

Working Party News

No. 323

For WACT Volunteers

November 2020

Editorial

So just as all our work parties were back in action, we are having to comply with a new set of Covid lockdown restrictions. A good momentum had developed over the summer with excellent progress in many areas as recently outlined at the Trust's October Meeting. So it is particularly frustrating to put on the brakes when there are so many projects in various stages of execution or advanced planning.

Inevitably, most, if not all, of our volunteering activities will be suspended from November 5th until such time as it is deemed permissible for us to resume.

Let's hope that this intermission will be shorter than that in the spring.

Peter Winter

Boat Group PEST

October has been a busy month for PEST. Our first day's work had to be cancelled due to very high winds and rain which would have made manoeuvring and working from the boats hazardous.

On our first actual outing in October, we took *Josias Jessop* down to Baldwin's Knob following reports of large branches in the water between there and Brewhurst. We cleared logs and other debris from the water as we went. Due to the difficulties with the lock, boats were not travelling further south. On the same occasion we also took *May Upton* up to the Devil's Hole winding hole and finished removing the large tree there.

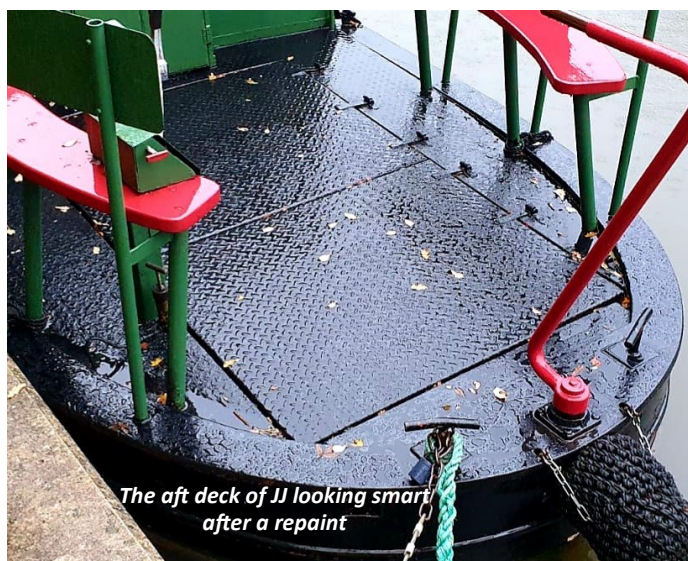
Subsequently we largely cleared the winding holes going North from Loxwood to Southland and that below Baldwin's Knob. We removed much of the weed from the main channel as well as a number of floating wooden pieces and logs, some of which had, apparently, been thrown in by members of the public.

Over the past few months the working party has been well attended by our small group of currently nine volunteers. Generally six of us have been able to attend on any working day. This is an ideal number, given our Covid-19 mitigation regime, as we can operate two boats with three crew in each which meets both our minimum manning requirement and our 'social distancing' obligation.

Chris Jones

Boat Maintenance

Following two weeks in Turkey, I then had to spend two weeks in self-isolation. However, Ian James, Peter Hyem and Alex Smith have been working away in my absence. The stern and aft deck of *Josias Jessop* have been cleaned off and given two



coats of our ample stock of black bitumastic paint. We still have to rub down, prime and paint the sides above the waterline and slip her to paint her bottom when we can get her down to the slipway.

Ian has drilled holes for the escape ladder pegs on either side of the bow of *Zachariah Keppel* which can now be abandoned from either side of the bow as well as the starboard side entrance port.

It is reported that the deep water channel in the bow of ZK causes the stand-on box to tip and threatens to precipitate the forward crew member into the canal. We will decide how to tackle this problem when my self-isolation ends.

Internal painting seems to beckon as the weather is not very propitious for external painting. The deckhead of the engine room of *Wiggonholt* would be better painted white as at present it is untreated plywood and very dark. The other job to fix is the forward wooden deck of *May Upton* which is rotten. Not really part of our remit as she is a working boat, but we do have some spare time and it needs doing for the sake of the PEST team.

Don't forget to let Ian or me know if you find any defects for us to fix. Alternatively, put them in the logbook if you're skippering.

David Arnold

Mrs Bucket Group

Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

The first two outings in October concentrated on Gennets and Haybarn, as anticipated for the latter in the last WPN. Once again we had an exceptional number of volunteers so the group worked in two or three parties and a lot was achieved. At Haybarn the towpath bank between the 90 degree turn in the canal and the swing bridge has been completely cleared down to the bed of the canal; the first time for many years in my recollection. Much work has also taken place on the field side at the request of the landowner.

The 'Gennets team', at Dave Evans's request, have cut the towpath bank all the way from the lock to the overflow weir, and undertaken more clearance work and this time pulling in the 'compound'. The team also burnt all the cuttings from the bank clearance plus lots of hidden piles from past work and a very large stack of branches from the tree felling. The whole site, including the woods, is now very tidy. The landowner came by and was very pleased with the results.

It was back to our regular sites for our third and fourth meetings, working at Loxwood, clearing the towpath bank, canal side, from Brewhurst bridge to the Canal Centre and burning the big pile of cuttings just below Brewhurst lock. Tidying up at the Drungewick aqueduct site included cutting the towpath from the lane to the lock, and grass cutting at Newbridge, Tickner's and Compasses bridge.

Nick Wood

Mid-Week Working Party

MWWP has continued to work in groups. We have had one group in Hunt Park who have been tidying up the area for winter. They have trimmed around the proposed Information Point and the path from the Aqueduct to Eastwood Road as well as a general clearance. A huge tree on the south side of the river has started to be cleared.

In the south, groups of six have been spread from Toat Bridge down to Pallingham Bridge. We have completed clearing the canal and banks from Toat Bridge to Cooks Bridge for this year. Hopefully next year it will only be a tidy up. We have also cleared a great deal from Cooks Bridge to Pallingham Bridge in order that the canal can be put in water. However, we have come to the end of what we can do there for this year as we have been defeated by the weather and the base of the canal is now filling up with water.

Margaret Darvill

Canal Maintenance Unit

The CMU has been busy at Cooks Bridge and Pallingham where we have removed the drain pipes from the canal bank and cleared a lot of tree roots from the canal bed. We have also converted a 2ft stone drain pipe in the canal bank into a small weir which will allow us to fill the canal to approximately 3/4 depth and then the water levels can be set throughout the Old Toat to Pallingham stretch of canal. The sluice and weir at Cooks Bridge has



Cooks Weir and Sluice

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)	Hedge Laying	Contact Nick Baxter
Every Tuesday and Thursday	Boat Maintenance	Contact David Arnold
Every Wednesday	Mid-Week Working Party	Details from Margaret Darvill
Every Wednesday	Tickners Heath Maintenance Depot	Contact John Smith/Ken Bacon
Every Wednesday and Thursday	Eric Walker Restoration Group	Details from Dennis Gillen/John Reynolds
Every Thursday and 3rd Saturday	Northern Working Party	Contact Bill Nicholson
First Friday of the month	PEST boat group	Contact Chris Jones/Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit level	Contact Dave Evans

been repaired with new boards and regalanisation of the metal channel. The discharge ditch has also been cleared of fallen trees and overgrowth.

Kev Baker

Eric Walker Group

Work is at an advanced stage on the refurbishment of Pallingham Bridge. The parapet brickwork on the most dilapidated north east section is now almost rebuilt, thanks to the fastidious efforts of JJ Price and Andy Slade. The remaining brick parapets have been reinforced with stainless steel ties where they were showing signs of cracking and repointing is ongoing.

As previously reported the team discovered the remains of a foundation of the towpath which, unusually, passed under the bridge arch against the west abutment. We have decided to rebuild this in its original location with stonework on the existing



Installing the stop plank base timber



Stainless steel ties in the brickwork

foundation and to install galvanised steel stop plank channels with a hardwood base timber.

EWG activities are now approaching completion and the installation of Cintec anchors to the abutments will be undertaken by a contractor.

Dennis Gillen



Martyn Baker—Master Mason!

Martin Smithers on the Mend

Martin Smithers, a long serving volunteer member of the Trust, formerly with the Boat Group and latterly with the EWG, was injured at the beginning of September, while working on the Harsfold Bridge project. In an unfortunate accident Martin sustained damage to two vertebrae in his upper back and spent seven days in hospital.

With the support of his wife Anita he has made a substantial recovery but he will have to wear a brace until mid-November. We are glad that he has been keeping cheerful and positive during his convalescence and has been meeting up with some of his work party colleagues!

Martin and the EWG team are in regular contact and he recently visited the group on one of its current projects. We miss Martin's experience and his contributions to EWG and look forward to having him back amongst us. He is very keen to get back to work and, subject to a favourable medical review in mid-

November, hopes to rejoin the group soon, initially on "light duties only". We send Anita and Martin our best wishes for a speedy recovery. Learning points from the circumstances of Martin's accident have been shared with the group and with other WACT working parties as part of our on-going health & safety briefings.



Martin making a visit to Pallingham

(Note that social distancing was observed for this picture although camera foreshortening suggests otherwise)

Northern Working Party

A busy month which started off with a small team removing tree stumps at the Tickner's Crossing site under the careful eye of our ecologists (the stumps had to be removed before the end of the month as that is when Great Crested Newts move into their winter homes). The road verge was also scraped; it was quite instructive to see how much life there is in a road verge – frogs, mice, voles, slow worms etc but in this case no newts.

During two very wet days, the majority of the scaffold tree protection fencing was erected with only about 15 metres left to do at the northern end. The next task on that is fixing the 'Heras' fencing to it. That part of the site will then be 'mothballed', while work is concentrated on removing many more tons of earth in preparation for the site compound. Work here has been stop/start due to heavy rain turning the site into a quagmire. These conditions make the need for improved on site worker facilities all the more urgent.

On the third Saturday the team diverted to Drungewick

Lock to collect the timbers used to support the lock walls for conversion into a temporary footbridge crossing at Birtley. This is pending the conclusion of works to design and install a lift bridge there. The timbers were taken to the slipway site which became our workshop for the next three and a half days.

Much of the time was spent cutting and drilling metal joining pieces, together with making the bolts (all different lengths) to assemble the whole. This part of the operation was substantially completed by the Monday night (and it was dark!). Assembly was to prove a much greater challenge – imagine a giant IKEA kit where the bolts don't always fit the holes. By lunch time on Tuesday enthusiasm was flagging and it took Dave Evans' energy and expertise to re-motivate the team. By 18.10 the

job was done (not quite dark) and the kit assembled. It will now be dismantled after careful marking of the hundreds of components which will then be painted or galvanised. In the spring the structure will be taken to the site and erected. The Birtley circular path can then be opened to the public.

Bill Nicholson



The temporary Birtley Bridge deck

The Contact List

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