

London WRG News



**Issue 68 - December 2009
(sort of...)**

Editors Note:

Hello!!!

Having announced in the last edition of London WRG News, now well over a year ago, that this was his 10th year of editing the newsletter Ed decided that it was time to get in new blood. Possibly the thought of editing another copy led to the slump below?



Unfortunately this decision was followed by a period of keeping it to himself leading to a lack of news on the London WRG front. However now all is well as I am here (even if Tim forgot to get everyone to approve the passing of the AGM - you are all stuck with me now).

The plan was for this edition to cover 2009, and the next two to cover 2010. So hopefully we will all be up to date with London WRG's news by 2011!, However then I realised that the end of 2008 is missing too so Christmas 2008 is also covered.

Helena Howarth
Editor (apparently)

Cover image: Tim Lewis - Chelmer and Blackwater Canal in November

Image above: Helena Howarth - Ipswich and Stowmarket Canal in August

6/7TH DECEMBER
2008 (SOMEWHERE)

Organising food and fun for fifty was never going to be an easy task. With people determined to enjoy themselves, and barrels of ale to be quaffed, I wasn't too worried about my task of organising the decorations and entertainment for this year's Christmas dig. In the kitchen though Eli had her work cut out organising a small army of volunteers to produce dinner and all the other meals.

I'd initially thought staying behind at the accommodation while everyone else went to site would be really easy. I was looking forward to a day's cutting and sticking and making decorations out of holly, ivy, glitter and baubles. After doing a run to site with the van, dashing back to make 120 rolls for lunch and a mile's hike to find holly that wasn't in someone's front garden, I started to reconsider.

There was a frenzy of activity on: a team of workers were peeling enormous sacks of spuds and scoring sprouts, two babies were crawling about the place and the floor was covered in glitter. A great atmosphere prevailed even as time ticked by and we expected the hungry hordes to descend at any moment. I was halfway through folding 70 napkins when the first van load of hungry Navvies showed up. Then there was just time to throw on my own costume before helping Mel stitch both her own and her sisters and laying out a cheeseboard.

Some highly impressive costumes. Paul Ireson won second prize for his creative interpretation of the Roman theme, coming as dodgy Russian Oligarch and football club owner Roman Abramovich. Amy and Jo did an excellent stunt as Boudica and her faithful steed, Jo surely scoring extra points for staying in her wheelbarrow 'chariot' all night long even when eating dinner. As leaders of London WRG and KESCRG Ian and Tim were appointed to judge, taking their responsibilities extremely seriously they awarded points based on effort and creativity. First prize went to Aileen for her roman centu-

rion costume which clearly took a great deal of effort to construct from estate agents billboards, in WRG red with matching sandals. Sadly Aileen later came a cropper as she damaged her foot during the games and was unable to come to site the next day.

After enjoying Eli's delicious soup and some home made bread we enjoyed some gladiator fighting with only minor injuries sustained by Jen. We had time for a quick game of pass the parcel before we settled down to eat a choice of 3 meats and then 4 puddings. Special mention must be made of the rum and almond gateaux which was excellent – we also enjoyed a very good Christmas pudding. In the interval before cheese the four teams had time to build chariots from wheelbarrows before a race.

My memories get a bit hazy after the main course, as I was presented with a crate of booze to say thanks for organising the fun, but I do remember there were candles for Mel's 30th (tastefully arranged on the cheeseboard, as everyone would have been far too full for cake) and lots more drinking. Thanks to everyone who helped make this a brilliant night, and cheers to Eli for the excellent cooking!

Sophie Smith

(Editors Note: For those who might wish to know what happened on site the pictures below have been included to give you a hint)



Images:
Tim Lewis

24/25TH JANUARY 2009 (EISEY LOCK)

My plea some months ago for more detailed information on the camps had limited success, as well as knowing that I bought a mattress that weekend I now also know that this clashed with Colchester Beer Festival so Adrian wasn't there and that he doubts Helen was there either. More positively Paul tells me the work was -

"Putting Stop planks into the bottom of the lock, this meant cutting them to size in the field and then getting assistance to move them to position and then getting them inserted into the slots. Also Ed & Nigel while putting on coping stones rearranged the brickwork below"

I vaguely remember the stop planks but whether or not Ed and Nigel's "rearranging" of the brickwork was on purpose is beyond me.

FEBRUARY 2009 (CHESTERFIELD - WITH ANOTHER GROUP!)

(Editors Note: To help make up for the lack of London WRG weekend dig reports Paul supplied the following note of two adventures (at least attempted) with ANOTHER GROUP, and it wasn't even a joint dig!! Should I be happy?)

N-Bump Northern Excursions

After the Xmas camp with assistant leader Ju Davenport, Paul Ireson had his arm twisted to come on the weekend dig at Chesterfield in February. With the notification of attendance sent on the 2nd attempt (his fault not the organisers) and a couple of days leave booked from work, he prepared for the weekend. However, the British weather would deal a blow to his and a lot of other people's plans.

On the Monday before the weekend, heavy snow fell on London leading to

extra hours at work and then the snow fell in other parts of the country. On Wednesday AM, he left a message with the organiser and packed me with equipment for the weekend including the recommend items if travelling in bad weather. This meant that I contained not only his normal weekend canal gear, but also a shovel, tent, stove and several extra blankets and half his pantry of food.

On Thursday AM, he watched the news, weather bulletins and webcams of the M1 via the internet. Everything seemed fine and with a final check of the mobile and e-mail for any messages, none were found, he prepared to set off. There was little traffic on the roads apart from commercial vans and Lorries, leading to a clear run until the services south of Chesterfield. The snow covered car park showed how clear the gritters had kept the road. Paul had a quick cup of tea before his mobile service provider sent the message from Mike Chase, timed for Wednesday PM, telling him that the weekend had been cancelled.

He decided as a courtesy to inform Mike that he had only just got the message and despite being just outside Chesterfield would return home. It was at this point that an Opel driver come into the services car park and attempted to stop, With the car sliding towards him, and me, a few expletives were uttered (Sorry Mike) but, by more luck than judgement, the Opel slid into the parking space in front of me without any impact. We then set off home ,having taken a photo to show that we had arrived at Chesterfield. At home he watched the news and read the e-mails stating the all the other weekend digs had been cancelled then spent the weekend spring cleaning the garage.

Second attempt for a WRG North West dig was Lichfield in March, Once again notification of attendance was sent (only 1 attempt this time) and, with comments of don't bring the snow with you, preparations were made to attend. This time work come to his aid by insisting he attend a meeting in Coventry on the preceding Friday, this would mean an early start on Friday but we would avoid all the motorway traffic on the Friday evening from

London. After leaving Coventry, we found a nice pub to have an evening meal in Rugeley (him, not me). Upon arriving at the accommodation we found the gates locked, after finding that people would arrive in around an hour we departed to find a closer pub with an empty car park. After a few more bottles of soft drinks for him and a rest for me, we returned to the accommodation. By then most people had arrived and after unloading GCW of equipment and handing Ju her late birthday bottle (which had accompanied us to Chesterfield) he set out his bed. This involved his new airbed which had an internal pump, resulting in several remarks from the older section of the group that it was never going to inflate. When all twelve people were settled in, the instructions for the weekend were read. The opening statement was: "Read and understand the drawings and plans provided." - Who did they think we are KESCRG?

Saturday morning arrived and after a hearty breakfast cooked by John Foley and John Hawkins and the arrival on his crutches of Ian Bunn the group departed to site leaving Ian and Liz to limp around the supermarket with Sue getting the food for the weekend. The work was to put the joined pipe into the overflow channel, but this had to be abandoned due to the fact that neither the experienced personnel or the equipment (it was in Welshpool) to do the joining was available. Instead it was decided that a few would help level of the overflow channel and the rest would dismantle the scaffolding further down the lock chamber and start brick laying. Having a couple of people with knowledge of the Navy Lark, a few remarks of "left hand down a bit" and the "floggle toggle has come loose" were heard, and the scaffolding come down - but not without the two mud larks Paul & Ju managing to get a little muddy.

After tea break with the normal Mr Mac efficiency along and a Banana & Walnut cake provided by Paul, the rest went on to do some brick laying. The mudlarks were given brick breaking as punishment. This involved breaking bricks into half so the brick layers could lay them as a ground base for the remainder of the wall. After finding the necessary PPE kit, they set

about the task with gusto. Although occasionally Cassie decided to sit on the brick piles, thus stopping work. By the end of the day, enough bricks had been broken for the full length of the wall and the brick layers had reached 2/3rds with half brick and around a quarter of the wall with the required height of full bricks. The group returned to the accommodation for the evening meal; cooked by Ian.

Sunday morning arrived and Paul awoke early as usual causing some annoyance as he packed up his airbed well before eight o'clock. Another hearty breakfast was cooked by the two Johns; however the count of people to eggs did not quite match first time round. Day two tasks were to join two of the pipes and move them so they could later be placed in the overflow channel and dig out the soil above the wing wall line so that it could later be filled in with concrete. No guessing who was the quickest into the trench!

The concrete delivery service to the trench involved mixing in the garden above the trench, then pouring the mixture into the bucket of the excavator, this then lowered it into the trench where Paul, John and Ju then shovelled it into wheelbarrows. These were then wheeled up to the local who told them where to pour and how deep. After several tipped barrows where the concrete did not quite arrive at the approved area Paul was removed from tipping duty. This continued all day stopping only due to the eventual exhaustion of the concrete supply!

After the final barrow was poured and clearing up has begun a heavy shower of hail hit the site - short and sharp it only pitted the concrete laid. We then returned to the accommodation to clear up and re-pack GCW before everyone departed to their homes. We had a nice clear run back to Essex and after a quick unpack and clear up in me, both of us settled down for a nice evening rest.

Signed
N-Bump
WRG Personnel
Vehicle

Image: ????



21/22ND FEBRUARY (WILTS & BERKS)

Helena went to a Wedding in Petersfield and Adrian gave Helen a lift. No one knows what everyone else was doing but the work was scrub bashing below lock 1.

28/29TH MARCH (BCN)

The BCN gets me thinking. Why do we spend our weekends the way we do? Rather than, say, pushing a trolley round Ikea, coaching womens' hockey, or starching 5 shirts for the week ahead. Then I think: why do the people who throw things into canals do what they do? Rather than, say, putting it in a bin, or a skip, or simply not nicking it to begin with.

I think the answer lies beneath the mysterious waters of the Birmingham Canal Network. There's something which compels us all beneath that oily green surface. On the WRG side, there's a thrill of anticipation as the grappling iron plunges into the murky depths, the raised heartbeat as the shapeless object is hauled onto the towpath for identification. An ever-present hope that it might be the lost Russian crown jewels you pull out, and not another bloody car tyre.

Surely it's the same for those who throw it in as those of us that haul it out. WRG and anti-WRG. The thrill of nicking a bike off a small child playing in a cul de sac, taking turns with a mate to ride it along the towpath, then the joy of hearing it plop into the water and disappear into the cloudy deep. An ever-present dread of a community police officer jumping out from behind a towpath bush waving a pair of handcuffs.

Hope, excitement, anticipation. Three emotions which unite WRG and anti-WRG alike. Are we so very different, those of us hauling on a grappling hook in waterproof trousers, from the bloke wearing a shell suit who originally

chucked it in there back in 1996? We're all just seeking thrills in our own watery way, albeit some of us with a greater social conscience than others.

Don't neglect either the spiritual aspect of both canal dumping and canal plundering. We, the recipients of the bounty of the deep, see not whence it came. Like the mystery of the flesh – from a muddy primal soup something emerges. Who put it there in the first place? Is it God, the unseen almighty, or is it a ragamuffin from the local estate? They, the misbegotten, the creators of mischief and of chaos, like Pan in a tracksuit, they are the providers of the black stinking fruit we harvest from the fertile mud of the canal bed. All life came from the water, and to water we all return, WRG and anti-WRG alike, in a dance as old as time (I may have taken that last bit from the documentary 'March of the Penguins').

Anthropologists would have a field day on the BCN, watching the tribes in action. WRGies gather in groups to haul prizes from the depths. Youngsters and new faces are inducted into the ways of the tribe (in this case, relentless innuendo and advice on removing mud stains). Afterwards, everyone gathers on the towpath to celebrate the find and there is brief notoriety for the person that hooked it. Later back at the cave (or school) there is drinking (lots of it) and the hunters recount their tales of daring-do. So too for the anti-WRG, who bands with his tribesmen to launch daring raids on neighbouring settlements. Together they haul their stolen prizes along the towpath, laughing triumphantly. Bonding occurs as they share the experience of throwing the spoils into the canal. Back at the estate, everyone gathers to hear the tale and the hunters enjoy brief notoriety for being Wel Ard, a quality highly prized by these tribesmen.

What does all human kind want? Prestige, exhilaration, the respect of our peers. Some of us achieve it throwing a sofa into a canal, some of us by fishing it out. In the words of the immortal Elton John, it's just the circle of life.

(Now after much waffling onto what we actually did - Hel)

This year's BCN was excellently organised by Aileen Butler, and the weather smiled upon us. The glut of shopping trolleys came as a welcome relief from the tractor tyres which tested everyone's patience in 2008. There was an excellent haul to be had along the Tame Valley stretch, along with the usual cache of bikes and kitchen equipment, and we plan to concentrate on this area next year. More unusual finds included a bag of jewellery (handed into the police) and some very exciting black lace underwear. We also hauled out a number of frightening-looking crayfish, black and stinking, who waved their pincers at us resentfully.

Back at the accommodation we were cosy and the atmosphere was very good. I know some people are very dismissive of the accommodation we've used for the last few years but I find one floor is pretty much the same as another when it comes to sleeping. What are you expecting – en suite? Showers were (eventually) hot and Maria calmly cooked up a storm. A friend I'd brought along on only her second dig told me afterwards "I had such a lovely time and it's so nice to be presented with a bunch of ready made lovely friends" so thanks to everyone who made Karen welcome. It's great that WRG is always so welcoming to new members.

Sophie Smith

**18/19TH APRIL
(CHELMER AND
BLACKWATER)**

Weekends with mild sunny weather and an achievable workload are as rare and precious as work gloves that fit, so London WRG knew to be grateful on our April dig at Heybridge basin. Arriving in the London van after dark we tripped along the path to the Haybay, nabbed bunks, and quickly scampered back in the opposite direction to the pub. A large crowd had already gathered and Nigel told everyone a very amusing story about a dead Labrador while we all enjoyed pints of the local nectar, Golden Maldon.

Not only had people come from far afield for this dig, we also had two new faces in Nobu and Peter. Cosy bunks are clearly a big draw: if every dig had them, WRG would probably be the size of the Red Cross by now. When Ed and Susie arrived later we congratulated them on their recent engagement before telling them the about the dead Labrador. (Also, just after midnight (making it a day late) we celebrated Adrians birthday with a cake supplied by Helen - **Hel**)

On Saturday we woke to brilliant spring sunshine streaming through the portal. We hot-footed it to site to find Maldon pretty much the same as we'd left it back in November. Clapperboard cottages: check. Boat masts clattering away: check. Sunshine and a brisk salt-laden breeze: check. Today there were manholes to be dug to access the pipes we'd laid on the Bonfire bash. Not fancying spade work, Mel, Helena and Susie and I found a job bashing the rust off a boat with hammers. There was more rust than there was boat so this took us most of the weekend.



A nearby boatman in overalls eyed us nervously: "Are you ladies sanding that boat? Just I'm painting mine this afternoon."

"And I'm varnishing my mast," piped up a glamorous woman in a beret in the boat next door. Eventually a compromise was reached based on wind direction. People can be very amenable to compromise when negotiations are conducted by four women with hammers.

Later we got quite chatty with the man painting his rather elegant wooden boat. "Are you volunteers? Where do you come from?"

"We're London WRG. We come from Birmingham, Southampton, Burton-on-Trent and Oxfordshire," we explained.

"Not London then?"

"No."



We worked on in the mild spring sun, talking of men and the many things wrong with them. Meanwhile the diggers continued chewing up the towpath as eight man holes were dug, lined and covered under the supervision of Roy the Local.

Work continued until relatively late, then there was time for a blissfully hot shower aboard before sitting down to an excellent pie cooked by Maria. A number of brave souls took shore leave to visit the pub again and Helen's little Bruv admitted that no he hadn't heard the story about the Labrador. Later back at the barge my cabin turned into a sleepover as debate continued about the utter wrongness of men. Susie showed us her magic pillow which speaks with the voice of Steven Fry, then we all fell asleep. Helena, cursed with dig insomnia, said we all snored.

Next day we hit the boat a bit more with hammers and holes began to get filled in. The weather continued glorious and we all enjoyed having the use of a proper on-site toilet. Our friendly boatman neighbour joined us for our tea break and told us about his 50-year marriage and his sea trips to the Netherlands and the Highlands. In return we told him about the dead Labrador. There were some very exciting chocolate biscuits and we discussed whether the boatman had enjoyed 50 years marital bliss despite or because of his frequent long absences. About to marry, Susie listened with interest.

"We're going to finish early at this rate," Helen mused as tea break ended. "Thank you for the tea. That was a very amusing story about a dead Labrador," said the

boatman shaking out his mug. We worked on for a few hours but the last barrowload of pea shingle was emptied not much beyond mid afternoon. Such a contrast to our last C+B visit where we worked on well beyond nightfall rushing to finish the task in hand. It had a been a great weekend with marvellous weather and a nice steady working pace. Props go to Helen for leading and also emptying the night toilet, and to Maria for excellent cooking.

Sophie Smith

Images: Tim Lewis

9/10TH MAY (GOUGHS ORCHARD)

In May London WRG enjoyed a good-spirited dig at Gough's Orchard and proved that we are quite capable of coping without Martin Ludgate for at least one weekend. Helena and I were joint organisers but fortunately Rick Barnes was acting as local organiser and things ran smoothly despite our efforts.

Following hot on the heels of the exhausting Cavalcade, there were fewer than a dozen of us with many people coming and going throughout the weekend. Knowing the London WRG regulars would be fairly broken from the previous weekend at Little Venice, I roped in a few of my mates who'd been on digs before, including Rachel who is a veteran of four digs now so practically an old hand. We were also joined by Mike, who'd not dug with LWRG for twenty years. Regulars included Tim Lewis, Paul Ireson and the peripatetic presence of Ed Walker and James Butler. Surely with that combined experience we wouldn't need Martin at all, we naively thought.

At Stroud Tim asked out of the blue if anyone in the van knew the way to the accommodation. My heart dropped. "What do you mean, the way to the accommodation? Martin never asks that." Eventually a pedestrian pointed us in the right direction. Lesson one: bring Martin, or bring a map.

We arrived late and quickly got the kettle on. "Where are those 12 pints of milk we bought?" asks Tim. Lesson two: always check the shopping trolley is empty before driving off.

Up early to make breakfast Saturday morning, Paul and I had a mini panic. Sandy's basket is empty – has she escaped in the night? We tiptoed round the sleeping shapes in the hall trying to find her. "What about that lump in James's sleeping bag?" asks Paul. I take a look. It is a very big lump. "If that isn't Sandy," I thought to myself "I must get to know James better." The lump twitched, moved, and Sandy stuck her head out of the sleeping bag. I feel relieved and slightly disappointed.

Arriving at site bang on time Saturday morning we find Gough's Orchard lock sunny and verdant. In the messy bits away from where the work's taken place, wild flowers are running riot. Rick gives Helena and I a leaders' tour of site. "You need to move those huge coping stones, because they're dangerous," he tells us. Looks like moving them will also be bloody dangerous, I think. "That water's probably contaminated, so don't touch it or use it in the mix. Oh, and look out for all the asbestos buried around the site. It looks just like this," he says, picking up what looks to me like a perfectly ordinary stone. "Got all that? Ok I'll be back Sunday night. Have fun." He drives off.

I turn to Helena. "This place is a bloody death trap. Let's go home." Helena suggests we may survive the weekend if we can only avoid death by crushing, Weil's disease and asbestos poisoning. "Yes, let's get the troops to do the dangerous jobs," I agree. "You and I can sit and watch the Burco."

Helena suggests I make a speech. "Right troops. Wear lots of sunscreen, don't drink the water – especially if it's got that nice rainbow pattern on the top – don't get lime in your eyes and remember coping stones are b*stard heavy. Oh, and there's a little problem with asbestos, so don't smash any of the stones into a powder and snort it. Helena and I will take a very dim view of any of that kind of behaviour. Please all

try and survive until this evening, as we are having steak and chips as a special treat, and I don't want to there to be a leftover steak." I think it is very inspiring and sure enough, people start to grunt, scratch themselves, and pick up tools. If Barack Obama is reading this and wants any advice on inspirational leadership, he can email me at cassava@hotmail.co.uk.

Helena takes charge of the gang moving coping stones down one end of site, and a small team working in a confined space manage to move about 20 of them.

We're mixing the first load of mortar when it occurs to us that we don't have a bucket. "Cup your hands, Tim," I suggest, but Tim prefers to go and buy a bucket. In his absence we make do with a bit of old cardboard with which we manage to get mortar to where it's needed.

Late morning, my old friend Karen (who you may remember from such digs as the BCN and Eisey Lock) turns up with her boyfriend Stef. "You will let him bricklay, won't you?" Karen has asked me well in advance of the dig. "It's the only way I could persuade him to come." We find a space for them both on the wingwalls and Stef is soon cracking on under Paul's supervision.

Pretty soon we are calling for "more mortar please, dry as a witch's tit." The mortar gets sent back several times over the weekend. Rick's been particularly insistent on how dry it needs to be. We're using hydraulic lime (1.5 sharp sand : 1 lime : 1 builder's sand if you're interested) on this site.

Saturday night was warm and light enough for everyone to sit outside before dinner and I could tell everyone was in a good mood. After Rachel and I cook dinner, James is overcome by the sherry trifle and asks us both to enter into bigamous marriage with him. Later we all trot off to the pub. Bar staff take one look at our party and offer us the use of a separate room. "This is nice, isn't it?" a few people comment. "Yeah, say did anyone other than me use the shower back at the accommodation? No? lucky they had the spare room then wasn't it."

Sunday's another fair day with the sun hot on the back of our necks. Paul was out of action after becoming ill overnight, so novice bricklayers Rachel and Karen admirably managed by themselves to brick a tricky curved wingwall.

Later that afternoon Rachel mentions her eye's been itching for quite a time, so we have quite an amusing time sluicing it out with eyewash in the toilets at the pub. Helena and her team finished off the hard slog of shifting back the coping stones and we left site in good time. Considering we were low on people, low on buckets and most of us were completely unskilled and inexperienced, we had achieved a great deal of work. Thanks to everyone for mucking in and providing such a great atmosphere.

Sophie Smith

**6/7TH JUNE
(DROITWICH)**

Tracy's WRG Dairy
(which Helena read and added too - it's a sisters prerogative)

Friday, 5th June

I arrived at Droitwich (for her first dig) after 4 hrs and many trains. When I got there I rang Martin to find out where everyone was (*the Scout Hut or the pub*). Martin was still on his way up from London but he gave me Mike's number to ring. Mike was at the Scouts hut. I set off but I got a little lost so he came and got me - which was good because it was about to rain again.

When I got to the accommodation everyone was very welcoming and I was introduced as Helena's sister (*as you would never guess by looking at us*). Helena was the last to arrive (*due to the train being cancelled*) so we went down to get her (*for which I was immensely grateful - it wasn't raining in the south and I was not dressed for monsoon rain*). Back at the accommodation we all had a drink or two before bed.

Saturday, 6th June

We were woken up by the smell of bacon; which is nice in the morning after not a lot of sleep. Some people had already gone down to site to continue the work that had been started on Friday (*by four brave souls, Mike, Jude, Mel and Alan, who used up Droitwich's allotment of sunshine for the weekend whilst digging the trench for the 1st quadrant through solid shale*). The rest of us got down there about 9am after breakfast and making the sandwiches for lunch and started digging the trench for the quadrant by the top off-side lock gate.

At this point it was still raining and showed no sign of stopping but we all got on with the work that needed to be done. There were 6 of us working on the trench and we ended up working as girls and boys teams. The girls seemed to do more than the boys (*odd that*). I was going backwards and forwards all morning with wheelbarrows of soil – this was good exercise for me!

We had lunch sat in the van and under a gazebo and by this point I was very hungry. I was also very wet and cold, because my coat wasn't as waterproof as I thought, so after lunch I went back with Liz to help with the food for tea (*see other people call dinner tea!*) and help Mel do the cake for Martin's tea party. This was fun. (*Meanwhile on site one quadrant had been cemented and, once the trench had been deemed large enough by Mike, who didn't seem to think that our method of measuring the width with a bit of string was adequate, and tidied up at the corners, the second was too*).

Everyone came back to the Scout hut at about 6pm and got cleaned (*as best one can over a sink designed for 3 year olds to wash their hands*) and changed then went down to the pub. I stayed to help finish the room and the cake for Martin's tea party; however when everyone came back Mel and I had to go in to the cupboard so Mel could finish it off (*due to the cake being an epic work of art*). We all had tea and afters and I did some of the washing up; then it was time to give Martin his cake. Martin was very surprised at

the cake, which was shaped like Fulbourn - the boat he and some friends own. (*It was in fact too nice to cut up when everyone was still full from tea so we left it for lunch on Sunday.*) After all this lots of alcohol was drunk then people started going to bed.

Sunday, 7th June

Woken up again by bacon and Paul turning on the light. Paul had done breakfast all on his own which was very good of him. We sat and had breakfast and discussed whether we were site because it was still raining a lot. Mike eventually announced we were going because work needed finishing. (*So off we trooped like good little volunteers wearing our water-proofs and bin-bags to continue digging; this time it was holes for bollards*).

Just before lunch the sun come out making people feel happier. It is amazing what a little sunshine can do to people! (*Martin and Nigel lay the bricks Tracy ably handed them for one quadrant whilst Bob and others started fitting bollards that weren't as fool-proofly designed as we thought. Meanwhile Helen, Mel, Chris, Adrian and others filled in the trench we had dug, and put a concrete base in, the day before as we were not going to have time to finish it and we couldn't leave the hole as a trip hazard for the locals*).

There were not a lot of us by lunchtime as people had started going home because they had long journeys. As the sun was out we decide to have lunch down at site, so Ed, Helena and I went to get lunch and our bags so we could go straight from site when was time for our trains (*allowing us to spend the maximum possible time on site – aren't we good!*) We also put the chairs and tables away (*to discourage sitting down and having a cuppa when people are supposed to be packing up at the end of the day*).

At site we had lunch then finished of the work. At 4pm it was time to go and get my train (I had wandered off an hour previously). When I was on the train I could just see the dig site as I went past. I was glad to get home so I could have a shower and sleep in my own bed. For a

week after my back and knees ached from the exercise, but apart from this I had a great weekend and I am looking forward to the Bonfire Bash in October.

(As far as I know all four bollards were fitted and the 1st quadrant finished. A good start but it leaves us a lot more to do at next Octobers newly organised "last ever Droitwich dig".)

**Tracy
(and Helena)
Howarth**



**Image:
Michael
Hinett**

20/21ST JUNE (TOOL-PAINTING)

(LWRG has a tool-painting weekend every two years or so in order to ensure our tools remain distinguishable from the locals and from other groups. No-one told me anything about how the weekend went and I wasn't there but I found some pictures Tim took on Facebook so thought I would put them in.



4/5TH JULY (EISEY LOCK)

I wrote a camp report for this but thought Adrian provided a great summary so I have put this in as my 'abstract' - Hel)

Abstract:

This was my first dig as leader. It started off really well! Then van had been pinched for a canal camp so I picked up all of the kit (glad I have a BIG car!) from Moose's. Got to the scout hut to find a bunch of kids preparing their beds. Not sleeping there then! Got to the pub and walked past 'the local' John (having never met him before). Found Helena (first thing to go right :D). Rang John. He met us at the pub. By then most of the rest had arrived. He managed to find another scout hut. I found out we had no gas. Luckily the new scout hut let us borrow theirs. It was then time for a drink. We found a strange Irish run place that was half decorated. We went outside and were offered sandwiches. Not sure the beer was right. Work was removing loose/damaged bricks. Might have done some brick laying, mortar mixing and moving lots of bricks/cement/sand. I cooked breakfast except the eggs both days! (another 1st!) Saturday night we went in a pub where we could hear the music from the back garden. It was a little cooler so we went in. But had to shout.

Discussion:

No van, no accommodation and no gas for the Burco. Minor hindrances soon overcome by our able leader Adrian. He proved that a van was not really necessary by fitting all the kit into the back (and front) of his car - the extra load leading to the tops of the wheels vanishing into the wheel arches. Tim gave Martin a lift and I made my own way from Swindon train station (despite getting lost).

The next challenge, being unexpected, was harder to overcome. On arriving at the hall to pick up the keys from the Scouts he found them instead bedding down for the night having apparently also

booked the hall for the whole weekend. It was soon decided that having us bed down with the Scouts was not a good plan (thought we thought them cooking for us as a "team building" exercise would be) and whilst Gill and Owen thought nothing of the lack of accommodation, having set up the back of their car as a bed for the weekend, the rest of us were a bit more dubious. Hence John the local (complete with policeman's uniform) was called in to find us a new accommodation.

Meanwhile we were all congregating at the pub, unable to drink (except me!) due to the need to drive to our new location. As a consequence of this the moment John returned there was a mass exodus (me still clutching my mostly full pint of cider). Unfortunately the Scouts had not yet cleared out of the new hall either so everyone sat in their cars in the Methodist church car park desperate for a drink whilst I contentedly sipped at mine (having miraculously managed not to spill any in Ed's landrover en route!!)

Our new accommodation was clean and warm with enough toilets (though the girls didn't lock) and also solved the gas issue as the Scout leader kindly lent us a gas bottle. All this on one singular condition we had to turn off the water when we weren't in the hall as they were on a water meter and the urinals have a massive effect on their funds. Most of us then trotted off to the nearest pub. Adrian and I waited behind whilst he checked the fire exit worked. Unfortunately someone had let Tim near it and so it didn't. The technique for opening appeared to be take a running leap at the door and bash it open with your shoulder, feeling that this was not particularly safe we did the Scouts a favour and bashed the catch into the correct shape with a lump hammer before following the others to the pub.

The pub it turned out was newly reopened so had little decoration and no ale. Less than impressed everyone had retreated to the beer garden where you could at least pretend to be in a real pub (though the grass was strewn with children's toys). In a vain attempt to entice us back for the second evening of our stay the landlord provided us with copious amounts of

cheese and onion sandwiches and cake. This failed and the next evening, after a wonderful lasagne with salad, we headed the opposite direction to a pub you could hear over 100 meters away. This was a much higher quality establishment and was packed with revellers listening to a live band (good music, bad singer). We again retreated to the beer garden having ordered by sign language, but this time with ales in hand!!

In between these pub excursions, and on Sunday, we did in fact do some work - lots of work. So much work that I had to have a lie down on Sunday afternoon to recover - or this might just have been to being out in the sun too long. I need to remember that summer digs should involve sitting in the shade where possible, drinking lots and wearing lots of sun cream. Water I had managed due to Tim wandering around with big bottles of juice periodically and making sure we all drank but the others I am less good at leading to my shoulders giving off enough heat to fry eggs on by the end of the weekend.

The challenge of the weekend was to prepare a partially demolished lock wall for rebuilding over the summer. Some parts were fine as the lime had washed out of the mortar leaving just the sand, however in other areas it was the bricks that were crumbling away with their remains held solidly in place. It was a challenging but mostly fun job. So fun in fact that Paul turned up unexpectedly to lend a hand on



Images: Tim Lewis - The "after" photo showing what a prepared wall should look like and Ed hard at work.

Saturday morning before heading off to join Nat and Sophie's summer camp – that dedication (or insanity) for you! Our only other jobs were pumping out the lock chamber to reduce the water level (leading to John getting soaked at one point when he forgot to put the cap back on the pump), putting some extra stop planks in, and occasionally moving scaffolding to a more appropriate position as we complete bits of wall.

All in all it was a fantastic weekend. Even if there were enough things not how we expected to make a word search! All the things that weren't quite as they should and the names of everyone on the dig can be found in the word search below. Can you find all 21?

O	A	S	T	U	O	C	S	D	T	I	V
G	I	L	L	T	N	I	P	E	O	W	A
A	C	C	O	M	O	D	A	T	I	O	N
S	U	Y	D	A	V	E	U	C	L	R	J
B	S	W	M	B	Q	R	L	A	E	P	X
O	P	M	H	V	N	H	O	J	T	U	N
T	I	X	E	E	R	I	F	A	L	M	I
T	Y	N	A	M	E	C	I	L	O	P	T
L	H	L	F	N	E	L	D	E	C	C	R
E	A	N	E	L	E	H	S	Z	K	A	A
N	S	W	A	D	R	I	A	N	L	P	M
T	O	G	M	A	E	R	C	N	U	S	K

25/26TH JULY (IPSWICH AND STOW-MARKET)

Paul tells me that he cut the stop plank grove in the walls with Gary and then him and Pete attempted under water concreting to set the stop planks in - made harder when the pump stopped working and they resorted to using a bucket chain instead.

Meanwhile Adrian was at a wedding in a village not far from Ipswich, but didn't have time to stop on the way and I (according to my diary) "Did nothing productive".

Helena Howarth

12/15TH SEPTEMBER (WEY AND ARUN)

(Bestival, Isle of Wight, for me! - Hel)

Saturday involved removing the stop planks without falling in and floating them down the river to the embankment with a slipway to retrieve them. Then we went chipping away at the concrete base at the top of the lock to make a clean bond for the concrete filling which was dispensed via either by bucket hoist or later via a direct drop from lock top into the wheelbarrow below. Sunday was spent scrub bashing on the warmest day and having bonfires.

Paul Ireson

4/5TH OCTOBER (GOUGHS ORCHARD)

(I was flying back from Poland and Adrian didn't go as he was playing on Helen's narrowboat; Augusta. It was his first time:

- steering a narrow boat (rather than wide beam),
- steering a boat on a canal (rather than river), and
- spotting then pulling a sheep out of the canal! - Hel)

On the dig work was putting coping stones onto the footpath side of the lock by using me as a pit prop holder. Right size for the job. We also did some landscaping of that side of the lock by robbing the soil close to the path to level the ground.

Paul Ireson

Images: David Miller



31ST OCTOBER/1ST NOVEMBER (EISEY)

Unfortunately I lost my voice prior to leading London WRG's Eisey lock dig and had to communicate using written notes. Luckily I hung on to these notes so I can now use them to tell the story of our dig.

Fri evening:

HELLO. 50 SAUSAGES NOW

This is me saying 'Hello' to Tim, to which he replied 'Frank is coming later with 32 sausages' I quickly did the maths and wrote '50 sausages now': the sum total of our sausage store for the weekend. Clearly my sore throat had not affected my powers of mental arithmetic.

The people who were going to enjoy this sausage bonanza included Tim, Dave Miller, 2 different kinds of Martin, half an Alan Lines plus half a Frank Wallder (this may equal one whole Alan Wallder) Adrian Fry who kindly supplied the fizz for Saturday night (it was my birthday after all) and new recruit Pete Fleming. We also had one Rachel plus a spare Rachel in case the first one got broken.

NICE ACCOMM

Yes it was very nice accommodation at Watchfield Palace, where it was extremely warm and there were 2 showers. New Year camp will have a pleasant time if they stay there.

NO CIDER ONLY STRONGBOW
IS THAT A PICKLED EGG?

I see by this point we had moved onto the pub, where the very friendly locals were delighted to see us, although they didn't buy us any drinks. Sadly it wasn't a pickled egg, only a pickled onion masquerading as one. I hid my disappointment with a Strepzil. Oh and there was a better cider on after all, just the fringes on the landlady's leather gillet were obscuring the Stowford Press label. This is the best cider in the world.

THE CEILING IS THE COLOUR OF TOFFEE

I FOUND IT IN WAITROSE
IT WAS MY BIRTHDAY YESTERDAY,
EVERYONE HAS TO BUY ME DRINKS
KAREN MOVED TO FRANCE

Quite a lot of stupid drunken chat as you can see. It was a shame I lost my voice this particular weekend as I had a particularly good joke about a man going into a sex shop which I think London WRG might have appreciated. Possibly almost as much as they appreciated Nigel's story about the dead Labrador. Never mind, I'll save it for the next dig.

3X LANDLORD, 2X STOWFORD PRESS
CIDER, 2X DOON BAR, 1X FOSTERS.
THANK YOU

This is me getting a round in.

SOMEONE NEEDS TO DO BREAKFAST
TOMORROW

That's the beauty of being ill, it means you can't do breakfast as no one wants you to cough on their sausages.

Saturday morning:

Just as well we have several dozen sausages too many as most of them are burned anyway. Never mind!

EVERYONE NEEDS TO MOVE THEIR
KIT AND OUR FOOD KIT OUT OF THE
WAY

I see I woke up bossy. Only disadvantage of Watchfield is we had to share the hall with other groups.

WE'RE SO LATE!!

As usual, haring it to site way past the time we said we'd meet the local Jon Pon-trefract. Can I just put in a word for Jon he is very even-natured and helpful. Not at all like a local in any way in fact.

CAN YOU BRING BRICK KIT? THX

More bossing. It's what leaders do best, voice or no voice. Rachel was doing a good job reading these out but I did notice

she kept prefacing everything with 'Sophie wants me to tell you...' in case anyone mistook her for a fascist dictator, rather than a mere spokeswoman for one.

3X SHARP, 2X
SMOOTH, 2X
LIME

Good old Cotswold
Lime mortar mix.



WHEN MY MUM PHONES CAN YOU
SPEAK TO HER AND DIRECT HER TO
SITE

Yes my actual Mum who was coming on her first ever dig but had made great pains to tell me she was going to have to arrive late and leave early. In the end she stayed longer than planned which I think meant she enjoyed it.

WHERE'S THAT MORTAR?
TEA'S UP!

Sometime round afternoon tea break Moose and Maria turned up, although there are no notes marking the occasion. Possibly they fell in the concrete mixer (the notes, not Moose or Maria). Much excitement surrounded the arrival of Moose's new dog 'Ace' who greeted everyone by biting their fingers (that's a trick to watch out for, folks). Although very thin, fairly quiet and with a real light of intelligence in his eyes, this rescue dog show great promise of developing into a thick, noisy and overweight trip hazard once he has become a fully-fledged WRG dog. I shall look forward to being nibbled on by him at many future digs.

Meanwhile new recruit #2 (I.e. my mum) was quite getting into the bricklaying and even braved 'The Loo From Hell' at the farm close to site.

GETTING DARK, NEXT MIX=LAST MIX
PLEASE

We headed back to the accommodation where my Mum had made a casserole which was enjoyed by all. After a mug of hot mulled cider my voice was just starting to come back, however I decided not to go to the pub and headed home for a hot

lempip in a real bed. Those who carried on through the rainy Sunday sent me regular picture messages and seemed to get a lot of work done, finishing off the course it seems. Thanks to everyone who came and for Jon Pontefract for not being like a normal local.

Sophie Smith

Image: David Miller

**31ST OCTOBER/1ST
NOVEMBER (EISEY)**

November 2009 Lwrg Dig was on the Chelmer and Blackwater Canal. Helen was leader and Maria was cooking, as the Haybay (boat) was out of commission our accommodation was the school that had been used for the reunion year before.

The work on site was a group filling sand bags with clay, and a team placing them in the water to build up the bank. Easy! This was the first Lwrg dig that our new dog Ace had attended. We arrived at the school found a bedspace etc. then it was off to the a pub, this pub is a micro brewery, so I think we tried as many as possible between us.

That evening we returned back to the accommodation for the normal toast attack, then it was sleep, remember this was Ace's first time of being with so many in a hall etc. and he was fine all night. He stayed on his bed, next to Maria and I, except when he got up to have a drink. In the morning Maria and I had agreed that I would take Ace on site, and she would have Bess with her.

So it was a big learning curve, Saturday during the day he was on site with me and I was filling sandbags with a few other Lwrgies and locals. We filled a lot between us, when the pile was getting a bit high a couple of Wrgies in the work boat would arrive just in time for the next load, so we would get as much in as possible and send them back to the Wrgies that were actually standing in the water with chest waders and building the sides of the tow path also using wooden stakes.

The work was fairly hard going on all accounts, lunch was called and we all went over to the picnic area as normal. Once all fed back to work, which was filling the bags, boat takes them over, and they were fitted to make the wall.

By the close of day I think people were very happy to go back to the school. The weather was fine but the work was back breaking. After dinner and the washing up etc, a strange thing happened, we found that pub again, and when we got back the

hall afterwards toast was being eaten!!! Very strange.

Sunday was much of the same except at the end of the day, a tidy up of the hall etc and then trundle our weary way home. I think it was a very successful weekend, C&B were happy plenty of bags filled and put in the bank, Ace was very good, and Bess was as normal, just Bess.

Moose

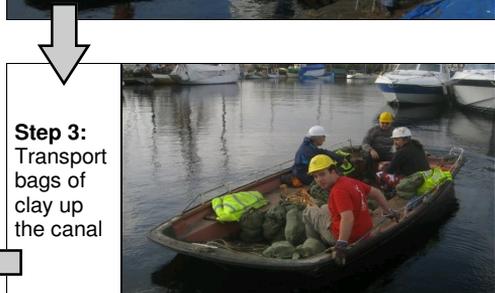
(Images below: Tim Lewis - The work in pictures)



Step 1: Fill bag with clay



Step 2: Load bags of clay onto work boat



Step 3:
Transport bags of clay up the canal

Step 4: Make a wall out of bags of clay (see front cover)

Editors Final Note: I skipped the Reunion and the Christmas dig as both were covered in Navvies and there's no point repeating everything. My thanks to Paul and Adrian for giving me notes on the digs I didn't have reports from and especially for Moose for con-juring up a whole dig report over a year after it occurred. Now onto 2010!!

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