RWB Branch Newsletter, June 2026



The recently-announced **Wiltshire Community Lottery** will hold its first draw on Saturday 6th June, and our branch has joined the scheme. Tickets cost £1. You may win the jackpot, but every week there is a clear winner – the **Wilts & Berks Canal Trust**, because most of that £1 is paid to us! It will be paid to our branch account, so you can keep up to date with how we are getting on at the monthly meeting.

Those mysterious chains



The eagle-eyed among you may have noticed a steel chain attached to the bank near to Noremarsh Footbridge. There's another one at Chaddington which is easier to spot because it's marked with a red float.

They have been installed as part of a survey by the fishery consultants **Fishtek**, who visited us on 13th June, which happened to be a work-party day.



They explained that they were installing **'Mussel coloniser and shrimp traps'** on behalf of, among others, **Bristol Water** and the **Canal & River Trust**. They will keep the traps in place for 3-4 months and then remove them.

Why us? The water from our canal passes downstream through the **Brinkworth Brook** and the **Bristol Avon**, and the testing is already paid-for.

Mayday celebrations

On Saturday 2nd May there was an event on Coronation Country Park with stalls and displays including the traditional Maypole dance, plus trips along the canal in Nonsuch.



It was the first trip-boat day of the year, with **Martin Palmer** and **Robin Dare** acting as crew. In all, there were six trips every hour, starting at 11am, and the weather stayed dry until 4pm.

Local artist **Marilyn Trew** braved the rain at 4pm; it was her first trip on Nonsuch. Marilyn's maps feature at several places along the canal within our branch area as well as elsewhere along both the Wilts & Berks and North Wilts Canals. The most recent has just been installed at **Mouldon Hill in Swindon** along the restored canal in the park.

Although Nonsuch went well for most of the day on 2nd May, it had proved difficult to start. We have engaged professional boat engineer **Brendon Hossack** to investigate why. He visited on 12th May and checked components and cabling, removing some parts to be sent off for analysis. Hopefully, the boat will be back in action when the parts have been checked and repaired.

New barrier at Marlborough Road

The rotating barrier had been out of action for a couple of months, but a few weeks ago a green horizontal barrier was installed - but locked in the 'open' position.



For the Mayday celebration, drivers were encouraged to use the land south of the Templar's Firs slipway (which had been mown short a few days before, as seen here) as well as the Marlborough Road car park

On 21st May, someone had driven onto the farm track to get to the canal, but by the time they headed back to Marlborough Road, the way was blocked. Wiltshire Council contractors hadn't checked in advance who might be on-site – and hadn't told anyone the code for the combination lock! Later in the day, Wiltshire Council sent all organisations who had access codes for the electronic keypads an e-mail from to advise the new code. Better late than never.

We shall give volunteers the combination code, but on a 'need to know' basis.

Work Party Update

Three out of the four May work-parties took place at Templar's Firs with the other on the 20th at Chaddington.

High winds earlier in the month caused floating reeds above Chaddington Lock to break away and accumulate between the lane and Chaddington Spill-Weir, making it look as if the canal was completely clogged up.



The floating reed mat from the west, before removal.



The reeds, from the site of Chaddington Lane Bridge.



Pulling the mats apart before leaving them on the side.



The mats were checked for wildlife before removal.

During the month, temperatures went up and down like a yo-yo, but on the 27th, the heat was so intense that work finished early. After a dead tree was removed, the paths and picnic areas were mown during the morning, as was the path beside the railway that was almost impassable because the Comfrey had grown across it. A few days earlier, railway contractors had sawn a trackside tree down and simply chucked the branches over the fence onto the path. Although the land between the railway and the canal is owned by **Network Rail**, it's maintained as a permissive path, which was now blocked by branches as well as Comfrey flowers. Luckily for us, the bees simply ignored us.



The thorn tree beside the garage area, at end-April.



Now blown down, the top of the tree on 27th May.



Sawing-up the remains of the fallen tree-top.



Dealing with the other tree, beside the railway fence.

Many thanks to **Gareth Penn**, who is training-up to be another **Work-Party Organiser (WPO), taking the Site Supervisor Safety Training Scheme (SSSTS) course.** We have had couple of new people wanting to volunteer; they first needed to have an induction led by our **Branch WPO Neil Lazenby.** If you want to join the team, please e-mail neil.lazenby@wbct.org.uk.

Just as we thought it would be safe to plan the first work-party of June at Chaddington, yet another tree has been blown down – this time at the east end of the Templar's Firs towpath, late on June 1st.

It had probably been weakened by the very thick growth of ivy around the trunk.

It is possible to climb over it, but it will be removed as soon as possible.



Coronation Country Park activities in May

During the month there was a moonlit **Bat Walk** on 21st May organised by WBCT member **Gerry Tierney** and led by **Wiltshire Bat Group members**, covering the country park and down to the canal. Species observed included Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule and Daubenton's Bat, and there could have been others recorded, still being checked. Where do they roost, I wonder?



During the last weekend in May, there was an **Archaeological dig** at various sites around the southern slopes of **Brynard's Hill**, searching for evidence of a possible hilltop fort or settlement.

The sites had been close-mown like the one on the left, and at the end of the weekend they were reinstated. I am told that several sherds of pottery were collected and are currently being analysed, and I look forward to further details as they emerge. How old were they?

RWB Carnival, 16th May

At short notice, the branch was asked if it could provide a Float for the town's Carnival on 16th May. Many years ago, **Frank Keohane** and others fabricated floats for the event, but this could be time-consuming. Short of simply towing a trip-boat through the streets (as happened a few times over the years), what could we do? Well, on 2nd May as well as being Nonsuch's skipper for the day, **Martin Palmer** brought **The Mary Archard** on its trailer so that it could be measured-up ready for decoration.

The banners showed the four trip-boats used along the canal, from **Dragonfly** and **Nonsuch** to **The Mary Archard** and **Damselfly**. This piece of WBCT history used to appear in two halves when it provided trips at the re-opening in 1993 and at subsequent Trail-Boat events. However, it is now only used as a single craft of double length – which it did at the Chippenham Folk Festival over the Spring Bank Holiday weekend.



Four photos were used for the banners as seen above. **Pinnacle Banners** charged just over £50 plus VAT and turned-round the order very quickly; they were delivered in time for the work-party on 13th May, so that they could be mounted on battens for more rigidity.

On the day of the Carnival, the TMA was towed to Templar's Firs where it was decorated with bunting. Then it was taken to Marlowe Way where floats were judged in the wind and rain (we were 'Highly Commended'). **Keith Talbot** and I had to be 'Wheel Walkers', accompanying the trailer past the crowds along **Marlowe Way**, **Stoneover Lane**, **Noremarsh Road**, **Station Road** and the **High Street**, ending at the **Show Field** where a fair was in full swing.



TMA and trailer in the rain (Photo: Gareth Penn)



The procession on Marlowe Way (Photo: GP).



Turning the corner into very-crowded Station Road.



East end of High Street, and on to the Show Field.

Note the band ahead of us, wearing green; they only joined the procession at the bottom of Station Road, having attended another carnival earlier in the day. At least we had drum-beats to help us march very slowly up the hill.

Branch AGM Results

Many thanks to those who stood for election and for those who attended. All those who stated their wish to stand were re-elected. Sadly, our **Vice-Chair Mark Smart** announced that due to ill-health he would have to retire; we'll miss his 'magic touch' in getting the TV monitor screen to work! **Steve Walls** agreed to become our new Vice-Chair. Steve has long been a Town Councillor and was also Mayor; he has steered the RWB Neighbourhood Plan through .to completion.

From Swindon Branch, both **Chloe** and **Peggy-Sue** attended, and we were delighted to accept Peggy-Sue's suggestion that she takes on Events and Fund-Raising for both branches. She certainly has a flair for running successful Quiz-Nights among a large variety of events in Swindon. Those present voted unanimously for Peggy-Sue to amalgamate the roles. Swindon already had a Community Lottery, and as soon as Wiltshire's was announced, we were signed-up.

Nelson and the Moorhen



The moorhen that built a nest in an old tyre used as a fender on Nelson did successfully raise a brood of tiny bundles of fluff – and they now look like miniature moorhens.

While the nest was in use, it couldn't be disturbed, but once it was vacated in mid-May, it has now been removed and the space blocked by a smaller tyre.

We are now waiting for the shims to be put in place in the engine bay, so that Nelson can help keep the yellow water-lilies in check. There are far too many of them for those moorhens to munch.

There are at least two other broods of Moorhen chicks recently hatched, seen between the two footbridges.

Events

The first **Branch Quiz** is planned to take place in **late July, most likely Wednesday 22nd**. More details will be announced on Facebook when known.

A reminder that the **Royal Wootton Bassett branch meetings** will be held on the third Monday of the month, at the **Angel Hotel in the High Street at 7:30pm**. The next meeting will be on **15th June**, then **20th July** and **17th August**.

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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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