

THE PORTAL

Issue 84 - Spring 2023

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Friends of the Cromford Canal

Registered Charity No. 1164608

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Front Cover

Weed cutter and rake boats from Somerset Boat Co at work on the 'Birdswood' length of the canal in February. (*Photo: Hugh Potter*)

Back Cover

Top: The currently weeded-up extension of the Cromford Canal above Langley Mill boat yard, built by ECPDA volunteers some years ago. The Beggarlee extension will continue the canal north through two locks and under the A610.

Bottom: The Beggarlee Extension will approach from the right through two locks then turn right under the former Barber Walker railway bridge beneath the A610. The old railway lines can still be seen in this photograph. (*Photos: David Martin*)

The copy date for the next issue is 12th May

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



For the last few years, FCC's activities at Langley Mill have been largely 'behind the scenes' with work on obtaining the Planning Permission and then fulfilling the conditions to start work on our Beggarlee Extension north from Langley Mill. Those stages are now over and we are beginning to see things happening on the ground. The work party has cleared brash and scrub from the area so that the more serious work can begin.

It has not been an easy location to understand 'on the ground' on account of the often impenetrable undergrowth (despite a public footpath running through part of it), but you will have a chance to be guided around the area yourself during the ECPDA's 50th Anniversary Rally celebrating their restoration and reopening of Langley Bridge Lock in 1973. Many people think that this is the top lock on the Erewash Canal, but of course it is in fact the bottom lock of the Cromford Canal.

We will now be able to extend the canal above the boatyard, through the section already restored by ECPDA, up a staircase pair of locks and under the A610. Come along on the late May Bank Holiday weekend to find out for yourself what is happening – see page 34 for details.

What would be even better is if you could spare a couple of hours to help our small team on the stand. It is not an onerous task; indeed we hope it will be very enjoyable! We just need a few extra people to chat to visitors and tell them about the canal and, ideally, sell them some of our books and other merchandise and persuade them to join FCC! If you think you could spare a just a couple

of hours on one day, please contact us at wharfshop@cromfordcanal.org.uk.

Elsewhere, we've been spending some money on the canal: dredging the totally weeded-up Pinxton terminus and cutting weed on the Cromford to Leewood section to facilitate *Birdswood's* passage.

Thanks to all who complemented us on the new centrespread map allowing you to get a better idea of what is where on the canal. We have repeated it this issue, with other key places marked related to articles in this issue. We plan to continue this feature in future issues.

In *Portal* we can give you full reports on what has been happening – but by the nature of its quarterly publication it cannot keep you up-to-date on day-to-day developments. So if you want to be kept better informed and be the first to learn of new works, events etc, drop an email to secretary@cromfordcanal.org.uk to be put on our mailing list – see page 33.

And talking of keeping in touch, we are making great progress, but we could do even better with a little more help. On page 32 you will see that we are looking for both a Project Manager for our exciting Beggarlee Extension and a Publicity Officer to spread the news of what we are doing to the wider public. Please do consider offering your help in either of these – or indeed in any other way you think you might be able to help; perhaps a day in the shop at Cromford Wharf, or joining the jolly crew of *Birdswood* or the happy band of work party volunteers. Whatever you can offer, we can use! Do get in touch. **T**

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

By David Martin



Well, it's all action stations down at the Beggarlee section. The Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association and FCC work parties led by Dave Turner have already been clearing away the self-sets and shrubbery from around the planned drainage alteration works areas - and my, what a difference that has made because now you can actually see the existing end of the Cromford Canal above the boatyard and where it's going.

We are currently in talks with the volunteer organisation Waterway Recovery Group about doing the drainage works alteration job for FCC later this year. This will hopefully be a great collaborative operation involving the three volunteer organisations of ECPDA, FCC and WRG.

Of course, the drainage works scheme is only the first step; the next one will be the construction of the flood mitigation zone which compensates for loss of flood plain due to the new canal embankments that we intend to construct later across the existing flood plain.

Also, we will be creating a mini compound here with a workstation, along with some limited facilities nearer to where the people are working on the ground.

Our engineers have been working away in the background as ever trying to simplify the flood mitigation zone in the hopes that this piece of work could be carried out by the same volunteer organisations too. In the meantime we will continue to search for external funding to get on with all these jobs.

At the other end of the canal, from Cromford Wharf to Leawood Pumphouse, we have employed a contractor to clear some of the weeds in the canal that blighted *Birdswood's* trips up and down the cut. Derbyshire County Council have also carrying out some repairs to water leaks along this section as identified last year.

From Aqueduct Cottage down to Gregory Tunnel we are carrying out our two planned surveys: a geotechnical survey with some embankment core sampling, and at the same time a topographical survey to help us understand the stability of the embankments along this section. The conclusion of these will inform us on our future course of action to remedy any problems that exist here.

Our January social at the Church Hall in Ironville was about the earlier tracks and tramways associated with the local coalfield and the canal and was well attended. The second part of this subject by David Amos, on 20th February, is all about the development of the early railways here.

On 20th March our trustees Mike Kelley and Richard Handley will be presenting their talk on the FCC's journey with *Birdswood* and the joys of being a volunteer for the organisation, so come along and find out what they do. And if you feel like giving us a few hours of your time, please get in touch with us at: volunteer@cromfordcanal.org.uk.

Finally don't forget that on 17th April we will be having our annual general meeting where we will update you all on what we did in 2022 and on where we are going; so if you have any questions, that will be your chance to ask them. I hope to see you there. ■

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

By Yvonne Shattower

I would like to start by wishing all our members a Happy New Year, even if we are now well into February. 'Better late than never', as the saying goes.

In this issue you will see an article by Richard Handley who is in charge of much of our IT (page 33). There are a great number of our members for whom we do not have an email address so we are unable to keep them up to date with our latest news and activities. By signing up to Richard's list you will be amongst the first to hear all our news!

Our friends from the Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association are holding a rally over the late May Bank Holiday (27th–29th May) at Langley Mill where the Cromford Canal starts – or ends – whichever way you look at it! The ECPDA was formed fifty five years ago to restore the Erewash Canal and to complete the restoration they created the basin at Langley Mill which was opened five years later. The Rally is a five year event and is always well worth attending, with lots of boats including rare historic examples, stalls, entertainment and a first class beer tent. The FCC will have a stand there, so do please put the date in your diary and come along and support us.

This rally will also give you the opportunity to see what has been achieved by ECPDA at Langley Mill and what the FCC's Beggarlee Extension involves. Each day there will be a guided walk led by Mike Kelley or Hugh Potter to take you over the route and answer questions. Full details at rally.ecpda.org.uk.



We have been enjoying David Amos's talks on the railways around Cromford and the Erewash Valley, but on 20th March we have something completely different: Mike Kelley and Richard Handley will be talking about the Life and Times of our very own *Birdswood*, so if you have never delved into her history, this will be the talk for you. On 17th April we hold our Annual General Meeting when you will have to chance to elect trustees and ask us any questions you have about our restoration plans, especially about the Beggarlee Extension at Langley Mill. All our talks will be in the usual place – Ironville Church Hall starting at 7.30pm with a bar, raffle and tea and coffee available.

Over the years, we have held open meetings with speakers at several locations, but we always find that Ironville is the most successful; however your trustees have been aware that we reach a very small number of our members. Do you know of a suitable location where we could hold a talk and would attract a reasonable audience? Is there a speaker you would like us to invite to Ironville or another location? We are all too aware that dark evenings and cold weather are not the most inviting conditions for 'turning out' for a talk, but we would like to reach out to more of our members in this way. Please contact me or our Chairman, David Martin, with any ideas you may have on this topic.

Hoping that we will see you at one of our events in the coming months.

NEWS FROM THE NORTH

Recent work by Derbyshire County Council between Ambergate and Cromford

The ground paddle opposite Aqueduct Cottage has been replaced to assist level control on this section. Voids, which had been detected by ground penetrating radar between Cromford Wharf and Lawn Bridge, have been filled in with geopolymer, greatly reducing leaks into Cromford Meadows.

Repairs to the supporting wall for towpath at Whatstandwell Bridge, planned for last winter are now to be done in September. This will involve partly draining the canal at this point.

Annual removal of reed and weed between Whatstandwell and Ambergate has continued through the winter.

Roof repairs at High Peak Junction, which are currently restricting access to parts of the historic railway workshops, are still to be done. **T**



Geopolymer being pumped into holes drilled into the towpath where voids had been detected just north of Lawn Bridge.



A temporary dam surrounded the sluice at Leawood whilst the paddle was replaced.



The only access to the site was from the rugby club road. A long pipe was then run to the work site.

WEED CUTTING

By Mike Kelley

For two days in January, professional weed cutters came onto the northern section of the Cromford Canal. Keeping the channel open has always been a problem and in times past it was all done by hand, which I can assure you is a very tiring job indeed. This year, for the first time in a long time, mechanical cutters were employed. Ideally it should have been carried out in the autumn, but still we are happy it was carried out in any case. We used a company who had been recommended to us by the Chesterfield Canal people, and they did their job well.

in operations over Covid allowed the weeds to grow to a level which was seriously hindering the operation.



The weedcutter (left) and the rake (right) in the car park at Cromford Wharf.

All photos Keith Bailey

A canal is a man-made structure (Yes, I know you know that, but I have come across those who think canals are, or have become, natural and should not be touched!) and if you do not manage them, you will lose them. Left to their own devices canals quickly silt up, get choked with reeds and the like, thereby stopping sunlight and oxygen getting to the water, preventing aquatic life from being happy there, or even causing it to disappear altogether. Regular passage of the boat helps to keep the weed growth down, but the hiatus



The weedcutter being launched off of the peninsula.



The weedcutter by Arkwright's boathouse shortly after being launched.

Aquatic plants can and do become a menace to any propeller driven boat. They are picked up by the propeller, which reduces the boat's thrust and, in some cases, stops it altogether. Our boat, *Birdswood*, does not have a weed hatch so someone (usually the skipper) has to lay flat out on the ground, ►



A beautiful sunny winter's morning cutting the "Spaghetti Weed" that really took hold south of Brown's Bridge during lock-down.



The weedcutter in action near Lawn Bridge.



Close-up of the weedcutter blade.



Who needs the key for Brown's Bridge?

whilst another person pushes the tiller over as far as it will go to allow the person laying down to reach into the cold water up to their arm pit, and pull the gathered weeds off the prop.

Hence we were very glad to see the weed cutters in action. **T**

WORK PARTY REPORT

By John Guyler

At Ironville, the November FCC work parties cleared the towpath side of thick brambles and vegetation from King William Bridge to Lock 4. We also started clearing the water course at Lock 4, which was very overgrown, finally finishing clearing the whole section up to the Codnor Park Reservoir overspill. This was done without going in the water and one crayfish was sighted, so we know they are still there.

We had two work parties at the site of the Pottery building, clearing some small trees outside the Pottery, and in the Pottery yard we were given permission to work on some of the small trees that were going through the wire fence. The brambles and vegetation opposite the Pottery were cut back or cleared in sections and a very small amount of litter was picked. We have left the brush in piles because the weather was against us having controlled burns and then we had to concentrate on Beggarlee.

In November, Malc Chisnall made fixing brackets and then Malc & John 'Taffy' Bates fitted a new bench at Codnor Park Reservoir. Malc and Taffy also cleared the 20in drain at the stone bridge on the far side of Codnor Park Reservoir. Water had been flooding back over the footpath to 9in deep, making it impossible to walk through. Someone had thought it funny to put large pieces of stone in the drain.

On the last Wednesday of November and the first Wednesday of December, work parties were at Whatstandwell near Robin Hood, lifting and clearing a large amount of pulled reed and then barrowing to disposal. These work parties must be the most strenuous work that we do. The reed, if wet, is very heavy; then it has to be barrowed to the disposal point which can often be a good ►



A final clean-up of the stop grooves in the gauging narrows.



The chain discovered in the infill could well have been used to prevent boats passing without paying tolls.



Dumper and chipper at work on Hall Road.



Plenty of scrub and brush to clear at Beggarlee.

distance away. If anyone wants a good work-out, join one of the reed-clearing groups! They have to be applauded for the effort put in on this task.

The work parties were split on the last Wednesday before Christmas. One group worked at Pinxton Wharf, clearing vegetation and litter. Quite a lot was achieved in the amount of vegetation cleared off the path, and on the roadway alongside the canal two large bags of litter were picked. The second group were working at Sawmills in the Gauging Narrows, digging out the stop board position

more thoroughly, ready for an inspection by a laser ground penetrating team, the results are not known yet. Both work parties finished at around twelve and retired to the Boat Inn for refreshments.

Beggarlee Extension

The work at Beggarlee has continued most Wednesdays from late November. First we started clearing the thick growth of bushes over the area covering the approach to the site of the new locks and the right turn towards the A610 bridge. As piles of brush were created and moved to points where the chipper could be sited, small trees, large bushes and saplings were exposed. These were cut to about 3ft height, so that straps or cables could be attached to pull the roots out.

The Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association work parties, based at the Great Northern Basin, have been working at Beggarlee on Fridays from December. First, they cleared the access up to the area where the locks are going to be built so that the dumper ►



No shortage of undergrowth attempting to take over the canal by the Pottery on Ironville lock flight.



Plenty of brush to chip, with the A610 bridge in the background. It is through this former railway bridge that the canal will pass.

can pull the chipper up to site. The FCC work parties cleared a lot of the bushes and saplings on this section on several Wednesdays. The result was good access, but with the large amount of rain in January this has developed into a very muddy track. We are now able some Wednesdays to get access through from Hall Road, so the chipper can be towed by a road vehicle on to site.

We are fortunate to be able to use the chipper owned by ECPDA, for which we are very grateful. The FCC has two volunteers trained and certificated to use it - John Dyson and Malc Chisnell - and the Erewash group have several certificated operators.

On alternate Saturdays starting on 7th January, FCC and ECPDA work parties combined, mainly to feed and operate the chipper. This has worked very well; probably the bacon cobs at the start in the ECPDA cottage at the Great Northern Basin have something to do with it. There were problems at the start with the chipper; we needed to replace some of the pull through mechanism and then have the chipper

blades sharpened, but now with several weeks of work behind them the operators have got to grips with how it is working. One indication of a problem is the change of chippings being produced, so now the machine is stopped and adjusted, or small brush which drops out of the bottom chute is cleared to prevent the cutters clogging up.

The main areas concentrated on for clearance are two open culverts which were put in when the A610 road was built, They are piped under the road and then they are open about 50 yards from the road and then run to the River Erewash. These culverts will now have to be piped completely, with one diverted to feed into the other and then down to the Erewash because they will be under the canal, and the embankments will cover them.

At the time of writing, at the start of February, the work parties have almost finished cutting the bushes back, and the exposed self-set saplings over the whole area are starting to be pulled out with a winch and cables. Because time is getting ►

short to complete the clearance especially around the culverts, we have a team of contractors coming in on the second week of February, for a week to pull the tree roots.

We have been fortunate to have the services of a Waterway Recovery Group trainer, who has put five FCC volunteers through the first part of dumper training. For training purposes the dumper was driven up to the main area being worked and loaded with a large amount of cut tree trunks, to give experience of driving with a load.

We also have one volunteer on training for using a chain saw (with all the protective clothing and helmet needed). There is a training period planned for large digger instruction; a digger and trainer has been identified, so four or five FCC volunteers will be going on that course.

The total FCC work party hours in 2022 were 2874.75 plus 500.5 travel hours.

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. The FCC will also require suitably certificated (to WRG standards) volunteers to work various pieces of machinery. The machinery will include, but is not limited to, dumpers, diggers (large and small), vibrating rollers and tea urns. We are looking at funding the instruction courses to operate the machinery and the volunteers will then be certificated to work on projects. If enough volunteers are trained then the FCC will be able to work in areas not under the control of a contractor. This is a good chance train up on what could be a useful skill.

If you would like to get certification on any of machines as above, please let myself or John Barker know: john_guyler@yahoo.co.uk or work@cromfordcanal.org.uk.

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**

PINXTON DREDGING

Recent dredging work was carried out on the Pinxton Arm by FCC and Derbyshire County Council using a local contractor. The length dredged is a short isolated section of the Cromford Canal to the south-west of Pinxton. Water vole are often present on this section, so a vole survey was carried out before work began. The channel was choked with common reed as it had not been dredged out since 2018.

These conditions were contributing to a rapid and significant loss of habitat for water vole as well as culverted water entering the canal section leading to flooding of adjacent land and road. After dredging, we have plenty of ducks on that section but no water vole at present – hopefully they will return now they have water to swim in. **T**



Waiting for the JCB driver to fill the dumper.

THE LONG-AWAITED OPENING OF AQUEDUCT COTTAGE

By Ron Common

Four years ago, Aqueduct Cottage was a roofless ruin engulfed by trees and vegetation. Invasive roots and weathering had taken its toll over four decades of neglect and the much-loved cottage was close to collapse.



The cottage in 2018 after years of neglect.

But, since 2019 and thanks to one of the most amazing community conservation projects the Derwent Valley has witnessed in recent years, new life has been breathed into the historic cottage by our team of dedicated volunteers and its official opening to the public is set for 25th March.



What a difference four years of dedication and hard work can do!

It's fair to say that not everything will be finished by then; for example, the lean-to pantry will still be a work in progress and restoring the privy outbuilding is expected to take all summer. However, the restoration works will be sufficiently complete to allow us to welcome visitors just ahead of Easter. What a proud day that will be!

In the run up to March, it's been an interesting few months on the project with several important jobs either completed or well underway.

The freezing temperatures in December and January meant that little progress could be made on rebuilding the pantry or pointing the rear wall of the cottage so we turned our attention to other areas.

One particularly tricky job was laying the front path. The main challenge was the irregular size and shape of the heavy gritstone slabs. Thanks to the ingenious use of cardboard cut-outs individually scaled to represent each stone, a suitable pattern was created which significantly reduced the time and effort in laying the slabs. The newly laid path blends beautifully with the cottage and its dry-stone walls and is a total triumph.▶



The front path was a 3 dimensional jigsaw puzzle.

One of the most important tasks we completed was the repair of the parlour floor. As followers of the project will know, the original stone floor was badly damaged by tree roots which left two large holes in the floor. Thanks to a kind donation we were able to fill the gaps with matching reclaimed flag stones, thereby maintaining the authenticity of the room.

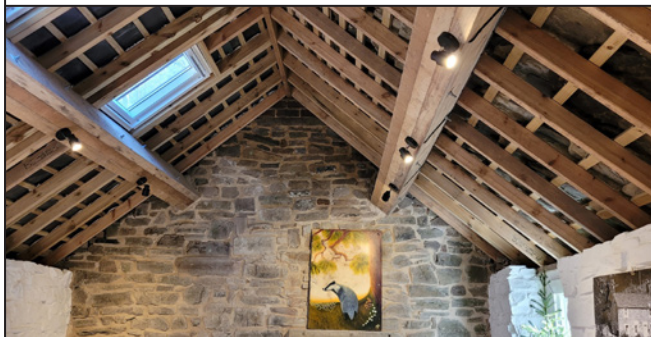
Another exciting milestone was the installation of lighting to the upstairs activity room plus the ground floor rooms, where the information panels will be located. The lights will be powered by a battery located under the staircase. Initially, it will be recharged at the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust office, but eventually charge will also be provided from solar tiles incorporated into the privy roof.

At the beginning of the year we also took the opportunity to clear the original path to the 'top garden'. This is a walled enclosure in Lea Wood approximately 150 yards south of the cottage next to the canal, used by past tenants to grow fruit and vegetables.

It had been completely forgotten about until Fay Bark's visit to the cottage in 2017 when it was revealed in one of her amazing sketches of the cottage. The path became overgrown decades ago which is why the garden was lost and ►



Donated reclaimed flag stones complete the repair of the parlour floor.



Battery powered electric lighting comes to Aqueduct Cottage for the first time in its history.



The original path to the "top garden" used to grow fruit and vegetables.

forgotten. But since it is part of the history of the cottage, we decided that restoring it opens up the possibility of repairing the garden walls and stone tool shed at some point in the future.

At the beginning of February we began an even more important task – restoring the entrance of the Lea Wood arm. (As some will know, this has been a personal ambition since the project began.)

The first step involved removing the four dead trees either side of the canal near the privy. Felling the trees was carefully managed by Ian Hooker (under licence with DWT) but the challenge was removing the tree roots, which had embedded themselves deep into the canal walls.

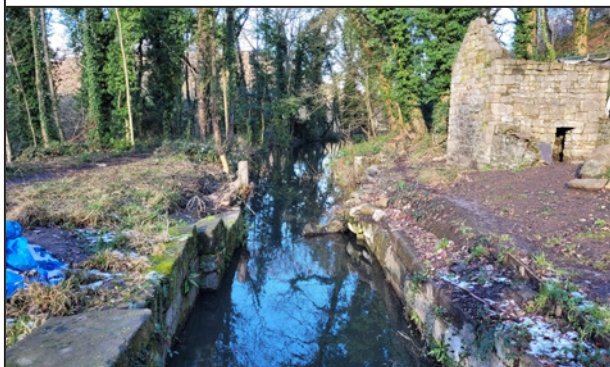
At the time of writing we had removed three of the four roots and had one more to go. The next step will be to replace the displaced coping stones and reinstate a lock gate. We have yet to source a pre-used gate but hopefully Canal & River Trust will oblige.

Once the gate is installed, interpretation will provide visitors information on the history of the Lea Wood arm. Restoring this feature sets the context for the building of the cottage. It will also be an enhancement to the Cromford Canal and World Heritage Site which I am sure will fascinate visitors.

It's going to be a frantic few weeks to Open Day, but when that moment comes, an important new chapter in the long history of the cottage will begin. **T**



The remains of the stone tool shed in the 'top garden'.



Work starts clearing vegetation and tree stumps from the entrance to the Lea Arm.



The exposed stop lock chamber and the badly damaged and displaced coping stones.

SARAH MORELAND AND CODNOR PARK POTTERY

By John Guyler with information supplied by Andy Cadman

A cast iron plate bearing the lettering “Sarah Moreland dealer in small wares” was found locally last year by Keith Henstock. Keith has now restored the plate, which measures approx 20in x 8in, and it is in position on the Pottery wall at Ironville.



Informative signs are now on both sides of the Pottery.

It was discovered in his back garden when builder Roland Rogers was putting some new drains in. The garden was once linked to Railway Row, close by.

Sarah Moreland was a dealer in small wares and according to the census records she lived in Ironville, at least between 1861 and 1881, at 5 Railway Row.

Initially she moved in with her husband and two children. Her husband was an ‘Iron Moulder’ (a foundry worker, who made moulds for casting iron). He was probably working for the Oakes Company in Riddings. He died in 1861 and is buried in Ironville.

No occupation is given for Sarah in the census records; however a search of the trade directories for 1875 and 1876 reveals that Sarah is listed as a shopkeeper living at 5 Railway Row. It is highly likely she was

a haberdasher, dealing in tapes, ribbons, braids etc.

Sarah was born in Birchwood, near Alfreton, to Thomas & Sarah Dawes. She was baptised with her twin brother John, on 1st June 1817.

Sarah married Thomas Moreland on 13th May 1854, at Swanwick Baptist Chapel. At the time of her marriage, she was living at Newlands Farm, Greenhill Lane, and the couple lived in Riddings before moving to Railway Row, about 1861.

Around 1891, Sarah moved to Osmaston near Derby to live with her daughter’s family. When she died in 1895, her age was given as 78 and was buried in Osmaston on 16th February 1895.

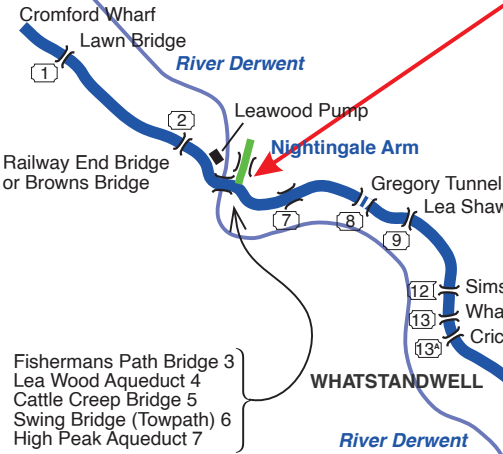


John ‘Taffy’ Bates and Malc Chisnall inspect the newly erected signs.

Last December, FCC work party member Malc Chisnall together with his long-time friend ‘Taffy’ Bates, put a number of plaques up on the Pottery facing the towpath.

Andy Cadman, who had the plaques made, has made enquiries and the building is not heritage listed. The now restored plaque to Sarah Moreland is also on the wall. ■

CROMFORD



Aquaduct Cottage will open to the public on 25th March.



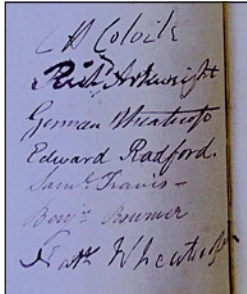
The Pottery building the locks at Ironv...

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

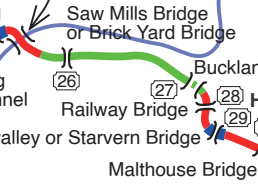
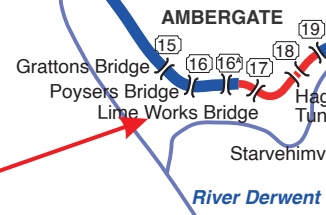
WHATSTANDWELL



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



Ambergate Toll Gate Signatories.



- █ Canal in water
- █ Canal bed intact
- █ Canal bed destroyed
- Rivers



Work on the FCC length of canal at...

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.

THE CROMFORD CANAL



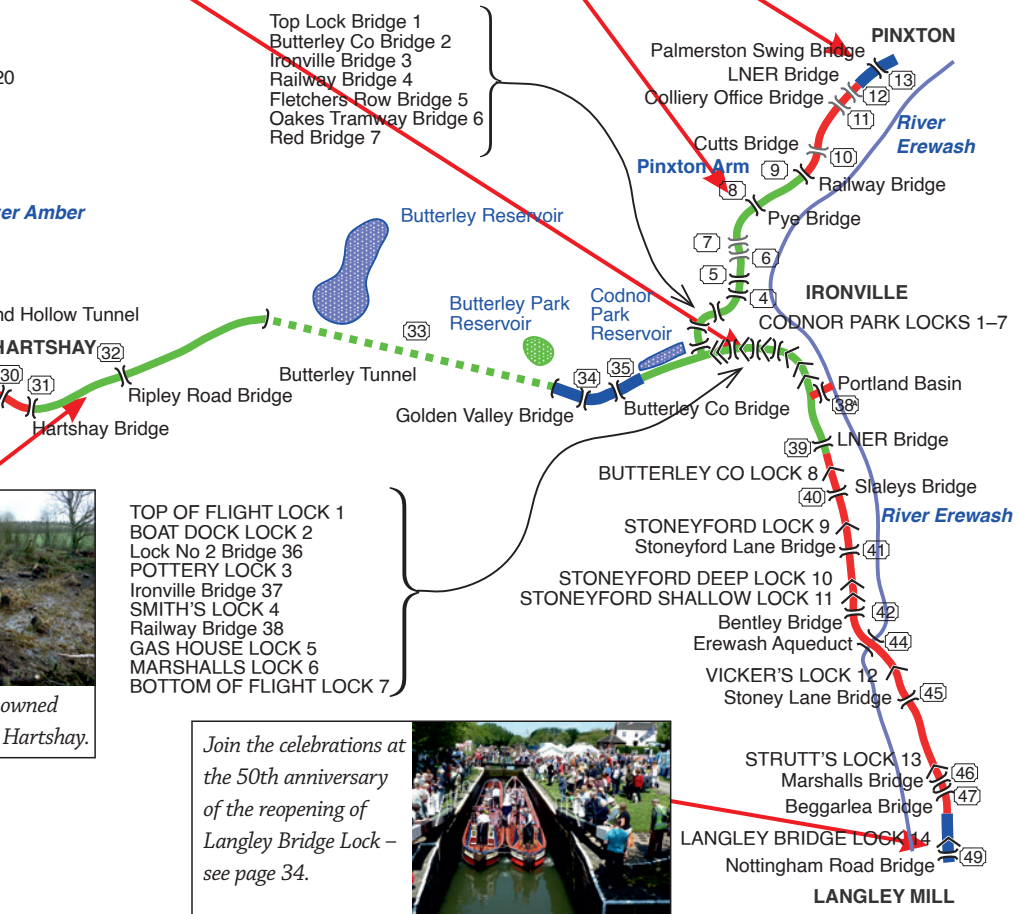
ing beside
ille.



Part of the winding hole
by Riddings Iron Works,
featured on page 26.



Dredging at Pinxton.



WEAK AT THE KNEES?

Keith Bailey looks at preparations for *Birdswood's* 2023 Inspection

In *Portal 79* I outlined the inspection requirements for our trip boat, *Birdswood*. Because she is licenced to carry over 12 passengers, she is subject to regulations imposed by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA). She has to be inspected annually to maintain the operating licence. On even years, the inspection is carried out with *Birdswood* in the water. This inspection focusses more on process and procedure, but also includes some structural elements. On odd years *Birdswood* is craned out of the water for inspection and this focusses more on the structural integrity and the boat is checked both outside and inside.

This year is an odd year, so a full out of water inspection will be required. This will take place in early November 2023. During the 2022 In Water inspection the Inspectors discussed in detail with us what they wanted to look at in 2023. They wish to focus on the hull braces that support and stiffen the sides of the vessel. Unfortunately, these braces are largely hidden and require a great deal of work to expose. As well as making the braces accessible to the inspectors the means of access needs to be removable so that the boat can be used to carry passengers during the April to October cruising season.

Volunteers, Dave Webster, Ian Hutchinson and Nigel Neale have spent many cold days since November 2022 racking up over 370 volunteer hours between them working to expose the hull braces in the boatman's cabin and galley. The braces in the passenger cabin are routinely exposed for inspection by removing the seats and lifting the floor plates as pictured in *Portal 79*. *Birdswood* Master Norman Wileman is the expert in this area. In this story I will describe how the obstacles were overcome and the extent of the, often quite dirty, work the team has undertaken.

Working Boat Design

A working narrow boat is essentially a floating box into which bulk cargo, often coal or limestone, is loaded. The design objective is to create the maximum volume for cargo within the constraints of the vessel's length and width, which are set by the size of locks through which the boat has to navigate. *Birdswood* is one of twelve so called "Station Boats" built by the Midland Railway in the 1930s and named after railway stations, except for *Birdswood*, which was named after a railway junction. ▶



Station Boat Ditton under restoration at Langley Mill in 1994.

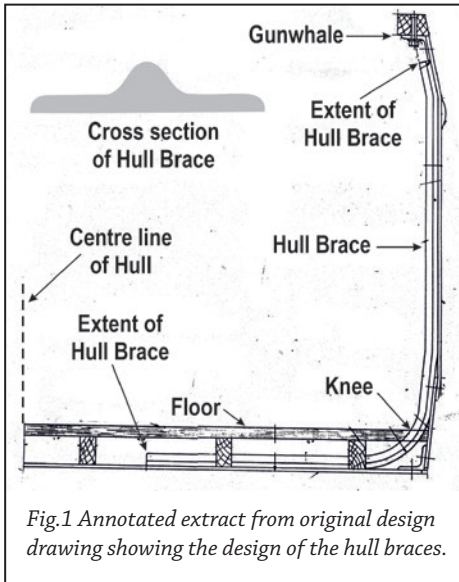


Fig.1 Annotated extract from original design drawing showing the design of the hull braces.

Shaped steel braces, as shown in Fig 1, were used to stiffen the sides of the boat and brace them to prevent collapse due the pressure applied by the cargo. The brace was shaped so that there was minimal intrusion into the cargo space. The photo of *Ditton*, another Station Boat, under restoration at Langley Mill in 1994, shows the regular spacing of the braces along the length of the hull. In Fig. 1 the sharp curve where the brace joins the base plate is called the “knee”. It can be seen that the knee is partly under the floor of the boat and it is therefore in a damp and hostile environment and prone to corrosion. It is for this reason that the MCA want to concentrate their inspection on the knees. The knees on *Birdswood* are particularly difficult to access because they are hidden by the built-in furniture in the boatman’s cabin and also by the fittings in the galley.

Boatman’s Cabin Access Problems

When the MCA outlined their requirements to inspect the knees and the entire extent of the braces it was feared that the whole of the boatman’s cabin would need to be dismantled because the area on the left-hand

side of the cabin, which comprises the stove, the fold-down table area and the bed, extends in depth out over the base of the hull braces and upwards to the roof of the cabin. The area on the right hand side also covers the braces. However, through the ingenuity and diligence of our team and a great deal of hard work the cabin has not had to be dismantled.

In the course of exposing the braces some “horrors” were also exposed. When FCC bought *Birdswood* she had a diesel engine and an indirect hot water cylinder heated by the cooling water from the engine. This was redundant with the electrically powered engine, but was still part of the plumbing system on the boat which feeds the sink in the galley and the hand basin in the toilet from the water tank in the bow.



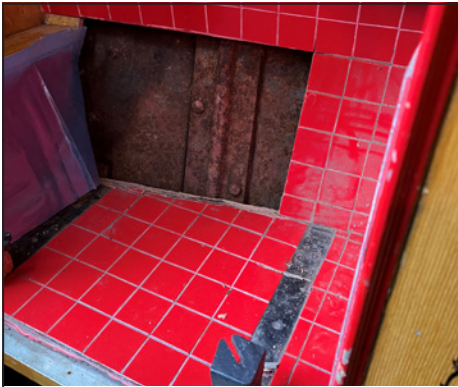
Hull brace under the stove shortly after exposure. Note the corrosion and slime.

This cylinder had to be removed in order to expose a brace and it was found that it had been leaking, allowing water to gather under the floor of the boatman’s cabin. It had previously been thought that this water came from the bilge in the motor compartment. The coal stove had to be removed to gain access to the vertical part of a brace. The chimney had to be removed as well, which was not a simple task. The cabin floor below the stove was removed to reveal the horizontal part of the brace. This revealed a congealed mass of corrosion and slime which was not at all pleasant to remove.▶



The area under the stove after extensive cleaning.

The vertical part of the brace was behind the tiled heatproof surround for the stove. Dave Webster did some very delicate surgery with a multitool to cut through the grouting between the tiles and the plywood backboard and remove a section intact without damaging any of the tiles. Battens were then fitted to allow the section to be replaced and fixed.



Tiles carefully removed without damage to expose the brace behind the heatproof stove surround.

The cross-bed was the next major hurdle. This required the board over the under-bed drawers to be removed as well as sections of the 18mm plywood base, and the whole bed unit to be temporarily jacked up. The board over the drawers has been refitted so that it can be removed for access. The plywood vertical back panel in the bed unit has been

made removable. There was a considerable amount to corrosion and dirt to be removed from and around the braces.



The area below the bed in the boatman's cabin before cleaning.

On the right-hand side of the boat the base panel of the seating unit has been made removable as well as the vertical panels. There is fibreglass insulation behind the vertical panels on both sides of the cabin which has got damp. This has been removed and will be replaced. ▶



The exposed braces below the bed in the boatman's cabin after cleaning.



Space in the cabin from where the hot water cylinder was removed.



New support battens and now-replaced rotten plywood on the vertical section in the galley

The Galley

The galley has shelving and storage units on both sides. These are more easily removed than in the boatman's cabin, but still required considerable effort. Once the units were removed and the floor lifted it was apparent the bottoms of the vertical plywood panels had rotted due to dampness. This had to be cut out and replaced. These panels are now removable. New wooden supports for the plywood floor panels supporting the furniture have also been fitted.



The exposed braces in the galley.

The Next Challenge

The next area to be tackled is the "gas locker". This is the space under the hatch at the bow of the boat. There is a 6mm steel plate covering the whole of the bow area from the back of the toilet. The plate covers the water tank, which does not take up the whole of the bow of the boat. The MCA want access to the void between the tank and the front of the hull. This will require a series of pilot holes to be drilled through the plate to determine the extent of the tank. Once this is established a larger hole will be drilled so that an endoscopic camera can then be dropped into the void. Who knows what will then be revealed!

The Plan

Once all the access areas to the braces have been made and repairs and modifications made, the furniture and panels will be reinstated in such a way that the braces can be exposed in a couple of days for the inspection to take place. This will allow the normal operation of the boat and will allow cabin tours to take place during trips

This work and the outcomes achieved have only been possible due to the expertise, talent, dedication and enthusiasm of Dave, Ian and Nigel.

Due to my advancing years and general decrepitude, I have not been able to assist the team other than to offer advice and encouragement and to document their incredible achievements. ▀

TURNPIKE TO A6

By Ken Brockway



The caption to this postcard reads “The AmberGate of the Cromford and Belper Turnpike Trust”. The canal runs along the hillside above the railway.

If you visit Cromford Wharf from the south it's most likely you will drive along the twisting road known today as the A6. It's easy to assume that the road has been there forever but think about the motorway network constructed from nothing during the last sixty years. In 1817 local landowners and entrepreneurs were also looking to improve road transport and presented “An Act for making and maintaining a Turnpike Road from the Town of Cromford to the Town of Belper”.

The Act included justification of the proposal: “Whereas there is no direct Road leading from the Town of Cromford to the Town of Belper, both in the County of Derby; and the present road leading from the said Town of Cromford to Bull Bridge, in the said County, is hilly and dangerous: And whereas the making and maintaining of a Turnpike Road from the said Town of Cromford to the said Town of Belper

would be of great Advantage and Convenience to the Land-owners and Inhabitants of the Neighbourhood and the adjacent Country, and likewise of great public Utility.” It then goes on to list the proposers starting with Richard Arkwright.

To make sense of their proposal we need to consider what routes were available at the time. Burdett's map of 1767 shows a turnpike road descending Cromford Hill to end at Cromford Bridge; a branch heads north through Matlock Bath to Matlock, crosses the ancient Matlock Bridge and continues northwards up the Derwent Valley. Matlock is also served by turnpikes from Mansfield and Alfreton.

The Derwent valley south of Cromford is pretty much devoid of roads. The river is clearly marked, as is the intended Cromford Canal. Downstream, Whatstandwell Bridge serves only a road from Crich to Wirksworth – what is now ►

the B5035. There is no crossing of the Derwent at Ambergate, the next is Belper which carried the recently authorised Ashbourne to Belper Bridge and Ripley road of 1764.

A new road, missed from Burdett's map, was the Langley Mill to Cromford Bridge turnpike of 1766; this followed what is now the A610 via Codnor and Ripley then Sawmills and Bullbridge. Today we would see the obvious route as Ambergate and up the A6 but in 1766 Crich was an important centre for lime and hence a thriving town. The 1766 road planners climbed the steep hill past Fritchley to Crich then to Holloway and Lea Bridge staying on the east side of the river to Cromford Bridge. This is the road described above as "hilly and dangerous".

We must remind ourselves that river valleys were not good places to travel because of floods, so constructing what is now the A6 was a significant challenge. As proof of the hazards, note the recent lengthy closure of Lea Road, part of the Cromford Bridge to Langley Mill turnpike. It was damaged by flooding in January 2020 which required expensive repairs to reopen late in 2022.

While stuck in traffic on the A6 you may note the continuous pavement or footway that is still in use by foolish or intrepid pedestrians. It is most likely an original provision because the Act also had the following:

"And be it further enacted, That if any Person or Persons shall wilfully or negligently injure, destroy, break down, or otherwise damage, or shall ride on, drive or lead any Horse, Beast, Cattle, or Carriage over or upon any Footpath or Causeway made or to be made on the Side or Sides of the said Road or any Part thereof," . . . It went on to list almost every eventuality for damage until finally concluding with . . . "every Person so offending shall for such Offence forfeit and pay any Sum not exceeding Five Pounds" (equivalent to £475 in 2022).

By Monday 1st September 1817 work had started and at a meeting of the Trustees attended by Francis Hurt, Peter Arkwright, William Jessop and others it was ordered that

the clerk should write to Mr Percy to say that the Trustees of this road consider themselves justified in using the hauling path of the Cromford Canal but that they will make good any damage that may be done thereto.

In March 1818 the trustees were empowered to raise additional funds up to £2,500 upon credit of the tolls, to complete the work as subscribers' money was insufficient for that purpose.

Much money was being paid out and dilatory subscribers were chased for their payments. In December 1818 it was agreed that the tolls would be let by auction in May 1819 at The Greyhound Inn at Cromford.

At a meeting of 1st July 1818 it was ordered that the road now be opened to the public and that full tolls be taken on the road as directed by the act of parliament. Mr Charles Gratton was appointed to collect tolls at 'the gate', Amber being inserted afterwards between 'the' and 'gate' which suggest this was the only toll gate.

At the same meeting the clerk was ordered to represent to the Cromford Canal Company that the arch for the public road under the Amber aqueduct is too low to allow large waggons to pass under and to request that the canal company will cause the same to be made passable by such waggons by lowering the road or otherwise.

In 1827 familiar names signed the oath to join the ranks of Trustees: two members of the Wheatcroft family. In 1837 tolls were let to the highest bidder at £1,200, that bidder being David Wheatcroft, Wharfinger of Buckland Hollow.

A meeting in February 1836 received notice of the proposal to build the North Midland Railway and there followed attempts to direct the construction perhaps to the detriment of the railway and advantage of the road. One demand was that the railway should pass under the road by a bridge fifty feet wide. The railway opened in 1840 and from then on the tolls failed to achieve the auction price, gradually dropping. In 1843 they were let at £817 where this story along with the first minute book ends. ■

THE ALFRETON/PYE BRIDGE/RIDDINGS/OAKES IRONWORKS

By Simon Waller



A rare view along the Pinxton Arm looking west towards Pye Bridge and the ironworks in 1965.

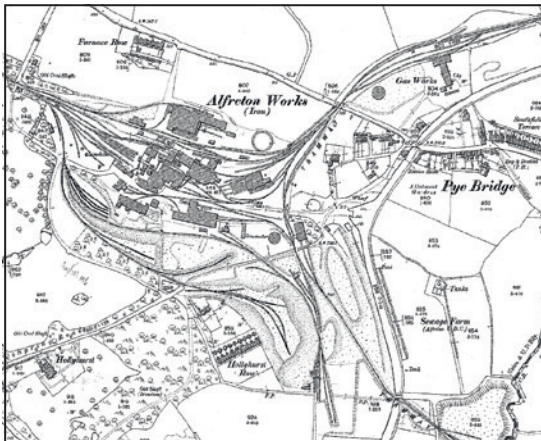
the huge pit, all the layers of coal and ironstone and clay – which previous generations of miners had tunnelled through the earth to find – were on view, exposed in the walls of the excavation: a treasure trove for the early industrialists.

When the ironworks was built in 1802 the surrounding landscape would have

Nowadays you would be hard pushed to find a square foot of Pye Bridge which hasn't been shovelled, mined, quarried, bulldozed, burnt or built on. Even the Erewash river, the county boundary, was moved out of the way to allow for opencasting in a last major burst of industrial activity. When the earth movers had dug out

still been mainly a farming one, with isolated pockets of mining activity. The mineral wealth of the area and newly built high tech transportation system – the Cromford/Pinxton canal – would change all that.

Although located in Pye Bridge, the fledgling business was originally named Alfreton ironworks



The ironworks as depicted on the 2nd edition 25in OS map from around 1880.

because they needed a postal address, and the nearest drop-off point for mail coaches at that time was the George Hotel in Alfreton. Later, through the influence of the Oakes family and their having adopted Riddings as the family home, the ironworks and any future ventures would come under the Riddings name.

When you hear of ironworking locally, Butterley usually springs to mind, but in its early years Riddings was achieving 60% greater productivity in its iron-making process than its rival, and would become known for its constant innovation. At that time there were around 22 blast furnaces working or being completed in the country, so there was plenty of competition. ►

The four original founder members of the ironworks were professional men based in Derby: a surgeon, a banker, a lawyer and a pharmacist, so they needed the right personnel to get their ironworking business under way. James Oakes comes into the story at this point. Probably acquainted with the four entrepreneurs through the Derby Philosophical Society and classed as a Gentleman – coming from a background of carriers and inn keepers – he was originally employed at their Derby site to manage shareholding matters, a position which would stand him in good stead in the following years. His abilities must have inspired confidence, because together with engineer Charles Sylvester he was given the job of establishing the Pye Bridge works, and within a few years all activity in Derby had been transferred to the new site.

The jewel in the Riddings crown was David Mushet, a Scot who had grown up in a family of ironmasters in business since 1771. Before arriving at Riddings, he had been employed as an accountant at Clyde ironworks, but as more of a hands-on type of chap, he used the works facilities, constantly experimenting and refining the iron and steel processes in his own time – usually at night. Possibly Mushet’s constant experiments got in the way of production

because he was eventually forbidden from using the works for his research, and he left. After relocating to Pye Bridge – where his knowledge and resourcefulness were more appreciated – Riddings ironworks became the most cost-effective and efficient in Britain. Coke had recently taken over from charcoal as fuel for the blast furnace process. It was produced by cooking the impurities out of coal, burning it in an environment starved of oxygen, and was commonly produced in heaps out in the open, where the burn was controlled by hosing with water. Mushet devised a method where the coking was done under a masonry structure, lit through a short chimney in the centre and controlled with a thick covering of ash and sand, resulting in very pure coke.

Luckily for Riddings – and Butterley – the second ingredient needed in the furnace could be shipped in by canal boat: a famously high grade limestone or, more accurately, fluorspar available from Crich. It was layered between the coke and the iron ore when preparing the blast furnace, and during blast it removed impurities (sand and rock) from the furnace contents. The iron ore was local. In 1808 landowner Lancelot Rolleston sold his Riddings estate of 80 acres and its mineral rights to the ironworks. Deposits ►



The blast wall and the site of two of the three furnaces towers over the modern industry on site.



A general view of some of the surviving buildings in 2020, and a close-up of the date stone over the arch.

Mushet now had a reputation, and must have been a target for all forward-thinking ironmasters. He was approached by the owners of the Whitecliff Ironworks in the Forest of Dean with an offer of payment in return for advice during the upgrading of their works. He accepted, and began dividing his time between the two companies. Riddings wouldn't accept the situation and gave him an ultimatum, resulting in Mushet leaving for Whitecliff in 1808, and selling his Riddings shares to James Oakes.

Even after he left Pye Bridge his research there

near parkland were extracted with care so that the land could be restored for farming – the top soil put to one side to be replaced later – then the ore dug from pits, the spoil from each new one filling the previous one. Again Mushet's resourcefulness appeared in the preparation of iron ore for the blast furnace. It needed to be cooked before being broken up – so he built kilns which would roast the ore uniformly.

enabled them to develop a new technique of turning local, low grade coal into a type of anthracite. It would later be the ideal fuel for the next generation of blast furnaces. During his time at Riddings, Mushet had worked in tandem with Theodore Silverwood, coal agent for the works and a man with a great knowledge of local geology. He now took over as manager. That same year, Oakes



A former rail bridge over the footpath at the bottom of Spring Lane.

bought the shares of founding partner Thomas Saxelbye, making himself a full partner in the ironworks. He continued to buy up any shares available, until in 1817 the last of the original four, Richard Forrester-Forrester (no not a misprint, he was that posh!) resigned and put his shares on the market. On buying them Oakes had a controlling interest in the company.

Whether Forrester-Forrester's resignation was a factor or not, the whole company and estate was then put up for sale by auction. Although widely advertised in the press, the first auction failed to ►

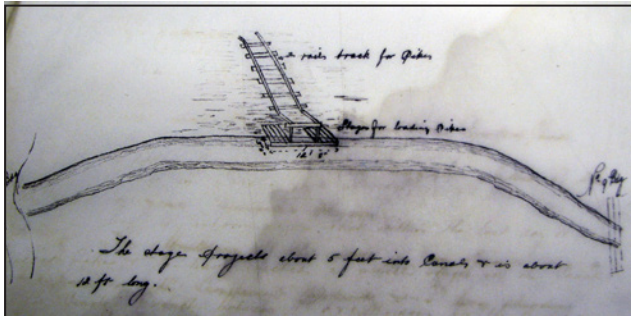
find a buyer, and there was a sizeable delay before it went on the market a second time. The gap could well have been to give James Oakes time to get the funds in place to buy it. In 1818 he became sole owner of the ironworks and Riddings estate. His family took up residence at Riddings House, a mansion half a mile from the works, set in parkland.

He immediately expanded the company by sinking coal mines. Earlier, they had depended on coal from established collieries, the drawback being that any hesitation with payment, and the likes of Moorwood of Alfreton would refuse to release coal until cash was taken to him – or his wife. Having their own supply of coal made good sense for Riddings. One colliery on the edge of the ironworks was driven deeper than the rest to

access the Kilburn seam, a layer of hard coal – anthracite. On the way down, the miners had to contend with flooding, then oil, but the seam was reached – along with deposits of fireclay and silica, useful as lining materials for kilns and furnaces. The colliery came to be known appropriately as the Old Deeps, one of the deepest mines in the country at the time. The high quality coke being produced as a result of mining the Kilburn seam attracted the attention of the Midland Counties Railway, needing coke in the running of the railway, and one of their major expenses. The deal offered to Oakes was for the railway to finance the building of 100 coke ovens, mostly on Oakes land, then the Riddings works would produce coke for them and load it onto canal boats (at an extra cost when using

Oakes's boats) delivering it to a storage facility at Long Eaton. It wasn't long before the high cost of the coke – in comparison to other suppliers of coke to railway companies – was questioned. Further investigation found that the ovens would only work with Oakes-produced hard coals. Cutting their losses. the railway decided to offer the coke ovens for sale to Oakes. Riddings now had two blast furnaces. so additional coke making facilities came in very handy. The original furnace (built 1802) became something of a record breaker – it was continually fired for 71 years without refurbishment.

James Oakes died in 1828, and was succeeded by his son, James Oakes. Around this time the workforce of the ironworks numbered 150, whilst the ironstone and coal extraction side of the business was 350 strong. ►



Oakes were still using the canal for transport in the first decades of the 20th century as is shown by a letter from canal foreman Mr Winson writing to his boss at the Midland Railway in either 1909 or 1919 (the date is ambiguous):

"I beg to inform you that within the last day or so Messrs Oakes & Co have erected a small stage in the Canal on the Pinxton Branch between Nos 8 and 9 Bridges for the purpose of loading up quickly a big shipment order for pipes.

"Questioned this morning as to who had given them permission to erect the stage etc their manager Mr Bates explained that he had not really thought it necessary and that they had a big shipping order to attend to which must go by boat and that this place had been prepared for the convenience of meeting such an urgent order immediately. However he has been asked not to use this stage until permission has been granted from Headquarters."

Depending on the date it is possible that the pipes were either for the Derwent Valley Aqueduct or for laying in Butterley Tunnel.

In the continuing quest for understanding the chemistry of the Iron making process – and with an eye on improved productivity – Lyon Playfair, a chemist, was invited to stay at Oakes' Riddings house whilst he tried to capture and analyse the gases which were produced in the blast furnace during combustion. He requested the help of the German, Robert Bunsen (yes, of Bunsen burner fame). What they needed were samples of the gases produced down where the iron was being liquefied. Attempts were made to lower pipes down into the 50ft furnace whilst huge flames erupted from the top. The pipes melted before a sample could be retrieved. Oakes, refusing to give up, had tubes built into the sides of the furnace (presumably protecting their inner ends with firebricks and clay) so that a small amount of gas would be emitted at various heights during blast. At the next firing, Playfair was taking samples from a high level when he was told that Bunsen, lower down, was in trouble. He climbed down to find Bunsen laid out on the ground – overcome by the fumes. Playfair carefully sniffed the emissions from the tube: Potassium Cyanide!

James Oakes II died in 1845. His family continued the business, and during the next 70 years branched out into brick and ceramic pipe making using local clay, or clunch as it's known round these parts. The works was based over the Erewash River, near the hamlet of Jubilee in Notts – although it still came under the Riddings name. Bricks were either stamped Riddings or Jubilee, and frequently turn up in local excavations. In the 1870s Thomas Oakes built two windmills at the top of Greenhill Lane in Riddings, close by yet another of their collieries, and named them James and Sarah after his parents. It was soon realised why windmills usually stand alone; one frequently disrupted the air flow to the other. They were connected to the ironworks by a rope-worked incline – now Parkside near Windmill Rise. Lower down, it joined the large internal rail network in and

around the works. The Oakes family would see the trucks passing the north edge of the park from their house – the rest of the works was hidden behind a belt of trees.

Up until 1849 most national transport of the company products revolved around the canal. Street furniture, cannon balls, lamp posts, bollards etc went by narrowboat. Bridges went out on purpose-built flat-decked boats, 45 tons per vessel. And then the Midland Railway arrived. Following the Erewash valley it passed close to the ironworks, whose sidings were now joined onto the northbound line via a crossing over the main Pye Bridge road, and the southbound by a bridge over canal, river, and under the main line by tunnel to the Jubilee area. One ambitious project undertaken by Oakes in collaboration with Butterley was the building of the Riddings & Co Gas Works, which was first set up to provide gas for the ironworks and illumination for Riddings House. It was later extended, providing gas for an area including Alfreton, South Normanton and Selston. It was nationalised in 1914.

Six years later the Riddings Ironworks left Oakes' hands. An economic slump after the first war and a strike by Nottinghamshire miners had damaged the productivity of the company badly, so it was sold to the Stanton Iron Company, in which Oakes became a director as part of the deal. Six years on again, and ironmaking stopped. Stanton had blast furnaces at their other sites – so the works was renamed Riddings Foundry.

The sale of the Riddings ironworks left the Oakes with their coal mines and clay products. Nationalisation took their pits in 1947, and the Pipe & Brick Works became part of Hepworth Ceramics in 1972. Again, I believe, Mr (James) Oakes became a director. It closed in 1987.

The former Ironworks eventually became part of the British Steel Corporation during the second nationalisation of the industry in 1967. It was closed in 1969. ■

SHUTTLE CONTROL



A view from what is now the Cromford Creative building during final work in 2015. The water of the Bonsall Brook, having passed beneath the first mill, flows under the bridge and along the channel to the site of the second wheel pit. On the right of the bridge is the semi-circular weir which takes excess water either to the Derwent or the canal, as controlled by the shuttles referred to in the report.

Over the years there has been debate as to who controls the water feeding into the Cromford Canal from the Bonsall Brook after it has flowed through Arkwright's mill yard. This report by the Midland Railway, then owners of the canal, dated 8th November 1906, explains how it worked at the beginning of the last century.

"With regards to the present day management of the shuttles governing the Bonsall Brook. It seems that the name of the man is Andrew Cooper, a native of Belper and an employee of English Sewing Cotton Syndicate.

"During the dry seasons Cooper journeys to Cromford each Saturday morning about eight o' clock and unlocks the shuttles before-mentioned which permits them to fall and so turns the water through the culvert supplying our canal. On the Sunday night or early Monday morning he again journeys to Cromford to turn

the shuttles back to the Derwent and locks them in that position. During the wet seasons he will probably miss several weeks, leaving the shuttles turned to the canal all the time, our men turning them back to the Derwent if this is found necessary.

"The MR Company provide Cooper with a card pass (made out for Mr Strutt's man) enabling him to travel between Belper and Cromford, which pass is obtained by Superintendent Johnson in the usual way and sent to the Station Master at Belper in value envelope, the Station Master there handing it over to Cooper.

"In addition to this we pay the man direct 3/- per week end (that is for two journeys).

"This arrangement is a very old one it being traceable in our Accounts Office as far back as 1821. During 1905 Cooper attended the shuttles 28 weekends and during 1906 Cooper attended the shuttles up to the present date 29 times." ■

JOB VACANCIES

Project Manager – Cromford Canal Restoration Beggarlee Extension, Langley Mill

The Friends of the Cromford Canal (FCC) is a charitable organisation working to restore the Cromford Canal by enabling the economic and social regeneration of the region, creating a living Cromford Canal corridor connecting communities and visitors with a distinctive industrial, cultural and natural heritage which can be accessed and enjoyed by all. Since their formation in 2002 FCC have successfully restored a short section of the Cromford Canal working in partnership with Derbyshire County Council and ensured that further sections are managed and preserved.

They are now seeking to appoint a professional Project Manager to drive the restoration forward. This is a unique opportunity for an individual with proven experience of shaping and managing a complex restoration project relying primarily on grant funding. The restoration works are detailed in two phases, but these will interact with each other to assist in funding opportunities.

The initial phase will require the successful applicant to work with the restoration engineering team to deliver the 'Beggarlee Extension' which has planning permission in place for a 1.5km stretch extending the canal north from Langley Mill.

Initially this role may only be part time. If you feel you could fulfil this position, we would be very interested to talk to you. Please contact us at chairman@cromfordcanal.org.uk.

Press Officer

The Friends of the Cromford Canal are looking for a volunteer to spread the word about our activities both locally through press, radio and TV and nationally through waterway magazines. At the moment many of our achievements pass unnoticed through lack of publicity, and we seek to rectify this. If you think you could help, you would be 'fed' stories and photographs from those involved in the particular project (eg Beggarlee Extension, work parties, Birdswood, fund raising) from which to compile press releases to distribute and to follow up with the many media outlets. If you think you could help please get in touch with editor@cromfordcanal.org.uk.

WE WANT TO TALK TO YOU!

Communicating with our membership is not only an obligation of our charitable status, but is essential for us to keep everyone abreast of what's going on.

Every quarter you receive our excellent journal *Portal* which contains historical articles and also some items on current activities; but in an increasingly fast moving world, that's often not frequent enough! Every two months a more punchy eNewsletter is issued to about 250 FCC members for whom we have an email address (it also goes to another 600 interested recipients who are not members), but there are about

another 500 FCC members for whom we do not have an email address.

We want to communicate much more frequently and deeply with all of our membership, whether it be on current initiatives, fund raising drives, social events, AGM notices or current news: so if you haven't already and would like to be much better informed please let us have your email address – send a quick note to secretary@cromfordcanal.org.uk. We promise that we won't pass your details to any third party and we won't bombard you with emails. **T**

FCC'S WEBSITE

By Richard Handley

Whilst *Portal* does an excellent job of providing interesting content to an essentially 'internal' audience of several hundred FCC members, it's our presence on the internet through our new website www.cromfordcanal.org that allows us to display our wares to a worldwide audience of 8 billion pairs of eyes!!

We launched our new website in May 2021 with the objective of it having a wide range of purposes including:

1. Information on every part of the canal, including who owns which bits, and an explanation of our canal's uniqueness; there's even an interactive map;

2. Updates on what we are doing on the restoration front;

3. A "meet the Trustee" section, with bios and photos of each Trustee;

4. A News and Events section;

5. The ability to sign up to our two-monthly eNewsletter;

6. Provision for being able to join as a member online;

7. An online shop where a selection of our merchandise can be purchased;

8. The ability to be able to Donate online, and information on legacy bequests;

9. A fully searchable and sortable database of the passage of boats along the canal between 1814 and 1878, including the names of steerers, owners and nature of their cargo. There will be more about this in a future issue.

We are constantly evolving and improving the website, and have recently added a selection of YouTube links, plus information on pubs local to the canal.

From day one we included website analytics: Google Analytics allows us to monitor the website in minute detail to help us focus on what users are interested and not interested in: we are currently getting over 3,500 page views per month (and growing).

So, our website is a key part of our overall publicity and communication activity: if you have any questions, comments or observations we'd be keen to hear them. **T**

EVENTS AND MEETINGS

What's On in Spring and early Summer

Langley Mill Boat Rally

The Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association (ECPDA) is holding its 55th Anniversary Boat Rally over the Spring Bank Holiday weekend 27th–29th May which also coincides with the 50th anniversary of their reopening of Langley Bridge Lock – the bottom lock of our own Cromford Canal. This is a huge, free, well-organised event that offers a variety of visiting boats, entertainment, information and, of course, a beer tent!

Please spare the time to drop in one day. As well as meeting some of our enthusiastic volunteers we will be explaining our plans to extend the Cromford Canal to Stoney Lane, not only allowing boats to access more of the canal but also give walkers much improved access to the towpath to Jacksdale and local nature reserves.

Guided tours of the work done by ECPDA above the boatyard and FCC's planned Beggarlee Extension will take place daily – just click the link on the FCC website for further details.

Leawood Pumphouse

Leawood Pump House near High Peak junction will be open on the following dates. 'Static' means the site and building will be open 11am to 4pm but not operating. 'In Steam' means the boilers will be fired up and the pump fully operational 12 noon to 4.30pm. Admission is free but donations are welcomed, especially in view of the huge increase in the price of suitable specialist coal for the boilers.

Thursday 6th April *Static*

Sunday 9th April *In Steam*

Monday 10th April *In Steam*

Thursday 13th April *Static*

Sunday 7th May *In Steam*

Monday 8th May *In Steam*

Saturday 3rd June *Static*

Sunday 4th June *In Steam*

FCC Meetings

Illustrated talks take place on the third Monday of the month at 7.30pm at Ironville Church Hall, Casson Street NG16 5NN. Car parking at rear. Bar, tea/coffee, raffle and FCC sales table. Admission £2.50 (AGM free).

20th March: The Life and Times of *Birdswood* - Richard Handley and Mike Kelley with the story of how our trip boat is run and benefits the FCC.



17th April: FCC AGM.

Birdswood Canal Trips

Our electrically powered trip boat *Birdswood* will be operating throughout the year from Cromford Wharf to Leawood Pump House. Regular two-hour return trips take place at 11am and 2pm on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, with extra trips on Thursdays in the summer holidays. Light refreshments are available on board as is a toilet, and well-behaved dogs are welcomed. A tour of our traditional boatman's cabin is included.

In addition 'Premium Trips' take place on 10th April, 8th May, 4th June, 2nd July, 6th and 27th August and 8th October starting at 2pm from Cromford Wharf. Trips include guided tours of Leawood Pumphouse in steam, Nightingale Arm, Aqueduct Cottage and High Peak Junction workshop. Free refreshments are offered.

To book any of the *Birdswood* trips or to enquire about chartering, visit www.birdswood.org.



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



www.cromfordcanal.org