Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen.

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



Before



After

Credit: Howard Wilson

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

Chair's Report

Happy new year to you all - although by the time you are reading this we will already be halfway through January! Where does the time go? As you can read below our dirty boots volunteers both construction and green continue to work extremely hard although the wet weather has been making outdoor work difficult. Still on the bright side at least the canal is full !

More good news is that Clive Dorling has agreed to be the Project Manager for the Pewsham site as a whole. Exactly how this will work is still being discussed but hopefully it will take some of the pressure off the WPOs who at times are trying to manage projects, lead teams of volunteers as well as numerous other tasks.

We have also recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Derry Hill and Studley Parish Council (part of the line of the canal falls under their parish). These MoUs are non-binding however allow us closer co-operation with the council so they become aware of our work and our ambitions which they will take into account when discussing relevant council issues. This follows on from the MoU we signed with Chippenham Town Council. We are looking to sign similar MoUs with Lacock and Bremhill Parish Councils.

Work is ongoing in looking to find improved access and parking for when we start to open up the Carpenters' Workshop to the general public.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

Health & Safety stats continue to generally improve across all branches. Key points in comparing 2025 to 2024 include:

Number of worked hours at sites 24237, Safety inductions 21% increase, Safety training 6% increase, Safety meetings 12.5% increase, SHOC submittals 63% decrease, Toolbox talks 4% decrease. This is great to see and of course the MCC branch volunteers have contributed to this, so well done to all.

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

Health & Safety

There have been no reported accidents in December and indeed only a couple come to mind for the whole of 2025. Well done everyone.

There has been a lot of work undertaken to complete RAMS for the Carpenters Workshop (one completed and another just sent out for review plus another just being started). More RAMS will be required now that we have the funding to complete the fitting out of the Carpenters Workshop.

Work on the RAMS for Bottom Lock repairs was also completed and will be expanded to include the forming of the coping stones.

My thanks to all those who have contributed to and/or reviewed the RAMS to ensure that the final document meets the needs of the tasks being undertaken.

It is important that we continue to build on the 2025 H&S improvements as we move into the New Year. My aim is to make Health & Safety something we do not something we have to do. I look forward to your continued support.

Wishing everyone a happy, safe, and healthy New Year.

Malcolm Hitchinson, H&S Advisor

Work Parties

Work Party Management Group

There was no meeting in December.

Ray Canter, WPMG Chair

Pewsham Site

Top Lock Bridge: The whole bridge is now finished and ready to be used. Members of the public have made comments to our volunteers admiring the work done. It now only remains to finish the roadway to allow vehicle access to the Carpenter's Workshop.

Carpenter's Workshop: Progress continues to be made on the fit out and installation of electrical wiring and the control systems for the solar panels and battery storage.

Bottom Lock: Further progress is being made in the lock chamber in removal of damaged areas ready for the replacement of brickwork.

Navigable canal: Our feeder stream brings in welcome quantities of fresh water to keep this length fully navigable, but unfortunately brings silt with it which builds up and restricts the depth in places. A long-term solution to this is being sought with the co-operation of the landowner. In the meantime, it is planned to hire a long reach excavator to dredge the deposits so that our boats can still reach Double Bridge.

Keith Vickery, Volunteer Lead

Other sites

Greenlane Farm & Pudding Brook: Nothing to report this month.

Studley Lane: Nothing to report this month.

Dauntsey Lock: Nothing to report this month.

7 Locks: Sadly, due to the Christmas break, weather conditions and volunteer time pressures we have not be able to return to video the interior of the culvert that has a suspected leak. However, Ray C and I visited and the "stream" running along the canal bed at right angles to the culvert did not seem to be dropping water through the canal bed to the culvert, so the mystery has yet to be solved. We hope to get back early/mid-January 2026.
I have been in correspondence with a member of the Wessex Waterway Restoration Trust with regards to cooperative working along the canal line in this area and Dauntsey; a meeting is planned.

Dave Maloney, WPO

Projects

Peterborough Arms

Despite the Christmas period December was a busy month for volunteers.

During the early days of restoration 2014/15, we had a buildings inspection carried out by a volunteer who had been in such line of work, and he uncovered damage to the end of a beam in the bar area. We subsequently discovered this was due to decades of water getting to the beam end from a damaged

windowsill in the bedroom above. The beam was repaired by a local builder using a steel cradle method. Although the windowsill was made watertight 2024, we carried out another temporary repair to the windowsill as sprinklers of water were reportable getting into the window seat area below the beam when it rained. Volunteers carried out basic inspection of the beam, taking the floor up in the bedroom above to access, and were not comfortable with what they saw so a structural engineer was called in. He advised precautionary acrow props be installed in the bar and below in the cellar so a more detailed repair could be carried out. The Trust has commissioned MLDE of Devizes to deal with this issue which will involve planning, listings officers and a suitable company to affect the repair.
I requested the engineer to return to site early January to carry out inspections of the beams in the cellar.

Unfortunately, there are also issues with the sloping roof at the rear of the pub and it looks as if a whole section of tiles will have to be removed, new battens and felt fitted (there currently is no felt) and tiles re-laid. Estimates are coming in for this work.

We may need to carry out some fund raising to cover these costs and volunteer cake bakers maybe required!!

On a brighter note, we found a weather opportunity to give the front doors a much need coat of fresh paint that matches the rest of the external woodwork shade.

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Carpenter's Workshop
December found most volunteers helping with the final push/clear up/scaffold removal at Top Lock Bridge. However, behind the scenes planning and material purchases took place, until my Trust debit card reached its limit!! During the Christmas break volunteers spent time surveying quantities of materials for works in the annex and seeking suppliers. Orders for these materials will be placed in early January.
The water treatment plant & Rainwater scavenging systems were ordered and due delivery early January 2026.
Method Statements and Risk Assessments for various tasks were researched and written up.

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Dry Dock
No work to sponsored tiles will be carried out until the spring of 2026.

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Melksham Link

In their meeting on 9th December, the EA and Wiltshire Council agreed to meet again on 29th January. Although this meeting will be just about Melksham Link, we are once more, not invited. We have been assured that we will be invited to a subsequent meeting, hopefully in February, to discuss the EA's apparent wish to "work in partnership with WBCT" to progress our planning application.

River conditions have not been suitable for our consultants to carry out the beaver survey, but the current dry spell may permit this to go ahead in early January.

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

Paul Lenaerts, Project Manager

Environmental

This month we have been completing jobs across various sites covered by the MCC.

Early in the month, a fallen tree was cleared from the footpath at Green Lane Farm.

The hedge laying from the Compound down to Bottom Lock, started last month, was completed. We now need to determine exactly where the Lime Kiln was located, to avoid fencing that area.





Credits Howard Y



Credit Howard Y

The dead hedge and coppiced area past Gordon's Meadow were completed. The Bluebells planted there should be visible in the Spring.




Credits Howard Y

The fallen tree over the culvert was removed, which will allow access to the culvert for review and repair.




Credits Howard Y

The annual Birdbox survey was started with half of the Pewsham boxes, together with all those at the Green Lane Farm site checked, cleaned and the status recorded. To date around 70% of those checked were used last year. The survey will be completed next month, ahead of the next nesting season.

Further log deliveries were completed this month by Dave M, ahead of Christmas and the New Year period. This used up all the dry seasoned wood from the wood pile and the next batch of logs needs to be processed.



Credit Dave M

Howard Yardy, Wildlife Officer

Boats

With the canal well filled it was possible to run Boswell as far as the "wet section" clearing off side vegetation. A similar task was undertaken mid-month but on this occasion, we could not get past the silt at "Hannah's brook" due to slightly lower water level.

Bob Howlett, Boats Officer

Events

The branch Christmas dinner was a great success for the 40 branch members who attended and I understand 3 guests who couldn't make it due to illness are now well. We were well looked after by the team at The Bell Inn, Lacock, the barn was toasty with good food and company in abundance.
We could do with a few more volunteers to help at the events in the Chippenham Museum on 19th February. This is generally a fun day working with visiting children (They have accompanying adults) to create bricks, dragonflies, painting etc. If you can spare a few hours on that date, please get in touch.

Dave Maloney, Chair - Events Committee

Media Relations

In December issued a press release to promote a New Year volunteer recruitment appeal.
Melksham member David Peatfield kindly agreed to be profiled, following a previous request from the Melksham News for a local case study. David has only been a member for a couple of years but has already donated more than 1,000 hours to support the work at Pewsham Locks.

He said: "All of the volunteers come from different walks of life and have different skills, but they're a great group of people and we always have a laugh and a joke. It's also nice to be able to spend time outside and surrounded by nature.
"You look around Pewsham Locks and see what was built more than two centuries earlier. It's hugely satisfying to think that our own efforts today will safeguard this site for many more years to come."
I included a photograph of David in front of the carpenter's workshop.

The Melksham News are yet to run the story, but the appeal has already been featured by national magazine Canal Boat and on the websites of the Wiltshire Gazette & Herald, Wiltshire Times, Swindon Advertiser and Yahoo News UK. Further coverage is expected.



Credit: Justin G

David Peatfield outside the carpenter's workshop being reconstructed at Pewsham Locks.

We also saw continuing coverage of the previous month's press release regarding the £10,000 grant from an unnamed family foundation to support the purchase of an additional mini dumper truck.

The story was featured by national magazine Waterways World and included my photograph of volunteer Nick Baker with the vehicle in front of Top Lock, together with Howard Wilson's photograph of the dry dock under construction. The article ended with a link to the 'Pewsham Locks update' page of the Trust website.

Justin Guy, Media Relations Officer

Branch Webpages & Digital Comms

Since the last months report the central comms team have shared images/reports on work of other branches and the consultation taking place re proposed reservoir along the line near Abingdon.

At branch level during December, we shared on social media images and descriptions of numerous activities.

- Artist's impression of laden canal boat near Foxham in 19c.
- Overview of Pewsham Locks site and its projects.
- Top Lock Bridge in particular, including photos of the bridge with scaffold removed.
- Hedge laying at Pewsham.
- More wonderful photographs of wildlife along the MCC canal line taken by Sonia Hill
- General photos of our activities, showing volunteers to help encourage more to join our merry band ☺

Dave Maloney
Howard Wilson
Howard Yardy

Finances

Much reduced activity in December.

Branch income was £160 donations for logs, and expenses were just £60 to empty the two toilets in November.

Also £12.50 bank charges, made up of a £4.50 monthly fee plus 75p per £100 cash deposited (from Pewsham open days, the quiz and branch meetings).

The branch bank account also received £80 donations towards the Carpenter's Workshop, and paid £138 of bills for the interior fit-out.

Bank balance at the end of the month was £2,992.

Steve Roberts, Treasurer

Membership (Info from SLT meeting)

Nothing to report