

For WACT Volunteers

May 2026

No. 387

Working Party News

Editorial

Well, what a month we have had. Hardly a drop of rain throughout the month of April. This has been great for all our working parties, who have been able to make excellent progress, especially at Rooks Hill. What is more, the Trust has secured a grant towards the costs of the next stage of the Rooks Hill project.

It's not such good news for the Boat Group, however, who will be wondering how much longer the canal trips will be able to run.

Peter Winter

A good crowd came to the Rooks Hill Open Day on 18th April

Photo by Robin Gardner



Midweek Working Party

This month we have had beautiful weather to do our work and we have been well supported with as many as 31 volunteers out - a record. MWWP has been concentrating on clearing the banks and removing tree trunks out of the canal at Alfold Road. We have cleared one bank but now we need to complete the other side. It has given us the chance to use the new Tracmaster and learn what it is good for as well as what not to use it for - a good learning curve.

Hunt Park had a good brush cut and now appears looked after. A culvert was cleared of laurel so that we could see whether the head wall needs repairing; sadly it does.

We cleared the track from Birtley Courtyard to Rooks Hill so that Trust members could walk to the Open Day and brick laying ceremony. We have taken down large tree trunks that were overhanging the route of the canal between Rooks Hill and Birtley Bridge 1 where we are hoping to install sheet piling in between the canal in water and the new stretch to be restored. Tickner's Crossing was also given a good vegetation clearance in the hope it will not need redoing for the contractors.

Margaret Darvill

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Boat Group PEST

Our first PEST get together would have been on Good Friday, but it was agreed that we would stay at home and eat Easter Eggs!

At the end of the month we had a rather unusual outing. All began normally, we took *May Upton* north to Devil's Hole Lock to clear a small amount of branches in the water and do some cutting back of vegetation on the non-towpath side of the canal. Our intention was then to go south of the Canal Centre but when we got back to Loxwood Lock we had a problem with the top gates. The rest of the day was spent doing what we could to resolve the fact that the gates wouldn't close sufficiently to allow us to open the bottom gate and leave the lock.

Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful so we returned to the Devil's Hole pound to off load what we had collected and then moored the boat on the north side of Loxwood Lock on the non-towpath side. Like all good stories it has a happy ending and I am pleased to report the problem has been resolved (see NWP report), MU is back on its mooring and I understand the trip boats have been going north.

John Lee

Monday Group

April may have been a 'short' month with a Bank Holiday and only three outings but much was achieved as we visited all our regular sites as well as a 'special'!

We were asked to cut the vegetation at the Rooks Hill site which we attempted to do with limited success as we were recommended to use the tractor. This was not an appropriate 'tool' for the job due to the nature of the undergrowth, so we had to rely on our brushcutters and long handled loppers to trim the brambles.

Having said that, our second and third meetings were more successful as we cut Compasses, Tickner's, and the locks at Gennets, Southland, Devil's Hole, Loxwood, Brewhurst, Baldwin's Knob and both sides of the canal at Drungewick Aqueduct. This was only possible as we had a good number of volunteers and decent weather!

Nick Wood

Thursday Group

At the start of the month, we spent a day at the Depot painting the recently fitted feather edged cladding on the gable end of the Machine Shop. Whilst there we also fitted new grease nipples to a couple of digger buckets, together with new bushes and support pins. In preparation for a forthcoming task that we have near Birtley Bridge 1, we tested the Aquadam by unrolling it in the dry at the depot and filling with air to check for any leaks. Fortunately, none were found.

A visit was made to the bridge at Devil's Hole Lock where we attached warning signs of a 2.5 tonne maximum load. We greased the winding gear and water pump at the lock and while returning to Loxwood along the towpath, cut down a number of overhanging branches.

We have also spent some time at Tickner's Crossing, tidying and clearing the yard in readiness for use by

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

the contractors, when appointed, while building the new road bridge.

On a very fine, sunny day, we took *May Upton* down through Brewhurst Lock to the Birch Copse compound and Baldwin's Knob Lock to carry out routine maintenance on the lock gear, gates and control cabinets.

More time was then spent at Tickner's Depot, where we made use of the very long handled electric hedge trimmer to tidy up and reduce the height of the laurel hedge along the fence line between the MDV Shed and the fuel tank. We also replaced the guttering along the length of the MDV Shed by the hedge, with larger volume guttering to prevent it overflowing.

The deck of Birtley Bridge 1 was prone to water pooling in heavy rain, so we have addressed the issue by drilling holes through the deck in various places and fitting drainage bungs.

The Aquadock is currently in use at Drungewick Slipway and to make it more stable, we have completely disassembled it and rebuilt it with the sections now in a brick bond pattern.

With there being a plentiful supply of clay spoil at the Rooks Hill Bridge site, we took the opportunity to collect a truck load and have begun to infill a section of eroded canal bank along the towpath opposite the Drungewick Slipway.

We have also begun to affix Plastecowood rails along the new Gabion baskets that edge the restored canal bank at Rooks Hill. There will be a total of about 350 metres to do, so this should keep us occupied for a while!

Brian King

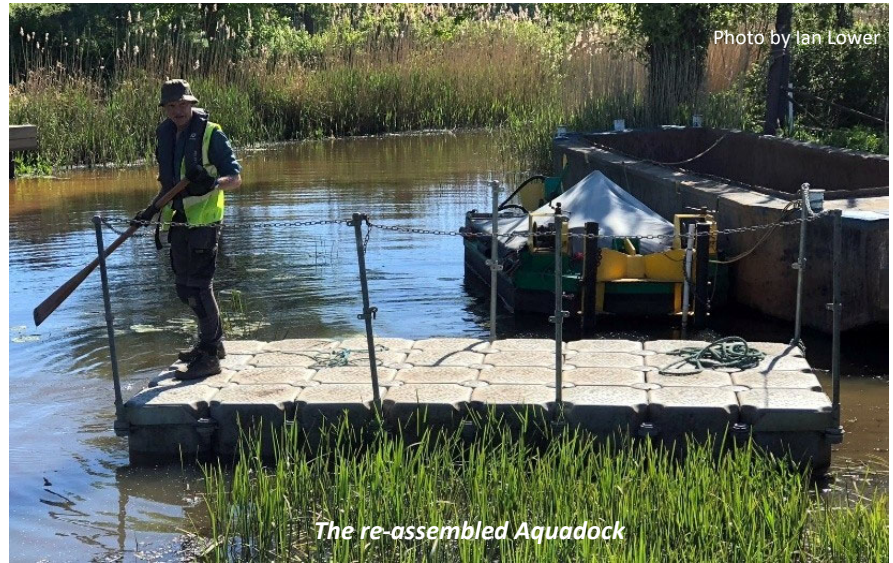


Photo by Ian Lower

The re-assembled Aquadock

Northern Working Party

We have been working again at the Rooks Hill Bridge site, where we have continued with bricklaying on the wing walls, concreting the cavity voids and filling the Gabion baskets along the new section of canal bank. We also assisted with installing and profiling the 'sausage' bank above the culvert. This involved fixing temporary formwork, lining with long lengths of membrane, backfilling with clay spoil, covering over with

Photo by Jeff Grimes



Log bay extension at Tickner's Depot



Photo by Jeff Grimes

Freeing the Loxwood Lock gates

the membrane and then repeating sections up the bank until there was sufficient to profile.

During the month, we also assisted with the preparation for, and the supervision of, the well-attended site visits on the morning of the WACT Spring Meeting and the commemorative brick laying by Sir Jeremy Hunt MP.

The Monday Team finished erecting the roof on the log bay extension at Tickner's Depot and this

weather protected space can now be used for siting the diesel engine for the log splitter and for storage of the four inch pump unit.

They also fixed a problem at Loxwood Lock where one of the top gates would not close properly, which made it impossible to open the lower gates, meaning that the lock could not be used. They installed stop planks, drained the chamber above the top gates and discovered a piece of wood had jammed in the mitre. With the wood removed and the silt cleared from around the mitre, the gates operated correctly and normal service was resumed.

Dave Miller

Tickner's Depot

Considering that Ian and I have had time off, we still achieved quite a lot at the depot. Two small water pumps have been brought back to life. They had been run without inlet filters and ingested gravel, which jammed the impellers. Please use the filters, as gravel in an aluminium chamber will only have one winner, and those chambers are pricey.

We've had teams from the Monday and Thursday groups helping out, and thanks to them we now have a roof on the log store extension, Hi-Capacity guttering on the MDV shed, a nicely trimmed laurel hedge between us and the neighbours and the pot-holes in the entrance track filled in.

The Tracmaster/BCS and flail have been in action and came back a bit worse for wear. Nothing too serious, just several yards of rusty barbed wire wrapped around the flails. It is something we have to look out for, but the wire is so well camouflaged when cutting brambles, that it's difficult to see before it's too late.

We were asked to get the 4" diesel water pump ready for use, firstly at Rooks Hill/Birtley and then down to Baldwin's Knob Lock. The big orange beastie hadn't been used for at least a couple of years and I was astounded to find it still had a battery in it (these are usually 'borrowed' for other bits of kit that have a dead battery and never replaced). After a quick check of the coolant, oil and fuel, I pressed the starter button and was shocked when it fired up instantly. And even more shocked when the black sooty liquid that had been languishing in the exhaust, shot up out of the pipe and splattered on my head.

Finally, welcome to Stephen Darvill, our latest recruit at the depot. As many of you will know, Stephen has been a WACT volunteer for many years and has decided to give the mechanical and maintenance side of the Trust a try.

Mark Feeney

Eric Walker Group



The EWG team has spent the whole month working at Rooks Hill. The activities on the project have included brickwork, installing interlocking concrete block walls and softbank construction.

One part of the team continued with the Plasticowood pile soft bank construction on the east side of the canal south of the bridge.

Another part of the group were employed on the construction of the 'sausage' design as we have named it on the west bank south of the bridge. This is not the most popular of tasks and involves laying a membrane of geotextile, filling it



with clay spoil to a depth of around 500mm and then folding the geotextile over to encapsulate it. This is then followed by further layers on top, each layer being set back from the layer below to form a bank at an angle of around 45 degrees. When five layers are completed the bank will be finally formed by laying a mattress shaped gabion basket filled with even sized stones.

Brickwork to the arches on the north and south sides of the bridge has continued along with the wing walls on both sides.

The team also removed the trusses that supported the formwork for the concrete pour for the bridge.

Dennis Gillen

WRG Driver Authorisation Scheme: Update from the IWA

Back in October the Inland Waterways Association employed a new company to upgrade their database which hosts all the WRG data. Unfortunately, it would appear that they 'forgot' about driver authorisation and the upgrade broke the system in a small but very fundamental way such that we could no longer produce cards, letters or emails. Although the fix should have been very simple, it has taken months of behind the scenes negotiations with the new supplier to get them to fix what they actually broke. We are expecting the fix to be in place very soon at which point we will start catching up with the huge backlog of over six months. Please bear with us and in the meantime for any Driver Authorisation enquiries please use da@wrg.org.uk rather than any individual email addresses so that we are working through information in one place.

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