



Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

Patron: Her Majesty Queen Camilla

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



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

Chair's Report



I would like to open this month's report by reminding members that the **Chair's Summer Dinner** will be held in the Barn at the Bell Inn, Lacock on **Tuesday 11 June** ... 6.30 for 7pm.

Not only is this a great chance to meet friends and acquaintances, but also to meet active volunteers who have a wealth of knowledge of what is going on along the line managed by our Branch.

If this wasn't enough, I will be giving a 30 minute update of the smaller but important activities that don't always make the monthly reports.

Please email me (dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk) to book your seat(s) and for a menu produced for us by the team at the Bell.

Branch News

Since my last report I have attended a number of meetings on behalf of the Branch. These have included:

- Melksham Link;
- Chippenham River Avon Project;
- Project meeting on the Carpenters Workshop;
- Trust Executive meetings; and
- meetings with Thuan Bui (Trust Branding).

At Pewsham I hosted Martin Hollis (Trust Chairman), Mike Gibben (Trust CEO) and Mr Malcolm Hewitt. This meeting was to show Malcolm our ongoing work at Pewsham and for Mike and Martin to explain our plans and aspirations going forward. I am pleased to say that, after this meeting, Malcolm agreed to set up and lead an advocate programme so that the Trust can start to reach out via his networking group to MPs, corporate heads etc. A title for Malcolm's group has yet to be determined.

Chippenham Avon Project

Those who live in Chippenham are hopefully actively addressing the issue of the new river plans, which at the moment will effectively see the water level drop to such an extent that boating will no longer be possible on the River Avon at the Town Bridge and upstream of it.

The Trust has officially responded to these plans expressing concern at the drop in water levels and challenging the Environment Agency with regards to the lack of studies to show a net gain in biodiversity if the current plans are adopted. Our comments will be shared when the Minutes of the May Branch meeting are sent out.

Please add your comments to the consultation document, which can be found at <https://www.chippenhamavonproject.com/about>. Responses to this plan must be received **by 5pm on Tuesday 28 May**.

Thank You

Thanks to Howard Wilson who, despite not being able to attend work parties due to recovering from a recent knee op, has carried on working hard behind the scenes in a number of areas: developing our Interpretation Boards/signage; sorting photos, including a large amount of newly discovered ones; and coordinating weekly work parties, to name but a few.

Fundraising

I made time to put a bid in to Calne Area Board seeking funds for materials to level the towpath at Green Lane Farm. The path is under restoration and currently walkable but, it is not flat or as level as it should be. If the bid is successful I hope we can use corporate work party volunteers to carry out this work in the Spring and Summer months.

We were very pleased to receive another donation of £1,000 from the Heddington & Stockley Steam Rally Committee for our Green work along the MCC line. Also £200 towards our work at Pewsham from an appreciative mum whose son used to enjoy walks along the Pewsham stretch.

Pewsham Locks

Can I please remind members that there is **no vehicular access to Pewsham Locks** unless it is by prior arrangement. Our lease of the lane accessing the Pewsham site is for volunteers and contractors only.

Volunteers were delayed leaving site recently due to an unknown car parked in the Green Lane. Volunteers could have simply locked the gate and left the owner to sort it out but, even after a long day, they waited until the car owner arrived back at his car. We can't always guarantee to do this.

If you want to access the site by car please contact Dave Maloney, Howard Wilson or Ray Canter via the standard WBCT email (firstname.lastname@wbct.org.uk). Thank You.

WBCT AGM

MCC are hosting this year's Trust AGM which will be held at Abbeyfield School on **Saturday 19 October 2024**. More details to follow.

Volunteers required

There are many ways that members can get more involved, even in a small but meaningful way. Please consider the opportunities below:

Civil Engineers

We are desperate for Civil Engineers to help our work at Pewsham. We are running behind on a number of projects due to the lack of these engineers, and the burden on the trust Chief Engineer, Jon Coates is immense.

If you are, or know of, a civil engineer with time to spare please do get in touch. You will make a great difference and help volunteers progress our work to create a Go To destination for visitors who want to come and see what Pewsham Locks were like in their heyday of the mid 1800s. Please contact dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk in the first instance.

Community Partnering Officer

We are looking for a volunteer to engage proactively with the Trust's partner stakeholders along the MCC route, focused on community organisations such as schools, parish councils, area boards, uniform groups etc., to facilitate progress in the restoration of the Wilts & Berks canal, and the delivery of education and public wellbeing. This promises to be a very rewarding role, and if you would like to see a copy of the Terms of Reference or to discuss the role in more detail please contact gordon.olson@wbct.org.uk

Fundraising Admin

We need more volunteers who can sit at a computer and complete applications for grants etc. that can be reviewed by the Trust's Fundraising Team prior to submission. If you can spare a few hours a month, please get in touch with ali.arnold@wbct.org.uk

Events Committee

Every year there are a multitude of events in our area that we could attend, whether to fundraise, to raise awareness or, maybe, simply a social for Branch members to let their hair down. None of these can happen without Events Committee members to organise and coordinate volunteers etc. Please consider joining this very rewarding clean shoes team and contact brian.wright@wbct.org.uk

Bee Route/Meadow Team

If you are interested in the wildlife element of canal restoration, why not Join Howard Yardy's team to look after the Green element of our Blue/Green Corridor (which our canal line is often referred as)? Work will include, but not be limited to, meadow creations, hedge laying, tree planting, and habitat management/creation.

Contact howard.yardy@wbct.org.uk for more details.

Notes from the Trust Executive

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

Engineering

Cases For Support (prerequisite paperwork before fundraising can commence) have been approved for:

- progressing an early contractor involvement (ECI) contract to investigate the feasibility of an alternative method of constructing the **M4 crossing** using jacking/tunnelling techniques; discussions continue with possible design and build contractors; and
- developing the business case for the hydro generator at **Melksham Gate Weir**; the next step is to appoint people to the key roles of project manager and consultants to undertake design and cost appraisals.

Planning

The developer for Wichelstowe has finally resolved planning conditions and can start on the phase 3 canal construction.

The possible loss of a route into Swindon town centre through the Oasis site will make the continuation of the canal from Wharf Green to the south side of the railway line much less valuable. A meeting with the developer of the Oasis and a councillor is scheduled.

Dave Maloney

Chair, MCC and F&L Branch

Executive Member for Sustainability and Usage

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Work Parties



Work Party Management Group

Planning

We held a special planning meeting in April to begin to talk through possible priorities once our current three Major Projects are finished. Obviously, there's still a lot of work to do before they can be regarded as finished, but we need to stay ahead of the curve. You'll hear a lot more about future projects over the coming months, and I hope we will be able to get the views of the Branch as a whole through discussions at the Branch meetings.

April's meeting

Another positive meeting this month, with a lot of progress being noted. This included completing nearly all of our outstanding Actions, significantly reducing the number of Jobs remaining on our Jobs List (these are the smaller jobs that sit outside of our Major Projects, but which are just as important) and making good inroads into the maintenance of our small machines (our larger kit ... dumpers, excavators etc. ... is more challenging).

Andrew Fergusson reported on the results of the Branch H&S audit that he and Fiona Rivers recently carried out on behalf of the Trust. The feedback from the Trust was very positive; they are extremely happy with the way that all the volunteers have embraced our H&S policies and culture. One learning point came up in relation to working with contractors; we need to be more assertive when it comes to the practices of third parties working on our sites.

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

It's time to inspire and excite...

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

As ever, Howard Yardy's report on Green Team activity covered a whole range of activities. We discussed possible sitings of mink, managing Ash dieback; establishing reed pulling protocols and the progress of Howard's tree planting project.

Within Major Projects, we agreed to continue our investigations of the Studley Road Bridge, and to pursue a possible long term solution to the Hannah's Brook silt problem. We also agreed to create a 'scrape' near the River Avon to promote biodiversity, thus offsetting any adverse effects of the necessary removal of vegetation from the Naish Hill section of the canal.

Our next meeting will be in June, but you can be assured that before then, whenever two or more WPOs get together, they'll be discussing what to do, when and how!

Ray Canter
Chair, Work Party Management Group



Pewsham Locks

We continue to get a good number of volunteers at our work parties, which is great to see, so a big THANK YOU to everyone who gives their time to help.

Top Lock Bridge

This is one of our three Major Projects, and I'm please to say that the rebuild of the eastern wall of the lock chamber has now started, and steady progress has been made through the month.

The brick cutter is coming into its own and is making life so much easier for Roger Noyce and the team. We are most grateful to Jenny Lund for her generous donation towards its purchase.



Roger lining up the brick cutter prior to operation

It is great to be able to add bricks to the wall rather than removing them!

Other Major Projects

Work continues on the Carpenters Workshop and the Dry Dock. More details in the reports from the Project Leads.

Other Work

As well as the work on our main three projects, the following has been achieved at Pewsham:

- Howard Yardy and team have been cutting up the large pile of logs just outside the main compound and putting them into storage for drying; these will create a useful source of income in 18 months or so when they are seasoned;
- the ditch to the East of Top Lock was cleared and a drainage trench dug, piped into Top Lock and then back filled; it is hoped that this will take some of the excessive amount of water that is draining through the ground and coming out to the side of the eastern wing wall;



the new drainage ditch and pipe

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- more bricks were cleaned ready for use;
- a causeway was created from the ramp in the Lower Pound to the Dry Dock; this will allow safer and drier access for volunteers and others to access the Dry Dock;
- a water harvesting system has been fitted to the roof of the Welfare Cabin; this includes a solar panel and water pump system;
- potholes in the Green Lane were filled;
- grass was cut within the Works Compound ensuring safe access for volunteers;
- paths were also created ready for the first 'Pewsham Day' of the season;
- Jeremy Brickell and Gary Tytherleigh carried out a Local Maintenance Plan Survey of the line from Top Lock to the Two Stiles. Issues raised are passed on to the WPOs for inclusion in their Jobs List and then for actioning.
- Henry Sullivan from Swindon Branch, with the help of Fiona Rivers and her van, took away much of the Swindon kit that we have been storing for them, now that they have their own storage facilities; this has emptied container #4, which is now being converted to include a work bench / work space area for Bob Howlett and Boat Team; and
- some extra roadstone was laid around the Slipway to make boat recovery easier.



the drainage pipe outlet



our supplies of clean reclaimed bricks continue to grow

Howard Wilson
Work Party Organiser



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. Howard Yardy and his Green Team continue to maintain the towpath on this section

Dave Maloney
Work Party Organiser

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pudding Brook

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Dave Maloney
Work Party Organiser

Projects



Peterborough Arms

The flood Protection Fund stands at just under £12K. Planning drawings have been finalised for submission.

Due to a number of unforeseen circumstances our work on the final letting room has been somewhat delayed since the last Branch meeting. We aim to complete this work by the end of May, just in time to start outdoor work in the Spring/Summer months.

We are down to a team of 3 ½ volunteers, so if you are a competent DIY'er and can spare a few hours or a day a week, please come and join us.

Dave Maloney
Refurbishment Lead
Dave Maloney



Carpenters Workshop

We continue to be frustrated by the lack of progress by the third party erecting the workshop, and concerned about the quality of the work. Jon Coates, Chief Engineer, will be discussing the materials that have yet to be delivered to site with a view to an early handover of the building to volunteers so that we can start to correct some issues and work on the roof and cladding.

Solar panels are ready for delivery, but we have delayed this slightly due to the lack of progress on the building, which has meant that we have yet to start the roofing.

Our local reclamation yard is unable to supply the quantity of Welsh roof slate that we need, so we will have to look further afield, or decide on using new slate instead.

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



Dry Dock

Basil Raddy continues to lead the team creating the coping around the Dry Dock. His team have finished the straight lengths, and are now concentrating on the curved elements.

Dave Maloney (with assistance from Basil Raddy)
Project Lead



Melksham Link

The Binnies study on river proposals (including Biodiversity Net Gain) has now been received, and we have had a meeting with them to discuss options. We are now considering these and hope to get a clear proposal to put to Wiltshire Council by the end of May.

Level surveys covering the A350 Challymead Bridge, and flow surveys of the river in Melksham are planned for mid to late May.

No further progress regarding the Hydro scheme.

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

Paul Lenaerts
Project Manager, Melksham Link

Wildlife



All our trees planted during the winter are showing signs of life.

The cherry trees have had a burst of blossom and now have green cherries on their branches.

The coppiced hazel trees are producing new shoots and have not been set upon by the deer.

We have a new offset verge mower for the Bee Route, which will make it easier to cut the towpath, canal bank and around the base of our trees quickly and safely.



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At Double Bridge the tadpoles are progressing well but numbers are diminishing, probably due to the large number of fish.



The hedges laid by Fiona Rivers near the slipway have had blossom and will now bush up nicely to form a dense hedge.

The new hedge planted by the Carpenters Workshop is starting to grow, and with the section planted by Fiona in previous years will form a great green backdrop to the lock area.

On the bridge, the crop of dandelions has been replaced by buttercups, with lots more flowers to come.



Howard Yardy
Wildlife Officer

Events



The Events Team are now in full swing striving to bring Trust members and the people of Chippenham interesting and fun events. If you can help, please ask. We can always do better/more, but to do so, we need your help.

In April we had:

- **The Spring Quiz**; a huge well done to the Team, taking £842 on the night.
- the following day we started our season of **Pewsham Days**, featuring Boat Trips, the Pop-up Café, tours of the Work Site and Green Team demos. We had a pre-arranged visit from The Chippenham Lions, who between them partook of all of the above. It was so nice to see Lynda and Jeff Daws again

If you know of a group (or you want to create one) that would like a guided tour of our Works Site, please contact me (brian.wright@wbct.org.uk).

Coming up in May and June we have (fine weather has been ordered!):

- **Chippenham Folk Festival 24 – 27 May.** Always a good weekend. In the past the Boat Trips takings have reached four figures. Much more going on than you might imagine. Dave and John Goring are leading on the Info' Stand, while Linda Howlett, Bob Howlett and Martin Palmer are leading on the Boats.
- **The Westonbirt Relish Running Event 23 June** needs Marshalls, for which we get a healthy donation. Marshalling requires no knowledge of either the progress of the canal or running. Tasks range from helping with Check-In, Bag Check, helping at the Food & Drink Stations or simply directing runners. Graham Stroud is leading the Relish Running Events.

Brian Wright
Chair, Events Committee

Boats



A bit more activity this month with a visit from the Lions Club at the first Pewsham Day (Pop-up café, Boat Trips, Work Site Tours and Green Team Demos); and again at the end of the month with Basil Raddy's caravanning colleagues visiting.

In addition, eight members attended a boat training day on Saturday 27 April.

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/@wiltsberks canal trust>.

Social Media

Posts to Facebook included:

- tadpoles at Double Bridge;
- Corporate Volunteers;
- promoting Andrew Vidler's Latest Pewsham update;
- Double Bridge;
- MCC Quiz; and
- Green Team Maintenance and Owl Box at Pewsham.

Additional

I produced a Powerpoint slide show for the Quiz Night.

I have continued with uploading and cataloguing/archiving photographs and videos of our work as I receive them. This has included a large, varied and interesting collection received from Val Melville, for which we are most grateful.

Howard Wilson
Digital Comms Officer

Media Relations



No Press Releases to report this month, but I did visit Pewsham Locks to take some photos for a potential profile for Volunteers' Week.

I took the opportunity to get some additional photos that we can use to promote Howard Wilson's Branch talk in July.

I'm also working on preparing some newspaper coverage for Howard Yardy's talk at the May meeting.

Justin Guy
Media Relations Officer

Finances



Good income is starting to come through from Branch events:

- £506 from the Spring Quiz and raffle, after expenses; and
- £148 from the Pewsham Day's Pop-up Café, Boat Trips and Tours, boosted by donations:
- £121 from customers at Semington Dock;
- £100 member donation towards the cordless drill & driver set; and
- £23 at the branch meeting.

Expenses paid through the Branch bank account were low in April since most items (including the cordless set) went through the HQ account:

- £30 monthly rental at Showell Nursery;
- £17 nuts, bolts etc.;
- £40 welding work on a mower;
- £81 several cables and connectors for 12V battery charging; and
- £50 deposit on the pitch at the Chippenham Folk Festival.

After £1,500 was transferred to the HQ account there was £2,258 in the Branch account at the end of the month.

Steve Roberts
Treasurer