

For WACT Volunteers November 2025 No. 381

Working Party News

Editorial

Daylight hours are becoming fewer and temperatures are beginning to drop but the enthusiasm doesn't wane. The Rooks Hill project is progressing at pace, as is the new section of towpath at Rye Farm. This is in addition to the plethora of other canal maintenance and back office tasks that are constantly required to be carried out. Congratulations to Keith Lyall and Lorraine Feeny who were presented respectively with The Jack King Cup and The John East Trophy at the recent AGM for their outstanding volunteering contributions to the Trust. Keith is a volunteer with both the Northern Working Party and the Thursday Group, while Lorraine is the Trust's long serving archivist.

Dave Miller

Boat Group PEST

For the reasons we are now very familiar with, PEST team were unable to work on the first Friday of the month. However, later in the month six of us went out. We divided into three groups of two. Two of us started the day with preparing and painting the handrail next to the steps where the boats are moored at Loxwood. It can be seen from the public towpath and now looks much better. Another two went to the burn site at Brewhurst Lock where we had deposited cuttings from a previous trip. This area is now much improved. The Heras fencing has been removed and we have raked the area following our bonfire. It only remains for the old pump to be moved. The third group took the work boat, *May Upton*, as far as Baldwin's Knob Lock and came back with a boat load of cuttings, fortunately the fire was still going.

After all that work and the bonfire we "had" to retire to the Onslow Arms!

John Lee

Dredger Group

The dredger, *Pauline*, is afloat again for the first time since late May! We managed to float her off the silted hump by letting down a quantity of lock water which eventually flushed her off. By clearing the old slipway next to Barnsill Bridge, she was successfully turned. Now facing Baldwin's Knob Lock she is in position to start



clearing the heavy buildup of silt resulting from last winter's flooding of the River Lox. This looks to be an area of some 200 yards extending south of BKL. We are intending to start clearing in earnest from the middle of November. Although her starboard leg needs major maintenance, we are hopeful that the problem is manageable, until she can be slipped to allow repairs to be carried out.



Brian Morgan has kindly donated a set of decals which we are in the process of attaching to *Pauline*. She is starting to look good.

Charlie Coxwell

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Midweek Working Party



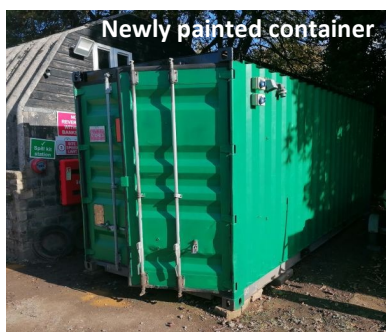
MWWP have been busy this month. The new Tracmaster flail mower, bought with a grant, has made our work so much easier. Work that would have taken a day, was done before coffee. We have been down at Haybarn clearing the towpath and banks. A small group cleared the line of the canal at Rooks Hill with the Tracmaster, while others cleared the stream from the new culvert head. Others helped to chop logs in the depot and do some clearance of Hunt Park. In preparation for Rye Farm Phase 2, a tree was taken down by a contractor and a group tidied up the logs etc. Birtley Courtyard overflow car park was also cleared of all the Buddleia which had already covered over half of it.

Margaret Darvill

Tickner's Depot

You will all be glad to know that the 'Sally' saga is at an end. Having passed her LOLER test with just an advisory on the lights (even though we don't work in the dark), our 13-ton excavator is now back at work. She was taken to Rooks Hill last Tuesday and, once back in her natural environment, immediately started scrabbling around in the mud.

Huge thanks to the various teams who have helped out at the depot in the last months or so. We've had our 'new' container painted in WACT green and it's connected up to the mains, so we have light and power in there now. The massive pile of tree rounds has been converted into an even bigger pile of split logs and stored ready for delivery.



The MDV shed has been reorganised and tidied up (this is on-going) and the archive store has been lightened with 14 boxes of old confidential waste removed and securely destroyed.

We've got quite a backlog of work to do, namely, service all of our many petrol driven water-pumps, generators, hedge-cutters, brushcutters and chainsaws, PAT test our electrical cables and appliances, build some racking for the water-pumps and a myriad of other tasks. So, if anyone is at a loss on Thursdays, pop down to the depot and lend a hand, you'll be very welcome.

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)	Contact David Stevenson
	Northern Working Party (Tuesday)	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 Stephen David

Eric Walker Group

The EWG team have continued to help progress the work at the Rooks Hill Project. Blockwork and brickwork has continued on the wing walls and facing the bridge abutments. With additional hardcore and a Geogrid membrane to the canal bed access track, the formation provided a surface for the trucks delivering the concrete Legato blocks. This enabled the blocks to be unloaded and placed straight into position to form the west bank of the canal. However, later in the month heavy rain meant that only the tracked excavator could use the track and we used that to transport and position the final ten blocks, completing the bank to the southern fence line of this phase.

In order to save money and be more efficient, the design of the bridge deck formwork was drawn up by Nigel Yarwood to use the formwork used on the Gennets Bridge project. This was stored at the Depot and has now been moved to the site and next month will be placed and supported on the special load bearing scaffolding that has been erected between the bridge abutments.



To see all the latest progress drone photographs, taken by our team member Robin Gardner, head to the Trust's Facebook site.

Dennis Gillen

Monday Group



In October we 'did our stuff' at Three Compasses, Tickner's Crossing triangle and Gennets Lock. Using the new Tracmaster, we worked at Drungewick slipway, on both sides of the canal and cut the towpath from the Drungewick Lane Canal Bridge to Drungewick Lock. We need to return to go round the lock and winding hole on another day.

We have also visited Malham again with the long handled chainsaw and cut all the vegetation growing out of the lock walls. Unfortunately torrential rain (good for the canal!) precluded the outing on 20th October, but we ended the month by completing the tidying up of the towpath from Birch

Copse to Baldwin's Knob Lock ... a task left over from September.

Nick Wood

Hedgelaying

Hedgelaying officially restarted on the 28th October, supposedly after sap had stopped flowing and hedgerow trees had entered winter dormancy. Unfortunately, climate change now suggests otherwise and most species (except blackthorn) were still holding their leaves. The first work party set off to finish laying the remaining 80m section of hedge on the towpath at Drungewick only to discover that a group of Hedgerow Pixies (and maybe also one Hedgerow Piskie) had prepped the hedge in readiness for us - wish that was always the case!

Another good surprise was that most of the newly planted hedge replacement trees were thriving and showing above the tops of the protection tubes - even after such a long and very dry summer. The trees were all supplied as plugs with good root systems, rather than bare rooted, and this seems to have made a significant difference to their survival.

A great first day's work in sunshine, abetted by the American grandson of one our team (learning all about old English hedgelaying techniques), meant that we made good progress. Lots of interest from walkers, including a Devonshire couple who want to lay their own Devonshire hedge - very different from ours as it involves mud and stone banks with hedgerow trees on top - we did talk about it in some detail! After completing the work at Drungewick (in a week or two), we will be coppicing hazel to provide stakes and binders for our next major hedge project at Rooks Hill.

As always, we are very happy to meet new people who wish to become involved in the arcane technique of hedgelaying. No experience necessary - just an appropriate mind-set!

Nick Baxter

Northern Working Party

One of our first jobs of the month was to clean and repaint the exterior of the old workshop container at Tickner's Depot. With a new coat of bitumen paint on the roof and two coats of WACT Green on the sides, it is now looking rather resplendent



Photo by Malcolm Pheasey

Gosden Aqueduct excavations

We also despatched a team to Gosden Aqueduct to carry out some exploratory excavations, in order for the condition of the structure to be assessed. Additionally, an attempt was made to float a CCTV camera under the arches for the state of the brickwork to be recorded and studied. With the river level being high and very little headroom under the arches, success was limited, but we hope to return and try again.

For the rest of the month, our focus turned to the bridge construction at Rooks Hill. With a large number of blocks and bricks waiting to be laid for the bridge walls, our friends from the Newbury Working Party Group were good enough to attend the site for three consecutive Tuesdays



Bricklaying training at Rooks Hill

and provide brick laying tuition to a number of our team. We now have a routine of laying bricks and blocks, mixing concrete and then pouring the concrete into the reinforced void between the bricks and the blockwork. We have also assisted with the positioning of Legato blocks along the new section of canal and the construction of gabion baskets for filling and placing on top of the blocks.



Collecting ash from Amberley Museum

Our earlier experience of using the CCTV camera at Gosden Aqueduct was put to good use when we were tasked with examining the condition of the interior of the brick culvert at the Rooks Hill site. Attaching the camera to a remote controlled car and sending it along the approximately 25 metre culvert was much more successful and showed it to be clear and free flowing.

During the month we took a trip down to Amberley Museum to collect some ash to be used for plugging leaks in stop planks. The ash came from the fireboxes used by their steam trains.

Dave Miller

Thursday Group

The beginning of October saw us back at Drungewick, where we assisted the contractor with pump work and fitted mesh over the river pump inlet. Whilst there, we installed stop planks at the upstream end of the lock.

The following week we returned to the Birch Copse compound to fit a more substantial cover over the chamber that houses the newly installed flow meter for the river pump.



Photo by Chris Everett

New meter cover at Birch Copse

Some time was spent at Lordings, clearing out the chamber of the water wheel and greasing the mechanism. Conditions were such that we were able to successfully run the wheel and measure the volume of water it could lift from the river approximately 2,000 gallons per hour!

We then heavily pruned back the tree growing on the river weir downstream from the water wheel and cut back the bankside vegetation to reveal and inspect the end of the inlet pipe feeding river water into the canal.



Photo by Ian Lower

Dam at Bonfire Hanger

The temporary stop planks previously fitted to the three dams in the Bonfire Hanger section, have proved to be successful and it has been decided to make them more permanent. Metal channels were constructed and welded at Tickner's Depot and we have fitted them to one of the dams, together with new stop planks. We will return and replace the other two dams in due course.

We have also attended Hunt Nature Park at Shalford to carry out repairs to the viewing platform, where a section of the decking had become loose. We unscrewed some of planks, removed the rotten supporting lengths of timbers to which they were attached and replaced them with Plastecowood. The planks were refitted and everything is now secure.

Brian King

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