

Working Party News

No. 347

For WACT Volunteers

January 2023

Editorial

A Happy New Year to everyone for 2023! Well the weather in December threw everything at us with wind, rain, snow and ice. Yet our working parties stuck to the tasks of keeping the canal in good condition and making progress on maintenance and restoration.

Peter Winter

Editor's Note

My wife, Hilary, and I are taking time out to travel to Mexico and South America from mid-January to mid-March, so I won't be able to produce WPN. However, I'm pleased to say that Dave Miller has stepped in as 'Guest Editor' so he'll be in charge for the February and March issues.

Northern Working Party

Following a tree felling weekend visit from the Waterway Recovery Group Forestry Team, the month commenced with a working party at Barnsill Bridge to sort and stack logs and generally tidy the site.



The digger being loaded on to Wasp

The next week, a digger was loaded onto *Wasp* at Loxwood to be transported down the canal to Brewhurst Lock for some trench work in readiness for the installation of new back pumps.



Wasp on the Drungewick Slipway

After being unloaded, *Wasp* was then taken on to Drungewick Slipway where she was pulled out in preparation for an overhaul.



A welcome pint at the Three Compasses

A biting cold morning greeted volunteers on the last working party day before Christmas. The opportunity was taken to tidy the yard and clean the tools at Tickner's Heath whilst sausage and bacon was cooking on the wood burning stove! Following a hearty lunch, complemented by contributions of hot sausage rolls, mince pies, home-made cake and sweet selection, the group adjourned to the nearby Three Compasses to enjoy a Christmas beverage in front of a roaring log fire.

Dave Miller

Boat Group PEST

December brought that curious mix of weather to the canal; mild and sunny weather followed by the big freeze. This was reflected in the PEST team's work this month.

Initially we had an excellent, sunny day on *May Upton* spent clearing the navigation above Loxwood including around the 'chicane' between Devil's Hole and Southland locks. Two boatloads of material were removed from the banks and water and taken for disposal. The offside bank bears witness to the team's work and is looking very tidy.

Our last workday in 2022 was a chilly one. With the canal at Loxwood frozen over and Santa Cruises imminent, the morning was spent breaking ice between Loxwood and Brewhurst locks. We certainly worked up an appetite for the PEST Christmas Lunch which followed at The Onslow Arms. All the current members of the team were able to attend and the very enjoyable get-together made a fitting end to

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The PEST Team take a break

the year’s work keeping the navigation clear for our skippers, boat crew and passengers.

Back to it on Friday 6th January 2023.

Chris Jones

Midweek Working Party

This month should have given us four weeks of work, but due to the heavy rain the outing on the 28th December was cancelled. Work has continued on the navigation section, south of Baldwin’s Knob Lock. We are clearing all the brambles and timber around the ash trees so that the large chainsaws can come in and cut down the trees with Ash Dieback. We were able to wave to the Special Invitation Cruise passengers and crews as they came down. It was a beautiful sunny day and everything glistened in the sun. Unfortunately there was far more to do than I thought and we continued the following week.

A further group spent time clearing alders and ash from the stretch at Birtley to Rooks Hill. The length is now looking much better and we have just the off side to clear.

Our annual visit to Run Common to clear the length of canal was visited by all the group. Over 20

members were there and enjoyed a cake made by the land owner with mulled wine and mince pies provided by a member. It was a fitting end to a successful year.

The Midweek Working Party is having a Navvies Lunch on Wednesday 15th February at Bramley Golf Course. If you are not a member of the group and would like to join us please contact me on my email.

Margaret Darvill

Canal Maintenance Unit

In December we continued at Brewhurst, completing the new shelter in preparation for installation of the back pump electrical control panel at the end of the month. We have also been working at the depot starting on the construction of a new footbridge for Brewhurst Lock.

Ian Lower

Boat Maintenance

As part of the requirements of our passenger survey, we had to weld up *Zachariah Keppel's* two freeing ports for'd and four aft, pierce the deck to drain the rainwater into a new tank for'd and the bilge aft, and fit a new pump, syphon and overboard outlet for'd.

This unexpected work naturally held us up in our regular refitting programme, but both ZK and *Wiggonholt* did obtain their passenger and safety certificates, valid until the end of November 2023, so all's well that ends well. Then came the cold snap and a couple of inches of ice which meant that we needed *Josias Jessop* to act as an icebreaker every day so that WH could run her booked Santa Trips to the Brewhurst winding hole and back again.

JJ has not been slipped in living memory, so far as I can ascertain, and her bottom is in a somewhat delicate state, which the icebreaking exacerbated. A

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
Alternate Monday	Tickner's Depot	Contact Ian Prior
Every Wednesday and Thursday	Eric Walker Group	Details from Dennis Gillen/John Reynolds
Every Monday, Tuesday, and Third Saturday	Northern Working Party	Contact Bill Nicholson
Every Thursday	Canal Maintenance Unit	Contact Ian Lower
First & Third Friday of the month	PEST Boat Group	Contact Chris Jones/Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit Level	Contact Dave Evans



A temporary fix to the leak by the weed hatch on JJ

leak just in front of her weed hatch developed, which the new pump (1,100 galls or 4.9 tons per hour) just about coped with. John Reynolds stuck a piece of Blu Tack in the leaking 9mm hole which staunched the flow, and Ian, Brian and I came the next day to effect more permanent repairs. With underwater sealant on a piece of wood lodged over John's Blu Tack (still holding out the water) and jammed in by another piece of wood, the leak was deemed temporarily dealt with.



The rotted engine room hatch

In addition, we had to re-connect the pump pipe, which was pumping water back into the boat, pump out the diesel oil and put it into a container to prevent polluting the canal, and then pump out the bilge. Water was coming in through the propeller shaft, which we

pumped full of grease, thus stemming the flow. Rainwater was also coming in through the rotted for'd engine room hatch (and did it rain). We couldn't do much about that.

We have arranged, with the help of Dave Evans, to slip JJ on 7th January and weld up all these leaks and defects, re-pack the stern gland and paint her bottom.

David Arnold

Hedgelaying

Our thanks to Chris Tavener for allowing us to work his hazel coppice again. It has provided really good quality stakes and binders with very little waste; now it is into a second rotation. Before we left the site, we completed laying the short section of hedge along the road frontage of the coppice, although we did have to push back the work party start time to allow the hedge to defrost enough for it to be laid; a frozen hedge just splits and cracks when being cut. The sun came out and warmed us up to +3 degrees by the afternoon!

On the final work party before the Christmas break, we started work at Drungewick Slipway. As always, the first task is to prepare the hedge by removing dead branches, old pleachers, excessive sideways growth and brambles, so that the actual work of laying can commence when we return in the New Year. This hedge is unusual, as it became evident when we cleared out the brambles that there is a parallel hedge along the top of the bank next to the slipway, and a lower, much longer hedge around the field boundary. So not all one continuous hedge as previously thought. Sadly, the lower hedge was inaccessible due to the field being completely flooded. Let's hope 2023 brings some drier conditions so that the lower hedge can be tackled.



Mistletoe by the Drungewick Slipway

A Christmas highlight was the discovery of two young trees in the hedgeline with mistletoe, some even in berry (mistletoe has separate male and female plants). Initially, it was a puzzle as there is no other mistletoe nearby. However, Penny Line confirmed that Keith Nichols had tried to introduce mistletoe to various suitable receptor trees along the canal, so it looks like his efforts bore fruit here!

Nick Baxter

Mrs Bucket Group Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

The weather was against us in December due to the very cold snap with snow, followed by heavy rain. So we were only able to undertake one meeting at the beginning of the month, at the Drungewick Aqueduct site where we trimmed and mowed both sides of the canal. To compensate for that our leader, Tom, organised a Christmas lunch at the Onslow where 14 of us had a most enjoyable time and reminisced, as you do.

Incidentally, it was good to see the canal between the aqueduct and the lock almost filled with water again and looking good. With the high levels in the canal, water was cascading over the stop planks at the heavy duty crossing by the aqueduct.

Our next outing is on 9th January, weather permitting. A Happy New Year to all from Mrs Bucket.

Nick Wood

Eric Walker Group

Work has continued at the Birtley Bridge 2 site, where having successfully completed the first concrete pour to the ground beams, the team started to erect reinforcement for the next 'lift' to the walls on both the east and west sides of the structure. Once the reinforcement was in place, installation of the timber formwork commenced. To achieve a constant distance between the two sides of the formwork, when the concrete is poured, it is necessary to install Dywidag ties. Normally this is not too difficult, but because of the amount of rebar in the design it was complex threading them through the steel bars and maintaining the required distances between them.

Eventually all was ready for the concrete pour on the 15th December, using the same pumped method

direct from the Singh concrete works next to the site. However, this date fell right in the middle of the recent cold snap and with daytime temperatures of freezing or just above we had to abort the exercise, virtually at the last minute. As there was not enough time to rearrange the pour before the group finished for the Christmas break, all we could do was to wrap up the structure to keep it clean and ready to concrete on our first week back in January.

Dennis Gillen



The formwork and reinforcing all wrapped up for Christmas

The Contact List

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