

London WRG News



Is it in straight? (Thames & Severn, 12/10/02, Ed Walker)

Issue 51 October 2002

From The Editor

Is it really October already? Only seems last week when I was putting the last one of these together. I seem to have sorted out the best way of getting dig reports out of people though, take a laptop on the dig and pay people with wine to write something! The first example of this is the Thames and Severn dig report on page 6, which was a team effort by Tunji, Sally and I. Also in this issue are the details of what we are doing for the next few digs, including a booking form for the bonfire bash. Apart from all that we have dig reports from the Ipswich and Wey and Arun digs and the information about the London WRG Christmas party.

Looking back at the last year and it is obvious that London WRG have done a lot of good work around the system, mostly brickwork. (see Tim Lewis's website for the evidence: www.timlewis.org.uk/Wrgpage1.html) I wonder how many bricks we have laid in the last year? My personal count is none, but I have certainly carved a lot up into some really odd shapes at various times.

From the look of our diary you could be mistaken for thinking that we are only going to be partying for the next few months but I am sure we will be putting in some quality work around the beers.

See people at a party dig somewhere,

Ed Walker

For up to date information check the London WRG web pages:
www.london.wrg.org.uk

London WRG Treasurer

After many years of looking after our finances, veteran London WRG Treasurer Mike Atkins has finally decided to hang up his chequebook and hand the job on to someone new...

That someone new is none other than Paula Kiernan. So in future if you have any expenses to claim back for anything you've bought for London WRG, or any incoming cheques to pay in, send it all to Paula at 9 Wellow Close, Havant, Hampshire. PO9 3DZ or contact her by phone on 07970-808726 or e-mail:

paula.kiernan@barclays.co.uk

And remember that any cheques will have to be signed by one of the other signatories of the bank account besides Paula i.e. Martin or Tim.

Many thanks to Paula for agreeing to take on the job. And many thanks to Mike for doing it for so many years.

Martin Ludgate

London WRG E-mail List

The best way to keep up with what's happening in London WRG is to be a member of the London WRG e-mail list. To join just send an e-mail to Ian Wingfield at IWA head office:

ian.wingfield@waterways.org.uk

To send a message to the list just mail:

londonwrg@waterways.org.uk

Note, only list members can send messages to the list.

Congratulations Dan!

Our very own web editor, Dan Evans, has been awarded an e-commerce award for the other site he runs, the main WRG one! So congratulation Dan and keep up the good work!

Ipswich and Stowmarket Canal, 31st August - 1st September 2002.

The first London WRG dig on the Ipswich for more years than many of the volunteers can remember came off with only a very few hitches. Leaving Waterloo relatively promptly (Rick Ansell in on time shock!) and remembering that Ipswich is not on the A40 we headed off. A quick stop in Tesco's in Ipswich to get breakfast meant we reached the pub in Needham Market by 10pm and met up with the rest of the group. A late license in the pub caused the last of us to make it out by 1am, luckily for Martin as he only completed leg one of the van and car shuffle from hell at 11pm. The scout hut was definitely "best described as basic" with boarded up windows and no oven but it had enough space (just) for the 18 navvies using it.

Morning brought complaints from the volunteers as the doors were thrown open and daylight penetrated the depths of the hall, hitting site we found that the work was to be continuing with the brick laying started by the canal camp a few weeks previously. Distribution of the work force left Sally and Dave Miller down Ed's hole rebuilding the retaining wall, Matt working on the bridge parapet, Tom, Andi and Dave Charlton rebuilding the nearside gate recess and Rick and Bob rebuilding a paddle culvert each. With all the brick laying going on there was still work for loads of other people and Nat and Andy took the kit formed formwork for the paddle culverts in hand, unfortunately the kit had been made the wrong shape and they spent the rest of the weekend reshaping it. Brick cleaning and mortar making kept everyone else busy for the first day, the huge pile of dirty bricks left over from the demo work of the camp were taken care of in short order.

Working Party Reports

Back on the bridge work two major problems were coming to light, a major crack in the arch next to Ed's hole meant that a section of arch had to be demolished, about ten minutes work for yours truly with a wrecking bar and a Dave. On the parapet it was found that all four walls had been built originally to different curves and so some modification to the brickwork with a breaker and an angle grinder was needed. A couple more jobs developed during the afternoon, the chamber was pumped down far enough for a patch of broken brickwork to be pressure washed ready for rebuilding and formwork was put up on the end of acro's for the arch patching.

Back at the hut, as it was a good evening and the scouts had a barbecue we decided that it was high time for the London WRG summer barbecue, unfortunately so much food was prepared that the fruit-salad-with-eyeballs had to be saved for site the next day. Later on in the evening Martin had to be recovered from Bury St. Edmonds after his Morris failed on the last stretch back from a ResCom meeting on the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal.

Sunday morning and amidst complaints of "National jet lag" we made it to site again for yet more brick laying and by the end of the day the bridge parapets had come up a lot and a major patch job in the chamber had been broken out, pressure washed and partially rebuilt by Dave. Heading back into London we had to jump-start Martin's Morris a further couple of times before getting back to Waterloo.

An absolutely superb dig with a lot of volunteers back from the camp and a great deal of work completed on the lock. Thanks to Matt for organising most of the dig, Sally and Dale for being cake fairies and all the people who helped do catering while the rest of us were on site.

Ed Walker

Working Party Reports

Wey and Arun Canal, 21-22nd September 2002.

On the weekend of 21-22 September, as something approaching half a million rural folks descended on London for the Countryside Rally, London WRG did the opposite and headed from darkest Waterloo to deepest Sussex. Not - as was suggested in the van on the way down - so that we could redress the balance by holding a 'Town Rally', and wave placards demanding that the country-dwellers don't forget about us townies, and don't try to outlaw our traditional urban pursuits such as drug-dealing and mugging old ladies... No, it was to spend a weekend working on the Wey & Arun Canal.

In several ways it differed from past W&A work-parties: for example we weren't staying in our regular accommodation at Kirdford, but in what turned out to be a rather nice hall in Ifold - once we'd managed to find the key at the Oak Tree Stores (that's just the name of the shop, by the way... they don't actually sell oak trees), which the Canal Trust had told us was in Plaistow (not the one in East London, but the next village to Ifold) - but which turned out to actually be in Ifold... nice try, guys! It was also remarkable for the fact that two volunteers were late on site due to their cars breaking down... and neither of them was me! Fortunately both Nat and Allan managed to get their vehicles fixed and join us for part of the weekend.

But in one way it was like almost every other Wey & Arun work-party...

To get to the Wey & Arun work site you have to drive along a lane from the main road to a farm, then through the farmyard and across a field full of cows to a muddy dirt track, then along a muddy dirt-track down a steep hill to where it crosses the remains of the canal not far from the river, then you turn and go along the towpath for some way.

That's not any particular Wey & Arun work-site, mind you. That's a description of pretty much every work site on the W&A that we've ever worked on, and this one was no different. OK we were working on a different site (called 'Bonfire Hanger') that we'd never worked on before: different lane; different farm; different field; different cows (*), different muddy dirt-track; different steep hill... same canal. You can't start work on the W&A without first lugging all your tools in a wheelbarrow across a field full of cows, down a muddy dirt-track...

Well actually you can. Because that was another way that this dig differed from the Wey & Arun norm (No, that's not the name of one of the locals, like Cotswold Neil or Droitwich Bill... I mean 'what's normal on the W&A'.) Anyway, just for once the work-site was not subject to the 'Sussex Monsoon' that afflicts the canal to a remarkable extent, considering that the canal was always short of water when it was open. Just for once, we didn't have to don our waders to get to site. We didn't get the WACT Land Rover bogged down and incur the wrath of the farmer while trying to get through the field of cows. We didn't have to cancel the dig at 24 hours notice thanks to the site being waterlogged. We didn't (unlike last time) have to borrow a work-boat to get materials to and from site. That's right - for almost the first time in 20 years of London WRG visits to the Wey & Arun, the work-site and access to it was BONE DRY! This meant that (a) we could drive ourselves and all our tools all the way to site in the minibus, saving a good half-hour each day and (b) one of the main jobs for the weekend was shifting building materials from the farm down to the site in the dumper, on the grounds that it was unlikely that we'd ever get such good conditions again.

The other major job represented another major difference between this work party and previous ones - whereas normally we spend our time clearing the canal and removing blockages, this time we spent most of it building a rather solid H-shaped brick structure right in the middle, as the centre of a dam to block the canal. If you think that seems a slightly odd approach to waterway restoration, you're probably right. But as local Graham explained to us - and we spent all weekend explaining to passers-by - the plan is that this length of canal needs to be re-watered as soon as possible. Initially this is so that it can act as a reservoir to supply

the restored 'Loxwood Link' length further south, where the trip-boat 'Zachariah Keppel' already operates, and where the newly-built bridge and aqueduct at Loxwood are extending navigation southwards; full restoration of the Bonfire Hanger length for navigation will follow at a later date. There are several locks at Bonfire Hanger - all of which appear to have been completely demolished and the building materials taken away - and rather than go to the effort and expense of rebuilding the locks now, when this section of canal isn't likely to see boats for maybe 10 years or so, temporary brick and clay dams are being built as a way of impounding the water in the meantime. Maybe in 10 years time, the south end of the canal will be complete, and we'll be back at Bonfire Hanger to find out how good our dams are when we knock them down and rebuild the locks.

Anyway we set to work on the second of three of these dams that are currently under construction, continuing with the part-built brickwork, clearing some of the surrounding area with the brushcutter and digging out trenches either side of the dam for sandbag-based clay banks to be built.

We were rather surprised to be joined by two visitors from California - and rather more surprised to find that they know all about us: they even knew that my car had broken down on our last dig! The wonders of the World Wide Web - they'd been reading all about us online on the WRG web site from the USA! And it turned out that they rebuild old British cars in the USA for enthusiasts, and were over here to source some spares. (strangely they didn't seem interested in buying-up the remains of Nat's, Allan's or my vehicle...) Anyway they joined Graham on another job - constructing a wooden footbridge to replace a footpath across the canal bed. And yes, we know it's only a foot above water level and you won't fit a boat under it... see the above explanation of why we're building dams across the canal etc etc.

By the time we knocked off on Saturday evening the trenches were dug, brickwork had had several courses added to it, all of our volunteers had actually found their way to the work-site (thank you Paula for the novel idea of indicating directions from the farm down to site by sticking rubber work-gloves on the appropriate arm of each of the 'public footpath' signposts!)

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and we headed back to Ifold for a meal of Spag Bol followed by a large trifle made with just some of the surplus tinned fruit from the last dig.

Then it was off to the pub. Unfortunately there isn't one in Ifold, so we walked along a public footpath that led to the towpath of the canal, and then along the towpath to the canalside Onslow Arms at Loxwood. Remarkably (and unlike the last time we tried it) we didn't get lost on the way to the pub, nor - even more remarkably - on the way back.

On Sunday we carried on with the bricklaying and with dumpering cement and ballast from the farm, and having completed the trenches, we filled and laid a couple of hundred concrete-filled sandbags. We worked on till a little later than usual to complete the brickwork, which meant that by the time we got back to the accommodation with little more than 15 minutes to clear it up, pack everything and get the key back to Oak Tree Stores before it shut. Somehow we managed this, although we didn't so much pack the catering kit as shovel it into the van...

Anyway thank you to everyone who turned out - I'm assured by WACT that next time we're there the canal will have water in it (thanks to the dams we've built) and so will the towpath, the field, the muddy dirt-track etc etc. (thanks to the inevitable return of the usual W&A weather conditions!)

(* Well I assume that they were different cows, but I've no way of knowing... in fact I've just had a spooky thought that they might be the same cows every time, and as we drove past they were thinking "Different farm; different field; different muddy dirt-track; different Transit full of navvies... or is it the same one?!?"

Martin Ludgate

Working Party Reports

Thames & Severn Canal: 12-13th October 2002.

A dig report in three parts by three different people.

The dig started as is almost traditional now, Rick phoning to say he was going to be late, unusually so late he wouldn't make it to site till lunchtime on Saturday! Met up with everyone else at Waterloo and headed out towards the Thames & Severn, stopping at Target roundabout to collect Sally, who had flown back from Switzerland especially for the dig! Emergency phone call from Adrian saying the pub opposite the hall had turned into restaurant so Martin kindly drove us down and back to the pub down the road. Sapperton Village hall is definitely slightly higher class than we have had recently, it even has showers!

After what can only be described as a rather civilised breakfast time we finally made it to site. After unloading the van, Martin, Natalie and Glenn set out to the yard to collect the bricks, cement and wood needed from the compound. Meanwhile those of us left on site split into two groups, fencing and brickies. The fencing gang set to with the mattocks to whip up the holes for the new fence, much discussion entailed as to whether we were working to a male or female 18 inches! Progress went well except for the discovery of various lumps of concrete, which had to be tackled with the wrecking bar. However initial progress on the brick laying was distinctly slower as it was a definite case of how many wrgies does it take to decide how high the wall should be! Finally the return of the van, and the ever-essential tea break ensured the work progressed rather more quickly. The uprights of the fence were soon concreted in and the brickies were soon busy laying, trying to ignore the fact the water seemed to be rising! Post lunch it was time to

battle the reeds past the river and also battle with some scrub removal along the towpath. This filled the rest of the afternoon with another brick collection run thrown in for good measure. End of site signalled the return to the accommodation for dinner and dig report writing before the ever traditional jaunt to the pub.

Sunday morning

Despite the rain we arrived on site to finish the fencing and the brickwork.

Rick, Bob and Robert had to demolish one wing wall to build up the other wing wall and it rained We almost finished the post and rail fence but it rained

We were two courses short of finishing the brick work in the bywash but it rained

Lunch was held in the minibus yes you guess because it rained

All in all it turned out to be a great debut organised dig by me.

Big thanks to all those who turned up. Did I mention it rained all day on the last day.

**Ed Walker
Sally Nutt
'Tunji Faleye**



Spill weir repairs (Ed Walker)

Mon & Brec Bonfire Bash: November 2-3rd

Accommodation: a brand-new school! It's near St Mellons village, not far from Junction 28 of the M4, and full joining instructions will be sent out by Head Office, and available on the WRG web site (www.wrg.org.uk).

Work: With restoration of the top lock well under way, the main job for the reunion is clearing out the chambers of the remaining 13 locks in the flight. That's right - all of them! Plus some more stonework on the top lock, removing overhanging vegetation from the tow-path, and 13 side-ponds to clear.

Fireworks: at the worksite after we knock off on Saturday evening there will be a big fireworks display by our big pyrotechnists Ralph & Harry. Please note: the organisers are providing the fireworks this year (it's included in the cost of the weekend) so please don't bring your own.

Bonfires: don't believe what you read in the press. Despite rumours to the contrary there WILL be plenty of bonfires on site! Otherwise it would just be a 'Bash'...

Beer: we'll be running a Real Ale Bar. If that's not your favourite tipple, please bring something that is.

Leaders: Adrian Fry and Spencer Collins, with Jude Moore in charge of catering.

Transport: As the van will be on camps duty the week before (along with much of the rest of London WRG!) there will be no pickup from Waterloo for this weekend. Keep an eye out on the London WRG e-mail list for details of people offering lifts.

DON'T DELAY - SEND YOUR BOOKING FORM TODAY! (See page 11 – Ed.)

Next Time Out

KESCRG / London WRG Christmas Party Dig: November 30th - December 1st

Unfortunately we have just learned that due to land ownership / permission issues beyond the control of the organisers and the canal society, we will not be able to hold this weekend on the Foxton Inclined Plane as we had hoped. But don't worry, it WILL go ahead somewhere in southern England, and there WILL be a wacky Saturday night party with a 'Star Trek' theme, and Maureen WILL be supplying delicious Xmas nosh as she always does. As this is written we are busy looking at various alternative sites, and hopefully by the time you read this we will have chosen one. For the latest information contact Martin Ludgate, or Eddie Jones of KESCRG (Tel: 07850 889249; email eddiejones@jazzfm.com) or check the WRG web site or the KESCRG web site www.kescrg.org.uk.

And if - like me - you don't need to know about such trivia as what canal it's on before you decide to go on the London WRG / KESCRG Christmas Dig, feel free to send off your booking - simply write a cheque for £12 payable to KESCRG, and send it with your name / address / phone number and any dietary requirements to Brian and Maureen Amos, 13 Trosley Ave, Dartford DA11 7QN.

Next Time Out

Christmas Camp: Dec 26th - Jan 1st

The WRG Christmas / New Year Canal Camp this year is once again on the Basingstoke Canal, and once again Pete Redway has miles and miles of canal bank that needs the overhanging trees and other vegetation cutting back and burning on some nice big bonfires.

The work-site is likely to be in the St Johns / Woking area - with a possibility that (depending on the weather) we might also be able to carry with work on the St Johns backpump pipeline installation job that we began earlier this year.

The accommodation is (provisionally) Woodham Village Hall, and the leader is Dave 'Daddy Cool' Worthington, aided and abetted by various 'old hands'. And no doubt the year 2003 will be welcomed-in in fine style, with the usual raiding of the local charity shops on New Year's eve to make the costumes for whatever daft fancy dress idea we come up with.

Wilts & Berks Canal: January 18-19th.

London WRG and KESCRG will be getting together again (we mustn't keep meeting like this!) for another good weekend, the site of which is yet to be determined

Birmingham Canal Navigations Cleanup 2003: March 22-23rd

This annual event involves WRG, the BCN Society and the local IWA branches getting together to spend a weekend dragging all manner of rubbish out of a different part of the BCN each year. This time we hope to start work at the four-way canal junction directly underneath 'Spaghetti Junction' on the M6 and work outwards along the canal in all four directions.

London WRG will be leading the weekend but we still need a volunteer to organise a number of things including confirming the site, liasing and attending meetings with BW and other local interest groups and arranging the weekend itself ie: transport, equipment, accommodation & catering. If anyone is willing to take on this task please get in contact with Martin.

Martin Ludgate



London WRG News Editor hard at work, dig reports are now written before the end of the dig! (Thames & Severn, 12/10/02, Natalie Parker)

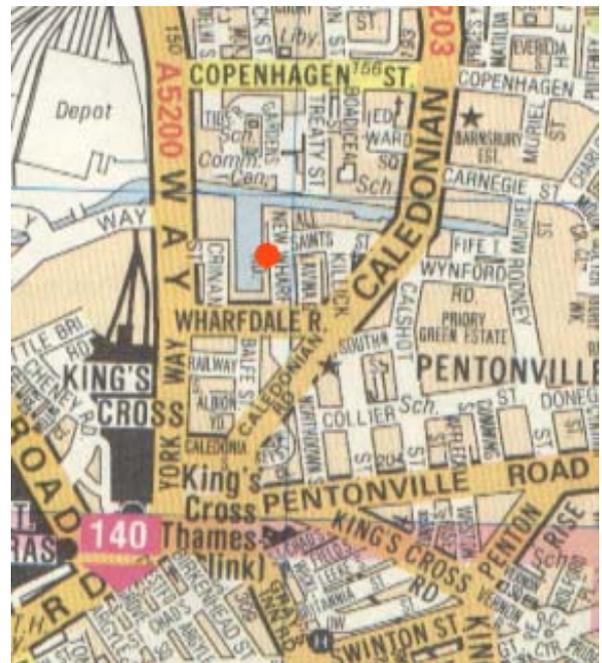


London WRG Christmas Party

As this is quite likely to be the last London WRG News of the year I have to mention the dreaded “C” word... Again. Yep, the London WRG Christmas party is almost on us again. This year we have decided to hold party at the London Canal Museum and it will be on the evening of Tuesday 10th December, starting at about 7.30pm. All the usual events will happen like the London WRG awards ceremony (Who’s going to get the lame excuse award this year? Or the driving award?), a slide show, good food, lots of beer and a raffle. All this and much, much more! It should be a brilliant night so add the date to your diaries now!



Please inform either Martin or Lesley (contact details on page 10) if you are intending to turn up so that the amount of food required can be catered for. The cost of the evening will be a measly £6.00 (money collected on the night) to cover the delicious buffet, this does not include drink so please bring your own (or contact Martin if you are interested in a share of a polypin). Anyone interested in helping with the catering please contact Lesley.



The London Canal Museum is situated on New Wharf Road, just to the Northeast of King’s Cross Station (the spot marks the museum):



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
2-3/11/02	Bonfire Bash (Mon & Brec Canal)*	-
31/11-1/12/02	LWRG/KESCRG Xmas Dig	-
18-19/1/03	TBC (Joint dig with KESCRG)	Moose & Maria
8-9/2/03	Dig Deep on the Basingstoke Canal	Andi
1-2/3/03	Dig Deep on the Wey & Arun Canal	Dave Moore
22-23/3/03	BCN Cleanup, Salford Junction	-

* No van will be available for the Bonfire Bash as it is on camps duty.

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, 19th November, 7th January etc. at the **Jugged Hare** pub 400 yards South of Victoria Station along Vauxhall Bridge Road, from about 19.30 till 23.00. Note: The social on 22nd October will be at the "Waterside" pub opposite the Canal Museum after Navvies Assembly.

Other Events:

22/10/02	Navvies Assembly, Canal Museum, 7pm	Martin Ludgate
10/12/02	LWRG Xmas Social, Canal Museum	Lesley McFadyen
26/12-1/1/03	WRG New Year Camp	-
?/02/03	LWRG AGM, Jugged Hare Pub	-
4-6/4/03	Aston Locks Opening	-

Who to contact:

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Weir Building, or how many brickies can we get on one stretch of wall? (Wey & Arun, 21/9/02, Ed Walker)



Bridge patching on Creting Lock (Ipswich & Stowmarket, 31/8/02, Ed Walker)