

Working Party News

For WACT Volunteers January 2026 No. 383

Editorial

Happy New Year! Here we report on the activities of our working parties during the last month of 2025. As you will see, much progress was made and we look forward to continuing with the good work in 2026.

Peter Winter

Eric Walker Group



*Rye Farm towpath
almost complete*

For the last month of the year, most of the Group worked at Rye Farm while a small team was deployed to the Rooks Hill site.

At Rye Farm work continued with the construction of Phase 2 of the new bridleway. With the availability of two diggers good progress was made in placing the bulk bags of dry mix concrete and crushed concrete by the edge of the canal. As before, layers of hard core were laid between the bulk bags and the canal bank and then covered by Type 1. By the week before the Christmas break, the whole of the base of Phase 2 of the project was completed and some 350 sandbags of dry mix concrete had been filled and laid alongside the canal edge. The ramps between the two phases of work were removed and now all that remains is to lay the final surface finish and tidy up the site.

For our final working day, all the members of the team decorated their hard hats in festive ware which brought many comments from the passing public!



Dennis Gillen

Dredger Group

Last month we replaced the hydraulic hoses on *Pauline*'s aft spud leg and it worked well for a couple of weeks. Now it looks like the ram itself has sprung a major leak! While we can still dredge using only the two forward legs, the dredger is not so stable and requires careful handling.

We are still hopeful that the shallow area between Baldwin's Knob Lock and its winding hole can be cleared before we are forced to slip *Pauline* to replace her spud leg rams. This work should allow our trip boats to access BKL and turn at the adjacent winding hole. Currently we are making good progress up the canal and have reached BKL. We will next have to bring the tub, currently moored above BKL, down to assist clearing the spoils. Hopefully we can do this early in January.



River Lox overflowing into the canal

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On Thursday 11th December we experienced very heavy rainfall, which caused the River Lox to overflow. This meant that a considerable amount of water spilt into the canal at several locations between BKL and the slipway. When the fast flowing water spills into the canal, it then slows significantly and deposits all its silt and debris. Last winter's floods caused a reduction in the canal depth of at least 800mm over a length of some 300 metres just south of BKL. We are also suffering from silt build-up at the slipway winding hole.

So, if we are to keep the canal navigable for our trip boats, it is essential to ensure that our dredger undergoes necessary repairs and is maintained in good condition to deal with on-going needs. However, that requires a considerable amount of commitment and finance.

Charlie Coxwell

Northern Working Party

We started the month by sending a team to Tickner's Heath Crossing to continue work on building the brick and concrete drainage chamber at the edge of the proposed temporary road. Unfortunately, due to very muddy conditions and excessive water levels, limited progress was made and further work has been delayed until the New Year.



Meanwhile, considerable progress has been made at Rooks Hill, where we continued with the bricklaying on the new bridge walls and filling the voids between the bricks and blockwork with reinforced concrete. We cut and fitted empty Gabion baskets along the top of the concrete block wall by the new weir and attached a layered, waterproof membrane along the rear edge of the baskets in readiness for the backfill of the excavated soil.

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



We then mixed and poured concrete into the complex wooden shuttering that had been prepared for the new weir. The shuttering was removed the following week to reveal the completed structure and we made a start on filling the Gabion crates on either side of the weir with recycled graded brick and stone.

In preparation for the formwork to be fitted for the concrete pour of the actual bridge deck we mixed and laid more concrete in the void between the facing bricks and the concrete abutment.

During the month we also returned to Elmbridge, Cranleigh where we completed installing the steps and handrail on the path that crosses the canal route alongside Elmbridge Village. We finished it off with a top dressing of wood chippings. We also attended Drungewick Slipway to add more wooden edging and wood chips to the new bankside path installed by the Thursday Group.

A well attended Christmas Lunch was enjoyed by the group at the Sir Roger Tichbourne, where it was a pleasant change to interact with each other in tidy clothes rather than wet and mud caked 'work' attire!



Dave Miller

Tickner's Depot

After last month's plea for help with our battery problem, I'd like to thank everyone who came back to me. There were only two, both of which were negative. That leaves me with a choice, either spend 25% of my budget on batteries, or replace the DeWalt cordless tools with this new style of cordless tool:



New style cordless tools

I was also a bit ahead of myself in announcing the imminent arrival of our Stump Grinder attachment. It turns out that the box that should have contained the unit had just a gearbox. With a bit of luck and a following wind, we should get the actual Stump Grinder early in January.

We had a bit of an issue with our Telehandler when the Quick-Hitch hydraulic circuit failed, resulting in us not being able to get the bucket off. It turned out to be a loose angle sensor on the boom.

Fortunately, Andy found the fault and fixed it before we had to call in a specialist to find the problem.

The servicing and repair of our collection of water-pumps, generators and mixers is progressing nicely, albeit slowly. If anyone feels they have or would like to learn the skills to help us, please get in touch.

And finally, in next month's issue, I will have some good news and I promise not to mention batteries. Happy New Year everyone.

Mark Feeney

Monday Group

Following on from the work we undertook in November, in the first two sessions in December we completed the job from the chicane to Southland Lock. With the aid of the farmer, the towpath and hedge have now been tidied up all the way from Loxwood Lock to Southland. That should now 'keep' until the growing season starts again in the spring.



In the Loxwood car park the number and depth of potholes has been a concern for some time. So, we were asked to undertake the task of filling them in. We cordoned off the relevant part of the car park and after two visits to the depot to load up the trailer with MOT Type 1 (a technical term!) we set to with the aid of rakes and the wacker plate. We still have a few more holes to fill, perhaps in January, but the car

park is a lot better for our efforts.

On the 22nd December it was time for our annual lunch at the Onslow Arms in celebration of all our hard work during 2025. So, thanks to Tom for organising it and for his successful leadership of the Group throughout the year.

Nick Wood

Boat Group PEST

Our only working meeting this month was to take some pumping equipment on the *May Upton* from the Canal Centre down to Baldwin's Knob Lock. On the way we fished a keb out of Brewhurst Lock that somehow had found its way into the water. On our return to the Canal Centre we cut some vegetation and left it at the disposal site at Brewhurst. We also searched in the water at Brewhurst for a role of chicken wire that was thought to be in the water, but no luck.

Our final meeting of the year took place at the Onslow Arms where seven of the PEST group celebrated Christmas. We were very well looked after by the pub. A very Happy New Year to you all.

John Lee

Thursday Group

In the interest of Santa's Health and Safety, our first job for December was to tackle the slippery wooden footbridge over Brewhurst Lock, near his Grotto. We stapled lengths of galvanised wire chicken mesh to the planks and are pleased to report that there were subsequently no unfortunate incidents reported!

We then continued on to Baldwin's Knob Lock, where we carried out routine greasing of the lock paddle mechanisms. On returning to Loxwood, we removed the broken ladder at the landing stage adjacent to the Canal Centre and fitted a replacement.

Meanwhile, a team was deployed to Drungewick Slipway, to make a start on making steps up the sloping bank at the bottom of the slipway, to assist the Dredger Group when boarding and alighting from *Pauline*. Above the steps, a length of the ground along the top of the slope was levelled and material put down to

create a safer path to the dredger mooring.

The following week we split into three groups. The first went to Loxwood Lock where we assisted a contractor to remove the back pump from the pump chamber, so that it could be taken away for inspection and a maintenance service. While there, we walked up and assisted the Boat Group who were using *Josias Jessop* to cut and remove a fallen tree from the canal just upstream from the lock.

With the recent spate of wet weather, there were a number of fairly large pools of water across the towpath between Loxwood and Devil's Hole Lock. So, armed with a mattock and spade, a couple

of us dug numerous gulleys along that stretch of towpath to drain the "puddles". The second team went to Drungewick Slipway to begin installing Plastecowood mooring dolphins in the winding hole to which the large dredger tubs can be tethered to keep them away from the bank. Good progress was made but a return visit is required to complete the job. The third team went to Baldwin's Knob Lock to assist the contractor with some remedial work on the back pump.

The plan for our third outing, just before Christmas, was to carry out some fairly clean tasks in the morning before adjourning to the Onslow Arms for drinks and a lunch. Unfortunately (or fortunate!) the weather forecast was atrocious for that day and with torrential rain from sunrise onwards. Discretion was the better part of valour, so we postponed work for the day and went straight to the pub instead. There's always 2026 to complete the jobs!

Happy New Year everybody.

Brian King



Midweek Working Party

MWWP have had a very short month. On our first outing we went to Run Common Cottage where we had a mini Christmas party with 36 attending. Some were no longer working with us but it was still in excess of 30 working members. We cleared the canal and took down some dying trees and had hot dogs and mulled wine. A good time was had by all.

The next two weeks 10 people spent their time clearing north of Birtley Bridge 2 in preparation of removing the bund and making a new towpath so we can have another Wildlife Walk. At the same time we removed most of a very large tree that had fallen on the other side of the canal. The rest of the group spent time clearing the brash south of Rooks Hill Bridge. The Waterways Recovery Group (WRG) had cut down some trees alongside the canal and left us to clear all the branches etc. There is at least one more week's work to do there.

I wish to thank the whole group for all the hard work that you have put in this year and I hope you have a very healthy 2026.

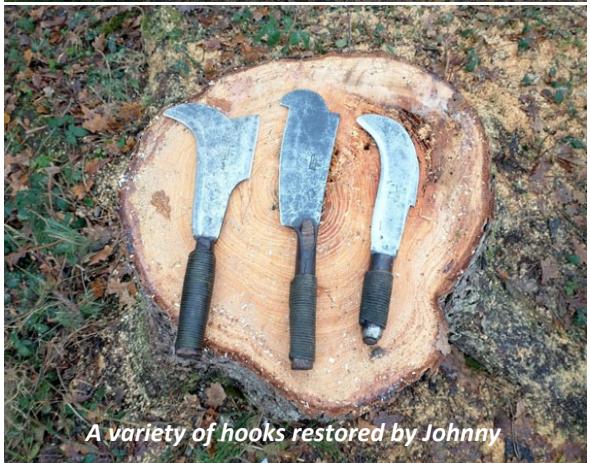
Margaret Darvill

Hedgelaying Team

December saw a good start made on laying the hedge at Rooks Hill, although, as always in December, the number of working days was reduced due to the holidays. We also took the opportunity to visit a local pub in Shamley Green for a late lunch after an excellent morning's work on the last task before Christmas - perhaps, we should do that more often, as the work rate that morning was exceptional!

My thanks to Zoe for transporting the stakes and binders to the site from Devil's Hole, once again demonstrating her expertise manoeuvring a twin-axle trailer in tight conditions. Thanks also to the Rooks Hill site team for allowing us to use a dumper to move the material up to the hedge.

The first section of hedge has been laid upstream from the bridge worksite, almost as far as the site of the lock, identified



by a distinct change in levels of the hedge (even though the hedge is comparatively modern) and also a few bricks and pieces of stone lying on the ground.

Special mention should go to Johnny, who, apart from being trained in fire lighting by Ray Mears and so manages to start fires in all conditions, has now proved to be gifted in restoring old tools to pristine condition, whilst ensuring that they still retain their charm.

Nick Baxter

Saturday Group

Four willing volunteers came out for our December outing, where we spent the day at Tickner's Depot. Our proposed plan to construct a brick and concrete drain chamber on the site of the temporary road at Tickner's Heath Crossing was soon scuppered, partially due to the freezing morning temperature which caused it to be too cold to lay bricks and partially due to logistical problems with plant machinery that we required. Thanks to the "to do" list previously provided by the Depot Manager, we were not left without work though!

We ventured into the gloom and depths of container C2 at the bottom of the Depot yard where we discovered piles of old hand tools, many old electrical tools and various other pieces of equipment, much of



and have been added to the WACT collection. There is now certainly no shortage of hammers or brick trowels!

Having successfully lightened the load of C2 contents, we fired up the diesel powered log splitter and spent the rest of our day reducing the heap of cut tree rounds and adding to the pile of firewood in the log bays.

The Saturday Group intends to meet every second Saturday of the month and can make use of as many pairs of hands as we can muster. Our next outing is planned for 10th January and, if you can spare the time, even if for only a few hours, you are very welcome to come along and join us. Please register your interest with stephen.david@weyarun.org.uk to be added to the Group mailing list and kept up to date with the arrangements for our next outing(s).



Stephen David

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which appeared to have not seen the light of day for several decades. Our brief was to sort through the ancient 'treasure trove', retain anything worth keeping and dispose of the rest. Suffice to say that the wood skip, the metal skip and the disposable waste bin were left much fuller than when we arrived! Quite a few usable hand tools were salvaged, however,