

Working Party News

No. 338

For WACT Volunteers

March & April 2022

Editorial

It's been a bit stormy over the past couple of months which has led to a lot of clear up work for our teams. But Spring is in the air, which means that there is even more urgency to getting the canal in good shape for the boat trips.

Meanwhile, progress continues to be made at Tickner's Crossing and preparations are underway to start work on Birtley Bridge 2.

Peter Winter

Northern Working Party

The winter months have not been idle for the NWP despite my lack of a report last time. We have been working at both Tickner's Crossing and on the Loxwood section.

At the former, the curved section of retaining wall below the bridge has been re-cast by our Tuesday group and the brick laying team of Dan Rolt and Graham Hawkes have completed the brickwork on the whole of the wall. The remaining job here is to cast the concrete capping beam and then the work in the whole forebay from the dam up to and under the footbridge will be complete - hopefully by the end of April.



Graham and Dan brick laying at Tickner's

Work has also continued on the footbridge access ramps. We await the completion of the Section 278 agreement with Surrey County Council for the temporary road before we can restart there.

At Loxwood the clearance of Ash Dieback trees has

continued with the focus shifted to the sections up to Southland Lock. Work on both sides of the canal has been carried out; the non-towpath side work being from *May Upton*. The weather has been either glorious or horrendous, as often is the case at this time of year. It all looks much improved and ready for a hopefully busy season of boat and other activity on the section. The work has been supported by visiting groups KESCRG and LWRG for which we are grateful.



Pressure washing at Baldwin's Knob Lock

In connection with boats, Dave and Adam, with the support of the NWP, have started work at Baldwin's Knob Lock. The problem is to identify and fix the leaks from the bottom gate cills. After the tedious task of getting the stop planks installed and water tight, the chamber has been pumped out to expose a large mound of silt against the bottom gates. This will have to be removed before we can get to look at the cills. Elsewhere on the lock, the top gates have been scrubbed down ready for painting. A temporary lock access tower erected and a start made on pressure washing the walls and lock sides.

We are currently back to working on Mondays, Tuesdays (weekly) and the third Saturday of each of the month. We often move around so it's best to check times and venues with Dave Evans either via e-mail or WhatsApp.

Bill Nicholson

Hedgelaying

By the time you read this, hedgelaying will have finished for this season. Birds are starting to look for nesting sites, and the sap in the trees is moving, with some early buds already bursting - both signs telling us to stop disturbing the hedgerows.

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The Team completed laying the very long hedge on the far side of the canal between the Canal Centre and Brewhurst Lock. Then we went on to re-lay the hedge immediately adjacent to Brewhurst Lock (last laid about 9 or 10 years ago). There is some tidying up left to do



The Hedgelaying Team at work at Brewhurst

now (removing dumpy bags of rabbit spirals and a few excess, but distorted, stakes), and now the main task is to identify hedges suitable to lay next season. Ideally, the hedges need to be about 3 - 5 metres tall, so definitely not trimmed this last winter or forthcoming summer, as otherwise there is nothing to lay. Suggestions please!

Nick Baxter

Boat Group PEST

On our first outing in February, with a full-strength turn-out, the team split into two parties. One took *Wasp* and went south of Baldwin’s Knob Lock to help clear up the debris left from the tree cutting. That team also made a start on clearing the large amount of sludge that has gathered since Drungwick Lock closed. The second team, on *May Upton*, cleared up two large loads of cuttings from the Birch Copse area. On subsequent work days the team assisted in the clean-up after Storm Eunice.

As a result of both long term and short term sickness among our small team of volunteers we had to cancel one planned working day and reschedule another.

We feel that with two boats and with six or more volunteers (a minimum of three per workboat) on a regular

basis we can achieve the kind of progress we want. This could be further improved if the team had the use of more mechanical equipment; this will be discussed with Trust management.

More volunteers required! As age and infirmity takes its toll on the PEST team, we are seeking two or three new members to join us. If you fancy working on the water in *Wasp* or *May Upton*, keeping the navigation clear for our boats, as a change from your usual, land-



Te PEST Team relax at the Onslow after a hard day

based work then please get in touch (see the Contacts List). We would particularly welcome any of our existing skippers and boat crew as they have the boat-handling skills, safety and first aid training we need.

Chris Jones

Midweek Working Party

MWWP have had another busy couple of months. We have had over 20 volunteers out every week. During the second week in February we held the Navvies Lunch at the Cranleigh Golf and Country Club. This was attended by over 40 people. It was a very happy time and a good time was had by all.

The majority of work by the MWWP has been between Lee Farm Lock and Lordings Lock. Work completed has been cutting hedges, clearing scrub, and taking down ash

Working Party Diary		
Every Monday	‘Mrs Bucket’ Keeping up Appearances	Contact Tom Close
Every Tuesday (late October to March)	Hedgelaying	Contact Nick Baxter
Every Tuesday and Thursday	Boat Maintenance	Contact David Arnold
Every Wednesday	Midweek Working Party	Details from Margaret Darvill
Every Monday & Wednesday	Tickner’s Depot	Contact Ian Prior
Every Wednesday and Thursday	Eric Walker Group	Details from Dennis Gillen/John Reynolds
Every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Third Saturday	Northern Working Party	Contact Bill Nicholson
First & Third Friday of the month	PEST Boat Group	Contact Chris Jones/Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit Level	Contact Dave Evans

trees. However, the job remaining to be done is to clear the tree trunks from the canal after the cutting down.

A second visit was made to Sidney Wood by a small group to help Dave Evans clear up a number of trees and tidy up.

Due to the storm in February we have had to do a lot of clearing of the canal at Fast Bridge, Hunt Park and Cranleigh Waters. The storm brought down a large number of trees.

Work has continued in Hunt Park on making the ponds for the Great Crested Newt Licence. Trees have also been planted in Birtley by the fence alongside the towpath. The primroses and birds on the Birtley section are wonderful. No wonder we have so many walkers using this new towpath.

Margaret Darvill

Eric Walker Group

The group has been involved at Southland Lock constructing a new stairway from the towpath down to the training wall to enable boat crew and passengers to embark/disembark from the boats. Before we could start this, however, we had to remove the temporary metal stairway, which has been in position for many years, so not so temporary!

Because of the location of the project and the logistics of transporting materials and equipment the long distance along the towpath from access points, either at Gennets Bridge lock or Loxwood, we decided to construct as much of the structure at the depot in Dunsfold and transport the components to site. Initially we loaded *May Upton* at the Loxwood moorings to transport materials to Southland Lock. However, we had to resort to a vehicle and trailer along the towpath as both the MU outboard motors proved very unreliable.



Laying the first step at Southland was tricky

We cast sixteen concrete steps incorporating an interlocking design and transported them from the depot to the site. This was quite a task as they weighed in excess of 170kgs each! To reduce the amount of onsite concrete mixing in what is a very restricted and heavily sloping



*The new steps installed
Just the handrails to do*

working area, we used precast concrete posts as the bearings for the steps. After casting a concrete landing platform behind the training wall we were able to site the bottom step on it and this supported the steps above it because of the “interlocking design”. By the end of March, all the steps were in place and a concrete top landing had been cast. All that remains to complete the project is to fit a metal “Keylok” handrail.

The team is now preparing to commence work at Birtley.

Dennis Gillen

Mrs Bucket Group

Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

As requested by the editor, this narrative covers the back end of January, all February and all March for this edition of Working Party News.

As anticipated in the last report, on 31st January the Group started tree planting at Harsfold and successfully completed painting the balance beams and headposts at Baldwin’s Knob, Brewhurst and Devil’s Hole Locks in a biting northerly wind which gave a chill factor of -5, all of which, I believe, falls in the category of ‘above and beyond’.

In early February, work at Loxwood included planting 150 trees and shrubs along the towpath and cleaning out the ditch at the bottom of the bank on the carpark side. In mid-February the Group returned to Harsfold to plant more trees but after a couple of hours were forced to stop work by flood water encroaching on the site!

The other two outings in February involved clearing the reeds from the canal bank between Drungewick Road bridge and the lock, leaving them to dry in piles near the fence. We also completed the tree planting at the end of overflow car park at Loxwood.

At the beginning of March, the Group spent a day at

Gennets planting trees, strimming around the pond and at Barbary Bridge, together with cleaning various mile-stones.

This was followed by two consecutive visits to Baldwin's Knob Lock, creosoting the stop plank shelter, bonfire 'duty' on two sites on either side of the lock, a significant amount of hedge cutting and strimming around the lock, lots of clearing and burning all the cut stuff.

Now off to Tickner's to do some more 'keeping up appearances'!

Nick Wood

Boat Maintenance

Maintenance has been confined to sorting out various small jobs, it being the cold and rainy season. After Ian



The repaired engine room deck on Wiggonholt

renewed the rotten engine room deck on *Wiggonholt* we bought her new, professionally made long fenders for the port and starboard bow.

I took the old ones home to my workshop, cut off the damaged lengths, re-secured and tidied up the frayed ends, and took them back to be fitted to the port and star-

board bows of *Josias Jessop* which now comes alongside with a gentle sigh instead of the usual clang.

The next job is to tidy up and re-secure the long fenders on *Zachariah Keppel* to complete the operation for all three boats.

Brian installed a solar panel and controller on *JJ* to keep her battery topped up. This is shown in picture three and is proving very successful. We are planning to install a similar set up on *ZK*, but the huge array required for the electrically driven WH is sadly, a bridge too far.

We had a visit from thieves who levered open one of the doors on the workboat *May Upton* snapping off the padlock and hasp in the process. Ian brought his welding machine and welded it back.

David Arnold



Bow fender for Josias Jessop



Solar Panel installed on JJ

The Contact List

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