

NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM CANAL TRUST

In co-operation with the East Anglian Waterways Association Ltd

Subject: Work-party at Royston Bridge area and Spa Common (Bacton Wood Lock)

Date: Sunday 22nd January 2017.

From: Chris Black, NW&DCT.

THE PLAN:

- To help Laurie with the construction of Bacton Wood Lock's new bottom gates.
- To modify Laurie's tipper trailer to a 'flat bed' trailer by removing the steel sides.
- To move two wooden foot-bridges to a temporary position across Bacton Wood Lock either side of the gate recesses for access during gate fitting.
- To have a small group of volunteers continuing to clear brash from around Royston Bridge

WORK ACHIEVEMENT: The weather was calm, frosty and very cold but with a glorious blue sky and sunshine. An excellent number of 17 volunteers turned out despite the cold.

Basically there were four tasks to do today. The first task was to board out the first of the two new lock gates, the second being the removal of the steel sides of the tipper trailer, the third to continue clearing around Royston Bridge and the fourth to bring the two foot-bridges down to Spa Common from just above Royston Bridge.

Several of the volunteers were set to work on boarding out the lock gate. The lock gates are truly massive and because the frame is made from greenheart, which is extremely hard, every coach screw used to bolt on the 2" facing boards required a pilot hole to be drilled in the frame. This task had to be done with a great deal of accuracy so it wasn't rushed.

Whilst this was being done most of the remainder of the volunteers set to work to remove the side panels from the trailer. The trailer sides were bolted on and the bolts had to be removed to allow the side to be dropped down, but years of rust meant that all but one had to be ground off – a tedious job! Added to the difficulty was the sheer weight of the side panels. Even the smaller panels needed four people to safely remove them from the hinge pins. The larger panels were an even greater problem as they were over 4' in height and half the length of the trailer. To make the removal safe we removed the top bolts then inserted new longer temporary bolts in their place to allow some movement laterally but now with the assurance that the heavy side panel could not drop to the floor – potentially with feet beneath! Both large panels were safely removed and stacked with the others. The back panel was removed together with the uprights, the front panel being left in place to stop forward movement of any load.

Three of the volunteers were despatched to do some clearance work around Royston Bridge.

Lunch was called at approx. 12.30

I and some others were just finishing lunch whilst sitting on Bacton Lock when Laurie appeared with the tractor and the 'new' trailer. He headed off up the bank to Royston Bridge to collect the two foot-bridges. We made our way along the bank on foot, which was thawing in the sun making it very slippery. We met several members of the public out for an afternoon stroll alongside the canal. Eventually we reached Royston Bridge and found Laurie hooking up one of the foot-bridges to the Hy-Mac arm. Both bridges were lifted onto the flatbed trailer and secured with strops. I volunteered to drive the tractor and trailer back to Bacton Lock but as I haven't driven a tractor for over 50 years

I was pleased to arrive without incident! Laurie followed on with the Hy-Mac to lift the temporary bridges into place.

The strops were removed and both bridges were positioned across the lock either side of the gate recesses. They were perfect for length for the width of the lock and as they are in good condition and very sturdily built they are safe to walk on. There is the need for access across the lock bottom to allow operation of the paddle gear etc. on the far side of the lock, so the view from downstream gives one a hint of what the finished lock will look like if a footbridge is installed.

We achieved all our tasks and thanks to our volunteer's observance of safe practice we did them without incident.

Our activities were filmed by John Parker for the record as the construction and installation of the new gates will be a milestone event in the restoration of the neglected canal.

Work ceased at approx. 15.30

Chris Black, Work Party Leader