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: Steve Court

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

Chair's Report

As you can read below some great work continues to be carried out by our dirty boots volunteers at Pewsham both on the construction and the environmental sides.

Our clean shoes team (some of whom also get their boots dirty!), also had a successful month with the first event of the year taking place at Chippenham Museum during the school half term. Thanks to all who helped out and it was good to see some new members getting involved.

You can read all about the proposed events for the year below but note that the first Pewsham Open Day of the year will take place on Saturday 11th April. Do come along for a boat ride and some tea / coffee and cake and a guided tour to see the work we are carrying out.

Mechanic Required: Finally, we have numerous machinery at Pewsham from excavators and dumpers down to brush cutters, mowers and strimmers. All these need to be looked after and maintained. Whilst we do have one person (Thank You Ray M) who manages this it is hard work for one person and so we are looking for another mechanic to help out. So if you have such skills and knowledge, or perhaps know someone who has and may be interested, then please contact me for further information.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

Andy Rhoades, an H&S Consultant, has been appointed as new Trustee for H&S. He will focus on 3 areas:

a. The H&S Trustee role (governance, policies etc)
b. Supporting Peter Thomas (WBCT COO) to review current documentation / processes - what's good, what needs updating etc.
c. Independent (external type) audit in line with Peter Thomas's spec.

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

Health & Safety

There were no reports of any accidents or incidents during February. Well done everyone.

I met with Clive Dorling, MCC's Project Manager (Bottom Lock) to establish how CDM & H&S requirements will be managed. Clive proposed, and it has been agreed, that a Project start up meeting will be held to discuss all aspects of the project plans, including H&S.

The tanks for the grey water and effluent disposal are now on site. This is a new phase of the Pewsham Locks project as it is not covered by any of the current RAMS The CWS RAMS only covered the build.

So, a project start-up meeting will be required. Ray C is project lead and will determine the scope of the meeting. He has already provided me with the manufacturer's brief.

The HSE have issued a bulletin highlighting the dangers of the mixing people and vehicles in the same area. A recent accident of this nature resulted in a £85,000 fine. My main concern is the mix of people and vehicles in the compound on work party days. I highlighted my concerns to the work party management team. My thanks to all for the positive responses, in particular to Howard Y who will be deploying banks persons when they are moving vehicles in the compound and to John G who circulated the current documentation and will be liaising with restCom to see if these documents can be updated and streamlined.

Malcolm Hitchinson, H&S Advisor

Work Parties

Work Party Management Group
Nothing to report.

Ray Canter, WPMG Chair

Pewsham Site - General



Credit: Howard Wilson

Having partially drained the canal the first week of the month was spent dredging the area of canal around Hannah's Brook which, whilst providing water to the canal has also brought a huge amount of silt down into the canal as well (we are in conversation with the local farmer to try to alleviate this). The silt was transferred by dumper to a designated site further down the towpath to the side of Gordon's meadow. This was not without its issues (see environmental report below) plus the dumpers caused some damage to the towpath which now needs repairing. Not only that, lowering the water level caused the partial collapse of the canal bank close to the slipway so that also needs repairing.

We have started to remove spoil and silt from the Top Pound, between top and middle locks. This is temporarily being stored in bottom pound before some being used as part of the towpath raising at the 'Wet Section', further down the towpath.

Photo Credit: Steve Court



Other sites

Nothing to report this month for:

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

Dave Maloney, WPO

Projects

Peterborough Arms

We have had a quote from the Structural Engineer for work needed on the beam in the main bar and the cost of the actual repair bracket. Both have been deemed acceptable and the Structural Engineer has been advised to continue.

We await final report on the 3 cellar beams.

Unfortunately, due to our small group of volunteers when someone becomes unavailable we often have to cancel a work party as volunteers are not allowed to work on their own. Such has been the case this past month which has resulted in delays to our work in the cellar to replace standard lights with LED and putting up some stud walling to reduce the cellar area that needs to be cooled.

If you are a competent DIYer or retired trade person that could help us with our maintenance/project work, please do get in touch. We are a friendly team and the work is varied and satisfying- Oh and there is often cake.

The pub itself is attracting more visitors to the entertainment nights, darts teams, skittle matches, Sunday lunches or just to enjoy the bar. As someone who has been involved with the pubs restoration since day one, this is great to see.

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Top Lock Bridge



Roger Noyce and team continue with the work on the lock entrance walls between the bridge and the lock gate. Both brick facing walls have had a concrete back fill. This will be followed by casting the concrete coping.

Photo Credit: Howard Wilson

Howard Wilson.

Carpenters' Workshop

Good progress continues to be made in the annex area this passed month with Steve Court coming to site and running relevant copper pipes for the heating/water systems. This will allow us to finish of cladding the internal walls of the toilet area.
Other tasks:

- Electrical cables ran for lighting and ring circuits with a bit more to do.
- Kitchen units installed.
- Work top, wall and floor tiles delivered.
- Ceilings painted and two coats of paint applied to kitchen walls.
- Insulation of celling above annex and south wall apex completed.
- Samples of floor brick for main workshop still not arrived.
- Externally both water treatment and rainwater salvage systems arrived on site.
- Decision was made as to where tanks will be situated, and relevant temp works/RAMS started.

Another visit from Wiltshire Council Building control to discuss various elements. They are happy with progress, but now need drawings/calculations for the bridge and roadway to CWS to ensure both are capable of taking the weight of a loaded fire engine.

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
Nothing to report.

Ray Canter / Howard Wilson

Melksham Link

Following the meeting between the EA and Wiltshire Council Planning, we heard that the EA offer to "work in partnership" with us on our planning application, means that they will advise us on scoping the WER assessment they want, without charge.
As we still maintain that we have provided them with the studies they asked for this is an offer we won't be taking up. Instead, we are challenging the EA request.

Regarding Flood Risk, the EA want us to provide a new FRA using their modelling, but they have still not provided details. We are maintaining that the updated FRA we have already provided is appropriate and challenging the need for a further FRA.
The beaver survey report has been received and confirmed multiple sightings of beaver activity both upstream and downstream of Melksham. This should not affect our plans.

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

Paul Lenaerts, Project Manager

Environmental

(All photos by Howard Yardy)



A bit of weather meant we had a chance to organise the tractor shed a bit better, including a shelf and wall.



The silt depositing at the end of Gordon's Meadow didn't quite go according to plan with machinery getting stuck. As I write, the mud is still very soft and will need a while to dry out before we start to seed the area with wildflower etc.



We welcomed our first corporate party from Babcock international and despite a rainy day they manage to build some step down from the towpath at Naish Hill and clear an area around a nearby culvert. A big thank you to Chippenham local Graham Oatley for organising his team.





It was great to see an otter playing in the canal during an early morning walk.

However, this weekend I received a picture of a dead otter at the Hyundai garage where the canal crosses the A4. It's likely to be the same one. Such a sad ending to a lovely creature.





We have been numbering the tit boxes along the canal at Pewsham, Green Lane Farm, Pudding Brook and along the wooded section at Semington Road Melksham. This is to allow us to be a bit more scientific with our recording of birds using the boxes. Some of the older damaged boxes have been upgraded with new models made from the scrap wood from the Carpenters workshop build.

Box number 74 at Double bridge has already received an enquiry from a blue tit!



We have also decided to try and raise some money to support our environment work by sponsoring the bird boxes. The deal includes the location of your box, updates from any boxes being used and an end of nesting season report on all the boxes. You will receive special instructions how to visit your box so as not to disturb any residents. A great chance to walk along the canal and see the work we're doing first hand.

To sponsor a box for £10 please contact me at Howard.yardy@WBCT.ORG.UK or text me on 07484356845.

Hurry they are going fast.



Meanwhile two 'anglers' were spotted having just had a fishy breakfast at Naish Hill last week. Cormorants apparently eat a quarter ton of fish over the course of their lifetime (22yrs). That's a lot of fishing.



We continued the hedge laying & between Squirrels' Rest and the slipway. Gansh P can be seen here in front of the new dedge at the small weir opposite triangle wood.



The completed laid hedge from the slipway.



Green team members then planted hedglings to fill some gaps and wildflowers.



A big welcome to Kathryn N and Jenny C our latest Green team recruits seen here with our first aider Gill W.

We recently caught our 11th mink, in the trap on the Pudding Brook section; this is helping to bring native wildlife back to the canal.

Howard Yardy, Wildlife Officer

Boats

Following extensive dredging in the area of the feeder stream, we were able to run Boswell to double bridge, cutting off-side vegetation on the way. This was duly delivered to the green team for processing.

Bob Howlett, Boats Officer

Events

First event of the year was the Chippenham Museum Day with 6+ volunteers turning out to help. Children and accompanying adults got to make 3D Barge horses, barges, dragonflies, which were painted or coloured to their own designs.

We have had confirmation of our pitch booking at the Chippenham Folk Festival, 22-25th May. We also have a slot allocated at the Chippenham Carnival on the 4th July.

First Pewsham Open Day of the year is Saturday 11th April and our friends from St Andrews Lodge in Chippenham make a return visit to see what progress has been made since their visit last year.

The events for 2026 are shown in this report. They are a cross section of events covering fund raising and public awareness or just about volunteers enjoying themselves. The key word is volunteers because without them the Events Team can't plan/run events. Please do volunteer at an event, none of them are particularly arduous and you can make a difference either to the branch/Trust finances or the public in general. We generally come away satisfied after an event in the knowledge we have either showcased the work of the WBCT or raised funds towards this work.

Please contact me for more information on event volunteering.

Dave Maloney
dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk
Chair Events Committee

2026 Events Calendar

	Pewsham Days* Pop-up Café, Boat Trips, Work Site Tours, Green Team Demos Contact: Bob Howlett re Boats	**Engagement**	**Race Marshalling**	**Social**
MCC Events 2026				
Mar				Skittles vs K&A Melksham Conservative Club? TBC
Apr	Sat 11th Apr (St Andrew's Lodge)	Spring Quiz The Neeld Hall 17th Apr	Bath & Bristol Railway race 19th Apr	
May	Sat 9th May (Melksham Men's Shed) (No transport required)	Chippenham Folk Festival 22nd-25th May		
Jun	Sat 12th Jun			Chair's Summer Dinner TBC
Jul	Sat 10th Jul	Chippenham Carnival 4th Jul Melksham Lions Club Teddy Bears Picnic 18th Jul		
Aug	Sat 8th Aug	Dauntsey Festival of Transport & Country Show 29th-30th Aug	Two Tunnels race 16th Aug	
Sep	Sat 12th Sep	Melksham Food & River Festival 5th-6th Sep		
Oct	Sat 10th Oct	Autumn Quiz The Neeld Hall 23rd Oct	Bath & Bristol Railway race 11th Oct	
Nov				
Dec				Branch Christmas Dinner Wednesday 16th December 2026. Barn at the Bell.

Media Relations

Following Canal Boat's full-page profile of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust in its February issue, the editor asked if I could provide a case study of a volunteer for an article which would focus on 'unsung heroes' of the waterways.

To stand out from the stories potentially being offered by other charities, which understandably focus on canal restoration, I suggested branch wildlife officer Howard Y. This allows us to highlight the environmental benefits of our work.

There was a very tight turnaround to provide the consented text and accompanying photographs, but we expect to see the article in the April issue of the magazine.

I am also starting to plan formal celebrations to mark the completion of the Top Lock bridge and the dry dock, with separate photo-opps for each occasion. Therefore, to maximise the impact of these events and secure coverage for the donors, I would be grateful if we could avoid sharing any photographs or videos of these projects for a little while longer (which also gives time for the scaffolding to be removed and for further landscaping to take place).

We will also use these events to promote this year's Pewsham Locks open days.

Justin Guy, Media Relations Officer

Branch Webpages & Digital Comms

Bit of a quiet month on the comms side which we put down to the volume of physical work being done by us digital contributors. That said the posts on line in mid/late Feb were well received and a post on the variety of activities at Pewsham Locks was picked up by the Swindon Advertiser and Wiltshire Times on their social media platforms so the word was certainly spread**.**

WBCT Ambassador Steve Court created a new FB page WBCT Chippenham, Calne & Melksham so we can showcase branch work. It's available by searching for the group name or at this link.
Howard Y posted a great report on the wildlife on the Pewsham line …it was such an early walk he found swans still asleep!!

A post about someone discovering the canal at Calne gave us the opportunity to explain that we couldn't work the line at Calne or the three other sites we have due to low volunteer numbers and encouraged folk to join us.

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

Finances

Branch income in February was £500 from our good supporters the Williamsons (to be put towards the road over the new bridge), £38 donations at the branch meeting and £80 other donations. Also £26 net proceeds from the Chippenham Museum event.

Spending was:

- £275 meeting room hire, 11 months
- £101 diesel and petrol
- £65 grease and oils at K M Parts

Spend by these funds went through the bank account too:

- Aviva tree planting £173,
- Bee Route £103,
- Carpenter's Workshop £93.

Bank balance at the end of the month was £3,213.

Steve Roberts, Treasurer

Membership (Info from SLT meeting)

(as at 25 Feb 2026)

Branch	Company	Individual	Joint	Life Ind.	Life Joint	Memberships	Members
MCC & F&L	4	283	231	43	12	573	816
RWB	2	71	72	10	6	161	239
Swindon	4	196	157	20	10	387	554
West Vale	1	46	34	1	3	85	122
East Vale & Abingdon	7	106	63	23	10	209	282
Offline	2	152	60	38	12	264	336
Total	20	854	617	135	53	1679	2349