

DRAGONFLY

Canalware
Fun things to do: page 2 of 3

wow
with every activity



THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
WILTS & BERKS CANAL TRUST
NO. 132 Spring 2014



Build your own boat (above) and make your own lace plate below) - See page 13





WILTS & BERKS CANAL TRUST

PATRON: H.R.H. THE DUCHESS OF CORNWALL

REGISTERED CHARITY NO 299595

RESTORING IN PARTNERSHIP THE WILTS & BERKS CANAL
THROUGH WILTSHIRE, SWINDON AND OXFORDSHIRE

A non profit-distributing Company Limited by Guarantee

Registered Office: Island House, Moor Road, Chesham, Bucks, HP5 1WA

The aim of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

To protect, conserve and improve the route of the Wilts & Berks and North Wilts Canals, and branches, for the benefit of the community and environment, with the ultimate goal of restoring a continuous navigable waterway linking the Kennet & Avon canal near Melksham, the River Thames near Abingdon, and the Thames & Severn canal near Cricklade.

The objectives of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

- a. Convince local authorities, government departments and local organisations of the benefits and feasibility of the proposed restoration.
- b. Convince landowners, local commerce and the general public of the merits of the restoration.
- c. Secure the route of the waterway and adequate water supplies.
- d. Establish the Trust as a key member of a partnership with local authorities and other bodies that will facilitate restoration of the canal.
- e. Implement an agreed programme for full restoration of the canal.

Membership of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust is open to all.

The annual membership rate is £10, with discounts available for families and under 18's. Company and Society membership is also available.

The views and opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily represent those of the
Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

Copyright © 2014 The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

DATA PROTECTION ACT

The Trust membership details are recorded in compliance with provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998

President	Dr David Fletcher C.B.E.
Vice President and Founder	Neil Rumbol
Vice President	Roger Crapper
Vice President	John Laverick
Vice President	Gen Sir John Wilsey GCB CBE DL
Office Telephone Number	0845 226 8567
Internet Address	www.wbct.org.uk
Email	info@wbct.org.uk

Dragonfly 132 Cover Image:

One of the many children who enjoyed a canal-themed day
at Chippenham Museum

Editorial

Editor:- Chris Coyle
E-mail:- editor@wbct.org.uk Tel 0845 226 8567

Sorry everyone, I'm still here, but not for long. Because of the pressure of other things it has been difficult to organise a hand-over, so I am working on this edition. However this definitely will be my last.

In this edition I have tried to include some articles of the sort that I hope will appear regularly, if not in every edition. To reflect the enormous value of the canal to wildlife, we have invited Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to contribute from time to time.

There is also a piece from the Swindon press archives describing a boat journey from London to Swindon via Abingdon. Fascinating in itself as a historical record, I

believe we will need to include more from our archives as we discover more of our history.

It makes me think how wonderful it will be to be able to do that journey again in the future. But to bring that about we must increase the visibility of the canal to politicians and decision-makers, and make sure that we get no more decisions which obstruct the line of the canal and make restoration more difficult.

Finally it is good to see how successful the Heritage days in collaboration with Chippenham Museum have been, and especially to see young people learning about the canal. Catch 'em young!

Chris Coyle

Contents

Vice-Chairman	5
Partnership Countryside Officer	8
Michael Lee—Forty Years of Volunteering	10
Fun with Canal Crafts at the Museum	13
Boat Report	15
Fundraising	16
Snippets from the past	18
Wildlife Notes	21
News from the Canal Shop	23
Around the Branches	25
Membership Matters	39
To the Editor	41
Contacts	44
Situations Vacant	45

DRAGONFLY 133

The next edition of *Dragonfly* will be published in July 2014
Please send articles and reports for inclusion by 1st June 2014

Vice-Chairman's Report

Chris Coyle



As I said in the weekly blog the other day, it really does feel like Spring, so hope and optimism must be in the air, despite the feeling that it is two steps forward, one step back sometimes. By the way, for those of you who have not found it yet, Ken Oliver, Kath Hatton and I are writing a weekly blog, posted on the Trust website. Part of our plan to keep you in touch, as best we can.

The big news continues to be about the Peterborough Arms. As some of you will know, we are asking for members to send their loan pledges for the purchase of the pub. We are working flat out on this project. We are very, very grateful to the people who have already made their contribution. We are looking to make the fund even bigger, so if you would like to make a loan, please contact us.

Similarly, if you would like to contribute but cannot commit to the loans we have asked for,

then a donation of whatever amount would be very welcome. If you have not made a Gift Aid declaration, and can do so, then that is very helpful as we can reclaim extra for the tax you have paid, so we can claim an additional amount equal to 25 percent of your donation.

In the meantime, we are working very hard on the plans for the pub as part of the Dauntsey Lock Canal Centre, and we hope to share some of the thoughts with you very soon.

There is a lot going on in and around Swindon. We continue our discussions on the route back through the middle, and in the shorter term there are a number of projects being worked on. The opening of the new Waitrose store is focusing attention on the restored canal right next door. It is very encouraging to see that the branch is re-organising; and gearing up to take on the challenges.

Very shortly we will see the publication of the independent consultants study into the economic impacts of the new waterway at Melksham. This study, which was jointly funded by the Trust and our partners Wiltshire Council and Melksham Town Council, is expected to demonstrate a very positive impact. We look forward to the full results, and you can be certain we will be publicising them!

From the front cover and from reports you will see elsewhere in *Dragonfly* the Heritage Days organised jointly with Chippenham Museum in February were a great success. Following on from that, the next note for your diaries is the two open days on the canalside at Pewsham, on 20th and 21st June. The first day is aimed at schoolchildren, and I am delighted to say that we are already fully booked. The Saturday is open day for the whole community, including members of course. We are very pleased to have Heritage Lottery funding for these events. So why not come along and enjoy the day?

The other projects that we have mentioned before continue to

make progress: the Biffa landfill site at Studley Grange, Pewsham Locks, Moulden Hill to name a few. We expect to bring you more news on these in due time. And of course, another date for your diaries - the Melksham River Festival on September 6th and 7th. We are marking the fact that it is one hundred years since the Act of Abandonment was passed in 1914 with a festival, to give a clear message that we are back, and are working to restore the canal, starting with a brand new waterway at Melksham.

On a different topic, we have been thinking about our members, and how we can harness their enthusiasm. We are very pleased to have 'armchair' members of course, as the fact that they are members and supporters is an indication to the outside world of their commitment to the restoration. And of course many of our members are involved in branch activities, which are a core feature of the way we work; they are the focus for much of the physical work of restoration, giving volunteers a sense of pride and ownership, as well as doing a multitude of other things such as fund-raising, building re-

relationships with the local communities, and of course having a significant social element as well.

However quite a lot of our members are for one reason or another not affiliated to a branch. It occurs to me to wonder whether we should be thinking about an additional way of bringing members together, by interest group rather than by geography. For example, I am sure that we have many members who appreciate the enormous benefits that the canal can bring to wildlife, and would be interested in forming a group to focus on this. Others might be interested in the industrial archaeology and artefacts

associated with the canal. Our canal is so lovely, and we are opening up more for walking, so there might be a group that would be keen to set up walking groups. Personally, I think there is a lot more to find out about the history of the canal, and particularly the people who built it and worked on it.

I would be interested your reactions to this idea, as to whether you think it a good one, what the interest groups might be, and how they might be organised.

Chris Coyle

Leave a Legacy

The restoration of the Wilts & Berks Canal is one of the most difficult and exciting canal restoration projects ever. The sections of the canal that we have worked on so far have already shown the enormous benefits to the community and to the environment of the restored canal. With over 60 miles of canal to bring back to life as a resource for generations to come we will need funding and support for many years. As a registered charity what we can achieve depends largely on voluntary gifts and legacies from our supporters.

For more details and information about how to leave a legacy, contact the Company Secretary on 0845 226 8567 or via chris.coyle@wbct.org.uk

Canal Partnership Countryside Officer's Report

Ken Oliver



Weathering the storms

There can be no doubt that this has been a challenging winter for many and in the general scheme the Wilts & Berks has escaped relatively undamaged. The floods have caused one structure casualty at Pewsham where a culvert under the canal has been blown apart by water pressure from an over-full stream - remedial repairs will start as soon as the torrent subsides enough to make a full assessment of the damage.

Partnership News

The March meeting of the Partnership has just taken place kindly hosted at Bowood House by the Partnership President Lord Lansdowne. The next scheduled meeting is Thursday 11th June 2014 at Wiltshire Council Offices Chippenham. At these meetings the Partners review current and planned projects and offer help and advice to help progress the restoration.

The Melksham Link

Work on the Economic Benefits Study is nearly completed and the report produced by consultants Amec should be published by the end of March. The first drafts of the report show a significant benefit for the town from the project. Work

has started on the species surveys required for the planning application and work is progressing on putting together a funding plan. The new slipway is nearly completed and we look forward to the River Festival over the weekend of 6/7 September.

Moving on.....

The Templars Firs extension project in Royal Wootton Bassett has now received planning consent and the project team are working on the programme of works which we hope to start this year. Similarly we now have planning consent to start work on Pewsham Top Lock and Cottage.

And the next.....

Studley Grange Royal Wootton Bassett is the next project to be under the spotlight of the planner's scrutiny. A planning application is currently under consideration and we hope to follow on shortly with another for the works required at Mouldon Hill in Swindon.

CRT visit


We were delighted to welcome Canal & River Trust's Chief Executive Richard Parry to Swindon recently. Yet another rainy day for a

visit to Wichelstowe and the intended route into the Town Centre was followed by some useful discussions over lunch at the (nearly) canalside Bayberry Inn. Richard was impressed by the progress of the project and has confirmed that CRT will help with technical and other advice, and has noted that the Wilts & Berks will fill a missing gap in a Southern Waterways network.

<http://wiltsberkscanal.blogspot.co.uk>
Ken Oliver
Countryside Officer Wiltshire Council
Tel: 01249 706494
Email: ken.oliver@wiltshire.gov.uk
Partnership Website: www.wiltsandberkscanal.org.uk

Wilts & Berks Blog

Chris Coyle, Kath Hatton, and I are trying to make a weekly bulletin available as a blog to keep you in touch with many of the fast moving events on the projects. You will find the blog at:

 Follow the latest project news @wiltsberkscanal


www.facebook.com/wiltsberkscanal

Land Fund

The activity in acquiring the track of the Wilts & Berks Canal is continuing to grow and so the need for funds is increasing.

It is vital we secure the track, as we cannot make serious progress at any point until we have control of the land.

The Land Fund is still open for donations and if you would like to contribute, please send a cheque to Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, PO Box 3630, SWINDON, SN4 4AN. If you were able to donate a few pounds on a regular basis, that would be even better. Just contact the office on 0845 2268567 or by email info@wbct.org.uk or speak to Kath on 01380 831231 or kath.hatton@wbct.org.uk and we will help you to set up a Standing Order.

MICHAEL LEE – 40 Years of Voluntary Canal Engineering

By John Laverick

Towards the end of 2013 the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust sadly accepted that one of its two Co-Engineering Directors would be stepping down from that role, although the professional engineering support that Mike Lee provides to the Trust has not ended completely – more on that below.

Michael and his wife Margaret, very bravely many would say, have left these shores for a new life in the Sultanate of Oman where they have joined their son Steven and his family in the coastal port town of Salalah. Steven owns a civil engineering company in Oman and just to keep himself out of mischief in retirement, Mike has joined the company as a working Partner.

Mike is a Chartered Civil Engineer of very wide experience, much, if not all of it of direct relevance to canal restoration. He has worked on the design of land drainage and pumping stations, has been an Estimator on projects including Dock & Harbour works, piling, railways and drainage works. He has for two separate periods in his career been a Divisional Engineer, once for a county council being responsi-

ble for the construction of 80 miles of sea wall and some 200 miles of flood protection works on rivers and other water courses. On a second occasion for a water company where he was responsible for all contractual and site administration for a Divisional capital works programme covering Water Supply, Sewage Treatment and Land Drainage works.

Throughout his career, both at home and overseas, Mike has prepared contract and other legal documents, vetted and managed contractors and where necessary negotiated claims. He has drawn up specifications for maintenance contracts and managed their operation.

When commissioned into the Royal Engineers during National Service in the mid 1950's, serving in both Egypt and Germany, he was not to know that his wide involvement with Bailey Bridges was to be of great assistance to WBCT in the 21st century. Mike has been closely involved with the restoration at Semington of the Bailey Bridge gifted to the Trust by Mendip District Council. The bridge will shortly

be utilised as a high level farm accommodation bridge spanning a gap in a former railway embankment through which the new Melksham Link Waterway will pass.

I first became aware of Michael's volunteer work for local waterways from the early days of Kennet & Avon Canal restoration when, back in 1974, he was appointed Assistant Honorary Civil Engineer to the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust, working with the then Honorary Civil Engineer Philip Ogden. Michael was himself appointed as Honorary Civil Engineer on Philip's retirement in 1990 which means that he served the K&A Trust in that capacity for a little under a quarter of a century.

For six years of that period Mike and I worked closely together when as the K&A Partnership's

Project Manager I managed the National Lottery funded final restoration phase of the Kennet & Avon Canal. We became firm friends and as a bonus Margaret and my

wife Valerie shared an interest in textile crafts. Margaret, also an author and accomplished artist, takes these skills with her to Oman where she will continue to practice them in the warm sunshine.

In 2008 I persuaded Mike to join



Mike Lee, now living in Oman

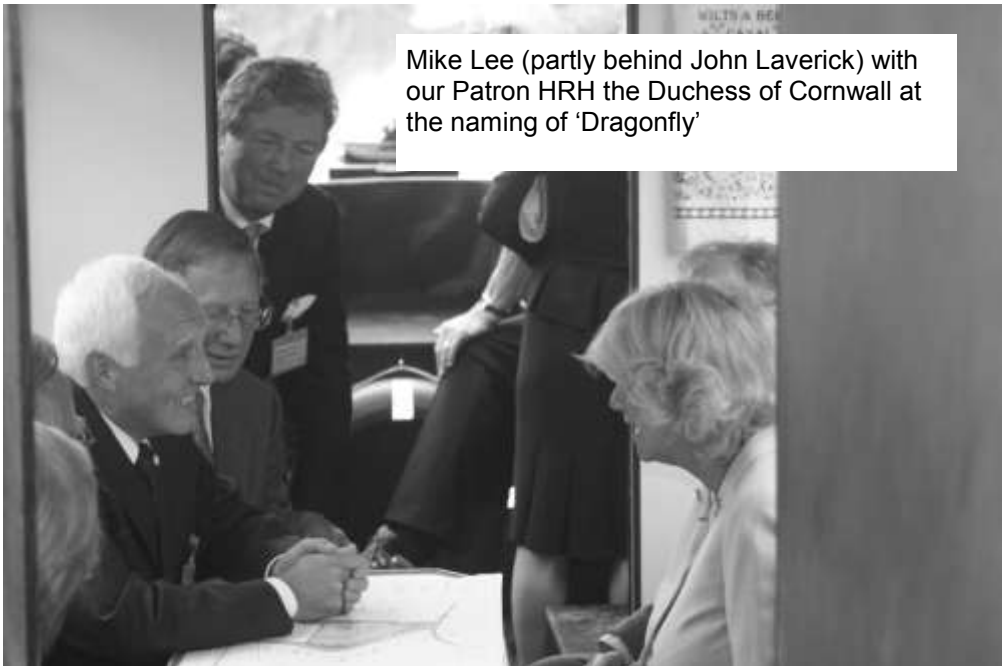
the WBCT management team as Co-Engineering Director, a position he has shared with Eddie Thomas for five years. Mike mainly concentrated on the engineering of the

western end of the waterway and Eddie on the eastern end. They jointly led a very busy Engineering Team. Mike has undertaken most of the engineering design for the Melksham Link Waterway and contributed greatly to the large number of documents needed for the Trust's detailed planning submission.

This year Mike would have celebrated forty years as a volunteer officer of the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust. Although in recent years engineering activity for that organisation has not been as concentrated as that within the WBCT, he nevertheless continued as K&A Honorary Engineer right up until his de-

parture to Oman a few months ago. I know that we shall miss Mike's every day involvement, but typically of the way that he has so generously and freely given of his time and professional expertise to the canal restoration movement for nearly 40 years, he has said that he is still at the other end of an email connection and will continue to provide whatever help and advice to our project that he can.

John Laverick
Vice President



Fun with Canal Crafts at the Museum!

By Val Melville

Having just over two weeks to organise three days of canal-based activities for children in the local museum at Half Term, does tend to focus the mind...

We heard at the beginning of January, (on the 8th to be precise) that we had been successful in our Sharing Heritage HLF bid for our project 'Pewsham Locks: A Centenary Commemoration'. However, it took another 26 days to receive the written permission to go ahead with the first part of our project which was to be a series of drop-in Activity Days for children at our local museum. HLF had been very specific that we should do nothing until we did receive it, and that took us to February 3rd, with Half Term looming far too close for comfort!

Fortunately Chippenham Museum & Heritage Centre has in Andrew Skelton, a fantastic, enthusiastic and energetic Learning & Outreach Officer, and he had already got ahead of the game. We wanted to work in partnership with the museum as they have always been supportive of the Wilts & Berks, plus they had a well-established programme of holiday activities for children, complete with a well-equipped indoor education

room – essential for February. Andrew had it all in hand, had met with me to discuss the activities, had produced a poster, informed the schools and ordered the resources; not too much for the rest of us to do then... It was just a case of organising the volunteers, booking a storyteller, locating some of our scattered finds for display, printing off sheets of paper-based activities, organising the (enormous) HLF advertising board, chasing up a few last minute materials, ordering a CD of waterway songs, devising a Powerpoint loop of canal photos and pictures, printing off photo consent forms, and setting it all up. And it was all done in time – just!

Thanks to Andrew's hard work, the enthusiasm and help of the WBCT volunteers, and the publicity given to the event by BBC Radio Wiltshire, we were almost swamped with enthusiastic children and their parents: ranging from babes in arms to young teens. Apparently the museum volunteers counted over 120 children and 75 adults over the three days - phew! It was BUSY.

Children made balsa wood model narrow boats, decorated lace

plates, painted enamel canalware mugs or wooden spoons, knotted dragonflies or plaited scoobies for keyrings, used a small-scale jig to spin 'rope', uncovered canal finds in a mini-archaeological dig, listened to Alice Ashe telling of her experiences with canal people, solved puzzles and word searches,

Museum & Heritage Centre for hosting the event, to Keith & Ronnie Vickery, Malcolm Hutchinson, Richard Evans, Gabrielle and Derek Flexer and John Millican for their help and hard work, to all the children who were so enthusiastic, and, of course, to the Heritage Lottery Fund whose grant enabled us



Val Melville with some of the children who enjoyed their day

and coloured, cut and stuck all manner of pictures and activities from the excellent Wild Over Waterways materials. They were fascinated to learn a little about life on the canals, and many were amazed to find out that there had been one in Chippenham.

to fund the event. We took the opportunity to send out WBCT leaflets and to advertise the second part of the project – our Open Days at Pewsham Locks on June 20th and 21st. Hope to see you there!

Val Melville

Many, many thanks to Chippenham

Winterization on Nb Dragonfly

We are not sure if Winterization is a word but we have used it to explain the quiet period between Christmas and Easter while Nb Dragonfly is taking a rest.

Santa trips proved to be all that we hoped for - 245 adults and 215 children joined us to try to find Santa along the towpath of the Wilts & Berks Canal in Swindon. This represents a great number of people who now know all about the work of the Trust. The volunteers were wonderful, 1 skipper, 2 crew and 1 Santa for every trip over a period of 11 days with a total of 40 trips.

Most of the team never meet up and we only speak to each other on the telephone or by Email so a night out was arranged on February 1st when we could all match the voices to a face. A skittles evening at the Wood-

shaw Inn in Royal Wootton Bassett proved a great success.

We already have charter bookings and vouchers issued for trips in the Spring. We hope to run Saturdays and Sundays this year and we will begin on Saturday 12th April – having left **Dragonfly** to have a good Winterization. So there is a greater need for both crew and skippers. Please contact us if you could help. Email boats@wbct.org.uk

Skippers require a Certificate of Community Boat Management and Mike Lang will be happy to talk to you about this. The next course will be held at Great Bedwyn in April / May. Please see the advertisement for dates and times of the first Spring Trips.

The Dragonfly Team



**After Winterization
the 2014 season
Spring Trips
Start
Saturday
12 April**

**Trips Saturday 12th 10.30, 12.00, 1.30 & 3.00
Sunday 13th 10.30, 12.00
Easter Sunday 20th 12.00, 1.30 & 3.00
Easter Monday 21st 10.30, 12.00, 1.30 & 3.00**

**Thereafter Dragonfly operates on Saturdays & Sundays
From Kingshill Swindon SN1 4NG
at 10.30, 12.00, 1.30 & 3.00 Adults £5 Children Free**

Fundraising for the Wilts & Berks

Kath Hatton

Almost three months gone of the New Year as I pen this article – days and weeks so busy they fly by!

The Trust was successful with the grant of £7,900 from Heritage Lottery Fund for the Sharing Heritage Programme. This is to fund activities relating to Pewsham Locks. The first events have taken place in partnership with Chippenham Museum and Heritage Centre – activity days for children over the half-term in February which were a great success. More than 120 children and 75 adults attended and all kinds of different activities were carried out, like painting canal ware, making balsa wood boats, rope work and storytelling. Planning is now well underway for the two Heritage Open days on June 20th and 21st which will be at Pewsham Locks. These events should form a good basis for an HLF bid to restore this interesting industrial site at Pewsham with the three locks as a centre-piece.

The 200 Club has now closed for entries for this year. My thanks to Jeff and Linda Daws for organising it once again. 257 tickets have been sold, a slight increase on last year and there will be £2,560 available for branches to apply for and a similar amount for prizes. The first draw will take place at Council of Management meeting on 25th March.

Diana Hunter is going to take over the organisation of merchandise in the next financial year. All stock in the shop and branches will have to be counted as of 31st March. Diana will set up a small team to decide what is required for the shop and sales at events. I believe she plans to set up a small mail order system too.

The purchase of the Peterborough Arms is progressing and the loan pledges are being called in. We are hoping that other members will join in to make a loan to the Trust now that the situation is clearer. Good designs are being drawn

up for the alterations to the pub and setting up of a visitor centre using the feasibility grant that we received. It is an exciting project.

All the big projects like Melksham Link, Pewsham, Seven Locks, Templars Firs Extension, Studley Grange, Wichelstowe Link and Moulden Hill are ticking over at different stages. All could do with more funding and with that in mind I have applied for funding to pay a part-time fundraiser with experience of writing bids for larger amounts of money like Heritage Lottery Funding. I will keep you posted on that. Out East on the canal, the study at Grove is now done and a small team is looking at the best project

to start to make a difference. Perhaps there will be a Garden City on the line?!

We would very much like to commission a second trip boat for the Trust and I will shortly be getting the tickets printed for this year's draw which will be in aid of the new boat. At the same time I will be launching a fund for it so please keep up with all the latest news on our weekly blog: <http://wiltshberksanal.blogspot.co.uk/>

Enjoy the Spring and take some photos for the next calendar and cards!

Kath Hatton

200 Club

At time of going to press 248 tickets have been sold, one up on last year's final number. There maybe a few others to dribble in. A huge thanks to all of you who continue to buy tickets and to those new ticket holders.

The first Draw will be at the March Council of Management meeting and winners will have received their cheques before you read this. As in previous years all prize winners will be shown on the main Trust website and in further editions of *Dragonfly*.

Branch **Chairmen** have been asked to prepare their bids for awards towards specific plant, projects or branch needs. Money should be available in the Spring ready for this year's restoration efforts.

Jeff & Lynda Daws

SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST

A COLLECTION OF STORIES COURTESY OF THE *EVENING ADVERTISER* IN SWINDON

TAKEN FROM THE WILTS BERKS AND GLOSTER CHRONICLE

APRIL 8TH 1872

There has been on the canal at New Swindon, since Monday last, a small steam vessel of somewhat elegant appearance, and showing some rather remarkable workmanship, so much so in fact that it has been visited by large bodies of the New Swindon Mechanics and has attracted very general notice.

The vessel, which is known by the name of the 'Fly-by-night', is the property of William Louch, Esq, who was formerly a pupil under Sir Daniel Gooch in the Swindon factory, and has just performed a voyage from London to Swindon by river and canal, having its owner and several other gentlemen on board.

In length the vessel is forty-two feet, over all, her width of beam

being six feet two inches.

The journey to Swindon, a distance of 134 miles, occupied four days.

The first day's trip was from London to Cobham, a distance of 54 miles, Second day, from Cobham to Pangbourne, a distance of 29 miles, Third day, from Pangbourne to Abingdon a distance of 23 miles, and the fourth day from Abingdon to Swindon by the Wilts and Berks canal, a distance of 28 miles.

Under ordinary circumstances the speed of the vessel is from 8 to 10 miles an hour, but the journey up the Thames was against the stream, and the full speed could not be maintained in consequence, whilst in the canal the weeds, the shallowness of the

water, and the locks, greatly retarded progress.

The draught of the vessel is three feet six inches, but it was found necessary at Abingdon to reduce the draught aft to three feet, and even then the journey from that place to Swindon took seventeen hours, there being, in addition to the eighteen locks, thirty lift and swing bridges to be attended to.

It may be interesting to some of our readers to know that the eighteen locks between Abingdon and Swindon represent a rise in the level of the canal of no less than 282 feet.

The Fly-by-night is not only of an elegant build, but is most complete in all its arrangement, carrying full accommodation for a party of nine or ten persons.

Propelled by a screw, her engine and boiler are models of good and finished workmanship.

The boiler, which is constructed on Messenger's patent principle, is vertical, and contains 115 tubes, one inch in diameter, and fifteen inches in length.

The engine which is affixed to the boiler is single, the diameter of the cylinder being 53 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, with an eight-inch stroke.

The diameter of the screw propeller is two feet six inches, with a four foot pitch.

With the boiler pressed at 80lbs the screw performs 300 revolutions per minute.

During the four day's journey the vessel was under steam forty-three hours, involving a consumption of twenty-eight cwt, of coal.

Although the boiler and engine are exposed to the view on the deck, they are kept quite distinct from the cabin, which is most elegantly fitted up, and so constructed as to be made, if required, quite private, the fittings being of polished mahogany and teak, with plate glass windows.

In various lockers there is every provision for even a long voyage, a complete cooking apparatus by steam being affixed when necessary to the steam boiler.

This is by no means the first time we have had occasion to refer to the ingenuity of the Messrs. Louch.

At the time of the Paris Exhibition they crossed the Channel and ascended the Seine in their yacht "the Argonaut" (10 tons).

We afterwards published "the log" kept during the outward and homeward trip, and a most interesting one it was.

Since then we have published "the log" of a canoe voyage up the Thames from Thames-head to London bridge.

lect that account will be pleased to know that the "Fly-by-night" which met the canoes "somewhere up river" is now lying at New Swindon, where no doubt, on proper application being made, they may enjoy the opportunity of inspecting her machinery and really clever and perfect appointments.

Ed: A fascinating account, and we look forward to more snippets.

Those of our readers who recol-

Royal Wootton Bassett Branch

**The Annual General Meeting
of the above Branch will be held on
Monday 12th May 2014**

Venue to be arranged

For more information please contact :

Jennystratton35@gmail.com

John.bower@wbct.org.uk

WILDLIFE NOTES: Should we feed the birds?

Yes and no.

Kathleen Wyatt, of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, writes:

BIRDS IN SPRING AND EARLY SUMMER

This is a very good time for seeing birds. In the first part of this period, before the trees are in full leaf, the birds are much easier to see. And then birds become very active when they have young to feed. This extra activity also makes birds easier to spot, and they often seem less aware of your presence as they concentrate on the important task of finding food for their nestlings.

Talking of which, people sometimes ask if they should continue to feed their garden birds once winter is over. I believe the answer is yes. The parent birds will take insects and caterpillars which are becoming increasingly available at this time, but with so many beaks to feed anything extra is appreciated. And of course the parents also need to feed themselves. I find that the nuts, seed mixes and fatballs which I put out in my garden soon disappear all year round.

Just one point to bear in mind at the time when babies are being fed: put peanuts into a suitable feeder rather than onto a table or on the ground. This will ensure that parent birds have to peck them into small pieces to get them out of the feeder before presenting them to their young. A whole peanut is big enough to choke a tiny nestling.

As spring turns into summer and the baby birds leave their nests, I have the added pleasure of seeing them in the garden with their parents, who presumably bring them to where they know they will find food.

Many of the birds you see in your garden may also be seen as you walk along the canal, plus a few more if your walk takes you out of town into rural areas. And last but not least, the birds which live on the water will also have babies at this time of year. Mallards are usually the most common, but you may also spot other ducks, moorhens, coots, grebes and swans.

Kathleen Wyatt

In the case of our old friends the ducks, it's very different, *writes Margaret Lord*. Following our article about ducks in the last *Dragonfly* Paul Appleby, a member from Grove, e-mailed the Letcombe Brook

Project to raise the question:

“... why are there so few ducks along the Letcombe Brook these days? I remember a time when the grass verge in Sharland Close was thick with them,

especially in summer, and although they had an annoying habit of waddling across the road just as you were trying to drive into or out of the Close they added character (and no little charm) to the village. Nowadays they are conspicuous by their almost total absence (I spotted a few on the old mill pond near Old Mill Hall a week or so ago, but I haven't seen any in Sharland Close for ages). Are they the victims of some draconian 'wildlife management' policy, or have they been washed away by the raging torrents of the Letcombe Brook?"

Sally Wallington, manager of the Project, replied:

"The ducks along the Letcombe Brook have declined naturally to normal levels. This happens when we reduce the amount we artificially feed them. Along with bread, here in Wantage they were thrown pizza and chips! Their natural diet is aquatic plants, grass and invertebrates. The ducks have dispersed in line with what the environment can naturally support. Ducks do not usually congregate in large numbers and when they do it is usually as a result of feeding them.

Feeding ducks encourages overcrowding, unnatural behaviour, rats, erosion of banks and is fundamentally not good for the duck. Bread is low in protein and many ducks fed on human foods die from malnutrition, heart disease and liver problems.

I agree with you ducks are absolutely a part of our native wildlife and the

work the project carries out improves the habitat for these creatures along with other species. I am not aware of any culling or disease so I hope this allays your concerns."

It seems that in the past the ducks have been the victims of their own character and charm, along with their natural greed and human ignorance! Ducks can't say No. Sally Wallington sums up in a few words the dreadful results of misguided benevolence. Ducks fed on junk human foods (even bread) develop human-type illnesses, and overcrowding leads to aggressive and unnatural (one might say human-type) behaviours.

The effect on the environment can be striking. In Wantage ducks getting in and out of the water have eroded the banks of the stream so badly that it has cost £26,000 in repair bills. This is in addition to water pollution and rats attracted by surplus food. Perhaps the Trust should keep these things in mind when dealing with water birds on the canal.

Anyone interested in the well-being of water birds should read the leaflet *Duck Welfare*, published by the Letcombe Brook Project with the support of several wildlife organisations, and obtainable from the Letcombe Brook Project (01235 771447).

Margaret Lord

NEWS FROM THE CANAL SHOP

We have now had the canal shop in Swindon for over six years having opened it in Dec 2007 and yet I have only just realised that we fail to keep our members reliably informed about what goes on there via *Dragonfly*. Many of you will have course been into the shop at some time but for others that is not always possible.

The latest idea we have been toying with is to use the side window of the shop to promote different branches. If we can get enough items in from a branch we will turn the window over to them for a few months. The first display we put in was the North Wilts Canal and has attracted a lot of interest since. It shows not just the North Wilts Canal but also the Thames & Severn Canal so that the public can see how it all joins up.

We have also given the front window over to the towpath challenge last year to promote that splendid idea, plus we have had a Wichelstowe lock display in the other front window, which as most of you know is the newly built canal here in Swindon. If your branch would like to take over a window please let us know.

The display of goods for sale now is amazing compared to when we first opened the shop and this is almost entirely due to the efforts of Sue Paine who has scoured the internet looking for items as far apart as children's books to Fleeces and mugs. We now have a larger than ever display of goods with the Trust Logo on them. Amongst are latest items are ladies' scarves and gentlemen's ties, plus polo shirts for children as young as three years old. Why not have your cup of tea in a Trust mug on a Trust table mat then wipe it up with a Trust tea towel?

Everything you buy helps to promote the Canal Trust each time you wear it or have it in your car or on your shelf, even the pen in your top pocket helps. We could also do with some more help running the shop so if you live close to Swindon and would like to help please come in and see use on a Friday or Saturday. Wootton Bassett Branch have been a life saver for us in this respect and we thank you for all your help.

A full list of sales items can be found on line at www.wbct.org.uk

Roy Cartwright Swindon.

Wilts & Berks Canal—Poser Page

In the last edition we included the following poser, suggested by one of our readers, Carsten Drew.

William Besley Dunsford, W&BC manager and Gentleman of Swindon, died in 1845. Where was he buried? We know the location of Robert Whitworth, the engineer who surveyed the canal, although the actual grave is lost. We know his son William, who was responsible for most of the construction work, is in Bremhill churchyard.

Does anyone know where this other giant of our canal is now?

We have had a number of responses, as below:

William Besley Dunsford died in the summer of 1845 and as the following extract from his Will shows, he remained faithful to the Wilts & Berks Canal to the end,; he wrote *'that my body be interred at as little expense as possible with decency in the cemetery at Chippenham of which I am a proprietor, I desire that it may be conveyed there along the canal in a boat on a Sabbath day and that one or more of my sons will go with it if convenient and that my faithful clerk and friend Cornelius Reynolds will also favour me with his company on the occasion'*. The cemetery is now a green open space more or less opposite the former police station at Chippenham; there are no gravestones. The canal ran alongside the cemetery.

Regards
David Pollard

Re the query on page 26 of the latest *Dragonfly*. It appears that he died in London (his death is registered in the St George Hanover Square District) but was buried in Swindon – there is a record in the Wiltshire Monumental Inscriptions Register ref 30437, 20 July 1845. Swindon Holy Rood. Aged 61.

Regards
Russell Wear
Swindon

And this month's: - Hugh Henshall, canal entrepreneur, a member of both James Brindley's immediate family and of his School of Engineering had as one of his business interests a farm near Stoke on Trent which specialised in the breeding of horses for the canal haulage trade. It cannot, surely, have been the only one of its kind? Were there any more locally serving the needs of the bargees on the Wilts & Berks and Kennet and Avon? Just how many horses, mules and donkeys would have been required and what was their working life?

AROUND THE BRANCHES

A regular look at what's happening along the line.

MELKSHAM, CALNE AND CHIPPENHAM

Chairman:

Derek Flexer 29 Rowden Hill, Chippenham, Wiltshire. SN15 2AQ. Tel 01249 656 497

Secretary:

Sandy Wright

Tel 01249 658812

Spring greetings, dear reader. After a series of very positive reports from the MCC section in previous issues, I regret this winter has been less kind to us. Our water at Pewsham - that full working height stretch I have been telling you about - has become victim to the wettest winter on record, as we keep being told.

We have a large culvert running under the canal about 50 yards South of the Horse Shoe spill weir taking Cocklemore Brook under the canal. It is an original brick culvert, some five feet in diameter. Or rather, it was. One work-party morning, we came to the canal to find the water pouring through a hole in the Western bank, about two feet across, into the

hole opened up. As we all know, liquids find their way to the lowest point they can and that is precisely what the water in our canal did.

Over a week or two, the continual flow of water down from the canal combined with the maelstrom of swirling water coming up from the brook in full spate below eroded the hole out to about 15



culvert below (picture 1). We assume that since the culvert was running absolutely full, a brick hanging partly down from the top got worked loose by the rush of water and once one brick came out of the top, more followed and a small



hole about two feet across (picture 2).

We have undertaken emergency meas-

ures with an excavator to dig the towpath away and create a by-pass and fencing round the hole. And we have since covered this temporary path with a membrane and road stone, so we have a useable towpath once more (picture 3). But until the waters subside and we can have it inspected, we do not know the full extent of the damage, nor the best way to repair it. No doubt this will be an ongoing tale across several coming issues of *Dragonfly*.



Let's to more positive things; we also have good news to relate. Elsewhere in this edition you will read Val Melville's account of the open days in Chippenham Museum and the preparations for our open days at Pewsham in June, all enabled by an award from the Lottery Heritage Fund. What a fantastic few days we had in February and the days in June by the Pewsham Locks will be even better.

Also we secured Area Board funding to allow us to complete the dry-filled bag wall to reinforce the towpath in the wet section at Pewsham. Once the towpath

was made serviceable again, as in picture 3 above, the team completed the sand bag wall, along with the membrane and back-fill of clay, so another piece of progress. The next stage for that stretch is to apply for funding to dredge the winding hole, raise the towpath and take out the bunds by the Wessex Water pipes, all as one project. You may recall from earlier *Dragonfly* articles that the sand bag wall filled with dry concrete mix, is to strengthen the structure and to

provide a vertical canal boundary, as a precursor to raising the towpath and moving it nearer the canal, allowing us to build a more stable towpath embankment.

We have also secured the lease with Bowood for the land North and South of the A4. We cleared a walkway along the towpath last year for survey purposes and the Tow-

path challenge under licence. Now we have the full lease, we can start comprehensive preparations. Interestingly, one of the lease conditions is that we clear the area over three or more years, to allow the resident wildlife time to relocate and adjust. We have spoken with an ecologist, Stewart Parsons, who is helping us draw up a clearance and maintenance plan. At the same time he has been teaching us how to use twigs in burrows to tell if they are occupied by rabbits or badgers, and many other things. He is a great inspiration; addressing the ecology concerns while combining these with practical restoration progress.

We have also been busy during the winter preparing new display backdrops for the gazebos, new boating signage and banners, getting our period costumes sorted out. Talking of events, here are a couple you might like to put in your diaries:

Sponsored Walk Bank Holiday Monday 5th May - Starting from the Chippenham Butter Cross to the Bell at Lacock and back. We are trying to encourage more people to see and use the canal. To that end although the total walk is 10 miles this year we are going to have a couple of shorter options. The first is to walk to the Bell Inn (five miles and two stiles) and get a mini bus back to Chippenham. The second is aimed at getting people who use wheelchairs and mobility scooters to use the towpath as far as the spill weir and back (six miles and no stiles). Also new this year will be a treasure hunt for young walkers and a photographic competition.

Activity & Open Day, Saturday 21st June - In marking the 100th anniversary of the abandonment of the Wilts & Berks Canal, we are planning a series of special events connected with Pewsham Locks near Chippenham. In June we have two Open Days: the first is exclusively for local schoolchildren, the second on the 21st June is for families and the wider community. We will

have demonstrations of traditional canal based crafts, practical activities, traditional food, music and drama. Volunteers in costume will help to set the scene and bring the Pewsham site to life, enabling local people to appreciate the importance of the Wilts & Berks Canal to their community.

Melksham River Festival, September 6th & 7th - A Trust event, but hosted on the MCC patch, and again, marking the 100th anniversary of the abandonment of the Wilts & Berks Canal, we are organising a River Festival on the Avon with Wilderness boats, steam boats, canoes, trip boats and many period and/or canal themed attractions. Please mark this in your diary and if you possibly can, please talk to your branch chair about supporting this event. As I say, it is a Trust event, that just happens to lie in our area and it will need many people to help staff it, support it, or simply to come and visit.

Do come and see us at one of our events coming up. We'd love to talk to you and share our enthusiasm with you. Until next time, safe digging and many thanks,
Derek.

The Melksham Calne and Chippenham branch meet at St Andrew's Church Hall, Melksham, at 8.00pm on the first Tuesday of each month.

MELKSHAM CALNE & CHIPPENHAM WORK PARTY INFORMATION:

Organisers: Doug Harris Tel 01249 652236
Bob Howlett, 66 Hardens Mead, Chippenham Wilts SN15 3AE Tel 01249 653448

Work Parties: Second & last Sunday each month

Details of the work parties are circulated by e-mail. Any member wishing to be included in this circulation please contact doug.harris@wbct.org.uk

FOXHAM & LYNEHAM

Chairman:

Andrew Chapman,
Tel: 01249 890379 / 07778 568957

Dauntsey Lodge Farm, Sodom Lane, Dauntsey, Wilts, SN15 4JA.

Secretary:

John Harrod, 6 Downham Mead, Chippenham, Wilts. SN15 3LN

Tel. 01249-461023

We have hopefully seen the worst of a winter that seems to have broken countless records for rain and flooding, but with the March 2008 Dauntsey flooding still in mind, we'll just have to wait and see. Despite days without any rain being numbered on the fingers of one hand, a few hardy souls have battled the weather to continue restoration and maintenance along our section of the canal.

Ours is a predominately rural branch with only small villages along its route, but it is an unusual day if the workparties don't meet several walkers enjoying this improving access to the countryside. If while you are out walking any of the Wilts & Berks towpath, come across a workparty and it is safe to stop, have a chat and let them know that you appreciate what they are doing – the odd word of support can be much appreciated, especially when they are cold and wet.

Looking at the branch from west to east, Ian, one of our canal-side residents has been hard at work at Foxham Top Lock and on the water heading east. Ian has an electric outboard on his boat and is a productive one-man weed

-clearing workparty. The photograph shows the section of canal that he keeps clear, partly by running his boat up and down the watercourse and partly by pulling and/or cutting weeds. Much of the weed and sapling growth on the left of the photograph was removed later in the day by the towpath mowing team so the canal edge is more clearly defined and any trip hazards easy to spot. The bank is now much easier for dogs to get up after their swim.

Also along the towpath, several small trees had been brought down by the storms – some of these had been already moved, presumably by walkers, so it is nice to see the wider community helping to protect this community asset. Last year, the hedgerow along this section was tidied up to restore the towpath width and get rid of most of the brambles, nettles, etc. that made walking more difficult. Despite this latest work being done in the last week of February, previously unseen hedgerow flowers were coming into bloom now that they had a chance of daylight, so it will be interesting to see what else materialises as the year progresses. Gordon and the Sunday workparty

have continued to make progress while the rainfall has tested the with their clearance around the holding capabilities of the section Elephant spillway (near Christian between Foxham and the Elephant. Malford), often in the most atrocious In Dauntsey Lock, work conditions. Despite the wet, and (presumably reported in more detail even in the rain, they manage to elsewhere) is progressing on the



View east from Foxham Lift Bridge

weave their special magic and finish with a roaring bonfire. The most direct access to the site is up a long green lane, except at the moment much is deep heavy mud with the official Public Right of Way being so deep under water that chest-high waders would be necessary to use it. The temporary bund that they have built has generally kept water levels low enough to allow working

planning and studies for the Canal Centre. Unfortunately the owner of the canal at each side of the road will not permit the public or Trust members to walk the canal, so there is currently no Trust activity on that section.

The B4069 will be closed at Dauntsey Lock between 8th March and 24th August to allow Network Rail to replace their bridge. I'm

writing this article three weeks into this road closure which has caused a major meltdown on the local back roads. Heavy goods vehicles are ignoring the weight restrictions and many drivers travel at up to double the temporary 30 MPH limits. Two heavily affected roads are the minor single-track roads Trow Lane and Bowd's Lane (at the top and bottom of Seven Locks respectively) which are now heavily used as "rat runs". To date the roads have been blocked by heavy goods vehicles stuck on Trow Lane bridge, cars in the ditch (driving far too fast) and verges becoming heavily rutted where drivers are unwilling to wait in passing places and go "off roading." Dauntsey Lock has a popular car boot sale on Sundays through the summer – this is due to restart in April so it is likely that Sunday mornings could be as bad as or worse than the midweek rush hours. If you intend to visit the eastern end of our patch between Trow Lane and Sodom Lane, you will be well advised to avoid rush hours – outside those times the roads can still be quiet and you should be able to park by the lock on Bowd's Lane.

At Seven Locks, work is con-

tinuing on the planning of the next stage of restoration. While waiting for environmental advice and the waters to recede, work has been limited to some general tidying up and planning for the intended Presentation Day on May 11th. Given the lack of parking space at the locks we had planned a minibus shuttle from more readily accessible parking areas. Given the chaos on the access roads we have been forced to the conclusion that there is just too great a risk that the road could become impassable just when we need to access Seven Locks. **It is therefore with deep regret that we have decided to cancel the event on May 11th.** We are unable to judge at this time how well the works at Dauntsey Lock will run to time so it may be sometime in 2015 before we can stage this event.

Despite not being able to run the event at this time, the site is open and there are a couple of picnic tables where you could sit and enjoy the sights and sounds... and you may bump in to us as we continue to work there.

Andrew Chapman

The Foxham & Lyneham Branch meet on a two monthly cycle, usually on a Tuesday evening at the Foxham Inn, at 7.45 p.m.

FOXHAM/LYNEHAM WORK PARTY INFORMATION

Organiser: Gordon Williams Tel. 07949 257897

Work Parties: Every Sunday at about 9.30-10.00 a.m. Ring Gordon to find out where we are working.

WOOTTON BASSETT

Chairman:

Jenny Stratton, 35 Sheriden Drive, Wootton Bassett, Swindon SN4 8JJ Tel 01793 850310

Secretary:

John Bower, 20, Glebe Road, Royal Wootton Bassett, SN4 7DU

Tel 01793 636297

It's the first day of March and the first day of meteorological spring, so the weather man says. The sun is shining, the daffs, snowdrops and crocuses are flowering. The winter has been the wettest on record they say and well we can believe it. The canal has flooded, the paths and towpath are quagmires in places and any restoration work in the wet and the mud has been so difficult. Having said that we have nothing to grumble about when we see how so many people are still suffering the effects of flooding and storms, and we have spring and summer to look forward to.

Our work parties stopped for a couple of weeks over Christmas and New Year and, for the first time we can remember, we cancelled two consecutive work parties because of storms and heavy rain. The effect of not having a work party is that the following week everyone turns up, keen to get out and get on with something.

We gained permission for access to Dunnington Aqueduct until early April so that we can clear the undergrowth and scrub again. We have had four work parties there but have to carry our tools and equipment about half a mile across fields that are mud baths. Our first job has been to cut a path along the old canal embankment which is higher than the fields and not very muddy. This has been quite a task as I don't think it has been cleared since the canal was abandoned. There has been an enormous amount of scrub to cut down and some huge bonfires to clear it up. The path is now almost clear and will give us easier access to the aqueduct which will take a few more weeks to clear.

The good news at Templars Firs is that our planning application to extend the existing canal from the slipway, through the redundant Council Depot and under the road has been approved with some condi-

tions. The work will be done in phases, phase one being from the slipway to the Council Depot boundary. Needless to say there is a lot of work to be done before we can start and, of course, the funding has to be found.

We had a work party at the Templars Firs section, cutting back and removing the weed from the canal. At the moment this section looks really good and weed free though we know it is poised to return when the weather gets warmer so we will need a couple more work parties there quite soon.

Further along at Chaddington the canal was badly flooded, with the water level the same both sides of the bund at the end of the new section below the lock. However, we were pleased how our system of pipes letting water in and out of the canal worked and the level

was back to near normal within a couple of days. We spent the first work party back after Christmas clearing weed from the canal above the lock and trying to stop the water above the lock from leaking to the section below the lock.

A huge amount of work has been done by the people preparing the planning application for restoration of the canal through the Biffa site. The good news is that the application has now been submitted and is going through its various processes.

It's looking like we will be busy for the foreseeable future, we welcome any newcomers who may be thinking of joining us.

John Bower

The Wootton Bassett Branch meets at 8.00pm on the first Monday of each month. Please contact the secretary for details of meeting venue
WOOTTON BASSETT WORK PARTY INFORMATION:

Organisers:

John Bower, 20 Glebe Road, Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire SN4 7DU Tel 01793 636297
Richard Hawkins Tel 01793 814959

Work Parties:

There are midweek and some weekend work parties. Please phone for details.
Work involves some maintenance of the existing canal area.

SWINDON

Chairman:

Rod Hacker 11 Whittington Road, Swindon SN5 7DF

Tel: 0750 204 6708

Secretary: Oliver Gardiner

Tel: 07785 775993

A new name at the top of the page, and I can only promise to do my best to make this branch successful. At the AGM on the 8th February I accepted the challenge of the chairman's role, supported by a nucleus of the branch committee formed from members who have a much longer track record of activity in the branch than I have. We are going to need much more support from members, as we will see below.

The AGM followed a very successful open meeting held at the new East Wichel community hall. Liz Payne of the Cotswold Canal Trust gave an excellent presentation on their work around Stroud for which this successful trust has attracted very large grants. Our own Chris Coyle followed this by talking about the opportunities and challenges facing the Wilts & Berks. It is clear that the opportunities are growing rapidly and we need to up our game to meet them all.

Our first branch meeting on the 4th March, attended by about 15 members, was devoted to mutual understanding of the branch situation and wide discussion on the ways forward. Swindon branch seems quite small when we consider the population of the borough, well over 200,000, and the importance of this length of canal to the overall scheme. We decided that much wider promotion of our activities and a drive to increase membership would be top priorities for the coming year. We also agreed that the busi-

ness format meetings should be interspersed with more social and informative events for members. Any volunteers to organise them?

By the time this report arrives, we will have held our second meeting on 1st April which will be the first at our new regular venue of the Broome Manor Golf Club (excepting the 6th May – check the website for details).

The work parties and efforts by volunteer groups have been fairly low key in recent months because we lack a large project. They have been carrying out winter maintenance at Westleaze and Mouldon Hill including planting over 300 trees with the help of local residents and employees of AFL who kindly paid for the trees. At Wichelstowe the team spent time digging out a trench in the clay to allow the water trapped at the western end of the canal trough to flow through to the lock from where it is pumped to the upper level of the new canal. We have also taken on the maintenance of the new length where we still have some more complex tasks to bring it up to full operational standard.

Behind the scenes, work is progressing to prepare the schemes for the completion of restoration of Mouldon Hill alongside the new country park and for constructing the link between East Wichel and the original line to the West and up to the Westleaze length. At Mouldon Hill we have completed all

the environmental surveys and are close to agreeing an environmental mitigation plan to protect the great crested newts and provide more reed bed habitat for rare birds. We plan to get development planning consent and a licence from Natural England for the mitigation works in time to start work in the late summer of this year. When successful, we will need lots and lots of volunteers for many different activities. At Wichelstowe the design and costing of the canal line is in hand with a view to starting as soon as possible.

The above projects will bring a step change in effort and expenditure in the Swindon area. This however may only be the start. It is evident from the local press and other sources that Swindon is engulfed by schemes for new developments, many of which potentially affect our preferred routes. We have to be able to track these possible impacts and be prepared to defend our route, negotiate where appropriate, and be able to give clear guidance on what we want to make the canal successful. If we miss opportunities they could be lost forever. If you learn of any potential development please advise me as soon as possible so that we can follow up.

The Dragonfly boat will be starting trips

at Westleaze on 12th April, running on both Saturdays and Sundays now that we have more skippers and crew. We can't quite run shopping trips to the new Waitrose yet but we can hope. Tell your friends and family that they can enjoy the trip this summer.

My final message for this edition is clear. **We need more help.** We need to expand the committee to share the workload and lead new tasks. We need people to help with all sorts of activities, increasing membership, promotions, events, raising funds, communications, and technical help as well as the dirty boots brigade. Even one day a year helping our display at your local fair, fete or other event is very welcome. The future is in all our hands.

End of sermon. Enjoy your spring walking, cycling or even boating on our canals. Working together can also be fun.

Rod Hacker
Branch Chairman
rodney.hacker@wbct.org.uk

PS. If you want to stay in close contact make sure that Oliver has your current email address. Send to oliver.gardiner@gmail.com

The **Swindon branch** meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm, usually at the Broome Manor Golf Club. Regular work parties are on a Sunday. Check our web pages for details www.wbct.org.uk/branches/swindon

SWINDON WORK PARTY INFORMATION:

Organisers:

Oliver Gardiner
Ray Aldridge

Tel: 07785 775993
Tel or Txt: 07502 046708

WEST VALE

Chairman:

Alan Norris, Greenfields, Station Rd, Shrivenham SN6 8JR

Tel: 01793 783024

Secretary:

Brenda Forward, 'Llamedos', Longcot Rd, Shrivenham SN6 8HF

Tel: 01793 782776

Wet and windy. I bet you've read that before this year!

But that's about all I can report this quarter – the effect that the wet and windy weather has had on Branch activities. As you would expect it has curtailed our workparties somewhat, with days cancelled or re-arranged almost every week and the mud, mud, mud has made progress on our new tow-path leveling activities very problematical. And that wind, or should I say gales, brought down many trees and branches that have had to be cleared away.

It even caused the lowest attendance at a branch meeting ever; who wants to turn out on a dark wet windy January evening to hear reports of lack of progress due to bad weather?

All 'Doom and Gloom'! Well No! All that rain didn't in fact cause any flooding; normally very wet spells cause the canal here in Shrivenham to flood onto the towpath, but it didn't! The canal was well full though! And all the properly recovered and stoned towpaths never got too

muddy! And all our recently cleared out ditches coped admirably! And some jobs did get done; the entrance, the road and the car park at the Canal-side Park were tidied up. You wouldn't believe how many wheelbarrows-full of leaves and moss etc can accumulate in just 100 metres of gutters! And we had some lovely bonfires! And we have had most welcome workparty help from Swindon and East Vale Branch members! And the brushcutter and Tirfor were mended! And repairs to the trailer continued! And new members were recruited! And we managed to gap up and plant up quite a bit of new hedgerow, and guess what? We didn't need to water them in!

And it's been mild so we look forward to an early spring. Blackthorn is already flowering!

"It's and Ill wind that blows no firewood!"

February's Branch meeting was graced with the attendance of Kath Hatton and Andrew Chapman, (Foxham and Lyneham Branch Chairman), and was well attended by branch

members. Much positive news, local and canal wide, was forthcoming from Kath, and lively discussion followed so we now look forward to another successful year. It looks like we are going to be busy here in West Vale, any more help out there?

from the Vale of White Horse Council that the branch has been awarded a sizeable grant towards one of our latest projects.

Keep digging, we **are** getting there!

Alan Norris

West Vale Branch Chairman.

And to finish on a really upbeat note I have received news

The West Vale branch meet at The Prince of Wales, High Street, Shrivenham at 8.00pm on the second Wednesday of each month.

Branch web-site: www.wbct.org.uk/branches/west-vale

WEST VALE WORK PARTY INFORMATION:

Organisers:

Chris Forward, 'Llamedos', Longcot Road, Shrivenham, SN6 8HF

Tel 01793 782776

Martin Thompson

Tel 07736 796419



Commemorate the Award to the Trust

What better way to remember the award to the Trust than by buying the splendid souvenir items that are now available.

The Trust was awarded a glass crystal, and you can obtain your own replica, engraved with the name of the Trust.

Pinbadges, ties, scarves and a replica of the crystal award are available.

Please order your items from the Administrator, Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, PO Box 3630 Swindon SN4 4AN

EAST VALE

Chairman:

Brian Stovold, 10 The Kestrels, Grove, Wantage OX12 0QA

Tel 01235 763072

Secretary:

Chris Naish, 5 Tirrold Way, Wantage, Oxon OX12 7DL

Tel 01235 769615

Let's start with the weather. The severe dampness has rather curtailed workparties over the winter and indeed as I write this just after the deadline (sorry Ed!) I hear we have cancelled the normal workparty for the second Saturday in March and deferred the Monday Mob. Having said that the sun is out today and hopefully the various bird boxes along the canal locally should soon have occupants.

The good news is that as of yesterday the Sack House in Wantage is now fully wired up and our local electrician Dan has done the necessary connecting for us. So.....our 200 year old building now has power for heating and a kettle and LIGHTS! The display posters are under way and therefore the East Vale Committee has decided to formally open the Sack House Museum on Saturday 26th April at 3pm.

We already have a few names for those happy to go on a rota for manning when open, (which we intend to be the 1st and 3rd Weds and Sats) however do

please get in contact with me if you are happy to be added. Once assembled we'll hold a meeting to discuss arrangements.

By the time you read this the Sackhouse facebook page and website page on the Trust site should be up and running.

Also at our last committee meeting we welcomed Alan Smith who has kindly volunteered to project manage the replacement bridge at Childrey Bridleway, something yours truly started then got waylaid on other matters.

Wantage Summer Festival this year runs from 8th June to 6th July as I have submitted an even larger programme of walks and events. Details will be emailed out to my "Walkers Mailing List" and put onto the Trust web site. Talking of which Ann in the Vale & Downland Museum has just reminded me that I need to do the walks book as per the west of the canal. This museum in Wantage is well worth a visit (and I can thor-

oughly recommend the coffee cake and quiche in the cafe).

The South East of the Vale has been identified in the Vale draft local plan as an area where housing development is to be concentrated, being close to the infrastructure and the Science/ Business Parks. Ken Oliver and I attended a stakeholder meeting yesterday evening. It will be interesting to see how this develops and surely the extra population are going to need more leisure resources eg long footpaths etc.

One of the new areas allocated is to the west of East Challow either side of the canal. At the same time we have prospective plans for a solar farm to the east of Grove. All of these present a challenge as well as an opportunity.

The events calendar is starting to come together. The branch is

looking forward to attending Childrey Fete on the 21st June and Uffington Show in August. If you would like us to come to your village show...please do contact me. If you are in the area and wish to chat to me as local chairman...I will be there along with the team.

Finally I repeat my closing paragraph from the last *Dragonfly* - if you are receiving this as a Parish Council in the Vale or a local organisation and haven't had our talk or presentation for some time...or at all, then please do give me a call on 07946 524928 or email me on brian.stovold@wbct.org.uk.

Brian Stovold
Chairman East Vale

The East Vale Branch meet at the British Legion Club, East Hanney at 8.00pm on the first Wednesday of each month.

Branch web-site: www.wantage-waterway.co.uk

EAST VALE WORK PARTY INFORMATION:

Organiser:

Bob Airey Tel 01235 769469

Work Parties:

Second and fourth Saturday of the month with changes at public holiday times.

The East Vale work sites are: Childrey New Road; West Challow; Elm Farm section; and Grove Locks. Contact WPO for details.

Membership Matters

Membership Secretary—Vacant

We welcome new members as below.
The total number of members is 2,355

No	Name	Town	Branch
3796	Mr. R. Phillips	Swindon	Swindon
3797	Mr. J. Currant	Box	Off Line
3798	Mr. S. and Mrs. J. Skull	Chippenham	Foxham and Lyneham
3799	Mr. G. Sawyer	Swindon	Swindon
3800	Mr. and Mrs. C. Thomas	Warminster	Foxham and Lyneham
3801	Mr. S. Panahinejad	Uckfield	MCC
3802	Mr. P. Pickup	Westbury	MCC
3803	Rev. A. Boulton	Swindon	Swindon
3804	Mr. D. Day	Swindon	Swindon
3805	Mr. P. Evans	Calne	MCC
3806	Mrs. C. Dowsett	Chippenham	Foxham and Lyneham
3807	Mr. N. Hill	Devizes	MCC
3808	Mr. and Mrs. M. Doble	Calne	MCC
3809	Mr. B. Rayner	Leeds	Off Line
3810	Mr. and Mrs. D. Wray	Holt	MCC
3811	Mr. R. Wallbridge	Chatham	Off Line
3812	Mr. R and Mr. W. Stevens	Abingdon	MCC
3813	Mr. and Mrs. Hemming	Swindon	West Vale
3814	Mr. and Mrs. P. Faulkner	Tockington	MCC
3815	Mr. T. Room	Bath	MCC
3816	Mr. K. Room	York	MCC
3817	Mr. and Mrs. T. Cook	Melksham	MCC
3818	Mr. R. Love	Swindon	Swindon
3819	Mrs. A. Rebbeck	Corsham	MCC
3820	Mr. J. Baxter	Bradford on Avon	MCC
3821	Mr. R. Parry	Nr Corsham	MCC
3822	Mr. M. Wightman	Swindon	Off Line
3823	Mr. D. Tinson	Chippenham	MCC
3824	Mr. D. Tidley	Chippenham	MCC
3825	Mr. I. Firman	Chippenham	MCC
3826	Mr. P. Boyce	Trowbridge	MCC
3827	Mr. and Mrs. N. Fox	Chippenham	MCC
3828	Mr. and Mrs. J. Pugh	Witney	East Vale
3829	Mr. J. Sidaway	Chippenham	MCC
3830	Mr. and Mrs. D. Howells	Chippenham	MCC

No	Name	Town	Branch
3831	Mr. I. Pittman	Trowbridge	MCC
3832	Mr. M. Warner	Worcester Park	East Vale
3833	Mr. and Mrs. P. Loader	Calne	MCC
3834	Mr. and Mrs. A. Lusby	Wareham	MCC
3835	Mr. T. and Mr. C. Robinson	Wantage	East Vale
3836	Mr. G. Culloy	Royal Wootton Bassett	Wootton Bassett
3837	Dr. S. Oxborrow	Swindon	Swindon
3838	Drs. J. and M. Keith	Tedburn St. Mary	Off Line
3839	Mr. and Mrs. D. Goddard	Salcombe	Off Line
3840	Mr. R. Brayden	New Jersey	Off Line
3841	Mr. C. Dimbylow	Keevil	MCC
3842	Mr. and Mrs. P. Beaumont	Charlbury	East Vale
3843	Mr. and Mrs. G. Elwell	Melksham	MCC
3844	Mr. M. Bishop	Didcot	East Vale
3845	Mr. and Mrs. S. Fivash	Melksham	MCC
3846	Mr. G. Pearce	Colyton	Off Line
3847	The Hon. Sir W. McAlpine	Henley on Thames	Off Line
3848	Ms. M. Trickett	Swindon	Swindon
3849	Mr. and Mrs. Sanders	Melksham	MCC

Land Fund

The activity in acquiring the track of the Wilts & Berks Canal is continuing to grow and so the need for funds is increasing.

It is vital we secure the track, as we cannot make serious progress at any point until we have control of the land.

The Land Fund is still open for donations and if you would like to contribute, please send a cheque to Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, PO Box 3630, SWINDON, SN4 4AN. If you were able to donate a few pounds on a regular basis, that would be even better. Just contact the office on 0845 2268567 or by email info@wbct.org.uk or speak to Kath on 01380 831231 or kath.hatton@wbct.org.uk and we will help you to set up a Standing Order.

To the Editor - Letters from Readers

Email:- editor@wbct.org.uk

Write to:- *Dragonfly* Editor, Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, PO Box 3630, Swindon, SN4 4AN

The Editor reserves the right to shorten, change or not to publish any letters received.

To The Editor,
Dragonfly Magazine

The Future

Firstly, let me say that this is in no way a criticism of anyone within the Trust or that of the hundreds of people that put in thousands of volunteer hours into restoring the canal.

It is intended as thought provoking and a reality check of when the project will be completed, and hopefully a few helpful suggestions. When I first joined the Trust it was hoped to open navigation by sometime early in the 2020s. When I started attending work parties some six years ago, we were already working on a one and a half mile length that we are still restoring today. Yes we have had lots of infrastructure to rebuild, minor forays into other sections and involvement in a multitude of other activities. If it has taken six years not to have finished a mile and a half I leave you to do the maths on how long it will take to complete the full restoration. Do we have a current date or is it still slipping to sometime in the 20?? I know it is a complex project and that it will throw up unexpected problems.

All major projects need to be professionally run, we are still very much an enthusiastic bunch of volunteers, in a lot of cases very professional with a wealth of experience and knowledge.

In all major civil engineering projects you start with a programme, this I do not believe exists for the whole length of the canal (or branch lengths), we should produce branch by branch a list of all parcels of land that need to be leased/purchased etc. major works required along the sections to include road crossing, locks, bridges, culverts, spill weirs etc etc that need to be built along with all the scrub bashing and dredging. If we add realistic time scales to these activities a programme for each branch and in turn a master

plan for the whole canal can be produced. It also needs to include the relevant periods for consultation, design, ecology reports, planning applications and fund raising etc. etc. If we have a programme we can monitor progress and take any necessary action. Any project large or small requires a programme then planning, without it it will be twice as difficult (if you turn up to have a bonfire and forget the matches it is not a success). Again all projects large or small should have one person in charge with an overall management system either at Branch level for small projects or Trust level for major projects monitoring the progress; this would assist in completing projects efficiently, and in a timely manner within budget.

I believe that the land acquisition committee/group should be split into 3 to cover the north, central and south sections of the canal. This would relieve one group of people being responsible for the complete land acquisition into more manageable areas and would allow much more local branch knowledge and input.

Lastly I do not know when the annual subs last went up but it is probably more than 8 years, is it not time to double them. I know that some people would oppose it and we will lose some members but does £10 even cover the cost of producing and posting this fine publication.

Jeff Daws

Dear Ed,

At my local auction last Friday I saw a large engraving of what I thought was the original junction of the Thames with the Wilts & Berks canal at Abingdon (having taken a few photo's from this position on our journeys through there) although it was described as '*a canal with barges, village and church to background*'.

Having checked my photos and your website for verification, I set off to the auction on Saturday, hoping no one else would want it and they didn't!

When I got it home the children put **Arthur Tooth & Sons, Abingdon** (the printers' name) into Google and Sanders of Oxford popped up and they have two for sale.

We are all delighted with the print (and we hope you are, too) as the Kennet & Avon is our favourite canal and we look forward to the day when we can cruise along the Wilts & Berks.

Wishing you every success with your work, it is much admired.

The Keeler family, Nb Bulwark,
Mountfield, East Sussex.

Note from Ed: The Keeler family supplied a photo of their print; it is in fact one that we knew of already and a version is reproduced below. We wish them full enjoyment of the print, and many years happy cruising.



Dear editor,

In the edition of Dragonfly no. 131, Winter 2013, there is a letter from Carsten Drew concerning the wear on stonework at bridges.

The boat people were very proud of their cotton ropes. These ropes would have picked up grit while in use and it was this grit which caused the wear on the bridges. Some canals, such as the Leeds Liverpool, had wooden rollers on the corners to protect the stone work, not the ropes. The main difference between this use and the cavers is that the cavers would hurt their hands if their ropes were gritty.

In case Carsten is interested in learning about the working boat era, then I suggest that he consults a couple of books which I can recommend. They are:

Narrowboats explained by Trevor Yorke published by Countryside Books in their Britain's Living History Series, and
English Canals Explained by Stan Yorke published by Countryside Books in their England's Living History Series.

If he is still confused, I am sure that Sue Day of the Horseboating Society could put him right.

Thank you for an otherwise informative magazine.

Gwynneth Buss,
Chester Canal Heritage Trust

Trust Officials and Council of Management

Council of Management :

Chairman	Vacant	
Vice Chair	Kath Hatton, 4 Charlton Hill, Edington, Westbury, BA13 4PL	01380 831231
Co Secretary	Chris Coyle, 27 Seymour Road, Bath BA1 6DZ	07710 737166
Treasurer:	Peter Kinsman, Nant-y-Broch, Purton Stoke, Swindon SN5 4JG	01793 771548
IWA Rep:	Roger Holmes, 72 Primrose Hill Lydney Glos GL15 5SP	01594840316
Project Director - North:	Vacant	
Project Director - West:	Colin Fletcher, Lower Foxhangers Farm, Rowde SN10 1SS	01380 828254
Project Director - Central/WPO Swindon:	Ray Aldridge, contact via Trust Office	07502 046708
Project Director - East:	Vacant	
Fundraising Director:	Kath Hatton, 4 Charlton Hill, Edington, Westbury, BA13 4PL	01380 831231
Environment Director:	Dr David Cook, 11 Highfields Road, Early, Reading RG6 5RZ	01189 863284
Engineering Directors:	Eddie Thomas, 14 Sandringham Road, Swindon SN3 1HP	01793 534404
	Vacant	
Health & Safety:	Dave Stirling, Contact via Trust Office	0845 226 8567
Branch Chair East Vale:	Brian Stovold 10 Kestrels Grove Wantage OX12 0QA	01235 763072
Branch Chair F&L:	Andrew Chapman Dauntsey Lodge Farm, Sodom Lane, Dauntsey, Wilts, SN15 4JA. Tel: 01249 890379 / 07778 568957	
Branch Chair WB:	Jenny Stratton, 35 Sheriden Drive, Wootton Bassett, SN4 8JJ	01793 850310
Branch Chair MCC:	Derek Flexer 29 Rowden Hill, Chippenham, SN15 2AQ.	01249 656 497
WPO MCC Branch:	Douglas Harris Chiverlins House Sheldon Chippenham SN14 0XQ	01249 652236
WRG rep/Technical Ops:	George Eycott, Knowle House, 1 Ham Road, Wanborough, Wiltshire SN4 0DF	07771 775745
Communications Director:	Vacant	
Membership Director:	Vacant, Contact via Trust office	
Towpath Project Director:	Tim Pyatt, 5 Manor Place, Speen, Newbury, RG14 1RB	0845 226 8567
Events Director:	Vacant	
Land Negotiations Director:	Vacant	

Officers

Archivist:	Doug Small, 8 Raymond Rd, Maidenhead SL6 6DF	01628 544666
Contact Officer Abingdon:	Martin Buckland, 4 West Avenue, Abingdon OX14 1QP	01235 204115
Branch Chair Swindon:	Rod Hacker, contact via Trust office	
B'ch Chair West Vale:	Alan Norris, Greenfields, Station Road, Shrivenham, SN6 8JL	01793 783024
Administrator:	Justine Hanley, PO Box 3630, Swindon, SN4 4AN	0845 226 8567
Finance Assistant:	Ann O'Donaghue, PO Box 3630, Swindon, SN4 4AN	0845 226 8567
Events Co-ordinator:	John Minns 19 Compton Drive Abingdon OX14 2DF	01235 525116
Trip Boats:	Mike Lang Contact via Trust Office	0845 226 8567
Corporate Membership Executive:	Harry Bromley Contact via Trust Office	0845 226 8567
ENTRUST Liaison Officer	Ian Skerry, 16 Chapel Hill, Watchfield, Swindon SN6 8TA	01793 784197
Gift Aid Officer	David Chalmers, 40 Greenleaze, Knowle Park, Bristol BS4 2TL	0117 972 0423
PR/Press Officer:	Vacant	
Webmaster:	Vacant	

Partnership - Wiltshire Council Countryside Officer:

Ken Oliver, Wiltshire Council, Monkton Park, Chippenham, Wilts, SN15 1ER	
Email Ken.oliver@witshire.gov.uk	01249 706494

Trust Office

PO Box 3630, Swindon, SN4 4AN	0845 226 8567
-------------------------------	---------------

Emails

Anyone on this page or in the branch details may be contacted using an e-mail address in the form: firstname.lastname@wbct.org.uk (firstname and lastname as printed in the listings).

Situations Vacant

The Trust has many important roles to fill.

If you are looking for an active volunteer role, but one where you can determine your own workload and approach, then think about helping in some of the following. For details please contact the Trust Office.

Communications Director

We need someone to oversee all our communications, both internal and external. We have such a good story to tell—we need someone to tell it!

Engineering Co-Director

After many years, Mike Lee has stood down as Engineering Co-Director. We need a qualified, experienced and enthusiastic Civil Engineer, preferably (but not 100% necessarily) with Canal knowledge to take part in major projects that are now being planned or are coming on stream.

Do You Speak Engineer?



The restoration of the Wilts & Berks Canal is a massive undertaking that requires many skills. Before repairing structures such as locks and bridges we need structural surveys, engineering designs and engineering drawings. We currently have a small team of skilled and committed engineers who work on these tasks but new members of the team will always be welcome.

Are you able to help us with any of these tasks?

Please contact the WBCT office if you can spend some of your time helping us restore our historic waterway.

Maintenance Co-ordinator and Manager

As we restore more and more canal, so the task of maintaining it becomes more challenging and important. We need someone to fill the key role of setting the policy, identifying the resources we need, planning the tasks along the line, and recruiting the teams to do the work, in collaboration with local branches.

Volunteer Co-ordinator

The availability of volunteers from many sources is growing, and it is an area the Trust is keen to grow significantly. We need someone to develop our contacts with all the various agencies involved, make sure we have the right supervision in place, and plan and oversee the programme.

Events Sales Manager

The Trust attends a number of events such as Festivals and boat shows during the year. To ensure that it gains maximum financial and membership advantage at each event the Trust is looking to appoint an Events Sales Manager.

The main tasks would be to:

Liaise with the Membership Secretary, Events Director and Merchandising Director to ensure that appropriate materials and personnel were at events where the Trust is exhibiting

Organise teams to act as 'Events Sales staff, encouraging membership applications and selling Trust items such as merchandise and raffle tickets

Provide briefing and advice to Trust personnel on duty at events

Project Managers

Could you see something through from start to finish?

We are looking for people to manage projects ranging from very small to very large, and of all sorts. It could be overseeing a small section of the towpath in your local area. It need not be physical construction—it could be cataloguing some of our archives and records such as our engineering drawings. Whatever it might be if you can help define it and plan it, please contact us. You would not of course be expected to work alone, but as part of a supportive team of fellow volunteers.



Some serious concentration
needed for canalware painting

