

# Working Party News

## No. 357

### For WACT Volunteers

### November 2023

#### Editorial

This month saw the culmination of three years hard work with the opening of the Birtley Bridges. Well done to all involved!

We also witnessed a switch to wetter weather and a subsequent change in the water levels. This month started with the trip boats sitting on the bottom and finished with water flowing over the top of Brewhurst Lock.

There's been a merger of work parties, with the Odd Job Group and the Canal Maintenance team combining to form the new Thursday Group.

*Peter Winter*

#### Eric Walker Group

At Birtley Bridges 1 & 2 the Beaver Bridges team have been on site all month completing the structural work to the bridges and then installing the hydraulic pumps, pipe work and rams. Although the hydraulic lifting systems are complete, they are not working to the design criteria, with more physical effort required to operate the pump levers than expected.



*Open Sesame!*

Investigations are ongoing to find a solution to the problem.



*The EWG Group celebrate the opening*

Meanwhile the EWG team completed the final touches by fitting the signs to each bridge, erecting picnic tables beside both bridges, painting the handrails and erecting the fencing to BB2. Finally signs were fitted to the gabion 'sign stack' and all was ready for the formal opening on 28th October. This was performed by the Deputy Lieutenant of Surrey, Mary Creswell, and witnessed by about 150 people.



*Dennis Gillen*

#### Thursday Group

Having frequently worked together over the past few months, it has been decided to merge the Canal Maintenance Unit and the Odd Job Group into a new 'Thursday Group'.

This month, our work has been concentrated at Drungewick Lock where, due to impending works at that site, it was necessary for us to locate and trace the route of the buried cables that run alongside the lock and canal. With the supply having been disconnected due to the damage caused earlier in the year, the use of cable detectors was unsuccessful and we had to resort to hand digging numerous exploratory trenches. Not an easy task, in the heavily compacted clay!

We then went on to excavate around the river pump chamber and lay an enlarged concrete pad, to enable contractors to assemble their equipment to safely access the deep chamber during the servicing

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Enlarged concrete pad for river pump

Additional works were completed on the boat *May Upton* including introducing a new bilge pump and preparing to install a solar panel.

*Brian King & Ian Lower*

### Northern Working Party

Work continued this month on the new lockside brick built cabinets. Steel doors and a GRP roof were installed on the one at Baldwin's Knob Lock. More top dressing was laid on the towpath at BKL and the stretch from Birch Copse to the lock is now complete.

Three of our team attended a First Aid Course at the beginning of the month, which provides us with better cover for when we split into smaller groups to work at various sites.

A long day was spent at Birch Copse, fitting a steel door to the new cabinet and installing a GRP roof. New ducting was laid from the cabinet to the pump chamber and the trench backfilled.

Work then began on clearing and preparing the canal bank for positioning the recently cast, very

and replacement of the pump that we had previously lifted.

The awkward part of the job was continually negotiating the electric fence around the field, between the materials and the job site but, fortunately, the team got away with just the one jolt! The fence was a necessary evil though, keeping the very inquisitive, resident cattle at a reasonably safe distance.



Whilst in the locality, we dug out a rotting gate post in Drungewick Lane at the towpath entrance to the aqueduct, replaced it with a new one and rehung the gate.



Installing the concrete pump outlet

## 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	Contact Dennis Gillen
Every Monday, Tuesday, and Third Saturday	Northern Working Party	Contact Gordon Powell
Every Thursday	Thursday Group	Contact Ian Lower or Brian King
First & Third Friday of the month	PEST Boat Group	Contact Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit Level	Contact Dave Evans

heavy, concrete pump outlet! The following week we returned to Birch Copse to actually install the outlet and then run a short but successful test of the river pump. Fortunately, an extraction licence was granted the same day and the pump was able to be left running for a longer period of time to help fill the pound.

Our Saturday outing of the month coincided with a visit from WRG Forestry and the Newbury Working Group. A substantial amount of tree felling and clearance was carried out at the Drungewick winding hole and the towpath at Barnsill, with both areas now looking much tidier.

We installed a new fence and gate at Tannery Lane, Bramley, followed by some fence repairs and fitting of a new gate near Birtley Bridge One. It was very useful being able to drive the truck over the new bridge to get to the site!

Many will be familiar with the very sorry looking ash tree on the edge of the canal at Brewhurst Bridge. Well, it toppled into the water of its own accord, narrowly missing the overhead power cables. Following a little tree surgery, made more awkward by the resident hornets, we used *May Upton* to tow



two large sections along the canal to the winding hole at Brewhurst pending their removal.

More trenches were dug and more cable ducting laid at Drungewick Lock and we poured a concrete pad in readiness for yet another brick cabinet to be built. On a dry, sunny day, but in very muddy conditions, we began installation of another of our pre-cast concrete back pump outlets at the lock and hope to complete the job on our next visit.

*Dave Miller*

## Health & Safety Improvements

The attractions of volunteering include comradeship, doing something useful and interesting without too much red-tape. But we all expect to go home from a working party in one piece, and without causing injury to others. The Trust, as required by our insurers, is making improvements to formalise our H&S procedures. In doing so we will be standardising processes already used and adopting best (and safest) practice.

- From today, all volunteers must sign in when they arrive at a working party and the WP leader will ensure, and record, that all volunteers have received all appropriate instructions (risk assessments and method statements) whether given orally or in writing/electronically about the site and about the tasks to be carried out. This should take up little more time than is currently spent on briefings. Some or all of these instructions may be given in advance of the working party, for example by email. All records of attendance and of the instructions or risk assessments used will be recorded centrally.
- Anyone using mechanised plant (such as dumper trucks and excavators) must have a valid and current ticket to operate it. We use WRG ticketing for most purposes. Any ticket you hold should be copied to me now to be held centrally, and you will need to have it with you on the working party to be able to operate the plant. (Chainsaw tickets are already held centrally.) Additional training and ticketing will be rolled out shortly to ensure we have sufficient ticketed volunteers.
- We will be introducing an improved system of training and familiarisation for other equipment which is liable to cause serious injury if misused (such as strimmers, brush cutters, grinders etc.) Again, we will need to hold a central record of tickets and you will need to be able to produce your ticket on working parties.

Boat crewing operates in a different manner but recording of attendees and briefings will also be centralised. Boat maintenance and PEST will operate like all other working parties.

When you began volunteering you will have received some general induction into the work of a volunteer. We now will ensure that for everyone this is regularly refreshed.

All of this is a process which we will develop and improve over time and with your assistance and input. Send any comments or suggestions, and copies of your tickets, to me at [giles\\_eyre@weyandarun.co.uk](mailto:giles_eyre@weyandarun.co.uk).

*Giles Eyre*

## Boat Maintenance

On October 8th the canal reached its low point in the late summer dry season. The picture shows *Wiggonholt* on that day at least five feet down from her usual position where the deck aft should be level with the concrete dock. The resultant drop made it impossible for me and very hard for Ian to get on and especially off the boat. The concrete dock is actually level with the entry hatch.



*Wiggonholt sitting on the bottom*

Fortunately, due to subsequent rains, permission to pump water in from the River Lox, plus John Reynolds juggling with the water levels the situation has improved greatly. Ian and I were able to bring *Zachariah Keppel* across to the Canal Centre side on October 26th. The water level at the time of writing is only about a foot short of the high water mark.



We straightened up the inside of ZK which had been painted in white, put up all the notices and signs and swept her out. She is now all ready for a charter for a maximum of 20 people. We will bring her across again and power wash her externally.

You will note that I have referred to Ian and me doing the work. With Guy now moved to Cornwall and Brian absent at the moment, we desperately need volunteers to join the maintenance team. It's normally only three hours on Tuesdays when the weather serves, plus dealing with emergency problems that crop up from time to time.

The week commencing 19th November is now the start of our survey week when we have to slip WH, ready for the MCA Surveyor's visit on November 24th. Fortunately a strong team of volunteers have signed on for this job.

*David Arnold*

## Monday Group

As anticipated in last month's WPN, we started October off with a visit to Lordings which really required our attention. We also found time to cut both sides of the road at Newbridge.



*Keeping up appearances at Lordings*

For our second meeting we 'did our bit' at Run Common, Compasses Bridge, the Tickner's 'triangle' and Gennets Lock.

We made our second visit of the year to Malham as well as cutting both sides of Drungewick Lock.



*and at Malham*

On the 23rd we cut Baldwin's Knob Lock and gave Drungewick slipway our attention, clearing all the brambles etc. from around the lockable tool and paint stores. Finally, we managed to complete tidying up the last remaining stretch of the permissive path to Drungewick Lock on a very damp late October Monday!

*Nick Wood*

## Midweek Working Party

The team has had a very busy month. We all met together the first week and tidied up Birtley for the opening. At lunch time we had a mini barbecue and

social. Jacket potatoes and sausages cooked in the fire.

The next week groups were split up. A group went to Haybarn to clear the towpath and banks and to take willow out of the canal. Others went to Bonfire Hanger, where they have been removing trees and clearing the ditches. This has continued all month as there are a great number of ashes with die back.

A small team have been at Rye Farm clearing the area for the proposed bridleway. Another group has cleared part of the towpath at Drungewick and Barnsill and past the lock in preparation for other working parties to cut trees down and do the bank repairs.

*Margaret Darvill*

## Tickner's Depot

I think I spoke too soon about our errant Honda generator. After reporting that it was working again, it now isn't! It's the same problem, runs for a while then stops. A bit more investigation required, me-thinks. This could turn into quite a saga.

For all you chainsaw users out there, we now have the tools and materials to make our own chainsaw chain loops. Having bought 100ft spools of chain, we can now make a chain loop for any length of bar, this will give us quite a saving over the manufactured chains. We also have a chain grinder, so you if you inadvertently clip a stone or piece of wire, we can grind the teeth back to a uniform size and restore the cutting edge.

Charlie and Brian have pretty much completed the refurbishment of the tug and refloating should happen in the next couple of weeks. With the tug moved, we can begin to sort out the disgusting gutter in the MDV shed and fix the water ingress.

We have improved access to the workshop by building a more gradual ramp at the side door. We needed to remove, and then trim a bit off the bottom of the doors, so Ian took the opportunity to paint them at the same time. Now, all of the wooden doors are the same colour.

Behind the workshop is a fair-sized Horse Chestnut tree and it has produced a bumper crop of fruit. So many, that we could probably host the inaugural IWA conker championship next year. Of course, everyone would need to have the latest PPE before they could take part.

*Anyone for conkers?*



*Mark Feeney*

## The Contact List

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