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



Credit: Howard Wilson

Melksham, Calne & Chippenham and Foxham & Lyneham Branch Members Report for January 2026

Chair's Report

The theme of this month seems to be rain, rain and yet more rain! This has limited the amount of work we have been able to do outside and meant that work parties have been cancelled or restricted to work inside - thank goodness we now have funding for the interior fit out of The Carpenters' Workshop (see report below).

Despite the success of getting funding for The Carpenters' Workshop we continue to struggle with other projects despite the valiant efforts of Pam Canter and the funding team. We are still searching for funding for Bottom Lock, Towpath raising and any other projects we want to work on. That's why the smaller amounts coming in (see Finance report below) are so important and my thanks to all who contribute to this. In particular, I would like to thank Dave Maloney whose continued efforts to deliver logs to local customers brings in a steady stream of donated income.

Following on from last month when I reported on the signing of Memorandum of Understandings with local councils, we are now looking for the councils to provide us with letters of support for the work we are planning to carry out which we can include when we apply for funding showing that we have not only community backing but also that of the local councils.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

A lot of time, not surprisingly, continues to be spent on the issues of SESRO, the proposed reservoir in Oxfordshire that will cut the line of the canal. The Trust has submitted an objection to Ofwat to the development of the reservoir in its current form and made a strong case that the restoration of the canal including infrastructure, e.g. locks, should be included within the development rather than being left till after the event. Note that SESRO has now been renamed 'The Abingdon Reservoir'.

The followers of The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/wiltsberkscanal/ has now surpassed 10K whilst The Trust's YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/@wiltsberkscanaltrust/featured has surpassed 1K subscribers. Not only is this good news in that we are getting our message out to a wider audience, but it also means that we can potentially generate revenue.

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

Health & Safety

The Branch received a request from the Trust to complete a Health & Safety Audit. This was a lengthy document and a bit repetitive. This point has been fed back to the Trust as part of the audit response. The detailed audit covered every aspect of our operations, including, plant, equipment, tool, PPE, site briefings, first aid and notices. I completed the report, with the help of Anita Churchouse and carried out a survey of out onsite documentation. There was one notice that was missing, the Trust H&S and Wellbeing policy. The Trust has now provided this document, and a copy is now on the H&S notice board. Our response was well received by Peter Thomas, the Trusts Chief Operating Officer.
I suspect that this will become an annual activity.

The fact that I could positively complete the form is thanks to the support of the WPO's and team leaders and I look forward to their continued support in 2026.

The one point I would like to reinforce is the need to maintain the briefing process, which is the main theme of the Trust H&S and Wellbeing statement. Because we have a diverse work profile covering several work areas across the Pewsham site, it is not possible to cover all aspects of work-related risks at the briefing given prior to signing in. Therefore, a second localised briefing is made by the WPO/team leader once the individual teams reach their work area. Dave M has written this into the RAMS for the CWS, the Green Team confirmed this process is completed by them.
I would ask that all WPO's and team leader ensure that this process forms part of their pre-task talk when tasks are allocated. This is especially important if there is a member new to the team.

Just to finish. Health & Safety is everyone's responsibility, so if you see something you feel is not right, please report it and if you are not sure about the work you are being asked to undertake, please say so.

Malcolm Hitchinson, H&S Advisor

Work Parties

Work Party Management Group

Meeting held in early January to discuss projects for the year, including removing silt from the canal near Hannah's Brook, from 2-6th February.

Ray Canter, WPMG Chair

Pewsham Site - General

Nothing to report.

Other sites

Nothing to report this month for:

- **Greenlane Farm & Pudding Brook**
- **Studley Lane**
- **Dauntsey Lock**
- **7 Locks**

Dave Maloney, WPO

Projects

Peterborough Arms

I have arranged for the Wiltshire Council Listings Officer to visit the pub and give advice re planning for the roof repairs.

The structural engineer has visited site again and inspected the beams in the cellar and we await his report.

Our donated Rationale oven sadly broke and as it was too big to get out of the kitchen in one piece, we had to dismantle it in situ...sometime restoring to an angle grinder! The oven is stainless steel, so we hope to raise a few pounds from scrap.

We arrived on site one morning expecting to see the new oven in place but found it in the skittle alley…this could only mean one thing…yep too big to fit through the doors!!
5 hours later, after taking whole door frames out, and with the use of dollies (loaned by Mr Collingborn) the oven was in place and ready for commissioning.

Those members who view Social Media will be aware that Landlord Paul has found a local catering team and the first Sunday dinner was a massive hit. Moves are underway to provide food on a regular basis including lunch times. Please find the time to go and support Paul and his team as they continue to manage the Trust pub and support our work along the line.

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Top Lock Bridge

The entrance walls between the bridge and the lock gates continue to be raised. Work on landscaping around the bridge has continued as the weather allowed. More roadstone was laid across the bridge allowing it to be used for site vehicles.

Howard Wilson.

Carpenters' Workshop
Our friendly electrician was back from his holidays and visited the site to give advice and to test the earth that Ray M had installed - all is well. Ray M also managed to adapt the cabinet so the storage batteries could be installed.
After an online search the best value insulation was ordered and although it turned up on the wrong day, I was able to get to site and help the driver off load. David P and Malcolm H started the installation.

Samples of wall covering for the toilet area arrived and a decision on colour was made.
Floor levelling compound applied to toilet area in readiness for the quarry tiles which as you read this should be on site and may even have been laid.

Building Control from Wiltshire Council visited the site. I am now packaging the drawings/photographs and other info they requested.

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

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

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Bottom Lock
Due to the extremely wet weather no work has been carried out on the lock during the month.

Ray Canter / Howard Wilson

Melksham Link

We don't know whether the planned meeting between the EA and Wiltshire Council on 29th January took place. We are still hoping to be invited to a meeting in February to find out what the EA mean by "working in partnership with WBCT" to progress our planning application.

The beaver survey was carried out on 6th & 7th January and there were multiple sightings of beaver activity both upstream and downstream of Melksham. The final report is expected soon.

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

Paul Lenaerts, Project Manager

Environmental

We have now completed the Hedge laying next to bottom lock, supporting the laid hedge with stakes and binders and planting up gaps with new trees. With the bramble removed from the hedge, it will develop into a manageable stretch and be more biodiverse.



Completed hedge laying next to Bottom Lock



New hedge at Squirrels Rest Credits Howard Y

We started on another section near to the seat at Squirrels Rest. We have completed the removal of bramble and dead wood in preparation for it to be laid this month. The brash created was substantial, which had been added to by the boat teams cuttings from the far bank. However, all has been accommodated in a dedge around the seat making it a cosy spot to sit. The hedge behind the right-hand side was laid prior to the dedge being completed. Shrubs and wildflowers were planted to finish the job.





Credits Howard Y

Andrew S and Gansh P erected 10 more bird and bat boxes (most made from scrap wood from the carpenters' workshop), along the towpath and at Naish Hill.
Graham S and Kathryn N completed a survey of the existing boxes at Pewsham earlier in the month and a group of us did the same just after Christmas for the boxes at Green Lane Farm/Pudding Brook area. Occupancy was good at about 65% with few dead bodies suggesting good brood.

Andrew S and I began clearing an area next to Gordon's meadow ready to receive silt from the dredging at Hannah's brook. Bramble scrub was cleared and the piles of reeds and grass cutting pushed back to open an area where the meadow can be extended.






Credits Howard Y

With the canal being drained for the dredging process, the mink trap became beached at the wet section, allowing a large brown rat to get itself caught within a few hours.



Credits Howard Y

Howard Yardy, Wildlife Officer

Boats

With good water levels we have been able to carry out some offside vegetation management. The green team have since converted the pruning into dedges.

Bob Howlett, Boats Officer

Events

Due to increasing workload within the Trust, Martin P has resigned from the Events Team committee, so we are looking for another volunteer to join our team. If you can spare a few hours a month to get involved with events organisation we would love to hear from you. MCC Events raise funds, spread awareness and generally engage with communities along our branch line from Semington to the outskirts of Royal Wotton Bassett.

Chippenham Folk Festival pitch booked and iScaff contacted re the creation of the relevant landing stage on the Island Park at Chippenham.

Details came through of Chippenham Carnival (4th July) and after some discussion with the Green Team, it was agreed we should attend and have the Bee Route tractor tow the Mary Archard as part of the parade to make more Chippenham people aware of our work. It's probable we will also have a gazebo set up for the day as well.

Spring Quiz date for your diary is Friday 17th April at the Neeld in Chippenham.

Dave Maloney, Chair - Events Committee

Media Relations

National waterways magazine Canal Boat asked me to write a full-page profile of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust for its 'Club Champions' series, which was featured in the February issue.

I included an overview of the charity's mission and vision, recent projects and how the community can get involved. Although the profile covered the whole Trust, I was able to mention the Pewsham Locks restoration, the Peterborough Arms refurbishment, the Naish Hill wildlife habitats and the proposed Melksham Link. The article was illustrated with our photograph of Dave M, David P and Basil R promoting the sponsorship appeal for the dry dock roof.

In the same issue, Canal Boat also included my press release promoting the £10,000 grant for an additional mini dumper truck at Pewsham Locks, together with my photograph of Nick B with the vehicle in front of Top Lock. The photograph of Nick was also used by the Melksham Independent News when it included my review of the branch year, as part of the newspaper's annual review of local charities. I included the progress at Pewsham Locks and Naish Hill, the generosity of local donors, and some of the latest volunteer opportunities.

This was followed by our celebration of MCC receiving the Tony Davy Award for the most hours volunteered last year. Branch chairman Howard Wilson was the spokesperson and was photographed with the award alongside the restored Pewsham stretch. He said: "We always appreciate every single hour donated by our supporters, but it's particularly impressive to see how the number of hours has grown so much in a single year. "It shows that people are increasingly recognising the potential benefits of a restored canal – not only for walking, cycling and boating, but also for biodiversity.
"It also shows how much they enjoy spending time with us, learning new skills and making new friends.
"Our fantastic volunteers know they're playing an important role in creating an important new amenity which will be enjoyed by the local community for generations to come."



Credit: Justin G
Branch chairman Howard W with the Tony Davy Award alongside the restored Wilts & Berks Canal.

The award has already been featured by the Wiltshire Gazette & Herald, This Is Wiltshire, Swindon Advertiser and Calne News.

Justin Guy, Media Relations Officer

Branch Webpages & Digital Comms

Since last month's 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 we shared on social media images and descriptions of numerous activities.

- Reporting on MCC Branch awarded the Tony Davy Award for 12,273 volunteer hours submitted 2024/25.
- Advising that we are to drop the water level in the canal ready for dredging during first week of February.
- Great videos from the Green Team on the Art of Dedging.
- Hedge laying at Pewsham.
- Information re the Peterborough Arms and the new catering team.
- Celebrating 10.0k followers on the WBCT Main Facebook page…great achievement.
- General photos of our activities, showing volunteers to help encourage more to join our merry band ☺

Dave Maloney, Howard Wilson, Howard Yardy (Digital Comms contributors)

Finances

January was a good month for donations:

- £250 from our generous members in South Australia
- £240 for logs
- £174 collecting box at Foxhangers Canal Holidays
- £83 collecting box (we assume) at Semington Dock
- £60 from model train enthusiasts, earmarked for Carpenter's Workshop
- £17 at the branch meeting

Expenses were:

- £160 advance payment for accommodation for July work camp
- £148 petrol and diesel
- £53 two wood moisture gauges
- £49 chainsaw oil and service parts

Non-branch spend was £83 for the Carpenter's Workshop – smoke and CO alarms, cable for solar panels.

Bank balance at the end of the month was £3,347.

Steve Roberts, Treasurer

Membership (Info from SLT meeting)

Nothing to report