

London WRG News



Tim Lewis brick laying! (Droitwich, 3rd June, Martin Ludgate)

Issue 49 September 2001

From The Editor

London WRG has been a little quiet over the last few months, probably due to a higher than average commitment to the WRG summer camps season (well Matt and Marcus seemed to be on all of them!). Hopefully with the National over we can get back to some semblance of normality and, as usual, we have a busy autumn, the usual reunion and Christmas parties (more details and booking forms enclosed), another two Dig Deep digs and the usual West Felton Harvest festival.

Apologies to everyone for the long gap between London WRG news's, by my reckoning the last edition came out in February, this is probably due to three reasons, London WRG not knowing whether we are coming or going because of Foot and Mouth, me having a lot of work on and very few dig reports. To make up for this we have a bit of a bumper edition here with details of what we are doing for the next year and dig reports from as far back as February!

See people at the socials, remember they have changed to a Tuesday (11 days before a dig), still at the Jugged Hare, Victoria.

Ed Walker

For up to date information check the London WRG web pages:

www.london.wrg.org.uk

Mont Harvest Festival Weekend

Possibly a little short notice but the usual harvest festival party at West Felton will be happening on 22nd-23rd September, this is usually a good social occasion while doing some work on the Mont itself (apparently we have some stumps to pull, robably on the Pant section). So come along and find out how much MKP will bid for a bag of pears this year or what Mole will be carving carrots into. The minibus will be leaving from Waterloo at 7pm on the Friday.

Anderton Abseil

Don't forget to support the (mad?) London WRG'ies that are going to be throwing themselves off the top of this historic structure next month, to try and raise the last amount of money needed to complete the restoration. Find a sponsor form enclosed and mark it with Martin, Matt or Nina.

London WRG Christmas Party

Apart from the KESCRG Christmas bash we usually have our own London WRG party with one of Lesley buffets, the London WRG awards and barrel of beer. This year we will probably be having it on Tuesday 11th December, a venue hasn't yet been decided upon and so further details will go out on the e-mail list when they become available.

WRG Christmas / New Year Camp

Clive Alderman is running the New Year camp again this year, work and accommodation are the same as last year, more scrub bashing on the off-side of the Basingstoke Canal. The camp runs from 26th December to 2nd January, further details and booking forms can be obtained from the WRG website (www.wrg.org.uk) or head office. The theme for the new year party has yet to be decided but a large number of London WRG'ies will probably be there.

Wilts & Berks Canal: 10/11th February 2001.

Here is a first, me doing a dig report.

The dig was on the Wilts & Berks, down near Wootton Bassett.

Everyone that was expected turned up on the Friday night, strange that we all met in a pub! Pete Smith and his lovely wife were there to greet us. After the sampling the local tipples. Maria & I was suffering we had just stuff ourselves with Indian Cuisine up on the high street, (very recommended). We adjourned to the Hall, nice clean hall with mod cons like flushing loos etc.

After the normal round of toast etc off we went to bed. The central heating was roaring, no problem, until during the night someone decided that the heating was making too much noise and turned it down.

Besides the point that he had put himself beside the quite heating and our hero Marcus was sleeping next to the loud one.

Saturday Morning bright and bushy, and B****dy cold, we find that during the night as people got colder and colder they actually started to put their clothes on.

After a lovely cooked breakfast with the added goodies of mushrooms we were all set. Off we went to site.

This dig was supposed to be a part of the Dig Deep project, working on the Summit lock.

But would you believe it the lock was under water, more rain had been forecast for the weekend, and the decision was taken that it would be waste of time in pumping the water out for it to fill up again as the water table is still so high.

So we were found a bit of scrub bashing, which when you looked at it for the more hardened members of LWRG, who worked on Dauntsey in the early days, was nothing a few little saplings etc nothing much.

Working Party Reports

It is so easy to be taken in by nature, the saplings had thorns 4 to 5 inches long and they hurt, the brambles were just as vicious, the day of the triffids again.

By the end of play Saturday, the fires had roared (big mound of ash, good sign), a large portion of the scrub had been sorted and some very weary battle hardened troops, went back to the hall.

Scoff on Saturday was going to be special, it was Peter Smith's birthday and his wife was going to roast the meat and we were to supply the Veg. With our Martin cooking the veg and Nadia (Pete's Wife) cooking the meat and supplying a very nice selection of red and white wines, a merry meal was had by all. After the washing up we all adjourned to the pub.

A few more beers etc later back to the hall, to sleep, the heating was left on all night (surprising that). It was cosier,

Again after a lovely breakfast with even more mushrooms, we set out to site, and carried on with scrub bashing. By afternoon tea break all the scrub was down on the towpath side and burnt very nicely, Maria & I had decided that this was our time to leave. And started the long road home.

All had a very enjoyable weekend; I had some very pretty scratches on my arms and legs. Now raring to go on the Thames and Severn.

Maria & Moose

Working Party Reports

Thames & Severn Canal: 19/20th May

80 degrees inside the van made the usual Friday traffic almost unbearable, any weight I'd recovered since returning from India I sweated off that afternoon. Started well by doing the weekend shopping in the morning, but by the afternoon a visit to check Marcus still had his nose in the books, and a last minute check of the emails found the numbers had doubled from 7 - 14. Still made it to Waterloo, even if they now send you the wrong way round the roundabout ...well it has been a year ! But nearly didn't make it to the Bell as those of us still awake in the front seat will testify.

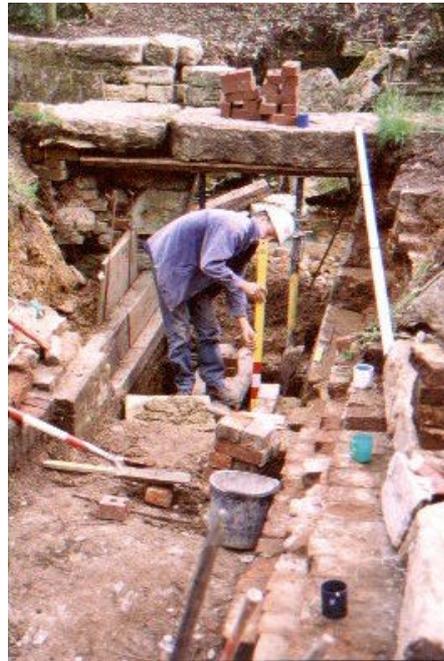
I'd been forewarned about the prospect of a chamber clearance under three feet of water, and so it seems had everyone else, being unable to find a spare hiding place in the van for my own wellies! all but Andi seemed grateful to BITM for clearing the wellie depth silt from beneath the KL15. Besides which we managed to convince Neil that our efforts would be better employed reconstructing the bywash and head of Valley lock.

Now there's a lovely word....reconstruction, and it seems most of LWRG are equally well acquainted with its old friend....demolition! So as Saturday was spent measuring, photographing, then breaking out the upright weir stones, we were glad to find that we were quite literally pulling apart the supporting brickwork. Hats off to Rick & Richard who judging by the constant sound of bolster vs mortar, or should that have been vs gunmetal, didn't quite have it so easy preparing the offside gate recess for Phil.

A baking hot Sunday, and after a morning spent replacing the supporting brickwork, the resetting of the weir stones progressed rapidly after lunch, leaving only one more for NWPG to lift into place and the rest to grout. Tim amazed us all when he put the camera down for the afternoon and took up a trowel, and even surprised himself by raising the entrance culvert brickwork a few more courses. Were not sure whether the journey of a very large tree down the steep valley sides had anything to do with the arrival of the chainsaw team at the end of the day, but Tenko & Graham did a fine job of knocking up timber supports to protect the freshly laid weir stones.

My thanks to everyone who came along over the weekend, I know our work was greatly received by Neil and the countless visitors to Chalford taking advantage of the attractive surroundings via the re-opened towpath. Not only were we seen as an alternative to the local book stall, but you can be sure we took their minds off the fact that now its not just their water bills that they receive through their gas supplier. After a failed experiment by Severn Trent Water left 16 miles of Transco gas main a little damp.

Matt Taylor



Matt Taylor rebuilding Paddle Culvert (Tim Lewis)

8th-9th September: Back on The Basingstoke Again

We were also back at Woodham Church Hall, where we parked and made the usual long dark walk through the woods to the Bleak House Pub, Alison spotting a glow-worm on the path. It was indeed bleak, with only one real ale (Burton's), which Matt tried, found was bad, and had replaced by Tetley's.

Most of the rest of us joined Tunji in drinking Guinness. The hall itself had in some ways changed. Gone were the computer printed A4 notices exhorting good behaviour. "I am your waste-basket. Use me and I will be your friend!" and "I am your toilet. Keep me clean!"

Saturday had a bad start on site, as one of the excavators refused to work and threw its track. In spite of Rupert, Pablo and Pete's best efforts it could not be fixed and was eventually swapped with the Hire Company for another.

Once we were fully equipped with two excavators, two dumpers, a sit-on roller and a lot of rakes and shovels the road-surfacing job went well. One excavator loaded the dumpers, the dumpers tipped, people raked, the second excavator graded and the vibrating roller vibrated and rolled. (How is it that they vibrate? Suggestions ranged from loads of hamsters in wheels to "an eccentric inside".) We worked gradually from the gate below lock two towards the new pump house (for the back-pumping scheme) giving the road a good water shedding camber.

On Sunday we also sent three people to paint the inner breezeblock walls of the pumphouse office and toilet in magnolia emulsion. After one dumper broke down we increased our number to four and the painting progressed until the paint was all used up. This happened to be around the time that the road material was finished and the re-surfacing reached the clearing by lock one.

Working Party Reports

Thanks to Alison and Rupert for organising the weekend so far from their home and bringing food for ten as well as all their own kit in the back of the Lotus. The pork with roast potatoes was lovely and the blackberry and apple crumble was great, making good use of the fresh blackberries found on site. Thanks to Andi for picking enough while waiting to be loaded for Saturdays crumble, another crumble for Droitwich camp the following week - and just wait for the Ludgate home made wine!

Lesley McFadyen



Initial roadworks, KESCRG Camp, July 2001 (Ed Walker)

Next Time Out “On The Buses”

You will probably have noticed that London WRG haven't been doing much recently work-wise. You may guess that the title of this item is a reference to one of the main reasons for this - the fact that we have been without the minibus that we usually use to transport ourselves and our kit to working parties for the last few months while it's been on Canal Camps duty.

Well you'll be half-right. That is one of the two reasons why we've not done a lot recently - the other one being that many of our volunteers have also been away on Canal Camps or other activities recently.

It's also one of the two reasons why this article is titled “on the buses”.

As for the other reason... well, the fact is that after an unfortunate and unprecedented gap in London WRG digging activity over the last three months with three consecutive digs having to be cancelled, it looks like we're all set to make up for it with plenty of work parties over the next few weeks... That's right. Just like buses - you wait ages... then three of them arrive all at once!

By the time you read this, the first of these will probably already have happened on the Basingstoke on September 8th-9th.

But don't worry if you missed it, there'll be another one along in a minute! On 22nd-23rd September the annual Montgomery Canal Harvest Festival working party weekend takes place, and although this isn't a London WRG event as such, it looks like enough of us are interested in going there for it to be worth sending a minibus from London. Please contact **Ed Walker** if you want to go.

Then the following weekend 29th-30th September is a London WRG working party on the Thames & Severn Canal (part of the 'Cotswold Canals') at Valley Lock, Chalford. Brickwork and stonework rebuilding work has been proceeding apace this summer, and you'll be able to see some real progress since the last time we were there in May. **Marcus Jones** is organising this weekend, and also celebrating his birthday. (He'll have to pay full fare on the buses like everyone else now!)

Three weeks later on 20th-21st October is a working party on the Wilts & Berks Canal at West Summit Lock - where there is some catching up to do on work, as work has rather fallen behind schedule thanks to the site being closed for much of the spring and early summer thanks to Foot & Mouth. This is a brick-built lock - the top half of which is missing. So plenty of work for our bricklayers. **Maria and Dave 'Moose' Hearndon** are your 'driver and conductor' for this one.

Two weeks later on November 3rd-4th is the 'Basingstoke Bonfire Bash' - a get-together with everyone in the whole of WRG and KESCRG for a major 'scrub-bash' clearing vegetation from the banks of the Basingstoke Canal and a Guy Fawkes party on the Saturday night; four weeks later on 1st-2nd December is our final outing for 2001, the Christmas Party weekend on the Wilts & Berks Canal, once again with our friends from KESCRG. You will need to book in advance for both of these events by sending off the forms included in this newsletter, but as far as getting there from London in the minibus is concerned, **Martin Ludgate** will be your 'Routemaster' for both weekends.

So don't 'miss the bus' - get yourself along on some of these working parties. There's "plenty of room inside" on all of them. Stand clear of the doors, move along inside now, hold tight, any more fares please? ...*Ting Ting!*

Martin Ludgate

Digging Deep - or digging far and wide?

Many of the working parties that London WRG organise are part of something called 'Dig Deep'.

This is a joint venture between ourselves and three other mobile canal restoration groups (KESCRG, NWPG and WRG BITM) who are also active in the south of England. By adopting certain projects in the south as Dig Deep Projects, between us we can give a commitment to provide a certain amount of volunteer work (say, seven weekends plus a week's camp per year for two years) which in turn can enable the local canal society to commit some of their limited funds to supporting the project with materials, plant hire, accommodation hire etc. in the knowledge (or at least in the not-too-misplaced hope) that the project will be completed to a reasonable timescale.

The current three Dig Deep projects are:

Basingstoke Canal: on the canal where many of our old hands 'cut their teeth' restoration-wise in the 1980s, we've been busy helping to put in a 'backpump' system to recirculate water that is used by boats passing through the locks. This will enable the canal - which has no decent water supplies and up till now has run out of water every year since its 1991 reopening - to be able to be used all year round by the boats for which we restored it. (including several boats owned by London WRG volunteers!)

We've more-or-less completed the Woodham backpump scheme, and we're in the process of moving up to the St Johns lock flight at Woking to install the next stage in the process of bringing water supplies all the way up to the summit. Having done rather a lot of towpath-work recently (to reinstate the path after contractors have installed the main water pipe for the pumping scheme), a few of us are getting ever-so-slightly bored with loading, tipping, raking and rolling gravel all weekend every time we go there. But hopefully at St Johns we'll be able to get involved in the actual installation of the pipe, and con-

Next Time Out - Dig Deep Update

struction of the inlet and exit weirs as well, giving us a bit of variety.

Wilts & Berks Canal: rebuilding West Summit Lock near Wootton Bassett got off to a slow start: on our first visit the site was flooded due to the very wet weather last winter, then the site was closed for several months in spring and early summer due to Foot & Mouth, then we had to cancel a visit in summer because of lack of volunteers. But the word from NWPG who worked there recently is that they had a very productive weekend, and that brick-layers in particular will be in demand as the missing top-half of the lock-sides goes back up again.

Thames & Severn Canal: Valley Lock, Chalford, in deepest Cotswold country, has seen a lot of progress recently. The entire top end of the lock has been rebuilt, including the upper bywash weir, paddle chambers, gate recesses (four of these, as the lock was rebuilt 20ft shorter and the top gates moved in the early 19th century to save water) and wing walls. Over the next few months attention will move down to the main chamber walls: one of them will need patching; the other is likely to be a complete rebuild job. Plenty of work on bricklaying and stonework (the lock is a mixture of the two) plus concrete backfilling, chamber clearance, scaffolding and much much more!

So these three projects will between them account for a large proportion of our working parties over the next year or so, and we hope that all three will provide us with some varied and interesting work.

Plus a fourth one on the Wey & Arun Canal that each of the Dig Deep groups is supporting with

Next Time Out - Dig Deep Update

a single weekend's work over the next year, as a possible lead up to a new project that will begin when one of the present ones ends - but more of this later.

But there is life beyond Dig Deep...

As I said earlier, "many of the working parties that London WRG organise are part of something called 'Dig Deep'." Well, to a certain extent it has been a case of "too many of the working parties..." recently.

It has never been our intention that all our work parties would be on the sites chosen for adoption as Dig Deep projects; there are many other restoration schemes that we like visiting, and the local canal societies appreciate our support. Not to mention the possibility of visiting some new ones that we haven't supported before!

As mentioned elsewhere, we had to cancel several digs recently - including one that was supposed to be part of our commitment to the Dig Deep Wilts & Berks project - due to lack of a minibus and shortage of volunteers during the WRG Canal Camps season during the summer months.

Next year we intend to avoid this happening again, by reducing the number of summer digs and making them joint weekends with other groups where possible. This gives us 15 digs altogether next year.

Given that we usually support the centrally-organised Cleanup Weekend in March and 'Bonfire Bash' dig in November, and we get together with KESCRG for a Christmas dig in December, if we had carried on with our commitment of three

weekends on each Dig Deep project plus one on the Wey & Arun, that would only leave two other digs - and I can immediately think of at least four other sites that I know many of you would like us to visit next year.

So we have decided to reduce our commitment for the coming year to two weekends each on the Thames & Severn and Basingstoke Dig Deep projects, while in the Wilts & Berks we will have two of our own weekends plus a joint dig with KESCRG on July 7-8. This is not because we favour the Wilts & Berks above the other two projects, (although we sort-of 'owe' them a dig, having cancelled one this year) but because KESCRG happen to already be going there that weekend, and it fits in with our plan to (a) hold joint digs and (b) increase the intervals between our digs slightly in summer.

That leaves us four 'TBAs' (five including the Christmas Party dig - there's no reason why someone in London WRG shouldn't nominate a site for this, even though it's a joint dig with KESCRG) Please think about where you'd like us to go for those weekends.

For example...

Ipswich & Stowmarket?

Wendover?

Droitwich?

Lichfield?

or even the Hereford & Gloucester!

...and bring your ideas to a London WRG social... or communicate them via the e-mail Mailing List... or suggest them when you're on a dig... Whatever you do, don't just wait till they're all decided and then whinge about it when you find out that 'TBA' doesn't stand for 'To be arranged' but 'The Basingstoke Again'... you have been warned!

MartinLudgate

London WRG & KESCRG Xmas Party

Its that time of year again, autumn is upon us, the rains have started and it is time to plan the Christmas parties. The best of these is the traditional London WRG / KESCRG Christmas Party which will this year be held on the Wilts & Berks Canal at the village hall, Goatacre (near Lyneham) on 1st - 2nd December 2001. We have the usual scrub-bashing, hedge-laying and stump-pulling work between Foxham and Lyneham and on Saturday evening we have a fancy dress party (fairy tale theme), a real ale bar and one of Maureen's excellent Christmas dinners. To book for the party of the year, fill out the form below and send a cheque for £12 (made payable to KESCRG) to:

Maureen & Brian Amos,
13 Trosley Avenue,
Gravesend,
Kent. DA11 7QN

See you there!

I would like to attend the London WRG / KESCRG Christmas Party on the Wilts & Berks Canal on 1st-2nd December 2001.

Forename: _____ Surname: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____ Tel No: _____

Any special dietary requirements? _____

I will be attending Saturday / Sunday / both days (delete as appropriate)

I enclose a cheque for £12 (made payable to KESCRG)

London WRG Dates List

For up to date information check the London WRG web pages:

www.london.wrg.org.uk

Working Parties: Transport available Friday evening in the London WRG minibus; meet by the post box outside Costa Coffee 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
29-30/9/01	Dig Deep on the Thames & Severn	Marcus Jones
20-21/10/01	Dig Deep on the Wilts & Berks	Maria & Moose
3-4/11/01	WRG Reunion: Basingstoke	Martin Ludgate
1-2/12/01	LWRG/KESCRG Xmas party: Wilts & Berks	Martin Ludgate
12-13/1/02	Dig Deep on the Wilts & Berks	TBC
2-3/02/02	Dig Deep on the Thames & Severn	TBC
23-24/2/02	Dig Deep on the Basingstoke	TBC

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: Tuesday night, normally 11 days before each dig i.e. 9th October 23rd October, 20th November etc. at the **Jugged Hare** pub (note new day) 400 yards South of Victoria Station along Vauxhall Bridge Road, from about 19.30 till 23.00.

Other Events:

22-23/9/01	Harvest Festival Celebrations, Mont.	Ed Walker
11/12/01	London WRG Xmas Party, TBC	Lesley McFadyen
26/12/01 – 1/1/02	Basingstoke Christmas Camp, WRG	Clive Alderman

Who to contact:

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

Phone: 020-83676227

E-mail: tim@timlewis.org.uk

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

Phone: 020-86933266

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

London WRG News Editor: Ed Walker, 226A Battersea Park Road, London. SW11 4ND

Phone: 020-79679771 / 07887-568029 E-mail: e.walker@ic.ac.uk