WEY & ARUN Canal Trust

Press Release

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust receives The Kings Award for Volunteering

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust is delighted to announce that we have been awarded The King's Award for Voluntary Service for 2026. This is the highest award a local voluntary group can receive in the UK and is equivalent to an MBE.

The Wey & Arun Trust was formed with the aim of restoring the canal which runs through 23 miles of the most beautiful Surrey and Sussex countryside. Over 100 volunteers participate in working party groups throughout the year and other volunteers operate our boat trips and take up administration, publicity and management roles.

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust is one of 250 local charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups to receive the prestigious award this year. Their work, along with others from across the UK, reminds us of all the ways fantastic volunteers are contributing to their local communities and working to make life better for those around them.

The King's Award for Voluntary Service was created in 2002 to celebrate Her Late Majesty The Queen's Golden Jubilee and was continued following the accession of His Majesty The King. 2026 marks the third year of The King's Award for Voluntary Service.

Recipients are announced annually on 14th November. The award winners this year are wonderfully diverse and include volunteer groups from across the UK. Representatives of The Wey & Arun Canal Trust will receive the crystal award and certificate from Mrs Neelam Devesher MBE Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey in the coming months.

In addition, two volunteers from the Wey & Arun Canal Trust will attend a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May and June 2027, along with other recipients of this year's award.

Margaret Darvill, a volunteer Trustee and Working Party Leader said "I am absolutely thrilled for the Wey & Arun Canal Trust to be a recipient of this coveted Award for Voluntary Service. This is a massive accolade for the immense contribution that our volunteers make and of all the hard work they do. It is also public recognition of the very positive benefit our work brings to the local community."

His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey, Mrs Neelam Devesher MBE said "I was delighted to hear that The Wey and Arun Canal Trust have been awarded a Kings Award for Voluntary Service. This is the highest honour a voluntary group can receive in the UK. This prestigious award recognises the hard work and dedication of volunteers in making a real difference to the communities that they serve and support."

Note to editors:

1. Lord-Lieutenants represent the monarch in each of the UK's ceremonial counties
2. This year there are 250 recipients of The King's Award Voluntary Service from across the UK and Channel Islands
3. More information on the recipients and the Award can be found at https://kavs.dcms.gov.uk
4. Full details on how to nominate are available at https://kavs.dcms.gov.uk/
5. Nominations for the 2027 award opened on the 1st September 2026.
6. For more information please contact Gordon Powell at press@weyarun.org.uk or telephone 07368 957256.

The Wey & Arun Junction Canal was opened in 1816, forming 23 miles of waterway to join the Wey to the Arun, as part of a network linking the Thames to Portsmouth (and also to Littlehampton). When completed, it had a total of 23 locks, 35 bridges, eight wharves, five lock-keepers' cottages and two aqueducts. It was formally closed as early as 1871 as a result of railway competition. (Ironically, the railway concerned was itself closed in the 1960s.) The land comprising the canal's route was sold off and many structures were demolished, making restoration much more challenging than for other similar projects. As a result, restoration has occurred in discrete sections, only where land acquisition has become possible.

The Trust has made much of the canal's route accessible to the public. With its water, trees and other vegetation, it forms an environmentally-valuable green corridor though a beautiful landscape, generating environmental and leisure benefits long before navigation becomes possible. Their local value is recognised in the substantial grants awarded to the Trust by local authorities and charitable bodies for funding WACT's restoration projects.

Most locks, bridges and other structures have to be completely rebuilt. Restoration started in 1970 and over the past 50 years, we have restored 11 locks, 24 bridges and 2 aqueducts.

There are a number of sections of the canal useable by small craft such as kayaks and paddle boards. We have restored 3 miles of the canal at Loxwood where the Trust has an Information Centre and operates two Trip Boats. These carry about over 5,000 passengers each year on cream tea cruises, private hirings and themed events.

Our latest restoration project at Rooks Hill, south of Bramley, is opening up new walking routes and involves the building of a new bridge and lock.