

Working Party News

No. 368

For WACT Volunteers

October 2024

Editorial

Summer is over but the wet weather meant that the teams keeping the canal tidy have been kept very busy. In fact maintenance activities are an increasingly important factor as described in this issue.

Peter Winter

Midweek Working Party

Having cleared as far as Toat Bridge last month, in September we carried on towards Pallingham. The undergrowth here was sufficiently bad that our wheeled trimmers were struggling, so we enlisted the help of Mark Tavener (Chris's younger brother) to help out with a self-propelled flail mower.

These devices have the benefit of coping really well with long grass and weeds. Having hired it for the day we managed to clear all the way to Pallingham Bridge, leaving the short stretch from the bridge to the end of the canal yet to do. We also had teams at Southland and Gosden.



The flail mower

Mark Feeny pp Margaret Darvill

Eric Walker Group

The work on laying Terraseal matting on the canal banks at Long Meadow is now complete and the Group is preparing for its next task. This is to repair a large brick culvert under the canal at Elmbridge.

Dennis Gillen

Monday Group

With five meetings in September, we completed clearing the construction compound at Tickner's, cut both sides of the towpath between Devil's Hole and Southland locks and widened the towpath between the Drungewick Aqueduct site and the spillway towards Barnhill bridge.

As usual, we tidied up around the Canal Centre and visited Compasses, Tickner's Road Bridge, Gennets, Southland, Devil's Hole, Loxwood and Brewhurst Locks as well as the Drungewick slipway and Newbridge. All in all, a good month's work.

Nick Wood

Thursday Group

Heavy rain curtailed our activities somewhat on our first outing of the month, so we took advantage of the shelter at Tickner's Depot to apply preservative to the pre-assembled parts of the new stop plank shelter. We also spent some time sorting and tidying the workshop and toolshed at Tickner's Crossing in readiness for the re-commissioning of the yard.

We couldn't stay out of the rain all day though and went to Gennets Bridge Lock to recover a load of barriers for taking down to the Surrey Hills Wood Fair the next day.

The following week, the weather was a little kinder and assembly of the stop plank shelter began at Drungewick Lock. All was going well until heavy rain stopped play later in the day and prevented the shelter roof being installed. At the same time, a small team went to Drungewick Slipway to stabilise the landing stage on that side of the canal. More bracing was fitted and the planks re-secured, making the whole structure much more solid.

We also assisted in transporting a tractor and grass cutter to Gennets Bridge Lock for the long grass in the WACT owned field just south of the lock to be mown.

Half the team returned to Drungewick Lock the next week and completed construction of the stop plank shelter by installing the sheet metal roof. All



The new stop plank shelter at Drungewick

Photo by Keith Lyall

stop planks are now neatly stacked away and the whole site is looking much tidier. The other half of the team went to Lee Place Bridge where we stabilised the nearby milestone and added a stop plank to the overflow weir by Lordings Flood Lock.

For our final Thursday of the month, we split into three teams. One team worked at Tickner's Depot fabricating some steel prototype buckets that we intend fixing on Lordings waterwheel to improve performance by increasing the volume of water that can

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be lifted per revolution. Help was also provided to the Depot Team in removing more of the scaffolding structure of the log bays roof, in readiness for a new solid roof to be fitted.

The other team returned to Lordings Flood Lock where a worn and damaged strap hinge was removed from one of the gates for a repair to be assessed. The wrought iron strap is believed to be over 200 years old, so has lasted well and will be refitted!



Strap Hinge from Lordings Flood Gate

Brian King & Ian Lower

Boat Group PEST

Our first outing in September was cancelled because of a lack of water in the canal and too much coming out of the sky!

However on the 20th of September we met as usual outside the Canal Centre. We were treated to the wonderful sight of a kingfisher flying north to south down the route of the canal giving us the rare opportunity of seeing a kingfisher in flight for several seconds at close quarters. Unfortunately, not long enough for us to take a photo.

After that the day became a little more routine. We took *May Upton* north again to continue the work of fishing out floating weeds and reeds, and cutting back annual growth. We have only visited this section recently because this is where the trip boats go. Through the winter we plan to head south.

We thought our day would be cut short by coffee time as we tried to shelter from the rain and count the seconds between thunder and lighting to see how far away the storm was. Does that really work? In the end the sun came out and we had to remove some outer layers.

John Lee

Northern Working Party

With the cabling now completed at Birch Copse and the trenches along the towpath refilled, we returned to the site to spread four trailer loads of stone top dressing to level the surface. We then moved on to Tickner's Crossing where, with work on the site due to restart soon, we began to clear and tidy the yard in readiness for our return.

Having installed a new gate in the towpath at the Rosemary Lane end of Bonfire Hanger last month, we returned to fit a new gatepost.

The next weekend was taken up with assisting with the WACT 'Drive a Digger' stand at the Surrey Hills Wood Fair at Cranleigh. In inclement(!) weather



Photo by Keith Lyall

A busy time at Surrey Hills Wood Fair

conditions, a long day was spent on the Friday setting out the large display area. Saturday was drier with numerous youngsters keen to have a go on the mini excavators. More heavy rain and thunderstorms

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 and Tuesday	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
Second Saturday of the month	Saturday Group	Contact Jack Walker

were forecast for most of Sunday but, to our pleasant surprise it didn't materialise, apart from a couple of short sharp bursts and claps of thunder. A large crowd was again present and the stand was busy throughout the day. We helped to clear the equipment away on the Monday and received some familiarisation with trailer towing when returning the diggers back to the hirers.

Following the Wood Fair weekend, we returned to Tickner's Crossing and spent a couple of weeks weatherproofing the canteen/staff room, preparing a firm base on which to site the mobile welfare unit and generally tidying the site and tool containers.

We paid a visit to Devil's Hole Lock to repair a leak in the large bore pipe leading from the canal back pump up to the lock.

With demand for bags of logs, we had a session of log splitting at Tickner's Depot and put our new-found trailer towing skills to good use making a number of deliveries.

Dave Miller

Tickner's Depot

The saga of the log store roof continues – but it should be over soon. In preparation for the new roof arriving, we had a team of six from the NWP come in and start lowering the existing roof. In my naivety, I thought it would just be a case of loosening the clamps lowering the whole roof by 60cm and clamp it all back up again. However, the weight of the scaffold poles meant that this could never happen, so the



Photo by Keith Lyall

Members of NWP lowering the log store roof

Longitudinal poles were removed, with the Ledgers, and repositioned 60cm lower. The guys did an excellent job and finished the first of the three bays. Two days later the left bay was also lowered. The roof materials have now been delivered and I can see this mini project will be ready for a topping out ceremony in the very near future.

As Ian and I have been away for a fortnight (separately) there's not much else to report except - the wasp nest has been dealt with, the 3-tonne dumper repair and service is well under way, Mrs F has visited us twice and already made a big difference in tidying up the Archive and Record Store, but with much more still to do. We have repaired and serviced two of the Monday Working Party strimmers and cleaned, maintained and sharpened three chainsaws.

I'm almost ready for another holiday!

Mark Feeney

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