The aim of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust
To protect, conserve and improve the route of the Wilts & Berks and North Wilts Canals, and branches, for the benefit of the community and environment, with the ultimate goal of restoring a continuous navigable waterway linking the Kennet & Avon canal near Melksham, the River Thames near Abingdon, and the Thames & Severn canal near Cricklade.

The objectives of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust
Convince local authorities, government departments and local organisations of the benefits and feasibility of the proposed restoration.
Convince landowners, local commerce and the general public of the merits of the restoration.
Secure the route of the waterway and adequate water supplies.
Establish the Trust as a key member of a partnership with local authorities and other bodies that will facilitate restoration of the canal.
Implement an agreed programme for full restoration of the canal.

Membership of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust is open to all.
The annual membership rate is £10, with discounts available for families and under 18s. Company and Society membership is also available.

The views and opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily represent those of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust. The Editors reserve the right to shorten, change or not to publish any material received.

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DATA PROTECTION ACT
The Trust membership details are recorded in compliance with provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998

President The Hon Sir William McAlpine Bt FRSE
Vice President and Founder Neil Rumbol
Vice President Dr David Fletcher CBE
Vice President Roger Crapper
Vice President John Laverick MBE
Office Telephone Number 0845 226 8567
Internet Address www.wbct.org.uk
Email info@wbct.org.uk
Postal Address Dauntsey Lock Canal Centre, Dauntsey Lock, Chippenham, SN15 4HD

Cover Image
Site of the old junction with the K&A at Semington after painting (article p 19). Photograph by Paul Lenaerts
I wanted this time in my report for Dragonfly to review for you all the progress we have made to date since the start of the new Executive in March of this year.

Those of you who were at our recent AGM have heard from all four of the Executive Directors, and Ken and Jock who together with the Branch Chairs complete our team: and I hope you were as impressed as I was at the progress they have made... and at their plans for the next 12 months.

It’s difficult to comprehend the changes in the management of the Trust since I joined just over a year ago and the pace of that progress since March: from rigorous project management and maintenance processes now in place; more and more volunteers coming forward to join the project teams; the new web site launched and a professional and market-centred approach throughout the PR and communications function; many different fund raising strategies now being explored and achieving results; a comprehensive review of our IT infrastructure and significant progress in migration to better systems; the introduction of an e shop; completion of the land team’s lease and ownership project data base; new effective relationships with statutory agencies, with Local Authorities, with land owners and many other organisations and individuals that the Trust needs to influence; the list goes on.

But as we all know there was a major and tragic accident in August which we will be dealing with for a long time to come.

At the AGM, I spoke about my feelings of great sadness when I, along with many members of the Trust, attended Peter Konitzer’s funeral the day before our AGM. Many of us met Peter’s family there for the first time. We were all impressed with how Peter’s family are looking for the positives at this incredibly difficult time for them: and how they are celebrating the achievements in his life. It’s a lesson for us all I think.

A small team from the Trust has been supporting Peter’s family since the tragic accident, and are also supporting our other volunteers. My thanks to Jock and Sheila for all their efforts for both the Trust and for Peter’s family: this is not easy work. We continue to work with the HSE in their investigation and I will report to you when these investigations are complete.

I want to finish on a positive note though: we have achieved much this year: the Studley Grange project was saved through your efforts to raise the additional funding needed, and the excavation was completed in November just before the weather broke. We are very close to the opening of the Community Rooms at the Peterborough Arms and the opening of the pub is not far behind. Our profile with the outside world continues to grow both from your efforts at Branch and local level, and through our much improved communication processes. Many other small and large projects are in process or in the pipeline, and I am increasingly confident in our ability to manage these projects better than ever before. Our membership drive has just started which you will read more about later in this issue, together with our plans for a Towpath Festival in September 2017.

I look forward with a great deal of confidence as well as anticipation to the next 12 months of hard work by the Executive Directors and all their team members.

**Volunteering? Please record your hours!**

It is vital the Trust captures all your hard work so we can demonstrate to a wider audience just how much is going on. Send your hours to juanita.poulton@wbct.org.uk who will be happy to hear from you and will send you a form for completion if you don't have one. Thank you,

Juanita Poulton
Chairman’s Report
Roderick Bluh

I am pleased to report to you that we had a very successful and well attended AGM: I thanked Dave Maloney and MCC Branch on the day but would like to repeat my thanks in Dragonfly. Sheldon School was a wonderful venue and the Trust was made very welcome, with the hard work undertaken by many members to prepare for our AGM very evident in all the arrangements.

I am also pleased to report that Steve Bacon was elected as the new Members’ Trustee. We welcomed him to his first Board meeting immediately after the AGM and I am confident that Steve will be an effective member of the Board.

Our new website was launched at the AGM. This project has been in the pipeline for a number of months and I feel that few Trust members, outside the small group who have been working on this, realise just how much work has been involved. So again thank you to the Communications Team guided by Jonathan and Sheila. The result is just what we hoped for: a professional marketing orientated site which will allow the Trust to develop all the communication initiatives that we need.

I am delighted to announce that the contracting work has been completed at Studley Grange. We were able to start work on the final 5000 cubic meters of excavation in October after your efforts during the summer to raise the necessary funds to allow this to happen. Spring 2017 will see the final works on the towpath being undertaken: planting hedges and wildflowers, installation of signs, etc. So all should be ready for opening in the Spring. This project has been a long, long process that we have learnt a great deal from. It will be very good to see this section of the canal open and in use.

I look forward to even more progress in 2017 throughout the Trust.

I would like to finish by saying that the thoughts of all in the Trust remain with Peter Konitzer’s family. Peter’s funeral bought home to me how important it is to live a full life, to enjoy the companionship of likeminded people and to participate wholeheartedly in the enterprises with which we are involved. I hope that all Trust members feel able to join with me in this aim.

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By the time you read this we will have started 2017 so here’s wishing everyone a productive and successful year in whichever bit of our canal building project you are.

If we are to achieve our target of building a navigable waterway, the range of skills required is huge and includes our armchair readers all the way through to all singing and dancing engineering types. We need every one of you and those you haven’t yet recruited so let’s make 2017 the year we step up a gear on membership numbers please.

We have much good news reported in this issue and we look forward to even more next time. Please remember this is YOUR magazine so if you want things included either prompt us or, even better, write us an article.

Apparently there is no such thing as bad publicity and there is currently much good televisial coverage of canals in general raising public awareness. It is, therefore, really good news that we may get even more coverage early next year on Channel 4 (article pages 14 & 15).

We have many ways of keeping everyone in touch with what we are doing so, please, have a look at the new website and select the ways you would like us to keep in contact either electronically or by the traditional methods.

What do you think about the new website? It was long overdue but nothing is ever perfect so feedback from members will help make it what you need.

Many thanks

John and Margaret
editor@wbct.org.uk
## Membership Matters

### Membership Secretary’s Report

We welcome the following new members:

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**Membership Team: 25 November 2016**
Dear Editors,

May I on behalf of the Malmesbury U3A engineering group, thank Malcolm Hitchinson for hosting a group to visit the Pewsham Locks Rural Heritage Site on 1st. November? The weather was overcast and distinctly autumnal but the welcome was warm and it was a enjoyable to listen to Malcolm and his colleagues whose knowledge, humour and enthusiasm proved to be very entertaining. Even with his excellent directions one car managed to "make a detour" to the pumping station, but not for long! I wish I had taken my advice to wear stout footwear; the damp grass went through the trainers much to my embarrassment but the banter added to the informality and enjoyment of the visit.

The tour took the the form of a gentle walk from the locks to just past Double Bridge and we enjoyed learning about the engineering challenges facing the the restoration project as well as finding out more about the history of the canal. The dialogue ranged from size of recycled bricks, the kingfisher, pillboxes, rights of way and much more. Two and half hours passed quickly! It is good to know that The Canal Trust welcomes groups such as ours, we learnt a lot in an enjoyable way and as we left , closing the gate behind us, our driver commented, "I am full of admiration for all the people involved in such a demanding project and hope it will be completed within the projected time"; we all agreed.

Gordon Williams, Malmesbury

Dear Editors, thank you for the last edition...

Maybe looking at the canals from a different perspective...

I have viewed lots of video from drones, those from people who fly them for fun. I was just thinking that perhaps, if some kid could use a few coins. He or she could fly one over the canals and projected area and perhaps produce a video for the Trust? It could even be edited showing where the canal might be going?

Just thinking out loud here... :) 

I have walked the Cotswold Canals and the Kennet & Avon Canal and quite enjoyed them. They have some very interesting maps available. The K & A one paid for by other people, I'm sure...

Keep up the good work, looking forward to reading the next one.

Take care

Denis H. Morin

Email:- editor@wbct.org.uk
Write to:- Dragonfly Editor, Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, Dauntsey Lock Canal Centre, Dauntsey Lock, Chippenham, SN15 4HD.

The Trust encourages debate and contributions from members on any matter relating to the Trust, and believes the letters page provides a forum for this. However the Editors reserve the right to shorten, change or not to publish any letters received.
Pewsham Lock Cottage Draw

This year, as a departure from the regular W&B Annual Prize Draw, Kath generously agreed that MCC could benefit from the proceeds of a lottery, providing that they organise the ticket printing, the sales, the prizes and the actual draw. It was agreed to put the proceeds into a fund towards the rebuilding of the Lock Cottage, and following sales through Dragonfly magazine, at events, in the shop, and by enthusiastic members, the draw finally took place at MCC’s Christmas Dinner held at The Angel Hotel on 05 December.

Thanks to the brilliant efforts of everyone who sold or bought tickets, at the time of going to press, the total raised was the fantastic sum of £4,079 plus £264 in donations.

Guests (Jonathan Till/Phil Newbury) drew the winning tickets:

1st Prize      HP ProBook Laptop      J. Hutton                   Carterton

2nd Prize       £250                              A. Merryweather      Cirencester

3rd Prize       £100                              A O’Shaughnessy     Wantage

4th Prize       £50                                M. Berry                    Watlington

Consolation Prize of a Family Ticket on Dragonfly:

Shorts - Box Hill,

Slater - Swindon,

Collin - Bromham,

Strong - Bishop’s Stortford

Winners have all been contacted.

Thank you very much to everyone who helped make the draw such a success. Special mentions should go to Alan Lank and Zara …. who between them sold £450 worth at the Melksham Food & River Festival; Malcolm Hitchinson, who did all the initial preparation, and Steve Roberts who then kept a careful record of the sales, the tickets and completed all the necessary documentation.

Dave Maloney, Chair MCC Branch
We made many walks during the last year by the side of the canal from Bincknoll Lane to Templars Firs and during the walks saw lots of interesting things. Here are a few that we found to be memorable especially as the weather was generally favourable.

A year or so ago, we heard about the beginning of work to extend the Wilts & Berks Canal eastwards. An exciting time! Heavy machinery dug out the clay and then there was something resembling a canal. A little water collected in the bottom. Suddenly in early January a lot of rain fell here in Royal Wootton Bassett. A walk down Bincknoll Lane to see the newly dug canal was on the cards. We were rewarded with the canal full of water. There was water flowing through the culvert under Bincknoll Lane and over the spillweir just like Niagara Falls. This was a first for water over the spillweir since construction and was spectacular. The event kept us happy for days.

The water subsided, the canal was full and winter drifted into spring with celandines flowering and coltsfoot shining brightly yellow along the tow path at Chaddington lock. More excitement in April as a pair of swans were nest building close to the canal culvert near the lane. Spring was definitely here with chiffchaffs in the hedgerows, mallard and moorhens happily on the bank and in the water. Walking the tow-path towards Templars Firs we heard a Cetti's warbler, willow warblers were in the nearby trees, chaffinches and a sedge warbler were singing; nature seemed to be busy. The large oaks by Chaddington were flowering and starting to leaf, as were the large ashes near Templars Firs.

The swan's nest was completed with Mrs Swan sitting on four eggs and later another four were seen on the nest. Mr Swan kept guard and kept away intruders such as a pair of Canada geese and assorted mallard. Late spring and eight cygnets or bundles of feathers were on the water being shown the ropes by the parents. Yellow brimstones, speckled woods, orange tip butterflies were on the wing as were some common blue damselflies.

Down at Chaddington we were being treated to aerial displays by the arrivals of swallows and swifts. The swifts adored the canal and used it for practice flying, swooping and diving and playing games, whilst the swallows collected bugs from canal surface. Birdsong was heard and plants were flowering in the sunshine. The tow-path edges were white with frothy cow parsley with some lovely yellow of the buttercups and clumps of pale purple vetch. So good to see all the colours of the flowers coming through the vegetation. Meanwhile mallards produced juniors as did the moorhens. One moorhen nested in the corner of the lock at Chaddington, the youngsters were so small and scurrying back and forth across the wooden sill. A day later and they were not there but somewhere on the canalside learning how to survive.

Early summer and the cygnets were growing. The first of many bright blue emperor dragonflies were spotted coursing the canal at Chaddington. We spent ages watching them as they are Wonderful fliers, the female remained on or near the water depositing her eggs, whilst the male kept interlopers away. Other dragonflies seen were broad bodied chasers, the males with their bright blue abdomen, a four spotted hawk and southern hawks. We waited for the banded demoiselle damselfly and there they were, alighting daintily on the canal vegetation. Their brilliant blue bodies with the black band across the wings are so delicate. The towpath at Chaddington was full of colour: blues, purples, yellow, red and whites: vetch, knapweed, yellow vetchling, campion and meadowsweet. The large flat white flower heads of the hogweed were hosting bees, beetles, ichneumons, and flies in all different shapes and sizes, such fun to watch them crawling round and to try to photograph.

September came and it was windy with the rustle of leaves on the poplars and mini waves on the water. Remaining damsels and dragonflies had been grounded, flowers were starting to fade and seeds were forming, so indicative of a change of season. Wonderful reflections were seen on the water of the trees and clouds. An exciting Sunday morning was when the family of swans went walkabout and were out and about on Bincknoll Lane, a long way from the water. With the help of a jogger we slowly helped them back to the canal as by this stage the cygnets were tiring and sitting
for rest. We were so relieved when we all reached the canal after some considerable time. Feeding for the swans took place followed by rest!

Towards the end of the month seeds were ripening on the meadowsweet, hogweed, tall stems of the figwort and willowherb. Meadowsweet seeds are lovely to look at they are small and twisted in a spiral, each flower head will produce many seeds. Hawthorn berries were glowing bright red and getting squidgy when squashed, the sloes were still hard and sour. One or two late butterflies were around, brimstones and speckled woods with red admirals juicing on the flowers of the ivy bushes. These ivy bushes were humming with the sound of bees and wasps. The heron was fishing and didn’t like being mobbed by crows.

Into November, and after wind and rain the ground is covered with leaves from the field maples, willows and ash, apples have already dropped and are covering the towpath. Apples are such a good source of food for wildlife during winter. They are truly sour wild apples even from the tree opposite the oaks at Chaddington. The bright yellow lichen zanthoria, growing on the brick bridge at Chaddington, likes the mineral salts in the brick.

Lichens are fascinating and very complex organisms. They do not have roots but absorb water and gases through their surfaces and so are good indicators of atmospheric pollution. Different lichens grow on a range of different surfaces.

The adult swans dropped by with three cygnets for a feed and sunbathe on a sunny morning and we wondered what the coming year will bring for us to watch. During the year the work party watched water voles, a kingfisher, the heron, baby mallard and moorhens and listened to birdsong. In the water the reeds grew, branched burr reed flowered as did the uncommon pink flowering rush and we spotted common water plantain, water dock and bistort.

The water level went up and down just like the year.

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**Dauntsey Lock Wheelbarrow Competition**

**Ann O’Donoghue**

The Tust HQ Office Team entered the competition, did up the wheelbarrows and a ‘Camden Lock tableau’ under the theme London stations.

They were awarded ‘Silver Gilt’ and received a certificate for their endeavours. Photo page 35
At this year’s AGM it was an honour to be able to recognise the great efforts made by the volunteers on the Wilts & Berks Canal restoration. I am pleased to report that the total number of hours which volunteers worked during the year to the end of March 2016 was 29,024 hours with a total value of £632,764. Obviously many of you here today have also made valuable contributions but haven’t let me know of your efforts. Every hour you work – whether working physically towards the restoration, compiling research, manning exhibition, etc. – is taken into consideration for ‘matched funding’ purposes. So effectively you are providing a resource that the Wilts and Berks can hopefully convert to hard cash at a later date. Please make a resolution to note the hours and activities and send them to me. I will be only too pleased to send you the blank log sheets and instructions for completion. You may contact me in the usual format at juanita.poulton@wbct.org.uk

These hours also help to support Ken Oliver’s position with Wiltshire Council. Ken is an invaluable asset to us all, so please keep giving your time and effort and let me know what you have done.

I was delighted to have the opportunity to present the Tony Davy Memorial Cup to Chris Coyle who, during the year to the end of March 2016, worked a phenomenal 1,286 hours with a value of £65,800.

The next presentation was the Tony Davy Award which went to Melksham, Calne and Chippenham Branch which had submitted the most volunteer hours totalling 7,928 hours with a value of £124,616.

A further presentation was made to the nb Dragonfly team who were the ‘branch’ who had made the greatest increase in volunteer hours since the previous year with a submission of 3,210 hours with a value of £2,598.

At the AGM I was asked to make a note in this copy of Dragonfly of how many hours each of the branches had submitted during the financial year. For your information they are:

- East Vale: 1,800
- Foxham & Lyneham: 2,832
- MCC: 7,928
- Royal Wootton Bassett: 4,107
- Swindon: 792
- West Vale: 93
- W & B Shop: 1,237
- Nb Dragonfly: 3,210

On behalf of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust I thank you for all you do to further the restoration of the Canal and for supporting this visionary project.
Saturday and Sunday 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} September

Lots of work is happening in the background with final approval for going ahead with the project being sought at Exec and Board of Trustees meetings in January.

In the meantime, progress is being made on the planning stage of the Festival, grant funding bids have been made and a presentation to the Partnership given in December.

Details so far:

What is it?
The Festival is going to be a series of towpath and canal/water themed events at a number of festival hubs along the length of the Wilts & Berks Canal

Why?
Designed to raise Trust profile
Target is to get 10,000 people to towpath/festivals over the weekend and to convert 25% of attendance to membership of the Trust
Prepare various areas including Swindon for further activity

How?
Aim is to be self-funding via grants, sponsorship, merchandising sales and donations
Unique Selling Points for each event but overall branding
The Towpath Challenge is to be part of the Festival and will consist of a number of circular walks and cycles based on each hub
Branch/members involvement plus outsourced event management in some areas
“Sorry, you mustn’t tell ANYONE who they are,” said Chris, the very friendly cameraman from Channel 4, “We don’t want the press turning up.”

OK, so that was different: I was of the opinion that celebrities rather enjoyed publicity and attention from the press and public – not these celebrities it seemed.

Dave Maloney and I were walking along the tow path at Pewsham with cameraman Chris, who was carrying out a recce before returning with his ‘Household Name Stars’ in October. All four were involved in one of those Reality Shows – a kind of Celebrity Big Brother Narrowboat meets Barging Around.

Chris explained further: “These four will be travelling up the Kennet & Avon Canal on a narrowboat. On the journey they will stop to visit interesting places, and among other things, they would like to see a restoration site quite close to the K&A. Would that be possible? Could you explain your project to Nigel Havers, Simon Callow, Debbie McGee and Lorraine Chase? We originally thought of Brian Blessed, but unfortunately he’s rather ill. However, Simon Callow is very interested in heritage, so we’ve managed to get him. Anyway, the idea is that they have a look round and then get involved in doing something practical.”

Wow! (Quick double take, did we hear that correctly?) A genuine Shakespearian actor AND the charming Nigel Havers. What a prospect! What a worry… what on earth could we get them to do? Various ideas were floated – unfortunately Boswell couldn’t be one of them as she was currently well and truly stuck in the mud. What about strimming? Or cleaning bricks? Would it be possible to get donkeys – photogenic visual aids with a historical connection, if a little unpredictable. In the end we agreed on brick cleaning – not exactly glamorous, but talked about enthusiastically, bricks can be fascinating.

So it was that a few of us waited rather nervously on a drizzly Thursday morning, wondering what the celebrities would be like: aloof or friendly? Bored or genuinely interested? Suitably dressed for practical canal work or strutting their fashionable stuff? There we were, all in our hard hats, hi-viz jackets and workboots, surrounded by piles of ancient broken bricks, heaps of gravel, mucky clay and unsightly safety fencing; you couldn’t get much further from a typical celebrity image!

The celebs arrived an hour and a half late in an enormous black 4x4 with privacy glass, reminiscent of premier league footballers, and not particularly
encouraging.

As it happened, they were all absolutely delightful, friendly, determined to put us at ease and to remember our names. Sensibly dressed (maybe a trifle overdressed in Simon Callow’s case: as the sun started to beam down, his hat, scarf and overcoat must have felt a little excessive), incredibly interested in everything, totally amazed by the whole experience – and never lost for words. Nigel Havers had brought along his lovely, very well behaved dog Alfie who was a very useful distraction, especially when I was feeling stuck for words. Apparently Alfie is afraid of water, so getting him to board their narrowboat along a gangplank had been a little challenging.

I was assigned to Nigel and Simon (yes, I was now on first name terms) who were very interested in just about every aspect of our canal: from what it carried to how many hours our volunteers put in. They loved the location, the environment, the ancient trees, the sense of history and the connection with the past, getting quite emotional at the thought of the lives of the boat people. They loved the dry dock and imagining the boat building and life that went on there: they really found it all very moving. It was a real pleasure to share information and enthusiasm for our canal, and they appeared genuinely impressed; although being renowned actors, maybe it was just a very good performance...

Ray took Debbie and Lorraine off to look at the canal in (low) water, Boswell and the leak. They were equally lovely and enthusiastic, not at all worried about keeping up appearances, and seemingly very interested in everything.

Well over two hours later, all four of our new best friends bade farewell, never having actually cleaned any bricks, but in a rush now to get to their next stop. (The appeal of a local vineyard was probably growing stronger by the minute.) We were left amazed at how taxing it had been to be filmed: constantly having to think carefully, repeat things and actions as required, and concentrate on the other person’s words as well as your own, at the same time as walking and not tripping up – they made it look so effortless. It was actually quite hard work, and I don’t think many of our wonderful volunteers would willingly exchange their wheelbarrows and shovels for cameras and microphones, despite the excitement and glamour!

So, sometime in the future, possibly next spring, you may catch a glimpse on Channel 4 of the Wilts & Berks Canal, some volunteers, plus four visitors and a dog. It will probably all be over in a flash – 2 ½ hours compressed into a mere 2 ½ minute slot between the Kennet & Avon Canal and a vineyard. But you never know, we may even gain a celebrity member or two...

PS: I can’t believe that I actually forgot to ask for a selfie.
Canal restoration and Real Ale – a match made in heaven? Certainly MCC thought so, and last year, the Events Committee decided to build on this theory by organising its first Beer Festival.

Dave Maloney was convinced we could make this a successful event in Melksham, as there was currently no regular festival; being a past chairman of CAMRA and on the organising committee of the amazingly popular Chippenham Beer Festival, he was the perfect person to lead us in this exciting new venture.

November seemed like a bit of an empty month for events, and as other local festivals were mostly held in the summer, it was agreed to go for a Winter Ales theme. Oh, and there should be cider (we had a few cider drinkers among our volunteers) and what about food? Always a good idea to offer something to eat, and there was a really good local traditional butcher in Melksham with an excellent range of gourmet sausages.

Well, as a learning experience, 2015 was absolutely brilliant. Yes, people came but we were not overwhelmed; Melksham Assembly Hall was a perfect venue with plenty of room for expansion; Newman’s sausages were delicious; ten beers, four ciders and a perry gave an excellent range of new tipples for visitors to try, and we even made a reasonable profit for Branch funds. So plenty of success to build on in 2016.

This year, we set to with more confidence, making even more effort with publicity, and sourcing different ales from different breweries. These included some fascinating sounding tipples, such as Severn Sins from Gloucestershire, 25 Silver Pig from Mildenhall, Red Bear from Bath, and even Snake Oil, a dry cider from Slaughterford. To avoid any problems of over-supply, it was arranged to sell any remaining beers at the live music night which would follow our festival. Dave organised his army of volunteers: Malcolm spent two hours slicing onions (what a hero), Alan, Dave and Jeff acted as brewers drays, driving round the area to collect the precious casks, and Keith collected the trays of sausages. Pub games, display material, membership forms, activities for children, commemorative glasses and programmes were all sourced, and the hall set up in time for a 12:00 noon start.

We didn’t have to wait long, a queue formed almost immediately, and as the hall began to rapidly fill up, we began to wonder if we would have enough beer, sausages, and even glasses! In the event, everyone had a great time, with the majority of people staying for several hours. The only things that actually ran out with about 45 minutes to go, were the sausages and rolls, and Dave and Rob Jones heroically put in an evening shift at the music event to sell off the remaining beer and cider.

The original navvies had a reputation for liking their beer, MCC now officially love it (although it has to said that they were already quite keen on a glass or two). With a 50 per cent increase in visitors, we had a healthy increase in funds for the cause, got some great publicity for our restoration project, and enjoyed good beer, good
It was good to see the AGM so well supported in October. I hope those of you who came to Chippenham enjoyed the day.

I have just submitted the end of project report to BIG lottery for the Studley Wildlife Trail project. Even though there have been big delays and we are almost a year late with the project, BIG lottery remained very patient with us. They have allowed me to pre-buy all the plants, seed and small trees that we need to complete the wildlife trail. Planting will take place next Spring and hopefully we will have a formal opening of the site later in 2017.

I am sorry but at the moment there is no access to the new towpath, as the contractors still have a little outstanding work to finish. Next phase of the work will be a new bridge on Bincknoll Lane so that we can join Chaddington to Studley. Unfortunately, GWR turned down our bid for funding but I will be trying others. This will be a big part of fundraising activities next year.

I put in a bid to IWA for part of the Tony Harrison legacy – we would like to buy a trip boat to run in Abingdon up to Jubilee Junction to raise awareness of our canal. We also plan interpretation boards and other measures to try to increase membership and get more local people interested in the canal.

Many challenges lie ahead for next year and fundraising is at the heart of many of them. I shall be looking for some help with writing bids. Is anyone interested in having a go? It can be really rewarding when it goes well! Get in touch.

I would like to wish you all a very happy and healthy 2017.
The ever-successful Santa Trips started again on Saturday 26 October. Dragonfly had been cleaned and decorated the previous week and was all ready to take on the families with their excited children, many coming for the fourth year in succession. Times have been changed slightly this year to give the hard-working crews the opportunity to have a slightly longer break between the morning and afternoon trips. This caught one family out who thought that the first trip left at 10.30am; after a frantic phone call we managed to actually get going about 10.15, which was not a good start to our carefully worked out schedule. The longer lunch break allowed us to get the two afternoon trips back on to the proper times.

Santa was on top form and all the children seemed very pleased with their presents. Sunday went very smoothly and again and we had many happy families.

Week two, Saturday 3 December: Aware of the very low night time temperature Wendy Cole, the skipper for the day, and myself both got to the landing stage about 8.30am to find the canal frozen and Dragonfly firmly fixed in place. The ice was probably an inch thick and we set to with both the long pole and the boat hook to set her free, taking at least 25 minutes to just turn her round. The rest of the day’s crew arrived including Santa, disguised as a normal person to collect the presents before going off to hide in the Swindon Branch Compound and await the shouts of the children. We managed to get away at 10.00 am, on time, and bashed, smashed and ground our way up the frozen canal with Santa watching our slow progress towards him. Pat Burden and I were quite hot with our ice-breaking efforts when we at last reached Bevans Bridge and picked up Santa. This first trip took well over its allotted time: another setback to our carefully worked out timetable. Things got better as the sun came out and we slowly won our battle with the ice.

Sunday 4 December: again 8.30am start, this time with Wendy assisting me. Big surprise, the ice was back but not quite as thick. We now had the help of Jonathan Till who joined the crew for the day; both Jonathan and Wendy got to work with the boat hook and pole to get the channel open and we soon got on our way this time keeping to the timetable.

Over the past five years that we have run Santa Trips we have battled torrential rain, very high winds (50mph on one weekend last year) but so far we have never cancelled a trip. We keep every thing crossed for the next three weekends.

As well as the people mentioned, I must thank the other crew members, present buyers and packers who all help to make our Santa Trips so successful, Cyan, Diana, Helen, Cheryl, Bob and Linda, Keith and Linette, Chris and Liz, Dawn and Mark, Colin, Paul, Norman, Bridgette, Pete, Derek, Liam and any one I might have forgotten.

Robert Yeowell

Photographs by Robert Yeowell
A New Look for the Old Junction with the K&A
Paul Lenaerts

The Bailey Bridge Team at Semington, having got the bridge all painted and stored away ready for action last autumn, turned their attention to a winter project of restoring the old wooden trip boat Willow, plus its trailer. Sadly, Willow’s bottom proved to be in a sorry state, so Richard Evans has been working away through the summer and is only now putting new wood in.

The rest of us, eager to be outside in the better weather, joined up with the local CRT group and ‘adopted’ a 200m stretch of the Kennet & Avon at Semington to include both the old and proposed Wilts & Berks Junctions.

The first job was to clean up and paint the old railings (ex tram tracks I’m told) above the old junction, and then we set about a project that John Laverick had suggested some time ago. This was to paint a ‘mural’ on the concrete wall of the old junction to bring to the attention of passing boaters, the significance of the spot. Those familiar with the towpath here will know that there is an interpretation board to inform passers-by, but nothing for those on the water.

So, aided by Carole Ball (wife of Bailey Bridge Boy Derek, and experienced am-dram scenery artist) we came up with a simple design to embellish the wall. We had to get scaffolding erected to provide a platform, then it was preparation and painting.

The job was finished mid-August.
One of the announcements made at the 2016 AGM was the Membership Drive targets for 2017 and 2019.

6,000 members by AGM 2017  
10,000 members by AGM 2019  
from a base in October 2016 of 2745 voting members

“Ambitious” commented Rod Bluh Chair of the Board of Trustees but “achievable” responded Sheila Wade PR Communications & IT Director.

**Question:** So how are we going to do it?  

**Answer:** On a number of levels and with your help…

Firstly: if every current member recruits another member before AGM 2017, that will give a membership of 5,500 which is nearly our target for 2017.

So please will all members review their family and friends and identify at least one person who could become a member and sign them up… what better Christmas present to someone who has everything!

Secondly: using the newly launched website with our social media feeds to lift the profile of the Trust in our area and further afield. Lots of work for the Comms team: extra volunteers much appreciated… please get in touch with Sheila.

Thirdly: **Towpath Festival 2017** our flagship membership drive programme seeking to attract 10,000 people to the towpath in September 2017. See details in another article  

**Together we can do this**
Partnership News

I am continuing to discuss with partners how they might be more proactive in promoting delivery of the canal. I am sure that many of you will be disappointed that despite strong lobbying from WBCT members Swindon BC did not feel able to support construction of the canal as part of the developers’ obligations for the New Eastern Villages.

The Partnership will meet next year in March June September and December.

A look back-

Perhaps a moment to reflect on some achievements during the year:

- The new organisation of the WBCT has made a big difference to how the Trust is run and what I am able to further do on behalf of the project.
- I am delighted to have helped facilitate the start of the transfer of land owned by Wiltshire Council to WBCT.
- There is now a canal at Studley Grange despite a huge number of difficulties!

An extremely successful year for boat trips.

The New Year

It always feels like a ‘hostage to fortune’ predicting events for the New Year but I am ever hopeful(!) that 2017 is the year where a number of things could come to completion:

- Melksham Link – successful determination of the planning application;
- Studley Grange Royal Wootton Bassett – opening of the canal and tow path;
- Peterborough Arms – completion of first phase of works;
- Wichelstowe – start of next phase of works;
- Towpath Festival.

Other areas where there should be some progress:

- Pewsham Locks
- Templars Firs, Royal Wootton Bassett
- Water management – East Wichel
- Mouldon Hill Swindon
- “A project in Oxfordshire!”

No doubt I will be reminded later in the year just how right (or wrong) this list is!!

My continuing thanks for the help and support from the team and to everyone who volunteers to help achieve this amazing project.

My sincere wishes for a very Happy New Year

Ken Oliver,

@wiltsberkscanal (Twitter)

www.facebook.com/wiltsberkscanal (Facebook)

The Trust’s Retail Outlet in Swindon

Steve Bacon from RWB branch has kindly put together a sequence of photos of the canal in Swindon and beyond, taken over an extended period from late Victorian times. Although all the pictures are fascinating, some are undated, some have no identified location or no photographer’s name attributed to them. Anyone of any age may be able to help us remove some of the question marks on this series of pictures. Please call in to the shop on any Monday, Friday or Saturday between the hours of 10am and 3 pm to enjoy revisiting the heyday of the Wilts and Berks in Swindon.

Helen Thomas
Calling all Members

Your Trust needs you

CAD Design

“Dirty boots and clean shoes”

Our project is not just about building and digging... we need designers and engineers too.

If you have CAD skills, we want to talk to you about how you can help us

Brick-laying

“I was part of that!”

Do you have experience of bricklaying?

Want to work as a member of a valued team?

Please come and join our volunteer working party teams weekdays and weekends.

Fund raising

“Water adds value”

We can’t even start all our wonderful work without funding.

So whether you have the writing skills to help us complete funding applications, want to give talks to publicise our work, hold fund raising coffee mornings or even do a parachute jump for the Trust... talk to us

The Trust Shop

“Our window to the world”

The Trust Shop in central Swindon needs motivated members to help sell the Trust.

Open on Monday Wednesday and Friday from x to y, but we need to open for longer hours.

Help spread the word to the many who come in to the shop.

Contact Us

Derek Flexer: derek.flexer@wbct.org.uk
Andrew Matters: andrew.matters@wbct.org.uk
Hedge Laying
Fiona Rivers

Last winter we laid 400 metres of hedge along the tow path side of the canal north of the A4 in Chippenham. I demonstrated and then taught several volunteers.

Hedge laying is a traditional rural craft. It is done to restore a hedge that has been abandoned and become a row of trees. It makes the hedge neat and thick. It lets in more light, enhances views, becomes stockproof and is beneficial to wildlife.

I am no expert. I went on a one day course several years ago and have laid a few hedges. It is like most skills, all you need is the right tools, rules and instruction!

You lay a hedge from November to the end of February when the hedge is dormant and there is little disturbance to wildlife. It should be laid uphill. Any branches laid below the horizontal will die, as sap rises.

First grub out the base of the hedge, removing nettles, brambles and dead wood. Decide on a starting place. Cut with a saw three quarters of the way through the stem at an angle of at least 45 degrees, as low to the ground as you can. Crack the stem down carefully to about a 45 degree angle. Continue this process along the hedge line. Cut away the sharp point on the stump. This is where the new growth will come.

Stakes are needed along the length of the new hedge to support the brush. “Live” stakes are stems from the original hedge cut off to the level of the finished height. They are a natural stake that will not rot and remains firm but only use when there are plenty of other stems to lay. “Dead” stakes can be cut from discarded pieces of wood or brought in. Where there are bare or thin areas in the new hedge, plant new native saplings.

The hedge should be cut every year after laying to encourage growth in the base and to keep it uniform in shape. If a canal-side hedge looks neat and tidy the farmer may even cut it for you!

You will need a couple of bonfires along the route as hedge laying produces masses of waste brush.

Everyone was impressed by the new look, not only to the hedge but the whole area.

The volunteers really seemed to enjoy it. Their passion was palpable. Some turned up with new pruning saws and loppers and one member had a book on hedge laying for Christmas!

Another skill shared! I do dry stone walling too, but I’m not stretching to the Cotswold canal as well – there’s too much to do here!
Doesn’t that look tidier?

_Dragonfly_ is available as a PDF via email. Please contact membership@wbct.org.uk

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**Land Fund**

The activity in acquiring the track of the Wilts & Berks Canal is continuing to grow and so the need for funds is increasing.

It is vital that we secure the track, as we cannot make serious progress at any point until we have control of the land.

The Land Fund is still open for donations and if you would like to contribute, please send a cheque to *Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, Dauntsey Lock Canal Centre, Dauntsey Lock, Chippenham, SN15 4HD.* If you were able to donate a few pounds on a regular basis, that would be even better.

Just contact the office on 0845 2268567 or by email info@wbct.org.uk or speak to Kath on 01380 831231 or kath.hatton@wbct.org.uk and we will help you to set up a Standing Order.
Hedge laying down one edge of the towpath. They wish someone had pulled the plug out first. An excellent example of how well puddled clay holds water for a long time.

MCC in action by the A4 near Chippenham

Almost ready for boats?
Calling all Members
Your Trust needs you

Good News For Members

15% Discount from Cotswold Outdoors. Just take this magazine into any of their stores or online quoting AF-WBCT-M8 and your membership number. Note this only applies to full priced items.
Keith Price

Project Management

“This is the largest and most complex waterway restoration project in the UK”

As a WBCT Project Manager, you will be the focal point for managing a project from the initial concept to completion and handover to the maintenance team, selecting and leading a team and working with the Projects Director and other officers and Directors to achieve the project aims.

Good people skills, good organisational skills, awareness of budget and time constraints, good communication skills...

Sounds like you? Come and talk to us about small and large projects that we need volunteers to manage. And come and talk to us about our training scheme.

Andrew Matters: andrew.matters@wbct.org.uk
200 Club

Prize winners for October.

1st No.302 M. Morris
2nd No. 253 Kenneth Dawes
3rd No.303 Brian Wright

November
1st No.247 John Sully
2nd No.291 Peter Gosling
3rd No.259 Julia Newby

December
1st No.245 Ronald weldon
2nd No.244 Alan Trinder
3rd No.264 Derek Harvey
4th No.69 Ian Carter

As hoped, the 200 Club has grown into a 300 Club which resulted in £3087.00 being awarded to MCC, Foxham and Lyneham, Wootton Bassett, Swindon and West Vale Branches to buy various specific items of plant and material (for exact details see the Summer Dragonfly) to assist in their restoration works. Over £3000 has been paid back to ticket holders in the monthly draws. Some people have been multiple winners – for the rest of us, better luck next year!

Now to 2017. Whilst ticket sales have increased and we loosely now refer to it as a 300 Club, bank account is still in the name of W&B 200 Club, so please make any cheques/direct debits and Bacs payment to W&B 200 Club.

For all new members of the Trust, we sell an annual ticket for £20 (you are of course able to buy more). Of the total money raised 50% goes to support individual branches to bid for and buy plant, tools, materials etc. to enable their volunteers to progress restoration and maintenance etc. The other 50% is paid back to ticket holders in nine monthly draws with a bumper draw in December (2016 December draw 1st prize was £350). It could be you if you join, an application form is enclosed and hopefully you will buy a ticket. Our next goal is a 400 Club! Full details of rules, etc are all on the application form.

All the best for 2017.

Jeff & Lynda Daws
Email: 200club@wbct.org.uk

AGM Report 2016

A very successful AGM 2016 was held at Sheldon School in Chippenham at the beginning of October. Thanks to the MCC Branch and Dave Maloney for the splendid venue and all the arrangements made for all our comfort and entertainment.

Prior to the AGM, the newly launched web site was available for members to see, merchandising stands and Trust and MCC Branch stands were very popular in the foyer. Minibus trips were arranged to take members to the nearby Pewsham section of the canal to see the work already taking place there and the extensive plans in the pipeline.

Rod Bluh opened the AGM and asked for a minutes silence for member Peter Konitzer who had very tragically died in an accident on site in August.
In addition to the usual business, two existing Board members were confirmed as re-appointed: Colin Fletcher as Vice Chair and Peter Kinsman as Treasurer. An election was held for the one Board vacancy for Members Trustee, with three candidates putting themselves forward. The Board of Trustees were pleased to welcome Steve Bacon as the duly elected Members Trustee.

Jonathan Till, Derek Flexer, Kath Hatton, Andrew Matters, Jock McKenzie, Ken Oliver and Sheila Wade gave reports on the progress and successes in their operational areas. Awards were presented to a number of people and the Pick of the Branches award went to Swindon Branch.

The Open Forum session was well attended and a variety of questions were presented and answered, from the recent merger of the Foxham & Lyneham Branch with MCC due to lack of Officers, progress with The Peterborough Arms, plans for completion of the Studley Grange project, and overall progress of the restoration plans.

Next year will be the 40th anniversary of the first meeting of the Wilts & Berks Amenity Group held in 1977 in Swindon and plans are being made to celebrate this important anniversary.

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**Around The Branches**

**A brief summary of what’s happening along the line.**

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**Melksham, Calne and Chippenham and Foxham & Lyneham**

**Chairman:**
Dave Maloney. 18 Bolts Croft, Chippenham, SN15 3GQ. Tel 07809 374 754

**Secretary:**
Lyn Dyer. lyn.dyer@wbct.org.uk Tel 07486 948 017

By the time you are reading this we will have reached the end of another momentous year along the MCC line. There have been some sad times balanced by those bordering on euphoric, such is the way of a volunteer with the Wilts & Berks Trust at the western end of the line.

Thanks to all that attended the WBCT AGM that was held on our patch this year. Seeing so many of the Trust membership attending made the effort all worthwhile...nice venue as well.

Our bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for work at Pewsham Locks was sadly not successful but already the team have met to decide the way forward for this historical and educationally important site.

More successful was our 2nd Ale, Cider and Sausage festival in Melksham which was attended by over 130 souls who enjoyed not only our displays of work going on in the local area but also a range of local ales & ciders. Our thanks to Melksham Town Council and Paul and Georgia from the Bell, Lacock for their support in particular. Talking of success we had a tremendous weekend at the Melksham Food and River Festival which also saw an increase in numbers. We trialled a Wheelyboat at this event which is able to carry wheelchair users, and hope to have one along the MCC line in 2017.

Work continues at our main work site in Pewsham, where we had another culvert leak we had to deal with. This was managed in a few days by our mid-week volunteers. Some of the volunteers have been hobnobbing with the rich and famous and you can read more about this in Vals.
Fundraising work continues apace and this year we have been involved in such diverse activities as road race marshalling, Prize Draw organisation (thanks to members of all branches who helped with this/bought tickets), boat trips, sponsored & heritage walks and Quiz nights.

There has been a massive amount of work going on behind the scenes by those involved in “Clean Boot” work and without this, frankly, some of the work on restoration simply would not happen so thanks to all those involved in such work. It is very much appreciated.

March 2017 is the deadline for us to complete the 3 year environmental plan of towpath and canal bed clearance for a 800 metres of canal running north from the A4 and some 120m running south. Both stretches of land have been cleared with the kind permission of Lord Lansdowne.

After a lot of hard work (generally in the winter months as bird nesting precludes scrub bashing between February & August) we believe this deadline to be achievable.

When we started the north section it had been overgrown for almost 100 years and some of the scrub was very thick including some brambles the like we had never seen before. The towpath was tackled first and now we are working to clear the canal bed of trees (photos p 25). We are grateful to the WRG BiTM team who have held two Christmas camps with us since we started this project.

As branch members will be aware we do not like to fell trees, and for ones we do fell we plant at least 5 more, so it was a sad day when we had to fell two large oak trees on the north section because the tow path/canal could not have been navigated with them standing. Our thanks to WRG Forestry for helping us fell these trees.

As regular readers will be aware we took Foxham & Lyneham Branch members under our wing until they find candidates for positions on the branch committee. Work on Seven locks has been reviewed with regards to wing walls. The relevant documentation is being evaluated and updated where necessary. An Environmental Plan is in place with regards to maintenance and habitat at Seven Locks and Work Parties will be/have been organised. Some branch members also assisted in work at the Peterborough Arms which of course is on the F&L patch so was most welcome.

Dave Maloney

ROYAL WOOTTON BASSETT

Chairman:
Jenny Stratton, 35 Sheriden Drive, Wootton Bassett, Swindon SN4 8JJ Tel 01793 850310

Secretary:
John Bower, 20, Glebe Road, Royal Wootton Bassett, SN4 7DU Tel 01793 636297

Where did 2016 disappear to, it seems to have gone in no time at all. We have had a particularly colourful autumn along the canal and even now there are beautiful last gasp colours in some of the trees.

The best bit was when we turned up to cut the lily pads in the canal again and found it was all gone, killed off by a bit of cold weather. It’s just kidding us though as we know it is lurking at the bottom ready to burst into life in the spring. We are looking at ways of getting the roots out of the canal to prevent regrowth. One of our volunteers has built a device which will help remove the roots of the reeds from the sediment and we may be able to adapt this for the lily pad roots.

I always think the canal looks great at this time of year when much of the vegetation has died back and the watered section is more prominent. The path on the offside of the canal at Templars Firs has been mowed numerous times this summer though during the autumn we allowed the grass to grow a little longer so it became more hardwearing over the winter to help prevent it becoming too muddy.

ABC Electrification, a Network Rail contractor has a base at the old Council Depot and is keen to support the work we are doing. Some of their employees have joined us on a couple of work parties and some of our members took other employees on a lunchtime walk along the canal. They raised money for us with coffee mornings etc. and presented us with a cheque for over £540. We
are hoping their support will continue whilst they are working near us.

We are still looking for a means to activate our planning permission to extend the Templars Firs section and we must do this soon. One of our regular leaks reappeared again at Templars Firs and was soon fixed. However we had a very wet spell soon after and another leak appeared in a different place that has yet to be fixed.

During October we received delivery of our own aluminium work boat and reed cutter attachment which we were able to purchase with generous donations from the old Wootton Bassett Civic Trust and from the 200 Club. We have been using the boat and reed cutter Swindon Branch have loaned to us over a long period which we have now returned with our thanks.

December means we have again applied for and have been granted a licence to access Dunnington aqueduct to clear the summer scrub growth and to keep the access clear so we are planning to do this over the winter period Chaddington Lock site the section above the lock has been drying out as there has been no water coming from Studley Grange because it was drained pending the dredging work. On a couple of occasions we have found enough water to pump to the bit above the lock, much to the relief of the swans but now that the Studley Grange dredging work is complete for this year the water supply has been restored and has filled the section above the lock. It’s good to see the spill weir in action once again. We spent a couple of work parties clearing the stream which receives the water from Studley via the spill weir. We have also done some scrub bashing and had a big bonfire.

There will be work which the work party will be able to do over the winter at Studley Grange as well as a host of other things to do so we will have plenty to keep us busy. Why not come and join us on a Wednesday for a while and see what we are up to?

John Bower

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SWINDON

Chairman:
Rod Hacker, 11 Whittington Road, Swindon, SN5 7DF Tel: 07840 072817

Secretary:
John Farrow Tel: 01793 490672

A fairly quiet quarter has just passed, apart from continuing maintenance works. The good news is a glimmer of hope that there should be movement soon around the Waitrose store at Middle Wichel.

The borough council organised a series of open exhibitions in October to show their schemes for the development immediately adjacent to the shop including the new district centre and pub opposite our landing stage. The consultation display boards can be found at http://www.wichelstowe.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Wichelstowe-Consultation-Boards.pdf

We should see some progress on the ground in 2017 and of course this has to include upgrading the canal alongside. We have restarted engagement with the Wichelstowe team on the canal details.

High level engagement with the borough council and others continues on the schemes to carry the canal through the town centre and on the New Eastern Villages route. The Public Inquiry for the refusal of the planning consent on the Lotmead villages developments at New Eastern Villages is now set for June 2017, thus giving us some time to marshal more or better arguments for including the construction of the canal as a part of the development.

The low rainfall recently has exaggerated the low water levels on all stretches in Swindon. Dragonfly skippers were struggling to get through the usual route in October and what little water came in poured out just as fast. Our work party found a couple of leaks in the Westleaze section and plugged them, which seemed to help but as the water rises they find more leaks higher in the bank. That section really needs a major overhaul of the tow-path edge which is slowly, or sometimes not so slowly, receding to expose potential leakage paths.

At East Wichel the fishing club is rightly...
A few of our stalwart local volunteers have, at last, returned to Steppingstone Bridge to finish off this very long running project. With just the north west wing wall (towpath supporting wall) and the coping stones on the west parapet to do and with all the necessary materials now to hand we waited for a dry spell, and one duly came along.

It was decided to do the wing wall first and we had a temporary path diversion in place so we already had a clear secure work area. The first workparty cleared all the site of weeds and rubbish and pumped out what little water had seeped through the coffer dams either side of the bridge so we could get a better look, especially at the foundations. It soon became obvious that this slippage had been a problem when the canal was still in use as we found several large wooden piles driven into the canal bottom in an attempt to arrest the slippage. Some we have left and some removed; they were about six feet long, carrot shaped, and about a foot across at the top. Apart from a lot of randomly sized, irregularly shaped stone there was no proper foundation visible, so it was all cleared away back to the clay and a 20 feet long flat level two feet wide base was cut into the clay. The largest flat pieces of stone that we had to hand were then laid end to end and left to settle to form a solid base. As expected the canal beneath the bridge partially re-filled with water seeping through the dams so every subsequent work party has had to pump out before work can begin. It was hoped that the water would help settle the stone. The plan was to gradually build up the foundations with sand bags filled with a good mix of concrete thus adding extra weight to the foundation to settle it in. Several mid-week work parties have since returned, pumping out and adding about 20 sand bags interlaced with each other each time. Twenty is about all that us old codgers can manage at a time, after all that is about half a tonne! Steady does it, gradually build up the weight to let it all settle, just a few more to do. Next summer we hope to complete the wall using engineering bricks from just below water level, topped off with coping stones at the waters edge, all the materials are on site ready, the only thing we are short of is volunteers!

Instead of finishing with my usual rant about needing more volunteers I am pleased to write that we do have some new and active members. Welcome Gary, Andrew and Alan. I should also note that thanks to the efforts of all, including the boat crews and shop team, our branch won the Pick of the Branches award for the greatest percentage increase in membership at the AGM. You can pop into the shop, support the guys there, buy a souvenir and admire the trophy on the wall.

Rod Hacker

WEST VALE

Chairman: Graham Banks, 12 Craven Common, Uffington, Faringdon, SN7 7RN
Secretary: Brenda Forward, ‘Llamedos’, Longcot Rd, Shrivenham SN6 8HF Tel: 01793 782776

concerned about their fish stocks while the water stays low. We are still trying to solve the leakage problems but until we get more water in we cannot identify the leaks at higher levels. It looks like it’s time to employ more sophisticated detection methods – at a cost of course. Meanwhile we are getting closer to securing funding for some repair work there, starting with replacing the collapsed stakes at the edge of the tow-path. I hope we can develop this as a work party project in which volunteers from several branches can develop the skills of installing this type of edging.

Instead of finishing with my usual rant about needing more volunteers I am pleased to write that we do have some new and active members. Welcome Gary, Andrew and Alan. I should also note that thanks to the efforts of all, including the boat crews and shop team, our branch won the Pick of the Branches award for the greatest percentage increase in membership at the AGM. You can pop into the shop, support the guys there, buy a souvenir and admire the trophy on the wall.

Rod Hacker
They “aint cheap, are tricky to install, else they don’t work proper and look a ‘pigs ear’, so you need someone who knows what they be a doin’ was our reply! When they discovered that the gates and installation by a contractor cost a lot more than they expected they came back to us “please would you install it for us?”, “else we can’t afford it!” Keen to do our ‘civic duty’ (being a soft touch) we agreed to install it but requested ‘some younger village helpers be sought’. The gate was ordered, helpers recruited and a date set. It all went mostly to plan, but taking longer than expected as the gate needed to be installed in a hedge line and roots caused us some bother, but it looks good and works “proper”.

How did it help canal restoration? Well, a nice article and photo appeared in the local villages “News” magazine, hopefully it will encourage more use of the Circular Walk especially along the canal towpaths and in the park, it reminded locals that the branch is still active and still short of volunteers, Oh! And a nice donation to branch funds was forthcoming!

Being involved in canal restoration, and wishing to remain sane, one needs to be ‘forever an optimist’, so I have this niggling feeling that 2017 might just be our year……..! Keep digging!

Seasons Greetings from all in West Vale Branch.

Alan Norris

I was walking along the canal between Stockham and East Challow the other day, revelling in the autumn colours and keeping an eye on what the various developers are doing down there.

It certainly is quite complicated locally at the moment! Phase 1 at Stockham Farm is nearly finished. Phase 2 is well advanced, leaving a gap for the new canal route and Phase Three has begun with housing going in to the south of the canal. Discussions are continuing to take place with regard to plans for a bridge across the canal to allow mowing equipment to reach the grassland on the north side. As yet it doesn’t meet our criteria.

The Vale Planning Office are being very supportive and I remain optimistic that we’ll get a solution in due course. Much work goes on behind the scenes by our Land Team and I must thank them for the various negotiations they are carrying out for the branch at the moment.

At the end of last week our last outing for the East Vale Marquee: Wantage Dickensian evening, an opportunity to chat to many people about the canal and restoration especially where they have a parochial view of what’s going on or not going on locally. Also an opportunity to freeze the toes on the cold tarmac of Wantage Market Place. We had a good season of fetes and shows this year, a very enjoyable activity. I recently dusted off the presentation and gave a talk to the Shrivenham Heritage Society. There was a great attendance and much interest in the history of the canal and our plans going forward.

The Sackhouse was open for Dickensian Evening and then closed until the Spring (ie after the Easter weekend). A chance to review the opening hours, exhibits and posters.

My thanks to the stalwart team for manning it during the year. More needed however and I would ask anyone interested in doing the occasional shift to contact me.

Dates for Diaries:

Winter Walk
Saturday 28th Jan 2017
2pm Meet Childrey Village Hall for 2 hour ramble to East Challow and back

Winter Talk
Weds 1st March
The Restoration Of The Cotswolds Canals
8pm Hanney Royal British Legion

Delighted that we are to have Clive Field of the Cotswolds Canal Trust to talk to us about the current state of play with restoration. This, I am sure will be a really interesting evening.

Donations will be taken on the day on the door.

Brian Stovold
The Melksham Calne and Chippenham branch meet at Melksham Skills Centre, Melksham, at 20:00hrs on the first Tuesday of each month.

**MELKSHAM CALNE & CHIPPENHAM WORK PARTY INFORMATION:**

**Organiser:** Ray Canter: raycanter@btinternet.com, Tel 01249 659111, Mob 07717 536883

**Work Parties:** Second & last Sunday each month
Details of the work parties are circulated by e-mail. Any member wishing to be included in this circulation please contact Ray

The Wootton Bassett Branch meets at 20:00hrs on the first Monday of each month. Please contact the secretary for details of meeting venue.

**WOOTTON BASSETT WORK PARTY INFORMATION:**

**Organisers:**
John Bower, 20 Glebe Road, Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire SN4 7DU
Tel 01793 636297
Richard Hawkins
Tel 01793 814959

**Work Parties:**
There are midweek and some weekend work parties. Please phone for details.
Work involves some maintenance of the existing canal area.

The Swindon Branch meets on the 1st Tuesday of every second month at 19:30hrs.
Check website for details or get on the branch email list for details (the next one is February 7th).

**SWINDON WORK PARTY INFORMATION:**

**Organisers:**
Ray Aldridge Tel: 07502 046708
Oliver Gardiner Tel: 07785 775993

**Work Parties:**
Regular work parties are on a Sunday morning with some on a weekday. Check our web pages for details www.wbct.org.uk/branches/Swindon

The West Vale branch meet at The Prince of Wales, High Street, Shrivenham at 20:00hrs on the second Wednesday of each month.

**WEST VALE WORK PARTY INFORMATION:**

**Organisers:**
Chris Forward, 'Llamedos', Longcot Road, Shrivenham, SN6 8HF
Tel 01793 782776
Branch web-site: www.wbct.org.uk/branches/west-vale

**EAST VALE WORK PARTY INFORMATION:**

**Organiser:**
Bob Airey Tel 01235 769469

**Work Parties:**
Second and fourth Saturday of the month with changes at public holiday times.
The East Vale work sites are: Childrey New Road; West Challow; Elm Farm section; and Grove Locks. Contact WPO for details.
Board of Trustees:

Chairman  Roderick Bluh, Contact via Trust Office  07831 340 387
Vice Chair  Colin Fletcher, Lower Foxhangers Farm, Rowde SN10 1SS  01380 828 254

Interim Board of Trustees

Peter Kinsman,  Nant-y-Broch, Purton Stoke, Swindon SN5 4JG  01793 771 548
Eddie Thomas,  14 Sandringham Road, Swindon SN3 1HP  01793 534 404
Jenny Stratton,  35 Sheriden Drive, Wootton Bassett, SN4 8JJ  01793 850 310
Dave Maloney,  18 Bolts Croft, Chippenham SN15 3GQ  07809 374 754
Brian Stovold,  1 Roman Way, Wantage, Oxon. OX12 9YF Branch Chairs Rep  01235 763 072

Dr David Cook  Advisor to the Executive Committee

Executive Committee

CEO and Finance  Jonathan Till  Contact via Trust Office  07444 432 441
Co. Secretary, Treasurer: Peter Kinsman, Nant-y-Broch, Purton Stoke, Swindon SN5 4JG  01793 771 548
Legal & Administration:  Jonathan Till  Contact via Trust Office
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Projects Director: Andrew Matters Contact via Trust Office  08452 268 567
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Officers

IWA Rep:  Vacant
Branch Chair East Vale:  Brian Stovold, 1 Roman Way, Wantage, Oxon. OX12 9YF  01235 763 072
Branch Chair West Vale:  Graham Banks, 12 Craven Common, Uffington, Faringdon, SN7 7RN
Branch Chair Swindon:  Rod Hacker, 11 Whittington Road, Swindon, SN5 7DF  07840 072 817
Branch Chair WB:  Jenny Stratton, 35 Sheriden Drive, Wootton Bassett, SN4 8JJ  01793 850 310
Branch Chair MCC:  Dave Maloney, 18 Bolts Croft, Chippenham SN15 3GQ  07809 374 754
Contact Officer Abingdon:  Martin Buckland, 4 West Avenue, Abingdon OX14 1QP  01235 204 115
Archivist:  Doug Small, 8 Raymond Rd, Maidenhead SL6 6DF  01628 544 666
Events Co-ordinator:  John Minns 19 Compton Drive Abingdon OX14 2DF  01235 525 116
Trip Boats, Operations:  Robert Yeowell, Contact via Trust Office
Corporate Membership Executive:  Contact via Trust Office  08452 268 567
ENTRUST Liaison Officer:  Ian Skerry, 16 Chapel Hill, Watchfield, Swindon SN6 8TA  01793 784 197
Gift Aid Officer :  David Chalmers, 40 Greenleaze, Knowle Park, Bristol, BS4 2TL  01179 720 423
WRG rep:  George Eycott, Knowle House, 1 Ham Road, Wanborough, SN4 0DF  07771 775 745
Membership  membership@wbct.org.uk

Partnership - Wiltshire Council Countryside Officer:
Ken Oliver, Wiltshire Council, Monkton Park, Chippenham, Wilts, SN15 1ER
Email Ken.oliver@wiltshire.gov.uk  01249 706 494

Emails

Anyone on this page or in the branch details may be contacted using an e-mail address in the form: firstname.lastname@wbct.org.uk (firstname and lastname as printed in the listings).

Trust Office

Dauntsey Lock Canal Centre, Dauntsey Lock, Chippenham, SN15 4HD  08452 268 567
Administrator:  Justine Hanley  08452 268 567
Finance Assistant:  Ann O’Donoghue  08452 268 567
IT/TechOps:  Martin Stubbs  08452 268 567
Dauntsey Lock Wheelbarrow Competition Display
Picture by Ann O’Donoghue (see article page 11)
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Dragonfly Available as a PDF via email. Please contact membership@wbct.org.uk

Map courtesy of Doug Small