

Working Party News

No. 356

For WACT Volunteers

October 2023

Editorial

September was a lovely warm (even hot) month and most of our work parties were able to make good progress. This was especially so at Birtley where work on the new bridges is almost complete.

However, water levels are still low with the trip boats sitting on the bottom and other boat related activities at a stand still.

Peter Winter

Eric Walker Group

The group has continued with its work on the Birtley Bridges 1 & 2. At the beginning of the month we hired in a long reach excavator to dredge silt from the canal and we also profiled the bank on the stretch between the two bridges.



The long reach digger clearing the silt

Subsequently the team then concentrated on the bridge abutment preparatory works ready for Beaver Bridges to start on site on 18th September. I say started, but the first obstacle was for the Beaver delivery driver to negotiate his way through the Birtley Courtyard car park. An extremely difficult task, with much manoeuvring because of the length of the articulated low loader. The next problem, after unloading the 20T digger, which will do all the heavy lifting, was to try and get it through the Downs Link bridge next to BB2. It was touch and go whether it was possible, with literally with a few millimetres to spare and much to everyone's relief, it was achieved. The structural steelwork, which should have arrived in the afternoon of the same day, was delayed and



A tight fit through the Downs Link Bridge

was delivered the day after.

So after a disappointing start and a day lost, the Beaver work team "pulled out the stops" and soon



Construction at Birtley Bridge 1



The bridge almost complete – just waiting for the hydraulics

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made up lost time, working long hours and the weekend. The result is that at the time of writing both bridges are virtually complete, with only the lifting hydraulics and non-slip bridge deck to do.

The EWG team will now finish off and erect the fencing, the west approach barrier gate (BB2), a bit of bank profiling and finally spread topsoil so all will be ready for the grand opening.

Dennis Gillen

Tickner's Depot

After last month's tale of the errant Honda generator, I can now report that it is now behaving itself again. Maybe it just needed a rest to get used to having clean filters and fresh fuel.

Dave has been getting on really well with the new secure tool store. As it's still awaiting the lighting, it's currently referred to as 'The Dungeon'. The blockwork is complete, and he's used the same design for the doors as those on the new lock pump control cabinets; just right for keeping our more 'attractive' tools in.

The tug refurbishment is moving on apace. It is looking really smart in its bright green and black livery.

The recent donation of a small leaf blower is coming into its own. Now that autumn is well and truly upon us, the depot gets its fair share of leaves, mainly horse chestnut, and blowing them is so much easier than the weekly sweep up.

Finally, last month I showed you pictures of the recently dredged channel at Compasses Bridge. Well it's now back in water and looking quite magnificent. No pictures, so it's a good excuse for you to pop down and check it out. Oh, and the pub has recently re-opened.

Mark Feeney

Mobile Display Vehicle

It was a busy time for the MDV In September with events on three consecutive weekends starting with the MacMillan Vintage Rally at Balls Cross on the 2nd & 3rd. This is an event we regularly attend and visitor numbers were good with plenty of interest shown in the W&A. Reasonable sales were made and information distributed.



Our biggest event of the year, the Surrey Hills Wood Fair, was on the 9th & 10th of September. Although visitor numbers were lower due to the extreme heat we still attracted good numbers to our exhibit greatly helped by what has now become a regular feature, 'The Drive a Digger' attraction, which this year included one for adults. Also for the first time we featured Plastecowood products all of which are made from recycled plastic, which previously would have gone to landfill. Wherever suitable the Trust is now using these products instead of traditional wood. As well as being maintenance free and having longevity they also provide a good environmental story for the Trust.

The third event of the month, the Wey River Festi-

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



At the Wey River Festival

val at Dapdune Wharf, Guildford was on Saturday 16th. An estimated 3,000 people attended. The MDV attracted plenty of attention and was busy throughout the day.

It was noticeable, however, at all three events that people were more cautious with their spending. This was reflected in the lower than normal number of new members signing up.

Two more events are currently scheduled for the rest of the year, the Cranleigh Artisan Festival on the 4th November and the Billingshurst Christmas Fayre on Saturday 9th December.

Roger Beazer

Boat Maintenance

It is now a slack period in the boat maintenance year. There is some attrition in our team with Ian and I going on holiday, Brian has an eye problem, and Guy has moved to Cornwall. As shown in the photograph the water for our regular moorings in the



Canal Centre section moorings is between two and a half and three feet below normal. The picture is of Ian standing in the stern of *Zachariah Keppel* and the proper water level can be seen behind him. The water is so low that it is very difficult if not impossible for us old ones to get on and off the boats.

Josias Jessop is aground, leaning over to starboard and hanging on her chains. I have spliced a new piece of mooring rope for her stern, but we can't board her as her stern chain might snap. ZK has been painted inside in gloss white and her engine serviced. She is full of water and has had her black tank pumped out (as has WH). With the batteries being kept topped up by

her solar panels, she is ready for operation.

WH has had two coats of Grey floor paint on her saloon deck and on the working and WC deck area aft of it. The batteries have been topped up with distilled water and the wheelchair lift serviced. She is also ready for work as soon as water levels permit.

Survey week is from Monday 30th October to Friday 3rd November. We still need a couple of volunteers to assist us, especially on Tuesday 31st October and on survey day itself when we have to do one shore survey and two sea trials. The MCA surveyor has been booked at vast cost and we can only hope for a few very heavy downpours between now and October 30th.

David Arnold

Midweek Working Party

This month we have had a number of people away due to holidays. However, we have achieved a great deal especially as we have had two commercial groups in to do volunteering.

We have completed clearing Tannery Lane and Dave's Monday Group have now started to fence it off from the footpath. As we are now in receipt of a Felling Licence for the stretch from the county boundary to Rosemary Lane, we have started to clear the trees with Ash Dieback and those trees which impinge on the towpath in readiness for us to improve the footpath next summer.

A group have been at Haybarn, doing our annual clearance of the towpath and banks. It is such an improvement where we have completed the work.

Margaret Darvill

Odd Job Group

Our first job of the month was to the Shalford Information Point at Hunt Park where, together with the Canal Maintenance Unit, we continued to apply preservative to the exterior cladding. The job was made rather awkward by the high pent roof and the fact that it is built on brick pillars to avoid flooding. With the requirement for quite a high, cumbersome scaffolding tower and the surrounding uneven



Shalford Information Point all spruced up

ground, progress was slow but steady. The work has now been completed and all should be well ... until we return to do it all again in two years' time!

We then turned our attention to Drungewick Lock



Removing backpumps at Drungewick Lock

where, again with CMU, we removed the two old back pumps that are going to be replaced. It was a long job, involving a scaffold gantry and chain winch. The aqua-dock was resited from Loxwood and positioned in readiness for contractors to bore a new hole through into the pump chamber with a large diamond drill. We dismantled the old stop plank shelter, that had seen much better days and, with tree work planned in the immediate area, it was considered prudent to remove the memorial bench and transport it to Tickner's Depot for safekeeping.

The river pump was also removed from its chamber in readiness for a service and we tidied up the winding hole by strimming the vegetation and cutting back the overhanging willow. We are continuing exploratory work with the backpump chamber to ensure sufficient ingress of water for when the pump is replaced.

pp Brian King

Northern Working Party

Public interest was aroused at the beginning of the month, when we were seen at Loxwood and Devil's Hole Locks wearing white oversuits, face masks and protective gloves. Looking like a scene from CSI, the truth was less interesting! On a very warm day, we started to construct the GRP (fibreglass) roofs for the newly built brick cabinets. As some will know, this is a messy job that, once you start, needs to be completed as quickly as possible. We know that there is a high temperature limit for laying GRP but it was on the cusp and, on a fast learning curve, we just about got away with it! Only two more to do.



Messy work roofing the control cabinets

On what turned out to be the hottest weekend of the year, WACT again had a stand at the Surrey Hills Wood Fair at Cranleigh and some of our team attended to assist with the display. As usual the junior digger driving activity was very popular with children of all ages and kept us busy throughout the day. I am now very proficient in operating a digger provided I can stand alongside and not have to sit in the driver's seat!

A forecast of inclement weather on our next outing delayed the construction of further GRP roofs, so we turned our attention to making a start on fitting the newly fabricated steel doors, beginning at Loxwood Lock.

On the third Saturday of the month we were joined by The London Waterway Recovery Group, who assisted us with tree work and installing the final section of cable ducting beneath the towpath from Birch Copse to Baldwin's Knob.

A miscellany of tasks was tackled the following week and the team split up into a number of smaller groups. At Tickner's Depot, work continued on fabricating more steel doors for the brick cabinets at Loxwood and further blockwork was added to that already laid in the MDV shed to create a separate storage area.



Completed cabinet at Devil's Hole Lock

The digger was used to scrape and level the tow-path near Baldwin's Knob Lock in readiness for new top dressing to be laid following the recent trenching work done there. A large diesel pump was taken down to Drungewick Lock and set up to pump out from the winding hole, to lower the water level to ease access to the pump chamber for subsequent removal and replacement of the back pumps. The new fencing at Barnsill Bridge was painted and, following a massive clearance operation by the MWWP at Tannery Lane, work began on erecting a new post and rail fence there.

For our final outing of the month, half of the team went to Baldwin's Knob Lock to spread sandstone top dressing on the towpath, whilst the other half went to Loxwood and Devil's Hole Locks to fit the steel doors to the brick cabinets and give them their final coat of paint.

Dave Miller

Monday Group

September was a diverse month. We undertook our usual strimming, mowing and cutting of the vegetation at Baldwin's Knob, Brewhurst (including, by special request, sorting out the bridge over the river and

the mill race), Loxwood, Devil's Hole, Southland and Gennets Locks as well as Compasses Bridge. We spent time at the aqueduct site tidying up the towpath and clearing all around the slipway.

After two day's work we have cut back about two thirds of the permissive path from Drungewick Lane Bridge to the lock. This turned out to be quite a task and we will need another visit to complete the job as far as the lock. That will be for October after we have been to Lordings before access becomes too difficult with the onset of the autumn rains.

Nick Wood



Before and after on the permissive path at Drungewick

The Contact List

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