

LWRG NEWS



Issue 85: January 2019

Editors Note

We went from the last issue when feeling a bit skint having decided we needed to blow the budget on a new tirror to suddenly being overwhelmed by generosity. Money making plans were afoot including Martin directing funds from his quiz mastering and a donation from the Canalway Cavalcade work camp of a few pennies saved on food due to the large LWRG presence at the event so we hoped our funds may stretch to replacing PPE of which we were running short. Then we had an anonymous benefactor who donated £500 towards our new tirror! This was just in the nick of time as the Burco had also had it and refused to relight even after a service from Bungle. London IWA branch came to the rescue and donated £500 to cover the cost of us being nourished, refreshed and hydrated enough to regenerate some canals. And we suddenly felt very rich and even offered Sophie some cash to replace some pots and pans. So a really big thank-you to our anonymous donor and to the IWA for keeping us afloat. I think this photo of the adoring attitude we have towards our brew shows the reverence in which we hold you. If you keep reading, photograph of the new tirror in action will appear soon too!

Fran Burrell



Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here to give praise to our new Burco..... The Burco making its first cup of tea on the Buckingham Arm. Photo credit Tim and words to Paul.

Wilts&Berks Steppingstone(s) Bridge 30th June/1st July

Leader: Tim Lewis

Far be it from LWRG News, representing the responsible side of waterways journalism, to make fun of other people's misprints. Not least because these kind of things have a habit of coming home to roost. But I couldn't help feeling, given that we were returning to Steppingstone(s) Bridge (nobody seems sure about the exact name) which we last worked on over a decade ago and still wasn't finished, that one could be forgiven for being a little sceptical about its prospects – and that it was perhaps appropriate that the health & safety file which had been put together for our weekend mentioned that “anti-septic wipes” were available”...

Following the usual departure from London Waterloo, the van contingent confounded any sceptics by arriving *before sunset* (for the second time running!) at the accommodation. This was the excellent Bourton Club, complete with a bar which was open and serving the popular (with us anyway) 'Bob' ale as also found in the Ship at Brimscombe, and not only that but we had our own sleeping and eating room separate from the bar room. Rumours that the bar would “stay open until 1am or when the fat bloke leaves” proved unfounded, but rumours

that Bungle was turning up in a van to deliver some kit to us turned out to be true.



Steppingstones Bridge at the beginning of the weekend. Photo: Tim Lewis

Sorry to raise the subject of typographic errata again, but in this case we were informed that Bungle was bringing a “genie”. We wondered if it would be in a bottle or an Aladdin type magic lamp, but when he rolled up in another WRG van he actually produced a generator, which we would need to run the mixer and electric drill – plus lots of cables and some lengths of twisty stainless steel tie-rod (see later). Pausing briefly for a discussion of what type of Tirfor winch we were going to buy (see last issue of LWRG News, and probably elsewhere in this one too), he then departed.

By the time we went to bed our numbers had reached double figures, although depleted just a tiny bit by our troglodyte physician having decided to instead spend the weekend exploring a cave which featured a tidal sump, and Helena having come down with enough different ailments that celebrating her wedding anniversary on a London WRG dig didn't seem a terribly clever idea. Some of us weren't sure that it was to begin with, but apparently her

husband had taken the kids away to celebrate it in another country...

Tim, meanwhile, was celebrating another recent personal milestone with perhaps not quite the same enthusiasm, although I'm sure he'll appreciate the free bus pass...



Alan preparing for re-pointing. Photo: Tim Lewis

Paul as usual was up at dawn (which is far too early at this time of year) and produced his usual excellent breakfast, before we piled into the van and headed for the worksite. This turned out to be a lot further down a long and overgrown bridleway than we'd remembered – probably because the last time we were there, we were all over a decade younger and take that sort of route march (carrying a load of kit) in our stride – so we cheated and reversed the van very carefully all the way to site.



Ian and Paul laying coping stones. Photo: Tim Lewis

This was a farm / bridleway bridge in the middle of the countryside which had been completely rebuilt from what had been two surviving lumps of bridge abutments (rather like the bridge on the Buckingham Arm is now, but not in quite such good condition). But one of the completed parapet walls had never had its coping stones added, and that was our main task for the weekend. To add to the interest of the job, the stones supplied weren't the originals, they were much too long to cope (sorry!) with the curves in the parapet wall, and we didn't really know if there were enough of them.



John splitting a coping stone to fit. Photo: Tim Lewis

Oh, and the stones, the mortar making materials, and (as we discovered) an elderly WRG pump were all concealed in the luxuriant growth of vegetation. So while one team found them, dug them out, measured them, calculated how many it would take, marked them

out for cutting into two or three with the bricksaw and started planning how to fit them, another team set about uncovering mortar-making supplies from the undergrowth. Oh, and we also uncovered a device looking suspiciously like a rocket-launcher, leading to the inevitable jokes about 'mortar'.



I don't know what it is but do not recommend you try to use this as a rocket launcher. Ed. Photo: Tim Lewis

Meanwhile Alan and myself dealt with two cracks which had opened up in the parapet walls (probably as a result of the ground settling since the arch was rebuilt) by raking out the cracked mortar joints and cutting out the two bricks which had broken.

Morning tea break approached, and disaster struck – the Burco (on which Bungle had replaced the thermocouple following problems on the previous dig) once again failed to light! We were left wondering if actually a genie might have been more use to work some magic on it, but settled instead for the genny. An electric kettle was

fetched, and after an animated discussion concerning the difference between pure resistive and combined resistive and inductive loads which reminded me of Physics A-level 40 years ago (and an alternative suggestion of hooking up a couple of crocodile clips to the new overhead wires on the nearby Great Western main line railway), a brew was produced. The genny and cables didn't seem to get significantly hotter than the tea, so we deemed it successful.

I should point out (in between taking the mick out of the odd typo) that actually the Project plan / Task plan / Risk assessment paperwork produced for us by Mikk at Head Office was spot on, and (apart from the need for a brief discussion on the mortar mix) told us all we needed to know. So once we'd sorted out the mix, we could start re-pointing the crack on the side of the bridge that we weren't laying copers on, and putting the first couple of copers on the side that we were.



Drilling for vertical ties. Photo: Tim Lewis

One added complication was that to make sure the coping stones were secured against vandals removing them, we needed to pin them to each other and to the top of the brickwork – hence the stainless steel tie rods which Bungle had delivered, and which also needed to be cut to length.

Somebody decided that we needed to think about a system for putting the tie rods and stones together and getting them onto the wall and all securely mortared together with no gaps. It was lunchtime by now, so we decided that the lunchtime activity would be ‘thinking’.

In fact, we spent lunchtime on a wide-ranging discussion covering every subject from the ongoing national lettuce shortage which has been troubling the British Leafy Salad Growers Association (yes, really!) to how many spiders’ legs there are in an average tuna sandwich. I guess this was just ‘displacement activity to avoid having to cogitate on how to drill the copers.



Pete using a template to drill for ties. Photo: Tim Lewis

Anyway soon after lunch the team had worked out a system that used wooden templates to mark out where to drill the tie rod holes in the ends of the stones so they matched up with each other, and in the bottom of the stones and the top of the wall so they also matched up with each other. All the holes were then filled with grout, the tie rods inserted, and the whole lot put together on a bed of mortar on the wall, levelled with a rubber mallet, and the mortar joints then pointed up. By afternoon tea break two stones had been laid, and another four by the end of the day.

Meanwhile on the other parapet I finished repairing the crack by replacing the one broken brick that had needed to be cut out, bringing my personal tally of bricks laid in the first half of 2018 to a grand total of... one. I had high hopes of at least doubling this during the second half of the year.



Pete lighting barbecue. Photo: Martin Ludgate

Back at the accommodation, we had decided to take advantage of the good weather, on-site bar and lack of vegetarians to have a barbecue. Pete did the cooking, and he must have done a good job because at least one of the locals in the bar tried to scrounge some. My notes also say ‘Tiramisu’ and ‘World Cup’ – I guess he must be

one of those South American footballers...

Sunday also began with breakfast cooked by Paul – and Tim memorably asking “Is there any lettuce?” This was followed by a request by Tim for tomatoes, leading to speculation that on hitting his landmark birthday he’d decided to turn over a new (lettuce) leaf. And this in turn led to a discussion on whether he’d get a free LWRG minibus pass (and when will we get an Oyster card reader for the minibus), and whether we should set up a system where people can pay for their food by waving their iPhones at the dig leader rather than old-fashioned cash...



Inka re-pointing. Photo: Tim Lewis

Back on site, the coping stone team had got a good system going and managed to put on another four stones by tea break, and a further six by lunchtime. Meanwhile (this being 1st July) I managed to match my total for the first half of the year by laying another one

brick, while patching up the crack on the second parapet wall.

The remaining five coping stones went on in time for an afternoon tea break, an end of dig photo of our volunteers with our completed wall, a tidy up and back to the accommodation. Thank you to everyone for a job well done, to Paul and Pete for helping with the catering, Tim for leading and sorting out the paperwork with Mikk, Bungle for sorting out various kit and materials (and especially for taking away our Burco to have another go at fixing it), to the Canal Trust for support (even though the usual contact had crocked himself – see below), and the Bourton Club for providing excellent accommodation, and to whoever sorted the hot sunny weather.

It’s been really good to go back to the W&B for the first time for ages and see (and help with) some real progress. It’s a project where things seem to be looking up after a bit of a quiet time – lots of things are happening at various sites along the route including in Swindon, near Melksham, south of Pewsham, at Lacock, and Studley Grange near Wootton Bassett. Clearly somebody’s got the “anti-septic wipes” working...



Paul and Adrian laying the last coping stone. Photo: Tim Lewis



Paul cleaning the old logo. Photo: Martin Ludgate

PS dig leader Tim received the following message from Alan Norris from Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, which we'd like to share with you all:

"Hi Tim, thank you for the photo. I managed to hobble over the field this afternoon to have a look. A bit of a struggle and very hot but well worth it!

Excellent job, please thank all of your team for their sterling efforts. I hope they all enjoyed their weekend, and thank you for organizing it all.
Alan Norris"

Martin Ludgate

Training Weekend 23/24th June

This wasn't a London WRG weekend, it was a centrally organised WRG weekend aimed at providing volunteers from WRG, canal societies and anyone else with the skills and training that they need for the canal restoration projects they're likely to be working

on. But as you can see from the pictures a fair number of London WRG regulars took part, either instructing or being taught.



Emma trains a Cotswolds Canals Trust Volunteer. Photo: Martin Ludgate

Emma showed us how to use a CAT scanner, which is nothing to do with feline quadrupeds and everything to do with making sure you don't go through a high voltage cable or a water main when you start digging.



Alan and Nigel teaching Inka and Darren to bricklay on the non-professional course. Photo: Martin Ludgate

Several of us LWRG folks (including Inka and myself) learned how to put up system scaffolding.



Martin learning about system scaffolding (hope he can do tube and clip Ed.). Photo: Alex Melson

Fran spent the whole weekend on the advanced bricklaying course, with professional instruction and some 'real' work on Weymoor Bridge on the Sunday, and Nigel managed to be both a trainer and a trainee, leading the beginners' bricklaying course and being given a refresher on levels by Emma. There was also training on vans, trailers, excavators and dumpers, and there's every chance that it will

be repeated next summer. Our thanks to Ali 'Womble' Bottomley for masterminding the weekend, supported by IWA / WRG head office staff, to all the volunteer instructors, to Cotswold Canals Trust for providing us with a site, and to the excellent catering team for keeping us fed.

Martin Ludgate



Also from this weekend a look back to a LWRG dig February 2016..... Photo: Martin Ludgate



.....to the Cotswolds Canal Trust trip boat on the restored canal in Stroud in June 2018. Photo: Martin Ludgate

Wey & Arun

1st/2nd

September

Leader: Paul Ireson

With the allocation of the leaders for the summer / autumn digs decided earlier in the year, I was nominated to lead the Wey & Arun which fell one week after the festival of water. Therefore numbers were severely limited with only four of us for Saturday (I presume Paul means that numbers were limited due to it having been the festival of Water, rather than that no-one wanted to come to HIS dig – ed.). Emma was on her way home to Bristol and was joined by Penny, Tim and myself. Martin L & Adrian S were due to join us on Sunday.

As I had all the kit and the normal van was away on the camp season circuit, the naked van was to be our means of transport. I planned to do the shopping in the afternoon and drive during the rush hour to ensure I met Emma at the earliest time. However, I had an afternoon nap and ended up having to find a supermarket in Guildford. After several fruitless attempts (Did they only have vegetables, grains, meat??? Ed.), I finished up at the local Waitrose which meant it took longer than expected to find what I wanted. I eventually met Emma in the pub who had positioned herself on the table closest to the fireplace. The others soon joined us and after a few more drinks we vacated to the accommodation where we set

up our beds in the four corners of the room.



Perforated pipe being laid to make a drain.
Photo: Tim Lewis

We arrived on site and Dave, who knew we were short of numbers, had persuaded a few locals to join us to complete the various tasks required to meet the overall objective of the weekend. This was to prepare the site and slipway ready for the official opening a few weeks later. One of the tasks was to construct a wooden fence up on the top of the slope above the slipway, while another task was to tidy up the pre-dug ditch and make it into a French drain. A group of the locals set about measuring and then digging the holes for the posts which were to hold up the gates at the top of the slipway. Penny kept the locals she was working with in line for the fence construction. Tim, Emma and myself first cleared up the drain and then laid the pipe into the bottom of it.



The drain was topped with hardcore and shingle.
Photo: Tim Lewis

Dave brought the stone to cover it in the bucket of the telehandler and we covered the pipe and replaced a soil covering. The locals had completed the gate post holes, inserted the posts and cemented them in. Upon returning to the accommodation we were joined by Martin and the evening meal of pie & mash followed by an individual fruit sponge with custard was served.

So on Sunday when we arrived at site, Adrian was there setting up the telehandler for the tasks today. Martin's task was to finish off a curving wall on the edge of the slipway, while Penny, Emma and Tim were detailed to do some landscaping of the slope. I was tasked to help Dave put in the four fence posts which lead down from the top of the slope to the gates. When this was completed we then hung the gates on the posts and they fitted first time.

After tea break we all cleared the area around the slipway ready for the main event of the day, so while the rest of us took our lunch, Adrian and Dave prepared to strop up the boat and move it to the top of the slipway ready for its launch into the canal. We then laid out some round wooden posts to act as rollers and attached tie lines so we could keep the boat straight and in line with the slipway. We also moved the floating pontoon which was previously occupying the slipway and Martin took this opportunity to get some photos from the pontoon. We lowered the boat on to the rollers and the boat rolled into the canal. Unfortunately the engine mounting grounded before the boat was fully afloat. Martin found out that even small boat launches can

cause unexpected circumstances when he found himself afloat in the middle of the canal on the pontoon. Emma took the opportunity to claim to be the first boater from the slipway when we towed the boat around to the edge of the jetties besides the slipway. We then launched a second craft which was a work platform punt but it was soon found to have a leak and was hastily strapped to the slipway to prevent it sinking.

A big thank you to all who attended in making this a very successful dig despite the small numbers.

Paul Ireson

Amazingly the smallest dig of the issue has produced the greatest offering of dig reports – please note the example and send your reports in! Though in some easily copied and pasted format please – ed.

St Neots to Bristol via the Long Way Round

Shattered after a week at the Festival of Water in St. Neots, I decided that with tent, holdall and large rucksack there was nothing like an indirect route home via a couple more canals. First a pit stop at the Basingstoke Canal for some laundry, and then onto the Wey and Arun. I found the pub and lay in wait for arriving WRGies. A small but select quartet made our way back to Womersley Hall where we spread ourselves out in luxury. Toast was consumed and Tim DID NOT set the fire alarm off; that was saved for morning wake up call.

Dave Evans had enlisted some locals to beef up our number. Our

tasks at the slipway were to erect a fence along the top of mound and down slope; concrete in two gate posts; install a French drain at bottom of the embankment and landscape the lower slope. Meanwhile ticketed dumper and telehandler drivers moved materials in and out of the way! Under the whip of Dave we cracked on. Tim did a lot of driving. I do not recall any untoward incidents.



Raking over the topsoil and completed fence in the background. Photo: Tim Lewis

Saturday evening Martin joined us. He had also travelled the long way round via Brimscombe Port and Tom's Farm. For the sake of the budget it was a good job we were a small group; as due to leaving all the dig paperwork and info at home a stressed Paul could only find a Waitrose for food supplies. After a well cooked tea, I enticed Penny on a short geocaching walk; the boys visited the pub.

Sunday we were joined on site by Adrian Sturgess who covered many miles in the telehandler, delivering soil for Penny and I to rake over the slope. And hide all evidence of the beautiful French drain we had installed.

The highlight of the weekend was launching the two trip boats onto the cut.



Launching the trip boat from the new slipway. Photo: Tim Lewis

A big shove and Martin, capturing the moment on film, nearly went swimming. All in all despite low numbers we worked and played hard and I think Dave Evans was pleased (as he could be!) with the weekends results.



The opening of the slipway. Photo: Dave Evans of WACT

Buckingham Arm 22/23rd September

Arriving at the cricket club I had forgotten how small it looked as we shifted furniture to make space to sleep. Perhaps it was with the eyes without the benefit of having had a drink as the bar was mysteriously closed. So we walked to Stoke Bruerne where the early

contingent had taken over one of the bars in The Boat Inn. Luckily we all managed to squeeze into the club to sleep although beds needed to be moved to make space for the tables at breakfast time. Paul cooked us a delicious breakfast and we finally managed to get everyone outside to drive to site which is a short distance away by road or around half a days boating.



Walking to site along the Buckingham Arm from Cosgrove Lock. Photo: Tim Lewis

Arriving at Cosgrove lock we met Terry and other Buckingham Canal Society volunteers for the safety briefing before climbing over the lockgates for the walk to site. The focus of the weekend was preparation for bridge construction. This involved moving materials and bricklaying. The materials included blocks, bricks, concrete posts, sand and sundries. The bricks were moved around site by wheelbarrow but most of the remainder had to be transported from the BCS storage area. Adrian immediately jumped into the large excavator, Pete took what I can only describe as an off-road forklift, Steve and Ian R. grabbed a dumper each and Paul drove the roller down to site. As it was rather muddy, I think he wonders why he did this and refused to drive it back which was probably the best decision. Our other machinery operatives who drove dumpers and the smaller

excavator during the weekend were the two Daves and Inka who using her newly acquired ticket from the training weekend, riddled with the best of them.

Major project two was to build bridge supports. Essentially the bridge has been designed to incorporate some of the old stonework so this heritage is not lost, but to widen the bridge to allow it to be useable by modern farm machinery. What we were building will not be seen by anyone walking the towpath or boating through but can affect how level the final bridge will be as we were to construct two brick walls on some concrete pads constructed by a previous weekend group upon which metal supports will be placed, with concrete posts lengthways and all filled in with some brick facing to be added later. Martin had to forgo the WRG meeting to be in charge of the core bricklaying team of Darren, Emma N, Rachel, Sam and Ian S. This may sound like a lot of people around a wall but actually just about everyone laid a brick, poked mortar into brick-holes, moved some bricks or did some brick related activity. Even Adrian laid some bricks! We estimated that in fact around 1260 bricks were laid over the weekend to construct one support and the first course of the second. As these were engineering bricks, this of course, required a LOT of mortar. Tim was keen to get started on this, but appeared to be supplanted by BCS volunteers at points, but with so many bricklayers, it's understandable that the mortar mixer may get tired! Even if the bricklayers seemed remarkably

content with the mortar consistency.

Another notable fact about this dig was the new Burco! After the demise of the old one we were incredibly sad, and of course, very thirsty. North London branch of the IWA heeded Tim's call that we couldn't restore any canals without tea and donated £500 for a new one, for which we must thank them very much. It is even bigger and better than the old one – so much so that Martin needed to build an extension to our box for it. It also has a push fit regulator though now we are worried about what we'll do next time we need a spanner and there isn't one always in a handy place in the Burco box. It was also rather satisfying to not have to sieve the last mouthful of tea in a virgin Burco – it's a shame it will unlikely stay so sparkling forever! Saturday night meal was a delicious pie with mash and vegetables cooked by Emma G. She then made something that I can honestly say I've never eaten before – a black forest trifle! It was amazing. Pete had been tasked with whipping the cream which we all know is not an easy and never as quick as you think it will be job and the rest of us were glad we hadn't been tasked with it. To reward himself he tried to lick the whisk clean but as Barry pointed out we hadn't done the whisk assessment for this. Getting your tongue caught between two metal whisk blades is certainly a risk though it didn't hurt enough to stop him having his share of the delicious trifle.



Terry admiring the new bridge support. Photo credit: Tim Lewis

Thank-you to everyone who came and worked so hard whether in the kitchen, bricklaying, the small scrub bashing team, moving materials, making tea and Rachel even brought us some chocolates! It was a great weekend and we got a lot done. So much so that a local offered us a job of constructing his patio – he reckons we'll get it done in half an hour!

Fran Burrell

Lichfield

13/14th

October

Leader: Pete Fleming

London WRG might not have worked on the Lichfield Canal since May 2017 (or worked at all on the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust's current worksite at Fossey Heath) but for volunteers Pete, Emma, Inka, John and myself it was a continuation of work from our summer camp. And it was also the prelude to what was hoped would be a major blitz on this site during November's annual

WRG Reunion / Bonfire Bash (which for once was looking like it would – weather permitting – be working on bricklaying and towpath work in November, and no actual bonfires at all!) We were also returning to our summer canal camp accommodation at the friendly Lichfield Cruising Club – the one with the Reasonably Priced Bar.



Work on the Lichfield. Photo credit: Martin Ludgate



Photo: Tim Lewis

We availed ourselves of this facility on Friday night after our journeys from various parts of the country, found various places (including a cupboard and a pool table) to set up our beds, and discussed whether Saturday's weather was likely to be suitable for the two main jobs – carrying on bricklaying on the towpath wall, and surfacing the towpath behind a completed length of wall.

The good news was that the weather was fine, and on getting to site we discovered that the Trust's volunteers had continued our work from the camp, extending the wall foundations and adding a lot of the copings (made of bricks on edge and on end) on top of what we'd done on the camp.

While some folks started bricklaying, we revived another feature of the summer camp – Emma and her notebook – and took copious levels all the way along the completed and part-built lengths of the wall to make sure it wasn't drifting upwards / downwards, and correct any places where it was. Meanwhile a large stock of clean bricks was rapidly produced by the St Helen's Brick Cleaning Team (Janet and Carol) while the locals were prevailed upon to fetch a couple of pallets of the concrete blocks which form the bottom section of the towpath wall, the bit that won't be seen when the canal's got water in it. I forget what bizarre combination of vehicles they used to collect them from the builders' yard... a dumper pushing a trailer?

Oh, and Tim arrived just in time for lunch.

On the off-chance that the weather might turn nastier on the Sunday, we concentrated on building up 'pillars' to the full height of the wall (other than copings) at various intervals along the length, so that come the Reunion it would be easy to string a line between them and get lots of bricklayers working straight away. We also got some concrete blocks laid, giving us a

new section to start laying bricks on at the Reunion. Well, that's the plan.

Being a typical self-absorbed brickie I didn't actually notice what else was going on around us (apart from the sterling work on brick-cleaning, mortar mixing and barrowing), but I think it involved a digger and a dumper and probably a Wacker plate too. Pete will know.



Another fine mess, George! Photo credit: Tim Lewis

Back at the accommodation, our cook George (who last time we were at Lichfield had excelled himself by turning up having bought the shopping for the entire weekend and then bugging off again – and was duly awarded the LWRG catering prize) was on form again, with his trademark Eton Mess pudding once again providing the opportunity for “I see you’ve made a mess again George” comments. At some point in the evening we were plunged into near-darkness by an almost-power-cut, so a few of us made for the Plough Inn, only to find that

although it had been spared the near-power-cut, the entire pub had been booked for a wedding party. Unsure whether we’d be able to bluff our way in, even though we’d changed out of our site clothes, we returned to the Reasonably Priced Bar for the rest of the evening.



Drinking requires no electricity. Photo: Tim Lewis

On Sunday we awoke to a steady downpour outside. It wasn't any better once we'd got to site, so there was no question of doing any bricklaying or blocklaying. Some fine surface material was delivered to a part-completed section of towpath by barrow and dumper, but attempts to compact it with Wacker plates of various sizes were in danger of turning it into a muddy morass. The only other job we could usefully do was backfilling behind another section of completed wall, so once that was done we packed up and went back to the Cruising Club for lunch.

Unfortunately we'd been told that a birthday party was taking place in the main room, so we had our sarnies in an upstairs room while discussing whether we dared gate-crash the party to retrieve our catering gear and pack the van. Surprisingly we couldn't hear any sounds of 'Happy birthday' being sung, or of hyperactive 7-year-olds careering around having stuffed

themselves with cake and orange squash... eventually we sneaked in and realised that people aged over 70 have birthdays too...

An early pack-up and departure meant that at least the London contingent got home before dark. And despite not getting so much done on Sunday, we left things in a good state for continuing work.

So what will happen at the (non-) Bonfire Bash? Will all our preparation on Saturday pay off, allowing the towpath project to leap forward? Will the Lichfield Trust's volunteers have finished all the work in the meantime and left us nothing to do? Will it hose down rain again all weekend? Will a black hole open up and deposit the entire Lichfield Canal on the far side of Neptune? Will Tim arrive in time for Lunch? Don't miss next month's thrilling instalment! PS I can't help thinking that one of the waterways magazines could run a series of interviews with famous waterways personalities in the Lichfield Cruising Club. They could call it "Star in a Reasonably Priced Bar".

Martin Ludgate

Reunion 3/4th November

At the end of my previous report, I left you all with a cliff-hanger ending: would all our preparation on the October London WRG Lichfield dig have paid off? Or would the rain put paid to all our plans?

Well, as we converged on Lichfield on the Friday evening the forecast was looking exactly the same as two weeks earlier: fingers crossed that it would be fine on Saturday, but not much hope for Sunday. And that mattered quite a lot, because unlike the usual big scrub-bash where the only problem if it rained would be getting the bonfires lit, this time we were hoping to lay a load more concrete blocks and bricks on the towpath wall, as well as some backfilling and towpath surfacing work – indeed, it was rumoured that this was going to be a non-bonfire Bonfire Bash.



Towpath wall construction. Photo: Martin Ludgate

We weren't staying in the boat club with the Reasonably Priced Bar this time, but in the larger but thoroughly labyrinthine (I'll swear someone moved the Gents' bogs at least twice during the weekend) Brownhills Community Centre. However, it had gained its own very reasonably priced real ale supplies (thanks Moose for sorting it out!) so acquaintances were renewed over a few glasses.

Leader Bex and WRG supremo Mike had sorted out four jobs – wall building, backfilling, hedge-laying and... yes... ta-daaa! SCRUB-BASHING. So much for no bonfires! So at some point between late Friday and Saturday morning we signed our names on the job

sheets, come 9am the weather seemed to be fine, and we all headed for site in the hope of working on all of the jobs.

I was on the wall job, with Pete in charge and (once again) something of a reunion of the summer camp, with Emma, John and Inka, but one thing was missing...

Disaster! Emma's famous notebook (see October dig report) hadn't survived the washout on the Sunday of the last dig. But she'd bought a new one, and we soon had the level set up and were checking levels ready to start bricklaying. And while the Lichfield locals had laid a fair number of bricks since we'd been there last, they'd also put down some more foundations, laid the first course of concrete blocks on a long length of existing foundation, and generally left us in a good position to do lots of the blockwork that forms the bottom half of the wall. Meanwhile a quick walk up to the far end of site while waiting for a mortar mix (not that I'm one to complain!) confirmed that not only was there scrub clearance and brushcutting going on around Fossey Lane Lock, there were indeed some actual bonfires burning!

By lunchtime some very good progress had been made with all the tasks – and the same appears to have been the case in the afternoon, although I was one of a number who had to leave for the WRG meeting (to plan summer 2019's canal camps, among other things) which was taking place back at the accommodation.

In due course the rest of the teams returned from site, just as we'd put

the first draft of the camps programme together, and on the flimsiest of justifications (something to do with a Facebook anniversary, if my memory serves me right), Mk2 proposed that we should visit a new micropub over the road. Fortunately it turned out to be quite a large micropub, as rather a lot of us ended up there, having the usual random discussions covering subjects including whether you could actually have a large micropub, or whether it was like a wide-beam narrowboat. Oh, and it was serving a 'black IPA', which given that the 'P' in 'IPA' stands for 'pale', seems like another such contradiction.



Adrian and Paul making a towpath. Photo: Martin Ludgate

Returning for some delicious food (thanks Jude, Eli and the cooking crew) there was more beer from Moose's barrels, another trip to the pub, and of course the real reason for having the WRG meeting on the Saturday afternoon – so that the folks planning the camps can nobble people to lead them after they've had a couple of beers. (In case you're wondering, the first week on the Grantham is the one to book for!)

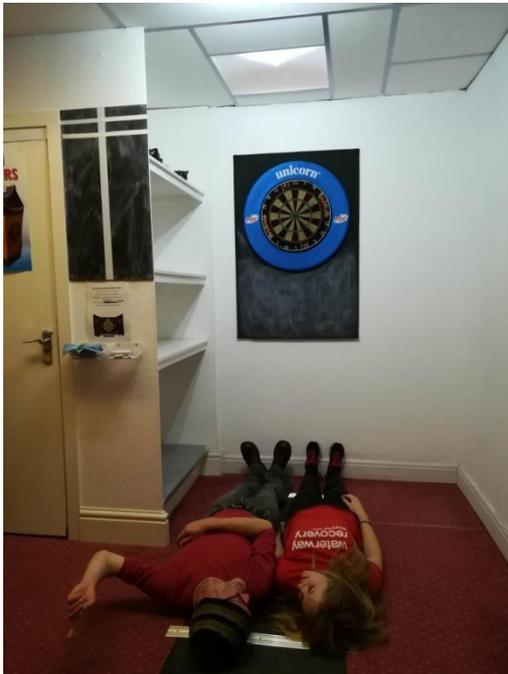
Come Sunday morning and it was clear that something was different from the October dig. It wasn't raining! In fact we got an entire morning's uninterrupted work done

(it was always planned to be a half day to allow time for the massive sort-out of kit at the end), and made some impressive progress on the wall and backfilling. You can tell you're doing well when someone calls tea-break, you put down your trowel, and you head off in completely the wrong direction for the Burco, because the wall's moved on 50 yards since yesterday's tea-break.

Meanwhile the scrub-bashing site was left not just cleared but manicured, with everything burnt on the bonfires.

Oh, and Tim arrived just in time for lunch.

Anyway we seem to have demonstrated beyond question that you can't actually have a non-bonfire bonfire bash, any more than a large micropub, a black IPA or a wide-beam narrowboat...



As for this, well who knows what Mk2 and Emma are doing. Photo: Martin Ludgate

COTSWOLDS

17th/19th

November

Leader: Inka Ro



The comedy boat is propelled using a spade which also acts as rudder, pole and stick to help you get in and out. Photo: Tim Lewis

Luckily John Pontefract had a plan. Essentially we needed to cut things down and burn them. So we did that. We used a boat to move logs on the canal and retrieved wood to burn or make log piles. We were surrounded by creatures – cows, sheep and swans anyway. The day was interspersed with the lengthy walk to the Burco for tea and cake.

The brush cutter whirred and access to the problem trees was secured. The area surrounding the fuel line that crosses the canal here was also uncovered with brushcutters and hand tools. I had a moment of disbelief when I read it was 'Catholic protected' but in fact the sign says it is cathode protected. Just as well I suppose. The whirring was increased by those with chainsaws cutting the larger overhanging branches from the edge of the canal. These were separated into logs to be piled up

and smaller branches to be burned. The felled limbs were dragged across the canal on a pulley like system as bonfires were only on the towpath side.

After a pleasant days end of bonfire watching and the toasting of marshmallows on pitchforks we returned to Brimscombe Port.

Martin D made us a stew followed by a rather special apple Frangipane apple tart that was consumed in its entirety before we visited the Ship Inn.

Sunday was pretty much the same but we packed up site just before the sun had time to set, looking forward to continuing our work in two weeks time during the Christmas party!

Fran Burrell

LWRG/KESCRG XMAS PARTY COTSWOLDS 1st/2nd December

Leader: Tim Lewis

It was LWRGs turn to organise site. Luckily John Pontefract had a plan. Essentially we needed to cut things down and burn them. So we did that. We used a boat to move logs on the canal and retrieved wood to burn or make log piles. We were surrounded by creatures – cows, sheep and swans anyway. The day was interspersed with the lengthy walk to the Burco for tea and cake.

The brush cutter whirred and access to the problem trees was secured. The whirring was increased by those with chainsaws cutting the larger overhanging branches from the edge of the canal. These were separated into logs to be piled up and smaller branches to be burned.



End of day fire watching. Photo: Tim Lewis

There were a few differences between this dig and the one of two weeks ago that extended beyond the increased numbers due to it being our joint Christmas dig. For one thing, Helen was mainly wearing other peoples' clothes.



As the damp ones were our seasoned boaters we are not entirely sure how badly it could go wrong. Photo: Tim Lewis

We also found a lot of mistletoe which seemed rather apt. Some people may have been more pleased with the find than others.



Helen and Martin with some of the mistletoe.
Photo: Tim Lewis

The mistletoe was donated to the Cotswolds Canal Trust Shop for sale after we forgot to bring it in to add to the decorations of Brimscombe Port. This did not detract from the very festive tables created by the Williamson children



The Christmas meal. Photo: Tim Lewis

Because of course the work on site was only part of the main event for the weekend: our annual Christmas party! As well as chocolate coins hidden among the tinsel of the table decorations, we were rather pleased to discover there were also bottles of real champagne!



Rachel and Fran enjoying the change from cider and real ale to the French wine. It had an acceptable bouquet or something. Photo: Martin Ludgate

We had a three course meal including Christmas dinner. I'm not sure what the exact definition of trimmings is but there was a lot of them.



Mick, Anne and Mk2 serving the Christmas Dinner. Photo: Tim Lewis

And despite feeling very full, everyone coped admirably with the fiendish quiz devised by Martin on the theme of food and drink. This included an edible round; the cheese round, and a drinkable round; the wine round. Some people whined more than others. Wine doesn't appeal to everyone. The fancy dress entrants included the portrayal of a famous chef, an

aflame birthday cake, and the winners or family entry of roast lamb.



Dresser-uppers at the LWRG/KESCRG Christmas party. Liz is Grey –V in case you were wondering. Photo: Tim Lewis

LWRG Tirfor

The London WRG tirfor was first used at our Cotswolds dig in November by the tirfor King, John Hawkins. We are very grateful to Pete Fleming for sourcing the tirfor, purchasing and even painting in red and white. And of course, many thanks to our anonymous donor.



Photo credit: Martin Ludgate

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Caption Competition



Photo credit: Martin Ludgate

"I know my place, I look up to them both, but I don't look up to him, as much as I look up to him....."
George Bungle Eycott

Send in your captions for this edition's picture to the email address in the contacts above!



Photo credit: Martin Ludgate

Date	Site	Leader
9/10th February	Shrewsbury & Newport	Tim Lewis
9/10th March	Wey & Arun	Tim Lewis
30th/31st March	BCN Clean Up	Central Office
11/12th May	Buckingham Arm	Fran Burrell
18th May	Leaders Training	Central Office
1st/2nd June	Cromford	George Rogers
22nd/23rd June	Training weekend	Central Office

London WRG socials – every Tuesday 10 days before a dig! (Apart from when it isn't)



October 2018. Photo: Tim Lewis



July 2017. Photo: Tim Lewis



Post Canal Museum Social. Photo: Tim Lewis



January 2019. Photo credit: unknown!

We hope to see you one Tuesday evening at the Rose & Crown, 47 Colombo Street, Southwark, or on a dig soon!