

THE PORTAL

Issue 67 - Winter 2018

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Friends of the Cromford Canal

Registered Charity No. 1164608



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Front Cover - Discovery Days 2016

Stalwart of the sales team, Val Roberts was photographed at the 2016 Discovery Days at Cromford Wharf by Ashley Franklin, courtesy of whom this picture is published.

Back Cover – Discovery Days 2018

Top: Regular 'organist' Peter Keeting takes a break whilst young Jamie Johnson continues the music making and attracts quite a crowd.

Middle: For the first time in several years younger visitors had the opportunity to try their hand at canoeing for free, courtesy of Acclimatize of Wirksworth, who offer Adventure Activities in the Peak District.

Bottom: Discovery Days regular Jes Inglis, who comes all the way from Oswestry, hard at work on his traditional 'Rose & Castle' painting.

Photos: Hugh Potter

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

by Hugh Potter

There has been a lot going on recently . . .

Thank you all so very much for responding to my Editorial in the last issue! I was delighted to receive phone calls and emails proving that, yes, you are out there. This has resulted in two pages of 'Letters to the Editor' on varied topics and a new series of walks.

Portal is the main way FCC keeps you in touch with what is going on, although there are the website, the new email lists, and the ubiquitous Facebook which carries up-to-the-minute news. And as you will read in this issue, there has been a flurry of work in the couple of weeks before going to press.

Not everyone wants to join Facebook, but there are two busy and productive groups operating on our canal who use it as their main communication: 'Cromford Canal & Codnor Park Res' and 'Friends of Aqueduct Cottage'. The former are working hard every week along the locks around Ironville and Jacksdale (see page 28).



The second group, fronted by the dynamic and indefatigable Ron Common, has recently revealed what must be the best ever image of Aqueduct Cottage. Thanks to a new member of the group posting some of her family photographs, we have a simply cracking photograph which within 24 hours she had brought round and allowed me to scan. We have the date (1894) and the names of the people in it. But sorry, that was only the other day and there is only space in this issue to show you a tantalising glimpse – to see it all, and other enlargements, check out the group's Facebook page!

Meanwhile please do continue to email me with your thoughts, comments and experiences of our magical canal.

Very best wishes for Christmas and, as they say on the canals, a 'good road ahead' for the New Year.

Copy date for next Portal is Thursday 14th February



From the scan of the Aqueduct Cottage photo, detail of the unusual construction of the swing bridge that gave access to the cottage can be seen, with the uprights apparently bolted to inverted cast iron T-pieces.

Photo: Caron Mellor

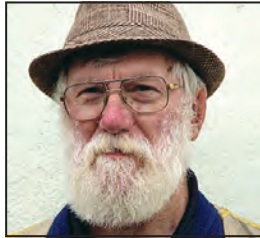


CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

by John Baylis BEM

A review of FCC developments over the autumn

The sorry saga of failures to get the Pinxton Branch of the Cromford Canal back across the old Smotherfly opencast coal site has continued over recent months. After several delays in announcing the winners we heard that the Friends' application of £495,000 for a Water



Environment Grant to restore the Smotherfly site had failed. My thanks to those members of the Strategic Restoration Committee for their efforts and I hope that the experience will stand them in good stead for future grant applications. Although, however, it is perhaps doubtful with the way that Brexit is going that a similar sized environmental grant will be available in the future.

The other bad news on Smotherfly is that the farmer who purchased the site no longer wants to talk to the Friends about the purchase of the route of the river diversion or future landscaping of earth piled up by UK Coal for restoration of the site. Pinxton has lost the opportunity to alleviate some of its flooding problems with the creation of a water habitat and new footpaths. Perhaps worse is the £40,000 and many hours of effort which the Friends have spent preparing the project for the planning application but being let down by others prior to implementation.

I am sorry to report that Bob Bullock and Jude Berry have decided to retire as trustees for personal reasons and I thank them both for their past services to the Friends. Bob as Treasurer has looked after the finances for twelve years during which time both the income and expenditure have increased five-fold. Jude had been a trustee for five years and latterly Executive Secretary and intends to continue with her main interest as secretary

of the Strategic Restoration Committee. Chris Wilding has volunteered to take over as Executive Secretary.

The retirement of Jude and Bob emphasise the need for trustees with a business or professional background. With the increased turnover through

Birdswood and the restoration project at Langley Mill there is a need for trustees who have experience in business to fulfil the growing requirements of the Charity Commission and financial bodies. Hopefully we have a volunteer for the treasurer position but we still need people to look after sales and publicity. If anyone is interested please give me a call to talk about what you could do to help the organisation of the Friends.

Finally, I would like to thank all the volunteers who have worked on the canal and its surrounds, the masters and crews of Birdswood, the shop assistants and all those who have worked on committees or at home. As it is near the year end I wish them and all the members a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and look forward to seeing you in 2019.

Monday 21st January 2019

The Grantham Canal

By David Lynam-Brown

All are welcome to this illustrated talk outlining the progress being made by our friends on the Grantham Canal where locks have been restored with innovative HLF funding. We might learn a thing or two . . .

**Ironville Church Hall, Casson St NG16 5NN
7.30pm - Tea, Coffee, Bar & Raffle**



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Friends of the Cromford Canal



Notice is hereby given that the Third Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Cromford Canal, Charitable Incorporated Organisation Number 1164608, will be held on Monday, 15th April 2019 at the Church Hall, Ironville, commencing at 7.30pm.

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the Second Annual General Meeting on Monday, 16th April 2018.
3. Matters arising.
4. Report of the Chairman.
5. Presentation of 2018 accounts.
6. Report on Financial strategies and risks.
7. Adoption of the accounts. See Note below.
8. Appointment of Community Accounting Plus as auditors.
9. Election of Trustees. See notes below.
10. Reports by Officers.
11. Any other business.

Notes

The accounts for the year ending 31st December 2018 will be available on the website before March 22nd. Paper copies will be available on application to the Executive Secretary. This is the third Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Cromford Canal as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and one third of the Trustees nominated to the Charity Commission must retire and seek re-election. The final nominated trustees John Baylis, Ian Hooker and John Barker seek re-election, Bob Bullock resigned during the year and does not seek re-election. Applications for these persons and any further applications for election as Trustees must be submitted in writing to the Executive Secretary before 28th February 2018. Application forms are available from the Executive Secretary and must be signed by the applicant. The full list of applicants with a short CV along with the trustee's annual report and the minutes of the second AGM will be sent to all members and made available on the website.

Chris Wilding
Executive Secretary
The Canal Shop
Weighbridge Office, Cromford Wharf
Mill Rd
Cromford, Derbyshire
DE4 3RQ
Email: secretary@cromfordcanal.org



MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

by Yvonne Shattower

Look out for our Monday evening talks for 2019

Firstly, I would like to apologise for the late arrival of the last edition of Portal. There seemed to be hold ups at every stage of production of the magazine, and we were all left tearing our hair out at the delays. Hopefully the problems have now been sorted.



This will be the second edition to be sent out by email to those of you who requested it. In the end, all seemed to go well with the email list; I was concerned that some of the eighty-four addresses would 'bounce', but in the end only three came back, and only one of these was a typing error, so I was very relieved. Chris Wilding has now prepared the lists of contacts for FCC volunteering and restoration, and Birdwood volunteering, so this will give us the chance to communicate more easily with you, and pass on information that is important to you. I know Vix has some important messages to go out, so keep a watch for them if you have asked to go on the list. And if you would like to go onto any of these lists please let me know.

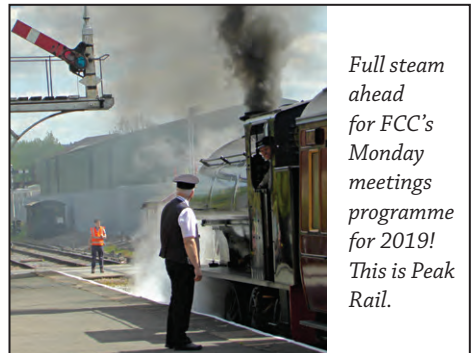
Unfortunately there didn't seem to be the number of visitors that we have had in previous years at the recent Discovery Days weekend at Cromford; the weather was not brilliant, so perhaps that put people off. I think we have been so lucky in the last few years that we have been spoilt. Even so, it was good to meet some new members and catch up with friends.

Our programme of Monday evening talks for the first four months of 2019 has been announced. We start off on 21st January with David Lynam-Brown who will give us an update on the progress of the work on the Grantham Canal. On 18th February, we will be able to hear about the Steeple Grange Light Railway.

If, like me, you have never heard of this, it is an 18in gauge line starting near Wirksworth and running along the line of a branch of the old Cromford & High Peak Railway. They use mainly old mining rolling stock, and take their passengers through some wonderful scenery. Then on

18th March, Nigel Carabine will tell us about Peak Rail. The original line ran from Derby to Manchester, and was built by several companies at various times starting from 1840 between Derby and Ambergate. To learn more about these two fascinating railways, you will just have to come to Ironville Church Hall at 7.30pm. We always have a raffle, a small sales table and tea and coffee are available. On 15th April 2019 we will have our Annual General Meeting, which is your opportunity to find out about our progress over the last year in our plans to restore this lovely canal.

I am writing this in the first half of November, and Christmas is getting closer and closer, so I would like to wish all our members a very happy Christmas and a hope that the New Year will see our restoration plans really starting to take shape.



Full steam ahead for FCC's Monday meetings programme for 2019! This is Peak Rail.



BIRDSWOOD REPORT

by Vix Wilding

Another successful year for FCC's passenger trip boat

I have had a long hard year with juggling a busy work schedule and finding time to get all the tasks completed on time. Birdswood has had another record number of passengers and is doing better than I expected. The growth has been so very fast in the last 5 years that there is little more we can do to extend the offering without another 20 or so volunteers! Having said that all the volunteers work so very hard to provide an excellent service to our customers.

They all really deserve the recognition for this success, not me. However, the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site team have recently recognised my additional work with a wonderful award. I have received a certificate and bobbin trophy for my 'Services to Volunteering'. It was a shocking surprise and has made all the hard work worthwhile.



The certificate and bobbin presented to Vix Wilding for her volunteering work on the Cromford Canal as part of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site.

Volunteers come and go, some have been around since the beginning! We have lost a large number this year due to illnesses of one sort or another but have also gained a few. The new staff have learned fast and join in competently with everyone else. We enjoy the day in the fresh air, walking and talking to the

public. The reward of happy customers and some excellent reviews and letters of 'Thanks' are very encouraging.



Adrian Farmer of DVMWHS presents Vix with the Volunteering Award.

Photo: DVMWHS

Continued advertising through leaflet distribution and the use of social media has widened the net to include guests from all over the world. Visitors are staying in Derbyshire and the accommodation sites are promoting us. Word has got around about Birdswood, which is the best advertising. Several coach companies bring people on day trips and I have seen a huge increase in the bookings from tour companies this year and some already booked in for next year. We have seen a few schools and guide/scout groups and even a school twinned with Bonsall Primary from London. I had a lovely afternoon helping the children compare their waterways with Cromford Canal. One of the most obvious was the stunning hills along the canal compared to the city buildings.

Setting the business plan for 2018 was a challenge, as we had had a closer look at the figures set from previous years and seen that there were some goals which we were never going to achieve. Realistically, with the current volunteer numbers and the increasingly high

average age of a crew team it was apparent that more charters and trips were not possible. The prices were increased in some areas and food and drink costs were reassessed. We have seen therefore an increase in income from drink sales particularly and the ticket price increase has proved very beneficial.

There will be more masters for 2019 who are currently training to be ready to take their test before next season as we have lost two this year and were struggling already. This is

an expensive process, both financially and time consuming.

Do you have any ideas for a fundraiser to help cover these costs? Its approximately £800 per master? Could we try a sponsored walk along the canal? A fashion show or even a silent auction? Someone asked me recently if I have ever considered a Barn Dance! Not sure about that one!! Please get in touch with any suggestions:

victoria@birdswood.org 07552 055455.



A recent review from Tripadvisor

We were in Derbyshire for the day and it I was looking for something to do with the family. It was the pump house that caught my eye as I was looking on tripadvisor. I'm interested by engineering from that age. So we parked at Cromford rugby club and had a look at the wharf. Then we noticed the narrow boat. On this day the narrow boat was being horse drawn, which was great. So we decided to travel up to the pump house and walk back. The canal itself was peaceful. Being horse-drawn was quite tranquil with no boat noise, although there was commentary. The commentator was knowledgable and happily answered our questions. There was also a member of staff serving tea/coffee etc at a reasonable price. The walk back along the towpath was peaceful and interesting as there is a swing bridge and some old railway workshops, worth visiting. The pump house itself was open but not operating due to maintenance. Hats off to the volunteers that made this day a great day out on our weekend away.



The Cromford Canal is well worth visiting at any time of the year.

Photo: CJ



STRATEGIC RESTORATION UPDATE

by George Rogers

What's happening at Pinxton and Langley Mill

It seems no time at all since I was writing my last update for Portal, and yet when I look back at what I wrote then, it is gratifying to see how much has happened in that short space of time.

First, as you'll have read in the Chairman's column, we have now been notified that we were unfortunately unsuccessful in our application for the Water Environment Grant towards the works at Smotherfly. With the ongoing delays, and an understanding that ineligible projects had already been weeded out, we assumed that at the very least we would be asked for more information. However, when we were informed, it was to tell us that they didn't believe the application delivered against the grant's goals, which was surprising to us all and we struggle to understand exactly why. I echo John Baylis' thanks to all those involved in putting together the application, and at least we all learned some valuable lessons.

Second, the news about the WEG application has meant that we've been able to return our full focus to the Langley Mill planning application. This work is being coordinated by John Boucher, with assistance from other members of the SRC. Since the last report the following works have been completed:

- Supporting documentation continued, most of which is now nearing completion. This includes the design & access statement, the flood risk assessment and all of the supporting drawings.

- Initial pre-application meeting held with Broxtowe Borough Council. They were supportive of our approach to date and indicated that it aligned with many of their planning policies which is encouraging. As the application will be a cross-border application,



Broxtowe will be acting as the lead authority, and they will coordinate with Amber Valley Borough Council.

- Meeting held with Susan White (DCC) to discuss the ecological appraisal, which Susan is now extending to cover additional areas of land relevant

to the flood mitigation works and the Broxtowe side of the A610.

- Contact made with the Nottingham 26 developers (the development at the new roundabout on the A610 going north from Langley Mill). The corner of the canal encroaches on their ecological mitigation strip so we will be meeting with them shortly to discuss this further.

- Site meeting held with CRT to discuss initial clearance and trial holes in advance of the main works. Assuming we don't hit any major show-stoppers, we should be submitting the application in the very near future – so hopefully I'll have some better news to report in the next Portal (though not, of course, a decision; realistically this could take many months).

Aside from the Langley Mill application, other members of the SRC are working on developing the findings of the Economic Development Study (EDS) and the SRC's review of the IWA work stages plan I discussed in the last issue. I'm currently finalising the work to incorporate all the comments received on the EDS so this will also be issued to trustees for final approval and made public shortly afterwards.

As we near the festive season, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all of you. Here's hoping that in 2019 we put a shovel in the ground at Langley Mill . . .



CROMFORD PARTNERSHIP CRUISE

by John Baylis BEM

Local councillors are shown FCC's work



Councillors and members of the Cromford Canal Partnership inspect stop planks installed by FCC in an attempt to alleviate leakage from Derwent Aqueduct.

Photo: Hugh Potter

Derbyshire is perhaps unusual in that at the last three council elections there has been a change in the controlling party; that usually means along with other bodies we need to get to know some of the new committee chairmen and explain the work of the Friends of the Cromford Canal. When the Conservatives came to power in 2009 they started the Cromford Canal Partnership. This was similar to the Chesterfield Canal Partnership which had been going for over ten years. DCC and local authority members and officers met with statutory and volunteer organisations involved with the Cromford Canal between Cromford and Langley Mill.

The management of the Cromford Canal in DCC ownership had been irregular for some years and the first action of new management was to commission a study along the total length of the canal. Atkins, the well-known consulting engineers, won the contract to carry out a scoping study and reported on several options to maintain or restore the

various sections of the canal. It was decided that a more expensive final study was not required and some of the money earmarked for the work was spent on dredging the first mile of canal from Cromford Wharf.

With the canal being dredged to a depth that would allow navigation the Friends started looking for a suitable passenger boat and finding funding for purchase. By that time Labour had become the major party. The diesel engine boat Birdswood was acquired but had to be converted to battery operation to satisfy operation in a Site of Special Scientific Interest. DCC licenced the boat on the agreement that the operating profit had to be spent on the Cromford Canal; at least half on the section used for navigation.

Over the past five years Birdswood has carried over 30,000 passengers, over £30,000 has been spent on this part of the canal, and it has become the number one visitor attraction in the area. When council changed again in 2017 we invited the new councillors and members of the Partnership to come and see what the Friends have done and the support we have given DCC Countryside Services in cash and with volunteers to help maintain the canal.

On 8th October this year the cruise finally took place and we showed members and officers what we had achieved with volunteers, also mentioning the £30,000 we had obtained in grants in addition to the profit from Birdswood.

The weather was favourable and the Councillors seemed very pleased with our efforts and the opportunity to see the canal from the water. My thanks to Vix Wilding and the crew of Birdswood for running the trip and to Arraslea Shires for providing the horse Ted free of charge.



WORK PARTY REPORT

by John Guylar

Lots of tea, coffee and cake and an empty 17-year-old crisp packet!

29th August One work party at Ironville replaced a top rail and three fence posts alongside Lock 2. Difficult work because two of the posts were in concrete; we had to use a sledge hammer and a long spike to remove them. Painted the fence up towards the Codnor Park Reservoir and ran out of paint. Clearing litter and brambles on the Pinxton Arm at Casson Street, Ironville.

Second work party at Lawn Bridge, Cromford, and the Swing Bridge at High Peak Junction. Clearing nettles and brambles for the comfort and safety of the Birdswood passengers.

5th September Pinxton Wharf, general clean up, litter pick and clearing vegetation around the weir, reed clearance in front of Boat Inn. Two bags of rubbish.

12th September Pinxton Wharf, working with Paul and Ian, the DCC tree fellers, removing willow and elder around the sump and the weir. The brash was shredded nearby and the larger pieces of timber were collected by a local landowner for his own use. Very heavy work; large amount of shrubbery cleared near the weir. We were provided with tea and coffee by a lady at 11am, so she could move her horses while it was quiet. Also collected one bag of rubbish.

19th September Ironville: finished painting the fence up to Codnor Park Reservoir. Fixed two new fence posts, digging out the old concrete around the rotten fence posts, again very hard work. One bag of litter picked around the reservoir car park.



Tree work at Pinxton on 7th November.

Photo: John Guylar

26th September High Peak Junction: Angela & Wendy completed painting the swing bridge, with some very athletic positions to paint the undersides of the spars. Chris Stamford-Burrows donned waders and cleared reeds from the stop planks at the southern end of the aqueduct, with others clearing the reeds on either side of the swing bridge.

3rd October Sawmills, working alongside the Bullbridge & Sawmills Area Civic Society (BASA) to clear saplings around the Gauging Narrows. Two trimmers were in action clearing the footpath and the narrows chamber. We have an additional positive of working at Sawmills; Gill Hirst, the 'Mary Berry of Sawmills', arrived with a two tier cake dispenser packed with elvan biscuits, lemon drizzle cakes, fruit cake, carrot cake and nut cake. Noble efforts were made to finish them off but sadly we were unable to complete the task and had to return to work.

10th October Cromford: unloaded 56 coir rolls and put them into store at Cromford Wharf (Phase 3 of the DerwentWISE grant).

Relocated to Sawmills to finish off clearing saplings around the Gauging Narrows.

16th October Ironville: clearing shrubs, undergrowth and saplings along the footpath on the Codnor Park Reservoir adjacent to the Pinxton Arm.

24th October Ironville: retrieved and relocated the Boat Lock 2 sign, which had been ripped out of its location, complete with concrete blocks, and thrown into the lock chamber. The sign was retrieved after a careful assessment of the water in the lock chamber for white-clawed crayfish, and was hauled up to the towpath and re-set in the original position. This is the latest act of vandalism at Ironville; there was damage to the Pinxton Arm Bridge in the summer when three teenagers were seen to push one of the coping stones off the bridge wall. This was subsequently retrieved and reset by the

husband of one of our volunteers. Damage was also noted to the mortar between the top coping stones on both sides of the bridge, which has been chiselled out, with damage to the stonework. In August, the fence leading down from the vehicle gate at Lock 2 had been smashed down. We then moved onto the Pinxton Arm to clear small trees and undergrowth and collect one bag of rubbish.

31st October Ironville, Pinxton Arm and Casson Street. Cleared the undergrowth from the Pinxton Arm Bridge under the pedestrian overbridge and along to Casson Street towards the church. Compliments were given to the some of the work party members by residents for clearing a walkway along the length of the canal line to the church, some only realising for the first time that it had been a working canal and the history behind it.

5th November Cromford: Reeds were cleared along the towpath wall north of Lawn Bridge to provide access for an environmental study of the wall, prior to reinstating the stone and re-pointing the wall. The clearance was from the towpath using cromes (long reed rakes or 'kebs'); further reed clearance will have to be done from the water, either by using a boat

or standing in the water with waders, floatation and safety equipment.

7th November Pinxton Wharf: Clearing the undergrowth and trees in the canal and on the opposite bank to the towpath. A 50-yard section was cleared with some difficult work to remove trees growing in the water. Strimming and litter picking took place on the towpath side, along the entire half mile from Pinxton Wharf to the weir. The highlight of John Dyson's litter picking effort was a historic crisp packet, 17 years old, and a beer can 5 years old – both

empty. One extra job was to assist Bolsover District Council workers to load half a ton of fly tipped rubbish from the turning point half way along the stretch. In all, three bags of rubbish and a fold up fisherman's chair were collected during the day (Note: the fisherman wasn't on it when it was picked up). A very hard wet day, but very satisfying.

Total FCC volunteer time on work parties, 29th August to 7th November: 465 hours and 69 travel hours.

If you fancy the idea of the occasional cakes, to go with the tea and coffee provided every week and also enjoy the company of a great group of folks, please contact John Barker (work party leader) 01773 760358 or work@cromfordcanal.org.

My thanks to all in the work parties who sent reports to me.



*Replacing the sign board at Lock 2.
Photo: John Guyler*



NEWS FROM THE NORTH

by Mark Brailsford

Work between Cromford and Ambergate by Derbyshire County Council Countryside Service

Leak repairs

The Derwent aqueduct near Leawood Pump is still leaking and canal water is being lost through each of its three spans. It appears to reduce in flow some days and increase on others; the leak often increases when water levels are down, so water pressure might be helping to seal the liner.

Work to investigate the leak was planned for November when levels could be dropped whilst Birdswood was not running and when there is less impact on wildlife.

The leak at Cromford Wharf was repaired at the beginning of November, as soon as Birdswood stopped regular trips for the year. A trench was dug and refilled with clay puddle to stop the water flowing at the car park.



At the Cromford Wharf leak site, a trench was dug and backfilled with puddle clay until . . .



The wall between the cones and the puddle clay had been leaking for some time and partly staunched with sandbags. Not only was the canal leaking, but a 'French drain' designed to run any such water into a land drain had become blocked, causing the leaks through the stonework.



... the leak was located.

Planned structural works

At Leewood Pump rotten roof timbers are being replaced. Work started in October, with the stone roof flags taken off to reduce weight before splicing repairs on several rotted timbers. Work was hoped to be completed by the end of November.

Middleton Top boiler house roof is also awaiting repairs.

Both Browns and Wayfarers swing bridges near High Peak Junction are to be repaired this winter, with new decking boards fitted.

Contractors are coming in November with a digger to remove reed and canal silt from between the river and railway aqueducts south of Derwent Aqueduct. Contractors will also be in this winter to de-vegetate the walls of the Derwent (Wigwell) aqueduct.

Volunteer work parties – Thank you

In November, the FCC volunteers started pulling and removing reeds from the canal, an ongoing annual task. Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and DerwentWISE also plan to do reed pulling along the canal this winter (see pages 27 & 30).

DCC planned work

This winter we will be doing reed removal at Leashaw, Whatstandwell and Ambergate. We

will be felling around twenty alders below Pisanis and trees close to the Derwent Aqueduct. DerwentWISE also plan to remove sycamore trees near Aqueduct Cottage to enhance the views.

New Interpretation boards

DCC continues to work closely with FCC, DWT, and DerwentWISE to produce new site interpretation for the canal at Whatstandwell and Ambergate.

New interpretation panels in the brake vans at High Peak Junction have now been installed, with more to be placed on the incline at Cromford and Sheep Pasture engine houses, with support from DerwentWISE.

Get in Touch

You can contact DCC Countryside Service at Middleton Top Visitor Centre on **01629 533298**.



Leewood Pump House clad in scaffolding and with a temporary roof to protect the engine whilst work is carried out.

(all photos: Hugh Potter)



BEHIND THE SCENES

by Mike Kelley

There's a lot more going on than you might imagine!

It is fair to say that Birdswood is currently the public face of the FCC, but behind the scenes a great deal of work is carried out constantly by a wonderful group of people, who are dedicated to the reopening of our canal. Some are working hard on the FCC's infrastructure



My role, as Project Manager for Birdswood, has seen active preparation for the annual inspection of Birdswood by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA). November is the chosen month for this, because from March to the first weekend in November our boat is in almost

constant use, and then in December we have the Beggarlee Extension of the canal at Langley Mill, while others have recently (sadly unsuccessfully) pursued grants for Smotherfly. Then there are frequent activities with work party groups, or the crew for the Birdswood operation. And of course some are active in all of the above.

constant use, and then in December we have the Santa Specials. So November it has to be.



Our multi-talented Chairman adjusts his angle grinder whilst sitting on the loo – well where it used to be – prior to cutting into the holding tank.



Planning ahead. In February, during the 'quiet' time before the start of season this year, the galley floor was adapted so that the hull beneath it could be readily inspected by the MCA this November. The kitchen was cleared, the four large original (and heavy!) steel base plates were removed, then cut so that they could be easily lifted in future without demolishing the kitchen again. Here, the galley is cleared and the plates await lifting.



Lifting the plates was definitely a two-man job.

The MCA are both rigorous and expensive! We have to meet their standards even though we only sail in a maximum of 3ft of water! But the law is the law and we must comply. Seats and tables out, steel decking up, panelling around the toilet out, kitchen floor up, fire extinguishers okay. And so it goes on. Then all the paperwork has to be checked. Safety manual up to date and suitable, training of crew recorded, counting of passengers recorded, all boat master's certifications okay and up to date, risk assessments in place, Search & Rescue document in place. Then when they have finished, all the removed innards of the boat have to be put back; and hopefully it all fits.

The removal of the panelling around the toilet was a problem; some of it was damaged in the process, requiring replacement. However it was a blockage in the effluent extraction pipes which required a section of the tank to be cut away by our hard working Chairman. And of course, after the MCA's inspection it all had to be put back together again before the Santa Specials could commence.

For some time now, Tony Bolton and I have

been beavering away working toward getting sections of the canal dredged this coming winter. Our target is to get about one third of the navigable section widened by 3ft. Sounds simple enough, I hear you say! So the areas from where the silt is to be removed have to be specific. The volumes of silt to be removed have to be calculated. Then the areas where the silt is to be deposited have to be identified and how much of the silt will go onto each site.

Once all that is in place, permissions to deposit the silt have to be obtained from the three land owners involved. With that in place we can then go to the Environmental Agency and Natural England to also obtain their permission – and these two can be the most difficult. It only needs one of the above listed to object and we have a problem. Nothing is ever easy.

Nor will this be cheap. It would have been nice to find a grant for this, but at the moment we do not have the personnel to seek out grants for us. Anyone out there who knows how to look for and obtain grants, we would love to hear from you.



And finally cleared, awaiting a coat of red oxide, and reassembly.



AQUEDUCT COTTAGE – RESTORED BY 2020?

by Ron Common, Friends of Aqueduct Cottage

Great news about one of the canal's iconic buildings



Tania Pells of DerwentWISE addresses a full house.

Photo: Sukie Khaira, DVMWHS

There was a packed room at the Gothic Warehouse, Cromford, in late October for the World Heritage Site 'Discovery Days' talk on Aqueduct Cottage.

The fifty guests heard three great presentations from Tania Pells, DerwentWISE Programme Manager, Rachel Costigan, DerwentWISE Cultural Heritage Officer, and Alex Morley, Living Landscapes Officer for Lower Derwent Valley (and DWT's project manager for the cottage restoration).

Tania set the context for the evening by explaining the DerwentWISE programme and the tremendous scope of its landscape improvement projects in the Lower Derwent Valley over the past 5 years (including Aqueduct Cottage), thanks to the £2.5m Heritage Lottery and local grants provided to the programme.

Rachel followed with a highly engaging talk on the work done to preserve and enhance the cottage and to develop a vision for it to be

fully restored as a visitor information/activity building.

For the finale, Alex revealed DWT's exciting plans to sympathetically restore the cottage and for it to become the 'gateway' to an enhanced Lea Wood Nature Reserve.

FCC members will be delighted to learn that a planning application for the cottage's restoration is close to completion and will be submitted shortly. Whilst this process is underway, decisions about the interpretation to be installed, and how to integrate Aqueduct Cottage as a 'gateway' to Lea Wood will be made. A new budget will then be drawn up and a funding strategy implemented.

When asked about timing, Alex explained that DWT would like to get the cottage restored and the Lea Wood improvements completed in time for the Florence Nightingale Bicentenary Celebrations in May 2020, but if this is not possible, hopefully by the end of 2020.

No-one is under any illusions about the

difficulty of the task and understand that there are no guarantees on this kind of endeavour. It is just great to know that DWT has the ambition and are going to give it their best shot (where there is a will, there is usually a way).

We wish them luck and they have our support!

Editor's note:

Ron has done a huge amount of work to secure the future of the cottage and also runs the 'Friends of Aqueduct Cottage' Facebook page, which is well worth joining. I am sure that all FCC members will also support DWT in their aim to preserve this much-loved building.



One of three displays specially assembled by Ron Common.

Photo: Ron Common, Friends of Aqueduct Cottage

IWA Stamp Bank

A fund-raising idea from George Rogers

Did you know that you can save all your used stamps to help raise funds for charities? No? Well you do now . . .

The IWA/WRG stamp bank raises approximately £1000 a year that goes back into helping these organisations restore canals up and down the country – including the Cromford when we have work for them to do! It also helps towards many of the back office and campaigning functions of the IWA which are invaluable.

So how do you help? Basically, cut the stamps off the envelopes, leaving approximately 8–10mm around all sides of the stamp (1/3in in old money). Save them up and pass them on to me when you see me (or to another committee member at social evenings, work parties etc). I'll then pass them onto the relevant people at IWA.

Note: The scheme works by bulk – ie individual stamps are not worth much, but together it becomes significant. Therefore please don't post them – the stamp and envelope will cost more than the stamps inside will raise. It's only worth passing them on at events you would be going to anyway.

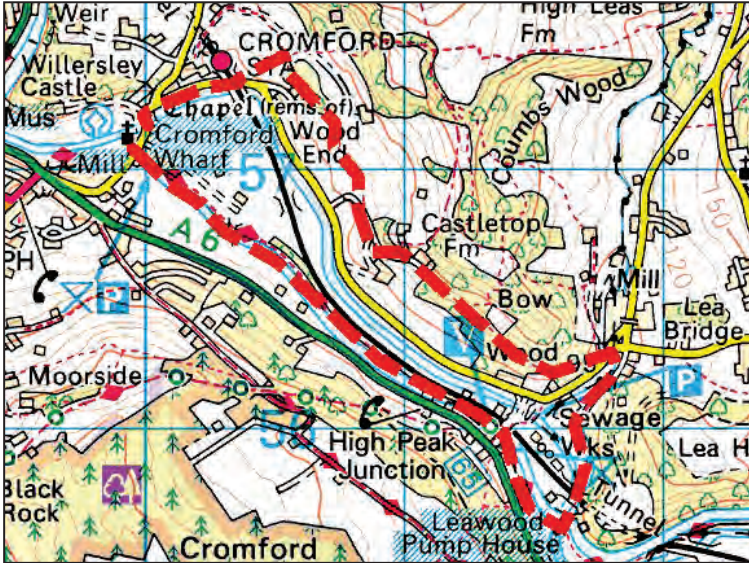


CANAL CIRCULAR WALKS – 1 CROMFORD

by Ken Brockway

This new series starts with a 4-mile walk from Cromford Wharf

How to get there: Train to Cromford station, Transpeak bus to Cromford, or services 140, 141 and 216 direct to Arkwright's Mill. Parking (pay & display) at Cromford Wharf (DE4 3RQ).



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Media 086/18

It's difficult, no impossible, to achieve a flat circular walk including the canal, so if you don't like hills, enjoy a there and back on the level towpath or a one way walk using the bus or train.

If you don't mind a climb we'll start with a warm up beside the canal before the work starts. The paths can be muddy and slippery; boots are recommended and take a bottle of water especially in hot weather. The OS Explorer Map OL24 (Peak District, White Peak) is also recommended. H&S here could be a long list but all we say is . . . take care.

From Cromford Wharf follow the Cromford Canal towpath; there is only one way so the start should be easy. This is a public footpath and part of the Derwent Valley Heritage Way,

a 55-mile walk from Ladybower to the Trent at Shardlow. But it's just a mile and a half of towpath on this walk!

At High Peak Junction you have completed a mile; there is a lot to see here, so allow extra time or plan a return visit. There are also refreshments (daily in summer; weekends in winter) and toilets. Pressing on, the chimney of the Leawood pumping station can be seen, standing by the impressive aqueduct over the River Derwent. A visit when the pump is operating should be on your 'must do' list.

Having crossed the aqueduct, do not cross the footbridge but bear left to follow the Leawood Branch. The channel initially has water, but more impressive is the Derwent below on your left. Cross over the rail line,

by a bridge which replaces the aqueduct and offers a fine view of the tunnel mouth; continue alongside the now dry canal bed. The old wharf is marked by brick and stone paving, the now extended wharf house, and a circular base where the crane stood. The path merges into the cottage access track; ignore a footpath signed off to the left. Then at a fork in the track take the less obvious one left and in a just a few yards meet the road opposite a sign for John Smedley “Home of fine knitwear” since 1784. The factory shop could be another attraction or – distraction.

Turn left onto the road passing the above-mentioned sign and cross the bridge over the stream which once powered Smedley’s mill. Ahead you will see a gate adorned with signs including one telling you this gives access to Bow Wood, part of the Woodland Trust Estate. To the left of the gate, a footpath sign and a stone squeeze stile is the route to take. It starts with a bit of a climb but soon eases off and you will notice that in years past the path provided a wide level surface. This could well have been the original road from Lea to Cromford.

A post on the right has plaques to the memory of Elizabeth & Frank Allsopp of Cromford Wharf. Pass under the wonderful arch of a leaning tree, then a boggy bit a footpath comes down from your right and a track drops down to your left. Ignore both of these, and continue on the level until the path leaves the wood.

Here is a good view up the valley towards Cromford with the large expanse of meadow. The path now narrows before meeting a metalled road. Take the road downhill and admire the view which includes Willersley Castle, built by Richard Arkwright but now a hotel and conference centre operated by Methodist Guild Holidays.

As you enjoy the descent, note the woodland on your right; when this becomes an open field look

out for a footpath sign and stile. Take this to enter the field before the road drops steeply away to your left. The path follows a faint track across the fields and again this could be the remains of an old improved road. The path veers left away from the power lines to pass an almost hidden stile to the left of a metal gate. After two fields a farmhouse comes into view above to your right, and a wooden pole carries overhead cables. Take care to pass to the right of the hedge with a steep bank to your right. Another brief climb then stay on the level; don’t be tempted to drop down to the gate on your left. There is a hidden stile which gives access to the wood.

More care is needed through the wood, but be guided by occasional improvements with boards to support a level path and occasional steps. The path leads to a stone squeeze stile to exit the woodland; here is a standard step stile on your right. Don’t take this, but turn left to follow a well-defined path down to the road. It’s a steep drop and narrow pavement so take care as the road can be busy. Turn right to pass under the rail bridge by Cromford station, then bear left to cross the bridge over the River Derwent to return to the Wharf.



The spectacular view with Arkwright’s Rock House on the left and Willersley Castle on the right. Matlock Rugby Club is in the foreground with the canal running on its low embankment beyond it.

Photo: Ken Brockway



AQUEDUCT COTTAGE AND THE ACID ATTACK

by Trevor Griffin

A long-standing mystery is solved by diligent research

Introduction

In 1968 Trevor Scott, who worked at the new Railway Technical Centre in Derby, and his colleague David Brown set out from Cromford Wharf in a canoe to see how far they could get down the overgrown Cromford Canal. They made it as far as Whatstandwell, the only place where they had to resort to portage being at Pisani's, where waste from the marble works had blocked the channel.

As they passed Aqueduct Cottage, at the junction with the Leawood branch, a disfigured man came out of the building, surprised to see a boat in the water. He got talking with them and told them how he had been the victim of an acid attack by a jealous woman and how he had lived in the house as a recluse to hide himself away.

Trevor told me this story back in the 1970s

and I have been retelling it ever since. In my version the man had operated the last coal boat on the canal and had come home to the cottage after secretly meeting a girlfriend in Matlock. His wife had got to know this and waited for him with the acid as he entered the cottage. In desperation he had jumped into the canal in order to save his face. She was promptly arrested and hung for this terrible crime. I have to admit that these additions to the story originate from my fertile imagination.

Trevor remembers the man as "Tom Bowler", a slightly suspect name. Hugh Potter challenged me to find out more and this article is the result of that research. I started with looking for a newspaper account of the crime and quickly found it. It was reported in the Derby Evening Telegraph of the 1st and 7th December 1949 and the victim's name was George Edward Bowler.



The well-known, but undated, picture of George Bowler, whose full story is now revealed, taken by the late Frank Rodgers. He is carrying two buckets on a yoke to collect drinking water, probably from the springs at High Peak Junction.

The Details of the Crime

George Edward Bowler was a railway worker in 1949, living in Matlock Bath. He was a widower.

He had got to know Eleanor Gladys Wragg, who was eight years younger than him. She lived in Matlock and was married but her husband had not been living with her for 13 years. She made a living by selling second-hand clothes on Chesterfield market.

Eleanor also worked as a cleaner for George from late 1948. She claimed to have known George and his wife earlier.

In February 1949 she stayed overnight at his house when he was suffering from flu. After that she spent half her time at her house and half at his, saying she was not happy at home because she did not get on with her son.

Eleanor said that she hoped George would marry her when she was free to marry him. They lived together as man and wife, although George denied this. She also claimed that George asked her to marry him, at which time she told him she was married.

George's version was that Eleanor had said she had no husband but when he found out that she had he asked her to leave. She asked if she could stay for a little longer and he agreed to this.

Eleanor stated, "I became suspicious that he was carrying on with some other women and I started to watch him unknown to him.

One morning . . . I caught him in his own house with another woman."

In June 1949 she bought some nitric acid from a chemist, saying that it was for cleaning brassware.

She spent the night of 25th June at George's house. There was no indication of what was to come and they had breakfast together. Afterwards he sat reading the paper in an easy chair while Eleanor washed up. Suddenly, without warning, she poured a saucepan full of acid over his head saying, "if I can't have you I will make you so that no one else can."

He rushed outside and put his head under a tap. He managed to get help from a neighbour who poured more water over him and called the police and ambulance while Eleanor sat passively and watched it all.

George was permanently disfigured and blinded in one eye. Eleanor admitted to the offence and was sentenced on 7th December to 5 years' imprisonment at Birmingham assizes. She pleaded guilty to throwing nitric acid George with intent to maim disfigure or disable him.

It's difficult reading the account to decide if George or Eleanor were telling the truth about the background to this attack but it ruined both their lives. The judge had no doubt that it was, "a most serious offence, one of the most dreadful ways of attacking another human being."



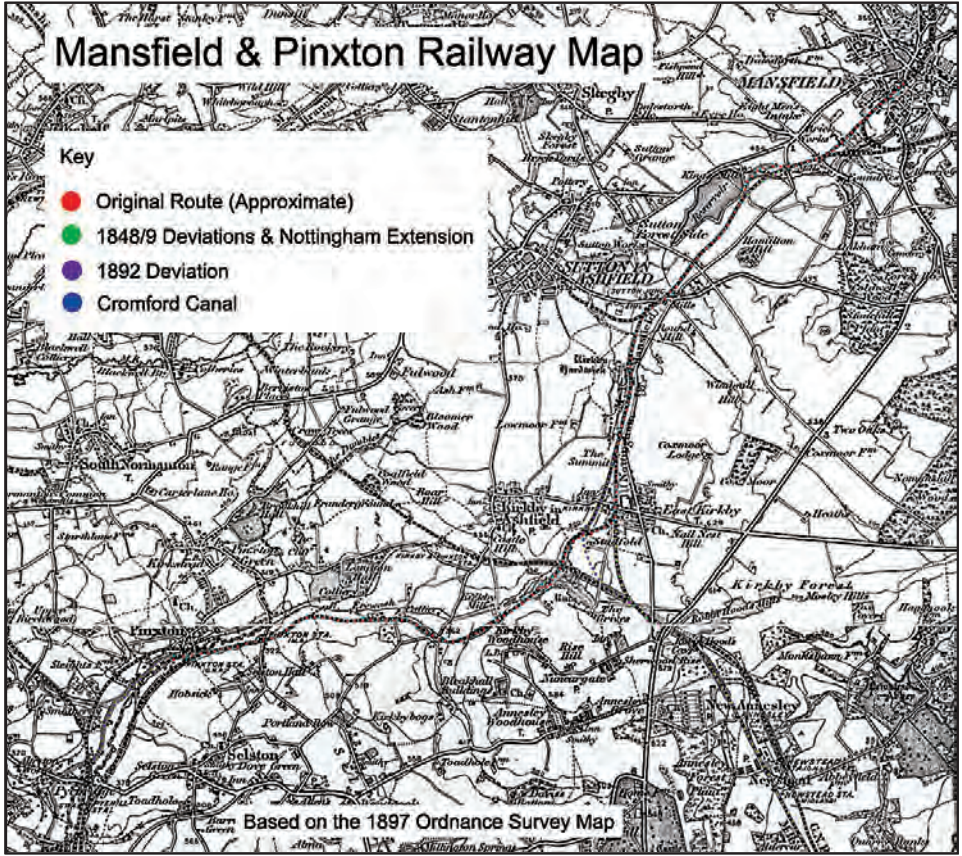
Mr Bowler (right) talks to a passer-by across Wigwell Aqueduct, photographed by Richard Bird in 1962.



200 YEARS OF THE MANSFIELD & PINXTON

by Denis Hill

The oldest continuously running railway in England



The Beginnings

Due to the great success of the Cromford Canal, coal mine owners approached the Cromford Canal Company in 1803 to explore the possibility of extending their canal from Pinxton to Mansfield, a venture that would benefit both parties. Mansfield was rapidly expanding, thanks to its cotton mills, malt industry and good quality building stone, but it was not connected to the ever-increasing canal

network, which prevented further industrial expansion. After all, a modern town needed coal to help it keep pace with the industrial revolution; it also needed more efficient modes of transport to export its goods.

The idea was first proposed to the Cromford Canal Co in February via a letter written from Mr Vickers, a Mansfield businessman. The idea was given due consideration but appears to have been dismissed; probably

after surveys showed great difficulties in this venture, either from terrain issues or financial implications – perhaps both. However, the story re-emerged in 1809 when a second request was proposed by a deputation from Mansfield, which now suggested connecting the Cromford Canal to Mansfield via a railway. On this occasion the Cromford Canal Co said that they had no objections to this proposal but indicated that they were not wanting to get involved and were not prepared to offer preferential rates in relation to this venture for goods carried on their canal.

Mansfield and district business people debated the idea and plans for several more years. By early 1817 a group of 35 businessmen had financially subscribed to the final plan, including the Duke of Portland and the Richard Arkwright Mills of Cromford, both of whom committed £5,000. The scheme was presented to Parliament as a Bill in April and was approved in June 1817. Work started immediately. Josias Jessop was appointed as the engineer and William Chrishop as the surveyor. A committee of proprietors was formed, and different elements of the work divided up between them. The line was made of 'fish belly' rails, which were held in place with 'pad stones'. The trucks had flanged wheels and were pulled by horses, although there are some references to suggest that other beasts were also used.

Opening & Expansion

In less than two years the work was completed, and on 13th April 1819 a ceremony was held to open the railway, which included many of



The M&PR's 1819 Portland Viaduct is the oldest railway viaduct in England.

the proprietors and dignitaries escorting the first load of coals (which had set out from the Cromford Canal Wharf, at Pinxton) from the Portland Viaduct to Mansfield, where it was burned in the Market Place. However, with the advent of steam locomotion this line soon became outdated and was bought by the Midland Railway Company in 1847, with the intention of upgrading.

The new company built an extension to Nottingham from a junction in the parish of Kirkby-in-Ashfield, within one year, and introduced steam engines on to that section. By the following year, 1849, the original line had been fully upgraded and had steam engines introduced on to it. The upgrading of the original line meant that some sharp bends had to be removed, which slightly altered the route of the line in one or two locations.

From its inception, the Mansfield & Pinxton Railway has had continuous usage. Originally it carried just goods, but after a few years several wagons were hosed-down and seats put into them on Mansfield's market day so that people from around Pinxton and along the route could more easily get to the market. In 1832 purpose-built carriages were introduced. From that time forward both goods and passengers were transported along the line until passenger services were cut in 1964. For many years goods trains still rolled along the route, but just as they began to decline, due to the demise of the coal industry, in 1995 the passenger services were reinstated, at least between Mansfield and Nottingham (Robin Hood line). This route includes the original track between Mansfield and Kirkby, after which it branches off to Nottingham on the 1847 extension, rather than continuing to Pinxton.

Celebrations

Today, passenger trains run extensively along the Robin Hood line, while freight trains run infrequently, but on most days, along the full Mansfield to Pinxton route. This impressive history makes the original route (Mansfield to Pinxton) the oldest continuously running railway in England, which is why celebrations



The warehouse at Pinxton with the clerk's office at the end was built by the M&PR in 1817. After the decline in canal traffic it was used for concerts, magic lantern shows, boxing etc and was named Palmerston House. At one time it became a public house known as the Palmerston Arms.

have been planned to mark the event along with other activities to ensure that this piece of local heritage claims its rightful place in our history books. The Portland viaduct, which is more commonly referred to as the Kings Mill viaduct and was built for the original railway in 1819, on the Mansfield/Sutton-in-Ashfield border was recognised several years ago as the oldest railway viaduct in England.

The Kirkby & District Archaeological Group teamed up with the Pinxton & South Normanton History Society, the Sutton Heritage Society and the Old Mansfield Society, along with several railway enthusiasts to apply for a Heritage Lottery Fund Grant of £89,600. After the successful application

we are now forging ahead with plans to celebrate the 200th anniversary of this line, produce a video, write a book and leaflets, run guided walks and locate interpretation panels along the route. We also aim to hold an archaeological dig across the original track bed to discover how those early engineers constructed their embankments and track beds.

This is truly a local piece of heritage with national significance, with which we aim to raise its profile on to a national level. If there is anyone interested in volunteering on this project, to help produce our outputs, then please contact me on 07443 536811 or email denishill1066@gmail.com.



The Boat Inn at Pinxton was the terminus for the first passenger journeys on the M&PR. This view, probably from the 1950s, shows the canal well overgrown if not infilled. The canal here has since been rewatered, along with the terminal basin, and whilst the structure of the Inn still stands it has been greatly extended and was scheduled to reopen in late November.



REED POWER

by Hugh Potter

Nature soon takes over . . .



The WRG work party in a rather chilly December 2017.



The channel was still well clear in January 2018.

When I came across a Derbyshire Wildlife Trust work party reed-pulling just south of Poyser's Bridge at Ambergate in early November, I recalled that similar work had been done not long ago. When I looked back through my photographs I was amazed to see that it was only 11 months previously that Waterway Recovery Group had achieved a dramatically clear canal, which was still looking clear in January. So in just one season nature has simply moved back in and almost blocked the water flow! Looks like a lifetime's work ahead . . . unless the canal depth is seriously increased so that it is too deep for the reeds to take hold.



But there was plenty of work ahead in November 2018!



LET THERE BE LIGHT!

by Marie Brown

Great work to open up the canal around Codnor Park

The Cromford Canal & Codnor Park Reservoir Group have been busy recently coppicing the area around Lock 7 next to the 'Humpy Bridge' at Jacksdale (The entrance bridge to Portland Basin - Ed). The group is now moving into the start of a new phase of planned works over the next 5 years and is working to create

Andy Moon, volunteer coordinator and chairman of the group said "It can look quite brutal when an area looks very different during a short space of time, but the benefits of the plan we now have in place will very shortly be obvious to everyone as the light and water quality improve drastically over the



*Treework being undertaken at the bottom of the lock flight to increase the levels of light reaching the canal.
Photo: Hugh Potter*

more light, better air quality and ultimately better water quality. The area behind the wall at Lock 6 will be flooded to create a wetland area where insects, butterflies, reptiles and amphibians will thrive.

When an area such as this, which has been neglected for so long, is to be coppiced it requires careful and planned management so that the benefits are measurable and distinct and that any negative impacts are minimalised. Working closely with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and experts such as Richard Parkinson from Wildground has given the group the opportunity to put a long-term strategy into place which ultimately will encourage more wildlife, provide better habitats and be sustainable for generations to come.

coming seasons. This also needed to be done as many of the trees had root systems eating into the wall along the canal which would ultimately lead to its demise. We are now in such a strong position and have many experts, enthusiasts and skilled workers willing to ensure that we manage the site in the best interests of the varied wildlife, but also so that the whole community can enjoy this beautiful place we have on our doorstep."

Much of the wood taken from the area is also being recycled in the form of bird feeders and habitats, and the group's volunteers are also using it for creating woodland crafts that will be sold to raise money for the group and the local community.

You may have also seen posts from the group

about some Aviva funding which, if successful, will be used to repair the 'Humpy Bridge', the entrance bridge to Portland Basin at Jacksdale. An important historical feature, it has suffered damage and neglect since the closure of the canal in 1944 and is now at risk of further degradation or loss. The funding the group are seeking will have a number of outcomes, but the main priority is to repair the structural damage done by years of decline in sympathy with the bridge's historical and integrity.

The location of the bridge at Portland Basin offers a unique raised view over the canal where the work of the group in the last 2 years has transformed it from a weed-choked and dried-up eyesore, full of litter and uncared for, into a thriving ecosystem that is home to a wide range of wildlife including ducks, dragonflies, small mammals, song birds, white-clawed crayfish and water vole, the last two of which are now rare but are found in abundance due to the hard work and diligence of the volunteers on the team.

It is an essential link on the canal towpath, from neighbouring playing fields and nature reserves and is crossed by many walkers

every day using the myriad network of paths in the locality for both daily commuting and pleasure.

Further up the Cromford Canal at the reservoir, work has been carried out by Canal & River Trust, clearing scrub and trees during a very small window of opportunity to minimise disruption to our growing water vole population.

The group has also carried out drainage improvements and coppicing on the Golden Valley end of the canal which not only ensures that the pathways will be accessible all year round but will also provide more natural sunlight and air around the water, thus enhancing the habitats for wildlife. Reeds have been cleared and litter picking and emptying of dog mess bins continues as part of the ongoing maintenance.

The group has a busy few years ahead and we would welcome anyone wishing to lend a hand on one of our volunteering sessions taking place each week.

Please contact the group by email on cromfordcanalgroup@outlook.com or join us on Facebook at Cromford Canal & Codnor Park Res where nearly 700 members regularly post photographs of the local wildlife.



The badly damaged entrance bridge to Portland Basin, recently rechristened 'Humpy Bridge' by locals, is the subject of a funding bid, results of which were awaited as we went to press.

Photo: Hugh Potter



NOVEMBER NOTES

by Hugh Potter

Lots of work took place in the first two weeks



Galliford Try volunteers are dwarfed by the sheer mass of reed at Gregory Wide.

For a canal that was legally abandoned in 1944, a remarkable amount of work takes place to maintain it as a linear amenity waterway, fulfilling the agreement that Derbyshire County Council made when the Ambergate–Cromford section was gifted to

them by British Waterways in 1975.

In just the first two weeks of November, as well as the successful work to plug the leak at Cromford Wharf (page 14) and the reed pulling by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (page 27), there was lots of other work going on.



How long would it take volunteers to remove that much reed? Mechanised clearance is so much quicker.

Following the clearance of the canal north of Poyser's Bridge at Ambergate last year, work was moved to a heavily silted length south of Derwent Aqueduct which the mini excavator could access along the towpath. Work had started on Monday 12th and when I visited on Thursday 16th, the canal had been cleared from Aqueduct Cottage almost to Gregory Tunnel. It had been made much quicker by being



Work was aided by the ability to dump the spoil down the embankment alongside.



The clear length of canal created in only a couple of days.

Photos: Hugh Potter

able to put the reeds straight over the embankment wall rather than having to carry it away by dumper.

If only reed clearance on the Birdswold length could be similarly carried out! However, the towpath is too busy and narrow on that length to permit the excavator to work without an expensive and inconvenient towpath closure. So come next January, no doubt there will be the annual appeal for volunteers!

On my way to see the dredging, I came across a large reed-clearance party at Gregory Wide, a place where access by machine is impossible. There is a daunting amount of reed there, but volunteers from Galliford Try at Darley Dale were doing great work under a DerwentWISE scheme.

If this rate of work continues through the winter, the canal should be looking very smart come next spring.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Following the appeal in the last issue, a heartening number of readers got in touch on a variety of topics. Please do write to the Editor with your thoughts and comments on articles in this issue or your visits to the canal.

Keeping in Touch

I always enjoy the articles in Portal, but this time the thing that struck me as a distant member was how nice it was to read about people who I have known for many years but now never see. The Portal really is a way of staying in touch as well as keeping up to date with any new developments on the restoration. (I'm sure it's you in charge of Birdswood in Sue Prince's painting.) Trevor Griffin never ceases to amaze me with his knowledge of Derbyshire's minor railways, and how years ago he pondered on the wharf by the former garden centre, something I had often seen but never given a moment's thought to.

Now I shall look forward even more to next time's issue, when hopefully you will have had a flood of new articles.

Brian Key, Norfolk

Walking the Canal

I read the latest copy of Portal and felt a bit sad at your plea for people to get in contact. I decided to email you and let you know just how much I enjoy walking on the canal.

My family is from Derbyshire; my Nan lives in Whatstandwell and my parents are in Swanwick. As a kid, when I was visiting my Nan, we'd walk down Shaws Hill, through the wood and end up on the canal. I loved it. I remember feeding ducks at different parts of the canal and learning about the different animals that lived around and about.

Now, I'm almost 30 and I've moved away to Worcestershire. Whenever I go back north to visit my parents, I insist we go a walk on the canal. Regardless of the weather, we pick a stretch of canal and have a wonderful family walk and catch-up chat. I love it!

The Friends of Cromford Canal are doing an incredible job of keeping the canal a beautiful place to visit. Thank you for all your hard work.

Florence Beastall, Worcestershire

Keeping it in the Family

A quick postscript to your excellent article 'Fox in the Hole' in the last Portal. Reading the excellent new book 'The Story of Osmaston' published in early November I am reminded that the Fox family and the Wright Family, owners of the Butterley Company, were related by marriage. Francis Wright's sixth daughter Mary married Charles Douglas Fox in 1863, and Selina Wright, his third daughter, married Douglas's brother Francis Fox in the church at Osmaston in 1869. This would be the same Francis who made the tunnel inspection in 1907. Useful when you can keep the fees within the family!

John Boucher

Never say Never

Just when you thought (your editorial comment) that no one responds to Portal, I can confirm that readers can respond to an article years after the author put finger to keyboard.

Back in your Waterways World days, you published an article which I called Utterly Butterley about a trip I organised, with some tunnel-exploring enthusiasts including my then fiancée Helen, still my wife despite that activity, back in 1963/4.

A month or two ago, this article was thrust under my nose by a fellow member of the Hornby Railway Collectors' Association of which I happen to be chairman. "Is this you?" he asked pointing at the author's name. Admitting my guilt, I was immediately asked to give a talk on the trip to a bunch of people, best described as lovers of underground engineering feats!

Anyhow, earlier today I was in the middle of scanning slides and researching through various websites and old editions of Portal, when Autumn's issue landed on the doormat.

Within its covers are several additional articles about Butterley Tunnel, the content of which will greatly enhance my presentation.

Helen and I both feel guilty about not helping with the Cromford, but we are both IWA branch committee members, editor and chairman, both heavily involved with the Chesterfield lot, Helen an RYA Skipper and I look after the greasy bits on one of the trip boats – and then there is our passion for trains.

Back to Portal, in Chesterfield Library is (or was in the early 1960s) the Prospectus for the Grand Commercial Canal. This was far more ambitious and pre-dated the IWPS ideas by about 150 years. It planned to link with Buxworth Basin as well as linking the Cromford with the Chesterfield and Sheffield. It failed due to the porous rock in the Peak District and the arrival of railways which lured speculators away.

So, thank you for Portal: always well put together, always well received and always read, 'cover to cover'.

David Dawson

Cromford Revisited

As a child and teenager I often walked the Cromford Canal from Whatstandwell up to Cromford Wharf. I found it fascinating, from the civil engineering to the strange beauty that some abandoned or disused places possess. I still get excited spotting glimpses of the Leawood Pump chimney through the trees, knowing that an ancient steam engine is awaiting discovery . . . once more.

In September, I introduced my teenage son to the canal. It was wonderful as the canal was just as beautiful as it ever was. After our walk we found refreshments at Wheatcroft's Wharf. I remember how sad and forlorn that building looked in the 1980s. Afterwards we popped in the FCC shop where I discovered and purchased your book; I was served by a charming lady, a volunteer I assume.

I have just finished reading your book and what a wonderful work it is. It takes me back to childhood and explains what I saw, from the sunken boat to Wigwell Cottage. The photographs are charming. It's astonishing to see what we have lost. On one of my teenage canal walks, back in the eighties, I took an Ilford 126, my first camera, and I'm sure I still have the prints and negatives. I shall dig them out and forward them on to you. (*I have since received these – thanks, Tim. Look out for them in a future issue – Ed.*)

Lastly, on our walk I noticed that Bridge 13, at Whatstandwell, was being repointed. The two workmen were doing a great job too.

Tim Dalton



LEAWOOD JOTTINGS

by Ian Yates

Work is progressing on the Pump House roof

The work to the roof has at last started, with the engine house enveloped in scaffolding. The whole building is surrounded with a temporary roof to protect the interior whilst the main roof is off. Inside there is a crash deck which prevents any debris falling on the engine. The contractors have covered this with sheeting to retain the dust.

Once the roof was accessible the true extent of the work required could be seen. Whilst the side visible to the towpath looked good, the other side by the trees was a different story. The gutters were full of debris, with some trees well rooted into the stonework and the stone tiles covered with a thick layer of moss. The gutter boards were rotten which had let the lead lining drop, thus allowing water ingress into the building.

Inside things were also not so good. It was known that two trusses had dropped but once there was access onto the false deck the truss over the staircase at the Cromford end was also seen to be rotten and had dropped about an inch. The two centre trusses had each dropped about two and half to three inches. The ends were so bad that you could put your hand into the gap against the wall.

By mid-November all the tiles had been taken off and the gutters cleared out; the next stage was to repair the trusses before the whole is reinstated. Efforts are also in place to try and get the oak tree, that stands close to the building at the rear, either well cut back or, if possible, removed as this is the main perpetrator of the problem with leaf debris; there is also concern about its close proximity to the building and the inlet culvert.

After discussions with the contractors, static opening was allowed over the Discovery Weekend at the start of November to let

visitors into the boiler house and ground floor of the engine house. Unusually the weekend was very quiet with few visitors on the Sunday but some donations were taken which helped. After many years the group have replaced the main door locks with new ones all suited together. There were three doors all with different locks and keys which were becoming old and worn and new keys did not work. With agreement from DCC all the locks have been replaced with the need for only one key for all the doors.

The steaming dates for next year will begin as usual at Easter. The steamings in June, July and the first weekend of August have become very slow so the intentions are to open static on the Saturday whilst warming up and then run on the Sunday. The opening times will be from 12 noon till 4.30pm as there are usually few visitors after then, but if there are people about we will keep running as at present.

Also next year the boilers are due for a major check over and at the moment this is scheduled for July and August, in which case we could not steam then; however there are discussions with DCC to carry this out over the winter when there are five months with no steamings scheduled. The full list of dates will be published in the next Portal.



Ready for steam, but not till next Easter.

Photo: CJ



WINTER EVENTS

FCC social meetings take place on the third Monday of most months at 7.30pm at Ironville Church Hall, Casson Street, Ironville NG16 5NN. Admission is £2 (except AGM) and there is a bar, raffle, tea and coffee. All are welcome to attend.

Santa Specials

One of the most popular places to see Santa is on board Birdswood, which he visits every year, and there may still be time to book when you read this. Trips depart at noon and 2pm on weekends until Christmas with an additional trip on Thursday 20th. There are seasonal refreshments for everybody and, of course, presents from Santa for the children. Bookings can be made via 07552 055455; sales@birdswood.org; www.birdswood.org. Under 5 years: £7; over 5 years: £10.

Monday 21st January

Grantham Canal Update

David Lyneham-Brown will review recent progress including the exciting lock restoration on Woolsthorpe Flight achieved with HLF funding. 7.30pm at Ironville Church Hall.

Monday 18th February

Steeple Grange Light Railway

John Finch looks at this 18-inch narrow gauge line, built on the route of Killer's branch of the Cromford & High Peak Railway, and its links to the Cromford Canal. 7.30pm at Ironville Church Hall.

Monday 18th March

Peak Rail

Nigel Carabine on the restored length of the former Midland Main Line that now offers steam train rides between Matlock and Rowsley. 7.30pm at Ironville Church Hall.

Monday 15th April

AGM

Followed by an update on progress in 2018 by George Rogers. Full details in the next issue of Portal. 7.30pm at Ironville Church Hall.

Kelley's Corner

by Hugh Potter

Once upon a time, back in March 2014, we were running a trial trip with Birdswood pulled by Chelsea, prior to introducing the regular horse-drawn weekends. Now it has to be said that steering when being pulled by horse is very different and very much more difficult than steering under motor power, when the flow from the prop helps guide the boat.

On the return trip Mike Kelley was at the tiller and failed to make the right-hand bend between the swing bridge and the railway narrows. Unfortunately, on the apex of the bend is a large tree stump that overhangs the water; Birdswood's bows hit this 'head on'. The boat stopped, the horse didn't, the tow rope broke and the people in the boat picked themselves up off the floor. Ever since then it has been known as Kelley's Corner.

To commemorate this now legendary event, farrier Lance Rose of Arraslea Shires (who

provide the horse power) created a sign out of horseshoes which was erected on said tree stump.

Mike saw it for the first time on the recent Councillors' Cruise and was much amused.

Oh, and don't worry, we now use a quick burst on the motor if necessary to make sure we never get into that situation again, so horse travel is entirely safe!



