

# London WRG News



Site Services at Canalway Cavalcade outside the Tay memorial Bar (Martin Ludgate)

**Issue 67 November 2008**

# From The Editor

I see from the archives that I have been editing London WRG News for ten years now and it seems not a great deal has changed, issue 39 had articles about working on the Lichfield at Tamworth Road (where we are still working) and a WRG Reunion on the Cotswold Canals (had a few digs there this year as well!). It also mentioned the London WRG/ KESCRG Christmas party which in 1998 was held on the Buckingham Arm, for details of this year's Christmas party and the new year camp please see page 11.

**Ed Walker**

## **London WRG / KESCRG Barn Dance**

The annual London WRG / KESCRG Barn Dance will this year be held on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2009 at Benson village hall as usual. Tickets are £12 which includes a chilli-and-spud dinner – contact Bobby Silverwood for tickets ([barndance@kescr.org.uk](mailto:barndance@kescr.org.uk)).

## **WRG Leadership Training**

This is open to anyone interested in leading either week long canal camps or weekends, the format is quite informal and involves the exchange of best practice ideas from more experienced leaders and recognising points where and how we could do better. This will also be on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> February in Benson so you can stay on after for the Barn Dance.

## **London WRG AGM**

Next year's AGM will be held on the evening of 21<sup>st</sup> February 2009 at the accommodation for that weekends Wilts & Berks dig. Further details will be provided closer to the date.

## **London WRG Awards**

About this time of year we start to generate a list of people who are in the running for this year's London WRG awards. The categories for these prestigious(!) awards are:

Driving  
Catering  
Lame Excuse  
New Recruit  
Leadership  
Brick Cleaning/Laying  
..and any other categories we can think of!

If anyone has any suggestions for the awards then please drop Suzie Pounce an email ([suzie@cherrytreefarm.org.uk](mailto:suzie@cherrytreefarm.org.uk)). This year's lucky recipients will be announced at the London WRG Christmas party...

## **London WRG Christmas Party**

The London WRG Christmas party is almost upon us again. This year Liz Wilson has graciously offered to host the party again and it will be on the evening of Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December, starting at about 7.30pm. All the usual events will happen like the London WRG awards ceremony, good food and lots of beer.

Please inform either Liz (by email on [liz@giantwasp.co.uk](mailto:liz@giantwasp.co.uk)) if you are planning on attending so that the catering can be organised. The cost of the evening will be a measly £6.00 (money collected on the night) to cover the buffet, this does not include drink so please bring your own. Anyone interested in helping with the catering please contact Liz.

Liz's address is:

19 Widford House,  
Colebrooke Row,  
N1 8DD

The nearest tube station is Angel, about five minutes walk away.

## **Goughs Orchard Lock, Cotswolds Canals, 2-3<sup>rd</sup> August 2008.**

When we arrived at the Scout Hut most people were already there. The first thing I noticed was that there was a shower. As all WRGies know this is quite rare on a camp. We spent time greeting everybody and some of us went to the pub until bedtime. We were hoping that the coming day was to be packed with hard but fun work.

In the morning we had the usual 8 o'clock English breakfast. Then we left the hut. Unfortunately the weather was grim; it started raining but it was still warm.

We split into different groups: some went with Martin to pick up bricks whilst Ed's group went to site with the WRGSW trailer. This was thanks to Rick and Harry, who could not stay but still managed to help. Luckily by time we got to site the rain had stopped and the sun consented to shine.

Opening the trailer I was impressed to find tools in perfect condition. When I grabbed a mattock without any scratches on it I felt like starting work straight away. So, I just waited for orders; destroy, dig, demolish...!

The working site was the lock of an old canal, which needed reconstructing. We were told to partly destroy one side of the waterway, as the brickwork had collapsed and been half washed away in those days when the canal was still in use. First, we had to remove copingstones from the top of the brick wall in order to access the brickwork below easily and safely. This involves digging enough space behind to receive the stone blocks, making it easier to move them when requested.

There was perfect teamwork. People on the top of the wall formed pairs: one WRGie had a mattock and used it to dig and soften the soil, whilst the other removed the soft soil with a spade. I was paired with Helena, another team was Allan (London) and Rachael, and a third was Owen and Gill. Others gave help to each and every team as and when extra pairs of hands were needed, which happened all the time as the work was hard and demanding.

# **Working Party Reports**

Lifting the massive blocks was the responsibility of Ed and Dave: from inside the canal they lifted the blocks using wrecking bars. However some copingstones were so bulky and heavy that extra help was called from the teams working on top. Work proceeded in stages, each lifting being followed by Martin (SW) securing the block with bricks underneath before the next lifting took place. This altogether heavy job required several hours of effort until late in the afternoon.



Coping stone removal and controlled demolition (Ed Walker)

# Working Party Reports

Then we were able to remove small bricks. Sophie happened to join us at this time. Now the job was much less exhausting, but it demanded attention and care. We had to check which bricks were good and well attached to the wall and which ones were no longer resistant enough. We had to take care not to damage good bricks when removing them. Then, bricks were cleaned, ready for new bricklaying. When evening came, we packed up and went back to our accommodation.

We felt really satisfied with a well-spent day. Another good thing awaited us: dinner! Nothing can beat a good meal after hard work. This time the camp's chef was Frank, whom I was meeting for the first time. He had an excellent reputation for 'knowing something about food'. This was undoubtedly true, judging by the splendid dinner and delicious dessert we all enjoyed, he followed Harry's instructions perfectly. I felt it was time for me to take some pictures, especially of the beautiful view we had from the hall over the whole valley. Later that night Tim arrived to join us.

On the next day, we returned to our working site at the lock. All the bricks that could be moved had been. I joined Francis in making mortar for Alan, Harriet and Rachael, under the supervision of our instructor Martin (SW). "3 sharp, 2 soft, 2 white", he kept telling us... or was it "2 sharp and 3 soft...?"

Meanwhile the wall of the wall of the lock required more cleaning. When I had mixed the mortar I joined the cleaning team and found my space between Sophie and Alan. That work took us the rest of the day, apart from lunch and tea breaks. Eventually we packed our equipment, and we could see that we had done a good job. But we also knew there was plenty of work left. We happened to leave just as the rain started. Good timing!

There is one thing I can say: with good organisation and well-motivated and hard-working people, a camp like this one can achieve a lot.

I will remember my friend Francis, who had decided to come on this camp just before returning to his own country, for saying, "Not only are you not getting paid for the work you do, but you also have to pay to be here... These are crazy people!" Well I am definitely ready to pay to take part in a camp like this, and cheerfully too. Especially when at the end of the camp you have people say "Good job guys" or "That's amazing, what you do!"

**Krzysiek Rosiecki**



**Above:** Brick cleaning! (Ed Walker)

**Right:** Laying coping bricks (Tim Lewis)

## **Droitwich Barge Lock, 6-7<sup>th</sup> September 2008.**

“Bugger this for a game of soldiers – let’s hole up in a Travelodge for the weekend. Droitwich can finish its own sodding canal.”

Harsh words and the dig hadn’t even begun. With severe weather warnings and rain lashing down so hard Martin had to slow down to 70mph on some stretches of road, morale was low in the van as we made our wretched progress out of London. Only the thought of Mel sitting in a lonely village hall surrounded by bags of cheap mince and sliced white bread encouraged us to press on. She’d been trying to persuade us for months to come on her dig and we all felt too guilty to drop out just because of some silly flood warnings and Helena’s fast-approaching dissertation deadline.

Conditions on site were bloody awful. “Look, it’s clearing up!” lied Mike, striding through the driving rain in a bin bag jerkin. The flood waters didn’t peak until the Saturday night but on Saturday morning the water was an inch from the top of the lock gates and even the ducks wouldn’t go in the rushing waters. Brickies worked on a scaffold platform only inches above the water and on day 2 we found wavy patterns of silt where the waters had covered the platforms overnight. We slung a tarpaulin over the bricking platforms and made a den in the compound to keep the rain off the brick cleaners and burco but site was deep in mud and conditions were pretty grim as the rain fell relentlessly. Veterans of the St Ives 2007 National, or Hurricane Katrina, may feel some sympathy.

On the face of it, there didn’t seem to be all that much work left to do (funnily enough, it still seemed that way at 6pm on Sunday when finally we left site). “Slap in a bit of cement, toss on a few coping stones, and whack in a couple of bollards,” Mike said cheerily. Despite two long days we didn’t finish off everything that was scheduled. I’m not quite sure what happened: we did seem to get a lot of work done over the weekend. It just wasn’t quite enough.

# **Working Party Reports**

A decision was taken to head back to the hall for a dry lunch and the chance to pee more romantically; in a real toilet rather than a grim site portalo. Fortified by bakewell tarts, we resumed bricking in our makeshift shelter in the afternoon. “It’s definitely cheering up,” said Mike, in defiance of all the evidence. To provide some light relief, Martin dropped his camera in the flooded lock as the rain continued to lash down and the ducks moped on the banks.

As the working day drew to a close, Mel and I headed off to the nearest supermarket, which unfortunately happened to be Waitrose. Whilst I stood in the fruit and veg aisle dripping mud and sobbing over bramley apples we couldn’t afford, Mel counted and recounted her pennies, wondering how she could manage garlic bread for 15 when french sticks were more than a pound each. In the end we accepted we couldn’t afford cannelloni and it would have to be spag bol instead.



# Working Party Reports

Saturday night saw us wringing out our clothing back at the hall under Graham Palmer's benevolent clay gaze: someone had found his bust and brought it along to lend gravitas to the London WRG AGM. We voted to increase food and diesel subs in the wake of rising prices and recruit new members as some of our group move away (Helena and Kryzk to Southampton, Mel back to Birmingham). Chuckling maniacally, Mike told us his plans to kidnap KESCRG from their Cotswolds dig the following weekend and force them to do his bidding in Droitwich until the damn thing was completed. He bought wine for everyone and became somewhat over-refreshed, calling Helena a 'vulva-hunting trollop' before falling asleep in a nest of bottles.



Repairing a gate recess (Tim Lewis)

With free wine from Mike, we were all in good spirits but decided not to go to the pub after a disappointing visit to a favourite pub the previous night. Blaring dance music in the Railway Inn on Friday evening had precluded all talk of tractor engines, favourite lock gates and other London WRG conversation staples.

We awoke to more rain on the Sunday morning. Mike was fine apart from occasionally bumping into the furniture. Work was a bit harder to come by on site; although there was plenty to do not everyone could do it at the same time. Helena and I stood and watched Krzyk digging a hole in a manly way until Mel sent us off for a bag of nails. I'm still not sure if she needed nails or if she just wanted to give us something to do. We walked all round Droitwich, which fortunately didn't take very long, until we found nail and donuts. Our 11am doughnut break was so successful that I think it might have to become a London WRG tradition.

Paul Ireson pushed wheelbarrows of mortar until near-collapse and the brickies soldiered under their dripping tarps, but come 3pm those of us not involved in bricking had run out of useful things to do, and we headed back to clear up the hall. This worked pretty well as it meant we could all make a quick getaway when work finally finished on site at the late hour of 6. It would have been nice to say we'd completed the Droitwich canal but we'd come pretty close. Despite the dismal conditions we all had a good laugh and accomplished a lot with a brilliant working party, especially the brickies who did a sterling job.

NB: If anyone from KESCRG reads this in time, please be on the lookout for a red van driven by a man wearing a bin bag with a crazed look in his eye.

**Sophie Smith**

## Ipswich and Stowmarket Navigation, 18-19<sup>th</sup> October 2008, Baylam Lock.

A large group of London WRGies and ex-Ipswich campers arrived at the Duke of Marlborough pub in Somersham on the Friday night to find it open! And selling beer!! Getting over this shock took a few pints which we enjoyed on their rather comfortable sofas.

Saturday arrived as usual and after an excellent Chad fuelled breakfast (he didn't even set the smoke alarm off!) we headed to site. Colin was waiting for us with a long list of jobs that needed doing, most of which required the lock chamber to be empty of water. While waiting for the pump to do its stuff most people started to dig out a set of coping stones at the top of the lock that will need to be moved at some point. Martin got handed the tricky bit of brickwork that the locals had been putting off – tying the new retaining wall into the old lock wall, the wall was required to curve in two dimensions!

Around Martin's wall a small team finished the back filling of the retaining wall, tomorrow's job would be to do some coping stone laying. On the other side of the lock David and a group of people were using a Tirfor to roll the last of the coping stones back and then winch them to the coping stone store near the bridge. Gerry, Helen and Natalie were kept busy all day making mortar and concrete to keep everyone occupied and I gave Helena and Lizzie the hopefully simple job of removing a coping stone from next to the bridge, the irony of giving a coping stone job to the two smallest people on site wasn't lost – they quickly decided that it wasn't going to come out in one piece whatever happened and so enlisted Tim's help to break it up, cue the sound of sledge and kango hammer.

With the pump having drained the chamber suitably Spencer lead a team to put up scaffolding, with one tower in place Gordon and Elanor started the main job of the weekend, putting in stainless steel ties into some of the brickwork. This job involved drilling 500mm deep holes into the brickwork, blowing out the dust, filling the hole with epoxy and inserting a steel spiral. Repeat about 20 times without gluing yourself to the brickwork and you can see why it kept them out of trouble for the whole weekend!

# Working Party Reports

After lunch Spencer's scaffolding gang finished the tower in the mill-side gate recess and Allan and Lizzie carried on with the bricklaying and Frank made a start on readying the off-side for coping stones, we hoped that it would just be a simple job of cleaning off the old mortar but brambles had grown through the mortar joints and quite a few bricks had to come off.

With the day closing in we left the brickies to finish up their mortar and tidied up – this involved trying to push the van out of where it had got stuck in the parking field, tried pushing, tried towing with Gordon's Freebie and then tried both together which got it shifted. Can we have four wheel drive transits next time please?



Liz, Helena and Paul laying coping stones (Ed Walker)

# Working Party Reports

Back at the hall and Liz had cooked us a great chicken stew with treacle tart to follow (courtesy of Sarah Patey who had dropped in) and we headed to the pub, which was open again! More beer was consumed to help us recover from this shock but as everyone was quite tired from site we headed to bed promptly.

Sunday and Frank cooked us all breakfast before we headed to site again. Work today was much the same as Saturday, Tim, Helena, Paul, Helen and others started to lay coping stones on the retaining wall, Frank carried on brick laying, Allan and David carried on with the gate recess job, David spending a while taking out an obstinate tree root.

As Elanor and Gordon had finished with their scaff tower Andy Helm moved it to the other gate recess and started to clean off the brickwork. Martin just about finished off his brickwork before heading to the Southern Canals Conference, which handily was on the same site!

By early afternoon Gordon had managed to blunten the masonry drill they were using to drill holes so that job was declared finished for the weekend. Tim's team had laid as many coping stones as they could and so we allowed the brickies to finish their mortar before heading home.

Colin (the local) was very pleased with all we had done, the only gripe was that we made off with a few of their spades – apparently they have red fibreglass handles and got mixed up with our gear! So can people please take a bit more care over packing our kit, our colours are red-white-red!

**Ed Walker.**



Demolition and rebuilding in progress (Ed Walker)



# WRG Bonfire Bash

London WRG were mainly working at the Heybridge Basin site at this year's WRG Bonfire Bash on the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation. The jobs involved laying a water main and electric cable conduit, re-laying a path and building a wooden fence.

**Clockwise from above:** Laying slabs, fencing, conduit laying, filing the trench in the easy way..., and the harder way, building a manhole (Photos by Tim Lewis)



# London WRG Dates List

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

[www.london.wrg.org.uk](http://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.

Dates	Location	Organiser
6-7/12/08	Xmas dig with KESCRG, Wilts & Berks	Centrally booked
10-11/1/09	Dig Deep on the Wilts & Berks	Moose
31/1-1/2/09	Dig Deep on the Cotswold Canals	David Miller
21-22/2/09	Dig Deep on the Wilts & Berks (AGM on Saturday evening)	Mel Parker
28-29/3/09	BCN Cleanup	Aileen Butler
18-19/4/09	Chelmer & Blackwater	Helen Dobbie
9-10/5/09	Cotswold Canals, Goughs Orchard Lock	Helena & Sophie
6-7/6/09	TBA	TBA
4-5/7/09	TBA	TBA
25-26/7/09	Ipswich & Stowmarket	TBA

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

**Social Gatherings:** Tuesday night, normally 11 days before each dig i.e, 25<sup>th</sup> November, 6<sup>th</sup> January, 20<sup>th</sup> January, 10<sup>th</sup> February, 17<sup>th</sup> March etc. at the **Star Tavern** Belgrave Mews West, behind German Embassy on Chesham Place, from about 19.30 till 23.00.

### Other Events:

9/12/08	London WRG Xmas Party	Liz Wilson
26/12/08-1/1/09	WRG Xmas Camp	Centrally Booked
28/2/09	WRG Leaders Training Day	Mike Palmer
28/2/09	WRG Barn Dance	Bobby Silverwood
2-4/05/08	Canalway Cavalcade, Little Venice	-
16-17/05/08	WRG Training Weekend	Ali Bottomley

### Who to contact:

London WRG Co-ordinator: Tim Lewis, 5 Herongate Road, Wanstead, London E12 5EJ

Phone: 020-85300425 E-mail: [tim@timlewis.org.uk](mailto:tim@timlewis.org.uk)

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# New Year Camp & Xmas Dig

## WRG New Year Camp

When you read this Christmas will be very close upon us and the camp will be 1 day behind the big day! The site is a virgin untouched 80 year old stretch of scrub on the North Wilts Canal North-East of Swindon. It should be a great site for small controlled bonfires and marshmallow cooking! The theme for the New Year Party is "Annual". Please book on via head office or get in touch with me at [james.butler@wrg.org.uk](mailto:james.butler@wrg.org.uk)

## London WRG / KESCRG Christmas Dig, 6-7<sup>th</sup> December, North Wilts Canal

The Annual London WRG / KESCRG / WRG-SW Christmas party this year is on the North Wilts canal, not far from where we worked at last year's Bonfire Bash. We are promised a "substantial" length of scrub that needs clearing from the towpath and a start needs to be made on the canal bed. Accommodation is at Kingsdown School (again, where we stayed at last year's Bonfire Bash) where Eli will be cooking up her usual fantastic food and Martin will be thinking up more silly games to keep us entertained. The theme for this year's fancy dress competition is "Romans"

Booking is via head office, either online (<http://www.iwashop.com/ecommerce/products.asp?cat=126>) or by using the form below.

## London WRG KESCRG and WRG SW Wilts & Berks Xmas party dig

I would like to attend on December 6th-7th

Forename: \_\_\_\_\_ Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Any special dietary requirements? \_\_\_\_\_

I enclose payment of £16 (please make cheques payable to 'WRG') for food

If you suffer from any illness about which we should know, or are you receiving treatment or medical supervision **please attach details on a covering letter.**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Please send this form to:

**WRG/KESCRG Xmas dig bookings**, Island House, Moor Rd, Chesham HP5 1WA



**Above:** Eisey Lock in April 2008... (Tim Lewis)

**Below:** ...and in September! (Ed Walker)

