

Editorial

Just in case anybody missed it in Julian Morgan's monthly e-newsletter, there was some excitement in late March on the Loxwood Link navigable section. Between 19th and 29th March a large number of volunteers got the chance to pretend they were part of a real live Canal & River Trust workforce, by getting the chance to operate a hired amphibious machine. Following training by the contractors, Land & Water, and under the leadership of Loxwood Link Maintenance Manager Kev Baker, they helped remove large amounts of silt and reeds from the canal, and tidy up the vegetation along the towpath. This was all in preparation for the 2018 boating season, which began with a vengeance at Easter.

The WACT plant stable has grown yet again, following a generous donation which has allowed us to acquire a Yanmar mini-digger in good condition. Some of you who may have been around in the 1970s will remember the 'Teaspoon', that was attached to the back of the Trust tractor and helped clear sites such as Malham. Well, the name lives on in the new machine which will greatly ease the task of maintaining towpaths and other places inaccessible to larger machines.

The controversial plans to build some 1800 homes at Dunsfold Park has now been approved by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The site is bordered in part by the canal's summit level. Although WACT has, of necessity, remained neutral about the plans, the news should be positive for us. Homes beside water are highly desirable, particularly in this part of the country, so we hope the developers will be keen to make the most of the waterside location.

Finally, some dates. 21st April marks the Gennets Bridge Lock formal completion, and the Trust's Annual Meeting. 13th May is the River Arun small boat rally, and the 2018 Poddle sponsored walk will be held on 3rd June.

Bill

Mrs Bucket Group - Keeping Up Appearances on Mondays

As anticipated in last month's *WPN*, we concentrated on finishing off at Malham lock on 5th March. We cleared all the brambles on the meadow side at the request of the landowner and added two more wires to the new fence making it stronger with four, rather than three, tensioned wires. The landowner was pleased with the result.

At Kev Baker's request we made our first visit to Gennets Bridge lock on the 12th and undertook a lot of hard work clearing both sides of the towpath north of the lock as far as the overspill weir. There was a lot of thickly grown brambles and low hanging tree branches which required a lot of effort to clear (see new photos on the Trust's website!).

You will not be surprised to hear that we didn't venture out there on the 19th following a revisit from the 'Beast from the East'. It was just too cold to work and the state of the roads was awful!

Thanks are due to Dave Evans who facilitated our visit to Sidney Wood in late March, with the result that we were able to complete the clearance of the towpath vegetation and overhanging branches all the way from lock 16 back to the second causeway from Firtree Copse, the point which we had reached after our visits in late November and early December. We also cleared both culverts 1 and 3. A really good day with favourable weather.

With Easter over, it is time to return to our regular sites.

Nick Wood

Hedgelaying Group

Felicitations All from Mr Gruntfuttock and I. Thirstly I want to wish Eric 'All The Best' as he has been a major driving force in the progress of reconstruction of the canal structures. Without him we wouldn't be 'opening' Gennets Lock and Bridge and as far as I can remember he has been the 'Guv'nor' of at least 15 other major projects. Great stuff Eric!

You may have spotted that there was nothing from me for the month of February. It wasn't that I couldn't be bothered (oh yes it was) but with snow and heavy rain we only worked two Tuesdays and with a low turnout of slaves we managed just 15 yards of laying, 30 yards of trimming and ½ a bonfire... ½ a bonfire, erm, well on a recent survey 10 out of nine people said their maths was perfect and that the answer was 42 and only eight people answered the survey of six people surveyed.

March has been a much better and more productive month. The group has laid 45 yards and thinned another 20 yards ahead with 1½ bonfires. The worst thing has been slipping and sliding in the mud. Boot accumulation of mud has made it more tiring as the more we do, the further we have to walk. The total laid to date this year stands at 107 yards.



Navvies' lunch, 2018 (picture by Nick Houston)

The wildlife has started to pick up. A large mass of frog spawn is now tadpoles. Marsh marigold is starting to flower as is, of course, blackthorn. Buzzards, skylarks, geese, tits and chaffinches have been singing/calling and seen. No photos at the moment as we have a technical problem.

Well, I think that's it for the moment as I'm off to Spain. Cheers all from Keith (in his home office)

Keith Nichols

Mid-Week Working Party

MWWP spent a day in Hunt Park clearing debris from the river and around the aqueduct. This was a difficult job because there was a very large log across one of the entrances and it needed to be tirdored out. Other branches and trees were removed from the fence bordering the schools. We will be back in April to complete the task. The other two weeks of March we have been down at the navigable section at Loxwood. A group cleared the blackthorn at Brewhurst Bridge and it looks quite different now, while others cut back all the bramble to widen the towpath in

preparation for the towpath upgrade. Our fourth outing in March was not a work day, but the Navvies' Lunch

51 people sat down to a lovely lunch at The Foxbridge Golf Club. It was mostly MWWP but other groups joined us as well as some partners. Everyone who attended had a really good time. Excellent food, good company and a day off from trudging through the mud. We must thank Di Miles for organising it and the staff of the Golf Club.

Margaret Darvill

Tickner's Heath Depot

A very short month due in part to some of the crew attending the annual 'Navvies Lunch' and good it was too, excellent food, better company and good crack, so thank you Di for organising another successful do and inviting us lot from the furthest outpost of the trust's empire.

During March we have continued in our everlasting quest to find space for the many and varied items coming back from the various project

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sites that have closed down or are in the process of completion.

Work goes on to try and find out exactly what has caused our generator to misbehave, John Piper is exploring every avenue, but I think we are fast approaching the time when enough is enough and we consign it to the skip.

As usual I do have a customary moan and that is could members please not dump their unwanted items at the depot as to date we have inherited obviously unwanted plastic patio chairs and carpet underlay. All were placed by our bonfire site. Please note our license does not allow us to burn plastic, so please take your redundant items to the local amenities centre.

One final thing - if you are thinking of visiting the depot please make sure you park on the hard standing as the grass is a trifle boggy.

All the best

John Smith

Northern (Summit) Working Party

My last report appears to be from the end of December last when the slipway site had just been inundated with water and we were talking about piled dams.

Well fortunately from a time and cost perspective this didn't happen and we were able to repair the breach with clay and pump out the workings. We have also been helped by the installation, by contractors, of a larger diameter culvert pipe under the road at the current Tickner's Crossing site. This enables water running off the airfield to escape into the river system and so far seems to be working well.

Conditions at the slipway have been harsh - always too wet to move about and often too cold to lay bricks. However, we have made some progress. The bricklaying on the southern slipway wall has been completed and looks good with its coping bricks.

At the end of January, with help from NWPG, we poured the concrete for the northern wall and

subsequently dismantled the shuttering, ready for scaffolding to go up for more brickwork. In March, again with help from NWPG, we installed the oak timber wallings on the piled wharf to the south of the slipway. This was a difficult and time consuming task that involved drilling a large number of wide holes through the piles, fixing the timbers and then using the same timbers to pull the piles back into line. We have since positioned most of the steel work and timber back shuttering ready for when we can pour the concrete beam behind the piles. We shall need an improvement in the "Somme-like" conditions before we can complete this.

Down at the crossing, a small team have built a concrete bag surround to the inlet to the road culvert (mentioned earlier) which should hopefully direct any surplus water down the pipe rather than across the road. This is all part of the essential water control measures that we need in place before starting work on the new Tickner's Bridge.

Being winter, we have taken advantage of the conditions and felled a number of ash trees which were suffering from ash die back and have filled about 12 crane bags of logs for sale or use in the Trust's various log burners. When we really can't find alternative constructive work, we resort to tidying the site, containers and cleaning plant.

Looking ahead, we hope that better weather will enable us to substantially complete our work on the slipway by the end of May. This will lead into the NWPG Summer Camp in July where the work plan will soon be finalised. More details next time.

Please call, text or e-mail either myself or Dave Evans if you would like to help. We meet every third Saturday of the month and often on other Saturdays as required. Please note that for April, the third Saturday will in fact be the second Saturday (14th) due to a clash with the Trust AGM and Gennets Bridge Lock celebration on 21st April.

Bill Nicholson

| Working Party Diary | | |
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| Every Sunday and Thursday | Mainly construction work | Details from Dennis Gillen/John Robinson |
| Every Monday | 'Mrs Bucket' - Keeping Up Appearances | Details from John Empringham |
| Every Wednesday | Mid-Week Working Party | Details from Margaret Darvill |
| Every Wednesday (plus Thursday and Sunday as required) | Loxwood Link Maintenance | Check with Kev Baker |
| Every Wednesday | Maintenance sessions at Tickner's Heath Depot | Contact John Smith/Ken Bacon |
| Various Tuesdays (not in summer) | Hedge Laying | Contact Keith Nichols |
| Third Saturday of the month | Summit level | Contact Dave Evans |
| 21st April | Trust Annual Meeting | See website and Wey-South |
| 21st April | GBL Completion | See website and Wey-South |