

Working Party News

No. 325

For WACT Volunteers

January 2021

Editorial

A Happy New Year to everyone. 2020 was certainly a start-stop, start-stop, start-stop year!

Yet it was also a year of significant progress with the completion of the Harsfold Bridge, the refit of *Zachariah Keppel* and the commencement of work at the Tickner's Crossing site. Mention must also be made of the continuing efforts by the groups that keep our waterway navigable and in good shape.

But for now we're in another National Lockdown and all activities are suspended. We'll all be ready to restart just as soon as conditions permit.

Peter Winter

Mid-Week Working Party

We worked the first week in November and then started again at the beginning of December. We have been cutting down the hedge on the side of the towpath starting from the gate about 200 yards from Harsfold Bridge. This stretch of hedge has not been cut for at least 15 years. In some patches it is full of brambles. We have completed taking the hedge down to four foot for most of the way as far as Flood Gate bridge. This was despite the fact that one week there were only four of us due to atrocious weather conditions and two weeks when the Arun was flooded and it was difficult to get in the field. A small group have been working on the hedge over the bridge and now as you go over you get a magnificent view over the countryside.

Margaret Darvill

Boat Group PEST

The team were able to restart in December but achieved only one day of work rather than the usual two. With six volunteers available we were able to use the optimum 'Covid-compliant' arrangement of two boats (*Josias Jessop* and *May Upton*) with a crew of three on each. A crew of three per boat represents both the minimum manning for safety and the maximum, on these boats, for social distancing. The day's activity focussed on the stretch of the navigation used for our Santa Trips removing debris from the water and any overhanging or encroaching growth.

From a boat operations perspective the currently operational section of the canal is in good order due to the work of maintenance staff and volunteer work parties. We look forward to the New Year post-Covid and to the reopening of the navigation to Drungewick Lock. After a couple of years out of use this should provide plenty of opportunities for long-distance PEST forays in 2021.

Chris Jones

Mrs Bucket Group

Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

We are pleased to report that we were able to resume work on 7th December, but not as expected in Sidney Wood. Two groups were out, tidying up at Gennets and the overflow weir above the lock, changing the signs on the information post and starting to remove the spirals off the plants as recommended by the adjacent landowner.



Photo: Nick Houston

The Mid-Week Working Party making an impact between Harsfold and Lordings

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We also gave attention to Loxwood car park and cleared around the pump house and other areas at Devil's Hole lock.

We finally returned to Sidney Wood on the 14th working in two groups from both ends of the section, i.e. the Firtree Copse end where we left off in early November and at Lock 16. The banks have now been cut as far as the second bund at Firtree copse, and at the other end of the section, the saplings growing in the canal winding hole above Lock 16 have been cut down. We brush cut all around and towards culvert 3. In addition, a third group very carefully cleared interwoven brambles from around both newt ponds at Gennets Bridge Lock and set up an information post on the site of Lock 9 by Gennets Wood footbridge.

Unfortunately, owing to new Covid restrictions and the prospect of heavy rain, our outing on the 21st was cancelled. We hope to resume work in Sidney Wood sometime in the New Year.

Nick Wood

Canal Maintenance Unit

With Christmas approaching fast the Team set about the replacement of the footbridge at Baldwin's Knob Lock. In the most atrocious weather, the team removed the old bridge, saving the deck for reuse as temporary stop planks elsewhere. The task not made any easier by the deck being bolted down with barely any room to get a spanner in to release them, but with persistence they were eventually removed and we called it a day. We were now ready to fit the new bridge.

This had been fabricated at the Depot by the volunteers there (several delays due to lockdowns) and painted by myself over a period of three weeks of daily painting. The parts were transported to Loxwood and loaded into *May Upton* which not only took the pre-assembled parts to site but also provided a work platform underneath.

The weather eased up a bit for the installation. It was still bitterly cold but at least it stopped raining and so we completed the installation by early afternoon and headed back to Brewhurst to unload all the old timber, and on to

Loxwood. All in all a brilliant team effort.

We also had a mass tidy up of the Depot ready for Ian Prior's first day as our new Depot Manager.

Although the weather has been a hindrance, we've pressed on with various repairs including Brewhurst Lock which suffered a failed paddle. Thankfully, we were able to repair it in time for the Santa cruises. However, the other paddle has now thrown the bottom stop rail and this will require a full drain down of the lock as soon as conditions permit.

Kev Baker



The smart new footbridge at Baldwin's Knob Lock

Working Party Diary

Every Monday	'Mrs Bucket' Keeping up Appearances	Contact John Empringham
Monday to Friday (as required)	Canal Maintenance Unit	Check with Kev Baker
Every Tuesday (late October to March)	Hedgelaying	Contact Nick Baxter
Every Tuesday and Thursday	Boat Maintenance	Contact David Arnold
Every Wednesday	Mid-Week Working Party	Details from Margaret Darvill
Every Monday & Wednesday	Tickner's Depot	Contact Ian Prior/John Smith
Every Wednesday and Thursday	Eric Walker Restoration Group	Details from Dennis Gillen/John Reynolds
Every Thursday and Third Saturday	Northern Working Party	Contact Bill Nicholson
First & Third Friday of the month	PEST Boat Group	Contact Chris Jones/Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit level	Contact Dave Evans

Eric Walker Group

Work is almost finished on the refurbishment of Pallingham Bridge. Since recommencing work on 3rd December, after the second lockdown in November, progress has been somewhat slower than planned because of the wet weather making working conditions difficult.

The parapet brickwork is now complete, except for a small amount of outstanding mortar joint repointing. Work on building the towpath stone wall under the bridge, however, was severely disrupted by the amount of water flowing down from the northern section. By creating a bund and following constant pumping we were able to complete the stonework to the wall and a start was made on backfilling with stone and concrete.



Water, water everywhere at Pallingham Bridge

We had planned to complete filling the towpath wall and for our specialist contractor to install the four Cintec anchors to the stone bridge foundation walls on the 16th December, but when the team turned up that morning there was a good metre of flowing water going under the bridge and all work had to be aborted.

With little prospect of the weather improving, we decided to cease operations for the Christmas break. The compound was secured and the plant and equipment were transported back to secure storage.

As all of our work locations are now in Tier 4 there will be no chance of any work being undertaken until the situation improves.

Dennis Gillen

Hedgelaying

After successfully cutting well over 100 stakes and a similar quantity of binders, the Team moved on to do some actual hedgelaying at Loxwood. The intention was to continue from where last season's sessions stopped, with six people each working on their own 11 yard section in order to maintain social distancing. So far, so good, in theory, but then partial Tier 4 re-

strictions (affecting most of Surrey and parts of Berkshire) stopped half the group being able to travel to Loxwood! One day was completed under the new regime with just three members of the Team on site, then Tier 4 hit in a big way, and all work parties have had to be cancelled. Hopefully, we will manage to do some more hedging before March, not least, as we have a large number of stakes and binders, which can only be used this season, as they will dry out over summer?

Nick Baxter

Northern Working Party

Happy New Year and my thanks to the Northern Team for sticking with us during a difficult 2020. Good progress has been made.

At the Tickner's Crossing site, work continued but the lockdown in November severely restricted progress. However, by working four days per week with up to six volunteers on each day, we caught up on the time lost.

The first task was to build the timber hoarding fence using the plywood sheets painted up during the summer and to construct the new vehicle access onto Dunsfold Road. There is now access to a car park which keeps cars separate from the construction activities.

Then there was the battle with the ground conditions. The heavy rainfall and the Wealden clays do not make a good combination. Add to this an old Victorian (?) land drain running across the site (6 feet down) that decided its contents were better deposited in the compound rather than in the canal. Many tons of hardcore and much patience eventually provided a workable surface.

The next job was to install the services and the concrete bases for the cabins and containers. Volunteers completed the concrete pads in time for the haulage contractors to move everything for the short hop across the canal from the Tickner's Depot. The third Saturday working party then completed the internal surfacing, steps and ramps to the cabins, front gates security together with a general tidy up. It is great that the site has a fully functioning operational base and we can now start on the bridge proper.

However, we are of course now back into lockdown and volunteer work has been suspended until further notice. Dave Evans and Adam (our new apprentice) will focus on getting the piling mats ready for the contractors who are due to start in February. They will install Continuous



The Trust's Nissan Navara delivering equipment to Pallingham



Positioning the steps for the Tickner's Crossing site office

Flight Auger (CFA) bored piles for the footpath bridge and the retaining walls on both sides of the proposed road bridge. Let's hope that the Covid situation will have then eased to allow volunteer work to re-start in some form.

Despite all the stop/start, we still welcome new volunteers to our group.

Bill Nicholson

Boat Maintenance

It's a quiet season for the maintenance team. Both *Wiggonholt* and *Zachariah Keppel* were in use twice a week for the Santa trips which precluded any big jobs, and we entered the worst of the monsoon season weather-wise. What with that and social distancing, our team's usual morning work, followed by a pint in the Onslow is just a happy memory of the past.

Ian has riveted the front door back on *Josias Jessop* after it fell off. He has also swapped her battery and charged it up fully. It is necessary to rotate the battery for JJ as it is needed to power the automatic bilge pump. I put two coats of primer and a coat of white gloss on the deckhead of WH's engine room and it now looks much smarter and brighter. It was all bare plywood before.

To help Kev, I took *May Upton* and *Wasp's* life rings home, scrubbed, re-strung, sign wrote and added 20 metres of new, blue throwing chord. I'm wondering if we might continue to do the same to some of the life rings on the locks and at the Canal Centre; they are a bit green and shabby at the moment.

Ian is still working on getting the ten double Melamine table tops cut out for ZK which will complete her refurbishment after her big refit. They will be adjustable (as are WH's) and removable.



David Arnold

The Contact List

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