

waterway recovery group ltd

NATIONAL CO-ORDINATING BODY
FOR VOLUNTARY LABOUR ON THE
INLAND WATERWAYS OF BRITAIN

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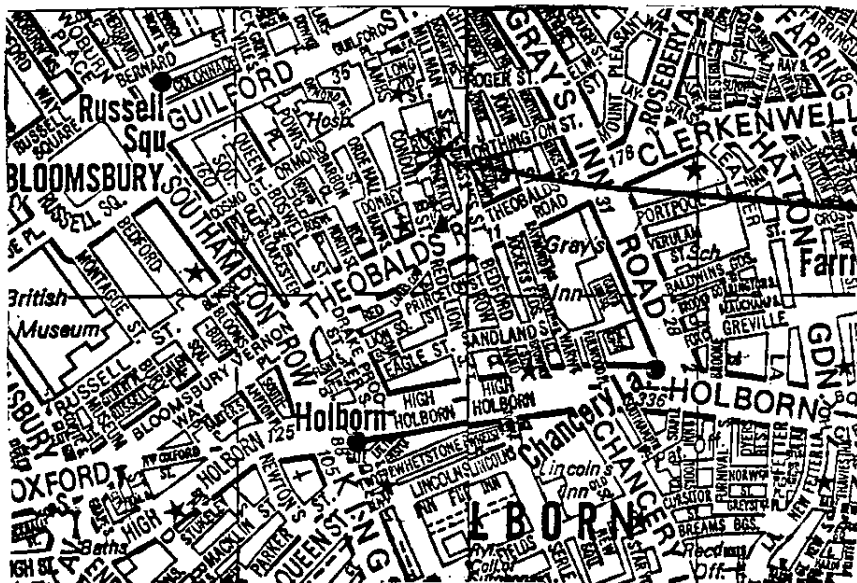
LONDON WRG A.G.M.

The Annual General Meeting of the London Waterway Recovery Group will be held at 19.30 on Wednesday 19th February in the upstairs room at the Rugby, Rugby Street, London WC1. Nearest Underground stations are Holborn, Russell Square & Chancery Lane. (see map below). Sandwiches will be provided.

We will discuss any relevant subject that anyone who attends wishes to raise, such as:

- Dates & venues of working parties for the next 12 months
- Organisation / coordination of working parties
- Frequency of working parties
- Skills / training / type of work
- Membership / recruitment / publicity
- Tools / equipment
- Attendance / participation at rallies & other events
- Fund-raising
- Transport
- Social activities

Please turn up & give your views on these and any other subjects.



HERE

Scott of the Antarctic ?

Allan Scott's debut as a London WRG organiser took place on a cold & frosty weekend on the Stroudwater & Thames & Severn Canals on the 7th-8th December 1991. The weekend began in the traditional manner, with various people pacing up & down outside Casey Jones at Waterloo wondering where the organiser had got to. Eventually, just as we thought we were going to have to organise ourselves for the weekend he arrived - his train having fought its way through the mountains of leaves on the line - and we made a belated departure. After a speedy exit from London & a clear run down the M4 our opinions of our new organiser began to rise sharply as we realised that we were going to arrive at the Amberley Arms well before closing time. Our opinions of our new organiser began to decline equally sharply as we stood outside the Amberley Scout hall after midnight, stamping our feet to keep warm as we gradually sobered up in the sub-zero temperatures, waiting for him to appear with the key. A search party was dispatched to attempt to find the organiser, followed by a second search party to attempt to find the search party. Mike Atkins applied all the skills acquired in a lifetime's service to Lloyds Bank (& most of the credit cards acquired) in a vain attempt to open the front door. Finally, just as a large screwdriver had been produced & attempt was being made to remove the door from its hinges, Allan reappeared with the key. It appeared that the directions for finding the custodian of the key had been completely misleading (something the more experienced organisers have come to expect) & he had in fact walked past his house several times without realising it. Possibly the reason for the misleading instructions was that the locals had expected us to arrive up the hill from the main road at the bottom of the valley, whereas we had in fact arrived down the hill via a secret route now lost in the mists of antiquity & known only to Winnie.

Sue & Ron arrived at 7am the following morning having failed to find the accommodation & spent the night in a car park at a service station. Perhaps the rest of us shouldn't complain.

After the performance of the night before we expected a fairly lengthy search for the worksite, aided (or hindered) by the 1:25000 map provided by the locals. In fact we found it fairly quickly, by accident, as we attempted to drive the van round by road to the apparent worksite, to meet the rest of the working party who had been dispatched on foot down what appeared on the map to be a road, but turned out to be a footpath which crossed the main railway line via an unguarded level crossing & petered out in the middle of a field.

Having retrieved the rest of the work party we were led to the real work site by the locals. This is a section of the canal which is actually owned by the Canal Trust & we were performing some regular maintenance on it. Some barbed-wire fence was installed on the towpath & various trees & undergrowth were removed, including some in the bottom of a section of canal built as a brick-sided channel, where the owner of a canalside cottage came out & asked us what we were doing, then provided us with cups of tea, then asked our opinion on whether his house really was in the process of falling into the canal, then finally asked us if we could move a little further away as he was suffering from the effects of "passive smoking" from our rather active bonfire.

When the Thames & Severn Canal & the Stroudwater Canal were built, they were, in the manner characteristic of the British canal system, built to completely different gauges. This seems to apply particularly to canals like these, which together form part of a through route, resulting in much transshipment of goods between different sized boats, or alternatively in the use of boats small enough to use both waterways, which means that cargo capacity is reduced & water is wasted by locks that are unnecessarily large for the boats. As the Thames & Severn, on which we were working, was built with longer locks than the Stroudwater, the canal company decided to save water by shortening its locks down to the same length as those on the Stroudwater. However instead of taking the obvious course of moving the bottom gates 20ft up the lock, they chose to extend the top sill 20ft down the lock & move the top gates. This left a 20ft by 14ft section of 6ft deep channel at the top of the lock, which by the simple expedient of installing stop-planks at each end, building a set of concrete steps up from the canal bed at the upper end & painting the inside of this section blue all over, be converted into an open-air swimming pool by the landowner once the canal was closed. One wonders if this was what the canal company had in mind when they shortened the locks. One can't think of any other explanation. Anyway this is what happened to one of the locks on the worksite. The stop-planks having been removed & the blue paint by now flaking off the walls, all that remained was a 4ft high lump of concrete in the centre of the canal that formed the steps. After a whole day spent attacking it with picks, mattocks, sledgehammers & crowbars we had succeeded in reducing its height by at least 6 inches. Hopefully not all of the landowners on the Thames & Severn have thought of converting their locks into swimming pools.

Our opinion of the organiser began to rise again once we had knocked off when we realised that (it being the last dig before Christmas) a large quantity of alcohol had been purchased to accompany the evening meal. After a further visit to the Amberley Arms Malcolm Bates showed us how to tie a hangman's knot (!) before we retired to bed.

On Sunday we moved down to the Stroudwater Canal at Eastington. This site is now a hive of activity as the Cotswold Canal Trust set about moving their compound to a new site 50 yards further West & on the other side of the canal. Several people were set to work moving various items of equipment to the new site, then moving them back again when someone from the Trust decided they weren't to be moved yet. Meanwhile another team had been set to work reassembling various pieces of wood on the new site which were alleged to have been part of a shed before they were moved. Possibly true, but almost certainly they weren't all part of the same shed. Perhaps they were the bits left over when the other 4 or 5 sheds were reassembled. Anyway the team set to work at the apparently impossible task & by mid afternoon a structure vaguely resembling a shed had been constructed in the new compound. It looked like it would stay up at least until either a bird landed on the roof or the wind rose above force 0. On completion it was checked with a spirit level & it was found that the only horizontal part of it was the sloping roof. As the shed-building team modestly said:

"Shed? What shed?"

"No, mate, nuffin to do with us."

"And anyway nobody saw us do it."

"And besides, you can't prove nuffin."

There was also a certain amount of jungle-bashing done on the canal bank nearby, but this wasn't allowed to detract from the main purpose of the working party. Perhaps they are restoring the canal so that the sheds can be moved by barge in future.

P.S. Allan won the "Best Organiser" award at the Xmas party.

Up Nately!

...is not, as you might have thought, a TV series from the late 1960s. It is, in fact, the worksite at the Western end of the Basingstoke Canal and the scene of London WRG's first working party of 1992. It was also the largest turnout by London WRG for any working party (as opposed to Xmas party) for some years. We had 20 people on site on Saturday with a total age range of 45 years. We made substantial progress clearing trees, undergrowth and a surprising number of bicycles from the canal bed & towpath in the direction of Greywell Tunnel. At this rate we should have the West end restored before the rest of the canal is open. We also cleared one or two trees from the offside bank of the canal, which brought the occupant of one of the nearby houses out to talk to us. He gave us a lengthy spiel containing various words like "whereas" and "hereinafter", which, when we asked for a translation, he rendered rather more simply as "Get off my land!". We pointed him in the direction of some of the local canal society & carried on a little more cautiously.

Remarkably nearly everyone had remembered to bring plates for the evening meal so nobody had to eat Winnie's Cottage Pie out of a teapot or an eggcup.

The following day we carried on clearing the canal bed and, armed with chainsaw & Tirfor winch, Malcolm Bates set about felling some large trees that had grown in rather inconsiderate places & were leaning at rather awkward angles. One of them landed on the garden fence of the man who had thrown us off his land. This was pure coincidence. Not even Malcolm can fell trees that accurately.

Into the pit

The weekend of 25th-26th January saw various London WRG members assisting a WRG centrally planned weekend working party at the new London Canal Museum which will be opening shortly at Battlebridge Basin on the Regents Canal near King's Cross.

The museum building was originally an ice-house which received ice by ship from Scandinavia, brought up from the docks by barge, then stored it in two huge pits under the building. Here it was used to freeze metal boxes filled with water, to produce blocks of ice, which were taken out by horse & cart to supply the meat and fish markets in London. The pits have since been filled with soil & the main job of the weekend was to dig out this soil, hoist it out of the pit with barrow-hoists & dump it in skips to be taken away. The pits are circular, 27ft diameter and 42ft deep. One of them has an opening in the floor above it, through which the barrows were hoisted, but the second pit is covered over & all soil removed from it had to be barrowed through to the other pit to be taken out. Just to make things really unpleasant there was a serious leak into the pits from the adjacent canal basin, which turned the soil in the pits into a particularly smelly mud. Despite the difficult working conditions 6 skips were filled over the weekend, which means a total of about 60 tons of mud was removed. Judging from their appearance by Saturday night some of the people working in the pit must have given up using shovels & started using their bodies to move the mud. Some of them were almost as black as the apple crumble. They departed to Kings Cross station where there were public showers for 90p. I reckon they got their money's worth.

Meanwhile upstairs a decorating team was busy painting the store-room (and themselves and anyone who came near them and even one or two people who did their best not to go anywhere near them). Also a team of London WRG's skilled craftsmen - the ones who know the difference between a chisel & a screwdriver (see * below) - were busy building what might appear from the plans to be a wardrobe, but was in fact a cupboard to cover over the assortment of fuse boxes, electric meters & main switches on the wall without which no restored 19th century ice-pit can function.

At the same time, Allyson & Marcia were struggling manfully (womanfully?) with a large & almost totally uncontrollable cooker in the accommodation - the old stables on the museum's 1st floor - where they eventually contrived to produce an excellent beef-in-Guinness & vegetarian alternative (rumoured to be beef-in-Guinness without the beef), followed by the aforementioned crumble.

The evening was spent in the Waterside Inn & the Malt & Hops, after which we returned to the accommodation, which, for those who have imbibed too heavily to tackle the stairs, can also be reached via the original horse-ramp, which the museum plan to turn into a kind of inclined-plane for wheelchairs when they open to the public.

On Sunday, more mud was shifted from the pit, the wardrobe sorry cupboard was completed and the painting team, who had been dangerous enough with paintbrushes on Saturday, were now using paint-rollers to terrorise the rest of the volunteers. Good job there weren't any sprayguns available.

All in all it was a successful weekend, although the museum staff staff have a lot to do to get it ready for Princess Anne to open it in 6 weeks time ("I name this wardrobe..."). Many thanks to all who turned up to work, and to the museum staff for making sure we knew which end of a shovel to hold, which end of a paint brush to hold, and which one to use for which job.

- * The difference between a chisel & a screwdriver is that you use a chisel to screw screws in & a screwdriver to open paint tins.

Next Time Out

Our next dig is on the Wilts & Berks Canal on 8th-9th February. Originally this was intended to be at Foxham, but we have heard rumours that Foxham lock & swingbridge may now have been completed, so we may be working somewhere else.

On 29th Feb - 1st March we return to Hanwell locks on the Grand Union Canal to continue clearing the lock side-ponds.

On the weekend of 7th-8th March is the Inland Waterways Association will be organising a National Canal Cleanup weekend, which will involve work at various sites, including the London area. It is not yet known where the worksites will be; for further details contact Tim Lewis.

The venue for our working party on 21st-22nd March has not yet been decided. It may be another weekend on the Grand Union Canal at Hanwell, or it may be on the Wey & Arun Canal, in which case we will probably be continuing rebuilding the stonework of the lock chamber walls at Baldwin's Knob Lock. It may even be somewhere else completely. Best to come along to the London WRG AGM, then you can help decide where it will be.

On 11-12 April we make our annual (or thereabouts) visit to the Chesterfield Canal.

There will be no dig on the weekend of 2nd-4th May, as this is the London IWA Canalway Cavalcade rally at Little Venice. This will be the tenth time this annual rally has been held & the organisers intend to make it a special one. In the past London WRG have won the "Best decorated boat" award once & been runners-up twice. We have already had some suggestions for decorating our work-flat for the procession. Come along to the AGM to find out what they are. See if you can think of anything as daft. Or dafter...

On the late spring Bank Holiday on 23rd-25th May we will be visiting the Montgomery Canal for our annual long-distance 3-day working party. We will probably be working at Aston locks, the second flight down from the junction with the Llangollen Canal at Frankton.

We have not yet chosen any dates, venues or organisers for our working parties for the remainder of 1992. Come along to the AGM on 19th February & help us to organise the rest of the year's programme.

Here's our complete dates list:

Working Parties

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Organiser</u>
08-09/02/92	Wilts & Berks Canal	Martin
29/2-1/3/92	Grand Union Canal - Hanwell	Eric
07-08/03/92	I.W.A National Canal Cleanup weekend	
21-22/03/92	To be arranged - probably Hanwell or Wey & Arun	
11-12/04/92	Chesterfield Canal	
23-25/05/92	Montgomery Canal	

Socials

Don't forget our midweek gatherings at a central London pub (usually the Founder's Arms on Bankside) on the Wednesday night approximately 10 days before the next working party (i.e. 11/03/92, 01/04/92 etc) starting at about 7.30 PM & continuing until closing time. Note that 22/04/92 IS a midweek social, even though there is no dig 10 days after it. Please note also that 19/02/92 is NOT a midweek social, it is our Annual General Meeting.

Other Events

19/02/92	Annual General Meeting.
2-4/5/92	London IWA Canalway Cavalcade Rally at Little Venice.
29-31/8/92	IWA National Rally at Wakefield.

For details of any events, contact one of the following:

Lesley McFadyen, 35, Silvester Road, London SE22	Tel: 081-693 3266 (eves) 071-405 8400 ext. 402 (days)
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Tim Lewis, 5, Herongate Road, Wanstead, London E12	Tel: 081-530 7926
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Martin Ludgate, 35, Bracken House, Watts Grove, London E3 3RG	Tel: 071-515 7046 (eves) 071-831 6144 ext. 4935 (days)
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