



Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

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

Patron: The former Duchess of Cornwall



Melksham, Calne & Chippenham and Foxham & Lyneham Branch Members' Report for March 2024

Chair's Report



Branch News

Thank You

I want to start this month's report by saying a massive Thank You on behalf of the Branch to John Goring. Not only is he carrying out Branch Secretary duties, but also secretary of the Events Committee and The Work Party Management Group. If that's not enough he is secretary of the Trust restCom group. At Branch level he is also managing the record keeping for all our H&S and training documents, keeps our branch inventory up to date and is maintaining the servicing documents until a specific servicing sheet is created for a piece of kit. Phew...Thanks John 😊

Swindon Branch

MCC volunteers continue to assist Swindon Branch, with Fiona Rivers helping Swindon Work Party Organiser (WPO) Henry Sullivan to get a load of their kit back to Swindon. This has the added benefit of clearing one of our small containers. Some more kit is to go back, which I will probably take to the Peterborough Arms so that it can be collected from there.

Fundraising

I made a bid to Chippenham Area Board for a grant to go towards a bank mower for the Bee Route tractor that Howard Yardy had suggested would be useful to save volunteers hours of brushcutter work. This unit would cut the grass on the canal banks and allow the grass to be cut around the base of trees. The Area Board agreed a grant of £1,175 and with money already available, we have been able to order this mower. This kit of course is used anywhere along the canal line within driving distance of the tractor, currently juts Royal Wootton Bassett. Our fundraisers are looking for a trailer, which will get the Bee Route tractor to all areas along the line of the canal ... subject to a willing volunteer with a vehicle powerful enough to tow it 😊

Through personal contacts, Gordon Olson has made the Trust aware of planning proposals for 2,525 houses in the Pewsham area of Chippenham, which could benefit the Trust in the form of S106 funding. Under S106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended, contributions can be sought from developers towards the costs of providing community and social infrastructure. We have benefitted from this in Melksham for the Melksham Link Project with David Wilson Homes donating £75,000 of S106 money. The proposal at Pewsham is in the early stages but representations will be made as soon as the process allows.

Projects

Looking forward to 2024/25, a Project planning meeting involving MCC WPOs and advisors is planned for mid April. The Project Funding Matrix submitted to HQ in 2023 will also be reviewed.

River Avon in Chippenham

I have been attending meetings concerning the Chippenham River Project which is dealing with the refurbishment of areas at the side of the River Avon in Chippenham. We are joining with partner organisations to lobby the Environment Agency (EA) for a like for like solution when they replace the radial gate in the River Avon in Chippenham. This gate is being removed and, unless a similar alternative is provided, the water level in the river will drop considerably.

The EA favour “re-wilding” the river in Chippenham, which will effectively lower the water level and the speed of the river, so it might end up a simple stream and not the lovely wide and useful waterway it currently is. The EA & Town Council are holding public consultations on the dates listed below and, if you live in Chippenham or surrounding areas, I would urge you to visit one of these and make comment as and where you see fit.

Drop-in Event 1

Date: 19th April 2024

Time: 2:00pm-7:00pm

Venue: Wiltshire Council
Offices, Monkton Park,
Chippenham, SN15 1ER

Drop-in Event 2

Date: 22nd April 2024

Time: 2:00pm-7:00pm

Venue: Town Hall High
Street, Chippenham
SN15 3ER

Drop-in Event 3

Date: 8th May 2024

Time: 2:00pm-7:00pm

Venue: Town Hall High
Street, Chippenham
SN15 3ER

Feedback, please

Finally could I ask for your feedback on the detail in the monthly MCC Members Reports.

... is there too much, just enough ... I suspect there is not too little!

Your feedback would be appreciated.

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Notes from the Trust Executive

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

New Director

Thuan Bui will be joining us as our interim branding director.

Thuan's main responsibilities will be:

- **Branding:** most of this has already been done by previous branding director;
- **Targeting:** defining the persons that we are targeting for our marketing (volunteers, members, corporates, government);
- **Messaging:** making sure that our messaging fits those different groups; and
- **Training:** to ensure our comms reach the target.

National Forest

Wiltshire Council are putting in an application for a second National Forest. There is already one up north, which was established 30 years ago. There is a new competition to set up a second one, and the prize money is about £9-10 million.

The plan is to link up about 500 square miles of old royal hunting forest from around Wells in the South to around Melksham. Part of the canal route would be in the North of the area. It is not a land grab, but a way to increase tree coverage. Mike Gibben, Trust CEO, has written a letter of support for the plan.

In a few months' time we will see if they have reached the short list of about four counties, and can go through to the second round. The bidding process is run by DEFRA.

Wiltshire Council

Following some changes at Wiltshire Council, Cllr. Sven Hocking has been appointed as the portfolio holder for Arts Heritage & Tourism, which includes canals. We welcome Cllr. Hocking as the new Chair of the Wiltshire Swindon & Oxfordshire Canal Partnership and thank Cllr. Najjar for his work on the project for the past three years.

Trust Organisation

Finally, there is a new organisational plan being shared by HQ.

Please note that it incorrectly lists me as Chair of restCom, which I have stepped down from. The Chair is now Peter Thomas, Trust COO.

Dave Maloney

Chair, MCC and F&L Branch

Executive Member for Sustainability and Usage

dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk

07809 374 754

Work Parties



Pewsham Locks

Restoration

Well the rains continued throughout the month but we still managed to carry out plenty of work.

Most work was centred on our three main projects: The Carpenters Workshop, The Dry Dock and Top Lock Bridge, which all have their separate reports.

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As well as the work on these projects the following has been achieved:

- a safe working area was created for the brick cutter. This has now been put in place and is being used to cut bricks for the Top Lock work;
- good to see Brian Grinham back on site and cleaning bricks;
- the Welfare Unit roof was painted, which will hopefully stop the water leaks;
- the water harvesting tray/framework was retrieved and made ready to be put up on the roof of the Welfare Unit (hoping to collect some water!);
- a stand was made up for having a water butt put on it, ready for storage of the harvested water; this will also feed water into the large water tanks within the Welfare Unit; fingers crossed, we will have running water to the sinks for hand washing;
- a grass pathway was cut around the top of the Lower Pound and the working area around the Dry Dock;
- a pathway running behind the Carpenters Workshop down to the Lower Pound was cleared of debris;
- the grass around The Wharf area was strimmed ready for the Boat Trips on the first of the Pewsham Days on Saturday 13 April;
- dredging took place where Hannah's Brook enters the canal; this resulted in the removal of a large amount of silt, and hopefully will allow for the passage of our work boat *Boswell* and trip boat *The Mary Archard*;
- *Pewsham* (aka the Butty) was taken up to Hannah's Brook ready for the Work Party Organisers' site visit to discuss ways to limit the silt entering the canal;
- Work Party Organiser Fiona Rivers carried out a Health & Safety audit with our H&S Adviser Andrew Fergusson, who was happy with our safe working culture; and
- Fiona also gave a H&S induction to a new volunteer and Toolbox Talks on First Aid Kits & use of the Defibrillator and on RAMS (Risk Assessments and Method Statements) to other volunteers.



the bench saw plinth in place (top) and the bench saw positioned



dredging near triangle wood

Maintenance

We've also been busy on maintaining our Plant & Equipment:

- the battery was replaced on one of our dumpers (battery kindly supplied by Martin Palmer);
- the drive belt tensioner was adjusted on the 26" All Terrain Mower;
- the inside walls of Pop-up Café were painted;
- a sump hole was dug, using the large excavator, for cement mixer wash out;
- a new fuel filter was fitted to the Jacobsen Truck, aka the buggy (it's running much better now);
- a battery isolation switch was fitted to the large excavator; and
- we started preparing the wooden sides of our "second" road trailer ready for painting.

Howard Wilson

Work Party Organiser

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Green Lane Farm

No further work parties this month mainly due to the fact we lost the bulk of our weekend volunteers during the summer. I am however planning to bid to Calne Area Board for material costs that will help us level the towpath along this section.

Dave Maloney
Work Party Organiser



Pudding Brook

No further work parties this month mainly due to the fact we lost the bulk of our weekend volunteers during the summer. However, the relevant Project Brief has been started for the investigation of the Studley Road Bridge, which is at the end of this section in regards of uncovering and making pedestrian access available ... early days.

Dave Maloney
Work Party Organiser

Projects



Peterborough Arms

Our thanks to Keith Vickery who joins our small band, Kev Murray, Mike Hamlyn and me, in working at the Peterborough.

Water ingress

The trial wall of blocks is working really well and the volume of water in the pub porch is slight. As a result of this wall there is less debris entering the pipe that takes surface/downpipe water from the front of the pub to the side garden.

There is no water getting to the cellar due to works carried out at the back of the pub. The newly installed pumps and switch system will tackle any water that overcomes defences.

As of Tuesday 9 April, the Peterborough Arms Drainage Appeal stood at £10,881. Our thanks to all those generous people who have donated to date.

Refurbishment

Bedroom 1 refurbishment is still taking place, with the main window sill and frames now fully painted and the last secondary double glazing unit in this room installed.

The rest of the window panes (estimated 72) are being prepared and painted. The pub is now on fibre broadband and the telephone cable that was causing us some irritation in getting secondary double glazing fitted has been terminated on the outside wall.

Would you like to help

Don't forget we need more competent DIYers ... even if it's a few hours; they will make a difference. Please get in touch if you can help (dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk).

Dave Maloney
Refurbishment Lead
Dave Maloney



Carpenters Workshop

Progress is frustratingly slow due to the attitude of the contractors.

Volunteers have had to carry out some work on the side wall panels due to lack of stability in the high winds.

Thanks to the accounts team and MCC volunteers, roofing battens, felt and nails are now on site along with the roof rafters.

The timber for creating the windows is on site and Bob Howlett and others will be using facilities offered at Calne Men's Shed to start creating the window frames this month.

We are in the final stages of an order for solar panels for the off side roof (no panels will be seen from the towpath) and are chatting to a local reclamation yard about reclaimed Welsh slate for the roof.

Dave Maloney (with assistance from Ray Canter and Basil Raddy)
Project Lead

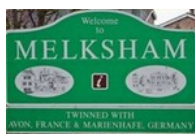


Dry Dock

Work on the Dry Dock has resumed with the casting of five 11ft 6in coping sections to date. The steel caging has also been made up for five more, which we hope to cast in the next five work days. This will leave the four corner pillars to cast, plus the curved and angled wall sections.

Due to an ever increasing work load Jon Coates has yet to compare for any anomalies the two quotes we have received for the supply of timber. Both companies were given the same brief and cutting list, but one quote is £15k lower than the other, so we need to be sure that we are comparing like for like. Jon is aware this comparison must be complete by May 2024.

Dave Maloney (with assistance from Basil Raddy)
Project Lead



Melksham Link

The Binnies study on river proposals (including Biodiversity Net Gain) has been further delayed. We are now hoping to get the first report by early April.

We had hoped to recommence flow surveys of the river in Melksham in early spring, but the very wet winter means that the earliest we can hope to be on the river is late April.

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Regarding the Hydro scheme, we have been in further discussions with Renewables First, but reasonable predictions of likely output are very difficult to make.

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

Paul Lenaerts
Project Manager, Melksham Link

Wildlife



The arrival of spring meant a last chance to lay some of the hedges along the towpath and plant up some of the gaps. We had 100 small trees/hedge plants donated by CGI IT Ltd. This was arranged by volunteer Richard Doyle who works for the company.



Gansh Parmar and Graham Stroud put the finishing touches to the planting.

We also had some time for hedgelaying lessons.



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The wood chip delivered by Catley's Ltd of Devizes was transferred from Green Lane Farm to Pewsham where it was used for a new mud-free path to the Carpenters Workshop. The meadows, Double Bridge and the towpath were mowed and will now be left to allow wildflowers to grow. It wasn't possible to use the cut and collect mower as the ground was too soggy.



It's been a good year for primroses along the canal. The coppicing work carried out in the hazel copse opposite Double Bridge has produced a flush of flowers (celandines) in the area.



Howard Yardy
Wildlife Officer

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Events



Skittles

We won the Skittles Match against the Devizes Branch of the Kennett & Avon Canal Trust (339 to 335) and brought home (and transferred to Steve) £40 as our share of the Raffle takings. So, a good night, with some excellent food. Lisa did a fantastic job on the scoreboard.

Spring Quiz

Meanwhile, Quiz Question writing/ scrutiny continues at a pace with help from Martin Palmer, Malcolm Hitchinson, Colin Fletcher, Christine Watt, Sandy Wright, Graham Stroud Graham Wright. Hope that I haven't missed anyone!

Pewsham Days

On **Saturday 13 April** we will be having our first **Pewsham Day**: Boat Trips, Pop-up Café, Worksite Tours & Green Team demos (weather/ water levels, etc permitting). I believe that sufficient volunteers have already been identified.

In some ways, this is a trial run. We have a friendly group being shown the worksite (possibly at a distance as it is extremely muddy in places) and we've never opened the Café this early in the season before. However, we're fully prepared and expect to have good weather, so please do come down and see what's going on. If you are coming from afar, please check with either Bob Howlett (boblin46@gmail.com) or myself (brian.wright@wbct.org.uk) first.

Looking forward to May:

- Our second **Pewsham Day** of Boat Trips, Pop-up Café, Worksite Tours and Green Team Demonstrations will be on **Saturday 11 May**. If anyone wants to help, please let me know (brian.wright@wbct.org.uk) These Pewsham Days will repeat (weather/ water levels, etc permitting) on the second Saturday of the month throughout the summer.
- We are considering having an Information Stand at the Castle Combe Steam Rally on Saturday 18 & Sunday 19 May. Does anyone want to help; please let me know?
- Going to Castle Combe will make this a busy month, as the
- following weekend, **Friday 24 to Monday 27 May** we have the **Chippenham Folk Festival**. Again if anyone wants to help, please let John (john.goring@wbct.org.uk), Bob (boblin46@gmail.com) or me (brian.wright@wbct.org.uk) know? We need the full compliment of Boat Skippers/ Crew, Shore Crew, Information Stand Helpers, etc. On a good weekend, in the past, we have taken over £1,000, so it is an important fundraiser for us, although good fun too.

Brian Wright
Chair, Events Committee



Brian receives the Skittles trophy for the second year running

Boats



Due to water in the starter motor and other issues, our work boat Boswell has not been out this month.(it does now start and run though).

The Mary Archard, one of our trip boats was taken to Royal Wootton Bassett Branch for experience in conjunction with their new trip boat “Nonsuch”. However due to heavy rain and hail this was curtailed early.

As some dredging has taken place at Triangle Wood on the canal at Pewsham, it should be possible to run The Mary Archard for training and boat trips at the Pewsham Day on Saturday 13 April, for which we will require help. Please contact me (boblin46@gmail.com) if you are able to help.

Bob Howlett
Boats Officer

Branch Webpages and Digital Comms



WBCT Website

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

WBCT YouTube Channel

Keep up to date with latest videos featuring work along the whole of the canal at: <https://www.youtube.com/@wiltsberkscanaltrust>.

The latest Local Videos released this month are:

- Royal Wootton Bassett Branch Narrow Boat delivery;
- Owl Boxes and towpath clearance;
- Carpenters Workshop Wall Installation – Phase 1; and
- Hedge Laying at Pewsham Locks with Fiona Rivers

Social media

Posts to Facebook included information on:

- the Newt Pond at Naish Hill;
- the last day of the season for Hedge Laying and Tree Planting;
- the erection of the Carpenters Workshop Walls;
- the creation of a temporary path to the Carpenters Workshop;
- advertising our monthly Branch meeting;
- Bee Route work at Pewsham; and
- MCC Skittles Match.

Additional

I have also been uploading and cataloguing / archiving photographs and videos of our work as I receive them.

Howard Wilson
Digital Comms Officer

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Media Relations



No activity to report this month.

Justin Guy
Media Relations Officer

Community Engagement



Work on building a first iteration dataset of the MCC Branch Partners is largely complete. MCC has provided a valuable service to the other four branches, who now need to pick up the ball and start running with Partner mailings.

We sent MCC’s partners a live mailing on Sunday 31 March about our work at Pewsham Locks. A copy is attached at the end of this report.

I have offered to fund a one year’s experimental deployment of Better Impact’s volunteer management system at MCC subject to Howard Wilson’s agreement that we should conduct a trial, as recommended by Dave Thomas.

Gordon Olson
Acting Community Partnering Officer

Membership



New member/membership numbers for this month and year to date (YTD) are given in the following table together with totals as at the date shown. Note that MCC Branch numbers are shown in red.

Members by Branch	New members						Current numbers	
	March (Last Month)		April (MTD)		2024 (YTD)		Membership	Members
	Membership	Members	Membership	Members	Membership	Members	Membership	Members
RWB	1	2			1	2	154	232
Swindon	1	1			6	9	374	534
West Vale	2	3			5	7	84	122
MCC					8	14	549	780
East Vale & Abingdon					3	4	224	300
Offline					4	5	273	350
F&L							46	68
Totals (all types)	4	6	0	0	27	41	1704	2386

The table includes members and memberships for active memberships. These are status New, Current and Grace. The membership must also have a valid Start Date

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For comparison, the total number of memberships/members at this time last year were:

- **MCC** 544 memberships (549 now) 768 members (780 now)
- **F&L** 47 memberships (46 now) 69 members (68 now)
- **Combined** 591 memberships (595 now) 837 members (848 now)

Gordon Olson
Membership Secretary

Finances



Several income items in March:

- £100 donation arising from the work by Dave Maloney and Howard Yardy to reuse a large oil tank;
- £80 for logs;
- £75 from Dave Maloney's talk at Devizes & District U3A;
- £40 as our half of the money from the raffle at the skittles match; and
- £16 at the Branch meeting.

Small amounts were spent:

- £46 for two chainsaw chains;
- £44 for plant repair parts;
- £41 for grease, cable ties, tools etc.;
- £40 meeting room hire, Jan & Feb;
- £30 for further vintage tools for the Carpenters Workshop; and
- £82 to be charged to Melksham Link project, for rope and a textbook for river flow surveys.

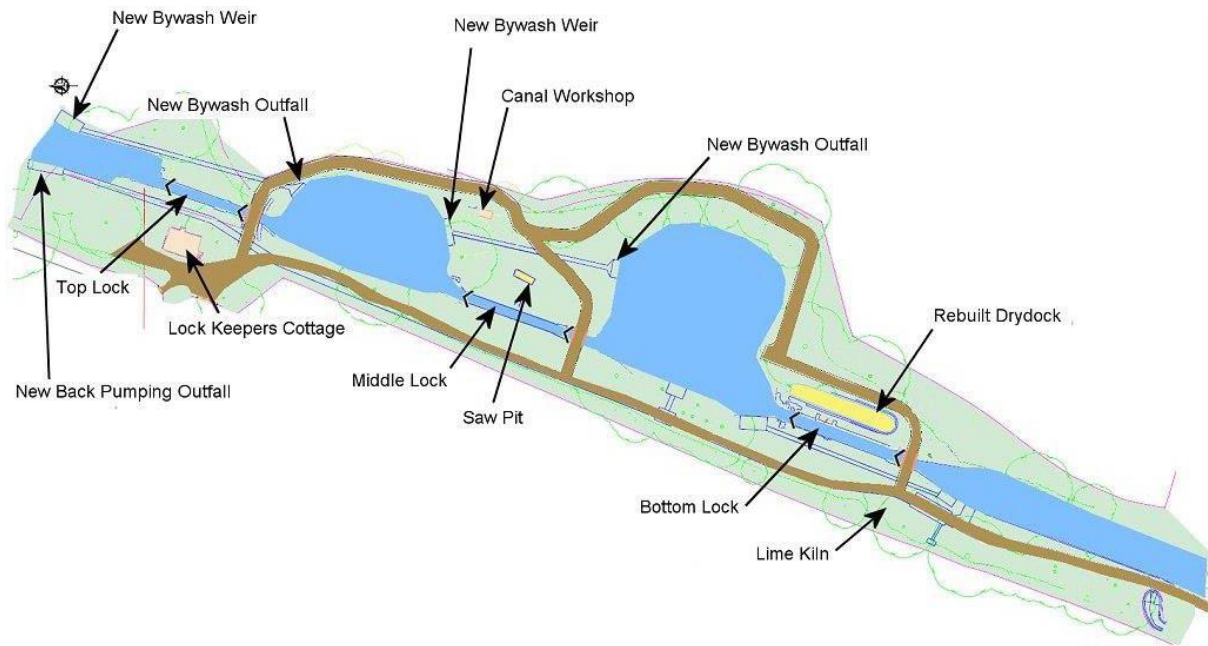
Bank balance at the end of the month was £2,834.

Steve Roberts
Treasurer



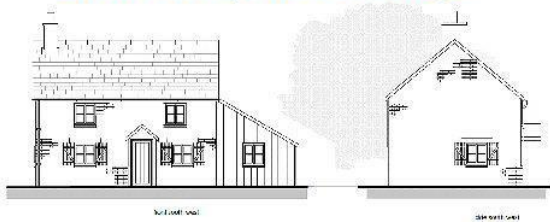
Pewsham Locks Heritage Site: Project status at 27/03/2024

Here is an overview of the work the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust is doing at Pewsham to restore three locks and a historic industrial site which serviced the construction and maintenance needs of the canal in the 19th Century,



Here are artist's illustrations of the four buildings identified in the map above:

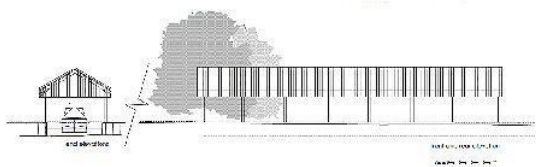
Lock Keeper's Cottage



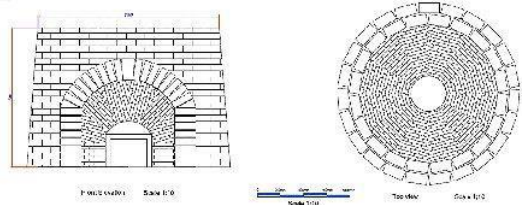
Canal Work Shop



Dry Dock



Lime Kiln



The buildings on the site

The Trust is currently working on the rebuilding of the Canal Workshop, aka the Carpenters' Workshop, and the Dry Dock. This work is being done by our volunteers and is using heritage and traditional materials wherever possible.

The Carpenters' workshop project is well advanced and awaits roofing in the course of the next month. In due course we want to offer the Carpenters' workshop as a learning centre where pupils at local schools can gain an understanding of working life on the canal in the 19th Century.

The Dry Dock, believed to be one of a very few examples in English heritage waterways, is awaiting completion of the coppicing to which the vertical members will be attached to support the tiled roof.

We have no detailed plans at present for the restoration of the Lock Keeper's cottage or the lime kiln, both of these will require the raising of new funds by the Trust.

The flight of 3 Locks

The four structures identified above are directly adjacent to a flight of three locks at Pewsham. These locks are located at the heart of the complex and are key to renewed navigation and future boating visitors on our canal. Their restoration to full operations is expected to require the work of specialist contractors and this will require new funding.

Meanwhile our volunteers are working on an accommodation bridge which will cross the top lock and provide access to the Carpenter's Workshop from the main entrance.

Gordon Olson

Community Partnering Officer, Wilts & Berks Canal Trust.