

Working Party News

No. 350

For WACT Volunteers

April 2023

Editorial

First of all, I wish to record my thanks to Dave Miller, who did an outstanding job as WPN Editor while my wife and I were gallivanting around Mexico and South America. We had a wonderful time and it's good to know that Dave is there to step in at a moments notice when we next go off on our travels.

It seems that the weather was cooler here than we were experiencing, but looking back over the last two issues, it is amazing to see how much work has been accomplished.

The last month has been a bit moist but that hasn't stopped our teams getting on with the work.

Mark Feeney is the new face looking after the Depot and his first report is included in this issue.

Peter Winter

Hedgelaying

Sadly for us, hedgelaying has stopped for another season as birds are now nesting (and cannot be disturbed). Sap is also running well in the hedgerow trees and bushes, making laying more problematic as the cuts become sticky, and open cuts with fresh sap encourage fungal and bacterial infections, plus late cuts check re-growth.

Highlights this year, include two team members entering the Surrey Wildlife Trust hedgelaying competition, bringing back competition-standard knowledge to share with us, and also another member becoming certificated for chainsaw use. We are now looking forward to having Trust supplied cordless electric chainsaws next winter, which are much quieter, for both the operator and other people work-



The Hedgelaying Team at Roger Dimmick Lane

ing nearby (and maybe, they will also start when required!).

So, it is time for the Team to sit back, reflect on another good winter's work, oil and sharpen our bill-hooks and axes, and replace saw blades in preparation for next year.

As always, newcomers are welcome. We will be starting next season (around the beginning of November) by cutting stakes and binders for about a month, then intend to lay the towpath hedge near to Drungewick Aqueduct, though there is the possibility of another site in the offing. If interested, please email the Hedgelaying Team.

Nick Baxter

Mrs Bucket Group

Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

Job done! As anticipated in our last report, we have now finished the towpath hedge trimming, bank strimming and tidying up all the way from the Loxwood Canal Centre to the Drungewick Aqueduct, as well as disposing of all the cuttings we left at on the offside at Brewhurst Lock.

On the 13th and 20th March we worked at Devil's Hole and Loxwood Locks raising the grassed sides of the lock to the level of the concrete by smoothing over and filling in all the holes with top soil including grass seed.



Levelling the grassed areas at Devil's Hole

In fact, it took 6 tonnes of soil at DHL and 2 tonnes at Loxwood. We finished the month by laying a further two tonnes of top soil on the left hand side of Compasses Bridge and then tidied up around the work site at Tickner's Bridge.

Nick Wood

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Midweek Working Party

This month we have worked the whole length of the canal, although one week had to be cancelled due to it snowing very hard at 7.30am, even though by lunchtime it was beautiful sunshine.

Work was done clearing up the brash, left by the tree surgeon at Pallingham Quays. It was still very wet and two days before the Quays had been completely flooded according to the locals.

At the opposite end of the canal, our boatman, Julius, and four others cleared all the rubbish including a canoe which had collected by the south side of the Gosden Aqueduct.



Gosden Aqueduct before...



...and after

In between we have worked at Rooks Hill and Fanesbridge. MWWP cleared around the culvert which the landowner used to crawl through in his

younger life. Another area that has been cleared is between Devil's Hole and Southlands where the hedge and brambles were protruding into the tow-path. The canal is now looking ready for Easter.

One week was spent disposing of dead, dying and dangerous ashes at Long Meadow in preparation for the work on fixing the leaks in the bank and our last job was clearing more dead, dying and dangerous ash trees at Haybarn. All in all a very busy month.

Margaret Darvill

Eric Walker Group

Having completed the reinforcement and formwork to the west abutment wall of the new Birtley Bridge 2, eight cubic metres of concrete were poured as planned in the first week of the month. The concrete, as previously, was pumped by delivery hose direct from the Singh Concrete batching plant behind the site, with the supportive help of the Singh team.

Following the pour, the formwork was stripped and a start made on the brickwork facing. The group then turned their attention to the east abutment, where the formwork, while not as complicated as that on the



Starting on the brickwork facing to the west side

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 Thursday	Tickner's Depot	Contact Mark Feeney
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
Every Thursday	Odd Job Group	Contact Brian King
First & Third Friday of the month	PEST Boat Group	Contact Chris Jones/Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit Level	Contact Dave Evans



John Reynolds takes charge of the final concrete pour at Birtley

west, still has a high level 'box-out' to form the horizontal ledge to create the recess for the end of the bridge deck. This complicates the design and construction of the formwork, which was ready for the final concrete pour to be successfully undertaken just before the end of the month. Having received three tenders from the invited companies to bid for the bridge superstructure,

we expect to place an order shortly.

Dennis Gillen

Boat Group PEST

March saw the team continue with our usual tasks of keeping the waterway clear of debris and the off-side bank in a respectable state. This month's activity was to the south working between Brewhurst and Baldwin's Knob Locks. The navigable section is now in good order ahead of the new season's boating activity. One of the two workboats, *Wasp*, is being taken out of service for a major overhaul. This will involve considerable work on her hull above and below the waterline and on her powerplant. With just *May Upton* at our disposal work may be curtailed as no more than five can really work comfortably aboard her. Still, we avoid cutting vegetation during the nesting season with work focussing on keeping the waterway clear and sightlines around bridges, locks and landing stages clear for skippers and crew.

Chris Jones

Boat Maintenance

This month, we've been working mainly down at the Drungewick Slipway, where we have set up a small shipyard in the open, to give *Josias Jessop* her long-awaited refit. You will remember that she had not been slipped in living memory, that she had had her bottom virtually shotblasted by her daily ice-breaking duties at Santa time and that she was kept afloat by a plug of BluTac in a rusted hole at the base of her weed hatch, later reinforced by a wooden wedge.

Our intrepid, four man, maintenance team of Ian (welder and engineering), Brian (general electricians and engineering), Guy (painter and general hand), and me (painting, splicing and generally organising) gently froze in the open while the work proceeded. Ian welded a plate across the bottom of the weed hatch which is now out of use (crews will have to clean the prop with a boathook from the jetty at the side of the stern).



Guy painting the inside of the engine bay hatches

If we ever need to do such a large job again, I'm going to order a plastic frame shelter and a couple of industrial heaters. After nearly three months *JJ* was ready, and in company with *Wasp* (due to be lifted out by crane and trucked up to our base) we proceeded back to the Canal Centre and her usual berth.



A refurbished Zachariah Keppel back on her mooring

Since then Brian has begun to rig *Zachariah Keppel's* solar collectors and controllers, one for each of her two batteries. *JJ* already has a solar collector which keeps her one battery fully charged. Ian has fixed *ZK's* water system and heads flush (this is perhaps too much detail) and I tested it when we did a cream teas trip to DHL and back.

The next job is to inspect the electric cable which charges *Wiggonholt* and organise, with John Reynolds and the base electrician, an electric power box right next to her stern together with a new, short,

rubberised cable to disconnect and connect her easily and quickly. The old cable's cover is falling apart and it is far too long; much of it remaining coiled up in the base of the cable box when *WH* is on charge.

David Arnold

Northern Working Party

We are thinking of renaming the group...to the Fencing Team! After weekly visits to the site since the beginning of the year, the last of 122 four foot tall fencing panels have now been erected at Elmbridge Village, Cranleigh, along the border of the canal; a total length of 225 metres.



The completed fencing at Elmbridge Village

A new post and rail fence was also installed at Drungewick, replacing the old rotting one on the towpath side between the gate near the bridge and the aqueduct. At Tickner's Crossing, a start has been made on erecting a chestnut paling fence along the road verge, to enable the Heras fencing on site to be removed. We look forward to leaving the fencing behind us and moving on to something new.



New post & rail fence at Drungewick

Preliminary work has commenced at Loxwood, opposite the Canal Centre, to replace the steps leading down from the road to where the Trust's boats are moored. The old steps have been removed in readiness for new concrete steps to be formed and poured. During the course of the work, two slow worms were discovered nestling in the old brickwork!

With the disposal of the Trust's Iveco truck being imminent, the opportunity was taken to train/refresh volunteers' skills in towing a trailer. In the safe environment of Dunsfold Airfield, manoeuvres were



Slow worm

practised before venturing out onto the public roads. I am pleased to report that no cones were injured during the course of this exercise and we thank Jack for his time and effort in conducting the training, as a result of which, we now have a larger number of vol-



unteers in the team who are more confident in driving with a trailer.

Dave Miller

Odd Job Group

Work continued at Tickner's Depot to improve the site layout and operability of the stores. The chemical stores were cleaned and repainted, and a goodly amount of spare pipework was stored away - all of which acted to improve the appearance of the site.

A new veranda was added to the welfare cabin at site and new concrete steps were installed in front of the container to be used by Adam.

The original granary stores were emptied and relocated into a container at site. New electrical lighting was installed into two sheds at site.

The workshop was checked and a lot of redundant



Cleaned and repainted chemical stores



A new veranda for the welfare cabin

equipment thrown away; most of it no longer complies with current HSE requirements.

As our work at the depot site nears an end, we made a visit to the Drungewick Lock area to see our next project which hopefully will begin in May.

Brian King

Tickner's Depot

The Depot has been a hive of activity in the last few months. Brian King and the Odd Job Group have been tidying, stacking, sorting, dumping and disposing of all manner of equipment and old stock. The result is a much neater and safer work environment.

The big Ferris lawnmower was left in a sorry state with three of its wheels seized or damaged, but Ian did a sterling job in getting it running again and we

will be next turning our attention to the ride-on Mountfield mower. A Hayter mower had thrown its belt and sustained damage, but that's ready to mow again now. We also have a Stihl brushcutter gearbox to change after the bearings failed and a generator that needs new rubber mountings.

If you have any pieces of WACT kit that need repair or service, please drop them off at the depot, but please leave a note and send me an email about what's wrong and who to contact when it's fixed.

I'm going to be building an Asset Register of 'small tools'. It'll be useful to know what we've got and when routine maintenance is due. These are powered items from big mowers and strimmers, down to cordless power tools. Once I know what info I need, I'll be sending out an email requesting all sorts of data on the WACT tools you have.

Mark Feeney

Canal Maintenance Unit

We have been constructing a concrete pad around the Birch Copse river pump chamber manhole, to make pump replacement easier in the future should it be required. A small timber shelter is also being built at the Loxwood moorings to house the Elsan pump.

We have started a regular programme of greasing the lock paddle gear and lock gate collars, although we found some of the grease nipples were broken and have been replaced. On sunny days we have also taken opportunity for gate and fence painting as required.

Ian Lower

The Contact List

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