

# Working Party News

No. 361

For WACT Volunteers

March 2024

## Editorial

This month we welcome Charlie Coxwell and the Dredger Group as contributors to this eminent publication. Also John Lee becomes the author of the PEST Group report.

As many of the reports reflect, February was a very wet month and some sessions had to be curtailed but the work still gets done thanks to our volunteers.

*Peter Winter*

## Eric Walker Group

It is with much sadness that we have received the news that JJ Price died in hospital on 23rd February after a short illness. JJ had a distinguished career in the Royal Navy before he became a very long serving member of the EWG. Initially his volunteering time with the group was spent operating a tracked excavator on the Southland Lock and Gennets Bridge Lock restoration projects.



His skills developed beyond plant driving and he became a highly competent bricklayer and the brickwork of the bridge at Gennets Bridge Lock was constructed almost entirely by him. Such was the excellent quality of this brickwork that

he became in demand to work on other projects, and was soon working with other groups. Moreover, he patiently passed on his skills to several novice bricklayers in the group.

He set himself very high standards in his work and heaven help anyone mixing mortar for him who couldn't mix it 'just right'. He was a loyal and dedicated volunteer with the Trust and will be greatly missed.

*Dennis Gillen*

## Dredger Group

The dredger & two tubs were moved from Dunsfold to Loxwood early in 2023. As *Pauline*, the dredger, has no working propulsion unit, it was decided to prioritise getting *Kermit*, the tug, in a work-

ing condition. Last summer Andy Evans rebuilt the engine and electrical installations. Brian Morgan and I wire brushed and painted her. I made a rather amateur cover that has helped to keep the worst of the weather at bay. However, it's very tricky to put on! Launched late last year she has already been used, among other jobs, to push tubs (helping move wood) and to do a canal depth survey between the Canal Centre and the Drungewick slipway.



*The dredger, Pauline, floating evenly after repairs*

Lately we have been concentrating on fixing the various bugs that have come to life on *Pauline*. The saying 'If you don't use it, you lose it' certainly applies to machinery, especially when kept in a watery environment! As many of you know the dredger has not been used since the start of lockdown. After her transfer to Loxwood we identified three main jobs that needed our attention. We had hoped to haul her out on the slipway for these and others to be sorted, but due to silt build-up on the slipway, we were unable to lower the launching trolley sufficiently to allow *Pauline* on to it! The jobs are:

- Leaking hydraulics. Currently 'work in hand' to replace a leaking demand valve.
- Bow wooden fendering in need of securing. Temporarily fixed with galvanised wire. A permanent solution to be made when *Pauline* can be slipped.
- Dredger listing. We suspected that this is caused by the starboard buoyancy tank leaking. The tank was removed, taken to the Depot, where several people rejuvenated the somewhat sad leaking float! (See the Northern Work Party report). Refixing it to *Pauline* became a bit of a challenge but was successfully accomplished on 15th February.

Thursday 22nd February saw the dredger finally being put to its intended use. The first job was to

Material published in *Working Party News* represents the views of the contributors and should not, unless specifically indicated, be assumed to be the policy of the Trust.

clear the silt build-up on the Drungewick Slipway. This was successfully done, and we even managed to find what we think is the slipway end; now marked with a scaffold pole driven into the bank. A small section of reeds was also cleared, near the second slipway. However, the deluge and wind we experienced finally drove us to quit and head for home. We'll be back next Thursday to continue with reed clearance. Hopefully we will have dried up by then!

*Charlie Coxwell*

### Northern Working Party

Our first task of the month was to take *May Upton* from Loxwood down to Long Meadow for it to be used for clearing vegetation on the offside bank. Having only recently removed the stop planks by the Drungewick Aqueduct, it was necessary for us to replace them again to raise and retain the water level in the canal.

Some time was spent at Loxwood Lock and Devil's Hole Lock preparing the conduits for the installation of new electrical cable. Work then continued to finish the guttering in the MDV shed at Tickner's Depot.



*Laying bricks at the Canal Centre*

Our next outing was a race to beat the wet weather and lay a heavy duty concrete ramp to connect the perimeter road at Dunsfold Park to the filtration service area. The Monday Group had done the groundwork and laid out the formwork the day before. With the added luxury of 4

cubic metres of readymix delivered to site, it didn't actually take long to lay the concrete, get it covered from the rain and swiftly return to the Depot in time for a coffee break!

Some of the team went down to Loxwood to make a start on laying bricks for the new low wall around the Canal Centre. Although somewhat hampered by the weather, good progress was made and further visits have since been made by both the Monday and Tuesday teams to prepare footings and continue with the brickwork.

Back at the Depot we worked on repairing the leak (s) in the steel buoyancy tank of the dredger. The worst part was cut out and prepped for Dave Evans to weld in a new steel plate. After a rub down and coat of paint, you can hardly see the join! The tank has been refitted to the dredger, which is now sitting much better in the water.



Photo by Keith Lyall

*Repairing the dredger's float tank*

Throughout the month, work continued on assembling the roof covering for the log bays at Tickner's Depot. The weatherproof sheeting has now been put in place and all that remains to be done is a little tidying around the edges.

*Dave Miller*

## 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
Every Thursday	Dredger Group	Contact Charlie Coxwell
First & Third Friday of the month	PEST Boat Group	Contact Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit Level	Contact Dave Evans

## Hedgelaying

Hedgelaying has continued on the section opposite the Drungewick Slipway. The pontoon bridge has been remarkable; not least for its ability to cope with fluctuating water levels - one week it had dropped by about 2 - 3 feet, which made dragging dumpy bags of arisings across to the disposal site interesting. Fortunately, the heavy rain has brought the bridge back up to just below the canal bank top.

Sadly, some locals using the towpath seem unwilling to pick up after their dogs. This is really not great when we are working there on our knees, and dragging material along the path. I'm not sure what can be done about this.

Hedgelaying will continue until the end of March, or probably when we run out of stakes and binders, or birds start nesting - whichever comes first!



*The Hedgelaying team in conference at Drungewick*

The conference facilities provided at the Drungewick Slipway have proved invaluable for our regular planning meetings, usually held at 11.00am on task days, as shown in the image. My thanks go to the volunteers or staff who constructed these.

*Nick Baxter*

## Midweek Working Party

MWWP have had an eventful month with far too much rain. I must thank all the team for coming out regardless of the weather.

We started the month by completing cutting the hedge between Haybarn and Lee Place (Harsfold) bridge. It now looks cared for. All the trees that needed to be taken down due to Ash Dieback have been dealt with and the ditch is now clear at Bonfire Hanger. We now await the results of our application for a grant to smarten up the towpath so that people do not wade through mud.

We have spent three weeks clearing the offside hedge between Drungewick Lock and Drungewick Lane so that the boats can easily get to the lock when the leaks at Long Meadow have been resolved and the Lock Pumps installed later in the year.

We continued the work on the off side of the Canal at Birch Copse and it is now possible to see across

the fields from the towpath and the boat. Another group started work on the Rushetts section of the Canal. This includes taking trees out of the canal and making the area much more pleasant. This is an area that has not been cleared for many years.



The Navvies Lunch was held at Bramley Golf Club and was enjoyed by all who attended.

*Margaret Darvill*

## Thursday Group

The month began with a day at Drungewick, taking *May Upton* across the aqueduct and along Long Meadow to continue cutting back and clearing overgrown vegetation on the offside of the canal. We also supplied a pair of hands to the Dredging Team to assist with maintenance tasks on the dredger at the slipway. At the end of the day, due to a minor mechanical problem with the outboard motor, we were fortunate that Adam was available to use the dredger tug to push *May Upton* and us, back to her mooring at Loxwood!

Our next session was on a very wet Thursday, when we took the opportunity to spend the day under cover at Tickner's Depot. We assisted the Dredger Team in cleaning up one of the large steel floats that had been removed from the dredger and transported to the Depot for repairs to a leak.

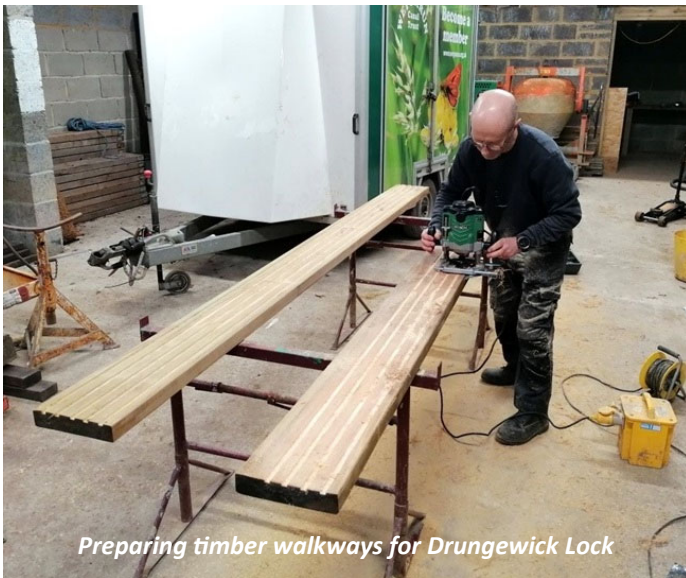


*The new notice board at Rushett Common*

We resolved the problem with the outboard motor taken from *May Upton* the previous week, blitzed the Machine Shop, creating a lot more usable space, and generally tidied up the yard.

After lunch we received welcomed instruction from Dave Evans on the safe use of angle grinders, manual handling and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health.

We had a much more pleasant day for our next outing. Half of the Group went down to Long Meadow and used *May Upton* to continue cutting back vegetation on the offside bank, whilst the other half went to Rushett Common, between Cranleigh and Bramley, and installed the newly built noticeboard on the Wey-South Path adjacent to the canal near Hazel Wood Bridge.



*Preparing timber walkways for Drungewick Lock*

Yet another very wet Thursday curtailed our proposed range of outdoor activities but we were able to shelter in the MDV Shed at Tickner's Depot and prepare replacement timber walkways for the Drungewick Lock upper gates.

The weather finally beat us on the last Thursday of the month, with the forecast of persistent heavy rain causing us to cancel our planned activities, which would all have been outdoors! We look forward to drier weather in March...fingers crossed.

*Brian King & Ian Lower*

## Boat Group PEST

Firstly the PEST team would like to take this opportunity to thank Chris Jones for all his hard work with the group over the last few years. Thank you Chris, we look forward to seeing you on the canal.

Our first February outing was on the 2nd. We took the work boat *May Upton* from the Canal Centre up to Southland Lock where we tidied up the offside entrance to the lock; the towpath side was looking fine. We then worked our way south cutting back all intruding growth and fishing out anything in the water, all the way to Devil's Hole Lock. Having worked on this stretch for several years we now feel

that it is completely under control, other than any fallen trees, branches and annual growth. It's always good to talk to adjoining landowners and on this occasion, we met and chatted to one of them.

On our second outing on the 16th we collected *MU* from the Drungewick Slipway and cut back overhanging vegetation on the aqueduct; there has been no work done on this section before by PEST. We then went to Long Meadow to continue the work that other groups have been doing on the offside. This is a long slow but rewarding job after several years of growth.

The PEST group is a very enthusiastic but small doing what we believe is an important job keeping the navigable section of canal safe and usable for paying passengers. We meet just two Fridays a month and whilst we have advertised for more recruits, so far we have had little success. It's a good opportunity to take to the water rather than just working alongside it. Please have a think about joining us. If it helps we are more than willing to buy any new recruits a pint, or a G & T in the Onslow at the end of the day! Contact Peter Hyem: [peter@barscorner1.plus.com](mailto:peter@barscorner1.plus.com) or John Lee [johnhollycottage@gmail.com](mailto:johnhollycottage@gmail.com).

*John Lee*

## Monday Group

As mentioned in the last WPN, at the end of January we managed to cut and clear the towpath bank from Loxwood New Lock to about 200 yards short of Devil's Hole. At our first two sessions in February we continued this work and completed the job all the way to Southland Lock. It looks a lot better now.

At Margaret's request, for our 3rd and 4th meetings, we shifted our location to the towpath from Lee Place (Harsfold) Bridge to Lordings. Hindered by rising floodwater in the adjacent field, cutting the



*The Monday Group at work between Lee Place and Lordings*

towpath bank and the hedge has now reached the chain stile, about halfway towards Lordings. So this is expected to continue in March at least for another two occasions.

*Nick Wood*

## Tickner's Depot

Given the persistent precipitation we've suffered over the last month, I'm glad to be able to report that the solution to the overflowing gutter in the MDV shed is now working. Unfortunately, said precipitation has prevented us finishing the Archive store roof. It's still dry, but just needs the edges glueing down. Fingers crossed for a dry spring!

The repair and maintenance jobs are keeping us busy. Andy has replaced the brakes on the 3-tonne dumper. Unlike cars & bikes, these are brake plates, bathed in oil and held inside the axle. Rather than just removing the wheel and changing pads or shoes, this involves dismantling the axle, draining the oil and hitting things with a big hammer.

Ian and I have serviced and repaired two of our outboard motors. The 6hp Suzuki just needed a service, but the Yamaha F20 was a victim in last year's vandalism and needs a new battery cable after the original one was cut by an angle grinder. MCA regulations frown upon joints in cables, and a pukka Yamaha one is £170, so I'll have a trip to SED in Guildford and get the cable and fittings for about £20.

We've had a mass maintenance session on seven of the Trust's stock of chainsaws and got plenty of practice at making up new chain loops.

I know it's not a depot issue, but we were working at Birch Copse recently and spotted a large amount of the dreaded and very invasive Giant Hogweed

(*Heracleum Mantegazzianum*). As we've got quite a few new volunteers who may not know how to identify it, this is what you need to avoid. When mature, the flower heads can be as large as 60cm across. It can reach a height of 3.5m or more and has a spread of about 1-2m. The picture is of young growth.



Our chemical control experts will be going out in the near future to spray the nasty stuff, but in the meantime, please don't pick, touch or brush past this stuff with your bare skin. The painful blistering effects can last for up to several years.

*Mark Feeney*

## The Contact List

Name	Group/Project	Tel	email
Maurice Cranefield	Visiting Working Parties	01483 505566	maurice_cranefield@weyandarun.co.uk
Dennis Gillen	Eric Walker Group	07866 583753	dennis_gillen@weyandarun.co.uk
Margaret Darvill	Midweek Working Party	01483 894606	margaret_darvill@weyandarun.co.uk
Tom Close	Monday Group	07811 534292	thomasdclose@googlemail.com
Mark Feeney	Tickner's Depot Manager	07747 445680	mark_feeney@weyandarun.co.uk
Nick Baxter	Hedgelaying		hedgelaying@weyandarun.co.uk
Gordon Powell	Northern Working Parties	07368 957256	gordon_powell@weyandarun.co.uk
Dave Evans	Operations Manager		dave_evans@weyandarun.co.uk
Peter Hyem	Boat Group PEST	01403 752393	peter@barscorner1.plus.com
John Reynolds	Boat Maintenance	07540 840549	john_reynolds@weyandarun.co.uk
Ian Lower	Thursday Group	07827 977916	ian_lower@hotmail.com
Brian King	Thursday Group	07771 666751	briankingems@gmail.com
Charlie Coxwell	Dredger Group	07786 614708	charlie_coxwell@weyandarun.co.uk
Roger Beazer	Mobile Display Vehicle		roger_beazer@weyandarun.co.uk
Julian Cheek	Maintenance Administration	01483 505566	julian_cheek@weyandarun.co.uk
Peter Winter	Working Party News Editor	07722 184117	peter_winter@weyandarun.co.uk