

Working Party News

No. 333

For WACT Volunteers

October 2021

Editorial

Another summer draws to a close with all teams well-supported and working hard. It's encouraging to see the progress at Tickner's Crossing but there's so much more to do.

The teams dealing with vegetation will be looking forward to a bit less growth after a very challenging year.

As reported below, it's the end of an era for the Mrs Bucket Group with the retirement of John Empringham. We wish him well and welcome Tom Close to the role.

Peter Winter

Mrs Bucket Group

Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

A lot of attention was given to Loxwood during September as the site was visited on all four occasions. Clearing the ditch and culvert in the overflow car park, attention to the garden around the visitor centre, litter picking and the usual mowing and strimming around the whole site including the lock, was undertaken.

As forecast in last month's WPN, the Group made the second visit to Malham this year. There was a lot to do, much brush cutting and clearance. We also cut the field side of the fence at the request of the landowner.

An overdue visit was made to Newbridge. Southland and Devil's Hole locks received our ministrations too. Both sides of the canal, including the slipway at Drungewick aqueduct were tidied up and the outstanding job of cutting the hedge was undertaken.

Once again a most productive month.

27th September was an all change day for the Monday Group. After over 16 years as leader, having taken over from the founder, Brian Crossley, in mid 2005, John Empringham has handed leadership of the Group over to Tom Close who will work closely with Margaret Darvill and her MWWP to maximise maintenance effort.

John has been a most inspiring leader and I can say from personal experience it has always been a pleasure to work with him. This sentiment is reflected in the continuance of the Group for a very long period and the 'staying power' of the volunteers against a background of many volunteering opportunities in the wider world. We wish him well in his 'retirement' and expect to see him as a member of the Group in the future. He was presented with a picture with a plaque and a meal in the Onslow Arms as a measure of our esteem and thanks for such a long leadership tenure.

Nick Wood

Mid-Week Working Party

MWWP have had a busy month despite many volunteers taking holidays. The numbers have held up and we have put out over 20 each week.

Most weeks we have had four groups of various sizes. The most southerly group have been working their way from Toat to Cook's Bridge and have now just reached about 80 yards south. The work has included brush cutting and strimming all the extreme growth we have had this year and burning a huge number of logs that have come down stream in the winter rains. Toat and Cook's Bridge are now looking ready for the winter rain.

The next group have been taking ash trees down on the towpath from Lee Place Bridge (Harsfold) to Haybarn. The landowner has obtained a felling licence and we are taking down the ash trees and either building hibernicula or burning the brash and unsuitable logs. Later in this or next winter season we will be planting small whips to replace the trees as part of the licence.

The third group has been continuing to clear the canal at Northlands of all the trees and branches that have fallen into the water. It is looking beautiful now but unfortunately the latest winds have brought down another large tree which we will need to clear.

The last group have been doing various jobs in the north majoring on Hunt Park in preparation for the opening of Shalford Information Point. One week they spent clearing ivy from the bridge at Hazelwood and brash from the hedgerow so that we could cover the badger holes in readiness for the badger licence. Another week was spent tidying up Gosden Aqueduct. Time has also been spent pulling Himalayan Balsam in Hunt Park.

Margaret Darvill



The presentation to John Empringham

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Northern Working Party

This report covers progress in both August and September. Our work has been exclusively on our main project at Tickner’s Crossing.

During August, work on the footbridge was completed – comprising the remaining decking, the hand rails and the brickwork. This still leaves the ramps to construct. Some material for the eastern ramp has been put in place, but the western ramp won’t be built yet as it would restrict the site access. Also during the month, the area of the proposed bridge forebay was excavated down to base level and the extracted material placed into the section of canal that will become redundant once the new route is complete. This will be transformed into a nature conservation area with some of the old canal retained for water based ecology. Later in August a blinding layer of concrete was put in place ready for the main base slab to be shuttered and cast.

September saw a mass of activity. Volunteers have worked in support of Dave and Adam on Mondays, Tues-

days and Thursdays of each week plus the 1st and 3rd Saturdays. Now that volunteers can once again sleep on village hall floors, the KESCRG group made a welcome return for a weekend visit near the end of the month with over 14 volunteers attending. This is KESCRG’s second visit this summer and, as per the first, they achieved a tremendous amount. The Trust is grateful for the continuing boost that the visiting groups provide to our projects.

Work completed during the month included pouring the main concrete base sections of the forebay/approach channel, setting up the hired shuttering panels and steel supports for the side training walls, steel fixing and shuttering for the wall extension, erecting the scaffolding prior to pouring the ready mix concrete and finally removing the scaffolding and shuttering. The results can be seen in the picture.

Looking ahead, our aim is to complete all our work in this area by the end of October/early November when ground conditions will prevent us working there. Brick-laying will be centre stage followed by casting a pile capping beam. Plenty to do!

We work every 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month plus Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays – for weekdays please give Dave Evans notice by e-mail of your intention to attend site. New volunteers are always welcome. Please contact me in the first instance before attending site.

Bill Nicholson



Boat Group PEST

Due to issues with Baldwin’s Knob Lock and water levels beyond, work this month has been concentrated on the section from Devil’s Hole to Southland locks.

Work included clearing around the winding holes at the two locks and areas of the bank around Southland Lock. The canal around Southland has been the focus of attention for passengers on four WACT Special Invitation VIP boat trips over the

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	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



At Southland Lock

past month. Particular care was taken to preserve the picturesque appearance of this part of the canal whilst keeping it safe for boat operations.

Leakage from the lock gates at Devil's Hole and Loxwood was investigated. Debris was removed from around the upper gates at Loxwood which made some improvement. DHL remains problematic.

Work is continuing to prepare *Wasp* for use by the PEST team.

Chris Jones

Eric Walker Group

Since the beginning of the month the group has been working at Long Meadow between Drungewick Lock and Drungewick Lane Bridge concentrating on repairing the numerous leaks through the west side towpath embankment into the adjacent field.

Most of the leaks are occurring where trees have been previously felled leaving the stumps in place, and the water is finding its way along the roots which have shrunk.

Once the trunks and roots have been removed, the operation involves stripping the clay from the bank, laying



Cutting the Bentomat to size

Bentonite matting and then covering the membrane with clay to create a seal.

Fortunately we already had in stock three and a half rolls of Bentomat at Tickner's Depot. However, as these weigh over one and a half tonnes each, handling and moving them proved to be very difficult. With the help of Dave Evans and the Telehandler we managed to get them out of the back of one of the sheds.



Stripping the clay from the bank with a trench to anchor the mat



Laying the matting



Covering the matting with compacted clay

Because of their weight handling full rolls on site was not possible without the purchase of some expensive specialist lifting equipment. The solution was to unroll the membrane, not an easy task in itself, and cut it into manageable sections, fold them up and transport them to the various areas of leakage.

The photos show the sequence of cutting the Bentomat, stripping the clay from the bank, laying the Bentomat and covering the matting with compacted clay and soil.

Dennis Gillen

Canal Maintenance Unit

With the summer finally arriving and with it dry fields, the team has been busy down south on the Arun Navigation. First we made a big effort to fill the dips in the tow-path around Haybarn initially with brick rubble and then topped off with grade 2 soil (some 15 tons of the stuff!). We still need a bit more but we can go back to that as access is better.

Then we moved onto Lordings (our summer destination) with a regular trim of the grass with our big mower at both lock sites and the towpaths around. At Lordings we have been busy with further refurbishment work on the Lock and Aqueduct whilst providing First Aid cover to the waterwheel team and ensuring no one was left on their own whilst on site.

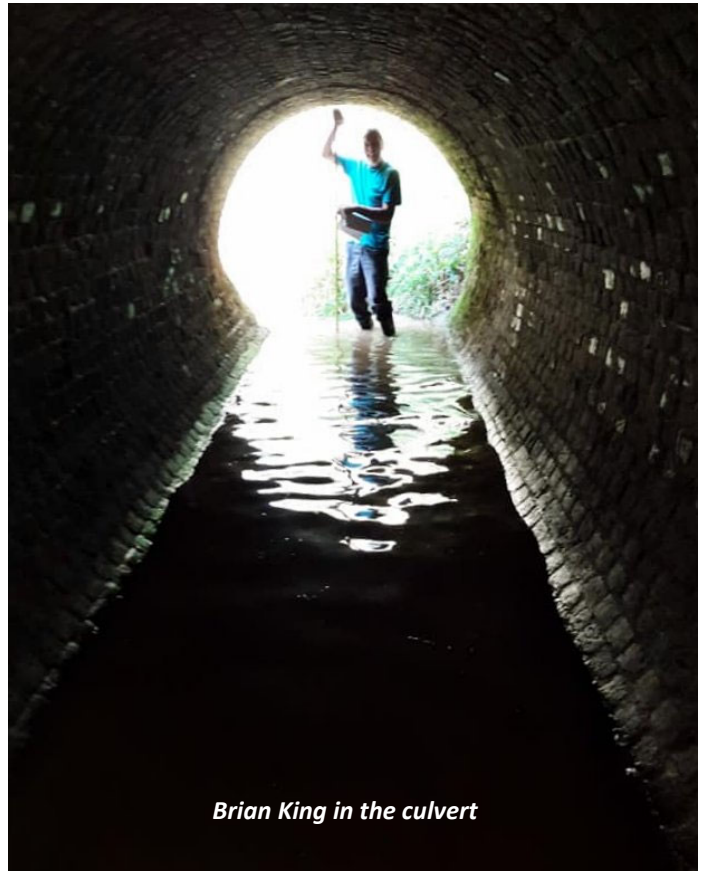
Brian King has masterminded the waterwheel repairs and he raised concerns about the significant leak through the wall from the river into the wheel pit. So we set about getting the river down to a level that allowed us to repair the wall. This was achieved by slowly removing the aqueducts weir boards one at a time over four days; this allowed the fish to migrate to deeper water whilst we did the work. On closer inspection it was found that the weir was in a terrible state and that the boards were rotting through. Three actually fell apart as they were removed! So a quick call to our friendly sawmill owner saw 16 new oak boards made and then we fitted them before applying wood shavings to seal them. It was not an easy task to



New weir boards at Lordings

lower the thick beams down a slot from above into position. I'm glad that the water was warm as I spent three days in shorts and wellies (full of water) in the river!

The leaks were in the bottom course of bricks at river bed level!



Brian King in the culvert

Whilst in the culverts under the aqueduct minor repairs were made to the brickwork and the source of the leak to/from the aqueduct was identified as the joint between the two halves of the culvert from the waterwheel. This can be fixed in the fullness of time, weather permitting access to the culverts. By the way Brian King could do with some help in restoring the waterwheel. If you can assist, you can contact him at brian_king@weyandarun.co.uk.

As always team co-operation between CMU, EWG and the waterwheel team has produced some fantastic results in the area, And I have to say a big thank you to JJ Price for turning up day in day out to lay brick after brick on a wall that has been a challenge due to the damage done to it in the past (more about that next time). And finally a thank you to all who have assisted Brian and myself in making things happen.

Kev Baker

Boat Maintenance

Work has eased off this month as the boats have been very active carrying passengers and earning money for the Trust.

There is a considerable amount of paperwork to prepare for the annual MCA survey scheduled for November 4th. *Wiggonholt* is to be slipped, and her hull washed off and painted. We have retained HMS Surveys Ltd to carry out an electronic survey of WH's hull thickness at the MCA Surveyor's request.



Wiggonholt all set up for a VIP trip

Otherwise WH has had various small jobs done including the cutting of a new starboard side seat in the cockpit for'd and the repainting of the port side one.

All 18 of the saloon tables have been scraped, sanded, stained, and varnished with twelve, four person tables in place plus three square-ended ones for serving and three spare ones stowed under them. The picture shows WH's saloon laid out for a special VIP trip to Southland for large donors and their families.

Various bits of tidying-up work have been done on *Zachariah Keppel* including the painting the after door green which was a very annoying yellow.

On the week commencing October 4th, Ian, assisted by me, will install the Class A fire-proofing to ZK's engine room as required to be completed in her last passenger survey. The necessary fireproof sheet, pins and joining tape has already arrived and is stored in the maintenance room.

Josias Jessop has a new forward seat and a repainted internal bow area. Both ZK's and JJ's engines and gearboxes have been topped up with fuel, water, and oil as appropriate.

The next big event is the christening at the Canal Centre, of the Wheelyboat hereinafter to be known after the donor's late uncle, Walter Grove (or WG as she will probably be designated). This will take place at 1300 on October 23rd.

She is currently in the Tickner's yard. She will be added to our maintenance fleet, although her mode of operation does give rise to several questions as yet undecided, such as 'Where will she berth?' 'Where's the ramp going to be constructed to take on the wheelchair passengers?' 'Where will we stow the very expensive battery and electric outboard overnight?' All to be sorted out and settled by next Spring.

David Arnold

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