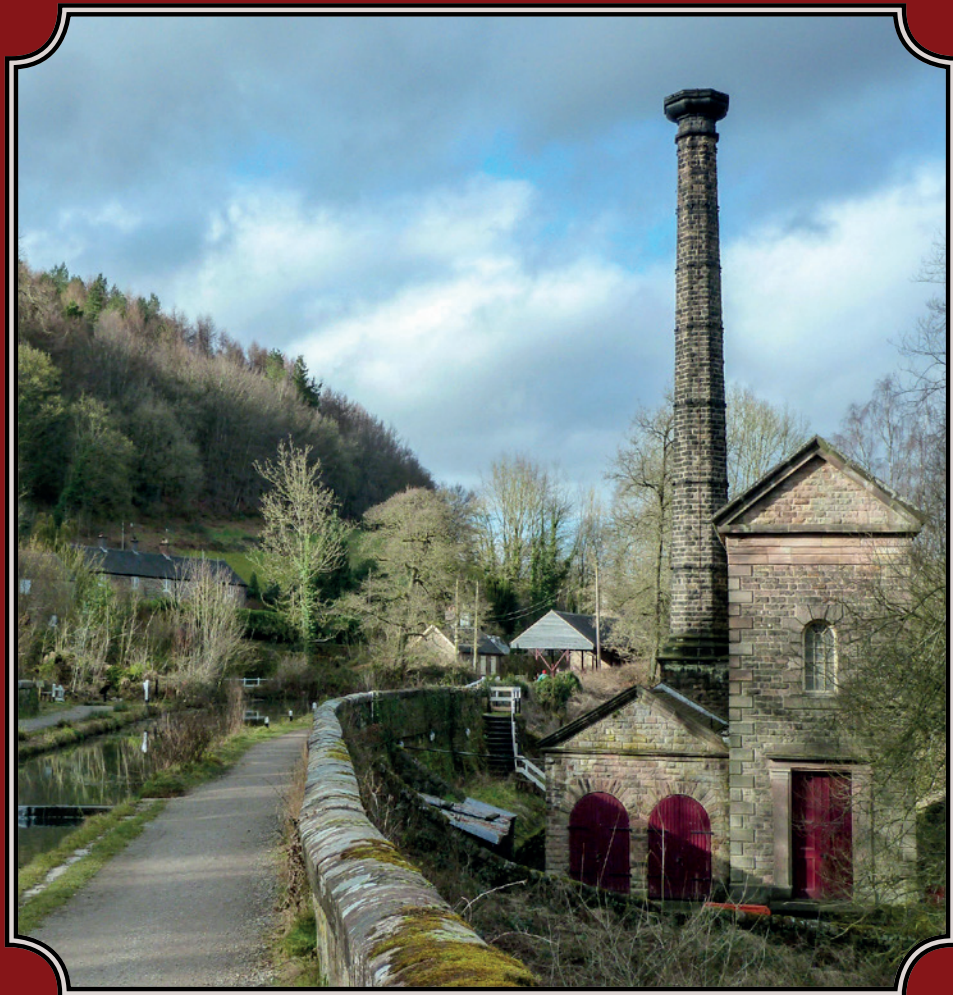


# THE PORTAL

Issue 80 - Spring 2022

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Friends of the Cromford Canal

Registered Charity No. 1164608

# FRIENDS OF THE CROMFORD CANAL

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## Front Cover

Deserted in the February sunshine, Leawood Pump will be a hive of activity once again when it reopens at Easter.

## Back Cover

Possibly the most momentous achievement of FCC in the last 20 years is the establishment of the passenger boat operation between Cromford and High Peak Junction using *Birdswood*.

**Top:** To enable *Birdswood* to run, the canal needed to be dredged and here a contractor's 'Truxor' is launched into the canal in March 2013 as part of a suction dredging programme. Almost ten years later and it is ready to be dredged again, although we are pleased to learn that Derbyshire County Council is acquiring its own Truxor.

**Bottom:** As a result, *Birdswood* could be launched into the canal after a road journey from Langley Mill in July 2013 – and attracted quite a crowd!

**The copy date for the next issue is 10th May 2022**

## 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

## Hugh Potter looks back over the last 20 years

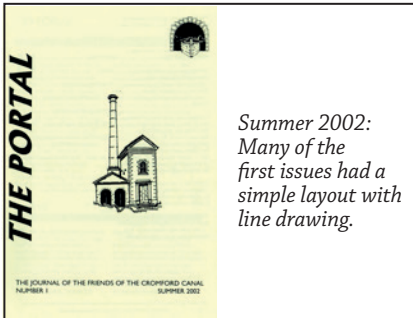
When you look back through the front covers of *Portal* since the first issue, you appreciate not only how desk-top publishing and commercial printing has changed, but also just how much FCC has achieved in two decades. So in this issue, I have taken a random selection of old covers and added a brief note as to what they portray. I hope you find it interesting and that they will stir memories that you will share with others through writing to *Portal*.

Over the 80 issues there have been just three editors: Brian Dominic (2002–2007), Mike Harrison (2008–2017) and myself from 2017. It's always a pleasure to put together, although sometimes it can be a struggle to fill the space, so please do take pity on the poor editor and send in words and/or pictures of what you have been doing and what you have

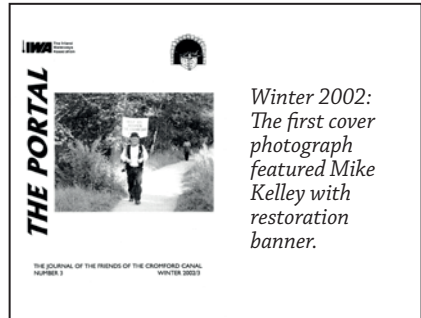
seen along our canal.

But before you take a look at the covers, I'd like to thank member Andy Greenwell of Northwich for writing in about our latest achievement, the restoration of Brown's Swing Bridge at High Peak Junction:

"Congratulations to you (and DCC) for what looks like a very nice piece of work. I have been most interested in the details that have been published in *Portal*, and appreciate some of the difficulties, having been slightly involved in swing bridge rebuilds in the 1980s on the Droitwich Barge Canal. I'm sure the many walkers who use the bridge will appreciate it too, and the future visitors to the newly restored Aqueduct Cottage visitor centre a little further along the canal. Best wishes for the future." **T**



*Summer 2002:  
Many of the  
first issues had a  
simple layout with  
line drawing.*



*Winter 2002:  
The first cover  
photograph  
featured Mike  
Kelley with  
restoration  
banner.*



*Autumn 2008:  
Brian Blessed  
starts off our  
sponsored walk  
from Langley  
Mill.*



*Spring 2010:  
Boats are  
launched  
to dredge  
the canal at  
Whatstandwell.*



*Summer 2011:  
Brown's Bridge  
is lifted for  
replacement –  
that didn't last  
long!*



*Spring 2013:  
Hurray! The canal  
is being dredged to  
allow Birdwood  
to operate.*



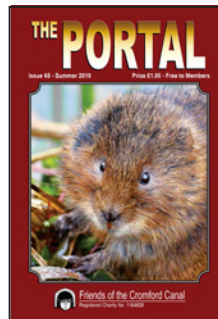
*Summer 2013: A  
big advance for  
FCC as Birdwood  
is launched at  
Cromford y Mill.*



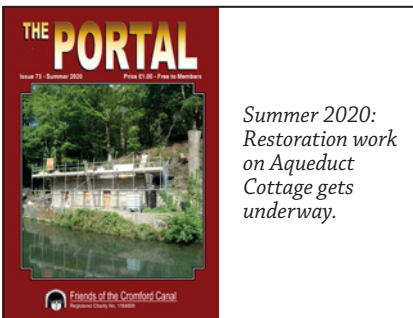
*Spring 2016:  
The work party  
gets the publicity  
it deserves for  
excellent work.*



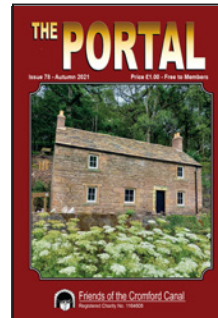
*Autumn 2017:  
Birdwood  
carries coir rolls  
to be fitted to the  
canal edge.*



*Summer 2018:  
Wildlife is so  
important on the  
canal and water  
voles are cute!*



*Summer 2020:  
Restoration work  
on Aqueduct  
Cottage gets  
underway.*



*Autumn 2021:  
Aqueduct Cottage  
is restored to its  
former glory.*

# CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

By David Martin



By the time you receive this edition of the *Portal* we shall finally have been released from all of the Covid restrictions after just short of two years that will have passed since 23rd March 2020. How that time has flown by. We in the FCC are about to celebrate our own historic event. It is twenty years ago this March that the Friends of the Cromford Canal was formed on 13th March 2002.

A year before this event Mike and Val Kelley had met up with Howard and Sheila Smith to form a subcommittee of the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association. These four became the first members of the FCC, numbers 1-4. This sub-committee was to look after the interests of the Cromford Canal and operated for about a year until it was decided to launch the FCC. The first public meeting was held at Ironville Church Hall and the name the Friends of the Cromford Canal was born.

There have been five Chairmen to date: Mike Kelley, Patrick Morris, Matthew Rogers, with Mike Kelley serving as Vice Chair, and then my predecessor John Baylis, along with many other dedicated committee members and loyal hard-working volunteers. I would like to pay tribute to them for all of their dedication and hard work over the last twenty years in keeping this volunteer organisation going, because without that vital volunteer support the FCC and all of its endeavours and aspirations would never have been possible.

Today the FCC runs four separate committees which conduct the charity's affairs. The Boat Committee looks after our world-famous trip boat operation on *Birdswood* along the Cromford section. The Strategic Restoration

Committee considers the future planning objectives of the charity.

The Construction Planning team is solely concerned with the current planning application on the Beggarlee Extension project at Langley Mill. Finally, above all of those are the trustees who try to

ensure that not only do we get the best value for money but also that the charity is run in a proper and correct manner according to the Charity Commission's guidelines.

Outside of all that we have now have two websites: one for the charity, and one dedicated to trip boat *Birdswood* - [www.birdswood.org](http://www.birdswood.org) - which starts running trips at the beginning of April. Over one hundred volunteers dedicate their time to the boat operation. Others on the weekly work parties managed by our current Vice Chairman John Barker carry out maintenance projects on all parts of the canal throughout the year.

We also run our social events at Ironville Church Hall every third Monday with talks on a wide and varied range of subjects. Hugh Potter our Archivist has produced some excellent books in the last couple of years; *The Cromford Canal*, *Cromford Wharf*, *The Leewood Arm*, and also our latest revision of the *Walker's Guide* are all available online from our website [www.cromfordcanal.org](http://www.cromfordcanal.org).

We also now have a Facebook page, Twitter account, quarterly e-newsletters, and the facilities for any of our goods and services to be purchased online, managed eloquently by Richard Handley. This all needs setting up, constantly updating for security and managing. We are currently urging all of our members old and new to change to Direct Debit ►

for paying their annual subscription, so that we can continue to send you the excellent Portal in a paper version. You can find out how to do this by emailing us on: [fccfees@ cromfordcanal.org.uk](mailto:fccfees@ cromfordcanal.org.uk). Your continued support and assistance in this matter is greatly appreciated.

As you can imagine, it all takes some managing and there are also still plenty of

opportunities for new volunteers in a whole range of subjects to help us keep this great charity going. So if you feel like giving us a helping hand, even if it's only for a couple of hours a month, please do get in touch; you will always be most welcome. On behalf of the trustees, I wish you all a happy healthy year ahead and a great big Happy 20th to the Friends of the Cromford Canal! 🇬🇧



*Back to the beginnings. Howard Smith, Stewart Simm (British Waterways), John Baylis, Val and Mike Kelley at Cromford Wharf on 7th March 2002 during an official visit from British Waterways to look at the canal just a few days before FCC was officially formed.*



*Pat Morriss addresses the crowds at the official launch of Birdswood during the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site Discovery Days on 3rd November 2013. Matthew Rogers watches on.*

# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

By Yvonne Shattower

Well, here we are in 2022; each year we say we hope that it will be a good year for the 'Friends', and then something happens which spoils it all (like Covid-19). But this year we are starting off with a totally different policy for running *Birdswood* and we have the Beggarlee Extension fund-raising to get our teeth into, so we are looking forward to a happy and profitable year.



their work. We will have a bar, tea & coffee and a raffle as usual. As this is a statutory meeting, admission will be free, leaving you more to spend on our sales stand.

Information on our other spring meetings is given elsewhere in this Portal and will also be found on our web site and Facebook page. If you can display a poster

advertising our talks, we can arrange to get a print-friendly version to you – the wider the advertising the better.

Mentioning raffles, we are always very grateful for any donations of good raffle prizes as these make it so much more attractive to customers, so if you have any unwanted gifts or surplus new items we would be delighted to have them.

Several members have contacted me to ask if it is essential to change their FCC subscription payment from cheque or Standing Order to Direct Debit – and the answer is no, it is not essential, but it will make it much easier for us to make sure that all members pay the correct subscription amount which we cannot do with members paying by Standing Order. It is however very important that, if you do change, you cancel any existing Standing Order or you will pay two lots of subscriptions. It is also worth mentioning that life members do not have to pay annual subscriptions, although any extra donations are always welcome.

It was really good to be able to get back to our monthly meetings at Ironville and see all our regulars there. Our Annual General Meeting will be held there on 25th April; please note that this is one week later than our usual 'third Monday' as that is Easter week, and therefore a Bank Holiday. As always you will have a chance to find out more about our plans for the restoration of the canal this year, be able to elect new trustees and quiz the existing trustees on

We are very grateful that Paul and Janet Barrass who have stepped into the breach and have taken on the task of Sales Officers and are bringing a selection of items to the meetings. They are also dealing with enquiries for postal sales for our books and other items, and we very much enjoyed their talk last month on 'My Mother had one of Those'; the embarrassing thing for me was that not only did my mother have one – I had one as well! Many thanks to both of you. It is hoped that they will be able to take the sales stand to various events throughout the year thereby getting our project better known and swelling our membership numbers, so do look out for them if you are attending local events. ■



# BEGGARLEE EXTENSION

## John Boucher reports on progress

Once again, there is not very much to see on the ground, but an awful lot has happened behind the scenes.

Back in December we got the finished Geotechnical Report, which has released a lot of dependant activities. Foremost, it has enabled technical discussions to be resumed with Derbyshire Highways on the effect of our flood compensation area on the stability of the A610 road embankment. It has in fact shown that the bank is sufficiently stable to avoid the need for a gabion retaining wall at its base – a relatively simple regrading of the bank will suffice. Updated design for formal approval by DCC is now in progress.

It has also shown that the depth of the earlier opencast excavations on the line of the canal is more than previously thought, and will have probably removed all traces of the original canal bed. This should enable the required archaeological work to be simplified, so the Written Scheme of Investigation required

under the planning approval can now be completed. Soils samples were also taken and tested to look for contamination. The fill in the old bed alongside the former wharf is slightly contaminated, but not so much it can't be dealt with under normal earthmoving processes on site.

In addition, finalised versions of the Landscape & Environmental Management Plan and the Water Vole Protection Plan have also been received. We are thus now almost ready to apply to the Local Planning Authorities for discharge of the pre-start planning conditions, and hopefully this will have been done before you receive this *Portal*. The LPAs require at least two months to consider and give their approvals; however, before we start we shall require a licence from Derbyshire County Council to commence work on their land, which may unfortunately take longer to obtain.

In the meantime, it has been noted that Himalayan Balsam has been spotted on an adjoining area to the flood area, and it is necessary to check for it on our site. John Barker and his work parties are therefore in the process of setting out this area of the site and searching for signs, and if necessary taking measures to eradicate it.

At a higher level the Trustees have engaged consultants to assist with fund raising and land purchase, and are also looking to appoint a project manager, so we can be in a position to arrange contracts for the various works in due course. ■



*The former Barber Walker colliery railway bridge through which the new canal will pass under the A610.*

# THE FINAL LEG

## Ron Common looks forward to Aqueduct Cottage opening later this year

Witnessing the installation of the new window frames in the cottage, back in June 2021, was a high point in the project. To my mind, this was the actual moment we 'saved' Aqueduct Cottage. The building was watertight, safe and secure. I think we also achieved a good likeness to the original cottage too.

However, few would be aware that it was also the moment when the project temporarily ran out of money. Covid and unexpected technical issues with the building increased costs which meant Derbyshire Wildlife Trust needed to raise more funds to finish the interior.

Once again, we reached out to the Friends of Aqueduct Cottage community. DWT was seeking to raise £2,000 matched funding for a £20,000

grant application to Tarmac Landfill Communities Fund.

We had a brilliant response to the Crowdfunder campaign which raised £2,600 within a fortnight! This allowed DWT to submit their application and at the end of September Tarmac confirmed that it had been successful! We could now press on with the final leg of the restoration.



*Aqueduct Cottage, then and now, showing the remarkable restoration of a building that many thought was lost forever.*

September was also the month we started planting the north garden at the cottage. Rosie Stewart, one of our volunteer team, designed the planting scheme which was approved by DWT. All the plants were donated by members of the public, some of whom helped out with the planting. ►



*Artists' painting day.*

As some were having fun in the garden, other volunteers received training on lime-mortaring from Andy Lawson of Limecraft. This enabled us to tackle the pointing of the



*The north garden begins to be planted.*



*In the wash house! Rebuilding the small outbuilding next to the cottage.*

walls in the activity room. Originally, we had intended to plaster these walls but, having raked out the old mortar, we noticed how attractive the original stonework was and decided to leave it un-plastered.



The revised plan is to point and paint three walls (to lighten the room) and leave one wall unpainted as a feature, to show the colour of the original stone.

Using the skills learned, our volunteers also took on the rebuilding of the wash house (the small outbuilding next to the cottage). Over the winter, the team made great progress in both areas. ►



*Progress on the upper floor.*



*A typical interior wall before lime mortaring.*



*Mike Kelley's interpretation of the cottage in winter.*

Also, during September two (of the four) volunteer artists, Ruth Gray and Mandy Jane Ahlfors, who produced the colourful paintings mounted on the cottage in 2017, organised an artists' painting day at the cottage. It was a fun reunion and Ruth hopes to organise another *plein-air* painting event in the summer.

November also brought that lovely blanket of snow which provided an ideal opportunity to photograph the cottage, with its newly refurbished exterior, in a winter scene. Needless to say, the best of the photos will be used as prints for Christmas cards later in the year.



*After lime mortaring. One of the interior walls will be left unplastered to show the original stonework.*

On 8th December 2021, the Friends of Aqueduct Cottage Facebook group reached its fifth anniversary. The page was originally set up in response to the many visitors we had asking about the cottage as we were clearing the trees, back in November 2016.

Today, there are over 3,400 members following the project from 40 countries around the world. The community has raised over £28,000 towards the restoration and there have been numerous donations of materials, services, and expertise thanks to the reach of the FB page.

### **The Eaton Family Connection**

Skipping forward to January 2022, the 1921 census was published. (Records from 100 years ago are published every 10 years.) ►



*A delightful photograph of Ann Eaton (left), who lived at the cottage from 1883 until at least 1921, with some of her family posed by the canal.*



*A Christmas card scene – possibly literally.*

The census confirmed that Ann Eaton and members of her family were still living at the cottage in 1921. We now have the census records of the cottage's occupants from 1851 to 1921. We also know, from the 1946 sale particulars of the cottage, that the Eaton family were still tenants in 1946.

Recently, I received a letter from one of the family descendants who confirmed that Selena Eaton and her new husband moved into the cottage with her parents, Anne and Joseph Eaton, in 1883.

We still need to confirm the occupants between 1921 and 1936, but the indications are that the Eaton family lived there for over 60 years, the longest of any family during the cottage's 170 years occupied.

It's sometime said that Aqueduct Cottage is the most photographed building on the Cromford Canal. Many have painted it too and it was an absolute delight to see the latest of these from Mike Kelly, which he posted on our Facebook page at the end of January.

Mike's brilliant creation (and the many others I've come across) are a testament to the artistic appeal of the cottage.

Also in January we had an attractive

Victorian fire grate donated for the cottage. Although in need of a slight repair, this has now been done by one of our volunteers and we look forward to installing it in the parlour when the floor repairs are completed.

We are currently looking for a cast iron range for the kitchen fireplace. The intention is to fit a working range which can be used in the colder months, once the cottage is opened. We have a description of the original range from Fay

Bark, who lived at the cottage in the 1950s.

The work in progress this February included obtaining quotes for the supply and installation of the staircase and repairing the parlour floor using stone flags which have been donated. The repairs involve filling holes created by tree root damage.

We are also in discussion with FCC's work-party organiser John Barker regarding the installation of new handrails on the concrete footbridge, next to the cottage. I would be interested to know if anyone can remember when they were last there!

Work has also started on landscaping the front yard which will have a mixture of York stone pavers and gravel. In April, we hope to plaster the ground floor walls, and then paint throughout.

Some big jobs still remain, such as the pointing of the outside walls and re-building of the lean-to pantry, but these are all scheduled to take place during late spring.

With a bit of luck, we will manage to get them all done which will enable DWT to open the cottage to the public by the end of July/early August. Fingers crossed! **T**

# AN UPDATE ON THE CHARITY'S IT INFRASTRUCTURE

By Richard Handley

Over the last 18 months, work has been progressing behind the scenes on updating the Information Technology that underpins FCC. It was felt essential that as the charity moves into the next stage of its development, more efficient and resilient infrastructure was needed.



and recurrent donations can now be made by anyone in the world: we can even get free donations when people shop online! To date, we have raised over £1250 this way.

The commercial arm of the charity – basically our trip boat and merchandise

In May 2021 – after a 3-year gestation – we launched our new website. Not only is this a much cleaner, clearer repository for information about the charity and our canal, but we have also now included the ability to join FCC as a member plus provide donations to our cause direct from the website. Check it out if you haven't already: [www.cromfordcanal.org](http://www.cromfordcanal.org). **Google Analytics** on the website allows us to see what the most viewed pages are (and much more); intriguingly the Butterley Tunnel page is one of the top attractions!

Being able to communicate easily and securely is vital, and we now almost entirely use **Microsoft's Office 365 E1** service – a free suite of office software that includes hosted email, and secure cloud-based storage. Trustees and others are now storing all our key documents in a series of secure folders.

Moving the membership onto a platform that enables Direct Debit of subscriptions was something that we managed to introduce in the autumn of last year, and more than 25% of members who are on annual subscription rates are now on our **GoCardless** platform.

The ability to easily make donations to the FCC for our restoration causes was seen as being crucial, and the introduction of the '**GiveAsYouLive**' platform means that one off

sales – is now supported by **Stripe**, for online sales, and **iZettle**, for contactless 'in person' payment. Last year over 80% of trading income was received by cashless methods.

Being able to communicate with our audience – whether it be FCC members or the wider public – is key if we are to continue to draw support and interest in our activities. So early in 2020 we started to use Mailchimp, a free service for proactively distributing mass emails in a secure way. Our database of 800 email addresses has been assembled from a variety of means – including user self-subscription from links on our website. *Portal*, eNewsletters and other news is routinely disseminated this way and the platform allows us to monitor interest levels.

And finally, social media. We have full control of our **Facebook** group and **Twitter** presence and we regularly post interesting comment; the recent publicity about the Brown's Bridge renovation generated over 25,000 views! We have managed to double our Facebook following in the space of just over a year.

So the Friends of the Cromford Canal may be a 15-year-old organisation looking after a 200-year-old canal, but we now use leading edge/industrial strength IT support to help us manage our business. ■

# HOOPS TO JUMP THROUGH

By Mike Kelley

We all love to see our trip boat *Birdswood* gliding along the beautiful and historic Cromford Canal, but these things do not happen by themselves; they have to be made to happen.

In order to get this classic boat to give pleasure to the thousands of tourists and enthusiasts alike who have enjoyed this unique pleasure cruise, the 'back-room-workers' have been hard at work. Firstly there are the licences and permissions which have all to be in place, any of which, if refused, means we would not be allowed to operate. Derbyshire County Council have

to grant permission and issue us a licence to operate. Then there are Natural England and the Environmental Agency, who also have to grant permission, due to the canal being in a World Heritage Site and a nature reserve as well.

Then, because our boat carries more than 12 passengers, we come under the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA). Yes, here we are in the middle of England, 'furthest from the sea', sailing in two to three feet of water, and we come under the authority of a body who are more used to dealing with cross-channel ferries! The MCA have to issue us with a Passenger Carrying Licence, and this government body is not cheap. Obtaining this licence is very exacting, time consuming and expensive.

The MCA require all official documents to be in place (all of which have been written by FCC volunteers). Documents such as 'Safety Management Plan', 'Search & Rescue Document' (yes you read that right), 'Self



*Master 'mariner' Mike far from the sea on Birdswood.*

Assessment Records' and 'Risk Assessments'. Then on a yearly basis they want to see the 'Crew Training Records'.

Every year they will come to examine (survey) the boat, and our documents. Every two years their survey requires the boat to be lifted by crane for an Out-of-Water-Survey and every year for an In-Water-Survey. All of this requires a mountain of paperwork.

And there's more! Every Skipper or Master must obtain their 'Boat Master's Licence' (BML). In order to qualify for this they are required to attend

three separate courses and undergo an on-site test, carried out by MCA inspectors. For this the FCC pays out a total sum in the region of £800 for each and every person wanting to obtain their BML. This is why we must have dedicated personnel who are willing to stay with us for a minimum period as skippers of our boat. In this we have been very fortunate to have some wonderful people who are both willing and able to become a boat skipper of *Birdswood*. They have our deepest thanks. [As does Mike Kelley who masterminds all dealings with MCA - Ed.]

Boat crew are also our lifeblood; without them we would go nowhere. So if you are willing to give us a minimum of one day a month to volunteer as crew, please do so; we need you. Please, if you can, consider joining our crew, you will meet many wonderful people (and we need you now). Why not contact any of the personnel listed on the inside cover of this magazine and offer us at least one day a month during the season? ■

# A NEW VIEW OF BROWN'S BRIDGE

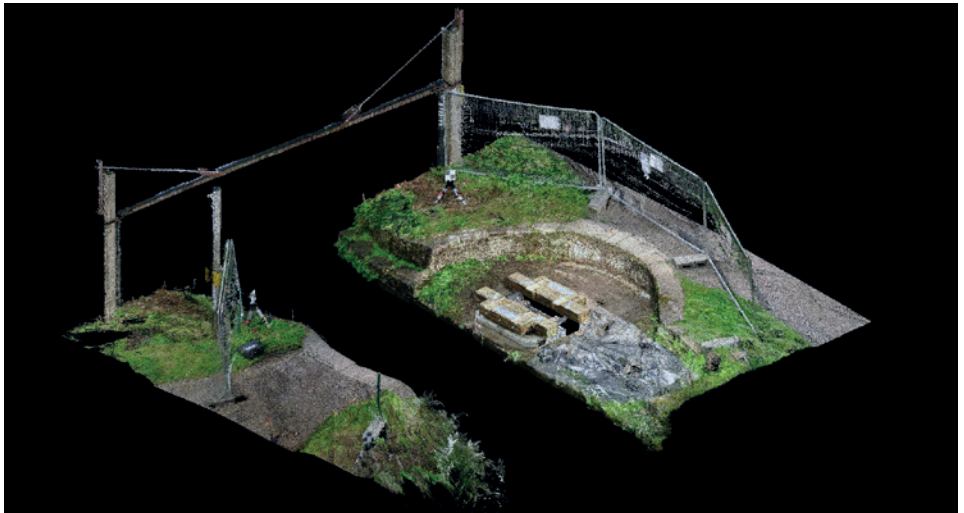
## John Boucher sees it from a different perspective

To help us get the levels right at Brown's Bridge we consulted a local firm of specialist surveyors, Terrameasurement Ltd, run by our member Andy Beardsley, to advise us. Because the bridge was being re-installed with the new bearing set dead level (the old one sloped upwards towards the west end), and the new bearing was thicker, raising the centre of the bridge almost 100mm, it was critical to get the underside levels accurate to set the bridge and to allow the deck to be tapered down at the east end to meet the existing ground level.

To achieve this, a first survey was required on the bridge before it was removed to check on existing twist in the deck, and to confirm the bridge was properly square on plan. The bridge deck was then removed, the timberwork strengthened and adjusted, while the new bearing was installed on the foundation block with additional supporting timbers fixed ready to receive the repaired deck. The new supporting timbers had to be

cut to the nearest millimetre to get it to the precise level required, but there was no way of calculating this until the existing timbers had been adjusted and strengthened and the new timbers installed in position on the bearing.

A second survey was required at this stage to pick up the precise levels, both on the new bearing and on the underside of the existing beams which were to sit on it, so that final adjustments could be made (to the nearest millimetre) to achieve the levels required. There was no opportunity for a trial run at this – we only had one go to get it right, which was where the very accurate surveying came in. Because of our critically tight programme we only had a window of two working days to get the results and Sim and Jan of Terrameasurement really performed with this, surveying on the Friday, processing the results over the weekend and providing me with the results on Sunday afternoon so I was able to issue final instructions to the contractor on Monday morning. ►



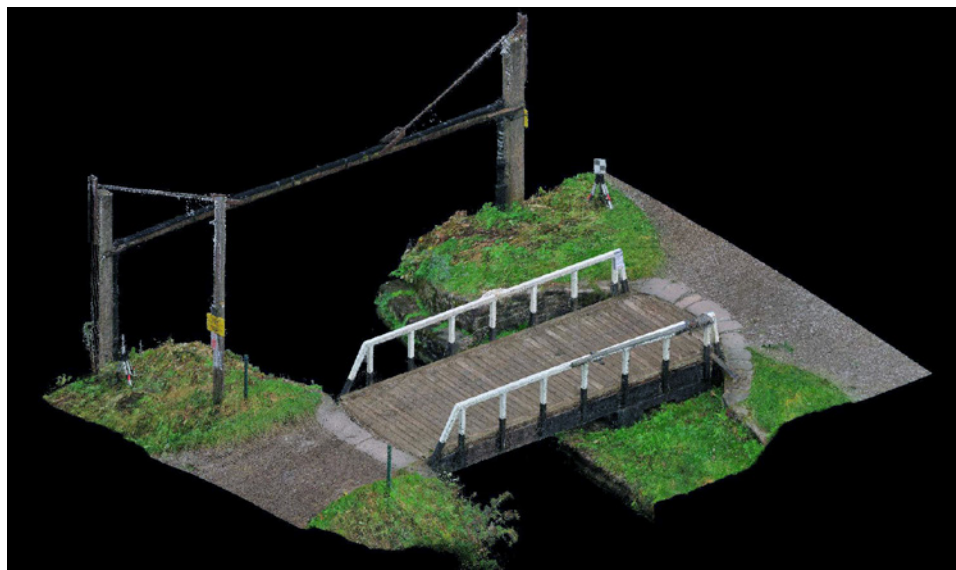


Andy and his team have previously worked for us elsewhere, most recently at Beggartlee. For Brown's Bridge he recommended that 3D laser scanning (also known as Lidar or Ground Based Lidar) be used to achieve the required accuracy, especially for the difficult to reach areas on underside of the main beams. 3D laser scanning is the ultimate method of spatially capturing a building, object or structure in fine detail. The reality of 3D laser scanning in heritage is that it accurately captures a subject as it is at the time of survey. This rich 3D data is then the ultimate archive, particularly if a subject is subsequently damaged or destroyed.

Members may remember Andy gave a demonstration of the techniques at one of our Ironville meetings, and he has now developed it to perfection both for modern applications such as accurate checks on railway and road alignments and building works. He has also undertaken many heritage projects for Historic England and other leading conservation bodies for surveys of historic structures, a good example being Dudley Castle. Local examples are surveys and subsequent 'video fly-throughs' of the Lumsdale Mills and Heage Windmill.

Although we only required levels for the timber, the method of scanning used picked up additional details of the bridge and surrounding ground, which will be useful for future reference. A conventional plan showing precise details of the historic surround masonry is a useful record, but a further by-product is the ease at which a picture can be produced. The attached views before work started, and at the second survey with the new bearing fixed, are more akin to draughtsmen's isometrics than photographers' perspectives, but I hope readers find them interesting.

Of further interest, the plan shows the position of a pair of stop plank grooves believed to have been fitted by the original Cromford Canal Society, but also detects shallow recesses in the canal side stonework somewhat reminiscent of the grooves for Brindley Gates to be found under several of the Cromford Canal bridges. I have never heard of Brindley gates being fitted beneath swing bridges before, but why not? A chance perhaps for an archaeological dig to check it out next time the canal is drained in the area? **T**



# WORK PARTY REPORT

By John Guyler



*Attacking the rampant vegetation at Brickyard (aka Lockwood's) Bridge, Sawmills. Note the missing parapet stones, which are still to be found..*

A few weeks ago, at High Peak Junction, several of us were told very firmly by a man walking his dog, that volunteering was a “mug’s game”. Never volunteer for anything was his message, always make sure you get paid for what you do. He didn’t get an argument in reply, but he continued to walk his dog where all the litter had been picked up, the vegetation on the towpath wall had been cut back, and the bridge he had crossed had just had a repair project managed by a voluntary organisation. Apart from that it’s a “mug’s game”.

It’s surprising (well it’s not really surprising because the enthusiasm of the people involved is great), how many volunteers come back week after week to work hard and feel satisfied at the end of sometimes a difficult or heavy day. They are not mugs in any sense of the word, but a group of folks who have very high

values and who like to contribute so that others can enjoy their surroundings. I don’t suppose the gentleman with his dog will read this article, certainly the dog won’t, but if he does and recognises himself, think on and read the article on volunteer hours and the value donated by volunteers of the FCC in 2021, elsewhere in this *Portal*.

I have commented on the lack of litter in the volunteer hours article and, on talking about it to others in the work parties, the answer is probably because other groups and individuals are also picking litter up. I have been told of a lady at Golden Valley who goes out twice a week litter picking. The worst area for our work parties is Pinxton Wharf to the weir. There is always fly tipping and litter along the length and at the weir; there used to be a problem around the angling section, but it seems better controlled now. ►

## Lower Hartshay

At Lower Hartshay, I am told that footfall is greatly increased since the first lockdown and the seats that were put in last year are well used. The work parties are now in the process of grubbing out the hedge bottom, for the replanting of hawthorn whips in early March. Small dead trees are being removed to allow the planters to get in to the hedge. There has been a lot of clearance of brambles and saplings by the group. Reed pulling is also a regular activity at Lower Hartshay.

## Sawmills

There have been several work parties at Sawmills, where the gauging narrows have been cleared and the channel up to the bridge is now very accessible. One job, that took a lot of hours was clearing around the four arched bridge. Originally, we were looking for the bridge coping stones. Several are missing off the bridge and we wondered if they had been pushed into the canal channel. It finished up with the whole area being cleared, but no such stones were found. I suppose the next step is to dig out the pile of rubble up underneath the bridge.



*The canal channel is almost lost in the undergrowth at Sawmills.*

volunteer hours makes interesting reading. The original job started February 2021, repairing the fencing near the Pinxton Arm Bridge, which had been damaged by the contractors working on the trees near the reservoir overflow.

Guess what, I am told the contractors have done it again around the same area. More unnecessary work. In the abandoned canal section at the reservoir, work has gone on to remove trees uprooted by high winds, which had fallen across or near the footpath. Work will be starting soon to repair the little bridge on the far side of the reservoir. One result of the seats being put in around the Res, is that visitors can now have a rest part way around and then continue all the way, instead of going so far and then going back to the car park.

## Cromford

At Cromford Wharf reed pulling has been the order of the day using the work boat near Lawn Bridge. Several boat loads of pulled reeds were unloaded and dumped. *Birdswood* brought the work boat down from High Peak Junction for us to use, and towed it back afterwards.



*The rather clearer channel at Sawmills after the clean up.*

## Ironville

At Ironville, work has now been completed on replacing and repairing the fencing all the way from Lock 3 to Codnor Park Reservoir – see the article on volunteer hours – the total

Four of us had an eventful few hours fetching the boat stands from Langley Mill boatyard, courtesy of Dan & Vicky the boatyard owners. Getting the stands out of the dry dock and loading them on to the ►

trailer was an effort. They were unloaded at Cromford Wharf with less distance to carry them, thankfully. The following day the stands were levelled and set true to each other, only for them to be moved again on the day *Birdswood* was lifted out of the water for inspection.

The FCC work parties and *Birdswood* crew combined to scrape the hull before the inspections. When *Birdswood* had been inspected and the hull painted, she was lifted back into the water, and it was time to get the boat stands back to Langley Mill and another heavy lift back into the dry dock.

### Elsewhere

At Pinxton wharf over several days the work parties cleared the opposite bank to the towpath with a strimmer and hard hand work.

At Whatstandwell and Sims Bridge, the work party cleared over fifty barrow loads of pulled reeds for disposal, which is very heavy work, and cut back a great deal of vegetation at Robin Hood.

At High Peak Junction there was a continuation of the reed and weed pulling, in the winding hole. At time of writing *Birdswood* is getting through and creating a channel which, it is hoped, will stay clear when trips start again in April.

If you would like to join us at the work parties, the volunteers are a sociable bunch; they look out for each other and are great to work with, so please contact John Barker [work@cromfordcanal.org.uk](mailto:work@cromfordcanal.org.uk). **T**



*Offside clearance work at Pinxton, opposite The Boat Inn.*



*Some heavy reed pulling to do at Pinxton.*



*There's a great sense of achievement at the work parties.*

# CONTRIBUTING TO THE CASH FLOW

## Richard Handley offers an update on FCC's trip boat and shop operations, and explains why more volunteers are needed

After the disaster that was 2020, where our heritage trip boat *Birdswood* cost the charity over £23,000 (in part due to employee costs) to deliver nearly zero service (apart from online merchandise), 2021 was a recovery year, even though Covid much restricted the services that we could offer

- We were unable to operate until June and only then with extremely restricted passenger capacity.
- From mid-July we were able to increase passenger capacity to two-thirds of our maximum.
- We only operated three days per week instead of four.
- The public at least initially were somewhat reticent in coming out and using our service.

On top of the above we had other challenges:

- The inoperability of Brown's bridge led to heavily discounted ticket prices.
- The retirement of the Arraslea horses meant a loss of a major attraction.

On the upside, last year we ended up delivering 22 private charters, ran 114 trips and carried 1,800 passengers in total – 1,500 of which were pre-booked. Our trading operations generated £18,500 of income – including £4,500 of online and wharf-side merchandise sales, which we estimate will mean that we will have contributed over £3,000 to the charity's cash reserves in 2021.

We have an active sub-committee of the charity that looks after the operation of the boat and shop and are now planning for the 2022 cruising season (albeit online merchandise sales have been ticking along throughout the winter months).

We successfully passed our biennial 'out-of-water' inspection (for the boat) by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency before Christmas and



*By bringing the Weighbridge shop at Cromford outside when weather permitted, Jan and Paul Barrass greatly increased the takings. Unfortunately they can only do Wednesdays, so we really need volunteers to open up at the weekend. It's great fun, and you get to meet all sorts of interesting people.*

are awaiting the imminent annual 'in-water' inspection. Mike Kelley has written an article in this edition of *Portal* with more details of these intrusive and costly inspections.

We already have 26 pre-booked charters for the boat and are planning on starting public cruising on 2nd April, running Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays until the end of October, and have recently opened our on-line booking slots for prospective passengers. Over 80% of last year's passengers were pre-booked and paid us by cashless methods.

We have taken another 12 months' lease on the shop at the end of the Gothic Warehouse at Cromford Wharf and are busy planning stocking levels for our merchandise sales.

So, fingers crossed, we hope to have a bumper trading season this year. We are now a 100% volunteer run operation, so we *need more volunteers!* Please get in touch if you would like to be involved in any way. ■

# HOW MANY HOURS IN A YEAR?

## John Guyler tots up the volunteer hours worked by FCC in 2021

The total direct FCC volunteer hours for 2021 was 10,116.5 with 979 travel hours, making the total including travel 11,095.5. If calculated, using the DerwentWISE structure of a 7-hour day, the value of FCC volunteer hours for 2021, is £101,917.5.

It is worth noting that the certification of the lime mortaring volunteers draws a much higher costing on the calculated daily rate, as do Masters on *Birdswood*, chain sawing, strimming, driving our dumper truck and any other jobs which requires certificated training.

Civil engineer volunteers working on the restoration projects, can qualify for a much higher daily rate, which can significantly increase the calculated yearly value in pounds.

This year, I have endeavoured to itemise more precisely the costing of the work being produced by our great bunch of volunteers, so the calculated value is more accurate. It has been proven that by being able to produce volunteer figures the FCC can negotiate certain projects for a reduced amount or free, against paying a large amount of money. If the volunteer hours are more closely recorded in each of the different groups, then we can achieve better things when it comes to applying for grants.

Individual volunteer hours of running the FCC are 3,670.5 with 231 travel hours, for positions such as Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer, Editor, Social etc.

Restoration accounts for 770.5 hours with 56 travel hours.

The total for restoration covered not only the main Strategic Restoration Committee and engineers' meetings, but the many hours on the phone, emails, producing line drawings of particular sections of the proposed new extension at Beggarlee, obtaining planning permission for

Year	Hours
2015	6,858
2016	10,785
2017	14,184
2018	18,159
2019	17,392
2020	7,429
2021	10,117
Total	84,923

*For reference the total number of direct hours worked over the last 7 years are given in the table above.*

necessary bore holes and drilling the bore holes, site visits for identifying the drainage pipes and recording the positions from the road, planning the flood area extension, identifying and dealing with land owners.

Meetings of Trustees, *Birdswood*, SRC and Engineers: 569 hours.

*Birdswood* business: 2,277.5 with 288.5 travel hours.

The *Birdswood* hours covered maintenance, crew and masters' training, crew hours spent on trips with passengers, and the shop. *Birdswood* was running with passengers only from June onwards, which caused a significant drop in crew hours. This was the second year when *Birdswood* not running has affected the volunteer hours significantly.

Work party: 2,727 hours with 398.5 travel hours. Total hours, including travel, for the different sections were: DCC 1,371; CRT 1,220; FCC, 556.▶

Total bags of litter were well down on previous years at 23 over all areas, mainly because earlier in the year there was very little litter being created.

Some of the projects completed by FCC work party teams:

- Lime mortaring, including the course, for which certificates were given to the participants: 148 hours.
- Repairing dislodged edging stones at Lock 5, Ironville: 79 hours.

- Repairing and replacing the fencing from Lock 3 at Ironville to the western end of Codnor Park Reservoir: 679 hours.
- Placement of three memorial seats at Codnor Park Reservoir, two seats and safety fencing at Lower Hartshay: 65 hours.
- Lock-keeper’s Garden, Lock 4, Ironville: 100 hours. Shirley and Steve Bullock together with Carole Hartley have worked the lock-keeper’s garden all year and the produce was donated to Age Concern. **T**

# IRONVILLE INFORMATION BOARDS

A new series of information boards has been put up in and around the locks at Jacksdale/ Ironville/Codnor Park. These explain the importance of the canal and the Butterley Company to the history of the area. The one in Jacksdale Community Centre car park shows a variety of short walks you can take to explore the locality. Look out for them next time you visit!



# WATER VOLES AT JACKSDALE

## By The Cromford Canal & Codnor Park Reservoir Group Volunteers

Did you know there is a thriving population of water vole on the Cromford Canal in Jacksdale? They are listed as endangered throughout the UK, are on the red list for conservation concern in England and are Britain's fastest declining mammal, disappearing from 94% of their former sites.



How special does that make it for us to be able to wander along our local canal and spot a water vole nibbling on the reeds or hear the heavy plop as one disappears under the water heading for its burrow or a safe hidey hole in the canal wall.

The water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) is the largest of our British voles; field and bank voles are much smaller. They are rat sized but easily distinguishable from rats, with a round face, small round ears, black beads for eyes and dark chestnut brown fur. The tail is half covered in hair and much shorter than a rat's tail.

Water voles are semi aquatic, living alongside water courses. Loss of wetland habitat and water pollution are some of the factors indicated in their decline. They excavate small burrows in the soft bankside verge leading to a labyrinth of tunnels and chambers at different levels, including some underwater entrances which provide a quick escape from predators. Evidence of their burrows can be seen along the canal path. They nibble the grass around the entrance creating a neat lawn at their front door and tunnels and runs are also visible within the reeds and on the water's edge.

They live on average for just 5 to 12 months. The breeding season is between March and May but can extend to June depending on the weather. During this period, they are busy producing 3-4 litters of around five young

each time. Climate change and warmer winters have seen earlier breeding behaviours; we think they may have started breeding in February this year. The young are born in underground nests and are blind and hairless. They soon grow and are weaned by 14

days old but are very vulnerable when they first venture out.

Water voles have many native predators: fox, otter, stoat, weasel, owls, herons, and pike, all species we celebrate and enjoy locally. This is the natural way of things, an ecosystem in balance and not a reason for the dwindling populations around the country. The presence of non-native American mink, however, has seen localised extinctions. They are one of the only predators that can follow the water vole into its burrow and can wipe out a population in a matter of weeks. However, the good news is we often find fresh otter spraint and footprints at the canal and have even caught a pair of otters on our wildlife camera. Whilst a few water voles may be predated by an otter, their presence and the marking of their territory can deter mink.

Having this precious mammal on our patch influences the way we manage the area; we want to provide optimum habitat to support the population and enable them to flourish. Their protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) means we need to consider the impact of our interventions on the local water vole population and ensure we do not cause harm or disturbance. For this reason, we do much of our work along the canal during the winter season.

Prolonged periods of flooding and of drought can be problematic for water voles, they love ►



areas of slow flowing water of different depths, so in the winter months you will see us pulling reeds, creating islands and rivulets to manage the water flow and create different habitats. This intervention also improves water quality and filtration and provides optimum conditions for fresh new reed growth and other emergent native vegetation such as water mint, rosebay willowherb and purple loosestrife, some of the water voles' favourite food. They need to eat 80% of their own body weight every day – a breeding female needs twice that amount – so we leave areas of bankside vegetation uncut, at least until the end of the breeding season.



*Photo: Maggie Campbell*

Lush edges of tussocky grasses, meadow sweet, nettles and horsetail provide further food options and vital protection from predators. Water voles tend to avoid areas overshadowed by trees, so we manage some of the trees on the bankside, but they will gnaw on the bark and roots of willow in and around the water's edge throughout the winter. They like to sit under the light shade of bramble, so we leave some bramble on the canal edge and let it creep into the water so they can eat the leaves and berries. They also love to nibble on apples that have fallen into the canal.

We often see water voles along the canal and many local photographers quietly and patiently wait for them to appear. However, to properly monitor the local population we

conduct twice yearly surveys. This includes recording sightings, if we are lucky, but we look for signs, including evidence of burrows, feeding stations and droppings. Feeding areas are identifiable from the tell-tale 45-degree angle on the reed or stem they have been nibbling on, with a neat pile of chewings nearby. Water vole poo is black and shiny, the shape and size of a tic tac. Surveys involve looking for latrines, which are small heaps of droppings often on a raised stone or muddy edge. They use these to mark their territories which range from 70m to 130m along the watercourse and they become very protective of their patch during the mating season. Counting and recording the number of latrines, burrows and feeding stations along the canal gives us some idea of the number of water voles present. Collecting this data twice yearly means we can check the effectiveness of our conservation work and monitor any local pressures on the water vole population. We regularly check water quality and keep a look out for evidence of American mink. We have found none so far so hopefully the otters are keeping them away.

The essential network of water corridors linking to the surrounding meadows, wet grassland and reservoir gives our local water vole population opportunities to move around and expand into new territories. Water voles are a flagship species, so providing and protecting habitat for them also benefits many other wetland species. The result is that our local area is teeming with rich and varied wildlife for us all to enjoy.

We are a group of dog lovers and know how much the area is valued for daily walks, but please support our efforts to protect the water vole by preventing your dog entering the water or disturbing their burrows, particularly during the breeding season when the young are vulnerable. A combined community effort will safeguard our water vole population and a stroll along the canal will continue to connect us with the wonderful nature on our doorstep for generations to come. **T**

# TWO COTTAGES AND A WEDDING

By Hugh Potter



I purchased this photograph recently on eBay as I recognised the house as being the lock house at Langley Mill, but I had no idea whose wedding it was nor why it was taking place there. I could only assume that one of the family lived in the lock house.

A post to the Facebook page of Heanor Local History Society almost immediately gave me a remarkable amount of information from Brian Meakin who said:

*“The picture was taken on the wedding day of Gertrude Elizabeth Lord and Leonard West, 18th May 1912. Gertrude was the daughter of Edward and Hannah Lord. Edward Lord (1858–1938) and Hannah Lord, née Clarke (1862–1936) had eight living children at the time: Mabel (1886–1973), James Clark (1889–1971), Amy (1891–1977), Annie (1893–1982), Evelyn (1895–1982), Charles Edward (1898–1874), Francis Burgess (1900–2003).*

*“So, to put some names to the photo I will start with the main row, left to right as you look at the picture: Evelyn Lord, James Clark (Jim) Lord, Mabel Lord, Leonard West, Gertrude Elizabeth Lord (married name West), Edward Lord, Hannah Lord and the girl on the end I believe to be Annie Lord. I am a little confused with the girl sitting at the front; it is believed to be Amy Lord but she looks a little young; she would have been around 20 at the time, so I am not so sure. One of the boys seems to be missing but I believe the boy standing at the back is Francis Burgess (Frank) Lord.*

*“Two of the sons and three of the daughters never married and all lived together at a general store at the bottom of Holbrook Street until they retired and moved to Eastwood. I used to visit them regularly with my mother in the 1950s and remember my great aunts talking of their childhood by the canal. They spoke of ►*

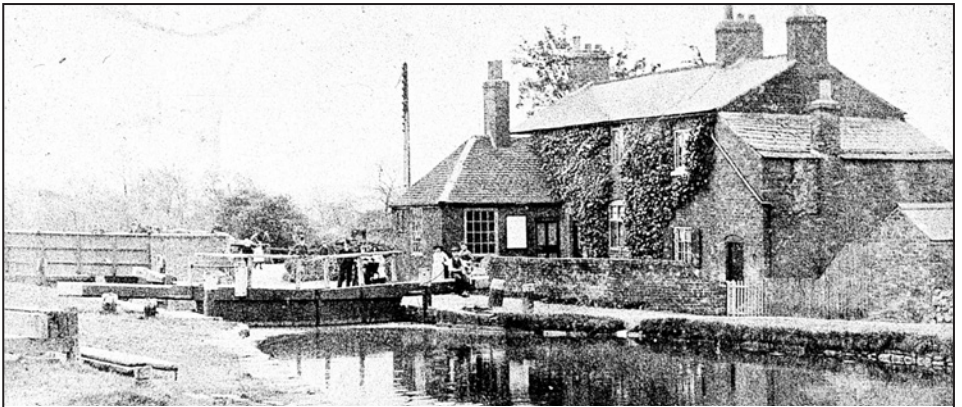


*The well-known photograph of the gateless lock with the cottages alongside, shortly before they were demolished. It is clear from this image that the original house had been extended on the right, then a two-storey 'lean to' was added which, by the time of this photograph, had been reduced to single storey.*

knowing many of the barges and having rides on their barges and of people skating on the canal one cold winter.

"Although they recalled living at the lock house I observed on the 1911 census that their address was actually given as the gauge house, the next entry to the lock house which housed the canal foreman. It seems that Hannah worked the lock and Edward worked at Langley

Mill Station as a railway clerk. Interestingly, I found a record of his appointment in the railway employment records. He was appointed in 1873 at the age of fifteen to work for the Midland Railway at Langley Mill, his occupation was given as boating clerk. Could this have been connected to the canal, and am I right in believing that the railway was responsible for the canal at that time?" ►



*Not the sharpest of images, but full of interest with a lot of people around the lock all looking towards the photographer, suggesting this is quite an early image. It shows the toll office with its notice board and the house ivy-clad. The two-storey 'lean-to' on the right is reduced to one in later photographs.*



*In 1954 Pat Saunders claimed his cruiser Mistress Mine was the first boat to reach Langley Mill for two years. On a fact-finding tour for the Inland Waterways Association with Mr C.F. Clements, they managed to get the boat through Langley Bridge Lock and as far as Lock 13. The two-storey extension can just be seen at the far end of the cottages.*



*A view from the south showing a second door into the toll office and the extension on the right reduced to one storey. The condition of the cottages here, with noticeboards and lifebelt holder (empty!) is very similar to the one depicted on page 35 of the last issue of Portal which had been taken in 1966.*



*A winter view of the cottages taken by Mick Carter in 1963 when he recalls being able to walk safely down the middle of the canal on the ice.*

the boats passing through. I have taken this opportunity to show some other photographs of this cottage which, sadly, was demolished around 1968/9, almost immediately after which the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association began restoration of the lock.

As an aside, it was during this demolition that the Cromford Canal Co permit books, many of which have recently been transcribed, were discovered about to be burnt and as many as possible were rescued; they survive today in various locations.

If anyone can offer any more information about the houses or their inhabitants, please do get in touch with the Editor. **T**

Yes, certainly, the canal was purchased in 1852 by the railway which became the Midland Railway, and it was railway owned and operated until nationalisation in 1947.

So, it looks like the building beside the lock was two separate dwellings; one for the lock keeper and one for the toll clerk who gauged

### **AGM 25th April**

*Members are invited to the FCC AGM in Ironville Church Hall, NG16 5NN, starting at 7.30pm on Monday 25th April. Refreshments and raffle – plus a summary of our achievements and future plans.*

# CRICH CHASE WOODS

## News from the Friends of Crich Chase

Surrounded by the villages of Whatstandwell, Crich, Fritchley and Bullbridge, and skirting the Cromford Canal between Grattons Bridge (15) and Chase Bridge (14), lies Crich Chase. A Site of Special Scientific Interest, it is described by Natural England as “one of the largest and most diverse ancient semi-natural woodlands remaining in the Derwent Valley”. Within the woodland are scrubby areas and grassy clearings, making a rich mosaic of habitats for fungi, reptiles, mammals, butterflies, insects and birds.




It has been privately owned for many years but was recently put up for sale. Concerned local people have formed Friends of Crich Chase to raise funds on behalf of Derbyshire Wildlife Trust so that the wood's future will be securely in their care, and public access to this very special place will be maintained.

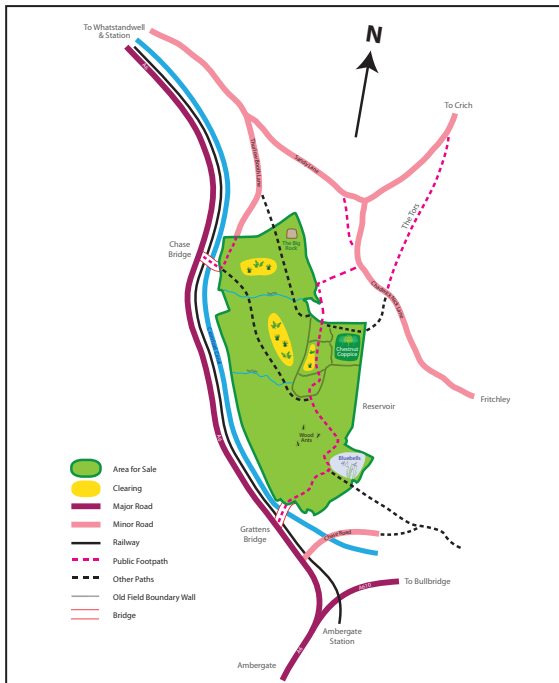
At 182 acres, this ancient wood is of national importance and even with its SSSI designation, it is vulnerable to unseen, unreported damage and alteration, which we hope ownership and management by the

DWT will prevent. Furthermore, the sales brochure mentions “sporting and mineral rights”, “harvesting opportunities” and “a substantial quantity of firewood approaching maturity”.

There is a great deal of local support but a huge amount to raise as the asking price is £720,000! Please give if you can. Help and/or advice would also be warmly welcomed. Thank you.

To donate, go to [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/crich-chase-woodland](http://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/crich-chase-woodland) or you can post a cheque or give over the phone direct to Derbyshire Wildlife Trust: Sandy Hill, Main Street, Middleton, Matlock DE4 4LR, 01773 881188 (please write on the back of cheques “Crich Chase Woodland appeal”)

For further information about the woodland visit [www.friendsofcrichchase.co.uk](http://www.friendsofcrichchase.co.uk). 



# 200 YEARS AGO

## A glimpse of what was happening on the Cromford Canal in 1822, taken from the company minutes

During 1822, the Committee met quarterly, three times at the Blackmoors Head Inn, Nottingham, which seems rather distant from the canal, and once at Matlock Old Bath Hotel.

### 1st March

William Evans appeared to a charge against John Bullock for navigating a boat of Messrs Sutton & Co through a lock with one gate open whereby a penalty of 40s [£2] was incurred under the bye laws. *[A bye law stated that both gates had to be opened even when a single boat was using a lock.]* When the Committee saw to favourable circumstances appearing, it mitigated the penalty to ten shillings [50p].

### 28th May

1. John Bakewell appeared to a charge of using the haling path with an ass and panniers, without permission. On his undertaking not to repeat the process the Committee consented to remit any penalties already incurred.

2. Benjamin Woodhouse, having sunk a boat in Butterley Tunnel, be consented to sign an acknowledgement of his offence; the Committee in consequence remitted the penalty.

3. Thomas Strutt appeared to two charges of navigating his boat into a lock without both gates being open. The Committee imposed a mitigated penalty of twenty shillings [£1].

### 29th May (AGM)

1. Mr Thomas Bishop on behalf of Mr John Simpson, wharfinger, applied for part of the wharf at Cromford to erect a warehouse that should cost him at least £250 on being guaranteed possession for 14 years from Michaelmas next, Mr Simpson in the meantime paying an acknowledgement to the Company.

It was resolved that Mr Simpson's

application be entertained on condition that the warehouse be erected two storeys high with proper materials and in a substantial and workmanlike manner under the direction of Mr Martin the Company's surveyor on such part of the wharf as the Committee shall direct Mr Simpson expending in making such building £250 at the least and also paying an acknowledgement of one guinea [£1.05] annually and agreeing not to assign underlet or part with the premises without the consent of the Company or the Committee for the time being except by will to his wife or children only, and that the warehouse be used as place of trade on the canal only – provided that it is understood that Mr Arkwright's consent must first be obtained to the erection of the building.

*[This is the warehouse that is now Wheatcroft's Wharf café, built alongside the 'Feeder Arm' opened around that time. The full story of the Feeder Arm and the various buildings on the wharf is told in Cromford Wharf, A History, available from [www.cromfordcanal.org](http://www.cromfordcanal.org).]*

2. Ordered that a Dividend of £7 a share be paid to the several proprietors on the first day of July next.

### 20th September

An inspection of the canal found that the part of the haling path had been walled as directed, and that the works in general were in a satisfactory condition.

### 20th December

Butterley Tunnel: The surveyor reported that on Wednesday 27th November a serious accident was discovered to have occurred at the western end of Butterley Tunnel by the falling in of the arch but that the damage was now repaired and the canal 'this morning' again became navigable. ■

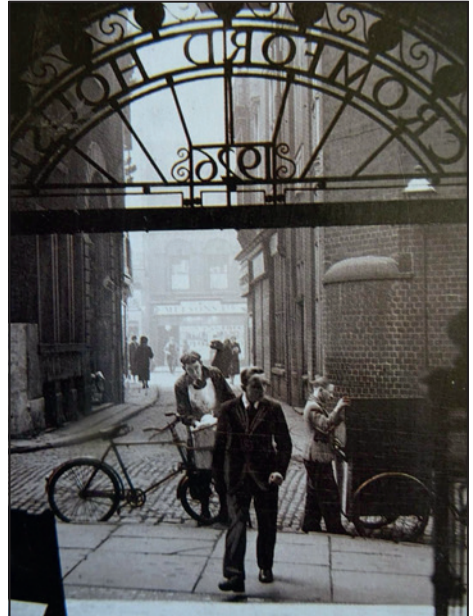
# ARKWRIGHT IN MANCHESTER

## Dave Ratner explores the connection

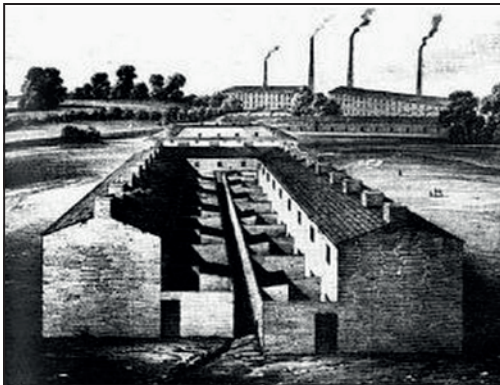
Richard Arkwright's Mill in Manchester was the first of its kind in this country. The mill was built between 1780 and 1782 by Richard Arkwright and his partners William Brocklebank, John Whittenbury, John Simpson and Samuel Simpson. It had been intended to drive the mill using a Newcomen engine, but this proved unsuccessful and in 1783 two large water reservoirs (upper and a lower) were constructed to supply water for a 30ft diameter, 8ft wide waterwheel to drive the machinery.

A steam engine pumped the water back from the lower to the upper pond. M. Nevell provides information (from the Boulton & Watt papers) that the first, unsuccessful, mill engine was made by Thomas Hunt. In 1784 Arkwright sold the mill to his son Richard, but in 1786 he withdrew from the partnership with John and Samuel Simpson. Engines from Boulton & Watt were installed. Known as Shudehill Mill (after its location) or Simpson's Mill (after the partners), it was badly damaged by fire in 1854, and was rebuilt.

In October 1892 Baxendale and Co, engineers and plumbers' merchants, took over and redeveloped the site.



*This image offers another rather more mysterious link between Cromford and Manchester. The elegant window light proclaims 'Cromford House 1926', thought to be in Cromford Court, just off Market Street. Do any members know what the connection is?*



*Rows of cottages with back yard privies, possibly built for Arkwright's workers.*

The mill was destroyed in a German bombing raid in 1940. The findings of the archaeological investigation of the site in 2005 (featured in the TV series 'Time Team' and available on YouTube titled 'Rubble At The Mill') were fully reported by Wessex Archaeology. **T**

# CROMFORD CANAL AND THE BIG BANG(S)

## Hugh Potter discovers that canals were not always quiet backwaters

		CHESTERFIELD.			
Pigou & Co.	A. Greaves, Druggist, Chesterfield - to Codnor Park.	42	Cks. of G. P.	2 3 0 0	—
		24½	" "	0 12 0 0	—
		208½	" "	2 12 0 0	—
		274		5 6 0 0	—

Back in 1874, London was rudely awoken at 5am on 2nd October by a huge explosion. Narrow boat *Tilbury* exploded with such force that it caused major structural damage for 400 yards, broke windows for a mile and was heard 15 miles away. As well as the major newspaper reports of the time, this has not surprisingly been the subject of several articles in the modern waterway press. But it is only in the latest article, by Richard Dean in the Summer 2020 issue of *NarrowBoat* magazine, that the link to our canal is clearly established.

It turns out that *Tilbury's* mixed cargo included Benzoline, a very volatile petroleum product that is thought to have leaked from its wooden cask, its vapours seeping into the boatman's cabin to be ignited by the stove and subsequently detonating over 5 tons of gunpowder destined for Codnor Park.

At the inquest, the invoice for the cargoes on the ill-fated *Tilbury* showed the gunpowder to have come from Pigou & Co for A Greaves, Druggist of Chesterfield, dispatched to Codnor Park. Pigou & Co had gunpowder mills near Dartford, but why was a druggist from Chesterfield sending 5 tons of gunpowder to Codnor Park? A quick internet search revealed that Abraham Greaves established his business at Ironville in 1836 before expanding to Chesterfield, so it seems likely that it was for use in coal mines, although 5 tons does seem rather a lot. I have been trying unsuccessfully to get some idea of how much gunpowder might be used in coal mining.

Martyn Taylor-Cockayne suggested that perhaps it was for use in detonators on the railways used as warning signals when a train broke down, as all the coal mines in Codnor Park had finished by 1875. However, Pyehill Colliery started in 1875, so they might have been the recipients. Another possible use was in the construction of the Great Northern Railway, which newspapers reported used a lot of gunpowder for the cuttings.

However, Dr David Amos suggested it could well have been used more widely: "I reckon five tons of gunpowder wouldn't have been that big an issue if it was for a use by a firm such as the Butterley Company at all of its collieries. In 1874 the Butterley Company's coal workings would have been considerable and still to expand with Kirkby Summit and Ollerton collieries still very much in the future."

So the jury is out, but whatever it was intended for, it never got to Codnor Park!

### An Earlier Big Bang

But that was not the first time that gunpowder destined for the Cromford Canal had caused problems. Many years earlier, on 28th September 1818, Nottingham was rocked by a huge explosion that newspapers described as a "most dreadful and melancholy catastrophe" which killed ten people, injured many others and destroyed canal warehouses.

The cause in this instance was a 'prank' by a boatman that went tragically wrong causing the explosion of 21 barrels of gunpowder totalling around 1 ton. In this case we are told that it was destined for Cromford and the lead mines of Derbyshire.■



# WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

## Hugh Potter attempts to find out



At a recent social meeting at Ironville I was shown a photograph of this brick structure and asked if I knew what it was . . . which I didn't.

However, as I was walking along the track of the railway that once ran past the Wharf Shed and linked the Cromford & High Peak Railway to the main Midland Railway at the real High Peak Junction, I spotted it straight ahead of me. It is a massive brick structure very securely encased in substantial metalwork.

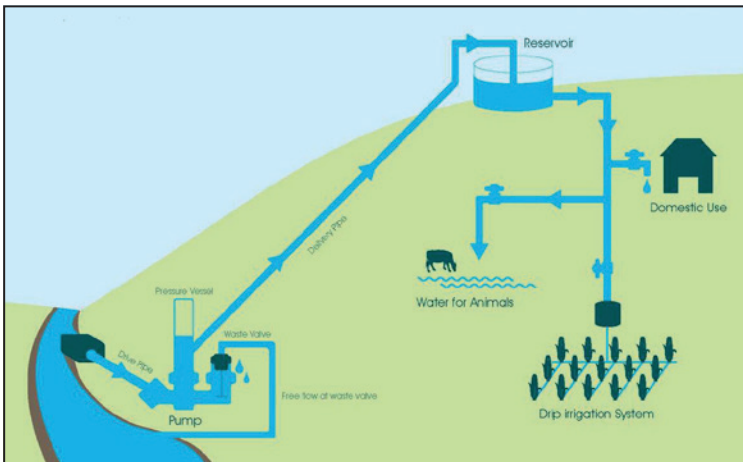
Fortunately DCC's John Thompson was working nearby and he thought it was the header tank for a ram pump that once supplied a nearby farm up the hillside; he had seen such a pump marked on a map.

Searching through the FCC Archives I came across an interview with the late Frank Bark who recalled a "red brick pillar" above a ram pump that you could hear 'ticking' from Aqueduct Cottage when he lived there.

For those of you who have not come across the concept of the hydraulic ram pump, it is an almost magical device that pumps water uphill using water power! By clever but simple use of valves, part of the water flowing through the pump lifts the rest of the water

to a surprisingly high level, whilst producing a regular clicking sound.

What puzzles me is that (you may recall from the last *Portal*) the name of Brown's Bridge is linked to that of Brown's Spring up on the hillside above, so why did the farm not use this spring water? **T**



# MEET THE TRUSTEES

## Who's who in FCC

### Mike Kelley

#### Tell us about yourself...

For ten years I was a teacher of history and technical education in a comprehensive school, then 28 years as a training manager in Middle Eastern and African oilfields (where I was caught up in three wars, escaped a gas plant explosion and was evacuated by the French Foreign Legion). Author, artist and former leader of a rambling group.



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

In the year 2000 I formed a sub-committee of the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association which became the FCC on 13th March 2002. As The Founder Member I was the first Chairman for around 5 years and then Vice Chairman for several years afterwards.

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

20 years; membership number '2'. I have been a Boat Master for *Birdswood* for more than 7 years now.

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

I was Project Manager for the *Birdswood* operation, being heavily involved in obtaining a grant from DEFRA, and Operations Manager for 2 years whilst getting her into service. I contacted our current President (Brian Blessed) and Patron (Julian Richards) for them to take up their roles with the FCC.

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

To see the Beggarlee extension completed, and the northern section extended.

### David Martin

#### Tell us about yourself...

As a child my dad had a narrow boat moored at Ilkeston on the Erewash Canal; later he bought a speed boat which he launched from various jetties along the river Trent.



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

In 1995 my wife and I went on a boating holiday on the River Cam from Ely and purchased our own boat soon after. Having lived in Brinsley and now the current County Councillor for Selston, the Cromford Canal, running along the western border of Ashfield, has always been in my life. We joined FCC in summer 2002 when we paid a visit to the Cromford Steam Rally and have always been passionate about the derelict canal.

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

I became a Trustee in April 2015 and Chairman in 2019.

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

I have encouraged many changes to modernise the fabric of the charity and its operations, even through the pandemic. We have a ten year plan and we are currently busy working on the Beggarlee project, but have aspirations to make improvements from Cromford Wharf heading south too.

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

I would love dearly love to see all of the canal open to navigation, but I'm a realist. Rome wasn't built in a day, but we can make a start to ensure that foundations are laid and that we have a viable plan. ■

# DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

## FCC Monthly Meetings

Speaker meetings are held on the 3rd Monday of the month at 7.30pm at Ironville Church Hall, Casson Street, Ironville NG16 5NN. Admission (except AGM) is £2.50. There is parking at the rear. A bar, tea/coffee, raffle and sales table for FCC products and other related items are available.

### Monday 21st March

*Chernobyl 36 years on*

Chris Broome will talk about the disaster and the British charity that supports victims and their families. FCC have also helped by offering *Birdswood* trips to visiting groups,

### Monday 25th April

*Note this is the fourth Monday owing to Easter Monday falling on our regular date.*

*FCC AGM*

The FCC Annual General Meeting will include an update of work achieved in the last 12 months and aspirations for the future.

### Monday 16th May

*Leawood: The Tale of the Severed Arm*

FCC Archivist Hugh Potter looks into the mystery and intrigue surrounding the shortening of the Leawood Arm less than 20 years after it was opened.



*Leawood Wharf was built only half way along the original length of the Leawood Arm. Find out why on 16th May.*

## Birdswood Cruises

FCC's historic electrically powered passenger narrow boat *Birdswood* begins operations on 2nd April. Trips depart from Cromford Wharf at 11am and 2pm on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Following the restoration of Brown's swing bridge at High Peak Junction, the full 2-hour round trip to Leawood Pump will be offered once again. For full details and to book seats visit [www.birdswood.org](http://www.birdswood.org).

## Leawood Steaming Dates

Below we list the days on which Leawood Pump will be in steam in the next few months. On dates labelled 'static' the pump will be in steam but not actually pumping. New for this year are some Thursday static openings during school holidays.

On static dates the pump house will be open 11am to 4pm. On operational dates it will be open 12 noon to 4.30pm.

### April

Thursday 14th April *Static*

Sunday 17th April

Monday 18th April

Thursday 21st April *Static*

### May

Sunday 1st May

Monday 2nd May

### June

Thursday June 2nd *Static*

Saturday 11th June *Static*

Sunday 12th June



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