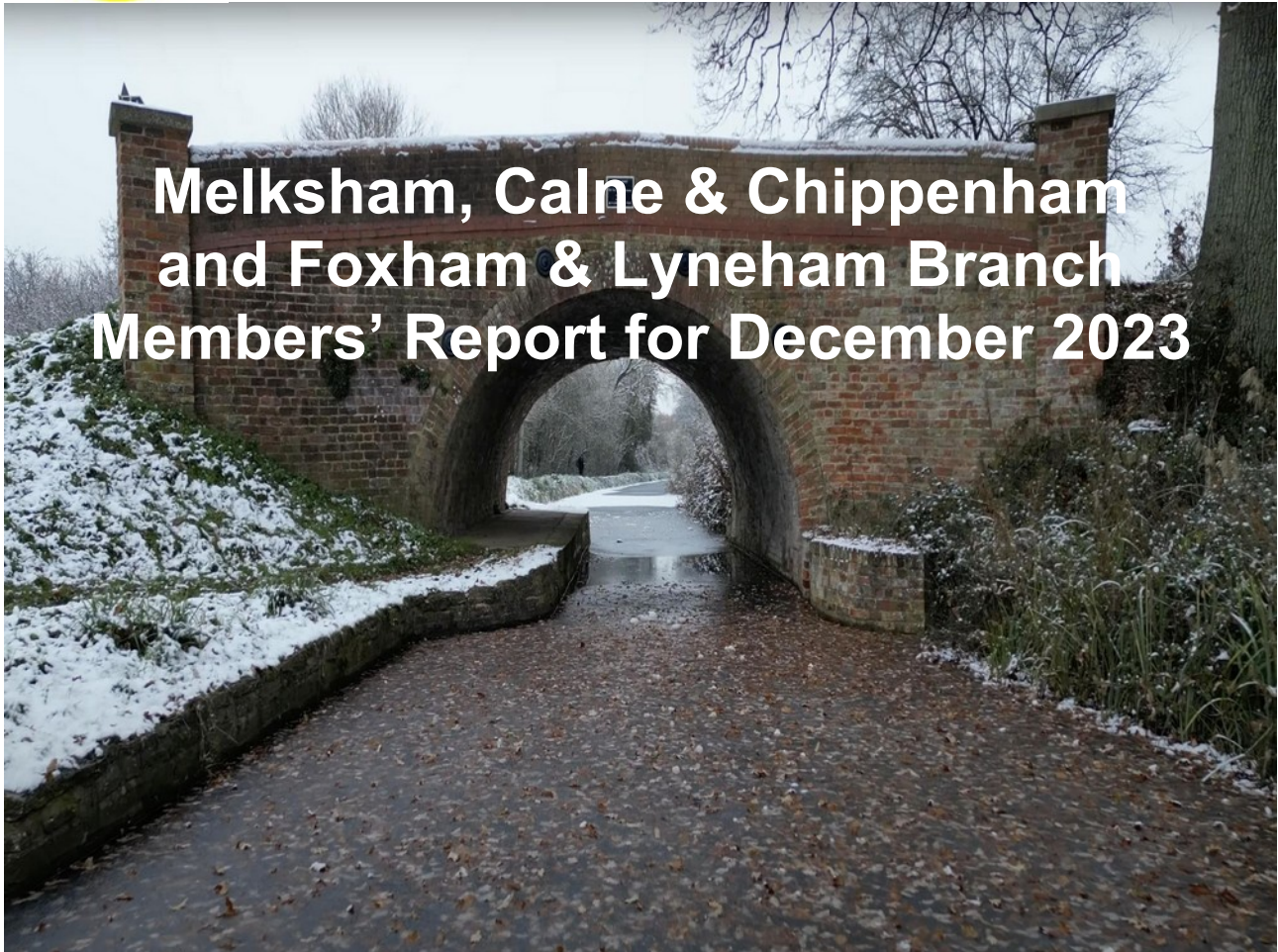




WILTS & BERKS CANAL TRUST

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 December 2023

Chair's Report



Branch News

Jenny Lund

It's with sadness that I have to report that Jenny Lund passed away just before Christmas. Jenny joined the Trust in June 2009 and was a grand supporter of the Trust, even attending some summer work parties to help us out at Pewsham, and with the Pop-up Café.

You will recall from last month's reports that Jenny kindly donated £1,000 to the Branch, which was spent on a brick cutter. She wanted the balance to go towards fitting out the Carpenters Workshop with tools.

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
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Pewsham

Despite the constant rain, the water levels in the canal at Pewsham were OK. The water level between the stiles at the southern end rose, and water came across the path in two places. Pipes between this section and one to the newt pond were found to be blocked and cleared.

Due to other workloads we were unable to tackle the clearance of the Naish Hill line whilst great crested newts were out of the water hibernating, so this will be on our list for September 2024.

Our first Work Party Organisers meeting of 2024 will have taken place before the next Branch meeting, and we will have reviewed the 2023/4 projects.

Health & Safety (H&S)

I have attended a number of meetings this past month, despite it being Christmas and all. One meeting was to do with H&S culture, paperwork and volunteer training. I was very pleased to hear MCC's work in this area being praised. In particular, MCC volunteer acceptance of and embracing the necessary H&S culture that is there to help keep us safe. H&S stalwarts Andrew Fergusson, John Goring and Fiona Rivers being mentioned by name due to their hard and consistently good work in this area.

Thanks were also expressed for those volunteers who submit monthly safety stats which are so important to help the Trustees/Directors have such info to hand should external agencies ask for it.

Elaine List will be helping Gordon Olson by creating a list of MCC Branch stakeholders who might want to be kept up-to-date with our progress.

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, £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 to help raise funds for the Trust and allow Branches to purchase tools and/or other equipment. Note if you have had a ticket in the past and pay by DD you need do nothing to continue your support. 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

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.arnols@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

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

Trust Chief Executive Officer

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.

Royal Wootton Bassett Branch

RWB had a legacy left by Branch member Vic Miller. After due consideration, the Branch have decided to purchase a day trip boat to run along the Templars Firs section. A potential boat has been identified and is being surveyed in early January. They have also decided to have dredging carried out by a contractor on the same section of canal.

West Vale Branch

West Vale are hoping to get access to 2.5km of towpath. Conversations with land agents appear to be going well, but no chickens counted until they have hatched. They have also been gifted a scaffold bridge which will traverse Tuckmill Brook and open another 350m of towpath.

Fundraising

The Trust's Head of Fundraising, Ali Arnold, is pulling together a list of all Branch fundraising requirements. She is asking for a funding brief for each requirement, and will be coordinating the fundraising.

Peggy-Sue Ford (Swindon Branch Secretary) is doing a sponsored Five Walks for the Trust this year: five walks to represent the five WBCT Branches. The funds are to help with our core funding. Please watch out for social media and *On The Button* for updates and how to sponsor and share for your area.

Trip Boat Dragonfly carried 220 adults and 181 children plus 12 infants in 60 Santa Claus Excursion trips, the most in one day being 68, the theoretical maximum being 72. Overall occupancy was 26%, as the earlier trips were less booked up. This is much better than last year and, interestingly, most of the children were new; grounds for optimism next year!

Engineering

Discussions continue with Thames Water regarding the use of Wroughton Reservoir to supply the canal at Wichelstowe. A technical note is being prepared by the Trust Engineering Committee (engCom).

Students at the University of the West of England (UWE) have been invited to consider alternative schemes to be used for routing the canal across major roads within urban areas where the hump-back bridge has been demolished and replaced by a near level road alignment.

Dave Maloney
Chair, MCC and F&L Branch
Executive Member for Sustainability and Usage
dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk
07809 374 754

Work Parties



Pewsham Locks

Restoration

Despite the wet weather, we managed to carry out some great work during the month culminating in 17 volunteers turning up for the last work party before Christmas, including three new volunteers. I'm sure the mince pies, courtesy of Fiona Rivers and Basil Raddy, and mulled wine, courtesy of Dave Maloney, had nothing to do with the high turnout!

The main task has been further work on the Carpenters Workshop. Drainage pipes were installed and hard core and scalplings laid and compacted on the floor areas.

Finally the sole plate was fitted to the building walls so that it is now ready to take the wooden frame early in the new year.

Further work has been carried out removing bricks from the East wall of the entrance to Top Lock.



Carpenters Workshop: floor compacted and sole plate fitted

Maintenance

During the frequent wet periods maintenance was carried out on some of the Plant & Equipment ready for hopefully drier weather in the New Year.

Howard Wilson
Work Party Organiser

Projects



Peterborough Arms

We continue to work in the last letting room, with window sill issues sorted, insulation fitted and wall made good. Flooded roads prevented us getting to the Peterborough on the Tuesday 2 January, but hopefully by the time you read this we will have had our first work party of 2024.

Highways have declared that water entering the cellar isn't their issue as the room is not occupied. So, for the time being, we have to mitigate this water issue as best we can. They will deal with the blocked pipe, but it's not a priority for them. Unfortunately the cellar flooded again in early January. I have suggested to the landlord that he submits a claim to Wiltshire Council for lost stock and damaged equipment.

During 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

The Carpenters Workshop is now ready for the actual construction panels. The sole plate was fitted before Christmas, and the panels are due to be installed mid/late January.

A local 'Men's Shed' have offered the use of their equipment to enable us to create window frames, Bob Howlett went to take a look, and the kit will suit us fine. Thank You the Calne Men's Shed.

As the window frames will be bespoke for the workshop, quotes for window panes have been requested.

Cladding will be ordered (three weeks lead time after payment) so that it arrives after, but very soon after, the building is erected; they can be stored inside prior to fitting.

Scaffolding has been ordered and will be onsite and ready for when the building sides start to go up.

The relevant H&S paperwork is being prepared.

Dave Maloney
Project Lead

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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 and pre-jointed timbers. As one was £15k below the price of the other, Trust Chief Engineer Jon Coates is having to compare the two for any anomalies, given that both companies were given the same brief and cutting list.

Dave Maloney
Project Lead



Melksham Link

We now have a programme for the Binnies study on river proposals (including Biodiversity Net Gain). The 'kick-off' meeting will be week commencing Monday 8 January, and the final report should be available by the end of April. Included in the programme are meetings with the Environment Agency and Wiltshire Council Planning and Ecology, so the timing and outcomes will be dependent on their co-operation.

The very wet final quarter of 2023 has not been good for predictions of output from the planned hydro-electric scheme by Melksham Gate Weir. Initial indications are that output from the generator would be zero for around 30% of the time over the last 3 months because the head of water decreases when the river is in flood. However, we are now getting lots of data on river levels so final design of the Archimedes Screw can be optimised. What we don't know is whether the recent high flows will be the 'new normal' winter pattern resulting from climate change.

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

Paul Lenaerts
Project Manager, Melksham Link

Boats



We tried to take our workboat Boswell along the canal to Double Bridge but the silt at Triangle Wood was visible above water level.

This will probably mean no boat trips this year at Pewsham until a large amount of silt is dredged.

On a positive note, we changed Boswell's oil etc.

Bob Howlett
Boats Officer

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Wildlife



Tree Planting

At Naish Hill, we have started planting trees purchased with the Aviva Fund.

Over 40 large trees and numerous whips were put in, staked and given deer protection in several locations. More will be planted in the coming weeks.

Trees species included lime, cherry, sweet chestnut, spindle, hazel, hawthorn and crab apple.

These will provide food and ultimately shelter for wildlife and form part of the process towards a woodland pasture habitat.

Hedges

A new hedge was planted next to the Carpenter's workshop at Pewsham Locks.

The trees were provided by the charity IDIGTREES, whose aim is to plant three million trees across the country.

They gave WBCT 600 whips this year, most of which will be used for new hedges.

Winter Weather

We fortunately only lost one tree along the canal in the recent windy weather.

An elderly field maple had rotted at its base and fell across the canal before Christmas. It has now been removed.



tree planting at Naish Hill



the new hedge at Pewsham Locks



tree removed from the canal

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COPPICING



Hazel trees in this woodland are being felled as part of the overall management of this area. This is called coppicing and is a traditional method of extending the life of hazel trees. The wood will be used for a variety of purposes. By cutting back the tree, light is allowed to reach the ground. Woodland flowers will start to grow and feed insects and birds. The tree stump will sprout many shoots in the spring and eventually providing nesting sites for birds and habitat for butterflies and moths. Remnants of the tree (brash) will be used to create a dead hedge to protect the new growth from deer browsing. This structure will also be exploited by wildlife. Only a few trees per year will be cut to create a mosaic of habitats. If you would like to help with this project, please contact the Trust at Howard.Yardy@WBCT.Org.UK.



coppicing next to the swollen River Avon

We've also coppiced some overstood hazel stools in the woodland between the River Avon and the canal just below the Wet Section.

A dead hedge has been constructed with the brash to protect the regrowth.

Signs have been erected near to our coppice work explaining the process (see above).

Howard Yardy
Wildlife Officer

Community Engagement



New recruit Claire Mickish, initially set to work on constructing the dataset we need to enable regular e-mailings to our Community Partners via CiviCRM, has had to step back temporarily to care for her elderly father. I will re-engage with her in January 2024 and, if necessary, seek help elsewhere on this important work

I submitted a list of MCC's 2024 funding needs to our new Funding Director at HQ, Ali Arnold. It includes further funding to complete the Carpenters Workshop and the Dry Dock, and money for the purchase of a trailer for the Bee Route tractor and mower, together with a new offset flail mower for towpath maintenance.

I followed up on our Wednesday 29 November meeting on volunteering by meeting Dave Thomas and Jeremy Lewis for a demo of Better Impact on Wednesday 13 December. It is a very impressive system that could make the management of volunteer work parties easier and more traceable. I will arrange a further meeting in January with Dave and Jeremy for a larger group of MCC interested parties so that we can make a decision on how to proceed.

Outside my normal work for MCC, I also pushed ahead with a project to print high definition replicas of the original canal mapping and sell them to raise money. We now have the first prints from two original copper plates to start the next stages of the project.

Gordon Olson
Acting Community Partnering Officer

Events



Apart from the Christmas Dinner at The Bell (which we could not manage to attend ourselves) there are no events to report on for December.

So, I spent a relaxing break over the Festive Season, eating too much, whilst thinking about events for 2024:

- first up, the **Children's Activity Day** at Chippenham Museum; the date yet to be decided but likely to be the **Thursday of the February Half-Term Break** (Thursday 15 or, possibly, 22 February); this is a day spent with local children, making clay bricks and String Dragonflies, colouring pictures, etc. If anyone is interested in helping, please ask me (brian.wright@wbct.org.uk) or one of the Events Committee;
- then **Friday 12 April** is our **Spring Quiz** in The Need; questions (and answers) and Question Master needed please; again, if anyone is interested in helping please ask me or one of the Events Committee.

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 CarpentersWorkshop. A start has also been made on pages for the Accommodation Bridge.

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

Social Media

Posts to Facebook included:

- Planting seeds, bulbs and wildflowers at Naish Hill (courtesy of Howard Yardy);
- Drone Footage of Pewsham Locks Site (courtesy of Steve Court);
- Restoration of Carpenters Workshop;
- Nest Boxes at the Green Lane Farm / Pudding Brook section (courtesy of Howard Yardy);
- Tree and Hedge planting at MCC (courtesy of Howard Yardy);
- MCC Branch: Tony Davy Award; and
- Planting of large trees at the Naish Hill section (courtesy of Howard Yardy).

Additional

Time was spent uploading and cataloguing / archiving numerous photographs of our work, and the pictorial review highlighting our work during 2023 was produced

Howard Wilson
Digital Comms Officer

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Media Relations



Our final press release of 2023 related to the Branch winning the Tony Davy Award for the most hours volunteered. Dave Maloney was the spokesperson and was photographed alongside fellow volunteers in the Dry Dock at Pewsham Locks.

He said: “We’re always amazed by the commitment of our volunteers who work throughout the year to bring this wonderful waterway back to life. From digging, bricklaying, grass cutting and engineering, to quiz nights, boat rides and other public events, everyone plays their part, and every hour is sincerely appreciated.”

The story has already been featured by national waterways magazine *Towpath Talk* and in local newspapers the *Wiltshire Times* and *Gazette & Herald*. In addition, Dave was interviewed by *BBC Radio Wiltshire*.

Further coverage is expected in January.



Justin Guy
Media Relations Officer

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Finances



Low activity in the Branch bank account in December: no income and just two expense items

- £30 rent for the Showell lock-up; and
- £127 spent in the previous month at K M Parts
£85 of that was for engine oil for the tractor, therefore booked to the Bee Route fund, and the rest was consumables such as hand-wipes, WD40 and grease.

Bank balance at the end of the month was £3,425.

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	3	3
WBCT	5	5
new this year (2023): Branch	39	54
WBCT	120	176
total at end of month: MCC	552	781
F&L	46	68
Branch	598	849
WBCT	1,690	2,366
total a year ago: MCC	545	769
F&L	48	71
Branch	593	840
WBCT	1,684	2,356

Micah Leitch
Membership Secretary