

# Working Party News

No. 369

For WACT Volunteers

November 2024

## Editorial

At last, it stopped raining which was a big relief to all our workgroups. As a result the teams have been making great progress as is outlined in this issue.

However, we could still make use of more volunteers as reported by the Dredger Group and the newly formed Saturday Group.

*Peter Winter*

## Dredger Group

Very little progress was made in September as both Brian Morgan and I went on holiday but during the second week in October, we managed, with the help of Adam Rayner on Telehandler duties, to launch *Pauline*. As usual there was very little clearance for her to float off the launching cradle, even with the water level up to maximum. Although we have had lots of rain, we still needed to let some wa-



*Pauline refloated*

ter down from above Baldwin's Knob Lock! The trip up to BKL in the tug showed significant reed growth that will no doubt need trimming back.

Jobs completed so far include the welding of a blanking plate under her weed hatch (many thanks to Ian James), Waxoyling the aft bilge area, making good and replacing the aft deck hatch, painting the aft deck area, making a spud leg depth indicator and making cabin top storage for ladders, boat hook and our life belt.

The aft deck area has now received its topcoat of green paint, while the forward deck still needs its final coat; we just hope the weather allows us to complete the job!

Our tug has obviously been feeling left out from all the work we have been doing on *Pauline*, so it has decided it needed some attention. The hydraulic steering motor fitted to the outboard leg has now sprung a leak and will need to be repaired - another

job for Agricom.

One of our tubs also is feeling left out and has sprung a leak in her inner hull, so again our workload has seen an increase as a weld patch will be needed and the outer hull accessed so that it can be pumped out.

Agricom are still experiencing difficulties acquiring the correct replacement parts to complete repairs to our excavator. It's been frustrating for both of us, as there are still several jobs waiting to be completed. Currently the main ram seal is disassembled and awaiting parts. As such, she is currently moored next to the canoe landing stage, as this is the only place that the main ram can be accessed from. Hopefully this will soon be sorted, and she can be moored back in her normal spot.

As soon as we are back in commission, we will start clearing the substantial amount of reed build-up near Birch Copse and just north of the slipway. Both areas have seen a substantial amount of reed growth, the picture shows. This was taken when the canal water level was at its maximum.



*Heavy reed growth along the canal*

To be able to run two sessions every week we will need help from volunteers. Ideally, we are looking to add four extra volunteers. We aim to run two teams of three every week. If you fancy joining us, your help would be most appreciated. Tasks will include, skippering the Tug/ Tubs and eventually operating the dredger's excavator. We will provide full training with a view to achieving your WACT driving tickets, for both the Tug & Dredger. If you're interested, or know anyone else who might be, please contact me.

*Charlie Coxwell*

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### Tickner’s Depot

As predicted last month, the log store roof is now complete, and what an improvement it is. The NWP guys have done a magnificent job. They even tidied up the log store and aggregate bays. It won’t be long before a new supply of trunks will be in there ready for splitting – we have over 30 victims of Ash Die Back coming in from Baldwin’s Knob.

The Iveco tipper has been giving us a bit of grief recently. It needed a new set of brake pads all round and a master cylinder. Easy enough to do, except a gorilla had done the wheel nuts up, so we needed to make use of a scaffold pole as a lever to get them undone. The 3-Tonne dumper had to take a back seat whilst we fixed the Iveco, but that should soon be available for use.

We’ll also be taking a look at trailer lighting. Not all our trailers work on all our vehicles and not all vehicles work with all trailers. So with four vehicles and at least ten trailers, it could get very confusing!

*Mark Feeney*

### Thursday Group

The month started with us splitting into two teams. One team went to Lordings Flood Bridge to carry out some preservation work on the reinforced concrete structure. All the moss, lichen and loose surface was cleaned off the worn area and a first coat of a bonding cement solution was applied to cover exposed steelwork. We also spread two tonnes of Type 1 stone to the bridge approach to adjust the slope to avoid farm trailers grounding when crossing. Having been cleaned up, we refitted the 200 year old wrought iron strap to the flood gate on the towpath side. The other team remained at Tickner’s Depot and continued assembling the structure for the log bays roof.

The following week, we again split into two teams. The first went to Bonfire Hanger to assist in transporting a newly donated bench to its site along the towpath. The bench was constructed by a local landowner from a 1930s mechanised hay-rake.



Photo by Simon Penn

They then returned to Tickner’s Depot and made three further depth gauge boards for later installation on each of the locks on the Loxwood section. The other team returned to Lordings and applied a second base coat of bonding cement solution to the surface. While it was drying, they moved on to Lordings Aqueduct where they installed three of the prototype stainless steel buckets to the waterwheel. It is planned to fit five more new style buckets, which have been designed to improve the volume of water



Photo by David Stevenson

## 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

that can be lifted each revolution of the wheel, and then assess their efficiency.

The next week we went back to Lordings Flood Bridge and applied the top layer of cement solution, completing that job. We also returned to Lordings Aqueduct to fix the remaining prototype steel buckets to the waterwheel and gave it a test run. Some issues were identified, which will require further adjustments being made prior to a re-test.

To preserve water in the Long Meadow section, and in preparation for the lowering of the water level below the lock for work required on the pump chamber, we went to Drungewick Lock and fitted stop planks above the top gates. A visit was also paid to Gennets Bridge Lock where we put a coat of paint on the mooring posts and rail fencing.

*Brian King & Ian Lower*

## Boat Group PEST

We took the work boat *May Upton* south as far as Baldwin's Knob Lock on both of our outings in October. On the first trip we collected plenty of floating weed from the canal and a certain amount of reed. On reaching BKL we emptied the lock of a large amount of this floating weed and disposed of a pile that a previous group had collected. Our final job for the day was to cut back some branches of a tree that was hanging low over the canal just north of this lock.

PEST learned a valuable lesson on this trip. When you use the long handle keel to hold the boat near the bank by digging the prongs of the keel into the bank, don't then empty the contents of the boat on top of it. It took quite a long time to free the keel.

On our second outing to BKL we cleared the remains of the growth on the towpath side between Brewhurst Lock and the bridge, that was left near the water by a group who had cut the bank earlier in the week. At Baldwin's we attempted to clear the growth around the base of ash trees that are due to be felled, although we found it difficult to get near to some of them in MU due to the reed growth in the canal.

Our nature moment of the day was spending several minutes at Brewhurst Bridge winding hole watching a cormorant swimming about diving for several seconds and coming up with fish.

*John Lee*

## Eric Walker Group

The group has had a very productive month and completed two small projects.

The first was to replace a two hundred plus year old brick culvert under the canal close to the boundary of the section the Trust owns next to Elmbridge Village. Due to a blockage of cut wooden logs from a mis-managed adjoining woodland, the water pressure had built up behind it and burst the brickwork on the crown of the culvert, creating a very large



*The partially excavated culvert*

hole four metres square and five metres deep. After excavating to expose the culvert we decided to remove the whole top section and lay double wall plastic pipes 25m long into the total length of the remaining brick lower section.

This had its difficulties, however, as the pipe sections floated in the continuous 300mm deep flow of water, because of the air trapped between the double skins of the pipes. The solution was to hold the pipe down with bags of shingle during the jointing process. To complete the project we demolished the crumbling existing brick head walls and rebuilt these with sandbags filled with a mix of rapid setting cement, sand and aggregate (ballast).



*Laying a pipe section*



The finished upstream headwall

The second project was to build a causeway across the canal to provide access from the Elmbridge Retirement Village to the public footpath on the other side.



Photo by Robin Gardner

An overhead view of the Elmbridge causeway

Provision of this link is a requirement under the terms by which this length of canal was gifted to the Trust. It can easily be removed and replaced by a bridge when the canal is restored.

A bund was created across the canal and topped with old sleepers, which were covered in chicken wire to provide a slip free crossing. A safety handrail was also constructed along each side.



Photo by Martin Smithers

Project done!

In both of these projects we were ably assisted by Darren Cross from the landowner, whose efforts on a large excavator saved much time.

*Dennis Gillen*

## Midweek Working Party

This month we have been lucky with the weather although for the first week of October, work had to be called off as so much rain had come down and filled up the canal at Pallingham.

During this month, a small group has taken down trees at Gosden Aqueduct. The landowner was very appreciative and presented them with chocolate brownies on both visits.

The other work we have been doing is clearing the offside between Brewhurst Bridge and Baldwin's Knob Lock. We removed much of the scrub so that WRG could take down the numerous dead ash trees, but our work is not finished there yet.

As WRG were working all week there we de-camped and went to Lee Farm Causeway where we took down some ash trees and started to clear the banks for our last visit.

*Margaret Darvill*

## Monday Group

We met four times in October and spent 165 volunteer hours strimming, hedge cutting and tidying up. Initially we worked at Drungewick Lock and the Aqueduct site together with the towpath towards the 90 degree turn approaching Barnsill bridge. A day was spent at Lordings and the Flood lock; the last chance before the ground becomes too soft to take the cars across the fields. We also gave Compasses, Tickner's and Gennets lock our attention before the last meeting in October when we attended Devil's Hole, Loxwood and Brewhurst Locks and the aqueduct site (for the second time).

We understand the Trust has some funds for cleaning the benches along the canal, so we got 'stuck in' and cleaned up the benches at Brewhurst (2), at the Canal Centre (2), at Loxwood and Devil's Hole Locks and at Drungewick Aqueduct.



Next month we'll be hedge cutting at Lee Place Bridge.

*Nick Wood*

## Saturday Group

It's finally arrived - November 8th and our Saturday group begins. All volunteers are welcome to join and please ask anyone to register their interest with me by email.

We have plans to make some vehicle preparation and clean down areas at the depot, as well as providing better vehicle and trailer storage while we gain a programme of works.

*Jack Walker*

## Mobile Display Vehicle

There's only one event left to attend this year at Billingshurst Christmas Fayre taking place on Saturday 7th December, thankfully it's indoors.

If anyone is interested in joining the MDV team for next year, please contact me.

*Roger Beazer*

## Northern Working Party

We started the month at Tickner's Depot, fitting the new purlins to the scaffold roof structure of the log bays, in readiness for the metal roofing sheets to be attached.



The following week we went to Bonfire Hanger to spread some stone top dressing on the final short section of towpath towards Gennets Bridge Lock and clear away equipment from the compound prior to its dismantling.

Work then continued on the construction of the log bays roof and the job has now been completed.

We were then able to spend time at the end of the month assisting with the tree work being done by a visiting WRG Forestry work party, who were clearing diseased ash trees in the Baldwin's Knob area. We went to Drungewick Slipway where we manually emptied a full load of cut trunks and branches from one of the large dredger tubs into 21 dumpy bags, only to see the second tub being taken up the canal to be refilled and brought back for emptying!

Whilst at the slipway we helped the Boat Group in preparing *Wiggonholt* for a safety inspection, by removing the flooring and ballast for the hull to be examined.

*Dave Miller*



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