

For WACT Volunteers

January 2025

No. 371

# Working Party News

## Editorial

A Happy New Year to everyone! Here's looking forward to another successful year for the Trust. It seems that most people like the new single column format for Working Party News, so we'll be sticking with that.

*Peter Winter*

## Tickner's Depot

There is a superstition that bad luck comes in threes. It probably comes from the same source that gave rise to Friday the 13th being unlucky. That said, we think we've just had our third engine failure of the year. Following on from a brace of brush cutters, one with piston and the other with a con rod bearing failure, we now have a deceased petrol disc cutter. We've yet to strip it down to investigate, but it doesn't look, nor feel very good.

There are rumours that Tickner's Heath Crossing is going to get re-started this spring, so in readiness we must make space for the contractor's equipment in the compound. It just so happens that we have a rotten container taking up space at the depot, so a fully kitted out 20 foot container will be brought back from the crossing and used as a tool and equipment store to replace it. At the same time, we will take the opportunity to go through all the existing tools and dispose of the bent, worn or broken stuff that has found its way into the tool stores, rather than the skip.

As most of you will know, Adam has sadly decided to leave the Trust. This meant we were left with a dire shortage of trained Telehandler operators – aka none! Fortunately, Zoe and I were booked on a training course in December, which we both passed. One of the tasks we had to perform was to place and retrieve a ¾ ton stillage of stone blocks 30 feet up a scaffold tower. It's really very difficult, but as can be seen in the photo, Zoe shows how it is done.



*Zoe shows how to use a Telehandler*

Don't forget, please get your powered tools to the depot for inspection and service before you need them in the Spring.

*Mark Feeney*

## Midweek Working Party

As the Bank Holidays have fallen on Wednesdays we have only had three sessions this month, one of which was our Christmas barbecue at Run Common Cottage.

For our first week in December, *May Upton* was used to remove the logs from the field between Brewhurst Bridge and Baldwin's Knob Lock. We cleared a large number, knowing that WRG was coming back at the weekend to cut down even more trees and therefore, we would need to clear more in the New Year.

Our second week was spent down near Orfold Lock, cutting the hedge and clearing the towpath. We were able to say our farewells to Adam who joined us for the day. Two small groups cleared fallen trees from Hunt Park and North of Birtley Bridge 2. There are still a large number that need to be pulled out of the canal at Birtley.

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.

The final visit was to the canal at Run Common Cottage, where we cleared the canal behind the Cottage and around the whole of her garden. The day was improved by the landowner’s large rum filled Christmas cake and by seeing several volunteers who are no longer regulars. Hot dogs were provided and a very jolly time was had by all.

*Margaret Darvill*

## Monday Group



*Dealing with the laurel hedge below Brewhurst Lock*

The Trust, having received permission from the landowner, allowed us to cut the laurel hedge below Brewhurst lock. This had grown very tall and thick over the years and was seriously restricting the use of the towpath. It turned out to be a major task for the Group and it took two sessions before we could say it was under control. Disposal of the cuttings was a major issue as they had to be wheelbarrowed to Birch Copse. As it is we have not tackled the height yet; that is for another day, after we have received pole saw training.

We finished the year with our annual Christmas lunch on December 16th at the Onslow Arms, attended by 15 regular members of the Group and Margaret Darvill.

*Nick Wood*

## Boat Group PEST

PEST did not work in December. Our first planned outing was cancelled because we were unable to use *May Upton*. It seems that two days before the outboard broke down with no replacement available. However, two days before was a Wednesday and I was with MWWP at Baldwin’s lock using MU to move cut timber. I’m sure it is just a complete coincidence that it was after then that the outboard broke down!

The second meeting was on the 20th and PEST had their Christmas lunch at the Onslow Arms, where we had a very enjoyable time and were well looked after by the pub. We expect to make up lost time during 2025.

PEST has had a good and productive 2024 going out regularly on our allotted days. Very few days were lost because of weather or lack of numbers. In fact our numbers have been increasing steadily over the year

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

but we would always welcome more. We believe that we have made a useful contribution to keeping the non-towpath side under control and the canal clear of debris.

We hope you all had a good Christmas and may we wish all the working parties and others a very happy and productive New Year.

*John Lee*

## Eric Walker Group



*scraping off the mud layer  
at Bonfire Hanger*

At the beginning of December the group spent a couple of days at Bonfire Hanger. Since completing the bulk of the bridgeway refurbishment by the visiting working parties in the autumn, the condition of 250m of the most southern section had deteriorated and became very muddy. This was due to a combination of the exceptionally wet weather in October and November and a high clay content in the Fittleworth stone used as the base course for the refurbishment. The bridgeway is also very well used by horse riders in the area and this exacerbated the situation. In order to make the route more useable and as a temporary measure, the group scraped off the top muddy surface. It is hoped that when the weather improves in the spring a permanent topping of Fittleworth stone can be laid.

For the remainder of the month the group were at Devil's Hole Lock, where we demolished the brick parapet on the southern (Loxwood) side of the bridge. The excessive cracking and state of the brick faces meant it was not possible to repair and refurbish the wall as had been done on the north (Southlands Lock) side. With the access scaffolding now erected by Mid-Sussex Scaffolding, the group will return in January and begin the construction of a new brick parapet wall, which is complicated by being curved on both plan and elevation.



*Demolishing the southern parapet  
at Devil's Hole Lock Bridge*

Meanwhile the group with their partners enjoyed a Christmas lunch at the Bat & Ball.

*Dennis Gillen*

## Dredger Group

This month the dredging team have been tackling the reed growth by Birch Copse. Most of the work has been completed by Brian Morgan, assisted by Tony Morgan, Malcolm Pheasey and Chris Elphick. I went on holiday on my narrow boat and picked up a bug, that laid me rather low; hence, I was very little help.

Early in the month the dredger had to be moved clear of the area where the visiting Forestry Group were felling trees. It's not easy to move Pauline when the tug is out of commission. However, all went well with the help of Adam pulling with one of our work boats.

Agricom successfully sourced a steering motor replacement, the old one being unrepairable and leaking hydraulic oil. In addition, Agricom managed to weld a patch on our spoil tub that had developed a significant leak in her inner hull. She is still on the slipway waiting a coat of blacking.

Many of you will know that we use Panoline Hydraulic oil in both the Dredger & Tug as this creates far less pollution if spilled. As a result, we get very little oil scum on surface water when a leak occurs. The down side is that the severity of any leak is often misjudged. Unfortunately, it is both very expensive (£30 per litre) and difficult to source. Generally, it takes up to 3 months from ordering to arriving at the depot.

On the 9th we managed to recommission the Tug and together with a spoil tub both were moved north of Baldwin's Knob Lock. Two trees had fallen across the canal, so Brian & John Reynolds spent a hard day clearing them both.

With the Tug back in use we managed to return to reed clearing duties on the 18th, just in time for the Christmas layup. However, due to very low water levels, little reed clearing was achieved.

Hopefully we will be back on track next year. In the meantime I wish you all a productive New Year.

*Charlie Coxwell*

## Northern Working Party

We returned to Baldwin's Knob Lock at the beginning of the month and continued with the groundwork around the new pump chamber and water inlet. More sandbags were placed to form retaining walls around the inlet and we stabilised the steps leading down from the lock.

A very enjoyable Christmas lunch was held at the Onslow Arms with good representation from both our Monday and Tuesday Teams. Our guest of honour was Adam, who joined us on his penultimate day with WACT and we would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his support of NWP since he has been with the Trust and to wish him well for the future.



Photo by Keith Lvall

For our final outing of the year, we inserted stop planks at BKL to preserve water levels in the Loxwood sections for the popular Santa Cruises.

We wish a Happy New Year to all our colleagues in the various WACT working parties and look forward to continuing to work with them in 2025.

*Dave Miller*



*New pump chamber and inlet at BKL*

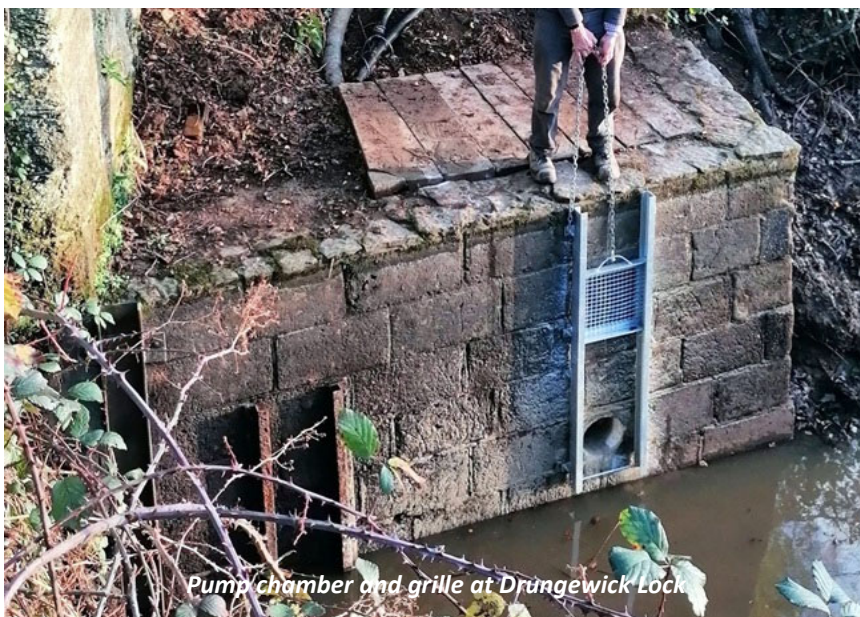
## Thursday Group

A variety of tasks were completed in December. We started the month by visiting Drungewick Lock to reposition and restart the submersible pumps so that the water level in the winding hole could be lowered sufficiently to allow the contractors to drill a new inlet hole into the pump chamber. We got the level down to an acceptable level for a few days and then Storm Bert blew in and caused the winding hole to refill completely!

The wooden transom on the back of May Upton had somehow split and so we fitted new timbers on to which the outboard motor is secured.

To prevent blockages, we installed posts and a wire mesh guard in front of the drainage pipes in the canal at Gennets Bridge Lock. The low stop plank weirs that we installed at Bonfire Hanger in November appear to be successfully retaining water in that section, so we have added more planks to the weirs to increase the depth.

With the weather gods finally having looked favourably upon us, our efforts with the pumps at Drungewick Lock were eventually successful and the water level was such that the contractor was able to attend the week before Christmas and drill a large-bore hole through the thick stone wall of the pump chamber. A newly made grille and runners were fitted to cover the inlet and the chamber is now ready for a new or refurbished back pump to be fitted.



*Pump chamber and grille at Drungewick Lock*

A Happy New Year to all WACT volunteers from all of us in the Thursday Group

*Brian King & Ian Lower*

## Hedgelaying Team

We managed to meet three times in December, and with over a dozen people turning out each time. As a result we have made great in-roads into the new section of hedge alongside the canal opposite the Drungewick Slipway (though we might have to request that the Drungewick Slipway car park is enlarged if more people intend to come along!).

Thanks must be extended to Zoe for helping to move all our binders and stakes over to the site from the Slinfold coppice site. We were in great admiration of her skills at reversing a twin-axle trailer from a very narrow section of the road at Slinfold, through a ridiculously tight gateway with deep ditches on either side.

The present section of hedge is not without its problems. It was flailed again this year, meaning that it is fairly low for laying, plus the flailed brash has lodged itself inside the hedge making it into a three-dimensional, extremely thorny puzzle which has to be undone (carefully!). The canal has also flooded at this site in the past and there is a large build up of semi-rotten material jammed against the base of the hedge and the adjacent fence. All of this needs to be removed before any actual laying takes place. The good news is that last year's section is looking very well indeed, so we have high hopes for this season's work in due course.

As always, we welcome newcomers. Please contact me first to confirm.



Photo by Nick Baxter

Clearing the hedge above Drungewick Aqueduct

*Nick Baxter*

## The Contact List

Name	Group/Project	Tel	email
Maurice Cranefield	Visiting Working Parties	01483 505566	maurice.cranefield@weyarun.org.uk
Dennis Gillen	Eric Walker Group	07866 583753	dennis.gillen@weyarun.org.uk
Margaret Darvill	Midweek Working Party	01483 894606	margaret.darvill@weyarun.org.uk
Tom Close	Monday Group	07811 534292	thomasdclose@googlemail.com
Mark Feeney	Tickner's Depot Manager	07747 445680	mark.feeney@weyarun.org.uk
Nick Baxter	Hedgelaying		hedgelaying@weyarun.org.uk
Gordon Powell	Northern Working Parties	07368 957256	gordon.powell@weyarun.org.uk
Peter Hyem	Boat Group PEST	01403 752393	peter@barscorner1.plus.com
John Reynolds	Boat Maintenance	07540 840549	John.reynolds@weyarun.org.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@weyarun.org.uk
Jack Walker	Saturday Group	07359 590988	Jack.walker@weyarun.org.uk
Roger Beazer	Mobile Display Vehicle		rogerbeazer@aol.com
Peter Winter	Working Party News Editor	07722 184117	peter.winter@weyarun.org.uk