Working Party News

For WACT Volunteers November 2026 No. 393

Editorial

As we move into Autumn, we've had a busy month on the canal. Many groups have been contributing to maintain good progress on the Rooks Hill project. Meanwhile others have been engaged in the continuing tasks associated with canal maintenance and dealing with vegetation. No doubt Storms Austen and Boelo will have added to their workloads.

Peter Winter

Thursday Group

For our first outing in October, we completed a variety of tasks in the Baldwin's Knob area. Having collected a couple of loads of clay from the excavations at Rooks Hill, we packed it into the eroded towpath bank just downstream from the lock. Then, to complete the installation of the recently installed back pump at the lock, we fitted protective chequer plate covers over the large flexible pump piping. The multi angled covers having been deftly fabricated at Tickner's Depot by Neil, one of our team members.



Before heading home, we visited Drungewick Slipway where we spread some Type 1 stone on the steps and walkway along the top of the bank to the dredger mooring.

At Tickner's Depot, in an effort to minimise the noise of the diesel engine that powers the log splitter, we were involved in the construction of a roofed, blockwork shelter at the end of the log bays. Though the sound level in the vicinity has been reduced, we propose to install internal acoustic tiles to provide further soundproofing.

The workboat Wasp has been stored at Tickner's Depot for a couple of years but she is now beyond economical repair, so it has been decided that she is to be scrapped. In order for her to be taken away, we have cut her in two for easier removal by the scrap metal merchant.

During the month, we have also had several visits to Rooks Hill where we have assisted with cleaning off the efflorescence from the facing brickwork of the bridge and installing Heras fencing along the farm track from the compound to the old bonfire site.

Meanwhile, the current low water level in the canal revealed that the concrete sub-structure of the narrow, canoe landing stage near Loxwood Canal Centre was badly eroding. Rather than repair it, we have completely demolished it, and will build a new, bigger landing stage further down the canal near the steps at the end of the car park, where it will be clear of the trip boats manoeuvring in the winding hole.



Demolition of the old landing stage at Loxwood—and building the new one

Brian King

Boat Group PEST

PEST did not go out at the beginning of October mainly due to lack of available work and because there were too many of us on holiday! However, towards the end of the month seven of us met at the Depot to paint one of the containers and do some tidying

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up. We also emptied the rain water out of a dingy that is in the Wheelyboat and covered them both with a tarpaulin to keep the rain off in future.

Talking of rain we are very excited that in the not too distant future, maybe in November, we will be able to return to the water in the work boat *May Upton* and resume cutting vegetation back on the non-towpath side of the Loxwood section of the canal. We imagine that as we have not been doing this since early summer there will quite a lot to do.

John Lee

Tickner's Depot

Colin, our big chipper, has proved to be a bit more problematic than we first thought. Having given it a service and topped up the hydraulic fluid, a quick test showed that the issue of hydraulic incontinence still persists! Having researched the fault online, it could be air getting sucked into the system via a damaged hose. All I have to do is to find which hose it might be. Please get in touch if you have any bright ideas as to how I can do that.



Log splitter engine bay

The housing for the log splitters hydraulic power unit has been built and evaluated. We thought we'd test it before fitting the acoustic foam in case we don't need it. The housing has made a difference, but it could do with being a bit quieter, so the foam will go on next week.

Many of you will remember *Wasp* one of the Trust's work boats. She was brought to the Depot several years ago, to have her inner hull inspected. The concrete ballast was broken up and removed, only to reveal her cross-bracing steel to be suffering from a serious bout of ferric oxide, so the decision was taken to scrap her . Our scrap metal man came in and agreed to take her, if we would cut her in half to fit on his lorry. Harry Simon did this a few weeks ago. Now 'all' I have to do is to get her out! Since she was put there, all sorts of equipment, materials and detritus have been deposited on the only access path to her. Time for a bit of a tidy-up, methinks.

Mark Feeney

Midweek Working Party

This note covers the last two months. October has been very wet on Wednesdays and work had to be curtailed by many groups or transferred to the Depot to chop wood. There have also been a number of trees that the group has had to clear due to the high winds and heavy rains. Time has been spent clearing logs that were cut in the Spring from Elmbridge.

We have helped EWG several times at the Rooks Hill site by mowing the field for a fence to be installed for the woodland copse, which is to be planted in November. We also cleared brambles so that the compound can be moved and removed a tree so that machinery can be used for the Birtley Stabilisation project.

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 had a number of Duke of Edinburgh participants volunteering as part of their Bronze and Silver Awards. They had a very enjoyable time and all the WACT volunteers enjoyed having them.

One week was spent at Tannery Lane clearing a tree lying over the fence and tidying up the whole area. Trunks have also been removed from the bank north of Birtley Bridge North. This required a winch to move them from the opposite side of the canal.

We have had several weeks at Bonfire Hanger doing our annual clearance of fallen trees and tidying the base of the canal. We had several compliments from passers by saying that they had never seen the section looking so good. Southland has also seen its annual clearance. It was brought forward due to trees being brought down by the winds. Even with the dry summer, there is a huge amount of growth to clear.

In the summer we had to clear the Quays at Pallingham, but we were unable to dispose any of the brash and grass so we cleared it so that it does not cover the footpath. Hopefully we will have drier Wednesdays next month.

Margaret Darvill

Monday Group

Once again, October was a busy month. Despite our visits last month, we were required to catch up with the vegetation at Compasses, Tickner's and Gennets. Since we had not been to Lordings since July we had a day there before access becomes too muddy. We cut around the flood lock, the main lock and the towpath hedge. We may need to return in the spring to clear nature's growth from the bottom of the 'main' lock..

We also attended Barnsill slipway for reed cutting and cleared the bank north and south of Baldwin's Knob Lock with the Tracmaster.

Our final outing of the month was spent at the Drungewick Aqueduct site where we cut the thick grass on the non-towpath side, cleared the 'railway tracks' and cut the reeds and the hedge with the tractor as far as the first bend north of Drungewick.

Two of our members attended a day long first aid course so we are well provided to meet this requirement as we now have four members so trained. On 26th we welcomed a young Duke of Edinburgh participant who made a big contribution to our work at Drungewick.



Tracmaster at work at Drungewick

Nick Wood

Eric Walker Group

During the month the group continued working on Rooks Hill Phase 1 and the Birtley Bank Stabilisation project. At Birtley we needed to complete the tricky task of earth filling and profiling to support the bank below the towpath so that the sheet piling can be installed along a section of the canal bank. This meant that excavators and dumpers were needed to excavate and transport the earth from the Rooks Hill Phase 2 canal cut. Once the bank filling and profiling was completed the team then widened the towpath and laid Geogrid and hardcore to create a stable platform for the piling rig to operate.



Platform for the piling rig



Earthworks to support the bank

At Rooks Hill, the brickwork continued to the east side wing walls, which are now 95% complete. Other work on Phase 1 involved transporting and spreading topsoil to the embankment to the east side of the towpath and bridge. This work is ongoing and should be ready for the tree planting to commence early next month. Before that happens the team needs to erect a fence with additional rabbit incursion mesh around the whole tree planting area.

Dennis Gillen

Saturday Group



Filling gabion baskets at Rooks Hill

Having assisted with the WACT display at the Surrey Hills Wood Fair in September, our October outing was at Rooks Hill. A small group of four of us met to work on continuing the construction of the edging of the newly cut canal bed northwards from the bridge site. We assembled fifteen more gabion baskets and levelled the ground for them to be positioned between the previously installed Plastecowood posts. We then hand filled eight of the baskets, which is a time consuming job, as the canal facing side has to be laid with neatly stacked stone before the rest of the basket is filled.

We would like to expand the size of the group and welcome more volunteers to join us. If you are interested, please email stephen.david@weyarun.org.uk, to be added to our mailing list and kept up to date with the arrangements for our outing(s). We meet on the second Saturday of every month.

Stephen David

Dredger Group

Both Brian & I have been away on holiday, Brian was swimming in Malta and I took our narrowboat on a round trip from Stone to Market Bosworth.

The dredger has now been moved back to the lower slipway ground fitting to allow safer vehicle access round slipway area. Unfortunately, the move highlighted problems with the cradle wheel bearings. Two of the four axles no longer turn! Another maintenance job to be done before the boat can be slipped.

I am frequently asked why we need to regularly dredge the lower navigable section of our canal. So, I thought I would add my thoughts on this. Water for our navigable section comes mainly from the rivers Lox and Arun. We are generally only allowed to pump when the rivers are fast flowing. Fast flowing river water contains a high quantity of suspended silt. When this is pumped into our still canal waters the silt settles out and needs to be dredged out to maintain navigable depth. This is compounded during periods of heavy flooding from the river Lox.

The pound between Baldwin's Knob Lock and Drungewick has lost much of its clay lining from the banks. Much of this damage may well have been caused during periods of flooding, when the river Lox overtops its banks and rushes down our normally tranquil canal. At the other extreme, when the water levels drop, the clay dries, cracks and falls off. There are also several dead tree roots, embedded into the canal banks, which may have produced a conduit for water leakage. All these factors cause an increase in water loss. To compensate for this, further quantities of river water are pumped in. Not only is this expensive, but it also brings in further silt. As an example, last winter we cleared approximately 100 cubic metres from the BKL winding hole. This winter we will need to return to clear another build-up. There is also a considerable build-up down in the slipway/winding hole/plant crossing area, which will be our next priority once we can get afloat.

When I first started volunteering (20 years ago!) we regularly ran trip boats down to Drungewick Lock. Many of these trips ran during early summer. Now, due to low water levels, mainly caused by poor water retention and excessive silt build up we have been unable to run these early summer trips even down as far as the slipway.

The big question is how are we to significantly reduce our leakage rate? Whatever the solution, it is likely to be costly and take several years to rectify.

Charlie Coxwell

Northern Working Party

With the sub-base of the temporary road at Tickner's Heath Crossing having been completed, we spent October laying a protective membrane over the surface and covering the site over with top soil. We took down the chestnut paling fencing alongside the roadside verge and created a soil bank around the site boundary. At the entrance to the yard, we have erected a wooden post and rail fence with a metal field gate for access.

Away from Tickner's Crossing, we have assisted with the building of a blockwork shelter to house



Groundworks at Tickner's Heath



Fencing at Tickner's Heath Yard

and soundproof the diesel engine that powers the log splitter at the Depot. We have also been involved in splitting a large number of the tree rounds that were accumulating and generally tidying up around the Depot yard.

We visited Elmbridge Village, Cranleigh on two occasions to inspect the culvert which extends from just outside the Village grounds, under the canal and adjoining field before draining into a ditch, then into Cranleigh Waters. We knew that there was a blockage in the culvert, about 30 metres in, that is likely to be tree roots coming from an old coppiced tree nearby in the field. Pending an assessment on how best to tackle the issue permanently, we dug out the ditch so that the level is now below the bottom of the culvert outlet, allowing a better outflow of water.



Culvert outlet ditch at Elmbridge



Presentation of Jack King Cup to Stephen David (in striped tee shirt)

At this year's AGM our Team Leader, Stephen David, was deservedly awarded the Jack King Cup for his outstanding volunteering contribution to the Trust. As well as running the Tuesday Group of the Northern Working Party, Stephen leads the Saturday Group and has also taken responsibility for administering the Trust's records for vehicle driving and plant operative authorisations. Having, unfortunately, not been able to attend the AGM, Stephen was presented with the cup at a post working party "wind down".

Dave Miller

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