

Working Party News

No. 348

For WACT Volunteers

February 2023

Editorial

Whilst Peter is away on holiday for a couple of months, it has fallen upon me to keep things ticking over with the Working Party News. My thanks to all contributors who submitted their reports in good time for me to wrestle with the Publisher programme!

Perhaps I can take this opportunity, on behalf of all the working parties to congratulate our chairman, Sally Schupke, on being awarded an MBE in the New Years Honours List for her services to the community in Shalford.

Dave Miller

Message from the Chairman

Many of you will have met and worked with Alan Jennings. He has been, for several years, the Lengthsman monitoring the condition of the canal between Run Common and Elmbridge. He has also been a long-standing member of the Mid-Week Working Party and has worked with the Dredging Team. Alan has recently decided, very reluctantly, that he needs to reduce his work with the Trust, though he promises to continue to follow the Trust's progress in restoring the canal. I'm sure you will join with me in thanking Alan for his years of service and wishing him well in the future.

We need to replace Alan as Lengthsman. If any members are interested in this role, please contact Julian Cheek (julian_cheek@weyandarun.co.uk)

Sally Schupke MBE

Boat Group PEST

The team was scheduled to have two workdays in January, on 6th and 20th. With the cold snap in mid-January freezing the canal again, the 20th had to be cancelled. Still, Friday 6th had been a productive day with the team taking 'May Upton' down to Baldwin's Knob Lock to remove a substantial tree overhanging the canal. Its sawn remains filled the boat. After unloading this first boatful of debris the team turned to the off-side bank above the lock. As many of you will know, the bank at this point has, over the years, become massively overgrown to the extent

that clearing it would yield another three or more feet of width to the channel. The PEST team make inroads into this growth from time to time, this time removing and disposing of another boatload of brambles and mixed secondary growth. A never-ending battle.

Chris Jones

Mrs Bucket Group

Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

Reporting on three outings in January. On the 9th, work was concentrated on hedge trimming on the towpath side of the canal at the Drungewick Aqueduct site. Some 400 yards were cut. Owing to earlier heavy rain, the road was flooded making access to the site require the exercise of volunteer initiative!



High level of River Lox at Drungewick Aqueduct

On the 23rd. the Group was divided into two teams cutting and clearing the canal towpath banks between Loxwood and Barnsill Bridge and northwards from Loxwood to Devil's Hole Lock on a very cold frosty day. C'est la vie this time of the year!

Finally, on the 30th, in more kindly weather, the Group continued working on the hedge bottom and towpath bank from Drungewick north to the 90 degree turn in the canal, about ¼ mile. This included two of the team for most of the day clearing the accumulated debris from the recent flooding which was covering the fence by the intermediate spillway. This was thought vital in case there is more flooding in February and March. Unfortunately, the debris has made a mess of the fence which will require repair in due course.

Nick Wood

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Hedgelaying

Cold weather does not stop the hedgelayers, and work at the Drungewick Slipway has progressed well. We welcomed Robert, an occasional escapee from the Monday Group - but only on a week that they are not working, of course (we would not wish to poach other teams' workers)!



Apart from sightings of a sparrowhawk over two weeks, plus a well-named clamour of rooks passing overhead at the end of each workday, the main wildlife spot was a displaced vole (probably a field vole as its ears are fur covered and its tail was very short?), with a great photo captured by David Beadman which can be seen on the website.

Our other discovery was safety charcoal, left over from a previous bonfire. Putting this on a really good fire puts it out faster than a CO2 extinguisher or a fire blanket. Easy to make - just soak the bon-

fire at the end of day to produce a good amount of charcoal, leave it in torrential rain to soak well, then freeze for around a week, or more. Lift it in frozen chunks using a spade (it looks like tarmac at this point) and spread onto a roaring fire. We found that the fire will die almost immediately and will take a very long time to get going again, no matter how hard you try. We are happy to share this tip with all work parties, with no need for acknowledgement or payment.

February brings the challenge of a hedgelaying competition set up by Surrey Wildlife Trust for newcomers. My best wishes to those Team members who have entered!

Nick Baxter

Northern Working Party

Whilst one day in the month was spent on the continuation of tree cutting and towpath clearing at Loxwood, all other efforts have been concentrated on the erection of a new fence at Elmbridge Village, Cranleigh.



140 four feet high wooden panels, with concrete posts and gravel boards, are to be installed on a 250 metre section of land that borders the Canal to the south of Elmbridge Road.

Working Party Diary

Every Monday	'Mrs Bucket' Keeping up Appearances	Contact Tom Close
Every Tuesday (late October to March)	Hedgelaying	Contact Nick Baxter
Every Tuesday and Thursday	Boat Maintenance	Contact David Arnold
Every Wednesday	Midweek Working Party	Details from Margaret Darvill
Alternate Monday	Tickner's Depot	Contact Ian Prior
Every Wednesday and Thursday	Eric Walker Group	Details from Dennis Gillen/John Reynolds
Every Monday, Tuesday, and Third Saturday	Northern Working Party	Contact Bill Nicholson
Every Thursday	Canal Maintenance Unit	Contact Ian Lower
Every Thursday	Odd Job Group	Contact Brian King
First & Third Friday of the month	PEST Boat Group	Contact Chris Jones/Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit Level	Contact Dave Evans

With there being limited vehicular access and storage facilities, it is a labour intensive job manhandling heavy materials and tools to the actual site. 45 panels have been erected so far. Under a 100 to go!

Dave Miller

Odd Job Group

We are a fairly new group, formed from a small number of volunteers who previously met on an ad hoc basis to complete the refurbishment of Lordings Waterwheel and who now meet every Thursday.

We currently have a project to tidy and organise the WACT Depot at Dunsfold and our first task was to dismantle the cabin and clear everything from the Thriscutt Slipway site. The various sheds at the Depot were then sorted through and tidied, with much of the accumulated “stuff” being disposed of and the remainder neatly stacked on newly erected scaffold shelving. The recent cold weather caused havoc with the plastic plumbing on site, with there being many bursts and leaks that have all now been repaired.

All chemical stocks have been checked for their usefulness, safety and relevance and those not meeting the criteria have been removed. The outside storage bays have been cleared and made ready for ballast and log storage.



Depot tidying at Dunsfold

We are about to start a major reorganisation of the Depot yards, which will ensure all on site chemicals and inflammables are kept in safe containers. The recent cold weather has been troublesome but work has progressed well. As our name implies, we are available for a miscellany of tasks and we welcome any new volunteers that would like to join us.

Brian King

Canal Maintenance Unit

With the help of the NWP Monday team a new concrete base has been laid around the pump chamber at Brewhurst Lock, to make access to the new back pump easier for any future maintenance work.



New concrete surround for pump chamber at Brewhurst

Work has continued at the Depot to complete construction of the new footbridge for Brewhurst Lock.

At the end of the month we worked at Baldwin's Knob Lock to replace the top lock gate walkway. We had also been asked to over-deck the lower landing stage, as the gaps between the existing deck boards were considered to be too wide. This was confirmed when my bunch of car and house keys fell through a gap! Thanks to Adam Rayner for recovering them with a magnet.



Footbridge construction at Depot

Ian Lower

Midweek Working Party

January has been a busy month for MWWP and very varied. The month started with a group at Fanesbridge Lock where a large tree had been blown down and needed clearing up. The other group completed the clearance of brash and brambles between Barnsill and Baldwin's Knob Lock in readiness for a number of ash trees to be taken down. The following week there was a group clearing the canal and taking down some dead trees at Birtley. The stretch is now looking lighter and clearer and passers-by say it is a joy to walk along.

A small group spent two weeks cutting down the willows in the osier bed ready for the Trust to sell. A group spent two weeks clearing the field at Brewhurst Bridge and the area is now much more pleasant.

Two weeks were spent cutting the hedge and pulling a tree out on the Harsfold to Lordings stretch. The last area that we covered was at Rye Farm clearing trees that have come down in the winds

Margaret Darvill

Boat Maintenance

On January 7th we steamed *Josias Jessup* down to the slip where we pulled her up and washed her off. The bow looked as if it had been sandblasted - a memento of her career as a daily icebreaker which allowed *Wiggonholt* to do her Santa trips in December when the ice grew to 2" thick on the canal on most nights. Work commenced in that deceptively mild period in early January, with JJ's hull being buffed off and pink primer applied.

New zinc anodes were ordered up to prevent further galvanic action between the propeller and the surrounding steelwork. The exhaust assembly was removed where it was leaking. Adam delivered a large 5mm steel plate for cutting and welding on the flat part under the stern.



It was decided to remove the weed hatch completely as it was virtually unusable, full of water and leaking and the propeller could be easily cleared from over-side with a boathook. Unfortunately, at this stage the weather turned from warm to freezing, -6C at night and warming to 0C during the day on the best days, with a bitter NE'ly wind straight off Bear Island. This made it impossible to paint and a bit too

much for welding and plate cutting in the open for elderly volunteers but we will continue as the weather warms up. I will be off to Florida next Monday 6th February (back on the 24th) where I hope to unfreeze my extremities.

Dave Arnold

Volunteer Discount—Boat Trips

The main reward for being a WACT volunteer is a warm feeling inside as you contribute to restoring and maintaining the canal. Unlike some organisations, we can't offer a lot of valuable benefitsbut what we can offer are boat trips.

This year we have decided to offer members a discount on private boat trips (otherwise known as charters) on the Loxwood section and active volunteers will qualify for an extra reduction. If you do regular volunteer work for WACT, either on the canal itself or behind the scenes, you are an active volunteer. The main condition is that the member must book and pay for the trip. *Wiggonholt*, is suitable for party sizes up to about 50 and *Zachariah Keppel* seats up to about 20. For smaller groups, *Josias Jessop* (maximum capacity 9) could be ideal. Typical trip lengths are in the region of 2-3 hours and we can arrange catering with the Onslow Arms.

For more details, contact our private trip organiser, John Robson (john_robson@weyandarun.co.uk) and mention that you are an active volunteer.

Julian Morgan

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