

Working Party News

No. 354

For WACT Volunteers

August 2023

Editorial

While the rest of the country was getting soaked, the lack of water led to the suspension of boat trips, but there was been no let up in the activities of our work parties as you will discover in this issue.

Peter Winter

Mobile Display Vehicle

Commonly known as the MDV, its role is to act as a direct interface with the public to communicate and inform on the aims and objectives of the Trust.

Throughout the year we attend a variety of local events updating visitors on the latest developments, encouraging them to join, make donations or purchase merchandise.



Future events we will be attending this year include:

- Wednesday 16th to Sunday 20th August: Amberley Museum
- Saturday 2nd & Sunday 3rd September: Macmillan Vintage Rally
- Saturday 9th & Sunday 10th September: Surrey Hills Wood Fair
- Saturday 16th September: Wey River Festival
- Saturday 4th November: Cranleigh Artisan Market

If you happy to brave the public and sometimes the weather then please get in touch as you'll be most welcome. Both additional people to man the display 'Manners' and drivers to tow the unit 'Towers' are always needed.

Roger Beazer

Boat Group PEST

During June the team was prevented from taking our workboat out due to lack of water and the consequent restrictions on non-essential lock operation. Every last drop of water was being saved for the revenue-earning passenger boat trips, particularly our cream tea 'specials' and, of course, the private charters.

July saw the team resume with our usual tasks of keeping the waterway clear of debris and the offside bank in a respectable state. Specifically, we worked between the Canal Centre and the pound immediately above Loxwood Lock cutting back vegetation from the offside bank that risked catching passengers and boat crew. However, on 17th July all passenger boat operations were suspended due to low water levels. PEST work was also suspended as navigation and, particularly, loading and unloading of the workboat would have been problematic.

We would like another one or two volunteers to join the team on a regular basis. Recently we have lost several loyal volunteers due to ill-health or moving away from the area. If you are interested in working on the water for a couple of days a month then please contact Peter Hyem on 01403 752393 or at peter@barscorner1.plus.com.

Chris Jones

Tickner's Depot

The workshop floor is now painted and sealed, so any dropped grub screws and other small parts can easily be spotted, before I tear out the rest of my hair looking for them.

The incoming water main stopcock now has a proper chamber and cover. All I have to do now is to stop Dave and Adam driving the tele-handler over it.

Mucky job of the month award has to go to clearing out the gutter on the MDV shed. When I inherited the role, I was told the MDV shed gets a bit damp – hardly surprising when the 6-inch square gutter is chock full of moss, pine needles, a small tree and probably several long expired animals.

The gutter runs inside the shed, so any rainwater will overflow into it. I've managed to clear the first and last 15-20 feet from either end with drain rods and a drop-end scraper, but the bit in the middle is proving to be quite a challenge. I don't really want to take it down to clean it, so if anyone has any bright ideas, please let me know. By the way, the

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roof is asbestos cement and very fragile, so no climbing is allowed.

The good news is that the large doors to the engineering shed, the MDV shed and the ‘shed next door’ are now looking magnificent, thanks to sterling work by Dave and Keith of the Odd Job Group.

Mark Feeney

Odd Job Group

A week after pouring the concrete into the reassembled mould for the second pump outlet, we dismantled the form-work to reveal another successful structure. Phew!



We then returned to Tickner’s Depot where we began prepping and painting the large double doors to the machine shop, with the assistance of young Alfie who was with us



Newly painted doors of the MDV shed

for the week on work experience.

Having completed painting the Machine Shop doors we then moved on the Mobile Display Vehicle Shed and repainted those doors.

For our final outing of the month we again teamed up with the Canal Maintenance Unit and met at Tickner’s Depot to prepare and start painting the doors of the shed adjacent to the MDV Shed.



Restoring the dredger tug

We also assisted the Dredging Team with their laborious task of wire brushing the hull of the dredger tug to strip it back to bare metal, in the first step of its renovation. Due to Health and Safety considerations, wire brushing with power tools is restricted to just 30 minutes per person per day, so it is a slow job but progress is being made. There is still much work to be done on the renovation and any offers of help would be gratefully received by the Dredging Team.

Dave Miller pp Brian King

Working Party Diary

Every Monday	Monday Group	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 Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit Level	Contact Dave Evans

Canal Maintenance Unit

After installing the bench at Baldwin's Knob Lock at the start of the month, we returned to move the wooden footbridge by approximately 12 inches to address a long-standing issue that the gap between the surrounding metal handrails and the handrails of the bridge was too wide.

We then carried out some jobs at Loxwood, sanding down and repainting three gates at Loxwood Lock, carrying out repairs to the canoe landing stage near the canal centre and repairing a split water pipe on the Elsan unit.

This month we have also carried out the regular task of greasing all the paddle gear and lock gate collars at all the locks on the (normally) navigable section.

Ian Lower

Eric Walker Group

The group has continued its work on the Birtley Bridges 1 & 2. With all work to BB2 now completed, with the exception of fencing and landscaping, the team carried on preparing the abutments on BB1 to take the steel superstructure for the new bridge.

This involved installing a reinforcement cage that was concreted in with a new galvanised steel run on edge. Then steel templates were used to mark out holes to be drilled for the new bridge base securing bolts. This operation was complicated because we did not know where the reinforcement was positioned. Therefore, we contracted Precision Engineering to diamond drill the 38 holes and they easily coped with all the holes including those through the steel reinforcement, except in one location where one vertical hole coincided with the end of a reinforcement bar, which could not be penetrated!

Five of the bridge concrete balance beams that the group cast at the Tickner's Depot were transported off to the Beaver Bridge manufacturer's site for their test erection operations.

We then had an unexpected operation to carry out. The owners of Birtley Courtyard requested that we provide the area of the overspill car park that the group's volunteers usually use for parking, for a new



Steel templates

tenant to use. This meant cutting back the overgrown hedge, which was expertly done by two members of the MWWP team, and levelling and laying a hardcore aggregate area to accommodate the group's cars.

Work has also started around BB2 to remove the extensive tree protection panels in readiness for the landscaping and fencing.

As previously reported the team found and recovered a number of timber beams that were used in the



construction of the original swing bridge foundations when it was built over 200 years ago. These have been preserved and David Beadman has used some of them to make a bench seat which has now been set in place at the west side approach to the bridge. It is hoped we will commission a plaque to explain the origins of the timber used to construct it.

On the final work day of the month, we took a 'holiday' and courtesy of Martin & Anita Smithers we met at Wonerish Bowls Club to be given an introduction to the art of bowling before a BBQ lunch followed by a quiz.



Dennis the master chef!

Dennis Gillen

Monday Group

July's calendar gave five meetings in the month and so a lot was achieved! We started off with a visit to Malham Lock and Bignor Bridge as we had not been there since February.

Subsequently we cut and widened the towpath to 1.5 metres all the way between Haybarn Swing Bridge and the new bridge at Lee Place; the hedge here needs a good trim so we shall need to return.

We gave attention to Run Common, strimmed and mowed Southland, Devil's Hole, Loxwood & Brewhurst Locks, the Drungewick Aqueduct site and



Malham Lock gets a trim

Roger Dimmock Lane as well as assessing the seats on the permissive path.

For our fourth outing we tidied up Compasses Bridge, Tickner's, Gennets and Baldwin's Knob Locks. Finally, the team cut both sides of the towpath from Loxwood Lock to Devil's Hole Lock.

It is amazing what the Group achieves with between 8 and 10 volunteers wielding strimmers, brushcutters, rakes and loppers etc. A lot of time and effort is spent clearing up as the cutting progresses so that we leave a tidy site.

Nick Wood

Midweek Working Party

This month we have been working south of the Canal Centre. A group of volunteers have been clearing trunks out of the canal at Northlands. In order to move them from the lift bridge they were moved down the canal by a complicated set of winches and shackles. The trees are now out of the water but still need to be cut up.



This tree trunk took some shifting

Another group have been clearing the growth of grass and blackthorn at Toat and have started clearing the canal from Cooks Bridge.

A small group had a canoe rally from the Canal Centre to Southlands as it is bird nesting season and we have do not have an abundance of work. Activity will pick up once the rain stops.

Margaret Darvill

Northern Working Party

Having completed the initial stage of the cable ducting installation along the towpath at Loxwood, one of our first jobs of the month was to surface dress a number of uneven patches between the Canal Centre and Devil's Hole Lock. We used the newly acquired tipping trailer to transport the material from the Canal Centre to the various locations along the towpath, where it could be gradually tipped into position, where required.



The new trailer gets an outing

During the floods earlier in the year, a large amount of cut tree trunks was swept into the River Lox near Devil's Hole Lock, where they accumulated. We have managed to recover all of them from the river ... and estimate there are about 15 tons!

The wooden fencing on the approaches to Barnsill Bridge was in need of attention and we have installed new post and rail fences.

An old and decrepit container was recovered from a field by the Haybarn Swing Bridge to be taken to the scrap merchant for disposal. Grateful assistance was provided by one of the farm staff who came along with a telehandler to get it out of the enclosure and onto the trailer!

Work has continued throughout the month with trenching and burying cable ducting and preparing concrete bases and brick cabinets at various sites in the Loxwood area. Good progress is being made and the new cabinets are gradually being completed.

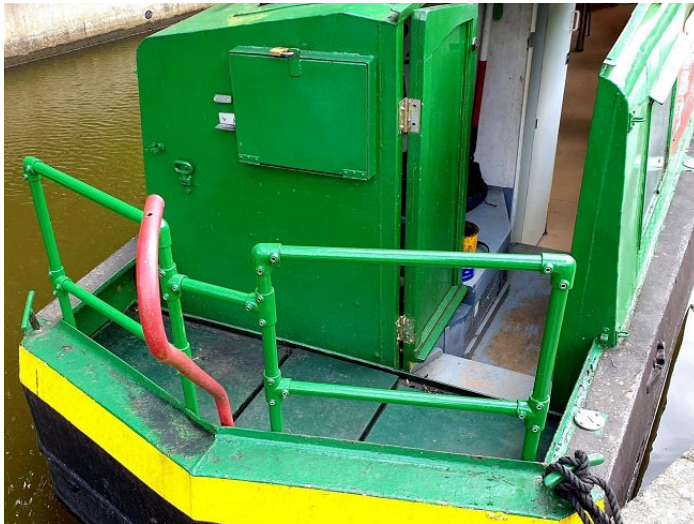
Dave Miller



And the end for an old container

Boat Maintenance

Due to a lack of water, all boat trips have been suspended until mid-August. This is bad news for the Trust's finances and the marketing of our aims to the thousands of people who ride with us. It is, however, good news for the maintenance team as it gives us a chance to do longer running jobs such as hanging the punt pole of *Wiggonholt* from the deckhead of the saloon, giving it two coats of stain at weekly intervals and then varnishing it.

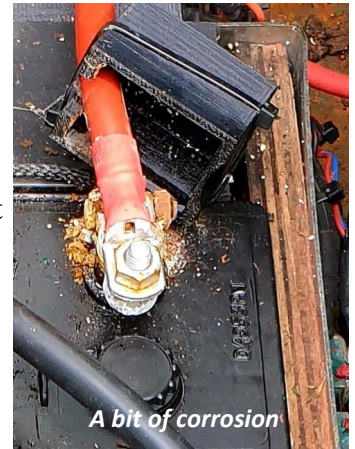


The big job on *Zachariah Keppel* was the construction and fitting of an after rail to stop the skipper falling overboard.

Brian did the construction, Guy the painting and

Ian the drilling and bolting; a very difficult job for which he had to construct special tools, as the space below the fixed deck aft and the exhaust to port and the water tank to starboard was very limited. The result is both neat and effective and doesn't interfere with the operation of the tiller.

WH had problems with the sporadic working of her bow thruster. This is operated by a battery which is charged up from the voltage reduction unit via the fuse box in the engine room. We examined this to find that the top nut screwing it down on the positive terminal was loose, and furthermore the battery clamp under the lead had rotted away with the passage of time. The picture shows the initial situation. A new clamp and the tightening of the top nut seems to have cured the problem, although eventually we will need a new, larger battery and heavier leads to the thruster unit.



Note that the maximum use allowed is two minutes in an hour to prevent overheating, and our maximum usage is under three hours a day, so the thruster should only have to operate for a maximum of six minutes between recharges.

David Arnold

The Contact List

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