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 April 2026

Chair's Report

Bremhill Parish Council is the latest to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with The Trust.

Melksham Without Parish Council have agreed for us to give a presentation of our work so they can better understand our plans and vision for the future and how we hope that we can forge a closer working relationship with them. This is scheduled to take place on 1st July.

On the volunteers side, it is great to see Brian Grinham back down at Pewsham and cleaning bricks for us again. On the downside, Ray Canter continues to struggle with his health. We all wish him well for a speedy recovery as his expertise and skills are greatly missed down the canal.

As you will see in the Events report this year's Chairman's Dinner is taking place at The Bell Inn on Wednesday 10th June. It's always a great evening and I would love to see you all with partners so if you can make it, please let Dave Maloney know. We have lots to celebrate!

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

Paul Tucker (MCC Member) has over the last few years been running the Trust's 200 Club which raises much needed funds. This club was started by MCC Branch (Jeff & Lynda Daws) many years ago and it would be good if we could keep it as such. So, if anyone would like to take over this role, please contact Patricia Clements (patricia.clements@wbct.org.uk) for further information.

Ali Rodrias (Systems Director) has unfortunately had to stand down due to increased responsibilities at her substantive employer. A renewed recruitment drive will take place to identify a successor.

The Membership & Volunteers Policy has been approved by the trustees. It was agreed that branch chairs will disseminate the policy at their respective branch meetings to ensure all volunteers are aware of its existence.

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

Health & Safety

Working with Martin Palmer I have created the RAMS for the installation of the grey water and effluent tanks to serve the Carpenters Workshop. Work has also started on the RAMS for Bottom Lock's South-East approach wall. There have not been any reported accidents or near misses.

Malcolm Hitchinson, H&S Advisor

Work Parties

Work Party Management Group

In addition to the usual reporting and discussion, the following items have been extracted from the WPMG meeting minutes (in Ray's absence):

- Concerns have been raised about the asbestos stored at Queenfield Farm, from the building roof there. A site visit was arranged to investigate. The plastic covering was found to be disintegrating, exposing the asbestos. Quotes are being obtained for safe removal of the material.
- Clive Dorling, project manager for the Bottom Lock project, went through his written report. Planning is required ahead of the July Work Camp. A site meeting was arranged. It was agreed that Roger Noyce would be the Lead Volunteer, in Ray's likely absence.
- Howard Yardy agreed to take on a WPO role (he has since completed his SSSTS training).

Pewsham Site - General

Our machinery, especially dumpers and excavators, are vital in allowing us to progress with the canal restoration. Over the month we have had mechanical problems with all three of the excavators we currently have at Pewsham (two of our own plus one from WRG) and this has not only limited what we have been able to achieve but also meant we have had to spend time contacting companies, explaining the issues then waiting for them to come out and, hopefully, fix the machines.

Most of the spoil has now been removed from top pound. It still requires final profiling which will be carried out later in the year.

With the Pewsham Locks Open Day approaching and the expectation of an increased number of cars on site it gave us a good reason to clear away some of the large amounts of scrap metal that had been accumulating over the past few months. Thanks to Martin Palmer for using his car to make several trips to the scrap yard with trailer loads of scrap. Not only is the compound a lot tidier but we are also a couple of hundred pounds better off from the proceeds. There is still more to remove that will be cleared in due course.

Other sites

- **Studley Lane North** (aka Mr Abbots).



It had been requested that the culvert and arch of the Studley railway bridge be cleared in preparation for an inspection by the relevant agency, so the Green Team set about clearing the fallen trees and brash from the area making access safe enough and giving much better visual access to the arch, culvert and retaining walls.

Some of the timber was recovered to Pewsham Locks with the rest to follow at a later date.

Nothing to report this month for:

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

Dave Maloney, WPO

Projects

Peterborough Arms

The bracket for the bar beam repair has been paid for and is currently being fabricated. During the week following this report volunteers will begin clearing the area above the beam so installation can take place. Listed Buildings Officers had no objection to the works being carried out.

A second stud wall/doorway has been started at the other end of the cellar area as it was agreed the current cellar curtains weren't really effective at keeping the area cooled.

Work has started on the exterior paint work with the first window sills and quadrant being repaired/replaced, and a layer of primer undercoat applied on prepared timbers ready for next week.

Converting the old smoking shelter to a log store continues and the store is now ready for its guttering and roofing felt.

Paul the landlord had reported a major blockage in a foul waste pipe which, despite local assistance and an expensive plumber, was still an issue when volunteers arrived on site for the weekly work party. We discovered an exposed clay pipe, partially embedded in the vertical wall of a ground level alcove, was holed in numerous places but not why rodding hadn't cleared the pipe. It was agreed that volunteers had the skill set to be able to close off this damaged pipe and connect the toilet pan to a new pipe, which would connect to an external vertical foul pipe. Such a diverse set of jobs this month so far but we always rise to the challenge when we can. ☺

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.

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☺.

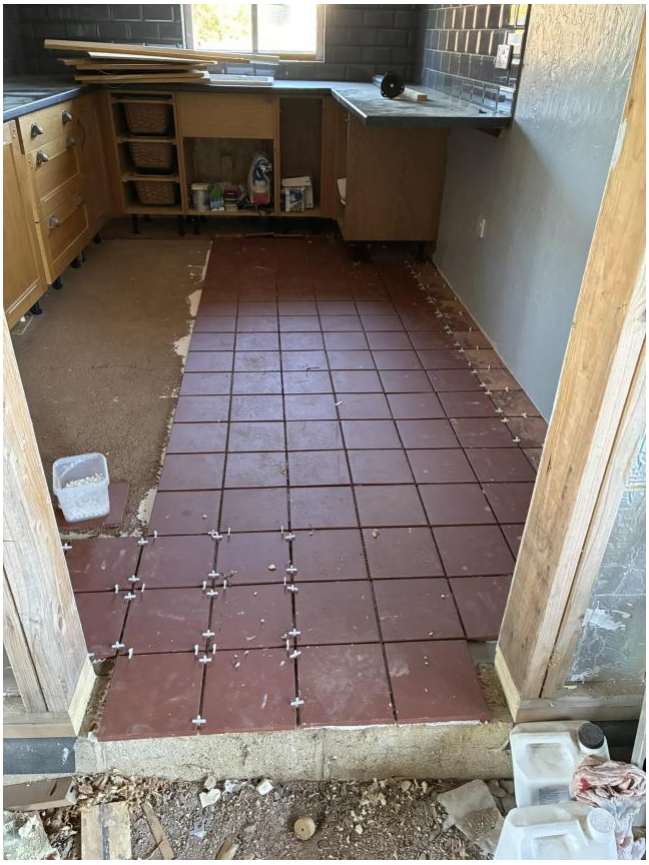
Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Top Lock Bridge
Work continues on the east entrance wall (under the bridge) where the bricks are being removed, cut to half thickness and then replaced thus ensuring there is enough width for boats to pass though. The exit pipe of the by-wash into top pound has been completed.

	
Completed By-Wash exit pipe	Working on east entrance wall

Howard Wilson

Carpenters' Workshop
We continue to focus on the annex area where the floor tiles are being laid in both the kitchen and toilet areas. The storeroom floor will be levelled and painted with garage floor type paint.

	
Kitchen Floor Tiles	Toilet area Floor Tiles

Electrical ring mains to the annex area have been completed and signed off by our electrician.
Solar panels continue to top up our batteries and green energy is being used to power temporary lights and the tile cutter saw.
First set of annex lights will be terminated soon and relevant extractor fans/ less able loo alarms are on site for installation.
Due to obtaining a good, pre current Middle East conflict quote, cladding for the toilet walls is enroute as are the 4200 bricks for the main floor. The bricks in particular, were purchased now due to their price and availability but no specific time scale set for laying yet, although I expect this to be before the autumn.
Site meetings have taken place with regards to the challenges and practicalities of getting the foul water treatment and rainwater scavenge tanks into the ground by the Carpenters Workshop. Both have to have concrete poured around them which will “mould” the concrete to the shape of the tanks.
Open Day visitors continue to be impressed with the building and the quality of workmanship going on inside it.

My thanks to the small band of volunteers who are bringing so much expertise and practical advice to this project.

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Dry Dock
Although the main structure was up and tiled some months ago there have been two major events in the past month. The first being that a boat appeared in the dry dock for the first time in over 126 years as Damselfly was positioned in the dry dock for pre-event maintenance.
On Saturday the 9th May the Dry Dock was Officially Opened with a number of volunteers being in attendance and a spontaneous ribbon cutting taking place. Cheers from a crowd of around 30 visitors followed the ribbon cutting. Tea and cake was enjoyed by all.

Thanks to our PR Guru Justin we had coverage across many genres including the BBC Website.

It is hoped publicity after the event with updated photographs will be provided covered by local newspapers and social media and it's our understanding BBC Wiltshire Radio plan to carry out daily reports around lunchtime. All this of course is great publicity for our restoration work.


Photo Dave Maloney Damselfly. First boat in the Dry Dock for over 126 years.

Dave Maloney, Project Lead

Bottom Lock

A meeting was held with Jon Coates (Chief Engineer) and other interested parties to discuss how we move forward on this project. Initial drawings have been produced for the south-east entrance wall and a list of preparatory work has been agreed (this before the actual rebuild can take place). Malcolm H is producing a set of RAMS. Some preparatory work can be started with silt removal from the lock entrance to allow erection of scaffolding that will enable removal of vegetation and loose brick work on entrance wall. Piles of spoil can also be removed which will be stored temporarily in bottom pound.

Ray Canter / Howard Wilson

Melksham Link

We have received legal advice regarding the best way to make progress on our planning application. The first step seems to be to update our wildlife surveys and consultants are being sought to achieve this.

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

Paul Lenaerts, Project Manager

Environmental (Photos by Howard Yardy or donated by wildlife photographers)

April has been a busy month with more corporate parties helping with our environmental work.

One group from Siemens were engaged in weeding and mulching the Miyawaki forest at Naish hill. The dedge around it needed a top up with some brash to keep the deer out.



Siemens again provided the next party with Emma bringing back her hard-working office colleagues. Last year they collected a huge pile of logs back to the compound and built the steps down from the wet section. This year it was more steps and a dedge at the seat on Naish Hill section. The area is looking nice now with a clear view down from the towpath to the river Avon. Wildflowers have been planted for a summer show and there is a blue tit nesting in the box in a tree opposite. A great place to enjoy nature.



Next up was a group from Rider, Levett and Bucknall who saw the steps created by the previous group and wanted to do their own.

The slope down to the Miyawaki forest has claimed a few of us taking a tumble, so steps were going to help create safer access.

After a few hours hard graft, we had a flight of 10 steps!



A big thank you to all our corporate group who take on some very strenuous tasks with fantastic results.

I have contact with several photographers who enjoy taking pictures of the canal wildlife.

One spotted a grass snake on the far bank next to double bridge.



The bullfinch colour is always stunning. A pair are nesting at Naish Hill.



We had a busy morning clearing the canal bed at Studley bridge recently so that council officials could inspect the culvert under the old railway.

This small section of canal is situated below a car park and unfortunately attracts a lot of fly tipping.



The beaver has been busy gnawing trees on the river Avon. The trail camera picked him up climbing onto the riverbank about 50metres below double bridge. Also, a pair of otters.



Howard Yardy, Wildlife Officer

Boats
Dragonfly moved to the dry dock and a start has been made on repainting.
Petrol outboard no.2 has had an oil change etc.
A successful day of boat trips and Pop up cafe was held on the second Saturday as usual. A big thank you to all who help.

Bob Howlett, Boats Officer

Events
April Quiz Night - Another successful event due to the hard work of our volunteers and the willingness of our Quiz Teams to give their continued support.
A minor tech hitch did not detract from the event and procedures are now in place to prevent any repeat of this particular hitch going forward.
Quiz teams were particularly generous in their gifting of raffle prizes and the purchase of tickets so much so that we ran out of raffle tickets and had to disappoint a few who wanted to buy more! The refreshments, including wonderful cakes, were well received.

May Open Day at Pewsham Locks - A very, very successful day with Friends of Chippenham Museum being our guests for the day along with a large group of visitors from a Camping & Caravan Club Rally taking place close by.
Although one set of tours was slightly delayed whilst we "officially" opened the Dry Dock there were plenty of behind-the-scenes tours, boat trips and of course the obligatory cakes ☺.
My thanks as always to volunteers who gave their time to help, especially Bob & Linda who spent the whole of the day in the Popup Cafe attending to our visitors, those who baked cakes and our visitors who gave generous donations.
Money raised by both of these events will be shown in the Treasurers report.

Events Container - Bob, Malcolm and Keith have spent some time repairing leaks in our events container and fitting it out with shelving. It's pretty much self-sufficient now and with everything in its designated place it should be fairly straightforward to gather the items we need for specific events.



Dave Maloney
Events container- main storage area.

Marshalling: Relish Running - graham.stroud@wbct.org.uk is coordinating this year's events so if any branch member is able to assist at these races they would be most welcome. The Relish Running Team are very generous in their donations to us so it's a great way to get outdoors and raise funds for our work. Volunteer activities include: Helping runners sign in, managing property, left by runners whilst

they race, water stations, food stations etc. Lunch is supplied to all volunteers. Please get in touch with Graham if you can help.

Chippenham Folk Festival - May Bank Holiday Weekend 22nd – 25th May. This is one of our annual major fund-raising events and as such needs a fair number of volunteers to help out. If you are available at any time over this weekend and could help with the boat team on the shore side, buoyancy aids for children, marshalling passengers to/from the boats etc or have sufficient knowledge of the branch and its projects to help out in the display gazebo please do get in touch with me.

Chairman's Dinner, Bell Inn Lacock – This year's dinner will be held on Wednesday 10th June in the Barn at the Bell Inn at 6.30 for a 7pm start. Plenty of volunteers, wives, partners and branch members attending so why not join this great bunch for a wonderful night out, catch-up or make new friends? Please do consider volunteering 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 regularly come away satisfied after an event in the knowledge we have either showcased the work of the MCC Branch or raised funds towards our work.

Please contact me for more information on event volunteering.

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

Media Relations
In April I promoted the publication of the new book by Peter Williams, 'The Lost Waterway of Melksham'.

Peter was interviewed live on BBC Radio Wiltshire's breakfast show and featured by the Melksham News, Wiltshire Gazette & Herald and Swindon Advertiser, with further coverage expected.

The articles were illustrated with our own photographs of Peter alongside the Clackers Brook culvert and Lowbourne Bridge parapet, as well as with archive images of Melksham Wharf and Forest Lock kindly provided by Melksham & District Historical Association.



Peter said: "I've been researching this book for almost 30 years, in between working and helping to raise a family, but it's been an amazing journey.

"I've met many wonderful people along the way, and I'm so grateful to everyone who's helped to discover records we didn't even know existed.

“The abandonment of the canal was a great loss to Melksham, but the modern restoration is truly inspiring.
“It would be fantastic to see it return, transforming the town once again and offering a major boost to wildlife, recreation and employment.”

Justin Guy, Media Relations Officer

Branch Webpages & Digital Comms

Our post on extensive work at Pewsham Locks was adapted (changed a full stop I think) by local press and ran on their website and hard copy…very flattering ☺ and of course great publicity.
Peter Williams’s new book was publicised via social media on our WBCT pages. This book reveals the fascinating story of the Wilts & Berks Canal through Melksham. ‘The Lost Waterway of Melksham’ traces the history of the waterway from Semington to Lacock. It’s available free on the Trust website https://images.wbct.org.uk/index.php?/category/4494

Our Pewsham Open Days were publicised via social media on numerous occasions.
Damselfly in the Dry Dock was picked by the Canal and River Trust and shared again.
The BBC Website shared our news of the Dry Dock Open Day which then of course allowed us to share the link via our Face Book pages.
News of nesting birds and the £900 Howard Y raised through sponsored Bird Boxes was also reported on our WBCT Face Book pages.

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

Presentations

Busy month in May with the first presentation being given to a local primary school class explaining the differences between canals and rivers. Two days later a double act with myself & Howard Y presenting to local rally of the Caravan and Motorhome Club, Wiltshire Centre. Members also came along the next day to the Pewsham Open Day…nice to see I didn’t put them off ☺
Two more in May which will be reported on next month.
If you belong to a group that would be interested in a presentation of canals in general and the local (MCC area) restoration of the Wilts & Berks, please do get in contact. I am flexible with dates and times. Although there is no charge, groups generally donate between £35/£50 for a presentation.

Dave Maloney

Finances

Excellent fundraising and donations in April.

- £600 member donation to Carpenter's Workshop Annex (received in HQ account)
- £254 at the first Open Day (split 50/50 with the Boat Team)
- £505 at the quiz night, net of prizes and venue hire; includes £284 from the raffle and £59 donations for refreshments
- £45 donations from railway enthusiasts
- £28 at the branch meeting

Also, Howard Yardy's bird box sponsorship campaign raised a further £276 for the Bee Route which brings the total to £918.

Expenses were modest:

- £107 diesel
- £58 minibus to take guests to the April Open Day
- £28 hydraulic filter
- £25 sundries for the museum event, the cafe and the welfare unit

Two advance payments were made:

- £295 balance of pitch fee at the upcoming Chippenham Folk Festival
- £680 hire of village hall for eight nights for the August work camp

Bank balance at the end of the month was £2,638.

Steve Roberts, Treasurer

Membership (Info from SLT meeting)

Nothing to report