

# For WACT Volunteers December 2025 No. 382

# Working Party News

## Editorial

Another year draws to a close and what a year it has been. On the restoration front, great progress has been made at Rooks Hill and Rye Farm, while the maintenance crews have been keeping the canal in good condition. Another milestone is that we are almost there on the upgrades to the pumping systems that keep the canal in water; that is when there is any water, which hasn't been the case for most of this year.

As you'll see from this bumper edition, all our work parties have been busy over the past month working on an amazing variety of tasks.

Finally my thanks once again to Dave Miller for doing such a great job as guest editor for the November issue and to all our contributors, who keep us up-to-date with activities on the canal. With Best Wishes to you all for Christmas and the New Year.

*Peter Winter*

## Hedgelaying Team

The Team has completed laying the very long hedge beside the towpath running upstream from the Drungewick Aqueduct, taking two winters plus a few weeks this year! The towpath now has good views across the local fields, and importantly will dry out faster as the sun can now hit the surface. Like most of the towpath, it is on Weald clay, which is horribly wet in winter and then ankle turning in summer when it dries out. Although it has been surfaced here, the clay still tends to win out!

Over the last few weeks, we have been working a hazel wood at Devil's Hole that was previously coppiced by the Team about 9 - 11 years ago, under the direction of our previous leader, Keith. It has produced some really good stakes and binders this year, demonstrating how reinstating a regular coppice cycle is so important. Also, like all the other coppices that we have



*The completed hedge at Drungewick*



*Coppiced stakes and binders*

worked, this is a privately-owned wood, requiring the landowner to be happy for WACT to come in and do work on their land. So we need to continue to demonstrate really good woodland practice, with minimum fire sites, quality coppicing down to ground level, and, most importantly, covering each cut stool with a wigwam of hazel to discourage deer from eating the new shoots when they re-grow. Partnership with local landowners and others is essential for the long-term viability of WACT.

In two weeks, we managed to cut around 320 stakes and a similar number of binders (good for maybe 140m of hedge), so we

should be well prepared for our next venture of laying at the new canal site at Rooks Hill. I anticipate that we will need to coppice more material before the end of the hedgelaying season, as binders tend to become brittle once cut, so a return to Devil's Hole is very likely sometime after the New Year.

As always, I am indebted to the Hedgelaying Team. It never ceases to amaze me how much work is completed each week, with typically 12 people who know what they are doing, and who work as a team!

*Nick Baxter*

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## Midweek Working Party

We have had some atrocious weather to work in this month, with heavy rain and snow. However, we have achieved a great deal, completing work at Haybarn for this year and having cleared the banks and ditch at Elmbridge, where we are awaiting the arborologist to take down four large trees so we can complete the job. A couple of people brushcut areas at Tickner's Crossing although the hedge still needs attention. A group are cutting dangerous trees in Hunt Park, where there are still a large number to do. Our last job has been to clear the paths to the north of Birtley so that you can see what we own. It looks so much better. We have also strimmed to the south of Birtley Bridge 2 so that walkers can enjoy the canal again.

*Margaret Darvill*

## Eric Walker Group



The EWG team was again split this month with a small group working under Richard Meinertzhagen's direction on the Rooks Hill Project. The tasks they were involved in are covered in the Northern Working Party report.

The rest of the team worked on progressing the bridleway diversion at Rye Farm. Despite a couple of days of bad weather and the 8T Yanmar digger still being out of commission, progress has been acceptable, with around twenty metres of construction being achieved each week.

During Stuart Dawson's expert CAT scanner survey, he got a strong signal identifying something at depth, probably a pipe, running at right angles across the planned bridleway route. As part of the construction design, we secure each concrete



filled bulk bag in position by driving a scaffold pole down through the bag and into the canal bed below. However, not wanting to take any risk of hitting something, we secured the bags by using longer poles pushed through the bags horizontally and tying them to the conventionally secured bags outside the risk area.

Subject to reasonable weather the remaining fifty metres should be completed by the time we stop for the Christmas break with the exception of the final surface finish requested by the Surrey CC Rights of Way Officer,

*Dennis Gillen*

## Working Party Diary

Every Monday	Monday Group	Contact Tom Close
Every Tuesday (late October to March)	Hedgelaying	Contact Nick Baxter
Every Tuesday and Thursday	Boat Maintenance	Contact John Reynolds
Every Wednesday	Midweek Working Party	Details from Margaret Darvill
Every Thursday	Tickner's Depot	Contact Mark Feeney
Every Wednesday and Thursday	Eric Walker Group	Contact Dennis Gillen
Every Monday and Tuesday	Northern Working Party (Monday) Northern Working Party (Tuesday)	Contact David Stevenson Contact Stephen David
Every Thursday	Thursday Group	Contact Brian King
Every Thursday	Dredger Group	Contact Charlie Coxwell
First & Third Friday of the month	PEST Boat Group	Contact Peter Hyem
Second Saturday of the month	Saturday Group	Contact Stephen David



## Monday Group

At the beginning of November we cut Devil's Hole, Loxwood and Brewhurst Locks as well as around the Canal Centre. Later in the month we moved on to Drungewick Lock and gave attention to the lock, tidied up around the seat and the stop-plank shelter, followed by a visit to the aqueduct site, where we trimmed both sides of the canal.

As it appeared that the towpath from Loxwood to Southland Lock required attention, we intended to start at Loxwood but discovered that, apparently the farmer had 'done the job' as far as Devil's Hole, so we started there! After two sessions we have cleared as far as the chicane, leaving from there to Southland Lock to be completed in December.

The Group sends good wishes for Christmas to all our volunteer colleagues.

*Nick Wood*

## Northern Working Party



Photo by Malcolm Pheasey

*Legato blocks in position*

November saw us continue work at Rooks Hill on the construction of the bridge, new canal wall and the overflow weir. In association with EWG team members, more facing bricks and blockwork have been laid and the main concrete supporting structure is gradually disappearing from view.

We have prepared the formwork and shuttering that will be installed, when sufficient brickwork has been completed, for the actual deck of the bridge to be poured with concrete.

We cut and fitted reinforced steel mesh in the void between the double row of Legato blocks that will form the canal bank and overflow weir downstream from the new bridge. Ready mixed concrete was then delivered to the site and we have begun to fill the void, which needs to be done in stages.

When the voids in the Legato blocks have been filled, they are to be topped with Gabion baskets, that are galvanised, welded wire meshed cages filled

with a locally sourced recycled mixture of graded brick and stone. The baskets are supplied flat packed and we have started to assemble them in readiness for installation.

Car parking was becoming rather congested for the working

parties at Rooks Hill, so we excavated the adjacent ground and laid some crushed concrete to extend the parking area.

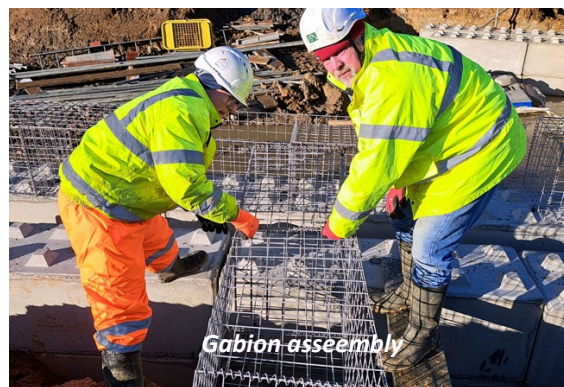
Our work is also continuing on constructing the temporary road for the diversion at Tickner's Heath Crossing that will be required when the new road bridge over the diverted canal is being built. We are currently installing the temporary roadside drainage and a new drain inspection chamber is required. The pit has been dug out and a concrete foundation laid, prior to us installing pre-formed concrete sections to form the chamber.

Additionally, we carried out a survey of the underside of Gosden Aqueduct using a boat, long lead camera and radio controlled, amphibious model vehicle. The survey was required to assess the condition of the structure.

Following the bank re-profiling recently completed downstream



*Brick facing completed on one of the abutments*



*Gabion assembly*



Photo by Jeff Grimes

*Surveying Gosden Aqueduct*



from Baldwin's Knob Lock, we returned to lay some Type 1 aggregate to level and consolidate the tow-path.

Also, we spent a day opposite Elmbridge Village, where we constructed some steps in a slippery slope on the muddy footpath leading from the canal towpath to Cranleigh Village.

*Dave Miller*

## Boat Group PEST

After months of dry sunny weather with low water levels we started the month in heavy rain. However, we went on down to Baldwin's Knob Lock in *May Upton* cutting undergrowth where we found it, although we always leave some suitable vegetation for birds. We also cleaned the water markers so that skippers can better see the current water levels. The weather improved but with shorter days we finished mid afternoon.

At the end of the month we took MU south again to clear a fallen tree or large branch that nearly crossed the canal. We managed to cut it up and took it to the disposal site at Brewhurst Lock. We then went north to Devil's Hole for the first time in quite a while. To our surprise we had multiple sightings of more than one kingfisher. In fact one settled on a branch quite close to us and stayed for a while. We also saw one dive into the canal for fish, well it was lunchtime!

A Happy Christmas to all our working party and other colleagues

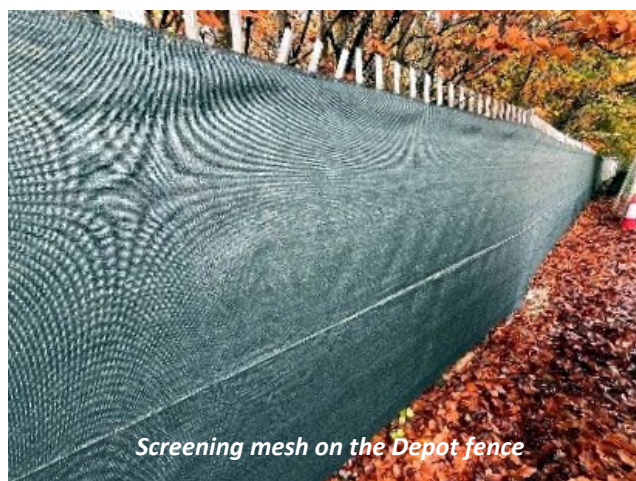
*John Lee*

## Saturday Group

Four enthusiastic volunteers attended Tickner's Depot for the November outing of the Saturday Group. Three were volunteers who also go out with other WACT week-day groups and one was a full time worker who is only available at weekends. Our objective was to tackle a list of tasks that was kindly provided by the Depot Manager!

We started the day by laying out and attaching green screening mesh to the metal security fence that runs along the bottom of the yard at the back of the large concrete trailer pad. This helps to screen the Depot from the passing traffic on the Dunsfold Road.

After that, we fired up the hydraulic log splitter and set upon the pile of tree rounds that were waiting in the yard to be chopped up for firewood stock.



*Screening mesh on the Depot fence*



*Racking installed for pipes, pumps and small machinery*

We then moved on to Storage Hut 2, where a large heap of piping, pumps and small machinery needed sorting. We cleared it all out into the yard and then erected some scaffolding shelving along one of the interior walls, before replacing it all back tidily on the new racking.

It is intended that a Saturday Group meets every second Saturday of the month and our next outing is planned for 13th December. If you can spare the time, even if it is for only a few hours, you are very welcome to come along and join us. Please get in touch to be added to the Group mailing list for the plans and updates on our next outing(s). My details are in the Contact List on the last page of this newsletter.

*Stephen David*



## Thursday Group

This month we continued the work on the temporary dams at Bonfire Hanger that we started in October. Trenches 2 metres long and 1 metre deep had to be dug by hand in the clay banks on either side of the stop plank channels to insert a waterproof membrane ... and then backfilled. Two of the three dams have now been completed, leaving us with one remaining. The manual labour certainly kept us warm in the freezing temperatures. It is anticipated that the improved dams will retain a low level of water in each of the canal sections between Rosemary Lane and Gennets Bridge Lock.



While there, we carried out repairs to the wooden footbridge that carries a public footpath across the canal. Some of the decking planks had become loose, requiring additional bearers to be fixed on the underside and the loose planks to be resecured.

Several visits were made to Drungewick for a variety of tasks. We scraped and painted the balance beams and metalwork on the lock gates, and one of the team utilised his woodturning skills to create bungs to cover the recessed bolt heads in the top of the beams.

We also fitted an elbow to the outflow of the dragon's mouth above the lock to divert and dissipate the back pumped water. The old water meter was removed from its chamber and replaced with a new one.

The updated water pumping system that has been installed re-

quired new water float switches at Baldwin's Knob Lock, Drungewick Lock and Birch Copse, where we had to dig yet more trenches and install more ducting for more cabling. This has now been done and is ready for the contractor to return and make the necessary connections.

With all the recent rain, the water level in the canal section south of Harsfold Bridge was getting quite high and we had a trip down to the overflow weir below the bridge to remove the top two stop planks to keep the water at a manageable level.

Visits were also made to Loxwood, Brewhurst and Devil's Hole Locks where we fitted mooring rings to each of the landing stages.



Brian King

## Dredger Group

Last winter, the dredger's forward port spud leg started to misbehave. To repair this *Pauline* will need to be slipped, with repairs possibly taking several months to complete. As we did not wish to do this during winter (dredging) period it was decided to nurse things over the next few months. We now aim to slip the dredger from March/April 2026 onwards.

However, the aft spud developed a leak in its hydraulic hose and needed urgent attention. One end of this hose is attached inside the spud leg, giving very limited access. After a lot of head scratching we finally worked out how to gain access. The hose is now fixed and we are back dredging. Excellent work from Agricom, especially as they had never tackled a spud leg





repair before! It just shows the importance of preventative maintenance as this is a job we had been putting off till next summer!

Our plan this winter is to clear the large area of silt, caused by excessive flooding by the River Lox during last winter. An approximate canal area of 500 metres south of Baldwin's Knob Lock is now very shallow. We are slowly attempting to restore its previous navigational depth.

The aim is to allow trip boats access to the BKL winding hole for next summer's public trips. The canal depth is currently too shallow to allow spoil to be placed into our tub, so we are having to move the silt to one side of the canal which will hopefully allow us to bring a spoil tub alongside the dredger so that the silt can be removed. The flooding has also reduced navigational depth in the reeds area north of the slipway and in the slipway's winding hole. So, all in all, a long job which shows the importance of regular canal maintenance.

*Charlie Coxwell*

## Tickner's Depot

We have a bit of a conundrum at the Depot. One of my first tasks when I started there was to make a rack for our DeWalt battery stock. The rack has space for 24 batteries and several slots were used for two batteries at a time. We used to have 28 batteries, but as of last week, we're down to FOUR! We know of three that have failed, and a couple were in use on the day. Somewhere, there are almost 20 DeWalt batteries that we have lost track of.

Could all teams and boat crews check your various hidey-holes, and tool boxes and let me know what batteries you have. If we have to replace these batteries, it'll set us back over £1500.

We've started to work through the backlog I mentioned last month. The Saturday Group have done sterling work in building a rack for the water pumps in Hut 2, and we've made a start on the servicing and PAT testing. By the time you read this, we should have received the last part of our Tracmaster BCS package, the Stump Grinder attachment.



*Where have they all gone?*

We'd like to wish all of our friends and colleagues a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

*Mark Feeney*

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