

NAVVIES

VOLUNTEERS RESTORING WATERWAYS

**Trolleys and more:
BCN Cleanup report and pictures**



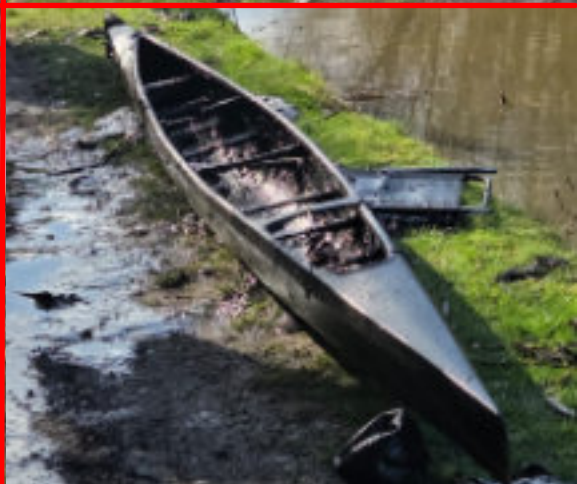
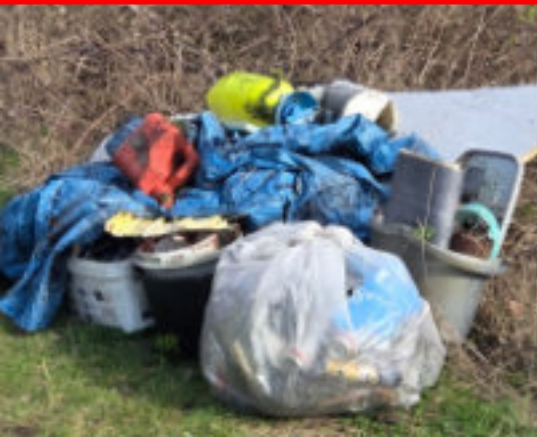
**WATERWAY
RECOVERY**
GROUP

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INTRO BCN Cleanup



March saw the annual Cleanup weekend on the Birmingham Canal Navigations. These pictures by IWA Lichfield's Neil Barnett and the editor show some of the volunteers and some of the junk we pulled out. See page 12 for a full report.



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PLEASE NOTE: subscriptions renewal cheques should be made out to The Inland Waterways Association. Note our new address (above right)

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Cover picture: They're a bit of a BCN Cleanup cliché, but we genuinely do find far too many supermarket trolleys that have ended up in the murky waters of the Birmingham Canal Navigations. See page 12 for a report of our Cleanup weekend spent pulling them out.

Back cover (top): Completed lock tail bridge at Pewsham Top Lock on the Wilts & Berks Canal, thanks to the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust and Kescrg who will be leading the summer Camp there.

Back cover (bottom) piling by Cotswold Canals Trust volunteers at the replaced Bonds Mill Liftbridge, as part of the ongoing Cotswold Canals Connected (Stonehouse to Saul) restoration

NAVVIES welcome from the editor

The editor looks through his magazine, and wonders if perhaps there isn't enough about canal restoration in it... or maybe there is...

Welcome

Hello and welcome to another edition of *Navvies*, the magazine for volunteers who help to restore canals all over Britain, published by national volunteering organisation the Waterway Recovery Group, and named after the similarly nomadic original 'navvies' (short for 'navigators') who travelled the country 200 or more years ago, finding work wherever they could on building the canals.

Well, yes, that's what I often say at the start of my editorial piece, but if you look through this issue you'll find quite a lot about other things besides actually restoring canals.

Not just restoring canals?

For starters there's a report on the Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN) Cleanup – which is an annual event aimed at dragging the biggest possible number of old bikes, prams, tyres, the old favourites supermarket trolleys (as our front cover shows), and other junk out of the less well-used parts of the fascinating BCN canal network of the West Midlands. Next there's the forthcoming Canalway Cavalcade festival at London's Little Venice, which could do with just a few more volunteers to help it run smoothly. In our progress pages you can read about the River Gipping Trust's record-breaking balsam-bashing feats in East Anglia. And back down in West London, there's the forthcoming heritage project restoring water-saving sideponds at Hanwell Locks on the Grand Union Canal, an unused historic feature of what is very much a working waterway. And although the bad news is that the planned spring camp there couldn't happen, we're hoping to reschedule it for summer when we might well (fingers crossed) get more work done given the better chance of dry weather. Finally, over in Shropshire the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust's volunteers have finished restoring one historic warehouse at Wappenshall and started the second one, in their long-running project that's creating a community centre, café and canal centre in the old buildings.

Which is all very interesting. But you could be forgiven, on quickly flicking through the magazine, for getting the impression that we (and by that I mean the whole waterway restoration movement) might be getting distracted away from the main job of rescuing canals from dereliction and returning them to good condition and opening them up for boats and everything else.

Not enough restoring canals?

Well, firstly (as I'm sure I've already said too many times – sorry if I'm boring you) I think that often these activities are very much relevant (possibly even complementary) to restoration. For example:

The Cleanup: What's the use in restoring the BCN 'missing links' of the Lichfield and Llapal canals (both of which have often featured in our Canal Camps programme; the Lichfield is scheduled for two weeks of work this summer) if in the meantime we let the existing network fall into dereliction through a vicious circle of lack of use and accumulation of junk in the canals? One day the Lichfield will be restored, and we'll be glad we kept the northern BCN (including where we were working on the recent Cleanup) open, because the Lichfield will provide a great new route for boats from the rest of the network to get into these quieter areas.

Canalway Cavalcade: It's not only a useful money-raiser for WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association, enabling it to carry on supporting canal restoration, but it also serves to publicise IWA and WRG, and remind London that it's part of an amazing system of waterways, which could be even more so with a few reopenings...



Some very clear practical restoration progress with the new liftbridge by Tamworth Road on the Lichfield

Wappenshall warehouses: these will help to turn what was an important junction (where the Shrewsbury Canal met the Newport Canal) into a focus for the whole restoration; bring in income from the café to support further restoration work, and hopefully form the base for a trip-boat operation as lengths of canal leading east and west from the junction are restored.

The Hanwell sideponds: I'm slightly struggling here to find a direct link to restoration... Perhaps if we say that (although there isn't an immediate plan to put them back into operation – but there could be in the future) the sideponds contributed usefully to reducing the amount of water that the locks used, and their reinstatement could set a precedent for the sort of water economising measures that are likely to be needed on canal restoration projects. No, you're right, that possibly is stretching it a bit. But no matter, because...

Secondly, you'll see elsewhere in the magazine that we're actually covering a fair bit of progress on 'proper' (i.e. directly waterway-related and aimed at reopening to navigation) restoration work. In particular, the 'big three' major southern schemes covered in our photo feature on page 20-23 about the mobile regional working party groups:

On the Wilts & Berks Canal, our friends in Kescrg have been hard at work on various sites including Pewsham and Moulden.

On the Wey & Arun Canal, NWPG and the Wey & Arun Canal Trust are making great progress at Rook's Hill Bridge, and this summer's Canal Camps aim to link this site to the Birtley lift bridges site where we did so much work between 2019 and 2023.

On the Cotswold Canals, Kescrg have been putting the finishing touches on the long-running project to rebuild Weymoor Bridge, create a new stream culvert under the adjacent canal bed, and reinstate the canal channel above the culvert. And on the same waterway, London WRG are back at John Robinson Lock, starting on the very first length of the new canal section being created to bypass the 'Missing Mile' section of the original canal (see our major feature in the last issue of *Navvies*).

...and I haven't even mentioned the Buckingham, Chesterfield, Louth, or any of the others.

So yes, waterway restoration is very much still active, on the ground and in the pages of *Navvies*, and hopefully I'll see some of you on a work site this summer...

Martin Ludgate

CHAIRMAN'S Comment

...on safety reporting and what we do with it; postponing the Hanwell Camp; and why CRT and canal restorers should speak the same language

Chairman's Comment

There are some editions of *Navvies* that I get to see where they are complete except for the pages marked "MKP to fill this section". Just before you assume that this is another diatribe about how the Chairman's Comment is always late, I'd like to point out that sometimes (not often, but sometimes) this is because Martin is ahead of the deadline, rather than because I'm behind it.

When this occurs, I have the advantage of being able to accurately refer to articles and I'm going to take that advantage now.

A common message from the WRG Board is that we really do both appreciate and encourage "safety reporting" in all its forms, be that:

- Incident reports from the Book kept in the First Aid kits, or
- Safety reporting cards kept in the Camps flight case & the van glove boxes, or
- Any other form for a specific issue (such as a traffic incident).

Any of these reports that come into Head Office are immediately circulated to the Board so that, in a very few cases each year, we can take any direct action required. However, direct action is only required in very few cases, usually correcting some misinformation. But the other use these reports are put to is an Annual Review. This is a vital part of the way WRG runs things safely – Martin has written an excellent summary on Page 11, both of the process and this year's outcome. Please do read it and consider how the messages included should affect your work both on site and (all too easily forgotten) the Accommodation.

However, before you get to Health & Safety on Page 11, you will get to "Coming Soon" on Page 8 where there is some news regarding the work we had planned on the side ponds of the Grand Union Canal's Hanwell flight of Locks. The work we were planning there for 21 - 29 April (having already been postponed from the original Easter dates) has had to be put back to 25 July – 5 Aug. Firstly I'd like to try and mitigate any rumours that might start, but then I think there is a lesson to be learnt here. Or to be precise – there is evidence that one of the Restoration Movements current concerns is valid.

But firstly to quell the rumours....

- This is not anything "environmental" – no nesting season issues or anything like that,
- Nor is it anything competence based – we were happily working with the Canal & River Trust (CRT) to ensure that Historic England (the sponsors) would be able to remove the historic side ponds from their Heritage at Risk Register,
- Given that HE were sponsoring the work, it's unlikely to be a funding problem,
- Nor is it a problem with Canal Camps – the Camp was well booked, the Accommodation was great and the Leadership team were looking forward to a good time.

So I think the only remaining 'usual suspect' is 'Health and Safety' and it is indeed the culprit, however, don't jump to any easy conclusions. Because we are in agreement with CRT about this. Dave 'Evvo' Evans (Camp Leader) wrote to all those who were booked on with the words:

Despite everyone's best efforts, there is one essential health and safety provision that cannot be satisfied before 21 April so we have no option but to delay our work to restore the side-pond at Lock 95 in the Hanwell Flight on the Grand Union Canal.

The safety of WRG's volunteers and CRT's employees is always paramount on a Canal Camp and we won't accept risks that we can't mitigate sufficiently. That is the situation here.

He's dead right about that. We just couldn't get everything in place in time and, you know how I love a quote, the one we commonly use feels right:

This restoration has been running for 60 years now – if it isn't safe or sensible to do the job today then wait until it is. Taking one more day is not going to stop it reopening.

[And before anyone points it out, no, we haven't been restoring the Hanwell side ponds for 60 years – but it's just as valid as a generic quote]

However, I mentioned a lesson to be learnt here? Here is my take on it:

While we have come to an agreement about the situation and the steps that need to be taken, it has been a difficult process to get to a situation where we thought we were both talking the same language.

Now you might be thinking that this sounds like a local issue? With CRT there is always the possibility that it's just a 'local issue'. Consistency between regions has never been one of their strengths. But the evidence around the Restoration Sector does seem to show it's every region where this is a problem.

I'm reminded of a comment I wrote for an IWA briefing document this time last year:

....although CRT do use phrases like "compliance can be achieved in many different ways", they only have 'their' method of assessing compliance. CRT have no 'infrastructure' to assess compliance other than the methods they use to assess contractors. Volunteers are not contractors. Nobody in CRT who assesses compliance has the authority to alter how those standards reflect different circumstances.

Just to be clear – I am not saying that the current CRT focus on "compliance" is wrong. CRT are simply asking questions they have a right (duty?) to ask, and the Restoration Sector should be able to answer them. But progress is only going to be made if the answers get properly assessed. Speaking the same language is essential to that process.

One final piece of WRG news - Helen Gardner has resigned from the WRG Board as she finds new home activities are demanding too much time. On behalf of the Board I thank her for the wisdom, dedication and perseverance she has brought to the Board and especially for the laughs that have always accompanied her.

Mike Palmer

NAVVIES NEWS STOP PRESS

WRG Driver Authorisation Scheme Back in October the Inland Waterways Association employed a new company to upgrade their database which hosts all the WRG data including camps, Navvies subscriptions and driver authorisation. Unfortunately it would appear that they "forgot" about driver authorisation and the upgrade broke the system in a small but fundamental way such that we could not longer produce cards, letters or emails. Although the fix should have been very simple it has taken months of behind the scenes negotiations with the new supplier to get them to actually fix what they broke. We are expecting the fix to be in place very soon now at which point we will start catching up with the ridiculously huge backlog of over 6 months. Please bear with us..... In the meantime for any DA enquiries please use da@wrg.org.uk rather than any individual email address so we are working through stuff in one place rather than hunting it down in various email accounts.

WRG Reunion? After last year's successful revival, we would like to hold another major Reunion weekend working party this November (or so), but haven't found a suitable site. If you're involved in a restoration society who can find work (and accommodation) for around 100 volunteers, we would like to hear from you.

New vans? Some of our current vehicles are starting to show their age. We've just ordered a replacement for the oldest, the panel van used by WRG Plant. Others should follow in due course.

COMING SOON Training and more

**Fancy helping to run one of the country's most colourful waterways events?
Or getting some training ready for the start of the summer Canal Camps?**

Canal Camp: Grand Union Canal, Hanwell Locks, POSTPONED TO SUMMER

Until a few days ago I was confidently expecting these 'Coming Soon' pages to begin with a final call for volunteers for the first of this year's week-long Canal Camps, due to start imminently (or possibly already started), working on restoring the historic water-saving sideponds at Hanwell Locks on the Grand Union Canal in West London.

But unfortunately having already rescheduled it once due to problems booking suitable accommodation, we've now unfortunately had to postpone the Camp until the summer. Despite everyone's best efforts, there was one essential health and safety provision that couldn't be satisfied before the planned start date so WRG had no option but to delay the work. The safety of WRG's volunteers and CRT's employees is always paramount on a canal camp and we won't accept risks that we can't mitigate sufficiently, as was the case here.

However the good news is that it's very much postponed rather than cancelled, and as *Navvies* was going to press we'd just had the dates confirmed: there will now be two weeks of Camps, from 25 July to 1 August and from 1 to 8 August. Hopefully the weather will be more suited to bricklaying than it would have been in early spring, and we'll be able to get plenty done. Leaders are to be confirmed, and booking will be online or via Head Office.

Canalway Cavalcade site services camp, Little Venice, London, 29 Apr-5 May

Final call for Volunteers to help support Canalway Cavalcade, WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association's colourful annual celebration of London's waterways and fund-raising event, held at Little Venice, at the heart of the capital's canals.

The event is being held over the May Day holiday weekend 2nd – 4th May, and we need plenty of volunteers both during the event and setting up beforehand and taking down afterwards.



Martin Ludgate

Help to make Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice a success

If you can spare some time before or after the festival, the IWA/WRG Work Camp volunteers are always happy to welcome an extra pair of hands to help build the event on the Thursday and Friday and especially to dismantle the festival on the Monday evening and Tuesday morning. If you fancy building market stalls, gazebos and putting up banners please email pete.fleming@waterways.org.uk to register your interest.

During the event, volunteers will be welcome for roles including running information stands, collecting donations and distributing programmes. To register your interest in volunteering please visit forms.office.com/e/8uKxQiKx5W, for queries please send an email to cavalcade.volunteer@waterways.org.uk

WRG Training Weekend: Lichfield Canal, 16-17 May

Another final reminder: as covered in detail in the last issue, our friends in the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust are once again kindly hosting our Training Weekend at their Fosseyway Heath work site in Lichfield on 16-17 May. Accommodation is available from Friday evening for those wishing to stay over.

Training will be available in: 360-degree excavators (categories 30 and 31 on the WRG Driver Authorisation Scheme), articulated dumpers, ride-on rollers, minibuses, trailers, site tools, bricksaws, bricklaying. It's an ideal opportunity for those attending a summer Canal Camp where specific skills have been identified as useful to have, but it's open to all volunteers, whether they work with local canal societies, WRG or other mobile groups.

If you would like to book on or discuss opportunities please contact the leader Ali Bottomley as soon as possible via email: wrgtraining@wrg.org.uk



Ali Bottomley

Get trained on an excavator or a dumper at the WRG Training Weekend

WRG Leadership Teams Day, 13 June

This annual event is aimed at anyone who is or is interested in being a leader, assistant leader or cook on WRG Canal Camps or mobile groups' weekend working parties - and especially those who have been appointed to the leadership teams for this summer's Canal Camps, who are very strongly encouraged to attend if they possibly can. This year it's being led by a new duo, so over to one of them - George Rogers - to tell us about it...

This year's Leadership Teams Day will be taking place on 13th June at a different venue: Lowsonford Village Hall (lesson one: book the hall early to secure dates!)

Having steered the ship for several years, Dave 'Evvo' Evans has decided to hand over the reins, and so Stephen 'Ricey' Rice and I are going to be following in his footsteps for this year at least. Hopefully Ricey's role as 'leader finder' for Canal Camps will mean he finds a suitable replacement soon!

The main focus this year is going to be on planning the work site, with a particular emphasis on excavations. This will be drawing on recent experience at Weymoor Bridge, where several holes were dug before it was realised the excavator needed to be sat on the ground that had just been removed to dig something else, necessitating infilling and re-digging later. The compound had to keep being expanded to accommodate the soil heap also...

It will also draw on evidence from the review of last year's health and safety reports, which could probably be summarised as (complete this common message) "a tidy site....". Of course, a tidy site is easier to maintain if you know where everything is supposed to go, have thought out the material deliveries and access routes etc.

We are planning for this to be a very practical day - plan on unpacking kit, and moving it around the car park several times!

The full agenda is still very much a work in progress (*), but hopefully this will encourage all current and potential leaders (+) to attend, and we believe this will be of great interest to local waterway society representatives also.

As always, the day will be followed by the WRG meetings on the Sunday (at Lapworth), and accommodation will be available at one of the halls on the Saturday night, along with dinner and breakfast.

(*) If there is anything you specifically want to see on the agenda, do let us know. No promises!

(+) Note there is not currently anything specifically for cooks on the agenda. This isn't because we don't value our cooks (we all know them to be the most important person of all), it is just that we tend not to get much take up of specific sessions for cooks, and we think cooks will still get plenty from the planned day. However, we are very happy to arrange something if you want, just let us know on george.rogers@waterways.org.uk and stephen.rice@waterways.org.uk. Equally, if you are interested in getting into cooking on camps in the future please let us know.



WRG Leadership Teams Day under way

HEALTH & SAFETY Annual review

Keeping a tidy site, manoeuvring vans in tight spaces, and avoiding letting things blow away: lessons from the last year's H&S forms submitted to WRG

Annual review of Health & Safety forms

H&S Forms: Our Canal Camps kits and regional working party groups have supplies of incident, accident and 'near miss' forms for filling in and submitting to Head Office in the event of any accidents or potentially unsafe situations that have arisen on site.

This is very much not so that we can criticise or punish any offenders, but so that we can look at what has or might potentially have gone wrong on site, see what (if anything) are the most common types of occurrence or types of equipment that they refer to, and therefore where we might be able to learn from them and avoid an accident in the future.

So once a year a member of the WRG Board (for the last few years it has been Dave 'Moose' Hearnden who will be well known to many of you) then goes through all the reporting forms that have been submitted, looks for any common factors, and produces a report for the WRG Board. And here in Navvies, once again so that folks can learn from what's happened rather than as a way of 'having a go' at anyone, we publicise these common factors as something for everyone reading it to think about when they're on site.

And although by and large our safety record has been good (and the total number of forms submitted has not been high), we have indeed picked up a couple of these common factors from our 2025 forms...

A tidy site is a safe site. It may sound corny, and we've said that in our safety video for as long as we've had one, but it seems that it's always worth emphasising, along with looking out for uneven ground. We've had forms mentioning slipping and landing on a pile of dismantled shuttering; ratchet straps lying around in the back of a van getting in the way of loading and unloading it; buckets and trugs getting in a concrete mixing crew's way when they could have been stacked more tidily; using a couple of slates to weigh down an awning (which then fell off when it was being dismantled) rather than cable-tying it; slipping down a slope on site that would have been easily avoided by cutting a step.

Vans: can you see? Our van / minibuses are big vehicles compared to the average car. They're longer, higher, wider and heavier. And you can't always see everything well from the driving seat.

So when you find yourself having to manoeuvre a van in a tight space (say in a dead-end that doesn't have a decent turning circle at the end, or in a narrow farm lane with overhanging trees), if you have any passengers there's no shame in asking one of them to get out and 'see you back'. And if you don't have any passengers, and it's safe to do so, there's no shame in getting out yourself, walking around the vehicle and checking how much space you've got.

Wind: don't let it catch you out. On windy days a gazebo that hasn't been secured properly could blow away; a section of Heras fencing (especially one with banners attached, making it catch the wind more) could blow over.

Eye protection: make sure it fits. Finally, although we have successfully reduced reports of mortar etc getting splashed into people's eyes since we introduced safety specs for everyone on Canal Camps, it's worth a reminder to make sure they're properly in place and don't leave any gaps at the sides for anything to get inside them.

Stay safe everyone!

**Martin Ludgate
(with thanks to Moose)**

BCN CLEANUP Weekend report

Despite three forced changes of site (the last one just hours before work started), the BCN Cleanup was a success as Chris Morgan reports...

BCN Cleanup report

As we explained in detail in the last issue, the annual BCN Cleanup is a centrally booked weekend working party held on a different site each year on the Birmingham Canal Navigations, the dense network of 100 miles of formerly industrial waterways covering much of Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall and the Black Country. The idea is to clear as much as possible of the large quantities of old tyres, bikes, shopping trolleys and other miscellaneous junk that unfortunately gets dumped in some of these urban waterways. By targeting the worst areas each year, we can help to stop them getting into a vicious circle which might otherwise eventually see them fall into disuse and become impassible to boats. It's also an enjoyable event, with volunteers vying to extract the biggest or unlikeliest items from the murky waters (see our A to Z of junk on the following pages).

It's a joint effort by WRG (who organise the overnight accommodation and catering), the local branches of WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association, the BCN Society and the Coombeswood Canal Trust (both of whom provide workboats) and the Canal & River Trust who provide a base to work from, and arrange for whatever junk we pull out to be loaded into skips there and taken away.

But despite the efforts of all of these groups, sometimes things don't quit go to plan. Over to leader Chris Morgan to take up the story...

Part 1: The best laid plans...

Well what can I say about this year's event? Other than adding an extra few grey hairs and a few less of the ones I have left at all...

This is a report of what happens when circumstances change, beyond anyone's control, not just once, not twice, but three times in the build up process of an event.



Pictures by Martin Ludgate

A good haul of tyres (inclindng a Formula 1 racing tyre!) from west of Sneyd Juntion

Last year CRT asked if we could look at the Daw End Branch canal from Catshill Junction to Longwood Boat Club for this year's event. As we had last year introduced cutting offside vegetation (which has been restricting the channel width badly in places) from workboats, alongside the annual grappling event, I thought: yes, a good candidate for such 'canal widening' is the Daw End!



As per last year, we also had a team cutting back offside vegetation

So accommodation was booked, logistics sorted, leaders and cooks arranged, the camp advertised, beer ordered and bookings being accepted...

Birmingham Canal Navigations



Strike 1! CRT informed me that due to an ongoing diesel pollution incident on the Daw End Branch we could not work on it. Now this would have been the nearest canal to our accommodation at Walsall Wood (which is why we chose it as accommodation), so this meant changes to logistics. OK no problem, we will instead work from Brownhills to Ogley Junction on the Wyrley & Essington Canal which isn't too far away, and see how that goes...

Strike 2! A week later: "Sorry, we can't get skips anywhere near to Ogley Junction or Brownhills, only Sneyd Junction". Now if you know the BCN (or look at the map on page 13) and the Wyrley and Essington Canal, you will know it's not called the Curly Wyrley for nothing: a mile's walk to a pub by road can be 17miles by water from the same spot! So Sneyd Junction is too far for work boats to do their trips back and forth to be emptied. OK, so let's tackle the length from Birchills Junction to the Bloxwich / Goscote / Hardern area; it's always grotty and well used by the local populace as an extended linear dump. I foresaw rich pickings!

Strike 3! The Friday of the Cleanup weekend, the camp was full, the car was full, Lou the cook had sorted her transport, team leader Dave 'Moose' Hearnden was on his way up the M1 singing jolly songs in his car and practising being nice to people, Darren was ironing his running shorts (lol - we missed you this year!), Karen was sitting at a bar in Cyprus (we

The Navvies A to Z of BCN Junk

The editor had a quick ask-around over a beer or two in the accommodation on the Saturday evening of the Cleanup, and it took a surprisingly short time for the assembled volunteers to put together an alphabetical list of items we've pulled out of the canal, mostly during this year's Cleanup, but if not then over the event's almost 30-year history.

A is for **Armchair**

B is for **Bicycle**

C is for **Canoe**

D is for **Drainpipe**

E is for **Electric cable**

F is for **Fan**

G is for **Garage door**

H is for **Helmet**

I is for **Insulation**

J is for **Jumper**

K is for **Knickers**

L is for **Ladder**

M is for **Motorcycle**

B



C



F



missed you too), and I had just arrived at Ma Pardoe's pub to pick up the beer, when the phone went... "Hi Nigel, no its not your birthday today..."

"Ahh Chris, its CRT, we have a problem..."

"Oh yes?"

"Due to last night's storm, we have pollution in the canal at Bloxwich so it's been closed!"

So I called a pint in, and over Scampi and chips agreed with CRT that we would work from Birchills (Walsall) Top Lock to Sneyd Junction: at least we would be near to the skips for the workboats.

Part 2: the actual event

I've got to know all these canals quite well over the past 20 years, So I suspected we would not get the rich pickings the volunteers were used to, so I was worried we were approaching a bit of a disastrous weekend.

Saturday morning after a latish night socialising and for some of us visiting the pubs of Walsall Wood, and after a good breakfast we all descended on Walsall Locks.

N is for **Nappies**
O is for **Oil drum**
P is for **Paddle (canal lock)**
Q is for **Quilt**
R is for **Radiator**
S is for **Supermarket trolley**
T is for **Tyre**
U is for **Unicorn (toy)**
V is for **Vending machine**
W is for **Wheelchair**
X is for **X-rays**
Y is for **Yellow warning signs**
Z is for **Zimmer frame**



One thing that I noticed more this year was the proliferation of towpath litter, drink cans and bottles for the whole stretch of canal we worked. Our litter picker volunteers filled lots and lots of bags full of litter in a two mile walk.

The grapplers pulled out much of the usual BCN detritus including the ubiquitous tyres, supermarket trolleys and bikes, plus a couple of TV sets, fencing including a long length of wire netting, various items of clothing from knickers to a waterproof motorcycling suit, a hedge trimmer, a gas cylinder, a kitchen blender and an ironing board (See Martin's A to Z of BCN junk).

Everyone seemed happy at the end of the day and the weather stayed dry. Sunday was only a half-day, to allow time for the boats to get back to Sneyd, get unloaded, and head back to their home moorings. But we still managed to add a significant amount to our Saturday total, with plenty of tyres coming out of the length of canal just west of Sneyd Junction.

I'd like to thank the awesome volunteers of the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society (BCNS), Coombeswood Canal Trust (CCT), who literally spent the last few weeks moving their workboats into place and enduring "pre canal cleanup cleanups" on their way, these are the heroes of our waterways, and they do it every weekend. We could not do this event without them.

CRT this year, for all the issues (not of their making) were brilliant, supplying gloves, and litter pickers, some extra vans to help move the volunteers from the accommodation to and from site, the refreshments at site: tea and coffee, juices and biscuits were very much appreciated. The communication all along was spot on. Thank you all.

I know links are actively underway towards speaking with Walsall councillors over getting more work done by volunteers in this area, so if our small event was a catalyst to future events it would be a win/win.

For the camp, thanks to Verena at head office, to my No2 leader Moose, to No 3 leader Stuart, to Lou the camp cook (great job as usual), to Jim and Alan top sandwich makers, to Pete and Martin for driving the vans, and finally to all the WRG volunteers, faces old and new it was great to see you all, if you were new, I hope you enjoyed it and want to come again and join us on the great annual event, Thank you all and see you at next years Black Country Canal Dipping session.

Chris Morgan (Leader / Organiser)

Next year we may return to Tipton and the Old Main Line canal. Details will be in Navvies



The junk pulled out is loaded onto work boats for disposal



The litter-picking crew have been working hard

IWA New trustees wanted

WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association is seeking new Trustees to help drive and monitor progress towards its goals. Would you like to be one?

IWA Seeks new Trustees - Applications open on 27 April

You will periodically see references in Navvies to Waterway Recovery Group's parent body the Inland Waterways Association (IWA), national campaigning body for the waterways. IWA is currently looking to recruit some new members to its board of Trustees - and feels that Navvies reader might be interested. Over to IWA Deputy Chair Ian Sesnan to explain...

We are seeking applications from candidates who demonstrate the experience, enthusiasm, and skills that will be needed over the three years (from September 2026) to fill vacancies and complement the existing trustees on the Board. We hope that readers of Navvies will be interested in this opportunity to help lead IWA. The role of IWA Trustees is to drive the direction of the charity, monitor its effectiveness in achieving its goals, and ensuring the organisation meets its charitable objectives. As a member of the Board, an individual Trustee's role is to use skills and judgement to work collaboratively with the other Trustees to:

- ensure the charity is carrying out its purposes for the public benefit.
- comply with the charity's governing document and the law.
- act in the charity's best interests.
- manage the charity's resources responsibly.
- act with care and skill.
- ensure the charity is accountable and well managed.

We are looking to complement our existing trustees and have identified the following skill sets that we think need strengthening:-

- experience of engaging and enabling participation of younger people with the charity.
- health and safety management.
- funding/fundraising.
- environment and sustainability.

- experience of restoration projects (not just waterways).
- marketing, membership and recruitment.

We would also welcome applications from individuals to apply if they think they have experience that would be valuable to the Association beyond those mentioned above. For example; we would like younger people (18 and over) to apply who may have very relevant skills and experience for growing IWA today.

Candidates must be passionate about our campaigning: for sufficient funding for Britain's waterways; the sustainable operation of navigations; restoration of closed waterways; and our work to make the waterways great places to live, work, travel, play, and for wildlife, nature recovery, and mitigating climate change.

Most Trustee meetings are held on-line, however we feel it is important to meet in person and to visit sites and events from time to time. Reasonable expenses are covered. You will need to be an IWA member.

We are committed to improving the diversity of our Board. We encourage applications from individuals from under-represented groups, including those of varying ages, genders and minority ethnic backgrounds. Selection will be made on merit and the ability to best serve the Association's charitable objectives, taking into account the current skills and experience of the Board. Candidates should have sufficient time available to be able to spend at least one to two days per month on IWA business.

The application pack will be available on <https://waterways.org.uk/2026-trustees-recruit> from 12.00 on 27/04. it will include information about the roles and responsibilities of Trustees, and contact details in case you wish to discuss potentially applying. Applications will close at 17.00 on 11/06. Applicants will be asked to submit their CV, complete a Skillset questionnaire, and submit a covering email rather than completing an application form.

Ian Sesnan, IWA Deputy Chair

NAVVIES DIARY

Week-long Canal Camps cost £90 or as stated. Booking for events labelled 'WRG Road, Berkhamsted, HP4 1EF. Tel: 01494 783453, enquiries@wrg.org.uk. Diary

Apr 21-29	WRG Canal Camp	Grand Union Canal: Hanwell Locks POSTPONED UNTIL SUMMER, SEE BELOW
Apr 29-May 5	IWA/WRG	Support camp for IWA Canalway Cavalcade festival at Little Venice, London. see page 9
May 9-10	KESCRG	Cotswold Canals (Stroudwater Navigation), John Robinson lock area, progressing the
May 16-17	WRG	Training Weekend on the Lichfield Canal: see page 9
May 16-17	wrgBITM	To be arranged
May 16-17	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
May 16-18	NWPG	Cotswold Canals: John Robinson Lock area
May 23-25	wrgBITM	To be arranged: Tool maintenance? Note new date
May 30-31	London WRG	Cotswold Canals: John Robinson Lock
Jun 6-7	KESCRG	Wey & Arun Canal, Rooks Hill: channel profiling, edge protection, gabions, etc.
Jun 13	WRG	Leadership Teams Day: see pages 9-10
Jun 14 Sun	WRG	WRG Committee/Board Meeting: Rowington Village Hall
Jun 20-21	wrgBITM	Suffolk Stour: To be confirmed. Jetty replacement
Jun 20-21	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Jun 27 Sat	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: event at Middlewood Locks
Jul 4-5	KESCRG	Wilts & Berks Canal: Camp preparation at Pewsham Locks. Joint dig with London WRG
Jul 4-5	London WRG	Wilts & Berks Canal: Camp preparation at Pewsham Locks. Joint dig with KESCRG
Jul 5 Sun	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: event at Nob End Locks
Jul 11-18	WRG Canal Camp	Wey & Arun Canal Camp: Channel construction at Rooks Hill. Led by the NWPG region
Jul 18-19	wrgBITM	Maidenhead Waterways: Access platforms installation
Jul 18-25	WRG Canal Camp	Wey & Arun Canal Camp: Channel construction at Rooks Hill. Leaders Dave 'Evvo' Evans
Jul 18-25	WRG Canal Camp	Lichfield Canal Camp: Channel construction in Lichfield. Leaders Colin Hobbs and Wil
Jul 25-Aug 1	WRG Canal Camp	Lichfield Canal Camp: Channel construction in Lichfield. Leaders Colin Hobbs and Wil
Jul 25-Aug 1	WRG Canal Camp	Grand Union Canal: Hanwell Locks sidepond restoration Rescheduled from April
Aug 1-8	WRG Canal Camp	Grand Union Canal: Hanwell Locks sidepond restoration Rescheduled from April
Aug 1-8	WRG Canal Camp	Wilts & Berks Canal Camp: Pewsham Locks Led by the KESCRG regional mobile group
Aug 8-15	WRG Canal Camp	Cotswold Canal Camp: John Robinson Lock. Rebuilding wing walls. Leaders: Mike Pa
Aug 15-22	WRG Canal Camp	Cotswold Canal Camp: John Robinson Lock. Rebuilding wing walls. Leaders: Stephen
Aug 22-29	WRG Canal Camp	Cotswold Canal Camp: John Robinson Lock. Rebuilding wing walls.
Sep 12-13	KESCRG	Wilts & Berks Canal: Channel profiling at Dauntsey
Sep 19-20	London WRG	Cotswold Canals: John Robinson Lock
Sep 19-20	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Sep 20 Sun	WRG	WRG Committee/Board Meeting: Rowington Village Hall
Sep 26-27	wrgBITM	Maidenhead Waterways: Bray Cut
Oct 10-11	London WRG	Shrewsbury & Newport Canals
Oct 17-18	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Oct 17-18	wrgBITM	Basingstoke Canal: To be confirmed
Oct 23-30	wrgFT	To be arranged
Nov 21-22	wrgBITM	To be arranged
Nov 21-22	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Dec 12-13	London WRG	Joint Christmas dig with KESCRG and WRG Forestry on the Chelmer & Blackwater N
Dec 12-13	KESCRG	Joint Christmas dig with WRG Forestry and London WRG on the Chelmer & Blackwater
Dec 12-13	wrgFT	Joint Christmas dig with London WRG and KESCRG on the Chelmer & Blackwater N
Dec 12-13	wrgBITM	Maidenhead Waterways: Bray Cut
Dec 19-20	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks

WRG and mobile groups

**WRG Canal Camp' should go to: WRG Canal Camps, Hardy House, Northbridge
y contributions to Dave Wedd, Tel 07816 175454, dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk**

e 8	Pete Fleming	01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
work on the lock	Ed Walker	07887-568029	pete.fleming@waterways.org.uk
	Ali Bottomley		ed@edwalker.org.uk
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	wrgtraining@wrg.org.uk
	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk
	Bill Nicholson	01844-343369	samklanacs@yahoo.com
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	bill.nicholson@weyarun.org
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	dave.wedd@wrg.org.uk
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		01494 783453	ed@edwalker.org.uk
	Mike Palmer	01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
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	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	samklanacs@yahoo.com
RG	Ed Walker	07887-568029	samklanacs@yahoo.com
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almer & Becky Parr		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
h 'Ricey' Rice & Sandra Horner		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
	Ed Walker	07887-568029	ed@edwalker.org.uk
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	Clive Alderman		
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avigation	Clive Alderman		
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk
	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	samklanacs@yahoo.com

GROUPS Kescrg, NWPG, LWRG

While we're waiting for the summer Canal Camps programme, let's see what the regional mobile groups have been up to on recent working weekends...

It's not just about Canal Camps...

You'll no doubt have been keeping up with what's happening with the programme of week-long summer Canal Camps that WRG has been putting together with the local canal restoration societies - and as you can see from the Diary pages, by the time you receive this issue it will be a little over two months away. But meanwhile, mobile working party groups - including WRG groups and independent ones - have been busy on weekend working parties around the country, particularly in the South. Here are a selection of pictures of what three of these groups have been up to recently. They all welcome new volunteers, and their dates and contact details are in the Diary pages.



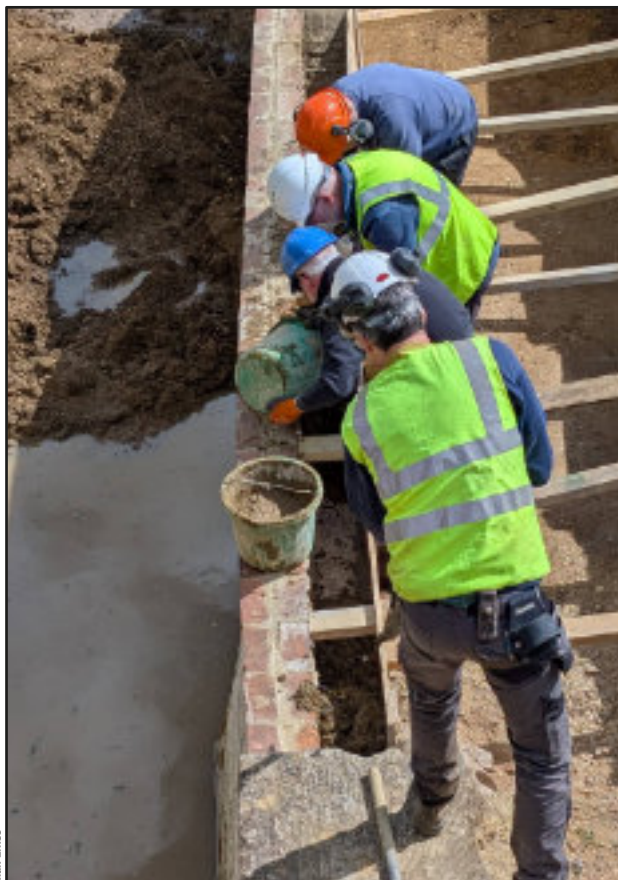
Left: NWPG on the Wey & Arun You may recall seeing pictures of last year's Wey & Arun Canal Camp where one of the main tasks was building the concrete abutments for the new Rooks Hill Bridge to carry a bridleway / farm track over the canal. Well since then the abutments have been brick faced, the arch has been cast, and NWPG volunteers are seen recently continuing the brick facing. This summer's Camps will be excavating the canal channel from here to the completed Birtley Bridges section.

Below: On the same NWPG weekend, just south of the bridge, volunteers completed the headwall of the culvert carrying a stream under the canal; the culvert has been extended to allow for a slight change to the canal alignment



Right: Kescrg on the Cotswold Canals A long-running project on the Cotswold Canals restoration has been the rebuilding of the demolished Weymoor Bridge which carried a farm access road over the canal. The arch was rebuilt some years ago, the road diverted over it and the causeway across the canal removed. Another job that needed to be done involved a small stream which crossed the canal adjacent to the bridge in an open channel cut through the canal bed. Over the last three years, this has been replaced by a new stream culvert buried under the canal bed, and the channel above it has been rebuilt in three sections, in reinforced concrete. One of the final jobs to be completed was rebuilding the towpath wall over the culvert. Kescrg volunteers are seen bucketing concrete into place behind the brick facing to complete the towpath wall.

Below: On the same Kescrg weekend, volunteers are pictured backfilling with earth between the new towpath wall and the previously cast reinforced concrete channel wall to create the new towpath surface



Alan Lines



Stephen Davis



Stephen Davis

Above: Kescrg and WRG FT on the Wilts & Berks In February Kescrg supported by WRG Forestry and the odd London WRG volunteer spent a weekend on the Wilts & Berks Canal's North Wilts branch, clearing overhanging vegetation and using the resulting woodchip to surface the towpath on the Swindon to Mauldon length. **Below and bottom: London WRG on the Shrewsbury & Newport** In February London WRG returned to one of their regular sites, clearing vegetation (including some large stuff requiring the Tirfor) from the Berwick Tunnel approach



Martin Ludgate



Martin Ludgate

Right: London WRG on the Cotswold Canals A well attended weekend working party in April made some good progress on John Robinson Lock, where work has shifted to the tail end of the lock chamber. They carried out brickwork repairs, rebuilding and repointing, as well as unearthing the lock overflow bywash culvert and finding where it was damaged, plus assorted other tasks. Here, bricklaying training is seen under way on the towpath wall under the lock tail bridge.

Below on the same London WRG weekend, repointing is in progress on the main chamber walls.

Bottom a view of the bottom end of the same lock, taken from where the canal comes to an end at the start of the 'missing mile' length (see article in Navvies 335): in the background work is continuing on the lock, while in the foreground the old wing walls can be seen. The work for this summer's three week-long Canal Camps will be concentrating on dismantling (as necessary) and rebuilding these walls



Martin Ludgate



Martin Ludgate



Martin Ludgate

BEHIND THE SCENES The Cleanup

In the latest of our occasional series looking at the 'behind the scenes' jobs that support our work, Chris Morgan describes planning the BCN Cleanup

Before the event...

So you've all enjoyed one of our camps or weekend working parties like the Birmingham Canal Navigations Cleanup (see report, page 12), and no doubt you've seen the leader / organiser staring into a cup of tea or pint of local ale, looking perplexed or even relaxed?

Well, there's a story that precedes the event that you've just partaken in, and normally it starts quite a while before you turn up at the accommodation!

For this article we will use this year's BCN Event as an example of a pretty exasperating experience. The report of the event is to hand in this edition of *Navvies*. But the actual organisation of a BCN Cleanup starts a year before the one you are currently on! Yes, come Saturday night and volunteers relax over a drink, it's "Where we going next year?" "Oh, when did we do that bit last?" "Oh yes wasn't that the area we pulled a motorbike out?"

Leaders Then it's "Have we got a leader?" "Has he or she got a deputy?" "Are the usual leaders still available?" "Are they still willing?"

So yes the conversations start early, ideas from local boaters who are regular

cruisers of the BCN system are taken seriously and logged by myself throughout the year; BCNS (Birmingham Canal Navigations Society – one of the local groups involved in the event) volunteers know the area very well and also organise Explorer Cruises to get boaters around the BCN including the lesser-used sections, so they know where the rubbish lies... It's a very good fountain of knowledge to be tapped into. The navigation authority the Canal & River Trust (CRT) with their own volunteers also know the grotty spots, and areas that are not regularly cleared.

So normally by the Sunday of one year's Cleanup I've got a good idea and a plan for the next one. Once a work site is in mind, CRT hopefully agree it, and after a few Teams meetings, and discussions with BCNS to see if we are all on the same wavelength, it's emailed to WRG for a decision on a date, but that normally doesn't take place until November after the WRG Reunion (if there is one) as WRG will be planning its next year of Canal Camps and we'll want to avoid any clashes of dates.

Accommodation: we used to use a great old school at Tipton, but that's been knocked down and a new one built that's too posh for wellies, so since 2014 we've used the Malthouse Stables activity centre at Tipton, which is canalside (great for several volunteers who like to arrive by boat and sleep aboard) and very accommodating with warm showers. Well, that's council run and normally takes many calls to get an answer to check availability etc. Lots of leaders find getting accommodation hard work; we rely on local knowledge but have to act early. (Other Accommodation is available at this time of writing).



Is there enough room for safe emptying of boats into skips?

Who's cooking? That's got to be the most important question after securing a site and accommodation. We can't do it without a cook. Can they get there OK? Has their car been written off the week before? Is their sleeping bag still locked in the car which is now scrap? Can they get a train from the middle of darkest Wales (North that is!) to a railway station? (*) Can they remember the ingredients to Eton Mess? Are they qualified?

Lots of questions that need to be asked. (I am so glad we do have a very good cook, who is a very good driver).

Get the event advertised! IWA / WRG Head office liaison starts in January with selected dates and information to go in *Navvies* and on the IWA / WRG website and social media. Accommodation details etc, decisions on how many volunteers we can take.

Local Volunteer Notices: Local branches of the Inland Waterways Association, BCNS, Coombeswood Canal Trust: all these groups have local volunteers that are always willing to be a key part of this event need to let their volunteers know the whys and wherefores...

Kit: Catering, tooling etc. Do we need the cooker? Have we got gas? Have we got a gas spanner? do we need the gas Burco for site? Are CRT doing tea and coffee etc on site? Have we enough grappling hooks? Enough kebs? Litter picking equipment? Gloves? Are CRT supplying them or are we?

CRT Liaison: In recent years CRT liaison has become the most important task. Is the chosen site acceptable? Are there any emergency closures or stoppages for maintenance work? Is the towpath accessible? Is there a safe site for volunteer welfare facilities? Have we an adequate site for rubbish skips and safe emptying of the workboats into them? Skips? I used to have to order the skips initially, up to four ten-tonners. Thankfully this is now managed by CRT.

Risk Assessments: These have to be updated every year to the specific site and accommodation. Where is the local hospital?

Vans: How many vans have we got? Where are they coming from? London? North West? The WRG store? Are they all serviceable, MOT'd etc?

Drivers! Have we got enough drivers? Are their qualifications up to date? Are they



Martin Ludgate

Have we bought enough beer?

willing to drive at this event? On a particular BCN event some of our drivers can spend all day shuttling back and forth so the more qualified drivers we can get the better, so they don't get stuck with the job for the whole weekend (eg if the editor is driving all the time, how is he going to find his next bike?) (+)

Bookings: All you lovely people book various ways, but our ladies at HQ do all the work to collate your medical issues and intolerances, and liaise with the leaders to ensure your safety. Please book early, don't take it for granted because you've attended every BCN for the last 67 years that you will automatically be given a spot for your bed roll!!

Paperwork: All needs to be updated, sign on sheets, tool sheets, risk assessment sheets

Van and Zone leader kits: Heron Maps' BCN maps; A to Z street maps; phone numbers of leaders and Zone leaders: a kit for each van.

Finalise things: Just before the event, check things with head office, with other leaders, with the cook etc, sort out any cancellations etc, speak to those who need picking up from rail stations.

Beer: Have we enough? Look at names of volunteers and guess the guzzlers! Get the beer, get the pumps, plastic glasses etc to keep the troops lubricated in the evening. Arrive safely and start again!!

Chris Morgan

(*) Yes, that really happened this year

(+) Yes, that really happened another year

PROGRESS River Gipping

"Has any river ever had Himalayan balsam totally eradicated?" River Gipping Trust would like to know... and maybe make it the first one!

River Gipping (Ipswich to Stowmarket Navigation)

The River Gipping Trust has recently been awarded grants for Himalayan Balsam clearance work and river water testing along the river Gipping.

Complete Eradication of Himalayan Balsam: That's the aim, starting above the top end of the navigation (Stowmarket) in a small tributary stream feeding the Gipping, and then working downstream clearing the balsam one mile at a time.

Following last years clearance of around one million Balsam plants along the Gipping supported by Northumbrian Water's Bluespaces (for which we received their Kingfisher 'Best Essex and Suffolk

Community Bluespaces Project' award), we are again working with Bluespaces on a project to completely eradicate the invasive plant along a 3km stretch over the next 4-years (whilst working along 6.5km). Last year we extensively surveyed the upper Gipping and its tributaries on foot and with drones during August (when the balsam is most prevalent with its pretty pink flowers) and plotted known occurrences very accurately (to within a few metres). With the extensive aid of corporate volunteers (we have 70 signed up over an 8-week period, and aim for 100+) we will wade (in waders) along the shallow tributaries where the balsam is growing and pull them all out, then repeat again next year and again in 2028 (seeds can be active for 3 years). Once the very top of the waterway is clear we will



River Gipping Trust

River Gipping Trust volunteers tackling the Himalayan Balsam last year

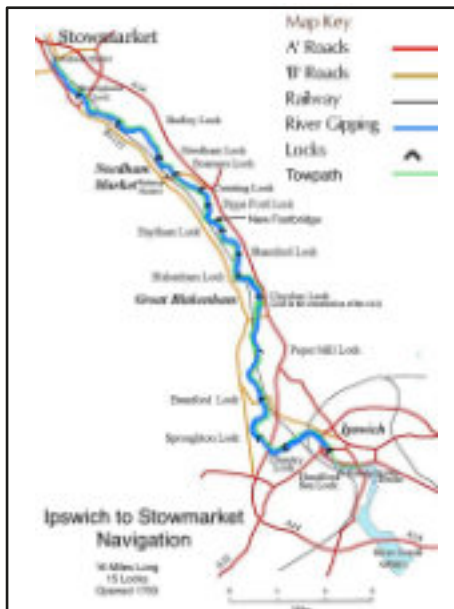
then work down downstream aiming to clear one mile per year. A long gradual process, but we feel worth pursuing. We will drone survey exactly the same areas again this August (and every August thereafter) to determine what we have achieved.

Has any river in the UK ever had balsam totally eradicated? AI says not, but we would love to hear from and gain knowledge from other groups who have tried. The Environment Agency won't allow spraying. So manual pulling and cutting is the only way. The project also includes many towpath and accessibility improvements plus interpretation boards and public benches.

Water Quality Monitoring along the River Gipping: Working with Essex and Suffolk River Trust and their RiverWatch Programme, River Gipping Trust (RGT) volunteers have been testing the water quality of the river Gipping each month since September at six locations and have recently included two more locations making eight in total. The RGT have funding approved to test for E.coli bacteria at 10 locations every month (and after heavy rain when possible) and funding for some better, more accurate, digital testing equipment which will allow us to expand this testing to 10 locations and we will be implementing both from May. In general, the ammonia and phosphate levels are good, but nitrate levels are on the

highish side. We have only done a few E.coli tests, but so far all have been good (under 1000 CFU/100ml).

Ian Petchey
RGT Restoration Manager



Above: the navigation from Ipswich to Stowmarket
Below: the Himalayan balsam affected lengths



PROGRESS Shrewsbury & Newport

Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust have opened the cafe in the restored Wappenshall Warehouse - and it's already a great success

Shrewsbury & Newport Canals

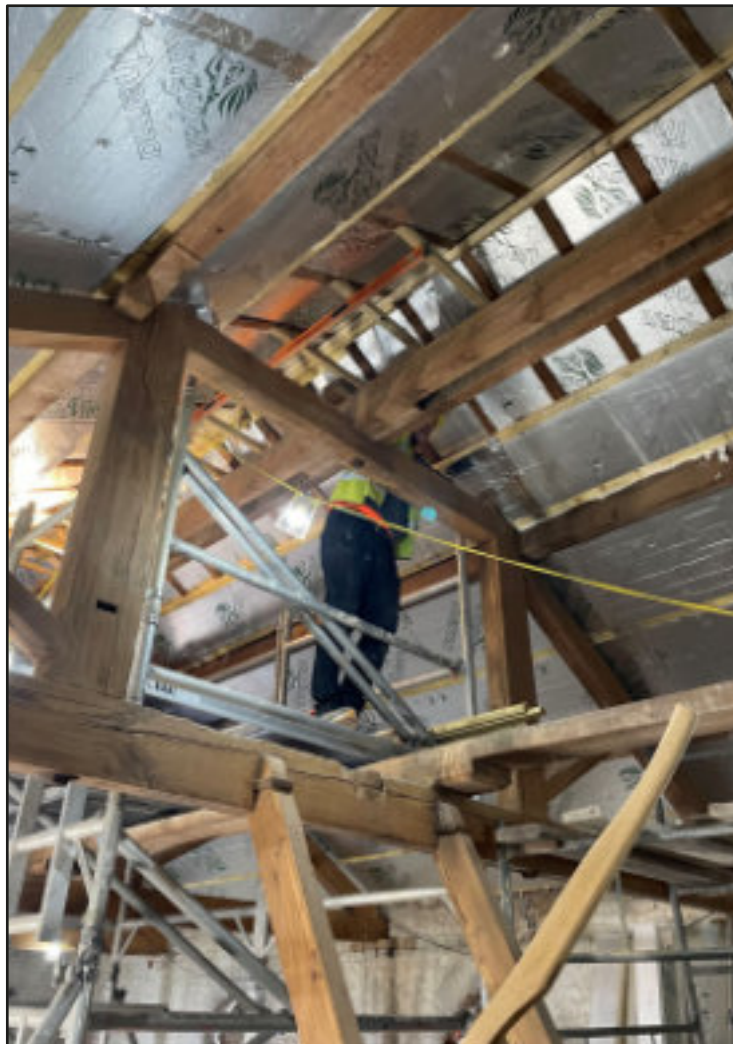
After many years of hard work, the cafe was opened at Wappenshall Wharf (junction of the Shrewsbury Canal & Newport Canal,

where the first of two historic transhipment warehouses has been restored by Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust as a canal centre and community centre) in mid-December 2025 and has been a great

success. So much so that we are having to construct a second kitchen to cope with demand. This is being built on the upper floor and will be connected via a dumb waiter to the kitchen downstairs.

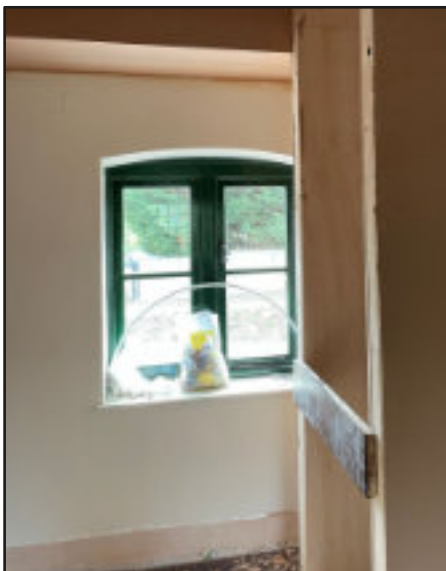
Work is also continuing on the larger transhipment warehouse, with insulation being put into its roof and spalled external brickwork being repaired. Much stored "stuff" has been removed from its first floor in order for it to be inspected and the unique "dock" that runs under the building has had spoil and bricks removed to enable reinforced concrete to be installed that will eventually take some steel supports to the upper floor.

Bernie Jones



Pictures by SMC unless credited

Kingspan installation being installed in the larger warehouse's roof



Above: the dug out 'dock' under the warehouse

Above right: the shaft ready for dumb waiter installation

Right: the hard work of digging out the spoil under the warehouse building

Bottom: drone view of the two warehouses (the finished cafe is in the nearer one; the roof insulation and the excavation work are in / under the far one), the car park and the restored East Basin



PROGRESS Chesterfield Canal

On the Staveley Town Deal project, the new Keith Ayling Lock nears completion, while work progresses well elsewhere on the site

Chesterfield Canal: New Year - New Structures

On the section of the Chesterfield Canal beyond currently being restored with funding from the Staveley Town Deal, the first part of 2026 has seen new structures rising. This section leads on north eastwards from the Staveley end of the six-mile isolated restored and navigable length of canal running from Chesterfield to Staveley: the new length is only short, but it includes the new Trans-Pennine Trail bridge – already completed – plus the new Keith Ayling Lock and provision for reinstatement of Bellhouse Bridge.

In our last update in the last issue of *Navvies*, our main contractor, O'Brien Contractors Ltd, had just poured the concrete base for the new Keith

Ayling Lock. Constructing the lock has been the main focus for the last couple of months, with the chamber walls now completed and the wing walls and paddle chambers progressing well too.

At Bellhouse Lane, the primary focus has been Severn Trent's work to lower the

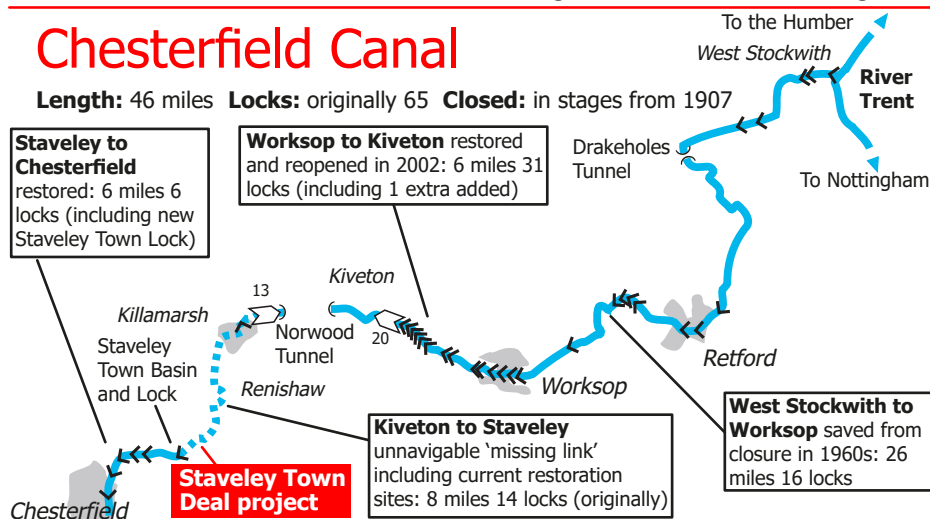


Pictures by Chesterfield Canal Trust

Foundations being laid for the new Bellhouse Bridge

Chesterfield Canal

Length: 46 miles **Locks:** originally 65 **Closed:** in stages from 1907



The Staveley Town Deal project, supported by £5m from the Towns Fund, is rebuilding the length northeast of Staveley Town Lock (which was added in 2012 to get the canal under a railway) including the new Keith Ayling Lock (to return the canal to its original level) and Trans Pennine Trail Bridge

500mm water main which had been laid underneath the canal with too little depth for navigation above it. This has been challenging with the weather and coordinating two separate contractors on site, but work is now mostly complete, with just some final remedial work to be done soon. This frees up the site for O'Briens to start constructing the foundations for the future Bellhouse Bridge.

Meanwhile footpath works have started on the length of towpath leading onwards along the still to be restored next section of canal to the Puddlebank embankment and beyond, with the base course of stone laid and new steps installed to the Doe Lea stream. Final finishing will take place when the weather improves. Also the reconstruction of the stone narrows at the entrance to Bellhouse Basin is well underway.

The next few months will be very busy, with the lock, Bellhouse Basin and the channel between all progressing. I'm also excited to see the new lock gates starting to be made - the supplier, ECS, has invited me to visit the factory in the Netherlands next week, so I suspect there will be plenty of photos for the next issue! Keep an eye on chesterfield-canal-trust.org.uk for more photos in the meantime.



Building the stone walls of the narrows at the canal basin entrance



Concreting is complete on the new Keith Ayling Lock chamber; lower wing walls and paddle chambers

PROGRESS Montgomery Canal

Wet winter conditions led the Shropshire Union Canal Society to find other jobs in place of channel work - including planting snowdrops...

Montgomery Canal February work party

"Mud, glorious mud," said Shropshire Union Canal Society restoration project manager, Tom Fulda, "This winter is characterised by persistent rainfall. The current area of site is

generally well drained, but that counts for nowt when plant tracks over it".

Heavy rainfall overnight on Thursday and cold, showery weather on Friday did not seem to deter volunteers who turned out in large numbers. Drizzle eventually eased off and on Sunday we even got the briefest

glimpse of what, from memory, was believed to be blue sky.

With the channel out of bounds to all but heavy plant, most activity was focused on towpath and hedging works. Excellent progress was made on hedge laying with two teams working simultaneously, aided by a team clearing the site ahead of the 'layers' and another continuously removing the arisings. With perseverance, it was even possible to get a bonfire going on Saturday. By close of play Sunday, all the brash has been disposed of. Over 70 metres of hedge has been laid this winter so far. There would be one more session in March (see later) before the winter environmental programme would finish for the season.

The programme also includes hedge planting. So far this winter over 500 whips have been planted with more to go next month. These are used both as infill for the hedge laying and also new hedging by the offside field in the Phase 1B



Pictures by SUCS

Much of the effort was focused on the towpath, making good progress



Some profiling was possible, but no channel lining work

section (the already completed section of channel between the limit of navigation since 2023 at Crickheath Wharf and the rebuilt Schoolhouse Bridge 86). Special thanks are due to CGI UK Ltd who have now provided hedging materials for three consecutive years, and also to the three corporate volunteers from Aico in Oswestry who turned up on Friday to assist with the hedge clearing and planting.

Two further teams of volunteers focused on towpath works, one fixing the boards and the other laying and compacting the aggregate. Like everything else, the aggregate was completely sodden making for very heavy work. Despite this, a tremendous 235 metres of towpath was completed this work party. The length from Schoolhouse Bridge southwards to Malthouse (or Waen Wen) Bridge 87 is now finished. North of the compound at Schoolhouse Bridge, a further 100 metre plus length, continuing southwards from towpath completed last year, has also been finished.

Despite the wet conditions it was still possible to make further progress shaping the channel in Phase 2. There is now a decent length prepared ready for lining with a waterproof line and blocking (laying a protective layer of concrete blocks on the liner) when the site has dried sufficiently to make a start. Judging by the conditions experienced this month, that could take a while.

Snowdrop salvage: a final group of volunteers, armed with wheelbarrows, undertook an expedition to Waen Wen to retrieve snowdrops and daffodils from the basin, where tree clearance work took place last November. A total of 5 barrow loads were relocated to the current site where they were replanted in the bank beneath the newly laid hedge.



Planting whips by the offside field



Snowdrops in transit and (below) in their new home



March working party

Aided by record volunteer numbers and favourable weather, the March work party saw several activities coming to an end and others starting.

Saturday attendees numbered 31, the highest ever on this project (other than work parties where the Society volunteers have been joined by corporate volunteers). We welcome young persons (with guardians) and there are now three Duke of Edinburgh's Award candidates attending. The age range of volunteers exceeds 70 years, proving there is something for everyone.

The last of this winter's environmental programme saw more hedge laying and hedge planting. With great teamwork and effective instruction, five rookie hedge layers have rapidly gained new skills over this period. The results look outstanding. 125 metres of hedge have been laid this season.

Towpath work has also concluded for the time being. A total of 485

metres of towpath has been resurfaced since November. Apart from a short length by the current Schoolhouse Bridge compound and through the bridge itself, where a wash wall will be constructed later this year, the entire 1,100 metre site between the limit of navigation at Crickheath Bridge 85 and Malthouse Bridge 87 (just before Waen Wen, the next target of SUCS channel rebuilding work) has now been resurfaced.

And so on to the new activities. At long



End of hedge laying season. Great job!



No shortage of volunteers on the March working party



Laying the waterproof liners, with a section already covered with blocks visible beyond

last, there have been several consecutive dry days. Ground conditions in the channel were suitable for lining (laying a waterproof liner in the notoriously leaky channel) and blocking (laying a protective layer of concrete blocks over the liner) to commence; even some overnight rainfall before the Friday start did not have a serious impact. Friday itself was spent with preparatory activities. There was further profiling of the channel and, in the compound, cutting of the different liners to the required dimensions.

Once again, this area of the site has no haul road meaning several adjustments to work methods are required. Blocks are delivered from the compound along the bed of the channel and the largest of the liners, colloquially referred to as carpet, must be manually carried to the work area along the towpath. The blocks extend to just below the

water line. Above the blocks, the liners are held down with large aggregate (riprap) covered by soil. For the towpath bank, this is delivered by power barrow but for the offside bank, both stone and soil must be placed manually using buckets. Space in the channel is restricted and whilst lining and blocking is underway, excavators cannot occupy the channel to profile it. As a consequence, further channel profiling will be done in advance of the next work party.

Work got underway on Saturday, continuing on from the previously lined and blocked channel in Phase 1B. Joining up with a previously restored section is always a little fiddly but by the end of the work party 25 metres has been lined and blocked with riprap placed on the off side bank. Sufficient liner has already been cut for next work party.



Rolling out the 'carpet' (can't afford red!)

