

Credit: Howard Wilson

Melksham, Calne & Chippenham and Foxham & Lyneham Branch Members Report for July 2025

Chairman's Report

It's great to see us refining and improving our working practices with great communication between Malcolm (our H&S Adviser) and the WPOs and work leads which is allowing us to get RAMS produced ahead of them being required rather than as a last minute rush. Well done to all involved.
As ever there is a large amount of work, on various projects, being carried out by our volunteers, which you can read about below, Whether it's the Top Lock Bridge, Carpenters' Workshop, Dry Dock or our environmental work these are very visible to the general public who use the towpath at Pewsham and we are getting an increasing number of them chatting and complimenting us on our work. It's nice to be appreciated !!

Whilst the fine, all be it sometimes hot, summer weather is allowing us to make great progress it has meant that sadly we have not been able to run boat trips as wate levels are so low. Fortunately our open days are still attracting people to the pop-up café and the tours of the compound so we are still managing to generate some revenue. Again many thanks to those that organise and run these events.

Senior Leadership Team notes.

Mike Gibben (CEO) is looking to attend each branches September meeting to explain and discuss the 5 year business plans and the 2050 vision (tbc)

Trust AGM: All members should have recently received an email about this years Trust AGM which will be held at East Challow Village Hall on Saturday 18th October.

Howard Wilson,
Chairman - MCC and F&L Branch
howard.wilson@wbct.org.uk

Health & Safety
Two more RAMS (Risk Assessment and Method Statement) are currently being produced. One for the creation of the interior walls in the Carpenters Workshop annex and a second one for the repair of east wall in Bottom Lock. This second one to enable preliminary work to be undertaken in advance of the main bottom lock refurbishment project.

There are further RAMS in the pipeline. Getting in advance with the production of RAMS is important to ensure there is always work opportunities for volunteers to tackle.

My thanks to the team leaders who, having produced the Method statements, have given time to work with me to ensure I understand the build sequence prior to producing the risk assessments

There was one minor accident reported this month, a cut finger. This accident happened close to the compound, so a first aid kit was readily available, but it shows the importance of taking a first aid with you if you are working away the compound.

Malcolm Hitchinson
H&S Advisor

Work Party Management Group
The next WPMG meeting is on the 27th August.

The case for support for the east wall of bottom lock has been approved. This means we can now start looking for some funds to do the work. The estimated cost for the materials will be the region of £23K and with the value of our volunteers' support is going to be around 45K total.

Ray Canter, WPMG Chair

Pewsham Site
Top Lock Bridge: The first layer of the arch of the bridge has now been completed, and a start made on the second layer.



Bottom Lock: Volunteers and a corporate work party have further cleaned the lock and repointed some of the existing brickwork.

Keith Vickery, Volunteer Lead

Projects

Peterborough Arms

We were back up to 3 volunteers on Friday thanks to Damien joining us.
We had access to the family letting room so tackled the last bit of wall/ceiling painting in a small annex. Ceiling and walls were prepared and then the first coat of paint applied.
At the front of the pub concrete blocks that had helped divert water away from the pub were removed to the rear as we are confident that the work carried out by volunteers and that of Wiltshire Highways (to unblock the correct drain) will prevent water heading to the pub side of the road.
We repaired the garden edge to remove trip hazards caused by the removal of concrete blocks that were diverting water towards a drain in the garden, these are no longer needed due to work mentioned above.
The paint colour we used on the exterior woodwork is a special mix of dark green and the front door need a recoat. Having driven to Swindon early one morning to get the paint mixed to the correct spec as per the last tin we had I was somewhat astonished when I took of the lid to see a luminous green which stayed the same even after a good stirring. I wasn't going to paint the front door until I was sure it would dry the right colour!!. A test area away from the front of the pub was painted and will be checked at the next work party.
We loaded a vehicle with hard-core for Pewsham and plasterboard waste/fridges for the recycling centre.
All in all, a very productive day in a month were holidays, family pressures and other works disrupted a number of our work parties.

As always if you are a professional or competent DIY'er it would be great if you could spare a few hours or a day a week (Generally a Monday) to help out at the Peterborough.

Dave Maloney, WPO
dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk

Carpenters' Workshop

Our thanks once again to Pam C who is working tirelessly behind the scenes to find donors who will help us complete the main room of the carpenters workshop.

Due to generosity of local members and some local companies we have enough funds/equipment to fit out the annex area. The relevant RAMs have been produced and Basil R started the layout of the donated kitchen this month.

We have had a site meeting with plumber Steve Court to discuss location of the gas boiler that will provide hot water and heating. We will have to design an outside "shed" perhaps that looks like an old privy, to hide the LPG bottles (assuming this is acceptable of course).

It is hoped stud walls and ceiling panels within the annex will be started soon, all materials are on site.

During Augusts Open Day we took a number of groups around the site and they were very interested in the story of the Carpenters workshop, its challenges, and how much skilled work volunteers had carried out to date

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Dry Dock



The battens were fitted to the west (towpath side) roof and slates installed. It's great to see the roof covered in reclaimed Welsh slate and of course on the inside the messages on the sponsored slates can be seen. Obviously, the good weather is helping, and work will commence on the east side once the scaffolding has been taken down and moved.

Needleless to say the Dry Dock is looking amazing.

Larch cladding for the gable ends will be ordered soon.

Sponsored slates now account for over £1,600.

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Melksham Link Report

We had a useful meeting with Kenny Green (WC Planning Officer) and decided the way forward following the unhelpful response to our Amendment Report from the Environment Agency. It was decided to write a 'rebuttal' letter countering all the EA objections, and seek further support from WC's top team as well as Brian Mathew MP. We also sent the updated Flood Risk Assessment to WC to go on the planning portal. We await the EA's response to our letter and the FRA.

Regarding the Martin Grant Homes planning application at Berryfield, we had a meeting with Melksham Without PC's Planning Committee where we (TorandCo + WBCT) explained progress towards achieving a solution to satisfy both parties. We continue to work together to achieve a mutually acceptable solution.

We are planning to have a site meeting with Wessex Water this month to agree a way forward for the water main diversion that will be needed at Semington to enable the new junction with the K&A to be constructed.

There is no further progress on the masterplan to fund construction of Melksham Link.

Paul Lenaerts, Project Manager

Wildlife

Bee Route Tractor

We've had a disaster with the Bee Route tractor. We were on our way to cut the meadow at Royal Wootton Bassett on the main road through Calne when a section of the lifting gear at the back of the tractor snapped. The mower dropped to the ground but luckily was not damaged. We were able to disconnect the tractor from the

mower and return it to Pewsham for repair. The mower was kindly lifted by a farmer to his yard for safe keeping. This is a busy time of the year as our meadows need to be mowed but we'll just have to wait.



Mechanic's get to work repairing the tractor.

Gordon's Meadow

We were able to get that tractor and special mower because of the fund raising and support from Gordon Olson, ex CEO and long-time supporter of the Trust who sadly died recently. It was great to have his family come along to Pewsham this month. CEO Mike Gibbins led a ceremony dedicating the wildflower meadow by the rocks to the memory of Gordon. A sign has been erected naming the meadow and this will be replaced by an interpretation board explaining the benefits of these important habitats and, of course, the "Bee Route project" which Gordon conceived and sponsored.

Corporate volunteers

Nat West Bank have sent along two groups of volunteers this month. Their task was to weed and mulch the Myawaki forest at Naish Hill to ensure the young trees are not swamped by bramble, nettles and thistles over the coming months; not an easy task but they did a great job. They also tackled some Himalayan balsam plants which were growing between the canal and river. This is a non-native invasive plant, which, if left to grow, would engulf the area pushing out native species and reducing biodiversity.



Cardboard and grass is used to mulch the Myawaki forest.



Emily, Louis and Henry (Nat West Bank) have volunteered at Pewsham twice this year.

WBCT is committed to dealing with this type of problem and we are grateful to these volunteers for their help.

A Chippenham company, Seimens sent along a group of volunteers who put their engineering skills to use by building a set of steps near the wet section. The steps give us easier access to the coppiced area down a steep slope from the canal. Before that, they warmed up by moving a couple of tons of logs up to the towpath for them to be transported to the log store at Pewsham compound.

Not content with those tasks, they finished the day by pulling up Himalayan balsam plants.



Siemens group ready to move a large pile of logs

A great day's work and I hope all our corporate friends come back for a nice 'relaxing' day in the countryside by our canal.

Grant

We are very grateful to receive a grant from HDH Wills for our environmental work. The £1,000 will go towards our effort to clear mink from the canal. Mink are a non-native species having a devastating effect on wildlife along

waterways. One of their prey are the endangered water voles but also ducks and moorhens. They have also been known to attack kingfishers, heron and even swans.

With the help and advice from Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and Waterlife Recovery Trust, we have removed seven mink in the last year from the canal at Pewsham. We have already started to see more ducklings and moorhens survive to adulthood.

Penny Birch, a talented wildlife photographer and supporter of WBCT, has been taking pictures of the water voles at Royal Wootton Bassett. We will continue to endeavour to protect them from these predators.



Water vole photographed by Penny Birch on the canal.

Howard Yardy, Wildlife Officer

Boats

No passenger boat trips this month due to weed and low water level. After much planning and preparation Boswell was run to the launching ramp (struggling through the silt and weed) turned, brought back to the bottom lock and hauled up on the bund ready for blacking. It was duly hosed down scraped and brushed to remove the deposits from being in the water for many years.



Cleaning Boswell's hull



Repaired floor of butty

Repairs were also carried out on the butty by replacing damaged flooring.

Bob Howlett, Boats Officer

Events Committee Report

July's Open Day & Pop up Café was another success despite the fact that we couldn't run boat trips due to the lack of water in the canal.

We had groups from both Chippenham Shed and Melksham Men's Shed who thoroughly enjoyed their walks around the site and were most interested in the projects going on.
We also had a surprise visit from residents of Churchill Living in Chippenham who heard about the open day and organised their own mini bus!!.
Brian W will be contacting their manager to discuss helping with transport costs on his return from holiday. One of those visiting is a branch member and confirmed the group had a lovely time despite the lack of boat trips and are keen to return once the water levels improve. As always our thanks to those volunteers who gave up their Saturday to help not only raise funds but also with the Dry Dock slate sponsorship.

Due to the efforts of Graham S we have a number of volunteers who will be turning out to assist Relish Running managing and supporting runners at their next run on the 17th August. We are generously rewarded for this support and going forward is we could get more volunteers to help out with this laid back and enjoyable few hours we would of course get a larger donation…something to think about please.

Our major focus for the next few weeks is the Melksham Food and River Festival which will be held in King George V Park and riverside on Saturday 30th & Sunday 31st August. Many, many thanks to those volunteers giving up their weekend to help as boat crew/shore crew and be the public facing element in the information gazebo.

My thanks to all those who have been involved in our previous quiz nights as they are all happy to help with our next Quiz in October. We wait to hear if the Chippenham Borough Lands Charity will support us by covering the cost of venue hire which of course means we are able to keep more of the funds raised on the night for our restoration work.

The Events Team needs more volunteers to help us with ideas and plan events in 2026. Rank and file volunteers are usually very generous with their time and support the current events list, but we need dedicated volunteers to help us plan and coordinate these events. No experience necessary, just a few hours a month. Why not attend one of the Events Committee meetings and find out more? You will be most welcome.

Dave Maloney, Chair - Events Committee

Media Relations

The sponsorship appeal for the dry dock rooftiles was the focus of media attention in July.

Dave Maloney was the spokesperson and was pictured in front of the structure with fellow volunteers David Peatfield and Basil Raddy.



Dave said: "This is a great opportunity for people to leave a lasting mark on a beautiful building while also demonstrating their support for a worthwhile cause.

"The messages will only be visible from the underside of the dry dock but, when the site is full open to the public, we hope visitors will be reading them for many decades to come."

The appeal received generous coverage in the Western Daily Press and Wiltshire Gazette & Herald newspapers, and on the Calne News, One Chippenham and WiltsHive websites.

We hope to follow this up with a press release announcing the amount of money raised, and then an official opening with key supporters and donors (so please beware of posting or sharing any photographs or video of the finished building prior to the official opening, as local media are increasingly lifting content from our social media platforms – this would reduce the impact of the celebration where we would like to invite all media outlets, and VIPs).

Towards the end of July, we issued a recruitment appeal for more volunteers to act as branch officers or as members of the event committee. This included the vacancies for branch secretary and branch digital communications officer.

Branch chairman Howard Wilson was the spokesperson and was photographed alongside the restored canal at Pewsham Locks.



He said: “Every role is equally valuable, and every hour of support is always appreciated.

“Volunteers don’t need to know anything about canals. They just need to be able to offer a few hours a month to support the rest of the team.

“It’s a great way to meet new people and make new friends, as well as playing an important part in bringing this wonderful waterway back to life.”

The appeal has already been featured by the Wiltshire Gazette & Herald and Swindon Advertiser., with further coverage expected in August

In August we hope to promote our attendance at the Melksham Food & River Festival, including the boat rides.

Justin Guy, Media Relations Officer

Branch Webpages & Digital Comms

Nothing to report.

Finance

Branch income in July was:

- £330 donations for logs
- £134 donations at Pewsham cafe (no boat trips this time)
- £20 at the branch meeting

Donations were also received for restricted funds:

- £100 towards mink traps (Bee Route fund)
- £170 towards Carpenter's Workshop
- £90 sponsors of Dry Dock slates

Biggest expense was £650 to acquire the storage unit for events equipment. Other costs:

- £147 petrol and diesel
- £72 minibus hire for Pewsham visitors in April and May
- £30 cable ties and grease
- £11 bank charges

Until May, Lloyds Bank refrained from applying any charges to our account. Since WBCT is a charity, we claimed exemption from the new charges via the Trust Treasurer but were turned down; an appeal is in progress.

Plenty of spending by restricted funds went through our account:

- £103 oak beams for Carpenter's Workshop
- £317 roadstone
- £1,251 for three mink traps, with rafts to carry them and remote monitoring; includes batteries and 12 months of connectivity

All that spending brought the bank balance down to £657 at the end of the month.

Steve Roberts, Treasurer