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

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Dragonfly 134 Cover Image:
A busy River Avon during Melksham River Festival
Picture by Jenny Stratton
Our first effort seems not to have ruffled too many feathers so, here we go with the next. There has been a great array of things happening and we hope that much of it is reported in this publication. There have been requests for maps of the route which we do not believe Dragonfly is the right vehicle for. There is much work going on in the trust to come up with accurate maps for the whole length. We are still waiting to be pointed in the right direction for a good list of well known canal phrases and acronyms to help our readers decipher what on earth some of us are talking about.

We have been promised, for future editions and not on a regular basis, book reviews which we look forward to including.

A number of members have got in touch to ask for electronic versions of our magazine going forward (it is definitely not compulsory - we like the paper version).

This edition has turned out to have a strongly historical flavour (quite by accident). We care about the story of the Wilts and Berks Canal and its place in the history of this country but we are also concerned with what is happening here and now, and the relations of the Trust with other people. Planning and environmental topics are never out of the news for long, and have never been so important. As ever, we would like to know your thoughts on these issues: if you have something to say about what is happening in your area, please let us know. Please keep in contact by snailmail or email.

We love to know what people are thinking and you keep us on our toes.

We hope to meet many of you at the AGM later this month.

The Editors.

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Since my last report there have been a number of tangible achievements, which I am pleased to tell you about. We own a pub! We completed the purchase of the Peterborough Arms in August. Since that time we have set up a small steering group to direct the next phases of the work. This is going to be a complex project, as we have a number of strands to pull together including refurbishing the building, finding the right person to operate it, negotiating for the neighbouring land, planning a trip boat operation, and working out how to make the best use of the non-pub parts of the site. As a first step we are carrying out detailed condition surveys, so that we can form an idea of how much work is needed, and in what order. We were all agreed that it would be ideal to open the pub in some form as soon as possible, but this has to be set against the disadvantage of opening it then shutting it while we carry out the necessary works.

In the meantime we are planning to hold an Open Day so that lenders and members can see the pub, before we do too much in the way of work. Mind you, the clean-up teams have already made a great job in making it look respectable. The date provisionally chosen is 1st November.

The other big event that the Trust organised was the Melksham River Festival in early September. What a great event! And that is not just what I thought; all the feedback we had from many sources was about how friendly the atmosphere was, and what fun people were having. We organised the event to mark the hundredth anniversary of the formal abandonment of the canal by Act of Parliament in 1914. Our key message was that we are back, and restoring the canal for the benefit of the community. Second, we wanted to show to the people of Melksham our appreciation of their support for the planning application that is currently going through for the Melksham Link. At the same time we wanted to demonstrate what a huge community asset the town has in the river, and how it could be used for the enjoyment of many people in the future. That was certainly a theme that came through from comments from townspeople. The event was a Trust-wide one, but a lot of the organisation was carried out by MCC branch, so a special thanks to Paul Lenaerts and Derek Flexer, and to the rest of the organising team. Other branches pitched in and helped with a will too, and I am grateful to them. All round, a huge success for the Trust. I think we marked the anniversary of the Act of Abandonment very well, with a very positive message about the canal coming back, and the Trust restoring the canal for the benefit of the community.

On the topic of the Melksham Link, we are continuing to carry out the studies needed to support our planning application. At the same time we are working on our thoughts for what the whole development might look like, with the canal as an integral part of an exciting use of the whole space.

Elsewhere, things are progressing, if less publicly. I mentioned last time that the Planning Inspector was holding an examination in Public of the Local Plan put forward by Swindon Borough Council. I am pleased to say that he did not do anything to remove the policy of protecting the line of the canal. We continue to try to press our case for the restoration of the canal through the town centre, and are gaining the support of Canal and River Trust for our canal as an integral part of a network of southern canals.

In a similar vein, we continue the dialogue with Swindon Borough Council about developments at Wichelstowe and other parts of the canal. We are dependent on their timetable for finding a partner for the next phase of development at Middle Wichel, and then on the thoughts that their partner will have on how they want to see the canal as part of it, so that is a little frustrating, but we continue the dialogue. Meanwhile the team in Swindon are pressing on as fast as they can with the proposal for a landing stage at the new Waitrose store.

They say patience is a virtue. Well, we have had to be patient on a number of fronts, including the Biffa landfill site at Studley Grange, Royal Wootton Bassett. Gradually we are getting there; we have a draft of the lease that Biffa are proposing to grant us, so we can get on with finalising that. We are issuing tender documents to contractors so that we
can make a decision on who will do the work, and when. Gradually it is coming together.

Of course, all of these projects, and a number more, need money. Kath Hatton reports elsewhere on her progress on this front.

We are now looking forward to the Trust’s AGM, which will be held on Saturday 18th October at Old Mill Hall, School Lane, Grove, Oxfordshire OX12 7LB. It will be interesting to learn from the East Vale branch about progress in their area. In addition, there is so much going on in the Trust generally that we want to give members an update on progress on a number of aspects. We look forward to seeing as many of you there as can come.

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Diana Hunter, 20 The Strand, Steeple Ashton, Trowbridge BA14 6EP

Email: diana.hunter@wbct.org.uk  Tel: 01380 871354

Please contact Diana for details of other merchandise such as Doug Small books and badges.
back to private landowners the canal slowly faded into the countryside, only bothered in any significant way by the army using its structures for demolition practice. The derelict canal’s slumbers were disturbed again by Jack Dalby researching and documenting its history for his book published in 1971 and as significantly by Neil Rumbol and the other founder members of the organisation that has become the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust starting the whole restoration story in 1977. If you have not read the story of this rediscovery have a look on the Trust’s web site http://www.wbct.org.uk/history/the-story-of-the-trust its a worthwhile read.

Now it’s our turn to carry the restoration baton over the finish line.

I look forward to catching up with you if you are attending the AGM this year.

Wilts & Berks Blog
You can keep in touch with many of the fast moving events and projects in our weekly blog. You will find the blog at:

http://wiltsberkscanal.blogspot.co.uk

Tel: 01249 706494
Email: ken.oliver@wiltshire.gov.uk
Partnership Website: http://www.wiltsandberkscanal.org.uk

Abandoned, forgotten, rediscovered, restored
One of the reasons for holding the Melksham River Festival was to mark the centenary of the Act of Abandonment. You might consider the headline as the four phases of the story of the Wilts & Berks Canal in the last one hundred years. We are currently well into the fourth phase but perhaps worth a moment to consider how we got here. The Wilts & Berks as a commercial proposition for carrying goods was a hopeless case and the Great Western Railway sealed the fate of the waterway long before Swindon Borough petitioned Parliament to abandon the canal. Sold or given
Leave a Legacy

The restoration of the Wilts & Berks Canal is one of the most difficult and exciting canal restoration projects ever. The sections of the canal that we have worked on so far have already shown the enormous benefits to the community and to the environment of the restored canal. With over 60 miles of canal to bring back to life as a resource for generations to come we will need funding and support for many years. As a registered charity what we can achieve depends largely on voluntary gifts and legacies from our supporters.

For more details and information about how to leave a legacy, contact the Company Secretary on 0845 226 8567 or via chris.coyle@wbct.org.uk

Commemorate the Award to the Trust

What better way to remember the award to the Trust than by buying the splendid souvenir items that are now available.

The Trust was awarded a glass crystal, and you can obtain your own replica, engraved with the name of the Trust. Pinbadges, ties, scarves and a replica of the crystal award are available.

Please order your items from:
Administrator, Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, PO Box 3630, Swindon, SN4 4AN.
Moving Dragonfly to Melksham River Festival
Cheryll Yeowell

Nb Dragonfly was moved on 26th August to the River Avon in Melksham, for the Melksham River Festival which took place on 6th and 7th September.

Before she could be moved from her Swindon mooring Rob Yeowell had to re-fuel her and fill her with water. He then took her to Waitrose where the crane from Ellis Crane Hire was waiting to lift her out. The whole process took about an hour under the supervision of Simon Ellis. Once the strops were placed under her, and everything secure, the crane then lifted her out. She was then lowered onto railway sleepers on the road to await the arrival of the lorry and then lifted again for the lorry to reverse under her. Safely secured on the lorry Nb Dragonfly was then taken to Thamesdown Transport’s bus garage where she was thoroughly steam cleaned to remove any non native, invasive species that might be in the canal at Swindon in order to prevent infecting the River Avon.

Now, with a hull free from any possible contamination, she was taken to CooperTires in Melksham where she was lowered, by crane, into the River Avon to be safely moored. A temporary landing stage had been built on the near bank of the river where the passengers will board the boat during the festival weekend. Two trips of just over a mile each were needed to check access, trip timings, and suitable winding holes before she was moored, once more, at her temporary festival home by CooperTires ready for participation in Melksham River Festival.

The whole process was due to happen again on 10th of September when she will return to Swindon.
Noting that our new Editorial team have said that they would like some articles on the history of the canal I thought that our members might like to read the following.

Some time ago Enid, a Swindon branch member came through the door of our shop with a small plastic case in her hands. “Look what I have found at home” she says. It turns out to be an article written in about 1982 in what we think was called Real Life Magazine. The article is entitled BLACK VENICE: I will just give you a very small potted version just so you get a taste of it. The main thrust of the article is about Birmingham but much of it relates to any canal system. The author talks about the canal being used for all sorts of uses such as fire fighting, and industrial water supply, he points out that land drainage alone would cost £20 million if the canal was not there, and that was in 1982. Filling in any canal at that time would cost about £200,000 per mile because all the puddled clay would have to be removed before infilling could be done, otherwise the area might flood when it rains hard.

The main point of interest in this article to me was that he was able to talk to many of the old canal workers who still survived back in 1982. All of these boatmen had nicknames much as today’s lorry drivers on the CB Radio have. He talks of Pinwire, Nine Lives, and Stabbit who got his name because his alarm went off one morning and he stabbed it with a bread knife then went back to sleep only to miss his place in the queue.

Caggy owned 24 boats and got his name from being left-handed. I remembered that at school we used to call all left handed children cack handed so that made sense to me. Today (1982) Caggy moans that middle class boaters “regard us as little better than Gypsies”.

He relates to the reporter that many fights were had by the boatmen but these were clean heel-and-toe affairs and few boatmen would use the splicing knives that they all carried. Most scraps started over disputes about who should go through a lock first as this could make up to six hours difference on a run. Canal etiquette demanded that you gave way to a narrow boat (they were 72 feet in length and sometimes called long boats ) once its prow had drawn level with your stern. Whether you observed this or not depended on the respect you had for your overtaker.

One fight he recalls went on for one and a half hours, and in another one it ended up with both men in the canal and still fighting. On a different occasion a boatman refused to fight another saying, “You have a glass eye and I will not fight such a man”, upon which the challenger took out his glass eye and threw it in the cut followed by his chivalrous adversary. Not for these men the fibreglass gin palaces that were appearing on the water at that time.

He also talks of the leggers who fell in and got crushed to death between boat and wall in the tunnels. He relates that in the 1890s all the crew of a tug working the 3,056 yard Blisworth Tunnel suffocated when something went wrong with the engine and by the time daylight appeared all were dead. There was even talk by a senior engineer of making the lock gear lighter so that a woman could handle it without doing herself an injury.

This is just a snapshot of this article but I find these old stories very enjoyable to read and should you wish to read the whole thing we have copied it and have it in the shop.

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Situation Vacant - Engineering Co-Director

After many years, Mike Lee has stood down as Engineering Co-Director. We need a qualified, experienced and enthusiastic engineer, preferably (but not 100% necessarily) with knowledge of canals to take part in major projects that are now being planned or are coming on stream.
**Membership Matters**  
Membership Secretary’s Report

We welcome the following new members

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Ms. A. Jacobs                                               Calne         MCC
Mr. C. Strawson                                             Melksham     MCC
Mr. D. Moore                                                Melksham     MCC
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Mr. and Mrs. S. Leake                                       Chippenham   MCC
Mr. and Mrs. B. Moore                                       Chippenham   MCC
Mr. and Mrs. M. Chislett                                   Chippenham   MCC
Ms. D. Lane                                                 Swindon       Swindon
Mr. and Mrs. W. Vater                                      Hullavington MCC
Ms. L. Laird                                               Swindon       Swindon

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**Irish Folk Night in Melksham.**

MCC are following up the success of the Trust's River Festival with an Irish Folk Night in Melksham. This event will be held at the Melksham Conservative Club on Saturday 18th October. Doors open at 7.15pm and the concert will start at 8pm. A bar will be available in the hall.

Tickets are on sale at the Conservative Club and the Tourist Information Centre in Melksham or can be reserved from Malcolm Hitchinson on 01373 859207 or email malcolm@hitchinson.eu. Tickets cost £8 each. The Conservative Club is in Bank Street, Melksham. Parking is in the Church Street Car Park SN12 6LS. Entrance to the venue can be gained from the far end of the car park.

Finnegan's Wake, who were headliners at the Westbury Music and Arts Festival, will play a lively mixture of jigs and reels plus many traditional Irish folk songs, which we can all join in with. They also have a line of witty Irish banter all of which has audiences chuckling and tapping their feet in equal measure.

Band members Frank Hackett on Accordion and Mick Franks on Guitar have been playing together for over 6 years. They started playing together because they have a shared love of traditional Irish music and songs. **Come and join us. You’ll be sure of a good Irish welcome.**
Fundraising for the Wilts & Berks
Kath Hatton

Two major events have taken place since the last Dragonfly – the Melksham River Festival and the purchase of the Peterborough Arms. The River Festival was the first to be held in Melksham and turned out to be a great success. It was never intended to be a fundraising event, it served as a glimpse into the future for Melksham and was excellent publicity for the new Link up from the Kennet & Avon into the town. We had quite a few new members signing up which was great. Due to my broken ankle, I had to sit in a wheelchair in the VIP tent most of the day, but luckily loads of people came to chat and it struck me how happy and positive everyone was. I did regret not being able to take a trip down that beautiful river though!

The purchase of the Peterborough Arms went through in August, paid for by loans from our members. Teams have cleaned and tidied outside and in and we are finishing off various surveys of the building, courtesy of the Feasibility Grant received from SIB – Social Investment Business. As soon as we have that data we can assess the extent of the renovations required and hence how much money we need to raise. We plan to hold an Open day at the Pub for investors and members - that is provisionally set for November 1st.

Following the advert in the last Dragonfly several members have set up new standing orders for the Land Fund and I thank them very much. I know I am always saying it but being able to purchase the track when an opportunity arises is so important.

I have put in a few applications for funds lately – one for a wildlife trail at Studley Grange that I am not able to publicise yet, one for the Guardian Charity Awards and one for funds to rebuild the breached culvert at Pewsham. Our Swindon chair has submitted a bid for funds to renew the soft bank edging at West Lease.

The funds in so far for the 2014 Grand Draw are over £3500 – I am hoping for a rush at the end! We will be making the draw at the AGM on 18th October – please get your stubs and monies to me before then to give me a chance to get them all folded and ready! As you know this year we are raising money for that second trip boat – judging by the popularity of the trips at Melksham on the Avon, it is something we need urgently.

Our 2015 Calendar has now been printed and you will find elsewhere in the magazine details of how you can obtain it and other goods from our Merchandising officer, Diana Hunter. Goods will also be on sale at the AGM at Grove. Hope to see lots of you there. I really enjoy meeting members and hearing their views.

200 Club

Update of winners

July 1st prize ticket 229 David Ball Melksham
2nd prize ticket 203 Brian Ship Chippenham
3rd prize ticket 11 Norman Barber Leatherhead
August 1st prize ticket 150 Simon Taylor Chippenham
2nd prize ticket 133 Adrian North Longcot
3rd prize ticket 72 Martin Savage Wanborough
September 1st prize ticket 45 Jim Andress Chippenhan
2nd prize ticket 188 Peter Bowers Parkstone
3rd prize ticket 211 Cliff & Jackie Jones Uxbridge

Good Luck for the remainder of this year's monthly draws.

Jeff and Lynda
Here's a new easy way to raise money for Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

This one does not involve parting with extra cash.

Everyclick.com has launched a new way to donate – it’s been christened “Give as you Live”. It means you can search the web, shop online from your favourite retailers, trade on eBay and raise money for WILTS & BERKS CANAL TRUST. You get great search results from Yahoo!, content from leading shopping providers and access to all eBay auctions. Every search you make creates a donation for charity. Our special address is http://www.everyclick.com/wilts---berks-canal-trust/111509/146041, all searches, shopping and eBay activity made from here will raise money for us. Make sure you sign up so you can track your giving – it updates every 3 minutes, you'll be amazed how quickly it adds up! Everyclick has already raised over £4,934,388.34 for a wide range of charities around the UK, and Everyclick was voted website of the Year 2008 and has been recognised as a top 100 media tech company 2009.

Another way to raise funds for Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) has announced the launch of its National Waterways Restoration Raffle. The raffle aims to raise £10,000 to support waterway restoration and development by donating 100% of the profit to restoration projects run by IWA corporate members and to a moorings improvement project on the Cheshire Ring to be carried out by IWA volunteers.

The raffle provides every person that purchases a ticket the option to nominate an eligible project of their choice on every ticket purchased. After the raffle has been drawn the number of nominations for each project will be calculated and the money each restoration project receives will be in direct proportion to their total nominations. For example a project receiving 10% of the total nominations would receive 10% of the money raised.

The nomination system means that waterway restoration across the country can benefit. Waterway restoration can bring social, economic and environmental benefits to an area and the National Waterways Restoration Raffle will support this nationwide effort.

There are many exciting prizes to be won. Tickets cost £2 each and are in books of five tickets. Also available through IWA website. The raffle will be drawn on 16th January 2015 at IWA’s Head Office in Chesham. To find out more about the raffle, eligible restoration projects, details of all the raffle prizes, to purchase tickets online and for full terms and conditions see http://www.waterways.org.uk/raffle

Newsflash: Possible funding:

We may need you to do some telephone voting for the Trust in November – will release details nearer the time on the website and social media. Please look out for it. Thanks Kath
‘When the weather is fine, you know it’s a sign, for messin’ about on the river’

And what an amazing weekend September 6th & 7th was, for messin’ about on the River Avon. It was a wonderful showcase for one of the Trust’s principal ambitions: to bring boats back to the heart of Melksham. The sights, sounds, and sheer exhilaration of seeing so many different craft were absolutely fantastic.

Thousands of local people turned up at the King George V Playing Field to enjoy the general atmosphere and in particular, take the opportunity of a rare boat trip up this beautiful, hidden gem of a river – soon to be a part of the reborn Wilts & Berks navigation, linking Melksham to the Kennet & Avon Canal.

‘There are backwater places all hidden from view…’

Over the festival weekend, Dragonfly and Damselfly, both skippered and crewed admirably by volunteers led by Robert Yeowell, carried the remarkable total of 496 passengers on a total of 46 trips. They voyaged along the crystal clear, weed lined water, totally hidden from the view of all, except for a few solitary fisherman well acquainted with this tranquil backwater of the River Avon. They were treated to sightings of kingfishers, moorhens, coots, swans, ducks, the occasional bird of prey, plus other craft also relishing the beautiful setting. Damselfly ran shorter 20 minute trips, while Dragonfly had a longer run, turning back just south of Beanacre, near the planned junction with the canal, once it’s restored. The visiting Wilderness trailboats, and the beautifully restored steam launches, being smaller and more nimble, were able to venture even further – some exploring almost as far as Lacock.

‘There are long boats and short boats and all kinds of craft…’

Back near the new slipway, at the hub of the festival, each type of boat took turns to cruise past the admiring spectators: the dozen Wilderness boats decked out in colourful bunting, and the four steam launches adding their evocative sounds and smells to the historical theme.

Bradford on Avon Scuba Diving Club demonstrated their skills, and also helped out by removing or marking hazards in the water; and Wiltshire Youth Canoe Club showed brilliantly how to be ‘skipper and crew, in a one seat canoe’ as well as giving opportunities for visitors to have a go. The Wiltshire Fire Service Rescue Team displayed how they would manage a water-based rescue, and many people had a great time getting very wet!

Some volunteers dressed in costumes, to help set the Edwardian theme of the festival, and the historical theme was continued on the playing field, where visitors enjoyed time-honoured entertainments of a coconut shy, a ‘test your strength’ challenge and swing-boats, as well as watching or having a go at traditional crafts including bodging, spinning and weaving. And, of course, there was face painting and ice cream for the children.

The weather was certainly on our side; after a slow, murky start on Saturday, the sun shone nonstop, bringing a steady stream of between 2,000 and 3,000 visitors to the site, where many enjoyed customary English breakfasts, exotic South African burgers or traditional ale, whilst sitting back, listening to folk bands or local radio. It was wonderful to see so many locals relishing the chance to relax and appreciate the special atmosphere generated by being close to water. Hopefully, more will have begun to appreciate what a lovely leisure resource the river is, so close to the centre of town.

Saturday evening also saw an excellent concert of folk music: in the words of one member, “The best £3 I’ve ever spent.”

Although the Trust has been trying valiantly to inform the local community of the plans for the Melksham Link, many visitors will have been surprised to discover the extent and imminence of the plans, and the River Festival must surely have generated even more enthusiasm and support for this exciting scheme. The information tents were certainly busy, with dedicated volunteers explaining the aims of the Trust and clarifying the latest situations and progress along the length of the canal.

Derek Flexer, one of the organisers, was
interviewed at length on Wiltshire Radio beforehand, and afterwards the event received a wonderful write up in the local paper The Melksham Independent News. Such extensive and positive coverage in the local media, as well as the impact of the event itself, promoted the Trust enormously, and many more residents will have begun to realise the potential financial benefits once the Melksham Link is completed. Local councillors and dignitaries were very supportive and enthusiastic, let’s hope they are just as positive when we come to the planning approvals!

The festival itself was a very ambitious event (among the largest the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust has organised) and it was wonderful to see so many volunteers from many different Branches all working together to pull it off. Altogether, an amazing 78 volunteers were involved from six different branches, many travelling huge distances and some even camped overnight, putting in a massive number of hours over the weekend. With such a long distance restoration project, a danger is that Branches could become insular and isolated; the spirit of co-operation and teamwork at the River Festival, highlighted that we are all working towards the same end, and are definitely (to borrow a recent phrase) Better Together.

Congratulations to everyone involved, it really was an amazing weekend to be messin’ about on the river.

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**Situation Vacant - Chairman of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust**

The Wilts and Berks Canal Trust is a registered charity, committed to returning this historic waterway to full navigable status. The canal will restore an important link in the national waterways network, but the project will also be part of the green infrastructure of the region, creating connections between existing wildlife habitats and creating aquatic and wetland habitats for endangered species.

What are we looking for?

**Knowledge and Expertise:**
- Be able to support fellow Trust members and staff
- Be able to act as an advocate for the organisation
- Have a good understanding of the organisation

**Personal Qualities:**
- Has a commitment to achieving the most ambitious canal restoration project in the country
- Commits to preparing for and attending meetings
- Not to be afraid to ask questions
- Ability to work with people at all levels
- Ability to work as a member of a team as well as individually
- Reliable
- Willingness to learn about the project and contribute new ideas
- Personality to represent the organisation as its national profile grows
- Good Communications Skills
- Ability to plan and organise
The Wilts And Berks Canal: The Coming Of The Industrial Revolution

Roy Cartwright of Swindon has a collection of what he calls “Snippets from the Past”, culled over the years from the Evening Advertiser. Here is his snapshot of a momentous decision.

The Wilts and Berks Canal was opened in 1810. This was the beginning of the industrial revolution for the people of Swindon.

Coal could be brought up from the Somerset coalfield and on the return trip the barges would take farmers’ produce, wood, stone, or any other goods that required transporting to Bristol.

But the lifestyle of the canal was to be threatened by a much greater revolution just 30 years later: the Great Western Railway.

The GWR (aka God’s Wonderful Railway) was to cover 323 acres, 73 of which were under and at its height employed 40,000 men.

Isambard Kingdom Brunel could have built his line south through the Vale of Pewsey or north via Oxford but he was to follow the line of the Wilts and Berks Canal through the Vale of the White Horse.

His decision was made after receiving a letter from Daniel Gooch (then his assistant) on 13 September 1840. This was without a doubt the most important piece of paper that Swindon has ever known.

The 21-year-old wrote of his decision to choose Swindon:

It also has the great advantage of being on the side of a canal communicating with the whole of England and by which we could get coal and coke, I should think at a moderate price. I am not sufficiently acquainted with the place to know how far we would be affected by the want of water. It might probably be collected in the neighbourhood and as we have a great deal of side cuttings they might be converted into reservoirs, and should even this fail us we have the canal. These reasons lead me to think Swindon by far the best point we have for a central engine station.

The directors approved Gooch’s plan in February 1841.
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, PO Box 3630, SWINDON, SN4 4AN. 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.
Nb Dragonfly team say farewell to Mike Lang.

On Wednesday 2nd July, many of the Nb Dragonfly boat team said goodbye to Mike Lang, the Boat Manager and his wife Teresa, who were moving to Devon.

The get-together was held on the Bruce Trust’s boat Diana in Great Bedwyn on the Kennet and Avon Canal. The artist presented Mike with a painting of Nb Dragonfly going under Skew Bridge on the Kingshill, Swindon, stretch of the canal. The artist was Mike Pattenhall, who also painted the actual Nb Dragonfly.

The team would like to thank Mike for all the work he has put in to enable the smooth running of the boat.

Postcards of the painting are now available for purchase on Nb Dragonfly or from Sue Paine. A pack of 4 with envelopes for £2.00, or singly with envelope for 60p.
There are reports on the antics of our little trip boat elsewhere in the magazine so to avoid overkill this section will remain dormant for this particular edition. Returning refreshed in the New Year.

Situation Vacant - Communications Director
We need someone to oversee all our communications, both internal and external. We have such a good story to tell and we need someone to tell it!
Welcome to the next instalment of The Cocklemore Brook culvert saga. I’m sorry if you don’t understand how one little culvert can take up so much of our time, but I assure you it is the “key stone” to our current renovation activities in MCC. Thankfully the glorious summer weather (with the notable exception of the last couple of weeks of August, thank you Bertha) has meant that Cocklemore Brook itself has subsided sufficiently to allow us to use our 4” pump to divert the water flow and thus allow the culvert itself to be pumped down with a 2” pump to a workable level.

Ray Canter had used a digger to excavate the towpath and canal bed away from the culvert to expose it and at the same time to build two bunds to divert the towpath to the opposite bank.

All we now had to do then was dig out the clay and culvert roof that had collapsed into the culvert channel. Some was possible by machine, thanks to Ray Canter’s now brilliant digger skills, but much of it by hand. And I can testify the water was still pretty chilly and large 200 year old bricks embedded like raisins in a cake of pudding clay make for a slippery difficult and heavy hand clearance job! The first picture (page 32) shows the exposed culvert roof, the extent of the hole and us starting said hand clearance.

Be that as it may, over several work parties, clear out the mud and bricks and detritus we did and also the remaining exposed roof of the culvert was dismantled, brick by brick, back to the new work from a couple of years ago when the header wall was renewed. The second picture (page 32) shows the fully stripped back culvert, before any repair has been started.

After due debate, it was agreed we will rebuild the exposed 10 metres or so, then rebuild the towpath on its original line over the new section and then dig out the 20 metres currently still buried about 10’ under the far bank and inspect what we need to do there – very likely that will need stripping back and re-building too.

To other matters; I am sure many of you will remember the wonderful pictures in the previous edition of Dragonfly of the children enjoying the Pewsham Lock open days. Well no sooner had that marathon event finished and the team had come back from a very well earned break, than I thrust a new challenge toward them; the Melksham River Festival. Up to that point, I’d been keeping them apart from the second event, for fear of compromising the open days, but it was now time to ask for their help and expertise.

At about the same time, we found we had been unsuccessful in being awarded the funding we had applied for, so we were going to have to get very imaginative and resourceful. Thankfully the steering committee chairman explored options with various potential sponsors and I am very pleased to report that Leekes of Melksham kindly agreed to save the Festival and underwrite about half the festival costs, enabling us to proceed. As part of this, they also agreed to help with publicity and to hand out flyers to their customers in the weeks preceding the event.

Time to engage the detailed work team and in record time, we had to convert the broad thrust and direction agreed at the steering committee into detailed site plans, risk assessments, staffing schedules, identify where we could beg, borrow
and beg some more to get gazebos, chairs and tables, fire extinguishers, road-cones, etc.

There is another article that describes the event itself, so I will not dwell on that here, but many people helped in the preparations, planning and delivery, a few I will mention here and to any that I have missed, thank you none the less!

Thank you to the MCC work party teams came to our aid (albeit this interrupted their valiant work on clearing and repairing the culvert, sorry, chaps) strimming the river bank where the Wilderness Boats and Steam Boats need to moor up and working to clear a navigable route up the Avon, in particular waging a battle royal against a tree that had fallen right across the river and was completely submerged, the above water sections having already been cleared by the Environment Agency.

I must also praise the enormous efforts of our “Harbour Master”, Ian Graham, who pretty much single handed, engaged with the boat owners, worked out their arrangements and planned all the visiting boats side of things, Ian, thank you.

Also deep thanks are due to the canoe club for their support and allowing us to share their facilities for the weekend and quite a bit of disturbance leading up to the event (not least having a slipway built during one of the wettest winters on record).

Many thanks too to the boat team for all their work in moving nb Dragonfly, getting her prepared and cleaned and moored up safe and sound in her temporary summer home and for all the skippers and crew for their help in running the trip boat before and during the festival. Also thanks for the help in publicising the event on our web sites and sharing many pictures to help give everyone a flavour of what was to come. A very important part of the boat operation, many thanks to the team at Cooper Tires for access to their site, use of their car park space and their generally very cooperative and helpful manner.

Thank you too, to the many many volunteers who did everything from putting up countless gazebos, selling programmes, explaining our project to visitors, helping launch and moor the boats and countless other tasks.

And, of course, to all the boaters who brought their magnificent craft to the show and made such a colourful and dynamic display, really showing off what a wonderful sight the river can be, thank you. Derek Fletcher

FOXHAM & LYNENHAM
Chairman:
Andrew Chapman, Dauntsey Lodge Farm, Sodom Lane, Dauntsey, Wilts, SN15 4JA.
Tel: 01249 890379 Mob: 07778 568957
Secretary:
John Harrod, 6 Downham Mead, Chippenham, Wilts. SN15 3LN Tel. 01249-461023

We have our Branch AGM coming up during September and the Trust AGM soon after, so this seems to be an appropriate time to review what has happened since I took over as Branch Chairman last year. It is normal in industry to find ways to measure performance and/or success and, while not something that I’ve ever seen done by WBCT, here are some actual numbers for F&L:

- Branch membership is up 66% but the workparty sizes remain relatively unchanged, although more people are just starting to volunteer at the Peterborough Arms.
- Canal length – there is 7.4km in our Branch of which only 470m is actually owned (Seven Locks) and nothing else is licenced. There is about 440m that we have access to that is actually navigable (Foxham) with a further 360m towpath and canal bed cleared of brush this year by our Sunday workparty, but no reliable water sources. Of the 7.4km potential towpath, there is the above mentioned 470m actually owned, a further 275m of Public Right of Way and 1,950m of informal permissive path. So we only have about 6% of canal restored and about 36% of the towpath freely accessible, neither of which have increased at all in the last few years.
- There are 11 locks with 4 restored. There are 6 road crossings but none restored. There are 7 amenity bridges of which 3 have been restored.
- There are 4 spillways, all restored. These numbers have not changed in the last few years.

Throughout this time, the workparty, under the leadership of Gordon, has slogged away in sunshine and rain to clear the above mentioned 360m of towpath and canal. Anyone who has not
Nearly September already, hopefully not the end of the summer. August hasn’t been too hot but July was so hot. We seem to have been fighting nature all summer, the hot weather following a wet winter seems to have prompted everything to grow twice as much as usual.

At Templars Firs we have mowed, strimmed and hedge cut throughout the summer and still there is more to do. A few years ago we used a digger to drag out the reeds, which were choking the canal, and for a while it was greatly improved. However, seeing some clear water, the water lilies have decided to fill the gap left by the reeds and have become quite a problem. At least we could pull the reeds out, roots and all, but with the water lilies we can cut them off and drag them out but this leaves the roots. We thought that if we cut them often enough they may give up and die, but this doesn’t seem to be happening. The local fishing club keeps the canal stocked with fish and some of these feed on the bed of the canal and stir up the mud, keeping the water cloudy. This should also deter the lily growth but doesn’t seem to be doing so. If we could run a boat up and down the canal on a regular basis it might help. As if this wasn’t enough a new enemy has come to test our mettle. We have a stream of alternate months with the next being on 18th November and 20th January. We currently meet at the Foxham Inn but look forward to when the Peterborough Arms has an open bar and we can move back to our historic venue. All members are always welcome.

Andrew Chapman
which feeds the canal and recently received reports that Himalayan Balsam, a particularly invasive waterways plant, had been identified in the stream just north of the canal. Investigation revealed scores of plants in the stream amongst two metre high undergrowth. A work party was dispatched to remove them and several dozen of the plants were pulled out, roots and all. At the furthest point up stream there was a huge plant over two metres tall which seemed to be the ‘mother plant’ of all the others. The plants were in flower and had not set seed which is fortunate as the seed pods explode when ripe and scatter seeds over a wide area. No doubt we will have to repeat the exercise several times again but hopefully have caught it in time. We have also found several of these dreaded plants below the lock in the newly restored section.

We have spent less time at the Chaddington lock site this summer though the paths, lock side and towpath have been mowed a number of times. The weed in the canal, even the new section, has had to be cut and pulled out and this will continue for some time. Restoring short sections of canal with no regular boat traffic certainly creates problems with maintenance and keeping the water weed free.

When we restored the section of the canal below the lock we were able to scrape back the topsoil from the field and stack the silt from the canal on the field. By the time this was done the wet weather had arrived and ground conditions prevented us from restoring the field. This we decided to in what turned out to be the hottest week of the year. We hired a large digger and spent about ten days spreading out, flattening the spoil and re-covering it with the original topsoil. Needless to say all that will grow for a while will be weeds so the area will have to be mowed several times a year for a few years, but the grass will gradually take over and choke the weeds.

As plans for the Biffa site take shape we are strimming the new growth along the stream to discourage the water voles from returning. We have strimmed the area a number of times where we can get at it and will need to do this for a while longer.

All this cutting and clearing has taken its’ toll on our strimmers and mowers with a lot of time and money being spent on spare parts but we have managed to keep our machines operating.

It is satisfying to see the end results and an increasing number of people enjoying the canal and walks, so many people pass comment on how good it looks and how much they enjoy walking along the canal.

Elsewhere in the Branch we have held our summer BBQ in good weather, it was well attended and enjoyable with a walk before getting down to the serious issue of the food. Thameswood Vets organised a sponsored dog walk along the canal and despite poor weather were able to make a welcome donation to Branch funds. A canal display stand was organised for a local Open Farm Sunday and again at the local church fete.

Volunteers are always needed and welcome for Branch activities as well as work parties. Why not pop along and see what we are up to at one of our work parties or Branch meetings.

John Bower
over the role of Steppingstone Bridge WPO/engineer (still a bit to do to finish it off). The rest of the committee, secretary, treasurer, webmaster and fundraiser etc posts remain with the past incumbents! So contrary to towpath gossip the branch is certainly not defunct.

Well, what a hot, dry summer we’ve had! All that mud I mentioned in my last report has turned to something akin to concrete, so we have again been hindered in our attempts to recover/repair/reinstate/improve the towpaths by Station Road Bridge. Our workparties efforts have been redirected to work at Steppingstone Bridge site, still a bit to do under the bridge on the wharf/wing walls/towpath etc. Work required that the site be drained so our two big pumps were called into service only for both to fail! The modern one to have

At our branch AGM in June a bit of a re-shuffle of committee members took place. Yours truly stood down as Chairman and Graham Banks, who has been Vice Chairman for eons, took over. We swapped roles as I am getting a bit ‘long in the tooth’. Actually there ain’t much wrong with my teeth it’s ‘me eyes and ears that are failing’! At meetings I struggle to hear what folks are saying and can’t read my notes so Graham has taken over, I will continue with many of the tasks I did before, eg. like writing this Dragonfly report! Graham is also our mid week WPO, several ancient and unemployed old codgers, including me, turn out most weeks!

Chris Forward has reverted back to our main WPO whilst still holding the plant, tools and machinery post and Adye Goodenough has taken over the role of Steppingstone Bridge WPO/engineer (still a bit to do to finish it off). The rest of the committee, secretary, treasurer, webmaster and fundraiser etc posts remain with the past incumbents! So contrary to towpath gossip the branch is certainly not defunct.

So, is a new sunny day dawning? Definitely. I believe we are laying a solid base for future activity and success. Why not join us for the satisfaction and enjoyment of helping to make that progress? 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
The Wantage Summer Festival has started…is how I begun the last report. Well, it finished as ever in early July and once again the Walks proved popular. Raising around £200 in donations for the Sack-house. The Summer Festival programme overall was organised by Wantage councillor Julia Reynolds who has now stepped down. I have sent our thanks because she has put an incredible amount of work into this over the years and has been very supportive of the canal walks.

As an addition to this year’s programme and as an alternative to last year’s Industrial Archaeology tour of Wantage during which I battled with the weekly bell ringing practice at the parish church and tried to control 40 people through the Market Square, I tried something different and whilst not badged as Wilts & Berks walks, my reputation as the “canal man” (if not something ruder) along with the subject ie “An Exploration of the lost pubs of Wantage” brought forth capacity crowds on both nights of 14, so much so that I had to lay on a couple of extra dates. Of course one of the lost pubs is the legendary Jolly Waterman adjacent to the Canal Wharf situated at the street end of a now lost row of cottages. Apparently the food (hot faggots) was famous the length, and depth of the canal network. The tour has just had a write up in the local CAMRA magazine.

Summer is of course, Show time and the season kicked off with the Childrey Show a superb village fete and one we always enjoy for the visitors looking at the displays in our marquee and asking questions.

Over to Newbury for the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust Waterways festival. Again a good one to visit as we are usually next to the Guildford and Reading branch IWA Stand so a chance to catch up. We overlook the little boating lake so always entertaining. A special hello to the three new members who joined that day.

At the end of August we had the two day White Horse Show. Weather superb on Saturday with record attendance but the forecast proved correct in that Monday was wet and generally awful. A lot of interest from the visitors and again a big hello to our new members.

My thanks as ever to our gallant workparty teams and our WPOs Bob and Mike. Whilst we wait for progress on leases and permission normal maintenance continues, including on our machinery. My thanks to Allan Smith who is project managing the Childrey Bridleway Bridge project, where we are awaiting a meeting with OCC Highways and Property. Hopefully more to report next time.

Mike and I undertook a talk/presentation on Monday evening for the Grove Methodist Ladies Group…although there were some blokes there as well. Good intelligent questions and they laughed at my jokes! Again a welcome to our new members…and to all those who I have cajoled into joining recently (neighbours, friends’ neighbours etc etc)

As I write this I am looking forward to Melksham

Alan Norris
River Festival and the good news appears to be that the weather is going to be fine!
Otherwise here in the Vale I continue to keep an eye on the various planning permissions on housing and other developments.

Finally with the AGM being in our patch this year I look forward to welcoming you to the Old Mill Hall Grove on the 18th October.
Brian Stovold

Recording of Volunteer Hours

It is not too late to submit your volunteer hours for the year ending 31st March 2014. Please submit to juanita.poulton@wbct.org.uk to be included in the statistics.

Branch Events - Use Of Trust Equipment For Events

In the absence of a Trust Events supremo the Branch Chairs have agreed to act as the conduit for booking out Trust equipment and have set up a google diary so that they can ensure that items are not double-booked. Therefore if you are organising an event eg a fete where displays boards etc are required please contact your Branch Chairman to check availability.
Thanks, Brian, East Vale

Branch Meeting & Contact Details

The Melksham Calne and Chippenham branch meet at St Andrew’s Church Hall, Melksham, at 20:00hrs on the first Tuesday of each month.

MELKSHAM CALNE & CHIPPENHAM WORK PARTY INFORMATION:
Organisers: Doug Harris, Chiverlins House, Sheldon, Chippenham, SN14 0XQ Tel 01249 652236
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 doug.harris@wbct.org.uk

The Foxham & Lyneham Branch meet on a two monthly cycle, usually on a Thursday evening at the Foxham Inn, at 19:30hrs.

FOXHAM/LYNEHAM WORK PARTY INFORMATION
Organiser: Gordon Williams Tel. 07949 257897
Work Parties: Every Sunday at about 09:30-10:00hrs.
Ring Gordon to find out where we are working.
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 the month at 19:30hrs, usually at the Broome Manor Golf Club. Check website for details.

SWINDON WORK PARTY INFORMATION:

Organisers:
Ray Aldridge Tel or Txt: 07502 046708
Oliver Gardiner Tel: 07785 775993

Work Parties:
Regular work parties are on a Sunday. Check web site for details

Branch web-site: 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
Martin Thompson
Tel 07736 796419
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.
Britain in the eighteenth century was a hotbed of new ideas, new technologies, and new industries demanding increasing quantities of fuel and raw materials, the building of factories and workers’ houses, as well as delivery of finished goods.

As R.A. Buchanan points out in Industrial Archaeology in Britain, social factors were also involved: a "new industrial middle class", receptive to new ideas and technological innovation and able to provide capital and other resources. The Industrial Revolution has been well documented, but it often appears as if it happened without the involvement of human labour. Historians have noted the pressure to increase transport by roads and waterways but there are few accounts of the lives of the workers who made all this development possible.

In 1993 OUP published Ramlin Rose: the boatwoman’s story. Sheila Stewart, the author, had interviewed a number of women who lived and worked on the Oxford canal in the early twentieth century, at the very end of the era of canal transport. Some of her interviewees were reluctant to be identified – some stories were tragic – so she has taken the bold step of combining the life stories of several real people into one fictional account. The book also presents a great deal of factual information about the details of family life and ‘housekeeping’ in the confined space aboard a narrow boat.

Managing a narrow boat was more than a job: it was literally a way of life. In many ways, boat people were a tribe apart from the general public, regarded by many with the same kind of wariness as gypsies. In some ways their life must have been enviable, with freedom and fresh air rather than arduous toil and crowded and unhealthy living conditions. But at the same time it could be cruelly confining in other ways. In the early days it was rare for the children of boat people to learn to read, and illiteracy was handed down from parents to children. Up to the 1900s schooling was a hit and miss affair and until the 1930s it was still common for boat people to be unable to read and write. To obtain an education required real dedication on the part of a child and his or her parents. For a ‘Number One’ (self-employed boat owner) making a living from a narrow boat was the first consideration, and school attendance was of less importance than delivering a load and taking on the next cargo.

Children did their bit towards the running of the boat, schooled in handling the boat as soon as they were old enough and taking the tiller on the easy stretches. Typically an older child would go to be a ‘little runnerboat’ to help an older person, often a relative, who was in need of another pair of hands. This would solve two problems at once: the living space on a narrow boat would accommodate five people, and families were often larger. As a community, canal people were self-sufficient, supporting each other and rallying round when needed. Boat people often married within the boating community. The author records that on the Oxford Canal there were a number of prominent families – Littlemore, Ramlin, Phillips, Atkins, Powell and a few others are names that occur repeatedly.

The expression for ‘wife’ was ‘Best Mate’. Women played a heroic part: steering the boat—not always an easy task – working the locks, ready for emergencies such as happened to Stewart’s ‘Rose’ when the mule that towed the boat fell into the canal. (This was far from being a comical event: without quick action the boat might have capsized and the cargo been lost.)

A boatwoman had to do a man’s job while at the same time tending her children, cooking and cleaning, washing clothes and laying in provisions for the journeys ahead. Meals were cooked on a range like the one I remember in my grandmother’s cottage. Typically they would be stews and casseroles – rabbit or Lancashire hotpot -- that could be set to simmer while the woman got on with her work. Boatwomen prided themselves on the standard of their ‘housekeeping’, carried out in their tiny living quarters. Many also found time to crochet and knit and polish their brass ornaments.

I recently talked to the daughter of Harriet Powell. Born at Falls Hill, Warwickshire in 1920, Harriet was one of eight siblings. The family’s most frequent cargo was coal, transported to Oxford from the Midlands coalfields. By the 1920s the authorities had made it more difficult for boat children to slip
through the education net. Leaving school at 14, she showed an aptitude for figures that made it possible to find a job ashore, but she had at least two elder siblings who could not read and write. She had seen the last of the old ways; much was changing as she was growing up, not least because of the war.

The canal system had been declining in importance ever since the building of the railways in the early nineteenth century and by the outbreak of WW2 it was almost at an end, but Sheila Stewart records that her chief character assisted in carrying essential supplies to London via the Grand Union Canal while under attack from a German bomber. My understanding is that at this time the Powell family used to carry sugar to Oxford from the Tate and Lyle refinery in East London, but this is not confirmed. We leave ‘Rose’ and her husband listening to a prize essay read by their daughter Jinny, entitled ‘Partners’, an account of life on the canals. The author includes a quotation from a 1959 essay by Jenny Littlemore: “Canal navigation and its dedicated workers have made a real mark in the history of this nation, and, although we shall never see the like again, it is good that there are those who are passionately engaged . . . to ensure that this important part of our heritage is not lost for ever.”

Letter to the editor Sept 2014
It was a superb and sunny Water Festival at Melksham. Well done to the sponsors, organisers and helpers it all went very well. In particular thanks must go out to Ian Graham of Wilderness Boats, for acting as harbour master and getting the boats on the water, they made a great show. A good time was had by all.

The most popular part of the festival seemed to be the boat trips it is a very pleasant stretch of river and the boats were a great novelty in the town.

Most of the Wilts & Berks Canal is in the countryside away from the general population. To further raise the canal’s profile would it be possible to make restored sections visible from the road. With this idea in mind, the following projects (west of Swindon) would show the canal from the road:

The canal next to the Peterborough Arms at Dauntsey Lock.
The proposed extension at Templars Firs (Royal Wootton Bassett).
And perhaps the following:
Extending the Pewsham restoration to the A4 near Chippenham.
Extending the canal at Calne to the A4.
Obviously there are the projects in Swindon, Shrivenham and in the Wantage/Grove area.
All the best, John Henn
Dear Editor,

As I have been preparing for Christmas 2014 my mind took me back to Christmases past.

In December 1810 there was a family living on a new coal-carrying Narrowboat, called Annie. This was the first time they were away from their home village of Paulton in Somersetshire. They had travelled from the Somerset coal fields and stopped at a new wharf two miles north of the little village called Swindon to give their horse a rest. This was to be their first Christmas away from home as they were taking coal all the way to Oxford. I took a walk along the towpath and was spotted by a young lad. He was named Albert and he was speechless. He called his mother in delight. She invited me on board the Annie to have a cup of tea and a piece of their fruit pie. You should have seen Albert’s face, all covered in coal dust, but eyes wide open and a big smile as he opened the Christmas present I gave him. It was a model of a canal boat just like the one he lived on.

In 2014 I received my copy of Dragonfly No 132 by airmail Via the North Pole and it was such a delight to read of all the children of Chippenham having fun and learning about the history of the canal. Were they told the story of all the children like Albert who lived on board one of the boats as it traveled along the canal?

It was a delight and joy to receive the messages from the children that I saw just before Christmas 2013. I will be in the Swindon area again for most of November and December 2014 so tell the children to look out for me on the canal bank when they are on Dragonfly. I hope they invite me onto the boat to meet their families just like Albert did. Will there be a cup of tea for me?

Santa.
Membership 2512

Email:- editor@wbct.org.uk
Write to:-  Dragonfly Editor, Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, PO Box 3630, Swindon, SN4 4AN
The Editors reserves the right to shorten, change or not to publish any letters received.
Canal Trips to find Santa In Swindon

November 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 29\textsuperscript{th} & 30\textsuperscript{th}
November bookings if sufficient demand

December 6\textsuperscript{th},7\textsuperscript{th},13\textsuperscript{th},14\textsuperscript{th},20\textsuperscript{th},21\textsuperscript{st},22\textsuperscript{nd} & 23\textsuperscript{rd}
10.00,11.30,1.00 & 2.30 each day
Midweek Santa Charter trips available on request

Presents for the children

Mince pies and drinks for all
Adults £6  Children £9

As Dragonfly carries only 12 passengers availability is limited & we will ask for payment at time of booking

Booking is essential

Please complete a booking form
Visit www.wbct.org.uk/santa-trips
Email santa@wbct.org.uk  phone 01793 827678
Or Trust Shop Theatre Sq Swindon SN1 1QN
Wootton Bassett Branch, friends, relatives and a new editor at work
(Report Next Page)

Cocklemore Brook Pictures
Report Page 20

Hand Clearance

1st Half Fully Exposed
As Dragonfly now has two new editors I thought it was time to take the opportunity to explain the next stage of getting your magazine to you.

About a week before the publication date Jenny Stratton (chair of Wootton Bassett Branch) delivers boxes of envelopes and labels to a small team of regular volunteers who frank and label the envelopes. At this stage they separate out the envelopes for the majority of the addresses in Wroughton and Royal Wootton Bassett which are hand delivered.

Once the magazines have been printed Jenny contacts her team of volunteers, mainly from Royal Wootton Bassett but also from other branches, arranging for them to come and ‘stuff’ the magazine, any inserts and this time the raffle tickets into the pre-prepared envelopes.

Once a date has been agreed the volunteers arrive at 9.30 at the meeting room on the top floor of Spittleborough Farm. As Jenny was on holiday, John Bower oversaw the packing of the Summer magazine and the ‘team of volunteers’ then carried the boxes of magazines, inserts and raffle tickets up two flights of stairs and organised themselves into a ‘production line’, some counting out raffle tickets into piles of three, passing them along to be placed inside the folded insert about the AGM, which were then put into the envelopes and sealed. They are then put into sacks ready to be carried down the two flights of stairs to the car for delivery to the sorting office.

This time there were fourteen volunteers including John Millican, one of the two new editors, who soon mucked in going to the shop for biscuits, to the Post Office to weigh a filled envelope, bringing up more supplies for packing and helping out on the production line.

Meantime another volunteer was filling the envelopes that were being hand delivered. All the envelopes had been pre franked, but only those actually put into the sacks are paid for, so John had to do a bit of arithmetic to deduct the eighty odd hand delivered magazines from the total before giving the figures to Justine to prepare the necessary paperwork which had to accompany the sacks to the sorting office.

Those living in Wroughton and Royal Wootton Bassett then sorted out the envelopes they were going to deliver by hand. Washing up done and boxes and other materials cleared away, it was time to go. All that was left was for John to deliver the filled sacks to the sorting office and the others envelopes taken ready for hand delivery.

This is a good opportunity to meet other members and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee (this time supplied by Frank) and have a chat whilst filling the envelopes. Although there were fourteen of us last time the number of volunteers available varies, if you think you would like to help with this then contact Jenny Stratton, chair of Wootton Bassett Branch.

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Situation Vacant - Events Sales Manager

The Trust attends a number of events such as Festivals and boat shows during the year. To ensure that it gains maximum financial and membership advantage at each event the Trust is looking to appoint a Sales Manager.

The main tasks would be to:
- Liaise with the Membership Secretary, Events Director and Merchandising Director to ensure that appropriate materials and personnel are at events where the Trust is exhibiting
- Organise teams to act as ‘Events Sales Staff, encouraging membership applications and selling Trust items such as merchandise and raffle tickets
- Provide briefing and advice to Trust personnel on duty at events

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Trust Officials and Council of Management

Council of Management:

Chairman: Vacant
Vice Chair: Kath Hatton, 4 Charlton Hill, Edington, Westbury, BA13 4PL 01380 831 231
Co. Secretary/Vice Chair Chris Coyle, 27 Seymour Road, Bath BA1 6DZ 07710 737 166
Treasurer: Peter Kinsman, Nant-y-Broch, Purton Stoke, Swindon SN5 4JG 01793 771 548
IWA Rep: Roger Holmes, 72 Primrose Hill, Lydney, GL15 5SP 01594 840 316

Project Director - North: Vacant
Project Director - West: Colin Fletcher, Lower Foxhangers Farm, Rowde SN10 1SS 01380 828 254
Project Director - Central/WPO Swindon: Ray Aldridge, contact via Trust Office 07502 046 708
Project Director - East: Vacant
Fundraising Director: Kath Hatton, 4 Charlton Hill, Edington, Westbury, BA13 4PL 01380 831 231
Environment Director: Dr David Cook, 11 Highfields Road, Early, Reading RG6 5RZ 01189 863 284
Engineering Directors: Eddie Thomas, 14 Sandringham Road, Swindon SN3 1HP 01793 534 404
Vacant

Health & Safety: Dave Stirling, Contact via Trust Office 08452 268 567
Branch Chair East Vale: Brian Stovold 10 Kestrels Grove Wantage OX12 0QA 01235 763072
Branch Chair WB: Jenny Stratton, 35 Sheriden Drive, Wootton Bassett, SN4 8JJ 01793 850310
Branch Chair MCC: Derek Flexer 29 Rowden Hill, Chippenham, SN15 2AQ. 01249 656 497
WPO MCC Branch: Douglas Harris Chiverlins House Sheldon Chippenham SN14 0XQ 01249 652 236IT/Tech Ops: Dave Maloney, 18 Bolts Croft, Chippenham SN15 3GQ 07809 374 754/ 01249 658699

Communications Director: Vacant
Membership Director: Vacant, contact via Trust office
Towpath Project Director: Vacant
Events Director: Vacant
Land Negotiations Director: Vacant

Officers
Archivist: Doug Small, 8 Raymond Rd, Maidenhead SL6 6DF 01628 544 666
Contact Officer Abingdon: Martin Buckland, 4 West Avenue, Abingdon OX14 1QP 01235 204 115
Branch Chair F&L: Andrew Chapman Dauntsey Lodge Farm, Sodom Lane, Dauntsey, Wilts, SN15 4JA. 01249 890379 / 07778 568 957

Branch Chair Swindon: Rod Hacker, 11 Whittington Road, Swindon, SN5 7DF 07840 272 817
B’ch Chair West Vale: Alan Norris, Greenfields, Station Road, Shrivenham, SN6 8JL 01793 783 024
Administrator: Justine Hanley, PO Box 3630, Swindon, SN4 4AN 08452 268 567
Finance Assistant: Ann O’Donaghe, PO Box 3630, Swindon, SN4 4AN 08452 268 567
Events Co-ordinator: John Minns 19 Compton Drive Abingdon OX14 2DF 01235 525 116
Trip Boats: Robert Yeowell and Sue Paine, 01793 827 678
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
PR/Press Officer: Vacant
Webmaster: Dave Maloney, as above
WRG rep/Technical Ops: George Eycott, Knowle House, 1 Ham Road, Wanborough, SN4 0DF 07771 775 745

Partnership - Wiltshire Council Countryside Officer:
Ken Oliver, Wiltshire Council, Monkton Park, Chippenham, Wilts, SN15 1ER Email Ken.oliver@wiltshire.gov.uk 01249 706494

Trust Office
PO Box 3630, Swindon, SN4 4AN 0845 226 8567

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

Once an endangered species – top of Defra’s list – voles are now being seen in the canal area around Challow in increasing numbers.

BBOWT’s community wildlife officer Mark Bradfield reports that surveys have found voles over the past two seasons. In 2003 there was only one site of vole occupation; currently 18 out of 22 sites were found to be positive. Volunteer surveyors look for feeding signs, latrines, and listen for the occasional characteristic ‘plop’ as an animal launches itself into the water. BBOWT has just concluded a very successful campaign which raised £37,000, plus £5,000 each from Thames Water and the Environment Agency. At the same time, I understand that the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust has paid a considerable sum of money to transport 21 voles from the Biffa site at Wootton Bassett to a breeding site in Devon. This appears surprising: is it possible for bodies with common aims to work together more economically?

The vole has a short life but a busy one: it lives for up to two years and produces three to six litters a year, each of between three and eight young. The water vole, arvicola terrestris, has a plump body and short furry tail, ears hidden in dense fur, and a blunt round nose. It is one of several similar varieties (Scotland has its own variation). These harmless herbivores are preyed on by mink, which have been largely responsible for the decline in numbers.

The bank vole is similar to the water vole and lives in the same places: the banks of streams and grassy areas. It has fur of a richer brown, and a longer tail. I have observed its feeding habits in my own garden some months ago. It came from its shelter in a pile of garden rubbish, straight to the overspill from the bird feeder, picked up a piece of food and made its way straight back, repeating its actions at short intervals. Unfortunately we had eventually to burn the rubbish, but, reader, the vole was not in situ at the time! All voles are in fact protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, so I hope my family were not breaking the law.

Confusingly, the water vole is known as the water rat, and has been immortalised as “Ratty” in the classic The Wind in the Willows, but there is nothing rat-like about him.

Everyone who has read the book remembers him as one of the heroes.