

# Working Party News

No. 337

For WACT Volunteers

February 2022

## Editorial

Well the year started with some heavy rain, but thereafter it's been dry although a bit cold at times. So working conditions have been pretty good and the Trust's work parties have been keeping warm with their activities to restore and maintain the canal.

It seems strange to look back at this time last year, when lockdown rules were in force and almost all activity was suspended. While Covid is still about, at least we can get on with the tasks in hand.

*Peter Winter*

### Editor's Note

My wife and I are planning to take a break in search of some winter sun. We'll be away from late February to mid-March, so regrettably there will be no Working Party News in March. You can look forward to a bumper edition in April.

## Boat Group PEST

January saw the PEST team continuing to maintain the navigation above Devil's Hole Lock.

The first of our working day, on 7th January, was something of a red letter day as the workboat *Wasp* had her first outing with PEST after the completion of renovation and improvement work. The work included major cleaning and clearance of her deck and deckhouse, refurbish-

ment and reinstallation of her outboard motor, battery and fuel system and the laying of ramp decking. With her larger working area and loading ramp she provides a welcome increase in maintenance capability for the Trust. The PEST team's thanks go to John Reynolds and Kevin Baker who were instrumental in bringing this about.

Using both *May Upton* and *Wasp* the team undertook bank clearance work towards Southland Lock and the removal and disposal of a substantial fallen tree. On our second work day progress was constrained by ice on the canal so, using only *May Upton*, we carried out bank clearance work just north of Loxwood Lock. Two members of the team detached to help Dave Evans and his crew with their huge tree clearance project south of Baldwin's Knob Lock.

*Chris Jones*

## Mrs Bucket Group

### Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

The first two outings in the New Year have concentrated on the restored section between Loxwood and Drungewick. The towpath bank has been brush cut, the hedge has been trimmed and the cuttings cleared all the way between these two locations with the result that the section is now complete for the rest of the winter - until the growing season starts again in the spring.

The balance beams and headposts at Baldwin's Knob, Brewhurst and Devil's Hole locks are in urgent need of a repaint. However, they have required extensive preparation, rub down and scraping, which was undertaken by a small team on 24th. As the lads and lassies are out tomorrow (31st) it is hoped to undertake the painting if the weather is suitable. We also expect to be planting trees at Lee Place (Harsfold). Report in the next WPN!

*Nick Wood*

## Midweek Working Party

MWWP have had another busy month with continuing large numbers of volunteers. We have had lovely weather this January and we continued to work on areas that we started clearing at the end of last year.

Roger Dimmick Lane is now ready for EWG to put down some hardcore so cars do not need to be pushed out. Hunt Park has had further maintenance as trees keep on falling down with the winds. Gun's Mouth Island has had more attention but we are awaiting an easterly wind so the brash can be burnt. At present there is too much to be left for ecology.

We had a lovely week in Sidney Wood clearing a dangerous tree, removing a fallen tree from over a culvert and coppicing the hazel. At the end of the month we start-



*Wasp on her first outing, with May Upton*

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ed to clear from Lee Place (Harsfold) to Lordings, cutting the hedge and clearing brambles.

*Margaret Darvill*

## Boat Maintenance

It has been a down period for maintenance, not helped by the fact that I have been away in isolation for a couple of weeks and had an operation on the 27th of January. I shall be locked down until mid-February as a consequence.



Peter Hyem has now obtained the solar charging equipment for *Josias Jessop* plus the recovered back cushions for her cabin. Sadly, he being neither crew nor skipper, no one told him of the change in lock numbers, so he was unable to access the vessel. I have let him know them now.

JJ has a rather more worrying problem in that water is seeping in under the engine silencer and from around the weed hatch. It is easily pumped out, but

will necessitate her slipping in July and, if due to rust in the flat plates under the stern, will require some welding of new plates there. Until she is slipped for a few days in July, we won't know whether outside assistance is needed or not. Meanwhile her hull will be buffed off, given two

coats of black International paint, new longitudinal fenders fitted (actually, the old ones from *Wiggonholt* rebuilt in my workshop), the engine room hatches rewelded where the runnels have wasted away, and repainted inside and out.

On *Wiggonholt*, Ian has been busy cutting a new floor for the engine room, as the old one is rotting away. Sadly, like all of us, our boats are getting old.

I had an interesting query from the Mon. and Brec. Canal Trust (that's the Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust to give it its full title) about WH's propeller. I looked up the motor information which specified a propeller of 16" x 14" and Ian confirmed this by taking a picture of the spare one in our maintenance room.



*David Arnold*

## Eric Walker Group

Thankfully during the month the weather has stayed largely dry and the group has been able to get on with laying the Fittleworth Stone aggregate to the towpath at Gennets Farm. This now extends all the way to the bridge by the lock.

The final residue of the old causeway next to the bridge was removed and water was allowed to flow down towards the two new bunds that have been installed.

With water rising in this section we discovered two areas that were leaking into the adjacent field on the west side of the towpath embankment. Fortunately they were not extensive in length and Jeff using his skills on our Yanmar digger was able to seal the bank of the canal

## Working Party Diary

Every Monday	'Mrs Bucket' Keeping up Appearances	Contact Tom Close
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	Midweek Working Party	Details from Margaret Darvill
Every Monday & Wednesday	Tickner's Depot	Contact Ian Prior
Every Wednesday and Thursday	Eric Walker Group	Details from Dennis Gillen/John Reynolds
Every Monday, Tuesday, 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



with clay dredged from the bed. The water then began to rise again, so hopefully that problem has been resolved.

There now only remains to remove the tree stumps adjacent to the lock, left after we felled the four ash trees with Dieback. Within the next week or so we will demobilise the site and move on to our next project.

*Dennis Gillen*



*The canal rewatered by removal of the causeway*



*The finished towpath*



*Fittleworth Stone laid right up to the bridge*



*Horse riders give their approval*

## Hedgelaying

By the time you read this, the hedge opposite the Canal Centre should have been finished, as we ended January with just one week's work left. This includes the crossover between the very end section laid by left-handed

hedgelayers and the main section which has been laid right-handed. Rightly, this has provoked a certain



amount of interest from towpath users (and also in the minds of the Hedgelaying Team) as to how we will join these two sections together without a gap - a very good question, and the answer (I hope) will have been found by the time this goes to press!

Last issue, I mentioned the long tarpaulin drag to take away arisings right across the field to the bonfire site near the Lock. This is an activity that none of us will miss when we tackle the next section, which is immediately adjacent to the bonfire site. Hedgelaying is 90% preparation and only about 10% actual laying; something for any potential new practitioners to be aware of.



One of the benefits of working alongside the canal is being able to enjoy the wildlife. From mid-January, we have been serenaded (if that is the right term) by two, and sometimes, three Great Spotted Woodpeckers drumming deafeningly loudly to define their territories (a good reason to keep some dead or dying trees, where safe to do so - the rotted centres help amplify the sound), while at the same time hearing the yaffle of a Green Woodpecker. We also discovered fruiting bodies of oyster mushrooms on both elder and ash. Spring, is apparently, on the way!

*Nick Baxter*



## The Contact List

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