

LWRG NEWS

2020



Editor's note



Nick Farr on the BCN making use of a chair he had retrieved from the murky depths. Photo: Tim Lewis

I believe that many of our feelings about 2020 are related to loss. This cover picture by Tim is from our dig in Shropshire when the corona virus was just a news story about China. Even now many people still have not had a personal encounter with this devastating illness, but it has touched all our lives. The picture feels like a rather a poignant reminder of early 2020 as since then we have lost the ease to even feel safe close to our friends – though I believe we can still throw mud at them from a safe distance when in tiers 2 and below.

There is a universal grief for the life we planned for, whether for loss of work, those cancelled digs or holidays or for the isolation from friends and family. For overwhelming numbers of us there have been multiple bereavements with many of us losing colleagues, friends, and family and this is compounded by other losses such as of our own health, jobs or even homes. It was with great sorrow that we mourn the passing of Ju Davenport, Mark Bennett and Nick Farr whom we knew would always make us feel better and welcome us on a work site or field somewhere.



Ju driving a tractor at a National. Photo: Tim Lewis

They were the friends we could yarn with over a pint in a village hall. So to help us to look back on their lives – I wish I could tell them how thankful I am for the gifts



they have given us – let us start with some of my favourite pictures of Nick and Ju. I am making the unanimous decision to take two pages for the editorial as I can't decide on my favourite photograph – and after all these are unprecedented times. Next page please!

More BCN fun! Photo: Tim Lewis



Nick at Brimscombe Port – though we clearly had not got round to being on the port at that point in time. The photo has come via Sue who did not tell me who had taken it – but it is a fine picture!

As well as there being some optimism as a vaccine has now been approved that doesn't need virgin unicorn tears to administer, thereby hinting that there may be a way out of this pandemic, there has also been optimism on the restoration front throughout the year with local societies adapting to the difficulties of operating in a Covid secure manner. We were delighted to have a dig on the Buckingham Arm in September – the dig report was submitted in very good time and so you can read all about it later in this issue. We brought our packed lunches, liberally doused ourselves in rhubarb scented hand sanitiser and camped or some booked themselves

into local hotels to maintain social distancing. The

Buckingham canal society shared this photo of a tractor and trailer using the new bridge at Cosgrove on December 1st – an early Christmas present to remind us of work done and a future to look towards.

Thank-you to Martin, Helena and Paul for their written contributions and mainly to Tim, but also to others for the use of their photographs mainly accessed online. All contributions are gratefully received. I no longer enjoy reading as I do not have the concentration to do it – after a lifetime of books I now struggle to finish a sen..... – so any contributions are really very welcome.



A tractor and trailer crossing bridge 1 of the Buckingham Arm at Cosgrove. Photo: The Buckingham Canal Society

Diary

Date	Site	Leader
Ongoing	Home	Do It Yourself

The diary is a little sparse – but I do hope we will be able to continue with Covid secure sites after the virus becomes more controlled by warmer weather reducing transmission and more vaccination to protect us. Please stay tuned. Tim is doing a great job of organising regular socials using Zoom and dates of these are routinely on facebook – and hopefully will be more regularly sent out on the email list too. I look forward to seeing you in person or virtually soon - hang on in there.



The team with Roy. Photo from Tim - not sure who has taken the photo so credited to a "passerby"!

18/19th Jan

Chelmer and Blackwater

Leader: Paul Ireson

The first dig of the year tradition was to attend the Chelmer & Blackwater navigation. The date was later in the month than normal to allow the Forestry team to work the previous weekend and also the availability of accommodation which now no longer would be the Haybay. After negotiations, we were to use the Black Notley Scout & Guide headquarters. As Martin L was going away to Glasgow for the weekend, the van had its short stay in the residential parking area of my flats. The names were collected and it was decided to do the London pick up at Canning Town station. This decision was to start my attempt to achieve all the main awards for the 2020 year in one dig [That's surprisingly useful as it turns out, is anyone making notes? Ed.].

1st nomination Catering – Due to work commitments, I decided to order the food via the Click & Collect method from my local Tesco's, However on the day I realised that I had forgotten to buy any Eggs, small cakes and also not enough Cheese.

2nd nomination Leadership – Original four person pick up was scaled down when both Fran and Tim made other arrangements. So only Ian & David would be picked up at the station. I had not realised that I could not drive directly outside the station so I had to park in the local Morrison's car park and wait for them at the top of the escalators and we all then had to cross the main road to get back to the van. Due to the amended departure location the drive to the accommodation meant that we went via the M11 & past Stanstead airport to arrive at the accommodation only just after the most local Adrian. We were only allowed four parking spaces but this proved awkward on arrival as most of the car park was full due to the other hall having a bingo night. So after unloading the van and the majority of volunteers arriving, we departed to the pub. However, finding the accommodation proved tricky for both Penny & Rhiannon. The only concerns were Joe & Laura who were coming by train to Cressing and walking to the accommodation. But when arriving they informed us all that although the walk was dark through the lanes, it was a very good star gazing opportunity.

Saturday's breakfast was eaten and I attempted to bully everyone to get

ready for departure to Hoe Mill. Due to roadworks the normal approach to site had to be from the north side, so I attempted to program my Tom-tom to take us to site.

3rd Nomination Driving – Due to failure on sat nav input and then taking several wrong routes the other occupants of the van were treated to a mystery tour of the country lanes of Essex. We arrived about twenty minutes after the others who had left from the accommodation.

The main tasks for the weekend was to build a hedge to shield the campsite from the storage area and also build a slope to access the storage area. Tim, Helen, Adrian & Penny had already started on emptying the old container that was used as a bonfire of ash and obtaining rubble to lay on the slope.

4th Nomination Do-nut – While getting everything out of the van, I discovered that I had left my site bag back at the accommodation meaning that I had to work in my trainers- good job the tasks were more gardening than construction.

The arrival of Inka & Alex meant that all the tasks were distributed out and people were either digging out the slot for the hedge or moving rubble and ash for the slope. The important job of lighting the Burco was left to Tim.

However, when Laura was passing by it about half an hour later discovered that it had gone out and being unable to light it again, it was discovered that both gas bottles were empty. Tim was dispatched to obtain a new one. One of the boaters who moor at Hoe Mill came to help and her dog Bonnie decided that she wanted some

attention. So to prevent her from chewing up the hedge saplings, a stick was found and she enjoyed a half-hour of keeping me occupied before I allowed Laura to continue the game. Eventually the owner took Bonnie back to the boat and we then enjoyed the delayed tea break after Tim had returned with the gas. This prompted the emergence of the WRG 50th cake that Helen had brought and photographs were taken.



Another of the 50th birthday cake – photo taken on one of Tim's devices – again we'll credit "a passerby"

Just before lunch, Roy stated that we needed to cover the hedge saplings in some wood chip and we could get it from the pile the other side of the hut besides the canal. This involved a 10 min barrow run in both directions but after three trips with three barrows we had sufficient wood chip for the hedge laid so far. After lunch Alex and Adrian started using the post cap bonker putting in the large stakes to hold the wire which will be used to support the hedge. This prompted a comment from Penny about having Bonking, Whipping and Chips. By late afternoon, we had emptied the container of ash and could start a new small fire in it to burn some of the waste wood around the site. This was

appreciated by some of the younger members of the group.



Photo: Tim Lewis

Just before departing Moose & Maria arrived and we all set off back to the accommodation, however, the van route was slower than the others. 5th Nomination Catering – I really must remember how many vegetarians and how many meat eaters I have to feed which meant that I had brought enough pies for everyone but managed to miscount and this meant that Inka, David B and I had a veggie evening meal. The evening meal was saved by Penny assisting me with the distribution of the mash potato after my emergency dash to the local shop to get another packet as I did not have enough first time round.

Sunday

Departure from accommodation was done with the kit of three of the volunteers going into either cars or van to be dropped off at local rail stations. First task was to complete the hedge planting and start on clearing up the area of all the detritus that had accumulated. A just job meant that Moose, David B and I were

despatched with the post cap bonker to re-erect a fence which had been knocked down by a tractor and after putting in the six posts the fence was re-attached and the bird feeder was put back up after Moose had knocked it off.

Tim was now allowed to have a bigger fire in the container and went about this with gusto. A select team of Helen, Wendy, Rhiannon & Penny were tasked to bundle up some faggots which were to be used for bank support later in the year. Roy found us another just task of moving 28 pieces of cut timber from where they were lying on top of a broken trailer and moving them to the hut along the canal. So some of us repeated the previous days walk along the canal. Following the flooding earlier in the month, several large pieces of timber had floated across the grass and a team was tasked to lift them and put them back in a nice orderly pile. Feeling that he had not had enough exercise David B pursued Adrian to help him put another couple of posts into the falling down fence but omitted to tell him that it was closer to the hut than where we were working by the fire. By the end of the day the hedge, slope and the whole site looked neat & tidy. Big thanks to all at Essex Waterways for their assistance and guidance. A return to the accommodation to clean up and load the van meant that we were all despatched by 16:00.

6th Nomination Driving – This was a lack of local knowledge when dropping off David B at the bottom of the M11 & A406 junction by a bus stop, I proceeded to drive and drop Inka off at

Walthamstow Central, not knowing that in effect we had driven straight past David's street to get there.

Paul Ireson



Storm Ciara is ahead..... Photo: Fran Burrell

8/9th February

Lichfield

Canal

Leader: Fran Burrell

Martin had a novel reason for being late to pick us up at Waterloo. He had an accident opening the back doors to put the brick kit in the back of the van and the mugs became small pieces of mug. This made an impressively loud noise. As did Martin. He was quite swearsy apparently. This was going to be a rather large dig with 25 people signed up – luckily only 22 came so no-one went thirsty. This was partly because the accommodation has a bar with very competitive prices. £1 for a pink gin, 50 pence for tonic said Carol. The accommodation was a little snug

so we spread out and some of us slept downstairs after the bar had closed.

Paul cooked breakfast and served it at 7.53am. At 8.01am Tim was late for breakfast and could not have an egg. We then set off to site – David S. won the one trench ploughing competition and John had to help to pull his van out of the field. This partly made up for John having told WRGNW that he was coming to our dig rather than me who was leading it. We blamed his age. We had some complicated arrangements for going to site to minimise the number of vehicles. The van made two trips and Alan complicated things by sitting in Nigel's car.



The towpath wall team hard at work. Photo: Martin Ludgate

Once we had all arrived on site Peter Buck showed us the site and we split

into teams; repairing the towpath wall, laying a towpath and removing part of a manhole to allow safe transit of vehicles through the site.

Tim said Martin made a hole then filled it in. Martin said he carefully removed the unstable bricks from a section of collapsing towpath wall. Carol and Janet then cleaned all the bricks so they could be skilfully replaced back into the wall with Tim's mortar. Other bricklayers were available. They stole the cleaned bricks too although John pretended that he was self sufficient and cleaned his own. Alan thinks he was given a number of lucky bricks as they were being laid today.

As there was a drain, Paul was down it. He and Dave B reduced the height – the pipe will remain until the canal is restored as it currently has fresh water through it. This may be an aside or a it may be a particularly valid observation, but Paul *did* look remarkably like an Oompa Loompa in an orange jumpsuit.



Paul down the drain. Photo: Martin Ludgate

The towpath team were constructing the wooden borders, laying a geotextile to prevent weed growth, filling with stone and compacting with David S's wacker plate. We had two

batteries for the drill – Martin D was worried that was not enough but I doubted LWRG could do that much screwing in one day. I was wrong but by the time the second battery gave up we were on the last section of path anyway. We completed 50 metres of 1.5 metre diameter permanent path and around 25 metres of temporary path. Adrian S was very excited to be driving a Wiedermann – this turns out to be a kind of mechanical shovel which was very helpful for moving materials around.



Adrian and a Wiedermann in action helping with the towpath construction. Photo: Tim Lewis

Emma had cooked another WRG 50 cake which we photographed and ate at break as it was sunny and lovely with snowdrops in bloom. She did come and visit us at lunchtime as we had forgotten to bring the fruit (like damnit!). Tim went to the chip shop and did not eat his sandwiches – I reminded him that potatoes do not count as one of your five a day but he refused to eat all of the fruit. We said not to bother bringing us fruit as we were coping with our fruitcake but she had made some chocolate chip shortbread as well which was devoured. We were rather worried about the impending storm so were glad to complete the path and a good

section of the towpath wall. Our drain team, having completed their task had also moved on to exposing the towpath wall further along the path.



Emma G's WRG 50th cake gratefully received at the dig!
Photo: Martin Ludgate

We needed to do the two van trips to get home – I anticipated that the brick layers may be the last to leave site and our impression was that Martin L expected this also as he pointed out that others had van tickets. Having organised another Martin to drive, Martin L then legged it from site leaving his dirty mortar wheelbarrow and stole a seat from Joe saying that he needed to tell Martin D where to go.

Back at the accommodation we all heartily agreed to have dinner early as there were delicious smells coming from the kitchen. Emma had cooked a shepherds pie followed by a chocolate

meringue served with whipped cream and soft fruit. And the bar opened. We then had a half AGM and decided on the winners for the LWRG awards for 2019.

Sunday: cancelled due to the storm with limited work on the wall left to do.

Mainly written by the dig at the bar!

LWRG Awards 2019

Catering – Paul Ireson for the indescribable custard. If it was mortar the brickies would have complained. – winner!

Bungle – for bringing the most eclectic selection of spirits to Cavalcade, including Unicum.

Martin – for his WRG tart tart at the shrewbury and Newport. For when you are running out of ideas to make a jam tart more exciting.

Alan for making sprout peeling look glamorous at the LWRG/KESCRG party

Honourable mention: John Hawkins - Saturday - set his alarm to start breakfast an hour before needed.

Sunday - changed alarm time but still got up an hour early, not realising until it came to the point to start frying the eggs.

New Recruit: David B – because we think he’s the newest but is already part of the furniture. – winner!



David sporting the new recruit award! Photo: Martin Ludgate

Driving: Alex for his magical mystery tour of Upper Tean on the Reunion. – winner! (Inka was the first to vote)

Lewis for bringing a round bottomed ice breaker to carry the Wergies home from the pub on the BCN clean-up – they were terrified of the rocking due to the round bottomed hull but they all came back to the accommodation disappointingly dry.

Honourable mention: Nigel for losing the rack of the MEWP on the exit road from the Christmas party trapping everybody on site in the cold.

Leadership: George R for forgetting to organise a dig on the Cromford although he saved the day by re-arranging at the Derby instead using the same accommodation on the line of another canal.

Lame Excuse: Sophie couldn’t lead the Shrewsbury and Newport as she had a baby, Violet, – agreed to be the winner as we think 9 months to prepare to avoid a dig is showing real commitment. Next time just tell us you are busy.

Martin D for falling off his bicycle and not being able to cook on the Buckingham.

Bricklaying: Martin won this as he thought that he was laying bricks on one side of the wall at the cottages in Derby while Pete was taking them out of the other

Donut: Nigel: on the BCN - Karen brought out a birthday cake for Nigel. It was only later that Nigel realised he had got his age wrong. But his Mum had not noticed either so maybe that’s OK. - winner

Honourable mention: Moose after we had been looking for the van keys for half an hour, “Everyone check your pockets....” As he found the van keys in his own pocket.

The Leap Dig!

29th Feb-1st Mar

at Ironbridge

on the

Shropshire

Canal

Leader: Tim Lewis

There were limited numbers for this dig so our leader had to make the difficult decision of inviting people who are more regular attendees at LWRG. Of course he announced this on facebook but had sent the invites on email (that I rarely check) so I spent a confusing evening wondering what made one a “regular”. On the 28th February the attendees assembled at the Coalport YHA. London WRG has not arrived so late at a dig since we had to collect a cooker – this time all we needed to collect when a pair came back from looking for a cashpoint was Martin who had been to the Restoration hub meeting in Rowington. The LWRG van arrived within a few minutes of alcohol not being served so we made hastily for the YHA bar and the earlier arrivals came back from the pub soon after. Martin D then regaled us with pieces of parchment about his family history. It appeared that David M had read the method statement and pointed out to our leader that we did

not have a gazebo so would not need to put it up safely or otherwise (which was a relief). We established that the river was still four or five feet below the carpark so slept soundly but we kept our wellingtons by our beds.



[The River Severn near YHA Coalport on Saturday morning as the level recedes. Photo: Tim Lewis](#)

The worksite is by the second highest inclined plane in the country so we were hoping not to get too wet. As it happens we got a mixture of bright sunshine, snow, hail, wind and rain. We wondered whether Paul had spent a couple of hours with his face pinning at the kitchen door but breakfast was cooked for us by staff at the hostel. After breakfast we headed for Blist Hill museum where we met John Freeman the organiser and Larry, a local volunteer, who took us through the work to be done and Pete and Adrian got excited about the machinery. This included 2 tracked dumpers which Martin D and David M were also quite excited about and were looking forward to having some training on these. The aim of the weekend was to build a sand bag dam, pump the water out of a section of canal that is known to be rather leaky and investigate how

the canal was constructed so that it can be rebuilt.

The sand bags were quickly filled and Martin was in charge of laying the dam – luckily he had brought his wellingtons. By tea break we had set up the pump which needed some encouragement as the vegetation within the canal was blocking it somewhat. Penny had brought a selection of decent biscuits so I was pleased that we had left the seven packets of the rubbish biscuits no-one likes from multi-packs in the food box in the back of the van. After tea the water had gone down enough to allow people to walk in the canal bed to start to dig up silt which was then lifted out by Adrian in the digger. Unfortunately the digger arm only reached halfway across the canal so a lot of digging was necessary. We call them digs but we don't often do much digging. Today was a lot of digging. It may last us for a whole year of digs. [Oh, the irony reading this now! Ed]



Some of our finds. Photo: Tim Lewis

Spencer, the resident archaeologist was very excited that we found clay at the bottom of the canal. At one moment everyone was excitedly talking about clay. We found several

other exciting things including bricks, pieces of tile and some bits of sagger. The theory is that this may have come from the works nearby as saggars are large pots that you put pottery inside during firing. I thought it was an old bit of pipe, but that shows how little I know. We all appreciated having an archaeologist on site with us to help us to understand what we found.



The sign reads "Do not climb on the Trevithick" which may be an entirely unique instruction. Photo: Tim Lewis

We also found the stone built section of canal quite fascinating as there were clearly two grooves either side for stop planks but there were also two areas on one side of the canal that looked like gate recesses but the only corresponding feature on the off side was a slight curve on one side of the stop plank groove. Some repairs made by the museum in the 1990s may have contributed to the confusion as it is not entirely clear if they repaired like for like or not.

Lunch was provided by the museum – most of the group had fish and chips but Penny and I went for a nice sit down lunch of soup and a cream tea in the café near the Trevithick engine. Blist Hill is an open air museum that

has several genuine remnants of the site including a mine, brick and tile works, some ironworks and the canal with the inclined plane. A Victorian town has been brought in and includes a railway station, shops such as a chemist, post office and a sweet shop (that actually sells sweets!), a coal mine and funicular railway. On our way back from lunch having been invited by the volunteer running the mine engine to come and see it after we had stopped to watch the man cage go up and down, we spent an enjoyable quarter of an hour being shown how to work the engine. The original engine was sent for scrap so this is a replacement of the same era from elsewhere. The pit for the flywheel is clearly larger than what is there now. After much reminiscing, mainly by Martin D about what was available in the shop windows we really had to go back to work. This was mainly digging. Though Tim cut a tree down on Penny's head to vary the activities somewhat – unfortunately as she was stuck in the mud at the time it took her longer to get out of the way than expected even with Tim being a not particularly quick sawer so she had a slight flick of a twig on her hard hat.



Paul's cake. Photo: Ian Stewart

Afternoon tea break brought us two more WRG 50 cakes. I feel that as this is only the second month people need to calm down as there are going to be much more than 50 (Oh the irony editing this post lockdown! Ed.). Ian made a lemon drizzle and Paul iced an iron bridge on his and was creative in his use of the Roman numeral for 50 – or L WRG. We always knew we were special.



The LWRG team. Photo credit: John Freeman of Blists Hill

We knocked off at 5 and headed back to the YHA with some money from John to spend on beer. We left our wet muddy outer clothes in the drying room and were amazed that Rachel had managed to stay so clean. We met Sue who had come round for dinner and there was some conversation about pounds, shilling and pence and some misunderstanding about whether Penny's mother was born in a canal lock (she wasn't). As breakfast and lunch were paid for by the museum we had chosen to eat from a set menu at the YHA so our individual food costs then balanced the cost of a weekend but strangely did not involve lasagne or tiramisu.

Some of us then went to the pub to write this while the others stayed in the warm and dry.

All I've written for Sunday was "digging", so I presume that's what we continued to do!

Fran Burrell

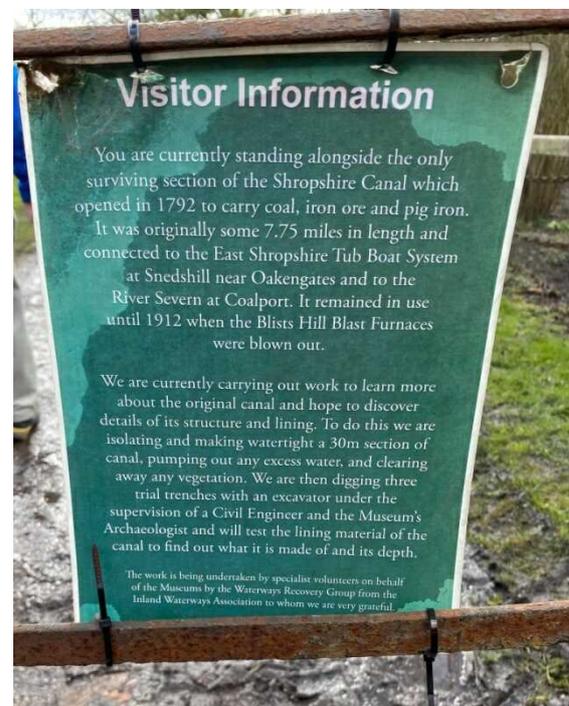
The Leap Dig continued.....

What can we fill LWRG news with if we can't go on digs – well we can double up on dig reports.....

Many years ago, in late winter 1992, London WRG held a weekend working party on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation. We called it a 'leap dig' because 1992 was a leap year, and our dig actually landed on the 29th. I remember joking to Kay, one of our recent volunteers, about whether she'd proposed to her then new boyfriend yet. They have two grown up children now. And 28 years on, the cycle of the weekends, months and leap-years being what it is, once again London WRG found ourselves going on a 'leap dig' on 29 February - 1 March 2020.

Something else which hadn't happened very much in a very long time was any restoration work on the short surviving length of the Shropshire Tub Boat Canal in the Blists Hill Museum, part of the

Ironbridge Gorge museums and heritage sites in Shropshire. Parts of it, including the surviving remains of The Hay Inclined Plane, saw some work in the 1970s and 1980s, including the odd visit by London WRG to clear weed from the canal bed. But when you're re-creating an entire industrial town from houses, factories, shops and other buildings brought there from demolition sites across the Midlands and re-erected, there are probably understandably many other priorities and the canal took a back seat. We went there a few years ago on a joint weekend with WRG Forestry to do some initial tree and scrub clearance around the canal, but that's been our only London WRG dig at Blists Hill since a visit in the mid-1980s - Tim has some pictures of some of us wading in the water pulling weeds up and looking very young.



Description of work for the weekend provided by the museum's visitor information placed on the towpath. Photo: Tim Lewis

However some recent changes in direction and priorities at the Museum have seen them take an interest in the canal once again. It might only be a fragment of a few hundred yards, all that's left of a network which once spread all over what's now Telford New Town, most of which lies obliterated and buried. But it is, after all, one of the museum's only four heritage features on their original site (as opposed to those brought in from elsewhere) - the other three being the coal mine shaft, the tile & brick works, and the iron works. A few yards of the canal are in water, but it would be good to make more of it. However attempts to re-water it in the past have hit problems with leakage where it runs along the hillside. So the plan was to clear a trial length, as the first step towards checking the lining, tracking down the leaks and (hopefully) making it watertight in the future.

And a small weekend working party by London WRG seemed a good way to do some initial trial clearance on a short 30 metre length. Numbers had to be limited due to the constricted work site (apologies to anyone who missed out), while accommodation would be rather different from the usual: we would stay at the YHA at Coalport, on the banks of the River Severn less than a mile from the site.

In the days leading up to the weekend, keeping the water in the canal seemed the least of our worries. The results of the winter storms (remember them?) saw the Severn rising to record levels, the TV news was full of pictures of nearby Ironbridge disappearing under

water, various roads to site were closed, and we wondered if we'd get there at all. But Coalport being a few feet higher above the river banks, and there being one access road heading straight down the valley side more-or-less straight to our accommodation, we agreed with the Museum that it was still on.



The Shropshire canal from the accommodation car park. Photo: Tim Lewis

Arriving in the dark and hearing the rushing waters of the swollen river sounding ominously close to the car park, we wasted no time diving for the safety of the hostel - well, the bar was about to shut. We'd booked YHA breakfast so the following morning we were neither woken from our deep slumbers in the luxurious beds (well, any bed on a dig is luxurious) by Paul clattering around at 5am nor by his raucous shout of 'BREAKFAST', but made our way to the cafe at a civilised hour [In case anyone wondering, this civilised hour was 8 O'clock I believe, Ed.]. Glancing out and half expecting to see a lake where the car park had been, and to hear on the radio news that an Iveco 9-seater had been heard putting out a Mayday call as it went over Maisemore Weir in Gloucester (Given all the other things they're fitted

with that I haven't found out how to use yet - cruise control, self-levelling suspension, direction indicators, hand brake... I assume that at the very least they've got the facility to put out an automatic distress signal) we were reassured to see R10RFB still where we'd parked it. A short drive (including a bit of incline-plane-spotting) and we were soon at the Museum discussing the plan with John and the other locals and picking up various tools and bits of machinery before heading along the towpath to the worksite.

The walk to site along the towpath was 'interesting' - we don't usually get to pass a coal mine, a funicular railway and a gospel tramcar en route. The first hour or two of the work was - dare I say - possibly not quite so 'interesting'. We filled sand bags. We tied sand bags. We moved sand bags. Repeat 200 times. Oh, and Adrian offered to move them with the machine. We pointed out that that would take away the most interesting one-third of the job.

But after we'd filled a sizeable number of bags, we could start laying them in the bed of the canal (in combination with some plastic sheeting) to form two temporary dams, with the aim of pumping out the short section between the dams - this forming the trial length.

To add some extra interest, one of the sites for the dams was a brick-built narrowing of the canal where two vertical metal channels indicated that this has been a set of stop-plank grooves - this being part of the efforts to protect the canal against leaks and breaches in its working days. There

had clearly been some alterations at different times in history - we had a not entirely conclusive discussion about whether there might have been a stop-gate (or perhaps even one facing each way) at one time.



Queues for chips. Photo: Tim Lewis

Lunch was different too: instead of the usual sarnies we were given museum volunteer vouchers to spend in either the museum cafe or the fish & chip shop. The latter isn't just a facility for visitors; it's actually an exhibit too - a traditional Black Country chippy dismantled, rebuilt, and serving genuine traditional fish and chips cooked in genuine traditional beef dripping. There was time for a brief wander around the museum (where our high-vis jackets managed to clash equally with the public visitors and the historic outfits of the museum staff and volunteers) and a short detour for a demonstration of how the steam powered mine winding engine worked on our way back to work.

Having built the dams it was time to pump the water out, with a diaphragm pump like I hadn't seen on a canal dig for a couple of decades, but it seemed to do the job (subject to the usual

struggle to stop the inlet getting blocked up with crap). The main job was then to attempt to dig the base of the channel out to something like original profile: apart from normal silting up, there had been a tendency for the 'uphill' bank (it runs along a steep hillside) to slide down the hill into the canal - oh, and some of the boats on it would have been carrying cargoes of clay to the tile works, so there might have been a bit of that shipped overboard too.



Volunteer at Blists Hill Museum explaining to interested Wergies how the winding engine for the mine shaft works. Photo: Martin Ludgate

Back at the accommodation, once again we were taking advantage of the YHA's facilities for our evening meal (was this the first ever LWRG dig with NO self catering at all?) but we did at least make it to the pub. Not the one we went to last time, as it had vanished underwater (I think at least one WRGie expressed a regret at having not packed a wetsuit, but I'm not sure the pub would actually have served us!) but another one rather further up the valley side. Oh, and there was a lengthy discussion of pre-decimal money, for some reason.

Sunday morning, and a couple of folks went for an early morning stroll along

the lower section of the canal, which used to run through what is now the YHA car park, to where it turns sharp right into the bottom of The Hay Inclined Plane (which leads up the valley side to the bit we were working on). Right by the sharp right turn is the legendary local tourist attraction The Tar Tunnel, which London WRG once visited back in the mists of time. Sadly it's shut now.

After another YHA breakfast we packed the van and headed off to site for more of the same: clearing the channel back to try to find the original profile. A brief delay before starting work (can't remember why, probably something to do with sandbags or mud) gave us a chance to walk to the far end of the length of canal in the museum, to look at the top end of the impressive inclined plane, the second-highest in the country at 207ft rise, and the third-to-last to cease operation, sometime between 1894 (last known operation) and 1907 (official closure). Oh, all right: the highest was Hobbacott Down on the Bude Canal the last two to operate were Foxton on the Grand Union Leicester Line and Trench on the Shrewsbury.

Anyway back to the mud-shifting, oh, one thing I didn't mention: even though (guess who?) Adrian was using a small excavator to do this, unfortunately being a small excavator it couldn't actually reach anywhere near the far side of the channel. (Why not use a bigger digger? Not enough room to get it to site, I suspect) So a team with spade and mattocks spent the time standing in the channel

digging some very heavy sticky mud, struggling to drag it to within reach of the excavator, and spreading a fair proportion of it over themselves.

But we had some encouragement, in the form of an archaeologist from the Museum, who had an enthusiasm for different colours of clay and other mud that reminded me of the sort of infectious enthusiasm that the late David Bellamy used to display when talking about (say) bat urine or something like that. Oh wow grey mud... hey, red mud... oh no, brown clayey mud!!! This enlivened proceedings until it was lunchtime, by which time we'd pretty much completed the work, appeared to have identified the original puddled clay canal lining as distinct from the various other kinds of mud, and the locals were very pleased with what we'd done.



With the outer layers back on to go back to site after lunch, you can see why Fran, Martin and Penny may not have been welcome in a café. Photo: Tim Lewis

We decided to go to the cafe, where we figured that we were so completely caked in mud that the best way of actually being allowed in at all was to just take most of our clothes off and leave them outside. We didn't scare the other customers, much.



Though Adrian who had stayed out of the mud in a digger (shock!), Paul, Rachel and Pete had to stay outside anyway. Would YOU let them in? Photo: Tim Lewis

This time the walk back through the museum after lunch was an excuse for a ride on the funicular railway. OK sorry, apparently it's not a real funicular because it only has one car and isn't counterbalanced.



We do not often get the opportunity to go to site by train. Photo: Tim Lewis

That just left time to clear up the site, take our tools and stuff back to the museum yard (pausing for a quick look at the museum's surviving restored canal tub-boat on our way), and spend a good hour hosing mud off everything

before getting changed in the car park (just like the old days) and heading for home.

Anyway we had a great weekend, achieved what the Museum were looking for, and were it not for the dreaded lockdown we'd no doubt have already been talking about going back there. So hopefully it won't be another 28 years (and the Leap Dig of 2048) before we can find an opportunity to support the next stage of the Museum's work of excavating and examining the canal, checking its condition, and hopefully one day repairing it, putting it back into water and maybe getting a trip-boat on it.

Martin Ludgate

BCN Clean-up 14/15th March

**Leaders: Chris Morgan & Dave
"Moose" Hearnden**

Or the last dig as we knew it for the year. No dig reports being forthcoming, I think we can summarise with pulling stinky stuff out of a canal and eating lots of delicious food and drinking lots of great beer – oh and cake. Here are some photos from the weekend – and I had made some notes on Saturday night.....

I'm not sure if I had made the notes before or after the port and cheese – but my first note was: "Martin checking

if anyone had seen his phone and when we called it, it was in his pocket."



The work! Photo: Martin Ludgate

I think I must have assumed that Martin was making up for Tim who wasn't at the BCN as apparently he had something important to do. We were slightly flummoxed as to what could possibly be more important than coming to pull rubbish out of the BCN. We were even more confused when evidence from Facebook suggested Tim was shopping for kitchen equipment.



Proud pullers with a haul of shopping trolleys. Photo: Martin Ludgate

Of course, what is really important is what junk we get – so a quick summary includes, Chris' team finding 36 trolleys from near Asda, 2 bits of an

blue 'invalid car' (sans invalid), a nice sack trolley with cast steel wheels, a grappling hook still attached to a shopping trolley from 5 years ago (or whenever it was we were last there). Moose team admit to finding the usual stuff including a bag of jewellery, a DVLA wheel clamp but only bits of car, and a tuggy tug boat to play boating with. The poor BCNS crowd were kept working late due to an issue with their work boat Phoenix but managed to get back to some hot food eventually.



A proud retriever by martin D. of....um....a thing.
Photo: Mattin Ludgate

For dinner we enjoyed chilli and jacket potatoes followed by pineapple upside down cake. We drank a toast to Ju. Feeling rather sad we felt that the cheese and port soiree was just the thing she would have approved of, before getting to bed far too close to breakfast time. The evening was also given the added entertainment of Chris

tapping the beer barrel with a liberal dousing of beer to anyone in the vicinity.



Chris tapping the barrel Saturday evening. Photo: Darren Shepherd



Moose and Alan found a romantic nook for lunch.
Photo: Martin Ludgate

Sunday as usual was similar to Saturday and we enjoyed the two fabulous 50th birthday cakes made by Ann-Marie and a friend of Chris'.



The two cakes! A WRG 50th with brickwork and a tasty bit of the BCN! Photo: Ann-Marie Burdett

As we packed up the next day, there was a whole packet of toilet rolls, we were a little wary and there was speculation if this might be some sort of trap around us stuffing our pockets with cake to eat on the journey home – but the cakes were innocently delicious and there were no ill effects from eating a part of the Birmingham Canal Navigation but to do such a thing remains ill advised.



Chris and David – as there is a;lways a tyre. Photo: Martin Ludgate

Fran Burrell

Canalway Cavalcade

Normally you might expect this issue to include some pictures and words about the annual IWA Canalway Cavalcade festival in London's Little Venice. Well, as with so many things this year, it's fallen victim to the pandemic. But not only did we run a 'virtual Canalway Cavalcade' video conference, complete with a virtual quiz to try to reduce the withdrawal symptoms, we also happened upon a very old issue of London WRG News, complete with a report of our participation in the 1992 event. That was back in the days when it wasn't about helping to set it up, it was all about the annual, usually fruitless (*) struggle to return the Pageant award to its rightful place in the London WRG van's trophy cabinet...

(*) like a typical London WRG lunch in those days...

Canalway Cavalcade 1992:

As this was the 10th year of Cavalcade, the organisers announced that the theme would be 'Anniversaries', so London WRG took the opportunity to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the Duke of Wellington inventing the Wellington boot. We decorated Rupert's boat *Ben* with several hundred cardboard cutout wellies, painted some suitably awful slogans on boards ("Gumboot diplomacy" etc), made two 6ft tall wellies with people inside them, and

drank beer from welly-shaped glasses. We all wore our best wellies.



Entry to the pageant. Photo: Martin Ludgate

As rumour had it that in previous years all one had to do to win [the prize for best boat in the Pageant] was to take a couple of IWA committee members on board and site them in prominent places, we equipped *Ben* with no fewer than four members of London IWA Committee, plus two members of the WRG Board, and the daughter of a former region chairman of IWA [*Now known as Jude Palmer*].

We thought we had it sewn up. But it was all to no avail, and this time we didn't even come second. We came "very highly commended" (i.e. last). This may have had something to do with two members of the totally unaccountable WRG Board (including Mike Palmer, the recently appointed Vice Chairman of WRG - or was it 'WRG Chairman of Vice'?) who appeared on the bridge with buckets of water and attempted to find out how waterproof our cardboard wellies were as we passed the judges. Never mind, even "very highly commended" (i.e. last) gets you a bottle of plonk, which is better than the totally empty silver cup that one of a flotilla of boats

dressed as birthday cakes got for coming first.

Martin Ludgate

12th-13th September Buckingham Arm

Leader: Martin Ludgate

As I sit here thinking how to start this report, the rain is hammering down and I realise how well timed our dig on the Buckingham Arm was. If we had left it just a week later I don't think it would have happened as the coronavirus rules tightened up again, and now as autumn descends it's unlikely that camping is going to appeal to anyone even if the rules allow it.

As it was, one sunny weekend in September an intrepid bunch of LWRGies from relatively near Milton Keynes was supplemented by those who lived just a bit too far away to go home every night for a lovely, if socially distant, dig with camping.

My own journey started Friday afternoon, frantically trying to remember where all my dig clothes were kept and making some crucial decision around layers of clothes

versus weight of my bag as I needed to get from Fareham to Wolverton on the train. This included crossing London on the tube (which was empty at rush hour, and a quite surreal experience), then walking to Cosgrove marina.



Some of the heritage being conserved at the bridge is the wear made by the towing ropes of horses pulling boats along the arm. Photo: Tim Lewis

Once at Wolverton, I hefted the bag once more and trudged my way through Ouse Valley Park, past many signs saying not to feed the ponies, but no ponies, and onto the canal bank at the Iron Trunk Aqueduct. This is a structure designed to induce vertigo! Once at the marina I realised a minor error, in that I knew that a piece of grassland had been designated for camping on, but I didn't know which and I didn't have Terry the local's phone number. A quick call to Martin sorted me out and I pitched my tent for a very socially isolated night under the

stars. During this I realised that I should have brought my sleeping bag liner as I ended up wearing every item of clothing I had brought with me.

In the morning I was woken by the dulcet tones of Paul I chatting to Terry about the volumes of wild rhubarb antibacterial spray he had bought – enough to fill a swimming pool. As others slowly started gathering, Terry got us to sign in and constantly sprayed the pen and anything else that looked like it may have been touched by someone recently.



Site safety briefing. Photo: Tim Lewis

Once we were all gathered, with a careful two metre gap tested by sticking our arms out and doing a pirouette or two [pirouettes?! Don't we all KNOW it's the two alsation (sorry German Shepherd for Moose) rule yet? Ed.], Martin ensured everyone had the right PPE. Most had arrived as requested with their own to keep the covid risk low, but others like me needed to borrow the hardhats and hivis Martin had kindly washed before bringing. As they hadn't been used since before the pandemic, this was unlikely to impact the covid risk but did mean that everything was shiny.

We had the most comprehensive site talk I have ever had. Whilst some of

this was covid19 related, I really appreciated the full induction into the weekends work – including a copy of the task list for everyone that detailed how many people and what skills were needed for each job.



Working to repair the approach wall. Photo: Tim Lewis

I opted for the nice and skill free job of clearing the stones from a collapsed dry stone wall so that the wall could be rebuilt. Penny and I set to with this, starting with clearing the nettles and brambles away as a tidy site is a safe site, whilst Steve M and Geoff started rebuilding the wall. This was a great job for maintaining a 2 meter distance as we simply spread ourselves out along the wall length. I was more worried at one stage that I might end up less than 2m from a badger as we discovered the reason the wall had collapsed was it had been undermined by an impressive array of tunnels. Happily careful investigation showed no signs of recent use.

Penny and I were demolishing the wall faster than Steve and Geoff could rebuild it – so we were soon even more distanced than at the start. Ours was the least technical job. They had to rebuild the wall with a solid brick and mortar back face where it would be holding back the dirt ramp up to the canal bridge, soon to be used as a farm crossing for the combine harvester, and a dry stone front face.

At tea break I discovered that Tim, in delivering mortar to the wall builders, had also managed to deliver mortar to my lunch bag. So before I could have a brew my mug, brought from home so that we didn't risk sharing, needed a good clean. With no running water on site this involved a 2 litre bottle of Evian Spring Water! Brew made, I collapsed in the shade – even before lockdown my dig attendance had been infrequent due to family commitments and my body was telling me that I need to get fitter in no uncertain terms.



A picture of Blue for old times sake – still working hard with David. Photo: Tim Lewis

Whilst I recovered I found out a bit more about what some of the others had been up to. Adrian had been playing with the dumper, once they had managed to jump start it moving

various materials from one place to another. Martin, Moose and Maria had meanwhile been moving different materials from another place to somewhere else using the Buckingham Canals van. This, it turned out, was RFB the 2nd so we introduced it to RFB the 3rd which is currently used by LWRG when not needed by WRG.



Adrian moving materials with the dumper. Photo: Tim Lewis

Paul I, Pete, Fran and others were meanwhile playing on the dam across the end of the canal, clearing off the vegetation ready for when it's removed. This proved trickier than anticipated as one sapling had grown its roots into the relatively newly built canal wall and needed removing. Happily the covid19 rules lend themselves well to the usual mix of one person working whilst 4 others supervise from a distance. It did however make the equally traditional

pastime of staring into a hole and going "Hmmm" harder to do as a group, so they had to resign themselves to taking it in turns to look thoughtfully down the hole they had dug at the offending root.



Clearance of the bund. Photo: Tim Lewis

These tasks took us through the rest of the day, including a socially distant lunch break where we all ate packed lunches like we were on a school trip and Fran had a nap. Adrian brought the dumper back in the middle of it and was yelled at until he moved it further away – he didn't want to turn it off in case it needed another jump start. Throughout Terry continued to spray everything in sight with wild rhubarb antibac to counter the risk of the automatic request of "pass the hammer" leading to cross contamination if anyone did happen to be asymptomatic.

At the end of the day we trudged back down the Arm to Cosgrove Marina, tired but happy to have been on site. It felt a successful day in that we had managed to get a lot of work done, whilst following all the safety rules due to Terry's careful planning. At this stage many of us dispersed home for

the night, or to local hotels, whilst a hardy group of 6 who had travelled the greatest distances (I think David M from Devon was the furthest with me in 2nd place) set up tents and ordered pizza.



Camping in a field at Cosgrove with social distancing. Photo: Tim Lewis

After setting up our camp chairs in a circle that would usually have accommodated about 20 people we opened beers and chomped down the pizza whilst the sun set until the only light was the glow from Northampton in the far distance. Tim had had the sense to bring a lantern, but that had the unintended effect of meaning I couldn't see anyone past him so Paul quickly became a disembodied voice in the dark. Since I couldn't see anyone anyway, as it got darker and colder I decamped into my tent to warm up whilst still chatting through the walls.

Sunday morning Alan told us all how lovely his hotel had been whilst I again rued the lack of sleeping bag liner and ate my breakfast bars. Tim didn't appear to have brought any food so scrounged any individually wrapped items off the rest of us that were going spare.

Back on site we did more of the same, but with a slightly different crew, gaining Marion and losing others, as several people were attending just one of the two days due to the distances involved. In the morning a group of the more technically minded installed a solar panel on the roof of the site huts, and at lunchtime one of the locals arrive with lots of advertising materials to provide to passing walkers who were fascinated by what we were up to. In the afternoon Tim decamped to the lock where there was sufficient wifi signal for him to zoom into his nieces wedding. Throughout it all David M riddled dirt with the digger, which I imagine as being a calming and peaceful task separating the soil from the spoil, but was probably boring as hell.



Helena rolling a hay bale! Photo: Tim Lewis

At about 4pm we had finished most of the tasks, but the last on the list was

untouched. We needed to unroll two bales of hay, split them in two and re-roll. Then put them in the canal in various locations. Having never unrolled a hay bale before I did not quite realise what we were getting ourselves into and how complex doing this whilst still trying to maintain 2 meters, or 1 meter with precautions would be, nor how utterly impossible it is to re-roll a hay bale once its unrolled. However, we managed it due to Pete F's knot tying skills, and even got one lump into position in the canal. There it will rot away, releasing natural chemicals that kill the reeds choking the canal whilst not harming the fish or other wildlife – very clever really.

This placement was quite tricky, having got it to the right position on the bank, the reeds prevented us getting it into the water. Penny and Martin threw lumps as far as they could, but it wasn't enough. Lucky for us Paul wandered along to see what we were up to at this point and Penny managed to say with a totally straight face, "Oh Paul, could you just push that a bit further into the canal for us". Which he did! One swimming Paul later, the hay was well and truly in the canal and somehow it had become my fault that Paul was sopping wet!

We decided to call it quits then and headed off site whilst Terry gave all the tools one last spray down. All in all, an excellent weekend that proved socially distant camps are viable. Although camping is not really feasible over the winter, maybe if a site has cheap enough local accommodation,

or enough volunteers living locally enough to travel each day, more digs can follow if the rate of coronavirus transmission stays low.



Helena has given her side of the story but Tim Lewis offers this photograph – and we will allow the reader to make up their own mind!

In the meantime I was happy to be out, and as I have been able to zoom into socials, no one had forgotten who I was. Unlike the last dig I attended where John H whispered to a very amused Nigel L; "Who is the new girl?"

Thank you to all of LWRG and the Buckingham Canal Society attending for staying safe, Martin L for organising and Terry C for having us! Hope to see you again soon!

Helena Rosiecka

Diary

While going through some early issues of what was then called 'Navvies Notebook' magazine recently, (you can always tell when editors are really desperate for copy: they start trawling through back-issues for a 'from the archives' column!) I happened across what is effectively the London WRG diary for exactly half a century ago,

from issue 23 (March 1970). I thought folks today might be interested in seeing what our predecessors were up to.

There are a few things to note:

(1) We weren't called London WRG, we were London WPG - that's the 'London Working Party Group' of the Inland Waterways Association. We didn't become a part of WRG for a while. In fact there wasn't even a WRG for us to be part of until Graham Palmer and others founded it a few months later in August 1970.

(2) We appear to have been sufficiently successful to risk organising two digs on the same weekend! I wonder how that went.

(3) Of the four waterways we were due to visit, two (the Wey and the Stratford) were already navigable, but relied on volunteer support as they were both run by the National Trust with limited funds for maintenance.

The other two are now navigable - the Kennet & Avon opened in 1990 (which rather shockingly - at least to me, having actually worked on restoring it - is considerably closer to 1970 than it is to today!) and Bugsworth Basin (it's gone back to the old spelling since this dates list was published) opened at least once only to close again when they found another leak, before its (fingers crossed) final reopening in 2005.

(4) Mention of the forthcoming IWA National Rally to be held at Guildford on the Wey in August 1970. That was the event where WRG was launched.

(5) No photos. (We couldn't afford the technology!) And all text bashed out on a typewriter. (Ditto)

Martin Ludgate (with my Navvies editor's hat on)

It is very difficult to dig over zoom...

However Wergies are also adept at other things like drinking beer, niche subjects for long conversations (I think you'll find....) and crafting so here is a quick selection from the socials. We have to thank Alex for the initial set up with the IWA and for Tim for hosting them. I have been told how much they have been appreciated during the difficult and lonely time that 2020 turned out to be. After all, where can you find such friends who can give such a high standard of abuse and laughter?

Though I am going to set up the RSPCWergies (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Wergies) in protest of all those virtual cakes which not being edible by the majority are a little mean. I propose that we keep notes and expect them created again at the next real life dig.

April 4th 2020

Leading a dig when you are not allowed out is tricky – but when presented with a problem it is a natural response to try and find a solution – even if it means 3 van changes by way of Brimscombe Port – as Wergies we CAN get this done! So April was our first virtual dig on the Wey & Arun via

zoom complimented by facebook posts! Reading it again now, I am reminded of going to the supermarket in London and finding empty shelves of certain foods and experimenting with vegan egg white as eggs were one of the last commodities to be back in stock – how strange our lives became!



Being WRG it seems any form of digging is associated with cake – though if you can't taste them I am still not convinced they actually exist. Cake and photo Ian Stewart

The invitation to the dig follows:



We are due a dig tomorrow at home preparing for some sort of restoration over the weekend. Having loaded up with cake as all the bread, eggs and pasta has gone from the supermarket we definitely won't be having lasagne or tiramisu tomorrow though Tim may have a tin of egg powder at the back of his cupboard that he seems to have been rummaging in lately so we may be lucky.

Now Martin has suggested some sort of zoom thing but I have no idea how that works and live on a boat with no electricity and the coal boats had sold

out of diesel before they got to me so little fuel for doing essential things like moving to get drinking water and empty the toilet so I'm not switching a laptop on to faff about. If anyone is good with this technical stuff and thinks it might be a good idea please go ahead. It has been suggested all our digs might be with KESCRG for the foreseeable future which seems fine to me as I for one am a little bit bored of eating my own cooking now and could do with an Anne and Eli meal.

The original idea was just to upload a dig related photo, so you doing something that might conceivably happen on a dig like scrub bashing the garden, sleeping on the floor, building a lock, adding a swing bridge to your porch (well I would if I had one!). And as it's a virtual dig, it's free! And you will only be virtually woken up at 7.50 on Saturday for breakfast in ten minutes! 🤖

The facebook dig was executed in traditional style with a safety briefing, someone losing the van keys and remembering to light the Burco with Inka wondering what time we could leave site.

From the early morning Martin: Come on Paul Ireson, get those sausages on, they aren't going to cook themselves!

I assume this was before Martin was going to bed as he is unlikely to be up before Paul.

To the late evening Tim: Who wants toast?

Bungle: Just on my way to swap the van over and bring the wrong parts to fix the burco.

As we all *knew* he does it on purpose!

We then had a “virtual social” in the evening which many people logged into and their pets and children could also join in which we decided was a good thing though we are reserving judgement on quite how much we’d trust the Bat Dog driving a digger.



Our first virtual social. Photo: Tim Lewis

April 25th 2020

Plans were afoot on how to celebrate cavalcade for those not able to sit in my living room drinking gin and eating cheese which incidentally I’d been doing since March. Martin did not get given a year off and planned to do a quiz though his glamorous assistant, Helen was unable to sell raffle tickets. On the facebook post about this social Helena suggested that tying a broom to oneself and navigating around the house would be a suitable way to do boat handling – please feel free to try this, particularly if you can video yourself or take a photograph. Alternatively, David S. suggested this link which I will copy here for those of you unfortunate enough to live in a house with all of your running water, sewage disposal, rubbish collections

and electricity: Narrowboat Simulator (Android, but also available in browsers for PC and Mac):

<https://sites.google.com/view/narrowboat-simulator>



I don’t even remember this to be honest – anything could be happening. Photo: Tim Lewis

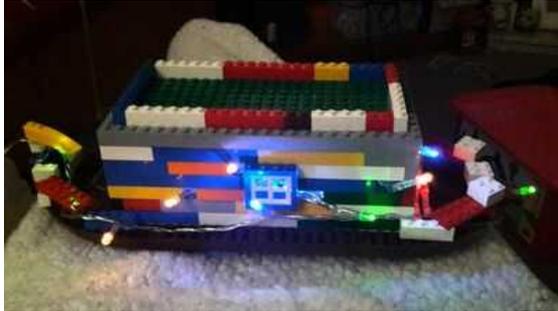
2nd. May 2020

Virtual cavalcade!



Boats, teddy bears and a quiz with old friends. This one is a bit emotional looking back on for me – I was in pain, dosed up on drugs and struggling to eat which turned out to be the early stages of Covid infection that changed my life in such an enormous way. Thankfully you can’t catch this virus virtually and no-one was harmed though a number of people may have

had a bit of a headache and felt fatigued the following morning as beer and other alcoholic beverages were consumed by many.



Likely winner of illuminated boats. Photo (and boat) by Tracy and Amy Howarth



The Kent contingent of the Teddy Bears Picnic BEFORE they got a little bit tipsy. Photo: Kay Spurrier



To be honest I think the Teddy Bears from Essex were a bad influence as they have clearly been on the spirits. Photo: Paul Ireson

There was the usual fun and games with a quiz by Martin, a teddy bears picnic and a pageant of boats. It was

lovely to have some of the old regulars from LWRG like Kay and her husband come along, cavalcade stalwarts such as Tracy and Wergies we see too rarely in normal times like Steve and Mandy. It appears no winners were decided so everyone hopefully congratulated themselves with a virtual box of chocolates and bottle of champagne.



Photo and boat: Helena Rosiecka. It is the 200th anniversary of the Regent's canal I believe if you are not sure what is happening on the boat; Limehouse to Paddington.

27th June 2020



Photo: Tim Lewis

The more technologically adept can hide the state of their houses by using various background images. However Sue is genuinely that small standing

against a standard 3 foot high milepost and was in fact on the Shroppie.

October 10th 2020



The problem with zoom is needing to tidy up and put suitable props out so people think you spend your time doing reading and suchlike.....Photo: Tim Lewis

The highlight of this appears to be finding Hamon has a tram in his living room. Alas, the tram is not visible in this picture. Though, I thought everyone did tbh – I mean I certainly have a small tram in mine.

November 7th 2020

This was Paul's birthday celebrations – he is now 70 according to Tim – and Marion entertained Sue by doing her housework showing there may be some benefit to virtual socials as you can cook dinner and do other useful tasks at the same time.



I'm assuming Marion is just out of view with her housework but who knows what has just happened to tickle them? Photo: Tim Lewis

November 21st 2020

Apparently Moose needed to change the fuel filter on his laptop or something so couldn't show, but Helena taught everyone the optimal thickness of a Rainbows badge and there was a 50th doughnut from Sue.



LWRG Social 21st November. I particularly like how it captures Tim taking a picture of the screen with his phone – at least we all know where his phone is with a zoom social so it avoids getting lost! Photo: Tim Lewis



A WRG 50th doughnut! Photo: Tim Lewis

Xmas social

19th December



Moose or Mr Scrooge next to a Christmassy Mk2 and Adrian – and others in their “appropriate clothing”.
Photo: Tim Lewis

Rather than a great meal, cutting down trees and making bonfires and a theme for costumes and entertainment, Martin asked for everyone to have a festive item of food or drink and “an appropriate costume / clothing” – the latter being a sad indication of the number of non key workers dressing habits in this time of Zoom I feel. Luckily everyone appears to be wearing their clothing in the photos I found on facebook as there is only so many traumas anyone can reasonably be expected to go through in 2020.

I believe a lot of us were too upset by the restrictions on seeing people we love announced a few hours before and so could not attend. Checking the facebook posts made me chuckle though.



I am sure Helena has a good explanation that is entirely “appropriate”. Photo: Ian Stewart

I found that Adrian had already drunk his Christmas pudding porter the day prior to the event but luckily still had a less festive supply of beer. I wondered why on Earth Helena was disembodied (I speculated whether she was being the spirit of Christmas present but from Tim’s picture she appears to be in a box so I am none the wiser) and noticing that Ian gets his vitamins from Sainsbury’s I wondered whether that is allowed if one works for an alternative supermarket chain.



The quiz master for the evening with a clearly inappropriate scene of Santa not following any of the rules of 6 prior to visiting EVERY child in the world on one night by going out for a drink in Camden! Photo: Ian Stewart

Mud and Navvies



Post Navvies assembly drinks at the Charles the First in Kings Cross in December 2015. Photo: Tim Lewis

You may be wondering why there is mud on a digital copy of Navvies – I mean the one good thing from it going digital is NOT getting grubby notes or snack crumbs with it you might think, but it started with Tim sharing a memory of Navvies Assemblies – well at least of going to the pub after Navvies assemblies – in those halcyon days of crowds of people, no fears and for me being able to stand up without needing a nap, and of course being able to drink BEER with your friends – Martin commented that “That’s by far the most convincing argument anyone’s come up with so far for going back to paper printing in due course...” and as a number of people expounded the virtues of reading a paper copy of Navvies, Emma added in mud as part of a standard reader’s experience. Tim tells me the canal museum is staffed by volunteers so it can be a bit dusty I suppose.....

Who to contact:

London WRG Chairman: Tim Lewis
London@wrg.org 07802 518 094

Enquiries: Martin Ludgate & Lesley McFayden Martin.ludgate@wrg.org.uk

London WRG News Editor: Fran Burrell katburrell@doctors.org.uk
07765 793 474

Navvies issue 23, 1970

