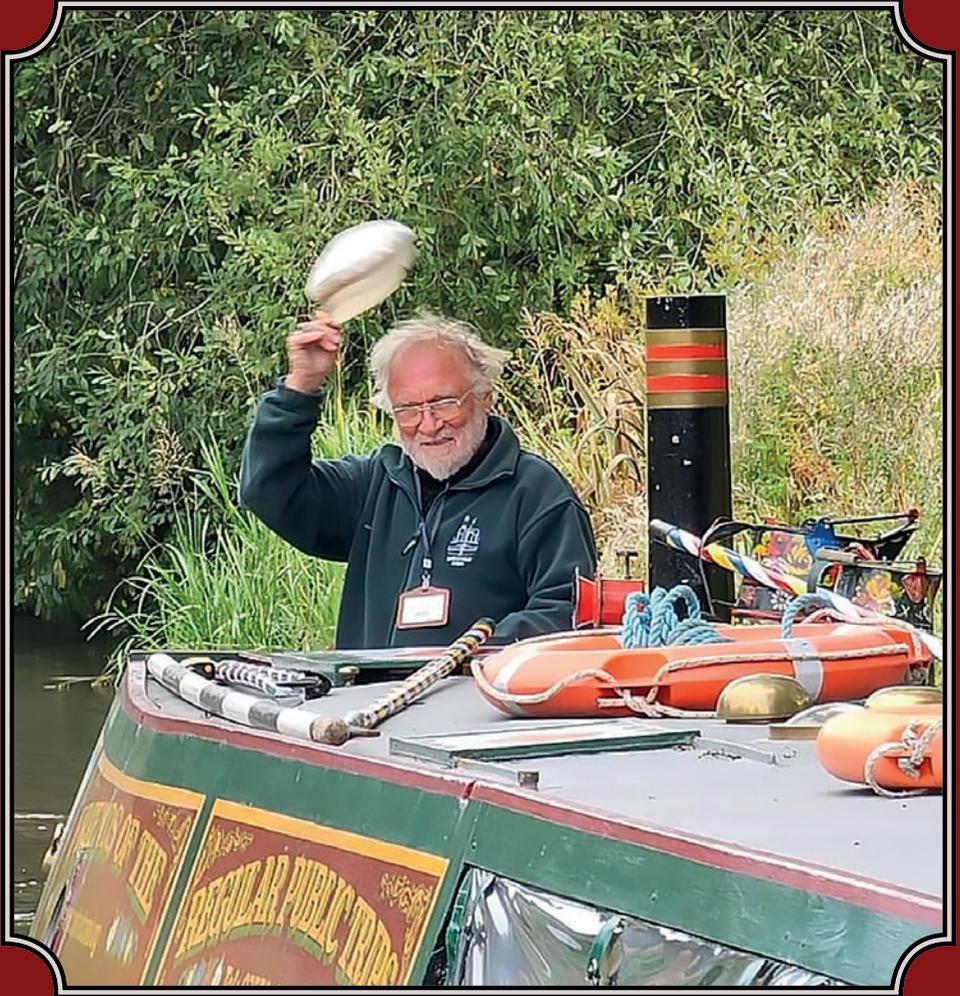


# THE PORTAL

Issue 91 - Winter 2024

Price £1.00 - Free to Members



Friends of the Cromford Canal

Registered Charity No. 1164608

# FRIENDS OF THE CROMFORD CANAL

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**Front Cover:** Hat's off for Mike Kelley as he retires from 11 years of being a master on *Birdswood* – see page 24.

**Back Cover:**

**Top:** Taken by Ian Huselbee on 1st April 1967, just months before closure, this shows what is now called the lengthman's hut at High Peak Junction looking towards Brown's Bridge. Close examination of the original shows metal guttering only over the two doors – not along the full-length of the roof as seen today.

**Bottom:** The FCC recently repainted the hut including what was assumed to be historic wooden guttering. But comparison with the earlier photo shows that this was almost certainly put in after the closure of the railway! Can anyone shed any more light on this?

**The copy date for the next issue is 14th February 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.

# EDITORIAL

By Hugh Potter

The Friends of the Cromford Canal was formed over 20 years ago, and at last we are seeing 'action' on the ground. This last year has witnessed unprecedented action north of Langley Mill.

In 1973, under the auspices of the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association, the bottom lock of the Cromford Canal – Langley Bridge Lock 14 – was restored and reopened, along with the Great Northern Basin. Extensions to build the dry dock and boatyard followed, then the ECPDA opened a further channel to the north, as yet inaccessible by boat.

Now, thanks to amazing work by Waterway Recovery Group, our own volunteers and help from ECPDA, great progress is being made on the Beggarlee Extension as reported in recent *Portals*. Despite use of skilled volunteers, much expense is involved in planning, materials, plant hire etc and for this we must thank grant funders and those who have given us bequests and donations.

On top of this our trip boat *Birdswood* contributes a significant sum annually towards maintenance and restoration along the whole length of the canal. This year looks like being another record year for turnover in the Cromford shop and from the boat, which is entirely due to the unstinting efforts of our wonderful volunteers. Their latest task has been responding to a 'googly' delivered by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency for their annual in-water inspection.

In the past this has been to inspect the boat afloat and to check our extensive paperwork. This year at short notice they advised us that they wanted all the floor plates lifted to inspect



underneath (which they had done at last year's out-of-water inspection). So the day after we ceased public trips on 3rd November our wonderful maintenance team got down to work. The plates are steel and are pretty heavy (they take at least two strong people to lift them). But what is worse, all the seats and tables have to be

disassembled and taken out first then carried to the undercroft of the Gothic warehouse – no small task.

As we went to press, the MCA had carried out all their examinations and checks on 13th November, and I'm delighted to report that *Birdswood* has been given her UK Passenger Certificate for another 12 months.

Talking of good news, *Birdswood* featured well in BBC's second *Antiques Roadshow* recorded at Cromford on a very wet day back in May. Fiona Bruce did us proud in her introduction to this broadcast which also featured the £10,000 bracelet that was carried on *Birdswood* the next day. You may have also spotted some of the boat's rather damp crew looking enthralled at one of the valuations in the first broadcast – they were roped in to the stand on the Peninsular Wharf as 'rent-a-crowd' as no sensible public were venturing that far in the rain!

There is still one more part to be broadcast, so keep your eyes open – we have no idea who or what will appear on it, but it is good to get such excellent publicity for the World Heritage Site of which Cromford is part. The first two parts are available on iPlayer.

Meanwhile, we wish all members – especially our many volunteers – a peaceful, relaxing break over Christmas, ready to start again in the New Year! ■

# CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

By David Martin



Well how fast has this year gone! So much has happened that it all seems a bit of a blur. We started off with clearing out the brash and self-set shrubs down on the Beggarlee flood mitigation zone before the bird nesting season started in preparation for the Waterway Recovery camp that was set

for July. Then we had engine trouble with *Birdswood* and were unable to run our trips down the cut on the Cromford section due to the delivery time scales of the parts we needed to fix it.

Needless to say, we got both jobs done sooner than expected. The site was ready, and materials started arriving soon after that, and by the end of April *Birdswood* started cruising again and has had a fantastic year, probably her best yet!

The Waterway Recovery Group turned up on 19th July and it was all systems go on the flood plain. A week later about 90% of the planned work had been done and we even found the remains of the original Lock 13 although we plan to do further investigations around that to prove that it is Strutt's Lock. In the more recent weeks we have still been digging away down there with our newly acquired mini-digger and now the River Erewash has subsided we have connected the top end of the flood zone to the river via a channel to allow the rainwater that had collected in there to run into the river. We have also been clearing the brash and shrubby away from our next work area adjacent to the Cromford Canal in preparation for next year when we hope to start extending the actual canal.

If you or a friend would like to volunteer on the boat, the work parties, the shop, down at the Beggarlee Extension, or for anything else, then please do get in touch. We never turn down a helping hand and all training will be provided where required. We value our volunteers very highly and we couldn't manage all the things

we achieve without them.

We have had some great talks this year at our social gatherings down at the Ironville Church Hall and up at the Gothic Warehouse at Cromford and by the time you read this *Portal* we will have completed this year's program.

In the New Year we will still be having our talks but our costs like everyone else's are continually rising and we haven't increased the entry fees for many years. In order to ensure that the charity isn't subsidising the social events we are putting the entry fees up to £5 and also so we know we have enough people attending you can now book and pay for this through our website at [www.cromfordcanal.org](http://www.cromfordcanal.org). We usually have a team from the shop in attendance at these events so if you want to get that special gift for someone then do come along and see us.

Our Annual General Meeting for 2025 will be on 14th April and following that there will be a talk on the Titanic which tragically sank the next day 113 years ago but there will be more about this in the spring edition of the *Portal*.

It only remains for me to say to one and all have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. ■

# WORK PARTY REPORT

By John Guyler

## Beggarlee

Work has now started on clearing the area at the end of the in-water section from the boat moorings in Langley Mill Boatyard. This is an area of rough vegetation and self-set saplings and will be the approach to the locks when they are built from the in-water section.

By the end of October there had been four work parties doing this job. The ground is very rutted from motorcycles using it and is now getting very boggy with all the rain. We have several large piles of tree branches and vegetation. Once they are cleared the area on the canal line will look very open. We have got to the bund at end of the in-water section; it has been well strimmed but the trees and bushes on the edge down to the water have been left so as not to expose a route into the water.

Work is now progressing along the edge of the bund on the opposite side to the footpath, clearing some very heavy and old brambles, again leaving the edge for safety. We had to cancel one work party because of the heavy rain; the ground would have been like glue and there was the possibility of the flood plain flooding.

On one work party the welfare hut came in very useful. It was raining so heavily we all retired to the welfare unit for an early lunch. With so many people crammed around the table it was cosy to say the least, talking about a range of topics from local authors and history to how the banks of the flood compensation ditch were to be grassed. On



*Clearance work at Beggarlee*

the flood compensation scheme, Waterway Recovery Group were going to come back for a long weekend to finish the run-off channels at each end, but they are not now able to come. With our newly acquired 6-ton Volvo digger, I think our drivers will be able to do the job.

But saying that, the dumper sounded decidedly sick, with crunching noises coming from the gearbox. Malc Chisnall dropped the gearbox from the dumper and stripped it, new parts have been sourced and with the help of Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association volunteers, the gearbox has been rebuilt. One task that we were very fortunate with was the pressing of the bearings on to the shafts; one of the ECPDA group had a suitable press and was able to do the job for us, for which we are very grateful. The dumper should be back in action by the time you read this piece. ►

Before the dumper went out of action, the gang were clearing around the top of the headwall banks ready for re-profiling the bank angles. Some tree roots have also been removed from the old Hall Road bank, where the lock summit will be. WRG will hopefully be back in 2025. It is worth noting that each time the new digger was used, at the end of the working session it was cleaned very enthusiastically, before being put back in its secure area. Some of the FCC volunteers have completed training on brick saws (large hand-held circular saws, capable of cutting bricks and steel bar); they have also completed training on the extended-reach power saw and also further digger training.

### High Peak Junction

After six work parties, all the fencing around the winding hole and down to Leawood Pump House, the bridge at Aqueduct Cottage and Brown's Bridge were rubbed down, under-coated and glossed. On the bridge at Aqueduct Cottage, our group had to paint the skirt, which entailed moving the bridge to the open position. That was fine until someone wanted to cross. Everything had to be cleared and the bridge swung back to allow passage; this happened several times.

The lengthman's hut has also seen some new paint on the window shutters, doors and the wooden guttering. The colours were based on the old LMS railway colours, crimson lake and cream for the door frames, known in railway days as 'blood and custard'. Graham, Adrian and myself did the lengthman's hut and it was surprising how many conversations we had with passers-by about the colour.

In early October, we went back to paint the window shutters and door on the small hut near the lengthman's, but the monsoon type rain made it impossible. Our work parties also did a lot of vegetation clearance whilst the painting was being done. The group, who were working along the railway wall at Brown's Bridge, had the surprise of a very large number of small frogs in the undergrowth, causing a prompt change of working plan and a move on to the wall towards Leawood Pump.



*Boys toys, just like your first car, always cleaning it!*

### Ironville

Clearance of the channel has been undertaken around Lock 2 and Lock 3 at the Pottery, removing a large amount of Himalayan balsam.

On one particularly unpleasant task undertaken at Ironville in early October, Jack Brown, John Barker and Malc Chisnall had to recover what at first was thought to be a dead dog which had been thrown from the road bridge into the canal channel. It turned out to be a butchered deer; the carcass, or what was left of it, had to be removed in a couple of bags for disposal (not nice).

The fencing between Lock 2 and the Pinxton Arm Bridge had to be repaired due to some of the lower rails having been smashed.

The youth railway coach, that we cleared around earlier in the summer, has now had a complete paint job (not by FCC) and looks absolutely great; it's worth a visit. ►



*Loading barrows with reeds pulled at High Peak Junction.*

## **Sawmills**

The work party cleared the gauging narrows and the surrounding area of vegetation. The rubbish dumping seems to have stopped since it was mentioned in the community by the Bullbridge group.

## **Black Bridge, Jacksdale**

We worked on a job for the Friends of the Forge to put steps into place to complete a circular route around the Forge site. Over two visits we established a good sound footpath and the location where the steps were to be sited, which involved shifting some very large flat stone slabs.

A small group of volunteers built the steps in John Boucher's workshop, to his design, and then a week later took them on site and securely fitted them into the bank. Handrails will be fitted by the Friends of the Forge.▶



*Graham Green scraping the guttering at the lengthman's hut at High Peak Junction prior to painting.*



*Working on the fencing at the site of Lock 1.*

## Lower Hartshay

A work party cleared a very long section of the canal edge, from the old A610 canal bridge towards the cottages. Strimming of all the nettles and vegetation was also done along the hedge, ready for 450-plus whips which have just been delivered; they are for a continuation of the hedge replanting. Strimming was brought to an abrupt halt when the exhaust fell off the strimmer; the bolts looked to have fallen out with vibration. Clearance of willow saplings has taken place along the section opposite the run-off. The saplings have come from several fallen willow branches in the water and the saplings were cleared to allow access for a winch to get in to pull the sunken branches out at further work party.



*Neil with some of the extra-large Himalayan balsam at Ironville.*

## Ambergate

We had a visit from a small group of corporate volunteers from AECOM at Chesterfield in mid-October. Along with several FCC work party volunteers they cleared a 30m section of the channel near Crich Chase Bridge of reeds.

There seems to be work going on at different locations all the time; it's getting difficult keeping track. But the amount of work for the community and other groups is very encouraging and says an awful lot of the selflessness of all the FCC volunteers. We have a great group. **T**



*Newly installed steps by the former Black Bridge – where the water now discharges from the canal to the River Erewash below Portland Basin.*

# STOP GATE IS GO!

## Ian Hooker reports on its successful installation at Aqueduct Cottage



*The lock gate arrives triumphantly at the cottage, filmed by local BBC.*

Readers of the last two issues of *Portal* (Summer and Autumn 2024) will recall that our major project over the summer has been finding, transporting and finally installing a lock gate at the entrance to the Leewood Arm of the canal. It now stands, as the original gate would have done, fitted into the recess in the stonework in the 'open to boats' position at the entrance to the arm.

The gate will remain static in that position. It would serve no purpose for us to be able to close the gate and it is not possible for us to balance the gate with an appropriate beam because that would block the public footpath across the 'bridge'. Its purpose is to serve as static statement of what Aqueduct Cottage was built there for, ie to provide accommodation for the person employed to manage the gate and ensure that no water was lost from the Cromford Canal to benefit the Leewood Arm.

Anyone familiar with canal navigation will be surprised that this seems to have been built as a stop-gate and not as a full-length stop-lock. Although an early map of 1811 shows what appears to be a full-length lock in place, it is doubtful that that was ever so. Had there ever been a lock we would expect to find stone walls and the rest of a lock structure extending straight up the cut for just over 70ft, and at the top the stonework for a top gate. None of this remains.

Instead, the stonework beyond the gate recess flares outwards for about 30ft to provide a smooth guidance into the gate area for boats returning to the main canal. Although the stop-gate remained in use for only 18 years it does seem unlikely that, after it was abandoned, the stonework of a lock would have been taken apart and the walls rebuilt as they appear today. It is much more likely that the canal was built as we find it and the gate simply removed.►



*The balance beam and spider crane cross the aqueduct, both tracked vehicles being extra narrow to fit along the towpath.*

*Photo: Alastair Newton*



*The special narrow tracked vehicle carrying the balance beam across Brown's Bridge*

*Photo: Alastair Newton*

If that is right, we must ask why no lock was ever built because the delays and inconvenience of waiting for a gate to open after levelling of a difference of even 6in of water (the original requirement of 12in had been amended before the arm opened) would have been considerable. The answer may be as simple as cost. Peter Nightingale built the arm on his own land at his own expense. That could not have been cheap. There is a high revetment wall at least 300 yards long on the first section of the arm and the cost of building a full-length lock might well have doubled his building cost.

The Stop-Gate project has been achieved only by the assistance, cooperation and the generosity of several companies and other businesses. First, we thank Canal & River Trust who gave us a retired lock-gate from the system. We were lucky in this respect that one of their area production managers had grown up in Cromford and therefore had an immediate interest in helping us out. CRT provided not just the gate and pontoons on which to float it to the cottage, but essential advice all along the way,



*The remarkably compact spider crane crosses Brown's Bridge.*

*Photo: Alastair Newton*

and have manufactured the collar that we needed to fit to a 200-year-old anchor point that holds the gate in place.

We are indebted also to Spectrum Freight in Chesterfield who swapped one gate for another that turned out to be an almost perfect fit and transported that gate and a balance beam to Cromford (see page 14). A local company W. Smart & Co provided a spider excavator and driver which removed about 5 tons of silt from the part of the arm where we wished to locate the gate.▶

Then on the day that Derbyshire County Council planned to take a weed cutting contractor's boat across the aqueduct we were ready with our gate loaded on the pontoon for it to be towed through to Aqueduct Cottage.

Once there it remained only for us to check the pot on the bottom of the heel post and to get in another contractor, Lift Ltd Mini Cranes from Leicester, to bring their spider crane and operators, to lift the gate and lower it into position. All of this and the cooperation of DCC Countryside Services, frequent and meticulous planning by our project manager Ron Common, and, of course, the enthusiasm of our volunteers – both wet and dry!

In case you are wondering about the relevance of spiders in this machinery, it means machines that have hydraulic arms or legs which when drawn in will permit them to pass through narrow places – along towpaths for example – but on arrival can spread them out to provide a working platform that permits them to shift tons of muck and to lift a one-tonne gate 12ft in the air and deliver it precisely where required. ■



*The spider crane in action lifting the lock gate*

*Photo: Alastair Newton*

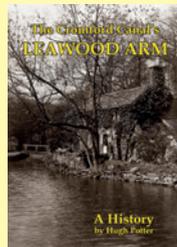


*Lowering the gate into position.*

*Photo: Alastair Newton*

### **The Story Behind the Lock Gate**

You can read the full – and rather complex – history of the Leawood Arm and the reason for the original lock gate, and its short life, in the FCC publication: *The Leawood Arm: A History* by Hugh Potter. Available online from the FCC shop.



Scan QR code for details.

# TIM CASTLEDINE



*Tim shows a group of FCC volunteers around the former Butterley Ironworks site in 2022.*

It was with a heavy heart that the Butterley Ironworks Trust reported that their co-founder and Butterley man through and through, Tim Castledine, had died in September. Tim was a fourth generation Butterley Company man; his father Stanley worked his way up to become deputy manager.

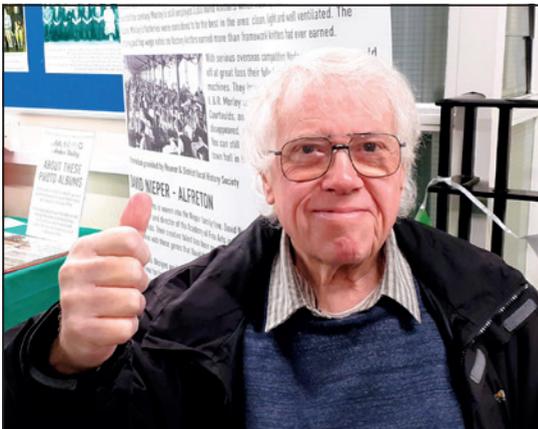
After Tim moved from the Butterley Company he worked all over the world for

Meehanite (including in Ukraine when the Chernobyl disaster occurred and was driving away from the country at the time!) Tim was a font of knowledge about iron and foundries, locally and internationally.

Tim's knowledge of Industrial Heritage was second to none and he had a passion for Heage Windmill, where he trained to be a miller and was so enthusiastic about passing on his knowledge to youngsters.

Tim's legacy is partly in the two books which he wrote about the Butterley Company which contain an awful lot of information which would have been lost without him. When the Butterley site was being partially demolished, he was one of the members of the Ripley & District Heritage Trust who rescued documents from the buildings to deposit at the Derbyshire Record Office.

Tim's talks were fantastic: loaded with information and funny tales, they were always a good night out. Indeed, we in FCC benefitted greatly from the several presentations he gave to us at our monthly meetings at Ironville – he will be greatly missed. **T**



*Tim Castledine came to support the Butterley Ironworks Trust set up at the 50th anniversary of Amber Valley event in April 2024 at the Town Hall.*

# ONE WEEK AROUND LEAWOOD

## Hugh Potter reports on a busy few days

The first week in September was a busy one in and around High Peak Junction and Aqueduct Cottage. Having completed their weed cutting between Ambergate and Whatstandwell, Tim and Lee of Somerset Boats relocated to work south of the Wharf Shed at Leawood. Here they undertook weed cutting from Brown's Bridge through to the winding hole where excessive weed growth had prevented *Birdswood* from turning for several weeks mid-season. They also carried out some spot dredging at key 'sticking' points that enabled *Birdswood* to resume her normal trips.

Meanwhile . . . the lock gate for Aqueduct Cottage was delivered to the Wharf shed where it was craned onto a pontoon built from floating 'Lego' type blocks earlier that morning. It was planned to man-haul this to the aqueduct, but help was on hand from Somerset Boats who used one of their boats as a 'pusher' tug. ►



*Unloading the lock gate by the Wharf Shed*



*Loading the lock gate onto the pontoon.*



*Somerset Boats' adaptable hull in both rake and weed cutter mode.*

Meanwhile . . . The weed cutter had then to cross the aqueduct, which is not simple because the level on the south side is around 18in lower than the north side – and it was full of dense weed. Fortunately there are two sets of stop planks on the aqueduct, which were used as 'lock gates', enabling the weed cutter to access and cut the weed on the aqueduct. This then had to be 'raked' off, taking many trips on account of the volume of weed. With the boat on the aqueduct, the northern stop planks were then replaced and the southern ones removed, thus dropping the boat to the lower level where it could begin work towards Gregory Tunnel.

Meanwhile . . . the lock was 'reversed' and the gate on its pontoon was floated onto the aqueduct ready for being ceremonially hauled across in front of BBC East Midlands Today cameras.

Meanwhile . . . Birdswood was brought down to check that all was good, which it was.

Meanwhile . . . the FCC work party was hard at work on the former railway building alongside the canal, cleaning guttering prior to repainting.

Meanwhile . . . a hired pump was brought by trolley along the towpath to empty the former 'lock' chamber outside the cottage where the gate is to be fitted. This was to ensure that the socket for the gate 'pintle' was still in place after 200 years (it was!) and do final measurements.

As I said: a busy week. **T**



*The lock gate is ceremonially hauled across the aqueduct. Instigator Ron Common is on the right.*



*The FCC Work party preparing guttering for painting.*

# LEAWOOD JOTTINGS

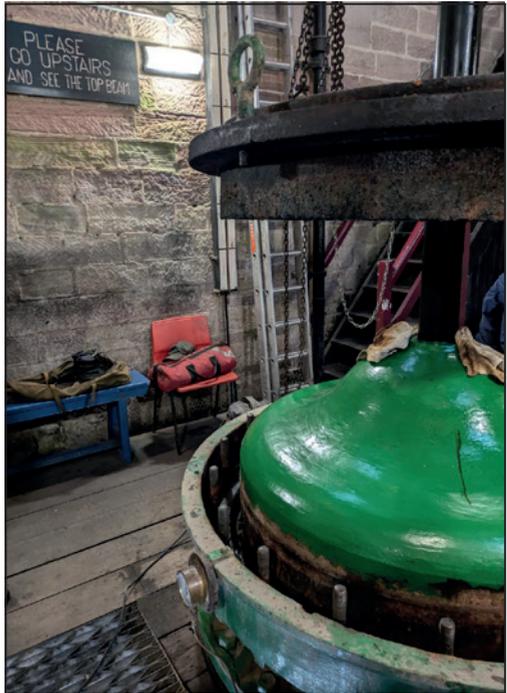
## Ian Yates rounds up the year's work on Leawood Pump

It doesn't seem a year since the last report from the Pumphouse. It's been a good year generally with quite a lot of visitors. The group has co-operated with FCC with the boat, Derbyshire Wildlife with the cottage and the High Peak Junction Workshops to all be open at the same time and give visitors a lot to see in their visit. This has seemed to work quite well and there have been more visitors on the Wednesday openings generally.

At the Pumphouse both boilers passed their examinations early in the year. No 44 has been used this year as 43 was used mostly in 2023 whilst 44 was NDT tested. The boiler inspector has asked for 44 to be checked at the end of steaming season to see if it has deteriorated any further and whether any repairs are going to be needed. A general boiler treatment is used and is now monitored more closely to maintain a good level of tannin protection and to keep the acidity level acceptable. The river water generally tests with a pH value of 7.5 which is very slightly alkaline and is reasonable.

### Pump Seals

A major issue was that the pump side was leaking badly, the seals no longer holding out. A quantity of hemp rope with a diameter as close as we could to 40mm – or one and a half inches – was sourced and this has a polypropylene core so should stand up better to wear but still has the natural fibre outer. The next issue was to obtain some tallow. This is melted and mixed with powdered graphite and poured onto the rope to form the seal. This was finally sourced from a company supplying tallow for artisan candle making, something not being considered as a supply.



*The pump with old packing stripped out and awaiting the new rope and tallow seal.*

Over a couple of weeks the canal was stanked off, which took more doing than first thought as the boards are in need of replacement, but a couple of pieces of strategically placed polythene and plenty of ash saved the day. Once drained down the old packing, or what was left of it, was removed and the void cleaned out. The rope was cut to length, the ends spliced together and pushed into the gap. The hot tallow mixture was poured over the rope which it absorbed, giving a good seal. A total of four layers were placed, each with its joint in a different place.▶

The retaining ring was replaced and very lightly fastened down. An inspection of the outlet valve was carried out by going down the empty outlet pipe with a gas monitor to check the air quality as it is a confined space. This was in good order and some residual detritus was removed. The water was then allowed back into the pipe, removing all the polythene as this was carried out. At the next steaming the nuts on the retaining ring were gently tightened down until the water passing the inside stopped. This was monitored during the day, gently adjusting the ring as required. The pump is now sealed fairly well, very little water passing as it operates or when we are static.

### Fuel Supply & Costs

Coal has been used throughout this year. The merchant acquired a full load of trebles at the beginning of the year and this has been delivered in four-tonne lots as required, one lot being stored in the Wharf Shed. This was screened for the heritage market and has burnt very well. The new fire bars have stood up very well and it is intended to make a second set for the rear of the grate in due course. The ash under the new bars is considerably less than the old ones which allow a lot of small coal to drop through; it is retained on the new ones.

Leewood has always been advertised as free admission but the donations were not covering the running costs. After much thought and discussion it has been decided for admission to be by donation with a suggested donation of £3 per adult. After some initial concerns, this has worked well and the takings have risen to a more acceptable level. Card payments can now be taken as a lot of people do not carry cash, and there is a QR code on the booklet so donations can be made elsewhere if the card machine isn't working due to the poor signal.



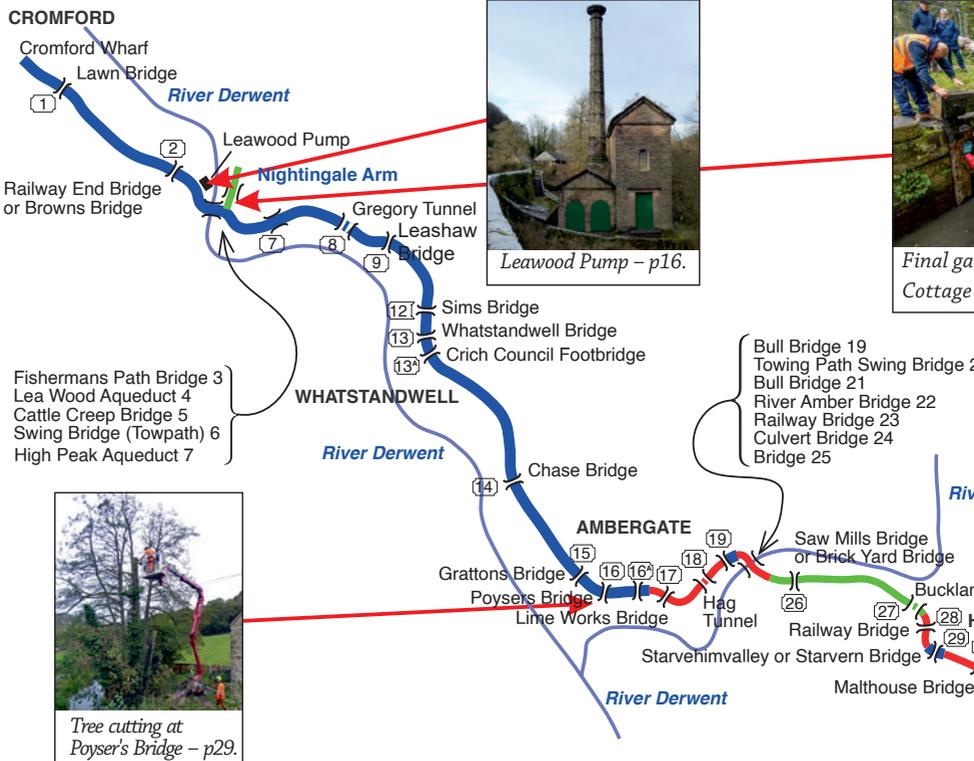
*Boiler 43 in use in 2022; Boiler 44 was mainly used this year.*

### Other Work

Over winter there are a few jobs lined up. One is to complete the cladding on Boiler 43 as it doesn't need any tests, and put the brass bezel back in place; there is not one for 44 despite trying to get one made. The coal shed roof still needs repairs and painting has not progressed but these will have to wait until next year due to the weather.

There is also going to be work done at Middleton Top as the group look after that as well but do not operate it due to lack of volunteers. Next year it is 200 years since the act to build the Cromford & High Peak Railway and it is intended to do a one-off steaming of the engine to celebrate this. A trial steaming has been carried out using a Fowler ploughing engine as the source of steam and to everyone's surprise after 57 years the engine ran remarkably well. A few things need tidying up plus a repair to a condenser feed valve to get it ready to run again early next year on a date to be confirmed: just watch this space!

That's the news for this year and hopefully the team will be back at Easter next year for another operating season. ■



**Walking the Canal**

We are fortunate that the canal's towpath was designated as a Public Footpath before it closed, and the entire route is still walkable today, with some minor diversions. Full details of the route are given in our Walker's Guide, available from the FCC shop.

**Canal Ownership**

The 5.5 miles between Cromford and Ambergate are owned by Derbyshire County Council, but the remainder is in various ownerships. Details are published on the FCC website.

- █ Canal in v
- █ Canal bec
- █ Canal bec
- █ Rivers

**THE CROMFORD CANAL**

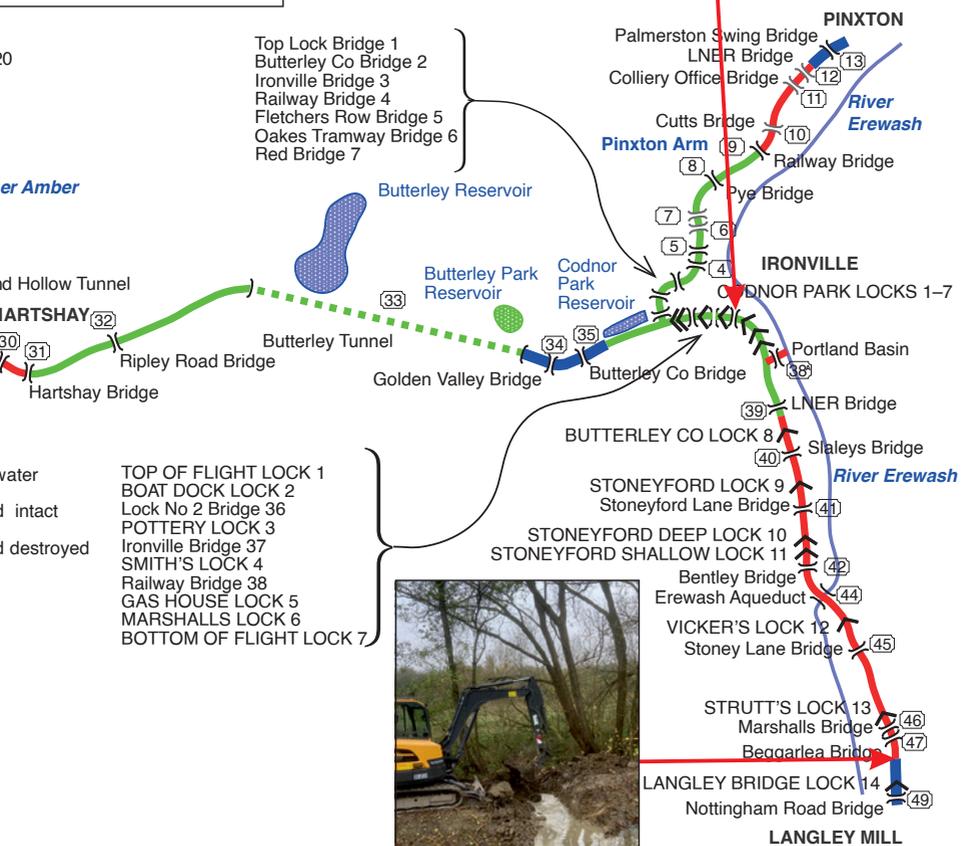




The installation at Aqueduct  
- p10.



Clearing the channel at Codnor Park - p22.



The new digger at work at  
Beggarlee - p6.

# THE FOOTBRIDGE TO HPJ

## Ian Hooker explains why it took all summer to repair it

Visitors to the High Peak Junction café and workshop who had hoped to drive to the car park and walk across the footbridge have had a frustrating summer. The footbridge has been closed almost all the summer and instead they have had a longer walk via the former towpath along the Leawood Arm. Many of them expressed some satisfaction at discovering a new and pleasant extra walk and as a bonus it meant that they discovered also the Aqueduct Cottage and

Leawood Pumphouse. But there is no doubt that it denied an easy brief visit for many.

The closure began in May and was scheduled originally to last no more than 8 weeks. That extended later to 12 and eventually to 20! Why was it closed? To do extensive repairs and refurbishment to the bridge. That began as a need to remove rotting boards that formed the deck of the walkway, but extended to removing a redundant 12in sewer pipe from under the pathway, stiffening the framework where the pipe had been with numerous cross braces, sand blasting the iron work to remove all rust, redressing the iron with a protective long-term plastic coating, and relaying fiberglass reinforced boards; the footway is now open again and should last for 30 years. So the job is finished – well almost finished; there are still two drain covers to fit at each end of the bridge.



*Definitely closed! But after 5 months it is open again.*

Of more interest to those of us with a curious bent of mind is to ask “How old is the bridge?” A regression of OS maps shows that the bridge was not there on the oldest map of 1879, nor on the revision in 1897. It appears on the next in 1920 and on the same map is an early version of the current sewage treatment plant (earlier versions which we know did exist do not appear on the older maps) so it seems reasonable to suppose that the footbridge carrying the sewage pipe was a part of that development. The original bridge was of wrought iron bars fastened together with rivets. At some later date steel outriggers fastened with nuts and bolts were fitted under the bridge in the middle section to give further stiffness and steel frames also fitted above.

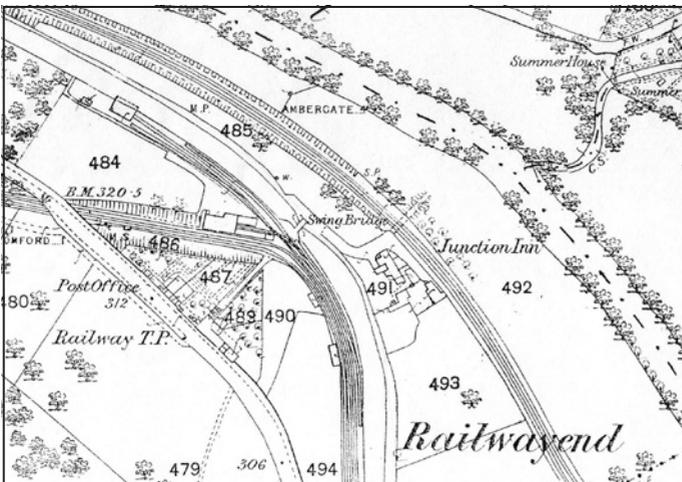
But perhaps of more interest is something that does appear on the 1879 map and not on the later maps. That was the Junction Inn,▶



*The footbridge during repairs with the pipe removed, and as reopened and (almost) completed*

situated between the canal and the railway, just below the bridge that crosses the railway. At that time the railway was further away from the canal, but the pub was doomed because 10 years later the railway was realigned when, in 1888, the new bridge was built to cross the

Derwent, and the pub disappeared under the track bed. The publican at the Junction Arms was a Mr Brown. He was also the farmer on Oak Farm above the turnpike (now the A6); hence the swing bridge at HPJ is Brown's Bridge, number 2 on the Cromford Canal. ■



*The 1879 OS map showing the Junction Inn between the canal and the old alignment of the railway. Note no footbridge across the river and the area is known as Railway End - not High Peak Junction, which was marked where the CHPR joined the Midland Railway's main line.*

# AROUND CODNOR PARK

## An update from the Cromford Canal & Codnor Park Res Group

Autumn heralds the arrival of flocks of redwing and fieldfare and migrating ducks and geese, changing the soundscapes of the canal and the surrounding grassy wetland. It marks the start of our autumn/winter seasonal work.

We look after the section of canal owned by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, for nature, and for people to enjoy and connect with the wildlife on their doorstep. Our group of committed and hardworking volunteers make sure the area is free from litter, empty the bins and ensure the towpath is accessible year-round.

This season's work focuses on managing the water levels within the canal. It is important to maintain areas of deep water, shallow stretches and slow flowing and faster



flowing zones, providing the variety of habitats needed for the diverse wildlife we find along the canal. This time of year, when disturbance to wildlife is minimal, we can start the endless task of cutting swathes into the reeds and chopping into the grassy reed, encouraging

the water into drier areas to create pools and ponds. It is hard manual work; you will often see us pulling out reeds from the towpath with long poles and a hook.

We have also been into the canal, donning our waders to winch out some of the willow trees and their strong roots; left unchecked these would dry out the canal. The cut branches and the root ball are used to build buffer strips on the side of the canal, to prevent the paths flooding and to create ideal habitat for water voles and bank voles. Wrens and robins enthusiastically feed on the numerous insects within the brush. Willows ►



*Digging out the roots of a willow tree.*



*Using a winch to drag the strong roots of the willows from the middle of the canal.*



*Immediate results of removing a group of willow trees, creating a pond area.*

are key to the ecology of wetland areas; they grow quickly and will readily regenerate from the roots and cut branches. Willows on the bank rather than the middle of the canal are much easier for us to manage from the towpath.

We witnessed immediate results from removing a small group of willows from the canal. It encouraged the water to flow into that area very quickly, creating a lovely pond area. Damming areas further downstream also helped the water to back up and maintain wetter areas of the canal. If we can prevent key areas of the canal drying out, then the vegetation that thrives on damp ground will eventually decrease and move out to the margins.

We tend to only tackle a small area at a time, then observe the impact of our work on the water levels further down the canal. We are looking forward to accessing deeper areas of the canal using the inflatable boat later in the season, to enable further reed and vegetation management.

Despite the heavy rainfall this year, the paths have remained relatively intact and flooding has been minimal. We have received

a large delivery of stone courtesy of Longcliffe Quarries, which will be used for path repair if required over the winter months and to renew the towpath next spring.

We have created some channels to direct the water from the towpath and onto the scrape. This is an area of wet meadow habitat important for egrets, lapwing and snipe and a feeding ground for winter ducks and geese. Conservation grazing on the scrape involves cattle creating varied swards of wet grassland habitat and lovely muddy edges around the ponds for the wading birds to pick over for their food.

This year, we have been involved in the Water Vole Recovery Project, an exciting venture run by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. The project is focussed on water vole recovery across the county. Our site was chosen, amongst others in Nottinghamshire, as a collection site for water vole droppings. Six small rafts were placed in various locations along the canal. Water voles, when marking their territory like to poo on areas that protrude out of the water, usually rocks or muddy banks but obligingly left their droppings on each one of the rafts. These droppings were then collected and sent off for genetic testing in a laboratory. Our site is well known for having a thriving population of water voles and it will be interesting to understand the genetic diversity and relatedness of our local water voles.

Don't forget to check out the QR posts dotted along the canal. Scan the QR code to access information and pictures detailing the industrial history of the canal. Since installation the QR codes have been scanned over 2,000 times, providing an interesting and educational addition to the area.

At the end of the year the group is saying a sad farewell and to Angie Sheard and Marie Brown, key members of the core committee who have put in years of hard work and dedication to make the group the success it is today. Thank you for everything you have done and achieved, you will be greatly missed. **T**

# ELEVEN YEARS AT THE TILLER

## Birdswood's longest serving master reports on his 'retirement'

It had finally arrived: 29th September 2024 and this day was my last as master (skipper) of our trip-boat *Birdswood*. My Boat Master's Licence (BML) issued by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) expired the very next day. I had decided not to renew it, because next season I would be 84 and this age was beginning to tell on me, after an 7-hour shift carrying passengers up and down this beautiful stretch of water from Cromford Wharf, Derbyshire.

I had not expected the wonderful reception I was to receive as I pulled into the wharf for the final time as 'master' of the boat. So many of my friends and colleagues had gathered there, where they presented me with an array of gifts, cards, good wishes and a heartfelt thank you speech from our Chairman, David Martin. It was quite overwhelming.

It was hard to believe that it was now eleven years since I had first started carrying passengers, come rain or come shine (this year mostly rain!) in the FCC's trip-boat.

It had taken a great deal of hard work to get this whole operation together. Throughout the 'noughties' we had run a campaign to get a trip-boat back on the water at Cromford, which required a reluctant council (who own this part of the canal) to dredge the canal first; then in winter of 2011-12 they did. This meant that suddenly, and unexpectedly, we had to find a boat and the money to pay for it. A total of £80,000 was required.

Our then chairman Patrick Morris managed to get a grant of £23,000 from the government body DEFRA, but the rest we had to find for ourselves. Not only did we have to find the money, we had to convert a traditional narrowboat, built in 1938, to electric power. We were to run on a nature reserve, and they would not allow diesel on this water. ➤



*In the beginning – well, before the beginning of Birdswood in fact – Mike was a lead campaigner to get a boat on the canal again.*



*Mike with councillor Andy Botham at the official launch of Birdswood in 2013.*



*A band of fellow volunteers gathered to greet Mike after his last cruise as master.*

The conversion of a traditional narrowboat such as *Birdswood* to electric power had never been done before. Dudley Tunnel Trust's operation had run special electric powered boats for many years, so I visited them to seek advice and help. They were great and put me in touch with Kerry Green whose company supplied their equipment. Not only did Kerry help, he himself was to become a master of *Birdswood*, and still is to this day.

Throughout 2012 *Birdswood* was stripped down and rebuilt, ready to begin carrying passengers by late autumn. But that was only half the story! As always we had a fantastic

and enthusiastic group of volunteers to see these tasks were completed.

Because *Birdswood* carried (at that time) up to 42 passengers we came under the MCA, and they demanded a great deal of work. Yes, even though we are sailing on a narrow isolated canal, in just two to three feet of water, we come under a government body more used to dealing with cross-channel ferries!

The paper work was/is colossal and it all had to be in place before we could operate. Not only that but several volunteers, of which I was one, had to get qualified in order to get their BML, which required expensive courses

to undertake, medicals and an oral and physical test by MCA officers. And all this had to be done in a few short months.

It was worth it, because the operation of *Birdswood* is now a major attraction within a tourist hotspot area and has been so for the last eleven years. One cherished benefit has been the wonderful people who have worked on this project. They are the salt of the earth and my life is better for having known them.

But they have not got rid of me completely! I plan to continue volunteering on *Birdswood* – as crew rather than master. See you all again soon! **T**



*Traditionally, it rained when Mike was on the tiller!*

# LETTERS

## Second Hand

In the article on Beggarlee Bridge in the most recent *Portal* (90) you mention the magazine *Railway Bylines* (June 2015) and say that it is no longer available ... not so fast! ... there are second-hand copies in circulation.

Many preserved railways/railway museums sell donated magazines to raise money; some have piles of magazines 'sitting around', other have entire rooms devoted to sorted (and almost catalogued) magazines. I would recommend the magazine room of the

Vintage Carriages Trust at Ingrow, first station out of Keighley on the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway.

Last time I looked 'we' had two copies of this issue (we don't usually keep more than two). I could acquire one of these for the FCC archive if you like?

We? Whoops, OK I'll admit I'm a volunteer at the VCT, responsible for the record keeping of the collection; my title, despite having little to do with the paper archives is 'Hon Archivist'.

**Robert Harvey, Wakefield**

*What I intended to mean (as you probably gathered) was that it was no longer available from their website. But, good point! We get a lot of old canal magazines in the FCC shop on Cromford Wharf and there are almost certainly many sets of railway magazines at our local restored railways (and we have a choice of at least three) where the issue could well be found (without the need to travel too far north!) Thanks for the kind offer to acquire a copy for us, but we do already have one in our Archives - Ed (aka 'Hon Archivist!').*



*Dorothy Heaney, Gladys Simpson and 'Grandmother' Jackson in a very 'twenties' pose on the towpath at the gauging house. (See letter on next page).*

## Farewell to the Friends

I joined several Canal Friends and Trusts when I was Eastern Region Chairman, and later National Chairman, of the Inland Waterways Association more than 30 years ago, of which the Cromford was one of the favourites, partly because one of my Vice Chairmen and a very great personal friend was John Baylis.

Now aged 91, it is time to cut back, and reduce my commitments. So I am writing to say farewell to the Friends. I have been kept in view of the progress of the restoration by your excellent periodical *Portal*, which I would like to continue to receive if the parting donation will ensure this. I am not keen on legacies and prefer to make payments whilst I am still in the land of the living! So I ask you to receive my cheque for £500 in the hope it will help to get more of the Cromford Canal cut into water.

With my best wishes to you and the Friends,

**David Stevenson, Coalville, Leics**

*Many thanks, David; your generous donation will certainly help. Of course, we will be only too happy to continue sending you the *Portal*, hopefully for many years to come! - Ed. ►*

## Gauging House Fence Posts

At the site of the toll house at Sawmills, where the canal narrows for boats to be gauged, the remaining stone fence posts pose something of a mystery. The solid stone posts have triangular holes to accommodate the cross rails of the fence. The question is: how did they get the wood into the holes?

This has mystified our work party team and our engineers. Can anyone suggest how these might have worked and why they were this distinct shape?

### Malc Chisnall

*The accompanying images show the posts today and a photo that must surely be from the 1920s that shows (as well as some elegant ladies) the fence in situ. A possible answer came from Dave Irving, who is a dry-stone waller and has farming connections; he discovered on enquiry that an 80-year-old friend of his, who has been in farming since childhood, remembers how the system worked.*

*Apparently in pre 'Postcrete' days the method was to dig a hole, tip the post into it, support it with smaller stone all around it and tamp earth down once the rails were in place. When the rails needed replacing, they dug out the surrounding stones,*

*tilted the post slightly to fit in the rails and put it back into place.*

*It seems a rather long-winded method, even if timber lasted longer in those days. So if anyone else has any alternative suggestions, we'd love to hear them!*

*There still remains the question of 'why triangular holes' to which Dave's suggestion is that these 'arris rails' – as they are still called and sold for modern fencing – prevent water pooling on top of the rail and hence improve its longevity. Also, rails being cut at a 45° angle, will produce eight out of a single log. **T***



*The stone posts at the gauging house show distinct triangular holes.*

## OUR NEW DIGGER

To complement our restoration work at Beggarlee we have bought a second-hand Volvo digger. She is a 6-ton 4-year-old machine with 2,700 hours. Part of this purchase was made possible by a very generous donation of one of our work party members whose mother had recently died and the family kindly donated £15,000; with agreement we are going to call the digger 'Lillie'.

The purchase was made in June 2024 and our fully qualified digger drivers have been using this machine on a regular basis, weather permitting of course. **T**



# SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST

## A random selection of newspaper cuttings relating to the canal

### Old Billy Whip

*Derbyshire Courier, 14th May 1910*

"An unusual sensation was created in the little village of Bullbridge on Saturday when it was known that Mr William Walters, better known in local circles as 'Old Billy Whip' had met an untimely end on the aqueduct at Bull Bridge where he had spent the greater portion of his life. Old Billy was a very familiar figure on the canalside, and had plied his trade as a boatman on the canal between Bull Bridge and Cromford for the last 40 years. He is a native of Sandiacre, Notts, but very little is known about his early life. He went out to Singapore and India at an early age and after spending some years there worked his way back as a sailor to England. After a good spell of knocking about on board merchant vessels as a sailor, he came inland got a position at Stanton Ironworks. Not settling down to this he secured a job as a boatman on the Cromford to Bull Bridge stretch of the canal. He was very handy on the boats and could be relied on to successfully pilot the huge cargoes of coal from wharf to wharf, along the route of the canals.

"His hobby was to repair and patch up any defects in the boats, and for a quantity of years made his residence in a boat cabin on the aqueduct at Bull Bridge. He had worked successfully for Messrs Wheatcroft and Dawes of Cromford and Messrs Elijah Bradley and White at Bull Bridge. Of late years he was employed more as a jobbing man, and was greatly indebted to the kindness of Mrs Else, Lea Wood, and Mr White, of Bull Bridge. It was while working for Mr White that he met his untimely end.

"It appears he had gone on a little errand, on the canalside, this being his last job for the night, the time being about 7.45 and on returning it is surmised he stumbled at the top of the steps which lead from the canalside to the house of Mr

White, and fell a distance of about 13 or 14 feet down 12 stone steps, alighting on his head. It is believed death was instantaneous.

"Mr Walters was 76 years of age and was a very heavy type of build. He was seldom seen in the village, except when on shopping expeditions. He had a remarkably clear skin which he attributed to the cold water tubs and splashes he regularly indulged in. Scrupulously clean he could be seen at his advanced age even in the winter months breaking the ice and having his morning tub."

*Mr Amos White was the canal foreman, but he reportedly lived at the old road toll house at Buckland Hollow, where the canal is not far above the road. The steps referred to seem more likely to have been from the Bullbridge embankment down to the houses on Drover's Lane or the even steeper drop to those alongside the A610. Does anyone recall any such steps, or another Mr White? – Ed.*

### 70s' style navvies in big canal clean-up

*1st October 1974, Derby Evening Telegraph*

"Modern navvies will move into action on the Cromford Canal on 12th October. Members of the Cromford Canal Society will be . . . using two mini excavators lent by Waterway Recovery Group. This will be the first of a series of working parties the society are organising during the coming weeks as agents for the new owners Derbyshire County Council. Cromford (Key) Estates Ltd have given the society permission to dump silt on their land at Cromford Meadows."

*Ah, if only it were that easy 50 years later!*  
– Ed. ■

# NEWS FROM THE NORTH

## Work on DCC's Ambergate to Cromford length

Derbyshire County Council employed Somerset Boats to cut weed on several sections of the canal in early September. The adaptable purpose-built boat worked first on the Whatstandwell to Ambergate section, but was thwarted from completing the final southern section by the discovery of no less than three high-pressure gas pipes passing across the canal just north of Poyser's Bridge 16. Unbeknown to all, these were only a foot below the surface and prevented passage of the boat. The weed on this length was later pulled by hand, to be followed by the length from Chase Bridge 14 to Whatstandwell.

The boat then transferred to the section from Brown's Bridge to Gregory Tunnel (see also page 14).

In November, DCC's Countryside Service employed Thompson Tree Service to cut back overhanging branches on problematic trees as well as reducing the alders at Poyser's bridge.

The excavator from Wheelplant will be returning later in November to remove silt between Whatstandwell and Gregory Tunnel, and woody vegetation on the east bank from Whatstandwell to Aqueduct Cottage will be cut back by hand over the winter. ▀



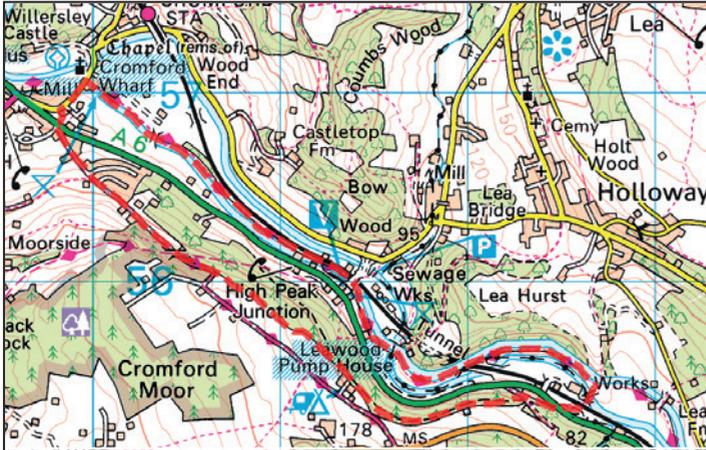
*The weed cutter is retrieved from the canal at Grattan's Bridge 15 after working on DCC's southern section.*



*Clearing cut weed on Leawood Aqueduct.*

# A CIRCULAR WALK FROM CROMFORD WHARF

Ken Brockway explores some interesting paths close to the canal



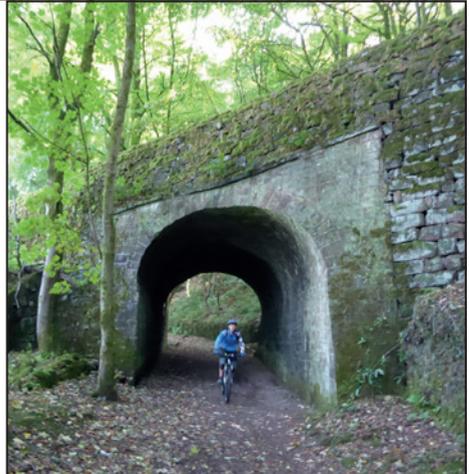
**Distance:** 4.5 miles; 7.5km.  
**Start point:** Cromford Wharf.  
**How to get there:** Train; TransPeak, 6.1, X17 and other buses; or car, parking at Cromford Wharf.  
**Refreshments:** Wheatcrofts and Laurretta's Homesford Tea Room (weekends only). Camping site shop when open.

©Crown copyright 2024 Ordnance Survey. Media 052/24

Starting from the Friends of Cromford Canal shop on Cromford Wharf walk towards the village alongside the canal feeder stream; do not cross the road. At the manager's house turn left alongside the car park then take the walled snickett right up to the A6.

Cross the road with care and continue up Intake Lane which makes a steady climb, but with excellent valley views. The road turns into a track at the end of the houses. Our route crosses under the High Peak Trail so there is an option to shorten the route by turning left after passing under the bridge.

We continue to climb on an old engineered track through pleasant woodland, close by the trail as it descends to High Peak Junction. When the main track turns sharp right take a path straight on; this generally follows a boundary on your right. The path is well used including bikes so keep a watch and listen for bells. There is a large rock outcrop on the left which makes an ideal coffee stop after the climb.



*The walk passes under the High Peak Trail.*

The path eventually meets a tarmac drive, access to a camping site (toilets and shop), and we continue along that. When the drive turns right our path continues straight ahead. Sight and sound of the A6 become apparent as the path descends. We meet a path from ►



*It is a low bridge under the railway . . . . . but is it really that low?*

the right and turn left then almost immediately turn right along a track behind houses.

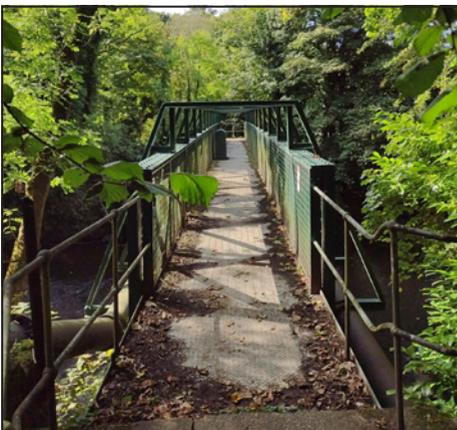
We meet the A6 and cross with care to our continuation path opposite; just to our left is Lauretta's (Homesford Cottage) Tea Room (open Friday to Sunday). The track drops down to pass under the railway then shares a pipe bridge over the River Derwent. On the opposite bank the path is rather uneven but soon leads to the canal towpath next to Gregory Tunnel. In spring wild daffodils bloom here.

Turn left along the towpath with the canal on your right. At Aqueduct Cottage cross

the canal and continue passing Leawood Pump House and High Peak Junction (light refreshments winter weekends; toilets) and so back to Cromford Wharf. **T**



*Some attractive forest walking.*



*The 'pipe' bridge across the Derwent.*



*Directions at Gregory Tunnel.*

## THE CANAL IN THE 1960s

These images, taken by J. G. Parkinson, are some of a large number of canal and waterway photographs now in the care of Online Transport Archive. The archive, which is a UK-registered charity, provides a home for vulnerable film, slide and negative collections of transport and canal interest.



*This 1966 view of Beggarlee Wharf shows railway wagons alongside the canal and the demolished coal loading chute in the distance. It was from here in the early 1950s that the last coal from Moorgreen Colliery was loaded onto boats. Today it is where the Beggarlee Extension restoration is taking place.*



*In the same year, Strutt's Lock 13 is about to be filled in. Remains of the walls of this lock were unearthed during work on the Beggarlee Extension.*



*Cromford Wharf in 1963 when it was still being used as a coal wharf and contractors depot. It is hard to reconcile this with the 'tourist hotspot' that it has become today.*

*In 1963, an abandoned ice breaker lies in the dry dock alongside Lock 6, with the canal workshops in the background. Does anyone recall when this boat was removed – and how?*



# EVENTS AND MEETINGS

## What's On this Winter

### 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.

#### **20th January**

*The Grantham Canal Society: Restoring locks 14 & 15* - Tony Osbond.

#### **17th February**

*Terror From The Skies: January 31st 1916, The Night the Zeppelins Came* - Stephen Flinders

#### **17th March**

*Bess of Hardwick A woman of many parts* - Maureen Taylor

#### **14th April**

AGM followed by

*The Titanic* - John Siggins

### FCC - Cromford Meeting

#### **Monday 24th February**

*Gothic Warehouse, Cromford Wharf, 7pm (Book on FCC website)*

'Derwent Living Forest Programme' - George Jones & Charlotte Taylor

### Derbyshire County Council Events

The visitor centre at High Peak Junction is open weekends only during the winter (10.30am to 4pm). 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.

#### **Make a Poker**

*Friday 27th & Saturday 28th December plus Saturday 22nd February 2025*

Have-a-go at being a blacksmith on the historic forge and make a poker or toasting fork to take home. Participants must be 11+ years old. Cost: £15 per poker. *Booking Essential: 01629 533298.*

#### **Introduction to Blacksmithing**

*Sunday 29th December 2024 plus Saturday 15th February 2025*

At High Peak Junction workshop from 9.30am to 12.30pm, and 1pm to 4pm. Cost: £50 half-day session. *Booking Essential: 01629 533298.*

#### **High Peak Junction Audio tours**

When the visitor centre is open, you can hire one of DCC's audio handsets and let Tapper Jack take you on a self-guided tour of High Peak Junction and the Cromford Canal for only £1.50. it is a great way to learn the area's history.



# 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

