

## For WACT Volunteers      December 2024      No. 370

# Working Party News

### Editorial

We've got a new look for Working Party News. Some of our readers commented that it was a bit difficult to read WPN on their phones due to the two column format. So I've switched to using a single column on each page. Let me know if this solves the problem.

While the days are getting shorter and cooler, our work parties still continue with their work and are now joined by the Hedgelaying Team for the winter months. In addition to our own teams, the Trust is assisted by a number of visiting groups as highlighted in the report below.

*Peter Winter*

### Visiting Workgroups

The Trust is fortunate in benefitting from the services of several visiting workgroups. These include:

KESCRG: The Kent & East Sussex Restoration Group

LWRG: The London Waterway Recovery Group

NWPG: The Newbury Working Party Group

WRG Forestry: Waterway Recovery Group Forestry Team

This article summarises some recent activity, when from the last weekend of October into the first week in November, we saw no less than four visiting groups in action concentrating on the area around Baldwin's Knob Lock (BKL).

WRG Forestry are regular visitors in the WACT calendar. This year they spent eight days felling dead ash trees on the offside bank between Brewhurst Bridge and BKL. The trees were felled into the field, the brash disposed of and the larger sections cut up into discs. These were loaded into one of the barges before being tugged down the canal to Drungewick Slipway and off loaded into crane bags. From there they are being returned to the depot for splitting. By the end of the week the majority of the dead trees had been felled and removed from the section. The remainder will be tackled in early December. KESCRG and LWRG joined in with this work at the end of the week.

NWPG were tasked with installing a new back pump chamber at BKL. Located on the offside of the canal below the lock, it was a technical and logistical challenge. Luckily the week leading up to our arrival was dry enough for farm manager, Michael, to kindly allow us to take the hired 13T digger through the woods and field to the site. He also made a number of runs with his tractor and trailer taking the sewer rings, dragon's mouth inlet and a hired trench box and more to the site. The dragon's mouth is the concrete water inlet structure for the back pump. We are very grateful for his help without which we couldn't have done the job. Other kit was brought to site by water.

When construction work started, using the combined expertise of Dave Evans (with us for the day) and Adam Morris (KESCRG), the site for the chamber was chosen and a large hole dug to the correct level for the pump inlet. The dragon's mouth was lowered into position onto a bed of lean mix concrete. A larger hole was then dug further back into the field for the pump chamber and the trench box lowered in. The final levels were established with some hand digging. The first sewer



*The dragon's mouth  
being moved into position*

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*The top ring being guided into place  
by Pete Turville (NWPG)*

ring was then lowered in and concreted into place; the difficult task being the lining up of the connecting pipes to and from the dragon’s mouth.

Sunday morning included a trip around local DIY stores and garden centres to find building sand – eventually found in Homebase at Broadbridge Heath. This was necessary to fill the lifting holes and to seal the two rings. The top ring was then lowered into place and the ground around the rings back filled with compacted clay.

Other jobs completed during the weekend included extracting the old pump from the canal. This was just attached to the outlet pipe like a bilge pump in a boat. The old cabinet was taken down and all other pipework and old wiring removed. The route of the existing pump outlet was tracked and the ends exposed pending a decision on whether it should be re-used, replaced or a combination of both. During the following week, further tidying and levelling of the site was carried out.

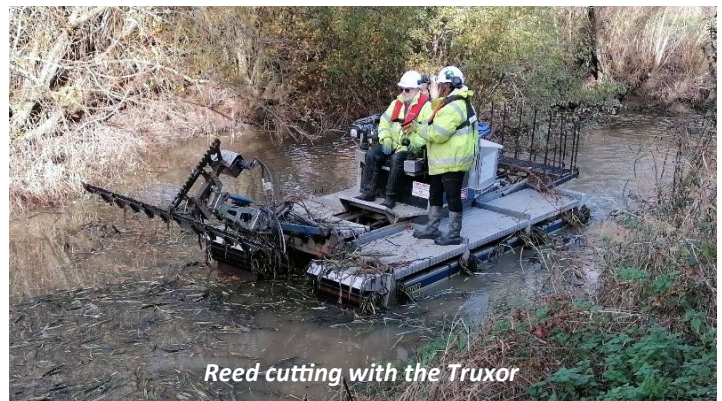
Overall a very productive 10 days, thanks to the four groups involved. The stage is now set for the completion of the Loxwood back pump improvements well in time for next spring.

*Bill Nicholson*

### Northern Working Party

Following a successful visit from the visiting work groups, who installed a pump chamber and concrete inlet at Baldwin’s Knob Lock, we have paid several visits to the site this month. We have been busy making a trench and installing cable ducting to the chamber, laying a few courses of bricks around the access hatch, profiling and sandbagging the slope down from the lock, building sandbag walls around the pump inlet and preparing the current pipework for the connection of a new length of water pipe for the back pumping. Work will continue at the site next month, weather permitting!

We have also spent several days assisting Zoe and Adam with clearing reeds and tidying the banks on



*Reed cutting with the Truxor*

## 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



the stretch of canal from Lordings slipway to below Lordings Flood Lock, and from Brewhurst to Drungewick Lock. This job was made considerably easier, and more fun, with the use of a Truxor amphibious weed cutter and harvester.

On one of the coldest days of the year so far, we went to Loxwood and Birch Copse to recover Heras fencing and other materials to return them to Tickner's Depot. We then went to Tickner's Crossing to collect the last of the tools and equipment from the workshop container, in readiness for it to be transported and re-sited at the Depot.

*Dave Miller*

## Hedgelaying Team

There was no hedgelaying over the summer, as birds nest from March to July, and sap runs well in the trees and shrubs until the weather cools everything down a bit, and the sap stops running so freely (meaning the plants do not bleed so much). However, a warm and wet summer meant that hedgerows have grown well (maybe too well this year?), so our thanks to the other groups who have done some excellent face (upright) cuts, keeping the hedges in check and making sure that the towpath is passable.



*Great re-growth on last year's laid hedge at Drungewick*

Our Hedgelaying Team first met again on Tuesday 12 November in Slinfold, with finely-sharpened tools (what else is there to do in summer?), where we started to cut stakes and binders from our previously worked hazel coppice. This coppice belongs to Chris Tavener (well known for helping WACT in many ways, not least for organising the Poddle), and our huge thanks to him for allowing us to continue to work this wood. Unfortunately, deer hammered some of the re-growth last year, even though we made what we thought were deer-proof surrounds around each hazel stool. So back to the drawing board to make sure re-growth happens next year. Deer are becoming a great problem across the Weald affecting tree growth, with a huge increase in numbers, and no predators, apart from the occasional car. Without an area-based control, they will continue to wreak havoc on our regenerating woodlands. I see deer at least twice a week, and local to the canal, we have roe deer, muntjac and herds of wild fallow deer. It is thought that there are now more deer in England than ever before - Robin Hood would be delighted!

With a large turn-out over two Tuesdays, we cut and bundled over 300 hurdles and binders in just two weeks. This is a testament to the quality of the coppice, and the work started by my predecessor Keith Nichols who recognised the value of this coppice.

We already have three new people starting this winter, but always welcome more. If you would like to learn about hedgelaying, please get in touch.

*Nick Baxter*

## Monday Group

In November, our four meetings concentrated on the section of the canal from Drungewick Aqueduct to Birch Copse, beyond Baldwin's Knob lock; a job we started in late October. So for something like 900 yards we cut the towpath bank and hedge making the area looking a lot tidier and cared for. Our main problem was collecting lots of cuttings and suitably disposing of them, a considerable amount of work and volunteer effort.

We wish all our volunteer colleagues a Happy Christmas and a productive 2025.

*Nick Wood*



*The improved towpath and hedge*

## Boat Group PEST

At the beginning of the month five of us took the work boat *May Upton* south as we have been doing recently. Firstly, we cut the waterside edge of the bank between the Canal Centre and Brewhurst Lock. Another group had cut the bank from the bank side but couldn't reach the waters edge, and it now looks really smart and ready for Santa Cruises. Surprisingly, this took us all morning so when we reached the lock we

had lunch on the two benches provided. We then took *MU* through the lock and emptied what we had cut. After that we collected a number of logs floating in the canal and then had to deal with several large branches of an oak tree that were lying partly on the towpath but mainly in the water stretching halfway across the canal.

At the end of November we again took *MU* south this time as far as Barnshill bridge. On the way we dealt with some overhanging vegetation on the non-towpath side. Our main purpose for the day was to remove a large amount of floating dry reed on both sides of Barnshill bridge. This had been cut along with a large amount of other reed by the amphibious Truxor machine .

*John Lee*

## Tickner's Depot

Huge thanks have to go to Jack and his Saturday team for the work they've done at the depot. They have cleared an area of some 144m<sup>2</sup> at the far end of the yard, where a concrete pad is planned to keep the trucks and trailers out of the mud. It's going to be a huge improvement for anyone wishing to use the trailers and for us in maintaining them.

The first batch of this autumn's ash logs arrived back at the depot and have been moved under cover awaiting splitting, which Dave & Dan have made a start on. There are many bags of logs still to be bought back from Drungewick and split, so if anyone fancies a bit of exercise over the winter, let me know. Talking of winter, it's rapidly approaching, so please get your powered tools that need service and/or inspection to us now please. Don't leave it until spring, when you'll need them 'tomorrow'.

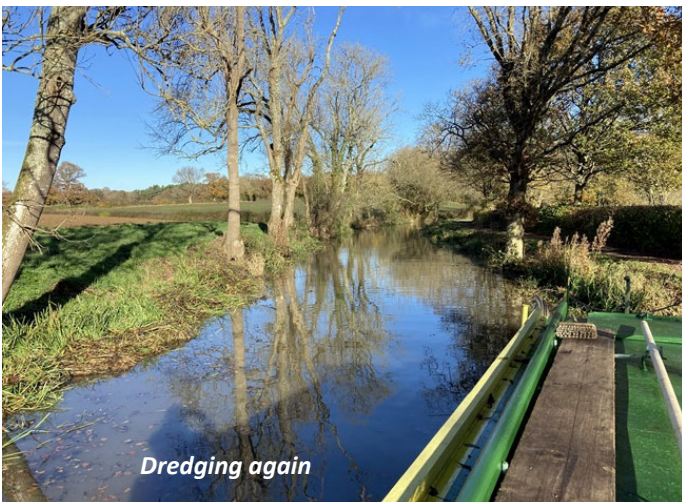
We had a brushcutter come in recently that needed more than just a service. The fault was reported as 'won't start and can't move the starter cord'. Ian and I had a look at it and that was a perfect description of it. With the spark plug out, and looking into the cylinder, there were signs of a foreign object in there. We stripped it down, and found that the exhaust valve head had snapped off from its stem, dropped into the combustion chamber and buried itself into the piston crown. With that amount of damage, the unit was deemed to be beyond economic repair and a new unit is on order.



Ian and I wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and look forward to seeing you in 2025.

*Mark Feeney*

## Dredger Group



The immediate repairs to *Pauline's* digger arm were completed and she 'broke out' from Drungewick this month when she headed up through Baldwin's Knob Lock and started reed/weed clearance. Having taken her up using the tug, the latter returned to Drungewick where the leaking hydraulic steering motor was removed for repair. Sadly, this was found to be 'beyond its useful life' and hopefully a replacement will be fitted in December.

We hope that in its absence, we will be able to progress dredging northwards for a couple of sessions.

Meanwhile back at Drungewick the leaking tub is out of the water and has been repaired. It is now awaiting jet washing and blacking, before being re-launched.

*Brian Morgan*

## Thursday Group

For our first outing in November, we split into three groups. The first went to the Loxwood Canal Centre to construct and fit a new kitchen cabinet and worktop. The second group went to Drungewick Slipway to assist the Boat Group in preparing *Wiggonholt* for a safety inspection, while the third group visited all the landing stages in the Loxwood area and jet washed them to remove the slippery algae.

The following week we completed numerous tasks. We visited Haybarn Swing Bridge to assist in assessing renovation required to the steelwork and wooden deck. More shelving was fitted at Loxwood Canal



Centre and *May Upton* was taken up the canal to place overhead cable warning signs, fit mooring rings to landing stages, grease lock mechanisms and finish fence painting at Gennets Bridge Lock.

To enable contractors to drill a new water inlet into the pump chamber at Drungewick Lock it is necessary to drop the water level in the lower pound. Consequently, we have installed stop planks above the top lock gates and put in submersible pumps to pump water back into the Long Meadow section. The old water pipes were dug out from the pump chamber and a replacement section laid out,



*Jet washing a landing stage*

in readiness for connection to the refurbished pump when installed.

In order to investigate the potential water flow along the newly cleared Bonfire Hanger section, we installed three low, temporary stop weirs between Rosemary Lane and Gennets Bridge Lock. Each weir consists of wooden planks attached to the brick walls of the previously used structures. The planks were sealed with clay and the whole arrangement was then covered in plastic, with the front edges being secured with sandbags.

We then spent a day at Tickner's Depot where we prepared some large chestnut posts that are to be installed at the Drungewick Slipway as mooring posts for the dredger. We also stripped out the old welfare unit container, with a rotten roof, in readiness for its disposal.

For our final outing of the month, we took *Josias Jessop* down to recover *May Upton* from where she was stranded with a faulty outboard near Baldwin's Knob Lock. She was successfully returned to her mooring at Loxwood and the engine was taken to Tickner's Depot for repair and servicing. During the trip we fitted two new water level gauges at Drungewick Slipway and opposite the Loxwood Canal Centre. We also fitted stop planks into the newly installed pump inlet chamber at Baldwin's Knob Lock.

*Brian King & Ian Lower*



Photo by Brian King

*Installing a temporary weir*

## Saturday Group

Our first Saturday kicked off trying to tidy up and organise some of the depot. We have to prepare the site for a new concreted vehicle and trailer storage area so that they can be parked in an orderly fashion and be easier to work on.

We plan to do this in January depending on the weather.

Any one is welcome to join the group. Just drop me an email on [jack.walker@weyarun.org.uk](mailto:jack.walker@weyarun.org.uk)

*Jack Walker*



*The trailer storage area before it was cleared*

## Midweek Working Party

This month we have had a real mixture of weather; glorious to throwing it down with rain.

We have worked the whole length of the canal from Lordings to Gosden Aqueduct. The Aqueduct has had a good tidy up and still needs more, but at present it is too slippery. Trees have been removed from Gennets where the storms have blown them over and blocked the canal. We have been clearing logs from the field between Brewhurst Bridge and Baldwin's Knob Lock using *May Upton* and then the slipway at



Barnsill has had its annual clear up. A small group helped EWG to recover bricks from the job near Elmbridge village. We have cleared the towpath from Lee Place Bridge to the Flood Lock gates. We cut the front of the hedge and cleared the reeds cut by the Truxor. The canal there is looking beautiful now.

*Margaret Darvill*

## Eric Walker Group

The group has been working on a couple of small jobs. At the depot, we excavated a trench and laid a new length of water pipe, connecting the existing main to a new stand pipe and tap next to the fuel tank and workshop. This will allow cleaning of vehicles and trailers on the concrete apron between the workshop and MDV shed, rather than on the access track next to the open storage bays, where the surface turns into mud!

The other job was at Devil's Hole Lock Bridge, repairing and strengthening the north side brick parapet with stainless steel anchors set in epoxy resin inserted into horizontal mortar joints at every fourth course. The existing brick capping was also removed, a damp course laid and the capping bricks re-laid, which will prevent moisture penetrating the brick work below.

The southern parapet needs more extensive repairs which we plan to start next month.

*Dennis Gillen*



*Completing the capping on DHL Bridge*

## WINTER LOGS

As you will have noted from the work party reports, the Trust has had to fell many ash trees suffering from Die Back. The timbers have been taken to Tickner's Depot where they are split into logs suitable for wood burners or open fires. They are available for a donation and if you would like some please contact Roger Beazer, who can arrange delivery.

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