Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

RWB Branch Newsletter, October 2026

Trust AGM at RWB Academy, 17th October



You should all have received an email with the AGM papers including a map showing the school's location and the main supermarkets and garage shops within a half-mile walk, where you can buy lunches and soft drinks.

The Sixth-Form Block has a kitchen where we shall provide teas and coffees, plus cakes.

In the AGM document, I couldn't use a Google satellite map of the school – because it pre-dated the Sixth-Form building!

I now have one derived from Bing Maps, as seen here.

The minibus trips will be at 10:30, 11:30 and 12:30 to Dunnington Farm, which is on private land - but for the AGM we have a licence to visit on the AGM day. Delegates can see the line of the canal, plus the Embankment and Aqueduct, from where you can get a wonderful view of the town and its church tower.

If you wish to go instead to Templar's Firs or Chaddingon, then you will need to make your own way there and use the car park areas. You should be back at the AGM venue before 2pm when the meeting starts in the lecture theatre.

When you arrive back at the Sixth-Form Black, please ensure that you have indoor shoes to change into.

Work Party Update

September started with a work-party at Chaddington on the 2nd. Having had no more than light showers, the water level hadn't flowed through the culverts at Bincknoll Lane for months, and so the spill-weir was still dry.



The remaining silt behind Chaddington Spill-Weir could be removed in black tubs, as seen on the right. Neil and Brendan passed the full tubs up to the towpath wall to be taken to fill holes elsewhere.

By the 9th, there had been some rain which caused the big leak to flow strongly to the west of the Blockhouse at Templar's Firs. Simon braved the mud to locate the hole in the bank while Brendan watched from the farm track.



Simon probing for the leak on 9th September.



Brendan staunching the flow onto the farm track.



The leak was finally located.



With plenty of clay, the leak was plugged by lunchtime.

The work-party itself finished at lunchtime because several volunteers needed to leave early.

In the afternoon, Neil, Gareth and I went to Dunnington 'on reconnaissance' to assess the work required to prepare for a visit on the day of the AGM. We timed ourselves to get an idea of how much could be seen on an hour's visit – but the first 10 minutes and last 10 minutes would be in the minibus shuttle, leaving only 40 minutes on site.



Dunnington Embankment east of the Aqueduct.



Returning over the Aqueduct. The canal was very dry.

On Sunday 12th, we spotted that the work pontoon had been un-tied from its temporary mooring on the north bank and taken on a trip to the second footbridge by persons unknown. Neil and Gareth returned it to its mooring.

On Wednesday 16th, the work-pontoon started on an official journey back to base, while the work-party strimmed a dozen clearings on the north bank.



This was to make them ready to remove the yellow water-lilies which would occur towards the end of the month.

The first work-party at Dunnington was on the 23rd, making rapid progress along the towpath east of Dunnington Lower Lock, onto the embankment and strimming/mowing the canal bed westward and across the Aqueduct. The ultra-dry conditions helped considerably. With thanks to Gareth Penn (GP) for most of these photos.

<table>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Great progress being made before 9:30am.</td><td>Looking east towards the Aqueduct (GP).</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Looking westward (GP).</td><td>View from west of the Aqueduct, looking east (GP).</td></tr>
</table>

We shall be returning to Dunnington for the morning of the 30th, continuing removal of thick brambles in the canal bed. The afternoon will be spent at Templar's Firs tidying up after the joint exercise with the Angling Club.

In October, Swindon work-party will join forces with us to tame the west end of the canal line in Dunnington Farm before the date of the AGM. For most of the Swindon team, this will be their first visit to this part of the canal.

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

Clearing the Yellow Water-lilies, Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th September

The **RWB branch** and the **RWB Angling Club** pooled resources over the last weekend of September to clear the invasive yellow water-lilies before they sink in the Autumn and become silt. There was enough in the branch bank account to pay half the cost of a specialist boat operated by **Justin of Clear Waterways Ltd.** He was based in the local area during the week and originally was coming to Templar's Firs on Friday, but this slipped a day while work finished on nearby fishing lakes. Justin arrived early on the Saturday and was in action all day.

The plants were literally dragged out by their roots using a wide fork. Justin is a keen fisherman himself, and he ensured that there was as little 'collateral damage' as possible to the fish, some of which would inevitably get caught in the greenery. To this end, he asked for several anglers to sift carefully through the piles placed along the north bank, throwing the fish back into the canal.

Justin warned that the silt stirred up by the work could affect the oxygen available, and so he planned his route carefully. His boat was moored overnight securely alongside Nonsuch, and he spent Sunday clearing the loose vegetation on the surface, which lessened the stirring-up of silt. Inevitably a few fish died while others were left

gasping for air; the majority would have migrated eastward to stay clear of the boat.
Alerted by an over-zealous towpath walker on Sunday morning, the Environment Agency was asked to check on the operation and contacted us. The verdict: ***"Having dealt with various reports like this over recent months, I was sure that you would all have this under control. With what you've said, I'm happy that you have a full understanding of this matter and have taken all necessary steps to limit any damage caused."***

<table>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Vegetation piling up next to the winding-hole.</td><td>The forks were lifted up before tipping.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>The forks lifted after rotation, dropping the vegetation.</td><td>Anglers checking for fish caught up in the greenery.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Mid-afternoon on Saturday – a full load.</td><td>Overnight safe mooring beside 'Nonsuch'.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Pulling the boat onto the trailer with an electric winch.</td><td>The very powerful propellor on the 2-ton boat.</td></tr>
</table>

On Monday morning, the canal water was already much clearer, and the fish were back to normal.

Newbury Show Gazebo, 19th-20th September

The **Newbury Show** is a vast event held at the **Newbury Showground** near the Chieveley exit of the A34. A team erected the WBCT gazebo on Friday 18th, and I joined our Swindon colleagues **Chris Barry**, **Henry Sullivan** and **Gary Kenyon** for the Saturday slot.

Another team of volunteers followed on the Sunday, after which the gazebo was taken down at the end of the show.





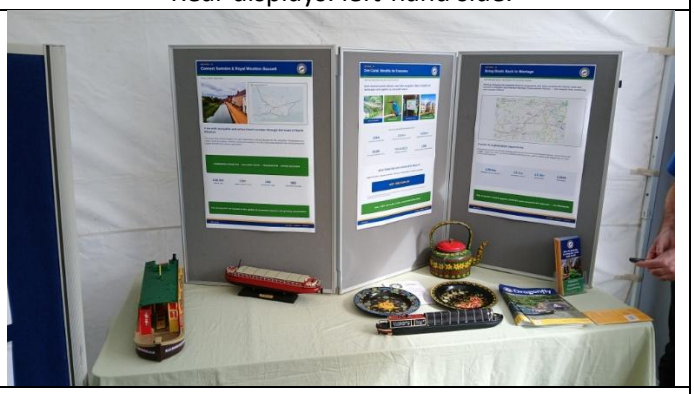
Left-hand side. Note the map and boats on the table.



Rear displays: left-hand side.



Rear displays: right-hand side.



Right-hand side, including model boats and canal ware.

For me, what was special about the gazebo? There were several bold new posters, which certainly caused many people to stop and chat – and a few promises to join the Trust or to volunteer.

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 **19th October** and **16th November**. If you cannot use the stairs, let us know in advance, and we shall ensure that we meet on the ground floor**.**

The December date (21st) is very close to Christmas, so it may be a social evening.

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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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