

Chairman's Update

March 2023

Last month I said "Things are brightening up". Well I can't get everything right. Almost as soon as I'd typed it the rains came and have stayed since. However with the clocks going forward Spring will officially have arrived and the nights will at least be lighter.

I have spent the last 24 hours trying to sort out the loss of my phone—in the river of course. No chance of retrieving it from there, so its get another one and reprogramme it all. For our younger members this will be a walk in the park, but not for me. It's at times like these when you realise that those automatic backups weren't quite so effective and all those carefully arranged photos for the update are nowhere to be found. Anyway thanks to those that have helped me to get back up to speed and provided the missing photos.

The Riverboat

I commented last time that we hoped to float the riverboat out of its winter mooring at Darley Abbey. A small team assembled as soon as we saw the levels predicted to rise by 40mm. A bit of rocking and poling managed to get the boat clear of the river bank and into the river. Gradually teasing out the rope at the front and the riverboat gradually backed downstream and out into deeper water. After that it was plain sailing down to the boarding platform. A beautiful sunny day with a few locals waving us on. We moored up with a sense of relief. Now we'd be in the right place to undertake the maintenance planned ready for our first sailing.

We also managed to instal the new GPS regulated commentary system. Thanks to Simon for his work over the winter. He's programmed the system to work out where it is and control the commentary accordingly. A very pleasant trip upriver to calibrate it ensued and a new screen was added so that we could monitor the results. I'm told it is a very cost effective system working from a Raspberry Pi and based loosely on a system that the Cromford programmed over the lockdown. The Cabin crew will be delighted that they don't have to manually control the recording to take account of the varied driving speeds and water flow and can focus on customers.

Of course this state of bliss could not last and it was the signal



for the snow to fall and when that melted a few days later the river rose quickly. We now monitor the river for height and flow rate and we saw a gently flowing river become a raging torrent. River levels doubled and the flow rate increased tenfold in the space of 24 hours. We keep an eye on the forecast levels, but they really aren't very reliable, so at one stage it seemed sensible to stay overnight on the riverboat as the forecast looked ominous and we wanted to be on hand. As it turned out the forecast was again far more worrying than reality and we rode out the surge quite happily.

So the last week has been spent on maintenance. We had hoped to get the motor supplier to check out our set up, but Covid has intervened and we'll have to fit it in during April. With six months moored under trees and within the range of wildlife there was a major cleaning exercise required. We'd experienced some leakage around the solar panel fixings, so we decided to remove them, clean the roof, repaint it and refix them ensuring that all fixings are leakproof.

As you can see the transformation on the roof has been considerable and we're about to start on the sides now, but that's a much easier job. The biggest challenge with painting under the bridge has been the flock of pigeons resident there. It's a bit offputting hearing the cooing as you clean the paintwork - again - and hope the paint dries fast enough to prevent them damaging it when you've gone home.



We still have a few more driver practice runs and the promotional activity to organise. Leaflets and windowboards are being printed and we have directional signs due to be erected imminently. The pontoon planning continues with the Council. They now have quotes in place, but are inevitably challenged with the budget. We have been assured that they will find the money to get it done as quickly as possible.

It is apparent that all councils are under severe financial pressure with Derby announcing significant redundancies to balance the books. This

was particularly apparent when we presented the final reports on the Derby Arm. The cost is obviously substantial and with uncertainty about national funding streams, including Levelling Up Funding, completion seems a way off. The reports are very supportive and point to significant benefits for the scheme. The key officers have expressed their continued support and will be joining us in a meeting with the site developers, St Modwen, soon. Time is important as the land is being developed quickly.

Working Parties

Working parties have been impacted by a theft at our container earlier this month. Security seemed to



be very strong. David noticed damage to the lock as someone had tried to prise open the container. Unfortunately the damage meant that we couldn't get access. Whilst we were organising a fix the culprits came back the next night with an angle grinder and finished the job. We lost all our maintenance equipment so David and Derek



are putting in an insurance claim and as you can see we've repaired and enhanced the cabin security. Two locks with thicker welded protection to prevent angle grinders should do the trick. Thanks go to our specialist volunteers (and family!).

The teams have also fenced an area of our land in Breaston by Longmoor Lane, so that our boundaries are clear when we look to restore the section.

Further progress has been completed on the Great wall of Borrowash, which has been joined by work on a couple of "great ditches".





Pictured here are the Ockbrook culvert and the channel that drains the Borrowwash Lock into the Ockbrook. Both looking better with a haircut!

Progress on the wall continues and is now getting closer to Borrowwash lock chamber.



We have been called to cut back overhanging branches along Longmoor Road by Cockayne's Bridge. It's looking much tidier now.



Extra Volunteers

I'm pleased to say we are making some progress in attracting volunteers to fill spaces. We have a few engineers, someone to organise our database systems and possible additional director input. We continue to look and in that context we will be presenting to Engineering institutes in June to continue to spread the message.

We are still searching for someone within the Trust to focus on ecological issues. Without someone to focus proactively on how we encourage wildlife habitats for the longer term we will miss opportunities. If anyone is interested we would be happy to look at filling in training needs as we did with Eddie.

Steady progress is being made at Chellaston, Draycott and with the land purchase at Draycott.

Conference Networking

On 18th March David Savidge and I attended the National Restoration Conference held this year in Chesterfield. This is organised annually by CRT and the IWA. We heard about the success of Chesterfield Canal Trust in attracting funding and working with the County Council Countryside department. We are now hoping that we can enhance our relationship with DCC Countryside and gain assistance for the more rural areas of Derbyshire that we are already working in.

Events

Thanks to those that have volunteered to help at Breaston on 1st May and at Langley Mill between Sat 27th to Mon 29th May. Anyone else that can help on these dates, please let me know.

Members' Meetings

We had a good attendance of members in February, who were entertained by Clare Howard and Sue Stone from Little Eaton talking about the canal in that area and work to improve what's left of it.

The next meeting on February 28th is by member and Derby resident David Jennings talking about The Derby Canal in the city. David has a number of photos that I hadn't seen before and I'm sure you will find fascinating.

Future meetings for your diaries are

April 25th Bennerley Viaduct—Restoration and into the Future

May 23rd Rod Auton Update from Chesterfield Canal Trust

Meetings will continue to be held from 7.30pm on the First Floor, Canal Cottages, Draycott DE72 3PE

I hope to see you soon.

Chris Madge

