

# THE PORTAL

Issue 77 - Summer 2021

Price £1.00 - Free to Members



Friends of the Cromford Canal

Registered Charity No. 1164608

# CONTENTS

Contents .....	3
Editorial .....	4
Executive Secretary's Notes .....	4
Chairman's Notes .....	5
Membership Matters .....	7
Work Party Report .....	8
Coping Repairs at Ironville .....	10
Raising funds for FCC .....	11
Birdswood is Beginning to Stir .....	12
Thank You, Nature .....	14
News from the North .....	15
Circular Canal Walks – 11 Jacksdale .....	16
Out and About .....	18
A Joyous Site .....	20
More Literary Links at Langley Mill .....	23
Birdswood Automated Commentary System .....	24
Derwent Valley Aqueduct .....	26
Meet the Trustees .....	29
Canalside Accommodation .....	30
The End of the Pinxton Arm .....	31
Butterley Ironworks Trust .....	34
Mystery Tunnel Hut .....	35

## Front Cover

Sprucing up *Birdswood* after over a year of not being able to operate – see page 12.

*Photo: Mike Kelley*

## Back Cover

**Top:** The western Portal of Butterley Tunnel in 1976, just before the A38 was built across it. The boards on the far bank probably mark the extent of the Armco culvert that was put in and the proximity to the rectangular hut suggests that this was demolished during that work. See page 35. Does anyone have any photographs of the work under way?

*Photo Courtesy Pat Morriss*

**Bottom:** The view at the other end of the tunnel 46 years later during the reprofiling of the cutting. See page 18.

**The copy date for the next issue is 16th August 2021**

## 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

I hope it won't be tempting fate to suggest that things look like they are beginning to return to 'normal'. The country is opening up again, and so is the Cromford Canal.

The shops, cafés and pubs along the route are reopening, *Birdswood* is about to start running again from 23rd June, Leawood Pump and High Peak Junction workshops will be open, and our work parties can assemble in numbers larger than six and get so much more work done.

But surely the greatest reopening in the near future will be Aqueduct Cottage at Leawood. Through the most unimaginably



difficult circumstances, progress on this project hardly wavered and gave us all hope that at least one physical canal-based project could keep going through the darkest days of Covid.

As we go to press, the removal of the scaffolding and the final major work of window replacement were scheduled (see page 20). Like so

many, I find it hard to believe, after so many years of abandonment, neglect and decay, that the cottage has been transformed back into its former glory in such a short time. It gives hope for future progress on the canal itself. ■

## EXECUTIVE SECRETARY'S NOTES

John Baylis, BEM, Executive Secretary

I am happy to record that my request for donations to help purchase the strip of land adjacent to the Cromford Canal in Langley Mill was far more than we expected. With recovery of Gift Aid from HM Revenue & Customs the donors will not only have covered the total purchase but also the legal fees and Land Revenue costs.

The request for donations towards the purchase of this land came as a suggestion from one of our long-term members. Despite the short notice and need for an early response it has given a very gratifying result with total income just over £11,000. On behalf of the trustees and members I would like to thank all those who gave such generous support to what will be a great help to the first part of the Beggarlee Project. With donations of between

£10 and £1,000, already accumulated funds can be used to start work when permission is finally obtained; the land transfer is now in the hands of the solicitors.

We held the Annual General Meeting by Zoom on 19th April. When the audited accounts were accepted, there was notable fall off of income due to *Birdswood* not running due to Covid restrictions; a loss was avoided by an unexpected legacy and grants from national and local government to overcome the effect of Covid on employee costs. Stephen Parish was the newly elected Trustee; the resigning trustees Jack Brown, Mike Kelley, David Martin and Yvonne Shattower were all re-elected. The annual report for 2020 and related papers have all been submitted to the Charity Commission. ■

# CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

By David Martin

Well, we are all awaiting the easing of Lockdown rules on 21st June and with that in mind we have booked the Church Hall at Ironville in the hope that our social events will be able to return. On 20th September I will be talking about the Friends of the Cromford Canal: where we have been, where we are at, and hopefully where we are going, followed by a question and answer session along with some of the trustees. On 18th October Kieran Lee from the Bennerley Viaduct will be giving us an update on that project. And on 22nd November Gary Slator will be telling us all about Henry V and Agincourt just for a bit of diversity. Do come along; we would love to see you all again.



originally anticipated – between around £70,000 to £120,000 – bearing in mind that we had already designed, ordered, and purchased the slewing ring which was a costly single item in itself at over £3,000. The outcome of this process has left us with a new quandary now of how to fund it. So now we will be concentrating on the fund-raising issue before we can move forward with the project.

## Keeping Things Moving

The Boat Committee have been up to all sorts as usual preparing themselves, the boat and the crew, and doing maintenance work along the canal ready to start up with running *Birdswood* boat trips again at the end of June, conditions permitting. *Birdswood* and some of the volunteers have also been out regularly on the wharf at Cromford on Sundays mainly using her as a shop and visitor attraction rather than opening up the Weighbridge Office which is quite a small space. It has also been successful in keeping up our profile for the trip boat. You can keep up to date with *Birdswood* at [www.birdswood.org](http://www.birdswood.org).

Our boat committee chairman and trustee Richard Handley has been working away in the background and we have finally launched the FCC's brand new website at [www.cromfordcanal.org](http://www.cromfordcanal.org). Our online sales through both websites has understandably been a lot higher during the pandemic; our current best sellers are our latest *Walker's Guide*, of which we launched the third edition last year, followed by the latest book by our historian Hugh Potter called *Cromford Wharf*.▶

## Brown's Bridge

There has been so much going on this last quarter it's been difficult to keep up with it all especially in the run up to an election. At the back end of last year, we set up a committee to deal with the problems we were having with opening and closing Brown's Bridge at High Peak Junction. As we had already gone through the design process, excellently handled by our engineers and signed off by Derbyshire County Council, we then needed to issue out tenders for the work, for which the committee diligently set about the task and wrote a tender document; it was an excellent piece of work.

We then asked companies if they would be interested in submitting a price and subsequently issued the tender document to the companies who had said they were. We received three quotes back and there was a wide variation in price. Having said that, all were much higher than we had

## Information Boards

I have been working in partnership with several others over the last two years on three interpretation boards that are to be installed at Ironville and Jacksdale this June, giving visitors some of the local history of the area. The project has been funded by Nottinghamshire County Council's Local Improvement Scheme and FCC, along with a small grant from Selston Parish Council given to the local walking group Walk On run by Joan Colebrook.

The design work has been done by Ashfield District Council, and I would like to thank their officers Theresa Dendy, and Alice Vigar-Ellis for all of their patience and great work on this project. I would also like to thank Andy Cadman, Martyn Taylor-Cockayne and of course Hugh Potter for all of their help with the project too.

The boards will be sited at Jacksdale Community Centre car park (above), Portland Basin and Lock 4. Do look out for them.

## Beggarlee Extension

At the beginning of this year we set up a separate committee for the Beggarlee Extension project. This is currently called the Construction Planning Team and it has a broad range of skills within it already: three engineers (one bridge), two environmental landscape designers, one fund raiser, one secretary, and one builder. But we really could do with some more help with fund bid writing, ecology, geo-technical engineering, and anything else you feel may be able to help us with, so please do get in touch.

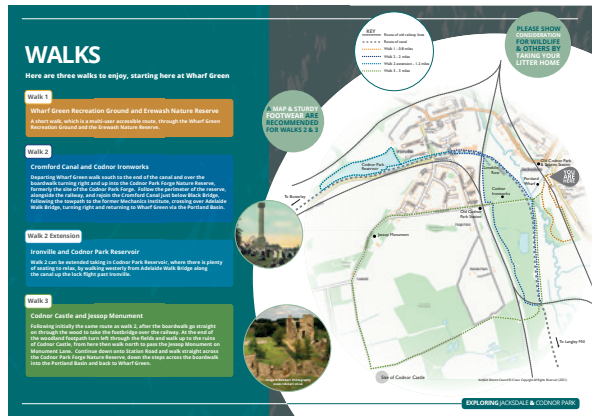
We are currently still working through the 23 pre-commencement planning conditions set by the two local planning authorities including an archaeology report, a local environment management plan, geotechnical investigations and site investigations, flood mitigation zones, a water resource study,

highways structures, and footpath diversions and insertions to name just some of them. Once we have completed these we will be more informed about what we are dealing with and be able to move on to the next stage of setting out a tender of works for the project. Land ownership is also another area we are about to tackle as there are currently six landowners in just this one mile, so it's not an easy task that lies ahead of us.

## AGM

Unfortunately, again this year we had to hold our Annual General Meeting on 19th April on Zoom to comply with the statutory obligations of the charity. Subsequently we held a trustees meeting on 10th May to elect the charity's officer posts; as you can see from the inside front cover very little has changed, but we do now have twelve trustees again as we welcome on board our latest member Stephen Parish who just loves tackling all those planning issues we quite often face where people want to build on our allegedly protected historic canal route.

So it just leaves for me to say that hopefully after 21st June we should all be getting out and about again and should you be looking for something further to distract you then why not become a volunteer for the Friends of the Cromford Canal? You will be made very welcome. **T**



# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

By Yvonne Shattower

At long last it looks as if we will have some good news as we should be coming out of Lockdown and can start to get back to something like 'normal', albeit with restrictions. *Birdswood* will be running again soon, and we are hoping to be able to start our meetings at Ironville Church Hall in September.



The first speaker, on 20th September, will be our Chairman, David Martin, and he will be explaining how the Friends coped with Lockdown, and updating you on our plans for the future. On 18th October we will have Kieran Lee telling us about the Bennerley Viaduct, a remarkable piece of railway engineering which has been the subject of intense restoration over the last few years. Have a look at their web site ([www.bennerleyviaduct.org.uk](http://www.bennerleyviaduct.org.uk)) for further information on this remarkable piece of engineering. By way of a total change, on 22nd November we will have Gary Stokes telling us about the Battle of Agincourt.

We plan to keep the format of the meetings as before, with the talks starting at 7.30pm with a short interval for tea and coffee before the second half. Hopefully we will have a bar and a raffle, but this has to be confirmed. Please bear in mind that these plans are still subject to any Government restrictions that may be in place at the time, so do keep an eye on our new web site or Facebook page for up to date information; the despatch date of the next *Portal* will be very close to the date of the first meeting, so we cannot be sure that the information will get to you in time.

I would like to give a warm welcome to the new members who have joined us since the last issue of *Portal*. We have had very few new members over the last few months, which

is not surprising as we haven't been able to get out and about to make our presence felt, so over the summer I hope that we will be able to increase our numbers. Do you have a friend or family member who would like to join us?

I would like to thank all the members who pay by cheque and have been so prompt in renewing their membership over the last year. Prompt renewal saves having to send reminders, so keeps our costs down and our numbers up.

I know I have asked this in the past, but please advise me if you move house or change your contact details in any way – every issue of *Portal* I get one or two copies returned marked 'gone away', which is a great shame. I always try and contact the member concerned by phone or email, but often these details are no longer valid so I have no option but to delete the member's details.

Hugh Potter has been busy during the lockdown, and has added a booklet on the Cromford Wharf to our list of items for sale. It is available through our website, or by post from me (details on inside cover of '*Portal*'). The cost is £4 which includes postage. It certainly is a fascinating read, and I understand Hugh has other ideas for interesting booklets in the future.

Have you had a look at our web site recently? It is brand new, with new photos and opportunities to buy our books etc, information on the canal, the Friends and our restoration plans as well as directing you to the *Birdswood* site where you will be able to book tickets for a cruise on this lovely boat.

I hope we will soon be able to meet up face to face again. ■

# WORK PARTY REPORT

By John Guyler



*The repaired fence at the site of Lock 1 which had been destroyed by CRT contractors.*

*Photo: John Guyler*

The FCC works under the Covid-19 Risk Assessment for both Canal & River Trust and Derbyshire County Council, which we submitted to both parties for approval before re-commencement of work parties in July 2020. All work is done with reduced numbers and with social distancing whenever possible.

## Repairing Contractors' Damage

The fencing at the site of the old Lock 1, at Pinxton Bridge, Ironville, was repaired due to serious damage caused by the contractors employed by CRT to remove trees at the Codnor Park Reservoir spillway. The contractors left

the fence smashed and a safety hazard. A repair team was quickly assembled to repair the fencing and make safe; ten fence posts and some of the rails were replaced over two days. Twenty-nine more posts were also replaced, over five work party days.

On one group of posts, they had the worst bit of concrete they had ever removed from fencing posts; it was concreted down to about ►



*Coir rolls installed to reinforce the bank.*

*Photo: John Barker*

2ft, really hard concrete, using crushed stone, not post-crete, tied into clinker and ash in the hole. It took until after 1pm to get the old concrete out. It was very hot work and the work party were dripping in sweat. All posts, fencing and post-crete, was supplied by CRT.

### More Fencing

The work party group has now started replacing the lower fence posts on the edge of Codnor Park Reservoir, working towards the western end of the reservoir. There are also two more memorial seats to fit in the same area as the one fitted earlier in the year.

Another repair job, at the railway bridge, Lock 5, which had been planned for a couple of years by CRT for repair, was finally achieved – see page 10.



*More Coir rolls being fitted near Gregory Tunnel.*

*Photo: John Barker*

### Other Work

In April, Shirley and Carole did an impromptu litter pick at the western end of the reservoir, travelling towards Golden Valley, and picked five bags of litter.

Four volunteers filled sixty sand bags at High Peak Junction for the repairs using the spare coir rolls.


The spare coir rolls in the Wharf Shed were moved down towards Gregory Tunnel by DCC Rangers, to be added to the six that were transported there before lockdown, for using in areas where the previously fitted coir rolls were either damaged or needed building up. It is hoped that this work will be finished by the end of May. On the Lawn Bridge/High Peak section, two silt traps were also cleared out, but there are another eight to do.

Three of the ladies went down to Lower Hartshay, to assess the work required there. They walked both the CRT and FCC sections and were lucky enough to see two kingfishers on the FCC section, which is an indication of good water quality. To clear the footpath, they cut some willow saplings, which were taken away by a walker on the towpath for repairs to a cane basket.

At the Lock Keeper's Garden, at Lock 4 at Ironville, Shirley and Carole have started digging and planting, but need help, if any member would like to assist, please contact us on the email address below

Chris Martin came up with a brilliant idea for repairing damage caused by dogs leaving the canal channel. A tree log is cut to size and spiked into the bank, clay bags are put on top and backfilled with clay, soil is finally spread on top to finish off. This method had been approved by Mark Brailsford of the DCC.

Hopefully, by the time you read this article, things might be getting back to normal with regards to work party volunteer numbers. My thanks to everyone who sent me work party reports.

If you would like to join the work parties, please contact John Barker at [work@ Cromfordcanal.org](mailto:work@ Cromfordcanal.org). 



# COPING REPAIRS AT IRONVILLE

By John Guyler



*The displaced coping stones above the railway bridge.*

When the towpath at Ironville between King William Street Bridge and the railway bridge at Lock 5 was re-laid several years ago, there was an accident with a dumper truck which resulted in some of the edging stones above the railway bridge being dislodged.

John Barker received a report that the edging stones had been further dislodged, by something large; since the towpath was opened up as a bridleway, it could have been anything.

A small FCC work party was sent down to repair the damage, lifting the stones with the forklift Jack Brown supplied, they were put on a pallet and placed under Jack's canalside window for security.

The supporting bricks were rebuilt to take the weight of the edging stones. A few days later the edging stones were replaced, again with the forklift, with a bit of digging out the towpath. The final job was to replace the fencing, which was done the following week.

Thanks to John Barker, Chris Martin, Malc Chisnall, Chris Stamford-Burrows – and Jack Brown for the forklift and driver. All work was under the Covid19 regulations. **T**



*The stones have been replaced and await the new fencing.*



*Job done!*

# RAISING FUNDS FOR FCC

## How you can help to restore the canal

The Friends of the Cromford Canal have aspirations to reconstruct and renovate major sections of the canal, as well as undertake smaller projects. Recognising that we need additional funding streams we are launching easy ways for members and public to be able to contribute and donate to our causes. All the money donated will go directly towards to costs of restoring the canal.

### Donations


We have an arrangement with “Give as you Live” and there are two ways of donating to FCC causes:



- **Donations for specific project appeals:** This can be done online at our websites [www.cromfordcanal.org](http://www.cromfordcanal.org) and [www.birdswood.org](http://www.birdswood.org) where there is a DONATE button. You will be offered the opportunity to click on a Gift Aid button which means that we can recover a further 25% on top of your donation from HMRC. You can also point your smartphone camera at this Quick Recognition (QR) code to open the link.
- **Donations for general charity activities:** Now every time you shop at 4,500+ top retailers, a free donation will be made to FCC and it won't cost you a penny extra! It's that simple! Thank you for your support. Now, point your smartphone camera at this Quick Recognition (QR) code to join up. Once you have joined you will automatically see “Give as You Live” pop-up on any participating web site that you visit.



### Legacies

Increasing numbers of our supporters are leaving us legacies in their wills. For further information about this, please speak to your solicitor and ask them to contact the Friends of the Cromford Canal Treasurer directly at [treasurer@cromfordcanal.org](mailto:treasurer@cromfordcanal.org) 

### Covid Catch Up

Join us at 7.30pm on Monday 20th September for our first ‘social’ meeting since Lockdown at Ironville Church Hall (Casson St, Ironville NG16 5NN) when FCC Chairman David Martin will be updating you on how Covid has (and has not) affected the work of FCC.

## BIRDWOOD IS BEGINNING TO STIR

By Mike Kelley

The last time *Birdswood* carried passengers was in December 2019. During lockdown she has languished in her mooring at Cromford Wharf. As reported in an earlier edition of the *Portal*, the new electric-hydraulic propulsion system has now been installed. So, in early spring, testing of the new system was carried out, and after a few initial problems it is now running perfectly. During these tests people passing by on the towpath would frequently shout across to us, 'Lovely to see you back', which is very encouraging.

Having remained static for fifteen months she was in a sad and grubby state, so a team of volunteers gathered to help out (as these wonderful people frequently do). The outside of the boat was scrubbed down, washed and polished one day, then on another day the inside was cleaned and polished. This was just in time for a video to be made of the inside back cabin, which takes virtual visitors around the back cabin to show how families would live on her during her working days. You can find it on YouTube by searching for 'Birdswood Back Cabin Tour'.

Derbyshire County Council, who own the part of the canal that we cruise on, would still not allow us to carry passengers during the month of May, due to ongoing Covid restrictions, so we used the boat as a floating shop every Sunday throughout that month. One of the biggest selling items were the chainsaw carved wooden mushrooms made for us by David Wright, who brought new ones along every Sunday. David is a life member of



*Sprucing up Birdswood under the canopy by the Gothic warehouse – the only place you can clean both sides at once.*

*All Photos: Mike Kelley*

the Friends and has a small woodland near to his home. He is a certified chain saw volunteer and part of his City & Guilds training was to cut out a piece of wood into shapes; he selected mushrooms. Our thanks go to him for all his good work for us. ►



*Roll up, Roll up! Get your mushrooms from Birdswood!*



Birdswood's *traditionally decorated back cabin can now be seen virtually on a YouTube video.*

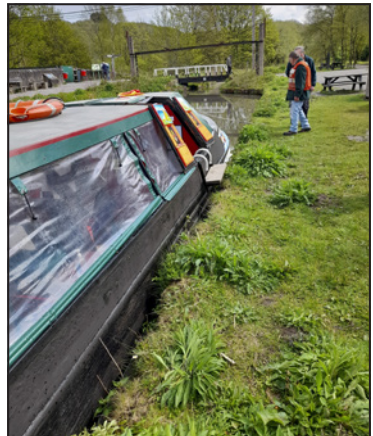


Simultaneously to this, the month of May saw us start a refresher-training programme for all *Birdswood* crew. Such refresher training is a requirement of the Maritime & Coastguard Agency, but in addition to that, this year we have to instruct crew on how to operate during Covid restrictions. We are in need of more crew so if you can give us a minimum one day a month please get in touch; we need you. You can call me on 07745 206958.

Our target date to restart cruises for the public is Wednesday 23rd June, and from then on we will be running every Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. Sadly though, we will not be able to do our normal run because the swing bridge at High Peak Junction (Brown's Bridge) has seized up and will not open. We have purchased a new slewing ring (bearing) and we have a price quote from a contractor, but it is far higher than we can afford, so we are in negotiations with DCC to see what can be done to resolve this.

In the meantime we are working on getting the boat to moor up at High Peak Junction in order to give passengers time to have a look around the railway workshops there. These workshops are the oldest standing railway workshops in the world and were built just a few months after George Stephenson carried out his trials with the *Rocket* at Rainhill in 1829. Yes, they are that old. In fact the rail tracks inside this workshop are the oldest in-situ rails tracks anywhere.

So why not book a cruise with us and come along for a truly enjoyable experience? Latest information at [www.birdswood.org](http://www.birdswood.org). **T**



*Testing out the mooring at High Peak Junction where it is hoped to be able to disembark passengers to view the historic railway workshops.*

# THANK YOU, NATURE

By Marie Brown

This last year has been hard on everyone, but it did make more people appreciate the outdoor spaces on their doorstep. Mindfulness, wellbeing and mental health were words confined to yoga studios and relaxing retreats before the pandemic, but now they are as common as the buzz of a bumblebee or the chirping of a bird.

I, like many, ventured out every day to listen, to watch and to enjoy the surety of seasons and it gave me great comfort to know that mother nature didn't feel that she had to lock herself away.



What I do find intriguing is whether people will continue to value their local green spaces now that the world is opening again. Will the army of volunteers that lent a hand when there was a lockdown continue to feel they have something to offer? Will the people who

walked their dog, and enjoyed time with their children outside, still relish the fresh air and maintain their new-found love of all things wild once the nail bars, hairdressers, bars and shops reopen? We can but hope and wait and see I suppose but also try to educate and engage the many visitors to the area.



The reservoir and canal are beginning to demonstrate that sure as night follows day, the great British summer is on its way. Cygnets, fresh from their parents' nest, are learning to swim, grebe are proudly displaying their humbugs on their backs and the fungi is gradually being replaced by pollinating plants and beautiful colours. We will soon look to skies and wait for the swifts, swallows and other migratory birds who come to enjoy the sunshine.

As volunteers, we too are coming back to working in a group, and we must share our gratitude for all the individuals and 'bubble couples' that continued to collect litter,▶

*Swan with cygnets.  
Photo: Ruby Fuller*



*Grebes with 'humbugs'.*

*Photo: Barbara Sherwood*

empty bins and maintain pathways. It is their dedication that has allowed us to come back to the 10-year plan and realise we haven't lost as much time as we envisioned.

Litter picks are resuming on every second

Saturday of each month and we have also introduced Tai Chi classes which are free for all to attend. Mindfulness by the waterside and a sense of coming back together in friendship, fellowship and fun are key now to bringing our communities back to life.

If you feel that you would like to get involved and continue to appreciate and learn about the wonders of the nature around you, please get in touch. You can give whatever time you want as we know that lives are busy and family, work and other pressures will soon return. We

would welcome your input, expertise, skill or simply your smiling face.

Contact: [cromfordcanalgroup@outlook.com](mailto:cromfordcanalgroup@outlook.com); 07812 130061; Cromford Canal & Codnor Park Res FaceBook page. **T**

## NEWS FROM THE NORTH

### The Cromford Canal is opening up!

It is pleasing to report that Derbyshire County Council are opening up their canal-related sites again, although the High Peak Junction refreshment outlet has been busy since Easter.

The railway workshop at HPJ will be open to the public on certain days through the summer. There are new interpretation installations, which have been possible with funding from the Great Places Schemes Experimental Fund.

It will include some of the artefacts from the Cromford & High Peak Railway being better displayed and interpreted, as well as banners and an interactive donation box. It will be open from noon with last entry at 4pm, with a limit of six per half-hour

session, which need to be booked (free).

The dates planned are Saturdays 29th May, 5th June, 3rd July, 7th & 28th August, but DCC may decide to open up without restrictions from 21st June, depending on Government guidance.

Leawood Pump will be back in steam on 5th (static) & 6th June, 3rd (static) & 4th July, 7th (static), 8th, 29th & 30th August. Booking (£5 per person) is essential for timed entry with limited numbers.

There are also several 'one-off' events in school holidays. For further details and booking call 01629 533298 or download the Countryside Events brochure from: [www.derbyshire.gov.uk/countrysideevents](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/countrysideevents). **T**

# CIRCULAR CANAL WALKS – 11 JACKSDALE

## Ken Brockway on the Pinxton Arm and the Forge Nature Reserve



©Crown Copyright 2021 Ordnance Survey.  
Media 020/21

**Distance:** 5 miles.  
**Start point:** Jacksdale, Village Car Park (free) NG16 5JU.  
**How to get there:** Bus 90 Ripley–Sutton; Rainbow 1 Alfreton–Eastwood–Nottingham.  
**Refreshments:** The Poachers Ale House, Jacksdale; Dog & Doublet, Pye Bridge; ‘Chuck Wagon’, Codnor Park Reservoir

From the car park/community hall turn left, cross the road and turn right into Wagstaff Lane. Follow this for about a quarter mile then take the footpath left after 77 ‘Dale View’. The path descends to a road.

Cross the road to take the path opposite which starts to climb. At a sleeper bridge you have a choice. The definitive path continues along a hedged route offering occasional views towards Codnor Park and Ironville; turn right on meeting a track. The alternative, by turning right at the bridge, is a permissive path winding through grassland and trees; turn right when meeting a track where the routes converge.



War memorial at Jacksdale.  
All photos: Ken Brockway

Pass through the gate and continue towards a gap between houses to meet the road at Jubilee Village. Turn left along the roadside footway. Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee was in 1887, Jubilee Cottages on your right were built in 1889; look out for the date stone.▶



The sign says it all.

As you drop down the hill to Pye Bridge there is a good view north along the line of the Pinxton Arm across the unrestored Smotherfly opencast site. Pass under the rail bridge then at Erewash Street cross the main road to take the track opposite passing Pye Bridge Fields, managed by DCC Countryside Services.

Climb a short flight of sleeper steps. This is now the infilled line of the former Pinxton Arm. The canal to your right passed under the bridge then swung left. This route is now a challenge to explore so turn left to follow the canal line towards Codnor Park.

Passing the back of houses on your left you arrive at an infilled bridge at Pye Bridge, with the Dog & Double down to the left. Cross the road and continue along the Pinxton Canal Path, again managed by DCC. Never far from urban life, this green corridor offers a breathing space in any season. Pye Bridge Pond was the site of a canal wharf. Continue on the surfaced path to cross a minor lane until arriving in Ironville. The Midland Railway Trust's preserved line passes over on a bridge, then the canal bed bends right to pass under a low road bridge.

Pass behind the church then across the car park and under a footbridge to emerge at Codnor Park Reservoir. Turn left with the water on your right. A bacon butty and mug of tea may be on offer in the car park here if you arrive before 1pm. The walk turns left at the original stone bridge. Walk beside Boat Dock Lock and under the bridge. At the railway bridge keep to the towpath, passing more locks and looking out for water vole.

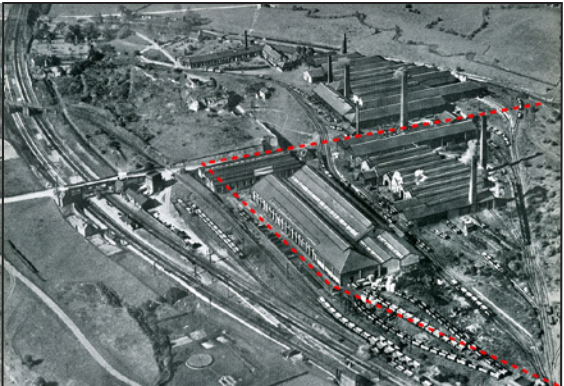
Continue alongside abandoned lock chambers and past Portland Basin. When the canal disappears completely cross the boardwalk bridge to enter woodland. Go up to the right over brickwork of the long-gone railway bridge. The path is wide and distinct, often on an embankment between holes strewn with boulders of furnace slag. This local wildlife site



*Take a break by 'Humpty Bridge' across the former entrance to Portland Basin.*

has had 25 different butterflies recorded; look out for the Dingy Skipper. Views to the right open up and in the dip a pond but keep in sight and sound of the rail line on the left until meeting a crossing track and tall metal gate.

Turn right here, taking the right-hand fork, down the gentle slope across an area once full of buildings, railways, noise and smoke. Descend the steps installed by FCC volunteers then cross the canal boardwalk and turn right along the towpath. Cross the restored 'Humpty' Bridge over the entrance to Portland Basin then turn left across the River Erewash to enter Wharf Green. Fork left to take a look at the retaining blocks made of foundry slag and the information board about the Portland Tramway, before returning to the car park. ■



*The path through the Forge site has changed somewhat.*



# OUT AND ABOUT

With Hugh Potter



*The 'new' view towards the eastern portal of Butterley Tunnel.*

*Photo: Chris Stamford-Burrows*

## Golden Valley

In Golden Valley, between the eastern portal of Butterley Tunnel and Golden Valley road bridge, much clearance of trees took place in early March causing considerable consternation locally. However, the trees were apparently in need of removal due to ash dieback and an array of new young trees has been planted. After the felling, the ground above, alongside the Coach Road, was levelled and much soil tipped down the slope and the canal below dredged. We understand that this land is now owned by the local caravan site which plans to build luxury lodges beside the Coach Road. The canal itself is owned by the Midland Railway Trust and was last dredged in 1996 as part of the construction of the Golden Valley Light Railway which has its Newlands Inn station just above the canal.

The Newlands Inn itself is finally being restored after the devastating fire ten years ago. This is part of a housing development in which the former pub will serve as apartments.▶



*Progress at last on rebuilding the Newlands Inn.*

## Mystery Arrows at Lock 2

Our intrepid work party uncovered some interesting marks in the masonry whilst repairing the fencing around Lock 2 for Canal & River Trust. These comprised no less than three arrows pointing upwards in the stonework of the lock approach, ie the 'return' wall facing up the canal towards the site of Top Lock. A long debate ensued on Facebook about what these might have been, top suggestions being stonemason's or Ordnance Survey marks, but the question was never satisfactorily solved.



*The three arrows (circled) in the stonework of Lock 2.*



*There was some debate about the names of the new properties at Golden Valley . . .*

*Photo: Sharon Butler*

## New Signage at Codnor Park Reservoir

There is no doubt now as to who owns 'The Res' following Canal & River Trust installing new signs at the car park entrance on Coach Road and smaller plastic signs at various local access points.



*The new sign at the entrance to Codnor Park Reservoir car park.*



*The arrows are in the short wall in the foreground facing the camera.*

**If you spot new developments along the canal please email the Editor or post them on Facebook (or both!) including photographs where possible. 📷**

# A JOYOUS SITE

## Ron Common reports on remarkable progress at Aqueduct Cottage

As milestone moments go on the Aqueduct Cottage restoration project, the first week of April 2021 takes some beating.

The anticipation had been building during March as Andrew Churchman progressed the tiling of the cottage's new roof; first the rear elevation with reclaimed Welsh slate and four Velux 'heritage' roof lights. Then, the painstaking process of tiling the front roof with reducing courses of Derbyshire Freebirch stone tiles.

extended, between 1811 and 1835. It's likely that the stone tiles from the rear of the original cottage were transferred to the front of the new extension to provide a match, then slate used to cover the rear.



*Replacing the guttering at the rear.  
Photos by Ron Common unless credited*



*A drone's eye view of progress showing the completed roof.  
Photo: Andrew Woodward*

You may wonder why the different roof finish for front and back. We believe that the introduction of Welsh slate on the rear probably came about when the cottage was



*The new windows in the workshop waiting to be delivered.*

We watched in fascination as Andrew skilfully laid out, then measured and trimmed the individual rows of tiles prior to hoisting them up the scaffolding and drilling and pegging each into place.



*The almost completed slate roof at the rear.*

The largest stone tiles measure 4ft x 3ft and weigh over 60kg. The smallest are the size of an average paperback book.▶



*Lifting the stone tiles weighing up to 60kg was assisted by a pulley.  
Photo: Becky Coleman*

Finally, on 8th April 2021, the stone ridges were added to complete the roof construction. What a relief and utter joy it was to see the cottage with its new roof and marvel at the building looking complete again, plus watertight for the first time in 40 years!

The twin chimney stacks, built with reclaimed bricks to match the originals, and the textured, multi-coloured stone tiles looked resplendent in the spring sunshine.

scaffolding at the end of May to allow other work to continue. It will be re-hired when we are ready to complete the pointing.



*The splendid stone tile roof nears completion.*

At the time of writing the guttering was being installed by our volunteer team. The material being used is 'Alutech' manufactured by Marley. It's a powder-coated aluminium, formed to look like cast iron. It's lighter, so easier to fit, and should be lower maintenance. Marley kindly donated all the guttering materials saving the project hundreds of pounds.



*One of the two reconstructed chimneys.  
Photo: Becky Coleman*

The top half of the newly built gable ends have been pointed and they provide a tantalising glimpse of how the building will look when the rest of the external walls are done. This will have to wait several months, however, because after 40 years with no roof, the original stonework has become saturated. Hence a decision was taken to remove the



*A lot of volunteer hours have gone into rebuilding the stepped path up to Lea Wood*

Other important work has been undertaken by our volunteers over the last 3 months. The most significant of these is the completion of the new access into Lea Wood, just behind the cottage. This herculean task began 17 months ago in November 2019 but was delayed several months by the pandemic.▶



*Work was sometimes not helped by the weather.*

A total of 47 steps plus several landings (one every 8 steps) have been built up the steep bank, replacing the treacherous route used previously. Digging into the 40ft rocky bank was all done by hand by the volunteers and the tons of soil and rocks removed were separately bagged and carried down the steps for disposal.



*There are a lot of steps in the path!*

Timber posts for a continuous handrail are currently being installed which will further improve the safety of the new steps. Completion of the new steps is a massive achievement by our volunteers for which they deserve a huge pat on the back.

The steps will provide improved access to the Nature Reserve for visitors for many years to come plus a safer, more convenient path for the many locals who use the woods daily. They look rather attractive from the towpath too!



*Finished pointing at the apex.*

Looking ahead, by the time this issue is delivered, another exciting development should have taken place – the installation of the new windows and front door (expected early June).



*Modern tools help to fix the stone tiles in place.  
Photo: Becky Coleman*

Once fitted, the exterior of the building will be close to finished, except the pointing. Even without this, it promises to look absolutely stunning and place Aqueduct Cottage firmly back on the map! ■



*The passers-by view of progress.*

## MORE LINKS AT LANGLEY MILL

The photographs in the last issue evoked some very different thoughts



*Atlas & Vela thwarted by the deliberately locked top gates at Sandiacre Bottom Lock when trying to carry coal to Spondon Power Station in 1946.*

*last attempt to navigate the Derby Canal in 1946.*

*“The picture David Bartrop is thinking of, depicting the two boats stuck in the lock, shows the boats with a cargo of coal for Spondon Power Station. The top gates had been locked by the Derby Canal Company to stop them, but it is doubtful that they would have been able to reach Spondon as there was very little water in the canal and going through four locks would have made it very difficult.”*

You mention that D.H. Lawrence writes about the Ripley Rattlers in his short story *Tickets Please*.

Quirkily, I have in my possession an old school book published in 1964 called *Modern Short Stories* edited by Jim Hunter who was a Senior English Master at Bristol Grammar School which book contains D.H. Lawrence’s short story. In the introduction to the story, Lawrence describes the tram cars (of the Ripley Rattlers) as green and cream coloured, whereas the city tram cars are crimson and cream coloured. The journey time each

I wonder whether *Atlas*, as depicted laden at Langley Mill in the last issue of *Portal*, was the same boat that got ‘stuck in the lock’ at Sandiacre in the campaign to keep the Derby Canal open.

**David Bartrop**

*Doug Flack of the Derby & Sandiacre Canal Society says: “Atlas & Vela were not in the 1961 IWA protest, but they were part of the*

way is given as two long hours.

Interestingly, the scenery along the line of the tram route is described using negative adjectives – long ugly villages of workmen’s houses, stark grimy cold little market places, the terminus that is the last little ugly place of industry, the cold little town that shivers. Yet it must have been a much more interesting tram journey than that surely.

**Andrew P Blunden, Leeds** ■

# BIRDWOOD AUTOMATED COMMENTARY SYSTEM

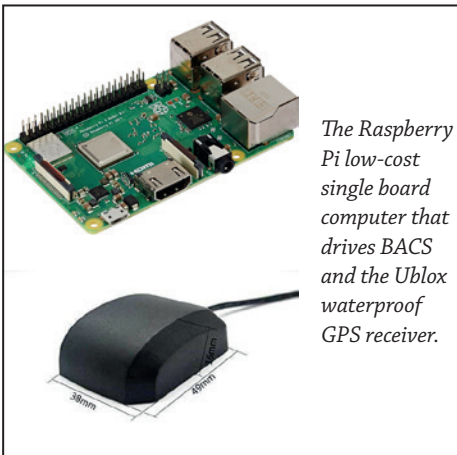
## Keith Bailey describes a lockdown displacement activity

Back in 2018, when we were running full boats and serving teas and coffees by the bucketload, it was often difficult to find time to give a commentary, so I thought it would be useful if we had an automated commentary system similar to those on open-top city bus tours.

The concept is simple enough: a GPS (Global Positioning System) receiver constantly reads the boat's position (latitude and longitude) and a computer program takes this data and compares it with a list of stored locations, and plays an audio file, which is the appropriate commentary for that location; 'Stella', for instance.

The obvious choice for a computer to run this system is not a laptop or tablet because these are too expensive, but a British designed Raspberry Pi single board computer that is about the size of a pack of playing cards. The 'Pi' is very capable and is only around £40. It has a Graphical User Interface (GUI) like Microsoft's Windows built in. Over 30 million have been sold and it is extremely well supported.

To make the commentary system, it was



*The Raspberry Pi low-cost single board computer that drives BACS and the Ublox waterproof GPS receiver.*



*The BACS system in its custom case showing the opening screen.*

necessary to write a computer program specifically for the purpose. The 'Pi' uses the Python programming language as standard. Python is free and is also very well supported and is purportedly the world most used programming language. There is a wealth of information on the internet, which I found extremely useful as Python is not a language I had used before – a very steep learning curve!

The most difficult part was capturing the quite complex GPS data stream and then reading the relevant items into the Birdwood Automated Commentary System (BACS) program. This was way above my competence and, again, the internet was invaluable in finding the right solution.

Initially, I tried a cheap 'hobby' GPS receiver and intended to use push buttons to control the commentary system. The 'hobby' GPS was very poorly documented and was not sensitive enough, losing signal under the trees in the Railway Narrows. I got a refund on it and shelved the project – until the dreaded Lockdown was imposed ►

upon us in 2020. After shelving the project, I looked at the commercial systems used on tour buses, but, at around £2,500 starting price, they were way above our budget and could not be justified.

Not having any boat trips to crew on, due to lockdown, I had much more spare time, so I revisited the BACS project. In the intervening period some much better cheap GPS receivers became available with very full documentation and test programs that would run on a laptop. This was very important whilst developing the BACS system.

When writing the program, it is vital to know the exact coordinates of the commentary points. I couldn't take the GPS and the 'Pi' on the boat because it wasn't running and the 'Pi' is not a battery powered device that I could carry, so I had to use the GPS test program on my laptop and put it, and the GPS receiver, in a backpack and go for a walk up the towpath, logging the coordinates every second as I walked. I found this receiver to be good, with no signal loss under the trees. I took pictures on my phone to identify commentary points from the GPS data in the photos.

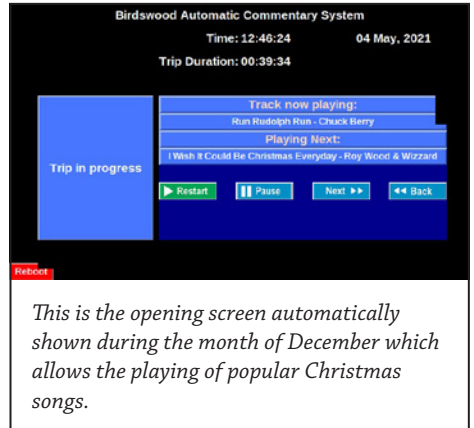
The GPS receiver is self-contained and waterproof and can sit on the roof of the boat using its magnetic base.

I originally planned to use push buttons to control BACS but I foresaw problems in

packaging the system for use on the boat, so I made the decision to use the 'Pi's' graphical capabilities

Having a GUI display enables a crew member to play the Brian Blessed safety message and then shows options to choose a full commentary, just safety warnings for bridges and disembarkation or nothing at all.

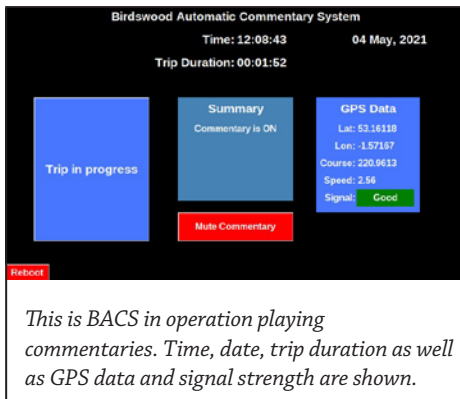
The design concept was to make the system as easy to use as possible and to minimise the interaction with crew.



Information like time, date, trip duration and GPS data are also displayed, mainly to show crew that the system is working.

Having scabbled around in the past to find or create music for the 'Santa' trips, I thought I would build Christmas music into BACS. In December, the system will (should?) start up with a different opening screen that shows the 'safety message' (Brian) and a media player that will play a built-in playlist of around twenty Christmas favourites. At the end of the list, it simply loops back to the beginning. The start button randomly shuffles the playlist each time it is pressed and crew can skip backwards and forwards.

I must give a big thank you to crew member Bob Staveley, who used to be a presenter on Erewash Sound, for voicing the commentaries so well. 🇮





# DERWENT VALLEY AQUEDUCT

## Ken Brockway discovers a little known but important water route



*The DVA pipeline bridge across the route of the canal through the former Stevenson's Dye Works site at Bullbridge, currently being developed for housing.*

We take turning on the tap for granted, but not too long ago the supply of water was a household chore along with many others. Large urban areas had to look afar to improve their supply of essential clean water and the Peak District was the choice of Sheffield, Derby, Nottingham and Leicester. Jointly these cities constructed dams on the remote watershed at Derwent and Howden along with the later Ladybower.

Equally important but far less well known are the pipes that transport the water from the reservoirs to the urban conurbations. This trunk pipeline is known as the Derwent Valley Aqueduct but unlike famous canal or Roman aqueducts which span impressively across valleys this one is mostly hidden underground.

The supply to Sheffield branches off at Ashopton through a tunnel over four miles in length to the Rivelin reservoirs. The main aqueduct, which interests us, extends from Derwent Dam to the Ambergate service reservoir, a distance of 28 miles. Seven miles is constructed as cut and cover, 4 miles as tunnels, both 6ft 3in diameter. The remaining 17 miles is carried by 45in diameter cast pipes.

Observant walkers will be aware of the DVA pipeline passing across the canal just north of the gas works blockage at Ambergate and again at Bullbridge in the former Stevenson's dye works site. The line is also marked by disused green inspection gates and the characteristic green cast-iron domes housing pressure relief valves (often seemingly in the middle of nowhere) which help us plot the route. These are often seen in the countryside when making circular walks involving the canal.

On its route south from the dams, the treated water pauses at the recently rebuilt Ambergate Reservoir which can be seen as a concrete 'wall' partly clad in camouflage netting high above the canal. Originally completed in 1910, by 2008 it was nearing the end of its natural life. A crack around the perimeter walls, dating from the early years, had limited the reservoir's capacity from 128MI to 120MI and the condition of the roof slab made it unsafe to work on. It was ►



*Characteristic green domes track the underground route of the pipeline.*

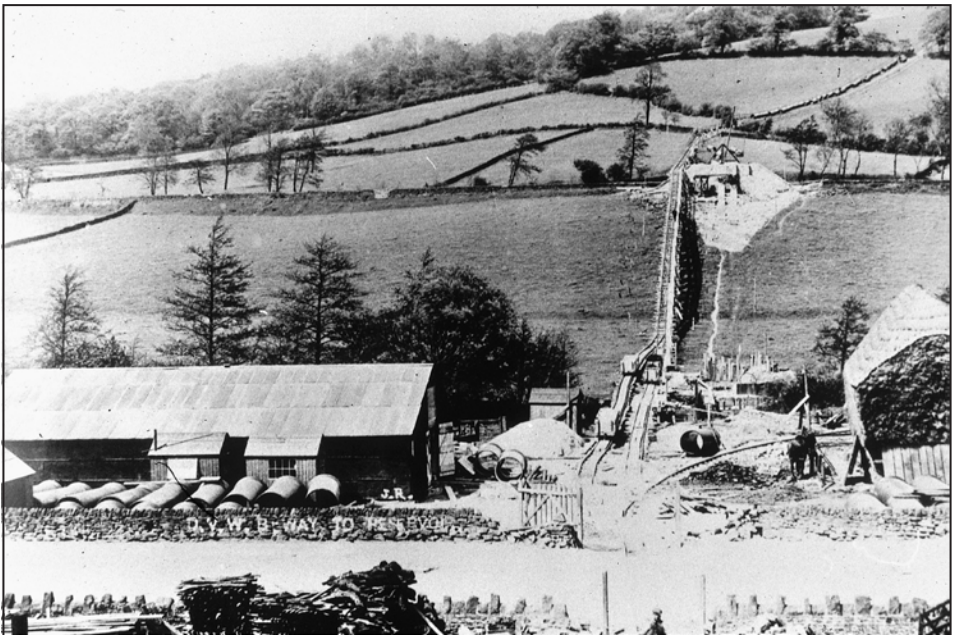


*One of the many gates that once gave access to the pipeline, apparently never now used.*

The first phase of the project saw the construction of a new reservoir consisting of two 43.5MI cells, the maximum capacity possible for the available land adjacent to the existing reservoir. The second phase involved demolishing the original reservoir and constructing a 50MI single-cell reservoir in its place, bringing the total capacity up to 137MI.

That work is now complete, but what of the early work to get the water to Ambergate? *The Engineer* in March 1910 printed a report on the section between Grindleford and Rowsley, a section of 9 miles. Of those, 4 miles were the relatively straightforward cut and cover along ground that offered a gently downward slope. Dig a trench, construct a brick pipe of 6ft diameter and back-fill the trench. ▶

built of mass concrete with only a part-height division wall, which meant the loss of three-quarters capacity when draining down for essential cleaning and inspection.



*Seen from where the A610 runs, the construction railway used to install the DVA pipeline is seen rising to cross the canal just to the north of where the gas works site now is. The pipeline is being installed across the canal to the right of the railway by the pile of exposed stone half way up the photograph. Pipes can be seen laid out in the field above.*



*The Ambergate crossing with the canal newly blocked off and the gas works under construction.*

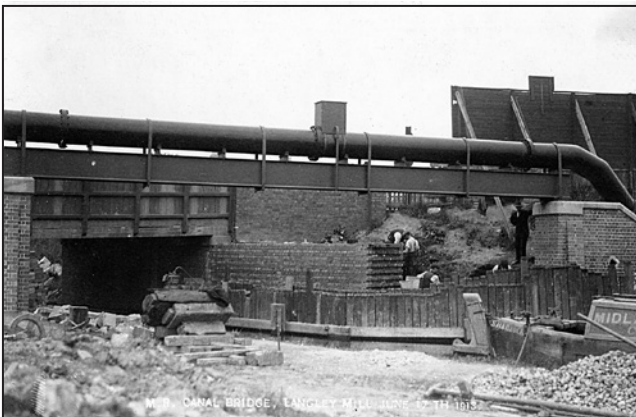
In addition three tunnels were needed with a total length of a half mile. The remainder, nearly 5 miles, is in pipes. These were needed where the ground dropped below the required level of the aqueduct which ran from 684ft above sea level at Bamford to 657ft at Ambergate. The most significant syphon, as

they are called, passed across Chatsworth Park. There is a picture of the contractor's railway passing right in front of the house.

The pipes were 12ft lengths of 45in diameter, made at Staveley. They were not identical because the pipes at the bottom of the syphon were required to stand a pressure of 150lb/sq in, so had a thicker wall and weighed nearly 5 tons each; the lightest were 2 ton less.

The pipes across the canal were completed in October 1908 whilst the one parallel with the main road bridge at Langley Mill was built 4 years later.

Precautions were taken should a burst occur, which would have rivalled the fountain at Chatsworth. A complicated valve system would close off the supply while another would prevent back flow at the end point. In all a remarkable piece of engineering and a piece of history still in use today. ■



*Construction of the DVA pipeline across the canal at Langley Mill appears to have taken place at the same time as the bridge was rebuilt to take the new tramway in 1912. The boat is Midland Railway Co's Shamrock.*

# MEET THE TRUSTEES

## Who's who in FCC



### Steve Parish

#### Tell us about yourself...

I am a retired vicar, with a previous existence working for British Rail. We regularly hired boats with the family, and I have been crew for several friends with their own boats. I'm a local councillor in Warrington, where I'm deputy chair of the planning committee.

#### How did you get involved with FCC...?

I was at a conference at Swanwick, went for a walk near Codnor, spotted an old canal bridge and discovered the Cromford. At the next IWA festival, I joined FCC, and then learned that Amber Valley BC had consented to a new house on the line of the canal. I took up the issue and the trustees asked me to liaise with local authorities (but 'liaise' has often meant 'battle').

#### How long have you been Trustee and have you a specific role?

I'm newly elected – meetings 60 miles away were a problem, but being a Zoom-in trustee is possible.

#### What have you brought to the party?

Time will tell. It may be many years before we find out whether our efforts today have made full restoration possible.

#### What are your aspirations for FCC ...?

We must make sure restoration is not impossible. The obstacles are many, but the benefits of reopening the whole canal would be brilliant for the area.



### David Ratner

#### Tell us about yourself...

Brought up in Salford near the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal. Engineering apprenticeship and various office jobs after. Then 20 years with Severn Trent, ending with a part-time post dealing with easements for Transco at Ambergate.

#### How did you get involved with FCC...?

I have been involved with FCC since 2003, after visiting a boat rally at Langley Mill basin and becoming a member at that point.

#### How long have you been Trustee and have you a specific role?

Previous roles include Social Secretary for the FCC, FCC Committee Member, Crew Member, Chairman of the Boat Committee. A trustee for 6 years.

#### What have you brought to the party?

Through the 2016–2017 seasons I did a complete refit of the *Birdswood* seating, reconstructed the notice boards at Codnor Park reservoir, arranged for the replacement sign over the Weighbridge office door and over the last couple of years initiated the work of replacing the worn out bearing under the High Peak Junction swing bridge.

#### What are your aspirations for FCC ...?

I would be happy to see the canal restored as far as Pinxton in my lifetime. **T**

# CANALSIDE ACCOMMODATION

With staycations looking like the only holidays for many this year, we look at opportunities close to the Cromford Canal

## Cromford

One half of the former wharfinger's house on Cromford Wharf is a weekly holiday let for up to four people in two bedrooms. Ideal for that trip on *Birdswood!*

[www.derbyshirecountrycottages.co.uk/matlock-southern-peak-district-cottages/cromford/dcwhf-wharf](http://www.derbyshirecountrycottages.co.uk/matlock-southern-peak-district-cottages/cromford/dcwhf-wharf)

## Holloway

For that special break, consider B&B in Florence Nightingale's former residence at Lea Hurst. You could even stay in her room. Just up the canal from Gregory Tunnel, this is a chance to pamper yourself as well as visiting the canal!

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

## Homesford Cottage

On the A6, just a short walk the other way from Gregory Tunnel are the three self-catering properties of Homesford Cottages.

[www.homesfordcottage.com](http://www.homesfordcottage.com)

## Robin Hood

Robin Hood Tower is a newcomer to the self-catering market. It is a newly converted fairy tale tower for two next to that wonderful house that everyone wants to live in!

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

Not far away, a short walk up from Sims Bridge, Oakford Cottage offers B&B in one double and two twin rooms, with ensuite facilities.

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

## Arraslea Log Cabins

Our friends Arraslea Shires, who supply Ted and Chelsea to pull *Birdswood*, also have three well fitted log cabins (with hot tubs!) on their premises at Alderwasley offering great valley views for 2-4 people.

[www.arrasleacabins.com](http://www.arrasleacabins.com)



*The self-catering Robin Hood Tower is above the main house to the right. Note the once-dominant willow tree seems to be re-growing.*

## Whatstandwell

The popular Family Tree tea rooms just down the hill from Whatstandwell canal bridge offers three B&B rooms in their separate annex building.

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

## Sawmills

The bungalow alongside the gauging narrows at Sawmills sleeps four in two bedrooms. The original toll house was demolished by the then owner, the former toll clerk Miss Simpson, and replaced by the bungalow around 1964. By this time she was in a wheelchair and so needed accommodation on one level. The toll house was originally two storeys on the canalside, three on the road side; the top two floors were collapsed into the ground floor under what is now the lawn. The original windows and doorway can still be seen at the lower level. [www.holidaycottages.co.uk](http://www.holidaycottages.co.uk) (search for *Canalside*)

## Golden Valley

If you are looking for caravan or camping sites you could try the one almost alongside the canal at Golden Valley, near the eastern portal of Butterley Tunnel.

[www.goldenvalleycaravanpark.co.uk](http://www.goldenvalleycaravanpark.co.uk) **T**

# THE END OF THE PINXTON ARM

By Hugh Potter

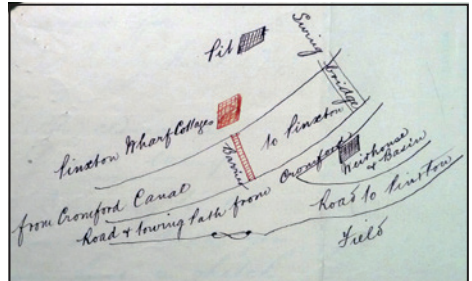
The first records we have of problems with the Pinxton Branch date from a miners' strike of 1892 when Mr Salmond of Pinxton Collieries (who had closed all roads to the pits) put some planks across the canal to give access to the occupiers of some cottages without using the closed roads. As owners of the canal, the Midland Railway claimed there was no need for the planks as there was a swing bridge a little higher up which "was fixed up by us at a considerable expense on purpose to accommodate Mr Salmond, and since it was fixed, it has always been kept swung over on their side so that it cannot be used."

This would be what was known as Palmerston Bridge 13, the remains of which are still in situ.

Mr Salmond offered to remove them if MR insisted but went on to say "I am very pleased to think that some interest is at last being taken in this canal for it is in a very disgraceful condition and we are unable to use it as we desire because the boats cannot get up, there not being sufficient depth."

In June 1892 Tom Wright, "Sole Agent for the Pinxton Collieries", wrote to MR saying the canal at the Pinxton end badly needed dredging which MR had been previously told but done nothing. In September 1892 MR said it would be done after work at Golden Valley and top lock was finished.

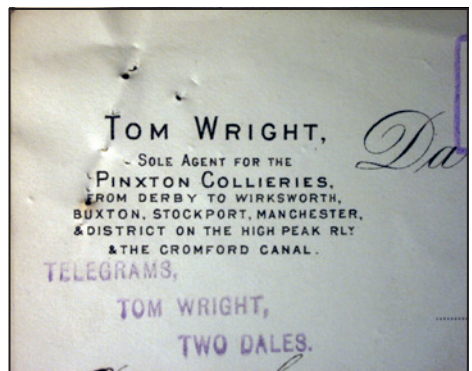
Then in May 1893, Pinxton Coal Co stated "We understand from the boatmen that it is impossible to fetch coal from Pinxton owing to the canal being so full of mud. You see we have been held out of a great deal of trade through the giving way of the Tunnel, and now that is completed, we are as bad off with the mud." The tunnel had been closed through mining subsidence since 1889.



*A sketch of the location of the planks put in by Mr Salmond in relation to the swing bridge.*

At a Pinxton Parish meeting at end 1893 several cases of typhoid were reported caused by, amongst other things, the "insanitary condition" of the canal.

In July 1906, national canal carriers Fellows Morton & Clayton (FMC) were complaining about the poor state of canal below Pye Bridge. Then traffic was completely stopped from 7th to 11th August because of water shortage. ►



*Letterhead for Tom Wright at Two Dales, who complained about problems with coal delivered by canal.*

In 1907, representatives of the Trent Navigation Co and FMC followed a wide boat laden with 42 tons attempting the journey from Pinxton. The boat struggled with lack of depth at various places. Having started from Pinxton at 12.50pm, it arrived at top lock at 3pm but the boatman had stayed at Pye Bridge 30 minutes for dinner [obviously they were in no hurry!].

It is not clear if any dredging had been done in the interim, but at least the canal was passable.

**Implications of Closure**

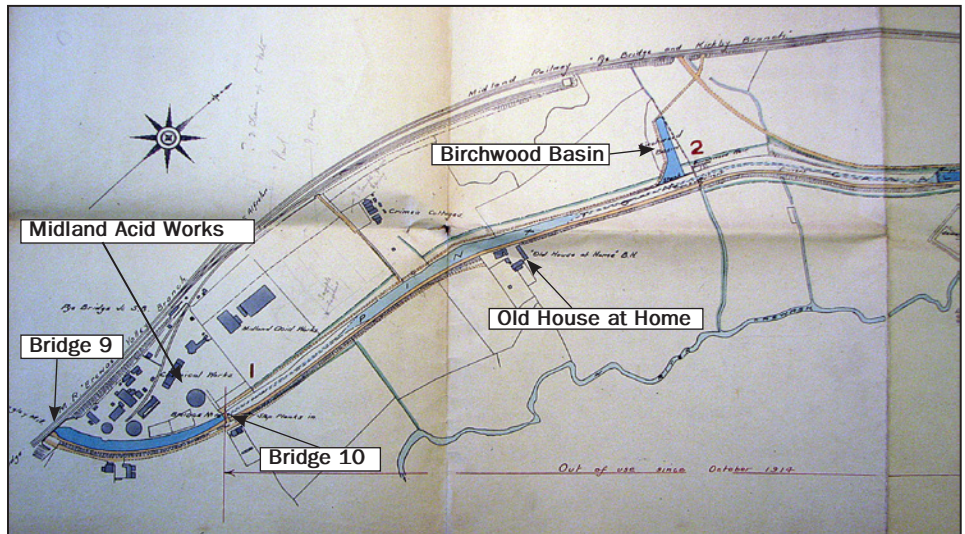
Then in February 1921 the implications of closing the canal between Bridge 10 (Kempson's chemical works) and the terminus, a length of almost a mile, were considered. The numbers of the paragraphs relate to the maps.

1. The Midland Acid works alongside the canal north of Bridge 10 had only been there a short time and had never used the canal for traffic.

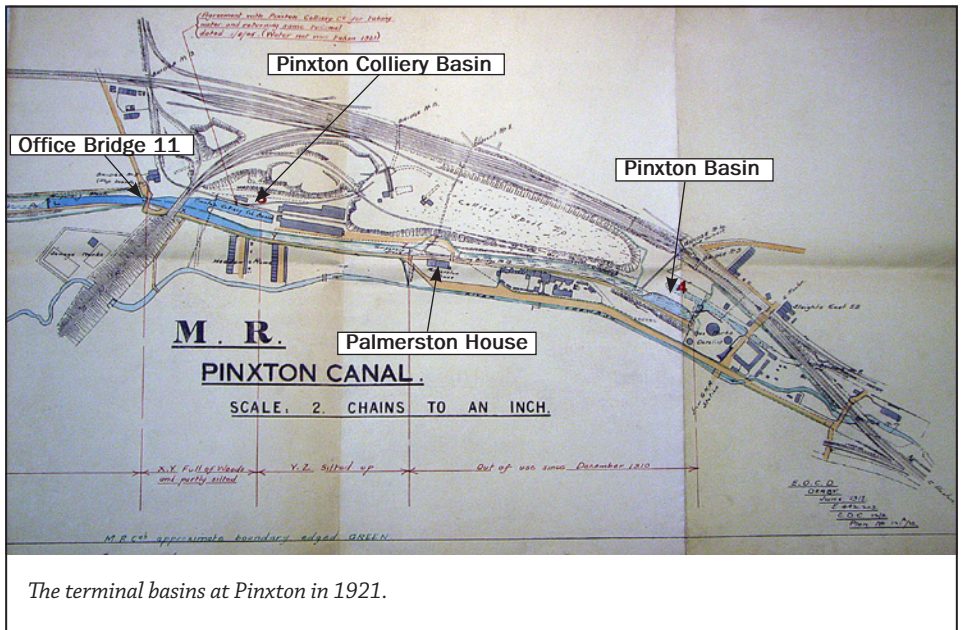
- 2. Birchwood Basin was formerly served by Butterley Co sidings to load coal into barges but the sidings had gone, and since 1914 the basin had been stanked off from the canal by a timber stank.
- 3. Pinxton Colliery Basin was the only place where any use might be made of the canal, as ►



*A group from Northern Canals Association examine Palmerston Swing Bridge 13 in 2009.*



*A detailed 1921 plan of the canal from the railway bridge to beyond Birchwood Basin.*



The terminal basins at Pinxton in 1921.

there was still a siding alongside it. But traffic to or from this basin had been of the very smallest amount during the last few years prior to 1914 when the canal was “closed for repairs”. No coal was being turned at the Pinxton Colliery close by and the company no longer used the water from the basin for steam purposes.

4. Finally, the sidings at the canal terminus had been removed and the former gas works was “quite derelict”.

The report went on to say “Owing to coal settlements etc this length is now partly filled with water at different levels, and partly with rank weed. At the Pinxton end in particular it is in summer very insanitary and the local authorities might complain of its state if left permanently as it is today.”

The towpath from Palmerston House to Bridge 11 was a public vehicular road maintained by MR. There were two brick bridges 10 and 11 and a swing bridge “which could probably be pulled down and their place taken by causeway improving the approaches and ridding us of their maintenance”.

## Jump to the Sixties

We have no documentation after that until an Inland Waterways Redevelopment Advisory Committee Report of 1960–63 which declared the canal in “advanced decay” and a “disgusting state” with the southern part containing some water and the northern part partly infilled. The branch’s use as a road and to lay a gas main had been rejected and the elimination cost was estimated at £15,000. However this doubled owing to conditions imposed by Derbyshire County Council.

Presumably this work was carried out (apart from at the basin, restored by DCC) as the canal is now infilled and largely dry from its junction with the main canal by Codnor Park Reservoir through to the Midland Railway Bridge 9, beyond which its route was later destroyed completely by the Smotherfly opencast site.

However, as its route is still intact and crossed by only one lowered road bridge (Fletcher’s Row Bridge, Nottingham Road), its future restoration would be relatively simple in engineering terms. ■



# BUTTERLEY IRONWORKS TRUST

## An overview of what is happening above the Tunnel

The company originally founded as Outram & Co in 1790 by Benjamin Outram and Francis Beresford became the Butterley Company in 1807, following Beresford's death in 1803 and Outram's in 1805. In its long 219-year life many iconic bridges, structures and machines were built and millions of tons of coal, iron ore and limestone were mined, placing it at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution during the 19th century, its fame continuing throughout the 20th century.

The Company closed in 2009 and most of the site's buildings built in the 20th century were demolished. It remained in administration until 2015 when it was bought at auction by Aquarius Estates Ltd, a London-based property developer apparently without full appreciation of the historical importance of the site. Two structures on the site, the Blast Furnace Wall and the tunnel's Wide Hole and Wharf, are Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Additionally there are two Grade II listed buildings with several others adjacent, also classified as 'listed' as being in the curtilage of the other two.

A local company, Godkin Holdings Ltd, are negotiating a long-term lease with the owners for the remaining buildings. They have jointly submitted a hybrid planning application to AVBC to develop the site for housing and light industrial and commercial use. This was conditionally approved at AVBC's planning board meeting on 28th September 2020. The board did however state that as part of the planning approval, the blast furnace wall's repair and subsequent maintenance must be carried out as part of a Section 106 agreement which specifies the repairs and funding required to carry it out and for future maintenance.



Both Butterley Ironworks Trust and Friends of Cromford Canal have a common interest in preserving the heritage of the site. FCC has a long term ambition to reinstate the whole length of the canal, probably the most challenging part being the reopening of the Butterley

Tunnel. BIT has recently produced a short report (see the Butterley Ironworks Trust section at [www.rdht.org.uk](http://www.rdht.org.uk)) which identifies the location and timeline for three generations of furnaces built between 1791 and the last decades of the 19th century.

The report identifies four potential sites considered to be worthy of closer examination by a small amount of excavation work, including the shaft down which the hot blast furnaces' cooling water was returned to the canal, entering through an adit just to the west of the entrance to the Wide Hole. Its position, located in the former No.1 Foundry floor, is clearly marked on a relatively recent site map (circa 1950).

Butterley Ironworks Trust is a Registered Charity, whose broad aim is to nationally/internationally secure the heritage features of the Ironworks site, part of the vision being to utilise the latest virtual reality technology to achieve it. Talks are already underway with Derby University about the best way to approach the project.

A recent Crowdfunding appeal to raise money to pay for professional services to develop a business plan achieved the magnificent total of £11,500 in just two months, indicating the level of external support for the Trust's objectives.

Progress may be slow but things are gradually moving forward, so watch this space – and our Facebook page!! ■

# MYSTERY TUNNEL HUT

## Hugh Potter takes a closer look



*The partly cleared entrance to the hut showing a brick arch above the door lintel, which comprises two sections of railway rail side by side. There is a substantial hinge top right, a fastening ring middle left, and inside is the curious concrete plinth.*

*Photo: Nigel Downes*

An email from Nigel Downes asked a question that I have never been asked before about the small brick building by the towpath, almost hidden in the undergrowth, near the west portal of Butterley Tunnel.

Nigel wondered what it was for. So do I! On closer examination the structure, which is only 7ft by 5ft, is unusual in having a brick-vaulted roof but does not appear on any maps or plans. Inside is a large mass-concrete plinth which may well be later than the main brick building.

By rights, so close to the tunnel, it ought to be a leggers' hut as the leggers waiting to assist boats through the tunnel would have needed somewhere to shelter. The tunnel closed in 1900, the hut is pretty small but sturdily built, and there was a tunnel keeper's house just above the portal, so it seems more

likely that leggers would assemble there – or in the Gate Inn just along the canal!

There was once a second hut, with flat roof, nearer the tunnel, which may well have succumbed to the building of the A38 across the portal. It appears in many photos in the 1950s and '60s but none show our arch-roofed hut. Pat Morriss recalled: "I was always told as a youngster that this was a carbide store for lighting the tunnel. The chap that told me this was Lol Thorpe from Crich, the last of

the proper ex-LMS canal men. I have a vague recollection of it having a door of corrugated steel at one time." Indeed, a substantial door hinge is still embedded in the brickwork.

Carbide was certainly used for lighting during repairs to the tunnel's Wide Hole; in 1915 an account of the work itemised the cost of carbide as £16 (well over £1,000 today, so a fair quantity). In days before efficient batteries and LED lights, it was widely used as a reliable source of light. Water was dripped slowly onto calcium carbide to produce acetylene which burnt with a bright light. In view of its vulnerability to water damage, dry storage was essential and this may well have been the purpose of the hut.

But other readers may have different suggestions, in which case please send them to the Editor. ■



[www.cromfordcanal.org](http://www.cromfordcanal.org)