

# London WRG News



**Issue 75:  
June 2013**

# Editors Note:

Welcome to this slightly and as late as ever edition of LWRG news! As usual my thanks to all those who contributed—especially to Paul Ireson for contributing via poetry and to Martin Ludgate and Martin Danks for providing dig reports without needing to be nagged! Please, please do 'volunteer' to write a report occasionally as without your help there is no LWRG news for me to edit! And remember—the smaller the gap between the end of the dig and the writing of the report the easier it is. Any other content you think other members of the group will find interesting is also welcome.

At the last AGM the dig dates for the rest of the year were discussed; these are shown below with the ones already passed crossed out. No further business was discussed in the meeting the only further note is that the half AGM will be held on the 28th September at the Cotswolds dig. Let Tim Lewis know if you have anything to put on the agenda.

We still have a dig date with no confirmed site—if you know of a local group with work to be done please let Martin know.

Jenny at Head Office has kindly extended the LWRG pages by creating a page for back-issues of LWRG news (screen-shot below). Currently this just contains the issues I have edited but over time it is aimed that more back issues will go up.

**Helena Rosiecka**

(Cover photo: Martin Ludgate)

Date	Canal	Leader
13/14th July	Cotswolds—Ham Mill Lock	Nigel Lee
3/4th August	Wey and Arun	Paul Ireson
7/8th September	Chesterfield	George Rogers
28/29th September	Cotswolds—Ham Mill Lock <b>(HALF AGM)</b>	David Miller
19/20th October	Somersetshire Coal Canal	Sophie Smith
9/10th November	WRG Reunion	Head Office
23/24th November	<i>TBC—may not have a dig</i>	Tim Lewis
7/8th December	LWRG/KESCRG Christmas Party—Chichester <i>(TBC)</i>	<i>TBA</i>

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## waterway recovery group

volunteers restoring the waterways

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# 12/13TH JANUARY 2013 (SHRIVENHAM)

The weekend started as usual in the pub - with plenty of steak to go with our beers. After food, and more beer, we meandered back to the accommodation for, erm.... more beer. There we found Moose and Maria, our leaders for the weekend ensconced with cans of... CIDER! After much gossiping, beer and cider we settled down for the night. I took the brave step of sharing with Moose, Maria and their dogs in an attempt to avoid Nigel's snoring (not that Moose's is much better). Luckily when I got up to go to the loo in the night the dogs recognized that I was allowed to be there and didn't bark at me!

Saturday mornings full English breakfast was enhanced by Bob and Hamon discussing over the toaster whether or not they had met before. Eventually I had to step in and let them know they had both been to Krzysiek and I's wedding. Then off to site; this was a new site to most of us so the Saturday morning faff started with the vital question of "Where is the site". Luckily Moose knew and led us along the verge from where we were parked and through the hedge to the canal bank. Our task for the weekend was to make a gap between the hedge and the cut without making holes in the hedge or falling in the canal. Further along there was also a strimming job clearing back smaller growth.

I started with the strimming job and spent most of the weekend at it - though I did let

Inka have a go! Whilst we played with the strimmers the others were hacking back the hedge. There wasn't much space so to start with Bob and others forged a path whilst others threw their cuttings into the fire. Once more space had been cleared everyone, including new recruit Sara, got involved in the cutting and extra fires were started.

In the evening we stayed in the accommodation as most people has their own supplies and food was (I think, I am writing this is September) cooked by Sophie. Those without booze made do with the hot chocolate in the kit. It was a convivial evening as Hamon got to know Ace (the dog) better by attempting to feed him his arm whilst Siobhan and Moose reminisced about past Nationals. We also had a visit from Mel and Bungle upon whom Sophie pressed copious amounts of beef and vegetable stock as an engagement present.

Come Sunday the work was much the same with the exception of getting the tinfoil out and Nigel playing with his chain saw. And so Inka was introduced to the joys of tinfoil wench jokes—"Is the earth moving for you love?" Through the day we tinfoiled, strimmed, hacked, burnt, and (in the cases of the deadest trees) simply pushed down! Although not the sunniest day it stayed dry and there was little wind so it was warm enough as long as you stayed working (so short tea breaks).

My thanks to all involved for a lovely weekend.

**Helena Rosiecka**  
(Images: Alan Lines)



# 2ND/3RD FEBRUARY 2013 (CHELMER AND BLACKWATER)

The Chelmer and Blackwater remains a favourite of WRGies for the good accommodation, the amazing locals and the variety of work to be done! However on this occasion our help was wanted for a more usual job - cutting back the hedge on the towpath.

On Friday night we rolled up to the pub hungry and asked if they serve food. In response we were handed the local take-away menus! Hence 40 minutes later we were all settling down to take-out with our drinks! Absolutely fantastic idea. Adrian also used this opportunity to present me

with my wedding present—a singular coat hanger—much to the confusion of all present and to my great joy

After a good nights sleep on the haybay we had breakfast and headed to site. This can't have been more than half a mile away but I can't remember if we were lazy and rode in the van or if we walked. . As stated above the job was hedge trimming - however this was not 'trimming' as done in your own garden where a few centimetres need cutting back here and there. This was "trimming" WRG style - the hedge needed cutting back up to 2 meters in places. This is to allow more sunlight to get at the towpath to dry it after rains as currently the path was collecting water which did not evaporate and so the whole stretch was turning into a mud bath.

**Helena Rosiecka**  
(Images: Gordon Brown)



In the evening we celebrated the birthdays of two of our members - accurately reflecting their mental ages on the cakes!



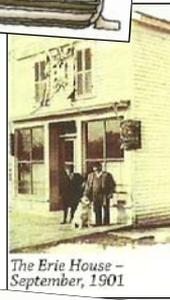
*As an aside, although I do love the Chelmer and Blackwater Canal, I could be persuaded to dig elsewhere having seen this...*



**Canal Society**  
of New York State

## Our Vision ~

We aspire to educate, interpret and preserve the exciting history of canals in NYS and the Empire State. We also strive to enhance accessibility to canal historical and current sites, documents, artifacts, and information for the general public as well as the serious historian and enthusiast. To this end we are preserving a 1850's Enlarged Erie Lock and establishing a Canal Society headquarters, museum, and archive complex in central New York with direct access from the Thruway at: The Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park.



The Erie House - September, 1901

## What We Do ~

- promote establishment of interpretative signage at canal locations;
- actively participate in events that foster canal preservation and positive publicity;
- represent our great canal state at national and inter-national canal meetings.

# 23RD/24TH FEBRUARY 2013 (SHREWSBURY AND NEWPORT)

This was a first for London WRG – indeed a first for any mobile group. It was the first visiting work party on a new project to restore the Norbury Junction to Newport length of the Shropshire Union Canal's Newport Arm, as a step towards one day reopening the whole Shrewsbury and Newport Canals route from the Shropshire Union Main Line through to Shrewsbury. It was, however, at least the fifth attempt to restore the canal – I can't be sure London WRG's never worked on any of the previous four restoration schemes in the five decades since somebody first tried to restore it in the early 1960s.

Ah yes, Newport. That's the one in Shropshire. I think everyone who went on the dig got the right one, although a message from Bungle suggesting that we might break our journey by turning off the M4 to stop off at his home near Swindon and pick up some bits for the van suggested that not everyone was so sure. At least nobody confused it with Newport (Isle of Wight) or Newport (Rhode Island).

Still, perhaps that explains why this canal has had such a chequered history of unsuccessful restoration attempts over most of the 70 years since the LMS Railway Act of 1944 closed it. Maybe everyone kept getting the wrong Newport...



A good sign that we'd found the right one was that when the van arrived at Forton the advance party had already made contact with locals and been shown the accommodation – a nice cricket club with showers. Even better, it was very handy for the pub – the Swan, just a five minute walk up the main road, where we made the acquaintance of Dianne from the Newport to Norbury Canal Restoration Community Interest Company and other locals.

It was very handy for the worksite too, as we found in the morning.

Considering that the canal's been given up as a hopeless case for restoration at least twice, there's an impressive amount of it left. Our worksite was situated between two interesting structures – a nice skew bridge (which those who know about such things identified as the work of Thomas Telford) with a stream culvert going diagonally under it, and an aqueduct over a small river that's surprisingly easy to miss from above. It's full width with no narrowing at all, and even more interestingly it has a road alongside it that's part of the same structure. Could we think of another one? After a certain amount of head-scratching we came up with one on the Buckingham Arm (which isn't entirely obvious, as the canal's been filled in and the road now occupies pretty much the whole width). Anyone who can think of another in Britain (Yes, I know about the one on the Canal de Berry in France – indeed I've driven across it) wins the Golden Anorak award.

And so we set to work. Our main tasks were clearing trees and brambles from the canal bed and bank with bow-saws, loppers and brushcutter, and pulling stumps with Alan's Tirfor winch. It was all disposed of using Andy's 'Gas Safe' bonfire. There was also some very careful removal of stumps from the skew bridge wing walls without dislodging any of Mr Telford's coping stones.

Rick and Harri arrived for the day, and immediately demonstrated the reason why you don't have two people operat-



ing the Tirfor winch handle at once, by breaking a shear pin. Tim showed that he's made of sterner stuff by breaking one on his own. No worry, though: it appears that Alan buys them by the hundredweight and uses them as ballast to stop his car going too fast. Or something like that.

Meanwhile there was work to be done on another site, a few hundred yards away and the far side of the A41 Newport bypass. This road is a bit of a problem for the canal restorers: it crosses at only just above water level, and forms the most serious obstruction on the first few miles of the route, and the main sticking-point when it comes to getting the canal open from the Shroppie main line down to its first major destination at Newport town. The canal restoration groups (NTNCRIC and SNCT) have a plan for getting around this, but it will be quite a tricky and expensive one involving diverting the canal and building a new lock on the east side of the road to replace an old one that's just to the west of it. If this eventually happens, it will leave a short dead-end and a spare lock leading to it.

Now, as it happens, the canal round these parts is also a bit of a sensitive area nature-wise, and one idea is that the lock and dead end could be preserved but as a nature reserve. So we found ourselves unloading a large number of wooden posts, a roll of wire fencing, and one of those things that I think are officially called post caps or some such, but which in WRG are invariably referred to as bonkers – if only for the potential for innuendo, as well as the usual quick-fire witty exchanges:

*“Have you lot done this lots of times before”*

*“Oh yes, we’ve been bonkers for ages”*

So we had all the bonking jokes as we bashed in a whole series of fenceposts to fence off the lock for work on it to start, which not only supplied us with endless opportunities for smutty humour but also kept us warm. It being a chilly day, everyone joined in enthusiastically including our new recruit Jo, and soon we had a splendidly permanent (if not entirely level – it's all very well bashing them in to armpit height, but what if not everyone's armpits are at the same height?) temporary fence, which should see out the next three or four attempts to restore the canal. Actually that's unfair, the current lot seem to very much have their act together (and I'm not talking about the 1944 LMS Railway act there!)

Back at Forton, a large bonfire was by now being allowed to burn down so that the site could be left safe, and (speaking of burning things) I left site early to start cooking the meat for the evening meal. This being the middle of the supermarket horse-meat scare, we were thankful that with Alan supplying the meat direct from his local abattoir, at least we could be moderately confident of its provenance – or at any rate, that it probably came from the right animal.

Having said that, I see from my notes of the weekend that I appear to have cooked

'Lasagne with crackling', and that this even extended to the veggie one. As for pudding, well, it would have been a shame to deprive the regulars of another opportunity to exclaim that "Martin makes a good tart" – on this occasion a plum tart.

Another trip to the pub, and a kind donation from the locals towards our drinks. There was also a slight change of personnel, due to the 'Smedley Shuffle' (consisting of Allison and Rupert attending for one full week-end between them), and to our friends Andi and Harri (a different one) who met up with us for a drink. The main feature of the conversation in the pub was that George did his best to make everyone feel much older than him – which isn't actually that hard, as we all are. (As an indication, just imagine getting "I was three then" in response to any comment about any dig that you've ever been on, and you won't be too far off). I got my own back later by reminiscing about trolleybuses, a valve powered radio (called a 'wireless'), steam trains, TV with only 2 channels, and the days when everything was black and white.

Next morning Paul cooked brekkie again, after which we set off to work with a slight changeround of sites: we dropped 4 people plus a brushcutter and hand tools to finish Forton, while the rest went to 'Islington'. This had the potential for almost as many mistakes as sending people to the wrong Newport, but turned out to be the site where we'd been post-bonking the day before. This time we were there to pull up stumps from the length of dry canal bed above the lock. We also pulled some whole trees down with the Tirfor. The fire was a little slow to start, but eventually got going so well that it took a certain amount of effort (and soil) to put it out again so that we could leave the site safe.

Anyway the folks from the local canal groups seemed very pleased with our work, and we were similarly impressed by their positive start on getting the canal restored. It clearly deserves to succeed at the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> time. And there's a good chance we'll be back there next winter to help.

**Martin Ludgate**

(Images: Tim Lewis and Martin Ludgate)

## 16/17TH MARCH 2013 (CROMFORD)

### THE PLAN...



Mix, barrow, bucket, pick stone, place stone, mortar in, point up, back-fill and repeat

(Images: Alan Lines and Tim Lewis)



## 13/14TH APRIL 2013 (BCN - STOURBRIDGE)

*[Abridged—for the full report see Navvies]*

Cromford on a Friday and Saturday night in March turns out to be an unmemorable affair. I have no recollection of the accommodation at all. Site however was fun. There was a bit of scrub bashing to do and Tim, Rachel and others had at that with their usual enthusiasm—the role of most being to keep Tim away from the bonfire so he couldn't put it out with his fire suppressing presence.

The main job however was, as shown on the previous page, rebuilding a stone wall that had collapsed. This work was aided by the unbounded enthusiasm of locals wandering by for the work we were doing and the close supervision of one of the nearby residents who spent most of the weekend propping up his garden fence and chatting with us. It was also aided, to the great excitement of the girls, by a nearby residents offer of the use of their outside toilet! No squatting in bushes this weekend, oh no, a lovely private experience in a cubicle with a locking door, a flush, a sink, running water and even clean towels to dry your hands on. Luxury indeed!

The wall building had been started by WRG NW and other groups in previous weekends and although we were using the same mortar mix a fair amount of time was spent discussing why our mortar was turning out grey whilst theirs had dried a lovely pale yellow colour. As we progressed it became apparent that this job should really be in the preliminary rounds of a strong man competition rather than undertaken by a group of men over 50 (excepting George who is just mentally that age—see page 4) and a couple of girls as the stones generally weighed more than we did. Martin, Paul, Alan and I however took up the challenge whilst Pete mixed the muck and made good progress. Luckily the rain held off until we were ready to leave so we were able to tuck it up for the night in blue tarpaulin as we left.

**Helena Rosiecka**



Some say it was on the BCN, aficionados may say it wasn't, so where was it?

The weekend started with a swift half at the Waterfall real ale pub. After that Aileen was whipping us into shape to find the accommodation. Smaller than previous years, but very interesting from a canal enthusiasts point of view, the Blowers Green Pumphouse, seemed very adequate for our needs. The pumphouse is run by the Dudley Canal Trust and is full of interesting paraphernalia to do with the work of the trust and its achievements.

Next the beer arrived - straight from the Old Swan Brewery (Ma Pardoes) at Netherton, owner and landlord Tim arrived and tapped both "ready to drink" barrels. Glasses were found and the evening started, the plan was to drink as much as we could before London WRG arrived. Well, we were nearly in bed before London WRG arrived!

So after some "sleep" and a fab breakfast cooked by Krzysiek we were off to the signing on point, and decisions were made as to which team went where, Moose's team took the route up the Fens Branch towards Brockmoor, joined by volunteers from IWA and a crew of Army Cadets. My group Headed for the bottom of the Delph Locks.

We were indeed in the Black Country, but 99% of our work took place on the Stourbridge Canal, although I can say that my group started Saturday morning on the BCN, just above lock 8 of the Delph Flight (Delph Road Bridge being the boundary). It was nice to work on a bit of waterway that actually sees quite regular boat traffic, as part of the Black Country Ring, quite a few boats passed us and crew thanked the volunteers.

As the grappling hooks flew, the usual suspects were pulled out, bikes, trollies, mattresses, vacuum cleaner, microwave ov-

ens... was there a cuddly toy, there may have been? The most unusual was steel rings about 12 inches in diameter, we had loads of them by Brettel Lane, I challenged Krzysiek to a game of horse shoes with a few, he soon gave up when he saw how good I was!!

We also ran the gauntlet of local hoodlums who enjoyed throwing in what we had pulled out, sad isn't it, they will probably go through life having never known the pleasure of using a grappling hook!

Saturday evening was another social, to finish off the beer and cool the aching muscles. An evening meal cooked by Maria was enjoyed by all, down one staircase, and back up the next!

On Sunday morning both teams headed down the Sixteen Stourbridge Locks with

Stourbridge town wharf being the ultimate destination, the locks were a little disappointing rubbish wise, but one volunteer found a handy windlass in one. The Town arm itself proved a lot more fruitful, bridge holes and indeed the cut gave up bikes, and large trollies to the groups of grapplers.

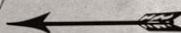
The groups were picked up from the Wharf to go for lunch, where it was decided to call an early finish due to logistics, one group however led by myself volunteered to go to the bottom of the Delph Locks, windlass in hand to help work the work boats up the locks, as we indeed started, we finished on the good old BCN.

Thanks to everyone involved , especially Aileen Butler months of work it takes to put this all together.

**Chris Morgan**

**1ST/2ND JUNE  
2013 (CHICHESTER  
SHIP CANAL)**

**HERE  
THERE BE  
DRAGONS**



A dozen of us met at the Four Chestnuts PH and enjoyed their fine ale and a bit of a band, Helena and Nigel having been out shopping for something for the weekend. Paul duly cooked a wonderful breakfast and sandwiches made, we headed for the canal basin. The jobs were to prepare for the following day's Dragon Boat racing: "polishing" the swing-bridge and pulling weed from the basin.

Two men and a dog (sounds wrong!) went to mow, trim and tidy around the swing-bridge. In the basin, two pontoons were used – one dragged along the basin edge and the other pirouetted around the mooring buoys by George tugging in a rowing boat, sometimes attended by Helena as crew. Heaps of weed were transferred to a dumb barge shunted around by a local in their push tug.

Morris dancing was due mid-afternoon, so help was given tidying the "dance floor" before they entertained us. To

celebrate the summer sunshine we had a barbeque for dinner. Despite technical problems with the apparatus (blame Tesco's naff charcoal?), Pete and new Paul persevered and we had a fine spread of meats and kebabs. George's efforts on the potato salad were so taxing he fell asleep! (or was it his strenuous oars-man-ship?). Martin made tiramisu which was enjoyed as dusk fell, and weary bones were laid to rest as the chorus of snores began...





Breakfast began early as Nigel took Adrian and Fran on-site for 07.30 to help put up gazebos and operate the swing bridge. Others took their turns on the swing-bridge throughout the day as it had to be opened every time a race started or the trip boat passed through. The task for the remainder was to re-establish an overgrown foot-path parallel with the towpath. This ran along a shelf at the top of woods that had been the route of an old tramway that crossed the canal a couple of miles down towards the harbour.

Much hacking, sawing and strimming saw the first 150m cleared about 2m wide and a builder's bag full of rubbish collected. This included a kettle, pots and a couple of rotting tents amongst other detritus. Locals remembered using this path a dozen years ago and were delighted to see it opening up again. The local co-ordinator Linda was also delighted by the work we did over the weekend.

### Before vs. After

Volunteers needn't fear there won't be enough work at the Chichester as



local volunteer coordinator Linda described reopening this path as "light brushwork."

I would hate to tackle heavy!

So ended an enjoyable weekend in the sunshine. New Paul says he will return and Fran celebrated her second LWRG dig!

The Chichester Ship Canal Trust have their HQ by the busy canal basin. As well as trip boats and tugs, they have skiffs for hire, access for canoes and fishing permits for sale. A new tea room and shop looking over the basin. What a model way to run a canal basin staffed entirely by volunteers!

**Martin Danks**

(Images: Paul Rudders Clarke)



## 22ND/23RD JUNE 2013 (COTSWOLDS)

Due to the loss of the training weekend

We got to arrange an extra dig

So off to the Cotswold Canal

And the normal pub meeting

So back we went to Brimscombe

But not to our former residence

So to the unit 1 for the first time

Although the cook had been before

So congregate inside the Ship

All sitting beneath the dartboard

Until the front bar empties

And we all de-camp en-mass

Mass toast coking then took place

More bread required next morning

A female room is set aside

And a room for Nigel and Pauls snoring

With multiple exits to the accom

All piled into vans, cars or walking

Arriving on site we find out

That we had left Inka behind

A morning task at Ham Mill

Was complete the lower dam

With Jon P in his waders

Bob and Paul went scaffold board surfing

Morning Tea break was a treat

With a local's cake as well as Sophie's

It was felt too rude not to try them

So a taste test was done by all

The towpath side was being re-built

Following the previous camps de-toothing

So with Helena doing brick laying

The wall got some straight Yorkshire talking

Dave and Pete were back at Ham Mill

Removing silt by means of an excavator

While Jon, Bob and Jo laid the cover

To the Dam to hold back the flow

Sunday's tasks were all at Griffin

More brick laying and some earth profiling

A little task of cutting the grass

To find the holes hiding beneath

At the end of the dig, the grass is shorn

So you can see the strimmer operator

And the wall had raised several courses

Succumbing to plain Yorkshire speaking

So time to leave unit 1

But we are all back in three weeks

So kit and beds are left behind

For Nigel's not extra dig

**Paul Ireson** (Image: Alan Lines)

## 22ND/23RD JUNE 2013 - IN PICTURES!!



Images Above: Alan Lines

Images Below: Martin Ludgate, Alan Lines, Tim Lewis

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