

Working Party News

No. 362

For WACT Volunteers

April 2024

Editorial

I hear that Spring is on its way and the prospect of better weather will be a relief to all our volunteers who had to cope with wretched conditions for most of the winter.

But your work does not go un-noticed and Dave Evans asked for the following note to be included in this issue of WPN:

Thank you to all volunteers across all our many work parties over this winter. It's been wet, nasty and miserable but your input to the Trust's work is very much appreciated by myself and the Trust's management team.

Peter Winter

Thursday Group

The weather gods eventually looked favourably on us, so we were able to complete a number of outdoor tasks on our first outing of the month. With the water company having finally installed a replacement mains stopcock at the roadside by Roger Dimmick Lane, we were able to finish installing the new water tap at Drungewick Slipway.

We then moved on to Long Meadow where we cleared a large amount of tree debris that had collected on the towpath, having previously been cut down from the offside bank.

Whilst we were doing this, some of the team took *May Upton* to Drungewick Lock to fit the new walkway planks, which we had prepared last month, to the upper gates.



New walkway planks at Drungewick Lock

With the offside bank clearance at Long Meadow having been completed, we returned to Drungewick

Aqueduct and removed the stop planks to enable us to recover *May Upton*. We then replaced the stop planks (hopefully for the last time, for a while!) and returned *May Upton* to her mooring at the Canal Centre. En route we did yet more bankside clearance in the Barnsill Bridge area.



Reinforced balance beam at Baldwin's Knob Lock

On another fine March day, after some quick repairs to the signage outside the Canal Centre, we took *May Upton* to Baldwin's Knob Lock. The joint at the end of the balance beam on one of the lock gates had become loose and required reinforcement. Two customised steel plates had been made at Ticker's Depot and we clamped them either side of the joint, making the structure much more stable.



Replacement waling boards at Drungewick Aqueduct

The old plywood waling boards at Drungewick Aqueduct are either rotting or missing. So on our last outing of the month, making use of the floating Aqua Dock on site, we fitted the first of about two dozen Douglas Fir planks as replacements. Weather permitting, we intend to continue with this next month and get the job completed.

Brian King & Ian Lower

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Monday Group

As anticipated in the last issue of WPN, in early March with the flood levels down, we were able to complete cutting the towpath and hedge from the stile to the Lording flood lock and bridge and a bit beyond. It did take two visits. Now, the whole length from Lee Place (Harsfold) Bridge looks a lot better.

With the beginning of Spring(!) we have returned to grass cutting. In the final two Mondays of March we visited Tickner's Crossing, Compasses, Drungwick Slipway and Brewhurst, Loxwood, Devil's Hole and Southland locks. Our new Trust-owned mower is a great help.



We expect to visit Gennets and the towpath side of the canal at Drungewick after the Easter break.

Nick Wood

Tickner's Depot

Well, the crossed fingers from last month worked a little. We have managed to get three sides of the Archive roof finished – before the rain came back. When will we get a decent spell of sunshine?

We've had a couple of small container units come back from Birtley. One of which will be repurposed into a spare parts and PPE store. It's in a bit of a sorry state at the moment, but a lick of paint and yes, you guessed it, a new roof, and it'll be good to use.

One of the Trust's large excavators was taken ill recently. Initial investigation revealed a large quantity of diesel fuel in the coolant. The head gasket was initially suspected of being the culprit, but that looked OK, so the thinking now is that the cylinder head may be to blame. Once the results from crack detection and a pressure test are back, we can get on with resolving it.

We've had all of the petrol driven power tools from the MWWP in for checking and servicing over the last week or two. Most were in good fettle, but we need to change the anti-vibration mounts as they can get weak and cause the painful and preventable 'white finger' to the operator. When our supplier gets the mounts in, we can get the tools back to their designated users.

Mark Feeney

Hedgelaying

This winter has been remarkably wet with four work parties cancelled completely because of very bad weather. However, the Team completed our target length of hedge for 2023/24, with all our cut stakes and almost all binders (over 300 of each) having been used by the end of March, meaning we have reached a stop just in time before bird nesting starts.

The hedge along the towpath opposite the Drungewick Slipway has not been easy to lay, having been flailed multiple times, resulting in a lot of twiggy growth, some serious die back and a lot of dead material trapped in the base of the hedge. It is also apparent that the Canal has flooded at times

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



Staking the hedge with a mallet

over the years, trapping even more dead material in the hedge. This has meant that preparation has taken even longer than usual. Hedgelaying is like decorating a house - there is always more preparation than actual painting or, in this case, laying. With 150 metres completed this season, there is still a further 270 metres of hedge to lay. At least we know what lies in store next season!



Hedgelaying at Drungewick

We have been pleased to greet a number of new hedgelayers this year and as always, we welcome further interest from both experienced hedgelayers and, especially, newcomers (training will be given). If interested, please contact me before next autumn,

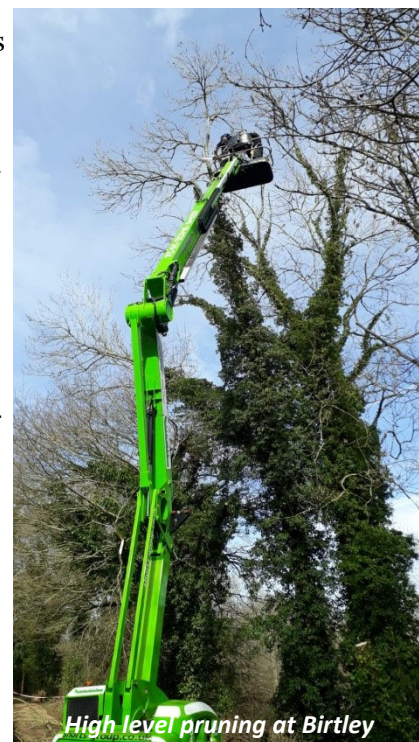
when we will start the new season by coppicing hazel for stakes and binders (or heathers), before returning to lay the remaining hedge at Drungewick.

Nick Baxter

Northern Working Party

The first week of March brought visits to Birtley to cut and trim trees along the Wey-South Path, overlooking the new lift bridge at Birtley 2. The work was assisted by the use of quite a tall cherry picker and the debris was cleared with Colin the Chipper.

In spite of some fairly heavy rain during the course of the month, both the Monday and Tuesday Teams concentrated on the construction of the brick wall at the Loxwood Canal Centre, often under the shelter of the large gazebo! With Easter fast approaching, the pressure was on to complete it and to generally tidy the area in readiness for the popular Easter Cruises.



High level pruning at Birtley



The completed wall at the Canal Centre

By the end of the month, the wall was completed. We cleared the area outside the Canal Centre as much as possible for the Easter weekend and it is all looking much tidier.

With our final outing of the month curtailed by yet more bad weather, we took advantage of the shelter

at Tickner's Depot and received Ladder Safety Training from Dave Evans. A very worthwhile session, because whilst a ladder is a very basic device, there are considerably more safety considerations regarding its suitability and use than you might first think!

Dave Miller

Boat Group PEST

Our first outing in March was on the 1st. Four of us met at the Canal Centre, collected what we needed and headed on down to the *May Upton* at Drungewick.

The first job was to cut back vegetation on the returns to Drungewick Lane Bridge. Then we continued on down to Long Meadow. After a huge effort by several groups all the larger trees on the off side that required cutting down or back have been removed and the cuttings taken across to the towpath side to be disposed of. However there was still a lot of more minor growth that we cut back to improve boat access to the canal without interfering with the land owner's privacy. At the time of writing there is still a large amount of cuttings to be disposed of on the towpath if any group has the time. An acceptable job during bird nesting season.

On the 15th the *May Upton* had returned from its holiday 'down south' and was back at the Canal Centre. The group with its new member, Jon



The weary workers of the PEST Team

Lazzeri, headed north as far as the chicane where we were able to cut growth from the non-towpath side and filled the boat four times. The towpath side having already been done, this length of canal is looking excellent and ready for the season's boat trips.

Clearly Spring is on its way and it is noticeable that trees are starting to bud and flower.

The photo shows four weary men returning from a day on the cut. The 5th weary man took the photo.

John Lee

The Contact List

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