

# LWRG NEWS

Issue 92 Winter 2023





## **Editors Note: Fran Burrell**

Thank-you Martin L for the cover photo from our October Wey and Arun dig. For the first time since our dashed pre-pandemic plans LWRG had an AGM! This was during the successful Shrewsbury and Newport dig where pulling out massive tree stumps and trying to burn them with very little smaller wood to fuel it turned out to be substantially less difficult than doing an AGM when you are out of practice. Indeed, when we finally got to the pub to recover, we then remembered we had not completed the business of discussing kit that may need replacing. However, we had dates planned for the next six months which felt like an achievement. There has been some changes; a dig added and another taken away, and we are still not positive our hoped for site will be suitable for June but it is good to have a plan. As always, anyone who would like us to do a dig somewhere and is happy to lead is welcome to propose this at our half-AGM to be held in the New Year. We are also keeping an eye on numbers to consider if we should return to three weekly digs rather than monthly.

There are still some difficulties in regular planning. The WRG Reunion was announced then cancelled rather quickly. In contrast, the Christmas Camp has happened successfully and the BCN was held earlier this year and we have been given a date for 2024, so things really are improving. The resilience and problem solving of WRG members is a huge boon for this and you will read about KESCRG's Eli doing remarkable changes of plans on finding a broken oven on Saturday morning on the LWRG/KESCRG Christmas dig to seamlessly nourish the dig as normal. With so much hard work and ingenuity amongst us I think we can confidently look to the future of restoration work with the many canal societies that are also moving forwards with equal aptitude with their plans.

## **Diary**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Dig site</b>	<b>Leader</b>
12 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> January 2024	Chelmer & Blackwater	Fran Burrell
25 <sup>th</sup> -27 <sup>th</sup> January 2024	Shrewsbury & Newport with Forestry	Sophie Smith
16 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup> February 2024	Cotswolds Canals	Martin Ludgate
15 <sup>th</sup> -17 <sup>th</sup> March 2024	Birmingham Canal Navigations Clean-up	Centrally organised
12 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> April 2024	Wey & Arun with KESCRG	Ed Walker
1 <sup>st</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> May 2024	Cavalcade work camp	Pete Fleming
17 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> May 2024	Cotswolds Canals	Sophie Smith
8 <sup>th</sup> June 2024	Tool painting at Stanstead Abbots	Maria & Moose 'Dave' Hearnden
28 <sup>th</sup> -30 <sup>th</sup> June 2024	TBC ? Buckingham Canal	David Miller
4 <sup>th</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> October 2024	Shrewsbury & Newport	Sophie Smith

# 16/17<sup>th</sup> September Wey & Arun with Forestry

Our chairman Tim Lewis took notes for this dig report but we wrote it without him on Christmas Camp, it being near the end of the year and the first dig being the one without a report! As I was not there, I am afraid I cannot account for the accuracy of what I have said, as you will see....

London WRG's job was to work with the local Saturday work party to complete the duct being installed as part of the Baldwin's Knob lock back pumping scheme upgrade. David M and Adrian S got into the hired excavators, which were both brand new with only three hours on the clock and did their best to look after them. They started at either end of the duct and travelled towards each other. David M had to look for where the duct had already been dug and filled in previously to ensure he did not dig up any completed duct. He did this by looking for the tape that will indicate the placement of electric cables which will be laid through the ducting at a later date.



Adrian S in digger number 1. Photo: Tim Lewis



David M in new digger number 2. Photo: Tim Lewis





Backfilling the trench after the duct has been laid.  
Photo: Tim Lewis

After the trench had been dug the ducting was placed in sections with connectors. Then some infill was placed, followed by warning tape, followed by more backfill that was compacted before the final backfill was placed and compacted again by the wacker plate to restore the towpath.



Compacting the backfilled trench to restore the towpath. Photo: Tim Lewis

Forestry were doing forestry things and helping clear the towpath of ash trees that have been affected by ash die back meaning a number of trees are now in an unsafe condition so unfortunately need to be removed.



Forestry removed dead ash trees below the lock.  
Photo: Tim Lewis

In due Forestry style a pint was had before dinner at the Onslow Arms. Rachel and Sophie had prepared dinner after shopping on Saturday with Martin driving the van after dropping the work site team off near the lock.



A pint before dinner at the Onslow Arms. Photo: Martin Ludgate

Everyone ate a delicious dinner, which even at the time, Tim has noted as a “scrummy dinner” but no-one can remember what the food actually was! The Forrester’s was shut so a team went to the ‘Other pub’ which may be the Sun (as per Team Christmas



camp) or the Half Moon (more contemporaneously noted by Tim). All we have to go on is that it is apparently owned by a famous person and seemed a little bit trendy. As an aside games are often played on Christmas camp and perhaps some memory type games in addition to going to the pub may be a useful LWRG occupation? Anyway, LWRG and Forestry were thankfully allowed into the pub as they had washed and changed their clothes since site.

Sunday was much of the same with the final job for the LWRG team to construct a manhole cover.



A manhole was also built. Photo: Tim Lewis

Having almost completed all of the work that was expected for the weekend by Saturday evening LWRG carried on with the ducting on Sunday. They were joined by the cooks, Sophie and Rachel. This meant that when a torrential downpour happened at

midday we could pack up and have lunch at the hall before leaving.



Tea break on Sunday joined by the cooks Sophie and Rachel

## 7/8<sup>th</sup> October Shrewsbury & Newport

**Leader: Sophie Smith**

We were very excited to have lots of new people sign up to this dig so we could give them all the horrible jobs. We have had no new people since before the pandemic. What was even better was they all turned up after signing up! Martin D and the St Helens gang had arrived before we left Waterloo so were rolling home from the pub when the LWRG van arrived just after 10 to run to the pub. They had also had the benefit of a nice dinner in the Corbet Arms with SNCT chair Bernie and his wife.





Tidying the towpath and trying to dispose of stumps.  
Photo: Tim Lewis

In the morning we had some changes for breakfast and Martin D essentially made Welsh rarebit for the vegetarians which made a nice change. On site we had to get the three tiffors going to start the epic task of removing some enormous tree stumps from the canal bed. One particularly well-rooted stump took a new split pin and the entire day with teams working in relay to get out.



Using tiffors and hand tools to remove stumps. Photo: Tim Lewis



Stump fire. Photo: Tim Lewis

A lot of these trees that had been felled had already started sprouting new willow growth so they needed to be removed but they were very heavy and difficult to break up.



The electricity substation site on Saturday morning.  
Photo: Tim Lewis



Only Chas of the locals had a working chainsaw so he was a man in much demand to make logs for us to shift and help reduce the size of the stumps. This was because we were unable to burn around some stumps due to the electricity wires from the adjacent electricity substation being overhead. We also removed some ivy and dead wood from the hedge side of the canal to try to protect the bankside trees.

We lit fires – the flame thrower helped Tim achieve success in lighting these. Sophie was in the waders in the canal when we found out they had a hole in. Poor Martin mainly did driving as he had to take people to sites and collect more PPE from Screwfix for our new recruits. There was also a team at the north portal site log splitting who were provided with new logs for this at regular intervals by a local driving a dumper.

There was an orange cake at tea break (note flavour not colour). The day was also broken up by Martin needing to be taken to the station to go to Mike Palmers for a lift to Northern Canals Association conference.



Martin at the pub with our WRG Chairman. Photo: Jude Palmer

Dinner was a rather delicious tagine followed by baked apple with either

custard or yoghurt. We did part of the AGM before dinner and part after then as we had forgotten any other business we had to do that in the pub.



Saturday evening drinks at the Corbet Arms. Photo: Tim Lewis

On Sunday Martin D had sourced some eggs and the vegetarians had omelette for breakfast- the meat eaters ate the same as usual.



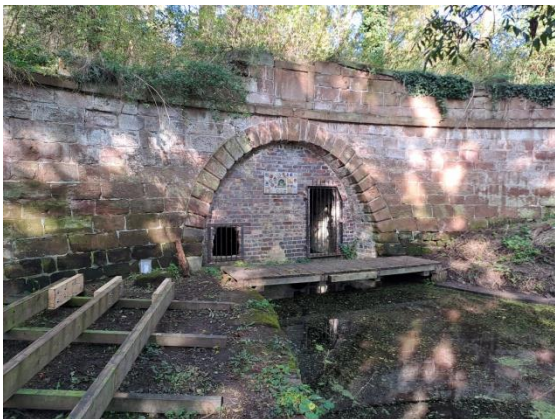
The log splitting site at the Northern portal of the Berwick Tunnel with a pile of logs to be reduced to stove-sized lumps before drying. Photo: Darren Shepherd

Work was the main part of the team continuing scrub clearance and trying to burn the roots of the previously felled trees. There was also a team splitting logs and a team was taken to a third job at the Southern portal site. The work here was to swap out a temporary bridge.



Starting more fires on Sunday. Photo: Tim Lewis

The bridge team soon arrived back to help with using the tiffors and continuing the scrub clearance. We packed up for the long drive while it was still light having made a dent in the destruction of the willow roots.



Swapping bridges over at the Southern Portal site. Photo: Darren Shepherd

## Reunion

Sadly the planned Bonfire bash on the Monmouthshire and Brecon canals was cancelled. It has been difficult to get a site for a suitable volume of work with suitable accommodation since before the pandemic so this was sad news. Due to the lateness of the gap we therefore did not have any plans for a dig replacement.

# 2-3<sup>rd</sup> Dec Xmas Wey & Arun with KESCRG

**Leader: Stephen Davis**

There was still plenty of traffic in London despite the slightly later start at 19.30 from Waterloo. As Fran had missed her train this was all good as she managed to arrive at the same time as Martin with the van. The journey to Womersh Village Hall is thankfully fairly short. Though, so are the parking spaces but after a little re-jigging with the KESCRG trailer everyone was settled at last and we went to the pub. The fore team who had arrived first managed to get us seats next to the log fire so it was so pleasant we stayed until after last orders before returning to the hall.

In the morning it was apparent some good news had happened while everyone was at the pub as Eli had arrived with much food and she had got up early on Saturday morning to cook breakfast. As the oven would not stay lit this was considerably more stressful than expected but she had changed plans and used alternative methods to produce a tasty cooked breakfast for everyone. This was heartily consumed among un/helpful suggestions on how to cook a turkey without an oven. As a vegetarian tea-



drinker, I felt filling the burco with oil to deep fry it in there was not a reasonable suggestion. Sticking it on the bonfire seemed OK from my point of view and we were unconvinced by Martin's idea to slice it up and put it in the toaster as Tim gets the fire alarm blaring just using normal bread. Eli had the most sensible idea that if the oven was kaput a turkey stew could be provided. This would mean that our first Christmas dinner of the year could be a Boxing Day dinner which seemed to be admirable forward planning.



The work site is on the offside of the canal. Photo: Stephen

We headed off to the Loxwood site where instead of finding Father Christmas doing Santa Cruises on the Wey and Arun trip boats, we found Dave E. who was full of cold, which was remarkably apt considering the weather. The frost had turned to mist by then but it was still quite nippy so the walk along the canal to site was welcome after we had loaded the boat with all the stuff to be carried to site.

Pete steered the boat down with Adrian C to find the walking party. The walking party had set off purposefully without much idea of where they were headed but fortunately had chosen the right gap in the hedge to stand opposite to.



Pete is steering the workboat with all the kit down to site. Photo: Adrian C.

When the boat arrived it was transformed into a bridge so we could unload the kit and allow everyone to access the off side to begin work. This was of the classic Christmas party variety and involved scrub bashing and bonfire building.



Martin and Pete started the fire. Photo: Martin L.

As a lot of our source material was brush it was soon blazing merrily so we did not miss Tim too much. Especially as it continued blazing merrily ALL day.

Alex brought down one of the exposed ash trees with a chainsaw as the start of fulfilling our task which was to expose the trees that have been affected by ash die back to allow their removal. Many of these diseased



trees are sprouting small spindly new growth which apparently means the tree itself is struggling – one had already fallen so this was removed by a team from a boat.



This is what to do when the piece of tree is too heavy for one person to lift. Photo: Martin L.

Eli and Ed had prepared lunch that included multiple sandwiches and a delicious soup as well as a lemon drizzle cake and this was gratefully consumed when it arrived around 13.30. We continued work until just after 3 due to the necessity of getting the tools packed away and everyone back at the landing stage, including the boat before it got dark at around 4pm. Martin took the boat back and due to the way of these things had to reverse for a substantial distance before being able to turn just before the bridge. The boat went considerably faster once it was going forwards and as the walking crew had now got rather chilly waiting at the landing stage they were eager to help unload the boat and everything was soon packed into vans and we were away once the boat had been taken to its moorings and tied up safely.

Back at the hall Eli had been hard at work. Sophie and Rachel decorated

with some tinsel, lights and crackers before going to the pub for a pre-dinner pint. Nibbles were served at 18.30 with dinner at 19.30. The theme for the Christmas party this year was Disney. Martin had arranged a quiz and several people had brought some dressing up.



I'm not sure Clive entirely accepts Pete's answer in the quiz. Photo: Ian Stewart

Woody won the dressing up although they were all strong contenders. The quiz was suitably fiendish and the separate rounds meant that no-one could be complacent as with a variety of skills needed such as factual memory, miming skills and acting the lead position was taken by each team in turn. I have in fact, forgotten who the winner was.

Sunday was much of the same progressing the areas cleared on either side of the boat bridge. The bridge did need to be temporarily re-



deployed as a boat to allow a canoeist to use the canal but we all agreed its great to see the restored canal being used for both walkers and water activities. An unusual aspect of part of the towpath here is that it is also used by horse-riders! We had a late lunch and packed up in time to clean the hall and disperse just as the daylight went. It was a productive and very enjoyable festive weekend.



The dresser-uppers! Can you guess who they are? Note the theme is Disney and no-one is dressed as Robin Hood! Photo: Ian Stewart.



Santa enjoying a well-earned beer. Photo: Sophie Smith

## Caption Competition



People said Tim was lighting bonfires on the S&N in October, please send me your captions for this photo – photographer unknown.

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