

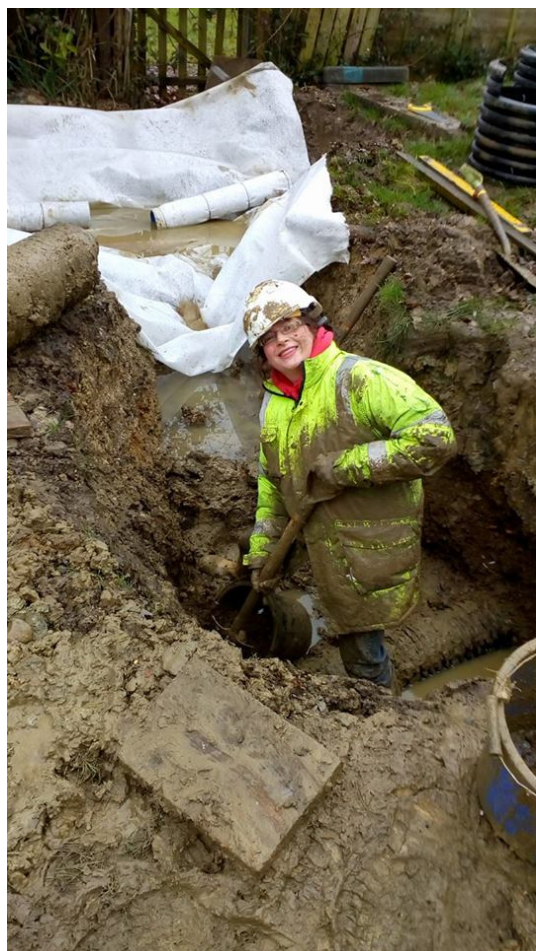
LWRG NEWS



Issue 83:

January 2018

Editor's Note:



You may have noticed that I am not Helena. I hate computers and am struggling with laying this damn thing out. We were lucky that Helena and family managed to attend one of our digs in February and can be seen here digging a hole at the Wey and Arun. Krzysieck and Helena's second daughter then chaired the AGM which seemed fitting as her older sister had done so the year before. Helena has taken a step back from editing LWRG news as we are very bad at sending her reports and she is more than adequately occupied with her family and work. So we wish her luck and wait until Rozalia and Maryla can both come along to work at LWRG digs too! Speaking of getting dig reports in – when Helena asked for someone to take over it transpired that only my dig of 2017 had a dig report written about it. In fact, if no-one else is credited with the writing, a lot of the reports in this issue are from my scant memories. I hope this won't make the issue too dull – but if it does, you know what to do about it! Volunteer to write a dig report!

[Helena in a hole on the Wey & Arun.](#) Photo Tim Lewis

Date	Site	Leader
10/11 th February	Buckingham	Fran Burrell
3/4 th March	S&N	Sophie Smith
10 th March	Barn dance	Centrally organised
24/25 th March	BCN	Centrally organised
21/22 nd April	Buckingham	Fran Burrell
12 th May	Leaders training	Centrally organised
12/13 th May	S&N	Sophie Smith
9/10 th June	Inglesham (with KESCRG)	Stephen Davies
23/24 th June	Training weekend	Centrally organised
TBC ?30 th June/1 st July	Wilts & Berks	Tim Lewis

Shrewsbury and Newport January 21- 22nd 2017

Leader: Sophie Smith

This dig was led by Sophie who doubled as site leader and gourmet cook. We stayed at Uffington Village Hall within a short walk of the local pub. We all stayed there, all being everyone apart from Valerie who sought a room as the pub doubles as a bed and breakfast, and Ian R who had his camper van. This is very sensible to escape the cacophony of snoring, but it is apparent that even being outside in a camper van is not sound proof against Tim setting off the fire alarm with toast.

The work site was at Sundorne. A group of us walked to site along the canal in the morning finding where the water was meant to be by a clue named Canal Cottage. It is currently a footpath but after a while the path becomes much more obviously a canal.

The work was clearing scrub to allow light to reach a newly laid hedge

that was unlikely to grow without this.



[View of the bonfire site at Sundorne. Photo SNCT](#)

We also removed ivy from offside trees and used the brush-cutter to tidy the towpath and clear as much vegetation from the channel as possible. What is most memorable from this dig has to be that not only had Sophie made us a wonderful cake and Sarah had made us some cheese flapjacks, but the local canal society, the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal Trust, were hosting a stall to inform local walkers and passer-bys about the canal. To help encourage the public's engagement in the project they had baked a vast number of cakes and used our Burco to provide tea and coffee. Luckily for us, they used similar means to encourage us too. In fact, Laura admitted to eating seven

different kinds of cake in one day.



A SNCT volunteer entertains another visitor with an interest in cake. Photo James Weir

Sophie cooked us a fantastic dinner and we did pretty much the same the next day. That is, we did our best to both work hard and eat as many varieties of cake as possible. I feel we should really single out Bernie's wife who makes us a cake EVERY time we visit which is always gratefully received and eaten surprisingly quickly.

Wey & Arun February 11- 12th 2017 and the London WRG Awards

Leader: Tim Lewis

The weather reports weren't promising and we did have the promised snow on Saturday morning and rain in the afternoon but without the promised freezing winds! Sunday was fine.

As usual Dave had a long list of jobs for us. This included bricklaying,

fencing, drain repairing and step installation, all of which seemed to go well.



Jobs clearly involved digging holes if the few pictures of the event I find are evidence, ed. Photo Tim Lewis

It was really nice to see Helena and family. Tim was not sure if we have ever had a six month old and two and a half year old at the AGM before! Although Rozalia has a history of chairing an AGM while sitting on a packet of toilet rolls so it's good to see her younger sister following in her footsteps by chairing an AGM while chewing on the leadership award. They also brought down the average age of the attendees by a considerable amount. Bonnie and Ace seemed more perturbed by the inclusion of a crazy spaniel than the Wergies were by a tantruming toddler and someone who spent most of the evening non-verbal and dribbling.

Talking of the AGM this happened and we agreed a provisional list of dates and sites for the rest of the year. We also talked about what new catering kit to purchase and, after checking first aid kit, thought that some new bandages etc should be bought.

And of course, what you are all waiting for, the 2016 London WRG awards which went as follows:

The Donut Award

Not too many nominations this year but for managing to throw her tools into the River Chelmer rather than clean them at the end of the day, the award went to Inka.

The Driving Award

Luckily for WRG we have been pretty good at looking after the van this year but Martin running over a grappling hook at the BCN Clean up just as we were due to go home took some beating so the award had to go to him

Carol will have to not find the accommodation at Uffington despite driving past it numerous times if she wants to get this award in future years!

The Leadership Award

A hotly contested one this year mainly for the right reasons, the nominations were:

Moose, Tim, Paul & Martin – collective responsibility for utterly failing to organise a dig on the Basingstoke Canal.

Peter for his efforts in sorting out the problems with the accommodation at Grantham.

David for organising the accommodation at the Lichfield dig which involved people sleeping, amongst other places, in a cupboard, in the bar and on the pool table.

However after arranging a dig with accommodation having centrally heated rooms with beds AND lunch served by waitresses in a Victorian town tea room the award went to Fran and Ian for the fantastic dig at Ironbridge. Fran decided that sharing the riding crop with Ian would be a

familiarity too far though and took it home.

The Catering Award

Again hotly contested for all the right reasons, those of us old enough will remember that the award came about after a series of catering disasters which included diesel flavoured crumble and a meal consisting of barely cooked meat served up after we got back from the pub!

The nominations were:

Emma G for having to cook the Saturday evening meal in the local organiser's house on the Grantham Dig.

Aileen and Harri for taking over the kitchen at the Coalport YHA including having to explain to the manager that it was *their* kettle and not our griddle that blew all their fuses!

Anne, Sophie, Mick & Rowena for the London WRG/KESCRG Xmas party meal which was still being fondly remembered two months later.

However after some noisily enthusiastic voting rounds, the award went to Sophie for her marvellous pies.



Writing the awards. Photo credit Martin Ludgate

The New Recruit Award

This year's award went to Emma N. She might have been digging for a while but she seems to have adopted us, for which we are very grateful!

The Lane Excuse Award

Despite having a good turn out on our digs last year we are still getting people not turning up using the flimsiest of excuses, these included: Paul I. for his annual trip to sunnier climes.

Helena for her annual excuse of having produced another baby.

Paul I. for damaging his arm (allegedly) at Uffington.

Paul R. for catching a rare infection whilst travelling up the Amazon

The award went to, rather unfairly I think, to me (says Tim) for arriving late at Uffington! Note from the editor: Tim *had* said he was doing something important so Martin and the rest of us could not understand why Tim was managing to post so many photographs on Facebook in the morning. Although he did (of course) arrive in time for dinner.

The Bricklaying Award

Again a good set of entries this year which were:

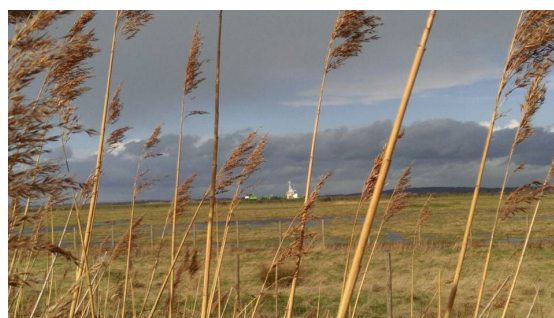
Fran for being made to lay blocks against her will at Compasses Bridge.
Martin for his complicated bull nose brickwork at Compasses Bridge

The award was convincingly won by Nigel for his devotion to duty in constructing a manhole over a particularly smelly drain, again at Compasses Bridge.

Tim Lewis

Thames and Medway with KESCRG 3-4th March

Leader: Fran Burrell



[View to the Thames from our work site.](#) Photo Fran

No more lame excuse award for me as I managed to attend the most local of all London WRG digs to my home. The trip started with my normal walk to the station with rucksack & bag containing my sleeping bags and karri mat. But instead of heading west to London, I headed east for Tilbury and caught the ferry across to Gravesend. A walk along the promenade to the sailing club where I meet Dave the local and we awaited the arrival of all the rest who were going to attend as this was a joint dig with KESCRG. The female members went upstairs to the sail room while the lads were located in the main room containing the bar.

But due to a tickling cough, I bagged the small spare room in the corridor.

Saturday's breakfast was eaten with a view from the table across the Thames and we departed in the minimum of

vehicles for the 17 that were attending. The task was as normal to scrub clear as much of the trees that had grown in the canal bed. The first fire was set up by Mick Lilliman who then left Tim to future manage it.



Gravesend cruising club. Photo credit Tim Lewis

Our leaders for the weekend Steve & Fran, divided the groups into the areas that needed attention, this meant that Mick went up further along the path to start another fire. A couple of locals were helping us and an organised destruction of the canal bed was soon taking place. Morning tea break set the pattern of all the breaks as Tim & Helen managed to load up on their phones an app that told you the shipping moving up and down the Thames.

So a line of people were looking towards the river for the craft



Photo credit: Kay Spurrier

mentioned. (Or that's what we *think* they are doing, ed)

Our leaders soon had us back at work and only allowed us lunch with

reluctance. This lead to more boat

watching but having the railway besides us also meant that when a freight train passed, we had expert analysis that one of the wheels were flat. Late in the afternoon the instruction from leader Fran to stop putting wood on the fire was followed by the cheekiness of me telling Tim not to listen before she appeared above footpath to catch us out (note to volunteers – hedges are NOT sound proof, ed).



Photo Credit Tim Lewis

After packing up for the day and returning to the yacht club, several of the group ventured out onto the pontoon to note the effect of the falling tide but also to suffer me telling them all the landmarks that were visible. After another sumptuous dinner from Sophie, everyone settled down to clear

the bar of drink.



"That's my flat, right there!" Photo Credit Tim Lewis

Next morning following the breakfast was the same task but it was decided that we should all concentrate in one area as the weather forecast stated that we could have showers. We had been joined by Rachel Errington & Hamon which meant that the taller trees were no longer out of reach. The fire which had been built besides the footpath had to several times be re-assembled when it burnt out one section but left some of the larger wood unburnt. The tea break ship identification was continued but some suspicion was raised when the apps told us a vessel was passing Tilbury but it was at least 30 mins before it appeared. As the plan was to work until early afternoon or when the showers appeared a late lunch was going to take place back at the yacht club. When by the time everyone was getting hungry, work was suspended and we returned back to the club.

As there are no ferries on Sundays, I arranged with Mick to give me a lift back to Purfleet. While waiting for the train was the time that the hail storm hit, so once again Fran had got the weather god's to obey her and hold off until the dig had finished. So a big

thank you to Fran and Steve for leading the dig, Sophie for the cooking and the local's for all the support and Gravesend Yacht club for the accommodation, So the lame excuse award should go to someone else this year (I hope). (We'll have to see about that. Nominations now open, ed)

Paul Ireson

BCN cleanup – 1st-2nd April

I don't think I can add much about all the things we grappled with, the mud we covered ourselves with and the cheese and port we guzzled, the huge dinner consumed that was cooked by Maria and George - all under the eyes of Chris Morgan and Moose Hearnden of course. We stayed at the stables and drank at the pie factory. For more enlightening details of the dig, please see Navvies.

Lichfield with WRGNW 20- 21st May

Leader: Pete Fleming

My favourite part of these digs is that as we did in May, we get to stay at Lichfield cruising Club at Huddlesford Junction. This is the junction with the Coventry canal and as the Lichfield

branches off the Coventry does a 90 degree turn beneath a railway bridge. However, what is even better is that the cruising club contains a bar, which is where a number of us enjoy sleeping. We had a variety of jobs to keep us busy at Summerhill. The site was near the Boat Inn and work will hopefully make the name of this pub next to a major road more readily understandable. A reinstated milepost is another clue. The pub were kind enough to supplement our lunch rations with sandwiches, salad, chips and olives on Saturday which was gratefully consumed.



In retrospect, this appears to have been a rare occasion in 2017 for London WRG in that bricks were involved. Perhaps it was this that put us off in that it was an eclectic variety of brick. Eclectic in both shapes and sizes. The large and small brick piles were soon joined by a medium pile, then where do we put these slightly flatter than medium, slightly longer

than usual, perhaps a little wider than normal, and so on. This was the Sand Wharf. I am pleased to say that Nigel, Martin, Mick and Janet managed to lay some of the bricks cleaned by Carol, Diane and myself but if you think they don't look quite right, well no, they don't.



Adrian Sturgess' machine in action. Photo credit Fran

Machinery was in demand as the channel was profiled and the towpath works extended as a through route is built to allow walkers and cyclists easy access along the towpath as far as the M6 toll. At the time of writing 8 months later, our chairman has in fact returned to walk the length. At the time, Tim was doing his usual thing of making lots of smoke disposing of scrub that had been cleared by local volunteers in the clearing of the channel and towpath. Sam and Adrian took up their customary places on the plant, although David M. and Pete may have been allowed a go. Unfortunately Dave's prediction that the track on the smaller excavator looked like it was going to come off was correct, but this at least provided entertainment for tea break. David S. and Paul were in charge of constructing a kissing gate to allow disabled access while preventing motorcycles. And of course

a team were busy constructing the towpath that we can now all enjoy.

Cotswolds

10th-11th June

Tea besides Lock

Leader: Paul Ireson

The task of organising this dig fell to me. I must have been asleep during the meeting.

As usual when going to the Cotswolds a varied task list was arranged.

Saturday

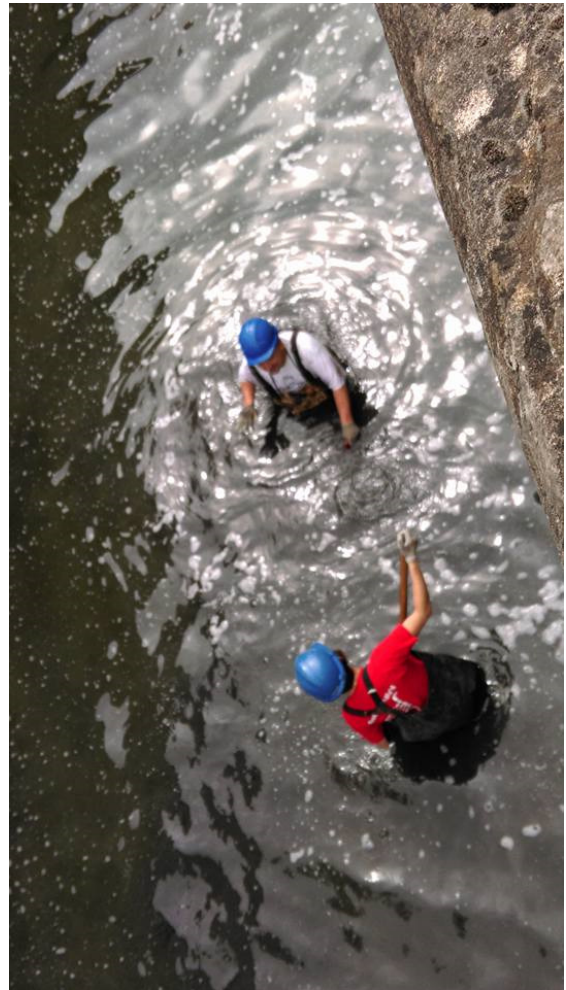
Following breakfast and lunch preparation, the group was split up into two parties

Task 1 was to cut a trench from the flowing water above Bowbridge Lock through the silt dredging's to the top of the lock.

Martin Ludgate, Mick Lilliman, Martin Danks, Tim, David Smith and several others took mattocks and shovels to start on the task.

Meanwhile Task 2 was to clear the silt from behind the lower gates on the Upper Wallbridge lock. The wader mud larks all volunteered for this. So with some of their own waders and Cotswold waders RAF Martin, Paul I, Emma Nurton, Dave Miller, Inka & Fran proceeded to the lock which is located besides the Canal Societies

café. After securing the ladder below the gates and making use of the lock ladder, the first ones descended. When it was noted that the depth could cause Fran some issues, she was tasked as our safety officer. It was found that the best method was to use the rakes to move the silt towards the gate seals and then using shovels move it over them.



"Daddy are they having a bath?" asked a little boy. Paul and Emma impersonating rocker bottom dolls in Upper Wallbridge lock.

Emma joined Martin, Dave & Paul down in the lock while the others kept the local's informed of what we were doing. Tea break was held in front of the café and we were joined by Nigel to keep an eye on us. After tea break a couple of attempts to shut the gates

were done and this highlighted where obstructions still occurred. More locals were now standing on the bridge and one young lad after seeing Paul & Emma in the lock was heard to ask his dad if the people were having a bath in the lock. I believe that Fran's response to them both was that Paul always looked that colour. Shortly after lunch the team managed to complete the task and were able to close the gates and flush most of the remaining silt by operating the paddles and this highlighted the leaks in the bottom gates.

We all went back to Bowbridge to see their progress.

The group had managed to dig a large area above the lock to aid the fast flow and had dug a channel that was described as a mini BCN and had reached just past the first set of houses. However, the excavator episode meant that at least four members were involved in trying to extract it from the canal. Fatigue and the promise of another superb Sophie dinner, persuaded most of us to pack up and return back to Brimscombe Port.



Five to one mix with Martin digging the channel. Photo credit Tim Lewis

Sunday Everyone was now involved in getting the trench up to the flowing water just beyond the third set of houses.

While the advance team cut a small channel to start the flow, the rest of us followed behind widening the channels and re-cutting the lower channel so it could take more of a flow.

A steady progress was made despite several detours across the canal bed to chase the flow of water.

So by the end of the day we had managed to reach almost 2/3rds of the way to the end of the houses and the location that the society wanted us to reach.

I must thank everyone who attended and apologise if I forgot anyone's valuable contribution but writing this up 8 months after the event, the old memory struggle. Once again big thanks to the Cotswold Canal Trust for hosting us and giving us mucky job in the summer months.

Paul Ireson



Photo credit Tim Lewis

Tool Painting

17th June

Moose and Maria Hearnden kindly allowed us space at the boatyard so we could descend on a bright summer's day to go through the kit and spruce up the tools with red and white paint. As seems to be the case when this is decided upon, the weather was hot leading to the most vigorous activity moving the tools around to paint them in the shade. At least it meant the paint dried quickly so we could avoid having red and pink rakes. Martin even took a paintbrush to the Burco box but Tracy, Helen, Tim and myself decided to keep to the less artistic of the tools to be painted.



At work in the hot sun. Photo credit Tim Lewis

Maria and Paul sorted out the catering kit and have tried again to convince us there is a logical order in which to pack it that will mean we won't have a frying pan that won't fit or an empty box at the end of the weekend. Pete and Moose also replaced all the bowsaw blades which has been greatly appreciated this autumn and winter. It was so temperate that Moose and

Paul decided to go swimming in the Lee. Later we had a wonderful barbecue and were consumed by midges.



Strange creatures in the Lee. Photo credit Tim Lewis

Buckingham

Arm 8-9th July

with KESCRG

Leader: Stephen Davies

Now I am biased about this dig as I love Cosgrove. With the iron trunk aqueduct and the course of the vanished locks parallel down to the Great Ouse, a pub through a horse tunnel beneath the cut and a derelict canal to restore, what is there not to like? It was also a very speedy drive from London meaning more time to spend in the aforementioned pub that sells a great range of real ale. Of course, this was where we found everyone when arriving at the hall we could not get into as everyone was out! The next morning the majority of us walked to site along the Grand Union. When passing the trip boat

moorings tramway tracks are visible and we crossed over the lock to access the towpath to the Buckingham Arm. We walked past the first part of the cut that is in water and currently used as moorings to the first collapsed bridge that has been replaced by a causeway. Here we met Terry and other Buckingham Canal Society's volunteers and Paul who had driven round in the van bringing our tools.



The site at Cosgrove. Photo credit Stephen davies

This is CRT land and so the health and safety talk was of necessity detailed. Plant training cannot happen on site so our experienced ticket holders were allocated jobs first. The work was clearing vegetation from and re-profiling the canal bed from the bridge.



The ruined bridge to be rebuilt - see our list of dig dates and come along February or April 2018

Ian W attacked the surface vegetation with gusto using an excavator that soon resembled some oddly shaped bird on a nest of

vegetation. Pete then completed the dry dredging and the excavating soil was used to help build up the towpath. It was shifted up the bank in the dumper by Mk2 and then spread out by a gang of willing navvies using shovels and spades and trampled upon to make more compact. We were forming half the path, leaving half to walk upon at the old level, with a plan to extend the path once the new soil had settled. We ate a very pleasant lunch in the sunshine and Sophie walked back to the hall early to cook a wonderful dinner. I had a quick walk down to the aqueduct to try and look at the old locks but was deterred by darkness and stray cows. In fact, cows are something I commonly associate with Cosgrove and they were in fact lining up along the edge of our work site waiting for the dumper to deposit the cleared vegetation, or as they saw it, interesting snacks.



Cows at Cosgrove. The junction of the GU and Buckingham Arm

The next day was pretty much continuing the same tasks, although we had some changes in personnel. Sophie and Rachel started the day by having an explore over a hedge to look at an old ice well in a crumbling stone structure that would have been part of

the manor house.



My lump of coal from Cosgrove

Chesterfield with WRGNW 2-3rd September

Leader: George Rogers

This was a joint weekend with our friends in WRG North West. Now if you know one thing about WRG North West... no, scrub that, if you know two things... no, make it three... Actually if you know four things about WRG North West it's that they (1) like drinking red wine and/or tea (2) run something called a 'Paper Chase' (and no, that doesn't refer to either Mike Chase or Liz Chase) (3) periodically hold their legendary 'ad hoc' meeting and (4) collect books to sell on their famous North West Sales Stand.

So in connection with No (4), and in addition to the usual volunteers, the minibus left London with a pile of canal books being donated by yours truly (or his employers) to the cause. A typically tedious journey up the M1 saw us arrive fairly late at Killamarsh Scout Hut (the one whose access drive is actually on the canal), too late to go to the pub, but in time to greet various London and North West folks – including Darren who spent some time telling us about a run-in he'd had on a camp recently, but about which London WRG News will remain silent (unlike Darren) in a somewhat unlikely outbreak of tact and diplomacy.

In charge of catering was Mandy of Essex WRG (Buckinghamshire Branch), but breakfast had been delegated to Ju of North West, who woke me up early to report a couple of minor snags. Firstly in keeping with what appears to have become a tradition when we have a joint dig with NW, I had managed to leave the box of pans in London. Secondly and much more seriously, the hall's electric Burco wouldn't go – so the London (gas) one was hurriedly set up in the car park (in the rain) to ensure a supply of tea with our brekkie.

And so, via an interesting route involving spotting trams and various bits of industrial history, to our work site on the edge of Staveley. One job was scrub-bashing to clear the canal route along a length heading out westwards from the town towards Renishaw, carrying on from the work some of us had done on the previous year's WRG Bonfire Bash. This was an

interesting area for two reasons. Firstly it was the site of a basin where an arm used to branch off the canal, which had been rumoured to be the final resting place of some former working boats – and which had recently been the subject of a highly successful archaeological dig, which had uncovered the remains of two boats including one of the canal's distinctive working craft known as 'cuckoo boats' because they laid their eggs in other birds' nests, or something. Or perhaps not known as 'cuckoo boats' at all – as anyone who goes into print on the subject is liable to find out from the lengthy letters page contributions to this debate which is clearly vital to the entire future of the waterways. And secondly, this is an area that's still under a certain amount of threat from HS2 (boo, hiss!) so the Canal Trust have hit on the idea that if we can get the canal open first, then we can turn round and be all pissy about whether we're going to let them build their overgrown overpriced train set rather than the other way round. Or something like that.



Tea break. Photo credit Tim Lewis

Being the first scrub-bash of the season (which runs roughly September to April, when the cuckoos aren't nesting), it was a little on the warm side for bonfires. It also meant that there was still quite a lot of fruit on some of the stuff that we were hacking

down and clearing from the route of the canal, leading to a desperate rescue mission to save the ingredients for a couple of gallons of elderberry wine from the bonfires. With Ian and Paul on chainsaws plus plenty on hand tools, we made good progress on clearing the scrub.

Meanwhile a second team were at work just the other side of Staveley, putting the finishing touches on a site which has seen a fair amount of WRG involvement in recent years – Constitution Hill Bridge, a little way west of the new Staveley Town Basin.



Constitution Hill footbridge. Photo credit David France

Returning to the accommodation via an interesting (and different) route, we were fed a doubtless delicious (but not detailed in my notes) meal courtesy of cook Mandy. Marion went for a run (hadn't we worked her hard enough?) then some of us, less energetic but determined to make up for missing out

on Friday night, headed off to find a pub. It was quite a lengthy walk up the hill to find some real ale at the Nag's Head, but worth it, we though. As it transpired, it was an especially lengthy walk up the hill to not find any real ale at all at the Nag's Head – because it had recently changed hands and stopped serving the stuff. It was a slightly longer walk back down a slightly different hill to the Crown, where (if you could stand the Karaoke in the background from the other bar) they did serve some decent ale.

At this point my notes say 'Climbing Wall'. I'm not sure if this was meant to simply imply that I should mention that 'climbing wall' was a feature of the accommodation, or that 'climbing wall' was an activity which actually took place. One thing I do remember was that the wall in question took the form of a number of bricks in the end wall of the hall having been deliberately laid slightly proud or slightly recessed compared to all the rest, leading London and NW's brickies to get decidedly twitchy and tempted to reach for their trowels and lump-hammers with a view to 'putting it right'.

If I remember rightly the Burco had been persuaded to work again, so there was no need to go out in the rain for Sunday morning tea.

Following an interesting drive to site by a third different route, the work for Sunday was more of the same, enlivened by several conversations from friendly locals and their dogs. (This makes a nice change, considering that not that long ago a bunch in Staveley cancelled our

accommodation when they heard that it was a group from 'bloody Loondoon' who were planning to visit and fix their canal.) We did our best to keep them friendly by supplying them with free logs by the barrow load.

With the canal looking nice and tidy, and the other team having put the coping stones on the parapets at Constitution Hill Bridge, we returned by a fourth and final interesting route to the accommodation.

Oh, and the box of books for the North West sales stand? Well, unfortunately the person who was supposed to be taking them on to the north west managed to forget them, so they went off with somebody else, and a couple of months later they were still making their way around north west England. But I won't point any fingers of blame, given that as I write this there are two more boxes of books on my landing which I have (so far) twice completely forgotten to even load into the van...

Martin Ludgate

Compliments from WACT

A paragraph in a letter from Sally Schupke, Wey & Arun Canal Trust Chair "Please pass on our thanks to all the WRG working groups that have helped the Trust during the past year. These include the Forestry Group and London WRG who have made a number of visits to us. These groups of volunteers are very important to the

Trust, as we benefit from their range of skills when we do not have the resources from our own volunteers.”

Wey & Arun

23rd-24th

September

Leader: Tim Lewis

This is certainly a contender for the Donut award for 2017. Having written copious notes in the pub to help Tim write a report – guess what has happened? Yes, you probably guessed right – he has lost the notes! Anyway, as long as we got the work done – which was putting in mooring bollards, erecting a memorial bench, a concrete pour, laying some blocks and more fencing – hopefully the WACT chair won't mind our loss of a dig report here.

Shrewsbury &

Newport 14-

15th October

Leader: Sophie Smith

Local people had been contacting the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal Trust with concerns about the condition of the tunnel face at Berwick Tunnel. The

trust contacted us to outline a plan of work –and it soon became clear we needed more than one weekend to do it all.



[Berwick tunnel](#). Photo credit James Weir

According to a recent structural survey, Berwick Tunnel is in surprisingly good condition inside. Outside it's a different story! The stone face is crumbling, mature tree roots have infiltrated the structure, and an old lengthsman's hut is falling to pieces nearby. All this needs attention before it gets any worse.

Our plan for the weekend was initially to add some edge protection to keep visitors out of trouble, and have a gander at the rest of the structural work. The locals have the ambition to create a short loop of footpath round that particular stretch of canal to open it up to walkers. This meant there was plenty of scrub bashing work to do.

We got started with clearing the scrub on the towpath side and began creating a path on the offside. Eventually this will join up to create an 'all-abilities' walking route of around a kilometre in length just outside Shrewsbury. It's a manageable project

and one that could really draw local attention to the wider restoration work.

As was perhaps appropriate on a dig so close to Halloween, this was a rather spooky weekend. For starters we were warned about a local population of bats that may or may not live within the tunnel itself. We found not one but several creepy pram skeletons buried in the undergrowth, and also a dead crow impaled on a wire fence. We also found out why the tunnel vents had been blocked up – a murder victim's body had been dumped there.

Working around the needs of the local bat population placed some restrictions on how we worked. We needed to drag the scrub well out of the way of possible nesting sites, meaning a lot of work moving branches about.

The local trust is active and well-organised but not very big, so London WRG's regular visits add a considerable boost to their impact. We're very keen on this project because we find the locals easy to work with and we enjoy the work. Accommodation in Uffington is excellent; clean and warm and with a great kitchen. But it's a bit small for a large group – we were more than 20 people so it was lucky a few folk were in camper vans.

Following some discussion with the locals and our half-AGM, London WRG have committed to return twice in early 2018 to continue with the work at the Berwick site. We need to dig out the roots of several felled trees and

rebuild an old brickwork linesman's hut before tackling the restoration of the stone tunnel face. Join us 3-4 March and 12-13 May to help us make a difference at this historic site. We always have a good time in Shrewsbury, so it's well-worth making the trip.

The local trust welcome other WRG groups that can contribute to this ongoing project. If your group would like to arrange a weekend on the Shrewsbury & Newport canals please contact Chas Warren on 07734 878 777.

Sophie Smith

Reunion at Uttoxeter 4-5th November

**Leaders: George Rogers and
Becky Parr**

No dig report again and I have to admit I'm really bored of writing them now.



The Wharf wall at the end of the weekend. Photo credit Tim Lewis

If you weren't there you missed out. If you were there, why haven't you written me a dig report? Anyway, Nigel was very wobbly with the old port in the evening but it was a well deserved party after we had done a LOT of slashing and burning. So much so that we had even discovered the site of a wharf that would have served Alton Towers in its days as a country estate before the screaming hordes whose cries occasionally drifted over the hill to us.



Discovery of the bywash. Photo Tim Lewis

The site of the lock was also established and a number of Wergies can be seen here staring down a hole. Luckily it was too small for any of them to climb down because you know what it's like, show a Wergie a muddy hole.....instead they had to be satisfied by just poking things down it. The local canal trust organiser was very pleased at the discovery.

Otherwise, it was the usual bonfires, cake, evening feast and catching up with old friends – fantastic. Let's do it again next year.

Wey & Arun

18-19th

November –

written by the group (at the pub; Fran, David, Martin, Emma, Tim - uh oh, where did the new outbreak of diplomacy go? ed.)

Fortunately Tim remembered something. We were going to Womersley village hall and not to Dunsfold as previously thought and he was driving as Martin was unwell. Luckily we did not need to remember the code to get in as Emma had already been there for 3 hours desperately wanting to get out to go to the pub. We pride ourselves at London WRG at not letting anyone down in this respect.

RAF Martin cooked breakfast remarkably quietly – so peaceably in fact that Martin L. Woke up and worried that no-one was cooking breakfast (presumably before falling asleep again) – I said REMARKABLY QUIETLY, Paul!

After breakfast we set off for the airfield where a 'Driver experience' day was occurring. We wondered if a way to raise funds could be to enter the WRG van in a 'Drive a trannie' or whether the experience of the new van's suspension would be comparable to driving a Maserati.

We arrived on site to find Dave having stoked a roaring fire in the stove and saying “I hope you’ve all got wellies” to RAF, who was the one volunteer who was wearing a pair of wellies. It seemed ironic that this canal that was famously short of water contained a substantial amount in the slipway where we were working.

The first job was to dismantle the scaffolding. This became more arduous as our boots combined with more and more clay. Fran had imagined being taller would be more glamorous than it was with several inches of mud added height.



Boots by fire. Photo credit Ian Stewart

Emma calibrated the level. “Aren’t we in trouble if we make the slipway level?” asked Tony. “Good point” we all agreed but the equipment used is now faultless. We then took out the shuttering on the Northern wall. Some of the diwdags (a diwidag is the metal tie used to keep the shuttering in place) were particularly stubborn. There were a variety of sizes of wrecking bars and a crow bar once referred to as a mini bar led to Tim thinking that he was missing out on something. But a nailbar can mean different things to different people.

The game of from me to you using a sledge hammer to remove the dywidags worked out much better when done alternately rather than together. One diddidag was so determinedly stubborn that when it was eventually removed it was clear that the concrete had got into parts of the shuttering within which it should not enter.



Martin and the diwdags. Photo credit David Miller

It was then time to put the shuttering up on the other side. Emma and a local volunteer knitted some steelwork together for reinforcing. (She had had some practice by knitting socks previously) Thankfully they had remembered to turn the cage over before closing it so we didn’t need to

cut the trestle out. Dave had even put a gazebo up to keep them dry.



Creating reinforcement for the walls of the slipway.
Photo credit Tim Lewis

Adrian did something with a digger. Like is the pope Catholic?! Shock. And Ian with others was decommissioning Compasses Bridge. It was getting dark after 4pm so we returned to the hall. Martin and Emma led a team effort to cook spaghetti Bolognese and he made the famous (infamous) tiramisu.

Sunday began with quietly fried egg bread and another tasty breakfast cooked by RAF Martin. Then Fran and Martin found the bag containing Tim's fourth work mobile phone of the year after looking into the back of the van. Unfortunately Tim had already checked the back of the van and not having seen it had returned to site and looked 'everywhere' for it the night before. On receipt of his bag, Tim then got into the van wearing David's shoes which no-one found surprising. The day then continued and we managed to erect a good amount of the shuttering ready for another team to do the concrete pour to complete

the walls of the slipway.



Creating shuttering for the slipway. Photo credit Tim Lewis

Once the slipway is completed this will provide access for a dredger. This will bring the reality of boating on this section of canal with boats of a deeper draught than a canoe (as you may have seen these boating here at the opening of Compasses Bridge earlier in the year).

Cotswolds Christmas Party with KESCRG 2-3rd December

Leader: Stephen Davies

The Cotswolds is clearly a great place to go for any reasonably sized gathering due to ample space while we can still access number 1 Brimscombe Port. Complete with its hot showers in freezing rooms that discourage

dallying it is perfect for a crowd. Although you may want to put your thermals on before visiting the library before dinner. John also seems able to magic multiple tasks for us at the shortest notice. The task list is clearly several miles long for the restoration and I am sure we can remain happily busy there for years to come.



Bond Mill Gatehouse. Photo credit Stephen Davies

The work for this dig was clearance of overhanging trees and tidying the towpath side as well as thinning some of the vegetation on the offside. Some particularly large dead trees were exposed from their ivy shrouds to allow people with the right tools at a later date to fell them in a safe manner. In order to transport the cut boughs and scrub to the bonfire site a boat was employed with the usual suspects messing about it. With some handy people having brought their chainsaws the supply of burning material was splendid and the bonfires warm. This was important as it was a very cold day. Eli made a warming soup that

she brought to site for lunch that was gratefully consumed along with just about everything else edible. I remember chocolate brownies and I think there was fruit cake and biscuits and fruit and stuff but I definitely remember the chocolate cake.....mmmmm.....



Bonfire at the Christmas Party. Photo Tim Lewis

Anyway, where were we? Of course, that was it – more food! True to tradition Eli and team made an amazing dinner. Even when I thought I couldn't eat anymore more room had was found. Though some may say that sprouts should not be available to all. It was then dressing up and Emma won the competition for her depiction of the Highland games using her new recruit award to great effect. I cannot remember what team won the fiendishly difficult quiz by their no doubt fantastic charade skills.



Enactment of Dennis Taylor beating Steve Davis in snooker



Fancy dress entrants on the theme of Sport. Photo by Tim Lewis.

Caption competition

What *are* they saying????



Photo credit: The London Canal Museum

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