

Issue 77:  
June 2014



London  
WRG  
News

# Editors Note:

Hi all!

I won't be out digging for a while so if you are running a dig weekend please nominate someone to write the dig report! Please also send in nominations for the LWRG awards.

Thanks as usual to all the contributions of dig reports, images and other material! I especially like ones where people are looking at the camera (the need to do this more is evidenced on the back cover by the most recent photos of Tim, Martin, Lesley and myself on Facebook as at 31 April 2014).

**Helena Rosiecka**  
(Cover photo: David Miller)

Date	Canal	Leader
12/13 Jul	Basingstoke	Helena Rosiecka
2/3 Aug	Wey and Arun	TBC
13/14 Sep	Cromford	George R
11/12 Oct	Somersetshire Coal	Sophie S
22/23 Nov	London Clean-Up	Tim L (Centrally booked)
6/7 Dec	Xmas party with KESCRG	KESCRG



**LWRG CATS:** Often as I prowl facebook I am confronted with more pictures of LWRG cats than LWRGies on digs. Therefore I have branched out from canal digs to pictures of cats. There is a **small prize** in it for anyone that can name all the cats pictured and their associated humans.



# 12/12TH JANUARY 2014 (SHREWSBURY AND NEWPORT)

Upon arriving early on the Friday evening, Peter Foord and myself met with Bernie and his wife, from the local canal trust, to show us around our accommodation for the weekend. We were staying at the Forton Cricket Club pavilion, which had good facilities including a few showers and a bar! We were later joined at the local Pub, the Swann. This was later than required as he sat in the car park for a while having not noticed that we were already there. We then enjoyed some of the lovely meals that were available from the pub menu.

Our leader for the weekend was Martin Ludgate, who arrived from his long journey in the WRG van from London just in time for last orders, well timed Martin!

Paul I was unable to join us this weekend due to feeling unwell, therefore Colin volunteered to be 'head breakfast chef' with myself assisting both mornings. It was quite interesting cooking breakfast quietly by torch light due to cooking behind the bar, only a couple of meters away from people still trying to sleep.

Our work site was a short van's journey down the road at Mere-town lock on the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal at Islington. Our day started with clearing some vegetation along the towpath and the dry section of canal. Adrian, Nigel and Peter started using the machinery on site to excavate some of the lock chamber and using the infill to create a bund at the other end of the dry section of canal near to the road, so the local canal trust can put this section back into water in the near future.

David used the other excavator along the towpath with another team digging a trench to lay a water supply pipeline from the pumping station, just past the lock, towards the main road. This would be used to supply water into the canal. A good bonfire was started by Martin using our trusted gas torch lance to get the damp materials lit. Paul C left his nearly full plastic water bottle a little too close to the bonfire, creating another hole in the base to drink from! There was also a good turn out from the local canal trust's



volunteers, who helped carrying out these tasks as well as informing members of the public about what was happening and the aims of their canal trust.

A generous donation was made by the two local canal trusts for us to use behind the bar at the cricket club that evening, which was gratefully received by all of us (including the cricket club during this quiet time of year) as it isn't that often on our digs that you can have a pint of beer served to you whilst laying on your bed!

Our evening meal was cooked by our multitasking leader, although a little later than originally planned, but was well worth the wait. Our pudding was mostly made from some free apples that Helena found on site, which was also very tasty and helped to keep our running costs down for the weekend.

On Sunday, after a cold frosty start, a test pit was excavated in the lock chamber to see the condition of the lock walls and bed.

All was in reasonable condition and can be restored back to its former glory in the future. The test pit was then back filled to prevent a deep hazard being left after we finished for the weekend. During the excavation works on the lower entrance of the lock, some of the original paddle gear and lock gate's metalwork was found, showing us the original design for these locks, which can either be restored or remade to the original standards.

Work continued clearing the off-side bank of shrub, removing dead trees and thinning out others. The pipework was placed in the trench and back filled restoring the towpath back to its original condition. A good weekend's work was enjoyed by all of us. If anybody would like to continue our work on this site, including restoring the lock, Waterway Recovery Group are holding a weeks camp here this year between 16th - 23rd August. Please visit [www.wrg.org.uk](http://www.wrg.org.uk) or contact Jenny at head office on 01494 783453 ext 604 for further information.



**Chris Bryne**

(Images: Alan Lines)

**Opposite: LWRG  
make an appearance  
in the local  
news rag**

**© Shropshire Star**

## Choir is looking to recruit sopranos

Soprano voices are needed at a choir of Shropshire singers.

The Newport-based Beaumaris Singers group, which has been singing for over 50 years, is looking for singers who can hit the high notes.

Choir leader, Colin Carter, said: "Our numbers are about 25 and we are looking for sopranos and alto voices and the repertoire is mainly classical with some high quality popular music. We are looking for singers who can hit the high notes."

Rehearsals are held every Tuesday evening during school-term time, at Cozy Cottage, Newport.

This term the choir's activities include a voice training day with Nicola Burrows at St Chad's School, Newport, and a choir workshop at St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury, on March 1. For more information, contact secretary Mike Carter on (01743) 258383.

## Young artists' work on show

Some of the UK's brightest young artists are having their work showcased at Weston Park's art gallery.

Original works including photography from art graduates are on display. It runs until January 27 in the Granary Art Gallery.

Volunteers get to work on scheme to refill dry section with water

# Diggers move in to restore canal stretch

**By Sean Wozencroft**  
A DRY section of Shropshire canal could be back under water in just seven months after diggers moved on site, enthusiasts revealed today.

Work has been carried out to dig out a metre deep trench at Meretown Lock in Newport.

Pipes have also been laid which will bring water from the Strina Brook into the 110-metre long section of canal in which the canal was abandoned in 1944.

The section, which is owned by Newport Town Council, will link together with the canal to the west of the lock, which is already filled with water and will go in the opposite direction up to the A41.

The old lock will also be restored, according to the Shrewsbury & Newport Canal Trust.

Bernie Jones, chairman of the trust, said: "This is the first real piece of digging out the trust has ever done. It's a real challenge."

"We hope to have that stretch back in water in August, subject to discussions with Natural England."

The project was really encouraging to hear the trust was taking on such a big job as we carry out the work."

More than a dozen volunteers from the Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) joined the diggers at the site for two days last weekend.

Diggers were used to remove the soil from the canal chamber.

The trust also used to build a dam at the far end of the canal, above the lock that is to be restored.

As well as lots of soil and rubble, volunteers also discovered iron, a distinctive



Digging a trench during restoration work at Meretown Lock in Newport



The pipes that will pump water into the stretch go in



Volunteers clear away vegetation from the area to be restored, under the A41 towards Newport, to make up with another stretch of old towpath.

Mr Jones said: "People have often said that it couldn't be done, but we look forward to proving them wrong."

The project is part of the trust's long-term aims to bring the Shrewsbury and Newport canal back into use.

It is hoped that the canal from Newport

## BRIEFING

### Football stars sign for Pepsi

Football greats Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Vincent Kompany and Jack Wilshere have joined forces for a dream team of players.

A squad of 19 stars has signed up for a new Pepsi campaign to be launched in the coming months.

The stars will work with the firm on the campaign which will run throughout 2014.

The campaign will feature in a forthcoming TV ad and many of the players will also feature on drinks cans in the coming months.

### Free check on pets' health

Older cats and dogs will be the focus of an animal health campaign at a vets in Shropshire.

This month and next will see a series of health checks which has a practice in Whitechurch, will be running a senior campaign offering free health checks for any animal aged over eight.

Contact the surgery on (01948) 662424 for more details.

### Policing on the parish agenda

Community policing and street lights are among the issues to be discussed at a meeting in Shropshire.

The agenda for the meeting is based near Whitechurch, and includes a discussion on the village hall at 7.30pm.

Other items in discussion include planning applications, play areas and this year's budget.

## 1ST/2ND FEBRUARY 2014 (CHELMER AND BLACKWATER)

I managed to surpass my usual level of complication in getting myself to this joint LWRG/ KESCRG dig by going via Swansea as I was on a course with work the previous week. Happily Paul was able to scoop me up (and Martin was able to print the LWRG award certificates I had forgotten) and we arrived just in time for last orders of food at the pub. I then enforced a period of LWRG award brainstorming so that I would actually have a list of nominations for Tim to read out the next evening (see issue 76 for the outcome).

Once everyone had had enough to drink (or was it once the pub stopped serving us?) we headed back to the accommodation – the lovely Haybay! Here I discovered that my best 4 bed cabin option was sharing with Colin and Nadine – meaning that Colin got to have both his weekend and weekday wife sharing with him. Having checked that Colin didn't snore I set my bed up on the top bunk – I later found out that I was querying the wrong Whitcombe!

On Saturday morning, following a lovely breakfast provided by Paul and his galley stewards, we walked to site (another advantage of the Chelmer) where Roy the

local described the work. It was remarkably simple – “See that path there – dig it up and lay a new one in concrete!”

Once spades, mattocks, wrecking bars and barrows had been dealt out to all and sundry we set to work. We rapidly destroyed the old path and barrowed the resulting aggregate spoil off to another section of the marina where it was recycled as pothole infill. This continued all morning, excepting the customary tea break. At lunch conversation turned to jobs that no self-respecting volunteer coordinator would give their volunteers – namely litter picking the car park (for more detail ask Bobby). As it was windy and the gazebo had been lowered to half height to stop the legs being twisted this conversation took place sat on a bench with our heads touching the roof of the gazebo - we may have looked stupid but I bet we were the warmest volunteers there.

By lunch the old path was pretty much clear at one end so the more technical members of the crew, such as Roy, Mick and Pete, took to building the shuttering to keep the new concrete in place. Once enough shuttering was in place to pour a section of concrete Helen and Tim started mixing with Steve and Bob on barrow duty. Pete, Paul and Nigel then took charge of making sure that the concrete had a nice smooth surface (and of shooing



off local dogs that wanted to make their mark on the nice smooth concrete surface.). As not everyone could be kept occupied with this a small contingent headed off to one of the sheds to de-ivy the roof. This was sold as quite a reasonable job – and would have been if the last time the roof had been de-ivied was within the last decade. However, we were undeterred. Adrian and his elite crew soon took to ladders with saws. I helped for a while before deciding it was a darn sight colder above the tree line

Back at base Peter Foord had taken over the kitchen and produced a lovely yummy dinner for us all. I vaguely think it was shepherd's pie (but I am writing this in late April...) followed by dessert. After dinner Tim led the LWRG award ceremony, ably assisted by Steve D (who was the only person in the room that felt they had good enough hand writing to fill in the certificates). After this, and the washing up, we headed to the other pub (yet another advantage of the Chelmer) for a few drinks.

The next day, after another lovely breakfast, we headed back to site again and continued with the previous days work. As I am unfit (and at the time three months pregnant) I decided to take it a bit easier and assigned myself as Mick's tool passer. This was a much more leisurely job though undoing some of the mooring ropes so that we didn't end up embedding them in concrete was more difficult than anticipated – and yes we did remember to tie them up again!

Whilst the concreting was not finished we got the whole stretch ready to lay with old aggregate removed, bottom levelled off and rolled (is that a word?), and shuttering in place. Thanks for a lovely weekend to all involved from LWRG and KESCRG; especially the cooks and our leader Adrian.

**Helena Rosiecka**

(Images: David Miller)



# 22ND/23RD FEBRUARY 2014 (WEY AND ARUN)

After all the rain in the previous weeks, it was unknown if this weekend was to be a dig or a swim. The weather abated during the previous days but the original plans by the locals had to be changed which meant no machinery on site.

Arriving at the hall to find Pete's van already there but no sign of Pete F and the pub being shut. I assumed that another volunteer had arrived and the pair was in another pub. When the pub opened, I obtained the keys and awaited the arrival of the others. By around 9, most had arrived and we moved to the other bar for more space. At the end of the evening we checked with the pub that they would open the next night and then returned to the hall for a toast feast.

## Saturday

Next morning along with the arrival of Anne, we proceeded to Dunsfold aerodrome and inspected the site and assess the jobs that were left. The three main tasks were:

- ⇒ construct a stock fence along a predetermined line with wire bottom and barbed wire top.,
- ⇒ erect a gate on the towpath where the fence would eventually meet it, and

- ⇒ generally clear the site of scrub and tree remnants by use of bonfires following the contractors clearance of the site for canal dredging.

The result of this action made the site visit with Bill Nicholson and Sally Scheke the chair of the W&A very tricky and muddy. Therefore, I kept up my routine of getting dirty early on but this time everyone else also joined in. Sally however provided the entertainment when she got stuck in the mud up to the top of her wellies and had to be rescued by Patrick.

After a short tour of the airfield periphery we set to work with Pete F, RAF Martin and Adrian setting about to erect the gate deciding on tubular slots to allow it's removal if required when plant needs to go along the towpath.

The two Martins (Danks and Ludgate) joined Patrick, Anne and Pete Forde on the construction of the fence while the rest of us started to clear the site of trees and other obstacles along the line of the fence and general clearing of site and feeding the fire.

By mid morning, it was decided that we did require a chainsaw and so Nigel popped home and returned by lunch to chop up a large obstruction on the fence line and then chopped up a large fallen tree in the 6 foot size sections to be used as bollards later in the year by the local canal society. By late afternoon, the fencing team

were ready to tension up their first section and this allowed Martin L to see how to operate the London WRG Monkey Strainer as he claimed to have never seen it in use.



After several experiments by the team using both the Wey and Arun as well as the London WRG versions of a Monkey Strainer, they managed to get it to operate. However, we agreed that the proper use of it would be an appropriate topic for a towpath path talk in Navvies for the rest of us.

By the end of the afternoon the fence posts were all in place and around 2/3<sup>rds</sup> of the wire had been tensioned, while the gate team had hung the gate and only had a small amount of concrete support to be completed tomorrow.

While RAF Martin and I cooked the evening meal, the AGM took place so that by 8:00 Martin L and newly arrived Tim ventured off to the pub. They returned within 15 minutes to state that it was shut and so proceeded to plunder their reserve stocks of alcohol along with the rest of us.

## Sunday

The following morning we returned to site and to finish off the tasks. The morning entertainment was provided by Tim who because he was not on site the day before managed to repeat Sally's trick of getting stuck in the quagmire of towpath mud. He however suffered more humiliation as he lost both his boots and his socks while being rescued by Adrian.

With the clearance of further large area of scrub via the production of another bonfire and the completion of all other tasks we were done. We completed the gate, erected around 120 meters of fence, and tension wired the fence with both stock wire and barbed wire topping. As a result we took an early finish and had cleared the hall and handed back the keys by around 4:00pm

I would like to thank everyone for the work done despite the late changes due to the conditions and all the help during the weekend. I would also like to thank the locals for the support and guidance of the tasks.

**Paul Ireson**  
(Image: Paul Ireson)



## 15/16th March 2014 (Cotswolds)

On arrival at the accommodation I realised that a slight renumbering had occurred – what was once unit one of Brimscombe Port was unit one no-longer and the unit one we were staying at was a totally different building. This was too much for my tired brain – especially as I wasn't allowed to have anything stronger than an orange juice to drink! Hence I settled in to listen to the usual LWRG musings on topics such as real ale, canals, lorry driving, amateur dramatics, the ongoing refurbishment of the Fulbourne etc.

Once the rest of the gang had consumed enough alcohol we went back to the accommodation for toast to soak it all up. The sleeping arrangements were slightly more complicated than in previous units – the rule being “don't sleep upstairs”. This is related to fire regulations – but I must admit I didn't really understand why. It didn't matter anyway as there were plenty of rooms to sleep in and heaters in them all, plus Sophie had arrived with three different air beds. She claims this was so she could lend them to poor souls like myself who don't own their own – but as two of the three had slow leaks I reckon it was because she couldn't remember which one was going to stay inflated all night.

In the morning there was a lovely full English breakfast before we decamped to site. For once “on site by nine” was correct and we had to hunt about a bit before finding Jon P (who sensibly gave up on LWRG arriving at the appointed time many moons ago). A quick tour of site showed that the jobs included uncovering and blocking a drain from the stream into the lock which was hindering efforts to keep the lock pumped out, some brickwork, some landscaping, a concrete pour, brick cleaning, scrub clearance at the next lock down, and something that I can't remember that gave Paul an excuse to wear his waders... (sometimes I wonder what would happen if we found a site with NO MUD for Paul to play in – I suspect he would accidentally overturn the Burco and make some). The scrub clearance also provided a challenge as most of it was embedded in mud deeper than our wellies (as Joe found shortly before he fell face first in it). These jobs kept us all busy with some movement between



jobs – the drain blockers especially as they kept stealing clay uncovered by the landscapers to use in their plug!

Maria meanwhile stayed at the accommodation to make sandwiches and cook dinner. This included a profusion of garlic bread – half a French baguette each! To make sure we had worked up enough of an appetite for it pre-dinner entertainment was provided in the form of painting some new kit with the LWRG red and white stripes. After dinner Alan was finally presented with his driving award for last year. This “new” award (as we lost the old one) is courtesy of someone who recently lost a hub cap on my route home from work. A splinter group then headed back to the pub whilst the mass of us stayed at the accommodation – generally slobbing (or in Mooses case napping) though Val, Joe and others played a game



In the morning I declared myself unfit for manual labour and elected to stay back and help Maria sort out the accommodation whilst Moose herded the rest back to site. Hence I don't really know what they did on Sunday – more of the same I presume. Maria and I on the other hand washed everything in sight in

a kitchen that, due to a south facing window, gradually came to resemble an oven. Once that was done we made sandwiches and took them down to site. Returning to the accommodation after a pleasant lunch in the sunshine we packed away as much of the catering kit as we could and segregated the cutlery. There should now be just 35 knives, forks, dessert spoons and teaspoons in the kit.

Overall a lovely social weekend with plenty of varied work to do and lovely weather.

**Helena Rosiecka**

(Images: Alan Lines)

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Please bring sturdy footwear and lunch.  
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jon.pontefract@stroud.gov.uk or call Paul Weller on 07896426317

Cotswold Canals Trust



BCN clean-up time again – bag packed in readiness, I thought I would take my unread copy of the Nicholson's Guide titled 'Birmingham and the Heart of England'. I imagined the satisfaction of correlating places cleaned up with picturesque photographs in my book. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that the definitive guide to Brum's waterways has no pictures of Birmingham in it! Not one! Not even a photogenic brewery or some interesting industrial girders! Although as we toiled through soupy waters to retrieve a city's detritus in the grey of early spring and at the rear of the foreboding red brick factories in the declining industrial centre, I

had to admit that they may have had a point.

Anyway, the fact that the 'Canada geese' that Helen saw without her glasses were actually floating rubbish, wasn't enough to deter WRGies from all over the country from converging on the Phoenix Training Centre near Bordesley Junction in order to do what it says in the title – with George beginning with a fabulous clean up in the kitchen before we had even tackled our first mangled, greasy shopping trolley. Did you know that throwing your shopping trolley with the pound coin still inside it means you are posh? Our evidence suggests that there are four posh people without their trolleys in the West Midlands, more of which later.

The LWRG van was a bit late and I thank the crew for not leaving me behind, but I'm still not entirely sure it was my fault we got lost. Twice. We were some of the later arrivals to the band of old hands, new recruits and WaGS (WRG Geriatric Society) members who rapidly adjusted to the new fangled taps on the barrels of real ale with remarkable alacrity. Whoever said you can't teach an old dog new tricks has clearly never seen WRG in action where a pint is concerned. With great team spirit the newly enlightened ensured every new arrival had this important tutorial first with health and safety covered in the morning.



Adrian? By the playing field near Small Heath on Sunday we retrieved goalposts and a “You were only supposed to blow the bloody doors off” (thank-you Bob) safe without a door. Pictures tell me that Alison found a much more presentable, though doubtless just as heavy, one in the other group.

To prepare us for considering the pitfalls of biological finds in the drink Gorgeous George prepared us breakfast, assisted after an initial delay by Ju, who then joined us to get some frilly knickers out. People were often disappointed with clothing and carrier bags, but they are a source of many a boater’s despair when in the murky depths – so better out than in.

The first day seemed all ladders to me, but accompanied by the usual range of bicycles, scooters, car parts, fencing and household items. Tracy even snagged a toilet. Alongside the computers, telephones, hairdryer (with hair straighteners) we could probably furnish a soggy bedsit. Who knew that part of the Grand Union was carpeted,

To all those, who say this is just a rubbish weekend, we waved at boats whose propellers we protected by our lucky-dip, and for the environmentalists, Chris and Nigel were reclaiming traffic cones for future service at Cavalcade. Amanda Walker even found a Lancashire boiler shovel which will be displayed at the BCNS pumphouse at Titford in Oldbury. The BCN clean up is also great for its role of a shared DCT, IWA, CRT and WRG effort with boats Phoenix, Crow, Bittel and her butty all utilised for waste removal to the former Sampson



Road depot. Apparently there is enough metal to be scrapped to provide the BCNS with enough cash to pay for diesel for a year!



We also filled four ginormous steel containers with trash from the cut.

That is four tonnes less junk on the prop! Fantastic! Moose gave us the highest praise indeed as he delivered the thank-you speech and reassured us we were all average. How proud are we!

Although I'm not allowed to write camp report purely concentrating on the fine fettle\*, having been distracted by all that work, back to the important stuff: Back at base, Maria, George and Helena were well above average and were utilising George's engineering skills to fit seven or eight trays of chicken and some yummy roasted peppers in the one-shelf oven for a grand tea. To top it off we had a BCN 2014 trifle made with chocolate or strawberries with no mud (or they did I had a personal one which I spent a full hour admiring in that *why* can't I have my cake AND eat it kind of way, before scoffing – yum).



Saturday night also allowed the opportunity of seeing the historic 1934 Cowburn and Cowpar

working boat, Swallow, which was beautifully illuminated and open for visitors during the weekend.

After a late lunch on Sunday, our illustrious leader, Chris Morgan also thanked us and made sure we were all taken away. We left the dirty old town a little less so. Especially down the Ashted locks, Typhoo basin, Camp Hill and Garrison locks along the Grand Union. Everyone appeared to enjoy themselves and it is truly incredible how exciting a fence post can be when you triumphantly raise it above the waters of Digbeth, to haul to the bank. And who doesn't enjoy a good grapple?

Anyway, I have told this tale from my point of view, many more stories could be told from the half century of people who participated in this feat – and who will hopefully come back next year – as we still haven't found a *full* safe, so we'll just have to keep looking, won't we?

Francis Burrell

(**Images:** Alan Lines and Kev Maslin)

\* Fettle = Birmingham for food – it's not fettle, that's a Southern thing

# 31ST MAY/1ST JUNE 2014 (CHESTERFIELD)

\*An initiation into the world of wrg!\*

The dig on the chesterfield I must admit began with me feeling rather apprehensive. It was of course my first WRG dig, a taster if you like, before I head out on camps this summer.

Travelling up became a fairly harrowing journey, much more so than I originally thought after heading out. As I was driving up all the radio traffic seemed to want to talk about was the fact that there were big delays on the motorway just before Chesterfield, so off I went heading out cross country, with my Sat nav shouting at me to get back onto the motorway. The accommodation (you all probably know it very well) was great although the parking was a bit like doing a jigsaw. We did all fit in however and we waited for the arrival of Martin and Helena and the WRG van. What I must say (for anyone who hasn't don't many digs/camps before is that a comfy bed is essential. A thin roll up mat does not guarantee a good nights sleep.

Everyone was woken up on the Saturday morning by what can only be described as the noise from hell. Of course this was the accommodations fire alarm, made worse by the fact that nobody knew the code to turn it off, not

even the lady who had issued the key. George however came to the rescue miraculously plucking some numbers out of thin air to silence the racket. *Can I please remind everyone to read the toolbox talk for the WRG toaster. I know it sounds silly but it is much needed!!!*

Me and Ju then got to serving the breakfast which was slightly overcooked and cold by this point but everyone still ate up. George finished the mountain of sandwiches and we were good to go. Saturday on site started with a few glitches that were soon smoothed over. Due to the bad weather of the previous week the contractors hadn't been able to finish before we arrived so our machinery men had to wait around for a bit talking about dumpers and excavators (which I'm sure they didn't mind too much). What they needed to do was to create a crossing across the bund that people could walk across during the Chesterfield festival and the opening of the new bridge. The team began once they got their hands on the excavator after lunch.



On the other side of the site another team started block laying. The ground conditions made carting the blocks fairly difficult in wheel barrows but thankfully the dumper came to our rescue

and carried the blocks we needed down to where we were working. As I had never done any kind of Block laying previously Martin gave me a training session along with Rachel and Hamon who needed a few helpful reminders. Ju and Helena started mixing mortar in the one, very slow, cement mixer.



Block laying got underway and then it was time for lunch. Me and George then went on a site visit for a potential Reunion site for this coming November. The walk took a little longer than expected so we didn't return to site until gone half 3. Deciding that to begin work again was rather pointless me and George headed off to the kitchen to chop vegetables, peel potatoes and whip some cream. That night I was introduced to George's sig-

nature desert of Eton mess which the whole camp devoured.

The next day Ju and I were up again making breakfast. Thankfully everyone stayed well away from the toaster, just in case George's lucky guess had been more of an accident. We climbed into the van and headed for site where worked carried on similarly to the day before with lots more blocks being laid. I can't quite remember how many Martin calculated but I think it was around the 200 mark.

The machinery crew which consisted of Adrian, Alan, Peter, Ian and for part of it Hamon achieved what they wanted to do and moved many a dumper load of earth from one area to another. We packed up site, cleaned all of our tools and headed back to pack up the accommodation at around 3.

I really enjoyed the weekend so thank you to everyone for making my first dig a great one.

**Amber Jenkins**

(Images: Alan Lines)

## 22ND/23RD JUNE 2014 (MON AND BREC)

They know how to fill out a grant application in south Wales, that's for sure. Lottery money has pimped out the community centre at St Hilda's church north of Cwmbran, making it some of the best accommodation we've used. Heritage lottery funds have been hard at work on the canal too. I led a

tricky camp at the flight of derelict locks by Torfaen 4 years ago and work has since moved on apace. It's good to know that a difficult week wrestling with eels and pumps and bee stings likely made some small contribution to getting the funds required to really get things moving here.

Big, sweeping visible changes have occurred with more planned. An access road's been built, welfare facilities craned in, scaffolding and harris fencing round the locks suggests a busy, active site where work continues through the week. I can't fault the pointing work and the hedge laying's beautiful. They take unemployed youths from the surrounding area and train them up in construction NVQs. It's all being driven by a local called Heidi. *"They come in pretty rough and ready,"* says Heidi, *"it's fantastic to see the change in them."*

London WRG are here for the weekend on a joint dig with BITM. On Saturday morning I help put the breakfast things away. We're using BITM's kitchen kit. They've got all different kinds of Tupperware and fancy knife sheaths. Also, their tea towels don't look like they were purchased second hand from an animal shelter.

*"Gosh they haven't half got nice Tupperware,"* I tell Helena.

*"Can't we have nice Tupperware like that in our kit?"*

*"We don't need any,"* she tells me. *"We've got all those cracked margarine tubs."*

*"Some of their pans even have lids!"* I tell London. *"And not ones that look like someone reversed a van over them!"*

A guy from BITM who's vegan has brought his own hazelnut milk to drink whilst a lady who's visiting from Austria has kindly brought some hazelnut chocolate for the

group. Also, we've got a guy who's allergic to hazelnuts. Everyone thinks this situation is hilarious, apart from the guy who's allergic to hazelnuts.

David Miller tells everyone that if you're allergic to brazil nuts you shouldn't have sex with someone who's eaten brazil nuts. I'm going to quit work and write a murder mystery with this as the plot called "The Nuts of Death".

BITM don't have a red plastic box all covered in mud that they use for the brew kit. Instead they use a clean cardboard box that they replace on each dig. Martin helped them unload their van earlier and reckons that they have a separate crate for every item in their kit. We all think this is a bit excessive but I can't help but notice their teapot isn't as dented as ours.

Site's a blissful place to be in the hot weather. We're in raptures over the lottery-funded facilities. A water cooler! A loo that isn't a bucket! A plastic chair with only one leg missing! We tell Helena she can go into labour any time she likes: we can boil water in the site kettle and they've probably got clean towels somewhere. Her baby's not due for 2 months so I think we're safe but Martin Ludgate quite likes the idea of taking more people home from a dig than we started with. Head Office wrote a separate risk assessment for her: the insurance people weren't very happy but they said they couldn't do anything



because that would be Discrimination. My view is a pregnant woman who knows how to pace herself is a damn sight safer than a volunteer that's a bit too cavalier about their own safety. Also, I'm enjoying going at her pace.

BITM brought most of the tools so we didn't have to bother. Their van is ferociously well-organised. BITM don't just open the rear doors and throw all the tools in the back like we do: it's all carefully ordered and ratchet-strapped down and there's even a special shelf for wheelbarrows. Martin swears he saw a defibrillator in there.

"Give over," we tell him.

"No – really." Its confirmed - they keep it in a special Tupperware.

We marvel at this. BITM are the last people on earth that need a defibrillator. They're none of them overweight and they hardly drink and two of them are on a no-fat diet. They've even got a vegan. "Why don't we have a defibrillator in our kit?" someone asks. Martin explains that it's because we spanked all the funds on that brush cutter. If you have a heart

attack on a London WRG site at least you'll be able to do it on a neatly-trimmed verge.

London has a big tree stump to tackle and nothing makes us happier. It takes quite a team: one to work the tirfor and at least half a dozen to stand round giving advice. Helena and I give as much advice as we can but we've got a nice little job clearing a bywash under a spreading oak tree. We manage to make it last most of the day as it's nice and shady there.

Lunchtime brings a cruel shock when someone opens one of BITM's big Tupperware boxes. "*Urgh, what's this? Salad?!*" At first I'm accused – they still haven't forgotten that time last autumn when I tried to feed them spinach. But BITM all fall on it hungrily just like it was real food. London stand around in amazement, like Princess Margaret watching someone drinking from a finger bowl during a state banquet. Later Helena says to me incredulously "*We've never got through a whole cucumber on a dig before, let alone two*".

After lunch is over we continue working at a relaxed pace. Helena has a bit of a go at the tree roots with a mattock while the boys sit round and watch and I play with my phone until it's time to go back to the hall. St Hilda's community hall has done wonders with their big fat wedge of lottery money. There's a huge kitchen with a fancy oven and a shower and loads of bathrooms and plenty of space



for sleeping and a small second kitchen upstairs with loads of storage room for all BITM's Tupperware. To protect this magnificent local resource the community centre has a high-security system based on keycodes and keyfobs. We manage to lose the keyfob in Morrisons halfway through the first morning. Later I lock myself in a corridor and then the keyfob stops working completely so we can't get in to the accommodation at all. "*There's ALWAYS some shenanigans with the keys,*" I sigh to Martin Ludgate. He proposes to create a section in Navvies dedicated to mishaps with keys. "*We'll call it 'Keynotes',*" he says.

We can't use the kitchen Saturday evening because a male voice choir is having a concert. The plan is to get fish and chips and eat them in a local park. Martin Ludgate agrees to drive everyone to the park even though he was hoping to make a start on the two crates of beer he brought with him. We go a bit wrong four or five times on the way there and end up briefly in a lover's lane. A couple in a parked car looks a bit nervous to see a big van of grubby menfolk pull up looking urgent.

They aren't to know the van's full of the smell of hot chips and vinegar, and we're all starving. When we eventually get to the park it's lovely with the long evening shadows thrown by the bandstand and the distant green hills.

On Sunday morning we have the ingredients for a million different sandwich combinations. There are 4 different kinds of hummous but I've tried London on hummous before and won't be trying that again anytime soon. Instead I make leftover bacon and leftover sausage and leftover gammon sandwiches, and chicken and ham. There's so much chicken and ham that I make chicken and ham sandwiches, together I mean. Someone suggests making cold baked bean sandwiches but I pretend not to hear.

Sunday is even hotter than Saturday. It's so hot that at tea break our flapjack melts and turns back into porridge. Helena and I take things real slow. A local who's been driving a forklift truck round site all weekend comes over and

### Christmas present perhaps?

Getting tools and mortar around site was massively simplified by this lovely toy! Can LWRG have one??



has a chat with us. This culminates in a series of extravagant stories of injuries he's sustained through the years. He started working with chainsaws aged 14 but the worst he's done was slice his inside leg open from ankle to crotch. He had a friend, mind, who managed to cut his own legs off backwards. Chainsaw trousers are only protected at the front, see. Also he once fell out of a tree and broke both legs...

We potter about a bit in the morning repointing a wall whilst the boys finish off the tree stump but really it's too hot to do anything so Martin Ludgate and I take a stroll up the towpath to see the next tranche of work. Heidi's already

secured the next lump of funding and the next half dozen locks are lined up for restoration soon. It's a very positive end to a weekend, knowing our work is going to be carried on with a weight of funding and political impetus behind it. Normally we finish a dig knowing KESCRG will be there the next month, or there's a camp planned over the summer. Instead we hand over at the Mon and Brec knowing the work will continue the very next day. It's work that benefits the wider community and leaves a legacy of skills behind. Highly recommended for a working party if you get the chance – the accommodation's fantastic.

**Sophie Smith**

(Images: Alan Lines)

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