

THE PORTAL

Issue 93 - Summer 2025

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Friends of the Cromford Canal

Registered Charity No. 1164608

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Front Cover:

For the first time since 1967, Middleton Top Engine was powered by steam in May. The engine was one of eight that hauled wagons up and down inclines on the Cromford & High Peak Railway, the Cromford Canal's link to the North West.

Back Cover:

Top: A spectacular view of Wigwell Aqueduct from above Aqueduct Cottage.

Photo courtesy of Friends of Aqueduct Cottage.

Bottom: Northern Canals Association delegates view the as yet unconnected (and rather weedy) section of Cromford Canal at Langley Mill restored by members of ECPDA under the leadership of Mick Golds.

The copy date for the next issue is 22nd August 2025

President – Brian Blessed

Patron – Julian Richards

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.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

By David Martin

The FCC has had a really busy first half of the year with our socials and the first five were all really well attended. It's great to have such solid support and we thank you for that. Our alternative social talks at the Gothic Warehouse in Cromford have been sell outs too – it must be our new diversity policy!

Our future events programme can all be found on our website at www.cromfordcanal.org and on page 34.

Back on 22nd March the Friends hosted a meeting for the Northern Canals Association – for the fifth time. The venue we chose was the New Horizon Church on Linkmel Road, Langley Mill. We had around sixty people on the day representing canal societies and trusts from around the country, and the FCC shop was also in attendance.

The morning session's saw talks given by Richard Handley on the importance of working with volunteers and what great progress can be made with them, and their huge importance to charities like ours. Secondly, we had Dave Ratner who gave a talk on the canal's general history and where we are heading. Finally the last talk was by our Engineer Chris Broome who gave a talk on the Beggarlee Extension and the work we are doing today at Langley Mill.

In the afternoon we all took a walk up the canal. It was like a historical progress starting at Lock 14 of the Cromford which was restored 52 years ago, then going past Great Northern Basin, through the boatyard, along the canal beyond that and up through to the Beggarlee site where we are working today. Upon returning to the venue, several canal societies gave us updates on their progress and aspirations from their parts of the country. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the volunteers and trustees who helped

and attended on the day to make it the great success that it was.

I will also add at this point that if anyone is thinking of holding an event, the New Horizon Church is a fantastic venue and the staff there were so helpful in ensuring that everything went smoothly, even the IT!

Back on the cut, up near Leawood our volunteers have cleared the bank for around 30m at Derwentside which was no small undertaking! This has enabled us to do a more detailed topographical survey of the bank structure itself, and we are now working towards a workable remediation strategy for strengthening that section of the embankment.

As I am writing this the Waterway Recovery Group, along with our work party volunteers, are working on completing the work that we haven't been able to do down on the Flood Mitigation zone. Hopefully we shall finish the job this time so that we can get it passed off by the Local Authority at Amber Valley before we can progress onto the next phase.

The next phase is being nothing but stopped and held back by the overly complicated processes that the Canal & River Trust have in place; my exasperation with that body has now passed boiling point. I don't know how anyone gets anywhere in today's world! Even communication with them is a surprisingly difficult process; it's like we exist in another time zone! Nothing reminded me more of that than the tour of the previous restoration works that had been carried out by our predecessors since 1973 at the Northern Canals Association meeting in March. Strangely, last year other canal societies did warn me about the overly complex processes that CRT now have in place and how frustrating they were with it all!

We have made every reasonable effort to push this process forward – currently to ►

no avail! If you feel that you could help us to resolve this situation then please do get in touch.

Finally, I write to you all with the sad news that the Chairman of the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association Norman Cornwell passed away earlier this month. His steadfast support for FCC will be sorely missed; he has always attended the monthly Strategic Restoration Committees and has been of immense support to our Vice Chairman John Barker and our work parties, especially more recently on the Beggarlee Project of which he was a keen supporter; that support will give us the resolve to push on! **T**



WRG volunteers working at Beggarlee at the end of May.

EDITORIAL

By Hugh Potter

On our trip boat *Birdswood*, we pride ourselves on running a 'tight ship' and at the end of each cruise we always ask passengers to consider leaving a review – either on our website or on TripAdvisor, as we are keen to understand how we are doing and whether we can improve.

So far this year, a dozen new reviews have been posted, almost entirely positive, and our overall rating from nearly 300 reviews is a brilliant 4.8 out of a possible 5 stars, better than all our local competitor heritage attractions!

It is one of the most rewarding aspects of the 'job' for volunteers to be thanked when passengers disembark after a cruise and say how much they have enjoyed it. Many are surprised to learn that such a professional operation is run entirely by volunteers. But that is probably a big part of the reason for our success. The volunteers are doing it because they enjoy introducing visitors to our wonderful canal – and raising funds for its maintenance and restoration – rather than it being merely a job.

I'm sure most members will already have been on a trip on *Birdswood*, but if not, please

do try it out, and if you have been on it and (hopefully) enjoyed it, please spread the word. Don't forget that as well as our regular trips on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, you can exclusively charter the boat on any day for family occasions or group visits. You can also arrange catering (cream teas are popular) through Wheatcroft's Wharf café, or you can bring your own! There are full details at www.birdswood.org. **T**



Birdswood's passengers probably don't appreciate all the work that goes into making their trip a pleasant one: Julian and Dave demonstrate the art of goose poo clearance, unfortunately a regular task for Birdswood volunteers!

NORMAN CORNWELL

By Mike Harrison

Like a lot of other people, I was very shocked to hear about Norman's sudden death and it is still difficult to believe.

Norman and his wife Shirley were canal enthusiasts and moved into this area from down south. They soon joined the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association and Norman started to attend voluntary work parties and became a more regular attender when he retired. He later became mooring officer and eventually chairman, a post he held for ten years. They kept their boat at Langley Mill and Norman became very keen to ensure that the Erewash Canal should be protected and remain navigable. He would also always welcome visiting boaters to Langley Mill, introduce himself and talk about the Association.

When we were at work parties, Norman would joke about his lack of technical knowledge if we were for example dismantling a dumper gearbox, although he always took an interest. If he was asked a difficult question he would say "can I have an easier one on sport?"

Norman and Shirley also regularly attended meetings at Sandiacre Lock Cottage, which was saved from demolition in the early years of the Association and has been used for monthly meetings and social events ever since.

Above all, Norman was very good at meeting important people such as Richard Parry, chief executive of the Canal & River Trust, and also their East Midlands Regional Director Linney Beaumont. He also twice invited Julie Sharman, the CRT Waterway Manager, to a boat trip down the Erewash Canal. The second time was a ploy to encourage her to allow the work party to do more maintenance tasks and was rewarded with permission to take over off side vegetation control.



Norman with the Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire after the presentation of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service to ECPDA.

Norman's comments about the weed problem on the Erewash Canal in our magazine *Erewash Outlook* were also picked up by the then MP for Erewash Maggie Throup, who subsequently spoke in support of the Erewash Canal in the House of Commons.

It was also a proud moment for Norman when he accepted the Queens Award for Voluntary Service for the Association from the Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire.

On the social side, Norman and Shirley invented the work party Christmas lunch. It was also Norman who invented the after work party drink in the 'Great Northern', buying the drinks himself for the first few weeks. This provided an opportunity to get to know each other better and exchange ideas about the current work.

So, in short, Norman has played a very large part in the activities of the ECPDA for many years and he will be greatly missed.

May he rest in peace. ▀

BIRDWOOD'S MOT

Richard Handley explains the safety tests and costs involved

The Friends of the Cromford Canal have operated trip boat *Birdwood* on the Cromford to Leewood section for ten years now and she has become an integral part of the heritage tourist eco-system in the northern part of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site. We carry around 5,000 passengers per year, many of whom travel from far and wide and spend time in other parts of Derbyshire while they are here.



Checking the base plates at last year's in-water inspection.

Ever since the *Marchioness* disaster on the River Thames in 1989, regulations have been in place to help ensure better Health & Safety when operating passenger vessels. *Birdwood* is a 'class V vessel operating on class A waters'; this means we are subject to a specific inspection regime by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA).

That means:

- We must have an 'out of the water inspection' every two years to essentially confirm the structural integrity of the boat.
- Additionally, we also must have an annual 'in-water-inspection'; this is to test the stability and manoeuvrability of the boat whilst in the water, as well as testing the competency of a sample of Masters.

- Over and above these inspections, we must prove to the MCA that our operational policies and procedures are fit for purpose: referred to as a 'Domestic Safety Manual' test.

In November 2025 *Birdwood* is again due for both its 'out-of-water' and 'in-water' inspections: we are budgeting for a total cost of around £8,000 this year. Clearly, the most onerous of these is the out-of-water inspection where we have to hire a crane twice: to lift the boat out of the water and then a couple of weeks later lift it back into the water.

For a charity that is 100% run by volunteers, and whose core mission is restoration of the canal, this is an enormous and costly task, and one which we can only undertake by our own fund-raising efforts. Only when the MCA re-certify us will we be allowed to start planning our cruising for the 2026 tourist season. **T**

WORK PARTY REPORT

By John Guyler

At Lock 4, Ironville, the FCC has set a new seat in position, financed by money given to the FCC and Friends of Ironville & Codnor Park when the Jacksdale Walking Group disbanded a few years ago. A suitable plaque has been fitted, to acknowledge the walking group and their legacy. It was agreed that the seat be placed at an angle giving a view towards Lock 3.

Over a period of four years the FCC work party volunteers have fitted five seats, including this one, along the length from Lock 4 to Golden Valley. Three seats have been placed in honour of Steven Restoric, who was killed on active service in the British Army, at the request of his family, and one seat at Pinxton Arm bridge for a local gentleman who always came to that spot to feed the ducks

The Mansfield Building Society have sponsored an information board at Hartshay, which has been put in position near the canal bridge on the old A610 (Hartshay Hill, Bridge 32) by the FCC in late February.

Around High Peak Junction

In mid-February, at High Peak Junction, *Birdswood* crew volunteers worked on maintenance of the swing bridge (Brown's Bridge). They lubricated the bearing, cleared grit from the stone face and managed to get the bridge to open but with some sticking when fully open. The work party were there the next day for Gregory's Nip, but four work party volunteers worked on the bridge to relieve the wood which was catching on the stonework when the bridge was fully open. We suspected that the wood was very damp and had expanded slightly on freezing. The wood was dressed away where it was catching on the wall. On trying the bridge fully opened it jammed solid and took some pushing assisted ►



The newly installed seat at Lock 4.



Coir rolls laid near High Peak Junction.

by some walkers on the towpath, to free off. With some more adjustment the bridge was operating without problem, ready for a charter at the weekend.

The rest of the work party at Gregory's Nip cleared more vegetation off the retaining wall. They found that the retaining wall petered out very quickly as it sloped up the bank. A short distance further on however there was a stone abutment and the wall reappeared and went up to towpath level and continued quite a way along this section and finished about fifty metres short of the railway below the section that has had a parapet wall near the railway aqueduct.

A short section needed clearing to finish, but the wall is quite high towards the railway and is not accessible for it all to be cleared. The group who had been coir roll fitting joined the main group and cleared the remainder of the low wall at towpath level near the site of the overtopping one hundred years ago, where the hand rails are on the towpath now. All clearance work is now finished.

Again, at High Peak Junction in March, volunteers fitted 24 coir rolls and backfilled them with clay. On the section near Kelley's Corner, sandbags were filled with clay for the infill of 'dog-outs' in that area. Several volunteers walked the towpath cutting back vegetation.

In April, three volunteers over two work parties filled approximately ninety sack bags with clay, to use in filling the 'dog-outs' in the towpath bank towards Cromford. 'Dog-outs' is the name we have given to damaged sections in the bank, caused by dogs scrambling to exit the canal. Over time if repairs are not carried out, they can cause serious erosion to the towpath. After filling at the Wharf Shed, the bags of clay were then transported by DCC tractor and trailer down the canal towards Lawn Bridge, where the 'dog-out' repairs were carried out.

In March at Lower Hartshay, six work party volunteers finished planting the remaining whips to form the new hedge, along with some bulbs for next spring.



Moving coir rolls with the tractor and trailer is a lot easier than man-handling them!

Beggarlee

At Beggarlee, mostly on a Monday or Tuesday, a small group called 'The Beggarlee Boys' set to, working with the digger and dumper every week for two months, starting at 8.30am and working through till 3 or 4pm. In February, they were fetching out root balls near the in-water section that the main work party had worked on so hard to clear the previous months. The 'Boys' also cleared saplings and vegetation along the Hall Road embankment where the new canal line will cross. Behind the old 3RB digger owned by ECPDA, they cleared and inspected the pipe supplying water to the canal.

After that, two volunteers over several days, working with the dumper and digger, started to reinstate the footpath from the gate at Great Northern Basin up to the Beggarlee site, in preparation of the visit from the Northern Canals Association on 22nd March. After a work party at Sawmills, three volunteers went to Beggarlee to clear the remaining railway tracks to make them a feature for the guided party of visitors at the NCA visit.▶



Improving the path to the work site at Beggarlee.

Then the long job started on clearing the site at the end of the flood plain extension, ready for WRG to come for a long weekend to finish off work on 23rd May. One of the first jobs was to adjust the depth of water at the 900mm and 600mm pipe headwalls. This was done using stone rip-rap to make the depth of water shallower and to stop the banks being eroded

The next stage was to clear and adjust the embankment area down to the River Erewash. The clearance of vegetation was first, which necessitated oil drum fires burning twigs and tree stumps to get a hot fire to burn large root balls.

They then dug down, finding old railway lines and two dumper loads of plastic sheeting amongst other things. On several days over the months, volunteers serviced the digger, greasing, checking oil etc, then moved on to clearing the embankment. All this work is being done to the specification of the FCC engineer, Chris Broome. As a diversion, they saw some large some trout in the Erewash.



The 'Beggarlee Boys' at work.



The lines of the former Barber-Walker colliery railway are revealed at Beggarlee.

Sawmills

On 12th March at Sawmills, thirteen volunteers cleared a lot of vegetation and there was a controlled burn. A wind-damaged tree was removed and the wood disposed of in the controlled burn. On the following Saturday, four work party volunteers removed an ash tree that was leaning over the four span bridge which went over the railway and canal. They also removed some overhanging branches off the tree that is causing structural damage to the northern end of the bridge.

On 9th April, one large FCC work party was at Sawmills to clear the mess left after several trees had been felled (not by FCC) ►

and also several wind-blown trees which had been brought down over the winter. The trees near the bridge were thought to be causing damage to the stonework of the old railway bridge put in by the Midland Railway in the 1870s.

Six trees in total in the area were piled up in one big heap. Baz and Malc started with a chainsaw at one end of the pile. Chris Martin made a start with a chainsaw, assisted by Chris Aukland and three other members of the work party at the other end. With bowsaws and loppers Graham Green and John Breedon were cutting branches away to allow access into the centre of the pile. Wendy, Dennis and Angela were working in the gauging narrows to clear vegetation.

A lot of logs were collected by various local people. Over the next two work parties, volunteers continued sawing up and burning the felled and fallen trees. Others worked on an area further down towards the gauging narrows, clearing and burning dumped rubbish from the houses beyond the narrows. There is still a bed and a microwave and other things to get at. Dumping at Sawmills, seems to be getting a problem again.

Pinxton & Golden Valley

At the Pinxton weir area, thirteen work party volunteers cleared vegetation and the remains of trees that had fallen in the wind and had been subsequently cut up by the FCC volunteers.

At Golden Valley, footpath edges were cleared so that growth in the spring didn't block it; in previous years, by July the brambles and nettles reduce the footpath width to about a foot which made life very uncomfortable for walkers.

Also at Golden Valley we removed fallen trees and branches from the canal channel and at Casson Street set about clearing the area near the church to enable the footpath through to the main line of the Cromford Canal at the Pinxton bridge to be clear through the growing season.



Plenty of spare wood at Sawmills. The work party take a break under the 4-arch bridge that crossed both canal and railway.



Time for a break at Pinxton.

On the day the seat was fitted at Lock 4, the three volunteers who had fixed the seat unblocked some drains at far end of the reservoir, which had been deliberately blocked.

The following week, eight volunteers cleared along the footpath from the church car park on Casson Street, Ironville towards the Pinxton Arm bridge. They managed to clear each side of footpath for one hundred metres, cutting a lot of brambles down which would have grown across the footpath.

Total volunteer hours given for February through to the end of April was 1,066 direct volunteer hours and 164 travel hours. ■

NORTHERN CANALS ASSOCIATION

FCC hosts waterway restoration conference



NCA delegates learn the history of the canal from Dave Ratner.

On Saturday 22nd March FCC hosted 57 members of the Northern Canals Association at Langley Mill. Despite its name, the NCA is now more a National Canals Association following the demise of its sister Southern Canals Association, with members coming from as far north as Huddersfield and as far south as Buckingham, as far west as Herefordshire and as far east as Norfolk.

Delegates were presented with three talks by FCC: Richard Handley on our excellent volunteers, Dave Ratner on a brief history of the restoration of the Cromford Canal and engineer Chris Broome on the complex details of the Beggarlee Extension.

Chaired by NCA's Ivan Cane and our own David Martin, the meeting was held in the excellent New Horizon Church just a few yards from Langley Bridge Lock. After lunch delegates were guided by David Martin around the work already carried out by the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association and by Chris Broome around the FCC/Waterway Recovery Group work on the Beggarlee Extension. All were impressed with the amount of work that had been achieved by FCC volunteers, supported by WRG and ECPDA.

On return, delegates were given updates on various other restorations around the country before dispersing to their sometimes distant homes. **T**



David Martin explains how the boatyard section was built..



On the bund between the flood alleviation channel and the river showing the run-off pipe to allow water to escape after flooding.



The new culvert outfalls with the former railway bridge, in the background, through which the canal will pass.

CROMFORD CANAL AND CODNOR PARK RESERVOIR GROUP

Seasonal Work Update

At last, spring arrived and everything burst into life. The lush bankside vegetation and reed beds are providing food and shelter for insects, small mammals and birds. The arrival of migrant birds, including reed warblers, grasshopper warblers and whitethroats marks the changing of the seasons and brings a feeling of hope and positivity.



crayfish. Our work plans are governed by the presence of these endangered species, as populations elsewhere in the UK are under threat. It's special that we have them on our doorstep, and as a community we need to look after them.

Water Voles

This season is a time to observe the impact of our autumn and winter interventions. We look after the section of Cromford Canal owned by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, running from the railway bridge below Lock 4 to where the canal joins onto the entrance of the Erewash Meadows site. It is an important wildlife corridor for nature and a haven for protected species including water voles and white-clawed

Our water vole survey on 2nd April identified numerous burrows, latrines, and feeding areas and we saw several water voles, busy making nests, marking out territory and preparing to breed. The area attracts wildlife photographers from far and wide and puts the area on the map as a place you are guaranteed to see a water vole. A group of future conservationists from Nottingham University visited the site to learn about water voles and how to conduct surveys.▶



Water voles are regularly seen on this section – but please do not tempt them with food.



Drone images like this help the group to monitor the water flow following their interventions.

Unfortunately, we have had to ask visitors to refrain from throwing food into the water to attract the water voles. There is plenty of natural vegetation for them to eat and they are easy enough to photograph with a little patience. Guidance from the Royal Society of Photography asks photographers to refrain from baiting wildlife for photographs for ethical and biosecurity reasons. Throwing purchased fruit or other foodstuffs into the canal can introduce pesticides and can attract rats, impacting the delicate ecosystem.

Wet & Dry

It was a wet start to the year, followed by a very dry April and May. We are always preoccupied with maintaining water levels in the canal. We have been monitoring the levels using drone images and comparing these with previous years. It is particularly interesting to look at the water flow in the areas where we have removed reed and built dams. There are more pools holding water and there is a steady flow of water down the canal where it had previously been dry.

The owl box on the Erewash Meadows fell from its post at the end of last year and on

inspection it was too difficult to mend. We have secured a new owl box from Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and hope to have it installed in the same spot towards the end of the year.

We have cleared bramble from the area on the railway bank overlooking Erewash Meadows, to preserve that spectacular view from the bench. We placed a temporary bin there and this has already prevented rubbish being thrown down the bank. ►



Clearing the view point across Erewash Meadows.

The wire on the boardwalk near 'humpy' bridge (the local name for the towpath bridge at the entrance to the former Portland Basin at Jacksdale) has been replaced as it was becoming a trip hazard and we have temporarily fixed the boardwalk leading onto Erewash Meadows as it had collapsed and had become unsafe.

We have contributed funding towards a seat which has been positioned at Lock 4, opposite the Lock Keeper's Garden. The funding was donated to our group and Friends of Cromford Canal from the Jacksdale Walk for Health Group, so the seat is a suitable thank you and a fitting place for walkers to rest for a while. Thank you to the FCC for sourcing the seat and the plaque and installing it.

Since the beginning of the year, we have accrued over 250 volunteer hours and collected at least 150 bags of litter. We will continue to maintain safe visitor access throughout the summer. A few of us attended an accredited safe use of brush cutter and strimmer course, to ensure we can safely manage the vegetation encroaching onto the towpath. We plan to repair and maintain the towpath using the pile of stone near 'humpy' bridge, which has been provided by Longcliffe Quarries.

We regularly receive and value feedback from visitors on how special the site is as a lovely place to walk and for the abundance and variety of wildlife. The site would be

neglected without our committed and skilled volunteers. Their time, energy and enthusiasm is greatly appreciated.

For further information, or if you would like to volunteer with us, please contact us via our Facebook page or by email. Our new email address is cromfordcanalgroup@gmail.com. ■



Mending the boardwalk at the entrance to Erewash Meadows.



Replacing the wire netting on the boardwalk near 'humpy' bridge.

INTERPRETATION BOARDS

By Mike Kelley



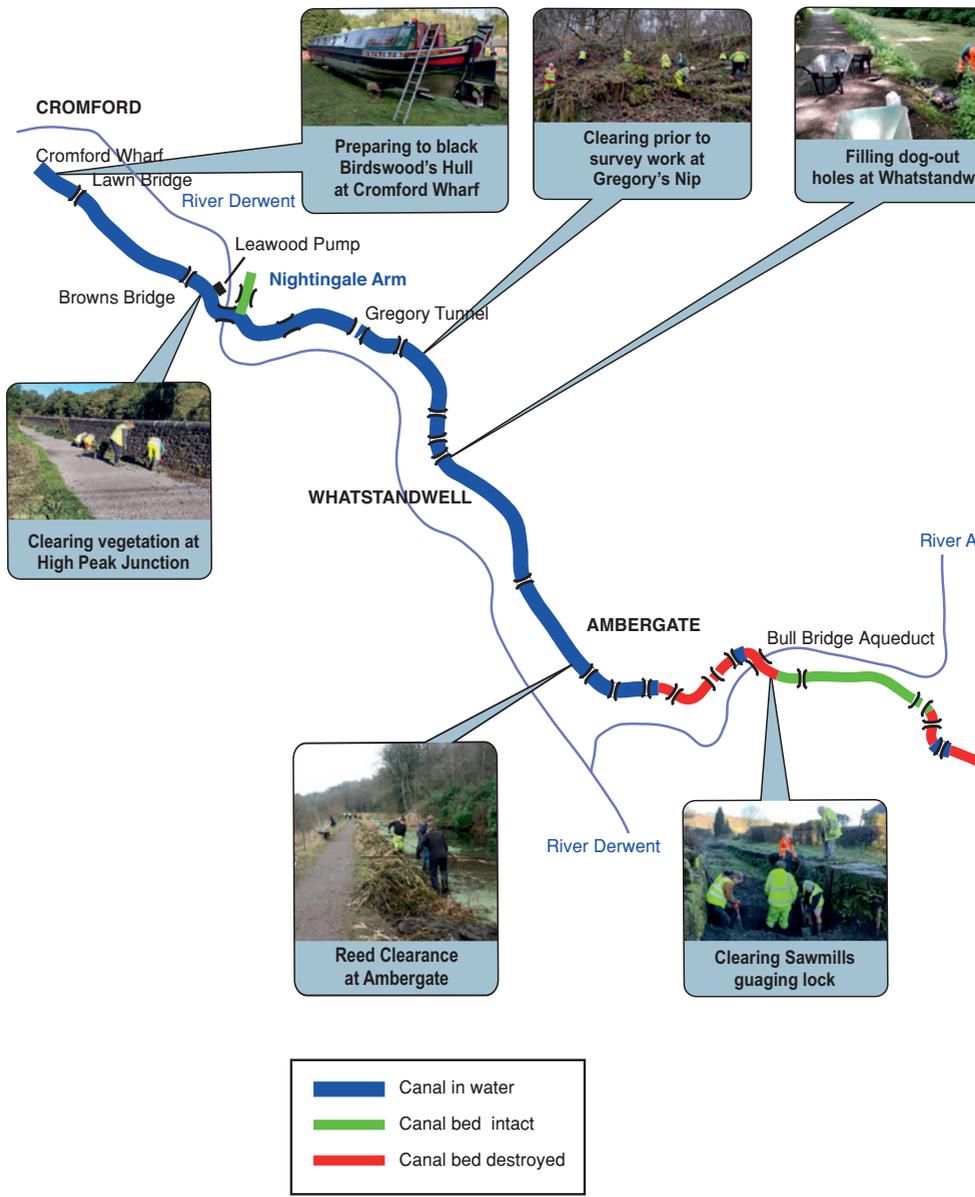
Mike Kelly, Simon Gardiner, Managing Director of P.J. Homes, and FCC Chairman David Martin at the newly installed board at Bullbridge. Similar boards will be found at the site of nearby Bullbridge Aqueduct, Sawmills and Hartshay. Other 'green' information boards are sited all along the World Heritage Site section, including at railway stations.

The FCC's latest interpretation board was recently unveiled at Bullbridge. It has been donated by the local housing developer, P.J. Homes. This is one of a series of such boards placed along the whole line of the canal from Langley Mill to Cromford.

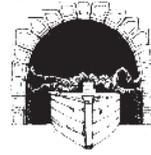
From the early days of the FCC we saw the need for these boards, and currently we have around eight in place along the canal line, which we feel are very important to our project. They provide information and context to visitors, enhancing their experience and understanding of our canal. They also communicate history, natural features, or other relevant details, encouraging engagement and deeper exploration toward our ultimate aim of restoring this sleeping beauty.

Key reasons for using these interpretation boards are: they provide information and details on facts, descriptions, and stories about the site. They enhance visitor experience by making the site more engaging and memorable by providing context and encouraging deeper exploration. Also, they educate and engage people, teaching visitors about the natural world and the history of the site. Also they can act as a way-finding tool, helping visitors navigate the site and understand its layout and significance. They highlight the unique aspects or points of interest of the site, encouraging visitors to appreciate the area's significance.

Without such boards, former important sites could wither away and be discarded and forgotten. But with these boards in place we keep the torch burning for all to see. ■



Friends of the Cromford Canal Restoration Work 2024-25



Replacing the foot path at Hartshay



Installing new steps at Butterley Reservoir



Repairing Pinxton Weir

umber

HARTSHAY



Replacing fencing at Codnor Park



Beggaree Extension

AQUEDUCT COTTAGE

By Ian Hooker

The Aqueduct Cottage project continues to grow. After most of our work was delayed by the wet and cold over the winter period, this warmer and dryer spring has given us a chance to really get ahead. Several projects are underway.

The Top Garden

This area was used by some of the cottage residents as an allotment on which they grew fruit and vegetables. It seems that originally it may have been the end field above the canal of the Lea Wood Farm as shown on the old estate maps. We have cleared one end and established an oak tree nursery. The trees grown there will be transplanted to other parts of Lea Wood to restore its original character as an ancient oak woodland.

Over the winter, a local contractor came in and felled the sycamore trees that had self-sown at that end over the last 70 years. This will give more light on the ground and copious material to build up the dead-hedge that forms a safety barrier along the bottom edge of the garden. It will be a haven for wildlife, and another source of firewood.



A fine view of Wigwell Aqueduct from the new seat above the cottage.



Hurdle making for the top garden.

Work on restoring the drystone walls stopped over the winter because the slope and slippery mud made it too dangerous, but now the main section of the back wall that had collapsed has been rebuilt. Other sections remain to engage us well into the future. Above this wall at the back ►



*Reconstructing the drystone wall in the 'top garden'.
Photos courtesy of Friends of Aqueduct Cottage.*

of the garden we are levelling an area that will be used for forest-craft type activities. We intend to create some rustic seating and basic weather protection.

Coppicing and hurdle making

While the ground was too wet in the garden area, we made a start on coppicing the overgrown hazels in another part of the wood. With these cut poles, and under the guidance of one of our volunteers, our volunteers developed skills in the ancient craft of hurdle making. These will be used as fencing in places around the cottage.

A view of the Wigwell Aqueduct

Back at the cottage we have cleared away the area on which we had stored our building materials and in doing that we took the opportunity to expand the grassed area around the seats at the end of the aqueduct. The area is defined now by a wattle fence where the bank drops steeply away and from which it is now possible to get a reasonable view of the aqueduct arch across the river that gave William Jessop much trouble and delayed the opening of the canal. (Readers may wonder why the aqueduct is called the Wigwell aqueduct –

alternative names are the Leawood or Derwent aqueduct. Wigwell Grange was an outlying property farmed by the monks of Darley Abbey down the Derwent. Its land reached down to the river on the western bank).

And a view of the Leawood Arm

At the early part of last century, a favourite postcard picture of the Leawood Arm was taken from the railway aqueduct looking along the cut as it curved away to the left towards the swing bridge just out of shot. In one, there is the figure of a woman of mature years, said by Ivy Turberville to be that of her grandmother, Ann Eaton. But until recently that photograph could not be replicated because trees had grown along the arm between the canal and the towpath – something that should never happen on a horse-boat canal.

We have cleared all those trees and will eventually try to increase the light that gets to the canal in the hope that something might be persuaded to grow in there. It might remain an isolated pool of water but even ponds have something living in them. In the old pictures there is a sunken narrow boat on the left of the water. We have no ambition to sink a boat there again – well not yet! ■

NEW WINDOWS ON OUR WATERWAY

By Richard Handley

When we purchased our 1938-built heritage narrowboat *Birdswood* back in 2013, one of our several initial expenses was for new 'windows' to replace the existing life-expired set which had become opaque and leaky. These 'windows' are in fact clear plastic sheets incorporated into a specially made fabric side and can be rolled up whenever it is not raining (which, even here in Derbyshire, is the majority of the time!). This gives passengers a clear view out onto the delightful scenery and wildlife on our canal. Conventional 'glass' windows will always mean that, even when 'open', only half the passengers have an unobstructed view out.

After 10 years these were showing their age, so last November, Friends of Cromford Canal launched a fundraising appeal for new windows. This generated over £2,500 in donations towards the £5,000 cost and the replacement windows were fitted at the beginning of April just in time for the new cruising season.

A big thank you to all who contributed, and to our volunteers who fitted them. This means that our 5,000 passengers a year will be able to fully enjoy their cruising experience, and we will be able to minimise the risk of inboard corrosion to the hull structures.

We have also had a custom rear deck cover made to protect this exposed area of the boat. This was prone to taking on rain water, and the new cover means that the frequent pumping of the bilges will no longer be necessary. **T**



Skipper Norman helps maintenance volunteer Dave remove the old windows.



New windows fitted.



Rear deck canopy in place.

THE FCC SHOP ON CROMFORD WHARF

By Ken Brockway

New staff and new lines will be discovered when you visit the Friends shop at Cromford Wharf. The 'Weighbridge' shop on Cromford Wharf is open Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, plus other days (usually Tuesdays and Thursdays) when volunteers are available.

New this season are narrow boat or 'Buckby' can fridge magnets at £3 and some detailed models: a holiday boat or traditional motor boat *Ferret* or butty *Mendip* from £7.50 each. We always have lots of donated craft items, kit or ready to go, plus books and jigsaws. The tables are sagging under the wide selection of gifts on offer.

We still have a good selection of painted ware by Trina Day who has donated to FCC a painted milk churn – see the picture. It's priced at just £120; look on ebay and elsewhere to see unpainted churns around £100 so this is a bargain.

Fancy spending time outdoors during the summer chatting to visitors? You could help us open the shop on more days; contact sales@cromfordcanal.org.uk to volunteer or call in and chat to our current volunteers. **T**



This uniquely painted milk churn could be yours

	Top - Fridge magnets £3	2025 Jigsaw £20
	Model - Ferret £15 Butty also available	
	<p>Warning: This is Not a Toy This product is not recommended for children For decoration. Contains small parts which could be a choking hazard.</p>	New lines for 2025

LEAWOOD JOTTINGS

By Ian Yates

Well it certainly has been a hectic start to the season. The first job was to return the feed water pump to Leawood. On the steam side the cylinder was re-bored, a new piston made complete with phosphor bronze piston rings, the slide valve seat milled flat and the slide itself trued up. The water side had a new packing retaining ring cast and machined to match the plunger which was also turned true. The whole was reassembled and mounted on a stout angle block on the radial drill at Clay Mills Victorian Pumping Station.

It was then trial run on compressed air and worked successfully. On the Sunday before the Easter steaming it was returned to Leawood by a team from Clay Mills, all much younger than ourselves bar one. Along with a couple of Leawood volunteers it was taken down the steps and remounted on the wall. The steam supply and water supplies were reconnected and a trial test using a crank confirmed the water was being fed into the boiler. The old oil feed pump was a bit unpredictable so a new one was purchased and mounted on the engine using the original connections. A general tidy up of the boiler house was carried out ready for the first steaming of the season.

The first steaming went very well and we were very busy. The feed water pump worked very well. It was very stiff to start with but eased off during the weekend. What did become obvious was the new oil feed was not feeding an adequate supply of oil. This needs assessing and hopefully another oiler will be fitted to match the age of the engine.

Whilst work was being carried out on the engine, the words 'Donkey Pump' were found cast into a couple of the brass bearing shells. A quick search on the internet resulted in the name of Frank Pearn & Co, Manchester Donkey or Wall Pump Banjo type, confirming our initial thoughts that it was from that maker as there are



Feedwater pump on test fixed to the radial drill in the workshop at Clay Mills Victorian Pumping Station

no maker's plates or marks on it. It was noticed however that there are two small holes on the valve chest cover which would have retained a maker's plate, it also shows the cover is on upside down!

The following weekend we did a private steaming for The Sandringham Royal Warrant Holders. The President is the Chairman of John Smedley at Lea Bridge and they had organised a day out to show off the Derwent Valley. All of the guests were mainly from the eastern counties and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

After that the boilers were out of ticket. One boiler, no 43, had been prepared ready and an inspection carried out by the boiler inspector on 20th May. All went well, the only requirement being that the fusible plug in the top of the firebox is re-certified with a certificate to show the melting temperature. The current plug is ►

marked as being of LMS origin but probably refilled at some time. This now needs all the fittings replaced ready for a steam test in June before the next steaming.

Middleton Top

Whilst all this was happening arrangements were being finalised for the operation of Middleton Top Engine on steam for the first time since closure in 1967. A steam supply had been arranged and on the Friday a Fowler BB1 ploughing engine of 1875 vintage arrived after a stop for lubrication at the Greyhound Hotel in Cromford.

It was connected up to the engine and we decided to give it a test run. A water supply was also required. Fortunately J C Balls & Sons Ltd from Ambergate came up with a 2,000 gallon bowser complete with tractor which they kindly loaned to us for the weekend. Things did not go as expected. The engine took much more steam than thought and successfully dropped the steam pressure on the engine by a large quantity, and the water level dropped by 2 inches which was not sustainable. A quick look around the engine and the amount of steam coming from one of the condensers revealed the pipe seal to the condenser was failing.



Boiling point: Traction engines pipe steam for the beam engine at Middleton Top. It is the first time the engine, which was used to winch trains carrying ore up the steep incline, has been steamed since 1967.

The TIMES Tuesday 6th May - The event hit the national press!

Photo: Rod Kirkpatrick



Steam up in Middleton Top engine house.

This resulted in a very early call on the Saturday morning to Leawood Pumphouse to pick up some rope and do a repair to the seal. An early run was carried out once the engine had warmed up and the seal had been successful. Another traction engine arrived and was piped up to supply steam along with the other engine.

The day started with a queue of visitors back to the top of the incline. The engine was run in 5 minute lots as it would have operated when moving the wagons on the incline. What amazed everybody was the speed the engine ran at. Once the vacuum picked up, the engine took off and had to be regulated to keep the speed steady at around 32 to 40 rpm.▶

It was noticed during the day that we were losing cooling water from the condenser tanks; approximately 1.5 tonnes of water disappeared into the pit at the bottom of the engine. When this happened the engine house filled with steam as the condenser tanks had emptied and hence did not condense the steam. Thinking hats on, it was realised that the return tank was starting full along with the condenser tanks. As the engine pumped the condenser water back to the tank it overflowed, hence the water loss. On the Sunday the return tank was left empty and, problem solved: as the water was pumped out of the condensers and around the cascade to cool it down the tank filled and this was returned back to the condenser tanks rather than onto the floor.

The rest of the weekend went very well. We were very busy every day with everybody enjoying the operation. More traction engines arrived, with five engines on site at one time. The bowser was refilled twice from a hydrant located outside the Sun Inn, fortunately off the main road. By the Monday afternoon the engine was running very well and only being supplied with steam from the

was sorted out. It was a hectic weekend but well worth it. Will it happen again? Watch this space but don't rely on it. ▀

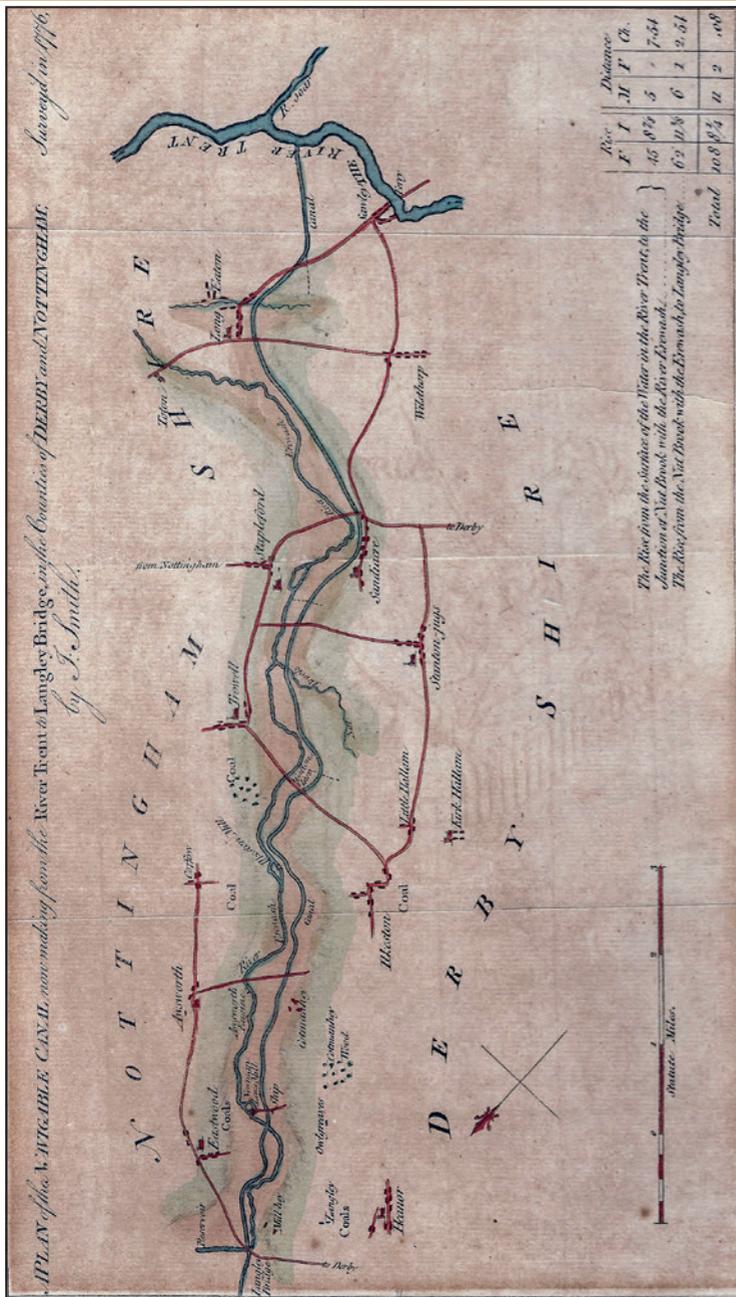


The 1875 Fowler BB1 ploughing engine supplying steam to the beam engines.



Once the steam leaks were sorted, there was a clearer view inside.

EREWASH MAP



Our apologies for making you turn your Portal on its side, but we wanted you to see this fine map of the Cromford Canal's link to the Trent – the Erewash Canal – in 1776. This hand-coloured map would have originated at the time of the application for the Act of Parliament and was kindly donated to FCC by Jim Dixon who runs the excellent Countryside Books at Cromford Mills.

CHARLES GIBSON

Memories of the Canal Inspector at Codnor Park



Mr Gibson explains the workings of a lock to local school children.

Some years ago Steve and Sue Footitt related their memories of Sue's grandfather Charles Gibson. They spent many an evening at Lock House [between Locks 5 and 6] sitting under the hiss of the gas lamps (there was no electricity) talking about the canal with him. He had started as a bricklayer and had worked his way up to become an Inspector.

At the end of the garden were the offices and workshop. At one time there was a saw-pit in the workshop for building lock gates.

He claimed he was one of the last few

people to leg through the Butterley Tunnel before it was finally closed and said it was dead straight: "built like a gun barrel". There were passages off where originally boats had loaded coal direct from the underground working.

The LMS [London Midland & Scottish Railway, who owned the canal] employed him at this time and one of their changes was at Bull Bridge aqueduct where they made provision for trains to fill their tenders with water from the canal as this was better quality water.▶



The Lock House before the extension was added to the front, with the workshops to the right. The boat that Sue remembers can be seen tied up to the bank. Steps can still be seen leading down from the towpath to the canal today.

Towards the end of the working life of the canal it was uneconomic to maintain some of the reservoirs and Charles Gibson had the spillway built at Golden valley just by the east entrance of Butterley Tunnel. This was to reduce the water level so it would no longer be classed as a reservoir and would not need the maintenance of a proper reservoir.



A snapshot of Mr Gibson describing his garden to local school children.

Charles was born in Ripley on 13th February 1880 and died in a Buxton Nursing Home in October 1979, just short of his 100th birthday. He met his future wife at a dance and they were married in 1910, making their home at Hartshay, where their first child, Marjorie, was born. Sue's Uncle Thomas was also born at Hartshay before the family moved to Sawmills, where Charles had a smallholding. Here Sue's mother, Mabel, was born in 1918 and her Aunt Jessie in 1920. The family moved to Holloway, then to a cottage on the Nightingale Estate at Lea. He had joined the canal staff in August 1907 and was promoted to canal Inspector in January 1932 replacing the retiring inspector Mr Winson. As a result, the family made their last move to the Lock House at Codnor Park.

He was in charge of the stretch from Langley Mill to Cromford and walked the entire stretch once every four weeks, inspecting everything from the water levels, footpaths and hedges, to sluices, bridges etc. He walked from Codnor Park to Langley Mill and back in a day and, two weeks later, did the other walk from Codnor Park to ►



In this well-known photograph, Edward John Sampson is on the tiller and Mr Gibson on the left.

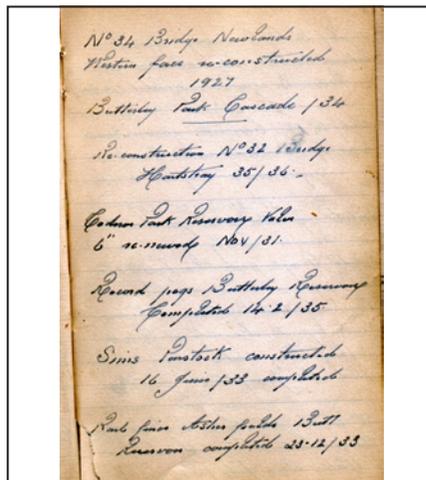
Cromford and back. He was in charge of a joiner, a bricklayer, a welder and three labourers.

When Sue was a child she vividly remembers the boat that her Grandad used to bring supplies over from the other side of the canal. At the time, there was no road access to the canalside lock house. 'Red Road' was only a foot/cycle path from Jacksdale to Codnor Park. She especially remembers the loads of coal that had to be shovelled into the boat from a lorry on the opposite side of the canal, rowed across and then shovelled out on the canal side ready for storing in the outhouse. This was what Sue had been waiting for, as she was allowed to join Charles in the empty boat for its return journey.

Another family member Linda Radford told us about his garden. Charles Gibson was known for his garden, which was often photographed in local papers. He also had rain gauge/meteorological station which the met people came to read. He also tested seeds. He had one garden for roses, one for veg, an orchard and a lawn. His borders went up in tiers to a lawn, there was a huge weeping willow and an ivy seat.

There was a lot of land and an enormous

cellar where he did a lot of his work. From Red Road you went up from the cellar to the kitchen etc, then up again to the bedrooms. ▀



A page from Mr Gibson's notebook recording, amongst other things, the reconstruction of Ripley Road Bridge 32 (by the former Gate Inn at Hartshay) in 1935/6.

SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST

Newspapers reveal embankment collapses . . .

Collapse at Ambergate

20th February 1833, Derby Mercury

“About 8 o’clock on Monday morning last the embankment of the Cromford Canal between Amber Bar and the Iron works of Messrs Mould on the Matlock Road gave way. The rush of water was so tremendous that even many trees in the wood between the Canal and the turnpike road were washed down across the road impeding the progress of coaches and travellers. The water found its way to the River Derwent which approaches within 150 yards.”

Surprisingly, there is no mention of this in the canal company minutes. ‘Amber Bar’ refers to what we now call Ambergate but in pre-railway days this area was known as Toadmoor. The location of the turnpike toll gate near the River Amber at the Hurt Arms might also have been referred to as a ‘bar’. Mold’s Wharf was north of Grattan’s Bridge where the derelict cottage now stands. Mold’s ironworks lay on the opposite side of the turnpike road and later became Ambergate Wire Works, part of which is now the Great British Car Journey. – Ed.

Embankment destroyed by rats

10th September 1890, Derby Mercury,

An extraordinary incident, demonstrating the destructive habits of the water rat, has just occurred on the Midland Railway Company’s Cromford and Langley Mill Canal. During the night it was discovered that a portion of the embankment near the High Peak Junction had collapsed, and that the water was rushing onto the lower lands and into the river Derwent. The leakage was discovered at the southern extremity of the aqueduct crossing the Derwent and the circumstance was reported to Mr Slack, of Holloway, the local inspector. The canal is the main waterway for the transit of coal to Cromford, Matlock, and

the intermediate places and the accident suspended the whole traffic. Moreover, at the time a party of excursionists were journeying to Matlock by the canal, but in returning the boat was stranded. A gang of men was sent to repair the damage and an examination showed the puddle and masonry had been burrowed through by rats. The damage was more extensive than was at first anticipated, and it is not expected that traffic will be resumed before Wednesday or Thursday.

Second Embankment Collapse

In the *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* of 13th October 1890, *Derby Mercury* of 15th October and also in the *Long Eaton Advertiser* a week later, the following somewhat dramatic report was published:

“Only a few weeks ago the embankment of the old Cromford and Langley Mill Canal, which is the property of the Midland Railway Company, collapsed near High Peak Junction, and during the past week a second catastrophe occurred in the same vicinity. The leakage was discovered on Monday morning on the aqueduct, the point where the canal crosses the River Derwent. Water was escaping through the puddle and masonry into a dry archway below, but traffic was maintained until night. The following day a gang of 20 men from the relaying permanent way department of the Midland Manchester and Derby main line, started to repair the damage, under the direction of Deputy Allen. The work however was not completed until Thursday night, and the pump for refilling the watercourse from the river was in operation 24 hours before traffic could be resumed on Saturday, after four days’ delay.”

It appears that the restrictions on pumping water up from the River Derwent had been lifted at this time. – Ed ■

TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS GIVEN TO THE FCC IN 2024

By John Guyler

Total = 12,364.5 direct volunteer hours with 2,652 travel hours

	Direct hours	Travel hours	Total hours
Trustees	2409	195	2604
Strategic Restoration Group	290	23	313
Cromford Wharf Shop	893	81	974
The Birdswood Business	4783	1804	6587
Meetings, (Trustees, Boat Committee, SRC meetings)	478	0	478
Work parties	3398	546	3944
Lock Keeper's Garden, Lock 4, Ironville	65.5	6	72
Wayne Scarle (CRT Ranger at Ironville)	45	0	45

The figures above are taken from all the submissions each month and they are used to calculate the total.

Some volunteers don't report every month and a couple don't report at all, so the true total will be slightly higher.

There is under reporting, because I know that several volunteers do quite a lot of work and travelling on different jobs but the reported hours are not as high as I would expect.

In 2024, Waterway Recovery Group volunteers from groups all over the country gave the FCC 606 direct hours and 87 travel hours.

For reference:

Recorded direct volunteer hours 2015 = 6,858.25 hours

Recorded direct volunteer hours 2016 = 10,784.5 hours

Recorded direct volunteer hours 2017 = 14,183.5 hours

Recorded direct volunteer hours 2018 = 18,158.75 hours

Recorded direct volunteer hours 2019 = 17,392.00 hours

Recorded direct volunteer hours 2020 = 7,429.00 hours

Recorded direct volunteer hours 2021 = 10,116.5 hours

Recorded direct volunteer hours 2022 = 12,421.00 hours

Recorded direct volunteer hours 2023 = 13,742.75 hours

Recorded direct volunteer hours 2024 = 12,364.5 hours

Total over ten years recording, FCC volunteers have given 123,450.75 direct hours

MAY THE 4TH BE WITH YOU

A less than usual character was spotted on the canal



EVENTS AND MEETINGS

What's On this Summer

FCC Meetings at Ironville

Illustrated talks take place on the third Monday of the month at 7.30pm at Ironville Church Hall, Casson Street NG16 5NN. Car parking at rear. Bar, tea/coffee, raffle and FCC sales table.

16th June

American Air Power in World War 2 - Anthony Laven

21st July

The Sheriff of Nottingham - Richard Townsley

15th September

The Nottingham Canal - Mick Golds



FCC Web Site
Events Page

FCC - Cromford Meeting

Cromford meetings take place in the Gothic Warehouse, Cromford Wharf, 7pm. Tea/coffee and FCC sales table. (Book on FCC website.)

8th September

Hedge-laying - Derrick Hale

Derbyshire County Council Events at High Peak Junction

The visitor centre at High Peak Junction is open daily. Refreshments and souvenirs are available and the Cromford & High Peak Railway Workshops (the oldest in the world) are open to visit. The nearest car park is on Lea Road (DE4 5AA); there is no car access from the A6. It also a pleasant walk from Cromford Wharf. Cromford is served by buses from Ashbourne, Buxton, Chesterfield, Derby and Sheffield and by train from Nottingham and Derby. The TransPeak bus stops on the A6 at High Peak Junction.

Leawood Pumphouse Open Days

The 1849 coal-fired Leawood Pump is open from noon to 4.30pm on the following dates. On 'in steam' dates the pump will be fully operational. Entrance is free but donations are encouraged, especially in view of the current cost of coal. Access is as per High Peak Junction.

Saturday 14th June *Static*

Sunday 15th June *In Steam*

Saturday 5th July *Static*

Sunday 6th July *In Steam*

Wednesday 30th July *Static*

Saturday 2nd August *Static*

Sunday 3rd August *In Steam*

Wednesday 6th August *Static*

Wednesday 13th August *Static*

Wednesday 20th August *Static*

Sunday 24th August *In Steam*

Monday 25th August *In Steam*

Wednesday 27th August *Static*

Saturday 13th September *Static*

Saturday 14th September *In Steam*

Saturday 4th October *In Steam*



Friends of the Cromford Canal



YOUR WILL COULD MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE

LEGACIES MEAN FASTER PROGRESS ON CANAL PROJECTS

Our aim is “The restoration, reconstruction, preservation and maintenance of the Cromford Canal”, but that’s an expensive business: a gift in your will could make a huge difference to the pace at which we can restore our unique canal.

HAVE YOU MADE YOUR WILL ?

Making a will ensures that your money and property go to people and organisations you choose to support. Leaving a financial gift to the Friends of the Cromford Canal will help secure the projects that are needed to complete our canal's restoration.

If you have already made a will and would like to include FCC as a beneficiary, a simple codicil (amendment) can be added. Leaving charitable gifts in your will can help you reduce the value of your estate liable for Inheritance Tax as charitable bequests are tax-exempt – so a gift to FCC could reduce the amount to be paid to HMRC after your death.

**Please contact the FCC Executive Secretary;
secretary@cromfordcanal.org.uk or the FCC Treasurer;
treasurer@cromfordcanal.org.uk for a confidential discussion. We
can also supply a blank codicil for you to complete and attach to
your will. This can also be downloaded from our website.**

The Friends of the Cromford Canal – registered charity 1164608



