

Working Party News

No. 327

For WACT Volunteers

March & April 2021

Editorial

At last the long wait is over and most work parties have been able to resume their activities. During much of the period of lockdown the weather had been wet and this made conditions difficult for those still able to work. But it has been dry since the beginning of March so conditions were good for the resumption.

With boat trips due to restart in May, there's lots to be done in the 'public' areas as well as on the many major projects that are now able to proceed.

This issue also features a fiendish cryptic crossword. Answers next month.

Peter Winter

Hedgelaying

Finally, after months of Covid restrictions, the Hedgelaying Team recommenced under the Rule of Six, on 30th March with a grand total of 6 people working! Sadly, the beginning of the end of Lockdown has coincided with the end of hedgelaying this year, as birds begin to nest. Also the sap flows in hedgerow plants, making trees more likely to be stressed if subjected to laying. However, we managed to cut 30 new hazel stakes, enough for returning hedgelayers to lay one section of hedge each over two weeks before the season finishes, and we also cleared a fallen tree which was blocking the main public footpath in Drungewick Woods, before we moved to Brewhurst later in the day to start actual laying.

Signs along the towpath point out that there is no such thing as a dog-poo fairy but it seems that is just not true. My observation whilst hedgelaying has clearly demonstrates that the Canal Centre team provides just such an ethereal entity, cleaning up the towpath, removing green and black bags, and regularly renewing the bin near the car park; definitely well beyond the call of duty for a WACT volunteer! Seriously, if this job was not carried out, the Canal that we enjoy could be very nasty indeed!

I just wish that all those who use the Canal for dog walking would pick up and put the mess in the bin, or take it home. It really is unacceptable to expect volunteers to deal with this, and please do not flick it into the hedge or onto the canal bank - that is where either the Hedgelaying Team or the Boat Team work. Just think about handling ropes or cut hedge material covered with dog excrement (or rather do not!). Sorry, I appreciate that I am speaking to the converted in this newsletter - rant over!

Although the whole Team could not work during Lockdown, some hedgelaying has taken place each week on an individual basis, as there is a need to demonstrate to the adjoining landowners that we are serious in our endeavours. So a little over half the hedge between Brewhurst Lock and the Canal Centre has now been laid; hopefully, we will have an agreement to complete the final section next winter. The good news is that walkers using the towpath have been very complimentary and recognise that this is all down to WACT's management of the Canal.

Finishing on a high note - frogs have been spawning in the rushes in the canal (and serenading us whilst hedgelaying), bluebells have just started to flower, Brimstone, female Orange Tip, Peacock and Holly Blue butterflies were seen on the last work party in March, along with a grass snake, plus primroses and Lady's smock. Spring is here and the Canal is looking splendid!

Nick Baxter

Boat Group PEST

Under the Covid lockdown rules no activity took place in March. With the easing of restrictions the PEST Group will restart in April with working parties on 9th and 22nd April. Activity will focus initially on the navigation between the winding hole below Devil's Hole Lock and the winding hole beyond Baldwin's Knob Lock in preparation for the restart of boat trips in May.

Chris Jones

Mrs Bucket Group

Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

Throughout February and March the Group kept in touch with our regular Zoom meetings which meant that everyone was geared up to resume work as soon as the Covid restrictions allowed.

So on Monday 29th March we were able to restart operations. We were pleased to welcome a new volunteer and we all had great enthusiasm after being unable to work for so long, with the result that we had 15 of us out working; the highest number of hours ever! We spent the day tidying up along the navigable section between Drungewick Lane bridge and Devil's Hole Lock. This included some light hedge trimming on the towpath side



Hedgelayers never know what they may find in the undergrowth!

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having checked the hedge to ensure there were no nesting birds. Brambles were cleared from the bank along this stretch too. Other activities included the usual clear up at Loxwood with litter picking, mowing and trimming back bushes undertaken. The faded info boards at both Brewhurst and Devil's Hole Lock were also replaced.

there was no smoke from the exhaust once the engine had warmed up a bit. All three boats are now ready for use.

On Tuesday May 11th we have an MCA Surveyor down (at great expense) to witness ZK's inclining, free-board, and running survey. The MCA have kindly allowed us to do this survey ourselves for the first time, instead of our employing a professional surveyor. We shall need plenty of strong men on Monday May 10th and Tuesday May 11th to handle the 70, 25kg cement sacks we shall need as the inclining and loading weight. All those young and lusty people from the working parties are invited to take a break from bridge and lock building and muster at the Canal Centre on the morning of Monday May 10th.

On a lighter note, it being the first of the new month, I see that the busy Boat Group team have no place in the Working Party News. They work hard, carry thousands of interested people in normal times and contribute heavily to the W&A funds. I thought I might add a little bit about them here, although it's not strictly maintenance. Being ex-MN and RN, I take as my text the subject of uniforms. We (the Boat Group crews) are a professional team, highly trained and doing a professional job for money (alas, not for us - we're all volunteers, but no matter). And yet, some of us, skippers, and crews, turn up for duty dressed as if they had been called in as an emergency from digging the allotment. Red W&A caps, red shirts, fleeces, or oilskins dependent on weather. White, khaki, or blue shorts or longs. This should be the duty rig we aim for. While idle in the lockdown I have even been moved to design a new skipper's hat (see picture).

Now, SHAPE UP YOU LOT!

David Arnold



Hopefully we can now look forward to regular Monday sessions after Easter to restore our other 'regular sites'.

Nick Wood

Boat Maintenance

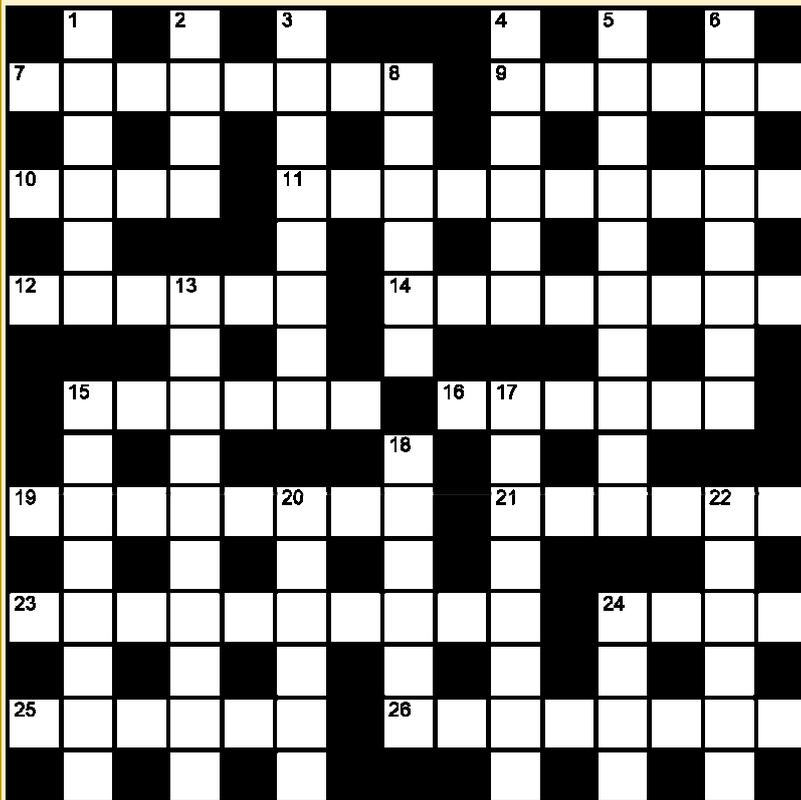
Ian and I were first allowed to get aboard our three boats on Monday 29th March after our long absence due to the lockdown. All were in reasonable shape. The electric horn on *Wiggonholt* is currently defunct, although on the list for fixing. *Zachariah Keppel's* automatic bilge pump had blown a fuse with the result that she had shipped about a ton and a half of water. Ian got it going again, and with both of us on the two after hand pumps, she was soon emptied out and is riding high again. Her engine started easily and was left running to charge up the battery as was *Josias Jessop's*. I took JJ for a little steam around to make sure all was well and to charge her battery too. JJ Skippers will be pleased to know that



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)	Hedgelaying	Contact Nick Baxter
Every Tuesday and Thursday	Boat Maintenance	Contact David Arnold
Every Wednesday	Mid-Week Working Party	Details from Margaret Darvill
Every Monday & Wednesday	Tickner's Depot	Contact Ian Prior
Every Wednesday and Thursday	Eric Walker Restoration Group	Details from Dennis Gillen/John Reynolds
Every 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

Brain Teaser Crossword

Compiled by Tim Lewis



Across

- 7 Boatman and I resettled in Canadian province (8)
- 9 Returning dummy chart to Argentinian plains (6)
- 10 Secure part of staircase (4)
- 11 Our electric boat can become glowing hot (10)
- 12 Included next was a bit of an accompaniment to raw fish (6)
- 14 A bar and another in outskirts of Selkirk (8)
- 15/16 Oat pot (6,6)
- 19 Various menus are required to sign on (8)
- 21 Simmering in Loxwood pub (6)
- 23 United pain working with debts (10)
- 24 Baldwin's door handle? (4)
- 25 Beatles's star sign has two names and another! (6)
- 26 Rotating coil's fully developed by the sound of it (8)

Down

- 1 Turnover Maureen entered twice while back (6)
- 2 James T's Scottish church (4)
- 3 Duck drawn or quail? (8)
- 4 Billy Joel's girl is wealthy (6)
- 5 Toads perhaps bin him ASAP? (10)
- 6 To start adding place to make sense (4,4)
- 8 Summer month's celebrated (6)
- 13 Reportedly a re-ordering resulted in variety (10)
- 15 French ladies' canteen accommodates pantomime character (8)
- 17 Large calculations support 'Operation Marsupials' (8)
- 18 Iron lady's hat (6)
- 20 Canopy is almost cavernous (6)
- 22 Ours do unusual smells (6)
- 24 Little tikes have one flying north (4)

shows.

At Gennets, a third group cleared brash that was on the side of the canal that had been pulled out of the hedge so the Maintenance Unit could re-fence the towpath. Once again another week's work to complete. The fourth group were between Flood Gate Bridge and Lordings where they were clearing brash on the canal side which had been cut during lock-down by the Maintenance Unit. Once again more work to do next month.

Our last group have completed their job of tidying up at Haybarn. Just before the swing bridge it had become very scruffy and this is now clear. The next few week will be much quieter now that bird nesting is upon us.

Margaret Darvill

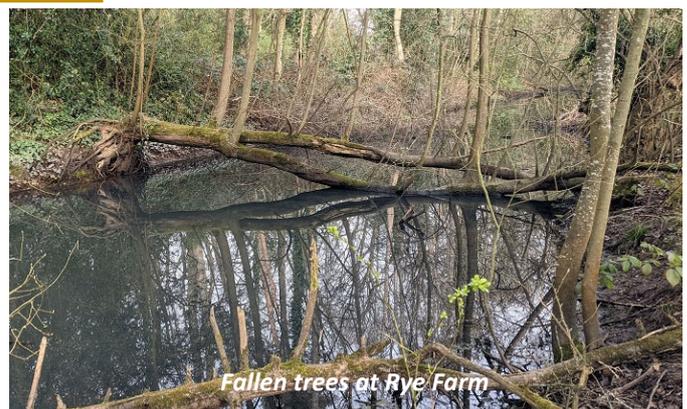
Canal Maintenance Unit



This month the Maintenance Unit has been working on the new section at Gennets Farm. In co-operation with the landowners, we have installed new gates and a new fence along the towpath to bring the towpath into a straighter line. Along with MWWP we have also started to clear back years of untamed hedging and scrub, and as the weather improves we will be able to add some surface to the often very muddy path. We have also, with John Reyn-

Mid-Week Working Party

We had a lovely day out on March 31st after the extended lockdown and were glad to be back. We had five groups of 6 out. One was at Gosden Aqueduct. A number of trees and brash were removed from Cranleigh Waters for the landowner. Unfortunately the chainsaw stopped working and so the job will be finished next week. The next group were at Rye Farm, a location that WACT has not worked on for over 20 years. The group will be there for a number of weeks as there are a great number of trees in the canal to be removed, as the picture



olds had some drainage companies in to quote on investigating the condition of the two land drainage culverts that run under the canal. Both will need to be repaired once we know the full extent of their condition.

Kev Baker

Eric Walker Group

The Group was pleased to meet again and welcomed Martin Smithers back to the fold. We resumed work on 31st March and 1st April with priority attention focussed on Pallingham Bridge where wet conditions and Covid had caused work to be abandoned last December.

The first task was to finish to towpath under the bridge, which was backfilled with stone and then concreted over to provide the pathway. Meanwhile, contractors drilled the north sides of both abutments and inserted Cintec anchors to stabilise the bridge.

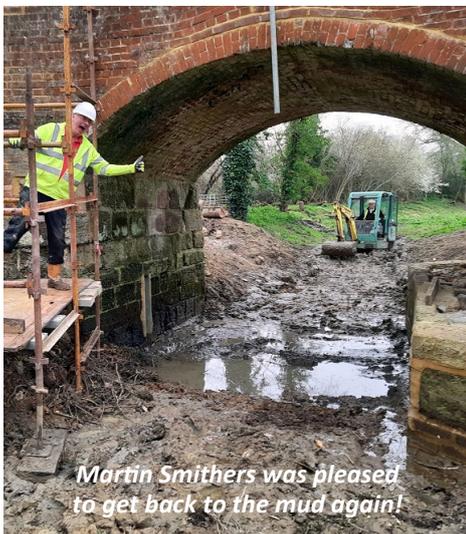
By the close of play on 1st April repointing of the brickwork had been mostly completed leaving a few minor tasks prior to clearing the site.

A small team was also deployed to Harsfold to make repairs to the weir



and towpath, and to relocate and repair the timber footbridge.

Dennis Gillen



The Contact List

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