

Working Party News

No. 319

For WACT Volunteers

July 2020

Editorial

As the lockdown eases, several of our teams have been resuming work under the Health & Safety provisions that were outlined in the last issue, and more will be back in action next month.

In particular there has been intense activity at Harsfold Bridge to make up for lost time in meeting our obligations to the farmer for access to the north of the canal.

The return of Zachariah Keppel to Loxwood was a spectacular sight that gave the Trust some excellent publicity courtesy of BBC South.

Peter Winter

Boat Maintenance

The maintenance team, having been completely laid off for three months by the Covid-19 lockdown, commenced work again on 15th June. On the following day Zachariah Keppel arrived on a truck from the 4 All Marine shipyard in Chertsey, where she had been completely refitted and had her hull electronically surveyed. The picture shows her being craned into the canal which occurred during a thunderstorm making everyone (especially the crane crew) worried about a lightning strike. TV cameras were present and we made the BBC South News that evening.

On Tuesday the 30th June, a strong team consisting of Ian James, Chris Jones, Lyn Nash, Derek Wright and me re-loaded the 400 bricks of ZK's ballast from the pallets brought to her side at the Canal Centre by Dave Evans in the giant Wey & Arun JCB fork lift truck. Sadly, it rained during most of this three-hour operation. There is nothing more depressing than loading dirty, wet bricks but it's done now, thanks to our brave volunteers. We now have to secure, rub-down, and stain the side plywood in her, then fit the decks back in place ready for the new furniture.

Wiggonholt's floor had collapsed in the vicinity of the head compartment, and Ian put a new one in making her fit for service; although the area still needs a top coat of deck paint. WH was cleaned up and, if we ever get clear of this virus, is now ready for service and can commence normal, passenger carrying operations again this year.

We seem to be suffering from an epidemic of floor rot,



Ian & Chris lay the ballast



Lyn Nash keeps them supplied

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as the saloon deck of Josias Jessop is also rotting and collapsing. A four-foot square sheet of plywood has been ordered by Kevin for this job.

David Arnold

Eric Walker Group

Since recommencing on 25th May at Harsfold Bridge, the group has worked Monday to Friday with teams of 5 to 8 volunteers in strict compliance with a Covid-19 Risk Assessment. Through commitment and hard work, progress has been as planned. The initial task was to complete the pour of 18m³ of concrete to create the bridge deck and then attention was mostly focussed on building the brickwork for the piers and wing walls. Contractors installed the balustrading and the scaffolding was dismantled. As a result, the structure is now at a stage where the landowner can cross with his farm vehicles to his fields on the north side of the canal.

However, the project still requires final landscaping work, including the excavation and profiling of the canal, under and adjacent to the bridge, which will take a further two weeks. Then, following the reinstatement of the bridleway approaching the bridge on the south side, the final operation will be to remove the site compound and welfare cabin.

Meanwhile at Drungewick Lock, the project to undertake repairs will get underway in the second week of Ju-



ly. The first operation is the pumping and clearing of lock ready for scaffold erection on 10th July. The group will then remove the existing top kerb blocks and one course of Horsham stone to the west wall, in readiness to cast a new reinforced concrete top kerb. Once that has been



completed a specialist contractor will take over and carry out wall reinforcement procedures and then the installation of the Platipus anchors system.

Dennis Gillen

Working Party Diary

Every Monday	'Mrs Bucket' Keeping up Appearances	Contact John Empringham
Monday to Friday (as required)	Loxwood Link Maintenance	Check with Kev Baker
Every Tuesday (normally from mid-October to end of March)	Hedgelaying	Contact Nick Baxter
Every Wednesday	Mid-Week Working Party	Details from Margaret Darvill
Every Wednesday	Maintenance Depot	Contact John Smith/Ken Bacon
Every Wednesday and Thursday	Eric Walker Restoration Group	Details from Dennis Gillen/John Reynolds
First Friday of the month	PEST boat group	Contact Chris Jones/Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit level	Contact Dave Evans

Mrs Bucket Group Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

In the early part of June we continued with our weekly Zoom discussions but were pleased to receive the go-ahead to slowly return to 'keeping up appearances' on the canal. As a result we restarted on 15th June in two groups of maximum 6 keeping strictly to the government guidelines and those agreed and identified in the Trust risk assessment. Five of our 'regular' sites were visited and we resumed brush cutting, strimming and clearing the vegetation growth. Great care is needed generally, but particularly at Drungewick aqueduct, to pause the work to allow other towpath users to safely pass and distance before work is resumed.

At Gennets Bridge Lock we tidied up the whole site and we cut the thistles down to ground level manually in the compound by the lock to ensure they cannot seed.

On the 22nd we returned to Tickner's Heath and Three Compasses Bridge to trim and mow the excessive growth. A separate group completed tidying up both sides of the canal at the Drungewick aqueduct site. At Kev's request this group attended to Drungewick lock in preparation for repairs to start shortly. As the site had not



received any attention for a long time, double strimming and raking were required. It now looks a lot better.

Finally we spent the 29th working mainly at Lordings flood lock. Both sides of the canal were tidied up (see before and after photos), while leaving the banks uncut to allow the wild flowers to flourish. We also repaired the bench seat and moved it back to its proper location and cleaned the notice boards.

It is good to be back! The members of our group were enthusiastic after such a long time away and the number of volunteers was above the previous norm.

Nick Wood

Northern and Summit Working Party

The Northern Working Party is now back in action and we have held two working parties at the Thriscutt slipway site with teams of 6 volunteers booking in under the Trust's Covid-19 rules. Volunteers register their availability with the organiser (me!) who then selects the lucky volunteers and issues joining instructions, venue etc.

Our first tasks have been to finish where we left off on 21st March – two days before lockdown. The slipway is now substantially cleared of materials and debris including the welfare cabin (cups and all!) so that Lyn Nash can start on getting it looking good for next year's trailboat rally. The cabins and materials are all now stored pending their move to site.

The second outing was the first of our now regular Thursday working parties and we certainly picked a hot enough day (32°C) to dig out and lay the last section of concrete access road to the slipway. We also progressed the sanding down of the new and very large steel barrier gates built by Andy Evans prior to the lockdown. These will be installed at our new compound at Tickner's Crossing once we get common land consent and the planning conditions have been discharged. There is still quite a lot of re-profiling work at the slipway to do with an excavator to enable the site to be handed over to the rally team.

Immediate plans are for some preparatory work and ground investigation works at the northern end of the canal in July and August pending being given the go ahead (hopefully) at Tickner's Crossing.

If you would like to join our work party you would be welcome. See contact details.

Bill Nicholson

Mid-Week Working Party

We have had large numbers out, in excess of 25 every week, since we resumed and everyone has enjoyed their time back. The group has been split up into 5 or 6 groups in order to be Covid secure. One of the weeks, the group worked in temperatures in excess of 32°C which was very debilitating.

There has been one group in the Northern part of the canal. They have been tidying up Hunt Park and pulling Himalayan Balsam. They pulled up more balsam in the Birtley section and, with the help of Dave Evans, cleared a tree which had fallen over in the winds.

Rooks Hill and Rushetts have had a good clear up of all the brash that had assembled over the winter. The southern group, in groups of 6, spent one week burning the remains of a hedge that had been grubbed up so a new fence could be put in, in the Drungewick area.

The rest of the group have been down south in the Haybarn area in different groups. Lee Farm Lock as been cleared of all the detritus that had accumulated over the past two years. The towpath from Lee Farm Lock to Harsfold has been cleared and the banks of the canal are being tidied up. Everyone has worked very hard this month.

Margaret Darvill

At Baldwin's Knob we have completed the bank work and raised the towpath in two places to prevent over flowing of the canal towpath.

And finally, the team has replaced the lower landing stage completely as the old one was beyond repair. The timbers were completely rotten, but not bad for something that has been there for best part of 20 years, maybe more!

Kev Baker

Maintenance

Well it's been a very busy month for my team despite reduced numbers! We have been at Drungewick alongside Dave Evans and between the two teams we have cleared up the field and installed 650m of stock fencing and concreted the end wall at Drungewick Lock to cure the water leaking round the back of the towpath side upper wall. We have also installed a new set of water level probes in a new tube, cleared the end of the winding hole below the lock and levelled the ground

Boat Group PEST

PEST resumes work in July and on the first and third Friday every month thereafter.

No news for June, but we have just produced a new risk assessment which includes Covid-19 mitigation measures and worked out how we can achieve appropriate social distancing when working from Josias Jessop and May Upton.

Chris Jones



New stock fencing by Drungewick



Completed repairs at Baldwin's Knob



A new lower landing stage

The Contact List

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