

For WACT Volunteers

April 2026

No. 386

# Working Party News

## Editorial

At long last conditions under foot have improved so that our teams can get on more easily with the multitude of tasks involved in restoring the canal and keeping it in good condition.

You can hear all about the latest developments at the Trust's Spring Meeting being held at Alfold Village Hall at 2.30pm on 18th April and in the morning you will also be able to see the progress being made at Rooks Hill. See the website for details.

*Peter Winter*



## Training Weekend

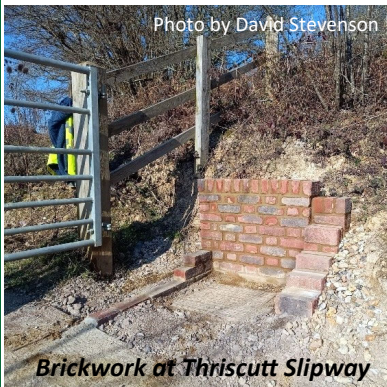
The annual Training Weekend organised by the Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) returns to Fossey Heath at Lichfield for 2026 and all training sessions will take place on Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th May. Volunteers will be given an introduction to the wide range of skills commonly used on restoration sites. The aim is to provide initial or refresher training, as well as WRG instructor training for those with several years of regular operator experience.

Training will be available in the following areas: 360-degree excavators (WRG categories 30 and 31), articulated dumpers, ride-on rollers, trailer towing, brick saws, bricklaying and any other useful sessions identified prior to the event.

WACT volunteers are welcome to take advantage of any of the training sessions and can attend either both or just one of the days. Accommodation is available from the Friday evening at just £10 per night (including food) or you can arrange your own accommodation, if required.

For further information on the training available, or to book a place, contact Ali Bottomley by email at [wrgrtraining@wrg.org.uk](mailto:wrgrtraining@wrg.org.uk)

## Thursday Group



*Brickwork at Thriscutt Slipway*

We continued with the work at Thriscutt Slipway by Dunsfold Aerodrome this month and infilled the dug out trench across the ramp with concrete. We finished the bricklaying around the two drainage inspection chambers on either side of the ramp to raise the height of the chamber covers and built a low brick retaining wall around one of the chambers to protect it from a high soil bank.

Water from the canal was found to be leaking around the side of the spill weir on the towpath opposite Drungewick Slipway where the bank had eroded, so we packed some new clay around the weir to reinforce the bank and prevent the leakage.

A few years ago, a very heavy back-pump at Brewhurst Lock was hauled out of the pump chamber and replaced with a new one. Its weight and location made it awkward to remove from the site but we recently attended and were able to eventually dismantle it into manageable sections and take it away on *May Upton* for it to be transported to Tickner's Depot for disposal.

A new electrical terminal box was fitted by contractors for the river pump near Drungewick Lock and a toggle switch fitted for the water level sensor



*Removing the old pump from Drungewick Lock*

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Fallen tree near BKL

Photo by Keith Eyal

in the winding hole. During the installation, it became apparent that water was leaking underground between the river pump and the outlet in the winding hole. We excavated a trench to uncover a length of the pipe to locate the leak and replaced the damaged section.

In preparation for installation of the terminal box, at Tickner’s Depot we fabricated support steelwork to which it could be attached. While at the Depot we were also able to do a small job for the Depot Group and fit slide bolts to the large Machine Shop double doors to enable them to be safely bolted open.

Following a report of a fallen tree across the canal near Baldwin’s Knob Lock, we attended the scene and cleared the branches that were obstructing the towpath but couldn’t clear the trunk from the channel, as it required a chain saw operator working from *May Upton*.

Brian King

### Dredger Group

Early in the month *Pauline* was prepared for slipping. A delicate operation as there is very little clearance between the top of slipway cradle and her bottom. However, as we had done this before we were full of bravado. Big mistake!



Out comes the leg ram

Her floats were first moved round and tied together as we intended to slip her bow first. Moving her floats round also gave us working space round her spud legs when ashore.

What we had not anticipated was the excessive silt build up next to the slipway. As her legs protrude an extra 200mm below her hull, she must be manoeuvred sideways on to the slipping cradle. The silt build-up made it difficult to place her on to the cradle. It was a long day, but we finally achieved our aim. Thanks go to the whole team, including Stuart Dawson who was driving the Telehandler.



Re-aligning the Floats

## 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



Happy chappies  
after a hard day's work

Once ashore, Agricom came to service both excavator and tug. The excavator's fuel tank was cleaned of its internal rust, an extra fuel filter fitted for added security and her exhaust repaired. The tug's exhaust leak was repaired together with her manoeuvring gear controller.

However, the main reason *Pauline* was on the slipway was to have her Spud legs repaired. No one was sure how the internal rams were attached, but in the end it proved rather simpler than anticipated. All that was required was to remove a big pin attaching the ram to the base of each spud leg and a considerable amount of clay ingress in the leg itself. The forward ones have been removed and sent to the repair shop for them to work their magic on them.

The aft leg ram will be tackled next month and once again Stuart has been tasked with bringing the Telehandler down to act as our skyhook to assist ram removal. This time the Telehandler will have to access the dredger via the plant crossing, as it's too big to pass the dredger on the slipway. So, progress is being made. Our aim is to have her afloat again ready for next winter's dredging programme.

*Charlie Coxwell*

## Hedgelaying Team

The final day of March saw the end of hedgelaying for the 2025-26 season. Another good season, with the very long hedge along the towpath at Drungewick finally completed before Christmas, using local coppice material from Drungewick Hill Farm, with thanks to Peter Foulger for allowing us to work his wood again.

We re-visited another coppice woodland, near Devil's Hole Lock, which the Team had previously worked about 9 or 10 years ago, under the then guidance of Keith Nichols, who set up the Group. This time, the coppice was just right for producing straight stakes and long binders - getting a hazel coppice back into a new rotation is essential for producing quality material for hedgelaying with very little wastage.



The completed hedge at Rooks Hill

We then moved on to Rooks Hill, laying the hedge next to the new section of the canal that the Trust is restoring upstream from the new bridleway bridge. This is adjacent to the site of Fanesbridge Lock, which became very evident when we started laying the hedge, with obvious changes in gradients and a few old stones visible. Altogether, the Team laid a length of around 260 metres and has cut and knocked in over 515 stakes to support the newly laid hedge (and cut and used a similar number of binders/heathers). The southernmost part of the hedge is very visible from The Downs Link long distance bridleway, which, along with the interpretation board on the Downs Link, is yet another indicator to the public of the positive benefit of land ownership by the Trust.

At this stage, I must thank both Zoe and, more recently, Stuart, plus the team at Rooks Hill bridge for helping us move the very large number of stakes and binders onto the site. A conservative estimate of value of the stakes and binders is around £1,300 if we had bought these on the open market!

Several members of the Team supported a joint task set up by Surrey Wildlife Trust, to train new hedgelayers - again, good to spread knowledge of what WACT does to outside organisations, and to network with other local groups

This year, two new members joined our Team (one who then had to leave at Christmas), but we have also said goodbye to two long standing members. So, in order to keep numbers constant, it has been suggested that we have a new rule whereby no-one else can leave the Team, unless they find a replacement.

If you're interested in joining us, we will start again probably in late October (weather dependent). No experience is needed, as we will offer training and loan tools to start with.

*Nick Baxter*

## Monday Group

The calendar allowed for five meetings in March. Just as well because the growing season has fully started and the rain fell! The Group, now in full swing and well attended with volunteers was in action mode, visiting Compasses, Tickner's, and Southland. Two visits each during the month were made to the locks at Gennets Bridge, Devil's Hole, Loxwood and Brewhurst, as well as the Drungewick aqueduct site and slipway. Despite all this work we found time to cut the vegetation at Drungewick Lock too.

*Nick Wood*

## Eric Walker Group

The EWG team has spent the whole month working at Rooks Hill. Operations on the project have centred around bricklaying to both the north and south sides of the main bridge structure. This involved the construction of the multi brick soldier arch laid onto the profiled steel angle, which was a complicated element requiring detailed setting out and was successfully completed by the skilled and patient work of David Beadman.



*The brick soldier arch*



*Bank piling ready for gabion baskets*

Other operations involved the excavation of the foundation for the interlocking concrete block wall to the south west side of the bridge. This is a difficult job because of the steep slope of the bank adjacent to the boundary of Fanesbridge Cottage.

Another group was occupied installing lengths of Plastecowood to form the "soft bank" structure on the eastern side extending from the end of the interlocking block/Gabion basket wall up to the bridge. This involved drilling holes with an auger attachment and driving the Plastecowood piles in at one metre centres in two parallel rows. The gap between the two rows of piles will eventually be made up to towpath level with stone filled Gabion baskets and a coir roll, all held in position by horizontal Plastecowood rails each side secured together by stainless steel rods.

*Dennis Gillen*

## Boat Group PEST

At the beginning of the month, we took the work boat *May Upton* as far as Birch Copse. On the way we cut some vegetation in front of Brewhurst Lock that would, in the growing season, have made it difficult for skippers of the trip boats to fully see the entrance to the lock.

Having gone through the lock we attempted to dispose of a very large pile of cuttings at the Brewhurst Lock winding hole burn site. Sad to say we were unsuccessful! However, we were not beaten and returned on our next meeting.

There was a large tree across the canal at Birch Copse which was rooted on the non towpath side and reached fully across the canal. Some work had already been done to remove the canopy so that walkers had access along the towpath. The tree was far too big for PEST to deal with but we did take off some of the smaller branches to help the chain saw team.

Determined as we were to deal with the large pile at Brewhurst lock winding hole, two of us spent the day there and were successful. Indeed with the burn completed and the old pump now removed, the area is looking quite neat.

Some of us took *May Upton* down to Birch Copse and were able to remove the final branch in the water following the successful removal of the tree.

*John Lee*

## Saturday Group



On a sunny Spring day, the Saturday Group met at Rooks Hill to progress the placement of Gabion baskets to the south side of the culvert. Six volunteers attended and worked hard during the day to spread and level a stone foundation to the required height and then place the remaining baskets in position for filling.

We also spent some time on mixing concrete and filling the cavities of the wing walls of the new bridge.

The Saturday Group normally meets on the second Saturday of every month and we encourage more volunteers, both current and new, to join us and expand the team. We will not be meeting in April and our next session is planned for the 9th May. Please email [stephen.david@weyarun.org.uk](mailto: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*

## Midweek Working Party

MWWP had an eventful month. We began the month with the Navvies Lunch at the Sir Roger Tichborne. We sat down to 51 people and a good time was had by all. The rest of the month was mostly spent clearing trees that have fallen into the canal or over a towpath. Therefore work has been on the navigation, Hunt Park and Birtley. A group has also spent time clearing the canal from Fastbridge to Mill Farm. This has not been done here for at least 4 years so bramble clearance and taking down trees had to be done. There is still a lot more to do here. A small group has spent time clearing trees at Rooks Hill to enable NWG and EWG to build up the east bank of the new canal.

*Margaret Darvill*

## Tickner's Depot

As mentioned last month, the gable-end of the engineering workshop has had some attention. Having cut out the offending PU foam and carefully replaced the 2 by 4 wooden framework to support the roof sheeting, we have now fitted waterproof underlay and the featheredge timber. Only two coats of Sadolin are required to finish the job, but it's looking good already.

Now that the gable-end is solid again, we can get the lighting supports up and have some decent illumination in the workshop. Hopefully, there'll be a photo of that next month.

Our big concrete mixer has come back to the depot for some much needed TLC. The front wheels have so much concrete droppings on them that they no longer turn, the towing handle has been bent and the diesel engine won't start. The starter motor was the most likely culprit. To gain access to it, the engine had to be moved forward on its sub-frame. Having done that, the starter was removed and bench tested – it worked fine. I now have the wiring diagram and will test the circuits next week. New wheels, drive belts, a service kit and some fresh engine oil will be fitted, as well as the repaired towing handle, before it goes back to Rooks Hill.

Talking of engine oil, the Isuzu came into the yard the other week dripping the stuff. With a spill mat in place, we set about investigating the reason. The oil was coming from the rear crankshaft seal and was dripping at a steady rate. When checking the dipstick, the 'oil' level was found to be about 5 inches above max! Using our vacuum extractor we took out 4 litres of black and very runny liquid. The dripping stopped, but why was there so much fluid in the sump? It turns out, the Isuzu has a Diesel Particulate Filter (DPF) in the exhaust. When this starts to get blocked with soot, extra fuel is injected in, and is supposed to burn the soot out of the DPF. It seems that this doesn't always work, and the extra fuel washes down the engine bores and into the sump. We did an oil and filter change the next day. In total, there had been 13 litres of fluid in the 7.5 litre sump!



*Mark Feeney*

## Northern Working Party

All of the Tuesday Team's time was again spent at the Rooks Hill Bridge site this month. We have continued with brick and block laying on the bridge wing walls ... and mixing concrete to fill the wall cavities as they get increasingly higher. We have bitumen painted the sides of the bridge abutments and assisted WRG with backfilling the ground between the wing walls on the bridge approaches. The ground level is now nearing the height of the bridge deck.

We filled the Gabion baskets positioned by the Saturday Group near the culvert and that stretch of baskets is now complete. Yet more baskets will be required on the new canal bank in the vicinity of the bridge and we have begun assembling them in readiness for positioning and filling.

In order to maintain the site approach track from the A281, we have



Track repairs at Rooks Hill

gone along the length of the track, filling pot holes with Type 1 and consolidating them with the wacker plate.

The Monday Team has been busy with several fencing projects this month. Following completion of the towpath work at Rye Farm, we have installed a length of panel fencing along the property boundary with Elmbridge Road to provide sound and visual screening. We have also erected post and rail fencing at Rooks Hill, by the bridge over Cranleigh Waters.

We are now working on erecting a post and rail fence at the rear of Birtley Courtyard, Bramley, by the boundary with the Wey-South Path.

*Dave Miller*



Photo by Keith Lyall

Concreting cavities in wing walls at Rooks Hill Bridge

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