

WBCT Swindon Branch Meeting January 2025 – Work Party Activities

During the last two months of 2024, we were quite lucky with the weather and only lost a couple of work days, despite the rather variable weather throughout this time.

Work parties on both Wednesday and Sunday mornings have been well attended along with an extra day as needed.

I was delighted to welcome Henry Smith to the work party as he joined our volunteers in December. Henry was Swindon branch chair and work party organiser at the turn of the century (around 25 years ago). During this time, he was responsible for getting the canal at Westleaze back in water which involved digging out the section at Westleaze farm, rebuilding Beavan's bridge and a number of other structures along the way. Henry also restored a significant section of the canal at Mouldon Hill.

Our main task during November and December was the continuation of the bank repair trial near Skew Bridge. Many wheelbarrows full of clay and soil were moved along the towpath to seal the repair and fill in the structure.



The structure was completed with the final brushwood fascine (bundle of sticks!) being wired in place.

The clay lining is now also complete and covered with backfill. There is just more fill and topsoil needed to

finish the repair. All the material removed from the canal has been reused and there is more fill needed which is being taken from around the compound area.

We will continue in the new year to complete the preparation and planning for the main repair work which is well underway.

We have been considering a bund/piling in the canal just south of Bevan's bridge. This would allow us to lower the canal level at Rushey Platt while maintaining the level for the boat trips near the Waitrose jetty. Henry Smith has great experience in doing this type of work and we are working out the best method. In the meantime, the work party have carried out extensive bramble clearing in order to expose the area where this work may be carried out. We have also continued with clearing work in the Rushey Platt area, to see if we can identify any areas where the bank is leaking. Some possible areas have been exposed, but it has been relatively dry since our clearing, so we will continue to clear and monitor over the coming weeks.

Another task carried out during November was around the entrance to the compound at Mill Lane. When the compound was built earlier in the year, a temporary fence was added after damage had



been caused by large vehicles using it as a passing place. New fencing was erected as a continuation of the fence alongside mill lane. Thanks to all those involved with sourcing the materials and carrying out this work.



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Maintenance of the towpath has also continued as normal at this time of year with trimming back the overhanging trees. During the high winds there were a few small branches lying on the towpath, but no fallen trees or blockages so far.

Rubbish removal has continued with a couple more bikes and a child's scooter being retrieved from the canal.

There is plenty more clearing needed on both sides of the canal as well as some hedge laying needed, if we can fit it in before the nesting season begins in March. We are also hoping for reasonable weather conditions over the next few months so that the great work can continue.

There has also been plenty of maintenance work to keep us busy with equipment and facilities in the compound. I finally managed to get the right sized wheel for our extra wheelbarrow so that we could get it back in action. Thanks to the volunteers who have provided materials and fixings for the wheelbarrow and gates that have needed maintenance.

Progress has continued on the building of the new stretch of the canal between Foxham Way and Mill Lane.

The joint development management team invited a group from the trust for a second visit to the site to see the progress. It was very good to see the great work that has taken place on this stretch. A good length of the towpath and bank are now in place, along with a healthy level of water. The development will continue in the spring or as soon as ground conditions allow.

We are all looking forward to further progress in 2025 after a very satisfying 2024.

Henry Sullivan – Work Party Organiser

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