



Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Magazine

Dragonfly



Issue 173 – Summer 2025



WELCOME TO OUR SUMMER EDITION

Editors View:

I found the Canal Trust in 2020 lockdown. Five years on, I am so proud to be part of not only a huge growing achievement year on year, but part of such a wonderful vast network of volunteers, all of which I class as good friends. The Trust is so welcoming and just like the articles you will see within these pages, the work is so diverse!

All charities contribute so much to the community around them and beyond and I am so pleased to see month on month that as a charity we deliver such an amazing result, from school talks, to boat trips and all the renovation, upkeep and wildlife and fauna improvements in-between. ... What a great organisation we are! So, if you're reading this, give yourself a pat on the back and let's enjoy summer 2025 as one happy family.

A special mention this month... my thanks to Helen our wonderful type-setter, who just moved to New Zealand, but continues to work for us. ... And the reward for possibly our furthest volunteer. Just shows that globally we can all still work together.

Chloe Ford — Head of Communications

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Cover illustration: Grove Common Lock and Bridge — Credit: Stu Thompson



OBSERVATIONS FROM THE CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

Well, spring has sprung
and it's now time
for the Trust to leap
forward positively.

One of the areas receiving (quite rightly) an increasing amount of attention is 'Public Advocacy', a rather grand term which means growing awareness of and support for the Trust, especially amongst key decision makers but also amongst the general public.

Amongst recent successes are contacting and/or meeting with all 9 MPs along our 70 mile canal line, each one offering encouragement and support. To have the active support of all our parliamentarians is a great starting point, and an important piece of the jigsaw.

Another piece of the jigsaw is councils along our canal line and we're very fortunate that many are already very supportive. As 3 examples, Swindon Borough Council, Chippenham Town Council and Wiltshire Council have all indicated strong support at Leader/Chief Executive level, and I recently received a letter from Richard Clewer, Leader of Wiltshire Council, an extract from which is as follows...

"I am writing on behalf of Wiltshire Council to express our strong support for the ongoing work of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust in restoring and revitalising the historic canal network across the county. . . . Please extend our gratitude to your team and volunteers for their tireless efforts. We remain committed to working together to realise the full potential of this vital heritage and environmental asset for future generations."

What a great vote of confidence, not only in our work but also in the significant benefits that our restored canal and

towpath bring to all our local communities. Thank you, Richard, and it's an enormous pleasure to extend gratitude to you all for your tireless efforts!

Over the coming months we'd like to develop (and deepen) the Trust's links with every council along our canal line (whether Unitary, County, District Town or Parish), and to share details of the wide range of benefits that our restored canal will bring.



We'd like to get to the point where every single council and councillor is an active supporter of the Trust's mission, namely "Restoring 70 miles of canal and towpath for the benefit of local communities, wildlife and leisure".

Can you help? Do you know a local councillor personally? Would you like to join our Public Advocacy team? If yes, do let Mike Gibbin or myself know. Thank you.

Martin Holliss

CEO's Report:

CELEBRATING OUR UNSUNG HEROES

Writing these articles for Dragonfly is always a challenge — not because of a lack of material, but rather the opposite. With the sheer scale and scope of what our organisation achieves, I'm constantly concerned that I might leave someone important out. Today, I want to shine a spotlight on some of the unsung heroes who form the backbone of the Trust's Head Office operations — those who support not only our internal volunteering and projects but also act as the vital interface with the outside world.

Many of these individuals rarely feature in the pages of Dragonfly, and it's high time we rectified that.

Our Finance Team, led by Jon Gregory, Chris Coyle, and Brian Stovold, ensure the Charity runs on firm financial ground, producing clear, stable accounts month after month. Without their diligence, our Trust simply couldn't function.

Our Planning Team, headed by Rod Hacker, works tirelessly to monitor and challenge planning applications that could threaten the protected route — quietly defending the future of the canal.

Meanwhile, the Restoration Committee, chaired by Peter Thomas and John Goring, ensures our risk assessments and work party procedures are not just compliant but robust and practical, keeping everyone safe.

Chloe Ford, wearing multiple hats, manages both the vibrant Swindon Branch and our dynamic Communications Team, ensuring our message is heard far and wide.

The Engineering Team, with branch lead engineers such as Nigel Leake and Jon Coates and now chaired by our newly appointed Engineering Director, Gavin Maxwell-Hart, brings technical excellence and oversight to every project we undertake.

Our Land Team, managed by Max Crofts, builds and nurtures vital relationships with landowners, safeguarding the land that is crucial to our mission.

The History Hub, led by Gary Kenyon, Robin Earle and John Henn, meticulously preserves our invaluable archives of historic records and photographs, connecting our past to our future.

Behind the scenes, the IT Team — Martin Stubbs and Chris Churchhouse — keeps our essential systems running smoothly, allowing us all to stay connected and effective.

And finally, our ever-growing Funding Team, staffed by Pam Cantor, Ian Mitchell, Steve Woods, and Patricia Clements, work hard to secure the financial resources that fuel our ambitions.

These are just some of the remarkable individuals who work quietly and tirelessly behind the scenes, keeping our Trust alive and thriving. Without their dedication, expertise, and passion, none of what we achieve would be possible.

Please join me in offering them all a heartfelt thank you.

Mike Gibbin

AGM NOTICES

MCC Branch AGM

The 2025 Annual General Meeting of the Melksham, Calne & Chippenham and Foxham & Lyneham Branch will be held on Tuesday 15th July at the Rachel Fowler Centre, Melksham SN12 6EX

The main business of the meeting will be to:

- approve the Minutes of the 2024 AGM;
- approve the Branch Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2025, and
- elect/co-opt Branch Officers for the forthcoming year.

The AGM will start at 19:45, and will be followed by the monthly Branch meeting.

Swindon Branch AGM

The 2025 Annual General Meeting of the Swindon Branch will be held on Thursday 26th June at the Pinetrees Community Centre, The Circle, Swindon SN2 1RF

The main business of the meeting will be to:

- approve the Minutes of the 2024 AGM;
- approve the Branch Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2025, and
- elect/co-opt Branch Officers for the forthcoming year.

Doors open 7pm. The AGM will start at 19:15 and will be followed by the monthly Branch meeting.

Be a winner with our fantastic lottery

This is a great opportunity to support our volunteers and the restoration of 70 miles of canal and towpaths to **win cash prizes** every month.

Visit our website for entry details: wbct.org.uk and click on Get Involved, then select the 200 Club link.



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East Vale and Abingdon Branch News

E. VALE AND ABINGDON BRANCH IS BECOMING MUCH BUSIER

Looking back at the last three months' work party reports and Branch meetings, one thing is certain: the E. Vale and Abingdon branch is becoming much busier!



The atrocious Winter wet weather caused Stu, our WPO, a few headaches organising work parties with changes of dates as they battled against mud and fallen trees. Lots of good work has been done on the Challows section, around Stockham and at Grove Top Lock. In addition several of the new information Boards have been erected.

As we thankfully Spring into Summer, a lot of work is planned to improve access on the muddier parts of the towpath with special emphasis on the Challows section where we plan to completely renovate the towpath. This will require outside contractors and funding. Watch this space!

Behind the scenes Richard (our chair) and Nigel have been working with W Challow Parish Council and Oxford County Council on design and funding for replacement of a weir near the A 417. Funding is now in place. Hurray! Hopefully the work will be carried out over the Summer.

There have been countless meetings with SESRO (South East Strategic Reservoir Option) otherwise known as the Abingdon reservoir. These are interesting times, for more information see the accompanying article by Peter Scatchard.

The Sack House, our small (but beautifully formed!) museum in Wantage, has now completed its face lift and is open from April 26th from 10.00 — 14.00 and the following last Saturdays of the month until September.

Land ownership, and therefore access, continue to be an issue but talks with the Elms Farm Partnership are proving to be very positive with an extended lease in the pipeline, which will enable expenditure of trust money on the cut, a real possibility.

Our regular monthly meetings at Wantage and Grove Cricket Club (OX12 7DH) on the first Mondays of the month at 20.00, where the beer is good and the company welcoming, are growing in popularity. However we still need more volunteers so why not come along and pay us a visit.

Val Scatchard



Top: New sign at East Challow — Credit: Stu Thompson.

IS THAT A CRACK IN THE LOG-JAM I ESPY???

An update on the SESRO reservoir project

Over the now 40 years since Val and I returned from a two-year assignment in New Zealand and purchased the almost completely wrecked Canal Farm House in East Challow that commenced our involvement with the canal group, significant progress en-route to the restoration of 'our' muddy-ditch in Oxfordshire has been sporadic and all-too-localised in scale to do much more than scratch the surface of the enormous challenges the Trust faces in realising its objectives.

Over the years, nay, decades, East Vale and West Vale Branches have kept the flame alive and gradually raised public awareness of the W&B by concentrating on small-scale restoration works and maintenance tasks to provide local benefits to their areas' populations.

Maintaining the public right-of-way along the tow-path from Grove Park Road to the Childrey New Road in the Wantage/Grove area, establishing a toe-hold connection to the River Thames Navigation at Jubilee Junction, Abingdon, restoring the canal path through Uffington Gorse, and providing the wonderful Canal Park in Shrivenham, all have taken the considerable effort of our many wonderful volunteers, including contributions from the Waterway Recovery Group (WRG, pronounced 'Werg') and many corporates who encourage employees to give of their time, all have started to show what benefits a restored Wilts & Berks Canal can bring to the region's inhabitants, human, animal and even vegetative!!

But they leave a huge gap between what we've been able to achieve and what we NEED to achieve!

To continue the earlier analogy, a flame has indeed been summoned into existence, but it has taken continual careful feeding to maintain it, and it's never approached true conflagration level—I can liken it to my two or three times annually bonfires on our hectare grounds in Cumnor, just how carefully one has to maintain those first bright evidences before they really start to catch hold, after which there's no stopping it!!!!

Are we at an irrepressible bonfire lift-on now?

No, I can't yet claim that, but I DO think we could well be looking at the movement towards such!!

How? Well, SESRO, that's how!!!! After no fewer than 30 years of communication between our canal-group and the teams promoting the building of a huge new reservoir between Abingdon and the Wantage/Grove area, in early April our n'th meeting with various parts of the SESRO team resulted in a statement to the effect of this:

1. The provision of a replacement for the historic route of the W&B canal is accepted by the SESRO project.
2. The provision of a water-body, or series of bodies, is accepted by the SESRO project (pounds?).
3. A canal for environmental, recreational and active travel purposes is accepted by the SESRO project.
4. The provision of a canal for navigation purposes whilst accepted as an ambition is not fully accepted at this time largely, I believe, as a result of lack of clarity regarding the Thames connection and further canal development upstream of SESRO i.e. credibility of the restoration to full-navigation-standard part of the Trust's ambitions.
5. SESRO's expectation is that in the light of the above, a letter of support for SESRO's proposals at the Development Consent Order stage is anticipated. Subject to the fine detail, we believe this is not unreasonable for us to provide.

During the meeting, I obtained a SPECIFIC undertaking that this meant that a three-dimensional course for the canal would be provisioned, by which is meant that not only will a channel from the GWR to the A34 be provisioned, but that its vertical profile would conform to the levels needed to step-down from the GWR to the A34 on its way to join the Thames in a series of pounds between where the necessary 3 or 4 locks will eventually be built.

The letter of support has yet to be agreed by the Trust, but we are clearly well on the way to reaching some

form of agreement with the SESRO project as to the benefit of our project to advance the re-creation/restoration of a canal across the area between the A34 trunk-road and the Great Western Railway (GWR).

Exactly what form this takes is still subject to detailed discussions, but the PRINCIPLE of replacing the original, historic line of the canal across the area the reservoir will occupy seems to be reasonably unequivocally accepted, that has two distinct benefits.

Firstly, the safe continuity of the W&B Canal's route from the Thames into the heart of the Vale of White Horse is agreed, and secondly, the ending of uncertainty of whether or not the canal could indeed be rebuilt across the reservoir area that would otherwise at a stroke have ended any hope of restoration of the essential canal link to permit the formation of a southern navigation network.

Once all this is indeed confirmed through the remaining stages of SESRO's planning-approval process, the Trust can work on the essential connections from the SESRO area, NE to the Thames under the A34, and SW across the GWR on to Wantage/Grove, thereby enabling us to be 'BBB2W', achieving our objective of Bringing Boats Back 2 (to) Wantage!!

Once this agreement is in place, to be largely implemented by the SESRO contractors, the associated smaller-scale works needed to connect to the Thames and Wantage/Grove can be logically planned, programmed, funded and implemented by the local East Vale Branch, in a series of prioritised local projects, such as channel clearances, tow-path restorations and improvements, structures' renovations or replacements (locks, bridges, culverts, waiting-walls, wharfs, winding holes, marinas etc). To this end, the 5/25 Year Planning Meeting held three days after the SESRO one has started to prioritise the local branch's activities to meet local and districts' objectives in a logical manner, that will provide the essential credibility for our fund-raisers and grant-awarders to 'buy-into', and we will hopefully start to see consistent progress towards the long-term reinstatement of the Wilts & Berks Canal across the Vale of White Horse, to eventually link up with the stalwart work being conducted by West Vale Branch, then on to link with the Swindon Team's progress and across Wiltshire.

Peter Scatchard



STAIRCASE TO HEAVEN

Who knew there were so many staircases and flights of locks on the UK's canal system?

In Scotland, the intriguingly-named Neptune's staircase comprises eight locks on the Caledonian Canal near Fort William. Designed by Thomas Telford and built between 1803 and 1822, the canal was intended to stem emigration from the Highlands by providing employment. The canal suffered a number of problems over the years caused by poor workmanship, but survived calls to close it.

By 2005, major work had been completed. 16,000 holes were drilled in lock walls for steel rods to strengthen the walls and 25,000 tons of grout was used to waterproof the structures. Neptune's staircase is now hydraulically-operated and the locks are probably in their best condition since being built. And the name? Men who built the staircase called it Neptune after the Roman god of the sea.

The number of locks in the flight at Lapworth near Solihull on the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal varies according to the route taken. Constructed in two phases in 1803 and 1816, the first phase provided a connection to the Grand Union Canal. Despite the locks being narrow, in its heyday the canal's annual traffic exceeded 180,000 tons. A subsequent decline resulted in the Lapworth section being badly silted, with some locks unusable and short pounds running dry.

A successful campaign to save the canal culminated in a re-opening ceremony carried out by the Queen Mother in 1964 after more than four years of hard

work by prison labourers, canal enthusiasts, Army units and National Trust staff. And the number of locks? It's either 26 or 19.

The difference between a flight and a staircase is that a flight is a series of locks near to one another with a 'pound' of water between each lock, while a staircase is a number of locks where the top gate of one lock is the bottom gate of the next lock chamber.

Simply called Fourteen Locks, or the Cefn flight, a series of locks on the Crumlin arm of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal (known as the Mon & Brec) near Newport in South Wales was completed in 1799. Unusually, the builder himself chose the lock width and the first boats were over 8 feet wide. One of the steepest flights in the UK, the Cefn flight's water supply is controlled by a series of ponds, pounds, sluices and weirs.

Today, a fully restored Fourteen Locks offers a tea room, museum, shop and a dragonfly sculpture. And the reason for the wider boats? The Mon & Brec is not connected to the wider canal network.

There are many more flights and staircases, but no room to write about them. Audlem, Adderley, Hanwell, Bow, Hatton, Grindley Brook, Caen Hill, Wheelock, Bingley, Marple and Wigan all have their own stories to tell.

Laura Basden

Above: Fourteen locks – Credit: Laura Basden.

UNEXPECTED BENEFITS OF CORPORATE WORK PARTIES



“Since Covid, there’s been a dramatic change in the way people work.

Our corporate work party volunteers are able to build experience as a team in a new space that allows them to reconnect – not just with nature, but with each other”.

*Images credit:
Colin – Swindon Work Party Organiser.*

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Rachael Wells, Work Party Administrator at Swindon branch, believes it’s an unexpected benefit to corporate work parties. “With so many people working from home, teams can be spread all over the country. We’ve had volunteers from as far away as York”.

Most bookings come via the Trust’s office, but some companies have started to contact Rachael directly. “When an enquiry comes in, I reply with an enthusiastic and welcoming response. I explain what the volunteers will be doing and the difference it will make. Often, I receive an animated reply to say the team is really excited and are looking forward to the day”.

Rachael, who joined the Trust a year ago, is part of a team with Work Party Organisers Henry Sullivan and Colin Stratton. She looks at logistics and volunteer numbers, and then Henry and Colin plan the visit.

“We like seeing a team get together to do something different and learn new skills,” explains Henry. “We make sure they enjoy the day. Some corporate work parties even hold their team meetings as well. And we’re spreading the word, which can be a funding opportunity if an employer is looking to support some community work”.

The trio are looking at a new idea of Colin’s — identifying work first, and then approaching companies who’ve previously sent work parties to get them on board. “We’re building relationships and our list of contacts. We know it’s a great experience by the feedback, recommendations and recurring bookings. What we offer is really quite special”.

“We’re passionate about the canal and all the volunteers”, Rachael says, “and towpath users, who are thankful for the work we do. We’re a small team, but we work really well together”.

At Melksham, Calne & Chippenham branch, Howard Yardy describes more unexpected benefits to corporate work parties.

Howard believes work parties provide opportunities for people who wouldn’t normally be outside in their day-to-day life. “Working outside brings huge mental health benefits — it’s great therapy and good for nature”, says Howard.

As the branch’s wildlife officer, he runs the bee route project, which is creating areas for wildflowers, hedgerows and coppicing. A recent team of corporate volunteers planted hundreds of wildflowers.



Howard enjoys spending time with volunteers, saying, “One group was so vibrant, so keen to help, and all laughing and joking — really good people to be around. We had three hours of a lovely time with them”.

“Volunteering keeps me physically fit, my mind sharp and I’m getting out, doing the thing I love to do. I see the restoration as not just the canal, but returning nature and the environment to what it was when the canal was built.

Retired policeman Howard Yardy, who lives in Melksham, has always been interested in nature and canals. He and his wife Helen spent their honeymoon on a canal boating holiday.

Laura Basden



West Vale Branch News

GREAT CRESTED NEWTS HAVE RETURNED!

The last report was wet, wet, wet, but now it's now it sun, sun, sun — a great time to get going again, although our volunteers have been steadily busy right through the winter.



Much progress has been made but we failed to make much progress locating that leak from the canal into the culvert within the Canalside Park, it was just too wet and now we have to stop because — they are back! The Great Crested Newts have returned to the canal in the Canalside Park to breed yet again this year, they are quite easy to spot as are the masses of frogspawn. Despite the cold wet weather our volunteers have also made really good progress repairing towpaths and working on the extension to the path beyond Tuckmill Brook, lots of clearance work, a bridge, gates and fencing all being installed. Clearing dead and potentially dangerous trees within the Park and laying the dead wood at the edge of the footpath network within the copse as 'dedges' was also completed.

Because of the wet all of our activities within the Park certainly churned up the grass, the paths and the track to our compound, all of which needed some remedial work — the pathways were covered in chippings and the track was repaired with a lorry load of aggregate. The patchy grass will be reseeded soon. However it didn't seem to affect the masses of Snowdrops, followed by daffodils, lesser Celandines & now we are seeing Cowslips & Bluebells in our Copse & Meadows

We now have a heated, lighted and well equipped workshop. Really cosy shed! So the 'make do and mend' maintenance team have fixed just about everything — frozen pumps — mowers — broken tools, electrics, servicing all the machinery, even PAT testing.

The branch is fortunate to have help and support in many ways — local groups, village organisations, corporate volunteers (one team already and two booked), they all come with physical help, and with donations of tools

and equipment and grants and donations from villagers and councils we make good progress. The Christmas tree plantathon went very well with donations of trees and hedging from 'The Woodland Trust' and 'I dig Trees' from 'The Conservation Volunteers' and help from villages, from teenagers to seventies, turning out yet again and then the expected rain watering them in has resulted in most of the 400 surviving. The local scout group has visited several times as have the gardening club helping with seeding and planting.

We had a boat and trailer donated. What for? Well the boat was well past ever floating again and although we have much wetness here we don't have enough depth of water in the canal locally to float it, so the boat has been 'sunk' a few inches into the grass next to our car park as a 'feature' and filled with good soil and lots of our home made compost mixed in. The Gardening Club has provided and planted flowers in it. The trailer is being refurbished to transport our good boat to Uffington. Make do and mend!

Good progress at Uffington Gorse: as well — any visitors to Uffington Gorse will have seen the ongoing work by the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust (WBCT) volunteers. Although our primary aim is to restore the canal and towpath, we are also committed to maintaining the woods on behalf of the Woodland Trust and our local communities.

To that end, we have a draft Woodland Management Plan which is in the final stages of completion with Woodland Trust and Forestry England input. An ongoing nature survey in support of the plan has thrown up a few recent surprises such as a Woodcock and a pair of Gadwall ducks.

Much of the work to date in Uffington Gorse has been supported by a significant grant from TOE (Trust for

Oxfordshire Environment), with funding from Grundon Waste Management Ltd through the Landfill Communities Fund. Over the last few months we have fully cleared the towpath from end to end, including felling a dangerously hanging tree that we hoped the winter storms might have brought down for us. As we cannot import wood chips into Uffington Gorse, we have twice had an industrial chipper operating in the woods, manned by our newly qualified volunteers, which allowed us to remove a lot of brush and improve some of the muddier paths. Our volunteers have also been learning hedge laying skills and have planted donated whips along Moor Mill Road to repair and develop the existing hedgerow. Thanks partly to residents at the Stainsbridge House Care Home in Malmesbury; we now have a total of 10 bird boxes and an owl box within the woods.

Due to the bird nesting season we are now limiting our work in the woods and have turned our attention back to the canal for the summer. Our priority now is to bring an excavator into Uffington Gorse for a couple of days to dig some trial trenches across the rubbish dump infill area. This will allow us to confirm the profile of the original canal and confirm the work required to clear it. We also hope to have a Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) forestry team joining us again in September to clear those trees that are still in or across the canal. And just in case the canal isn't dry enough, we will be bringing in a small work boat.

Finally, we are always looking for additional volunteers in Uffington Gorse, so either contact us through the WBCT or drop in on any Wednesday morning between 0930 and 1300. You will be made most welcome.

Alan Norris & Simon Knapper

Above: Uffington Gorse — Hedge Laying on Moor Mill Road — Credit: Simon Knapper.



NONSUCH IS BACK ON THE WATER

By the time you read this, *Nonsuch* should be running boat trips each Saturday. The improved weather has allowed the boat team to paint *Nonsuch* ready for the WBCT logo and *Nonsuch* name to be applied.



The team has now decided to run the trips from the secure compound on the north bank, and there is now an all-weather path from the slipway.

RWB Town Council has finally taken ownership of the park at Brynards Hill, north of the railway. Initially promised as a country park by Wainhomes complete with a car park off Bincknoll Lane, the developer has taken two bites out of the park to build more homes, and had threatened a third land-grab which was unsuccessful. The Town Council took over the land in January 2025 and has worked with volunteers to re-plant trees and improve what's left of the park, now named the Coronation Country Park, after an opening ceremony on 10th May.

Having lost so much land to housing, the park lacks car-parking space as well as facilities such as a café. Where can they go? In the short term, WBCT can offer Marlborough Road car-park, already well-used by dog-walkers who also venture up Brynards Hill. A café will have to wait! We already have a woodland walk on the north side of the canal as well as along the towpath. We now have another bench on the northside next to Noremarsch Footbridge, installed by the Town Council and paid-for by employees of a local firm in memory of Nick Evans, who died far too young.

Winter work-parties (contact our WPO: neil.lazenby@wbct.org.uk) have laid an all-weather path on the muddy section from Buxstone Bridge to one of the four benches donated by the Rotary Club; this one is at Hancock's Water. There are now several picnic areas as well as the



wildflower meadows at Templars Firs. Further east, we shall mow around Chaddington Lock before 'No Mow May'. The fallen Damson tree is showing signs of growth, and it's sprouting many off-shoots. Will they bear fruit?

The gearbox on the work-boat Nelson has finally been fixed. We hope to start dredging later this year.

The Swindon Speedway hopes to get planning permission to site its track and other sporting facilities at Studley Grange north of the Biffa land-fill mound. Will this affect the tranquillity of the canal?

From May (the 2025 AGM), our monthly meetings will be on the third Monday at the Angel Hotel in the High Street, starting at 7:30.

Steve Bacon, RWB Branch Chair.



PETERBOROUGH ARMS

All change at the
Peterborough.
New landlord
Tom Kohler took
over the pub
on 1st April.

Unfortunately the outgoing landlord had not carried out annual maintenance in certain areas so there has been some delay in preparing the kitchen to be able to serve food, something that Tom is keen to be able to offer. Volunteers always offer to help the landlord with maintenance and repair jobs that are within our skill set but sadly the outgoing landlord hadn't made us aware of such jobs and as result there are a myriad of small jobs to tackle. Volunteers have been asked to help tidy and spruce up the pub's frontage as plants have died due to lack of attention and planters are in a sorry state. We are also looking for volunteers to help with garden furniture refurbishment.

An upside is the road on Dauntsey/Lyneham Banks is finally finished and is open again. This is of course a bonus and Tom is pulling together a list of events. A recent music event with Stephanie Von Clitz was well attended and a short video certainly showed customers enjoying themselves.

With regards to the water ingress issues we have amended pipe work to the side garden path which we believe will divert much of the roof rain water into the local drainage system. Both sets of work we believe will drastically reduce the volume of water that used to flow to the front and rear of the pub. A short heavy downpour of rain is needed to prove

the new improvements. Once we are happy these improvements are working we can remove the large number of concrete blocks that are currently protecting the pub from water ingress.

At the time of writing Wiltshire Council have not yet unblocked a pipe that was reported many months ago, which is causing water to flow down the wrong side of the road and enter the pub's frontage. Before the road reopened volunteers were able to install ramps along the whole of the front which raised the kerb level to the standard 70mm. Whilst the yellow elements look a little stark at the moment we are waiting to see whether local conditions will dumb down the colour before considering spraying the yellow sections, but not at the carpark entrance section.

With only three regular volunteers it's becoming more difficult to keep on top of these jobs so if you are a competent DIY person and can spare at least one day a week please come along and help.

It's very rewarding working on the Canal Trust's major asset and you will join a small but friendly and like minded team:

Dave Maloney
dave.maloney@wbct.org.uk



Swindon Branch Update News

MOULDON HILL TOW PATH RESTORATION UNDERWAY

On the 10th of March this year we got the final approval and signed a licence agreement on the Mouldon Hill stretch. Much work was done to this stretch almost 25 years ago now and sadly fell back into a poor state in recent years.



With no current agreement the branch could not work at the site and an agreement took a long time to sort.

I am so pleased to finally be writing about Mouldon Hill. ...

Our work party volunteers have been putting in extra days and making great progress on site. In 2024, the tow path got overgrown and extremely restricted by vegetation, fallen trees and tumbling brambles and all we could do was watch. ... In the winter, the northern section of the path become so boggy people could lose their shoes in the quagmire. This year our team have started at the northern edge near the aqueduct and are working southwards. Fallen trees removed, brambles tackled, and grass and hedges cut, the tow path already looks so much better.

Our next improvements will be the fitting of 3 shiny new signs and rebuilding the original 30+ year old wooden notice/sign board as a rebuilt notice board.

Also, we plan to install gates either end that improve access for all and fix the damaged fencing.

While writing this, the branch are also now working on resurfacing a section of tow path from Beavens Bridge up to the Wichelstowe houses. This also got boggy this past winter and yet has heavy pedestrian traffic, especially as a school commute route.

A big thank you to Barrett Wilson Homes for the grant funding enabling this work to go-ahead in materials and plant, and a massive thank you to our volunteer work force.

I hope to update in the next edition. ...

A large proportion of our monthly branch income, that we use to purchase tools, fuel, consumables, timber, and all manner of items to continue maintenance and host events come from the community lottery players.

Please do look up Swindon Community Lottery, find Wilts & Berks Canal Trust and sign up to win prizes up to 25k. We do get regular winners, of which 2 kind players donated their winnings last month. ... Thank you so much.

We have a quiz night being held on Thursday 10th of July at The Manor — Swindon — SN2 2NX. Teams up to 4 can enter. ... £12 per person and includes the famous buffet.

Book now. ... Email: Peggy-Sue.Ford@wbct.org.uk to book.

I always like to hear from branch members and supporters far and wide and am always available via email: Chloe.Ford@wbct.org.uk

Chloe Ford, Swindon Branch Chair.



COATE WATER RESERVOIR

It started life in the 1820s as a feeder reservoir for the Wilts and Berks Canal, suggested by Robert Whitworth, the Canal's surveyor. It was because Swindon, being the highest point, geographically, of the Canal, would experience a greater loss in water in its use of locks.

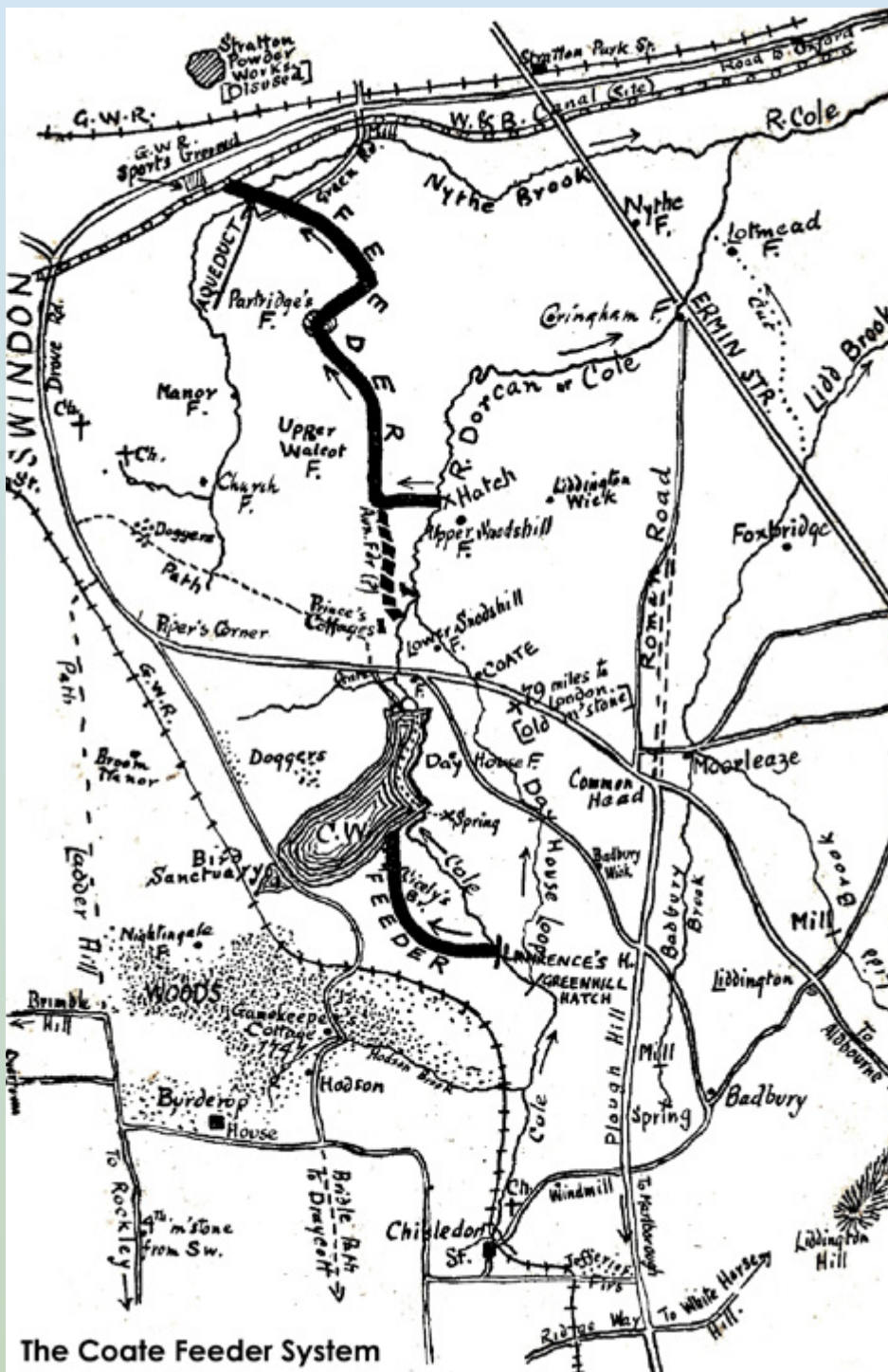
Coate reservoir formed a 70-acre lake, built in 1822 by diverting the River Cole to provide water for the canal and it remained outside the borough of Swindon until the borough's expansion in 1928. A stream known as the Dorcan fed it. The southern part of Swindon parish, the former Manor of Broome, remained largely rural in 1964. Besides the farmhouse the only other houses in this neighbourhood in 1841 were three or four labourers' cottages and the house of the keeper of Coate reservoir.

Coate Water Country Park is the main green space in Swindon

The River Ray forms the western boundary of the borough, and a tributary of the River Cole runs from Coate Reservoir on the south-eastern boundary through Coate and Walcot before turning away eastwards. The lake's leisure potential was quickly seen by Swindonians. It was used for fishing, boating and when it froze, teemed with skaters. Coate Water is situated 3 miles to the south-east of central Swindon. From the late 19th C there was boating on the water at Coate. By 1900 a number of boathouses had sprung up at the north end of the reservoir.

In 1914, with the canal abandoned, Coate became a pleasure park; changing rooms and a wooden diving board were added. 1921 saw the erection of a wooden predecessor to the concrete one at the lake's north end. It was surrounded by a swimming and diving area separated from the lake's main body by timber boards. By the 1930s the site featured a small Art Deco style outdoor bathing pool and fountain — now long gone.

Continued on next page



Top: The Coate Feeder System – Credit: National Library of Scotland.
Bottom: Coate Reservoir 1904 – Credit: Swindon local Libraries.

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As is the children's paddling pool — there's now a splash park on that site.

In 1935 the wooden diving platform was replaced with a 33 ft. high concrete platform in an Art Deco style which has been praised by English Heritage and, although swimming in the lake has been prohibited since 1958, the diving platform is today a much loved part of Swindon's architectural heritage. It was listed (Grade II) in 2013, being one of only four interwar concrete diving platforms to survive to this day, and the sole example located in a lake. Given that much Art Deco architecture has not survived the passing fashions, we must be thankful for this recognition. This platform was built of reinforced concrete to the most modern and safe design of the Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA). It was opened officially on 22 June 1935, and Miss Cicely Cousins, later the National Diving champion, performed the first dive from it. It was completely refurbished in 2022

In the period between the two World Wars the chief expansion of the town was to the north. With the transfer of the land in Chiseldon, the whole of Coate Water was brought within the borough boundary. In the 1920s the remaining area west of Drove Road was built, and there was much ribbon development here and along Shrivenham, Marlborough, and Croft Roads. East of Drove Road the fields of Walcot were first encroached upon by building. Off Marlborough Road the estate south of the Lawn was built and finally some roads were laid out south of Kingshill Road. This extension accommodated a population growth from 54,920 in 1921 to about 61,000 in 1939.

In 2004, Swindon Borough Council and the University of Bath published plans to develop land next to the park as a campus, but the university later withdrew the proposals. Since then Persimmon Homes and Redrow Homes have submitted various planning applications. One was turned down and dismissed at a planning appeal. Another proposal for 900 houses and an industrial estate went to appeal in November 2011 and was allowed by the Secretary of State. Local residents began a Save Coate campaign, which drew attention to archaeological features and pointed out that development conflicts with several of Swindon Borough Council's environmental policies.

A buffer zone around the park was proposed in late 2006, although campaigners and local residents did not think this was enough. In a newspaper poll,



Main Entrance, Coate Water, Swindon. 1920s



The Main Entrance to Coate Water 2021



20 percent of readers said they believed that the new plans would help to protect Coate Water. The issue was further compounded when Coate Water was voted "Swindon's Favourite Place" by the local population.

Archaeology

The area has Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British and Mediaeval history that spans a period of 7000 years or more. The oldest known ancient monuments nearby are the scheduled Day

Continued on next page

Top: Main Entrance, Coate Water 1920s — Credit: Swindon Local Libraries.

Middle: Main Entrance, Coate Water 2021 — Credit: Roy Cartwright.

Bottom: 1905s Coate Diving Platform — Credit: Swindon Local Libraries



Melksham Calne and Chippenham Branch News

PEWSHAM PROJECTS POWER ON

The generally dry spring weather has provided us with much better working conditions i.e. no mud!



Consequently work has been able to continue on our two major projects at Pewsham: the Carpenters' Workshop and the Top Lock Accommodation Bridge.

The external work on the Carpenters' Workshop is now complete with both doors fitted and also the glazing and guttering. This has meant that we have been able to remove the scaffolding to show the workshop in all its glory! Inside we have been laying the screed floor in the Annex but further interior work will be limited as we don't yet have any funding. Outside we still need to connect the downpipes to the water harvesting system and to also raise the ground and landscape it. We have however started to construct the road from the workshop to the Accommodation Bridge.

Talking of the bridge, this continues to progress well. The parapet walls and pillars are nearing completion and we are working on how we are going to construct the brick arch of the bridge over the lock itself.

Howard Wilson

*Top: Bridge view looking north. Left Top: Fitting the second door.
Left Bottom: South and west sides – Credit: MCC work party events.*

Continued from previous page

House Lane stone circle, and the Bronze Age burial mounds along the lane, one of which is also scheduled.

Further Middle Bronze Age cremations, a possible pond barrow, and two large ring ditches have been found on the opposite side of Day Brook valley. A large, regionally significant Mesolithic flint scatter, with some topologically late artefacts, is also present c.150m south west of Coate Stone Circle. Six stone circles were recorded in the 18th/19th and early 20th centuries,

all in the Coate area, and possibly linked, at least in part, by avenues of large sarsen stones. The remains of one of the stone circles probably still lies at the bottom of Coate Water.

An area of 51.1 hectares of the lake and its margins has been notified as a biological Site of Special Scientific Interest, mainly for its breeding bird populations. Part of the site is also a local nature reserve. Coate Water is a notable site for birds.

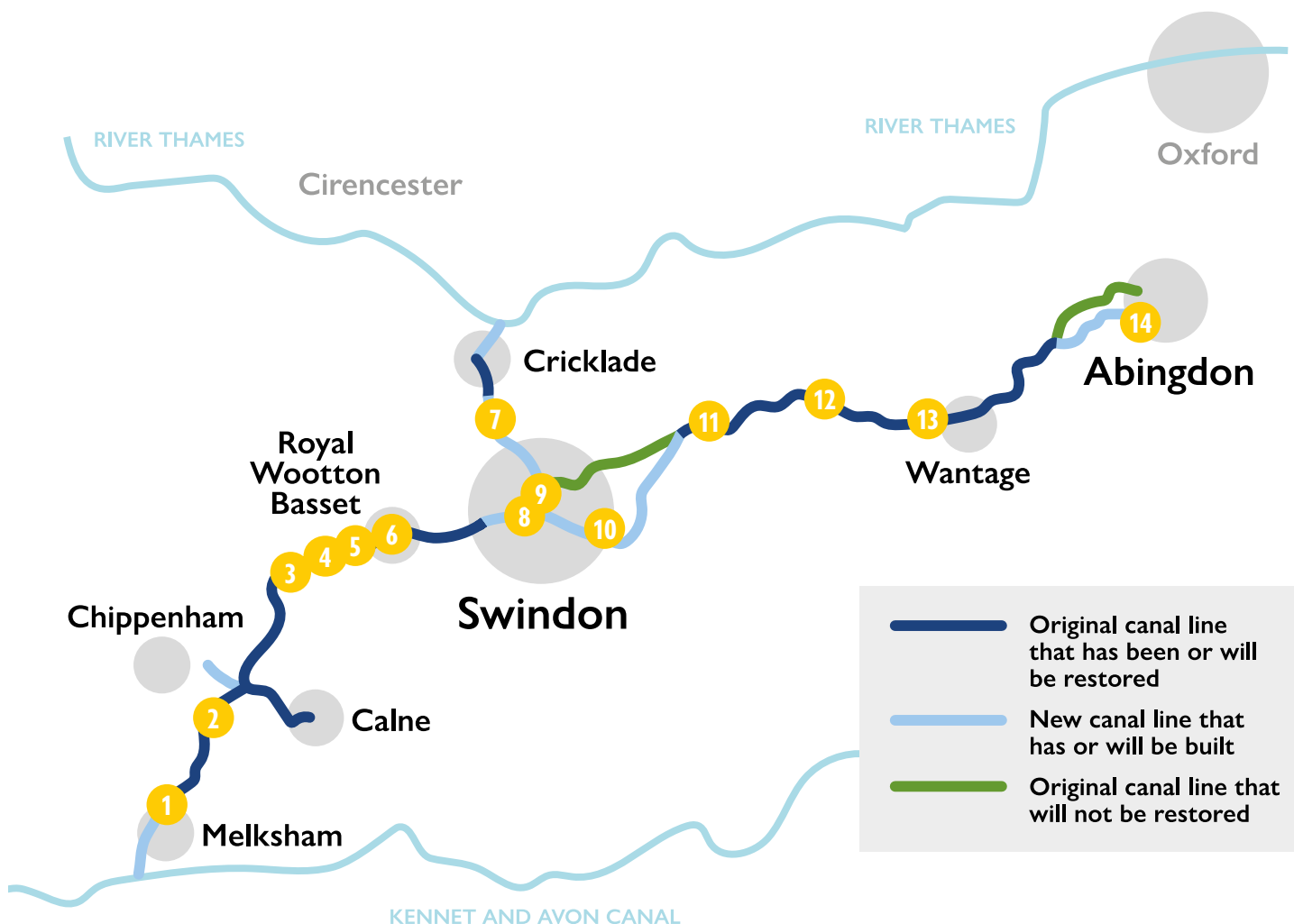
Organizations based at the lake include Swindon Rowing Club and Coate Water Sailing Trust. The North Wilts Model Engineering Society have a miniature railway, with about one mile of track of 5in and 7¼in gauge.

Author Richard Jefferies (1848–1887) was born at Coate village, a short distance northeast of Coate Water in Chiseldon parish; his home is now a museum. The “New Sea” in his Bevis books was based on Coate Water.

Robin Earle

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LOCATIONS MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE OF DRAGONFLY



- | | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 Melksham | 4 Peterborough Arms | 7 Mouldon Hill | 10 Coate Water | 13 East & West Challow |
| 2 Pewsham Locks | 5 Templars Firs | 8 Wichelstowe | 11 Shrivenham Canal Park | 14 Jubilee Junction |
| 3 Dauntsey | 6 Chaddington Lock | 9 Kingshill | 12 Uffington Gorse | |

For more detailed location information, check out the WBCT Interactive Map at www.wbct.org.uk/map

Dragonfly is the quarterly publication of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust is a charitable organisation with the aim of restoring all 70 miles of the Wilts & Berks Canal to create a tranquil public waterside park for walking, cycling, fishing & boating.

If you are not already a member please consider joining.

By being a member you will:

- Be part of our amazing project: the longest and most complex waterways project in the UK today, combining restoration and community engagement
- Receive regular newsletters, active social media and other communications
- Be part of the branch organisations with meetings, quizzes, talks, and volunteering opportunities
- Have opportunities to help; both on the ground and behind the scenes.

Our members achieve amazing results through their efforts for the Trust.

In the future, we will all look back and say: "I was part of that!"

We are always happy to hear from members who would like to volunteer to work with us at the Trust. It could be:

- joining a work party to help maintain/restore a stretch of canal
- working with the Boat Team as crew
- joining the team communicating with the members
- raising restoration funds.

Go to www.wbct.org.uk/volunteer for more details.

To find details of WBCT membership go to www.wbct.org.uk/join