



WILTS & BERKS CANAL TRUST

Patron: The former Duchess of Cornwall

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



Melksham, Calne & Chippenham and Foxham & Lyneham Branch Members' Report for November 2023

Chair's Report



Branch News

Donations

A generous donation from Jenny Lund has allowed us to purchase a powered brick cutter needed for our work on Top Lock, and probably other locks going forward. Our thanks to Jenny for this.

The customers at Semington Dock generously pay into a donation pot hosted by owner Ian Williamson. Ian is a Branch member and has donated this money to go towards a replacement Branch chainsaw.

The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust
Registered Charity No 299595, Limited Company No 2267719
Dauntsey Lock Canal Centre, Dauntsey Lock, Chippenham SN15 4HD
A Non-Profit-Distributing Company Limited by Guarantee
Office telephone: 08452 268567
E-mail: info@wbct.org.uk
Web Site: www.wbct.org.uk



It is obviously the season for giving! In the past I suggested to the Land Team that we might ask Mr Abbot for a lease on a small length of his land on which the canal ran. Having had a number of conversations with Mr Abbot I was hopeful he might donate this stretch to us.

On Friday 8 December, Max and Richard from the Trust Land Team and I met with Mr Abbot and a family representative to discuss a stretch of canal. Mr Abbot generously donated land which gives us the 30 metres of canal between Studley Road and the Chippenham/Calne cycle way.

Regular readers will remember we want to uncover the Studley Road Bridge portal, which sits on Mr Abbots land, in the hope that the road bridge portal is clear and we can get walkers and cyclists through it and join with the Pudding Brook section.

Obviously it will take time for the paperwork to be sorted and we will have to get bird nesting season out of the way so we can make the land safe for volunteers to work in.

200 Club

Applications from members to join the 200 Club for 2024 are now open at £25 per ticket. Applications close on Wednesday 21 February 2024.

Since 2012, through the efforts of two dedicated MCC members, £19,000 has been raised for the Trust. Basically monies go into a monthly draw for ticket holders to win three cash prizes a month. The balance goes to Branches when they bid for funds for specific items. Please join here: <https://www.wbct.org.uk/get-involved/200club>

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 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

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

It's time to create an environment both we and our children can be proud of...

It's time to inspire and excite...

It's time to put our canal at the heart of everyday life...

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 for more details.

Notes from Executive

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

Our CEO Mike Gibbin had been approached by other charities. So after discussion the Trustees agreed with Mike to pay him a modest sum based on three days' work per week.

Financial Reports

Peter Wilkinson reports that the key issue is that funds have become tight again. Without further grant income, unrestricted funds will fall to the £40K minimum in April 2024. This is partly because of the need to find some cash for the Peterborough Arms situation, but the arrival of the new tenants will help. Budget holders are asked to ensure careful spending of resources again until the situation eases.

Chief Marketing Officer's Report

James Farmer was pleased to announce the appointment of Jacob Dankwah as Head of Digital Marketing, who has already come up with some good ideas. He is keen to teach marketing skills to others. James has set up eight induction calls for him.

Fundraising Report

Ali Arnold said that a bid to Hedley (Sainsbury's) for £4,250 towards the Dry Dock had been successful but a bid to Weinstock for £10K core funding had yielded only £3K, so it might be necessary to put in more than one bid for a given project, and be prepared to withdraw a bid should another be successful. £42,000 of bids had been submitted in November, but by no means will all be successful.

Planning

Rod Hacker reported the most immediate issue is the Oasis site in Swindon, where we risk losing the route altogether because the corridor of land as it stands is too narrow. It's believed that houses are planned for the site, and we need to concentrate our efforts on this section with regards to discussions with various bodies.

Dave Maloney

Chair, MCC and F&L Branch

dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk

07809 374 754

Work Parties



Pewsham Locks

The wet weather continued through the first three weeks of the month followed by a cold spell at the end. However that didn't put off our volunteers, and we had some really good turnouts that enabled us to make good progress on a number of tasks.

It's time to create an environment both we and our children can be proud of...

It's time to inspire and excite...

It's time to put our canal at the heart of everyday life...

Of course all of this work couldn't go ahead if we didn't have a Work Party Organiser (WPO) organising tasks and ensuring the safety of all our volunteers. At times it might seem a thankless task and as over the last couple of months or so I have been laid low with knee problems, special thanks should go to Basil Raddy and especially Ray Canter who have ensured that work parties have been able to go ahead come rain or (very occasionally) shine.

It's great to be able to announce that after a huge team effort led by Basil Raddy and Roger Noyce, we completed all the foundations and blockwork, including the interior block work, of the Carpenters Workshop. It is now ready for the wooden frame to be installed, which is likely to be early in the New Year, weather permitting!

Whilst this has been our main task, with our many volunteers, we have managed to carry out a number of other tasks. These include:

- Howard Yardy leading a team that erected a new secure storage unit; this means that the RUBB Tent can now be utilised as a workshop where plant maintenance can be carried out in a dry and safe environment;
- a brick sub-base was laid at the entrance to the wood store, and scalpings were spread out in front of the Welfare Unit and over the brick sub-base; this will hopefully reduce the amount of mud in the Works Compound, and make it safer when walking around;
- some pot holes were filled in with scalpings along the Green Lane;
- Fiona Rivers and team tidied up the new hedging on the east side of the Upper Pound; also overhanging branches were cleared along the length of the towpath (see volunteer Ray, right) with some of the overgrown towpath hedges layered and tidied up;
- channels were cut in the towpath to remove standing water and the



preparing the brick base for the Works Compound resurfacing

- grass/vegetation along the canal bank from the Winding Hole to Double Bridge was cut;
- John Goring carried out some admin relating to RAMS (Risk Assessments and Method Statements) and also carried out an audit of all our plant;
- Bob Howlett worked on getting a cold water supply to the Welfare Unit; and
- a few more bricks were removed from the eastern wall of the Top Lock entrance; this is a slow and laborious task as the mortar that has been used is so hard!



the blockwork of the Carpenters Workshop rises out of the ground to greet the autumn sunshine



from just a framework (above) to a complete secure storage unit (below)



When the weather was too wet to work, we were still able to carry out a lot of necessary maintenance on our plant; led by Ray Martin, this included repair of an oil leak on one of the dumper engines, checking the newly acquired disk cutter, repairing the brakes on the buggy, checking some of the mixers including greasing, spark plug cleaning and air and oil filter change and small plant maintenance; even all the locks we use for security were oiled; finally, the WRG Excavator was cleaned prior to it going off-site.



keeping our kit in good, safe working order

Finally, Howard Yardy and his 'green team' have managed to carry out much good work at Naish Hill; see his separate report for details.

Howard Wilson
Work Party Organiser



Green Lane Farm

No further work parties this month mainly due to the fact that we lost the bulk of our weekend volunteers during the summer. We will try and rally a new group for the winter work of hedgelaying.

I am planning to bid for local funds to buy materials so that we can start levelling the towpath along this section.

Dave Maloney
Work Party Organiser



Pudding Brook

No further work parties this month mainly due to the fact that we lost the bulk of our weekend volunteers during the summer. We will try and rally a new group for the winter work of hedgelaying.

Dave Maloney
Work Party Organiser

*It's time to create an environment both we and our children can be proud of...
It's time to inspire and excite...
It's time to put our canal at the heart of everyday life...*

Projects



Peterborough Arms

The Peterborough Arms has a new landlord, Kevin Graham. The pub will be open to customers as soon as supplies are in place.

On the restoration front, although we have identified our cellar flooding issues as a blocked drain pipe, Wiltshire Council (WC) Highways don't seem to be particularly interested in sorting it! We have put plans in place to divert the rainwater in the short term. In the meantime, regular emails to WC Highways is the order of the day.

We continue our work in the last letting room, and hope to have it ready in the next few weeks. We will need some furniture though and, as always, Facebook Market Place is our friend 😊 Come the Spring, of course, there will be more outdoor work to finish off so, if you are a skilled DIY'er and can spare a Monday to help us with the final push, please get in touch. Thanks

Dave Maloney
Refurbishment Lead



Carpenters Workshop

Volunteers have worked incredibly hard to get the footings in place to take the sole plate of the building, which will be fitted by Seviour Timber prior to Christmas. Sadly, due to delays and an ill draughtsman, we did not meet our target of a watertight and secure unit before Christmas ... It was not for the want of trying!

We are in the final stages of choosing bricks for the floor and slate tiles for the roof, and a local sawmill is the best place for cladding.

Details of correct type of nails for this historic reproduction are being researched.

Dave Maloney
Project Lead



Dry Dock

Work has stopped at the Dry Dock for the time being. This was due initially to volunteers being needed to help with the Top Lock forewall, in preparation for the bridgework to start.

We have received the final quote for a supply of pre-cut/pre jointed timbers, and as one was £15k below the price of the other, Jon Coates Trust Chief Engineer, is having to compare the two for any anomalies (given both companies were given the same brief and cutting list).

Dave Maloney
Project Lead



Melksham Link

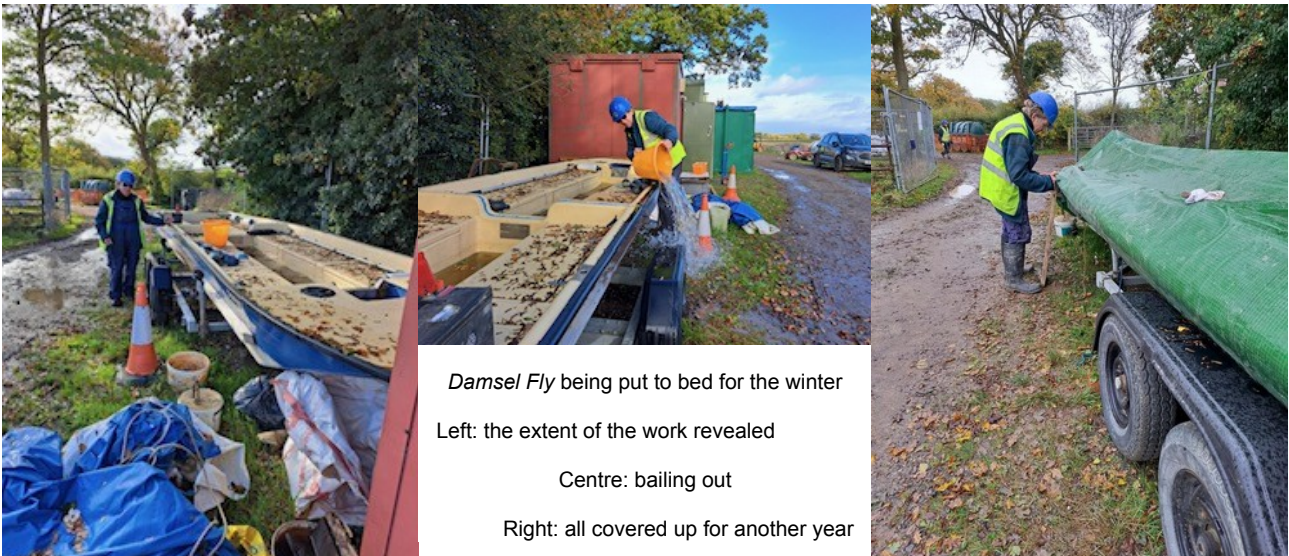
The funding of the Binnies study on river modifications and biodiversity has been confirmed from the Section 106 Agreement between David Wilson Homes and Wiltshire Council. Exactly how we access the money is still to be advised, but we have now commissioned the work and await an updated programme from Binnies. The prospect of gaining planning consent in 2024 is realistic but will depend upon the results of the study. We have had meetings regarding the Masterplan and funding of the Project but the way forward is not clear. Further discussions are planned for the New Year.

Paul Lenaerts
Project Manager, Melksham Link

Boats



Trip boat *Damsel Fly* was bailed out and covered up for the winter.



Damsel Fly being put to bed for the winter

Left: the extent of the work revealed

Centre: bailing out

Right: all covered up for another year

The battery in work boat *Boswell* was taken off and recharged, then reinstated.

Bob Howlett
Boats Officer

Wildlife



Wildflowers and hedge planting at Double bridge and Naish Hill activities this last month. The area coppiced last month was finished off and a dead hedge built around it to protect the regrowth from deer grazing.



Nest boxes

A check and clean was carried out on the nearly 30 nest boxes at the Green Lane Farm/Pudding Brook section.

Last year there were lots of dead bodies and nest failures as a result of the extremely hot weather. This year only one box had a brood that had died and two thirds of the boxes had been used.



dead hedge building



Trees for Naish Hill

Trees have been purchased with the Aviva funds, and will be planted in the coming weeks at Naish Hill.

Why not come along and help us plant the trees, especially if you contributed to the fund. You'll be able to see exactly what the fund has enabled us to do. Contact howard.yardy@wbct.org.uk



coppiced area below Double Bridge



volunteers having lunch at Double Bridge

Howard Yardy
Wildlife Officer

Community Engagement



During November, I recruited Claire Mickish to work, initially, on constructing the dataset we need to enable regular emailings to our Community Partners via CiviCRM. It might transpire that she will have sufficient skills and time to become MCC's Community Partnering Officer (CPO) in due course.

I briefed our new Funding Director at HQ, Ali Arnold, on our fundraising history at MCC, and provided her with a listing of historic and existing donors to our Branch's Core and Restricted funds. I will continue this dialogue with Ali during December so that we have a clear and consistent picture of our funding needs and how they will be satisfied.

On Wednesday 29 November, I facilitated a meeting of those at MCC who have an interest in increasing our volunteer numbers. I circulated my notes from this meeting the following day; they contain a list of volunteer vacancies that was created during the meeting.

During the meeting, we received a presentation from Dave Thomas on recruiting and retaining volunteers. He recommended that we review a software platform called Better Impact, which he has deployed elsewhere, to recruit, retain and manage volunteers. This review will commence in December with a view to showing the system to a wider audience in January. Better Impact is an SAAS (Software As A Service) platform and will not, therefore, have any impact on our existing IT infrastructure.

Gordon Olson
Acting Community Partnering Officer

Events



Another comparatively quiet month for the Events Team, except for planning, in particular for the Quiz in April.

Does anyone see themselves as a budding Ann Robinson or Bradley Walsh, as we need a new Question Master and Scorekeeper. We also need volunteers to set and verify verifying the questions (and answers).

If you feel that you want something in your calendar that is new/different, please come forward and let me (brian.wright@wbct.org.uk) or one of the Events Committee know.

Brian Wright
Chair, Events Committee

Branch Webpages and Digital Comms



WBCT Website

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

The Project pages were updated to include the recent rebuild of the Waiting Wall between Top and Middle Lock.

A start has also been made on pages for the Accommodation Bridge and also the Carpenters Workshop.

These can be viewed at <https://www.wbct.org.uk/mcc-projects>

Social Media

Posts to Facebook included:

- photos of a walk along the canal at Pewsham (courtesy of Howard Yardy);
- 'before and after' photos of the recently rebuilt Waiting Wall;
- volunteers carrying out maintenance of plant at Pewsham;
- Coppicing and Dead Hedging at Naish Hill (courtesy of Howard Yardy);
- tidying canal/removing dead branches at Pewsham (courtesy of Howard Yardy);
- numerous photos along canal line Pewsham to Naish Hill highlighting work being carried out (courtesy of Steven Court);
- post and photos of 'Carpenters Workshop – Restoring an Industrial Hub'; and
- post about a Corporate work party at Pewsham.

Additional

Time was spent uploading and cataloguing / archiving numerous photographs of our work.

Howard Wilson
Digital Comms Officer

Finances



Income in November was a pleasing number of donations:

- £295 for logs;
- £200 for work done by Howard Yardy;
- £28 at the Branch meeting;
- £500 member donation towards core costs; and
- £1,000 member donation to be spent locally.

Expenses were:

- £285 venue hire for Autumn Quiz;
- £160 meeting room hire (8 monthly meetings);
- £55 repair parts for log splitter; and
- £33 miscellaneous consumables: trimmer line, studding, etc.

Bank balance at the end of the month was £3,512 which is an increase of £1,380.

Steve Roberts
Treasurer

Membership



The totals for this month and year, and for a year ago are given in the following table.

	memberships	members
new this month: Branch	6	9
WBCT	9	13
new this year (2023): Branch	36	51
WBCT	115	171
total at end of month: MCC	550	779
F&L	46	68
Branch	596	847
WBCT	1,692	2,370
total a year ago: MCC	544	768
F&L	47	69
Branch	591	837
WBCT	1,684	2,354

Micah Leitch
Membership Secretary