

For WACT Volunteers

February 2025

No. 372

Working Party News

Editorial

Thank goodness January is out of the way. It was so dull and a bit wet at the end.

It's the end of an era for the Mobil Display Vehicle as Roger Beazer has stepped down from managing its operations. Roger has been a stalwart, having overseen MDV outings for the last eight years and recruiting many new members to the Trust at various events. So our thanks go to Roger and best wishes to Phil Short, who is taking over.

Next month Dave Miller is once again taking on the role of Guest Editor while Hilary and I enjoy a bit of sunshine in Tobago.

Peter Winter

Thursday Group

On a bitterly cold morning, we began the New Year by adjusting the recently installed stop planks at the top gates of Baldwin's Knob Lock to make them more watertight.

In preparation for a metal storage cabinet to be placed at Drungewick Slipway, we cleared the ground and put in a concrete base between the picnic bench and boundary hedge. We also assisted the contractors with reinstalling the serviced river pump and a refurbished back pump at Drungewick Lock. With the back pump now in working order, we have finally been able to fill the pipe trench and leave the site tidy.



The refurbished back pump at Drungewick Lock



Dealing with the lower gates stop planks at BKL

Having successfully tackled the leaking stop planks by the top gates of Baldwin's Knob Lock, we returned to work on the stop planks for the lower gates. With the aid of the aqua-dock, we braved heavy rain to place ground protection mats and a tarpaulin in front of the planks to reduce leakage. The stop planks have been installed so that the lock chamber can be pumped out for a structural inspection to take place.

We had a busy day at Tickner's Depot, where we re-sited the lifting chain store and assisted with the removal of the old green container from between the workshop and the log bays. The large workshop container was then collected from Tickner's Crossing Yard and we helped in positioning it where the green container had been at the Depot. We then made a start on clearing and tidying the end 'log bay' by removing some of the pallets of bricks and then lifting in various bags of sand and aggregates so that they were under cover. Finally, we had a session with the hydraulic log splitter to tackle the ever replenishing pile of logs in the yard.

Brian King & Ian Lower

Hedgelaying Team

January has been an interesting month, with lots of high water in the River Lox but also some unexpected sunshine on occasions. We have continued hedgelaying at Drungewick, with one session starting late morning to allow the water to subside, and

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the last session of the month was cancelled due to very high (and rising) water showing on the real-time EA Flow Gauge at Drungewick.

Apart from interfering with actual work, the heavy rains have led to various problems. Parts of the current hedge at Drungewick have been severely flooded by the canal over-topping. There is a spillway along the towpath where we are working, but this seems to be set too high, or more probably, maybe not wide enough to cope with the excess flows that we seem to experience every winter now. The canal overtops elsewhere on both banks around the Drungewick Slipway and has deposited large amounts of flotsam (especially cut reeds) into the hedge and also importantly into the stock-fence on the edge of the field below it.

The flooding has knocked over the fence in places, and many of the fence uprights have rotted. A 130m section of stock fence (exactly adjacent to the length we laid in 2023/24) was apparently replaced in summer 2024 by Dave Evans, but that has already collected wet detritus in places and its life is most certainly reduced. Unfortunately, there is a further 270m of old fencing, adjacent to the hedge where we are working now, which has also collected detritus. It has been knocked over in part and so is no longer stock-proof. The laid hedge should act as an animal barrier, but in parts the hedge does not exist, and the farm manager thinks that out of control dogs will still find access points into the field. So the fence will need replacing.

There is also a great deal of cut reeds lodged in the hedge on the non-towpath side of Drungewick Slipway, where the hedge lies at the base of the embankment. Our team intends to remove this before hedgelaying finishes around March, as otherwise the previously-laid hedge will be severely damaged and could rot and die.

On a positive note, we have been visited by a number of hardy people walking along the towpath in the inclement weather, and all have been very positive about the canal and also our work. One of these included a member of the Boat Team, Ian, who came along the following week to present us with a splendid (and very heavy) aluminium mell for banging in stakes - our huge thanks to him. We do wonder what it was designed for originally - banging in circus tent poles, maybe?



Staking above the damaged fence line

Nick Baxter

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

Midweek Working Party

Even though it has been very wet and slippery, MWWP has been busy clearing a number of areas. A team has been working north of Birtley Bridge 2 taking out numerous trees from the canal. Unless we have more storms, that job is now completed.

We have cleared an area of the common land near to Tickner's Heath. It is unbelievable what a difference the group have made. The neighbours are very pleased.

Several weeks were spent cutting logs up and moving them via *May Upton* from the field between Brewhurst and Baldwin's Knob Lock to the depot. Zoe was a great help bringing the trailer down to Brewhurst Bridge.

We have also continued to tidy the towpath from Harsfold to Lordings. This job is very much starting and stopping as the flooding down there has been phenomenal.

Margaret Darvill

Northern Working Party

The large steel tool container at Baldwin's Knob Lock is no longer required on site and so our first job of the year was to load it onto *May Upton* and take it through the locks to the Canal Centre. There it was ably unloaded by Zoe, using her newly acquired telehandler skills, and transferred to a trailer for towing back to Tickner's Depot. The stop planks that were inserted by the top gates at Baldwin's Knob Lock before Christmas had to be removed in order for us to get *May Upton* through - and then replaced!

We completed laying out the large bore piping into the newly installed pump chamber at BKL and connected it to the remaining existing pipework for the water to be pumped back up above the lock when the replacement pump is fitted.

The following week we split into two groups, with one going back to BKL to make final preparations for the contractor to install the new back pump. The other went to Tickner's Crossing to refix the newt fencing around the spoil heap next to the site of the proposed temporary road. They also disconnected the electrical supply to the workshop container, prior to it being transported to Tickner's Depot pending the road and bridge works.

We then had a day at Tickner's Depot, where we installed underground power cable ducting and a concrete base for a cabinet between the MDV Shed and the Machine Shop. This is to facilitate a convenient external power socket to be available for vehicle maintenance etc. We also refitted the main water supply stopcock cover at the corner of the log bays after it had been inadvertently dislodged during groundworks.

The hydraulic log splitter was back in action and we made a start on the large pile of logs in front of the log bays. A return visit was made to Baldwin's Knob Lock and the flanges were positioned on the large bore pipes to the pump chamber in readiness for the new back pump and control panel to be fitted by contractors.

With the top gate stop planks at Baldwin's Knob Lock being in place, we went down and installed stop planks by the bottom gate, to prepare for the pumping out of the lock chamber. We also accompanied Zoe to assess bank repairs needed just below the lock.

The gates at Tickner's Crossing Yard are in need of attention and we have measured up for replacement gate posts, that we will fit when obtained.

A new hard standing is to be installed at Tickner's Depot as a parking area for the Trust's trailers. We cleared the equipment and debris from the area at the bottom of the yard and began to excavate the plot for the sub base and concrete to be laid.

Dave Miller



Base for electrical cabinet at Tickner's



Clearing the site for trailer storage at Tickner's Depot

Tickner's Depot

A while back, I reported that a number of our transformers had gone AWOL. Well they're all back now, but it seems that the trend has been contagious. We're now missing one of our new 4½ inch DeWalt angle grinders. It was last seen wearing a Yellow and Black cover. We think it may be with several of our similarly coloured DeWalt batteries, as they are also missing. Please remember that all of our tools and equipment have a 'Back' on them – Back where they belong!

Rant over, now the good news. I mentioned last month that we were looking to get a 20ft container from Tickner's Heath Crossing to use in the depot. Well, thanks to Darren, one of our local landowners (who had bought and restored our old Chieftain trailer) the container is now in place, and mighty fine it is too. Kitted out as a workshop with benches, racking and strip lighting, we plan to consolidate our storage in it and have most of our tools in one place, thus enabling us to dispose of our older storage units, which are very much 'showing their age.'

Some time ago, one of our dumpers, a Thwaites 3 tonner, got stolen and was then recovered. Unfortunately, the scallywags who nicked it also started to dismantle it. It has sat in our workshop for some time awaiting some TLC, which it is now about to get. A new prop shaft, clutch, battery, hoses, and a filter kit are ready and waiting to be fitted, so that it can go back into active service, which will save the Trust quite a bit in hire costs on the forthcoming projects.

Don't forget, please get your powered tools to the depot for inspection and service before you need them in the Spring (which is only a month away).

And finally a date for your diaries. On the 13th March, we will be hosting a Volunteer Information Day at the Depot. We're opening the depot to anyone who might be interested in joining us or just want to know what on earth we spend our time on each Thursday. It'll run from 11:00 to 14:00, the kettle will be on, and I might even get some decent biscuits in. So, if you can, do drop in for a coffee and a chat.

Mark Feeney

Eric Walker Group

The group has spent the whole month working at Devil's Hole Lock, repairing and rebuilding the parapet walls to the bridge. As mentioned last month the north side wall was able to be repaired with the three vertical cracks in the brickwork being stabilised by the insertion of stainless steel helical ties. These were built into the horizontal courses across the cracks and set in two pack epoxy resin before repointing.

The south side, however, was so badly cracked and with a large number of the bricks having spalled faces, that it was beyond repair. After demolishing the wall down to the bridge deck level, the group set to rebuilding the wall. Unlike normal brickwork with level horizontal joints and straight on plan, the new brick wall is curved both on plan and in elevation. This required a considerable amount of setting out and with timber curved profiles having to be made to ensure the brickwork maintains the correct curves.

In addition to the complexity of the wall layout it is necessary to lay steel "ladder" type reinforcement every fourth course to ensure the future stability of the wall. Because of the original method of construction of the supporting stone bridge abutments, it is inevitable that they will continue to "move" with the seasonal expansion and contraction of the clay ground on which they were built. Hopefully the reinforcing to the parapet wall will keep movement to a minimum.



Dennis Gillen

Boat Group PEST

PEST's first venture onto the canal in January took place on the 3rd, with hangovers from New Year's Eve well and truly gone. Six of us took *May Upton* out in Arctic conditions, though fortunately, the canal

was not frozen.

We headed north as far as Devil's Hole. Along the way, we cut back a significant amount of brambles on the non-towpath side. At this time of year, and after several years of work, there is little substantial growth on this stretch, and we hope this continues for a long time. On our return to the Canal Centre, we collected a boat load of dead and floating reeds that had been cut in December.

On the 17th, we returned to the Devil's Hole stretch to ensure that the non-towpath side could accommodate the dredger, which was due to be moved north of Loxwood Lock the following day. After that, we headed back to the Canal Centre and went south through Brewhurst Lock and down as far as Baldwin's Knob Lock to collect floating timber out of the water.

Earlier in the week, someone had decided it would be fun to see large lengths of tree branches skidding across the ice! In fact, with both Devil's Hole and Baldwin's Knob Locks having stop planks in, on this trip we covered the full length of the usable canal.

John Lee

Monday Group

In January we concentrated on cutting both sides of the towpath from Brewhurst Bridge through Loxwood and Devil's Hole Lock to just short of the chaine in the canal north of DHL despite rain, hailstones and floods! (*Ed*: Apparently, the chaine is the wiggle in the canal between DHL and Southlands.)

It is likely that in February we will continue with this task by clearing the chaine, possibly a full day's job, and then on to Southland Lock.

Three of the Group also received pole saw training in January.

Nick Wood



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