



WEY-SOUTH

**Quarterly Magazine of the
Wey & Arun Canal Trust**

Issue 203 June | July | August 2023

The Quarterly Magazine of
The Wey & Arun Canal Trust

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The Wey & Arun Canal Trust is dedicated to restoring the former inland waterway route between the River Wey and the River Arun and to conserving and improving it for the benefit of everyone.

All communications and copy either by post to:

Wey-South, Wey & Arun Canal Trust
Bridge End, Somerswey
Shalford, Guildford
Surrey
GU4 8EQ

Or e-mail to:

weysouth@weyandarun.co.uk

Address changes, non-delivery, etc: please notify the Membership Secretary at the address above or email to:

membership@weyandarun.co.uk

Material published in *Wey-South* represents the views of the contributors and should not, unless specifically indicated, be assumed to be the policy of the Trust.

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The Wey-South team always welcomes articles and pictures for possible use in the magazine.

Issue 203

June | July | August 2023

Wey-South team:
Julian Morgan, Jonathan Copeland, Trevor Lewis, Peter Winter, Sue Batey (proofreader), David Jessop (proofreader).

Trust website: weyarun.org.uk
Facebook: [weyandaruncanal](https://www.facebook.com/weyandaruncanal)
Twitter: [@weyandarun](https://twitter.com/weyandarun)

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Shalford (Northern) Office (Boat trips, Administration, Accounts and Publicity). Visitors by appointment only.
01483 505566 (support@weyandarun.co.uk)
Bridge End, Somerswey, Shalford, Guildford GU4 8EQ

Front cover: Our dredger nears the end of its journey from the canal alongside Dunsfold Park to the section next to the Loxwood Canal Centre.

News

Loxwood criminal damage

We were all shocked by serious deliberate damage to our Loxwood canal infrastructure on the night of 1st/2nd April. Heroic efforts by staff and volunteers quickly got the canal looking good again. Behind the scenes it will cost us a lot of time and money to restore our ability to manage water levels and conserve the water supply effectively. *See News Feature on page 10.*

Birtley Bridges

– order placed for lifting decks

In our largest single investment in canal restoration in the last few years, we have placed an order valued at over £150,000 for the lifting decks of the two Birtley Bridges, south of Bramley in Surrey. Our volunteers have largely completed the substructure of the bridges and we are hoping for an official opening later in the year. *Read more about this restoration and maintenance story on page 26.*

Bonfire Hanger

– our ownership expands

Thanks to a gift from a generous supporter, we are now the freehold owners of the 800m Bonfire Hanger section of the canal. This attractive section immediately north of the Surrey/Sussex border, near Alfold, extends our existing ownership in the Gennets Bridge Lock area.

News feature on page 5 and take a “virtual walk” along this stretch of the canal on page 6.



Annual Meeting

Our Annual Meeting at Cranleigh on 22nd April approved our new constitution (“Articles”), bringing us firmly into the 21st century, so for example we can hold meetings and communicate electronically when needed. We also have new Aims & Objectives that clearly express what we set out to do. *(See page 9)* The term “Council of Management” (CoM) is now obsolete – the Trust is governed by a board of directors.

There was no real controversy at the meeting, but perhaps the programme was ambitious and a little long, not helped by logistical glitches. We apologise to those members present and will improve time management next year.

2022 was frankly not a vintage year. It was great to see a start made on the ground at Birtley, but we have suffered huge frustration with our planning applications to Waverley and Guildford Borough Councils. *See our Planning feature on page 12.*

News

Dredger move

On 14th April, in a long and complex operation, a very large crane lifted our dredger and two 'tubs' (unpowered barges) out of the canal at Compasses Bridge, near Alfold, and back into the canal near the Loxwood Canal Centre (see front cover). Contractors are desilting the section alongside Dunsfold Airfield, on behalf of the owners – and this work will benefit us hugely. We needed to move the equipment out of the way of the contractors and it will be put to use at Loxwood.



Seven boats of our fleet all in one place on 14th April (the workboat May Upton was also there but not in the picture).

Land Ownership and Landowner Relationships

With good news about more land acquisition at Bonfire Hanger, it is a useful opportunity to explain our approach to the ownership of the canal route. To continue and accelerate our restoration efforts, we first need to have access to the land. When the canal closed around 150 years ago the route was sold, mainly to neighbouring landowners. In some areas property has been built or the route of the canal absorbed into gardens or commercial property.

So how much of the canal route do we currently own or lease? How do we communicate with landowners along the route? Many local landowners have been happy to work with us and have gifted, sold or leased land often at costs significantly below its commercial value. The most recent acquisition at Bonfire Hanger means we have over 8 miles of the canal route (36%) in our control. This means we have a good land (and water) bank to work with but full restoration will usually require planning approvals to be granted.

Many landowners along the route are supportive of our restoration efforts and have provided access for inspections or welcome our working parties to carry out some clearance. Some owners of course are not open to canal restoration through their land and, when this is the case, we must respect their decision and explore options to reroute the canal. For each landowner a Board contact is assigned to address any concerns and, when the time is right, explore any opportunities to acquire additional land.

In addition (as last reported last year) we have launched a Property Fund to be ready to purchase a private home or business premise should it be put up for sale, where some of the land can be retained to restore the canal and the remaining land and property resold. The concept is in place but more help and funding would be required to make a major acquisition.

Bonfire Hanger Walk

How far does the canal go? is the constant question from visitors at the Loxwood Canal Centre. Well, sadly we don't have a boat going to Guildford today – but there is plenty to see in both directions. Turn right (as you face the canal) and just over two miles will take you to Drungewick Lock. Turn left and there's another mile of navigable canal to Southland, then another half-mile's walk will take you to Gennets Bridge, another rebuilt lock – and then?

It's great news that from 30 March the story has changed as we have now acquired another half-mile or so of the canal north of Gennets Bridge – the section called Bonfire Hanger. Rather than go into lots of explanation, let's go for a walk and meet our Midweek Working Party (MWWP) who started at Bonfire Hanger on 5 April.



As we cross **Gennets Sluice** we also cross from West Sussex into Surrey. This is also the start of the Bonfire Hanger section.

The footbridge (below) is at the lower end of Gennets Wood Lock, which is Lock 9 on the Wey & Arun Junction Canal. Locks 8 (Gennets Bridge) to Lock 16 form the Sidney Wood flight of nine locks.





The locks were at intervals of 200-300 yards/metres and each had a rise of about 8 feet (2.44m). They were built with bricks and dismantled in the 1920s.

Probably there are remains under the ground; our team rebuilding Lock 8 found substantial timbers.

Our green Infopost (above) marks the lock site and MWWP (right) are deploying along the banks to clear overgrown vegetation.

One of the challenges we face in Bonfire Hanger is that the towpath, which is a public bridleway and part of the Wey-South Path, is in very poor condition. In early April it was a quagmire in places. We will do our best to improve it, if possible with grant finance.





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The site of Lock 11

Between the sites of Locks 10 and 11 there is another footbridge carrying a public footpath.

In the early 2000s our volunteers built brick dams at Locks 9-11. At that time we held a lease on the section, but this ended when the property was sold. Without going into detail, the dam plan was not a success and the dams later had to be opened out.

Our immediate aim is to make the canal in the Bonfire Hanger section look like a canal rather than a ditch.

The site of Lock 12 is at the extreme northern end of the section that we now own. The boundary of the section is about 50 yards/ metres south of Rosemary Lane. Here we are just over 4 miles/6.5km from Long Meadow Winding Hole, south of Drungewick Lock (Lock 3), and we now own or lease over 95% of this 4-mile section.



Quagmire in Bonfire Hanger !

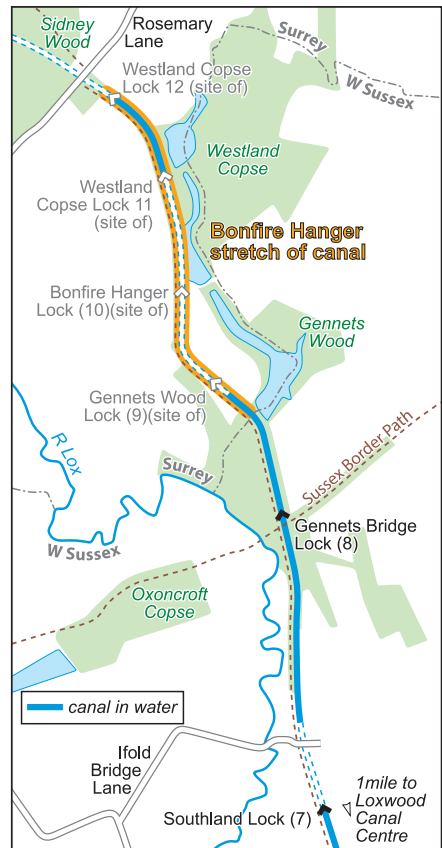
Approaching Rosemary Lane from the south, beyond the section that we own, in the undergrowth on the left there is a World War II air-raid shelter. On the right is the site of the original High Bridge on the canal.

So will we immediately be developing plans to rebuild Locks 9-12 and planning to run boat trips to within sight of Rosemary Lane? Sadly the immediate answer must be ‘no’. There are still a number of obstacles to overcome south of Gennets Bridge and there is no reliable water supply, although in the winter there is some overflow from the fishing lakes. Complete restoration would have an estimated cost of at least £2m. With all the other calls on our resources, we have to move one step at a time. For Bonfire Hanger in the short term this means relatively modest work to make it a part of our ‘green corridor’ that we can show off with pride.

Julian Morgan



The site of Lock 9 after tidying up by our Midweek Working Party



What We Do

In updating our Articles of Association, the Board also considered our charitable objects (or purposes). These were revised to include in this formal document all of the different benefits to the public that the work of restoring the canal from the River Wey to River Arun encompasses. The Board then thought it would be useful to update previous statements of “What We Do” and set out these Aims in a short document. This is now available to everyone who supports us, and everyone else we want to interest in our work.

It remains our long-term aim to re-establish travel by boat from the River Wey to the River Arun. However in doing that, and even when one day we achieve it, we bring a wide range of benefits to a large number of people of all ages and of many backgrounds and interests, as well as to the countryside through which we pass. The Aims set those out. And our volunteers, who are so valuable to the work we can achieve, support us in all of these Aims, bringing with them a wide range of skills and also learning more skills as they do so.

Aims of the Wey & Arun Canal Trust

Restoring the inland waterway from the River Wey at Shalford to the River Arun at Pallingham, following the original route wherever possible and working with landowners and other stakeholders to that end

Conserving and enhancing the natural environment along the route to create a “green corridor” for wildlife and for the peaceful enjoyment of the countryside

Enhancing public access to this corridor, including restoring the towpath and creating new footpath and bridleway links, and promoting the route for leisure, health and well-being

Encouraging use of the waterway for recreation and leisure for all (regardless of age or ability), including for canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding

Working with community groups, educational organisations and individuals to use this corridor as an educational resource and as an opportunity for volunteering activities

Researching and conserving heritage features along the route and publicising information on the history and ecology of the waterway

Criminal Damage at Loxwood

On Sunday morning 2nd April major damage to the canal in Loxwood was found. During the previous night electrical control equipment for pumps was destroyed and precious water was released from the canal. Multiple pumping control locations were attacked and padlocks on canal locks removed to release water down the canal. As well as disrupting boat trips, the sudden loss of water also has serious implications on fish and other wildlife in the canal.

Emergency Recovery

An emergency recovery operation started at once, with the immediate aim of restoring the water levels and allowing some of the planned Easter boat trips to run. Our staff and volunteers took quick action to organise temporary pumping and ensure the damaged electrical installations were safe. The boat trips scheduled for Wednesday 5 April were cancelled but all the trips planned for the long Easter weekend (7-10 April) ran as planned and without any problems.

Essential Pumping

Pumping is an essential part of the Loxwood boat operation because the canal has no natural water supply apart from a limited number of land drains and overflows that bring rainwater into the canal. Historically the water came from a reservoir near Cranleigh (Vachery Pond) but this was a long way from the canal and is no longer connected. Today we obtain most of the water for the Loxwood canal by pumping from the River Lox and the River Arun. The amount we can pump and when we can pump are regulated by the Environment Agency. If the river levels are low we will be told to stop.



The canal at Loxwood shortly after the criminal damage was discovered, clearly showing the dramatic drop in water level

Conserving Water

Once the water is in the canal we do our best to conserve it and we mainly do this with backpumps at each of the operational locks. When a boat moves through a lock this results in water moving from a higher level to a lower level. The pumps then come into action to move the water back to the higher level. Normally all the pumps operate automatically and this is the job of the specialised electrical control equipment which has been seriously damaged. Limited manual operation is possible in some cases but this is very labour intensive and not sustainable over a long period. Replacing the damaged equipment will take time and incur substantial costs.

In the meantime some curtailment of longer boat trips is inevitable.

We reported the crime to the police who later visited the canal as part of their investigation.

Fundraising Appeal

The incident received widespread media coverage, with Chairman Sally Schupke and Communications Manager Gordon Powell giving interviews on local radio. With initial estimates of £50,000 for repairs, we realised that the financial implications could be serious and we launched an emergency fundraising appeal. We know that our members and supporters are exceptionally generous, but even so the response surprised us, with around £27,000 donated in the first week. We are immensely grateful to everyone who contributed. The Loxwood canal is our showpiece and we know how much local people value it, whether they come on boat

trips, launch their own boat or simply enjoy the towpath. We would hate to have to choose between preserving this valuable asset and pushing forward with our ambitious plans for other sections.



Anyone with any information that might assist inquiries should contact Sussex Police on 101 quoting '0731 of 2/4/23' or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111



Emergency pumps were brought in to replace the lost water, and thus ensure that our boats could operate on this important section of the canal over the crucial Easter weekend

The Canal and the Planning System – Slow Going

Why so complicated? Our Director Bill Nicholson answers our questions.

Why do we need planning permissions to restore the canal? There's no inherent right to restore an abandoned canal. Any 'development' comprising new work 'in, on under or above land' has to go through the Planning system, just as if we were building houses or offices. Repairs and maintenance don't need planning permission.

Who do we apply to?

To the District Councils for the locations concerned. These are Guildford and Waverley in Surrey, Chichester and Horsham in West Sussex. Nearly half of the canal route is in the Waverley Borough Council area.

What's in an application?

We need to submit plans and elevations, and a planning statement setting out what we are doing and how it stands in relation to the relevant development plan(s).

Some applications need an Environmental Statement which assesses impacts on biodiversity, traffic and landscape amongst others. Even for smaller applications we have to carry out ecological and tree surveys. There is also a fee to pay.

What happens to an application after we have lodged it?

Once the application is checked and registered, the application is allocated to a named case officer, technical and non-technical consultations are sent out and the application is posted for public inspection on the Council's Planning website.

Who are the consultees that are invited to comment?

These can include:

- The Highway Authority (for roads, footpaths, cycleways and bridleways)
- The Council's Arboriculturalist
- Ecologists, either another Council officer, or external (such as Surrey Wildlife Trust)
- The Environment Agency for anything in or near to a flood plain
- The relevant Parish Council(s) – they can comment on, support or object to an application but they cannot decide it
- The public – through site and press notices and the Council's website
- User groups – e.g., the Ramblers and British Horse Society

How long should it take to get a decision?

In theory the majority of applications should be decided in 8 weeks, although extensions may be needed.

How long does it actually take?

If recent experience is anything to go by, it can take up to 18 months and more!

Who decides - officials or councillors?

Straightforward applications can be decided by the case officer. Complex or controversial applications are decided by the Council's Planning Committee.

What are the criteria for deciding an application?

Our application has to comply with relevant Development Plans, namely Local Plans and related policies produced by the District Councils and (if applicable) any Neighbourhood Plan produced at Parish or Town Council level – unless there are good reasons for non-compliance. Fortunately, our canal ticks many of the policy boxes related to the environment and leisure.

Objections have to be assessed – in theory on their quality rather than their quantity.

If our application is refused, can we appeal?

An unsuccessful applicant has 12 months to appeal to the Government's Planning Inspectorate.

If an application is approved, can someone else appeal against this?

No. However, they could seek a Judicial Review in the High Court, alleging that the Council had made an irrational decision or had not properly assessed development plan policies or other material considerations. Simply disagreeing with a properly-made decision would not be grounds for a Judicial Review.

The costs of a Judicial Review are substantial, and costs can be awarded against the unsuccessful party.

Is there a time limit for starting the approved work?

Work must normally commence within three years of decision.

Can we change our designs after we have obtained a permission?

Minor or what are called 'de minimis' amendments can be agreed with the Council after permission has been issued. What is minor is often a matter for debate!

What other permissions do we sometimes need?

- Footpath and bridleway diversions – required from the Highway Authorities, in our case Surrey and West Sussex County Councils.
- Section 278 Agreements from the Highway Authorities relating to any works to the public highway.
- Land drainage consent – from the Environment Agency if working on a 'main river'. The Wey, Cranleigh Waters, the Lox and the Arun are all 'main rivers'.

What happens if we just go ahead with the work without getting planning permission?

The Council's Planning Enforcement Officer would first advise us to cease work immediately. If we didn't, the Officer could serve a Stop Notice and even an Enforcement Notice to reverse what had been done.



Finance in 2022 – an “OK-ish” year

Ask Julian Morgan (Finance Director) how 2022 was for our finances and he’s likely to pull a face and say something like “not too terrible”. Our numbers in 2022 were similar to 2021’s. There were no huge financial headlines from the year. From a pure accounting point of view, we came close to breaking even (a ‘loss’ of just under £40,000), but we invested heavily in equipment, meaning that some of our cash was converted into hardware. So at the end of the year we had fewer “current assets” (the type you keep in the bank) and more “tangible assets”.

Our policy is always to spend what we can afford on the canal and not build up large reserves (currently losing value thanks to inflation). In 2022 we spent less on restoration projects because of planning permission bottlenecks. We spent more on maintenance including a couple of unexpected big-ticket items – repairing Baldwin’s Knob Lock and replacing the pumps at Brewhurst Lock in Loxwood. In the current difficult financial climate, we are immensely grateful to members and others who maintained their generous support for us in 2022. In 2022 we did not receive any large legacies; in recent years legacies have allowed us to make huge leaps forward with restoration work.

At the end of 2022 our funds amounted to just over £800,000. We have enough money available to finish work we have started at Birtley. But the costs of doing everything we currently have in planning will be far more than what we have in the bank – several million pounds more. The Board may face some interesting discussions soon.

Trading company finances

Our trading company runs boat trips and sells merchandise. Profits go to our charity. Trading results in 2022 were similar to 2021. They would have been better but for the very dry summer that stopped boat trips for 10 weeks. Special events at Easter and Christmas did very well.

Looking to the future, gross trading income in 2022 was around £52,000. In 2017, trading income was around £120,000. In both years, just under half of income was profit. So will we soon recover to 2017 trading levels? Realistically the answer is most likely ‘no’. Covid-19 has had an effect but it is not the whole story. Volunteers do a fabulous job but the canal can’t reliably support vastly more boat trips. Water supply and historic infrastructure can be fragile, the demands on volunteer time are heavy and our costs (especially to satisfy the Maritime & Coastguard Agency) are rising sharply. We have to make the best of what we have, concentrating on the activities that make most money and the times of year when water supplies are most reliable.



Growing Our Green Corridor For The Public Good

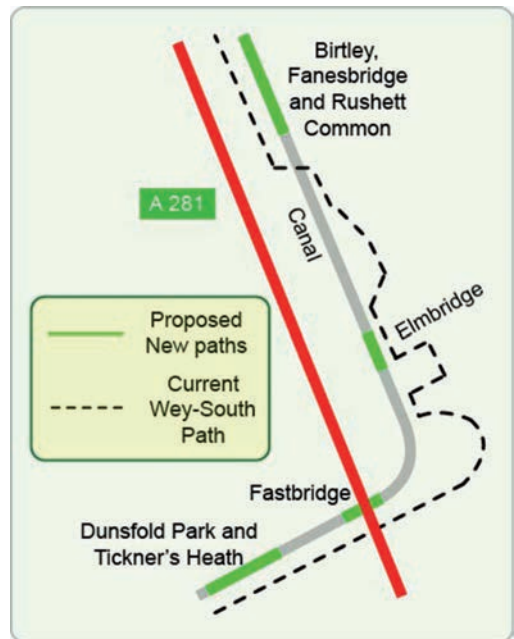
This is a summary of a presentation that Tony Ford gave at our Annual Meeting.

We are not just restoring a canal. We aim to conserve and enhance the natural environment along the route, and enhance public access to this green corridor for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. We do this by restoring or recreating the towpath for all-weather use and, increasingly, by creating new paths that link the towpath to the wider network of public footpaths and bridleways in Surrey and Sussex.

This began with getting formal designation of the Wey-South long-distance path. Where possible it comprises the canal towpath, but in many other places its continuity is broken and it has to deviate across fields and local roads. We want to eliminate those diversions by restoring and reopening more of the towpath.

A recent win has been at Birtley, where acquiring the canal has enabled us to bring back into public use some 600m of the towpath together with 100m of new route which connects the towpath back to the Downs Link long distance path. Opened in October 2021, this has provided a popular “circular walk” for the residents of Bramley and Shamley Green.

The Birtley towpath will be extended by a further 600m once the Rooks Hill and Fanesbridge project gets underway. This will connect with the Greensand Way long-distance path and add a further circular walk to the Downs Link path. Better still, the plans for Rushett Common will extend the towpath by a further 800m with a further link to the Downs Link path. In total, these three projects will reinstate two continuous kilometres (1¼ miles) of towpath.



Elsewhere in Surrey:

- The Elmbridge Road project includes a completely new path which will provide an alternative route for the residents of the Elmbridge Village retirement community to reach the centre of Cranleigh without having to walk alongside the busy Elmbridge Road.
- Our plans for removing the obstruction to navigation at the A281 at Fastbridge include reinstating the towpath and providing improved arrangements for pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders to cross the busy road.

- We are working with the developers of Dunsfold Park on plans for bringing into public use 1.5km of the towpath which lie within the boundary of the proposed new country park and which includes connecting to the Thriscutt Slipway.
- At Tickner's Heath, the works include 300m of new path which will "fill a gap" in the rights-of-way network. Currently, bridleways at the Springbok Estate and in Sidney Wood stop at the roadside, meaning pedestrians and horse-riders need to walk along the narrow verge of Dunsfold Road. Our path will provide a new route for them as well as providing a connection to the existing towpath on the north side of the canal.

Through these initiatives, we hope that we will increasingly be seen as not just a waterway restoration body, but as a significant contributor to improving access to the countryside for the enjoyment and wellbeing of all.

Thanks to volunteer Tim Keogh, we have recently added two short walks to our website, both from Run Common, near Cranleigh. You can download walk descriptions from our website or pick up a leaflet from our Loxwood Canal Centre.

Surrey Waters

On Saturday 13 May listeners to BBC Radio Surrey will have heard that station's annual Surrey Day podcast which this year visited waterways in the county. Thanks to the kindness of Christine Howard of Visit Surrey and Ken Bare of the Surrey Hills Society we were invited to contribute to the podcast which comprised interviews recorded at various sites, ranging from an upper reach of the River Wey near Elstead to the lake used by Littleton Sailing Club, south-east of Staines.

Our contribution was recorded on 8 March, interviewer Lewis and sound-man Simon firstly visiting our Shalford office to be briefed on our mission, then talking to volunteers at the Birtley Bridge 2 construction site – all achieved efficiently despite persistent rain. For those who missed the podcast it can be heard on BBC Sounds until late June 2023.

Alan Johnson, Technical Liaison Officer



At Shalford, interviewer Lewis Mason hears about us from John Reynolds (centre) and fellow director Alan Johnson (left)



Young people paddling a raft they had just built themselves

Making A Splash

Saturday 4th March saw ten children spending three fun-packed hours building and paddling rafts at Drungewick. It was organised by local enterprise Surrey Hills and Rivers, whose director Ben Webb realised that this was an ideal location for a requested action-based birthday party for a Cranleigh family.

On land, Ben's firm offers day and residential farm-based outdoor experiences near Haslemere. Meanwhile, his water activities – paddlesports as well as raft-building – already take place at two locations on the River Wey, and on the Basingstoke Canal. Ben (and we) hope that our canal will be a further regular location for them that can be offered to families and other groups.

'Drungewick is a lovely spot'

Ben says, 'Drungewick is a lovely spot with a degree of privacy. The lack of river flow suits raft-building. The parking is good too. The canal's office made sure all our needs were catered for.'

Ben can call on a team of qualified instructors and helpers for water-based activities. Equipped with kayaks, canoes, multiple raft sets, a trailer and a minibus, his firm can offer a whole range of water-based adventures.

While this was a private function, Surrey Hills and Rivers works with all sorts of families, youth groups and schools, with the common objective of engaging young people in physical activity in the countryside. Ben believes this is the main ingredient in a recipe for wellbeing - for young people individually and for society collectively.

For more information, see www.surreyhillsandrivers.co.uk.



Director Ben Webb

Hedgelaying Competition for Newcomers

On the first Sunday in February, Surrey Wildlife Trust organised a hedgelaying competition for novice hedgelayers (open to those with two years or less experience), as part of its Heritage Lottery Fund sponsored Hedgerow Heritage project. This project aims to encourage interest in hedges in the North Downs and Surrey Hills and the competition was held alongside a bridleway at Tytings Farm, just outside Guildford. David Beadman and Philip Wakeling, two recent recruits to our Hedgelaying Team, decided to enter the competition and see how they would fare against other newcomers! The other competitors came from a variety of conservation organisations, with the largest contingent being Surrey Wildlife Trust members, but the Wey & Arun was the only canal organisation represented.

Adjacent sections - then five frantic hours

Unusually, some of the competitors worked on one section as pairs, with a total of 16 competitors involved altogether. David explained, “The day started just after 9am with a briefing, an introduction from the judge, and a draw for the 6-yard (5.5 metres) section of hedge that we were each to lay”. David and Philip fortuitously drew adjacent sections, which meant that they could assist each other through the day. The judge, Paul Matthews, a National Champion hedgelayer and an active member of the South of England Hedgelaying Society, was available all day for questions as he walked up and down the hedge.

The actual competition ran from 10am to 3pm, and it quickly became clear that time was a significant factor, as there was a lot of work to do in just five hours. There was no time for a coffee break, lunch was just a quick sandwich, and sadly no time to walk back to the pizza van and coffee van which the organisers had arranged to be on site.



Philip Wakeling (left) and David Beadman bid for hedgelaying glory

Style differences

David realised that he was unlikely to be on a winning streak with various comments during the day from the judge, “You need a heavier axe” and “Your hammer is too light”. Other comments : “You don’t put your stakes in yet” and “You have cut off far too much”, started to reveal that the South of England style practised on the Wey & Arun was not exactly what the judge was looking for!

David and Philip just about managed to finish their sections in the allotted time, and then packed up and made their way to the results at 4pm. On the way, Philip helped a couple of other competitors who were still working as the timing was so tight.

One section of hedge stood out as being very different. The hedge extended about 18 inches (0.45 metres) from the stakes on each side with very little attempt to bind the hedge by weaving in and out of the stakes, and very little trimming or thinning out of the hedge.

The verdict

David explained that the judging was based on three criteria: marking the neatness of the pleachers (this refers to the cut close to the ground to allow the hedge to lay down); staking and binding; and, finally, the overall look of the laid hedge. All competitors received a well-deserved wooden medal for taking part. Out of the twelve sections laid, Philip was delighted to come fourth.

Interestingly, the winner was the section of hedge described above and the judge commented that he was pleased to see that the two teams placed first and second had attended his hedgelaying course in recent months! It also became apparent that the Southern Counties competition style has changed over the last 7 or 8 years, to become

much thicker with less cutting back of bushy growth - how times change. This is very different from what we practise on the canal, where we ensure that the hedge does not encroach on the towpath by being too thick.

David’s final comment summed up the day perfectly, “This was an exhausting, but enjoyable and very interesting day, helped by lovely weather”.

Volunteer Opportunities

Your Wey-South team needs you

Right now we are producing Wey-South magazine with an all-volunteer team which is saving us valuable funds. For us to continue with this approach we really need to strengthen the team. If you could be an occasional reporter, taking photos or writing work, please get in touch. We would also love to meet anyone with experience in publication layout or design. Please contact jm@weyandarun.co.uk.

Health & Safety

Thanks to John Talbot, who has now retired, our frontline staff and volunteers are working with a very solid Health & Safety approach. Documentation and procedures are in place and we also have the support of professional consultants who help us stay up to date.

Now we would very much like to meet one or more volunteers who could help us with the day-to-day running of our Health & Safety system. This is mainly a back-office job that needs someone with a very organised approach. You do not have to be an expert, although any canal or engineering knowledge will help. Please contact support@weyandarun.co.uk to chat through the opportunity.

A history of the Canal Trust – the short version

Perhaps you are wondering how the Canal Trust show got on the road. Well, it was something like this. Back to the 1960s – long hair, Beatles ... the grim wartime years are starting to fade from memory, people have more free time, more money to spend. The commercial days of the British canals are pretty much finished, but a movement starts to revive those half-forgotten ditches – this time for leisure. Basingstoke, Kennet & Avon, Ashton – armies of volunteer navvies begin to turn the tide. 1965 – Paul Vine publishes ‘London’s Lost Route to the Sea’, a history of the Wey & Arun Canal. He claims to have rediscovered the canal while he was a schoolboy at Godalming in the war years.



Rowner Lock - 1972

1966 - Enter (stage left) John East, West Sussex councillor, and around 1969 (stage right) John Markwick, an early IT specialist. Both are excited about reviving the canal, but they don't know each other and don't meet until mid-1970. Things move fast. Over the long weekend 7-9 August 1970, the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) hold a rally in Guildford. Some more enthusiasts meet up and talk about the canal just a couple of miles away. Just a few days later (20 August), JE, JM and Jack Mackley (owner of an engineering firm), with three others, meet and the Wey & Arun Canal Society is formed. JE is Chairman, JM is Secretary, Treasurer and member no. 1.

First job – find something to do. Good news – three landowners will allow work on the canal route north of the A272 at Newbridge. In 1971, the first working party sets out for Rowner Lock. To mark ‘Loxwood 1871’, marking the 100th anniversary of the canal closing, the first issue of a new publication appears. Its name? Wey-South Bulletin. In 1973, the Society upgrades its organisation and becomes a registered charity and a company – the Wey & Arun Canal Trust Ltd.

Sadly we don't have space for everything so we have to take it a decade at a time.

The 1970s – hopeless optimism meets hard reality. Restoring the canal isn't a walk in the park. By the end of the decade, both founders have left the board. In 1975, Peter Beresford becomes Chairman and John Wood Secretary. But the Trust is finding its feet, with some restored features to show off, mainly on the section south of Loxwood, but also Lock 17 near Cranleigh. No truly navigable waterway yet though.

The 1980s – more bits are restored but in hindsight the really significant event is late in the decade when a new landowner buys two farms in Loxwood and a large section of canal. The new owners – Gordon (father) & Peter Foulger (son) are canal enthusiasts. The rebuilding of Barnsill Bridge, opened in 1989, is just the start of something really big, later to be called the 'Loxwood Link'.

The 1990s – the dream starts to become reality. By 1999, the Trust has its own tripboat on the canal with navigation possible from the Onslow Arms to around 1½ miles southwards. And planning permission is available for the 'Drungewick Crossing', an ambitious project including a new aqueduct and a new bridge under a public road. But in 1996 there is a major upheaval when a group of frustrated members propose a motion of no confidence in the board. The motion fails but in the fallout Peter Beresford and John Wood later leave the board. The new leaders are Peter Foulger (Chairman), Jim Phillips (Treasurer) and Eric Walker (Loxwood Link Manager).

The 2000s – the momentum builds as the Trust shows it can remove major blockages on the canal route. The highlights are the 2003 opening of Drungewick Aqueduct and the 2009 completion of the 'Loxwood Crossing'. Both involve fundraising and engineering on a previously unimaginable scale. Loxwood work takes a big chunk of our resources, but other sections are not forgotten – in particular, the 'Bramley Link' project is launched to look at the most northerly section. In 2009, Peter Foulger retires and Sally Schupke becomes Chairman.

The 2010s – the Trust moves beyond the 'one big project' stage. By the middle of the decade, Eric Walker's team has extended the Loxwood section as far as currently possible – to over 3 navigable miles. Canoeists and paddleboarders can use the whole Loxwood section – previously this was only possible on special days. The Loxwood Canal Centre opens. Now our ambition is to work on many fronts at the same time. 2016 sees big celebrations for the 200th anniversary of the canal and



A newspaper photo of 1973 shows our joint founders John East (left) and John Markwick.



At the official opening of Barnsill Bridge, Loxwood, on 15 September 1989. The figures in the foreground are (from L to R): Paul Vine, unidentified lady (with back to camera), Lord Egremont, Gordon Foulger, Peter Foulger, Betty Beresford, Peter Beresford (our Chairman at the time).

the official opening of Compasses Bridge on the Summit Level near Cranleigh, the first removal of a major route blockage in Surrey. The idea of a ‘green corridor’ takes shape, with the creation of the Hunt Nature Park as a starting point. Late in the decade, work starts on the Birtley canal section immediately south of Bramley.

The 2020s – hey, we haven’t finished those yet. But the multi-site approach is a clear success, with work in progress or being planned all the way from north to south. True there are headwinds, with Covid, rising costs and logjams in the planning process. Land acquisition becomes a hot topic as we acquire several canal sections on a freehold basis. That Frequently Asked Question: how long will it take to complete? Our normal answer: as long as it takes, but at least we can honestly say we are closer than ever before.

If you would like to read the full story of the Canal Trust (up to 2009), John Wood’s book ‘The Wey-South Project’ tells it in great detail.

We had planned to celebrate our 50th anniversary in 2020, when the centrepiece would have been a National Trailboat Rally on the Summit section. Thanks to Covid none of that happened.

On our website is the “50 years of Restoration” presentation put together by Mark & Lorraine Feeny and shown at our Annual Meeting.

The Wiggonholt Association

The name “Wiggonholt” will be familiar to many members from our splendid electric wide boat launched in 2009. Wiggonholt is a very small village (population around 50) in the Arun valley south of Pulborough. The Wiggonholt Association (WA) was founded in 1996, with the aim of protecting the rural environment.

Peter Flatter was Chairman of the WA for many years. His interest in all things green made him a natural friend of the Canal Trust. It was Peter’s initiative that led the WA to make a very generous contribution to the tripboat *Wiggonholt*. For a number of years, WA members enjoyed an annual trip on the boat - we will remember these for some marvellous picnics in quiet spots.

In October 2022 the members of the WA decided to wind up the Association and donate its assets to The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE). Apart from a small amount of cash, a significant asset was the traditional red telephone kiosk in North Stoke, converted as an information point. We are sad to hear of the formal end of the WA. We enjoyed our partnership immensely and the boat is still doing great service.



*The boat leaves the wharf at the naming of **Wiggonholt** and the opening of the Loxwood High Street Crossing on 9 May 2009. From L to R: Peter Flatter, Doreen Mann, Lord Sterling, Peter Foulger (our Chairman at the time), Eric Walker, Lady Sterling, John Miller (crew).*



Our Chairman, Sally Schupke who was awarded the MBE in the New Year’s Honours list, was invested by the Princess Royal on 20th April at Buckingham Palace

Credit British Ceremonial Arts Ltd

A flash of azure

The mythical Kingfisher - how and where to see them on the canal

Two wildlife encounters are etched in my brain, coincidentally both with blue animals, and I know I will have these mental pictures as long as I live. The first is of the huge, arching, turquoise back of a blue whale sliding out of the green-blue sea, then slowly returning to the depths, a few yards from the boat I was in just off Monterey, California, almost ten years ago. The second, closer to home but no less exciting, was the darting flight of a kingfisher as it arrowed the length of a lake near Rudgwick, a fabulous, almost shocking azure blue as the sun caught its back. I'd seen kingfishers before, but generally just brief glimpses in flight and that's why this was so memorable, although I guess it lasted only a few seconds.

"I've always wanted to see a kingfisher." Simon Barnes, a well-known birder writing in the Sunday Times said he hears this phrase frequently, describing this ornithological legend as being almost mythical to those people who've never seen one. I guess I've been lucky for, as I say, I've seen kingfishers both before and since my special encounter, and I've seen them more on the Loxwood stretches of the Wey & Arun canal than anywhere else. In fact when my wife and I and our dog go for walks on the canal that's what we're all keeping an eye out for. OK, maybe not the dog so much. It has to be said we seldom see them.



Diving for a fish

Maybe it's anecdotal, but Julian Morgan who sees these birds regularly on the Shalford stretch of the canal says "If you see ripples of a perfect circle on the water surface you may have just missed seeing one diving for a fish". So, again, you've not seen one.

Could we do anything to improve our chances? Well it turns out we could. Turning again to Simon Barnes for advice, he writes "they're much harder to see if you've never seen one before. I've seen hundreds of kingfishers, and that's precisely why I am able to see more...." It seems he waits and watches and can pick them out from the background as they rest in trees or reeds. In these hiding places they are often not so clearly blue, more brown or tan coloured, and thus,



being small - their bodies are not much bigger than a sparrow's - they are camouflaged and difficult to spot. And that means you're going to be better off sitting still and looking, rather than walking, glancing and hoping, so as to pick them out and wait for them to take flight.

It also helps if you do that sitting somewhere where kingfishers are known to be. Dave Verrall, who knows the canal and its inhabitants better than most, and who took many of the pictures in this article says "They may be seen all along the operational length from Drungewick to Southland as that is stocked with fish. Most people, including myself, only see a flash of blue and orange as they fly fast along the canal.

Right place, right time

"With most wildlife photography, especially with kingfishers, it is all about being in the right place at the right time. You may be lucky and see a kingfisher land on a branch, a bush or in the reeds. This has happened to me on several occasions. I slowly approach the kingfisher taking photos and try and get as close as I can without scaring the bird."

There is every reason to think these birds might be seen anywhere along the length of the canal where it is in water, or by the neighbouring rivers. So, if you're one of those who has "always wanted to see a kingfisher" spend some time sitting quietly by the canal and keep your eyes open for that flash of blue and orange. You never know your luck!

Jonathan Copeland

See more of Dave Verrall's photos, and those of other canal visitors in the wildlife section on our website which Dave curates : weyarun.org.uk/wildlife



Restoration And Maintenance News

Ten teams of volunteers are hard at work at least sixteen days a month, improving, protecting, restoring and maintaining the canal, using equipment and tools from the Tickner's Depot team. We operate throughout most of the year, apart from Hedgelaying which stands aside for nesting birds.

Come and join us – your canal needs you! All help is welcome – some have limited spare time while others generously support several teams. You may already have valuable life skills to offer but all volunteers receive professional-standard operating and safety training. It's never too late to learn!

This hard work is recorded monthly in Working Party News, available to all on our website at <https://weyarun.org.uk/backdrop/wpn2> or automatically by email via listadmin@weyandarun.co.uk. Working Party News has full details of the contacts for each team, who'll be delighted to hear of your interest and to answer your questions. See further details about the teams under 'Volunteers' on our website.



The final concrete pour at Birtley Bridge 2 on March 30th raised the bridge substructure to its final target height.

Birtley Bridges

The substructure of the new Birtley lifting Bridge 2 is largely complete. This major construction operation, together with the lifting deck for the existing Birtley Bridge 1, is the most northerly current restoration scheme south of the longer-term Bramley rerouting. The bridge location is accessible for pedestrians from the main A281 Guildford–Horsham Road just south of Singh Concrete, whose concrete was pumped directly to the work site.

We have placed a £150,000+ order for the design, building and installation of the bridges' superstructures and hydraulic mechanisms, for installation planned for August and an opening ceremony later in the year. This is our biggest capital outlay for two years. The successful tenderer is Beaver Bridges Ltd of Shrewsbury.

As the substructure work on Bridge 2 neared completion, in early May the EWG team's attention turned to Bridge 1 further south.

Some relatively minor changes are needed to allow the substructure to take the new lifting deck.

Removal of the causeway that bypassed the Birtley Bridge 2 worksite will result in 650 metres of continuous restored canal. We will need to plan desilting before boats of any size can navigate this section. The team has recently reprofiled the short section north of Birtley Bridge 2.



This picture taken in late April shows brick facing on the new Birtley Bridge 2.



Completed work at Brewhurst Winding Hole

Environmental Plastic – not a contradiction in terms!

How do you reinforce crumbling banks? Steel piling is brutal, and expensive. Wood has a finite life. So we are trialling high-density, self-coloured Smartwood™ plastic posts from Plastecowood of Rhyl. Smartwood products are all made from 100% recycled plastic. The makers say that every tonne saves 700 kg of carbon from landfill or incineration, saves 2.5 trees compared with wooden products and reprocesses at least 25,000 single-use waste plastic packages.

Our first installation at Brewhurst winding hole was successfully piled with Smartawood round posts and planks. The process was completed with coir rolls which will be planted with vegetation later to give it an even more natural look. The work was carried out by our staff and volunteers and by a visiting team from Newbury Working Party Group.

We are assessing further opportunities to use Smartawood, with the expectation that a higher initial cost compared with traditional timber will be more than offset by its longevity reducing life-cycle costs.

Big changes at our depot

Mark Feeny is now our Depot Manager. Thanks to a huge amount of work by Mark, Brian King and volunteers, Tickner's Heath Depot at Dunsfold now has been reorganised and upgraded. Externally, there's now racking for water pump piping, a relocated and repurposed office cabin on a new-laid base, and storage bays cleared for ballast and logs. Internally, much has been rationalised. Unnecessary, unsafe and non-operational equipment and chemicals have been disposed of, and the stores for retained stock have been cleaned and repainted.



Mark Feeny
at our Annual
Meeting

Brewhurst Landing Stage

Ready for the summer season, a new canoe landing stage above Brewhurst Lock will be highly appreciated by paddlers. Launching and getting out of boats was previously awkward here.



JJ gets some love and care

A four-person team took three months working heroically in the open on Drungewick Slipway to give our smallest tripboat *Josias Jessop* (JJ) her long-awaited refit. Fresh zinc anodes were fitted to prevent galvanic action between hull and propeller.



Elmbridge fence - hard work completed

Over several months 122 fencing panels, stretching 225 metres, have been erected as a firm boundary between the canal and Elmbridge Village at Cranleigh. We acquired this short section of canal route in 2021. Limited vehicular access and storage facilities meant much manhandling of materials and tools to and from the site.



Roger and Ian are our cupwinners



At our Annual Meeting we awarded our volunteer cups to Roger Beazer (pictured left with Chairman Sally Schupke) and Ian James (right).

For a number of years, Roger has put in exceptionally dedicated work as our Mobile Display Vehicle (MDV) Organiser.

As well as being one of our busiest boat skippers, Ian has applied his huge practical talents to a vast range of boat maintenance tasks.



Membership Report

19 new members joined us in the last quarter and our membership now stands at 2,862. We would like to extend a very warm welcome to the following new members.

Craig Baxendale	Sarah Chatfield	Denise De Fraine	Karen Goodger	Toby Goodger
Clive Hamilton	Peter Hannell	Jean Page	Doreen Phillips	Robert Phillips
Kathleen Rayner	Martin Robinson	John Sleight	Linda Thorpe	Peter Verrall
Jack Walker	Christine Watts	Sir James Stewart	Lady Dorothy Stewart	

We have learned with regret of the death of:

Ann Heaver	Andrew Ritchie	Peter Bailey	Georgina Hall	Eric Tickner
Martin Foster	John Gray	David Thompson		

John Tovell
membership@weyandarun.co.uk

We were very sorry to hear that **Martin Foster** of Brighton died on 8th April 2023. He had been a member since 1975. Martin had a passion for transport and heritage. As a young child, he lived close to the canal in Bramley. He was very keen to support us with the construction of a traditional brick-arched canal bridge. We are planning to build one of these, similar to the one at Gennets Bridge Lock, at Fanesbridge (Rooks Hill) near Bramley. With luck and planning permission (are you listening, Waverley Council?) we hope to celebrate the opening of “Martin’s bridge” before too long. We plan to include a more complete appreciation of Martin’s life in a future issue.

Meet The Volunteers

In the first of a new regular feature, Wey-South spoke to **Dave Miller**



What's your background?

30 years as a Surrey police officer, then 18 years as civilian support in their Criminal Justice Department. I retired in 2019.

When and how did you get involved with the canal?

Living near the canal, I was well aware of the Wey & Arun Canal restoration project and it always interested me. With more free time after retiring, in 2020 I attended a Volunteer Introduction Day at Dunsfold, where I was impressed by the welcome and enthusiasm of Bill Nicholson and Dave Evans.

I offered to help with the Dredging Team which had recently started the long job of clearing the silted-up section that borders Dunsfold Park. Charlie Coxwell invited me to a taster session on the dredger. I had no previous experience whatsoever and thought I would just be a watching bystander - but I was immediately taught the controls and put straight to work, dredging hydraulic bucketloads of silt from the Canal and depositing them on the bank! I said I'd like to continue and came back for another session - but we were then hit by the Covid pandemic and all work was shut down. In August 2021 most working parties had restarted but not the Dredging Team, so I spoke to Dave Evans about the Northern Working Party, who were working on the construction of Tickner's Crossing, and was immediately invited to join them.

...and now?

I'm still with the Tuesday Group of the Northern Working Party who, amongst other general tasks, are building a new road bridge and footbridge at Tickner's Heath, Dunsfold. The bridges are needed to cross a short section of the Canal that is going to have to be diverted.

I also volunteer with the Odd Job Group on Thursdays which, as the name suggests, is tasked with short-term projects and jobs. For the last few months, we have been tidying and carrying out maintenance work at our depot at Dunsfold, where there is a workshop, large storage sheds and numerous items of equipment. We are shortly moving on to a project at Drungewick Lock to replace the water pumps.

What have you enjoyed most?

I enjoy every day I am out volunteering on the canal - there is such a variety of work and great camaraderie. Joining the small team that restored the water wheel at Lordings Aqueduct,

under the leadership of Brian King, was a particular pleasure. A major restoration was required last year. After months of work, stripping and replacing most of the actual wheel and repairing the brick chamber, the wheel is now serviceable again. It was designed to use the water power of the River Arun to lift water from the river up into the aqueduct above to replenish the canal. It's now in good order, awaiting the restoration of that section of canal.

What skills have you acquired?

I had only a short time with the Dredging Team and have a lot more learning to do. However, I do now know which controls to use to operate an excavator - but don't ask me to dig a trench yet!

I have been trained to use a large, petrol-driven disc cutter and I can now certainly make the sparks fly! Whilst involved in towpath repairs, I was trained in the use of the road roller - which I can confirm is a very bone-jarring experience. I am now comfortable driving our Iveco tipper truck and have recently had refresher training on towing and manoeuvring an assortment of large trailers.

When not volunteering on the canal, what are your other hobbies and interests?

I am a keen football supporter, following the National League side Dorking Wanderers and regularly attend their matches. I also enjoy long-distance walking. I have walked the South Downs Way, Hadrian's Wall and the Cumbria Way National Trails and have almost finished walking all the sections of the 78-mile Capital Ring walk around London. For the first time, we have recently become owners of a miniature Schnauzer puppy, so are currently adapting to the change of lifestyle!

What would you say to someone considering volunteering with WACT?

"Don't be shy, give it a try!" Go to Working Party News on the News section of our website, to see the various volunteer groups and the type of work that they are involved in. Contact the leader of the group you are interested in - you will be made to feel welcome.

Previous experience is always useful but is definitely not a requirement. You will be shown what to do, as and when required. You will get full training and you will not be expected to do anything you are not comfortable with. There is no commitment. You can just volunteer on the days that suit you.

Do it now, you won't regret it.





At Loxwood on the morning of our Annual Meeting (22 April) - Top: Our Vice-Chairman Margaret Darvill presented Adam Rayner with his Apprenticeship Completion certificate (with distinction). Adam is seen here with visiting volunteers. Bottom: Our Anniversary Gala Rally attracted a good number of boaters. Julian Nowell captured a group near Barnsill Bridge.

