

Working Party News

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For WACT Volunteers

November 2022

Editorial

At long last there is sufficient water in the canal to enable the restart of boat trips and for the PEST Team to resume activities.

The Hedgelaying Team is also preparing for action so a full compliment of work parties will be operating once again.

Peter Winter

Canal Maintenance Unit

It was different tasks every week for us in October, including improving the ground surface around the bench at Barnshill bridge, reed removal at Drungewick in preparation for use of the slipway, and replacement of the top lock gate walkway at Loxwood Lock.

Also, whilst replacing *May Upton*'s deck floor last month, we noticed there was an excessive amount of ballast at the stern. So after consultation with the Boat Group, we removed some of the ballast to raise the freeboard. The opportunity was then taken to bring *Wasp* back to Loxwood and we found that Baldwin's Knob Lock is just long enough for *Wasp* and *May Upton* to both pass through at the same time!

Ian Lower



May Upton & Wasp in Baldwin's Knob Lock

Hedgelaying

As always, summer is the time for us to check that the hedges laid in previous years are still alive. I am pleased to report that all are good so far, even with the very dry weather in June and July. We now head towards a new season starting with coppicing for stakes and binders in November, then hedge preparation and laying at Drungewick slipway, re-laying a hedge that had been worked on by a previous incarnation of the team about 12 - 14 years ago.



Last season, I was approached by a local Morris Group, to ask if we could provide them with new hazel sticks to hit each other with; apparently it encourages them to dance faster and better! As we always have spare lengths of hazel from producing stakes, we were pleased to help. The picture shows the Alton Morris (a mixed side) in action earlier this summer with the hazel sticks.

Nick Baxter

Boat Group PEST

The PEST 'clear navigation' team were back in action in October after an enforced lay-off due to insufficient water to float their boats. Their work-boats being *May Upton* and *Wasp* both of which benefitted from continuing maintenance and improvements. The engines of both boats have been

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serviced recently and *MU* has had new decking fitted to replace the rotting original.

With the ongoing improvement to *Wasp*, the team will be making more use of her in future taking advantage of her greater capacity, front ramp facilitating unloading and her easier handling.

On our first of two scheduled work days in October the team took *MU* and worked on the pound between Brewhurst and Baldwin's Knob locks to clear the mass of weed and floating debris from the water. Three full loads were removed and taken for disposal. The removal of the mass of wet weed from the boat proving to be a back-breaking task, as one can imagine. The second scheduled workday had to be cancelled due to bad weather. Next month it is anticipated that the PEST crew will be assisting in the removal of dead ash trees south of Barnhill Bridge.

Chris Jones

Boat Maintenance

Zachariah Keppel has completed her painting and spruce-up, ready for her slipping and subsequent MCA survey during the week in early November. Now all we need to demonstrate is that there is sufficient water to get her to the slip, and that the reeds have not grown across the channel to such an extent as to make us tow her like the African Queen.

Our attention has now transferred to *Wiggonholt*. Rubber-backed mats have been bought by Lyn Nash for the saloon deck centre aisle and they were put to use on our first passenger trip since July, which we completed successfully on Wednesday 19th October.

WH seems to have suffered some mortality amongst its six (yes six) bilge pumps. We have had to replace two of them with the automatic ones, together with the switch which was in the after starboard corner on



the deck, just aft of the desk. This latter item is being renewed and placed in a more convenient place just under the desktop against the engine room bulkhead.

The forward pump is there to clear water from the scuppers on either side of the foredeck. Since this deck is well above the water, it seems strange that the pipes lead down to an automatic pump in a plastic tank below the waterline and is then pumped up again and out through the starboard side. It would have been easier to let the scuppers drain straight overboard, through the lockers. Hindsight is a great gift!

David Arnold

Working Party Diary		
Every Monday	'Mrs Bucket' Keeping up Appearances	Contact Tom Close
Every Tuesday (late October to March)	Hedgelaying	Contact Nick Baxter
Every Tuesday and Thursday	Boat Maintenance	Contact David Arnold
Every Wednesday	Midweek Working Party	Details from Margaret Darvill
Alternate Monday	Tickner's Depot	Contact Ian Prior
Every Wednesday and Thursday	Eric Walker Group	Details from Dennis Gillen/John Reynolds
Every Monday, Tuesday, and Third Saturday	Northern Working Party	Contact Bill Nicholson
Every Thursday	Canal Maintenance Unit	Contact Ian Lower
First & Third Friday of the month	PEST Boat Group	Contact Chris Jones/Peter Hyem
Third Saturday of the month	Summit Level	Contact Dave Evans

Northern Working Party

The month started at Tickner's Heath Road Crossing with landscaping work to grade the clay embankment down from the footpath and planting of a selection of young trees, including hazel, field maple and oak. The timber rail fencing on the footbridge approaches was completed and, with the removal of most of the Heras perimeter fencing, the site is generally looking much tidier.



A Saturday working party met at Barnshill Bridge to do some tree felling and towpath clearance, with a total of 11 trees being felled and cut to form two large timber stacks. The opportunity was taken to begin training two new volunteer chainsaw operators who are going to be required to assist with the canal-side clearance of more diseased ash trees in the coming months.

Work then moved to Devil's Hole Lock to tackle the problem of the trip boats grounding. An impressive extended digging clam shell scoop (or 'long dangly thing', for the uninitiated!) was specially hired and attached to digger 'Sally' to remove silt from the bottom of the chamber. Some rotting fence and gate posts were replaced and the AquaDam, with a lot of heaving and tugging, was recovered from its position in the canal.



Clearing silt from Devil's Hole Lock

For the last week of October, our volunteers joined a visiting party from the Waterway Recovery Group Forestry Team to fell, stack, chop and dispose of diseased ash trees along the towpath between Loxwood and Devil's Hole Locks. A tremendous effort by all, with an ever growing pile of logs but, unfortunately, there is still much more diseased tree removal to be done, but that is for next month!

Dave Miller

Mrs Bucket Group

Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

In October the Group fully returned to 'keeping up appearances'. We largely completed cutting back the reeds and branches between Drungewick Bridge and the lock including trimming stuff on the offside of

the canal as it was possible to walk across the canal in wellies. We returned a couple of weeks later to dispose of all the spoil and cleared Drungewick slipway. However, another visit is required to complete the task. The canal looks good but it is likely that the canal will not be re-filled with water until the spring.

Reading from north to south, all the 'regular' and some others sites were visited during the other three outings in the month and tidied up by strimming, brush cutting and raking, Gosden Aqueduct, Run Common, Compasses bridge, Tickner's roadside by the causeway, Gennets, Southland, Devil's Hole, Loxwood and Brewhurst. For a team of eight volunteers that is quite an achievement.

Nick Wood

Eric Walker Group

Work continues on the Birtley Bridge 2 site. As the weather changes from the long dry summer to the wet and changeable days of the autumn, we are working on the foundation structure and every shift starts with an hour or more of pumping out water.

We have, however, been pushing on with the stabilisation of the ground in the base of the excavations laying a 100mm layer of concrete blinding. This was essential in order to support the steel reinforcement of the ground beams. Although the structure is not very large, about 4.5m x 5m overall, the design is complex, the amount of steel reinforcement bars is extensive and fabricating the cages is time consuming. The reinforcement for all of the ground beams is now almost complete but it has been a difficult task because of the constant ingress of running water from the west bank which has had to be channelled to a sump with a constantly running submersible pump.

Work has started on erecting the pre-made form-



work panels (made by Martyn Baker and Len Hasler at the Tickner's depot). So, with the formwork virtually complete, the first concrete pour can go ahead, which will, because of the location of the project, be quite unique! But more about that next month.

Dennis Gillen

Midweek Working Party

This has been a time for many of our volunteers to go on holiday. However, we have completed clearing the base of the canal north of Mill Farm and pulled all the Himalayan Balsam from the south side. Now the weather has changed the canal is filling up with water. The group has been back to Lee Place Bridge and have felled a number of ash trees and cleared most of them up. We will be returning in November. Hunt Park has had a great deal of attention, clearing up from where the adjacent school has installed a new fence and strimming the autumnal growth.

Margaret Darvill

The Contact List

Name	Group/Project	Tel	email
Maurice Cranefield	Visiting Working Parties	01483 505566	maurice_cranefield@weyandarun.co.uk
Dennis Gillen	Eric Walker Group	07866 583753	dennis_gillen@weyandarun.co.uk
Margaret Darvill	Midweek Working Party	01483 894606	margaret_darvill@weyandarun.co.uk
Tom Close	Monday Group	07811 534292	thomasdclose@googlemail.com
Ian Prior	Tickner's Depot Manager	07864 708932	ian_prior@weyandarun.co.uk
Nick Baxter	Hedgelaying		hedgelaying@weyandarun.co.uk
Bill Nicholson	Northern Working Parties	0118 9714785	bill_nicholson@weyandarun.co.uk
Dave Evans	Operations Manager		dave_evans@weyandarun.co.uk
Chris Jones	Boat Group PEST	01483 421136	chrisryderjones@outlook.com
David Arnold	Boat Maintenance	01403 790168	dja103@hotmail.com
Ian Lower	Canal Maintenance Unit	07827 977916	ian_lower@hotmail.com
Julian Cheek	Maintenance Administration	01483 505566	julian_cheek@weyandarun.co.uk
Peter Winter	Working Party News Editor	07722 184117	peter_winter@weyandarun.co.uk