

For WACT Volunteers

July 2025

No. 377

Working Party News

Editorial

I am standing in as guest editor this month while Peter is away on holiday ... and what a month it has been! In consistently very hot and dry conditions, as can be seen from the following reports, the various working parties have continued to keep busy and be very productive.

Additionally, we were pleased to host two weekend visiting groups from WRG, who contributed to the work at Rooks Hill, and KESCRG, who resurfaced the last length of towpath at Bonfire Hanger near Gennets Bridge Lock.

Dave Miller

Boat Group PEST

PEST only went out once towards the end of the month.

Five of us were available and three took out *May Upton* south to Baldwin's Knob Lock. There we removed a section of tree floating in the water and cut back some overhanging growth.

Two of us took the opportunity to repaint the trip boat *Josias Jessop*, following a full rub done by the Midweek Working Party earlier in the month. The boat is now

looking a lot smarter for small trips, however the canvas sides do need a good clean and the black decking should also be repainted.

John Lee

**Thursday Group**

With the concrete base having set at Southland Lock, we returned to the site and lowered the stop plank shelter back into position. Together with the benefit of some added timber support bracing, the shelter is now much more stable and looks level again!

The job was finished off with a coat of preservative and, hopefully, won't require any further attention for another few years.

Photo by Ian Lower



The next big task was at Devil's Hole Lock, where the stone wall of the lock chamber

was badly eroding in places. Several visits were necessary during the month. First, with the aid of *May Upton*, we jet washed and cleaned the walls. On our next visit we applied a skim coat of a bonding agent to the damaged areas and then we returned to apply a specialist mortar mix in thin layers to build out the cavities. Further layers are going to be required to level out the eroded areas completely but good progress has been made.

Photo by Keith Lyall



Landing stage at BKL

The landing stage just downstream of Baldwin's Knob Lock was becoming unstable and in need of

WACT email addresses

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fairly urgent repair. This necessitated stripping off all the top planks (that we had fitted above the original planks not so long ago to narrow the gaps between the boards to prevent dogs' paws and volunteers' keys from falling between!). New Plastecowood poles were then driven into the canal bed and additional bearer beams affixed. This work is ongoing and more bearer beams are to be fitted. We will then replace the top planks.

Brian King

Tickner's Depot

We've been having a bit of a saga with our 13-ton excavator, 'Sally'. Many of you will know she's not been well, and the engine was removed for inspection last year. The diagnosis wasn't good, with fuel in the oil sump and the coolant tank and some nasty scored cylinder bores. One idea was to scrap it and get another, but finding a digger that we can afford that isn't just as bad was almost impossible. So, a couple of months ago I



Photo by Mark Feeny

Nicely skimmed cylinder head

proposed to the Board that we rebuild the engine and get it working again. The Board approved the plan and a big box containing a 'short' engine arrived a week or so ago. A short engine is just the block, pistons and crankshaft, we have to put all the other components on, having checked and cleaned them first. The biggest and most complex part is the

cylinder head. It has sixteen valves and valve gear to match, along with two overhead camshafts. The original plan was to have it stripped, cleaned, and skimmed before reassembling it and bolting it on. Unfortunately, after having it skimmed (as little machined off the surface as possible, to make it absolutely flat) we found that it was cracked. So, we now have a complex piece of scrap aluminium. But at least we now know how the fuel got into the coolant. I have sourced a replacement head that is within budget, so the work will continue. Also away with specialists are the four fuel injectors and the turbo-charger unit.



Photo by Mark Feeny

Spot the crack !

Mark Feeney

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 (Monday) Northern Working Party (Tuesday)	Contact David Stevenson 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 Margaret Darvill

Monday Group

We never let the weather get in the way! Despite high temperatures, that does not stop the team working! Over the last month we have 'done our bit' at Three Compasses, Tickner's, Gennets, Southland, Devil's Hole, Loxwood & Brewhurst (twice), Baldwin's Knob Lock and at the Drungewick Aqueduct site. At the latter, we spent a full day cutting the very long grass and clearing the slipway at the request of the Boat Group. Some reduction in the heat would be welcome in July!

Nick Wood

Eric Walker Group

EWG continued with its work on Phase I of the Rye Farm bridleway/towpath project. By the end of the month, all of the base layer had been installed and 70% of the final topping surface had been laid.

Some of the Group transferred to Rooks Hill to help with preparations for the new bridge.

Dennis Gillen



Towpath at Rye Farm

Northern Working Party

Having prepared the bridge over the Downs Link Path at Rooks Hill last month, we took delivery of 50 tonnes of Type 1 aggregate and spread it over the deck and approaches. After spreading, raking and rolling the surface, the bridge is now ready to withstand the heavy vehicles that will be visiting the Rooks Hill site during the construction of the new canal bridge. While on site, we also laid a concrete base for the large steel fuel tank in the compound area.



Photo by Keith Lyall

Downs Link bridge at Rooks Hill

the compound for use as a tool store.

We have paid several visits to Drungewick/Barnsill where we have installed stockproof fencing behind the newly laid hedge along the towpath. We were joined by a herd of very inquisitive but friendly cows who were particularly interested in our coffee and lunch. We have now become quite adept cattle herders!



Photo by Keith Lyall

Trench at Tickner's Crossing

Work has continued on the temporary road at Tickner's Crossing, where we dug trenches along both sides of the remaining stretch of planned road, in readiness for the installation of the drainage piping. We also added more brickwork to the inspection chamber through which the drainage pipes will run. Thames Water have now finished the necessary work on diverting the water main and all that remains is for us to refill the trench alongside the footbridge path and replace the post and rail fencing!

Progress has also been made on constructing the trailer parking pad at Tickner's Depot. Crushed concrete has been spread, levelled and "whacked" across the majority of the area and shuttering has been put in place for 5 bays,



Photo by Nigel Hart

Cattle herding at Drungewick



in order to be able to alternate the concrete pours, which we hope will be in the not too distant future. All being well, when the rains eventually come, we will have a hard standing for all the Trust trailers and less of a muddy swamp at the Depot!

The gate posts for the heavy gated entrance to Tickner's Crossing Yard had rotted at the base, making it very difficult to open the gates. Having removed the gates a few months ago, we replaced the posts but have had to wait for assistance in lifting the gates and putting them back in position. Zoe (with telehandler) was able to help out this month and the gates have now been replaced and the yard secured.

In conclusion, our thanks go to Martin Smithers of the Eric Walker Group who kindly gave up his time during the month to instruct and authorise four of our team to operate dumpers on sites.

Dave Miller

Midweek Working Party

June has been a hot month for working on the vegetation. No rain but lots of vegetation! A group of MWWP have spent time taking dead trees out by the canal and clearing the off side of the canal of vegetation by Rye Farm. This was to make life easier for EWG. We have spent a considerable amount of time clearing vegetation from Rooks Hill and Rushetts. One week was spent clearing Lee Farm Lock of all the dross in the lock and brushcutting the top. Others spent time clearing a trunk from the canal near Barnsill Bridge. Our last MWWP of the month had a barbecue for members and their partners at Harvey and Frances Silverman's house in their beautiful garden. A good time was had by all.

Margaret Darvill

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