

For WACT Volunteers

March 2026

No. 385

Working Party News

Editorial

At long last there is a hint of Spring in the air, which is welcome news for our valiant work parties who have had to deal with some horrendous conditions throughout the winter months. Nevertheless they have kept on with their tasks and a major milestone was achieved this month with a successful concrete pour to create the bridge deck at Rooks Hill.

Peter Winter

Tickner's Depot

Over the course of a year, many days and volunteer hours are spent on the back breaking task of cutting our established hedges and canal bank edges to allow safe and clear passage along our towpaths. We have over a dozen hedge trimmers and brush cutters of various lengths and blade sizes for the job. What we really needed was something to make the job a bit easier and quicker.

Following several months of behind the scenes activity and with huge thanks to our Grants Administrator, Caroline, the Trust now has an Iseki TM3267 Compact Tractor and Flail, which was 75% funded by a Loxwood Parish Council. The tractor was delivered at the beginning of February and has already been put to work.

Being not much more than a metre wide, it is able to access most of our towpaths (although consideration has to be given to turning it round at the end of a section!). The flail can reach up to 2.4m with the flail head horizontal and go below the wheel-base level, down to 45 degrees for cutting weeds and saplings at the canal edge.



Volunteers all trained—and wishing the tractor had a cab!

Six volunteers attended a training and familiarisation session at Wiltshires' offices in Dunsfold, who supplied the tractor and flail. The following week, the Monday group took it to Long Meadow to trim the towpath, canal bank and hedge. With bird nesting season now upon us, the flail will be used for weed and grass cutting, although a narrow trailer can be fitted to move equipment and tools along the towpath.

We recently got called out to Rooks Hill to take a look at their welfare unit. The generator had taken up smoking. A dangerous habit, that was choking the guys inside the unit. We traced the fault to a fractured flexi-hose on the exhaust - an easy fix. With the new part fitted, a test of the generator showed that all was still not well. No leaks, but the engine ran like a three-legged dog, and after 30 seconds or so, cut-out. It restarted,

Volunteering Sub-Group

A new Volunteering Sub-Group to the Board has been formed to put more focus on recruitment, support for new recruits and information for our volunteers. We want to get your input and we have created a survey which we would like all volunteers to complete. A link to the survey has been distributed via Working Party Leads, and you can also access the survey via the QR code. If you would like to join the group or if you have any other ideas to share, please email volunteering@weyarun.org.uk

Bill Nicholson and Gordon Powell

Wey & Arun Canal Trust Volunteer Survey



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Hardly surprising the exhaust gases couldn't get out!

but soon cut out again. I originally thought the problem was a blocked silencer, but decided more investigation was needed. Last Thursday I removed the exhaust system only to find the blockage was not in the silencer, but just in the pipe itself. I knocked out the offending sooty mess, reassembled the pipes and left the guys happy that they could sit in the dry and warm without choking on diesel fumes.

In other depot news, our thanks go to the Thursday group for cladding the outer vault door and adding extra shelving to the high security vault (Dave's Dungeon). We are adding new lighting to the machine and engineering workshop, but will have to replace the timber gable end first. A crack in the roof has allowed water onto the timber frame. The PU foam insulation prevented us from noticing the rot and when we exposed the timber to add a support beam, we found the wood had as much structural strength as cottage cheese and was of a similar consistency. The crack has now been sealed and

a new C24 grade timber will be ordered.

And finally, the depot team has increased by 50% as Ian and I welcome Alan to our little group.

Mark Feeney

Monday Group

We had four meetings in February plus tractor training and familiarisation. Our time was mostly spent on hedge cutting at Baldwin's Knob Lock and the bonfire site and from Drungewick Lock to the Aqueduct using the new tractor with the hedge cutting attachment. This saved a lot of work!

We had two sessions cutting the brambles and growth alongside Loxwood car park on both sides, including canalside where we were met with compliments from walkers. We also tidied up around the seats at Brewhust Lock and Loxwood following a request from Margaret Darvill.



The new tractor being put to good use

Nick Wood

Boat Group PEST

Well after an extended break in January due to the weather, we were hopeful of getting back to our monthly routine in February. Unfortunately the weather had other ideas and we had to cancel our first trip of the month. However, we were able to go out later in the month and for our first outing of 2026 five of us took *May Upton* north almost as far as Southland Lock. There we found a small but busy tree half down and impeding the canal on the non-towpath side. We were able to cut back and remove the canopy, and further north near the chicane we found the lower part of a tree lying on the water covered in a considerable

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)	Contact David Stevenson
	Northern Working Party (Tuesday)	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

amount of ivy. We were also able to deal with that.

In addition there was tree debris in the water from the recent winter storms and on our return to the Canal Centre we also removed sprouting willow from the bank on the towpath side that had been left after the bank had been cut. We very much look forward to going south on our next outing to areas that we have not tackled for some months.

John Lee

Eric Walker Group

As the work at Rye Farm has now finished the EWG team was reunited and working at Rooks Hill. Operations on the project have been concentrated on the bridge itself as access to the rest of the site is, to say the least, difficult with the clay substrata not allowing quick drainage after days of continuous rain.

Because of the skill sets of the EWG volunteers and previous experience with large pumped concrete pours, the team were given the task of erecting the formwork, fixing the reinforcement and pouring almost twenty two cubic metres of high strength concrete. With the help and guidance of David Beadman, an EWG team member and civil engineer, we were able to design and erect the formwork for the bridge deck,



The concrete pour in progress and the resulting bridge deck

which had to restrain the pressure of and to support over fifty tonnes of concrete. Thankfully on the day of the planned pour, the 19th February, the weather was dry and everything went to plan, helped by a very experienced and cooperative boom concrete pump operator. Also the whole operation was recorded with an aerial video and photo shots by another EWG team member, Robin Gardner, with his drone. The formwork was removed the following week to reveal the concrete bridge deck.

We have not yet received permission from the management team at the Elmbridge Retirement Village to commence drainage work, so we will not be commencing that job next month, but will mobilise to Birtley Courtyard ready to start on the bund removal by Birtley Bridge 2 and the towpath formation north of the bridge.

Dennis Gillen

Northern Working Party



Photo by Gordon Powell

Bricklaying at Rooks Hill

Although the dismal weather persisted through most of February, we were able to continue with the works at the Rooks Hill Bridge site. Whenever the weather allowed, we carried on with the block and bricklaying on the wing walls of the bridge and, as they get higher, we are mixing and pouring more reinforced concrete into the cavities. Also, we have started to spread bulk deliveries of stone between the wing walls to raise the ground level on the bridleway approaches to the bridge deck.

At the newly built culvert outlet, just downstream from the bridge, we have continued to place and fill large Gabion baskets on either side of the culvert to form a retaining wall between the outlet

and the higher bank of the new canal cut.

Away from Rooks Hill, there were several other tasks that we

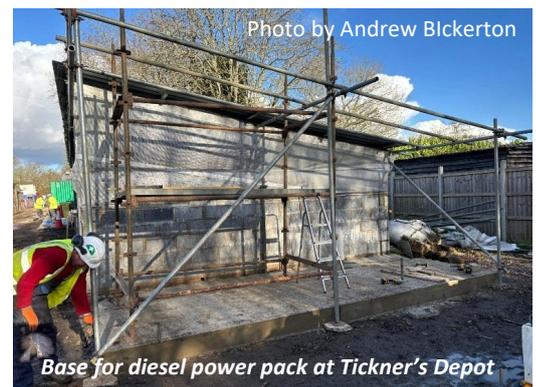


Photo by Andrew Bickerton

Base for diesel power pack at Tickner's Depot



Fallen tree near Birch Copse

Photo by Nigel Hartley

tackled. At Tickner's Depot we continued laying the concrete base for the diesel power pack for the hydraulic log splitter and began construction of the extended roof over the log bays to provide it with some weather protection.

We also assisted with clearing a fallen tree from the canal near Birch Copse. Using *May Upton*, we were able to remove and dispose of many of the lighter branches but a winch is going to be required to clear the trunk and heavier boughs.

Dave Miller

Hedgelaying Team

Hedgelaying has continued apace at Rooks Hill with the spectre of the season finishing at the end of March encouraging us to work harder and faster. Whilst the hedge will respond well to our work and be rejuvenated, it is disappointing to think that it was very much moribund until we came along and in reality was towards the end of its life due to years of being flailed with no other maintenance being carried out.

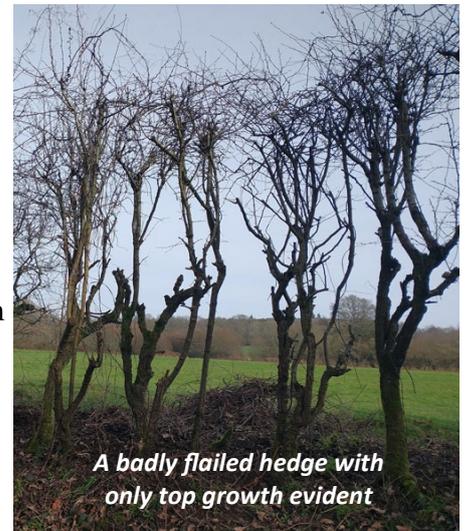
A good hedge needs regrowth from near ground level to keep it thick, which hedgelaying encourages. This makes it stock proof and is also good for wildlife like nesting birds. Flailing only encourages regrowth higher up with gaps below, leading to a very gappy hedge. We have also discovered extensive rot in this hedge, due to water and fungi entering the smashed branches running down as far as ground level, leading to death of some of the hedgerow trees and creating even more gaps.

Flailing is a useful tool for trimming hedges, but needs to be carried out thoughtfully. Ideally an A-shaped hedge is best, as this does give some cover for wildlife with a broader base. Alternatively, face cuts with an A-shaped top is also quite good. However, face cuts and a flat top will ultimately lead to the demise of the hedge, unless integrated with hedgelaying in rotation.

We also need some decent top growth in order to lay a hedge properly, with maybe 3 - 5 metres of upright growth, so 2 - 3 years of non-cutting of the top is ideal for us, though face cuts are still acceptable to keep the hedge in check.

We will be finishing the current hedge early next winter, and are looking for the another hedge or hedges to lay from Winter 2026 onwards. All suggestions welcome.

Nick Baxter



A badly flailed hedge with only top growth evident

Saturday Group



Filling Gabion baskets at the Rooks Hill culvert

On what was, fortuitously, one of the drier days in February, the Saturday Group, joined by a Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme participant, spent the day at the Rooks Hill Bridge site where we tackled a variety of tasks. We spread and compacted crushed concrete between the west wing walls to raise the ground level on the approach to the bridge deck. We laid more blocks on the west wing walls and then mixed and poured concrete into the wall cavity.

We then continued with extending the line of Gabion baskets on either side of the culvert outlet, which involved setting the empty baskets on a stone base to bring them up to the required height and then filling them from bulk bags of stone.

The Saturday Group meets on the second Saturday of every month and we encourage more volunteers, both current and new, to join us on our next outing on the 14th March. Please email 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

Thursday Group

At the beginning of the month, we took advantage of a wet and miserable day to work under cover in the MDV Shed at Tickner's Depot. We finished fabricating a heavy steel door for the secure store at the rear of the shed and fitted it into position. We also constructed shelving in the inner strong room for the storage of small machinery.

For our next outing we were unable to find an excuse for sheltering from the rain, so we went to Thriscutt Slipway to carry



Photo by Dave Miller

New steel door in MDV Shed



Photo by Ian Lower

Groundworks at Thriscutt Slipway

out some groundworks on the concrete ramp. Utilising the petrol disc cutter, we cut a trench across the ramp and dug out the loose material that had been used to infill a trench previously cut by a contractor to lay a drainage pipe. We also dug out the ground around two manhole covers on either side of the ramp and laid a concrete base for some brickwork to be laid to raise the height of the covers and for a low retaining wall to be built in front of the soil bank on one side.

Just upstream from Baldwin's Knob Lock is a culvert under the canal, the outlet of which is supported by a short wall of Legato blocks. The wooden posts of the fence running along the wall adjacent to the towpath had rotted at the base and become unstable. In relatively fine weather, we dismantled the fence, dug out the old posts, replaced them with new ones and reassembled the fence, leaving it much more secure.

With grateful assistance from the Dredging Team and their hydraulic bucket, we attended the towpath downstream from BKL and removed the post and rail bank reinforcement that had been damaged by the flooding from the River Lox at that point.

Brian King

Dredger Group

As many of you know, we have been steadily clearing silt from the canal bed south of Baldwin's Knob Lock. Dredged silt is first deposited into the Spoil Tub. The more spoil we place into the Tub, the lower it sinks increasing the chance of going aground. Currently, we stop filling when its approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ full. At this stage the tub has a draft of around 700mm.

The dredger is then moved to a convenient location where a ditch is first dug into the offside bank to contain the dredged spoil. The Tub is moved alongside and the dredger is used to empty its con-



Dredger spoil deposited on the offside bank



Helping out the Thursday Group by removing damaged bank reinforcement

tents into the newly dug ditch. Each dredging day we aim to $\frac{1}{4}$ fill and empty one spoil tub.

With the help of several additional volunteers, we have been able to dredge two days every week since Christmas. A full tub carries approximately 25 cubic metres of spoil, so a $\frac{1}{4}$ of this is around 6 cubic metres. All in all, I estimate that around 100 cubic metres of spoil has been successfully cleared this winter. There is still much silt to be cleared from this area, but the good news is that the trip boats can now access BKL and use its winding hole to turn and return to the Canal Centre.

When the spoil is deposited on the offside canal bank, it quickly settles as the water content drains and within 6 months vegetation growth

masks the spoil heaps. From an environmental perspective, placing the spoil on an offside canal bank allows any dredged invertebrates to quickly find their way back into the canal.

This large quantity of silt is mainly swept into the canal when the River Lox floods. Unfortunately, this has become a regular event and clearing needs to be done repeatedly if navigation is to be maintained. The recent towpath bank repair has been unsuccessful, and a more robust solution needs to be engineered. On our last day of February we assisted the Thursday Group in removing the failing bank protection. Can anyone suggest a viable cost-effective solution?

Although there is much dredging still to be done, work for this winter is now finished. The fish spawning season runs from March to June, and during this period dredging is not environmentally acceptable.

Our next task is to slip the dredger with a view of repairing her faulty Spud legs. This should have been done last summer, but low water levels prohibited the use of our slipway. Hopefully this time we will have sufficient water to float the dredger on to our slipway cradle. Spud legs are large pipelike feet that are used to stabilise the dredger when dredging and are essential to the operation. *Pauline* has three of them. These need to be lowered when dredging and raised to move the dredger. The hydraulic mechanism that does this is failing and needs urgent attention. Unfortunately, this is a difficult and time-consuming task and one that can only be attempted when she is ashore.

Charlie Coxwell

Midweek Working Party

MWWP have had a busy month when we have cleared a large number of sites in the north. The south has been too flooded to park and do meaningful work. We have had some beautiful sunny days despite February having many very wet days. A group made great headway in clearing the banks of Cranleigh Waters in Hunt Park, although it is not finished partly due to the high level of water. We have also cleared a patch of land, that WACT owns, east of the Josiah Jessop bridge at Tannery Lane.

Work has continued taking dangerous trees down north of Birtley Bridge 2. The trees were very tall and if they fell would go over the Downs Link and hit people's property. A couple of trees were taken down at Rooks Hill to enable Phase 2 to start in April and we cleared the footpath over the old bridge, east of the new bridge at Rooks Hill for Surrey County Council.

Brash and trees were cleared at Elmbridge to enable EWG to put in the new pipe for flood protection, whilst others cleared behind Rye Farm Cottages. We have also started work clearing the banks of the canal at Alfold Road.

Margaret Darvill

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