

Working Party News

No. 331

For WACT Volunteers

August 2021

Editorial

Once again our working parties have been hard at work, sometimes sweating in the heat while at other times dodging the heavy showers.

This is the time of year when dealing with vegetation is a real challenge, so the efforts of MWWP, PEST and the Monday Group are really important. As the Trust acquires access to more stretches of the canal, the demand for their services will be on the rise.

It is good to know that the commitment of all our volunteers is appreciated, as many of the attendees at the AGM in Billingshurst commented.

Peter Winter

Eric Walker Group

Having completed the construction of a new concrete weir we have concentrated our activities over the last few weeks to finishing off the repairs to the towpath between Harsfold Bridge and Big Bend. This has been quite a significant task because over several extended stretches we have had to make up levels by in excess of half a metre. Several lorry loads of material had to be delivered each week.

Two mature Ash trees with “dieback” which were in an unsafe condition and next to the towpath had to be felled. We also re-profiled the west bank of the canal up to the new towpath level.

The final task is to lay a “topping” layer of limestone to give a uniform and level appearance to the towpath.

Dennis Gillen



Work on raising the towpath between Harsfold and Big Bend is approaching completion



Shalford Information Point Preview

The Shalford Information Point will be formally opened at 2.30pm on Saturday 18th September, but for all our loyal volunteers there will a special preview on Tuesday 17th August from 11am to 2pm. So you are all invited!

There will be glasses of something fizzy or a soft drink to celebrate and WACT T-shirts, Christmas Cards, publications and second-hand books will be available.

Parking is available off the A281 at the Trunley Heath layby (Satnav GU4 8EQ) and there is a pedestrian island to cross the road to Hunt Park and the new building.

If you are thinking of attending, please email events@weyandarun.co.uk so that we can ensure that sufficient supplies are available.

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Canal Maintenance Unit

We have been kept very busy this month with mixed results!

With the recent unsettled weather the growth rate of hedges, grass and weeds has been a bit of a problem. With other work parties stretched to breaking point dealing with the vegetation, the team has also been out with the mowers and brush cutter to assist! Starting at Haybarn where we cut the bridge area, we then set off northwards towards Lordings where a metre wide path was cut throughout and the bridges and locks were given the full tidy up treatment. Not bad for a small team with basic mowers.

time in the last 20 years! It now has a field access gate (normally locked), a stile and the "famous" dog gate. There is still a bit more to do to finish it all off. A light cut of the banks here has reduced the weeds whilst allowing the wild flowers to thrive.

At the flood lock we replaced the damaged fencing, rehung the lock gates and secured the field gates with new padlocks and chains for the landowner. Moving north we have again done the towpath above Gennets Bridge and up to the Trust's boundary at Gennets Wood sluice. Some minor alterations were made to the gates on the Gennets Farm section as they've moved a little since installation.



The new gate at Big Bend



And the new stile and dog gate

In the middle of the month, we ordered and placed some 15 tons of graded soil onto the towpath at Haybarn to cover the heavy bricks and stones underneath that we had placed the week before to reinforce the banks. Thankfully we had the loan of a small loader from the landowner which made it a lot easier.

With the assistance of some of the EWG team, the fence at the Big Bend was again rebuilt - for the third

Meanwhile, at the Depot low water pressure was traced to a burst pipe. This caused us a bit of headache as it was under four pallets of bricks! Consequently, we had to move the bricks before excavating. However, this did give us a reason to finally deal with the piles of bricks and blocks that were everywhere at the bottom of the yard. They are now all sorted into types and restacked on fresh pallets ready for future use.

Kev Baker

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

Boat Group PEST

This month's work went well. The weather was fine and we were able to get a lot done. At Brewhurst we cleared around the entrance to the lock on both sides of the canal



This Wasp could be a PEST

to give more space for the kayaks and paddleboards. The steps on the off side were opened up and even used by some paddle boarders at once; they much appreciated the extra facilities.

We then cleared a large amount of the floating vegetation and part of the offside bank towards Baldwin's Knob Lock taking two full boatloads back to Brewhurst.

As reported last month, with *Josias Jessop* now spruced up for passenger work only, the search is on for a replacement workboat. With John Reynolds' help we have looked at three existing W&A boats and it has been decided that *Wasp* is best suited to our work. She needs a little bit of work (ramp planking, work platform installation, general cleanout and fettling) but should be usable shortly.

Chris Jones

Mid-Week Working Party

The MWWP has had good numbers out throughout July and the weather has been good to us most of the time.

We did have one week not working but enjoying ourselves at the Navvies Lunch. Our thanks go to Harvey and Frances Silverman who gave up their garden for 53 people from the Working Party and their partners. This was the first time for many, that they had seen other members and colleagues for over two years due to Covid lockdowns and the split into smaller work groups. The day was ideal for the event and everyone had a really good time.

Back on the work front, the northern group tidied up Hunt Park and helped with the new Information Centre, and cleared away fallen branches and strimmed the path at Birtley, south of Bridge 2 and Rooks Hill in preparation for the AGM walk.

One group has continued work at Rye Farm where as soon as it is thought the job is coming to an end, more is added. It is unlikely that this job will be finished before the end of August. If you walk down the bridleway at Rye Farm, there are some wonderful views of the canal.

The majority of the working party has been working by the canal at Alfold Road on both sides. It is looking clearer now and we have finished there for this summer.



Margaret Darvill rouses the troops at the Navvies Lunch

We have now moved on to Northlands for the first time in nine years so there is a lot to do. The bank is very wet and we are clearing a six foot wide pathway so that we can clear the trees from the canal. We expect to be there for several weeks as many volunteers are on holiday.

Margaret Darvill

Northern Working Party

As a bad absentee work party leader, this month's report is based on hearsay and observation! Apologies to those workers who really know what's going on.

Work has continued on decking out of the footbridge at Tickner's Crossing. This is now about two thirds complete and is looking very smart. Installation of the hand-rails has also commenced. The oak for both is being recycled (via the timber yard) from trees cut down last year to make way for the canal; a very satisfying result in line with our objectives to reuse materials wherever possible.

The reconstruction of the eastern brick abutments for the footbridge is also substantially complete with more to do on the western side. This work has been necessary to allow for the "as built" alignment of the water main attached to the footbridge and which will replace the main that runs under the road at this location.



Because of the delays in obtaining the formal agreements from Thames Water and also Surrey County Council on highway matters, work on the main road bridge has had to be put back and it was decided to start work on the approach channel and training walls from the existing canals. We can anticipate some serious excavation work over the coming months – that will bring on the rain if anything does!

We work every 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month plus Tuesdays and Thursdays; these by prior arrangement please with Dave Evans.

Bill Nicholson

Boat Maintenance

Another busy month with the main activity a complete exterior repaint of *Wiggonholt*. The picture shows the painting task force, Stephen Keating, Patrick Jiskoot, Steve Harmes and Chris Jones. Day one covered a lot of ground. The second painting day was cancelled as *WH* was needed for an enlarged charter, too many for *Zachariah Keppel*. We have two more days scheduled, weather permitting.



Meanwhile Peter Hyem and I have been working our way, painting round the fiddly bits in the fine weather. I always felt that we could have immaculately maintained boats if only they weren't being used to carry passengers.

Brian Hewson has fitted and tested the new engine hours meter at the back of the panel in the engine room on *ZK*. It reads a happy 0.9 hours after our test.

The hooter button on *WH* was fixed as were the lashers for holding back the engine room doors on both *WH* and *ZK*. A very picky trainee had noted that blocking them open with a fire extinguisher was not very professional. That was before he got *ZK*'s punt pole jammed and broke it (now glued and whipped back together by John Reynolds). He has a standing invitation to join our maintenance team.

Ian James is back from his holidays and working on a Perspex window to replace the yellow board blocking off the port side entrance way on *ZK*. All hands have been loading extra chairs and tables for increased numbers of passengers per trip, consequent upon the inception of 'Freedom Day' and the anticipated liberation from social distancing. Some if not all of the table tops in *WH* are very shabby, and I have started a programme of scraping, sanding, staining, and varnishing them, one at a time, at home.

Brian, being our new electrical expert, has been cleaning all the main battery terminals on *WH*. They were in a sorry state, and the outlet side port one was so corroded that a part of the top broke off. When he can get two clear days with *WH*, Brian has a plan to fix it. Such work is a bit beyond my pay grade!

David Arnold

Mrs Bucket Group

Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

As in June, July was a busy month too and at least on one occasion, almost too hot to work.

From north to south, all our sites with the exception of locations on the Arun navigation, received a visit, sometimes two, during the month.

Accordingly 'Keeping Up Appearances' occurred at Run Common (a bit weird as access is only possible from

the Cranleigh direction because the road bridge over the Downs Link is still being repaired and vegetation is encroaching on both sides of the road), Compasses, Gennets Bridge, Southland, Devil's Hole, Loxwood (including maintenance of the Canal Centre garden and an extensive litter pick), Drungewick aqueduct (both the towpath and slipway sides of the canal) and a start was made at the lock, a bit more to do here though.

Nick Wood



Southland and Devil's Hole Locks looking better after the Mrs Bucket treatment



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