Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

RWB Branch Newsletter, March 2026

Coronation Country Park's QR-Code signs

The next development at the **Coronation Country Park** will be a set of signs displaying **QR Codes**, to be placed at different locations in the park – including one near the railway bridge leading to the canal. Members of the Park's Steering Committee have been tasked with creating themed web pages packed with layers of information.

Although these can be viewed on a **desktop or laptop**, they are intended for those walking around the park and using their mobile phones, so what you see on a wide screen is arranged differently compared to an **iPhone** or an **Android phone**.

The first stage was to assemble the information, and then to ensure that the information was accurately shown on a phone or a wide-screen. First results were very encouraging, but were definitely 'work in progress', especially the one on the canal! How do you compress over 200 years of history and 50 miles of main line canal into an easily-digestable format? Visitors will learn that **"Wootton Bassett's Canal"** is only a small part of the **Wilts & Berks Canal** and **North Wilts Canal**. We want people to explore it way beyond Noremarsh Footbridge.

Here's a flavour of what you might expect to see when the QR Codes start appearing. Click on these links:

https://www.ecorwb.org/coronation-country-park

https://www.ecorwb.org/railway-history

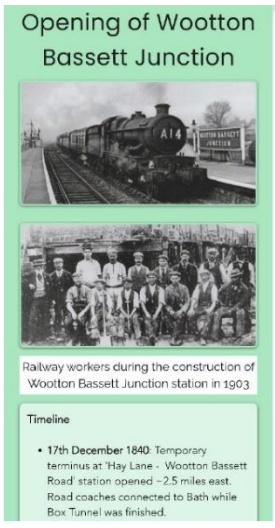
https://www.ecorwb.org/hillforts

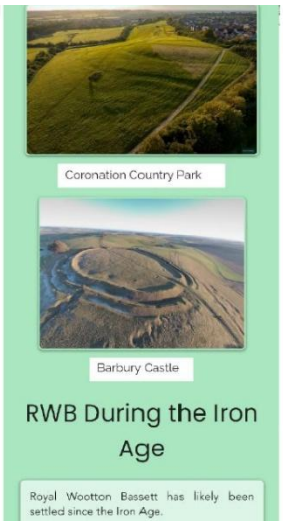
https://www.ecorwb.org/ponds

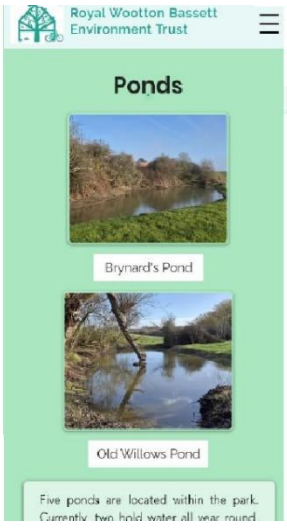
https://www.ecorwb.org/canal-history

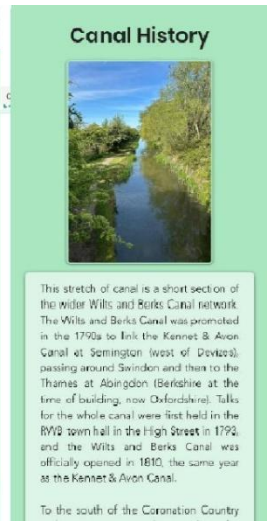
Here's a quick snapshot of each of the five web-pages, as seen on an Android smartphone:











If you spot anything that needs to be changed, please let us know.

WBCT Engineers inspect Studley Grange gabion slips

Our Head of Engineering, **Gavin Maxwell-Hart**, arranged for volunteer engineers with expert knowledge of the behaviour of soil structures to visit Studley Grange to view the Gabion slip that had occurred in December 2020, plus the more minor Gabion slip spotted in mid-February 2026 (for photo, see 'Work Party Update' on Page 4).

We met at the parking area along Bincknoll Lane on Friday 27th February and squelched along the partially-waterlogged towpath past Padbrook Farm to the Biffa Phase 2 landfill mound. **Steven Sexton** and **Scot Parkhurst** were able to attend, but unfortunately **Robert Cox** had picked up an infection and was unwell. We stopped at several points along the way while the engineers discussed what they'd observed, reaching the final straight after at least an hour and a half - there was a lot of analysis.

We decided to turn back without observing the older, Phase 1 mound, which in itself had been subject to minor landslips from 2016 on. The first photo shows the farthest gabion walls either side of the drainage culverts issuing water from the drainage ditches around the landfill mounds into the canal, while the second shows the engineers checking the major gabion slip, which to me doesn't seem to have moved any further south and downwards since Spring 2021.

	Steve Sexton, Gavin Maxwell-Hart and Scot Parkhurst opposite the cascade to the east of the Biffa Phase 2 landfill mound. Despite the dry day, there was plenty of water flowing from the drainage pipes.
	Gavin, Steve and Scot opposite the lowest part of the bulging line of gabions. I have since collated a chronological set of photos starting in October 2015 and ending at the official opening in July 2018. It shows the restoration of the canal and the continued rise of the landfill mound. It actually reached its peak in December 2020.

Scot was able to stay longer than the others, and we took to the work pontoon to get across to the northern bank. Scot took many photos of the mound and its slopes. He aims to produce a report recommending possible solutions.

50th Anniversary preparations



Those of you who have received the Spring 2026 edition of the free magazine 'Community' might have noticed that there is no WBCT report this time. This was partly because I had nothing really new to say.

However, on page 54 the magazine asks us to **'Send in your Stories'**. Surely our 50th Anniversary celebrations will have an impact on the town that spawned the Wilts & Berks Canal way back in 1793 in the old Wootton Bassett Town Hall. Do you have a story about the canal's restoration n the early years?

Or about the 200th anniversary of the canal celebrated in the old Town Hall in 1993 – when the first section of canal was opened to the public at Woodshaw?

The late **Vic Miller** did so much to make that event a success, operating one half of the trip-boat **'Damselfly'** while others including **Dave Pope** (see his photo below) operated the other half on the day.



Vic Miller steering half of Damselfly in 1993.



Dave Pope steering the other half of Damselfly.

If you can, please volunteer to do something for our 50th Anniversary celebration, be it on a trip boat (**Nonsuch** or **The Mary Archard** – Damselfly is now too delicate to be split into two!) or helping with refreshments, or acting as a guide at exhibitions or on walks.

I shall be putting out an appeal in the Summer 2026 'Community' magazine.

Ought we or a specialist **'Green Team'** to cut-and-lay the now rather-unruly hedge growing beside the towpath both above and below Chaddington Lock – itself part of a grand opening in 2005? As mentioned last month, the **Trust's Wildlife Officer Howard Yardy** has proposed that each branch could plant **'50 Trees for 50 Years'.**

Work Party Update

Two work-parties in February were at **Studley Grange**, continuing the battle against the mass of **Norfolk Reeds** in the bed of the canal beside the towpath. It's been tiring work using strimmers from the pontoon, but there's now only a short stretch left to do, apart from a section on the north side where the reeds have grown thickly into the middle of the channel. We hope to take the aluminium work-boat to Studley Grange to cut the remaining reed stems so that they will be completely underwater, where there is a chance that they will naturally rot away. This will still leave plenty of reeds on the north side as habitat for **Reed Warblers**.



Alan on the north bank cleared of reeds, revealing the drainage pipes between the two Biffa landfill mounds.



The cleared centre section, showing that the half-metre gabions had slipped slightly. Waterlogged ground?

At the east end of Studley Grange, the remains of a very large tree had been left on the edge of the towpath until **our local chain-saw expert Mark Greenwood's** shift pattern gave him time to cut the trunk and long branches into manageable lengths for safe removal.



Hand-sawing the tree so that it could be removed.



The tree now on the bank where it could be chain-sawn

If anyone else has a current **chain-saw licence** and would like to join our volunteer team, we have the remains of another tree to deal with, at **Templar's Firs**. At least the towpath was cleared by an emergency team on Friday 20th February, although the tree's trunk is still lying in front of one of the benches beside **Buxstone Bridge**.



19th Feb - a fallen tree blocking the towpath.



20th Feb – **Neil Lazenby** sawing the upper branches.



Removing the branches from the towpath edge.



The towpath now clear – but the bench is blocked.

Our other two Wednesday work-parties were at **Templar's Firs** where the most urgent task was to pump out the immense amount of water that had built up in both boats moored on the north side. By the 18th, they had been pumped dry – and both have tide-marks that reveal just how much water had accumulated over only a few weeks of persistent rain.



Nelson - several inches higher in the water.



Nonsuch: the stern is now higher, as seen on 2nd March.

So far, the leaks either side of **the Blockhouse at Templar's Firs** have not worsened much despite so much rain in January and most of February, but we keep checking that all is under control.

Our **Work-Party Organiser, Neil Lazenby,** is happy to welcome new volunteers. If you want to join the team, please e-mail **neil.lazenby@wbct.org.uk** .

Trustee Council Meeting at Dauntsey Lock Canal Centre

Trustees usually meet every two months at video conferences, but on Sunday morning on 15th February, we had the opportunity to meet face-to-face. The day started quite wet, but it cleared up in the afternoon, when some of us managed to walk part-way towards Seven Locks. I'd earlier checked in the rain that we could walk all the way.



Trustees paid for their lunch at the **Peterborough Arms** after the morning's meeting in the **Canal Centre**.



Trust Chair **Martin Holliss** and Treasurer **Brian Stovold** walking the towpath half-way to **Seven Locks**.

Events

The next **RWB Branch meeting** is on **Monday 16th March** at the **Angel Hotel, starting at 7:30pm, either in the committee room or downstairs in the Restaurant area**. **April's meeting is on the 20th**, while **May's meeting on the 18th** will be our **Branch AGM**. Later in the year, we hope that **John Farrow** will give us a talk at one of our meetings, and that we shall be able to have a Skittles evening at the **Peterborough Arms**.

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Restoring all 70 miles of the Wilts & Berks canal in Oxfordshire and Wiltshire to create a public and wildlife waterside park for walking, cycling, fishing and boating.

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Dauntsey Lock Canal Centre, Dauntsey Lock, Chippenham SN15 4HD