

For WACT Volunteers

May 2025

No. 375

Working Party News

Editorial

Our hard working teams have been making good use of the continuing fine weather to keep the canal in sound order and to make progress on various maintenance and restoration activities. Of particular note is the start of site preparation ahead of the Rooks Hill Project.

Peter Winter

Eric Walker Group

The Group is continuing with the construction of a new bridleway at Rye Farm. Early morning each work day, we take delivery of dry mixed concrete which is discharged into bulk bags plus an additional heap used for filling sandbags. Later in the day we have deliveries of bulk bags of crushed concrete and a load of hard core.

We now have an efficient routine for construction of the bridleway. To start two bags of dry mix concrete are carefully positioned in the canal maintaining the correct line. These are fixed securely in place by sinking scaffold poles through the bags into the canal bed. Then two bags of crushed concrete are placed alongside the dry mix bags. Spoil is then spread between the bags and the bank and then covered with geogrid matting before hard core is spread on top. Then we move forward and repeat.

Each day we place ten bags of dry mix concrete and ten bags of crushed concrete, so that we complete 20 metres each week. Meanwhile, sandbags are filled with dry mix and placed on the canal side of the path. So far, we have completed over 120m of the base surface of the bridleway.

This all involves close coordination between the digger loading dumpers and the excavator placing the materials in the canal – all made easier with walkie-talkies!

Dennis Gillen



The new bridleway is taking shape

Midweek Working Party

It has been a very busy and varied month. The weather has been good to us and we have completed a number of jobs.

After walking the practice Poddle, I encouraged a small group to clear the canal and banks from Hillcroft to the bottom of Southlands Lock and the hedge around the lock. It is now possible to see the canal and lock.

Hunt Park was given its first tidy up of the year and now it is clear around the Information Point and the Viewing Platform as well as the canal walk. It now looks loved. Tickner's Crossing Compound had a tidy up so that EWG could remove the Heras Fencing from the hedge. The rest of the area was cleared as well. The Common Land on the opposite side of the road was cleared so that people can see the canal from the footpath and road. At the same time a small group have been taking trees out from the canal that had fallen in during the winter just opposite the depot.

Work was also done clearing all the trunks taken down at Rooks Hill and moving them

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to the depot. This same group spent a day cutting up the trunks and splitting them ready for fire-wood. This will continue next month.

Margaret Darvill

Boat Group PEST

Initially, we were still unable to go beyond Devil's Hole Lock to the north and Baldwin's Knob Lock to the south. However, following the opening of Baldwin's Knob Lock on our second trip four of us collected *May Upton* from the slipway and came back towards Barnsill Bridge where an oak tree was partially blocking the canal. We took out three boat loads of ivy and branches to expose the trunk for the chainsaw crew to remove the tree. The team also cleared another tree near to the bridge. In the afternoon we cut some overhanging brambles and willow before unloading the boat and returning it to its mooring at the slipway.

John Lee

Monday Group

As anticipated in last month's WPN, on the last day of March we resumed our 'normal' visits to Gennets, Compasses and Tickner's, catching up on the spring growth. We noted the construction of a large film set on Dunsfold aerodrome for a future Tom Cruise film.

As the weather had been dry, allowing access across the fields, we were able to make an ear-



The film set at Dunsfold Park



The monster mower in action!

ly visit to Lordings, brush cutting and strimming both sides of the lock and the flood lock.

We followed this by attending to Devil's Hole, Loxwood and Brewhurst Locks and made a preliminary visit to the towpath from Drungewick Lane Bridge to the lock and the lock itself.

In late April, with the use of the 'monster mower', we were able to 'do a proper job' cutting the towpath from Drungewick Bridge to the lock, around the lock and winding hole. A satisfactory outcome!

Nick Wood

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

Dredger Group

April and at long last we have a period of good weather, which has enabled us to press on with painting the excavator's main boom, dipper, engine cowling and cabin sides. Although there is still much left to paint, she is looking much smarter. Just need to keep her looking that way! Many thanks to John Lee, Tony and Brian Morgan who spent many hours pushing paintbrushes.

Progress has been made with the iDig system, which is now fitted and partly calibrated. Unfortunately, some extension poles, required for complete calibration, are currently missing from the Trust's laser level kit. If anyone has seen a couple of round aluminium poles, approximately 400mm x 15mm with male & female threads at either end, please let me know.

Initial trials with the iDig system suggest this will be a game changer in maintaining the canal bed profile, reducing the chance of accidental damage to the puddling clay.

Later in the month, we helped the Monday Group to gain access to the stop planks, next to the pounds overspill site. Currently there appears to be a substantial leak which is stopping water levels reaching maximum height in the pound between Baldwin's Knob Lock and slipway. It looks like the source of one of the leaks was identified, so next time we plan to start layering clay slabs into the area. We shall keep our fingers crossed that it's successful. There are at least two more leaks along the towpath side, between slipway and overspill area that will need attention.

To slip the dredger, maximum water levels are required, otherwise it will not float above the slipping cradle. Hopefully the leaks can be sorted soon, as *Pauline* needs to be slipped to rectify the leaking spud legs, in readiness for next winter's dredging schedule. Last winter's flooding brought in rather a large amount of silt into the canal, which in some places has reduced the navigational depth down to 600mm.

Charlie Coxwell

Northern Working Party

This month we began by returning to Devil's Hole Lock to continue dealing with the leak that caused the sink hole by the top lock gates. We removed the shuttering from the concrete repair, backfilled the sink hole and replaced the post and rail fencing that had been removed to enable access by an excavator. Several trips were then made to Ewhurst Brickworks to collect loads of clay that they had kindly donated, to pack the canal bank and complete the repair.

We then had several weeks erecting tree protection fencing along the site boundary of the Rooks Hill Project site. The fencing is required by the local authority as part of the planning consent for the new bridge and new section of canal.



Devil's Hole Lock before...



...and after



Rooks Hill under way

Photo by Keith Lyall

Following the visit of the Newbury Working Party Group who made a good start with the fencing and compound, we completed approximately a further 120 metres in several weeks, just in time for a planned visit from the Local Authority's Tree Officer to inspect the final works.

Over the past winter, damage had been caused to a length of field fencing at the end of Long Meadow adjacent to the Drungewick Lock winding hole.

We refitted the damaged section of stock proof fencing, leaving the area secure.



The canal bank by the towpath just downstream from Baldwin's Knob Lock had become badly eroded, so we assisted Zoe by taking *May Upton* to the site and installing post and rail formwork, to support coir rolls for a re-profiled edge. We now intend to backfill the void between the canal and towpath.

Our attention then turned to the Thriscutt Slipway on Dunsfold Park where, on a very warm day, we tackled a number of tasks, prompted by the site being incorporated into the route of this year's Poddle. We realigned the double gates on the access track and dug out the stone underneath, in readiness for concrete patching.

We mowed around the plaque and down the path towards Tickner's Crossing, levelled the footpath around the pump manhole and fitted a cone on the bore-hole pipe. We also made repairs to the brickwork edging of the actual slipway and installed a gate in the boundary fence to allow access to the canal side path.

Dave Miller

Tickner's Depot

In early and mid-April, the felled trees from Rooks Hill were bought to the depot for converting to firewood. Having used the tipping trailer, the logs were unceremoniously dumped in a heap by the wood stores. A team from the MWWP came in the other day to slice up the logs and split them. Despite doing a sterling job, there's still quite a bit to do. Today, I have tidied them up a bit, but shifting this many logs in 26C heat wasn't much fun, so the rest will have to wait until it's a little cooler.

Huge progress has been made on the Thwaites dumper – it now runs. The hydraulics have been checked and all work as expected, the brakes have been bled and it moves under its own power for the first time in years. A couple of jobs are still outstanding;

the horn and the green beacon need connecting up and then we can finally get it out and put it to use.

We think we've found out why the 3 inch water pumps weren't pumping. They rely on a really good seal on the inlet pipe coupling. The seals we have are very old, brittle and perished (or missing!). A new set seems to have fixed the issue. Well, they worked in the Depot with nice clean water and a relatively short inlet pipe. When we get a spare hour, we'll take them to the slipway and try them in earnest.

Mark Feeney



Thursday Group



The River Lox pump inlet at Birch Copse had become clogged and silted up over time and it became necessary for it to be cleared. Two of the Group made an excellent job of clearing the area around the inlet and, with the water flow meter having been replaced, we have re-enabled river water to be extracted, when required.

The decking of Haybarn Swing Bridge has been showing signs of deterioration and a welder was arranged to replace the cross hatch sheet metal edge at one end. While he was there, we replaced some of the deck

timber at the other end and covered with tarmac patching. A new steel hoop was fitted in the concrete surround for the securing chain and padlock to be attached to prevent unauthorised opening of the bridge.

Most of the month though, has been spent at Baldwin's Knob Lock where we have continued to carry out repairs to the lock chamber and construct a concrete lid to the back pump chamber.

All of the joints in the lock stonework, up to the low



Photo by Keith Lvall

Re-grouting the stonework in Baldwin's Knob Lock

level water line, have been raked out and grouted, with the assistance of a motorised mortar gun. We removed both sets of stop planks at the upper and lower gates to enable us to use *May Upton* inside the lock to re-grout the higher levels of blockwork.

We completed construction of the concrete cover surround for the recently installed back pump chamber and have inserted all the concrete lintels.

A water level indicator board has been fitted to the back pump inlet to show the depth of water in the canal at that point. Site clearance is now well underway and we are in the process of returning all unused materials and equipment to Tickner's Depot.

Brian King



The Thursday Group take a well-earned rest

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