pride. It's a misnomer of course. The boatman would take a wife and bless her with children and his cabin was really theirs. In

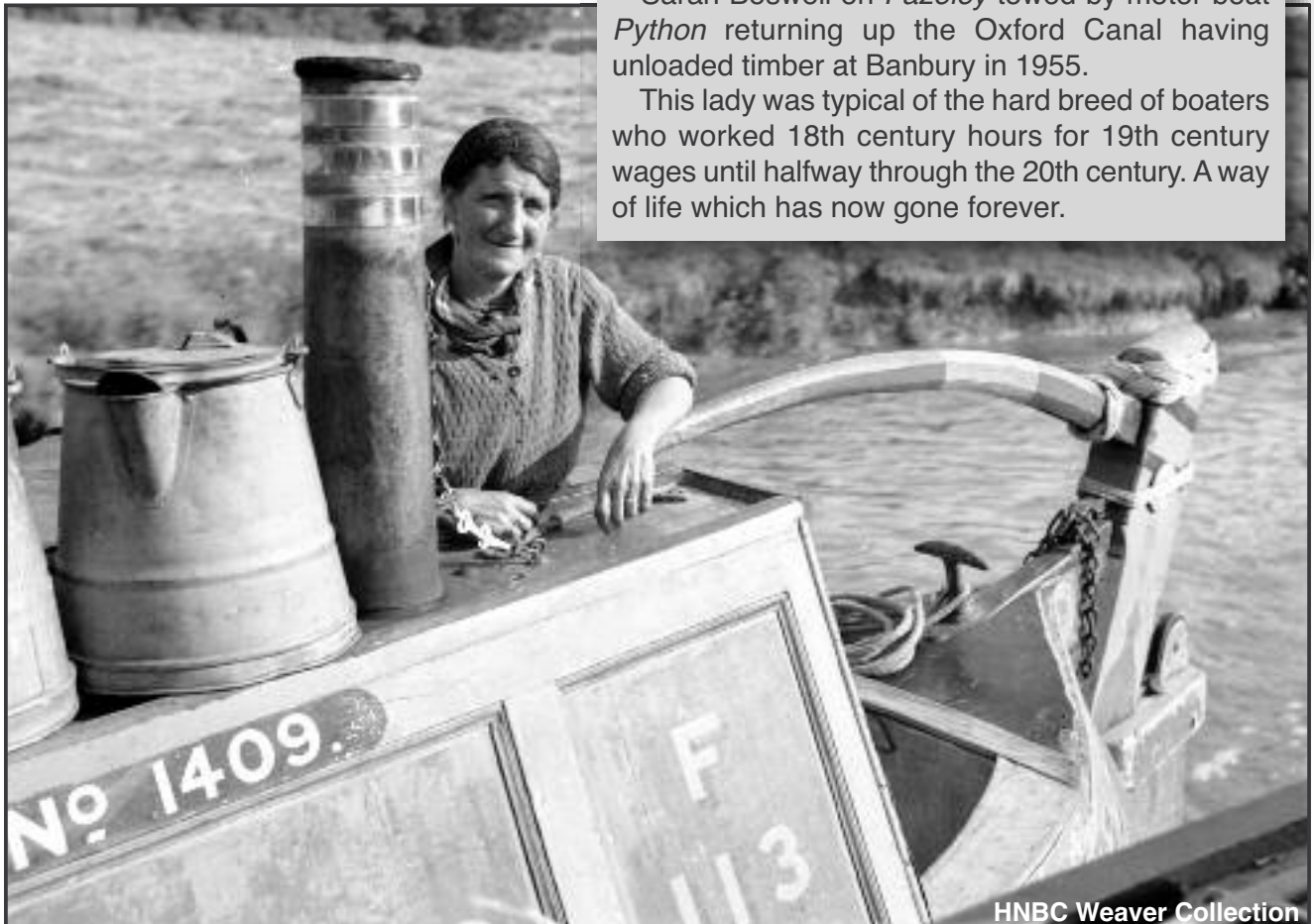






a space much smaller than a modern four berth caravan, the family would sleep across the boat and across each other, eat around a hinged table the size of a bagatelle board, live through the winter and evenings by the light of an oil lamp and cook on the tiniest of coal ranges. And yet, what makes the passenger's gasp and makes my heart swell, is not the dearth in this cabin but the wealth. The scumbled woodwork, the rings of painted roses, the dreamy castles and crocheted lace, the horse brasses and lace plates, the romance of the oil lamp, the gleam of the fire irons. You see the buckby can, the water bucket, and marvel at the painted daisies; you don't imagine having to break the ice.

I've lived, cocooned, inside a cabin like this, within the womblike shelter, a small daughter sleeping beside me and the other on the little bench-come-bed. Down our boat, we had a bathroom, a galley and another log stove in a well-lit saloon. Other mothers, often called Rose, lived in their cabin in one set of clothes, knew no sanitation or privacy, cooked one pot dinners on a hotplate almost open to the weather, washed in the cut water with its suspended grit and took the helm whatever the weather. These Roses could not swim and the space at the back of the boat was very small; it was not uncommon for a mother to slip and drown in the weight of her own soaked clothes. In photographs the Roses' weather beaten faces and gap smiles are wilted and worn with creases like those cut at the corners of canal bridges.



Sarah Boswell on *Fazeley* towed by motor boat *Python* returning up the Oxford Canal having unloaded timber at Banbury in 1955.

This lady was typical of the hard breed of boaters who worked 18th century hours for 19th century wages until halfway through the 20th century. A way of life which has now gone forever.

HNBC Weaver Collection

We point out Lawn Bridge. Just one bridge on this section built to span the cut as it cut up Richard Arkwright's lawn and named after his resentment of the damage done. Richard Arkwright made his mark here along the Derwent river, whose racing power he sequestered to run the cotton mills, the cradle of the Industrial Revolution; but he never used the still canal. The cotton went over the hills and moors by packhorse while the canal carried limestone, marble and coal. Inside Lawn Bridge there are the grooves made over decades by the rasp of hemp rope from horse to boat. Walkers on the tow path are



delighted to see a boat on the canal but there is no horse with its head down, shouldering the harness and weight of a floating cargo. [*There soon will be - Ed.*]

*Birdswood* floats slowly and quietly, she's got an electric engine now. It's impossible to get her to a diesel supply, or even a coal supply, she runs on batteries stoked overnight courtesy of the nearby café.

The passengers, even in autumn, sink into a warm and relaxed frame of mind. They watch the passing reeds and trees; the pace, slower than walking, is calm and the stories we tell them open up little windows into a world gone by. We tell them of the shockingly young man who built this navigation and discovered coal while tunnelling through the hillside. We tell them about the itinerant mobs of navvies who dug the navigation, barrowing up to 20 tons of dirt a day each. We show the place where the canal was narrowed and the towpath strengthened to make room in the valley below for a railway line, even the name of the railway, the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, evokes a time of hope and discovery, we get to the junction and talk about the incline, the steepest in the country, and the winding houses that worked the winches to help the locomotives upward, steaming upwards, as though anything were possible. We go past the Greek marble works, established since 1790 and wonder at the Pisani family leaving Greece for Derbyshire with their vision to sell us marble.

We point out the dabchicks and moorhens, the fungi and toadstools, we notice the flowers and show where the canal has recently been dredged and sides shored up with a textile membrane. We tell small children stories of floating islands, look for the lonely stegosaurus in the abandoned nursery and for wooden crocodiles floating in the water. The canal raises magic like a mist and everyone is touched by it, everyone remembers or dreams. The passengers, already friends, tell us their stories and point out the things they see. A woman dreams of living on a boat, another of owning a gypsy caravan, a man points out a steam plough stored against the railings, someone spots a squirrel, we look out for a kingfisher and a child helps to measure the displacement of silt which we do for Natural England. They tell us of their holidays on boats, their Harley Davidsons, their grandchildren, their pets and, yes, sometimes, their loneliness. Along the linear canal we are all one line of stories.

The couple, more comfortable now, have relaxed into one another and against the little table, tell us they live in Dorset. Actually they are from Cromford but left soon after they got married, no they don't see the sea all that often, you get used to it you know. They come back once a year to see friends and, well, they just miss Derbyshire really. It's nice to come back. Did he remember the canal from his childhood? Oh yes, it was just a muddy ditch, full of reeds, a bit smelly. They used to play along the towpath, no fish, they'd throw stones. He remembered the steam trains on the incline and racing up beneath the trees to the winch house. He remembers the warm company of the man in charge of the winder, how he'd let them ride the winch and how, when he wasn't looking, they'd catch a ride on a downhill wagon as it strained to not run into the canal beyond the junction. He says that when he heard there was a boat on the canal he had to come and see it for himself. The County Council bought the canal in 1972 and they said they'd restore it but no one believed them. They said that there'd be boats on the canal again but everyone thought it was just a rash idea. He can't believe it's 2013 and he's on a boat, afloat on the Cromford Canal. A member of the crew asks where the man used to live, when he lived in Cromford. Ha, the same street as I do now! So, what number? No.... I don't believe it! Do you want to come for tea? Along the linear canal we are all one line of stories, and just the occasional circle; a little bit of magic.





## KEEPING THE CHANNEL OPEN - PART TWO

by the Editor

In the last issue, John Barker reported on how he has been leading a team removing weed and branches from the canal to help *Birdswood's* progress along the still restricted channel following the disappointing outcome of the dredging operations. The specification agreed by Derbyshire County Council for the dredging was unfortunately not achieved and there does not appear to be any possibility of any further dredging in the near future. However, we are faced with operating the boat trips and apart from the weed situation, there have been problems with the boat striking large stones and other submerged obstructions.

Ever resourceful, John approached Belper Sub-Aqua Club and has been successful in securing their services to investigate the problem. On Sunday 2nd Feb a small intrepid group of divers from the club came to the canal and were successful in clearing underwater obstacles from alongside the Wharf Shed and also the towpath side opposite the winding hole. This was particularly important since there was a risk of damaging the propeller when the boat was being turned round. There were a number of objects recovered, from rocks and coping stones of various sizes to an old railway sleeper. The divers said they were glad to help a local charitable organisation whose aim is to see the restoration of the Cromford Canal. The picture below shows a jolly band of divers holding up one of the stones which they have recovered from alongside the Wharf Shed. In the foreground is the railway sleeper which had also spent many years under water.



Stuart Mason





George Rogers



The divers then turned their attention to the winding hole as shown on the left, where a series of soundings were taken across the area where the stern of the boat needs to swing round, and again various items were recovered. The Belper Sub Aqua Club dives all around the UK and celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. Anyone wanting more information can contact the club via its website:

[www.belperdivers.co.uk](http://www.belperdivers.co.uk)

Shortly after this work was completed, Birdswood was brought down from Cromford on a trial run before the start of this year's public trips, passing through the swingbridge and turning at the winding hole at Leawood with no trouble, as shown below.



Editor





## BLOW UP BRIDGE

- and why the gunpowder didn't make it to Codnor Park

by the Editor



In common with many canal enthusiasts, and no doubt some other FCC members, I have long been familiar with the story of a boat carrying gunpowder exploding under Macclesfield Bridge on the Regents Canal in London in 1874. This incident was widely reported at the time and although the bridge was subsequently rebuilt, it has been known to this day as Blow Up Bridge. What I did not know until recently is that there is a direct connection to the Cromford Canal.

There were several contemporary reports of this incident, most of which are at variance regarding the details, but I have tried to produce as accurate an account as possible from the various sources as follows:

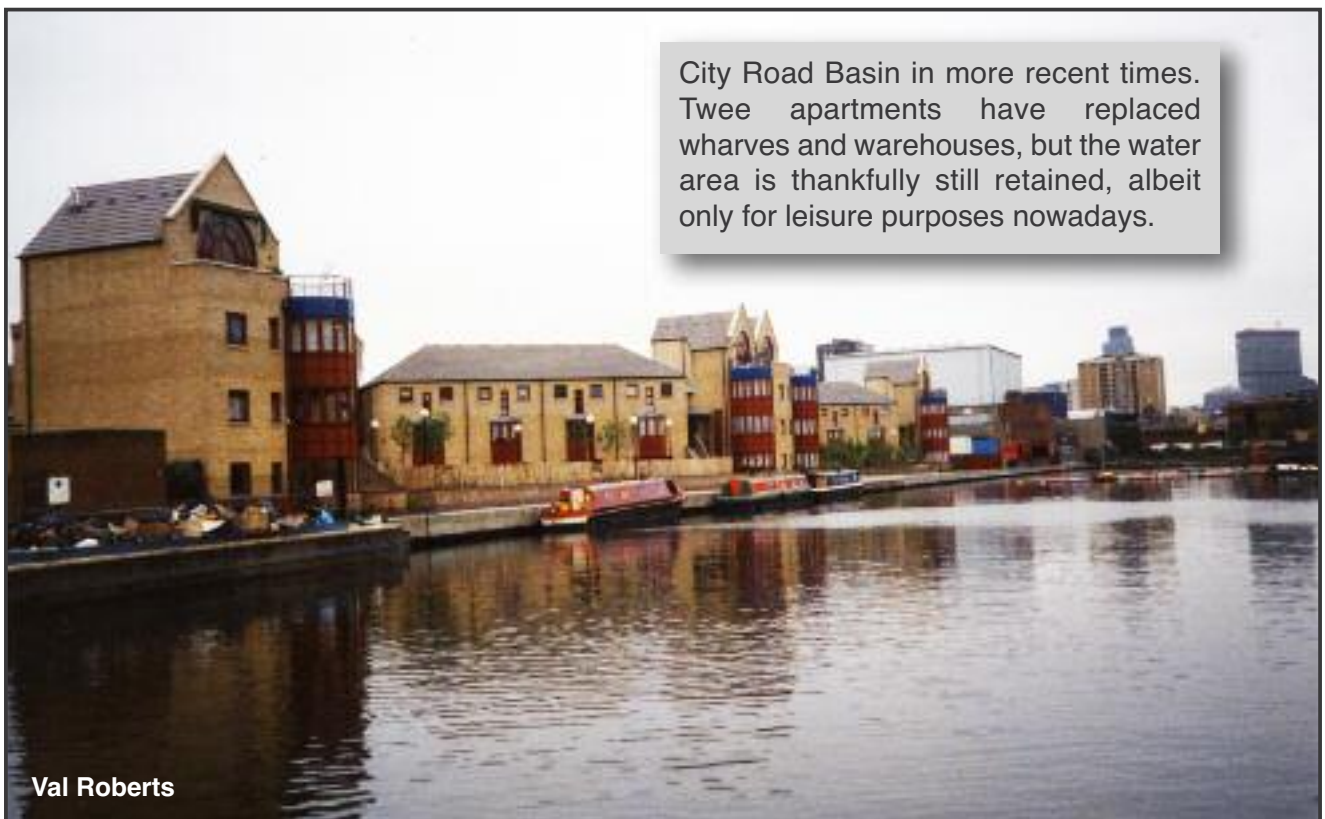
The gunpowder was manufactured at the Royal Gunpowder Mills in Waltham Abbey. This was one of the first sites to manufacture gunpowder, and had it's own network of canals for the conveyance of hazardous products around the site. A system of two locks linked these canals to the River Lee Navigation, which in turn gave access to the Regents Canal and thence the main canal system. Water transport was favoured for the carriage of gunpowder at the time because it was thought that the new fangled railways with their steam locomotives showering out sparks were too dangerous! Although gunpowder has not been produced at this site for many years, some of the buildings and a section of canal remain and are now part of a major tourist attraction (see [www.royalgunpowdermills.com](http://www.royalgunpowdermills.com)).

The consignment in this case was despatched by Messrs Pigou and Wilkes and consisted of five tons of gunpowder in wooden barrels and was being sent to 'Codnor Park



near Nottingham for blasting purposes'. No other details are given but it is fairly safe to assume that the blasting was to be in a coal mine. Unfortunately, although the FCC archives have some records of gunpowder being carried on the Cromford Canal around this time, they refer to unloading at Bullbridge rather than Codnor Park, but our archivist may yet come up with more information. The canal journey from Watham Abbey would have entailed passage of the Lee Navigation, Hertford Union, Regents, Grand Junction, Grand Union Leicester Section, Erewash and Cromford Canals. This would have been a trip of 195 miles and 190 locks, but in this case the voyage was tragically cut short.

The gunpowder was part of a mixed load on a boat named *Tilbury*, referred to as a barge in some of the reports, but to make the trip from London to Codnor Park it must have been a narrow boat. The load consisted of 'sugar, nuts, straw-boards, coffee, other miscellaneous articles, three barrels of petroleum and five tons of gunpowder'. Rather a recipe for disaster one could say! However, the first part of the journey passed uneventfully, and the boat moored overnight in City Road Basin on the Regents Canal in Islington.



City Road Basin in more recent times. Two apartments have replaced wharves and warehouses, but the water area is thankfully still retained, albeit only for leisure purposes nowadays.

For the next part of the trip, the boat was included in a train of five which were to be towed by the steam tug *Ready*. Behind the tug was the flyboat *Jane*, also carrying gunpowder, followed by *Dee* then *Tilbury*, *Limehouse* and *Hawkesbury*. The train of boats left City Road at 3.00am on Friday 2nd October 1874. Having worked up the five locks to Camden Town, the steerers and crew would have settled down for the trip behind the tug along the 19 mile level pound of the canal out of the capital to the west before the long climb north on the then Grand Junction Canal to the Midlands began.

At 5.00 am, the train had reached Regents Park and the *Tilbury* was just passing under Macclesfield Bridge when the gunpowder ignited and an enormous explosion occurred. The boat was blown to pieces and all the crew were killed. Early reports mentioned four crew - steerer Baxton, labourer Taylor, another labourer and a boy, both unknown. It was later suggested that a young lady was also on board who was cooking for the crew of all five boats, no doubt using a coal range by the light of an oil lamp! Her body was found afterwards but she was never indentified.





The boat *Limehouse* behind *Tilbury* was also sunk and the bridge was completely demolished. As will be seen from the picture at the start of this article, this was no ordinary canal bridge, but a fine affair with iron columns cast at Coalbrookdale, elegant brick arches and ornamental railings. It was named after the Earl of Macclesfield who, as chairman of the Regents Canal Company, had made a substantial financial contribution when the Company was running out of funds. Some nearby houses were completely destroyed and windows broken up to a mile away. At one house 300 yards away, a large part of *Tilbury's* keel landed on the roof and passed right through into the basement, although, miraculously, the occupants escaped unhurt. In fact, considering the force of the explosion, there were remarkably few casualties. There was a great deal of damage to glass in the nearby Regents Park Zoological Gardens (now London Zoo) and it was feared wild animals may have escaped. Gas and water mains and telegraph wires which passed over the bridge were all severed. The explosion was heard all across London up to 20 miles away.

A drawing of the rescue and salvage operation  
from the *Illustrated London News*



Many members of the public ran towards the scene to help the police and fire brigade to save what remained and search for survivors. The Horse Guards were also called out to calm down the crowds, many of whom were screaming and running about in their night clothes. The scene was enveloped in dense smoke and many feared for their

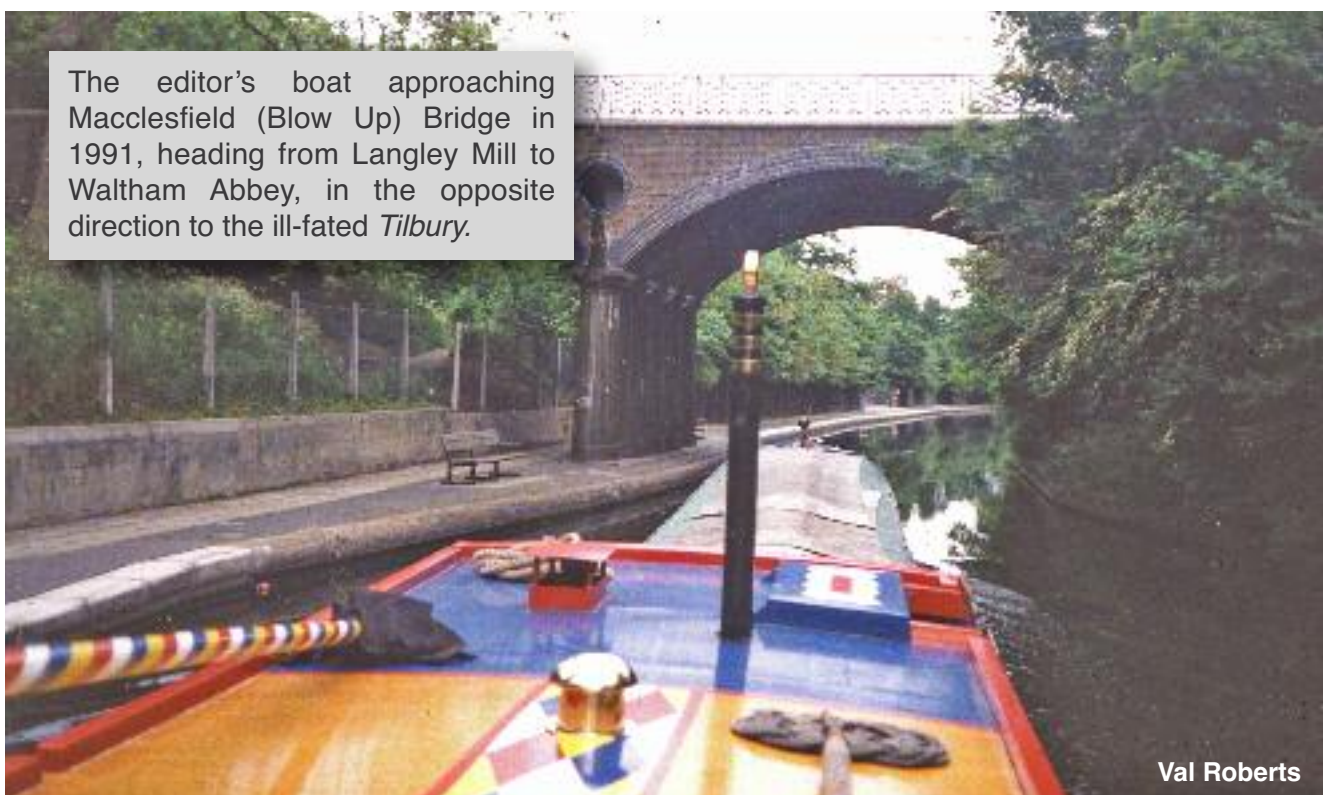


lives. It was soon realised, however, that if the explosion had occurred half an hour earlier or later, or in the tunnel under Islington, the damage would have been even worse. As it was, the substantial bridge took the worst of the blast and the fact that the canal is in quite a deep cutting at this point funnelled the explosion either upwards or eastwards and westwards along the canal.

Newspapers at the time were very critical about danger to the public caused by the transport of explosives, although most were probably unaware of this traffic beforehand. The Gunpowder Act of 1860 was considered inadequate and not properly enforced and the upshot was a new Explosives Act introduced in 1875. At the inquest at Marylebone, survivors were questioned and the conclusion reached was that the explosion was caused by the petroleum vapour igniting from the fire or lamp in the cabin and so igniting the gunpowder. The Grand Junction Canal Company, who owned the boat, was charged and subsequently found guilty of gross negligence and fined an unrecorded amount. This and the new regulations caused the company to stop carrying gunpowder altogether.

Regarding the aftermath for the Regents Canal, at that time canal traffic was very heavy and every effort was made to clear the blockage as soon as possible. The canal was obstructed by a heap of debris some 20 feet high. Two pump boats were quickly on site and by midnight on the Saturday, the section of canal had been stanked off and pumped out. A hundred men were employed in relays 24 hours a day to remove the blockage and the canal was open again on the Tuesday morning, four days after the explosion. If anything like this occurred today, the canal would no doubt be closed for weeks.

The bridge was later rebuilt, with the cast iron pillars being re-used, and now looks as though nothing has ever happened, apart that is from one interesting detail. The pillars on the towpath side had the familiar grooves caused by the toelines of the thousands of horse drawn boats. When the bridge was rebuilt, these pillars were rotated through 180 degrees, so that the grooves were now facing away from the canal. Horse drawn boats continued to use this canal in considerable numbers until after the second world war and since the bridge rebuilding, a new set of grooves has been formed on what is now the water side of the pillars, so that the careful observer today will see grooves on both sides!



The editor's boat approaching Macclesfield (Blow Up) Bridge in 1991, heading from Langley Mill to Waltham Abbey, in the opposite direction to the ill-fated *Tilbury*.

Val Roberts





# NEWS FROM THE NORTH

## Cromford Canal - Cromford to Ambergate

### Update - March 2014

from Rick Jillings - Assistant Area Manager  
Derbyshire County Council Countryside Service

#### Volunteer Work Parties

Throughout the winter John Barker and a group of dedicated volunteers have been braving the weather on a regular, often weekly basis. The volunteers from FCC have cleared the navigable channel removing loose weed, sticks and debris in the canal around High Peak Junction. Joint FCC/DCC work parties have also cleared reeds from the channel around Ambergate near Hayes Wharf. Work also revealed coping stones and mooring rings. In March silt traps were excavated on a number of streams that flow into the canal between Cromford and High Peak Junction. We are very grateful for all of the time and effort of volunteers who have helped out in managing the canal. New volunteers would also be very welcome. [See also George Rogers' report on pages 26-27-Ed.]

John Guyler



John Barker and his team removing large stones from the channel near High Peak Junction.

#### Cromford Mill Paddle

Work has now been completed to restore to working order the paddle gear on two sluices within the Arkwright's Cromford Mill yard. The paddles are required to work to regulate waters between Cromford Mill, Cromford Canal and culverts connected to the River Derwent. [See also Portal 48 - Ed.]

#### Towpath improvements

The towpath from Gregory Tunnel towards High Peak Junction has now been resurfaced. As a result 5 miles of towpath is in good condition, suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs all the way from Ambergate to Cromford. It is hoped that funding may be found in the future to dry out the puddles between Cromford to High Peak Junction.



## Leak Repairs

There is still an on-going problem of leaks near Whatstandwell at Simms Bridge despite additional canal bed repairs this winter. Unfortunately this means that this section of canal will have to be kept at a lower water level to prevent leaks. Unfortunately this will mean there is no through flow of water from north to south.

Repairs were successful near Crich Chase, where a section of bank near Ranch Corner subsided in the autumn, caused by a leak.

There are a number of leaks including between Cromford and High Peak Junction and on the Derwent aqueduct that require further investigation and repair.

## Tree Felling

DCC Countryside Service staff, along with volunteers have carried out a significant amount of felling work along the canal from High Peak Junction towards Cromford. Numerous alder trees of the same age and size had grown up causing heavy shading and some trees were damaging the canal structure, growing out of dry stone walling. The spring sunlight is already shining through to the canal and the canal bank is starting to green over. Branches close to the waters edge have been retained to encourage water fowl to nest in locations where they won't be disturbed by *Birdswood* or canoes.



Hugh Potter

*Birdswood* on the first horsedrawn trial getting the benefit of the DCC offside tree felling operations.

## Audio Trail

A Cromford Canal Partnership audio trail project involving FCC, DCC and co-ordinated through Derbyshire Wildlife Trust will shortly be launched. Two information boards and a number of QR codes will be appearing along the canal between Cromford and High Peak Junction this summer. Using a smart phone you will be able to discover more about the canal's history and wildlife.

## Events

The Countryside Service Events programme for 2014 is available; it includes the operating dates for Leawood Pump and Middleton Top Engine House along with a number of heritage walks.

<http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/leisure/countryside/events/default.asp>

**For further information please feel free to contact me at  
Middleton Top Visitor Centre on 01629 823204.**





# ARE THE FRIENDS READY TO BE SOCIAL?

Nic Barfield ponders how Social Media might benefit the FCC

It's 2014. The Cromford Canal is 220 years old. *Birdswood* is 75 years old. The Friends of the Cromford Canal isn't even into its teens yet at 12 years old. It's still young, enquiring, exploring and open to new ideas... Or is it? Are we as members of this fresh, questing, curious, adaptable society really ready to embrace Social Media?

When I talk to people my own age (and I'm hardly ancient at 57), many of them glaze over at the mention of Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and other leading social media. Yet Ofcom\* reports that 80 per cent of adults access the internet, and that the average British household now possesses three or more internet-enabled devices (i.e. PCs, laptops, tablets, smartphones and smart TVs). And UK smartphone ownership broke through the 30 million level in 2013, meaning that well over half the adult population now has an internet-enabled phone. So are my friends Luddites, late adopters (a marketing expression for people who can't/won't/don't engage with new products and services until they are forced to), or just people with the right kit to join the online global village who haven't yet got around to signing up for social networking?

In 1815 - around the time the Cromford Canal was at its commercial zenith - news of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo took four days to reach the London papers. Two hundred years on, we live in an always-on multi-channel world where a misjudged sound bite or the first shot of the next world war can echo around the world in seconds.

While you sleep, Google's tireless search bots are crawling into the crannies of the internet, trawling through trillions of bytes of data, and feeding the results into complex algorithms that decide what comes at the top of the page when you do your first Google search of the day. Meanwhile, in chilled, darkened, silent rooms, thousands of servers are sifting and sorting and sharing further trillions of bytes of info-flow, ready to pour it on to our screens the next time we go to our Facebook, Yahoo, MSN or Google+ pages.

So what does all this mean to us as members of a small special interest society with a heritage canal boat to run? Sure, all this connectivity worries some folk. The sheer scale of the internet is scary, as are privacy issues, eavesdropping, scams, phishing, cyber-bullying, lack of content control... But this new digital dawn heralds a bright new day for small societies like us. No longer do we have to wait for a man to walk around the city with a bell to cry the news. Instead we just sit down at our PC, swipe our phone screen or fire up our tablet, and the world shrinks into a village where we can all talk around the parish pump, swapping ideas and pictures and opinions.

**FACEBOOK** is the most popular social networking site worldwide, with 1.23 billion users as of December 2013. In the UK, a mere 24 million people log on every day, with 10 million of us doing so via our phone or tablet while away from the home or workplace. So increasingly, Facebook goes where we go - and even encourages us to 'check in' when we arrive at our destination, to show our friends what a jolly time we're having. And half of us have over 200 Facebook friends, a lot of people whom we can tell about a good experience or a new product or service that we've enjoyed.

I've been spending an unhealthy amount of time on Facebook recently, mostly on our *Birdswood* page at <https://www.facebook.com/Birdswood>. While sharing content creation and admin duties with others, I've become fascinated by how different types of posts bring different responses from visitors, by what they 'share' and 'like', and by how far our 'reach' extends (France, Belgium, Italy, USA, Australia, South Africa... and Gabon. Had to look that one up - Africa, between Congo and Equatorial Guinea.)

By carefully managing what we put on the *Birdswood* page, and by selecting suitable links to other pages such as Derbyshire and Proud, IWA and Just Canals Forum, we've managed to increase visitors from the barely measurable to 500-plus for an interesting post with an appealing



photo. And page 'likes' have risen from under 100 to over 200 in just a few weeks, so we're doing something right. Finally, we intend to use the trip boat's page more as a shop window to promote the trip schedule and to bring our followers updates about programme alterations, special cruises etc, and as a contact point for people coming to us for the first time. So if you're not already following *Birdswood*, you're probably missing out!

For the moment, the Friends of the Cromford Canal group page on Facebook at:

**<https://www.facebook.com/groups/327567204742>**

remains more of a by-members-for-members resource. It keeps people updated about recent developments on the broader restoration and campaigning front, and generally covers all the news that the glossy printed publication you're holding in your hands can't because it's quarterly. But all that might change if members were to come forward with fresh ideas about developing the FCC group page.

Our existing FB followers don't fit neatly with Facebook's overall user profile, which is heavily biased towards the younger end of the demographic. Almost 60 per cent of FB's users are under 35, while only 16 per cent of viewers of our *Birdswood* FB page fall into the 18-34 age group. Our heartland is the 35-64 segment, which takes in 72 per cent of our page visitors. The figures drop off rapidly for over-65s, who are well represented in FCC's membership but tend to use the internet less and not have smartphones, in line with the rest of the older population.

These stats show us there are big opportunities out there for marketing *Birdswood* as an attraction. Under-45s are typically people with younger children looking for a day out that won't break the family budget, and *Birdswood* should certainly win out here. So we're trying to build links that bring our average page visitor age down, reaching more under-45s, retaining their interest and getting them to engage with us physically as passengers, crew volunteers and maybe even FCC members!

**TWITTER** is the other huge social media platform. The micro-blogging site ('micro' because tweets have to be 140 characters or less; 'blogging' as a shortened form of "weB LOGGING" - i.e. composing a log of thoughts, opinions or experiences in the form of a string of consecutive entries known as 'tweets') is altogether simpler than Facebook but perhaps even more addictive. Starting out later than Facebook (which has only just celebrated its tenth birthday), Twitter signed up its ten millionth UK user in late 2013 and is on course to fascinate 14 million of us by 2017.

Not only is Twitter growing rapidly, it dominates the social networking activities of the under-35s - an amazing 45 per cent of 18-24-year-olds use it, plus 40 per cent of the 25-34 age group. So if we want to reach a new audience (and I take it we do, to bring in younger families and attract young people who might want to join the *Birdswood* team), then that's somewhere we need to be. So we've just set up **@BirdswoodBoat** as our Twitter 'handle', and our URL is

**<https://twitter.com/birdswoodboat>**

The account is being handled by recent FCC recruit and master-in-training Daniel Harrison - someone still in his twenties and (I'm reliably informed) very much in love with his smartphone...

It's early days but we'll be promoting Twitter on the boat and in our promotional material. We hope to be able to post all manner of delights such as vole sightings and service updates, and maybe engage with our followers via competitions and quizzes, as well as tweeting news items and relevant links to other waterways and leisure sites.

There's no space left to consider user-generated review websites such as the mighty TripAdvisor, but they will obviously play a part in *Birdswood's* success. (Perhaps the Editor will let me cover them next issue?) Meanwhile, if you'd like to start a social media debate or just have questions about social networks, go to the *Birdswood* Facebook page and leave a public post or a message, or tweet us. We're hoping to see at least some of you further down that information super-highway!

(\* Ofcom 'The Communications Market 2013', pub. Aug 2013)





# WEBSITE, WORK PARTIES and WATERWAY RECOVERY GROUP

by George Rogers

## Website Report

I'd like to start with a big thank you to those people who have responded to my plea for a volunteer to help with the routine maintenance of the website. I have had at least three very positive responses and we are currently in the process of organising amongst ourselves how it'll work. One of the volunteers lives in Kent - proving that you can still be a very useful volunteer from afar! He'll be keeping the events diary up to date and publishing the posters and event summaries on the home page. In addition our Archivist, Hugh Potter, will be helping to keep the news pages relevant, and all stuff to do with the boat will be dealt with by Nic Barfield (who is also coordinating the social media presence of *Birdswood*, see elsewhere in the *Portal*). I am very grateful to all of them, and hopefully this will free me up to finally develop some of the ideas I had when I first took on the website 4 years ago.

Away from setting up the new team (and making a few technical tweaks to the website to enable them to edit things more easily), I have finally added some of the photos regarding *Birdswood*. Please take a look online, and if you have any further photos please get in touch - the more the merrier!

## Work Party Report

Somehow, I seem to have ended up sorting work parties (but if anyone wants to take over please shout). Since Dave Tinkler stepped down, and with the boat operations taking much volunteer time, work parties had somewhat languished. However, we're trying to get things moving again, and to that end John Barker has coordinated two work parties with DCC, and I am now running a regular series at Sawmills.

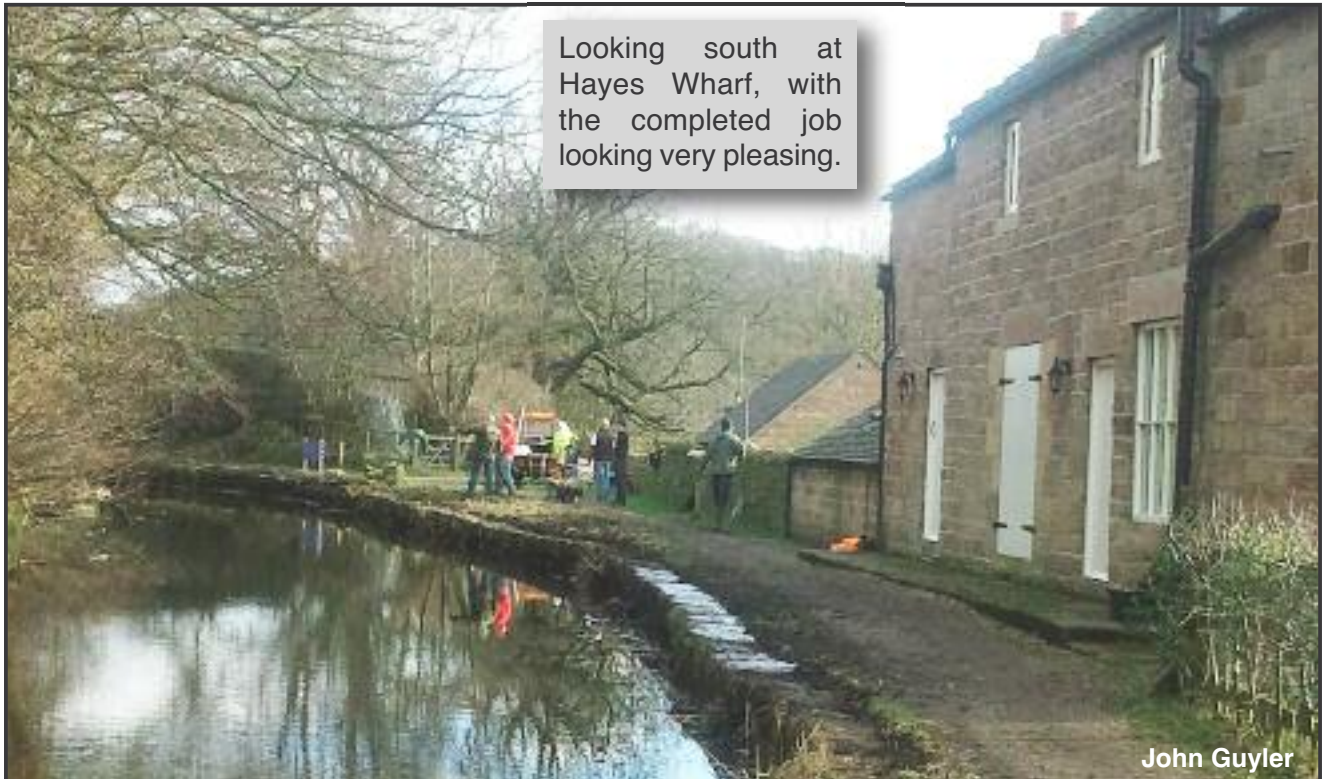


Pulling out weeds at Hayes Wharf. A good length of the original wharf wall was exposed

John Guyler



**DCC** - work with them has been split over two weekends, one each in February and March. In February we worked at Hayes Wharf, clearing off the old coping stones and doing a lot of reed pulling. See pictures opposite and below. In total 7 people worked on the Saturday and (a slightly different) 7 on the Sunday, including the DCC rangers who support us. In March we had a very entertaining weekend building silt traps - something none of us knew anything about! In the end we built 6 silt traps between Pisani's and Lawn Bridge - each of them different so hopefully by the time we come to repeat the exercise we'll know which sort works best. In total 7 people worked on the Saturday and a reduced 3 on the Sunday, again including the DCC rangers.



Looking south at Hayes Wharf, with the completed job looking very pleasing.

John Guyler

**Sawmills** - work here is currently planned for the fourth Saturday of every month. As is often evident by numbers on a full weekend work party, Saturday tends to be more popular. The first of these took place in February, but with the rather short notice and lack of advertising, John Barker and I shifted about 7 tonnes of stone ourselves. When we get a few more people we are aiming to finish the resurfacing along the footpath and hopefully get the wall finished as well - any budding stone layers get in touch!

**Future work party dates:**

**26th April** - Sawmills

**24th May** - Sawmills

**21st / 22nd June** - DCC (Himalayan Balsam clearance)

(No Sawmills work party in June)

**26th July** - Sawmills

**30th August** - Sawmills (put back by 1 week because of the Bank Holiday weekend)

We are also currently discussing dates with DCC for the Autumn - look in the next issue and on the website.

**Waterway Recovery Group Report**

Nothing much to report this issue, it's that slightly quiet time on the ground whilst the work ramps up behind the scenes to prepare for the summer camps. Thanks to all of you who have given me further suggestions for accommodation, I am looking into them all at the moment.





*There have been many and various comments regarding the equipment on Birdswood, one of which is that the mop we have on board is not up to the job. It is a fact that mops which one can buy nowadays are very inadequate compared with the substantial traditional items which would have been used on this boat in its working days. This was commonly made by the boatmen themselves. It would be great to get one made, not only to mop down the cabin, but to look authentic when placed with the traditional water can in front of the chimney. The following article, which was first published in the Historic Narrow Boat Club Newsletter, describes the process.*

## **MAKING A TRADITIONAL BOAT MOP**

by Beryl McDowall

This 'recipe' for making your mop uses the old traditional techniques, but some parts have been modified slightly to take account of the materials currently available. Traditionally, the handle or stale of a boat mop was of sufficient length for the user to stand on the cabin top and dip the mop in the canal with ease, without having to crouch down, as is so often the case with modern short handled mops, which often seem to be based on a broom handle! The handle also needs to be of a larger diameter than a broom handle. Some people use a section of cut down boat shaft, but I prefer to use a pitchfork handle. This is not only fatter than the broom handle, but can be obtained with the top end (i.e. away from the mop head) elegantly shaped to give a good grip. It also helps prevent a wet mop handle from slipping through your hands. The best place to find a pitch fork handle is a large agricultural merchant, or an old fashioned ironmongers shop, although it is a sad fact of modern life that these are becoming increasingly difficult to find.

Having obtained a stale, you now need an old donkey jacket - the heavy generally navy blue woollen Melton cloth is very absorbent and it's felt-like qualities mean it is less prone to fraying than a (grey) blanket. Cut the cloth into strips all the same size, approx. 14"x3". Depending on how thick (and heavy) you want your mop to be, and on the thickness of the fabric, about 12-15 strips will probably suffice. Remember that a wet mop weighs a lot more than a dry one!

The next item to hunt for is a piece of steel pipe about 1" - 1.5" long, of just the right internal diameter to fit tightly on to the mophead end of the stale. If you have access to a solid fuel fire (or a blow torch) and a pair of tongs, heating this collar will make fitting slightly easier. Clamp the stale vertically, mophead end uppermost, where you can reach the top of it. Heat the collar in the fire, then, holding the hot collar in the tongs, ease it on to the end of the stale far enough to allow you to let go with the tongs, without the collar falling off. Hold a piece of timber across the top of the pipe (to prevent burring) and hit it with a lump hammer, several times. You will probably need to work your way round the collar to avoid one side digging into the stale. The top of the collar should then be flush with the end of the stale. This collar will help prevent the stale from splitting when you attach the mophead.

Next you need, ideally, a heavy tapered nail of rectangular cross-section 3" long. You could acquire one from a local blacksmith, or you may need to be inventive - find a large diameter nail and grind flats on 4 sides. If you try using a round nail, you will find that your mophead begins to rotate after a little use, making it impossible to spin it dry. Having located your nail, cut a piece of supple leather (a bit of old boot is ideal) about 2" in diameter, punch a hole in the centre, then force this leather washer onto your nail. This will stop the fabric pulling off. Some boatmen also liked to use a strip of leather 4" long x



1.5" wide, with a hole 1" from each end. This formed into a loop and threaded onto the nail. See fig. 1. The loop is then manoeuvred into place so that it covers the nail head, thereby reducing the risk of scratching the paintwork when mopping off. If you decide to do this, fit the loop first, followed by the circular washer.

Now find the centre of each strip of fabric and push it onto the nail, on top of the leather washer. Continue adding strips, arranging them like spokes of a wheel. On completing one round, start going round again until you have used up all the strips. Push them down hard. Clamp the stale vertically as before. Offer the mop head up beside the stale and mark the depth of the nail. Drill a pilot hole down the centre of the stale, then open it out with a larger drill, remembering that when you hammer the mophead into place, the nail should be a tight fit. See fig. 2. Before hammering the nail home, make sure the pieces of fabric are still arranged in a spiral.

Traditionally, a boat mop was used to wet the boat to clean it (and to help prevent the wood from drying out in hot weather), and to soak up the water, so that no unsightly water marks remained after cleaning. To dry the mop out, hold it between your hands, one hand either side of the point of balance, and twist the mop by drawing your left hand towards you and pushing your right hand away from you, see fig 3. Each time you get to the end of a stroke, jump your hands back on to the mopstick. Repeat until all the water is spun out. This gives you the opportunity to show off your mop handling skills and looks impressive! Remember a soggy mophead sitting on the cabin top can cause long term damage to the paintwork.

A word of advice to the novice mop spinner, it's a good idea to practise on land, as a mop in inexperienced hands on a cabin top has been known to launch itself into the canal, whereupon the head end sinks and you are left with a only few inches of stale above the surface to aid the retrieval process!

Good mopping.

Fig 1

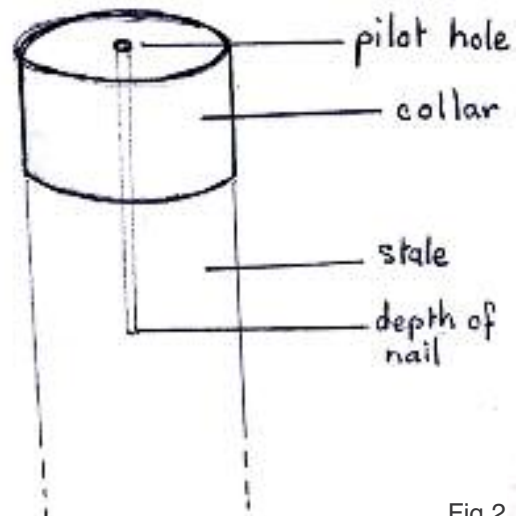
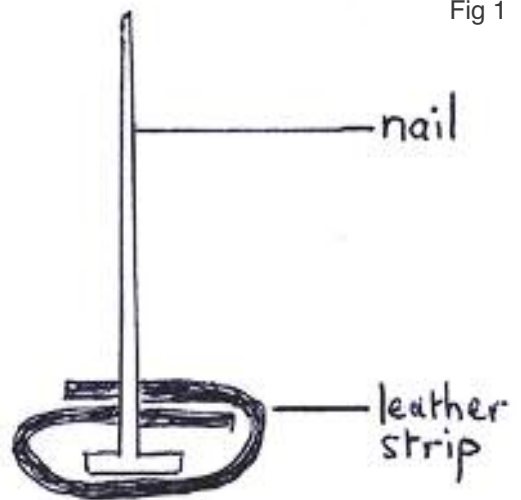


Fig 2

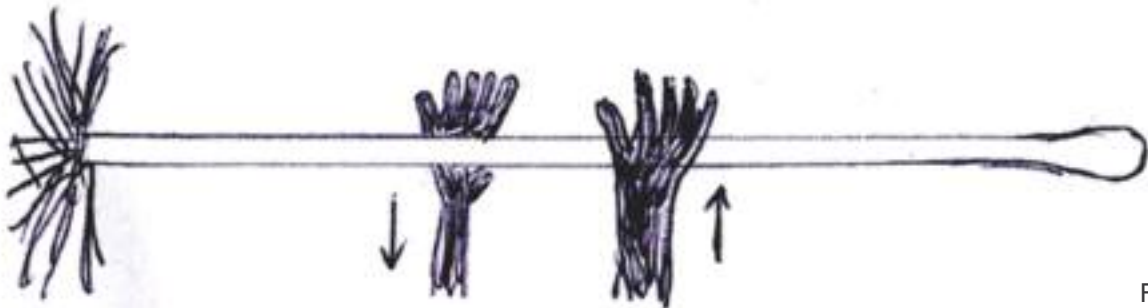


Fig 3

*If any of you would like to have a go at making a mop for Birdswood, and then paint it in the traditional multicoloured 'barber's pole' design, it will greatly enhance the appearance of the boat, as well as being a useful tool to keep up the smart appearance of this fine craft. Ed.*





# MATTHEW'S GOSPEL ON CANAL WALKS - No.5

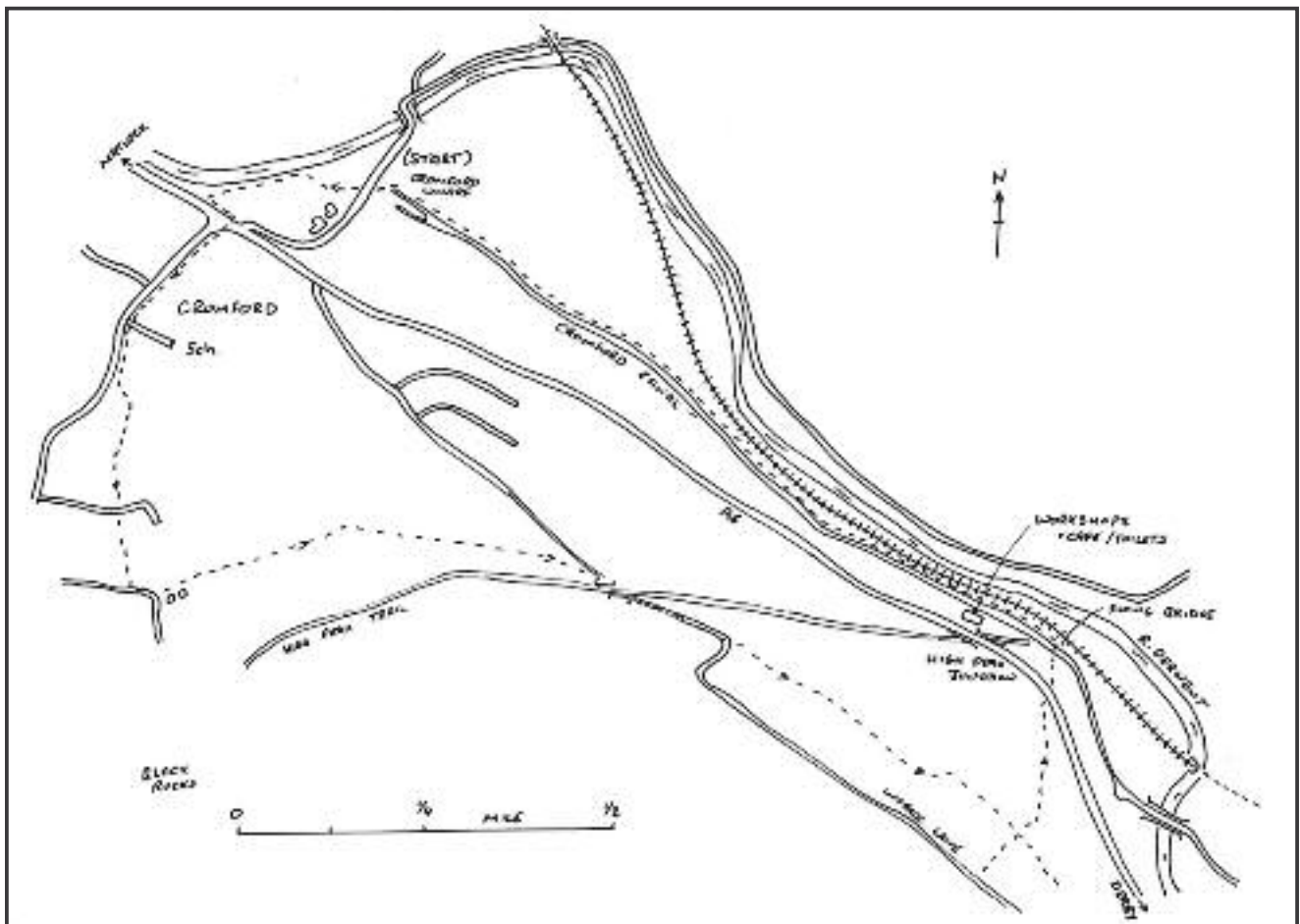
by Matthew Rogers



Last time we were at one end of the canal so this time I thought we'd go to the other end! This is our 5th in a new series of walks and we explore the area around Cromford and High Peak Junction. The walk is mainly on paths and tracks and includes quite a steep climb up Cromford Hill. However, the views really make it worthwhile.

This walk starts from Cromford Wharf GR 300 570 and can be followed on OS 1:25,000 Explorer Map OL24. The walk is about 3.5 miles long and is not suitable for pushchairs in places.

1. Leave the car park by the Gothic Warehouse, cross the road into Cromford Mills's car park and pick up the footpath at the rear turning left by the river. Follow the well-marked path for about 200m until you emerge onto the A6. Cross the road on the crossing and head into Cromford Village past the shops and up the hill, past the Bell Inn and North Street (North Street in Cromford was built in 1776 and still to this day consists of terraced 3 storey buildings which were used to house the mill workers) until you reach Bedehouse Lane.





2. Turn left following the restricted byway up a very clear tarmac path crossing a small road and continuing ahead signposted Black Rock. After passing through a stone squeezer, at the next road turn left for 50m and at the bend take the left hand footpath passing Rogulem cottage and Ivy Cottage on your right. Keep straight ahead with the wall on your left and fantastic views of Cromford and Willersley Castle - a 200 year old Grade II listed building, commissioned by the great industrialist Sir Richard Arkwright. The wall switches side but keep straight ahead on a wide grassed path
  3. Enter the woods over a wooden stile and keep straight on a clear path passing under a stone arch that carries the High Peak Trail and continue ahead signposted Longway Bank. After 100m, as the track bears right continue straight ahead by a large stone outcrop and the wall now on your right into the woods.
  4. After about ½ mile a path crosses the track. On your right there is a campsite and an old tin barn about 100m away. You need to turn left dropping quickly down a narrow track with large boulders underfoot. After about 250m you emerge from the woods and cross a small field to the A6. Cross the road and continue ahead to High Peak Junction Workshops. Stop for a look around and enjoy a cuppa / ice-cream.
  5. When in operation a short detour will give you an opportunity to explore the Leawood pumphouse. <http://www.middleton-leawood.org.uk/leawood/whatson2014.html>
  6. Cross the swing bridge and turn left for the 1 mile back along the towpath to Cromford Wharf where hopefully *Birdswood* will be seen passing by.
- Well Done!

### **REMEMBER THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**at Ironville Church Hall on Monday April 28th at 7.30pm**

After the official business, some tutors of the Nottingham University engineering students, who made a study of possible solutions to some of the restoration challenges of the Cromford Canal at Sawmills, will be showing us their findings.

### **LEAWOOD PUMP STEAMING DATES 2014**

The engine will be in motion from noon to 5pm on each of the following days (except Discovery Weekend - 11am to 4pm).

Why not book a ride down to the Pump House on *Birdswood*?

Call 07552 055455

MONTH	SAT	SUN	MON	PERIOD
APRIL		20th	21st	Easter
MAY		4th	5th	May Bank Holiday
JUNE	7th	8th		First Weekend
JULY		6th		First Sunday
AUGUST	2nd	3rd		First Weekend
		24th	25th	August Bank Holiday
OCTOBER	4th	5th		First Weekend
NOVEMBER	1st	2nd		Discovery Weekend





## MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

A good way to help the FCC is to recruit new members. Just to remind you, the membership rates are shown below. Also, anyone who is a UK taxpayer can use Gift Aid to increase the value of their subscription by 28 pence in the pound. Application forms are on the FCC website or contact Yvonne.

Individual: £7.00 Life: £110.00

Couples: £10.00 Life: £165.00

Corporate Business: £35.00

Corporate Charity: £17.00



from  
Yvonne Shattower

In this magazine we give a special welcome to Mr and Mrs R E Day, who are our 1500th and 1501st Members. Unfortunately we do not, of course, have anywhere near that number of current Members, - it would be wonderful if we did, so perhaps it is time to thank those of you who renew early and remind others that prompt renewal of your subscription when you receive your reminder is a way of helping the Friends.

A lot has been written in the last few magazines about *Birdswood*. Do try and get to Cromford to have a trip on her if you can. We shall shortly be starting to run horse drawn trips, taking us back 200 years. Ironically, the horse drawn trips are quicker than those under power. Such is progress!

Unfortunately the Friends have decided not to attend any of the major National Waterway events this year, mainly due to the cost, but our Sales Team will be keeping the FCC flag flying at lots of local shows, carnivals etc. Please do support them if you happen to see them 'out on the road'. They work extremely hard; if of course you are able to help in any way, please do offer as we always need extra hands.

Our new Social Secretary, Dave Ratner, has put an interesting and varied programme together for us for the rest of 2014, apart from the December meeting. The Pie and Pea Supper in 2013 was not as well attended as in the past, and your Committee are wondering what you, the Members, would like in the way of a Christmas Social evening. Please do give Dave (or any committee member) a call if you have any ideas.

Finally, a reminder that our AGM is at Ironville Church Hall on Monday 28 April 2014, which is a week later than our usual meeting night which would be Easter Monday. Don't forget to bring your copy of the last issue of *Portal*, which has the details and Minutes of the 2013 AGM, as these will not be available separately on the night. We hope we will see many of you there. This is your opportunity to find out what we have done, and what we plan to do in the coming year.

### **We give a warm welcome to the following new members who have joined us since the last edition of *The Portal***

Mr J Dolan, Matlock

Mr & Mrs R E Day, Belper

Mr & Mrs B Wild, Matlock

Mr J Hall, Oakham

Mr A Peat, Sheffield

Miss S Hulme, Matlock

Mr H Pearman, Belper

Mrs A Haile, Ilkeston



## FORTHCOMING MEMBERS' SOCIAL MEETINGS

The Friends of the Cromford Canal welcome everyone to their Social Meetings, held on the **Third Monday of the Month at Ironville Church Hall at 7.30pm.**

The following are scheduled for the remainder of 2014

There is a bar and raffle available at all meetings. Admission is £2

- **April 28th - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** (free admission)
- **May 19th - The Fosdyke - A Watery tale of Mystery and Intrigue - Ian Morgan**
- **June 16th - The Building of the Falkirk Wheel - Peter Travis**
- **September 15th - A Farrier's Life - Doug Bradbury**
- **October 20th - William Jessop - The Man - Martyn Taylor-Cockane**
- **November 17th - My Farcical Career as Liason Officer on a Cruise Ship - Colin Bower**
- **December 8th - Christmas Social, details TBA**

## BIRDSWOOD DVD

A new DVD is now available from the FCC sales stall.

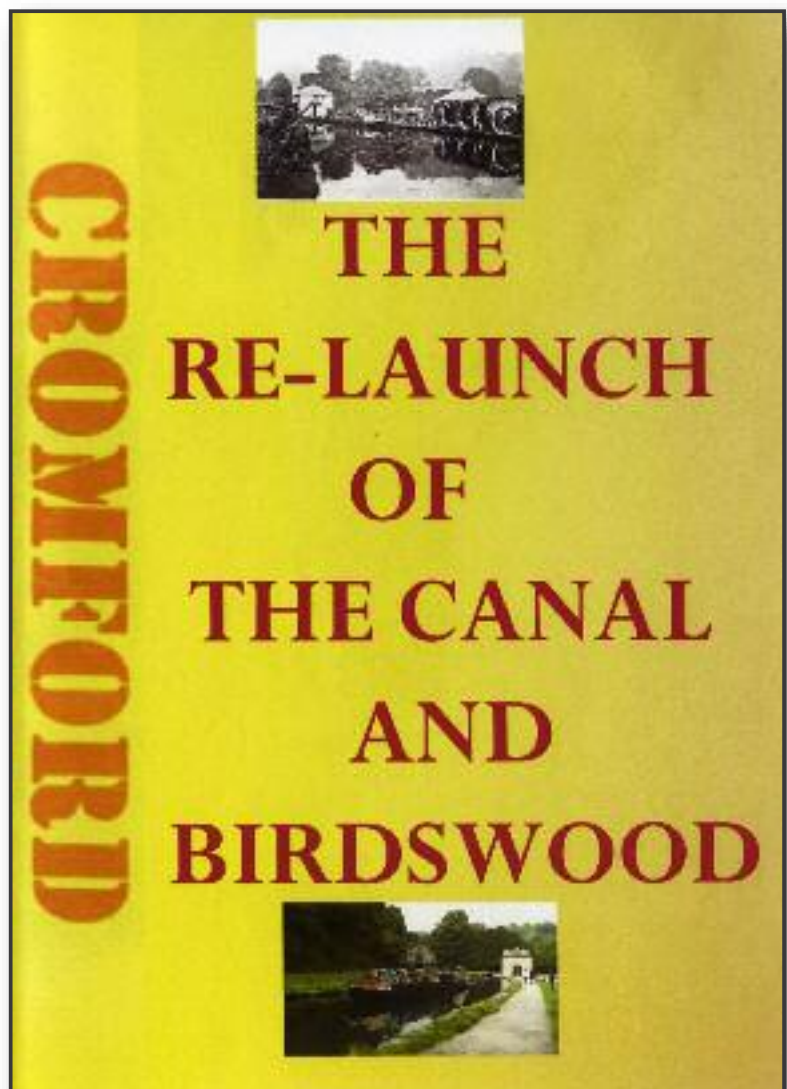
This is introduced by our first chairman Mike Kelley, who describes the formation of the FCC and the subsequent purchase of *Birdswood*.

There is then some very interesting footage of the loading on to a lorry at Langley Mill, the road journey to Cromford and relaunching into the canal at Cromford Wharf. Also included is the official launching ceremony

We are very grateful to the Amber Valley Camcorder Club whose members were positioned at each end of the journey and along the route to do the filming. They have then produced this fine DVD at minimum cost. Collect yours from any of the social meetings or AGM.

**£4.50 each**

**or £6 by post from FCC Sales**



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