

# Working Party News

For WACT Volunteers  
*February 2009*

## **Editorial Comment** *(Wendy Andrews)*

Thank you to this month's contributors and to all of you who go out, whatever the weather, to 'do your bit'. As I write I'm looking out over a snowy landscape, only too relieved that most of my contribution to the Trust is based at my desk!

## **Restoration Manager** *(Turlough Bamber)*

Greetings to you all for 2009.

I had drafted the main content of this contribution for the January WPN. However, as it had not been through CoM Wendy and I agreed to wait until the February WPN to float the concept of this note.

One of the major challenges in the WACT restoration programme is the permission of Landowners to access their land to clear the historic route of the Canal. WPs need to revisit the cleared sections as maintenance operations. What is suggested will not relieve us of these continual returns.

As we take on additional lengths of Canal for restoration it would be sensible to direct our thinking towards rebuilding structures where we can get landowner permission to work. We have a great bunch of Volunteers with restricted areas of operation.

I have a meeting with Eric and the Sussex 'Train to Gain' team this month when we will see whether we can get funding for various skills training associated with, typically, the construction of structures i.e. locks, culverts and farm accommodation bridges etc. As an organisation, we (the Loxwood team in particular) have shown the local districts and counties that our Volunteers can do jobs like the New Lock. One of the benefits of the current economic woes in which we find ourselves is that there are funds being made available by the Government for training volunteers in skills like block making, steel fixing, concrete placing and manufacture, survey and the like. I fully appreciate that this is a departure from our norm but it will be a set of new skills gained for other tasks both on and off the canal. I am led to believe that the funding is significant per person. If we can get ourselves trained we can, in certain places, build locks well ahead of the long canal lengths becoming available. Yes - there will be some gaps between structures but the earthworks and reshaping of the canal between these structures are far easier and quicker to complete later on. The time consuming and major effort come from the rebuilding of structures. This possible project is a 'Yes we can do' and in the long run will make a significant contribution to the restoration programme. The major component of cost is labour for any contractor. If we can do this for the Trust we will have made a major contribution by using current funding while it is being made available. Where we get the instructors or where we do the practical training or who will run the individual jobs will be addressed once we have resolved the issue of volunteer's willingness to go along with the concept. The funding, issues of training, engineering, planning permissions and construction would be the next set of discussions.

Over the next couple of months I would appreciate it if Working Parties give it some thought.

I am pleased to welcome John Smith and Tony Rozier who have joined us to take care of the Tickners Heath depot. By the time the next WPN is prepared I hope we will have defined what we hope to do there. John has a background as an instructor in the REME. Tony has a commercial background and has his own workshop at home!

## **Recycling Mobile Phones and Print Cartridges** *(Wendy Andrews)*

My most sincere thanks to Penny Clear who kindly came forward and offered to look into the opportunities for fundraising by collecting print cartridges and mobile phones for recycling. With Penny having looked in detail at the 'small print', she and I have come to the conclusion that such an initiative would not work for WACT. It was worth a try.

## **Race Night at the Onslow Arms in Loxwood**

Talking of fundraising, the new landlord at the Onslow Arms in Loxwood has kindly arranged a Race Night at the pub on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> March, with profits going to the Canal Trust. There will be 8 races, with 8 horses in each race, and it is possible to 'buy' one of these horses for £5 (contact [tom@onslowarmsloxwood.co.uk](mailto:tom@onslowarmsloxwood.co.uk) or call at the pub); if your horse wins you will receive £20. Betting on the races is also possible. Entry to the event is free and it starts at 8pm.

### **Monday Working Party** (*Nick Wood for John Empringham*)

A cold start to the new year for all us intrepid volunteers which meant stops for 'elevenses' and lunch were short! Our two outings in January were held in Sidney Wood to continue the clearance of brambles and other growth from the towpath bank. This will require at least another visit in February to complete. The bed of the canal is thick with reeds; these will have to be left for the time being as there is too much water in the canal to enable us to cut them back. A return visit in September is on the cards! We also gave attention to the two culverts to ensure that the flow of water was not impeded and refixed those lease boundary marker posts that someone had thrown into the canal. In addition we cleared 12 barrow loads of debris from the roadside culvert at Tickners Heath to the yard following a request from David Kersley.

We meet again on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February if you would like to join us..

### **Thursday/Sunday Group** (*Eric Walker*)

Burras are expected to be clear of the site by mid February. Meanwhile our volunteer efforts will principally be on the northwest wall. It is to be brick faced to a level that will enable the bank slope to the fields to be no greater than 1 in 1½. This level is higher than the top of the pile cap so a block wall has been built to achieve the required height. As for the wall facing below water level, we have laid concrete blocks and we are now waiting for access to put in the scaffolding so that the brick laying above can start.

Verrall have started to remove the bund, leaving just enough to enable Burras to escape and also enough to ensure that the section between the bund and the lock is dry during the volunteer works and the gate fitting.

If you are available to work with us at the Onslow on a Wednesday please let me know. Similarly, for training I guess Turlough will be writing in this WPN about it in general terms, but again if I can be of any help, let me know.

We have a busy time ahead - I was going to say 'whatever the weather' but of course if it is fine and warm all the better.

### **Hedge Laying Group** (*Keith Nichols*)

These are exciting times, but enough about me and my second barrel of strong beer – only 9%!

January has seen us pay 4 visits to Drungewick Aqueduct/Bridge hedge, our 5<sup>th</sup> being Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup>. We are relentlessly moving towards the bridge section of hedge. Hold on, we are actually laying from the bridge back to the aqueduct so scrub what I just said. (It's nothing to do with the beer, HONEST GUV!)

On Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> two of us layed 15m. On Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> a 5 strong team finished the section from the landing stage to the Gauging Station gate; we had 2 bonfires and planted 9 trees. The bonfires were used to bake potatoes and cook bacon. Ah! The smell of bacon cooking over an open fire in the great outdoors. I'm starting to salivate. On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> we were another 5 man team; it was a very wet day and 2 departed early. The 3 soggy stalwarts layed the 28m between the aqueduct and Gauging Station. It took nearly a week to dry everything out!

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> saw 6 of us working from Drungewick Bridge back towards the aqueduct. 2 courageous souls braved the floods to dig up and replant into the hedge 12 trees plus another 7 potted saplings. We layed 14m and did a lot of tree trimming to allow more light into the difficult section. Some of the team tried skiing for the first time - they were actually trying to climb or descend the steep bank. I enjoyed the free entertainment!

I wondered what Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> would bring? Well - not the forecast of heavy rain, instead light rain in the morning otherwise dull, cloudy and mild. Two intrepid souls slipped and slid their way to lay 7m which leaves 67m to lay.

The best thing on the 28<sup>th</sup> was being able to watch the Barn Owl quartering the field opposite us from 10.00 until 16.30. At one point, when it perched on a fence post on the east side of the bridge, it was mobbed by 2 magpies. Quite a flying display. Also, I was treated to a low flying display by a Sparrow hawk which flew behind Dave, at head height, across the towpath, dived down over our work, through the trees and along the old river bed at a height of 3 feet.

That's all folks, until the end of February.

Dates:

Feb 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> (?), (1 or 2 days in the week of 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>)

Mar 2<sup>nd</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>

### **Winston Harwood Group** (*Ron Chamberlain for David Junkison*)

The group has spent the first month of 2009 at Rowners Lock where we were at the end of last year. Working towards Newbridge, the team has cleared all the bracken and brambles as far as we have been allowed to go. Now back at Rowners Lock some work has been started on the non towpath side of the canal in order to gain access to some large trees which are growing in or across the canal. It looks as if the weather could slow things down a bit but at least spring should be just around the corner

That's all for now - see you next month

## **Mid Week Working Party** (*Richard Watson*)

We've now spent a couple of weeks at Tannery Lane clearing undergrowth and small trees to within a stone's throw of Eastwood Road, in preparation for a survey of the area to be conducted at a later date. Peter J. used his various talents to get a key for vehicular access to the site so Dave Kersley was able to get in with the Land Rover and trailer to remove an amount of firewood. Just for a change, we lit a few fires and burnt the rest.

Last week was all about gardening; we planted bulbs at Brewhurst, Baldwins Knob, Drungewick and Loxwood (new) Lock. The bulb planting went well and didn't take too long. Early turnout was poor, but we had a pretty good crowd (around twenty) when we settled in to work by the new lock. After a late elevenses, tidying up the lock-side hedge and getting the last of the bulbs in, we did some cutting, clearing, and burning along the towpath for about 75 yards, though progress was slow with no brush cutter to hand.

This week we're back at Tannery Lane for more clearance work.

## **Working Party Diary for February/March/April**

Usually first & third Mondays of the month	'Mrs Bucket' – Keeping Up Appearances	Details from John Empringham
Most Tuesday mornings	Maintenance sessions at Tickner's Heath Depot	Contact John Smith
Every Wednesday	Mid-Week Working Party	Check with Peter Jackman or Alison Saville for confirmation of venue
Every Wednesday	Loxwood Link Maintenance	Contact Peter Wilding
Every Thursday & Sunday	Mainly construction work. Meet at the Onslow Arms, 09.30	Contact Eric Walker for details
Every Thursday	Winston Harwood Group	Contact Ron Chamberlain or Tony Clear for details
Varying dates in the winter months	Hedge Laying	See Keith Nichols' piece for this season's dates
Friday 6 <sup>th</sup> March	Fundraising Race Night at the Onslow Arms	More details from the WACT office
Saturday 25 <sup>th</sup> April	WACT AGM	More details to follow next month and in Wey South

## **Working Party Directory**

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