

THE PORTAL

Issue 86 - Autumn 2023

Price £1.00 - Free to Members



Friends of the Cromford Canal

Registered Charity No. 1164608

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Front Cover: A splendid autumn reflection at Robin Hood captured by Claire Taylor..

Back Cover

Top: The late Yvonne Shattower helping out on one of the ECPDA stalls at the Langley Mill Rally in May, talking to ECPDA Chairman Norman Cornwell (left) and Radio Derby's Andy Twigge. See page 9.

Bottom: A sketch of Aqueduct Cottage drawn by the local canal inspector in the 1910s. The cottage is on the left and the building on the right is the recently excavated stone cabin that was built as a blacksmith's workshop – see page 25.

The copy date for the next issue is 9th November

President – Brian Blessed

Patron – Julian Richards

The aims and objectives of the Friends of the Cromford Canal



The restoration, reconstruction, preservation and maintenance of the Cromford Canal, its associated buildings, towing path, structures and craft and the conservation of its natural character as a navigable inland waterway system for the benefit of the public.

EDITORIAL

By Hugh Potter

We were all shocked and saddened to learn of the death of our Trustee and Membership Secretary Yvonne Shattower. Yvonne has been a stalwart of the FCC since its inception and of the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association for many decades before. Tributes to her appear elsewhere in this issue.

Yvonne was a supporter to the end, actively helping ECPDA on their various stalls at the highly successful Langley Mill Rally at the end of May (page 23). The event's organisation was as superb as always and it is heartening to know that such a large volunteer pool can be found in a group that is 55 years old! I hope the FCC will still be going that strong in another 30 years!

In this issue you will read about the exciting progress that we have made in making available online the data from the Cromford Canal Toll Permits, which we have been working on for many years now. Thanks to the sterling work done by a host of volunteer transcribers, especially Christine Johnstone and her niece Laura at Harvard University (see page 16), we think we have virtually all the data available online.

Whilst this is not directly relevant to the future restoration of the canal, it does help spread the word to a much wider audience of historians and genealogists, who would otherwise never have heard of us.

If by any chance you know of any other records of this type, then please do get in touch as we would love to be able to add their contents to our database.

On the ground it is wonderful to see work started at last on the Beggaree Extension and I make no apologies for publishing two reports on this: from the engineers' and volunteers' viewpoints.

This autumn, you may see a few changes at the northern end of the canal. Long-awaited roof repairs to the workshop at High Peak Junction are planned to start in September, so they will be closed, but the shop and toilets will remain open. It will involve scaffolding outside and inside the building, and hopefully be completed before Christmas when DCC plan to have a Forge Day on 27th December.

Also in September, DCC Highways plan to repair the supporting wall of the towpath north of Whatstandwell Bridge. This will require that section of the canal to be drained in order to do the works.

Our social meetings at Ironville Church Hall will start again in September with a talk by Ian Hooker on the Restoration of Aqueduct Cottage (see page 24). Further dates will be on the website and our Facebook page. Meanwhile, if anyone could offer to take on the organisation of these, our already very busy Chairman would greatly appreciate it! **T**

Friends of the Cromford Canal

The successful restoration story of
Aqueduct Cottage
by volunteer Ian Hooker

7.30pm Monday 18th September
Ironville Church Hall NG16 5NN

Tea coffee bar and raffle Admission £2.50
Non members are always welcome

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

By David Martin

On the Spring Bank Holiday Weekend at the end of May, the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association held their Boat Rally, this year celebrating the fact that they had restored and reopened the Great Northern Basin at Langley Mill as well as the beginning of the Cromford Canal including Lock 14, exactly fifty years ago. A great deal of effort goes into organising these types of events and I'll take the opportunity to applaud and congratulate all of the hard-working volunteers who managed to carry it off and get through what must have seemed a very long weekend over those three days.

It has always been a very popular event; attractions, boaters, and stall holders come from far and wide and of course the sun always shines on the righteous – it was lovely



Visitors were allowed to inspect the parts of boats that are not normally seen by visiting the dry dock at the rally.

weather on all three days. The FCC made the most of it with our own stand being managed by Ken & Linda Brockway right next to Chris Madge and the Derby & Sandiacre Canal Trust amongst others; great thanks go to them and the other FCC volunteers who helped throughout the event. We took five guided tours on the short walk up to the area of the Beggarlee Extension and one of the other tours was all about the ECPDA's past restoration work on the Cromford Canal and Langley Mill Boat Yard. One of the other highlights was the flypast by the Lancaster Bomber and the Spitfire from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight; the crowds clearly enjoyed that, and most definitely the brass band playing in the two narrow boats that came up in the lock for the opening ceremony.

Then on 15th July FCC invited its many volunteers to a 'Thank You' Event. This year it was held at Wheatcroft's Wharf café at Cromford. We had around fifty attendees for a very relaxed buffet as a mark of our thanks for all of their ►



The spitfire banks over the rally site at Langley Mill.



Langley Mill Boatyard put on a remarkable display of engines over the rally weekend.

In addition to these two groups, we also have those that manage our merchandise sales, our engineers, our design team who do the *Portal* and our social media posters etc, and finally the Trustees who try and navigate it all. So, if you feel you have some time to help us along with any of the above please do get in touch; we can always find you something to do!

Also, on 7th–10th July we gratefully received a visit from the Waterway Recovery Group who stayed at the Church Hall in Ironville. Pete Fleming and his volunteer group came to lend us their skills in civil engineering and construction

contributions to the charity. Our volunteers are mainly split into two groups: the work parties who perform both maintenance and restoration work up and down the canal, who last year at Beggarlee alone did 1,664 hours of unpaid manual work, and our boat volunteers who made a total of 160 trips carrying some 3,787 passengers up and down the canal from the wharf at Cromford on *Birdswood*.

to help us make a start on the preparatory works to the two pipes that we need to install below the newly planned canal at Beggarlee. For more on this see later in the issue.

I would just like to add our greatest thanks to all those who came as the weather wasn't the kindest; it was very humid with thunderstorms and rain – just what you need when you're working in a difficult-to-access clay-ridden corner of Langley Mill!



The chairman (centre) takes part in discussions about the fate of some rather large 'found' objects.

Since then, led by our work party volunteers Ian Hutchinson and Malc Chisnell, the gang have installed another 42m of 600mm drainage pipes bringing us to where we need to be ready for the next visit from the WRG group early in September. It's all going on! This was all the subject of a visit from BBC Radio Derby's Andy Twigge show on the morning of 26th July of which the recordings were posted on our Facebook page.



The Beggarlee Extension got good publicity on Radio Derby.

Finally, it is with great sadness that we received the news of the passing of our Membership Secretary, Trustee, and dear friend Yvonne Shattower. She was a founding member of the Friends back in 2002 and has always been there working away in the background. She will be sadly missed by all who knew her. **T**

WORK PARTY REPORT

By John Guyler

Codnor Park & Ironville

At Codnor Park Reservoir there was a need to repair fencing along the angling section near the car park. Malc Chisnall and Chris Aukland also had the job of cutting up a storm-damaged tree that had fallen across the path up by the steel bridge. At Casson Street, the work party cleared the footpath through towards Pinxton Arm Bridge. Also, a dead tree was made safe; its poor condition and position next to the footpath made removal necessary.

The following week the FCC work party acted on a special request, through Chris Martin, to cut the long grass behind the church for a special village event. Chris has since made a sand pit in the same area. At the old Lock 1 area (Pinxton Arm Bridge) the work party managed to remove a large amount of Himalayan Balsam from the reservoir overspill, almost to Lock 2. At Lock 4, we started clearing balsam from around King William Bridge and made our way towards Lock 4 where there was a very large clump at the start of the lock which took a lot of effort to remove.

Moorgreen Reservoir

At the beginning of June, FCC had a request from Canal & River Trust to assist at Moorgreen Reservoir to clear the areas around the water level gauges and the gullies accessing them. These were difficult to get to, because the gauges were set back in the bank, in 'V's cut into the bank and were very overgrown. They were cleared with a lot of effort and then there was the long walk back to the car park, which was at Colliers Wood, about half a mile away; the nearest on-site parking was a lay-by which could only take a couple of cars.▶



Shirley Bullock with some of the produce from the lock-keeper's garden by Lock 4, which was given to Age Concern at Eastwood.



Some of the work clearing the gullies at Moorgreen Reservoir.

Lower Hartshay

At Lower Hartshay, we had four separate work party days. One was to clear Himalayan Balsam from the channel, made particularly difficult because the vegetation was very high and there was also a problem with mud and deep patches of water. John Dyson had to empty his wellies five times, which even for him was getting tiresome. The next work party went up to the CRT section and cleared vegetation and Himalayan Balsam. Then there was more balsam bashing along the far bank from the towpath. John Barker had to have a small work party there to clear the towpath grass verges, whilst by coincidence a council employee was working on the opposite bank, doing the same.

Pinxton Wharf

At Pinxton Wharf, we had two separate work parties clearing vegetation and cutting off a few tree branches which were overhanging and causing a nuisance. Two bags of litter were also picked.

Cromford to Ambergate

At Cromford Wharf, Ian Holloway strimmed the high vegetation on the peninsula so that the crew of *Birdswood* could work safely. Stella (the dinosaur) had a clean and a new paint job, courtesy of the *Birdswood* work party. The usual work party cut all the grass around Stella to keep the view from *Birdswood* clear. A work party at High Peak Junction went on the look-out for Himalayan Balsam right up to Gregory's Tunnel, but there was very little.

Myself and John Dyson had the job of finding protruding steel rods in the coir rolls after a complaint from a dog owner to DCC; ironic really, as the dogs created the problems in the first instance that caused us to put the coir rolls in. As the coir rolls had sunk into the bank the securing rods were left protruding, whereas before they were flush. So, armed with a sledge hammer and a mallet we searched the bank all the way from Gregory's to Lawn Bridge and any we found we persuaded to go deeper in the bank. ►



John Dyson demonstrating his novel way of measuring Himalayan Balsam at Aqueduct Cottage.



John Dyson hammering a steel pin further in to the coir roll.

The metal work boat was in action to clear the silt traps near the former garden centre. The work boat was brought down from High Peak Junction behind *Birdswood* on the previous Sunday. Then on the work day it was again towed to site by *Birdswood*, where the work party got in and worked on the silt traps. At the end of the day, it was towed back again to Cromford.

The first work party in August was at Poyser's Bridge, Ambergate, for more Himalayan Balsam bashing, removing a lot for disposal.

The cleaning team on *Birdswood* have been in action every fortnight and are doing a tremendous job. *Birdswood* really does look good. There is also report of stowaways on *Birdswood*. After walking up to Gregory's Tunnel from High Peak Junction and back all the way to Cromford wharf, some of the ladies in the work party saw the chance of a ride back to HPJ on *Birdswood* as she was about

to leave on the afternoon trip. Everyone else walked back but they took the easy route. They enjoyed it very much, none of them having been on *Birdswood* before, so thanks to the Master and crew for allowing them on board.

Join Us!

With the building of the Beggarlee Extension getting closer, we need a Site Manager, someone who has the experience of managing contractors and keeping the job on track. If anyone has the experience and is interested; please contact David Martin at chair@cromfordcanal.org.uk to discuss terms and conditions.

If you would like to participate in the work parties, the volunteers are a sociable bunch, they look out for each other and are great to work with; contact John Barker at work@cromfordcanal.org.uk. **T**

YVONNE SHATTOWER

By Mike Harrison

Members were very sad to learn that Yvonne Shattower, who has been our Membership Secretary since the formation of the FCC in March 2002, and a stalwart supporter ever since, passed away on 4th August.

I first met Yvonne and her husband Derek when they moved into a house on Beckett Street in Long Eaton which has a garden backing on to the Erewash Canal, became members of the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association and started to attend meetings at Sandiacre Lock Cottage. Yvonne soon joined the ECPDA Committee and had been the Secretary for many years.

When the FCC was formed, Yvonne and Derek attended the inaugural meeting at Ironville Church Hall and Yvonne soon volunteered to be Membership Secretary, a vital job which she has ably carried out ever since. Sadly, Derek passed away soon after this first FCC meeting, but Yvonne has carried on her support of

both the FCC and the ECPDA ever since. She has been a stalwart at the monthly Ironville meetings, always being on the door to welcome members and visitors and collect their money!

Apart from attending monthly meetings of both organisations, Yvonne would regularly help at events such as the Discovery Days events at Cromford and boat rallies at Langley Mill as well as other events both local and further afield. Despite having mobility issues in more recent times, wherever there was a fund-raising opportunity or the chance to promote either of our local canals, Yvonne would be there, regularly driving quite long distances on her own.

Above all, Yvonne was a lady in the true sense of the word. She would always be pleasant, polite and welcoming to everybody and will be greatly missed by us all. A photograph of Yvonne helping out at the Langley Mill Rally appears on the back cover. **T**

BEGGARLEE EXTENSION ENABLING WORKS – PHASE 1

By FCC's Honorary Water Engineer Chris Broome



Large scale work has now begun at Beggarlee placing a large concrete manhole.

Finally, nearly three years on from obtaining detailed planning approval, we have made a start on the restoration of the Cromford Canal from the southern, Langley Mill, end. The first stage is a 1km reach from Langley Mill Basin under the A610 and along as far as Stoney Lane. To make things more 'interesting' we cross the administrative boundary between Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire as we go under the A610. But we like a challenge!

Before we can start construction of the canal itself, we have to undertake some enabling works. The first phase of these works was commenced in July and involves the culverting of two small watercourses that cross the site of the canal alongside Hall Road, on the west side of the A610. We have been fortunate to have had the Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) come along to lead on the construction work.

FCC have ordered and paid for materials and plant and provided assistance on site as needed. WRG were on site for 4 days and in that time they managed to complete the construction of a new concrete manhole

and start the laying of the 600mm diameter culvert. Since then, volunteers from FCC have completed 42m of the culvert across the site. Some preparation work has also been undertaken by FCC for WRG's return to complete the land drainage work planned for the beginning of September.

Some site clearance works have been done on the east side of the road bridge and some fill material placed in the southern arch of the bridge so that we have deemed to have made a start on the future footpath under the bridge inside the Broxtowe Council's administrative area, to comply with their planning conditions.

WRG were to be onsite again from 31st August for 5 days to complete the land drainage works involving laying 16m of 900mm diameter concrete culverts, the conversion of a large concrete headwall into a chamber which is an in situ reinforced concreting job, the placing of precast concrete headwalls onto the downstream ends of both the 600mm and 900mm culverts and the benching out of the new concrete ring manhole. ►



The concrete manhole in place and backfilling is underway.

FCC volunteers will be involved again like last time assisting WRG volunteers with placing pipe bedding and backfilling around structures, trenches etc. At the end of Day 5 it is hoped that Phase 1 of the enabling works will be completed or at least mostly completed. If all goes to plan this will be completed by the time you read this! Any remaining minor works will be finished off by FCC work party volunteers.

Phase Two

Phase 2 of the Enabling Works is likely to be undertaken next year. This will involve the construction of a flood storage compensation area located on the north side of Hall Road and the 900mm diameter culvert. When we start to construct the canal out of Langley Mill basin, the canal will be occupying part of the River Erewash floodplain. Its towpath will be set at a level above the one-in-100-year-plus climate change flood level so that the canal isn't flooded except in a really extreme event.

The Environment Agency requires us to compensate for the loss of the floodplain storage by lowering some 'high' ground along the edge of the floodplain so that it becomes part of the floodplain. A scheme was submitted as part of the planning application for the Beggarlee Extension. Since then, a revised scheme has been proposed which doesn't impact on the A610 road embankment and I shall be submitting

this to the EA for approval later this year. The scheme is purely earthworks so it is possible that FCC volunteers may be able to undertake these works themselves in the spring/summer of 2024. We are not allowed to start work on the canal itself until the compensation scheme is completed.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Pete Fleming and his motley crew of volunteers from WRG for their stoic efforts so far on this project. It is not easy work especially in wet weather when the ground can become very muddy and difficult to work in. May I also thank John Barker and his volunteers for their hard work. It is a team effort all round. By doing this work using volunteers we have been able to save FCC a not inconsiderable amount of funds which would have been paid out to a commercial contractor to do the same work.

We have also been fortunate to be receiving a grant from Derbyshire Environment Trust to pay for some of the materials we have purchased for the works. The final cost for the land drainage works isn't yet known but is expected to be around the £45,000 mark. A civil engineering contractor would be charging more than double this amount! With the expected grant, the final cost to FCC should be around about £20,000 which is pretty good value, everything considered.

A start has been made! **T**

WORK HAS STARTED AT BEGGARLEE

John Guyler reports on volunteer involvement

After many years of planning and discussions with various council bodies, the extension to the Cromford Canal at Beggarlee, Langley Mill, has got under way. At the end of May this year, work started by hand on the clearance of silt from the 600mm diameter water runoff pipe. After a day digging by work party volunteers the water level had gone down to the centre line of the pipe; when they started, the pipe was completely blocked. It became obvious that a digger of some description would be needed to clear the pipe and the gully for the water to run off.

The water comes off the A610 from surface drains through a 150mm diameter pipe and from the run-off gully on the other side of and under the road. A mini digger was procured and the volunteers Malc Chisnell, Ian Hutchinson and Les Hall, who were qualified to use the machine, set to and cleared the pipe, deepened the run-off gully and created an area around the headwall that the pipe exit was concreted in for safe working.

It soon became evident that a much larger digger was required, to dig out the clay behind the headwall and to use a jigger pick on the head wall itself. To remove the headwall and remove the pipe attached to it took a couple of days. With the headwall out of the way the area was prepared for the arrival of the Waterway Recovery Group, the national volunteer group who work primarily on waterway restoration.

They were with us from the 6th to the 10th July and billeted at the Ironville Church Hall where the FCC has its members' meetings. There were six of them who came from Manchester, London and Lichfield. The concrete piping, all £28,000 of it, was delivered on very large truck and laid out in position ready for assembly. WRG set to and assembled the large manhole chamber ►



Building the inspection chamber.

where the headwall had been previously. This chamber is 1.5m in diameter and 2m deep, built in three sections, and has a facility inside for inspectors to climb down. On the top is a brick level which has an inspection cover for access.

Several concrete sections of large diameter pipe with rubber seals inside were located in the inspection chamber by WRG, and that was where they finished their long weekend. That's where the FCC volunteers came into their own; over a period of nearly four weeks of continuous working, they have dug out a new gully and connected large flexible pipes each 8m along to the concrete pipes at the inspection chamber. This piping will be under the canal channel when it is completed. In all, they have fitted 44m of piping to reach the other larger gully where the two pipes will connect up and then discharge into the River Erewash.

Previously, when WRG were on site in March to pull tree roots out of the area, they brought some really heavy winches along, to do the job. The FCC and ECPDA work parties had done some tree root pulling but with much smaller winches. We are now ready for WRG to continue the next heavy lifting of the 900mm diameter pipes and build an inspection chamber within the two headwalls, in early September.

Thanks go to Wernick Danzer, for allowing all the equipment and supplies of material to come through their site and making space in their factory yard for materials, parking our machinery at night and opening up for us to access the site at weekends. They have also donated some land on a temporary basis for supply trucks and equipment to turn on site.

FCC engineers Chris Broome and John Boucher have been overseeing the work from the start, together with John Barker who has been responsible for supplying diesel most days for the digger and dumper. John has also been responsible for the billeting, arranging meals and showers for the WRG volunteers on both visits. He has also been arranging for ►



The inspection chamber finished and the surrounding area partially filled in.



The site seen from the A610 embankment.



Radio Derby on site for live interviews.



Unloading the concrete pipes.



The footpath has been laid through the bridge to the right of the right-hand pillar.

machinery hire all the way through this period of work.

It has become evident throughout this work period, what a good buy the dumper was five years ago. The late John Baylis was the driving force when it came to buying it and thanks to his foresight in pushing for it to be purchased. It's done a lot of work.

Radio Derby on were on site in the middle of July, for volunteer interviews in a live broadcast.

I put a press release out in mid-July, to various news outlets and the following week, it was completely mad with the number of emails and phone calls for information on the project.

Since the work started on diverting the gullies and piping in, WRG have given 244 volunteer hours, and FCC volunteers have given just over 400 hours. The total volunteer hours on the Beggarlee site stand at 2,579, including initial litter picking, clearing scrub and self-set trees, root removal and the piping.



The pipes that FCC volunteers have fitted and the position at the end of August, with 45m of pipework laid.



Action shots during the works at Beggarlee showing our volunteers hard at work. Ian Hutchinson poses by the completed inspection chamber whilst Malc Chisnell finds a tyre.

OUR AMERICAN PROJECT

Christine Johnstone says the Permit Books were what the internet was invented for

Starting in 2017, many volunteers have spent many hours and days transcribing the surviving Cromford Canal Permit Books/Toll Receipts onto a database for researchers to use. The toll receipts all come from the Langley Mill toll house, and mostly cover the period 1813-1849. Together, FCC has built up a wonderful resource for historians interested in the early 19th century.

But there has always been one big hole in this database: the ten volumes that are now in America. What are they doing there and how could we add them to our database?

We found out that Harvard Business School bought the bound volumes in Britain for £6 – it says so on the inside of each cover! The bill books, as the Americans call them, were shipped to Boston, USA, and added to the special collection of the Baker Library. This was in 1971, when there was a lot of academic interest in British business history during and after the Industrial Revolution. And because there's thousands of toll receipts, there's a lot of business information buried in them, especially about transport and mining.

In 2020 I asked Harvard Business School's reference library if they were willing, in principle, to let a researcher copy their toll receipts on behalf of FCC. I explained that we had already photographed and transcribed all the toll receipts we could find in Britain and that the Harvard ones were the only ones left to do. I had a speedy and helpful reply from Melissa Murphy. She explained that their reading room was temporarily closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, but offered to put our project on the waiting list. She also suggested that we could make our database available to Harvard Business School.

Fast forward two years to summer 2022. Melissa confirmed that the reading room had reopened and that the toll receipts could be photographed. And my niece, Laura Harvey, was

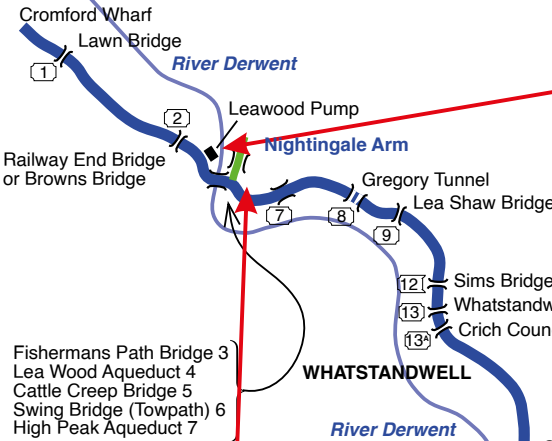


The proof of the price paid for the books in 1971, inscribed in each volume.

now studying in Boston. Despite being busy, and having no particular interest in canal history, Laura agreed to photograph all the toll receipts and upload them onto a file sharing platform from which I could download them. Melissa arranged for the volumes to be fetched from their off-site store and welcomed Laura to the library. I sent Laura precise details of what we needed, and Laura fitted the project around her own university studies.

After Laura had photographed and uploaded all the Harvard toll receipts, I downloaded them and checked for missing ones, then downsized them, transcribed them volume by volume onto a spreadsheet, checked and double-checked each spreadsheet for typos before sending it to Hugh Potter, our Hon Archivist. With the support of our webmaster, the Harvard toll receipts have now joined all the others on an online database for anyone to use. This will also be used at Harvard as a back-up to their collection and catalogued and made available through WorldCat.org, a global catalogue of library materials. ■

CROMFORD



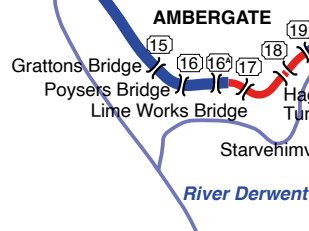
The final steaming dates for the Leewood Pump this year are 17th September and 7th-8th October, the last day being the last Birdswood Premium trip of the year.

- Fishermans Path Bridge 3
- Lea Wood Aqueduct 4
- Cattle Creep Bridge 5
- Swing Bridge (Towpath) 6
- High Peak Aqueduct 7



Aqueduct cottage - see p 24

WHATSTANDWELL



- Bull Bridge 19
- Towing Path Swing Bridge 20
- Bull Bridge 21
- River Amber Bridge 22
- Railway Bridge 23
- Culvert Bridge 24
- Bridge 25

Walking the Canal

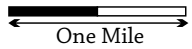
We are fortunate that the canal's towpath was designated as a Public Footpath before it closed, and the entire route is still walkable today, with some minor diversions. Full details of the route are given in our Walker's Guide, available from the FCC shop.

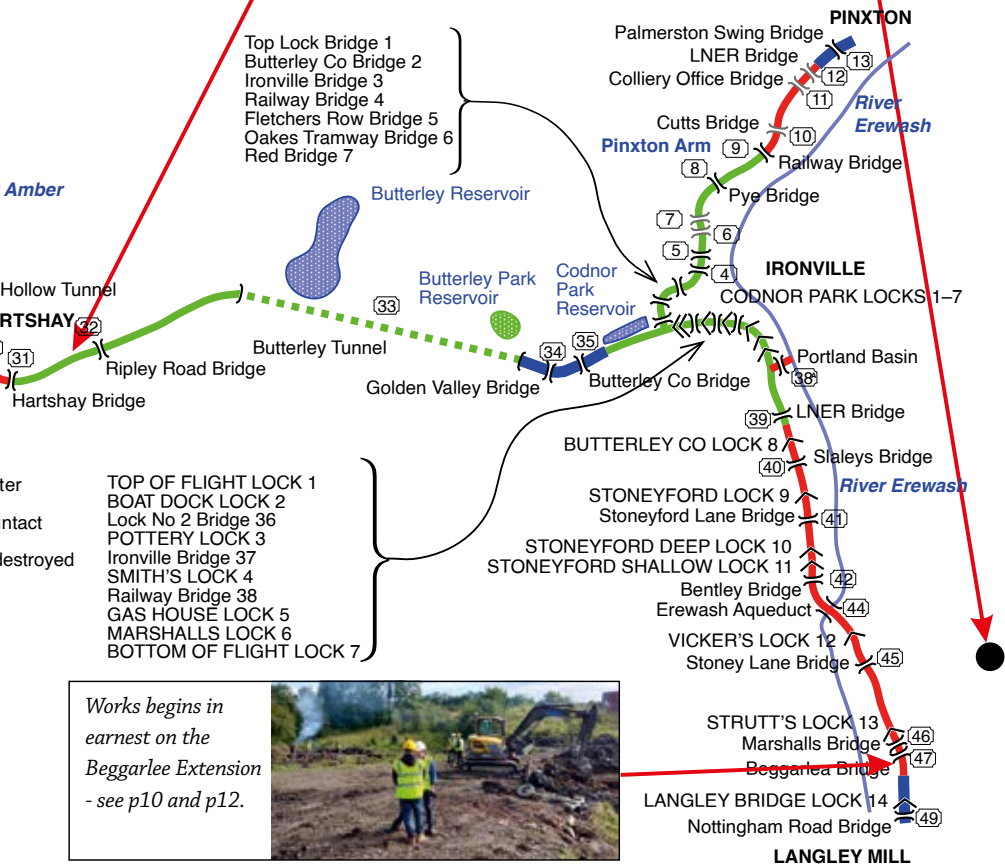
Canal Ownership

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

- █ Canal in wa
- █ Canal bed
- █ Canal bed c
- █ Rivers

THE CROMFORD CANAL





Works begins in earnest on the Beggarlee Extension - see p10 and p12.



REPAINTING STELLA THE STEGOSAURUS

By Keith Bailey

“Stella” the Stegosaurus at the now defunct Cromford Garden Centre appears as quite a surprise to new customers on *Birdswood* as well as first time visitors to the canal on the towpath. Stella was originally built for the then Cromford Plant Nursery by a local sculptor named Simon Waller. It was made as an accurate representation from a Natural History Museum model in 1990. Simon made sketches for a second dinosaur to be located opposite a series of ponds, some of which are still there, but the centre changed hands and the second sculpture was never built. Simon also said that the wharf was built in the hope that the canal would be restored and that boats we be encouraged to moor and visit the Garden Centre to buy plants and patronise their café. This, however, is at variance with Hugh Potter’s assertion in Portal 66 that the wharf is much older and predates the Garden Centre.



Stella as built in 1990.



Stella before her clean-up in 2019. The moss and the algae are clearly visible.

The Garden Centre changed hands when David Charlton bought it from Poples who now run Garden Centres in Chesterfield and Dronfield. It appears that Charlton wanted to expand the business and its appeal and constructed the “Woodland Walk” that incorporated Stella. As the photo above shows, Stella was much more out in the open when she was built than she is now, possibly due to additional trees being planted to form the Woodland Walk. During Charlton’s ownership Stella was also repainted from the original dark grey to the light blue-grey we were all familiar with.

The Cromford Garden closed on 9 May 2007. David Charlton cited financial pressures including increases to the minimum wage as well as increases in business rates. He also cited issues relating to difficulties in getting planning permission to extend the site and make it more appealing. Complaints that still resonate with businesses today. The site was ►

sold to an unknown developer who never did anything with it and the site became derelict and very overgrown. It has recently been bought by Pete Astles who owns Peak Paddlesports based in Darley Dale, Derbyshire. But, once again, Peak Paddlesports are in dispute over planning permission.

Stella and Birdswood

Birdswood has been running passenger trips on the Cromford Canal since 2015 and has always pointed Stella out to passengers as the boat passed by, much to the surprise and amusement of passengers, particularly children. The boat's current GPS based commentary system highlights Stella on both the outward and return trip giving passengers a second chance to get a photo.

During the 2018 cruising season it was noted by crew that Stella was looking very down at heel. The vegetation in front of the sculpture was regularly cut back by our Work Parties but she was being crowded out at the back by overhanging tree branches and Laurel bushes. The sculpture was covered in a patina of green algae and also had a lot of moss growing between the large fins.

As reported in Portal 69 this Author and two other volunteers took *Birdswood* up to the Garden Centre Wharf in the Spring of 2019 to give Stella her first clean. Naturally – it rained! However, Stella looked a lot better, but this then showed that her paint was peeling quite badly.

Covid then struck in 2020 and there was no cruising that season and none well into 2021. By this time Stella was not faring well and another clean-up and tree pruning session was undertaken in June 2022. After this clean-up it was becoming even more apparent that the paintwork was flaking badly and that Stella really needed a paint job. This was discussed at the Boat Committee and was agreed, subject to cost. Unfortunately, good quality masonry paint is not cheap and Stella is a large structure that would need quite a lot of it. Pete Astles, now



The second clean-up in June 2022 featuring the five dinosaurs. Stella is the one in the middle!

the owner of the site, was contacted and readily agreed to the repaint and was very happy the we were “looking after” Stella.

It transpired that one of *Birdswood's* crew worked at Homebase and he asked the manager if he would be willing to donate the paint to FCC. The manager very kindly agreed and two 5 litre cans of Sanderson masonry paint appeared on *Birdswood*. But before repainting could begin, Stella again needed a clean-up, but prolonged unsettled weather in March 2023 precluded painting. However, it did not prevent the clean-up together with some determined surgery to the trees and Laurel bushes taking place, again in the rain. This caused one of the work party to see an advantage in this by remarking that “at least we wouldn't need to rinse!” The clean-up further revealed the deterioration in the original paintwork showing that Stella was even more in need of a repaint. ►



During the third clean-up in March 2022 a lot of the overhanging branches to the rear of Stella were removed.



The third clean-up in March 2022.

The weather settled down and in May 2023 we took *Birdswood* up to the Garden Centre on a non-cruising day and gave Stella two coats of light grey masonry paint and it didn't rain!

Bob Staveley, the narrator for our automatic commentaries recorded an addition to the outward commentary acknowledging the donation from Homebase at Ashbourne. ─



The work party hard at work giving Stella her first coat of paint.



The finished product. A rejuvenated Stella.

LANGLEY MILL RALLY

Over the late May bank holiday thousands of people and hundreds of boats visited the Cromford Canal Boat Rally at Langley Mill to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the re-opening of Langley Bridge Lock (the bottom lock of the Cromford Canal) and Great Northern Basin. It was also the 55th Anniversary of the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association (who carried out the restoration), the 40th anniversary of the Erewash Canal being reinstated as a Cruiseway, and the 30th anniversary of the restoration of the Victorian Pump House.

After the 'traditional' opening ceremony with brass bands aboard narrow boats rising up in the lock, throughout the weekend there were visits to the pump house, the boatyard, the length beyond the boatyard already restored by ECPDA, and the 'Beggartee Extension' beyond that where FCC are working with ECPDA and Waterway Recovery Group to open up another 1km of canal including a staircase pair of locks.

It was good to have so many visitors call in at the FCC stand, and especially those who signed up for membership. Highlight for many over the weekend was the flypast by the Lancaster and Spitfire of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. ▀



ECPDA Chairman Norman Cornwell was interviewed for local TV news.



Eyes (and phones!) to the sky for the Lancaster fly past.

AQUEDUCT COTTAGE SUMMER REPORT

By Ian Hooker



The sight of smoke drifting lazily from the chimney brings the cottage even more to life.

Aqueduct Cottage was opened to the public in March, which means that walkers on the towpath have been able to examine the cottage at close quarters, to sit on the seat outside and to use the picnic table with a view along the aqueduct.

Unfortunately, access to the inside of the cottage has been limited to those days when our working parties have been on site, which until now has been Tuesdays and Saturday mornings. The limiting factor has been having to get extra volunteers to act as 'hosts' at the cottage so as to be able to open on other days. *(If you are interested in doing this, please look on Derbyshire Wildlife Trust website for Volunteering Opportunities at Aqueduct Cottage.)*

Even so, and with a counting system that probably grossly undercounts, we have had over 1,500 visitors inside the cottage in the first 4 months. For August we added each Sunday morning between 10am and 1pm. With more volunteers we hope to extend this arrangement throughout the autumn.

Meanwhile restoration work goes on. The weather this summer, particularly in July, has delayed our work on pointing the back walls and in building the walls on the lean-to pantry-cum-scully that had been added at the south end of the cottage and accessed through what was the kitchen. As I write the walls are almost complete and there is every chance that the roof can be completed before the winter. At the same time work will be going on with rebuilding the privy and pigsty

that was the small, detached building to the north of the cottage. Given good weather that might also be done over the winter. ►



Gradually revealing the old smithy building.

While all of that has been going on, four of our team have been excavating the site of what we understand was a shed, possibly a smithy with a forge, at the end of the south garden. This building was apparently constructed by the tenant in the 1860s and '70s, William Robbins, a blacksmith. We know of this because correspondence was found from his landlord advising that the building was outside the boundaries of his lease and must therefore be removed.

We believe that Mr Robbins then rebuilt his shed on a site beside the privy. By the 1950s Mr Robbins' original shed had been demolished and the excavated part of that site filled in to make a flower garden – either by that time the area leased had been extended or the landlord no longer objected to encroachment!

We have now dug out the whole site revealing a well-made floor of crazy paving and walls of stone built into the embankment. When those walls have been repaired and stabilised, we will use a part of the area to make a covered log store for our firewood that will fuel the wood burning stove now installed in the kitchen fireplace. The debris dug out included parts of what may have been large cooking vessels as well as much broken crockery and glass together with iron nails, various rusted bolts etc.

In the autumn a series of events by artists and craftsmen highlighting the use of natural objects and materials will be held in the upper room of the cottage. Details of these events will be available on the DWT website and on the Facebook page. **T**



The tiled floor is re-laid and the wood-burning stove installed.



The recently revealed floor and lower walls of the smithy. Also see the back cover.



Some of the items discovered in the excavation of the smithy.

BIRDWOOD – TEN YEARS ON

By Mike Kelley

On Saturday 27th July 2013, there was great excitement at Cromford Wharf, with much media and TV coverage. This was due to the arrival of *Birdswood*, the first boat to sail on this part of the canal for many years. It had been a long, hard slog to get this far, and now we could finally see the rewards of our work as *Birdswood* was carefully craned into the water.

A few short years before this, it had seemed impossible, due to the shallowness of the canal, but in March 2012 Derbyshire County Council announced they would be dredging the canal. Maybe it was the campaign the FCC had run which had helped to produce this positive action. Whatever; the FCC now sprang into rapid action. A suitable boat was sought and quickly found, but there were problems. (There always are!) The canal at Cromford is a nature reserve, so no diesel engines were to be allowed on this water,

forcing us to rapidly set about researching the technology of electrical power. This was at the beginning of the electric power ►



27th July 2013, Birdswood is launched into the canal at Cromford.



There was lots to do before Birdswood was ready to carry passengers.



How it all began in 2010!



Mike steers Birdswood on the first trials with Arraslea Shires' horse Chelsea in March 2014.

popularity that we now see. The conversion of *Birdswood* would be a first. Yes, she was the first traditional narrowboat to be converted to entirely electric power; really quite an achievement.

Not only that, we had to raise around £80,000 to purchase and convert her. We did get a grant to help toward this, but it only covered about 30% of the total costs, so we had to quickly find the rest ourselves. In March 2013 she arrived at Langley Mill for a strip down, a rebuild, a conversion to electric power and complete repainting inside and out. All this intensive action resulted in her successful arrival at Cromford, ten years ago.

Before we could carry passengers we had to get several volunteers to qualify as Boat Masters (skippers), which was not easy, for although we are on an isolated canal, which is just two to three feet deep, due to the number of passengers she carries she would come under the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA)! This entailed a mammoth amount of paperwork and very expensive regular inspections. Getting those volunteers qualified was akin to getting HGV licences, but we did it. Sailings for the public began in September 2013, with our first full season beginning the following year.

Since that day in July 2013 we have carried tens of thousands of passengers and *Birdswood* has become the FCC's biggest source of income and is listed as one of the area's top tourist attractions. ▀



Our original electric motor installation (now replaced).



Bringing Birdswood up the Erewash Canal to Langley Mill.



Signwriting Birdswood at Langley Mill.



A tight turn for the low loader bringing Birdswood onto Cromford Wharf.



The original, heavy, loose wooden box seating, soon replace with the current, lighter weight, fixed versions.



Some of the early crew in 'trad' costume.



Refixing the new lighter weight seating after an MCA inspection.

CANOEING ON THE CANAL

A rare report of travelling on the canal in 1869

We have seen a few photographs of canoes exploring our canal in times past, but until now we have not read any written reports of such expeditions.

Under the headline 'Canoe Expedition From Matlock To Lincoln' *The Lincolnshire Chronicle* for 16th July 1869 reported on a communication from the Lincoln Rowing Club on their expedition which was planned to start by going down the River Derwent. It appears that conditions on the river have changed in the last 150 years because they reported rapids that they found so terrifying that they resorted to the calm waters of the canal instead. The account continues:

"We determined to leave the river for a few miles and continue our journey by an almost disused canal, which we had understood to be somewhere near the river. The thing was to find it. However, after a little reconnoitring, we were successful, and quickly launched our boats on the canal, after dragging them over hedges, stone walls, and ditches, and a few other trifling obstructions of that description.

"Hitherto we had but little opportunity of enjoying the scenery, our attention having been quite sufficiently occupied with the management of our boats, but now that our eyes were more at liberty, we thoroughly appreciated the lovely country through which we were passing. Wide-spreading trees overhung the water, ferns and wild flowers grew down to the water's edge, and the water-hen and kingfisher flew athwart our path as if disputing our right to invade their own particular territory.

"On and on, passing Lea Hurst, the home of Florence Nightingale, and providing ourselves with a candle at Mr Nightingale's Woodside Cottage, to prepare for our

passage through the long tunnel, near Lea Hurst, which presently, like a huge telescope, lay before us, piercing a lofty wooded hill. Entering the tunnel we soon found ourselves in perfect darkness, and then, lighting our candle, we fastened it to the bow of the canoe which carried our talented special artist, who was thereby enabled to make a faithful sketch upon the spot of the strange scene around us. [Sadly, the fate of this sketch is unknown.]

"Through the tunnel at last, and on through quiet villages and more tunnels, until Ambergate is reached; and then we determined to renew our acquaintance with our old friend the Derwent, who now appeared inclined to be more amiable in his treatment of us. Dragging our boats from the canal and once more upon the swift stream of the Derwent, we paddle onward . . ."

That they exaggerated the perils of the river seems substantiated by their reference to "the long tunnel", which is not the 3000-yard Butterley Tunnel, as you might think, but the 70-yard Gregory Tunnel which is far from perfectly dark at any point. Beyond there, the "more tunnels" can only have been bridges!

What is most interesting though is where they purchased the candle from to light their way: "Mr Nightingale's Woodside Cottage". This surely has to be our loved Aqueduct Cottage (there were no other canalside cottages before the tunnel). It would have been wonderful if they had named the person from whom they bought that candle.

Thanks to Alison Cannon, author of books on boating on canals in Victorian times, for bringing this to our attention. ■

PROTECT OUR WATERWAYS (1)

Your Support Needed Today

Lengths of the Cromford Canal owned by CRT

Bullbridge Road Bridge (19)
Buckland Hollow Tunnel (27; structure only – not canal itself)
Canal between Hartshay Hill Road Bridge (32) and A610 crossing
Butterley Tunnel (33)
Butterley Reservoir
Codnor Park Reservoir
Canal between Codnor Park Reservoir and Lock 5
The length of the original canal line from the A610 Langley Mill By-pass to the junction with the Erewash Canal at Langley Mill
The line of the Pinxton Arm along the headwall of Codnor Park Reservoir

The Canal & River Trust (CRT) owns several sections of the Cromford Canal – including Butterley Tunnel – a total of 3 miles of our 14½ mile canal; in short they look after 20% of the canal on our behalf. They also own two reservoirs.

Imagine what it would be like if those sections of our canal fell into even more disrepair and degradation; precious natural habitats would be lost and vital lifelines to

health, well-being and connection could be destroyed.

Unfortunately, this unpleasant vision could become reality, despite the sterling efforts of our work party on the 'adopted' sections at Hartshay and Ironville. The photographs on these pages show that the lengths owned by CRT are far from being in the best condition, even before the budget cuts.

The Government has announced a new, reduced funding settlement to CRT, the body that manages 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales, which may have devastating consequences. The sum of money awarded represents a steep reduction in funding of more than £300m in real terms over a 10-year period from 2027. This will inevitably result in a decline in the overall condition of the network.

Our historic canals that we enjoy and rely upon so much are here in major part thanks to the tireless campaigning and countless volunteer hours invested by the Inland Waterways Association and others.

There are four ways you can take action:

1. Write to your MP to tell them how much you love your local canals and rivers and why they need to be funded adequately.
2. Make a one-off or regular donation to the IWA, however small, to support their campaigning activities.
3. Join the IWA as a member: they represent and campaign for all waterways users, not just boaters.
4. Spread the word to friends and colleagues; share the IWA campaign hashtag #ProtectOurWaterways; like and share their social media posts. ►



The remains of Lock 4 at Ironville.

FCC Support

The Inland Waterways Association asked for FCC support to lobby against the reduced future funding, so we emailed the details above to those on our database of over a thousand contacts asking them all to consider supporting the campaign.

A number of our contacts have taken action as a result of this call to action, and here is an extract of one response from a senior MP to one of them:

“While there is no obligation on Ministers to fund CRT beyond 2027, I am aware that, subject to certain conditions being met, the Government will offer a new long-term funding package of over £400m. To date, the Canal & River Trust has been supported with £550m funding from the Government. With this further commitment, the charity will be supported with a further £590m until 2037.

“Since it was first created in 2012 as a private charity independent of the Government, Ministers have been clear that CRT should become progressively more self-sufficient financially. I understand that a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and CRT signed in June 2012 included the objective to ‘reduce dependence on Government Grant and to foster increasing self-sufficiency, by providing access to new charitable income streams and stimulating new efficiencies’. I am aware that the long-term £400m funding deal for 2027 to 2037 continues that objective.”

This shows the power that FCC has as a collective, and the benefits of being able to quickly push out messages via email. If you haven’t supplied us with your email address already you won’t have seen this or any other campaign emails or FCC



The rise in the towpath marks the site of the top lock at Ironville.



The end of one CRT section at Hartshay Bridge 32.



Codnor Park Reservoir and the infilled line of the Pinxton Arm.

progress bulletins; so if you’d like to receive such please let the FCC Executive Secretary (richardhandley@cromfordcanal.org.uk) have your email address. ■

PROTECT OUR WATERWAYS (2)

By Sarah Niblock, CEO of Inland Waterways Association

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) is the only independent, national charity dedicated to supporting and regenerating Britain's navigable rivers and canals as places for leisure, living and business.

IWA was formed to protect our inland waterways in 1946 at a time when they were under threat. As a result of IWA's work many navigations that would have closed remained open. Appreciation of the value of our waterways began to grow and restoration schemes got under way. We can now say proudly that since IWA was formed 500 miles of waterways have been restored and another 500 miles are under restoration.

But, gravely, the clock is starting to turn backwards. The government has announced it's cutting its grant to Canal & River Trust, putting the network's future in peril. IWA is very concerned that without adequate funding our waterways will again face closures and the millions of hours of volunteer time spent restoring and protecting waterways will be lost.

We launched the "Protect Our Waterways" campaign in March 2023 and, by joining IWA, you will strengthen our voice.

FCC is doing a sterling job of restoring your stretch of canal and IWA is proud to support the work of societies across the country. Our support includes:

Educating politicians about the many and varied benefits of our waterways;

Access to expertise to guide your projects through the planning system;

Engineering and heritage expertise to call upon;



Practical Restoration Handbook - the 'go to resource' for all volunteers involved in waterways restoration;

Help with construction costing and planning;

Help with construction projects through WRG camps and weekends;

Sharing knowledge and ideas through the Restoration Hub;

Technical expertise – engineering, planning and heritage etc;

Provision of cost-effective insurance for restoration projects.

Only IWA provides this range of support to the waterways family, but now we need every member of this society to help to reverse this damaging decision. Restoration projects will become untenable. You know better than anyone that it is far more costly to repair and restore than to prevent decline in the first place. Here is how you can – and should – support our campaign:

As well as being an individual society member, please join IWA. You will have access to all the benefits above and more. Your membership will help strengthen our voice to protect the network and ensure another 500 miles are restored.

Make a one-off or regular donation to IWA towards our campaign costs.

Sign up for our mailing list where you'll find links to our petition and how to write to your MP.

Spread the word – please use your communication channels to engage as many of your local waterways users as possible and direct them to our website. It will only take you a few minutes via our website www.waterways.org.uk, but could put the waterways on the right path for years ahead. **T**

RAISING THE BAR

Ian Hooker on how DCC saved the day at Brown's Bridge

Birdswood trips have continued well this year, if rather slowly. After weed was cut over the winter we enjoyed reasonably clear water until it grew again in the southern section beyond Brown's Bridge. But on Wednesday 2nd August disaster struck. After *Birdswood* had cleared the bridge on her way back to Cromford, the bridge stuck on a slight over-run and, in the strenuous efforts made to get it free, the lever arm used to move the bridge snapped in two.

It looked as though trips for the foreseeable future might have to stop at the bridge. Nigel Neale and I attended at High Peak Junction at midday on Thursday to see if there might be a temporary solution when, to our amazement and delight, we saw on top of the truck of John Thompson, a DCC Countryside Ranger, a readymade perfect replica of the lever bar. This 'miracle' turned out to result from the foresight of John who, having seen us repairing the bar two years ago when cracks began to appear in it, had ordered a replacement to be made by the DCC Estates department and had held it in store for just this event.

Thursday afternoon was spent getting the stub end of the broken bar out of the steel ferrule that forms part of the 'hinge' for the bar and in marking up, carefully, how much wood should be removed to fit the new bar in its place. That work was almost completed on Friday when a message came to the rangers of a fallen tree across the canal and towpath down at Ambergate. That took priority over our bridge repair but, true to his undertaking, John was back Saturday morning, and despite the pouring rain, he had completed the work by 10am ready for the next *Birdswood* trip.

We owe a special thank you to John Thompson and to the Countryside Department for anticipating just this event and moving promptly to make the repair. ■



The broken bridge arm.



John Thompson and the shiny new opening arm.



The new bridge arm in action.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We always welcome your thoughts on canal-related issues – please keep them coming!

Butterley Length (1)

I was interested in your piece on the length of Butterley Tunnel (summer issue). Using my FCC privileged access to the Land Registry e-services, it is possible to spot the coordinates of the tunnel end to mm accuracy (provided you can keep your hand sufficiently still). To the nearest metre, the coordinates of the centre of the east portal are E442121, N351307, and the west portal (present Armco extension) are E439361, N351713 (or on OS maps, SK42121,51307 to SK39361,51713)

Using a little trigonometry this gives the straight line length of the present tunnel as 2789.2m or say 3050.3 yards.

John Boucher

Robin Avery replied: Just when I thought that we had put this to bed! Using the grid references given in John's email on the 1892 map, I would agree with the western portal position but the eastern ones appear to be about 10m east of the entrance. I think that I will stick with what I have but will add this to the information that I have for future reference. It is a shame that the portals cannot be picked up on Google earth as I have established that the measurement system there is accurate to less than 0.5m on the regatta courses at Nottingham, Munich and Marathon.

Butterley Length (2)

To add my two pennies worth to your answer concerning the tunnel's length in my 2006 report. I included a table of GPS measurements for the structures accessible along the tunnel giving a total length in 2006 of 3049 yards. The report is still available online via the link on the Butterley Tunnel page of the FCC website (scroll to bottom of page).

Tina Cordon

Words from Wales

With regard to Issue 85 (and many before), it is always a joy to receive each fine edition of *The Portal*. Thank you for giving so much precious time and intense work towards putting it together. It is clearly done with genuinely great love, ever shown by the scrupulous attention to detail. Each of the contributors add something more of their own, and you link it seamlessly.

I hope I can come and see progress made at the canal before too long, and to meet at least some of you again. It's marvellous to think how visitors and users, over many years ahead, will delight purely through current dedicated effort that, single-mindedly, is determined to bring it all back to life.

My ongoing regret is that I still contribute so little to something that promises to be yet more wonderful all the time.

Thank you ALL for what you do!

Sincerely so!

Melanie Jane Martin, Harlech



Warning!

I just want to say what a most interesting edition of *Portal* recently delivered (No 85, Summer 2023). Every edition is interesting and gets read from cover to cover, but this one absorbed me in one session and completely wrecked my evening when I was supposed to be doing something else! Beggarlee is looking especially good.

Tim Boddington

Last 2023 Premium Trip

Birdswood's last premium trip for this year, featuring guided tours of Leawood Pump, Aqueduct Cottage and High Peak Junction will take place on Sunday 8th October. Book at www.birdswood.com



Friends of the Cromford Canal



YOUR WILL COULD MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE LEGACIES MEAN FASTER PROGRESS ON CANAL PROJECTS

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

HAVE YOU MADE YOUR WILL ?

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

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

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

The Friends of the Cromford Canal – registered charity 1164608

