

London WRG News



London WRG French Maids at KESCRG/London WRG Christmas party. (Ed Walker)

Issue 40 February 1999

From The Editor

Its been a busy few months for London WRG with the usual excesses of Christmas and New Year. The festive season was enjoyed in the traditional manner with the London WRG / KESCRG Christmas party (see later on in this issue for a report) and the London WRG Christmas party where the usual awards ceremony was carried out. This year's bunch of miscreants to be recognised is as follows:

Helen Gardener

New recruit award (beard)- Just because the beard matched the hair.

Driving award (steering wheel)- For a small incident in RFB.

Martin Ludgate

Cooking award (wooden spoon)- For the North Wilts custard episode.

Me (Ed Walker)

Leadership award (whip)- For missing a dig I was organising.

Lame excuse award (crutch)- For the excuse given for missing the above dig.

Vagrancy Award (all London bus map)- for having three phone numbers in one week.

I think that's all the latest news but if anyone has any material at all for the next issue then please get in contact with me.

Ed Walker

For all the latest info don't forget to check the London WRG web site:

www.danevans.demon.co.uk/lwrg

The latest news and the most interesting photos!

AGM

The London WRG AGM and social will be held in the Doggett's Coat and Badge pub on Wednesday 10th March 1999 at around 19.30. Come along and get involved in the running of the group and help answer the perennial questions about where shall we go digging, what social events shall we run and who will volunteer to run them. So come along and help us decide the direction of London WRG for the next year!

Car and Hard Hat Stickers

Yes they have arrived, the stickers mentioned in the last issue are now on sale and they are going like hot cakes. Many thanks to Neil Ritchie for making them up for us and they can be picked up at any London WRG dig or social from me for the nominal charge of 50p for the car stickers and 25p for the hard hat stickers.



Helen Gardener receiving the new recruit award at the London WRG Christmas party (Ed Walker)

Droitwich Barge Canal: 5th-6th September 1998

We spent most of the weekend digging shit.

OK, I know we often use that word to describe whatever unpleasantness we happen to be dealing with - be it mud, silt, dredgings or the latest BW regulations... But this time was different: when Mike Palmer promised us a crappy job, he wasn't kidding.

Maybe it was his way of getting revenge for us 'dumping him in it' - so to speak - as up to two days prior to the dig he was busy at Salford Quays clearing-up after the festival, blissfully unaware that we were coming. But coming we were, and by way of celebrating their first ('paper') wedding anniversary, Maria and Clive were doing the organising.

Anyway, after the usual late start on Friday night from London, a fair-sized contingent (and there were plenty of us, too) gathered for a couple of pints at the 'Railway' while MKP outlined the plan for the weekend. A large overspill weir had lain undetected, unknown and unsuspected in the undergrowth by the Barge Canal for countless aeons. (well, actually I remember seeing it in about 1984 but I'd somehow forgotten it.) A brick culvert used to lead from the weir to the river. Part of this culvert was still intact, part had been replaced in concrete when a sewer was built under it, and one section was what is generally referred to as knackered (for the non-technically minded, that's a technical term meaning 'buggered'.) The top had collapsed, it had become blocked and useless, the water flowing into it had backed up and flooded the field, and the whole mess had been turned into a total quagmire by the

Working Party Reports

field's occupants - a herd of cattle who appeared to be part of the testing programme for the Bovine Laxative Research Project. And our job was to dig it out and rebuild it. Plenty of opportunity for hard work, lavatorial humour ("Is it a 'big job', Mike?" "I see this is the 'number two' job on the work sheet"...) and generally getting covered in shit.

When I say 'our job', I really mean 'their job', as on Saturday morning I did a runner and headed 100 miles
Working

north to an IWA Restoration Committee meeting on the Sankey Canal, so while the rest of the team were busy getting stuck into shovelling crap, we were busy spouting it.... No, that's not fair, it wasn't that bad, and we got a nice tour of a very interesting restoration scheme that could do with a lot of money, now. (don't they all?)

Anyway, when I got back in the evening, I headed for the 'Railway' expecting everyone to be there already, and they weren't! So, back to the accommodation and they weren't there either! A quick call on a mobile phone revealed that they'd gone for a boat ride on the canal... bloody typical - I miss out on a year's boating 'cos Fulbourne's minus its engine, then the first day's London WRG digging that I've missed all year, and they've all gone boating without me! Oh well.

Anyway, it was just as well I arrived back at that moment, so I could take the minibus down to Ladywood and

Working Party Reports

retrieve the boaters, then we could head for the 'Railway', which thanks to the current landlord is gradually acquiring a OO gauge model railway running round the entire pub interior at picture-rail height, and tunnelling through the walls....

"I'm afraid it's taking me rather a long time." "Don't worry, I bet you finish your railway before we finish our canal."

The following morning we marked our organisers' paper wedding anniversary with an appropriate token of our affection - a paper plate, signed by everyone. (I've just looked it up and I see that the first anniversary is 'cotton' and the second is 'paper'...whoops! Oh well, we know what to get them next year, don't we? Three years is 'leather'... wahey!!)

Back on site, it was obvious that the cows had inspected our work overnight, and given their opinion on it. (they thought it was 'crap') Having completed the excavation work, we dammed up the bywash to stop water coming through while we rebuilt the brick sides of the culvert to something approximating to a level surface. Then we built a 'lid' for it with concrete paving slabs.

Then it was time to cover it over with backfill up to ground level. Someone suggested we ought to find some way of enticing the cattle to line up with their rear-ends over it and fill it up for us. (our culvert would be 'interred', so to speak) The cows weren't interested.

So we had to do it ourselves. (No I don't mean we parked our arses over the hole....) We quickly shovelled the mud and everything else back into the hole... it went like shit off a wet shovel... that's because it was....

Anyway, by the time we knocked-off the field had been levelled, the culvert was flowing OK, and MKP was pleased with our work (we probably deserved a 'pat' on the back). All in all, not bad for a weekend spent digging shit.

PS thanks Mike for organising the boat-ride PPS any complaints about the language in this dig report should go to the editor, not me!

Martin Ludgate

KESCRG /LWRG Christmas Party Buckingham Arm 5-6 December 1998

Since LRY was off having its seatbelts replaced, LWRG had the use of JFH. Unfortunately there are not enough seats in JFH for all the LWRGies, so some of us assembled at Waterloo to be transported to Cosgrove in Alison's Morris and Dan's Nova. JFH arrived later having collected tools plus Aileen from Bromley, and ...(roll of drums)... a spy sent by Neil Edwards from IWA head office in Rickmansworth.

Once we got to the pub (most of the KESCRG contingent were there already), Andy (otherwise known as "The Spy") successfully infiltrated the KESCRG group and chatted up the girlies. LWRG talked about boring things like boats and canals.

Saturday morning dawned early and cold, cold unless you were inside the hall, which was baking hot. After an excellent breakfast we walked to site along the navigable canal towpath, in itself a novelty on most digs. The work consisted of scrub bashing, stump pulling, and bonfires, basically continuing what we started last year.

Back at the hall, everyone started transforming themselves for the evening party which had a French theme.

LWRG becoming finally:-

Joan of Arc (Lesley)

Cyrano de Bergerac (Phil)

The Eiffel Tower (Martin)

Two French men with onions
(Rupert & Ed)

4 French maids
(Alison, Helen, Aileen & Dan)

Working Party Reports

Dan was very becoming, and Martin went round all evening crouching due to having made his costume (hat) too tall for the hall!

Brian and Maureen (and their team) excelled yet again, and a substantial repast was had by all, after which the serious business of the evening commenced. LWRG propped up (and manned) the bar, whilst everyone else played party games.

Sunday dawned and we were allowed a welcome lie in. Martin retired to bed with his breakfast and was last seen clutching a bear (before a late arrival on site with Lesley in time for lunch). Work was understandably slow. JFH was swapped for RFB (more seats and more diesel in the tank), containing a defunct camp's fridge/freezer. This was unnecessary as it didn't get much above freezing all day, the canal at Cosgrove lock stayed frozen with no boats. The road out of the village was also icy, as we discovered driving home.

All in all an excellent weekend, enjoyed by all. Many thanks to everyone who contributed to making it such a success.

Rupert Smedley

Working Party Reports

Basingstoke Canal: 23-24 January 1999.

Martin and I had almost arrived at West Byfleet when we had a phonecall from Ed W: "we're in the pub... can't find the hall... it's too foggy..." Luckily Martin remembered where Woodham Church Hall actually was, and various cars & the van soon got there. Making our way pubwards across a path through the wood was interesting - "it's not muddy, honest guvnor". It was pitch-black, and following the person in front was not helped by Helen and Moose wearing army-style camouflage jackets. But we soon arrived in the "Bleak House" pub, where the local organiser explained our tasks for the weekend.

This was to be the first London WRG dig on the Basingstoke for a number of years. It had been found that water supply is a great problem on the canal. So a backpumping scheme has been proposed to lift water from lock 6 back to lock 1. But first, as a precaution against the backpumping overdoing itself, bywashes are needed.

We were working at lock 1, where a new bywash is being installed on the off-towpath side. This is to supplement the existing bywash, which had proved inadequate. The bywash is to be constructed of concrete piping sections, laid on a concrete base. The base is needed to stop movement of the pipes, which could cause them to go out of alignment. One of our main tasks for the weekend was to dig-out and lay the concrete base. Despite Clive's

demonstration of digger driving skills, work was soon underway.

Another major task was the construction of the inlet and outlets for the bywash. The latter required piling to be done, and soon a piling team went about it with a will. Controlling a piling hammer was much more knackered than it looks, especially if you are holding it 2' above your head!

"I hope we're not going to have to go and drink this beer tonight, I'm not sure I've got room" quoth Martin (!) after an excellent lasagne from the man himself, followed by Maria's apple crumble... But of course, he was proven wrong!

Sunday was much of the same, except this time, piling tie-backs needed installing... "Oh no, me nuts have fallen off", said Ed B in summary. There were also some b****rd piles which just wouldn't go in, so we had to take the angle-grinder to the tops of them.

Overall, a good dig, with lots of progress made, on what looks like an interesting site. I'm sure we'll all look forward to going back there again soon.

Dan Evans

As WRG is a subsidiary of the IWA, here are a few words about the activities of the IWA in the London area. For those of you who don't know, the London Region consists of three IWA Branches, each of whom put on regular social meetings with speakers and illustrated talks at two locations: Middlesex Branch (with socials in Uxbridge and Richmond), North & East London Branch (socials in Islington and Edmonton) and South London Branch (socials in Mottingham and South Norwood).

There are also monthly meetings in central London, organised by the Region, which take place in a lecture room at Imperial College. The topics for the next few meetings are:

- Thursday 18 February: Planning & Navigation Seminar – a discussion about current local issues being looked at by our Planning & Navigation Subcommittee
- Thursday 18 March: Helen & Chris Davey: an illustrated talk about the BCN 24 Hour Challenge
- Thursday 15 April: Region AGM followed by presentation from BW on the London SRB. **Also, a second chance to see “A Perfect Day” – a compilation of slides put together by Martin Ludgate for the pre-panto entertainment at Salford Quays National last year**
- Thursday 20 May: an illustrated talk by the Droitwich Canals Trust
- Thursday 17 June 1999: a guided walk along the River Thames

IWA London Region

These meetings (with the exception of the guided walk) take place in Room 601, Civil Engineering Building, Imperial College, South Kensington and start at 7.30 for 8.00.

The London Region also organises the famous **Canalway Cavalcade**, at Little Venice over the early May Bank Holiday weekend (1-3 May 1999). KESCRG run the site services and anybody interested in helping over the weekend should contact Eddie Jones on 0181 684 7741. The number to phone for boat entries is 0181 691 9190. The pageant of boats on the Saturday afternoon will have London WRG taking part as usual.

If you would like information on any of these meetings or events please phone Alison Smedley on 0181 691 7215 (evenings).

From The Archives

30 years ago:

In 'Navvies' no 16, what was then 'London Working Party Group' were working on clearing lock chambers on the Stratford Canal:

"NAVVIES PARADISE - the most glamorous part of any restoration has always seemed to be an efficient lock digging-out operation... the original navvies must never have done this, but they would certainly have worked in the mud and cold and rain. We can't promise all of these, but confidently expect the mud and cold at least...."

"The Shropshire Union Canal Society have indicated to IWAAC their intention of reviving the Montgomery Canal"

"The Basingstoke Canal is privately owned and the owners will not allow the Society to do any work. The future of the canal must rest with the county councils of Surrey and Hampshire, who are reported to be interested in purchasing."

25 years ago:

From 'Navvies' No 46: "150 navvies from all over southern England turned up for the first ever official working party on the Basingstoke canal. This resulted in the clearance of 2 miles (Two miles!!) of towpath and a bridgehole..."

"Sincere apologies for the confusion caused in the last 'Navvies' by the mis-

numbering of some pages and the fact that continuation numbers were not given to pages that completed certain articles. This was caused by technical problems outside our control (stupidity)."

20 years ago:

The dates list in 'Navvies' 74 included the following entry:

"South East WRG - London:

1st APRIL Basingstoke Canal

This one-day working party really is taking place. No kidding!"

15 years ago:

The Dates list in 'Navvies' 92 included something remarkably similar:

"London WRG:

1st APRIL: Croydon Canal

Meet in the Anerley Arms, bring light gardening tools and pneumatic drills..."

(This one actually was an April Fool - although we actually did turn up at the pub and posed with van and shovels for photos by the surviving length of the canal at Betts Park)

Meanwhile, we were generally busy elsewhere... wonder if you can guess where? That's right - 4 of the first 5 digs in '84 were on the Basingstoke!

10 years ago:

I see from London WRG News that we were having an AGM, to discuss such novel subjects as what to do for Canalway Cavalcade, and how to recruit new volunteers.

We also reported on the Christmas party:

"Thanks especially to:

...'Winnie' for his fine effort in capturing the whinging award. He also won 4 bottles of non-alcoholic lager in the raffle. Are these events in any way connected?

...Alan for winning most of the alcoholic prizes in the raffle. Next year we'll just give him a cheque and send him to Unwins."

...and an apology:

"Some of my comments last time are already out of date. I predicted that our last dig of the year would be our last EVER Basingstoke dig... our revised dates list is as follows:

18-19/02/89 Basingstoke
11-12/03/89 Basingstoke
01-02/04/89 Basingstoke..."

5 years ago:

London WRG News 22 reported a dig at Dauntsey "...despite some huge bonfires we were all feeling the cold, so we warmed ourselves up by pushing the van and several people's cars out of the muddy corner of a field in which we'd been clever enough to park

From The Archives

them...including some interesting catering on Saturday night...the editor cooked burnt lasagne followed by burnt apple pie...and on Sunday the Bath lot [*] kept to their promise and duly dragged a GAS - POWERED barbecue 200 yards past several enormous bonfires to cook our lunch for us."

[*] I that means they were from Bath in Somerset, rather than that unlike us they were not part of the great unwashed...

'Next time out' featured a familiar name....

"ON 16-17 April we return to the scene of our earlier triumphs, the Basingstoke Canal..."

...and some familiar initials..

"Most of the rest of the dates are currently marked 'TBA'. In the old days it used to be a standing joke that this stood for 'The Basingstoke Again'. Those days have long gone...."

'Long gone'? Pull the other one!



One of the older (odder?) forms of London WRG transport (Martin Ludgate)

Next Time Out

Our next dig on March 6-7 should have been on the Kennet and Avon 'Dig Deep' project - installing bywashes and lock-moorings to make the canal more user-friendly and to avoid the water wastage that results from having to leave all the locks empty due to lack of bywashes. Unfortunately, this project is still stalled due to negotiations with BW, the Heritage Lottery Fund (who are paying for a lot of the current works on the K&A) and English Heritage taking longer than expected.

Some time this summer we will have to make a decision on whether to carry on pursuing this as a Dig Deep project or whether to look elsewhere for work.

In the meantime, our next dig has been moved to the Lichfield Canal, and will be a joint weekend with KESCRG. The work will probably include piling, earth-moving with excavators and dumpers and scrub clearance, Ed Walker is down to organise this one.

After that, on 20-21 March we'll be supporting the BCN Cleanup weekend, a major nationally planned working party organised by WRG, IWA and BCNS to clear as much rubbish out of the 'navigable' Birmingham Canal Navigation's as we can. Following the success of the last two years' efforts on the Walsall and Tame Valley canals, this year's is on the Wyrley & Essington. Please fill in the enclosed booking form and send it off to Helen Davey if you want to come. Contact Tim Lewis if you want transport from London in the minibus.

The following dig was intended to be another K&A weekend; this one has been moved to the Droitwich, and Mike Palmer will probably have us working on the Junction Canal locks at Hanbury. No London WRG organiser for this one yet - turn up at the AGM and volunteer for it, or don't turn up and have somebody else 'volunteer' you in your absence....

Then it's 'put your thinking caps on' time again, because it's the London IWA Canalway Cavalcade rally at Little Venice. This year's theme is 'Our Waterway Heritage', and need to think of an appropriate way of decorating a boat. (Not quite sure which boat it'll be, but it won't be 'Ben' this year, as it's up north at the moment) As well as taking part in the pageant, we'll be running the canal names tombola game all weekend, in the hope of raising some dosh to pay for all the stuff we will no doubt decide we need to buy at the AGM...

After that, it's back to the Basingstoke Backpumping project, and by June the Wey & Arun Canal will have dried-out enough to risk a weekend there. Amazing isn't it - all it's life it suffered from water shortages, but whenever we go there there's too much of the damn stuff!

For up to date information check
the London WRG web pages:
www.danevans.demon.co.uk/lwrg

London WRG Dates List

Working Parties: Transport available Friday evening in the London WRG minibus; meet outside Burger King at Waterloo station; normally at 19:00 but may be earlier or later depending on distance. Contact Tim, Martin or Lesley for details.

Date	Location	Organiser
6-7/3/99	Lichfield (Wyrley & Essington) Canal	Ed Walker
20-21/3/99	BCN Cleanup (Wryley & Essington).	Tim Lewis
17-18/4/99	Droitwich Canal (TBC)	TBA
22-23/5/99	Dig Deep on the Basingstoke.	TBA
12-13/6/99	Dig Deep on Wey & Arun.	TBA
3-4/7/99	Dig Deep on Hereford & Gloucester.	TBA
24-25/7/99	TBA	TBA
11-12/9/99	TBA	TBA
2-3/10/99	Dig Deep on Wey & Arun.	TBA

As most of the digs are TBA's at the moment, volunteers would be very welcome to help arrange them, come along to the AGM and volunteer!

Note: Digs marked "Dig Deep" are on projects where work is being co-ordinated under the Dig Deep Initiative, a scheme involving ourselves and three other mobile groups (NWPG, KESCRG and WRG BITM).

Social Gatherings: Wednesday night, normally 10 days before each dig i.e. February 24th, March 10th, April 7th etc. at the **Doggetts Coat And Badge** pub, southern end of Blackfriars bridge about 19.30 till 23.00. We are usually in the bar just above bridge level.

Other Events:

10/3/99	AGM, Doggetts Coat And Badge, probably downstairs.
1-3/5/99	Canalway Cavalcade, London IWA rally at Little Venice.
29-31/5/99	WRG training weekend.
11/7/99	London WRG barbecue, lunchtime at Dave Charlton's.
9 or 16/10/99?	Possible Legoland trip.

Who to contact:

London WRG Co-ordinator: Tim Lewis, 6, Downs Road, Enfield EN1 1PA.

Phone: 0181-367 6227

Enquiries: Martin Ludgate or Lesley McFadyen, 35 Silvester Road, London SE22 9PB

Phone: 0181-693 3266

E-mail: editor@navvies.demon.co.uk

London WRG News Editor: Ed Walker, 13 Trumper Rd., Stevenage, Herts. SG1 5JZ

Phone: 01438-227 900

E-mail: ew82625@glaxowellcome.co.uk



Martin Ludgate recovering after the KESCRG / London WRG Christmas party (Ed Walker)



Shovelling shit on the Droitwich Barge Canal. (Martin Ludgate)