

Working Party News

No. 358

For WACT Volunteers

December 2023

Editorial

This month sees the end of an era as David Arnold steps down from his role as Boat Maintenance Manager. Our thanks go to him and his team for all their hard work in keeping the Trust's boats ship shape and MCA compliant.

Meanwhile, it's a welcome return to action by PEST Boat Group and the Hedgelaying team.

Peter Winter

Boat Group PEST

PEST is back! November saw our first work day since the start of the water shortage in July. We now have more than enough water to float our boats.

Our first workday after our long lay-off saw a full team carry out a remarkable amount of work, removing four *May Upton* loads of vegetation and debris from the canal and from the offside bank. Specifically, we cleared around Brewhurst Lock where we saw a kingfisher and made sure we left perching places for him and his friends.

Moving on, we cleared around the Brewhurst Bridge winding hole. A massive stump that had been washed into the canal was shifted and secured where it would no longer be a hazard to navigation. A large amount of vegetation was cut back from off-side bank around Silver Birches Copse and, finally, sight-lines were cleared around Barnsill Bridge. A satisfying day's work.

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

Chris Jones

Boat Maintenance

This will be my last Boat Maintenance Monthly News. I will be, in my 85th year, ending my skippering and being Maintenance Manager. I've been doing both jobs for six years, and I think it's time to leave it to a younger and more active person.

Meanwhile, we have had a very busy three weeks slipping *Wiggonholt* and doing sea trials on both *WH* and *Zachariah Keppel*. While *WH* was slipped, her hull was painted by our dedicated team.



Wiggonholt's hull gets a new coat of paint

The MCA Surveyor was an ex-Chief Engineer and was very fussy, leaving us with a multiplicity of jobs to do before we could get a passenger certificate for each boat. Bearing in mind that the survey was on November 24th and the first Santa trip was on December 2nd, Ian, John and I pitched in, ably assisted by Ken Broomfield on some extensive new paperwork and first aid kit. Meanwhile Lyn Nash fixed new reflective tape on the lifebuoys. Bearing in mind that neither boat is now licenced to operate after sunset, this latter item did seem a little unnecessary as did the urgent requirement to fill in and submit an MCA form detailing our passenger counting method for official MCA approval.

He even demanded to be sent the skipper's licence for Ian James who was aboard *ZK* and assisted in her sea trials as required by the MCA!

The big job was the re-positioning of the load line freeboard marks on both boats which have passed many MCA surveys in the past but which apparently do not correspond with our certificates.

With the assistance of masking tape, a soft measuring tape from my wife's sewing kit and a lot of agility, John, Ian and I managed to spray the old marks black to obliterate them and the next day, spray on new white ones.

David Arnold



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Tickner's Depot

I need your help. You'll remember from last month's report, that we can now make chainsaw chain loops. Sadly, we don't have an up to date list of all the chainsaws the Trust is using. So, could any chainsaw users reading this please let me know the make & model of your saw(s). You wouldn't believe the combinations of pitch, gauge, and drive links there are out there. My phone number is now in the contacts list.

It was beginning to look like the tug would be spending winter in the warm and cosy MDV shed. Resplendent in its fresh paint and refurbished interior, it was found to have a defective solenoid. The guys decided it was far easier and safer to sort it out on dry land, so her launch was delayed. Imagine my surprise when I found out she was back in the water at Loxwood, ready to earn a living again. Of course, the disappearance of the tug now means that I don't any excuses not to get started on the disgusting gutter clearance job.

Some of you may know that the Trust has a trailer mounted Bowser Power Washer. A year or so ago, when it developed a fault and steadfastly refused to pump any water, it was left in the yard gathering moss. Now, the boat crews love to have the boats super shiny, and washing a 72 footer with a bucket and sponge is no fun! So, Ian and I have now started the repair and recommissioning of the power washer. The pump and diesel engine have been serviced and all the dilapidated hoses replaced. The safety valve has been replaced as a precaution. All we need to do now is to put some PTFE tape around the drain plugs, fill it up and give it a test.

Whilst the recent torrential rains have swelled the canal levels, it's played havoc with the Archive and Records store. The temporary fix to the roof has proved to be even more temporary than I thought. There's a damp patch on the floor and the ceiling has

begun to sag. Having looked at the roof, some of the welds have split, so a new cover is required. The plan is to fit a sloping timber frame directly to the steel, capped off with OSB sheeting to provide a flat sub-surface. A rubber membrane will be glued to the OSB and sealed to a depth of 6 inches down the sides. All we need is a couple of dry days to get up there and do it.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Mark Feeney

Northern Working Party

At the beginning of the month, following the trials and tribulations of Storm Ciaran, we were blessed with a fine, bright day to visit Long Meadow at Drungewick. With the wetter weather, the heavy machinery that has been used for the work at Drungewick Lock had made quite a mess of the access track across the field from Drungewick Lane to the towpath, making it impassable for lighter vehicles. We scraped and graded the surface, put down a Terram membrane followed by a layer of crushed concrete and a top dressing of Type 1 stone, resulting in a much firmer access route ... and all done in one day!



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 John Reynolds
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

Haybarn Swing Bridge was found to have become stuck in the open position, possibly caused by the strong current during the wet weather. The padlock securing the chain was broken and the bridge had obviously opened quickly with force because the runners had become wedged over the top of the stop. We managed to free the bridge and make it operational again.



Haybarn Swing Bridge open

The weather had generally caused havoc with fallen trees. We were called upon to clear and dispose of a couple of trees that had fallen onto the road at Tickner's Heath, pull a tree out of the canal near Barnsill and then use *May Upton* to clear a tree from the Canal just above Loxwood Lock.



Dealing with the collapsed oak at Compasses

Photo by Keith Lyall

Following the collapse of a large oak tree by Compasses Bridge, completely blocking the canal, we spent a day clearing the area by cutting the trunk into manageable sections and hauling them out with



Relaunching the dredger tug boat

Photo by Keith Lyall

the power winch. It would have been a much longer job using the Tirfor!

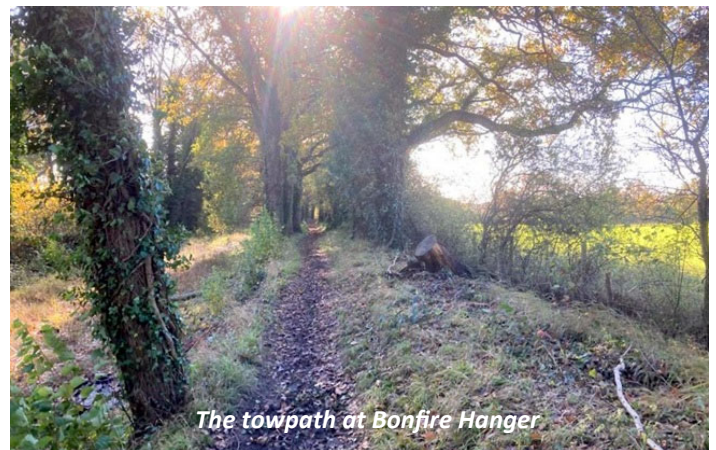
The log storage bays at Tickner's Depot are currently open to the elements. This month we have begun to assemble a scaffolding roof structure to assist in keeping the contents dry.

Following months of work on the refurbishment of the dredger tug at Tickner's Depot, it is now looking rather resplendent and we assisted in transporting it to Drungewick Slipway where it was unloaded and taken on a successful test cruise to the moorings at Loxwood. The MDV shed is now looking much roomier and tidier!

Dave Miller

Midweek Working Party

We have spent most of November at Bonfire Hanger clearing trees marked on our arborologist's report. Most of these are dead ashes but a few other trees have had to be taken out in order to widen the towpath to as near 3 metres as we can get. Whilst there we have been clearing the ditch to increase the drainage of the path. At present the towpath is a quagmire in places.



The towpath at Bonfire Hanger

We have had several splinter groups this month working on smaller jobs. Trees have been taken down at Rye Farm in readiness for the new bridleway. At the same time the offside of the canal is being tidied up. Hunt Park has had to have work done to clear trees that have come down due to the storms. Work has also been done on tidying up around Barnsill.

Margaret Darvill

Hedgelaying

After a protracted period of enforced aestivation (or summer diapause) across the summer months, while sap runs and hedges grow, the Hedgelaying Team has emerged blinking into the wintery sun to start again to tame the canal's wild hedgerows, to ensure that towpath hedges are again in good fettle for wildlife and are looking their best for visitors. We are always indebted to other teams who trim the various hedges during the year allowing us a necessary break to mend and sharpen tools and minds!

This year, some of the Team started early in October, trimming back excess growth on the laid hedge opposite the Canal Centre. In November, once sap started to stop running freely, the Team descended again on Chris Tavener's hazel coppice to cut stakes and binders. Having worked this coppice for around seven years, the re-growth is phenomenal and means that we can cut what we want comparatively quickly with minimal waste.



Plenty of stakes and binders

This month, we have cut over 360 stakes and 360 binders (enough for around 210 yards of hedging) - any more, and the material may become too brittle as it dries out, before we can use it. The cut hazel stools are then protected with a variety of deer-proof corrals (looking like an outdoor sculpture exhibition, as everyone has their own design). As a thank you to Chris, the Team started to lay a hedge fronting the coppice; good practice for us, and great for the site.

We hope to start working on the towpath hedge near Drungewick Slipway in December. Please say hello, if you are there when we are working. We also welcome new potential hedgelayers, and have been pleased that Andrew has joined us this season. Training will always be offered by the seasoned veterans, along with advice!

Nick Baxter

Thursday Group

Storm Ciaran put paid to our first outing of the month. With discretion being the better part of valour we battened down the hatches and stayed at home in the dry and out of the wind. On the positive side, the weather did bring a sight that had not been seen for a while, with water cascading over Baldwin's Knob Lock. Talk about going from one extreme to another!

Now that water levels have risen, the workboat *May Upton* is operational again and we were able to put her to good use when we visited Drungewick to refit the stop planks at the aqueduct. Storm Ciaran and subsequent adverse weather conditions had caused the planks to be forced apart and jammed



Photo by Gordon Powell

Plenty of water at Baldwin's Knob Lock

with tree debris, causing water to cascade through from the canal. Following removal, cleaning and replacement of the planks, the breach was successfully sealed.

Weather conditions again caused us to cancel our next group outing, though a couple of the team did manage to go to Loxwood and complete fixing the new solar battery charging unit on *May Upton*.



Fixing the stop planks at Drungewick

Photo by Keith Lyall

A miscellany of tasks were completed the following week, when we took *May Upton* up to Southland Lock to install a new lifebelt post, plastic wood spur posts to the unstable information board and replace wooden end post to the rail fencing on the opposite side of the lock. On the way back to Loxwood, we were also able to secure a rope to a fairly large tree branch that had fallen into the canal and tow it down to a convenient spot to remove it.

Our final outing of the month was a to Devil's Hole Lock where we replaced a repaired bench on the towpath and began work on replacing rotting gateposts on the bridge crossing.

Whilst we were doing this, *May Upton* was called upon to tow the dredger tug back to its mooring at Drungewick Slipway. In the afternoon we all assembled on *Wiggonholt* where we received Workboat Safety training from John Reynolds and we are now all certified to skipper *May Upton*.

Brian King & Ian Lower

Monday Group

As yours truly is off cruising from the middle of November, this report covers the first two outings of the month when the Group cut the hedge and trimmed the towpath for 800 yards from the aqueduct to the first wood towards Barnshill bridge. There was a lot of work required to clear all the cuttings and transporting them over considerable distance to suitable sites for disposal.

During the remainder of the month, the Group worked south from the Canal Centre doing similar work. Happy Christmas to all.

Nick Wood

Eric Walker Group

With the Birtley bridges formally opened, the team did some final painting, tidied up the site and arranged for the welfare unit and storage container to be moved back to the depot.

With those tasks out of the way, the team was ready for the next project at Northlands Farm. As part of the agreement whereby the Trust purchased 800m of canal, it was agreed that the Trust would lay a track from a new entrance off the B2133 to the Northlands farmhouse with a spur off to the canal. Creating the track involves scraping away the topsoil, laying a layer of Geotex fabric followed by a layer Geogrid reinforcement. This is covered by a crushed concrete and finished off by a layer of basalt/limestone aggregate.



Making a start on the tracks at Northlands

The work will be undertaken entirely by the EWG team, who have already made a start on the track from the entrance.

Dennis Gillen

The Contact List

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