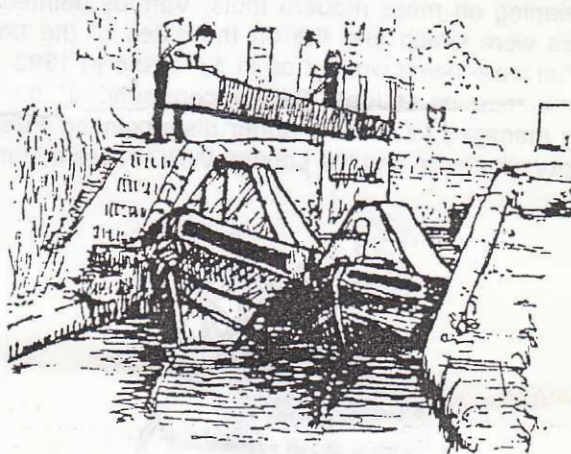


# Come Boating with London WRG

Your opportunity to come for a midsummer (June 30th) night's trip on the Regent's Canal.

Our boat will be Water Buffalo, a broad beam cruiser run by the London Waterbus Co. We will cruise from Little Venice (departing 19:30) to Camden, possibly taking in the Paddington Arm, and a trip to Port-a-Bella Dock. The trip will take around three hours. We will provide sandwiches/snacks, but please bring a bottle.

The boat we are using will look nothing at all like those in the illustration. At least one of the boatmen (the Steward) will, however look very much like Winnie.



Please send this form, with £5 per person, to Lesley (address over) as soon as you can. There are a limited number of places

available. We shall meet in the Warwick Castle, Warwick Place, London W9 at about 19:00 for a swift pre-trip drink.

Please put your name and address below and return this form to Lesley as soon as possible

I would like to come boating on 30th June 1993      yes     

I would rather not, thanks.      no

## Canalway Cavalcade disaster...

1st-3rd May

Regular readers of this column will know that every year at London IWA's Canalway Cavalcade rally at Little Venice London WRG enters a decorated boat in the pageant and always seems to come second, third or "highly Commended" (i.e. last) in the "Best decorated boat" competition. For this achievement we receive a bottle of plonk which is drunk (as are most of the crew) on the boat's return journey to its mooring on the Monday afternoon. This year, however, it was different. Our entry, timed to coincide with the "Canals 200" celebrations, depicted "200 years of canal navvies". The front end of the boat featured "Navvies 1793", with some ancient-looking wooden tools held by ancient-looking navvies wearing hobnail boots, waistcoats, stocking caps, yarks, collarless shirts etc. and pantomime horse "Basingstoke" specially brought out of retirement to haul a wooden wheelbarrow. The back of the boat featured "Navvies 1993" with some more up-to-date navvies wearing safety gear and leaning on more modern tools. Various painted signs made sure that the judges knew which navvies were which and the on the sides of the boat were placards with the names of various canals that were being worked on in 1793 and in 1993. All this should have made sure that we came second, third or at least "highly commended" (i.e. last) and got our bottle. However, we inadvertently managed to come a rather disappointing **First**, which meant that all we got was a **completely empty** silver cup and the London WRG News editor had to dress up rather like this...



...and make a speech on being presented with it, and we had to buy our own booze for the return trip. The weekend also featured the arrival of the latest London WRG T-shirts (white on blue background, available in large or extra large from Aileen Butler) and a singing session on the front deck of Ben on Sunday night, accompanied by large quantities of a substance that many people thought to be Rupert's emergency Diesel supply but in fact turned out to be Ron's home made carrot sherry. (Don't be silly, you can't get a hangover like that from drinking diesel.)

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Please detach this part and return to:

Lesley McFadyen,  
35, Silvester Road,  
East Dulwich,  
London SE22 9PB.

Phone 081 693-3266



### Thames and Severn Canal 17-18/04/93

This is not just a case of me showing off my new-found ability with the word-processor; it is also a fairly close approximation to what the first chamber wall at Boxwell Springs lock is starting to look like after our second weekend of blocklaying. You may recall (you're unlikely to forget if you were there) that on our first attempt we laid 250 45kg concrete blocks in a weekend. On our second effort we laid a further 400 or so. Only about 3500 to go and the lock will be finished!

We were accompanied for the weekend by Ian Williamson & Judith Moore who are organising a camp there in July. We threatened to leave the lock in such a state that it will take the entire camp to get it tidy again. They pointed out that they are using our van for the camp and could return it in a similar mess if we weren't careful. We doubted their ability to send NUH back in a worse state than they get it in.

There were some notable efforts on the Health-and-safety-at-work front. Various people found their thumbs an easier target for their lumphammers than the concrete blocks. Martin found out why we wear hard-hats when his was severely tested by the steel toecap of Steve's right boot. Steve found out why we wear hard-hats when he took his off for 5 seconds to mop his brow and Ron dropped a plank on him. ("The last time I heard a crack like that the umpire signalled a six" - D. Moore) Finally Martin nearly became part of the new chamber wall when he got his thumb stuck between the last two blocks laid in the entire course. Well, they were very evenly laid and it would be a shame to disturb them...

### A question of balance...

### Wilts & Berks 1st-3rd May

Those of you who spend their holidays travelling the waterways of Britain by canal boat will doubtless be familiar with those delightful little lift-bridges found on some canals, where the steerer eases the boat slowly into the deep water alongside the well-maintained landing-stage and the smallest crew-member steps off and tugs gently on the bridge rope, whereupon the bridge deck rises smoothly into the air and rests securely in place while the boat passes easily through the opening, then waits at the other landing-stage while the crew-member lets the bridge span return gently to the horizontal before skipping lightly along the towpath and back onto the boat.... Well, that's the theory at least. Anyway, it appears that the Wilts & Berks Canal was endowed with an abundance of these quaint devices and the Canal Society has decided to replace some of them, starting with the one above Foxham upper lock. The abutments have already been rebuilt with old bricks and a horizontal deck supplied by Callis Mill workshop has been installed. All that remained was to rebuild the superstructure. And so on March 8th we found ourselves standing in the rain in a windswept field looking at several very chunky bits of wood and an assortment of ironmongery which we were expected to turn into the aforesaid superstructure. John Filer & Peter Smith were on hand to give us a few clues concerning which bit went where and also to warn us to be on the lookout for Great Created Newts which had been sighted in the area and were a protected species.

"Lift-bridge" was, we soon found out, an appropriate name for the device as the bits of wood were several hundred yards from the bridge abutments and our first job was to lift the bits of wood bodily onto the dumper, transport them across several fields and then lift them off again. The bits of wood weighed half a ton each, there were 4 of them and by the time we had moved the fourth one we were wondering if it wouldn't have been easier to leave them where they were and move the canal. Next job was to bolt various bits of metal on to the bits of wood. As a way of testing our ingenuity somebody appeared to have made a point of making all the pieces of metal the wrong shape and drilling all the holes in the wrong places. A set of chisels was purchased and our skilled craftsmen got to work cutting chunks out of the bits of wood while the rest of us started constructing scaffolding towers round the sockets in the ground that the upright bits of wood were intended to fit in. Eventually all the pieces had been boded together somehow and it was time to set up the uprights, using the dragline to lift them.

The weather having got rather colder overnight several of us had taken advantage of several sacks of jumble sale left-overs outside the village hall and were an assortment of ill-fitting jumpers (and a rather natty black velvet jacket) when we arrived on site on Sunday. Some of the local canal society arrived to work on the abutments of the next bridge up the canal, and brought with them a supply of the latest Wilts & Berks sweatshirts, hot off the press, with a picture of a lift-bridge on the front of them, so at least we knew what the thing we were building was supposed to look like. Having wedged the upright bits in their sockets we lashed the first of the horizontal bits of wood securely to the dragline and lifted it into place. A few final bits of chiselling (I don't recall my woodwork teacher telling us how to chisel at arms length when the piece of wood is suspended from a dragline) and we had the horizontal bits of wood fixed on. The final job was to fix the metal bars connecting the bridge deck to the horizontals and we were ready to dismantle the scaffolding and attempt to lift the bridge. With all of us hanging onto bits of rope with all our available weight we just managed to raise the bridge. Unfortunately that didn't leave anyone to take the photographs, so we had to explain to a passer-by from the Canal Society how to operate 6 different kinds of camera before we could let the bridge down.

Back at the hall we all weighed ourselves on a set of bathroom scales salvaged from the jumble sale and calculated the size of counterweights that will be required in order for the bridge to function properly.

And we never had to stop work for a Great Created Newt all weekend. A case of "No newts is good newts?"

## Flowers in the rain...

## Neath Canal 29th-31st-May

Our annual 3-day long distance dig on the Spring bank holiday weekend was London WRG's first ever visit to the third of the projects that we are currently committed to working on as part of the "Dig Deep" initiative. Glyn had originally agreed to be our organiser for the weekend, as he understood the local language and also we would be working in Glyn-Neath and thought it would be appropriate. Unfortunately he had to drop out owing to illness and your editor had to take over at very short notice, with not much knowledge of the site or the work, other than that it involved stonework and someone had said that the locals had "some wonderful plant".

Having contacted the local organiser and ascertained that we would be meeting him at a pub called the Bryndulais in a village called Seven Sisters (surely it should be the Seven Sisters pub in Bryndulais?) we duly set off late, got held up on the M4 and arrived at about 20 minutes after closing time outside the Bryndulais pub at Seven Sisters, where we met local man Colin who led us up the road past the Seven Sisters pub (in Bryndulais) to the accommodation, a community centre with snooker tables (but no balls) and showers. Unfortunately it doesn't have a kitchen, but Colin provided us with two portable electric cookers which were set up on what was normally used as a bar. This gave adequate cooking facilities provided the cook was either 6' 6" tall or equipped with (a) a box to stand on (b) a periscope (c) some of those see-through pyrex saucepans or (d) a lot of confidence.

Not having anyone over 6' 6" or any (b) or (c) Saturday breakfast was cooked with the aid of (a) and Colin arrived as we were finishing it and led us to the work site at Granary Lock, near Glyn Neath. This is situated alongside the main road down the valley, which seems to be at least as busy as the M25 and is culverted across the canal below the lock. The idea is that this lock and the one above it will be restored by volunteers over the next few years, by which time the main road will have been replaced by a new dual-carriageway the other side of the valley and the culvert will be removed, which will connect this section of canal to a 4-mile length that has already been restored with the aid of the local council.

The Neath Canal locks are built of stone in courses of differing heights. The offside chamber wall of Granary Lock had already been partly demolished and our job was to start rebuilding it. First we had to sort out enough stones of the right height, while a team of people fetched sand from a heap the other side of the road using a pickup-truck supplied by the council. Eventually enough stones for the whole course had been laid out and enough sand had been fetched for a weekend's worth of mortar, and stone-laying commenced. By knocking-off time we had completed the first course and also started rebuilding the bywash walls in rough stonework. And it was raining heavily.

Back at the accommodation, Debbie employed (a) to produce lasagne followed by apple Charlotte while several of us tried out the Seven Sisters, which seemed an excellent pub if you didn't mind drinking Flowers IPA and getting in the odd fight or two. Afterwards we went to the Bryndulais which seemed an excellent pub if you don't mind drinking Flowers IPA and being pestered by the odd drunken Welshman or two. Arriving 20 minutes after closing time on Friday was probably the best thing that happened to us all weekend.

On Sunday morning Martin decided to employ (d) rather than (a) to produce breakfast, which resulted in him inadvertently using the pan that had the left-over apples in it to heat the tomatoes in. Thus "Pommes Sept Soeurs" joins Sliceable Soup, Ironbridge Custard and Diesel Crumble in the London WRG cookbook.

The rain showed no sign of abating as we arrived on site and those of us who had omitted to bring waterproofs took advantage of some bin-bags provided by the locals as we braved the elements and set to work laying the second course. The London WRG News editor was congratulated on his rough stonework on the bywash channel. ("That's the roughest stonework I've seen in a long time.") It rained for most of the day. Apparently it usually does. Some of us who had been there on a London IWA tour of South Wales some years ago reported that it rained continuously then as well. Eventually as we completed the second course and packed up the rain ceased and the sun came out.

Not having seen any evidence of large machinery on site I can only assume that the "wonderful plant" referred to when describing the site was a reference to the profusion of **wild garlic** which grows all around the lock and was used in quantity in the chicken casserole cooked by Alison on Sunday evening. We didn't fancy drinking more Flowers in the company of First Drunken Welshman and Second Drunken Welshman so we persuaded Maria to drive us down the valley to the Rock & Fountain in Aberdulais which sold various local brews including Felinfoel, Brains and Buckleys.

A rather wet Monday morning was spent making a start on the next course of stonework (the last one apart from the coping stones) then at lunchtime we packed up and went for a look at the junction of the Neath & Tennant canals and the aqueduct over the Neath river at Aberdulais, before returning to London.

Next time out...

### Work programme June - November

By the time you receive this we will probably already have had our 19th-20th June working party. This was originally pencilled in for the Chesterfield Canal, but as they couldn't accommodate us that weekend we have decided to go to the Montgomery Canal. We normally regard the Mont as being a bit too far for a two-day weekend but have made an exception as WRG are appealing for visiting groups and volunteers to help finish the Aston Nature Reserve project on time.

The following three digs are as planned at the AGM. On 10th-11th July and 11th-12th September we have "Dig Deep" weekends on the Wey & Arun Canal, and we have confirmed with the Hereford & Gloucester Canal Society that they can take us on the 31st July / 1st August.

The date for the WRG national Big-ish Dig has now been confirmed as 6th-7th November and will be spent scrub-bashing on the Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal. Although it is described as a Canal Camps Reunion it is by no means limited to people who have been on camps and we hope to take a van-load of London WRG members. This is a Centrally Booked Weekend, so if you want to go please send the enclosed form to Helen Davey.

We will not now be holding a London WRG dig on 13th-14th November as this is only a week after the Big-ish Dig. We will therefore be going to the Wilts & Berks on 2nd-3rd October instead. This confirms 23rd-24th October as the date for the Ipswich & Stowmarket Navigation.

## navvies...

As, as you probably all know, a magazine published by Waterway Recovery Group six times a year, which contains details of work carried out by ourselves and many other groups involved in canal restoration, together with various articles, letters, photographs by Tim and other things of interest to canal restorers. I had always assumed that everyone in London WRG subscribed to "navvies" but recently was surprised to be told by one of our regulars that they didn't. When I asked the reason, I was told "because I don't know who to send the money to." Therefore, to avoid the re-use of this particular excuse, and (it must be admitted) because I happen to have four of my own articles in the latest issue, you will find enclosed in the newsletter a subscription form for "navvies". So you'll have to think of a new excuse now.



An occasional series of excerpts from old issues of London WRG News and its predecessor "Dig This"

## Ten years ago.....

Jeremy Frankel's review of work so far in 1993 reported on the Basingstoke Canal at St. John's:

"...finishing off lock 10 and moving onto/into lock 9...Winnie and his vibrators banging piles into the bottom sill. This is, apparently, where the Basingstoke mysteriously caught fire..."

and Dolphin Sailing Barge Museum:

"the weekend was hampered by a combination of factors such as a large number turning out...casting 5 concrete beams for a barge bed support...had to be completed preferably before the incoming tide swamped us...Martin (the one with the beard) was perched on the top of a ladder attempting to reach the parts (of the museum) that a job creation scheme couldn't reach. And succeeding in spreading the tar / bitumen (whatever it was) over everything else - people's clothes, bicycles, rucksacks, you name it...Saturday lunchtime...the bar staff couldn't quite cope...most people ended up with someone else's food...sent Michael off to make peace with one particularly fraught female...she was visibly embarrassed...Saturday afternoon struggle to haul this lump of wood - it must have been at least 30ft long by 18" x 18" - along the ground some fifty yards using an assortment of various diameter semi-round wooden rollers, one trolley jack and the faithful tranny. Come Sunday we discovered that someone had cut the wood in half."

while in "Navvies" no. 88 London WRG organiser Bob Keaveney reported that we didn't:

"...spend our weekends selling local cough toffees to unsuspecting members of the public. Neither do we possess anyone capable, or even prepared, to write articles for Navvies..."

and after making an appeal for anyone with a shed in South London to store our tools in he gave some ideas on recruitment...

"...London WRG has grown steadily in size over the last 12 months...the sheer dynamism, enthusiasm, zeal and modesty of the organiser...what started as an occasional "quick" after-dig drink...developed into regular Wednesday evening sessions...nobody yet has accused us of being a clique...perhaps other working parties should try our approach?"

before concluding with another appeal for a shed in South London for our tools.

## Five years ago.....

Lesley's London WRG News report in "Navvies" no.111 reported on the end of demolition work on the Basingstoke Canal:

"It wasn't so long ago that we spent what seemed like every dig on the Basingstoke demolishing brickwork with Kango hammers. You could always tell our workers in the pub at lunchtime, unable to hold a full pint (of shandy?) without spilling it, due to the shaking of their hands..."

and described the search for fresh challenges at the AGM:

"Some of those rejected as too difficult were restoration of Martin's car and teaching Michael a route less than 100 miles long from London to West Byfleet. Digging Bob's garden was rejected as too easy for a working party of more than one part-time navy, so Bob will have to do it himself..."

reported various marriages and births in the group and commented on the implications for recruitment of breeding our own navvies:

"...A return to good old family values will ensure working parties into the next century..."

and, remarkably, reported the culmination of Bob's 5-year mission to seek out a shed for London WRG's tools. He bought a house with two sheds in the garden.

# LONDON WRG NEWS

# Dates List

**Working Parties:** Friday night start; meet outside Casey Jones at Waterloo station; normally at 19:00 but may be 30 minutes earlier or later depending on distance. Contact organiser of dig or overall co-ordinator Tim Lewis for details.

19-20/06/93 Montgomery Canal - Aston	Ron Jones
10-11/07/93 Wey & Arun Canal (Dig Deep)	Martin Ludgate
31/7-01/8/93 Hereford & Gloucester Canal	Lesley McFadyen
11-12/09/93 Wey & Arun Canal (Dig Deep)	to be arranged
02-03/10/93 Wilts & Berks Canal	to be arranged
23-24/10/93 Ipswich & Stowmarket Navigation	Darryl Foster / Cath Coolican
06-07/11/93 Grand Union Canal Wendover Arm (big-ish dig)	Martin Ludgate*
04-05/12/93 Basingstoke Canal (KESCRG Xmas party)	Tim Lewis

\*This dig is a centrally booked weekend. Please send the enclosed form to Helen Davey. Martin Ludgate will take names for transport to the Wendover Arm in the London WRG van.

**Social Gatherings:** Wednesday Night, 10 days before each dig i.e. 21/7/93, 1/9/93 etc. at the Founders Arms, Bankside, London SE1 (on the South bank, 100 yards East of Blackfriars bridge.) about 19:30 till 23:00. **Please note that 30th June is not a social, it is an evening boat trip.** See elsewhere in this newsletter for details. **Please Also note that there will probably be an extra social on 11th August** as it would be unlike London WRG to allow a six-week gap in our digging activities to lead to a six - week gap in our drinking activities.

**Other Events:** further details from Tim Lewis, Martin Ludgate or Lesley McFadyen.

30/06/93	evening boat trip from Little Venice
Sometime	Booze up in a brewery (if anyone can organise one)
Autumn	London WRG members slide show.
15/12/93	Christmas party

## Who to contact:

Tim Lewis, 5, Herongate Road,  
Wanstead, London E12.

Overall London WRG Co-ordinator  
Phone 081-530 7926

Martin Ludgate, 35, Silvester Road,  
London SE22 9PB

London WRG News  
Phone 081-693 3266

Lesley McFadyen, 35, Silvester Road,  
London SE22 9PB

Membership list  
Phone 081-693 3266 (eves)  
Phone 071-405 8400 x402 (days)

## Coming soon...

...London WRG News's very own cartoon strip. Watch this space.

## Apologies...

...for the misprint in the "archive" column in London WRG News 18 which referred to "1992" instead of "1982" in the "10 years ago" section. I hope none of you were fooled into thinking that our 1992 activities involved people like Bob, Winnie, & Martin working on the Wey & Arun, Basingstoke & Thames & Severn Canals and suffering a van breakdown on the way back from the Mont.

...to Bob for all the bits about or by him in the "Archive" column this time. I'm sorry, Bob, I'm not doing it on purpose, there just seem to be more bits involving you than anyone else. And I haven't mentioned your name in connection with Brewery trips a single time in this issue.

## And finally...

I hear on the grapevine that Winnie tried to walk on water during Canalway Cavalcade and found he couldn't. Maybe he'd forgotten he wasn't an IWA branch chairman any more.