

Wendover Canal News

Restoration Biodiversity Well-being



WENDOVER
CANAL TRUST

2026 Spring
Issue 1



BRADLEY & JONES

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If you have an article, or an issue you want to share, send it to newsletter@wendovercanal.org.uk for possible inclusion in a future edition.

Deadline for the next issue is 5th July 2026.

Chairman's Column

We have completed preparation of our Little Tring work-site ready for the Remediation, and you can read about this elsewhere. The need for this preparation became urgent because we had two (fortunately unsuccessful) attempts to break into one of our metal storage huts, together with another visit from a bottle collector digging another big hole in the ash in the Tip. It became essential that we made the work-site safe and compliant with the latest Health and Safety legislation, so we have had to buy and erect second-hand Heras steel fencing around the whole compound. It was great to get back on-site, even if it was only site preparation.

Mikk Bradley has completed a thorough review of any other possible Health & Safety compliance issues around our work-site. By the time you read this, a plan to address these should be with CRT for approval, and then we should be under way with the remediation.

I have just sent what I hope is final



Remediation documentation to CRT, and we hope to agree a date to do this work very soon. Remediation requires the transfer of some material to the entrance of our work-site, so that it can be loaded into lorries and taken away. We have been in discussion with CRT about creating a temporary loading platform where the material can be stored for a few days before removal. The material can't just be left on the ground, for fear it might cross-contaminate the material which we are keeping. We have reached a compromise with CRT to design a platform which while temporary, is sufficiently robust, and we have created this temporary platform.

CRT sent a new version of their proposed Restoration Delivery Plan, and they have improved it in line with the comments raised by myself and other groups. However the fundamental issue remains, of volunteers like us



having to pay CRT to talk to a senior restoration engineer who they are recruiting now. And this despite restoration being one of CRT's published charitable objectives. I am not confident that IWA are going to negotiate this requirement away.

It doesn't look like this CRT RDP will start on 1st April, so our existing Licence Agreement with CRT has been extended until 30th June, and will be extended again if the RDP hasn't started by then.

The Aylesbury Arm was at last reopened on 28th January, having been closed since 16th June for lack

of water. Seven and a half months! This shows only too clearly how important the Wendover water is, in keeping Tring summit and the Aylesbury Arm open.

Sadly there is no news of improvements to the towpath from Halton to Aston Clinton. We had understood that we could manage this work ourselves, but the management was taken in house by CRT, which has increased the cost and slowed progress.

Colin Metcalfe has asked to take a break from producing our calendar (after producing the last three), Please would someone else like to volunteer?



Colin says he's willing to offer a full handover and as much support as he can reasonably provide. An appeal for photos needs to go out fairly soon, so that they can be selected and the calendar printed in good time.

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Clive Johnson, Chairman

Council members 2025/26

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IWA Nominee: To be appointed

Newsletter Editor: Carol Williams/ Janine Jones newsletter@wendovercanal.org.uk

Contacting Wendover Canal Trust



The best way of getting in touch with Wendover Canal Trust is to use the email addresses on the Council members page of this newsletter, this should ensure that you get a prompt reply. They are also on the Contact Us page of our website.

However if you do want to send us a letter by Royal Mail, our correspondence address for many years has been kindly provided by the Inland Waterways Association, and they have recently moved office. So write to:

Wendover Canal Trust, c/o IWA, Hardy House, Northbridge Road, Berkhamsted, HP4 1EF

If you come across an old address for us in Chesham, please let us know, it can be surprisingly difficult to update our address everywhere. If you have a problem accessing our website, please check whether you are using the old address wendoverarmtrust.co.uk, which we changed 4 years ago. To save money, we have stopped paying to maintain this old website address, so if you use it, it might not be redirected. We use wendovercanal.org.uk



February 2026 Preparations Report

Preparation for the remediation was carried out between 16th – 20th February 2026. Wendover Canal Trust was taking advantage of availability of bog boards and Heras fencing to carry preparatory activities. Free-issue Type 1 (small stone) was also available. 16 different volunteers attended site and completed 32 days' work during the week.

Health, Safety and Environment

There were no accidents, incidents or near misses.

A Safety, Health and Environment inspection was carried out on Friday 20th February.

A temporary works inspection was carried out on 20th February.

Site Compound

Heras security fencing was delivered to site. The fence was erected to the site compound boundary. Recent attempted break-ins made this activity a priority.



Security fencing to the site boundary



Temporary materials storage area



Bog boards were delivered to site and the temporary materials area was constructed.

Five dumper loads of Type 1 was delivered from the Wilstone Reservoir site. The Type 1 was placed on the plant access track.

Type 1 placed on plant access.



Further dumper loads of Type 1 were delivered during week commencing 23rd February. These were placed in the volunteer car park ready for backfilling the trial storage area.



Type 1 stored on volunteer car park.

On Tuesday 17th February it was discovered that the site had been visited by bottle collectors and a deep hole was found in the former tip material. The hole was filled in with the ash from the hole.



Hole in former tip, subsequently filled in.



Mikk Bradley, Site Management Team

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Bird spotting along the canal

If you happened to be walking along our canal during one of the brief sunny spells we had this winter you may have noticed a little grey and olive coloured bird performing a strange routine over the water. This little bird is a warbler called a Chiffchaff - named after it's distinctive song. Once summer migrants, some birds now tough out our winter and are starting to build up a presence on the Wendover Canal.



A Chiffchaff at Heygates Mill



A Chiffchaff at bridge 5

The strange routine involves bobbing around the far bank and in and out of the bushes and bramble briars. Then leaping out over the water to perform a short aerobatic display, before darting back into the bushes. As entertaining as this seems it is of course not for our benefit, although they are

not fazed by our watching presence. The animal is hunting tiny gnats that dance over the water's surface brought out by the weak winter sunshine. It is an engaging sight and you can find yourself mesmerised by their repeated airborne activities. Look out for them when you are walking along the canal.

Photographs show them at Heygates at New Mill, and near bridge five.

Regarding another species, this winter the canal appears to be missing one of its avian celebrities. Have any of our readers recently spotted a Mandarin duck on the canal? We used to have many stretched particularly from Wendover to Butlers Wharf. Now they seem to have disappeared.

A pair of mandarin ducks



Colin Metcalfe, Council Member

Water transfer by Canal

A plan is progressing to transfer water by canal from Atherstone to Great Brickhill (south of Milton Keynes). This is not related to our Wendover Canal, but will bring income to CRT, and affects a nearby canal.

Affinity Water wants more water for the Luton area. Severn Trent Water's treated sewage from Minworth near Birmingham is currently taken away by river, eventually the River Trent. The plan is to use pipelines (at each end) and the canal system to move the treated water. The water will be piped from Minworth to the Coventry Canal near Atherstone, and then along the Coventry Canal, northern Oxford Canal and Grand Union Canal to Great Brickhill, just past Milton Keynes. From there it will be piped to Luton.

The planners of this scheme have learned from the Llangollen Canal (before its recent big breach at Whitchurch). Probably the main reason that the Llangollen Canal survived, is that it is used to take water from River Dee above Llangollen and then the entire length of that canal to Hurlston, from where tap-water is supplied to mid-Cheshire. As a result, there is a noticeable flow down the Llangollen Canal.

This new water transfer scheme will be similar, and will ensure that there is sufficient capacity in the bypass weirs and channels. But there are canal sites where the water will have to be pumped uphill (rather like the existing back-pumping schemes). These are Hillmorton on the Oxford Canal, Braunston on the Grand Union, plus the shallow locks at Hawkesbury and Fenny Stratford. The Grand Union Canal's Braunston summit level has two reservoirs, and these will have extra water stored in them to help balance the supply. This may have the side-effect of improving the water supply for navigation.

There will be further effects on the canals, though these don't seem too bad. Flowing water has a gradient and so around 20 kilometres of banks will need raising or repair. Probably the most noticeable impact will be the addition of three or four "transfer locks". These would be like flood locks on river navigations, they will be left open for canal traffic almost all of the time, but they will be used when the required flow rate is high, which will be only during prolonged drought. The lock gates are

described as automated. One bridge may need raising, Peartree Bridge next to Woughton Marina in Milton Keynes.

This proposal seems good to me. To read more about these proposals, go to guctransfer.co.uk, where you can comment until April 2nd. There don't yet seem to be any target dates for this project. There is also a very long-term proposal to use the entire Cotswold Canal to bring water from the Severn to the Thames, and I support that too.

Clive Johnson

Do you remember Wendover/Tring Festivals held on the Late May Bank Holiday

The Wendover Canal was built as a feeder to increase the water to the summit. Unfortunately, being on chalk, sections leaked and stop planks were inserted outside the Tringford Pumping Station. During the 1970's commercial carrying traffic was declining, so British Waterways started mooring unused

commercial boats at Little Tring on the Wendover Canal. At that time navigation on the canal was only possible to Little Tring due to the stop planks. As far as British Waterways could see, no boats would be interested in cruising this 1-mile section.





But the start of leisure boating in the area, made several local boat clubs aware of the danger for future loss of the canal. The festival origins go back to a Rally of boaters visiting the Wendover Canal each year and being awarded a plaque from the Grand Union Canal Society. During these events many boats all battled their way along a weeded and silted canal with no means of turning at the end.

Do you remember the festivals? Did you attend? They started in 1990 over the late May Bank Holiday after the farmer John Brown offered his land for the festival. These were arranged for the next 20 years, till unfortunately WCT lost the use of the field.

From the first festival, the boats came, and the public attended in increasingly vast numbers. The profits Improved each year, which

enabled the start of the restoration from the stop lock at Little Tring. During the earlier years Herts Caravan Club also attended with 70 units.

As the boats were moored along both sides of the canal (mooring planks were an essential part of the boater's kit), a scaffold bridge originally supplied by Malcolm Miles and later sponsored by Wyvern Hire Base was erected by trainees from Halton Camp for easy access to the festival site.

Another display was the Agfa Hot Air Balloons, it did not ascend but lit up the sky at night with its burners. It was tethered to a tractor and conveniently positioned cars. The bar was run by the Lionharts Boat Club, while many of the volunteers were provided by the Dunstable & District Boat Club. The local St John's Ambulance group attended each year camping on site





to give full medical coverage.

The festival contained an arena with various performances, a marquee for crafts, a tea marquee, a bar with evening entertainment, fun fair and many outside stalls. One hot year, a flatbed lorry turned up on the Monday morning and requested a last minute pitch. After handing over cash, they were found a suitable site. At this point they started off loading hundreds of boxes of strawberries, by late afternoon all were sold.

Every festival was only successful because of the hard work of many people, and as the scale got larger so did the need for help. To man the gates, taking the entrance fee over 2 days was a mammoth task, but every year it worked. The ambiance of the festival came from this non-commercial feeling, maybe it was not perfect, but problems were always solved.

The boats started arriving during the previous week, this was to bag the best mooring. OK if you were retired, but many volunteers spent many evenings cruising from their moorings to attend. The actual site lay out could not be started till the Friday, but entailed mowing the field, marking out the pitches and erecting fencing around the site. This was mostly down to the restoration volunteers who erected marquees, signposts, and became delivery transporters of table, chairs and many other essential items. The festival chairman stood with a plan directing everyone to various corners of the field.

On Saturday morning the trade and charity organisations would start to arrive, all needing to find their pitch. This day was mostly for the boaters, with entertainment in the evening. Sunday and Monday were for the public, and they came in their droves.

1993 was particularly windy, with marquees taking the full force and some lightweight charity gazebos even taking flight. Luckily WRG were in charge of the parking area, as on wet years this entailed a lot of pushing cars out of the mud. The year 2000 weather was particularly bad in the previous week, which



cancelled due to it clashing with the Queens Diamond Jubilee celebrations. A wise decision in retrospect, as in the event the weather was awful.

At this point the festival committee

needed a digger to bring hard core for the road entrance. The festival committee agonised as to whether cancellation would be the best option, but game fully carried on. The weather improved, many other local events were closed, and the punters poured through the gates.

The profits increased year by year, till 2005 a massive £54,000 was achieved. But the British weather had other ideas, 2006, 2007 and 2008 suffered severely from mud. So, to cover that eventuality, the committee decided to increase to a 3-day festival. By these years, the ownership of the field had changed hands and its future use was in doubt. An event was arranged at Boxmoor in 2011, which although successful seemed many miles from the Wendover Canal and 2012 was

felt they were running out of ideas for future venues, so disbanded. Not only was the Trust's future funding for the restoration lost, but also the band of committed helpers that were involved each year. Over the subsequent years these have sadly drifted away or became too old for physical help. Funding for the restoration is now from grants, local councils, legacies, and hopefully lottery future awards. To achieve this further funding, volunteers with experience to cover all the areas will be required. Past volunteers can see how amazingly different the canal looks to the days when even access along the towpath was impossible.

Jenny Brice



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