



# Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

Restoring 70 miles of canal and towpath for the benefit of local communities, wildlife and leisure

Patron: The former Duchess of Cornwall



## Melksham, Calne & Chippenham and Foxham & Lyneham Branch Members' Report for February 2024

### Chair's Report



#### Branch News

It's with sadness I have to report the death of Michael Plaskitt, a young man who enjoyed the fruits of our labour as he walked the canal line. In fact, he enjoyed his walks so much that he nominated us for a Civic Award, which was presented to me and Ray Canter in October 2021 by Chippenham Town Council.

Another milestone in our work at Pewsham was the delivery of pre-constructed panels for the Carpenters Workshop. It's impressively large, and you can read more details in the Project Report.

Andrew Vidler was on hand to record elements of the day for the WBCT YouTube Channel, which can be found [here](#). Steve Court was also on site videoing for his YouTube channel, [Court Above the Cut](#).

A number of the Work Party Organisers together with Howard Yardy visited the Abbots section of the canal line where we are in the very very early stages of a project; see more under Projects.



I attended a meeting of Chippenham Area Board on Monday 11 March where the very supportive group of members granted funds towards a flail unit. In addition Ian Williamson from the Semington Marina kindly gave us £103 of customer donations towards the flail unit.

On your behalf I have also attended a number of meetings since the last Branch meeting:

- those to deal with the Health & Safety Executive case;
- overview of new Trustee Ron Clark;
- Melksham Link;
- Chippenham River rewilding;
- monthly Trust Exec meeting; and
- project meeting (Carpenters Workshop).

I also gave a talk to the Trefoil Guild in Chippenham and joined a very long but interesting meeting of the Branch Work Party Organisers.

The meeting with regards to the River Avon in Chippenham was to discuss many things including the development by the river. What was clear was that the Environment Agency (EA) will be removing the Radial Gate at Chippenham. As local residents know, this gate is what gives the river its depth along a 2 mile stretch down to the Town Bridge. If this water level drops then there will be no Chippenham Sailing Club; no canoeing; no paddle boarding; no open water swimming etc. In addition of course we will be unable to run boat trips at the Chippenham Folk Festival.



Chippenham Radial Gate

I have asked the EA what plans they have to replace the gate, and have been advised they have yet to publish any details about their plans as these are currently being developed. They intend to go to public consultation on this just after Easter, at which point they will have a set of information online.

I will be in contact with other river users and see how we might band together to protect this lovely wide stretch of the River Avon in Chippenham.

### **Volunteers required**

There are many ways that members can get more involved, even in a small but meaningful way. Please consider the opportunities below:

#### **Civil Engineers**

We are desperate for Civil Engineers to help our work at Pewsham. We are running behind on a number of projects due to the lack of these engineers, and the burden on the trust Chief Engineer, Jon Coates is immense.

If you are, or know of, a civil engineer with time to spare please do get in touch. You will make a great difference and help volunteers progress our work to create a Go To destination for visitors who want to come and see what Pewsham Locks were like in their heyday of the mid 1800s. please contact [dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk](mailto:dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk) in the first instance.

#### **Community Partnering Officer**

We are looking for a volunteer to engage proactively with the Trust's partner stakeholders along the MCC route, focused on community organisations such as schools, parish councils, area boards, uniform groups etc., to facilitate progress in the restoration of the Wilts & Berks canal and the delivery of education and public wellbeing. This promises to be a very rewarding role and if you would like to see a copy of the Terms of Reference or to discuss the role in more detail please contact [gordon.olson@wbct.org.uk](mailto:gordon.olson@wbct.org.uk)

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## **Fundraising Admin**

We need more volunteers who can sit at a computer and complete applications for grants etc. that can be reviewed by the Trust's Fundraising Team prior to submission. If you can spare a few hours a month, please get in touch with [ali.arnold@wbct.org.uk](mailto:ali.arnold@wbct.org.uk)

## **Events Committee**

Every year there are a multitude of events in our area that we could attend, whether to fundraise, to raise awareness or, maybe, simply a social for Branch members to let their hair down. None of these can happen without Events Committee members to organise and coordinate volunteers etc. Please consider joining this very rewarding clean shoes team and contact [brian.wright@wbct.org.uk](mailto:brian.wright@wbct.org.uk)

## **Bee Route/Meadow Team**

If you are interested in the wildlife element of canal restoration, why not Join Howard Yardy's team to look after the Green element of our Blue/Green Corridor (which our canal line is often referred as)? Work will include, but not be limited to, meadow creations, hedge laying, tree planting, and habitat management/creation. Contact [howard.yardy@wbct.org.uk](mailto:howard.yardy@wbct.org.uk) for more details.

## **Notes from the Trust Executive**

my notes may be limited due to some degree of confidentiality and the need for clarity

### **New Names**

The Trustees have created a mini task to look at compliance, in particular of Charity Commission Rules. It would seem that we would be better off changing the names of our three major groups as shown below:

<b>Current</b>	<b>New</b>
Trustees	Board of Trustees
Directors	Board of Directors
Executive	Senior Leadership Team aka SLT

## **Royal Wootton Bassett (RWB) Branch**

Despite dredging being carried out on the RWB stretch, their new trip boat NonSuch is grounding on what they believe is aggregate washed in from a local development. This might have to be dug out by hand.

## **Swindon Branch**

MCC Branch volunteers joined the Swindon team to help prepare the New Compound ground, and work progressed well. Three days was allocated for the work but it's more a seven day job. A container is arriving soon, and their Welfare Unit will follow in mid-March. Note that, from an MCC point of view, once the Swindon Compound is sorted, the Swindon Branch kit currently stored at Pewsham can be collected. This will free up much need space for our work parties.

## **Dave Maloney**

### **Chair, MCC and F&L Branch**

### **Executive Member for Sustainability and Usage**

[dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk](mailto:dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk)

07809 374 754

## Work Parties



### Work Party Management Group

Another long and fruitful meeting this month.

Andrew Fergusson, our Branch Health & Safety Adviser, asked us to try to complete more Safety Hazard Observation Cards (SHOCs). Despite what the name might suggest, these can be used to report good news too. Andrew reminded us that this is an excellent way to spread best practice across the Trust. The Work Party Organisers (WPOs) will be reminding volunteers of this at the daily Safety Briefings that take place before each work party.

We spent quite a lot of time reviewing our major projects, and you will be able to read about some of these elsewhere in this report. Much of these discussions revolve around future planning. Given the progress that we are hoping to make this year, we will begin to discuss potential new projects at future meetings.

The Local Maintenance Plan surveys that Jeremy Brickell, together with another volunteer, undertakes every quarter feed into our Jobs List, which contains jobs that we need to do but which are outside of the scope of our major projects (or our kit servicing schedules). I'm pleased to say that the list continues to come down rapidly.

Dave Maloney has done a lot of work in preparing servicing schedules for our kit, and he has agreed to give a Toolbox Talk to volunteers to explain how to use them.

One of our long-standing WPOs, Keith Vickery, announced that he felt that he could no longer lead work parties. I'm pleased to say that Keith has agreed to continue as a (non-active) WPO and to be a Task Leader when attending work parties. Keith will also continue to attend the Work Party Management Group meetings, which is extremely welcome as his contributions are always most valuable.

Finally, the silt being deposited into then canal by Hannah's Brook has become a serious problem, which we will be dealing with as soon as possible. Looking at a longer term solution, a group of WPOs will be visiting Triangle Wood on Friday 15 March to assess possible options.



silt deposited from Hanna's Brook

**Ray Canter**  
Chair, Work Party Management Group



### Pewsham Locks

#### Restoration

Despite it being yet another very wet month we still managed to get a lot of work done.

When raining our volunteers spent time carrying out plant maintenance and tidying and cleaning containers and our Welfare Cabin.

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As ever thanks to all our volunteers who continue to turn out in good numbers.

The Big News continues to be the work on the Carpenters Workshop (see separate report) with the arrival and erection of the wooden wall panels towards the end of the month. The general public can now see a building taking shape from the towpath.



Elsewhere on site:

- work on the Accommodation Bridge over Top Lock continued; the last of the bricks on the eastern lock entrance wall have been removed and a cement lacquer has been added to the remaining brickwork, which will ensure a good bond when the rebuild begins; this is great news as we are now at a point of rebuilding as opposed to dismantling the wall;
- further work has been carried out at the Dry Dock where more steel work has been set; additionally, a wooden former has been created that will be used for the casting of the concrete coping;
- overhanging trees on the far bank were cut back along the canal from The Wharf to The Slipway;
- leaves and debris were cleared from in and around the culvert on the far bank just North of Double Bridge;
- the fence between the towpath and the small circular weir and culvert was repaired;
- the canal bank that had been eroded by dogs going into and out of the canal was repaired, and a ramp added in the hope that dogs might use that;
- tidying and laying of the towpath hedge continued;
- channels were cut along the towpath, and also in the Green Lane, to allow standing water to disperse;
- potholes were also filled along the Green Lane;
- the Local Maintenance Plan Survey was carried out; this is carried out every 2-3 months, and reports on any issues found along the canal; that report is passed to the Work Party Organisers enabling them to plan work parties to manage these issues;
- four bays were recreated at the Wood Store for log storage, with more to follow; and
- shelving has been created in Container #2 to hold service manuals and records.



from top  
Carpenters Workshop from the South  
fencing at the Circular Spillweir  
the Log Store before & after  
a slipway for dogs!

## **Maintenance**

The Jacobson (Buggy) was serviced and is now running well.

The two All-Terrain Mowers were serviced.

Two of the small trailers were serviced and are now ready for use along the towpath.

One of the road trailers was partially serviced.

A hand-operated throttle cable was fitted to the compactor.

A new oil sensor was fitted to one of our generators.

Some prep work was carried out on the large excavator plus it was taken to the Carpenters Workshop site ready for the delivery of the wall panels.

Annual checks were carried out on some of the brush cutters

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## **Health & Safety**

Fiona Rivers checked the contents of the First Aid boxes, which were replenished where necessary.

She also went through some of the RAMS (Risk Assessments & Method Statements) with one of our new volunteers.

In addition, she gave a toolbox talk on hedge-laying to volunteers.

One of the new volunteers was trained on the use of the Jacobson Truck (the Buggy).

Finally, several of our volunteers signed as having read and understood the RAMS on the Carpenters Workshop and the erection of the scaffolding around it.

### **Howard Wilson**

#### **Work Party Organiser**



### **Green Lane Farm**

No further work parties this month mainly due to the fact we lost the bulk of our weekend volunteers during the summer. The Lansdowne Estate could not agree to our request for an increased lease on the Green Lane Farm section, which runs from the A4 to Pudding Brook. This means at the moment we continue to have a five-year rolling lease.

### **Dave Maloney**

#### **Work Party Organiser**



### **Pudding Brook**

No further work parties this month mainly due to the fact we lost the bulk of our weekend volunteers during the summer. Howard Yardy and his team have been there recently (see his report) and you can view a good video on the [WBCT You Tube Channel](#).

### **Dave Maloney**

#### **Work Party Organiser**

## **Projects**



### **Peterborough Arms**

Now that we have got the water ingress issue into the cellar sorted, we turned our attention to protecting the front of the pub.

The volume of water coming down Lyneham Banks is immense and, as our car park entrance is at the bottom of the bank, the water flows straight to the front of the pub. The kerbs are all lowered at the front of the pub and the drains often get blocked.

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A planning application was approved (my thanks to Fiona Rivers) for a grassed bank at the front edge of the pub to keep water at the edge of the road. This was superseded by hollow concrete blocks which will be covered by soil and planted.

We have temporarily put these blocks in place and are drawing up plans for a cattle type grid with pit to capture a large volume of water and pipe it away. We will need planning permission for this, and you will have received some information about a fundraising appeal.

We are close to being able to hand over the final bedroom to Kevin the landlord and will return our attention to the outside store and other outside jobs in the spring/summer months.

Don't forget we need more competent DIYers ... even if it's a few hours, they will make a difference. Please get in touch if you can help

**Dave Maloney**  
**Refurbishment Lead**



## Studley Road Bridge

Work Party Organisers together with Howard Yardy visited the site to start preliminary investigations to uncover the bridge portal of this road bridge.

We want to decide whether the bridge is safe enough/can be made safe for pedestrian access from the Chippenham/Calne cycleway route, over Abbots land and through the bridge to the Pudding Brook section of the canal. If so, this will give a safe walking and cycling route between these sections.

Howard and I will have to deal with a very large willow that has blown over and could put volunteers working in the area at risk.

There is a great map link [here](#), for those interested in such things, where you can have a modern day map side by side with a map considerably older.

**Dave Maloney**



## Carpenters Workshop

At long last the pre-constructed wall panels for the workshop arrived on site. Once the lorry was positioned on the towpath, it unloaded the panels into the Upper Pound, where Ray Canter was waiting with the large excavator to take the panels to the Carpenters Workshop base. Staff from Seviour then secured the panels in place.

While we were pleased that the panels are finally on site, we were somewhat disappointed that not all the panels went fitted. The panels for the West side were simply left nailed to the sole plate with no other support, and panels not fitted were left inside facing up to the elements. Volunteers rectified these issues. More disappointment ensued when we were told that the roof trusses were not in the UK yet.



Carpenters Workshop from the air

We have put up the rest of the scaffolding, plus the footboard and the kick boards ready for the scaffold to be signed off and the arrival of the roof trusses. We wait to hear when the Seviour team are back on site.

More positive news was to come from Steve Court, who talked with Plum Base in Chippenham and arrange for a donation of a disabled toilet kit. This will include all components needs for a full fit out of the disable loo in the Carpenters work shop.

The cost of kitting out the interior of the workshop is just over £20500 but we are doing out bit locally and have already had donations of new taps for regular loo and kitchen and possible a gas boiler to give instant hot water, we have materials left from the Peterborough which also may be useful.

By the time you read this, timber will have been purchase for the window frames so Bob Howlett can get on and use the Calne Men's Shed equipment to make the frames in kit form for them to be assembled on site.

**Dave Maloney (with assistance from Ray Canter and Basil Raddy)**  
**Project Lead**



## Dry Dock

Work has recommenced on this project with Basil Raddy and David Peatfield creating the formers for the coping for the walls, A number of other volunteers have joined them to start casting of this coping which will eventually go around the whole of the dry-dock walls.

Due to an ever increasing work load, Jon Coates, Trust Chief Engineer, has yet to check for anomalies the two quotes we have received for the timber work. Given that both companies were given the same brief and the same cutting list, it is potentially worrying that one quote is £15k lower than the other. Jon is aware that this comparison must be complete by mid-March 2024 so that we can make a decision and move on to the next phase.

**Dave Maloney (with assistance from Basil Raddy)**  
**Project Lead**



## Melksham Link

The Binnies study on river proposals (including Biodiversity Net Gain) is underway but delayed. We are now hoping to get the first report by mid-March.

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We understand that the sale of the Cooper Tires sites has progressed and bids have been received, including one for the fields on the left bank by a community “Green Space” group. No details of other bids are available.

Regarding the Hydro scheme, we have been in discussion with Renewables First regarding performance of the proposed Archimedes Screw turbine.

There has been no further progress regarding the Masterplan and funding of the Project.

**Paul Lenaerts**  
**Project Manager, Melksham Link**

## Wildlife



This month we have been coppicing, hedge planting and newt watching.

Following a bit of coppicing and pollarding at the Newt Pond, the crew took some time out to watch lots of newts surfacing and diving in the pond. A real reward for the work we've put in over the last 18 months. We spotted both common (smooth) newts and great crested.



Our first Saturday work party of the year saw 11 volunteers (including some from Good Energy) complete some coppicing work below the Wet Section. The old hazel trees have been cropped to the ground to regenerate them. The new growth will be protected from grazing deer by a surrounding hedge built from the brush. While this was going on, Bob Howlett ensured safe passage down to the site by building some steps.



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Final tree/hedge planting and hedgelaying took place on Thursday 7 March. Gaps in the towpath hedgerow have been closed near to the Wet Section to supplement the hedgelaying by Fiona Rivers by the Slipway.



**Howard Yardy**  
**Wildlife Officer**

## Events



Events are starting to pick up now that the days are getting warmer.

We (Val Melville, Linda Howlett, Bob Howlett, Christine Watt, Malcolm Hitchinson and I) had an enjoyable day entertaining children at Chippenham Museum. We helped them make various things associated with the canal (clay bricks, decorated paper plates, string Dragonflies. and the excellent card boats from Bob) to take home. We saw 31 children and 36 adults, some of whom plan to come for a walk along the canal at Pewsham.

Meanwhile planning continues for:

- the annual Skittles Match versus the Devizes Branch of the Kennett & Avon Canal Trust on Saturday 23 March; more players wanted;
- the Spring Quiz on Friday 12 April; the Quiz Team is busy thinking up questions; and
- Pewsham Open Days (Pop-up Café, Boat Trips, Tours of the Work Site, Green Team demonstrations) on the second Saturday of each month through the summer, weather/water levels permitting.

Although help is always wanted at any event, please call one of the Team Leaders or myself before turning up, various details can/do change at short notice.

**Brian Wright**  
**Chair, Events Committee**

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## Boats



Another quiet month.

The seat slats for trip boat The Mary Archard have been treated ready for reinstallation.

Trip boat Damsel Fy is in the process of having an additional plate fitted to the underside to assist with launching (it currently fouls the trailer rollers).

Work boat Boswell is out of action due to a possible electric fault.

Boat training will be held at Pewsham on Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 April, subject to weather conditions.

Boat crews are needed for our 'Pewsham Days' (Pop-up Café; Boat Trips; Work Site Tours; and 'Green Team' Demonstrations) which will be held on the second Saturday of each month from April/May to September/October, weather and water levels permitting.

Boat crews are also needed for the Chippenham Folk Festival (Friday May 24 to Saturday May 27) and for the Melksham Food & River Festival (Saturday August 31 and Sunday September 1).

Some names have already been submitted; please can we have some more. Contact [boblin47@gmail.com](mailto:boblin47@gmail.com).

**Bob Howlett**  
**Boats Officer**

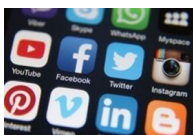
## Media Relations



No activity to report this month.

**Justin Guy**  
**Media Relations Officer**

## Branch Webpages and Digital Comms



### **WBCT Website**

Branch Webpages can be found at: <https://www.wbct.org.uk/our-enthusiasts/mcc-fl>.

### **WBCT YouTube Channel**

Keep up to date with latest videos featuring work along the whole of the canal on the [WBCT YouTube Channel](#).

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## **Social Media**

Posts to Facebook included:

- (a) using Bee Route tractor to help in canal restoration;
- (b) Tree Planting at Pewsham;
- (c) Carpenters Workshop: video update;
- (d) Community Engagement: lesson to KS2 pupils (also featured in Calne News);
- (e) Coppicing & Dead Hedging at Pewsham;
- (f) Community Engagement: MCC volunteers at Chippenham Museum; and
- (g) Carpenters Workshop: delivery of wall panels, update.

## **Additional**

I held preliminary discussions with Gordon Olson on potential ways to increase Trust/Branch membership.

Time was spent producing a poster for Joining/Donating and also for the upcoming 'Pewsham Days'.

Time was also spent on producing a new information Board.

Also uploading and cataloguing/archiving numerous photographs and videos of our work.

**Howard Wilson**  
**Digital Comms Officer**

## **Community Engagement**



I continued working with Elaine List on building a dataset of the MCC Branch Partners, which now total 119. We sent them a live mailing, a questions and answers paper about the Melksham Link, on Thursday 29 February.

During the month I offered to take up the Membership Secretary role being vacated by Micah Leitch and am now learning the ropes.

I continue to work with Howard Wilson on a trial of a volunteer management system from Better Impact, and will obtain a free trial during March.

**Gordon Olson**  
**Acting Community Partnering Officer**

## **Membership**



New member/membership numbers for this month and year to date (YTD) are given in the following table together with totals as at the date shown. Note that MCC Branch numbers are shown in red.



## WBCT Membership Summary at 14/03/2024

NB: MCC and F&L branch data in Red

Members by Branch	New members						Current numbers	
	February (Last Month)		March (MTD)		2024 (YTD)		Membership	Members
	Membership	Members	Membership	Members	Membership	Members		
<b>MCC</b>	4	8			8	14	552	783
Swindon	2	3	1	1	6	9	374	534
West Vale	1	1			3	4	82	119
East Vale & Abingdon	1	2			3	4	224	300
Offline	2	3			4	5	277	355
RWB			1	2	1	2	154	232
<b>F&amp;L</b>							45	66
<b>Totals (all types)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>1708</b>	<b>2389</b>

**Gordon Olson**  
Membership Secretary

## Finances



Income in February was £18 from the children's day at Chippenham Museum and £23 at the Branch meeting.

Expenses were £29 for servicing the toilet in the Welfare Unit, plus the usual £30 rent at the Showell nursery.

The cost of the new shelving in the container for the service manuals and servicing records (about £50) went through the HQ account.

Bank balance at 29 February was £2,837.

**Steve Roberts**  
Treasurer