

For WACT Volunteers

March 2025

No. 373

Working Party News

Editorial

While Peter is enjoying himself in sunnier climes, it has fallen upon me to edit the publication this month. Considering the time of year, it is good to see that all working parties are keeping themselves busy on numerous tasks along the Canal, often supporting each other to get the jobs done. Even more work on the horizon though, following the planning approval for the Rooks Hill project finally coming through. A new section of canal is to be dug southwards from the Birtley Bridge 1 section down to the Greensand Way crossing, where a new bridleway bridge is to be built a project that will involve a joint effort from an assortment of Groups.

Dave Miller

Monday Group

As anticipated in our last report, we have now completed clearing the chaine between Devil's Hole and Southland Locks and disposed of the cuttings; but it was a bit of a slog because of the thickness of the brambles. In fact, it took us a day and a half, the penalty of not keeping it under control! We continued cutting both sides of the towpath from there to Southland Lock, so that is all done now.

On the 24th, at the request of the Chairman, we carried on cutting the hedge back between the 90 degree turn in the canal to Haybarn Swing Bridge, a job that had been started by MWWP.



Nick Wood

Boat Group PEST

In early February, four of us took the work boat *May Upton* south as far as Baldwin's Knob Lock. Being limited to the length from that lock north to Devil's Hole Lock makes our job more restricted. On the other hand, both north and south to both stop planked locks are looking very smart! As for the rest of the navigable length, that will have to wait for another day. Given the time of year, there should be little fresh growth. Our jobs on this trip were cutting back brambles and other growth plus low overhanging branches. It's surprising that given winter storms how little debris there is floating in the water. Being bitterly cold with an easterly wind we didn't work long in to the afternoon. On the 21st February, six of us repeated our trip earlier in the month to finish off.

John Lee

Dredger Group

We ended last month reporting that while clearing spoil from the pound above Loxwood Lock, the dredger had developed two oil leaks. All further work was stopped and oil



mats were deployed to mop up the spillage. The first leak was due to a faulty oil filter, this was remedied by a replacement filter. The second leak appears to be due to a leaking ram seal that is used to lift and lower the port spud leg. Spud legs are lowered to the canal bed to secure the dredger while the excavator is in use. *Pauline* has three legs. The legs are each operated via an integral hydraulic ram. To access this, the leg must be removed from its housing, done by lifting it clear. However, it cannot be lifted out without first removing its foot (measuring approximately 3' x 2' x 5" and made of steel). Hence the need for her

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.

to be slipped. To access the slipway we needed to pass through Baldwin's Knob Lock. Our thanks go to the Thursday Group who removed both sets of stop planks to allow *Pauline* to transit through. Naturally the dredger's excavator helped to reinstall both sets of stop planks. Prior to slipping, the dredger was tasked to remove the bund between the canal and BKL's newly installed back pump chamber. This was successfully done with minimal hydraulic loss into canal. The spud leg is hollow and leaking oil fills this prior to flowing into canal. So, by pumping out the oil from spud leg we are able to contain leakage into the water. Before slipping *Pauline*, we will first try to complete the various jobs needed to allow the spoil tubs currently on the slipway, to be launched. Jobs such as painting, blacking and hatch sealing will hopefully be done prior to launching, all require reasonable weather! Any offers of help with these tasks would be most welcomed. Please contact me if you can assist.

Charlie Coxwell

Hedgelaying Team

The Team has continued laying the extremely long hedge on the towpath side upstream of Drungewick Aqueduct.

This month, we also replanted a significant gap in the hedge, where brambles had overtaken all the previously planted hedgerow plants. The brambles were cleared, and the hedge was then re-planted using cell-grown hawthorns (UK stock grown by Cheviot Trees, who specialise in cell-grown trees). Previously, gapping up has used bare-rooted plants, which can dry out and die while waiting to be planted, especially in windy conditions like those that seem to prevail at the Canal!

There is good evidence that well rooted cell-grown plants establish better and faster, even though the plants are fairly small - time will tell if that is the case - the plants all had excellent root balls, and were ceremoniously dipped in the

Canal before planting to make sure that the roots were completely soaked. Biochar (fine charcoal), from site bonfires, was then applied as a weed suppressant around the base of the newly planted trees - competition for water is the major killer of trees during the establishment phase and suppressing grasses, in particular, is very important.

As expected, during February, the Team finished using all 330+ stakes and 330+ binders cut back in November. Some of the binders (aka heathers or heathering) were already becoming brittle, which is why numbers cut early in the season were deliberately limited. The hedgelaying season normally runs towards the end of March, so a further 130 stakes and a similar number of binders were cut from a local wood on the last outing of February, to allow us to work across March. The Team

would like to express our sincere thanks to Peter Foulger who very generously allowed us to work his hazel coppice again, providing us with necessarily flexible binders as well as stakes.



Hawthorn plants



Hedge planting at Drungewick

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 Stephen David
Every Thursday	Thursday Group	Contact 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

As always, if you wish to join us, do contact me - no experience necessary. We will provide you with tools on a temporary basis, while you decide if hedgelaying is right for you.

Nick Baxter

Midweek Working Party

We have had a very productive month. We completed clearing the Common Land opposite the depot entrance. All the bendy trees have been removed and the area has a great deal of light, so plants should grow now. A group spent a couple of weeks clearing trees that had fallen in the canal and on the towpath at Birtley and Harsfold. Some very large trees have come down this year! Another group has spent several weeks cutting the hedges and brushcutting the banks between Lordings and Haybarn, which we do annually. One week was spent on Gun's Mouth Island where we cleared lots of brambles and cleared a number of dangerous trees. We had intended to go back the following week to complete the job but Cranleigh Waters was running too fast for us to go over by boat and instead we cleared a large tree from the towpath at Compasses Bridge.

Margaret Darvill

Tickner's Depot

Considering February is a short month, a great deal has been achieved at the Depot. The Saturday Group have increased our security by putting up a thicker mesh screen on the fence that faces the Dunsfold Road. It looks so good that I'll be getting some more mesh to do the rest of the fence. Stephen David and the Northern Working Party have been busy excavating the area for the new concrete vehicle stand. After a minor setback with a broken water pipe, the area now has a decent thickness of crushed concrete, ready for the reinforcing mesh and then the concrete can be poured.



Screened fence at Tickner's Depot

Many of you will remember the old Case 13 Tonne excavator. It had done sterling work for the Trust for many years but, like me, its best years were behind it. So, after at least 5 years rusting silently away in the yard, it's now gone. We've got quite a bit more space, the place looks tidier, and the Trust is 650 quid better off. The Thwaites 3T dumper is progressing nicely. The service items have been fitted and the gearbox and propshaft are now ready to go back in. The next challenge will be to work out where all the wires go!

Don't forget – please get your powered tools to the depot for inspection and service before you need them in the Spring (Which, by the time you read this, will already be here).

Forthcoming event – Thursday 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 the Trust, or current members who just want to know what we spend our time on each Thursday. It'll run from 11:00 to 14:00, the kettle will be on, and I've ordered the biscuits. So, if you can, do drop in for a coffee and a chat.

Mark Feeney

Eric Walker Group

The group has been employed for most of the month on the restoration of the bridge at Devil's Hole Lock. Having demolished the southern parapet wall, because it was beyond repair, the rebuilding was started, but was a slow process. The new brickwork had to be erected in an unconventional way, being curved on plan and elevation and reinforced every fourth course with a purpose made stainless steel wire "ladder" format reinforcement. Work, thanks to reasonable weather on the group's work days, was completed a week before the end of the month.

With the conclusion of a contract with the landowner, the team mobilised to start work on the Rye Farm project to divert the bridleway to a new route adjacent the canal bank. This is not going to be an easy construction method, but more about that next month.



New parapet wall at DHL

Dennis Gillen

Thursday Group

One of our first jobs in February was to return to Baldwin's Knob Lock where half the group removed both sets of stop planks that had been inserted by the upper and lower gates. This was necessary in order for

dredger *Pauline* to be brought back down from Loxwood to Drungewick Slipway for repairs to be carried out. While she was negotiating the lock, *Pauline* was put to good use in assisting with the lifting and positioning of the heavy stop planks back in place. The other half of the group set out on foot from Loxwood, travelling north, to carry out routine greasing of the winding mechanisms of all the locks and to install new overhead cable warning signs on the canal banks.

With the three low level dams at Bonfire Hanger proving they can successfully retain water in the sections, we



Replacing stop planks at BKL

have slightly raised the height of two of the dams to further increase the depth of water.

There is a flow meter in a concrete chamber at Birch Copse, that measures the amount of water we take from the River Lox. The meter is in need of replacement and we have made two visits to assess fittings and take measurements for a new one. Our first visit was aborted due to the chamber being flooded!

The timber boardwalk and viewing platform at Hunt Park was becoming covered in algae and moss, so we made a couple of trips with the diesel powered jet washer to clean it all down and make it a little less slippery underfoot.



Jet washing at Hunt Park

During the month, we have also been assisting the contractors with the replacement of the river pump at Drungewick Lock and

the installation of the new back pump at Baldwin's Knob Lock. The work is ongoing at both sites but progress is being made.

Brian King

Mobile Display Vehicle

The MDV event season will start on Saturday 10th May at the Dunsfold Village Fete. Throughout the summer the MDV will attend 13 weekend events. Being at these events enables us to promote projects such as Rooks Hill, Tickner's Heath and many others to the local community and try and gain some support in the way of new members to the Trust. There are Volunteer Information Days arranged for the 13th March at Dunsfold Depot and the 15th & 20th March at the Loxwood Canal Centre. The MDV will be in attendance on these days and should any one think they may be able to give up a weekend day to assist the team, come along and see what is involved. For each event we have to get the unit towed to and from Dunsfold Depot to venues across Surrey and Sussex this is an area where we need towing drivers. Please get in touch if you think you could help.



Phil Short

Northern Working Party

In February, work has been focussed on constructing the concrete parking pad for trailers at Tickner's Depot.



Base of trailer pad at Tickner's Depot

The area has now been cleared and the ground excavated to the required depth. 36 tonnes of crushed concrete for the sub base has been delivered and spread. The next step is to lay the steel mesh reinforcement and fix the shuttering, in readiness for deliveries of pre-mixed concrete. Thankfully, we are not mixing it ourselves, as the finished pad will measure 18m by 8m! Additionally though, we have managed a few other tasks during the month. We assisted Zoe in taking the large diesel pump to Baldwin's Knob Lock and sited it where it can be used to pump out

the lock for the inspection that is required. We also took the new backpump for BKL with us and placed it above the pump chamber in readiness for its installation by contractors.

Just south of BKL, the edge of the canal has eroded on the towpath side and we have helped Zoe by first putting in a row of posts before we can reprofile the bank.

With the Thursday Group having laid the concrete base at Drungewick Slipway, we took a large metal storage cabinet from Tickner’s Depot and put it in position for use by the Dredger Group.

Having recently regained access to Sydney Thruscutt Slipway, we discovered some damage to one of the side walls and we are in the process of repairing the brickwork.



New backpump at BKL

Following a sink hole appearing alongside the top gates of Devil’s Hole Lock, we have installed stop planks and sheeting to assist in further investigation of the situation and assessment of the repairs needed.

The large gate posts at the yard at Tickner’s Crossing had rotted and we have had to remove the gates and fit new posts.

The large gate posts at the yard at Tickner’s Crossing had rotted and we have had to remove the gates and fit new posts.

Dave Miller



Working on the gateposts at Tickner’s Crossing

The Contact List

Name	Group/Project	Tel	email
Bill Nicholson	Visiting Working Parties	07791 097773	bill57nicholson@gmail.com
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
Stephen David	Northern Working Parties	07757 702970	stephen.david@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
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
Phil Short	Mobile Display Vehicle	07761 372551	pjshort@hotmail.com
Peter Winter	Working Party News Editor	07722 184117	peter.winter@weyarun.org.uk