

THE PORTAL

Issue 72 - Spring 2020

Price £1.00 - Free to Members



Friends of the Cromford Canal

Registered Charity No. 1164608

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Front Cover

Farewell to the Duchess. The name board is ceremonially handed over by John Thompson of DCC to Ian Yates of Leawood Pump Group for preservation prior to the scrapping of the boat – see page 18.

Photo: Hugh Potter

Back Cover

Two new images recently acquired by FCC Archives.

Top: Bullbridge railway aqueduct as it appeared in the short time between demolition of the A610 aqueduct (to the right) on 13th October 1968 and the subsequent demolition of Stephenson's cast iron span across the railway. Note the large water tank which supplied steam locos on the railway from the canal.

Bottom: FCC's trip boat Birdswood when still in operation on the Caldon Canal near Froghall in August 1981. The lack of hydraulic pipes indicates she was yet to be motorised.

Copy date for the next issue is 14th May 2020

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

Aqueduct Cottage

At the risk of repeating what others say in this issue, I am delighted that FCC has been able to support the restoration of Aqueduct Cottage to the tune of £6,000 (plus that already donated towards the planning application). All credit for the success of this project must go to the dynamic Ron Common who has single-handedly masterminded the saving of this iconic building that is not only an important heritage feature of our canal but also lies within the World Heritage Site.

The support for this project, both through its Facebook page and associated fund-raising, and through the weekly volunteer support, shows just how much this building is cherished. Its appeal will be further enhanced once the work is finished, hopefully this summer.

Electronic News

In addition to Portal, you can keep up to date with what is happening on the Cromford Canal in various other ways, including an exciting new e-Newsletter, which has been initiated by volunteer Richard Handley.

This e-Newsletter is currently issued every two months and is designed to keep members (and others) more up to date than this quarterly Portal can.

If you have not yet signed up to the e-Newsletter and would like to receive it 'hot from the press' then drop an email to fccnewsletter891@gmail.com.

And if you want hour-by-hour commentary make sure you have joined our Facebook page which publishes up-to-the-minute news of what is happening where on the canal. Membership of the Facebook page is growing



rapidly, from 886 members last November to over 1000 by the end of January – don't miss out on the news!

Portal Design & Make-up

I have said before that credit for the much-praised design of Portal should not go to me but to designer 'CJ' who has worked with me over the last 12 issues to put together the words and pictures that I supply from submitted articles.

Sadly, CJ is finding that the work is taking up too much time and wants to pursue other avenues of work and leisure. CJ has put up with all my quirks and fads without complaint for all those issues; for that and for the wonderful result each quarter, I offer my heartfelt thanks.

However, that does leave a large gap, and I am hoping that there is someone out there who will be willing and able to take this on. We are looking for someone with knowledge of layout and design who has the appropriate software – and time – to put Portal together each quarter.

I will supply all the edited copy and illustrations; we are looking for a designer to put it onto the page in a legible and attractive manner and to liaise with the printers. If you think this is something you could do, please get in touch.

Portal is our main communication with members so it is essential that it appears every three months in a timely manner. I hope there is someone out there who will be willing to help.

20th April 2020

FCC's Annual General Meeting – Free Admission
7.30pm, Ironville Church Hall NG15 5NN

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

By David Martin

Welcome to the first edition of the Portal in this new decade, the Twenties, at the start of which the Friends of the Cromford Canal will have been around for eighteen years!

I trust you all had great Christmas and New Year celebrations, and here we are heading for Easter already when the boating season really begins! For those of you that attend our regular social events at Ironville Church Hall on the third Monday of the month, you will know that we had a packed hall in January for David Amos and his talk on the history and the bicentennial events for the Mansfield & Pinxton Railway, one of the oldest railways in the world built in 1819.

The next evening event will have already passed by the time you have received this copy of the Portal, being held on 17th February, a talk on the 'Fall of Anglo-Saxon England', by our very own former first chairman Mike Kelley; his book on this subject is still available and is a great read; if you would like a copy please get in touch.

On 16th March we shall be hosting a talk on 'The Birdswood Experience' by Steve Adams, which is all about working as a volunteer



on our world-famous trip boat from the beautiful Cromford Meadows. On 20th April it's our Annual General meeting for all members of the FCC to have a say on where we are heading. Afterwards there will be a short talk from John Guyler who will be presenting us with the latest

facts about our amazing team of volunteers and what that means to FCC.

Following that on 18th May is a talk on the Bennerley Viaduct by Kieran Lee with their society's plans to make it a safe and more accessible site for the general public to use again. You can keep up to date with all these news events on our Facebook page, by subscribing to our new e-newsletter, or the through the FCC website. So, it's all going on and if you would like to get involved, Peggy Cope and Alan Oakley who both are currently volunteers on Birdswood, have offered to become our new recruitment team to help us enlist other volunteers to help with the many wide and varied jobs that there are to do with this fifteen miles of canal and its trip boat!

More great news! After another successful year for Birdswood, our Boat Operations Manager Mrs Vix Wilding has accepted our

offer to work full-time, with the Boat Committee and the FCC trustees fully supporting her throughout the year ahead.

Things to look out for along the Cromford Canal this year will include our work parties beavering



Major tree work has been carried out at Buckland Hollow where previously unmanaged growth had become a danger to motorists on the A610.

Photo: David Martin

away at various locations along the canal including Brown's Bridge, Lower Hartshay sluice and Pinxton weir. J.C. Balls have already cut back lots of self-set trees and done some clearance work around Hartshay, Sawmills, and Bullbridge; it's looking a lot tidier there now. Derbyshire County Council have also been busy lately dredging the canal in the Ambergate area from Poyser's Bridge through to the end of the canal and resurfacing the towpath.

Later this year there will be exciting developments at Aqueduct Cottage where Ron Common and his volunteer team are extremely busy breathing life back into this previously derelict but very important historical building. FCC will be supporting this work in conjunction with DCC by giving them a grant of £6,000 to help them bridge their current funding gap on this very important piece of the canal's history.

Then in late autumn FCC hope to finally be dredging around the Lawn Bridge area of the canal to keep Birdwood going; many thanks go to our volunteer project manager Tony Bolton for all of his hard work and most of all his patience.

With the input of Ken Brockway and Hugh Potter, we shall be launching the third edition of the Walker's Guide to the Cromford Canal soon: a very handy tool to have with you when discovering where the canal weaves its way through the Derwent, Amber and Erewash valleys.

Hopefully in the not too distant future we should be receiving Amber Valley and Broxtowe borough council's determination on our planning application to extend the canal from its current terminus at the Langley Mill Boat Yard through to Stoney Lane at Brinsley; their final enquiries are currently being satisfied on this mammoth task, carried out by our volunteer engineers on the Strategic Restoration Committee.

A final reminder that our Annual General Meeting this year will be held at Ironville Church Hall on Casson Street, Ironville NG16 5NN on 20th April at 7.30pm where we shall be presenting our annual accounts, other reports, and electing next year's nominated trustees.

So, I'll look forward to meeting some of you soon on one occasion or another, because there's plenty happening in 2020!



*Work is progressing rapidly on stabilising Aqueduct Cottage at Leawood, helped on by a £6,000 grant from FCC.
Photo: Ron Common*

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

By Yvonne Shattower

It seems a little late to be wishing you all a 'Happy New Year', but I hope that 2020 will be a good year for you all as well as for the Friends of the Cromford Canal.

Those of you who opted to receive information by email will have received our new e-Newsletter which has been produced by our volunteer Richard Handley. This is something which we had hoped to be able to produce for some time, all we needed was someone to do it – so we are very grateful to Richard for this and all the other work he is doing for us behind the scenes.

We have used the information given on the General Data Protection Regulation form which was sent to all members some time ago to identify who is happy to receive this Newsletter; if you did not complete this form but would like to receive the e-Newsletter, please let me know and I will arrange for you to be added to the list. The mailing will go to all borough and county councillors, businesses and many others who we think will be interested in our aims and objectives, so hopefully we will reach a very much wider audience than we have been able to do in the past.

Since the last Portal, we welcomed our 1,800th member, and our membership now stands at 975. If you know of anyone with an interest in the Canal, do encourage them to join us and help restore this lovely canal. The membership form is on the website, and fees are still £9 single and £14 for two people at the same address.

Elsewhere in this edition, you will find a list of forthcoming talks at Ironville Church Hall. Our Chairman, David Martin, has got some very interesting speakers lined up as well as some new ideas, and don't forget that the Annual General Meeting is on 20th April. This has always been very well attended, and you

will have an opportunity to hear about further plans for the Friends, as well as having the opportunity to meet current Trustees and vote in new ones. This is the one meeting you can attend without having to put your hand in your pocket for an admission fee, although I am sure there will be plenty of donation tins around, and we will have the usual tea/coffee in the interval.

The FCC has many volunteers who attend work parties, run Birdwood etc, and I would like to welcome Peggy and Alan who have volunteered to 'spread the word' about the Friends at various events throughout the area in the search for volunteers for Birdwood. I would also like to thank Joan, who comes in especially to make the teas for us at the monthly meetings, and Howard, Dorothy and Moyra who, four times a year, tramp round their local area to deliver the Portal for us – your help is very much appreciated.



Annual General Meeting

Followed by a talk about FCC's amazing volunteers by John Guyler

7.30pm Monday 20th April 2020



Ironville Church Hall (NG16 5NN)

Tea, Coffee, Bar & Raffle Admission Free

Non Members Welcome

For further information: 07976 764439

www.cromfordcanal.org

AQUEDUCT COTTAGE GRANT

Ron Common, Volunteer Project Manager – Aqueduct Cottage Restoration, reports on how a major FCC contribution has helped achieve what once appeared impossible



*Work gets underway in mid-February.
Photos: Ron Common*

The Friends of Cromford Canal, in collaboration with the Derbyshire County Council, has awarded a £6,000 grant towards the restoration of the historic Aqueduct Cottage to help bring this iconic local ruin back to life.

The original proposal for the donation came from my good friend, Hugh Potter. The idea was put to the FCC Board of Trustees, which gave it their unanimous support. This gave the green light for FCC's Chairman, David Martin, to raise the matter with DCC. Thanks to existing partnership arrangements that the FCC has

with the council, funds were identified and on 13th February, Councillor Trevor Ainsworth, the current Chairman of DCC, along with his cabinet agreed and supported the plan.

The grant, the largest donation received by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, outside corporate funding, also means that the funding target to complete the re-building works, has been achieved.

This is a very important milestone to reach and is the final piece of the jigsaw on the 3-year mission to secure the restoration of this



The gate collar for one of the former stop gates.



One of the first tasks was underpinning work.

important piece of Cromford Canal heritage.

With planning permission granted, funding in place and a builder appointed, the path is now clear to complete this long-awaited project.

The builder, Andrew Churchman Ltd, started work on the cottage at the beginning of February and is expected to spend the next 4-6 months repairing the masonry and re-instating the roof.

With the funding secured, it means the restoration can continue unimpeded until the project is complete, which is targeted for July /August 2020.

In recognition of the FCC's contribution, DWT and FCC will collaborate on including information about the history of the canal within the interpretation to be installed inside the cottage.

It will inform visitors of the importance of the canal and why

the cottage was built, and this will help raise awareness of the vision to regenerate the canal.

The cottage restoration is turning out to be a fantastic community collaboration project and it is important that FCC and DCC are stakeholders, along with other local businesses and the many volunteers involved to make this project a success.

Volunteers have been on site since October 2019. They have a regular working group on Tuesdays, and almost every week a new discovery is made. These have ranged from a John Else 'Purity' lemonade

bottle (made in the old hat factory), to the iron bracket of (what appears to be) the original stop lock.

By mid-February, the first major structural repair was completed, which involved removing a large tree root from under the corner of the cottage and under-pinning. There are a series of structural problems to be overcome, but Andrew Churchman is highly experienced in these kind of buildings and relishes the challenge.

The volunteers are making good progress too. They removed over 20 tons of debris from inside the cottage before Christmas and, since the beginning of the year, have been concentrating on rebuilding dry stone walls around the garden areas and rebuilding the steps into Lea Wood.

There is still a long way to go, but the restoration is now well and truly underway.

By coming together as a community, the restoration of Aqueduct Cottage proves that the seemingly impossible can be achieved, and that insurmountable barriers can be overcome. It takes patience and a lot of determination, but visions can be realised.

This is a Derbyshire 'good news' story that the FCC can be proud to be part of.



A John Else 'pop' bottle found on site.

WORK PARTY REPORTS

John Guyler looks at what was done in November to January

Robin Hood

We had three work parties at Sims Bridge, Whatstandwell. Working with Steve Carver at Robin Hood, the first session cleared approximately 30m by 10m of brambles on the offside. Angela, Wendy, Shirley and Carole cleared an area where a large crane base has been recently uncovered, wild flower seeds were then scattered and raked. This spring and summer should have a nice show just north of Sims Bridge. We cleared 30m of reed from the channel on to the towpath edge. On the second and third visits another large area of brambles was cleared on the opposite bank to the towpath. Vegetation was cleared from around the seat at Sims Bridge and along the wall going north from Sims Bridge for some 500m. Reed clearance took place on a long stretch of the channel.



Working on the offside footpath at Robin Hood.

Three of us recovered dumped bricks and stones, and broke them up to form hardcore in muddy areas on the path over Sims Bridge ready for a large load of tree bark to raise and reinstate the footpath.

The hot mince pies provided by Mrs Carver, the week before Christmas, were very well received.

Lower Hartshay

Of the five sessions at Lower Hartshay, three were assisting Dave Wright (arborist) to remove some large trees, submerged tree trunks and branches. At these work parties the rest of the group were removing vegetation.

One day, a separate group of three repaired a large hole in the wall at the runoff pipe, where the top edging slab was unsupported. The hole was filled with twenty-four engineering bricks and the top edge slab was re-seated.

Working along the hedge by the towpath, some medium sized saplings which were leaning over the towpath were removed by hand saw. One nest box was put up and there are several more to finish off assembling, then they can be put up.

Gaps, or as we were calling them, windows, were cut into the hedge. The hedge was cut down to 5ft in height for a length of 3m, then the hedge was left untouched either side of these windows; this was done at three points. These windows were created to provide a view over the wetland to which the canal run-off supplies water. The brash along the towpath that we had previously dumped was carefully removed and some of the longer bigger diameter pieces were threaded into the existing hedge to fill holes where the hedge was thinning. The rest of the brash was put onto one or other of the controlled burns we had going. There is some more brush to be disposed of at a future work party. One big

problem that was noticed was dog fouling, which will have to be addressed. We hope to replant hawthorn in thin sections of the hedge and possibly to place two seats for observing the wetland birds.



Brickwork repaired; compare this to the photograph on page 24.

Cromford

We had two work parties at Cromford Wharf in November, scraping and repainting the hull of Birdswood before and after the MCA Inspection.

We had two work parties at Lawn Bridge; the first one cleared some 70m of reeds. The four ladies transferred across the canal on the work boat to the former garden centre, trimming back vegetation on the patio area and around Stella. One silt trap was cleared and partially rebuilt.

The second session was with the assistance of Birdswood and crew, pulling the work boat to north of Lawn Bridge, reed pulling from towpath side. Working from Birdswood and the work boat several work boat loads of reeds were pulled from the offside bank, some protruding branches were also cleared. The work boat was towed back to Cromford Wharf by Birdswood. John Barker and John



Taking a break whilst burning the brash.

Sparham cleared two silt traps near the Pisani steps. These silt traps are sometimes very difficult to work in, because of the depth in some sections.



Moving reeds with the help of DCC's mini-tractor and trailer.



Clearing silt traps.



*Clearing the gauging narrows at Sawmills.
Photo: Hugh Potter*

Sawmills

One session at Sawmills saw us clearing the gauging narrows and several other areas of rough material, to allow wildflower seeding. Litter picking was also undertaken.

Pinxton

At Pinxton Wharf we cleared vegetation on the bank opposite to the Boat Inn, and in the brambles we found a complete section of railway track that had been buried. Five bags of litter were picked.

This day was also the FCC pre-Christmas thank you for the work party volunteers, which took place at the Boat Inn at Pinxton. We had 20 volunteers who had been invited and some came a good distance, Chris Martin travelling back overnight from Switzerland to be there, 850 miles. It was worth the long trip: plenty of sandwiches and chips courtesy of Nick Lowe the landlord a very pleasant event; the Boat Inn is well worth a visit.



Buried railway line discovered opposite the Boat Inn at Pinxton.

Photo: John Barker; uncredited photos by John Guyler

Join Us

If you feel you would like to join the work parties, please contact John Barker 01773 760358 or email work@cromfordcanal.org

PINXTON WEIR

John Baylis BEM explains what is planned



The current weir at Pinxton showing concrete top with loose stones below.

Photo: John Barker

The FCC work party has been carrying out some vegetation clearance between Pinxton Basin and the weir, at the request of Derbyshire County Council who own this length. Now there is also the possibility that FCC will rebuild the weir, so some background may be in order.

At the terminus of the Pinxton Branch is what is now called Pinxton Basin to which there is a long-established water feed from land drainage in the village. At some time prior to the Smotherfly coal open casting in the 1990s a dam was placed across the end of the channel to retain the level of water in the basin and past the Boat Inn.

The dam was probably built by contractors for the National Coal Board by constructing what may well be an earth dam with a concrete crest. The downstream side is covered with stones about 10–20cm diameter forming the tail of the weir. Below the weir under the

canal bed was a culvert taking water from the adjacent colliery basin direct to the River Erewash. The contractors broke into this culvert and constructed a concrete wall, thus allowing the canal water to run into it. At one time there was grid over the culvert to prevent rubbish entering it but that has now largely disappeared.

DCC were considering rebuilding the dam at considerable cost after it became clear that restoration of Smotherfly by the successors of British Coal was not going to happen, but when the FCC applied for a Water Environment Grant DCC was persuaded not to do the work pending the outcome of our grant application. Following FCC's unsuccessful bid our engineers examined the dam and suggested that a much cheaper repair could be

carried out by volunteers. The basic problem was that the loose stones on the tail of the weir had been washed out and the water was under-cutting the concrete crest of the dam, which only continued about 30cm down from the actual crest. After examination, and some efforts at pumping out last year, we offered to do the work if DCC would pay for the materials.

We were hoping to do the work late last year, but heavy rain kept the weir running too much and a final method of working was not agreed. We have started negotiations again with a view to doing the work in the spring, using ready-mix concrete with steel reinforcing to repair and prevent water erosion of the dam tail. The Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association and Waterway Recovery Group North West are planning do the work; the former group have considerable experience of ready-mixed concrete at Langley Mill.

LEAWOOD JOTTINGS

By Ian Yates

It has certainly been an eventful period since the last notes. The last steaming went well but it was apparent the engine needed some work over the winter. The boilers were fired with smokeless fuel again and it was learnt further how to manage the fire, which is completely different to coal. There was one issue that raised its head, that being the fumes from the smokeless. These are very unpleasant and were noticed at the workshops as well as around the boiler house. When it came round to cleaning out the tubes they had to be left a week or so till the fumes cleared. Unlike coal they are very sulphurous and really catch the throat, so considerations will need to be made as to the further use of this fuel.

Farewell Duchess

The next major issue was the Duchess. The boat was taken down to Cromford with Birdwood and on a very wet Monday, and after an issue with the lifting straps both boats were placed on the headland. It was immediately apparent that all was not well. A quick look by Dave revealed some welds were being split by rust growth and there was a lot of scale in places. An inspection by the boat inspector confirmed this and he actually made three holes as he removed rust to do a thickness check. He pronounced the boat as unfit to go back in the water. There were very few strengthening pieces in the bottom and it moved as it was walked on.

Costs were quickly assessed and it became clear it was too expensive to repair; other options were to cut off the bottom and weld a new base on it but both time and cost were not really available. The decision was made to scrap it whilst there was access to a crane to load it onto a vehicle. On a very cold Saturday the wood was all stripped off and recovered for reuse by the Rangers. On an equally cold

Monday the boat was loaded for removal. It was thought we could not get a lorry onto the headland but with a bit of manoeuvring this was achieved and the boat loaded and secured. As the lifting straps were pulled out they caught on the keel and after a good pull came free but the keel actually moved with them. The costs were covered by the scrap value.

There was a lot of heated debate about its demise but the sides were very thin – less than 3mm in places – and neither the finance, labour or lifting gear would be available to carry out any repairs safely. One person looked at it then realised they could not get the lorry to their premises, the crane would be needed also to lift it off. It was a shame, and a method will need to be sorted out how to get fuel to the engine house, but after 30-plus years in the water and a period on a farm on Via Gellia the boat really had come to an end. The Duchess name plates have been recovered.

Air Pump

The next job was to look at the air pump on the engine. After the boilers had been put to bed with the heaters in place work was started in the engine house. The air pump was removed and it became obvious what the problem was. There should be about 45 wooden blocks forming the sealing ring around the air pump piston there were eight! The engine had been using a lot of steam and the vacuum was poor but had kept working; the reason was now obvious. A supplier was approached but the cost was rather high so it was decided to make the blocks ourselves. A set of cutters have been made to form the curves and end angles and some Western Red Cedar acquired. This is an ongoing process. The packing on the main pump is also leaking badly so the rear outlet has been drained ready for the installation of



*The air pump
being removed.
Photos: Mike
Lewis*



*A comparison
of the old
block and
a new one
against the
pump piston*

a new packing piece. The outlet valve support chains can be inspected at the same time as these were replaced with stainless steel last year.

Costs for the repairs to the boiler barrels are being actively chased. Both are thin in places, boiler 43 worse than 44. They are both in ticket till June but 43 will be off after then as it is too thin in a few small patches. Hopefully both can be done together if possible which, in

the words of the boiler inspector, will give us two good boilers again. There is also a new boiler inspector in place as the current one has retired. If repairs are not done, it is hoped to carry on with 44 as this boiler has less wasting subject to inspection and thicknesses checked and approved.

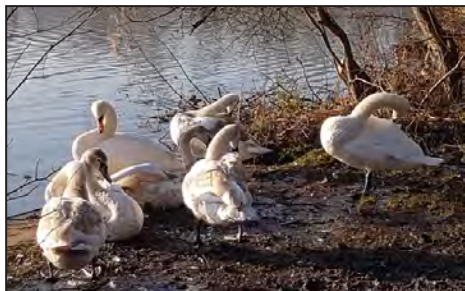
Steaming Dates

Do try to visit us (12 to 4.30pm), and don't forget the donation box to offset the ever-increasing cost of fuel! ('Static' indicates pumphouse open and in steam but not operating.)

12th & 13th April
9th & 10th May
6th (static) & 7th June
4th (static) & 5th July
1st (static) & 2nd August
30th & 31st August
19th & 20th September
10th & 11th October

SAYING HELLO, WAVING GOODBYE

Marie Brown reports on spring developments



Swan family. Photo: Will Jones

Spring is traditionally a time for renewal as the bright colours of yellow daffodils and bluebells herald the start of warmer weather. Here in Ironville and Codnor Park it is also the time when we begin the month-long cycle of saying goodbye to the five surviving cygnets as they set off, or rather are pushed off by Dad, to begin adulthood elsewhere. To many this seems like a cruel phase around the reservoir, but it also signals that it will soon be time to welcome the new arrivals . . . and so the circle keeps on turning.

Cromford Canal & Codnor Park Reservoir Group works under the guidance, supervision and support of the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust so let's begin with some Countywide news that they wanted us to pass on.

Thank you to everyone who supported the recent campaign to stop the badger cull in Derbyshire. Thousands petitioned and campaigned and thankfully, for now, the cull has been stopped. The Countywide vaccination programme continues.

You may have heard recently about the decline in beavers, not just in the UK but globally. Again, Derbyshire will be leading the conservation charge and will be reintroducing families across Derbyshire. Look out for news

of this exciting project in March 2020 on the DWT website blog.

DWT have three charity shops – in Derby, Bakewell and Belper – which fund the vital work with local wildlife and are always looking for donations. As an affiliated group we would be happy to collect them locally and act as a collection point. If you have any good quality items such as clothes or bric-a-brac please contact the Secretary on 07812 130061 and we will arrange collection.

Local News

Many of you will know that the group has the motto 'The Wildlife Comes First' and that everything we do locally centres around that commitment.

Last year we concentrated our efforts on infrastructure and information as we repaired Humpy Bridge and provided interpretation boards in key areas to inform visitors, tourists and photographers. This year, the 5-year plan of investment will continue and the work focus will be on environment and engagement.



Sparrowhawk.

*Photo:
Andrew
Reardon*

All of our readers will have witnessed a higher number of visitors coming into the area and we will be working to ensure that this increase adds value to the area rather than having a detrimental effect on the wildlife. Work parties will be looking at improving the natural light and water flow around the length of the Cromford Canal stretch that we serve, regular litter picking will continue, we will be improving the access and pathways so that damage to the natural surroundings can be minimised and providing educational workshops, guided walks and courses to educate and engage with the local community.

All of the information about forthcoming nature events will be listed on the group's Facebook page 'Cromford Canal & Codnor Park Res' but please, feel free to get in touch with us directly on 07812 130061 or by email at cromfordcanalgroup@outlook.com.

Please also head over to the page and complete the Biodiversity Survey we are currently running as your information really helps to map exactly what can be spotted locally and can inform ecologists, conservationists and environmental agencies on the areas of natural beauty and areas that need protecting.

Some of the species that have been entertaining our group recently include the water voles, who are emerging from their winter habitats, an otter that has been spotted locally, kingfishers, woodpeckers and owls galore, our fox and badger population and, a more recent highlight, the delightful family of bank vole.

May we also ask that if you are out and about enjoying all of the wildlife this area has to offer that you follow our motto too: the wildlife comes first!

- Take photographs but don't destroy or alter habitats or disturb wild creatures to do it.
- Take your litter home; even the most innocent items can be lethal to wildlife.
- Pick up your own mess and take it home.
- Keep dogs on leads in public areas, off banks and out of the water.
- Do no harm.

• Enjoy, ask questions, get involved and let's protect the beauty for future generations.

If you are new to wildlife or would just like to know more, why not get in touch and join us for a leisurely walk about the local area. All of the group are highly knowledgeable and would be happy to tell you more about the wonderful things that you have on your doorstep but maybe never get the opportunity to stop and see.



Bank Vole.

Photo: Maggie Campbell

Work Parties & Litter Picks

Each month we alternate between work parties and litter picks - we meet at the reservoir car park at 9.30am and are done by no later than 11am. Families with children are welcome to join the litter picks but under 16s cannot attend the work parties due to insurance restrictions. Get in touch or turn up on the day and you will also be treated to a bacon bap and a cuppa at the end of the shift.

All volunteers need to wear sensible clothing such as sturdy boots or shoes but will be provided with all the equipment necessary such as litter pickers, bags, hi-vis vests and gloves. We meet the second Saturday in the month as follows:

Litter Picks: 11th April, 13th June, 8th August, 10th October, 12th December*

Work Parties: 14th March, 9th May, 11th July, 12th September, 14th November

*The December litter pick is usually followed by our annual fuddle to say thanks to all of the volunteers working alongside us this year.

THE DUCHESS IS DEAD

Hugh Potter looks into the boat's history, with a lot of help from Simon Stoker

Followers of FCC on Facebook will already know of the fate of Duchess, and also her history, but for the benefit of other members, a resume of the story of this much loved boat may be of interest.

The 40ft-long Duchess was found on a pig farm at the top of the Via Gellia not far from Cromford, but had an appalling (and rotten) wooden conversion. The Cromford Canal Society bought her and Simon designed and completed the conversion with a steel frame. The only thing missing was a rudder and tiller, which were fabricated in the workshop. Bespoke side curtains folded



The newly fitted-out Duchess in 1968.

Photo: Simon Stoker



An exterior view of the Duchess with her new superstructure.

Photo: Simon Stoker

up onto the cabin roof in nice weather. CCS also fitted a kitchen in the back and served meals on evening trips. She was launched by the late Duchess of Devonshire on 27th July 1968. She was horse-drawn and carried up to 20 passengers.

Following the demise of the CCS in 1990, the boat was kept in use by volunteers from the Leawood Pump group who used her to carry coal across the canal. Leawood Pump has never had road access, being supplied with coal directly from canal boats. Today the nearest access by road is from the A6 to the Wharf Shed. Here coal was loaded onto Duchess to be poled across the canal. In future it will have to be taken around via Brown's Bridge with DCC's mini tractor and trailer.

The Duchess was lifted out for inspection last November along with Birdswood but, unlike Birdswood, was condemned by the surveyor. Having not been taken out for maintenance for over 30 years, her thin metal hull was almost rusted through. DCC decided

that it would cost too much to replate her and rather than try to sell her for someone else to repair, sent her for scrap.

A sad end to a boat with a name and a history.

Much of this story and the earlier photographs

came from Simon Stoker, to whom many thanks. His book 'There and Back Again' tells of the work of the erstwhile Cromford Canal Society in restoring the canal between 1968 and 1988 including the various boats that were used on the canal.



Ready for the off: Duchess and motive power at Cromford Wharf.

Photo: Simon Stoker



Dr Desmond and Simon Stoker with the Duchess of Devonshire at the christening ceremony for the boat on 27th July 1968.

Photo: Simon Stoker



Duchess at Cromford Wharf with John Gray behind her.

Photo: Mike Kelley



During the campaign to reinstate a public trip boat on the Cromford Canal, Duchess was towed by horse for 'Discovery Days' over several years; this is 2007.

Photo: Hugh Potter



Punting the coal . . . and unloading it.

Photos: Hugh Potter



On Monday 2nd December 2019 Duchess was loaded onto a lorry to be taken away for scrap. The craning and surveyor's fees were covered by FCC.

Photo: Hugh Potter

BIRDWOOD OPERATIONS

By Vix Wilding



Peggy and Norman give the galley a facelift.
Photo: Hugh Potter

Birdswood offers a unique experience in the Midlands, not just Derbyshire, and I will be driving this forward in 2020 to boost the revenue potential further.

There will be stalls, including a tombola, held at the wharf on 22nd April to celebrate Earth Day and 20th June at Scarthin in Cromford Village. Any donations for the tombola or offers of support for the stall itself would be gratefully received. There is the opportunity to advertise the charity work and recruit new volunteers at these locations. We have also been invited to attend Mount Cook Activity Centre and Cromford Mills with advertising stalls.

It's been a busy few months for the maintenance team. There has been painting, polishing and welding done on Birdswood to keep her looking great for another season. A small group also stripped the galley and gave this a repaint and additional shelving to assist with keeping the area tidy. Many volunteers have helped over the last few weeks, too many to name. These tasks may appear small in relation to changing the motor but they are just as necessary to keep the boat functioning and looking attractive to the visitors.

When possible the FCC work party team have attended Cromford and started the reed pulling. As I'm sure you're very aware, this is essential to keep the channel clear for Birdswood to run and keep the income rolling in. Reed pulling is a hard job and not all our regular boat volunteers are able to help out. Any outside help we could get would be a bonus. Do you have contacts with larger companies who do 'team building' schemes? If you do please send them my way, as always call 07552 055455.

I hope to see more of you all again this year; do pop by and say 'Hi'.

As you will read elsewhere, I am now in full-time employment as Boat Operations Manager so will be developing the marketing strategy for the business and pushing the community engagement to a higher level. I hope to be able to invite more people to the canal for activities other than boat trips to indirectly educate them about the beauty of the canal, its historic value and the importance of restoration.

The Old Weighbridge Office has had a facelift and refocus on selling charity souvenirs. The walls have new images for visitors to look at and there is a digital display with further images on the desk. The Birdswood website still has an online shop which also needs a makeover and push to sell more products online. I have already secured some funding towards new sales stock and have commissioned the draft of other new ideas too.

I will be doing more promotional adverts and working closely with a new volunteer to raise the charter awareness to more coach companies, groups and individuals.

BIRDWOOD UPDATES

Mike Kelley reports on a busy winter...



Some have said to me “I expect things are quieter for you in the winter?” Well, no, not exactly. In November we had the out-of-water inspection (reported in Portal 71), then in December we had the Santa Specials, closely followed in January and February by reed pulling, maintenance, crew training and business plans. To name but a few.

The Santa Specials saw many excited children, parents and grandparents carried along the canal, with Santa’s Grotto neatly displayed in the back cabin. All of the children had a present and lovely festive food was available for all. Altogether we carried a total of 422 passengers that month.

Problems developed with the propulsion system of the boat at the end of last year, which turned out to be due to the hydraulic motor that drives the propeller feeling its age. As I write our multi-talented Executive Secretary John Baylis is pursuing a solution that will hopefully see us up and running on schedule in mid-March.

Reed pulling is underway, with teams from both the Work Party and Birdwood crew

taking part. Just think of how much you would pay for in a gym to get this exercise, and we offer it for free!

In accordance with the Maritime & Coastguard Agency’s requirements Sean Dodds has been very active in refresher training of crew and masters, along with the training of new masters and crew.

Then there is the business plan. This is not my field, but we have a man whose field it is. Richard Handley has produced for us what I can honestly say is the best business plan we have had to date. This is not meant to detract from all who have helped with this in the past, far from it, but this is help which we certainly needed, and for Richard, this is his field of expertise. Of course, as we are a business, we need a business plan and to have a specialist on our team is a great asset for us.

So how did we do last year, in 2019? Well, we carried a total of 8,536 passengers, which is 590 down on the year before, but is still our second best year since we started. Our trips for the public started in September 2013 and from that date we have now carried a grand total of 44,598 passengers. Not bad eh! Not to mention we are number one on Trip Advisor for the area we operate in.

Perhaps the biggest change is that our hard-working Birdwood Operation’s Manager, Vix Wilding, has been made our first full-time employee. Up until now this was a part-time job, but the demands of this position were very great. It is a hard, demanding job, but she is up to this.

And finally the Boat Committee meet once a month to monitor and help with the many different facets required for the running of Birdwood. So along with all of our many crew volunteers, we have a wonderful group of people working hard to make the Birdwood operation the success it is.

...and John Baylis BEM reports on removing the rudder to install a new hydraulic motor

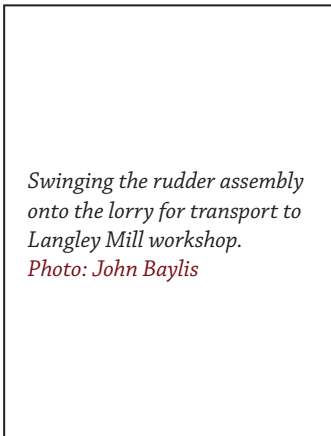
In the last edition of Portal we reported on the work on the new internal pump and electric motor. Unfortunately the external hydraulic motor on the rudder was noisy, possibly more noticeable because the noise from the internal pump had disappeared; and on the Santa Specials it occasionally lost power. Several trial runs and tests, suggested by local hydraulics specialist Tim Ogle, indicated that the propeller pump might not last for a full season. At their meeting on 11th February the trustees decided to take the specialist's advice and remove the motor so that he could more easily identify and locate a replacement.

This should prevent a breakdown lasting several weeks during the season.

So, on Friday 14th February John Baylis, Malcolm Chisnal and Alan Barnes from WRG East Midlands, assisted by Nigel Neale, removed the hydraulic pipes from inside the stern of the boat ready for lifting off the rudder. The telehandler used three years ago when we last had to lift the rudder off was not available, so we had to hire a lorry fitted with HIAB crane. The rudder is now in the workshop at Langley Mill and stripped down for repair, ready to be fixed and reinstalled for the new season in mid-March.



*Removing the rudder (which houses the propeller and failing motor) from Birdswood.
Photo: John Baylis*



*Swinging the rudder assembly onto the lorry for transport to Langley Mill workshop.
Photo: John Baylis*



CROMFORD CANAL AT HARTSHAY

By John Baylis BEM



The canal water currently leaves through this low-level culvert, highly prone to blockage, on the site of a former run-off sluice. Temporary brickwork repairs have been carried out by FCC work parties pending rebuilding to offer a more efficient run-off weir.

Photo: John Guyler

It is a sign of progress when a canal restoration society is gifted a section of canal; therefore I am happy to report that the Friends of the Cromford Canal have now achieved that goal. The Friends have been donated about 500 yards of canal at Hartshay by a founder member, and the Land Registration is now complete.

The section of canal from Ripley Road Bridge (Hartshay Hill) by the former Gate Inn to Hartshay (Bridle Lane) Bridge was purchased from British Waterways Board in 1975 and is still largely in water but is suffering from lack of maintenance resulting in willow trees growing – and dying – in the canal bed. In addition to being given a section of canal we have also acquired some interesting early deeds and sale information.

Most of the Cromford Canal still in water has at the best a dry stone wall along the towpath but more often this has deteriorated and been replaced by reed and water weed.

However, the Hartshay section suffered from subsidence caused by deep coal mining and the entire towpath wall was re-built in concrete when the canal was owned by the Midland Railway Company, possibly in the early 1900s. The water supply comes largely from Butterley Tunnel through a short section of canal still owned by the Canal & River Trust.

The water leaves the canal through a low level run-off at the site of an original side run-off paddle. Due to the low level the outlet does get blocked by weed or rubbish causing the canal water level to vary, and on occasion in winter overtop a low part of the towpath coping. Now that we own the section we are intending to build a run off weir at the site to prevent the culvert from blocking; this will retain a more constant water level in the section. The last part of the canal channel up to Bridle Lane Bridge was filled in years ago and is not part of the gift.

For some months the FCC working party has



When the run-off blocked in 2014, and caused the towpath to flood, FCC volunteers were called on to clear it!

been helping a chainsaw operator to remove some of the fallen and dead trees from the channel and this work will continue for the time being. We have been taking advice from the Derbyshire County Council Waterway Officer who is a trained ecologist with a view towards improving the habitat and retained water level. To this end one of our Honorary Engineers has offered to design a new, improved run-off weir.

In addition to removing the trees from the channel we also intend to lay the thorn hedge alongside the towpath which has grown out of hand for far too long.

For some time we have had a maintenance

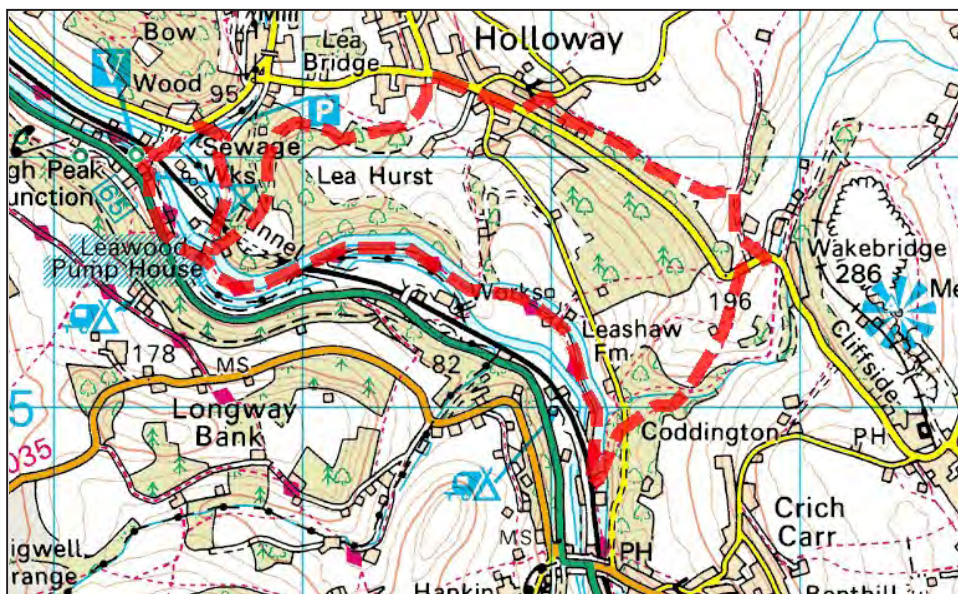
agreement with Canal & River Trust on its section from Ripley Road Bridge to the A610 embankment and we have met CRT managers with regard to continuing and improving its section at the same time. They were happy with our suggestions and offered support from their ecologists. The whole of the towpath is easily walkable most of the year but we hope to improve the surface as work progresses. This should be an excellent opportunity to train volunteers on canal restoration and maintenance and John Barker would be interested to hear from any volunteers.



*Self-set trees, some leaning at dangerous angles, have been felled by FCC work parties.
Photos: John Guyler*

CIRCULAR CANAL WALKS – 6 LEA BRIDGE

With Florence Nightingale's Bicentenary in May, Ken Brockway offers a walk with Nightingale connections, and some splendid views



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Distance: 5 miles.

Start point: High Peak Junction.

How to get there: Bus Transpeak to A6 or services 140, 141 to Leam Bridge. See Traveline for details. Car park at Leam Bridge, pay & display.

Refreshments: High Peak Junction Visitor Centre; 'Fuel' at Holloway (closed Wed).

Make your way from the bus stop or car park to the High Peak Junction Visitor Centre which is worth spending time to look around before setting off (open weekends in winter; daily from Easter). From the foot of the railway incline walk alongside the canal with the swing bridge and canal on your left. This takes

you past the Wharf Shed where goods were transferred between railway and canal. It has more recently been used as a field centre by Derbyshire County Council who now seek a new use – any ideas?

Follow the lower track to cross the Derwent by the aqueduct and continue on the towpath. Aqueduct Cottage, on your left, has now been found a new use as an interpretation centre so should soon be re-roofed. Follow the canal for a little under two miles, passing through Gregory Tunnel (or if you don't like tunnels, there is a direct path over the top), go under the old arched stone bridge at Leashaw Farm then pass the hamlet of Robin Hood, once a busy saw mill now an attractive residence.



Gregory Tunnel

At the next flat bridge, Sims Bridge, we leave the canal. Take the path right then cross over the bridge and follow the path towards Robin Hood, almost retracing your steps. Take a look at the recent excavation work reported in the last Portal, then fork right to climb to a metal gate, cross a minor road and continue the climb through the long-disused quarry, part of the Duke's Quarry complex. These have a Nightingale link; Florence was concerned that the men were being paid (and therefore spending!) their wages in the Wheatsheaf pub at Whatstandwell, so opened some coffee rooms opposite for that purpose.

About 350 metres from the road the path crosses a stream, look left for a squeeze stile, leave the main path and pass through the stile into an open field.



Robin Hood

Continue the climb heading for the fence line and follow this on your right. Continue in the same direction through another stile to meet a track; follow this to the road at Wakebridge. Turn right along the pavement. NB: If you missed the left fork the path still meets the road but turn left not right.

As the road bends right, cross with care and take the footpath which once read 'To Dethick'. Cross the field towards farm buildings and join a track, keeping the farm buildings on your right. As the track climbs take any fork to the left and keep a lookout on your left for a wooden finger post; take this path left up a short steep bank. Turn left then right to follow the stone wall on your left.



Sims Bridge - departure point.

The path drops down and crosses a small stream then crosses the next field climbing to a seat which offers rest and a good view across the Derwent valley. The climb is now almost done, so take your time admiring the views to your left while in the open field. At a gate the path passes to the other side of the wall and starts to drop down among trees. Buildings appear above – this is Upper Holloway; don't be tempted towards the houses and road, but keep ahead, passing through a squeeze stile. The path soon drops steeply with a handrail and steps to arrive on the road through Holloway; turn right along the

village street. Here you will find the unusually named 'Fuel' offering drinks and food.



Blue plaque on the Florence Nightingale Memorial Hall at Holloway.

Opposite the road right to Lea is the Florence Nightingale Memorial Hall. The family owned much of the land around here and lived at Lea Hurst. Our path turns left into a field just before the hall. Follow the track to a gate with a private notice, take the stone stile on the right. After 40m go through the tall metal gate left and follow, you have no choice, an enclosed

path across the field. You will glimpse the roof of Lea Hurst on your left. Another tall gate exits onto a wide level path with a stone wall on the left. Follow this delightful path gently downhill under beech and other mature trees. Enter Lea Wood managed by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust.

The wide path continues to descend to an opening in the wall where it enters Lea Wood Meadow. Just past the new finger post, our path turns right and follows the edge of the meadow but is soon back among the trees with quite a steep drop to the right. The Leawood Arm comes into view just before we pass over the top of the railway tunnel, with the Derwent immediately beyond it, to arrive by a steep descent (take care!) at the canal behind Aqueduct Cottage.

Cross the Leawood Arm and turn right to follow it over the railway again with a view of the tunnel mouth. The private canal arm was built by Florence's great uncle Peter Nightingale. Pass the former wharf then leave the main track, turn sharp left with way-marking by a wooden field gate. Follow this enclosed path to cross a stream and emerge onto the road. Turn left along the road for about 60m before turning left along a metalled footpath to High Peak Junction. This passes the car park.



Derwent Aqueduct seen over the soon-to-be-restored Aqueduct Cottage. Photos: Ken Brockway

NEWS FROM THE NORTH

Mark Brailsford on key work carried out by Derbyshire County Council Countryside Service

- Dredging works were carried out in December and January at Ambergate, south of Poyser's Bridge. Contractors Wrights Agricultural removed several tonnes of silt and reed to improve flow on the canal.
- Meanwhile throughout the winter DCC have been doing reed removal by hand along canal, with help of volunteers and FCC.
- Two minor leaks were repaired by DCC, one between Sim's Bridge and Robin Hood on towpath side, and the other at High Peak Junction, again on towpath side, opposite the lengthman's cabin.
- Walling repairs are to be done to Gregory's Tunnel, south east portal, due to tree roots pushing it out.
- Works to improve interpretation at High Peak Junction workshops will start in spring.



Derbyshire Wildlife Trust volunteers clearing reeds from the offside by dragging them across the canal to the towpath; the bank opposite is too steep to stack them. They were working at "Percy's Cottage" aka Mold's Wharf north of Grattan Bridge, Ambergate.



*During and after dredging at Ambergate. The towpath has been fully resurfaced.
Photos: Hugh Potter*

EREWASH MEADOWS FOOTBRIDGE UPGRADE

By Kate Lemon, Regional Manager for Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

DWT have recently been fortunate enough to receive some funding from TESCO 'Bags for Life' to carry out a range of access improvements to our section of Cromford Canal at Jacksdale. We have been busy upgrading the boardwalk and bridge across the canal at the entry to the meadows part of the reserve to make them useable all year round and replace rotten timber on both.

This autumn and winter have proved very challenging to try and get in to do the work with so much rain making the water levels very high - it's hard to drill holes under water! However in early January we braved the depths to replace the boardwalk and take the opportunity to raise it up too. This means that visitors can get across the canal safely all year round to access the old Forge site and also make their way along the line of the old towpath down the meadows to Aldercar and

Langley Mill.

We still need to replace the footbridge at the same point; the water was just too deep in January so we will attempt it again in early March. If you haven't found this part of the canal it's well worth exploring. Simply walk south down the canal towpath from Jacksdale for approximately half a mile until you reach the old railway bridge abutments. From here you can cross the boardwalk and return to Ironville and Jacksdale through the Forge site, keep going south to Aldercar or head east to Brinsley Gin and Westwood. The large meadow alongside the canal is also owned by DWT and is full of wading birds such as lapwing and redshank, dabbling ducks on the pools and barn owl is a regular visitor at dusk. If you keep your eyes peeled you can see water vole in the canal as well as birds such as swans, moorhens, little grebe and teal.

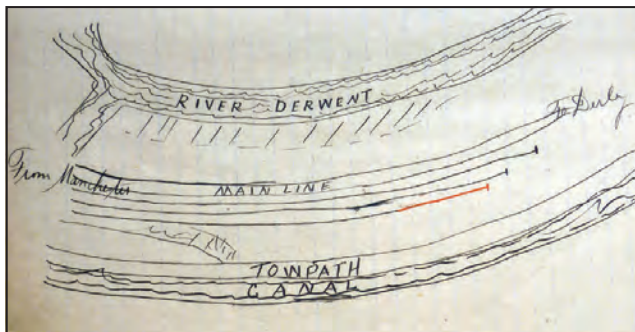


MYSTERIOUS RAIL AT LAWN BRIDGE

By Hugh Potter



The 'gatepost' in question.



The sketch referred to. This is at the north end of the 'Railway Narrows' where the railway was closest to the canal.

How many times have you walked past Lawn Bridge at Cromford without noticing what our astute Birdwood master Kerry Green spotted one day? Boat crews always point out to passengers the grooves worn in the bridge stonework by towropes of passing horse boats, but no-one had previously noted the rail that supports the gate adjacent.

I was challenged to find out where it had come from. Trevor Griffin, local rail expert, suggested "it is standard flat bottom light rail as used for light railways, temporary and construction railways from the late 19th century onwards. It would be spiked to sleepers unlike main line railways of the time that used chairs. With dimensions and location we might speculate on its origin. It is the sort of rail that would have been used on the temporary railway used during the construction of the 'aqueduct' to transfer drinking water from the Derwent Valley dams to East Midland cities, in the first decade of the 20th century."

In which case it could be related to an agreement dated 18.11.1903 made between the Midland Railway Co (as owners of the canal

and railway) and the Derwent Valley Water Board, who were building the 'aqueduct', "for permission to erect a crane and deposit iron pipes and connections for a distance of twelve wagons' length alongside the Co's sidings near the canal south of Cromford and shown in red on the sketch map . . . and also to transfer the said pipes and connections across the towing path to boats on the canal and to unload the said pipes and connections from boats across the towing path at Cromford Wharf to the licensee's yard adjoining."

Quite why the DVWB wanted to unload the pipes from wagons onto boats to transfer them to Cromford Wharf is unclear as the 'aqueduct' did not pass through Cromford, but rather through Dethick and Lea Bridge. Was this 'double handling' the easiest way to get them onto road wagons locally?

And could it be that the rail line currently used in the gate was once associated with this work in some way?

It seems like a good explanation, but if any readers have any other ideas then please do drop the Editor a line. We do love a good mystery!

LETTERS

If you have any comments to make about articles in this issue, the work of FCC, or anything else to do with the canal, please email editor@cromfordcanal.org



The only known photograph of Helen & Birdswood together – but at a boat festival at Lincoln. The caption read: A narrow boat stuck at Brayford Pool, Lincoln in August 1975.



*Helen at Fradley.
Photo: Carol & Brian Stevenson*



*Helen's 3-cylinder Bolinder engine.
Photo: Carol & Brian Stevenson*

Have You Seen Helen?

On our summer cruise last year we saw a boat called Helen at Fradley Junction. Built by Harris Bros of Netherton in 1942 she is on the heritage boat register as a tug and icebreaker, but what caught my interest was that she

towed our Birdswood when a restaurant at Froghall on the Caldon Canal.

We spent quite a time looking over the boat. It is not often that you see a 3-cylinder Bolinder keel-cooled engine that is in superb condition. The boat is also kept in very good

condition. I thought members might like to see the engine and boat.

Carol & Brian Stevenson

Hopefully one day Helen will be reunited with Birdswood! Does anyone have any photographs of Helen pulling Birdswood at Froghall? – Ed

Every Poster Helps

Lots of us are very fond of the Cromford. Members and non-members are inspired by its history, scenery and wildlife. But some are missing out, because they don't get to hear about FCC's social evening.

More posters need to be distributed, so that more people get to know about our socials. We can all help by asking for a poster to be displayed. Try your local library or supermarket or perhaps a club or community centre.

Please print the poster image on the homepage of the FCC website (just click it to download it), and take it to the appropriate reception or customer services desk. Always ask for permission to display a poster. More posters mean more people can enjoy our evening social. Every poster helps!

Angela Marsh

The Editor responds: Great idea, Angela. We have some excellent speakers at the meetings, which are

also a chance to get to know other members as well as committee members. If you can spread the word by Facebook as well to any local groups you are in that would be a fantastic help.

Aqueduct on Ice

I thought you might be interested in the attached photograph, from memory taken during the very severe winter of 1981–2. Not one of my best photos but it was a very dull, misty and cold day. The temperature had barely climbed above freezing for some weeks with very hard night frosts, but to my surprise there was sufficient flow from the Cromford end to keep the canal ice free as far as the overspill near the aqueduct. Would anyone care to estimate the length of the largest icicle?

I've always had an interest in the canal and regularly fished it (probably poaching!) along with a group of friends in the late '50s and early '60s; the best area for us was the now destroyed section by the lime kilns at Ambergate. There was a healthy population of tench, bream, perch, roach etc in the clear reed-lined water.

Best wishes and many thanks for an interesting magazine.

Alan Walker



Huge icicles hung from Wigwell Aqueduct in the winter of 1981–2.

BULLBRIDGE SWING BRIDGE

Hugh Potter reveals why its remains now rest on Cromford Wharf



The 'kit of parts' for the Bullbridge swing bridge in 2005 when they were more easily recognised.

The more observant of you will have noticed a pile of 'scrap' metal on the peninsular at Cromford just beyond Wheatcroft's Wharf café. Believe it or not, this is far from scrap, but in fact the remains of an English Heritage listed swing bridge (along with the metal knees of an old icebreaker).

In January 1982 the Joint Liaison Committee (which had been set up between Derbyshire County Council and the Cromford Canal Society to further the restoration of the canal) agreed to a proposal to remove the swing bridge (a Scheduled Ancient Monument) from Bullbridge Aqueduct to Leawood Aqueduct.

The owner of the swing bridge, Mr Boot, was happy to agree to this, and a formal application was submitted to the Department of the Environment Ancient Monuments Secretariat. In subsequent correspondence, a number of questions were raised concerning the detailed arrangements for restoring and re-siting the swing bridge, but in the summer of 1983 it was decided that the difficulties involved in re-siting it on Leawood Aqueduct were such that an alternative site should be

found.

These problems arose mainly because (a) the swing bridge was slightly shorter than the width of the aqueduct which would have entailed building an additional pillar into the canal and (b) when the swing bridge was in the closed position it would obstruct the towpath.

It was therefore decided to re-site it at Cromford Wharf where it could be used for demonstration purposes. The swing bridge was indeed moved to the wharf, some time after 1986, but as you can see, it was never put into use and it is something of a miracle that the ironwork is still there today. Anyone fancy a restoration challenge?



The bridge in its original location where the towpath changes sides at the northern end of Bullbridge Aqueduct.

SPRING EVENTS

FCC social meetings take place on the third Monday of most months at 7.30pm at Ironville Church Hall, Casson Street, Ironville NG16 5NN.

Admission is £2.50 (except AGM) and there is a bar, raffle, tea and coffee. All are welcome to attend.

For further details of Birdswood events phone 07552 055455 or check out www.birdswood.org.

Leawood pump is free to enter (donations welcome) and is accessed on foot from High Peak Junction (car park on Lea Road, DE4 5AE).

Saturday 14th March

Volunteer recruitment stall at Cromford Mills. 10am to 4pm.

Monday 16th March

The Birdswood Experience. An illustrated talk about volunteering on the boat by Steve Adams. 7.30pm, Ironville Church Hall.

Sunday 29th March

The popular Folk music group Whatapalava returns to Birdswood. 5pm to 7pm with refreshments included, £12 each. See Birdswood website for details.

Sunday 5th April

Sales Stand at Mount Cook Adventure Centre supporting the Bonsall Chernobyl Link. 10am to 4pm.

Bank Holiday Monday April 13th

Baroque Music with traditional instruments and song on Birdswood. £10 each. See Birdswood website for details.

Monday 20th April

FCC AGM, followed by a report on work party activities over the year by John Guyler. 7.30pm, Ironville Church Hall.

Wednesday 22nd April

Earth Day celebrations with free outdoor play for children and stalls at Cromford Wharf. 10am to 4pm.

Monday 18th May

Bennerley Viaduct. Kieran Lee updates us on the restoration of this historic landmark. 7.30pm, Ironville Church Hall.

Horse-Drawn Trips on Birdswood

Offering a very rare chance to take a 2-hour canal boat trip pulled by a horse (there are less than half a dozen such opportunities in the country), Arraslea Shires' Clydesdale cross Chelsea or Ted will be taking up the strain on the towrope on the following dates this year: 12th & 13th April, 9th & 10th May, 6th & 7th June, 4th & 5th July, 1st, 2nd, 30th & 31st August, 19th & 20th September, 10th & 11th October. All trips depart Cromford Wharf at 11am and 2pm. Details and booking at www.birdswood.org.

Leawood Pump in Steam

On all horse-drawn days, Leawood Pump will also be open to the public and in steam, although Saturdays in June to August are 'static' – see page 14.

