

LONDON WRG NEWS



**Issue 81:
June 2016**

Editors Note:

My thanks to everyone that contributed dig reports to this edition of LWRG News, most especially to Tim for annotating his photo albums so that I was able to “construct” dig reports for digs I had not even been on.

Helena Rosiecka

LONDON WRG AWARDS—2015

Catering went to Paul for his breakfast cooking. He also won the lame excuse award for managing to go abroad every time we hold a dig on his nearest canal restoration site (The Thames and Medway).

The leadership award went to Peter for his valiant work in overcoming the red tape on the Ashby Canal dig. An honourable mention was made to Sophie for her efforts on the Shrewsbury and Newport.

The new recruit award was shared by the St Helens girls for returning to the Shrewsbury and Newport after their canal camp.

The driving award was won following a popular vote by David for attempting to use a vibrating roller in a less than horizontal position!



The bricklaying award was won by Fran for declaring herself a fully qualified brickie after having laid a full four bricks.

The doughnut award was rather unfairly awarded to myself just for making a funeral pyre out of my camera on the Chesterfield canal dig!

Tim Lewis

Late 2016 Dig dates:

9th/10th Jul	Cotswolds, Bowbridge and Wallbridge Locks (with KESCRG)
6th/7th Aug	Wey and Arun, Compasses Bridge
3rd/4th Sep	Wey and Arun, Compasses Bridge
24th/25th Sep	Litchfield, Summerhill and Darnford Park
15th/16th Oct	Shrewsbury and Newport, Uffington Scrub Bash
5th/6th Nov	Chesterfield Canal, multiple sites (WRG reunion)
29th/21st Nov	Shropshire Canal, Blists Hill Museum Scrub bash

16/17TH JANUARY 2016

(CHELMER AND BLACKWATER)

Once again LWRG returned to the Chelmer and Blackwater for the first dig of the year on the wonderful Haybay led by Paul I. Its good to start with a weekend in one of the higher quality accommodations (even if the toilets are in a building on the shore). It was made even better by the cold but sunny and dry weather

The first job of the weekend was to move logs from the Island to the car park. This was carried out by boat, allowing Inka and others to enjoy floating along between bouts of activity loading and unloading. Later we also moved chippings from the island to lay on the offside towpath.

However, the primary job was to construct canoe racks. This made an interesting change from our usual restoration work. Once completed these also had chippings laid around them and along the access path to improve the route to the racks.

We also laid stone on part of the car park—basically most of us spent the weekend moving materials from neat piles in one place to another place where it was spread out.

The weekend ended on an amusing note as Inka and Matt threw a post-hole shovel and a mattock respectively into a 6ft deep bit of river while washing the tools. This necessitated the use of the magnet to retrieve them.

Inspired by **Wendy Hodkinson** and **Tim Lewis**

(Images: **Tim Lewis**)

**ALTERNATIVE (ORIGINAL)
DIG REPORT ON PAGE 4**



C&B - ALTERNATIVE REPORT

The first dig of the New Year was being held at Paper Mill on the Chelmer. My sources at the basin informed me that was only nine on the weekend, so I did not expect much disturbance on my island. However on Saturday morning they all invaded my domain along with Sam and Roy from Essex Waterways. Their tasks for the weekend were to clear all the wood accumulated on the island and move it across the stream to the field beside the offside mill cottage and then build the two canoe racks in the area vacated. Paul marshalled his troops and while Tim got the working boat the rest started moving the wood to the canal edge. After the first load was put in the boat, Inka joined him while Martin, Helen and Fran walked over the lock gates to receive the boat load. I went to check on Pete who was starting to drill out and shape the pieces of the first canoe rack along with Sam.

Tea break arrived and despite having several members who have a preference for cats, I obtained my desired amount of affection from the female contingent. I also demonstrated my warning to other dogs is on the opposite towpath that the island was my domain. After tea break and up to lunch the crew continued to move the logs and clear the area ready for the construction of the canoe rack. During lunch more dogs were walking the opposite side but none responded to my barks. After lunch, the log crew moved over to putting chipping down on the opposite towpath and also where they had been moving the logs. After afternoon break, the construction of the first rack was taking place and after Pete had slotted the screws through the wood, then Helen would finish off tightening them. Paul had them working even with the moon was out but then the sun had not yet set. He then prevented Helen from swinging on the completed rack. After the evening meal they all adjourned to the pub.

The next morning, Pete and Roy started the building the second rack with a different joining structure. This meant that some adjustment on the middle bar was required. Paul and Matt started to dig out and level the area where this rack was to go. The others were tasked to worship the path on the far moorings, this involved a round trip of about 40 minutes, so morning tea break was taken just after the second run. A fellow named dog responded to my barks but was moved so not to cause a disturbance to other cafe users. After lunch the rack started to take shape and after Pete had drilled out the screw holes, Roy and Paul threaded the screws through and this were then secured. The workshop team had finished their task and assisted in the shortening of the screws and worshipping the ground surface around the two racks. The final job was to wash all the kit which Matt indulged rather too enthusiastically and dropped part of kit in the river which required a fishing test with the sea searcher and a keb. A very productive weekend and I now have more structures to look after on the island.

Bella the Paper Mill lock dog

6/7TH FEBRUARY 2016 (THAMES AND SEVERN, WALLBRIDGE)

Present on camp there were three Martins (L. D and T), Paul and Colin the breakfast crew (thanks), Sophie, Inka and I (Verity Taster) the kitchen gang, with myself as humble acolyte to Sophie's genius. She produced a WONDERFUL meat pie and simply brandylicious mushroom and leek pie for the veggies, with a VERY lemony pudding which took 24 separated eggs.

When I was serving this up Sophie announced: 'It's wet when you get inside'. This floored everyone for a moment until we realised she meant that there was gravy under the pastry. The topping was made of pastry, and included masterfully produced boats, cats, books and tools.



Paul Weller arrived Sat morning and all bemoaned the over damp situ which pre-empted the predicted tasks. Too wet for coving relocation as the simply torrential water would wash out the mortar or cement. Also present: David from Bristol,

David Miller, Alan Lemon Drizzle Lines, Marion (nice jigsaw) and Emma who arrived on the 19.44 train. This caused much train spotting action from the window in Brimscombe.

My jigsaw was a pressie from Joe and Laura who had excused themselves from attending as they'd decided to prefer Paris to being soggy in the cut. Mad fools. Martin L produced a rival jigsaw which had been donated for testing; it had a very odd surreal canal scenario with dolphins in the water around a narrow boat. Hmm. Also some boats going uphill , on a grass slope, or so it seemed. This jigsaw was 500 pieces and took a team of 4 about an hour to complete.

So what were the rest of the gang getting up to in the rain, at 'Cheapside' which turns out to be behind Travis perkins (we found them quite easily when we brought the lunch down to them): Richard Thomas, Fran, Nick Farr, Jon P, and Tim, were busy sawing trees down on the offside bank while Paul and Fran were feeding the fire which was on an island (cue song, Islands in the stream). Colin and



Alan were using a grappling hook to haul out the trees and the tow-path users (members of the public) were suitably impressed by these antics as they wove their way in and out of the felled and dragged foliage and marvelled at everyone's stoicism as they ate sandwiches sat on stones in a ditch in the rain.

As always we felt rather like kids making a den in the woods and having fun eating sarnies and cake which tasted like ambrosia because of how hard they'd toiled in adverse cambers and clobber.

Also of interest was the sign on the door at Brimscombe: 'Blue Mouse Poison on floor' Scrawled underneath: 'Blue Mouse now dead.' My mate needs this as her mice are too canny to fall for modern traps and the 'blue mouse poison' is not working as they are not blue.

Verity Taster

Thanks to everyone who came and helped to make it a success in the face the worst that the weather could throw at us. Despite not being able to do any of the planned work on the lock as it was too wet to be safe, locals Jon and Paul were very pleased with what we achieved on the alternative job clearing trees from the offside bank.

Special mention to Sophie in the kitchen, breakfast chef Paul, Tim and Paul (again) for sharing the van driving, Fran for taking the minutes at the London WRG AGM on the Saturday evening (no comments about Doctors' handwriting, please!)

Martin Ludgate

(Images: **Tim Lewis**)

Editors Note: I cannot find the notes from the AGM - so I am assuming there was nothing earth shattering in them.

27/28TH FEBRUARY 2016 (WEY AND ARUN)

A rare early morning start at Compasses Bridge began with the safety briefing. The work for the weekend was to continue the construction of the bridge over the canal which is to replace an existing access road into the airfield which is blocking the canal.

A small select group had arrived on the Friday to shift several hundred tons of previously excavated material to the other end of the

airfield, This work continued on the Saturday, although we did manage to prise Adrian out of the excavator to lay part of a water main



across the site compound entrance at one point.

The work for the weekend, apart from the giant material shift was varied and most, but not all jobs are reflected in the following paragraphs. It was another weekend to savour the list of jobs vanishing from the site whiteboard.

The block paving on one side of the bridge had been part laid but required pointing—a task undertaken by James, who hadn't been on site in so long he almost counted as a new recruit. At the same time Martin completed the block paving on the North pavement and Matt and Hamon extended the pavement kerbing on the South side of the new bridge.



David Miller cut steel plates to be placed over the water main that crosses the new bridge. Others sawcut the airfield road for a new watermain crossing.

Later in the day James and Hamon laid and concreted in a new duct adjacent to the watermain across the bridge. Paul backfilled concrete

around some duct chambers that the team had constructed that morning.

Saturday nights supper was ably cooked by Maria.

Sunday started with a brick chain to move bricks and block to under the bridge, making use of a brick slide. During this Fran and Joe had a brick fight—a sure recipe for disaster.

A major task of the day was laying the water main in the road crossing trench, then the ducts, then covering the ducts with sand to protect them from the backfill material that went in next. This was finally topped by temporary concrete over the water/duct trench.

At the same time Colin W mixed concrete to form the base of the block paving on the South pavement. This was put in after the steel plates had been cut and installed to protect the water main



After the end of the weekend Dave the local circulated the following facts about the work:

Over the weekend LWRG used:

- 60 bags of cement
- 6-8 ton of ballast
- 80 ton of type one aggregate
- 18 lengths of duct
- 550 litres of diesel

They:

- constructed 6 man holes and chambers
- pointed 40m³ of paving pointed
- removed approximately 300 ton of clay from site
- Moved 3 lengths of very heavy steel

He added: “Our contractor started yesterday and was amazed in the change in the site compared to our pre start meeting Wednesday last week.”

This was the most complicated dig I have ever attempted to lead—with a lot of knowledge of who could drive what and calls for volunteers with specific skills in advance. I was unfortunately unable to actually attend the dig due to being ill (read “pregnant and knackered”) so my eternal thanks to Adrian S and others who stepped in to make sure everything ran smoothly over the weekend itself.

Helena Rosiecka

(report content inspired by Tim Lewis)

(Images: **Tim Lewis**)

19/20TH MARCH 2016 (GRANTHAM CANAL, WOOLSTHORPE)



On arrival on site at Woolsthorpe on the Grantham (assuming I'm not confusing it with another LWRG Grantham dig) - only the 4 corners of the lock were standing, with the rest of the walls down to invert level. The invert itself in good condition.

David Mitchell and I worked on tooting out brickwork and breaking off the last few layers of the walls above the invert at the top end of the lock whilst others did the same at the bottom end, even though it looked like the bit they were tooting out was cracking off the main corner. Others excavated behind the (Non-existent) nearside wall so that a concrete base could be laid

They had a new brick cleaning machine, but don't know how well it works as it wasn't used as its incredibly loud. Tim and others stacked a load of very heavy concrete blocks onto pallets to make

them accessible by telehandler. I didn't have the heart to point out when he'd finished that the pallets were the wrong way around and therefore still inaccessible to a telehandler. I guess he knows now...

David Smith

(Images: Tim Lewis)



A BCN CLEAN-UP REPORT FOR 16/17TH APRIL CAN BE FOUND IN NAVVIES

7/8TH MAY 2016 (CHESTERFIELD)

At one point in time, I am sure that this dig was supposed to be about mowing the grass, planting flower beds, looking forward to the Trail-boat festival and generally celebrating how marvellous we all are at restoring canals.

Oh, how wrong could we be... An autumn and winter of rather inclement weather had left Staveley Town Lock and the stretch of canal below it (now christened Hartington Harbour as the winding hole has grown to look more like a second basin) badly behind schedule. With ever more work being piled on the local work party by Derbyshire County Council, not to mention an ever depleting work force as one by one they declared 'oh bother, it's really very muddy, I think I will come back when it is a bit drier' (or something similar), the

likelihood of everything being finished by the end of May has become increasingly remote.

Eventually, the decision has been made that only the lock and a short section of the pound below will be put into water, and it will be taken out of water after the festival in order to finish things off properly - so don't be surprised if we're still working in the same place on the next visit!

So what did we actually do? Unusually for Staveley, I actually started the day with some idea of what we could do! Admittedly, I had foregone a proper breakfast in order to get a head start on site, but at least it meant I beat the local Dave France to site. When the vans arrived I was therefore able to set everybody off on something useful. One team got onto concreting a pad for the first quadrant. David Wild (there were 3 Daves on the site) decided he'd get mud-

dy and start scraping out the bottom of the lock. Some people went off to play (sorry, work) with the machines moving earth around.

Another group started removing the wooden protection that was put on the lock tail bridge at the Easter camp - carefully preserving the big sheets of plywood and equally carefully hoarding the small offcuts for the bonfire later on. Mike Chase and Martin Ludgate finished the blockwork (you knew I couldn't get through a Chesterfield dig report without mentioning it didn't you!). I drank tea and pondered what the next round of tasks would be...

Having removed the plywood from the bridge, Lynne and her team broke up some old garden benches, with the metal frames intended for the scrap pile then suitably salvaged and squirrelled away for future 'refurbishment'. With that done, and various miscellaneous bits of tat removed from the compound, green netting was strung up around the outside of the compound, necessitating lots of climbing over piles of remaining tat. After that, they were allowed loose on the fire and we didn't see them again for the smokescreen.

Steve filled the spare time when his digger skills weren't required removing lots of nails from the bridge - not the most glamorous job but at least we won't be sued for a personal injury claim from the public now. Back at the ranch, we were treated to a very nice evening meal courtesy of our gourmet catering

team (Liz Chase, Mandy Morley and Christopher on the pots and pans drum kit). Some sleeping was done, mainly by me.

Sunday was more of the same, the concreting team changed places and started haunching behind the new coping stones - finding in the process just one way you're not supposed to use a shovel. More fire was made, more bricks were laid, some concrete was cut out for a pipe and some earth was removed for the next quadrant. A new fence was erected, an old one removed and lots of bricks and sand was lifted off the festival site. Who knows, it might just happen!

With some staying on site for lunch, most headed back and so that was that. Thanks to everyone who came along, cooked, drove, worked, laughed and smiled. Hopefully next time we meet we'll be somewhere else on the Chesterfield, though I'd hazard a guess we'll be building a lock. After all, there are only about 20 to go...

George Rogers

Editors note: Below is the first boat to go through the completed lock—with the Chesterfield's local working party on board.



18/19TH JUNE (SHREWSBURY AND NEWPORT - FORTON)

Thanks to an astonishing turnout of volunteers, London WRG got a ton of work done on the Shrewsbury and Newport canal this June. 25 people, plus some locals, turned out for the weekend and we had a lot of heavy machinery to help us. We worked at such a pace that I couldn't believe how much we'd already got done by first tea break.

Site was chiefly characterized by the number of hazards it offered to human life. Volunteers had access to a wide array of dangers including death from above, death by heavy plant, death by fire, as well as many other ways to injure themselves using hazardous substances and pointy tools. There was also an alarming number of stinging insects including bees, horseflies and a wasp the size of a man's thumb. In the end, not a single mishap occurred despite the rather cramped site layout and multiple risks.

A visiting tree surgeon brought down an enormous elm without incident and the stump was very quickly removed using a digger. We burnt the branches and root crown as best we could and whisked the logs off site. This manoeuvre was complicated by the need to close the road during the operation, which was accom-

plished by some diplomatic WRGies negotiating with local car drivers.

A team also set to work excavating a French drain. [French drains aren't so named because they were invented in France – they are named after Henry Flagg French, an American, who popularized them in his 1859 book 'Farm Drainage']. The idea was to excavate a trench to the brook, lay pea shingle and then run a narrow pipe through the channel for drainage. The trench needed to be dug to a depth that was greater than the reach of the available diggers. We solved this problem by digging twice: first a broad trench to gain access for the digger and then a much more narrow trench for the pipe itself. With a keen machine operator behind the wheel this task was accomplished quickly.

We'd laid several rolls of bentonite matting at our dig the previous October but one of these subsequently proved to have been faulty, and the matting in one particular section had slipped down the slope. We managed to repair this section using Pete's clever method of hanging the bentonite roll from a scaffolding pole off a digger and unrolling it like loo roll down the slope. At the same time, an industrious team of workers braved nettles and angry bees to repoint large sections of the bridge. We also managed to complete some repair work on coping bricks that had shifted forward and needed mortaring back in place.

We were joined for dinner on the Saturday night by some of the locals, who very kindly put £100 behind the bar of local pub 'The Phez' for us to enjoy. Dinner was notable for an experiment where we made garlic bread using massive thick round loaves instead of the usual French sticks. Everyone seemed to agree it was an improvement on the usual way of doing things with a more slender loaf. Food-wise, the weekend was also characterized by an abundance of 'And' cake. These included: rhubarb and custard cake, cardamom and orange cake, chocolate and raisin flapjack, and date and ginger cake. The latter was kindly donated by the locals.

On Sunday we made a short expedition to the other end of site to find the hidden aquaduct / viaduct. It's an impressive piece of historic architecture, incorporating 3 tunnels and allowing both a road and the canal itself to pass over a slow flowing river. It's also



a very picturesque little spot with a lazy pool of water, wild roses and water lilies. It's very easy to overlook this curiosity even if you're working on the site at Forton for an extended period of time, so do seek it out.

The weather held out until the minute we were packing away. It was just as well we got away in good time – rotten traffic meant that it took some of us nearly 7 hours to get home.

We enjoyed the weekend so much that we agreed to try to come back. The S&N has always proved to be an enjoyable canal for us to work on and well worth the long journey.

Sophie Smith

(Image: **Tim Lewis**)

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