

Working Party News

No. 335

For WACT Volunteers

December 2021

Editorial

As the year draws to a close, it's good to report that all the Working Parties have been active and making great progress. It's also interesting to note how the various groups are working together to great effect as noted in several of this month's reports.

Fortunately the weather has been on our side over recent weeks so working conditions have been relatively good. Let's hope that it continues.

So it just remains for me to thank all our volunteers for their hard work during 2021 and to wish you all a Happy Christmas and Best Wishes for 2022.

Peter Winter

Eric Walker Group

The team started work at the beginning of the month on the stretch of canal from Gennets Bridge Lock south towards Southland. The project's objective is to clear the canal bed of trees and tree stumps/roots, and raise the level of the west canal bank and towpath where necessary. We will also remove the causeway near the lock to put the canal "into water".

The first operation was to install two large pipes in the towpath, set at a level that will maintain the maximum depth of water to around one metre. These will control the water currently held back by the causeway at the lock,



David Beadman repairing the damaged culvert

some collapsing of the structure. The area of collapsed brickwork has been reinstated and the rest of the culvert "rodded". When this has been overlain and sealed with clay, it should ensure the level of water in the lakes is largely controlled and water in the canal prevented from leaking through the culvert.

Meanwhile, Kev Baker and Dave Evans have felled many of the bankside trees suffering from Ash Dieback.

The next operation is to remove the causeway at the lock and build a new causeway just north of Hillcroft. The final task is to build up the level of parts of the towpath and to lay a topping of Fittleworth stone aggregate.



Installing the overflow pipes at Gennets Farm

to ensure that it will not overflow a new bund just to the north of the Hillcroft boundary.

There is an old brick built culvert below the canal bed, about one hundred metres south of the lock. This was intended to drain water from two lakes in the land immediately to the east of the canal into a tributary of the river Lox. This has been rendered almost ineffective over the years by tree roots encroaching the brickwork and by



Celebrating Len Hasler's 20 years on the cut

Towards the end of the month, we marked Len Hasler's 20 years as a stalwart WACT volunteer with a card from his EWG colleagues and cakes from Sally. Well done Len!

Dennis Gillen

Hedgelaying

The start of more seasonal weather has encouraged sap movement to slow down in trees, which have also mainly lost their leaves. This in turn meant that the Hedgelaying Team could reconvene after what seems to have been a

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break lasting forever, as last season's Covid restrictions meant that we hardly met together then.

As usual, we have started by cutting hazel for binders and stakes; these are used to hold the laid hedge together. This time, we re-worked a coppice owned by long-time WACT member, Chris Tavener, to whom many thanks are due for allowing us to move in and take away material to use on the Canal. Having cut the hazel here about five years ago, there was now a great deal of long flexible, and straight binders and quite a few thicker shoots suitable as stakes. Although another year or two will see much more of the latter available. It soon became very evident that regular coppicing is much more productive than moving into a wood that has not been worked for decades, as there is much less waste, and the shoots are all comparatively straight. This is why coppice workers in the past would have preferably rotated through their regular woods, rather than moving on to new unworked coppice.

After three weeks cutting, we had around 200 stakes and 200 binders, all tied up into bundles of 10 stakes and 25 binders. Though we may well look at reducing the sizes of bundles when we next cut, to ease handling and save our backs! Thanks are also due to Kev Baker for coming to our aid and moving almost all the bundles in one trailer load to Brewhurst, ready for laying to start.

We have now had two weeks working on the hedge opposite the Canal Centre, taking down the stock fence, and clearing out brambles and blackthorn scrub in the field in order for us to reach the base of the hedge. There is also a lot of scrub and brambles on the canal side of the hedge, which need to be removed in order for the hedge to receive adequate light to allow it to regrow, plus we are losing the smaller flowering plants from this area. This is not easy due to the steepness of the bank and proximity of the canal. A boat-mounted side-arm flail would do the job perfectly: something for the WACT Christmas list? Possibly, the

worst part of preparation is removing the disintegrating rabbit spirals, which are now 13 years old and invariably entangled with thorns and sometimes with the tree caloused around it. My plea is that these should be removed about four years after planting, when they will come off in one piece and not cause long-lasting damage to the trees. This is really something that needs building into any post-planting maintenance schedule.

Actual hedgelaying has just started, after all the preparation, with both right-handed and left-handed sections of hedge available (hedges always should be laid uphill, so handedness depends on the direction of the slope), so our two left-handed hedgelayers are particularly pleased.



The Hedgelaying team with stakes and binders at Brewhurst

After the very long hedge leading to the winding hole, we hope to revisit the short section previously laid within Brewhurst Lock itself - as long as it is not trimmed beforehand! Any other suggestions of suitable hedges for laying along the length of the Canal will be gratefully received.

Nick Baxter

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 Monday, Tuesday, 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

Mid-Week Working Party

This has been a very busy month for MWWP with volunteers working North, South and in between. A large group took to boating across to Gun's Mouth Island, where the team found that it was completely overgrown as it has not been touched for many years. It took a great deal of time to get through the undergrowth to cut down the brambles and blackthorn. There will be another visit next month.

The Northern group have been improving Hunt Nature Park by clearing the pond near the schools. This has meant taking out a large number of branches, pulling out trees and generally making it lighter as per the ecologist's instructions. Hunt Park will always need time spent on it, and in due course we will be hoping to extend the boardwalk and allow more visitors to the area.

Time has also been spent tidying up the aqueduct and making the Birtley Permissive Path ready for the public.

The middle groups have been tidying up Drungewick slipway after a tree fell down. The job entailed taking down some more dangerous trees, tidying the hedges and generally making the area much more presentable for the canoeists. There is still much to do.

A group cleared the offside at Brewhurst and now Santa Cruises can get a view, whilst others cleared the canal side verge from Brewhurst up to Devil's Hole. The job is not finished yet.

Further south we have been tidying up the towpath from Haybarn Swing Bridge to Lee Farm Lock. This has entailed taking ash trees down as part of the felling licence, cutting down the hedge and clearing the banks. We were pleased to see that the landowner has now cut the hedge for us.

Margaret Darvill

Northern Working Party

Work has progressed steadily throughout November at the Tickner's Crossing site, where the focus remains the construction of the temporary road. This is being built from the compound end in a northwards direction and is about 2/3rds complete as I write.

The method of work is to excavate the route of the tem-

porary road down to around 750mm below existing ground level and for the clay arisings to be taken off site by tipper truck. Typically about 100 tons of clay are removed in a day of operations. After excavation, a Terram membrane is laid on top of the base clay and two 6 inch flexible perforated drainage pipes are laid alongside the route. These are also wrapped in the Terram to prevent the drain holes becoming blocked. Many tons of imported recycled crushed hardcore are then placed on the Terram and thoroughly rolled in. On top of that is a layer of Type 1 limestone also rolled in by the NWP team.

The final asphalt layers will be put down by contractors at a later time. To complete our work, sea dredged pebbles are placed on top of the drainage pipes behind temporary shuttering boards.

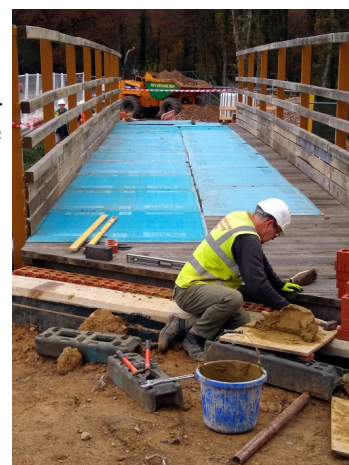
Elsewhere, we have laid more bricks on the four foot-bridge abutments such that this work is now substantially complete. Bricklaying has also reached final height on both sides of the above waterline training walls of the bridge approaches.

Apart from the curved section of training wall on the north side, which is being modified before being re-cast, the walls are ready for the pile caps to be cast. The shuttering for these has been another job completed during the month.

Work on the site will continue until the 18th December when we will be taking a break until the New Year, resuming on Tuesday 4th January. Please note that we are currently not working on Thursdays for the time being. For weekdays (Mondays and Tuesdays) it is best to give Dave Evans notice by e-mail of your intention to attend site. New volunteers are always welcome. If new to our site or volunteering, please contact me in the first instance before attending site.

I thank all the team for sticking with us during 2021 and hope that you all have a very Happy Christmas break.

Bill Nicholson



Temporary road construction at Tickner's Crossing

Mrs Bucket Group

Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

Job done! But it has taken six visits between the 18th October and 29th November to complete the clearance of the towpath and, where appropriate, the offside bank in Sidney Wood from Firtree Copse to Lock 16.

As mentioned last month, this is the result of Covid last year which precluded work. The task included clearance of culvert 1 and the inflow entrance to culvert 3 (culvert 2 was sealed a number of years ago and is not in use).

However more attention is required here as the outflow from culvert 3 is a mess. The wooden fence has fallen over the portal which is also obscured by a tree and a very large tree trunk suspended in mid-air from the towpath. It will need a chainsaw team to clear the trees to allow the fence to be repaired.

There is also a need to restore the bench on the path down to the canal. It has an in-remembrance plaque on it, but we are not sure who put it there and whose responsi-



bility it is to repair the seat (see photo).

Notwithstanding the Sidney Wood job, during the month the team spent a full day at Gennets, mowing both lock sides, strimming the canal

embankment part way towards the overflow weir and sweeping the bridge. We also worked at Loxwood, brush cutting the embankment on the car park side and up to the low fencing on the river side, tidying up around the visitor centre, cutting down the evergreen foliage plants by the steps at Lynn's request, mowing the access track to the lock and tidying up the lock sides. We also pruned the hedge alongside the steep triangle by the road bridge.

All Monday Group's tasks are now undertaken in full liaison with Margaret Darvill's MWWP.

Nick Wood

Boat Group PEST

This month the PEST team have been clearing the canal banks and waterway around Brewhurst Lock and down to Brewhurst Bridge. This work complemented the work of other working parties which have been clearing the towpath side and the bridge approaches. This leaves the stretch of canal between the Canal Centre and the Brewhurst Bridge winding hole in good order in preparation for the festive season cruises.

The team continues to use the workboat *May Upton*.



May Upton at Brewhurst

With the arrival of the *Walter Grove* wheelyboat, MU has been banished to the Brewhurst Lock winding hole where she is looking a little sad. The PEST volunteers will give her a bit of a make-over as time permits.

Our second of our two planned work days had to be abandoned due to insufficient volunteers. When on the

water we are required to operate with a team of a minimum of three people one of whom must be a qualified W&A skipper

With the Loxwood to Brewhurst Bridge section of the canal in good order our attention in the coming weeks will turn to the canal north of Loxwood, in particular the 'chicane' above Devil's Hole Lock.

Chris Jones

Boat Maintenance

The maintenance team of Brian Hewson, Ian James and myself were joined by Chris Jones, Stephen Keating, Ken Broomfield, and Kevin Young, kindly assisted by the Canal Maintenance Manager, Kev Baker. *Wiggonholt* was slipped on November 2nd, washed off, buffed off and her hull was given two coats of best black International paint from a five-gallon drum. Her green paintwork was touched up and she was measured for a pair of straight ropework fenders for the bow to replace my home-made green one.

Rob Shaw, the MCA Surveyor, carried out a full survey



Ken Broomfield is pleased with the work on Wiggonholt

the following day while Vladimir Chorbazhev of HMS Surveys Ltd. (generally known to us as Vlad the Impaler) did an ultrasound hull thickness survey which proved that her hull was sound, although the bow thruster tube has some deep pitting in way of the propellor. We relaunched her and carried out a run test and emergency drills while on the way back to her Canal Centre berth.

On November 19th Rob had arranged to do the remaining checks and drills on *Zachariah Keppel*, she having been examined for stability by an inclining test last May.

Rob also required an Office Audit which none of us had done in its entirety before as, in the interim, the Granary Office had closed. John Reynolds and I read diligently

through the numerous MCA publications including Lord Justice Clarke's findings on the Marchioness/Bow Bells collision enquiry of 30-odd years before. We listed the office paperwork required, appointed people to carry out the various jobs, fixed a survey date before the Santa trips and arranged for a rehearsal at the Canal Centre on Tuesday 16th November. The final survey being fixed for the Friday following. Sally Schupke and Julian Morgan came to assist, and Ken Broomfield was unanimously chosen as the Designated Officer to deal with the MCA and its voluminous paperwork requirements in future - an inspired choice.

The MCA has now granted both boats with their Passenger and SMS Certificates, valid until next November.

David Arnold

Canal Maintenance Unit

With the weather on our side, we have been able to continue with our work at several locations. The first and most important job was to ensure *Wiggonholt* was able to get to her appointment with the slipway and the MCA Inspector. An early start from the Onslow and with good luck on our side this was a nice straight forward trip and all completed by lunchtime. Also at the slipway we have had a lot of issues with dead trees, so with help from Dave, Adam, MWWP and CMU a big clear up has ensured that our customers can safely use the slipways without fear of a tree falling down.

Elsewhere we have been working with EWG on the latest Gennets Farm project, which has resulted in a massive improvement to the section with plans in place to finish this work with a new towpath surface in the New Year. The towpaths from Drungewick to Southland have all been cut with our big mower and all that remains is for the Monday and MWWP groups to clear what's left.

At Devil's Hole the long awaited replacement sign for the picnic area was installed and Southland Lock has been emptied for the winter months (refilling will be in



New fencing around the waterwheel at Lordings

late February).

Finally, but no means least, we have completed the lock approach wall rebuilds at Lordings Lock. Gone are the gaping holes and piles of broken bricks; a heartfelt thank you to all involved in this project which I personally have wanted to do for over 20 years. I'm sure the late Winston Harwood will be smiling!

We have also completely replaced the fencing around the waterwheel and chambers with a more robust metal fencing system. As Christmas approaches, we will be in and around Loxwood doing a few outstanding tasks

Kev Baker

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