Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

RWB Branch Newsletter, September 2026

Successful Quiz Night on 19th August



Many thanks to **Peggy-Sue Ford**, who has run several Quiz nights for Swindon branch, and has now added RWB to the list. Despite running it in mid-August, it was a great success. There were no fewer than 34 contestants at £5 each, split into 9 teams.

Our congratulations go to the winning team composed of **Simon Meredith** and family, and calling themselves the **Elementals**, who each received a prize.

Despite being on the same large circular table as the Elementals, the losing team was the **Tres Amigos** from Swindon. Both teams obviously kept their answers secret from the opposition! The losers received packs of 'Smarties', and one covered his face in shame when photographed by Peggy-Sue…



The winning team 'The Elementals'.



The 'Tres Amigos': Chloe, Colin & Brian from Swindon.

There was a Tombola arranged by **Chris Barry**, which itself raised £63, and the total amount banked in the RWB Branch's account after expenses was a terrific £212.35. Many thanks to the Angel Hotel for hosting the event in the Ballroom.

Apart from handing out the prizes, I was also a member of the **'Mudlarks'** team, reflecting the work-party that day.

Thank you to everyone for your support. The next Quiz will cost a little more because it will include a buffet.

Angling Club Match, Sunday 23rd August



The Angling Club has gained new followers including those from Peatmoor, Swindon.

On Sunday 23rd, no fewer than 14 vehicles found a place to park near the slipway and along the farm track bypass, and the anglers took up positions all the way from the slipway to the Hancock's Water junction.

An officer from Wiltshire Council's Estates team will be meeting myself and a representative from the Angling Club to discuss the condition of the canal, which has been plagued this Summer with the yellow water-lilies that grow right across the canal if not kept under control by regular boat movements.



At least two anglers seen as far east as Hancock's Water Junction, vied from the footbridge.



A rod hangs over the towpath hedge. Walkers and runners tend to use this track if the towpath is busy.

Progress on new bridges at Wichelstowe

The Joint Venture developing the land at Wichelstowe hosted another site visit by the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust on Monday 24th August. We are grateful that the Wichelstowe team has brought forward its plans to extend the canal past the new **Badger's Bridge** to a new swing bridge and on to a canal junction with the new main line extending east towards Mill Lane and west towards the proposed tunnel under the M4 – and ultimately to join our section of canal at Studley Grange. It may take a few years yet, but in the meantime, we hope to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Trust with an impressive length of new canal in water.

The main structure of Badger's Bridge is now in place, and the road from **Mill Lane** is now partially surfaced. It won't be long before this whole stretch of road is covered in Tarmac, though it won't be open for traffic for another year.



The first photo shows **Steve Court** recording a video blog while another takes a photo of the bridge from the north side. While we were there, the contractors were preparing the formwork ready to complete the concrete towpath bank under the bridge.

The concrete structure of the swing bridge is now complete, including the swing bridge deck. **Steve Court** flew his drone over the swing bridge loaded with dozens of WBCT representatives.



Badger's Bridge seen from the south side, which is still very much a construction site.



Looking southwards towards the new swing bridge in the distance.



A close-up of this view, with the swing bridge deck.



The swing bridge deck seen from the west side.



From the swing bridge looking north to Badger's Bridge.



West bank of the new canal junction, from the bridge.



From the towpath for Mill Lane to the new junction.



Steve Court filming Chloe beside the canal to Mill Lane.

Note the soft bank along the south side of the canal towards Mill Lane, and the wooden posts marking the north bank. We might adapt some of these techniques to strengthen the banks at Templar's Firs. The next photos show the materials ready to be used along the new canal bank, and the already-completed canal east of Mill Lane:



From the Mill Lane end to the canal junction.



The completed channel in water, east of Mill Lane.

Steve Court has kindly supplied the following drone photo of the swing bridge with the with the generously-sized junction beyond. 'Dragonfly' would have plenty of room to turn left towards Mill Lane and to the lock at **East Wichel**, or in the medium term to the right through the trees towards the proposed M4 tunnel and on to **Studley Grange**.



Work Party Update

There have been four work-parties during August, three at Templar's Firs and the last one on 26th at Chaddington. We continued to clear the channel at Templar's Firs of invasive yellow water-lilies, and beyond Hancock's Water of Reed-Mace and other reeds. Many thanks to Gareth Penn ('GP') for some of the photos.



Brendan clearing the weed from the prop, 12th August.



Towing the work-pontoon on 19th August (photo: GP).



Work-boat and ponton seen from Noremarsh Bridge.



Work pontoon with pulled reed-mace & mud on 12th.



Muddy work-pontoon on 19th. (GP)



Buxstone Bridge before work. (GP)



East of bridge after work. (GP)



The Bee-Route tractor and flail mower finally made it to the wildflower meadow on 26th August, driven by **Howard Yardy** and **Andrew Shrewring**. Howard commented that he'd identified several Yellow Rattle plants, which are vital to creating a wildflower meadow. When all was cut and removed, Howard broad-cast a bucketful of wildflower seeds harvested at **Pewsham**.

The tractor made its slow way on to **Chaddington**, where the team had already been busy mowing the lock sides. The water level was down by half a metre.

The Paddock was flail-mown in less than 2 hours; it would have taken the work-party at least a day to achieve the same result. It went on to mow the car park beside the culverts before starting its road journey back to Pewsham.



The flail mower in action cutting and collecting on 26th.



Andrew with all-terrain mower, cutting the edges.



The team's all-terrain mower and tractor.



Nearly done at Templar's Firs. Note the water level.



Flail-mowing but not collecting, Chaddington Paddock.



Removing silt and vegetation, Chaddington Spill-Weir.

If you would like to join our work-parties, please e-mail our Work-Party Organiser **Neil Lazenby** on **neil.lazenby@wbct.org.uk** for more details.

Nonsuch



On 19th August, **Robin Dare** tested Nonsuch, successfully starting the engine. However, the canal was about six inches down thanks to evaporation, making progress almost impossible.

He and crew-member **Kevin Davis** abandoned the test after just one boat length, struggling through the yellow water-lilies. We needed rain, which has since finally lifted the water level on Thursday 27th.

Chaddington Lane Bridge in the 1960s

A few weeks ago, a lady phoned, who said that she was at **Padbrook Farm at Chaddington** in the 1960s until 1969, and that she had some copies of black and white photos of the bridge over the derelict canal. Did we want them? It

transpired that they had been requested in 1989 by the late **John Allen** who was gathering information on the canal at Chaddington and Studley Grange – but that her late husband hadn't got around to sending them.

The photocopy on an A4 sheet was folded up and sent in an A4 business letter, so I was surprised that they'd arrived without crease-marks. I tidied the images up and sent them to **Gary Kenyon of the History Hub.** He colourised them, with amazing results. Let us know if they bring back memories – and if the colours are realistic.



December 1967 - looking east from Chaddington side.



December 1967 – the arch shows some damage.



January 28 1968 – a first line of culverts placed under the bridge, standing proud of the bridge stonework.



January 28 1968 – the completed culverts would extend 30ft. Note the remaining pipes, stacked behind.

After the culverts had been installed, a pile of stones was laid on top before the bridge deck was removed and the road flattened to take 40-ton milk tankers.

We already have some unidentified photos, probably from later in 1968. In the second photo, the bridge parapets had been demolished, but the crown of the bridge was still in place:





Branch Officers re-defined

The August branch meeting heard about a revised set of Branch Officers now agreed between our CEO **Mike Gibbin** and Branch Chairs.

Branch Chair *Provide visible, supportive leadership for a Trust branch and help its volunteers, projects and partnerships progress effectively.*

Vice-Chair *Support the Branch Chair and provide continuity of leadership when the Chair is unavailable or additional help is needed.*

Branch Secretary *Provide clear and dependable administrative support so that branch decisions, actions and updates are accurately recorded and communicated.*

Branch Accounts Manager *Maintain accurate branch financial records and help ensure that income, expenditure and reporting are handled responsibly.*

Work Party Organiser *Plan and lead safe, welcoming and productive volunteer work parties that maintain and improve the canal and associated sites.*

Branch Safety Officer *Provide competent safety oversight and help the branch apply Trust policies and guidance consistently across its activities.*

Work Party Administrator *Provide the records and administrative support that help work parties remain compliant, well equipped and properly planned.*

Corporate Work Party Administrator *Turn enquiries from businesses and organisations into well-planned, welcoming and valuable corporate volunteering days.*

Boat Officer *Where a branch operates a boat, coordinate the safe, effective and sustainable operation of its boating activities.*

Branch Planning Officer *Help protect the canal route by monitoring relevant planning proposals and supporting well-informed Trust responses.*

E-Hub Officer (Environment) *Represent a branch within the Trust's Environment Hub and help embed sound environmental practice in local activity.*

Communications Officer *Tell the story of a local branch, build public awareness and coordinate engaging communications across print, press, social and video channels.*

Schools Liaison Officer *Build meaningful relationships with schools and colleges, helping younger people discover the canal's heritage, environment and restoration.*

Fundraising and Events Officer *Raise funds and public awareness by coordinating accessible, enjoyable events, displays and community fundraising activity.*

History Hub Officer *Help preserve, interpret and share the rich history of the Wilts & Berks Canal and the communities along its route.*

Of course, smaller branches like ourselves will only be able to fill a few of the 15 posts, which would far exceed the number of branch members usually attending! In the meantime, those elected will continue in more than one role. If you think you can fill any of the positions, please let me know on **steve.bacon@wbct.org.uk**.

Events

A reminder that the **Royal Wootton Bassett branch meetings** are held on the third Monday of the month, at the **Angel Hotel in the High Street at 7:30pm**. The next meetings will be on **21st September** and **19th October**. If you cannot use the stairs, let us know in advance, and we shall ensure that we meet on the ground floor.

The **Trust AGM** is at the **Sixth-Form block at the RWB Academy on Saturday 17th October**. If you would like to help to host this event, act as a guide on the morning site visit, or help with providing teas and coffees, please let us know. Many thanks to John Paine, who will be the minibus driver.

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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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