

Working Party News

No. 360

For WACT Volunteers

February 2024

Editorial

Storms Henk, Isha and Jocelyn have been and gone but they didn't deter our work parties from getting on with the job. However, the winds did bring down a few trees, some of them rather large, which did pose a few challenges.

In fact, during 2023 volunteers contributed over 27,000 hours of their time to Trust activities. That's the equivalent of 16 full time staff!

Please note the plea from the PEST team. They are low on numbers and need new recruits.

Peter Winter

Northern Working Party

On a very cold morning at the beginning of the month we had a site visit to the canal footbridge at Bonfire Hanger to consider the design for steps to replace the very awkward stile on the field side of the bridge. A detailed CAD (cardboard aided design) drawing was prepared and then, due to difficult access for materials on site, work began at the Depot to pre-construct the steps out of Plastecowood planks.

Whilst this was being done, a team went down to Pallingham Bridge to cut and fit a replacement stop plank. The original having been swept away when all the planks were dislodged and scattered around in the adverse weather conditions.

With the preparation work on the new steps having been completed at Tickner's Depot, we returned to Bonfire Hanger to install them on the footbridge. With Gennets Bridge Lock being the nearest accessible point, 700 metres from the job site, we were kept warm with multiple trips back and forth carrying all the materials along the towpath! It was a long day but we were able to completely remove the old stile and finish fitting the steps before dusk, leaving them usable by pedestrians. Judging by the very favourable comments on the Facebook item that was posted, users of the footpath are now finding the footbridge much more convenient to use.



Work also commenced on preparing the ground around the Loxwood Canal Centre to replace the rotting and damaged sleepers with a low brick wall. Not an easy job, because although rotten, the sleepers had been very well secured with plenty of steel bars! The underlying concrete was then broken out and a trench prepared in readiness for laying concrete footings for the new brickwork.

To aid the Hedgelaying Team who are working in the area, we collected the floating Aqua-Dock from Drungewick Lock, paddled it back along the Long Meadow section and secured it across the canal at the Drungewick Plant Crossing. We were also able to make use of the Aqua-Dock to make a start on removing the stop planks at that location. We managed to remove the top four planks but the remainder were stuck fast and had to be left in position for removal at a later date.

More jobs were then tackled at Tickner's Depot. The roof on the MDV shed is in poor condition and the rain leaks into the building from the central valley guttering. With the roof being so fragile, and consisting of old asbestos sheeting, it is not safe to work from above, so we began to install an internal system of pvc guttering to catch the incoming rain-water and divert it to external downpipes at either end of the building. It's an unorthodox design probably not recommended for domestic use but should be effective in keeping the MDV shed dry for the time being.



The Aqua-Dock in use at Drungewick

Finally, we returned to Bonfire Hanger to install a pedestrian gate on the new steps to the footbridge and fit a couple of additional side rails to deter inquisitive livestock. Work also continued on the temporary roof being constructed over the log bays and the scaffolding framework was adjusted in readiness for the waterproof sheeting to be affixed.

Dave Miller

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Hedgelaying

The Hedgelaying Team has now started work in earnest at Drungewick, opposite the slipway. We are indebted to Dave, Adam, and NWP volunteers (see above) for putting in the temporary bridge (adjacent to the aqueduct stoplock); without this, our task would be so much harder, as it gives us access across the canal and also means that we can transport stakes and binders fairly easily (and safely) to the hedge, rather than carrying them several hundred yards along a very narrow road.



The hedge is not easy to lay (are they ever?), as it is full of brambles and briars, with many gaps, and has been flailed a number of times over the years, producing a lot of twiggy growth in the wrong places for us. Unfortunately, it was flailed again in autumn, meaning that we have only a very short amount of upright growth to work with, but, as always, the team is doing an extraordinary job.

A couple of images showing the start of work were added to the WACT Facebook site recently - thanks to Gordon Powell.

Nick Baxter

Tickner's Depot

It's all change at Dunsfold Park. A few of you will have noticed that the access to the depot has changed. The new roundabout on the A281 is now the main access to Dunsfold Park and the depot. The Northern access road via Stovolds Hill is closed to all traffic. Compasses Bridge is still open on weekdays, but only to cars and light traffic.

The new access road, Canada Avenue, was officially opened by Colonel Bouchard from the Canadian High Commission and other local dignitaries. A contingent from WACT joined other invited guests.

Anyone visiting the depot and using Canada Avenue will have to go through the security gate and turn left along the perimeter track. We also have it on good authority, that 'some' of the potholes will be repaired soon, so we won't have to play 'dodge-the-cone' to get to the depot.

At the depot itself, we've had a productive start to the year. The temporary cover over the archive store did suffer a bit in storms Henk and Isha, but we managed to get the proper membrane on before Jocelyn struck. We need to leave the edges loose for the time being to get the last of the moisture out, before sealing it for good.

A solution is being put in place for the overflowing gutter in the MDV shed, so we'll be able to carry on with the electrical installation in the secure tool room and hopefully get that finished in the next month or so.

We've had a few tools in for repair and servicing. Sadly one of the brushcutters had to be given the last rites when the big-end bearing exploded, and the resulting shrapnel caused the engine to seize. On the positive side, we have repaired the hedge-cutter with a bent tooth and finally got the little Honda generator working again.

Next month, we've got another small Honda genny to service, brakes on a dumper to replace, fix the

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

starter on the Iveco truck and, if we have a bit of a dry spell, finish the archive store roof.

That's always assuming nothing more important crops up!

Mark Feeney

Monday Group

The first three outings in January continued the work we did in December with the result that we have completed the towpath hedge and bank cutting all the way from the Canal Centre at Loxwood southwards to Drungewick Aqueduct.



The Monday Group in action

We have now started cutting the towpath bank northwards from Loxwood New Lock and by the end of January reached about 200 yards short of Devils Hole Lock. In February we intend to continue with this, passing DHL and onwards towards Southland Lock.

Nick Wood

Boat Group PEST

Due to a combination of extended Christmas and New Year holidays at the beginning of the month and icy condition making for unsafe working from boats on the water in the latter part of the month no canal maintenance work was undertaken by the PEST team in January.

This did, however, give us an opportunity to review our health and safety practices and improve the available documentation. With guidance from Giles Eyre and Julian Cheek we have developed a convenient Health & Safety package for use by the working party leader of the day on each of our working days. The pack comprises:

- a guide 'Health & Safety – key points for working party leaders'
- a script 'Toolbox talk - workday leaders briefing'
- the generic 'PEST risk assessment'
- the generic 'PEST method statement'
- a sample, partially completed PEST 'site attendance form'
- emergency contact forms for each team mem-

ber to be held by the Working Party Leader

- a supply of blank 'site attendance forms'.
- This brings together existing materials, adds new useful and practical information and forms the basis for the required 'on site start of day' briefing and attendance and working hours recording.

Our plea in past issues of WPN for volunteers to join the team has been unanswered. With the PEST team now down to five full-time active members we are beginning to question its future viability. We wonder whether the time is coming when our work needs to be subsumed into that of other, larger working parties. Watch this space.

Chris Jones

Midweek Working Party

MWWP have been out five times this month, spending much of our time at Bonfire Hanger and Haybarn. At Bonfire Hanger we have been felling very large trees under Dave Evans' supervision. We hope we will only have one more week there.

At Haybarn we went to clear a couple of trees that were over the towpath. It was not possible to do most of the job as it was too wet. However, while we were there the landowner informed us there were two more down, one was gigantic. It took three weeks to clear and we still had to leave the trunk and root. Whilst there we cut the bridleway hedge and cleared the towpath bank.



MWWP getting stuck in to clear a large tree

Other work small groups have been cutting the osier bed in Hunt Park, clearing the banks and canal basin at Rooks Hill and starting to cut the offside hedge between Drungewick Lane and Drungewick Lock, which has not been tackled for over 10 years. Adam skippered *May Upton* and some of MWWP joined Zoe, our new apprentice and our work experience student, in cutting the hedge.

Margaret Darvill

Thursday Group

For our first outing of the New Year, *May Upton* was used to break the fairly thick ice and make our way from Loxwood towards Baldwin's Knob Lock to recover a long section of tree trunk that had been floating in the canal. We then made our way back up to Southland Lock to clear another large tree that had fallen completely across the canal. A long day, involving Adam using a chainsaw to cut the trunk into 'manageable' (?) sections for us to haul into the boat and then, in the dusk, unload further down the canal and stack for disposal.

Back at Tickner's Depot, some of the team continued with weatherproofing the roof of the Records and Archive Store that had been started last month.

The following week we went to Brewhurst Lock and spent a very cold day clearing the site on the offside and disposing of a large heap of tree debris.



Two of the team started work at Tickner's Depot on constructing a new canal-side notice board. It was pleasing to be able to renovate a previously used sign board and incorporate it in the new design.

A visit was also made to Drungewick to formulate plans for a new stop plank shelter at the lock and repairs to the landing

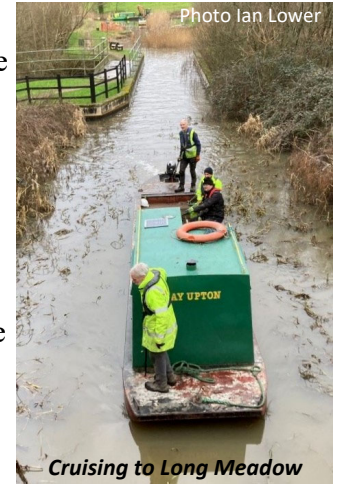
stage at the slipway.

For our final session of the month, we went to Drungewick Aqueduct where we were met by the Dredging Team who assisted us with removing the stop planks that had been found to be stuck fast in the channels. The dredger made light work of releasing the planks and we were able to gingerly take *May Upton* through the thick reeds, over the aqueduct and along Long Meadow to Drungewick Lock.

Having not been navigable for a number of years there was a lot of floating debris we were able to remove en route. We successfully went through the lock to unload at the winding hole, where we turned to head back to Drungewick Slipway after loading the surplus materials and rubbish that had collected from the works that have been going on in the vicinity of the lock. Unfortunately, the reeds were too much for the outboard motor this time and, in the gathering gloom, we were forced to abandon ship and moor on the approach to the aqueduct for the boat to be collected and unloaded at a later date.

However, a splendid job was made of the new notice board that was completed by Keith and Harry, and is now ready for installation on site.

Brian King & Ian Lower



Cruising to Long Meadow

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