



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



Chair's Report



Chippenham Avon Project

A small group of volunteers lead by Rod Hacker, Trust planning guru, created a response to the Chippenham River Avon Project.

The current plans will lower the river level to such an extent that it will be unsuitable for boating activities. As well as our annual boat trips at the Chippenham Folk Festival, the river is also used for sailing, canoeing and paddle boarding. There have also been Dragon Boat Racing on a number of occasions.

The final response document is attached to this report and has resulted in an invitation from the Environment Agency to discuss its contents. A date is yet to be set.

Branch News

Chippenham Folk Festival

My thanks to the Gazebo Team who helped out at the Chippenham Folk Festival. The number of visitors was probably down last year, due to the weather predominately, but those who popped in were enthusiastic and interested in our work. A young couple who moved to the area six months ago and discovered our line at Pewsham were so pleased with what we had done that they want to help at weekends ... look out for a weekend work party (which we haven't had since Covid).

Community Outreach

Howard Yardy kindly gave up a Sunday morning to host a walking group from Devizes Museum, who were taking in the Pewsham Line as part of their round robin walk from/to Lacock. They were impressed with the work we are carrying out both restoration and environmental.

I am pleased to be able to sponsor the WBCT Scarecrow at the Lacock School Scarecrow trail again this year. Not only does it have a personal benefit for my grandsons, who attend the school, but from a Trust/Branch point of view it keeps us in the public eye with hundreds and hundreds of local families visiting the village to take part in the Scarecrow trail.

Gordon Olson has decided to step down from his role as Community Engagement Officer, and we thank him for all the hard work he put into this role. We will continue to keep informed the list of influential members/groups of the local community who are interested in our work.

We do now of course need a new Community Engagement Officer. This is a role that would suit any Trust member who can spare a few hours a month, and even better if they are interested in community matters/engagement. Please contact me if you can help: dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk

Donations

The £200 donation mentioned in last month's report has been spent on battery powered tools to help our work along the line and at Pewsham in particular.

Trust 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.

Notes from the Trust Executive

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

Engineering

Peterborough Arms water mitigation- planning drawings being created by Martin Stubbs with input from Jon Coates.

Environmental

Mike Gibbin, Trust CEO, has created/updated previous note "A Trust Environmental Policy" and has include information from myself and Howard Yardy.

Boats

Royal Wootton Bassett Branch are to have two pontoons for the new trip boat *Nonsuch*.

Planning

The Trust are engaged with meetings about the South Eastern Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO).

One of the major reasons for not restoring the canal in the Eastern end is the ongoing “threat” of a new reservoir that would wipe out restored sections. After many many years lying dormant, the possibility of such a reservoir is now being discussed and the Trust obviously have an interest.

A dedicated team from East Vale Branch is involved. More info here:

<https://thames-wrmp.co.uk/sesro/>

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

dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk

07809 374 754

Work Parties



Pewsham Locks

As the holiday season is beginning, volunteer numbers have fallen slightly. However we still continue to make good progress. Work on the Carpenters Workshop and Dry Dock is reported separately.

Restoration

We now have a good supply of cut bricks, which is allowing Roger Noyce and team to slowly rebuild the eastern entrance wall of Top Lock. Brian Grinham continues his sterling efforts in cleaning the bricks prior to their use.

Howard Yardy and team have continued cutting up the large pile of logs just outside the main compound and putting them into storage for drying. So much so that five more storage bays have had to be constructed.

A new leak was discovered on the far side of the canal bank opposite the Stone Meadow. Initially this was thought to be close to the bottom of the canal however after clearing vegetation along the canal bank it was eventually located about 300mm (12 inches) below the water line. Discussion with the landowner/ armer allowed us to take an excavator and dumper onto their land via Double Bridge to access the leak. The excavator was used to dig into the bank, remove the old clay, and replace it with new clay. This seems to have stopped the leak – for now!

Grass was cut within the Compound, ensuring safe access for volunteers and for the monthly ‘Open Day’.

Cardboard and mulch was put around recently planted hedge in the Compound.



one of our piles of refurbished bricks (top) and the new log stores (above)

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the completed repair to the leak
just waiting for ten grass to grow back

Work on fitting out Cabin #4 for Bob Howlett and the Boat Team has continued. Shelving has been completed, which opens up the floor space.

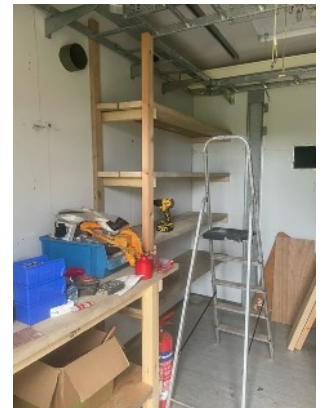
The Compound has been tidied and cleared of scrap.

Unused concrete blocks by the Dry Dock were removed to the Green Lane for storage.

Maintenance

Two new tyres were fitted to the Wheelhorse Tractor

The two hydraulic rams for lifting the bucket on one of our Dumpers, plus the lift/lower valve unit were removed as all were leaking. These have been repaired and replaced. The drive shaft had new bearings fitted and a new pipe made and replaced.



the new look cabin #4

Health & Safety

Fiona Rivers labelled all the containers in the Petrol, Oils and Lubricants (POL) store to ensure all volunteers are aware of its contents.

She also tidied and checked the contents of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shelf.

Training

Fiona gave a potential new volunteer an H&S Induction and Site Tour.

Relevant Risk Assessments and Method Statements (RAMS) were given to volunteers to read and sign as understood.

Four volunteers were inducted on the use of the log splitter; they read the RAMS and signed the relevant forms.

Having sent out a lot of RAMS to volunteers, many have returned forms as having read and understood. Thanks to those volunteers who have done this. If you have not done this yet, please do so at your convenience and return the signed forms to John Goring (john.goring@wbct.org.uk) or leave them in the Welfare Unit when you're next on site.

Fiona gave a Toolbox Talk on Infections and Diseases related to Canal Restoration to ten volunteers.

Howard Wilson
Work Party Organiser



pudding Brook (including North of Studley Lane)

Howard Yardy & Martin Palmer took the strimmer mower to this section as well.

Paperwork for the uncovering of the Studley Lane Bridge portal is in hand. Once we have a plan we can start basic exploration.

We need to erect a post and rail fence to indicate the land between Studley Lane and the old railway line generously donated by Mr Abbot. This will include a gate, so that Mr Abbot can still access the area. We expect this to be completed in June.

The large fallen Willow might have to wait until September.

Dave Maloney
Work Party Organiser



Green Lane Farm

It's the summer, so work on this section is mainly grass cutting to keep the towpath clear.

Howard Yardy and Martin Palmer tried out a new strimmer mower, which was very effective and saved many hours of back breaking strimmer work.

We discovered that we don't have towpath levels on record for this section, so have delayed applying for Area Board funds until we have these levels. We are seeking advice from Engineers and long standing Branch members, who might have such details on file.

Dave Maloney
Work Party Organiser

Projects



Peterborough Arms

We have handed over the last of the bedrooms to the landlord, with the understanding that he and his son will finish the beam painting and some wall painting in the annex area. This is to release an upstairs bedroom for letting.

There are some issues with both of the rooms upstairs: an extractor fan and shower that have stopped working. These will be our priority at the next work party, before moving outside for the summer.

Contractors have been appointed by Wiltshire Council to start work on the road slippage. Some local residents are advising that the road is still moving, and are concerned the proposed fix will not be long term.

Dave Maloney
Refurbishment Lead

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Carpenters Workshop

Rafters are being fitted, albeit slowly, and we have lost at least one contractor's day due to vehicle issues they were having. Still slow progress on their part.

The protective blue membrane that was damaged during wall panel installation has been replaced. This of course will be covered by cladding so will not be seen once the cladding is on.

Volunteers have partially dismantled the ring of scaffolding to create a tiered platform at the southern end of the building to allow the contractors to fit the southern gable panels.

We had sufficient invoices for roof materials for me to be able to submit them to Entrust for consideration of a £10k offer they made to pay for roofing materials.

Solar panels and all the other relevant kit was delivered to site and the reclaimed Welsh roof slates from a local source will be delivered in the first week of June.

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



Dry Dock

Basil Raddy, David Peatfield and their team continue with the coping at the Dry Dock. The cages for the curved coping have been made and the curved coping casting has started. The finished coping is already starting to weather nicely.

Since the image above was taken, the blocks have been removed from the Dry Dock.

Readers might remember that the grass is covering a brick floor, which has remnants of pitch and tar from boat repair work. This floor will be uncovered and possibly sealed (waiting for advice) once the Dry Dock structure and roof is on.



Dave Maloney (with assistance from Basil Raddy)
Project Lead



Melksham Link

The Binnies study on river proposals (including Biodiversity Net Gain) has been discussed and a draft final proposal should be available in early June. We now have a date to present the proposal to Wiltshire Council Planning and Ecology towards the end of June. If this goes well, we will submit the proposal to the Environment Agency.

Level surveys covering the A350 Challymead Bridge, and flow surveys of the river in Melksham have been completed. We will need to service the level sensors, take spot river level readings from Challymead Bridge and consider further flow surveys this summer.

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



Bee orchids are now flowering on the Rock Meadow. This is a rare plant and makes this area special. To my great surprise I found more flowering along the canal bank by the towpath.

The meadow at Double Bridge has more flowers than previous seasons despite the cold and wet weather this Spring.

The wet weather has helped get our winter tree planting off to a good start. All but one of the large trees have developed strong leaf growth and have avoided major damage by deer.

Some of the cherry trees planted the previous year have cherries which will provide a meal for the birds.

The coppiced hazels are regrowing well and the dead hedging has worked to exclude the deer who love fresh hazel leaves.

The new hedge by the Carpenters Workshop is progressing well and has been weeded and mulched to give it an extra boost.



Bee Orchid (above)
coppiced Hazels regrowing (below, left) and cherries (below, right)



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In the canal there was an explosion of tadpoles by Double Bridge. Thousands were clinging to the wall. Their numbers have reduced considerably since, probably due to the shoals of fish gathering nearby.

Martin Palmer and I gave the new verge flail a run out when we cut the Sea Cadets' field at Chippenham. This tractor-based piece of equipment (pictured right) will help us maintain the canal edge and the Naish Hill area.

Howard Yardy
Wildlife Officer



the verge flail mower in action at the Chippenham Sea Cadets

Boats



A busy month with Pop-up Café boat trips and the Chippenham Folk Festival.

The modifications to trip boat *Damsel Fly* were completed.

A failed shear pin rendered the electric outboard unavailable for the Folk Festival weekend. So it was back to petrol propulsion for the boat trips.

Showery weather problems resulted in fewer passengers than last year, but it was still a good event, aided by the revised jetty arrangement.

A big thank you to all who helped with this month's events and preparations.

Bob Howlett
Boats Officer

Events



May has been a busy month; we had:

- Our series of Pewsham Open Days/Boat Trips/PopUp Café continued on **Saturday 11 May**, with a visit from some residents of The Fairways Retirement Village in Chippenham;
- The Castle Combe Steam Rally was on **Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 May**. Unfortunately, Dave Maloney, the Event Lead, had to withdraw from us having a stand at this event owing to lack of volunteers.
- The Chippenham Folk Festival took place from **Friday 24 May to Sunday 27 May**, with us running Boat Trips and our Information Gazebo on the Saturday, Sunday and Monday. As usual, this was a good and enjoyable weekend. At the time of writing this report, the figures are not available. Saturday was busy while Sunday and Monday were less so.

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Coming up in June we have:

- The Pewsham Open Day/ Boat Trips/PopUp Café on **Saturday 8 Jun**, with a visit from some residents of St Andrew's Lodge, Chippenham.
- The Chair's Summer Dinner at The Bell, Lacock is on **Tuesday 11 June**. For more detail (be quick before all the places are taken) please see email's from Dave Maloney, or contact him direct (dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk).
- The Westonbirt Relish Running Event needs Marshalls on **Sunday 23 June** for which we usually 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 our help at the Relish Running Events. Please contact him if you can help (graham.stroud@wbct.org.uk).

Please, if you have any ideas for an Event or a Pont of Contact with a group that would be interested in visiting us at a Pewsham Open Day, we would like to hear from you.

Please speak to or email either one of the Events Committee, or myself (brian.wright@wbct.org.uk).

Brian Wright
Chair, Events Committee

Branch Webpages and Digital Comms



WBCT Website

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

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:

- advertising National Volunteers Week, when we are offering taster sessions to anyone who is interested in 'dirty boots' volunteering on our stretch;
- Boat Trips at the Chippenham Folk Festival (twice);
- the Wildlife talk given by Howard Yardy at our April Branch meeting (twice);
- the 'Pewsham Day' in May, advertising the Boat Trips, Pop-up Café, Work Site Tours and Green Team demos (twice);
- Pewsham Wildlife Update;
- Carpenters Workshop Update 3; and
- our reconstruction work at Pewsham.

Howard Wilson
Digital Comms Officer

Media Relations



In advance of National Volunteers' Week in the first week of June, we profiled Howard Wilson as a case study. This included how he heard about the Trust, why he chose to get involved, and the wide range of tasks he's supported.

The story has already been featured by national waterways magazine *Towpath Talk* together with our photograph of Howard alongside the canal at Pewsham.

He said: "I'm involved in developing and maintaining the Branch pages on the Trust website, and managing our photographic archive and social media. I also help to produce leaflets, posters and other materials.

"I've stayed involved with the physical restoration too, as a Work Party Organiser responsible for supervising tasks for other volunteers. "It keeps me busy but I thoroughly enjoy it".

Further coverage is expected during the week of the campaign.

Justin Guy
Media Relations Officer



photograph courtesy of Justin Guy

Finances



Plenty going on this month.

Income was:

- £120 from the extra Pewsham café at the end of April;
- £320 from the 'Pewsham Day' in May;
- £200 donation in memoriam;
- £24 donations at the Branch meeting;
- £428 cash from Boat Trips at the Chippenham Folk Festival, plus £58 donations; and
- £105 from sale of scrap metal.

Additionally £1,500 of boat tickets on the card machine at the festival went direct to HQ.

Expenses were:

- £370 venue hire for the April Quiz;
- £29 servicing of the toilet in the Welfare Unit;
- £109 eight wire brushes, chainsaw chains etc.;
- £240 balance of pitch fee at the Folk Festival (£50 deposit paid last month);
- £784 Landing Stage at the Festival; and
- £86 second gas bottle for the Pewsham café.

£50 for sponsorship of a scarecrow at the Lacock School event was covered by a member donation.

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Other expenses went through the HQ account, including:

- £414 jigsaw, batteries, blades and storage box;
- £25 paint and wood filler for blue trailer;
- £30 parts to charge 12V batteries from solar panels; and
- £67 two tyres for the Wheelhorse tractor.

Bank balance at 31 May was £1,866.

Steve Roberts
Treasurer