

Working Party News

For WACT Volunteers

December 2009

Editorial Comment (Wendy Andrews)

2009 is rapidly drawing to its end – it has been an exciting year for WACT with, hopefully, another exciting year to follow.

I wish you all a Very Merry Christmas and Best Wishes to Yourselfs and your Friends and Families for 2010. It's not too late to book your seats on a Santa Cruise or even to offer to help. The trips are running on Saturday/Sunday 12th/13th December and from Saturday 19th December to Wednesday 23rd December. Tickets are available from the WACT office; offers of help to Rosie Sugar at rosiesugar@hotmail.co.uk or on 01403 752321

Get Well Soon (Wendy Andrews)

Please join me in wishing 'Get Well Soon' to Colin Gibbs and Keith Nicols.

After two months in hospital, following major surgery, Colin is now recuperating at home; it will be many months before Colin is fully recovered – meanwhile we send him our very best wishes.

Keith's recovery from an operation on his leg has been slower than he had hoped – he's not yet well enough to be back at work nor to be leading the Hedge Laying Team. Let's hope for better news next month.

Inland Waterways Association Newsflash (Wendy Andrews)

Here follows a copy of a newsflash from the Chairman of the IWA which will be of interest to all of you:

You may know about the media speculation that the Government intends to include the British Waterways' property portfolio as a component of the £16bn asset sale.

The Government has made no announcements and is steadfastly refusing to be drawn on the subject.

We have been using this period of silence as a window of opportunity to lobby Ministers. We have orchestrated a political lobby in both the Commons and latterly the Lords to pressurise Government, and have briefed radio and national TV, using an array of reasons to support the argument that a sale would be in no-one's interest.

We stand the best chance of preventing this sale if the Government can be persuaded not to do so, during this period of Ministerial silence. Whilst no announcements have been made, it is easier for Government to back away as it involves no public reversal of policy.

However, an e-petition has appeared on the 10 Downing Street website;

<http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/protectourcanals/>

IWA supports the statements in the petition. The worst outcome now that this is in the public domain, would be if this petition receives scant support. That might give Ministers the impression that there are few waterways supporters who care very much about the issue. On the other hand, if it is well supported, the Government, this close to an election, is very sensitive to actions it might take which may lose votes, and would probably take notice.

I am therefore urging you to sign up to this petition - if you agree with it, and ask that you encourage everyone that you know, to also sign up.

We need more signatures than our membership, or even the total number of boaters in the UK – So please ask all of your colleagues, friends and family and e-mailable contacts to help us today! – and ask them to pass this message on as well - we need all of the UK to know about this and to respond on line.

The future of the waterways could depend on your actions today – Please act, and pass this message on.

Thank you , Clive Henderson, IWA national chairman , nationalchairman@waterways.org.uk

Winston Harwood Group (Ron Chamberlain for David Junkison)

The group has spent the whole of November back at Rowner Lock clearing bracken and brambles and generally reclaiming the tow path.

We have been fortunate that Richard Watson and Tony Clear were available to do some brush cutting so the rest of us could get on with the job of clearing and burning - it is quite amazing how fast the stuff grows!

As there is limited parking at Paplands Farm the group have to park at various places and meet up like an 'old pals' reunion. I take my hat off to these chaps who have to carry all their equipment from wherever they have parked down to the site and it always seems to be twice as far back at the end of the day.

We welcome a new member to our group, Paul Coton, who spent a busy day with us and we hope will continue to join us for some time to come.

Well, that's all for this month – more for you again next month!

Mid Week Working Party (Peter Jackman)

No news from Peter this month; hopefully there will be a bumper update in January.

Thursday/Sunday Group *(Eric Walker)*

Work progresses at Devils Lock. The walls on the top cill are complete except for a small section over the ground paddle sluice on the towpath side. The next step is to cast the copings.

The laying of the ducting for the cable to get electricity to the lock has continued at about 100m per session. It is now ready for the cable to be pulled through. That is going to be an interesting exercise – the cable is 500m long! With that in place the availability of electricity on site will aid the restoration and be ready for the back pump when fitted.

The construction of the winding hole has been on hold this last month. Meanwhile the rains have come, not as bad as Cumbria but still over 3 inches leading to the whole of the canal from Southland down to Loxwood being filled with water. As a number of people have said, the shape of the winding hole is clear. Action has been taken to reduce the level until we are ready for it. In the now isolated winding hole the landowner has asked us to dig out a duck pond and to help us our Conservation Officer is supplying notes on its form. In the meantime the level of the water in that area is rising with having nowhere to go. That area will also provide some room for the silt from the canal when it is cleared to Loxwood. The landowner has had some Game Shoots through the area but after some negotiation they had minimum impact on the work schedule for our working party.

Work has started building the training walls at the top of the lock. More blocks from Tickners will be used for this, also some of the copings made for Loxwood Lock that were not needed.

There have been occasional extra meetings on Tuesdays but as the work is diminishing or maybe because of people having holidays these have been curtailed.

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

Sketch map 10 of the canal shows that in 2006/07 the Trust erected a fence and planted a hedge, mainly hawthorn and blackthorn, in conjunction with the landowner and a local contractor, between Lee Farm lock and the 90 degree bend north of Haybarn. The scale of the map indicates that this is over a mile of canal. However in the intervening time grass, brambles, nettles and other undesirables have grown up around the young hedging plants inhibiting their growth and, particularly south of the bridge, even the towpath has become inaccessible (although this section is not a public right of way). As Haybarn swing bridge is one of the sites at which we regularly 'keep up appearances' and having cleared the towpath of accumulated brambles and other vegetation north of the bridge to beyond the 90 degree turn in August (see Sept WPN), Peter Foulger asked our group to undertake to clear the towpath and around the hedging plants for the whole way following representations from the landowner. It's a big undertaking for our small group, especially as clearing around the hedging plants is a manual, hands and knees job. Nevertheless we are having a go. After our two November meetings and with the help of three members of MWWP and David J at the first, the section north of the swing bridge has been completed. However on the southern section we reckon we've cleared about two thirds of the towpath but probably are not that far advanced in clearing around the hedging plants. So there is much more to do. We had hoped to carry on on the 30th but the extreme wet weather was against us. Obviously we need to return to complete the job and that is to be arranged.

In the meantime the culverts in Sidney Wood are calling out to be checked and if necessary cleared after the 'leaf fall season'. Peter Wilding also has some maintenance tasks for us.

We are hoping to meet on 7th December, to make up for our cancelled session and on 14th (1/2 a day, navvies lunch!) at sites to be determined by our leader.

Tickners Heath Depot *(John Smith)*

During November we have continued to add to the livery of the Wasp giving the old girl a shiny green coat on her bottom half when the weather permitted. All that now remains is for the upper works to be given a coat which, judging by the recent precipitation, will have to wait for the better weather to arrive possibly in the spring.

Ken Bacon has thrown his efforts into weather proofing the engine shed; this has turned him into somewhat of an expert scaffold erector (bookings are welcome subject to the negotiation of a suitable fee). He has also developed a head for heights that he never knew he had. Well done Ken!

The team gave the Reed Cutter boat a full service before Richard Emsley used it to good effect ensuring that the canal looks less like the scenery out of the African Queen.

Before I close, when clearing the area behind the Engine Shed, Ken and I uncovered a host of lock ironmongery - rather than just taking it direct to our friendly scrap merchant can anyone who has a knowledge of such equipment please give it the once over and let me know what needs to be retained and what can go for scrap. Many thanks.

All that remains is to wish all you hardworking types out there a Happy Christmas and Prosperous 2010.

Restoration Manager *(Turlough Bamber)*

Firstly I wish you all a Very Happy Christmas with your Families and a Good New Year in 2010.... all of the 365 days of it!

No doubt you have heard via Tow Path Talk that we have a new Conservation Officer, Ian Burton. I have met him twice, once was for 6 hours when we went from Loxwood to the Sussex Border path. I concluded that he is sensitive to both the Law and to our attitudes to conservation. I am sure that as a Trust and as volunteers we will get along well and that he will make a very positive contribution.

It is also good that John Talbot has taken up the role of Chief Engineer and has revived the Engineering Group. We have a core group of 5 (mainly engineers), with inputs from others with specialist expertise on an 'as and when' basis. We will be reviewing all matters of engineering for the best and most economical solution to problems and techniques in restoration.

Some concerns have been expressed and reported to me that we have not been successful gaining access to certain sections of the canal for clearing. Please rest assured - we have been doing our best on such matters. It would be totally counterproductive to push reluctant landowners to give access or even 'demand' a meeting. We have to play it cool! So, I ask you, please be patient....

Thank you all for your most valuable input over this last year. The Trust has developed a higher profile now that Loxwood Bridge and Loxwood Lock are open. It will be even higher when Devil's Hole Lock is open in the spring.

Well done to all Working Parties including the Visiting Groups for which I thank especially as they come from afar.

Health and Safety (*Michael Bates*)

A short note from me to say that from December 1st a sample of Emergency Plans will be available on the website as will the Accident, Incident and Near Miss Form which all should be used if there is an accident - this is to cover both volunteers from future awkward enquiry and the Trust.

Working Party Diary for December/January

Usually first & third Mondays of the month	'Mrs Bucket' – Keeping Up Appearances	Details from John Empringham
Every Wednesday	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	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	
December 12 th /13 th & 19 th to 23 rd	Santa Cruises at Loxwood	Book through WACT office

Working Party Directory

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John Empringham	'Mrs Bucket' (Monday Group)	01483 562657	john@empringham.com
Peter Wilding	Loxwood Link	01483 422519	peter_wilding@weyandarun.co.uk
John Smith	Tickner's Depot	01903 235790	john8216@btopenworld.com
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