

WEY & ARUN

Birtley
Opening Edition



Quarterly Magazine of the
Wey & Arun Canal Trust
Issue 205 December 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.

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

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December 2023

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Front cover: Birtley Bridge 2 opened for boat traffic on October 28th

News headlines

Celebrations for Birtley Bridges opening

Despite some typically unpredictable British weather, our Birtley Bridges opening on October 28th was a great success. The lift bridges were duly raised and lowered, canoes and kayaks came through and a good number of people were there to see the fun. Our principal guest Mary Creswell, Deputy Lieutenant of Surrey, was enthusiastic and amazed at how much we have done. “What a great achievement and a great asset for Surrey”, she commented. (Read more overleaf.)

Promising signs for Tickner’s Heath Crossing

After the celebration tea at Bramley Village Hall, Tony Ford gave a brief update on Summit Level developments. Tony made an important announcement about the Tickner’s Heath Crossing Project. Here we are creating a new canal route under the Dunsfold-Alfold road. Work has been on hold for a period as progress is not possible until agreements are in place allowing work on the public road. We also have to divert a water main that runs along the road.

The next steps will mainly need work by contractors and Tony explained that after Covid the construction industry was in a chaotic state and it would have been very difficult to find a contractor willing to do the work at a reasonable price. The situation is now beginning to ease and we can accelerate progress towards completing the legal agreements and selecting a contractor. This is good news but Tony warned that we will need to raise significant funds to complete the project.

Good news on funding from our largest supporter

Also at the Bramley Village Hall event, Finance Director Julian Morgan announced the excellent news that MJ Camp Charitable Foundation, our largest single supporter, made an exceptionally generous contribution of £230,000 this year. For several years, the Foundation has made a substantial annual contribution, but it would be completely wrong for us to rely on this. The new funding will allow us to plan more ambitiously for future work, although members should understand that completing all the projects that we currently have in the pipeline will need funding on a much larger scale.

Chairman plans retirement

Our Chairman Sally Schupke MBE took up her post in 2009, succeeding Peter Foulger immediately after the completion of the Loxwood High Street Crossing project. Sally has announced that she will step down from May 2024. Under Sally’s leadership, our organisation has made tremendous strides. Rather than focus almost exclusively on one big project at a time, we have built up our strength to work across all 23 miles of the canal route. Sally has shown huge commitment for a long time but she confesses that she is nearing exhaustion and she feels the time is right for someone else to take the leadership role. Sally does not plan to leave canal work altogether but would really like to concentrate on the jobs that she actually enjoys, such as volunteering in the Loxwood Canal Centre and working as a tripboat crew member.

2024 member meetings

Because of changes to the timetable for preparing our Annual Report and Accounts, in 2024 there is planned to be an informal Spring Meeting with project updates (not a formal meeting) on April 20th and our Annual Meeting is scheduled for October 19th.

Birtley - what we've achieved

On 28 October we celebrated the transformation of the Birtley canal section. Let's summarise what we have done and achieved.



*Looking south from the site of Birtley Bridge 2.
Left: 1976 Right: October 2023*



Raising the profile of the Surrey canal

If you live near Loxwood in West Sussex, you already know how good it is to have a restored canal on your doorstep – and now, 10 miles north in Birtley, just south of Bramley, we're trumpeting the same message to Surrey residents and visitors. Our restoration of 1 km of canal is already bringing enhanced recreation and conservation benefits to the area, on our 'way to the Wey'.

Five years of work – or more than 50

The current work at Birtley started late in 2018 when we acquired the section from Westland Farm. Our first volunteer working party in Surrey was at Birtley on 16th January 1972. Later in the 1970s we repaired a major breach in the canal bank.

What we are delivering

- ✿ Public access to a section of canal that was previously private and inaccessible
- ✿ A new circular walk along the canal banks and the Downs Link path
- ✿ A continuous towpath, useable by maintenance vehicles – this did not exist in part of the section
- ✿ Removal of two causeways that blocked the canal route for navigation
- ✿ Clearance of the canal channel to remove overgrown trees and vegetation, allowing in more daylight and encouraging wildlife
- ✿ Two new lifting bridges, suitable for farm and canal maintenance traffic
- ✿ New fencing along the canal banks

What we have invested

Countless volunteer and staff hours, plus over £400,000 on materials and professional services. All this money came from our members and supporters, including two specific fundraising appeals, legacies and donations in memory of a family member.

The technical bit

The two bridges are essentially identical. The bridge deck weighs around 4 tonnes with an additional 1.5 tonnes of steel in the overhead beam and 4 tonnes of concrete counterweights. The objective of these 'Dutch' style lifting bridges is for the counterweight to do the bulk of the lifting and the hydraulic jacks provide the difference of around 20%. The bridges themselves have a 10-tonne axle loading capacity.

What next?

Over time we would like to make the Birtley section available for small unpowered boats, which will need one or more landing stages. A small tripboat operation could also be possible, but currently there is not enough depth of water – some desilting work will be needed. Our focus is very much on the Rooks Hill/Fanesbridge section to the south where our plans include more public access and re-establishing the canal channel.

Birtley timeline

It is over 50 years since we first worked at Birtley, but this is how the latest activity developed

<i>Autumn 2017</i>	<i>Project manager Philip Oliver announces plans to work on the Birtley section. The first aim is to create a circular walk</i>
<i>Autumn 2018</i>	<i>Temporary access track from Birtley Courtyard created, towpath improved</i>
<i>January 2019</i>	<i>Land purchase finalised</i>
<i>April 2019</i>	<i>Planning permission granted for Bridge 1 (in only three months!) and first fundraising appeal launched</i>
<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Three successive weeks of volunteer work camps construct the substructure for Bridge 1</i>
<i>October 2019</i>	<i>The substructure of Bridge 1 is complete, with brick facing added</i>
<i>December 2020</i>	<i>Planning permission granted for Bridge 2, with conditions that will take many months to fulfil</i>
<i>June 2021</i>	<i>Temporary fixed deck installed on Bridge 1, clearing the way to open the circular walking route</i>
<i>March 2022</i>	<i>Our EWG team starts on-site preparation work for Bridge 2 construction</i>
<i>May 2022</i>	<i>Fundraising appeal launched for Bridge 2</i>
<i>Summer 2022</i>	<i>Gas main diversion at Bridge 2, piling work starts, remains of original swingbridge uncovered</i>
<i>October 2022</i>	<i>EWG team starts on Bridge 2 construction</i>
<i>March 2023</i>	<i>Final concrete pour on Bridge 2, order placed for lifting decks on both bridges</i>
<i>July 2023</i>	<i>EWG prepare both bridges for lifting deck installation</i>
<i>September 2023</i>	<i>Lifting decks delivered and installation starts</i>
<i>October 2023</i>	<i>Official opening ceremonies</i>



*Above: The site of Birtley Bridge 1 in 2019 Below: Opening Day, October 2023
Bottom: The Nicholson family on opening day*



Birtley Bridge 1

Bridge 1 is at the ‘country end’ of the Birtley section. The cows in the next-door field could tell you the whole story in great detail. From Bridge 1 a short footpath leads to the Downs Link – a vital section of the circular walk between here and Bridge 2.

At the start, Bramley Link project manager Philip Oliver asked Northern Working Party leader Bill Nicholson to take on the Birtley section and Bridge 1 seemed a good place to start – less complicated than Bridge 2. Bill’s son Rob designed the bridge base. Our Operations Manager Dave Evans oversaw the main construction phase which took about six months. Three weeks of Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) camps over the hot summer of 2019 gave the project a huge boost. Other visiting groups including KESCRG (Kent & East Sussex), London WRG and Newbury Working Party Group made great contributions, along with our own Northern Working Party.

In Summer 2023, our EWG team did the final work to prepare for the lifting deck installation.

The opening day

The Nicholson family contribution to Bridge 1 did not end with their massive volunteer efforts. Bill’s parents passed away in 2018 and 2019 and his family was happy to provide a substantial memorial gift towards the bridge construction.

Bill says “My parents were not fanatical about canals like me, but they were keen supporters of the waterways.” Aged 14, Bill joined his first canal working party at Bonfire Hanger on our canal.

A downpour around 9 o’clock was ominous but the sun came out by 11.30 when Bill’s sister Alison unveiled a plaque in memory of their parents. Rob Nicholson then officially cut the ribbon and helped to raise the lifting deck (this was hard work – the hydraulics still need some tweaking).



Left: Rob Nicholson pumps Bridge 1



Right: Bill’s sister Alison unveils the plaque

Birtley Bridge 2

Bridge 2 is at the ‘village end’ of the Birtley section. The site is very much in the public eye as a busy footpath/cyclepath crosses the canal here. People on the Downs Link also get a good view. This was the site of an original canal bridge (Birtley Bridge) that disappeared under a causeway after the canal closed.

Planning, design and third party technical approval took the best part of two years to complete. We were very lucky to have volunteer Nigel Yarwood, a civil engineer by profession, to take charge of this very complex work. The bridges had to meet the demanding standards for vehicle-accessible bridges on public footpaths.

Our EWG team, our in-house construction experts, got the job of building the bridge. Firstly there was a gas main across the causeway that had to be diverted. As the team dug a trench for the diversion, they discovered ‘running sand’ conditions – water was constantly flowing underground. This needed some specialist treatment. Vandalism and theft just added to the challenges. It was exciting to find remains of the original swingbridge under the causeway.

The opening day

Everyone had been intently studying the weather forecast which was for sunshine and showers. At 1 o’clock, with just an hour to go, it was bucketing down. By 2 o’clock, though, it was clear.

Speaking first, Nigel Yarwood commented “My hat goes off to the EWG team who built this often in foul and freezing weather”. Following up, Dennis Gillen, leader of EWG, said “This project may not have been the largest restoration project undertaken by our volunteers, but it’s been one of the most challenging.”

Dressed brilliantly for the occasion in a bright yellow raincoat and boots, Deputy Lieutenant of Surrey Mary Creswell congratulated everyone who had contributed to one of Surrey’s largest volunteer projects. She then cut the ribbon and invited our Midweek Working Party boaters to navigate under the bridge (which had already been lifted). After the bridge deck had been lowered again, Richard Hinckley from Beaver Bridges was officially the first to cross (OK – so there might just have been a cheeky photographer who nipped in front of him).



The site of Birtley Bridge 2 from the Downs Link. Left: In 2004 Right: October 2023



Birtley - the bridge builders



L to R: Nigel Yarwood (bridge designer), Richard Hinckley (Beaver Bridges - bridge supplier), Dennis Gillen (EWG team leader), Dave Evans (supervised Bridge 1 construction), Rob Nicholson (designer of Bridge 1 substructure)



Members of the EWG team celebrate at Bridge 2. Richard Meinertzhagen (4th from right) is Dennis Gillen's deputy. Nigel Yarwood credited Richard with 'ESP' - an extraordinary ability to foresee potential problems ahead of time.



It's a navigation now! Top left: Midweek Working Party boaters at Birtley Bridge 2. Top right: Arriving from the north - did they come all the way from London? Below: Mary Creswell speaks as the boaters wait for the 'go' signal.



Celebration tea at Bramley

After the Birtley Bridges opening celebration, everyone was invited to Bramley Village Hall for a glass of something bubbly and a festive tea. With everyone feeling cheerful, we decided that an 'Autumn Meeting' with an hour or so of project presentations might dampen the mood. But our directors did make some very brief and very positive announcements. (For more details see our news headlines on p3.)

Tony Ford (Summit Level Manager) gave us some encouraging news on the Tickner's Heath Crossing project.

Liz Sutherland very kindly took charge of the catering with her assistants.

Julian Morgan (Finance Director) had some very good news on funding from our largest single supporter.

Margaret Darvill (Vice-Chairman) was optimistic that work at Rooks Hill/Fanesbridge, immediately south of Birtley, could start in 2024.



*Top right:
Tony Ford
Centre:
Margaret Darvill
Bottom right: Julian
Morgan
Left:
Liz Sutherland*



The causeway at Birtley Bridge 2

If you were at the opening of Birtley Bridge 2 you may well have had a great view from the temporary causeway across the canal next to the bridge. But you may have wondered why the causeway is still there, now that you can cross the canal on the lifting bridge. Yes, the causeway will eventually disappear and future boaters (no visiting boats are allowed at the moment) will have a clear run to Bridge 1, but right now we are not in a rush to remove it. In the short term we expect that some bank repairs will be needed and it will be easier to move machinery via the causeway than the lifting bridge, which has a tight turn to the towpath.

The Sorrell family visit Fanesbridge

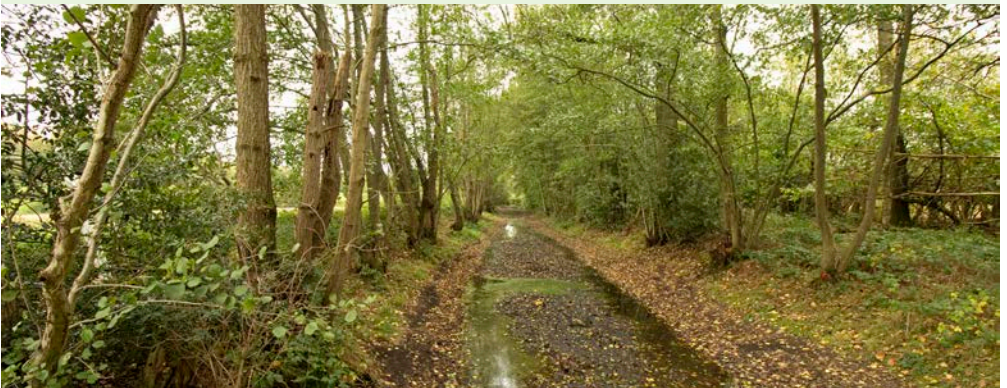
As you stand on the new lifting deck of Birtley Bridge 1 and look south you will see the canal stretching southwards and apparently ripe for the 'Birtley treatment'. It is around 600m from Birtley Bridge 1 to the site of Fanesbridge Lock (Lock 18). We hope it will not be long before the Birtley towpath can extend to Fanesbridge so that the public can also enjoy this section. This all depends on our Planning friends at Waverley Borough Council. The job is more difficult than at Birtley because part of the canal has been filled in.

Geoff Sorrell was a member who died in 2018, and in 2019 we were delighted to hear that he had left us a substantial legacy. We agreed with Geoff's family that we would associate Geoff with the Fanesbridge project (also known as Rooks Hill from the nearby farm). We have spent part of the funds on purchasing the freehold of the canal section.

We were very happy to see many of the Sorrell family at the opening of Birtley Bridge 1 on October 28th. Afterwards our project manager and Vice-Chairman Margaret Darvill took the family on a walk to view the Fanesbridge section. By the time you read this, a memorial plaque for Geoff should have been installed.



Looking south from Birtley Bridge 1 along the Fanesbridge section



Moving on from Birtley

The Birtley bridges are finished, and we're waiting for planning permission for several major initiatives. Are we taking a rest? Quite the opposite! There's always more to do – and we're doing it...



Bonfire Hanger - the work begins

As reported in June's Wey-South, we are now the freehold owners of the 800m Bonfire Hanger section of the canal. This extends our ownership in the Gennets Bridge Lock area immediately north of the Surrey/Sussex border, near Alfold.

With an estimated full restoration cost of £2m, our focus at present is limited to improving public access to the 'green corridor' along this attractive section.

The current towpath, which is also a bridleway, quickly becomes a quagmire in wet weather. So, starting in 2024, we will improve and widen the path with a stone surface which will require 1,400 tonnes of material. This is estimated to cost 'only' £62,000. Some of this will come from existing resources. We are applying for grant funding for the balance. Ahead of this, our Midweek Working Party is already removing dead ash, and other trees that would block the widened towpath.

Two wooden footbridges cross the canal in this section. They connect the towpath to other footpaths, which opens up some lovely circular walks. These bridges will now receive the attention they need. At the field end of one of the bridges, a very high stile with a steep drop on one side makes access difficult. We will add some steps for easier transit.

Your boats need YOU!

Our tripboats bring us valuable income and spread the word about the canal. We need to broaden the team that maintains them - too much is being done by too few at present.

David Arnold would like to hear from people with good basic DIY skills for painting and woodwork, as well as anyone with mechanical or electrical expertise. Can you offer a morning a week (possibly two), particularly for the summer trip season? If so, please contact David at dja103@hotmail.com.



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Long Meadow bank repairs and Drungewick pumping upgrades

It has been frustrating that, despite the completion of repairs to Drungewick Lock, the canal section south of Drungewick Aqueduct has had to stay closed, mainly because of leaks in the canal bank at Long Meadow. We have previously installed new bank lining on some of the section. This did not fully fix the leaks, and tree roots are contributing to the problem.

Funds have now been allocated to get this section fully restored and open again for boat trips, kayaks and canoes. This will involve relining a 50-metre section of canal, installing a new backpump, discharge pipe and spillway, and a new chamber for the pump on the River Arun. This pump provides a valuable source of water that can be pumped into the winding hole below the lock and thence back up into the Drungewick pound. This will help us maintain water levels in the future.



Two visiting work parties in October helped us get this work underway. The Newbury Working Party, led by Bill Nicholson, spent a weekend investigating the locations of the current piping and cable ducts before installing new piping for the backpump and digging out a location to install a new concrete spillway. Work was also carried out to start the reprofiling of the canal banks in the section to be relined, after several large tree stumps were removed by our Operations team the day before.



In addition, the Waterway Recovery Group Forestry team spent five days working on this section to fell a number of ash trees suffering from dieback. This has opened up the footpath below the lock and provided better access to the river pump location.

With the great start made thanks to the hard work of our visiting work groups, our own volunteers will now continue the work under the guidance of Dave Evans.



Loxwood damage – building back better!

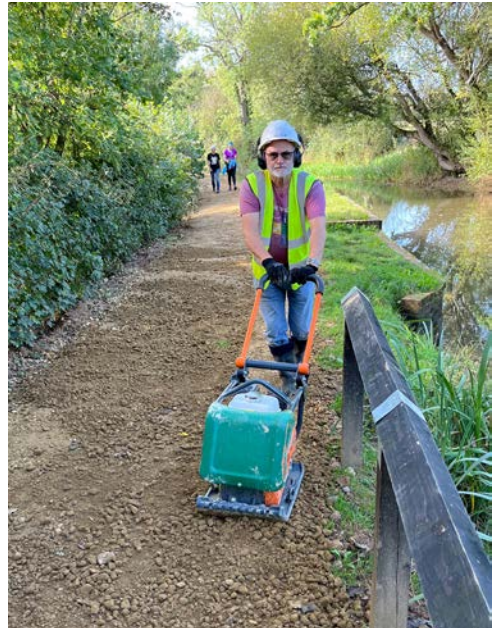
Our Loxwood Appeal targeted raising over £50,000 towards the much larger cost of repairs and upgrades to the pump control systems. The response from members and the local community was amazing. The appeal has now passed £60,000 following the award of a £10,000 grant from Loxwood Parish Council for which we are extremely grateful.

Operations Manager Dave Evans led the immediate response to put some temporary solutions in place to enable boat trips to continue. He then developed a complex plan of work to build new and more secure cabinets to house the pump control equipment, install underground ducting for new electrical and data cabling for the pump control equipment and connect level sensors and the pumps.

To date, our volunteers have now built and installed four of these new pump control ‘brickhouses’, with steel doors for security, and with cast concrete roofs waterproofed with a glass-fibre coating. We’ve dug out nearly 600 metres of trenches for new ducting, then backfilled and reinstated the towpath.

Three new spillways to feed water into the canal have been designed and cast in-house, to be taken to site from the Depot. The first of them was installed in October at Birch Copse (close to Baldwin’s Knob Lock) and connected to the pumping station that draws water from the adjacent River Lox. This happily coincided with the first real rain of the autumn and with the Environment Agency’s resulting reinstatement of our pumping licence, which it had suspended during the summer drought.

Electrical and pump control contractors can now install the new cabling and pump control equipment for robust management of water levels in the Loxwood section of the canal.



Northlands Farm

Are you confused about Northlands and Southland? Well, it's really very simple – Northlands is in the south (near Newbridge and Wisborough Green in Sussex) and Southland is further north (about a mile's walk up the canal from the Loxwood Canal Centre).

Northlands saw one of our first major projects when a lifting bridge (*picture right*) replaced a fixed farm bridge in 1980. In 2021 we acquired the 850m section of the canal previously owned by Northlands Farm. So far it has not been easy to get access to this section for maintenance vehicles. As part of the purchase agreement we undertook to build a new access track. This work had to wait for approval of the landowner's planning application for an improved entrance to his property, which has now been given. In late November our EWG team started work on site to complete the track work.



Ash to ashes

Our canal runs through areas of woodland, with mature trees growing on the banks and along the towpath. Many of these trees are ash and most are showing signs of dieback. We have to fell them, and for public safety this is done in the autumn and winter. This year's forestry season has already started and will require a considerable amount of volunteer effort over the coming months.

We have several experienced and trained chainsaw operators. We have invested in equipment for tree removal such as grabs and powered winches so we can minimise paying contractors to do the work. Some paid use of professionals is unavoidable, but we are grateful for donations from people who take the resulting timber for firewood – we deliver some in the local area to residents without suitable transport.



Our own volunteer work is supplemented by frequent welcome visits from the Waterway Recovery Group Forestry team.

We are also selectively thinning other woodland to open up the views along the canal. Most trees remain, and we replace those that unavoidably have to be removed during restoration work with fresh planting nearby.

Developments around Dunsfold Park

For newer readers, Dunsfold Park is the site of the World War II airfield built in 1942 by Canadian engineers. The canal route runs along the boundary of the airfield for around 1.5km – this is part of the Summit Level. The ‘Dunsfold Cutting’ was the largest single piece of engineering work on the canal; underestimating this work was the main reason that contractor Zachariah Keppel went bankrupt in 1814. After the war the airfield has remained in use, for many years as a test site for mainly military aircraft. There are three Boeing 747 jumbo jets on the site; the last landed in late 2020 after retirement from British Airways.

The site has become the base for a variety of businesses and sees regular use for filming (including ‘Top Gear’) and motoring events. But the long-term objective of the current owners has always been to develop the site for residential use – up to 1,800 homes are planned. Local opposition to the plans has been fierce but outline planning permission was granted in 2018. To move forward it was essential to improve the site’s road access which is currently via two fairly minor roads - the one to the south crosses the canal on Compasses Bridge that we opened in 2016.

New eastern access helps our canal plans

In the last year, work has started on the eastern access which is a direct link to a new roundabout on the A281 Guildford-Horsham Road. This is just north of the canal route at Fast Bridge. The A281 has now been diverted slightly to the west to use the new roundabout. The old route of the road has been converted to a cycle path that continues south along a widened pavement (crossing the canal at Fast Bridge) so that cyclists will be able to reach Cranleigh via the quieter Alfold Road rather than the busy A281.



The new cycle path crosses the canal at Fast Bridge - the canal is behind the railings on the left and the green sign in the centre reads “You are crossing the Wey & Arun Canal”.

This development is helpful for our plans to remove the canal route blockage where the A281 crosses at Fast Bridge. Although it will still be a very expensive project, thanks to the roundabout the speed limit on this section of road is now 40mph rather than 60mph previously. This means that meeting the design requirements for a new bridge will be more straightforward.

Meanwhile contractors working on behalf of Dunsfold Park have been desilting the whole canal section alongside the airfield. This is a very significant advance so far as we are concerned - we aim to cover it in a more detailed article in our next issue. But we understand that good progress is

now being made and that expert subcontractors are helping out. The work is scheduled to finish in 2024. The canal is very much part of Dunsfold Park's plans; the outline scheme includes a new canal basin and we are hopeful that over time the towpath will be accessible to everyone. Today it is mainly inaccessible (within the secure airfield area) or severely overgrown.



The new eastern access to Dunsfold Park nears completion. In the left distance are two Boeing 747s.

Forestry First Aid

We are fortunate to have many volunteers in our various working groups. Working outdoors with and close to water introduces a number of potential hazards. While safe working practices and training mean incidents are rare, we want to ensure that all work groups have trained First Aiders to respond to an accident or illness that may occur.

In October, 12 volunteers attended a Forestry First Aid course in Bramley. This course covered all the usual First Aid topics but put added emphasis on situations that may happen when working outdoors and in remote locations where there may be delays in accessing medical services.

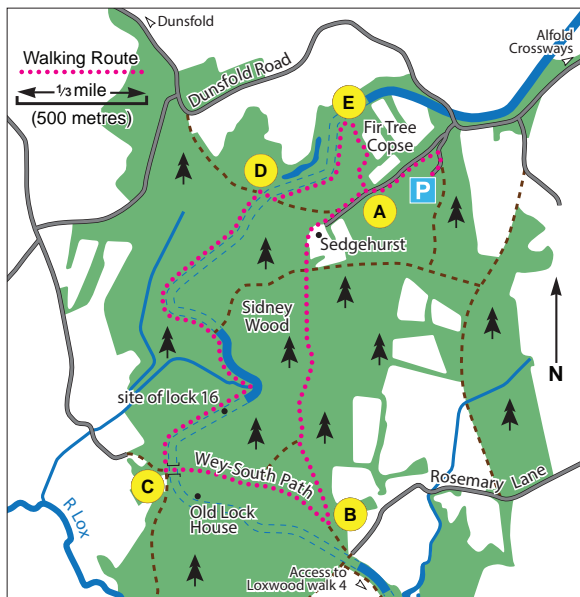
The course consisted of an online element (e-learning) and a full day of practical sessions to put the theory into practice.



Range more widely, find out more

Infoposts and new walks

The canal is the backbone of 13 walking and cycling route guides detailed on our website – several new ones have been added this year, thanks to volunteer Tim Keogh. The latest is the 3½-mile Sidney Walk Circular. Can you think of others we could create?



Along the canal, we've installed many Infoposts over the years. These give brief facts for passers-by about the restored structure nearby. Most posts now feature a QR code which will link you directly via your

mobile's scanner to one of the relevant pages on our website, created by volunteers Ashley Brown and Gordon Powell. Here you'll learn more about the canal's history and restoration at that location, with some before-and-after photos, and the flora and fauna to look out for.

To find the Walking and Cycling Routes and Infoposts pages on the website, hover on the 'About the Canal' option in the top menu and select accordingly.



Dry channel in Sidney Wood.

Our work helps threatened butterflies

In mid-September Butterfly Conservation announced the results of its Big Butterfly Count 2023 and it was a mixture of good news and not so good. Good: the number of butterflies recorded in 2023 was the highest since 2019. Not so good: “longer-term trends show worrying declines for some of the UK’s most common butterfly species.”

The Wey & Arun Canal and its banks are a marvellous place to spot butterflies. We had a look to see which of the declining species we had seen in 2023 and the answer was “most of them”. Just picking out three, the results tell us “Species that saw a decline from last year include Ringlet, Common Blue and Speckled Wood, all of which also show long-term declines.” In one visit to the Hunt Nature Park in Shalford on 6th August we spotted Common Blue and Speckled Wood butterflies and on 9th July a Ringlet.

Butterfly Conservation say “If butterflies can feed, breed and shelter, they can thrive. By creating a Wild Space in your outdoor area you can help to reverse the massive losses of wildlife-friendly habitat.” This is exactly what we are doing in Shalford and many other locations. During the summer months we minimise cutting vegetation on the canal banks so that wildflowers can grow and benefit all sorts of wildlife including bees, butterflies and caterpillars. We are very happy to see that our efforts are producing such positive results.

*Butterflies photographed on the canal this summer. Clockwise from top left :
Common Blue - wings open, Common Blue - wings closed, Speckled Wood, Ringlet.*

All photos by Julian Morgan



The Stantons of Bramley and Elmbridge



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We know of only one photograph of the Wey & Arun Junction Canal when it was in use - a colourised version is above. Thought to be from around 1868, it shows William Stanton (in stovepipe hat) and his housekeeper standing in front of their home Wharf Cottage, Bramley. At this time William was the proprietor of a successful canal carrying business inherited from his father, James Stanton Snr (1783-1848). It seems to be a simple story but other sources reveal the important contribution of another family member.

Thanks to our member Neil Stanton, a direct descendant of James Stanton Snr and his eldest son, we know that William was James Snr's second son, born in 1810. His elder brother, James Stanton Jnr (1806-57) also played an important part in the operation of the Junction Canal.

Stagecoaches and locks

James Stanton Snr's position at Bramley was lockkeeper, collecting tolls from passing barges. This job did not pay well and clearly the company did not object to him running his own canal transport business. From 1819, James was also Superintendent of the Junction Canal. We don't know whether he had any previous waterway management experience; before the move to Bramley Wharf, his family were in the coaching trade at Ripley, where horses were changed on the London to Portsmouth stagecoach route. James probably kept the multiple jobs of canal superintendent, lockkeeper, bargemaster and coal merchant at Bramley into the 1840s.

It seems that although day-to-day operation of the canal was controlled from Bramley at first, by mid-century this function had moved south to Elmbridge Wharf, west of Cranleigh. Here the canal company leased the wharf cottage north of Elmbridge Road and east of the canal (see picture right). Now James Stanton Jnr enters the picture. James Jnr succeeded his father as lockkeeper at Bramley in the early 1840s before also becoming Superintendent of the canal. This meant that sometime before the 1851 census he had to move his family to Elmbridge Wharf. It seems this was becoming an increasingly important place for handling freight, including coal to Cranleigh village.

In early April 1857 the canal company's General Purposes Committee dismissed James Stanton Jnr as Superintendent with three months' notice, requiring him to quit the Elmbridge cottage. We can speculate that James was unable to do his job due to illness because he died, aged only 50, at Send on 3rd August 1857. He is buried in Ripley churchyard - a double headstone there marks his grave and that of his wife Esther who lived until 1868.



Wharf Cottage, Bramley, as it is now

End of an era

Rather than call on James's younger brother William (who had remained at Bramley) to fill the vacant post of Superintendent, the company interviewed two candidates. They chose Thomas Pullen, a bargeman who lived at Elmbridge, and he took over towards the end of 1857. Pullen was dismissed in 1867 as the canal's business declined due to competition from the new Guildford-Horsham railway. At this point William Stanton became the final Superintendent of the Junction Canal, dying in January 1872, six months after legal abandonment of the waterway.

The Stanton's barge business had been successful; from one vessel in the 1820s the fleet expanded to a fleet of six barges which busily carried cargoes to and from the south coast, London, and local towns and villages. William left generous legacies to local causes, including £1,000 each to the parishes of Bramley and Womersh.

Alan Johnson
Technical Liaison Officer

Footnote: Neil Stanton's excellent website (tntstanton.co.uk) gives more information on the family. London's Lost Route to the Sea (PAL Vine) only mentions one James Stanton.



Wharf Cottage, Elmbridge, pictured in 2023

Our MDV at the Surrey Hills Wood Fair



It has been a busy summer for our Mobile Display Vehicle (MDV) team led by Roger Beazer, with a first visit to the Amberley Museum, the Wey River Festival and the Macmillan Vintage Rally. Most recently, in the September heatwave, we attended the Surrey Hills Wood Fair in Cranleigh, where Dave Evans and his volunteer team also ran ‘Drive a Digger’ sessions where adults and children could test their skills on real equipment.

The display featured ‘Plastecowood’ recycled-plastic wood-lookalike poles, posts and planks which we are now using for restoration, maintenance and repairs, where suitable. These are made from plastic that would otherwise go to landfill, and are expected to outlast timber by many years.

The Mobile Display Vehicle goes to local events to tell – and sell – the Wey & Arun story. With it, we explain to the wider community what we’ve done and what we plan to do. We sign up new members, collect donations and sell merchandise.

It’s a major part of our public engagement to maintain and grow local interest and support. It’s also a fun day out! Please get in touch if you could spare a day (or part of a day) to help in 2024.

Top : Roger Beazer explains a part of our work

2. A youngster tries his hand at digging

3. Tuition in log-lifting with Adam Rayner .

Bottom : We put on quite a display in Cranleigh



From our archives

It is topical to include this 1976 picture which shows a group at the site of the Birtley Breach. 1976 was the year that the breach was successfully repaired with 1,000 tonnes of clay after a previous unsuccessful attempt in 1974. The site of the breach was roughly halfway between the two lift bridges. In the foreground of the picture are (left to right) Richard Brunstrom (later Chief Constable of North Wales), John Ward (later WACT Restoration Manager), John Wood (WACT Hon. Secretary), Peter Beresford (WACT Chairman) and leaning on the fence post is our joint founder and member No. 1 John Markwick.



Although neither was at the first meeting in 1970, Peter Beresford (as Chairman) and John Wood (as Secretary) were very much leading figures in our first 25 years. The picture taken in 2010 shows four Secretaries with 36 years of service between them – Peter Beresford (Secretary 1973-5), John Wood (1975-97), Iris Piggott (1997-2000) and Julian Morgan (2004-2013).



Good deeds by our Wheelyboat

Our Mk III Wheelyboat Walter Grove (named after a former master carpenter on the Wey Navigation) is a mini-landing craft - a shallow-draught, flat-floored drop-fronted craft designed to accommodate up to eight passengers in wheelchairs, but which can be used in many other ways. The charity behind the boat is the Wheelyboat Trust, which has supplied 228 of them to deserving causes, us included. Its intended use here is for trips on the Dunsfold lock-free pound – but that is unavailable until desilting is completed.

So we were pleased to loan it recently to the Canal & River Trust (CRT) for use at Pontymoile Basin on the restored Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, where CRT's Hannah Cubie reports that it has been enthusiastically welcomed by numerous local groups and individuals. The first group to take a trip on it came from the local Integrated Autism Service. The skippering of Walter Grove is being organised through the Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust who are working with the CRT's Community Roots programme in Torfaen to host free of charge trips for people with additional needs.

Thanking us for the loan, Hannah reports that passengers have commented favourably on “feelings of peace and tranquillity, joy at the closeness and connection to nature and amazement that being on the water is such a different experience to being on land”. The CRT hopes that this test will in time result in the permanent acquisition of a Wheelyboat for the ‘Mon & Brec’.



'Walter Grove' in use at its temporary Welsh home



50 years on – we don't sell these anymore

It was an intriguing find on eBay – a “Pottery Bottle Coaster Wey & Arun Junction Canal Company”. Sensitive readers may wish to skip the rest, but it turned out that it was produced as – there’s no other way to say it – an ashtray. And in 1973 it could have been yours for 40p (postage included). We found the advert in *Wey-South* issue number 6.

Tony Clee Pottery in Eton, Berkshire, produced similar items for other canals. The Wey & Arun one is based on the device of the canal company (supposed to refer to Arundel Castle) with the date 1813 and “Incorp Geo 3 53” (the 53rd year of King George III’s reign). Probably your home doesn’t need ashtrays, but if you would like an elegant paperweight, or perhaps a dish to serve nuts, you may be able to pick one up on eBay - probably for more than 40p though.



THE WEY AND ARUN CANAL TRUST LTD.			
PRICE LIST - AUGUST, 1973			
Ref.No		Price	P. & P.
	<u>EXCLUSIVE WEY & ARUN CANAL TRUST ITEMS</u>		
8B	<u>WEY & ARUN ASHTRAY</u> 4" Diameter Glazed Pottery with Crest of old Canal Company in base. available in Green, Blue or Ochre.	30p	10p

A postcard from 1957

Wey-South was pleased to hear from octogenarian Marc Rumpus, now in Australia. His lifelong kayaking enthusiasm began with the Sea Scouts. His picture is of him and a scout friend, aged 14 and 15, on a fifty-mile camping and kayaking expedition down the Rother, up the Arun and then back and out to sea and along the coast. “We had no lifejackets, and (of course) no mobile phones. We did have a tent, food for three days, loads of confidence and a letter from our Scout leader asking for anyone reading it to help us, if requested. I think we were very fortunate to have grown up in such unsophisticated and ‘incorrect’ times – would today’s children ever be granted this freedom?”



Day 1 took the explorers to an overnight stop “on the Arun somewhere above Pallingham”. On Day 2 they continued to Newbridge and Marcus recalls that “we went under an old aqueduct through drain pipes just big enough for us”. This would have been Lordings Aqueduct when the river still flowed under it. Nowadays the river flows via a new cut just south of the aqueduct.

Restoration and Maintenance News

Nine teams of volunteers are out most weeks, restoring the canal and maintaining what we've restored. Come and join us! You'll use your skills, learn fresh skills and make new friends. Learn more about each team under 'Volunteers' on our website.

The full story of these efforts is recorded monthly in Working Party News – see under 'News' on our website – or send an email to listadmin@weyandarun.co.uk to receive an electronic version. Working Party News lists the contacts for each team.

There's lots of 'Restoration', recent and planned, elsewhere in this edition, so the emphasis here is on Maintenance.

Making the most of Shalford Information Point

Working together, the Canal Maintenance Unit and the Odd Job Group have spruced up our Shalford Information Point which is in pleasant surroundings in our Hunt Nature Park, close to the A281 Guildford-Horsham road, near where we plan to use the stream called Cranleigh Waters to reroute the canal's northern connection back into the River Wey. The exterior cladding has had fresh preservative applied – not a straightforward job, as scaffolding was needed, the ground is uneven and the unit sits on pillars to avoid flooding.

During the summer a small team of volunteers - Chris Jones, John Gunner and Philip Dudgeon - did a great job opening up the Information Point for visitors and making it more visible and attractive to passers-by on the old railway path. Hunt Nature Park itself is always open, forming part of our 3-mile Shalford Walk from Stonebridge Wharf on the Wey to the canal's Gosden Aqueduct near Bramley and back.



Boat inspections

This year it is the turn of Wiggonholt to have an 'out of water' inspection by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency. 'Out of water' means that the boat has to be on the slipway at Drungewick.

We had the inspection booked for early November, but a couple of weeks beforehand we weren't confident that there would be enough water for the move to the slipway. (In fact it would probably have been OK – thanks, British weather.) Anyway, the inspection was moved back to late November and on November 19th our Boat Maintenance team moved the boat to Drungewick.



Wiggonholt the last time she was inspected.

Our boat fleet



The floor of our large passenger craft Wiggonholt has been upgraded with two coats of wear-resistant grey paint (*above left*). Her wheelchair lift has been serviced. In November she was lifted ashore for her annual Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) survey, prior to resumption of trips with the return of an adequate water level in the Loxwood area (see opposite page).

Our tug nears the end of its refit at the Depot (*above right*). It is actually (a contradiction in terms) a 'pusher tug', propelling a dumb barge in front of it rather than towing it, in true Mississippi style. Counter-intuitively, this actually steers quite well. The barge is held taut in the jaws of the tug with the winches which have been refitted.

The saloon of Zachariah Keppel, our smaller tripboat, has had its peeling yellow emulsion repainted, and is now sparkling white. With her batteries being kept topped up by solar panels, she too is ready for the Christmas season, subject to passing her MCA survey afloat.

Work on our passenger fleet was complicated by the low water level at Loxwood, leaving the boats firmly aground and very difficult to get down into.

Then it rained. And it rained...



Water pours over Loxwood Lock in November

Chain action

Our teams are heavy users of chainsaws, whose cutting chains have a finite life. Rather than buying manufacturers' individual replacement chain loops at considerable expense, the Depot has now bulk-bought chain in 100ft spools, from which chains can be made up one-by-one as needed. We can indeed in many cases avoid the need for any replacement when a chain has inadvertently clipped stone, nail or wire, as the Depot has a chain grinder to restore a damaged chain, taking the teeth back to a uniform size and restoring the cutting edge.

Three generations at Bonfire Hanger

Nick Houston, a Midweek Working Party volunteer since 2008, was hard at work on a November Wednesday when he was surprised and delighted to be joined by both his son and his grandson.

Grandson Charlie had an 'Inset Day' off from Rodborough School, Milford and son Jeremy used a 'Volunteering Day' away from Premier Miton Investors to take Charlie (already a life member) out for a day's hard(ish) labour, clearing vegetation along the newly-acquired bridleway at Bonfire Hanger. Nick says they enjoyed it and learnt a lot.

Jeremy and Charlie both enjoy kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding. Perhaps they will revisit Bonfire Hanger one day by water.



Raffle Tickets

There are big money prizes up for grabs in this year's Christmas Draw. For members who receive Wey-South by post, we enclosed raffle tickets with our September issue. But before you invest in a stamp, please consider entering online - this will also save us the heavy charges that our bank makes for paying in cheques. Just go to www.weyarun.org.uk/raffle. You can still return the counterfoils with a cheque made payable to Wey & Arun Canal Trust if you wish. The closing date for entries is 16th January 2024.

Membership report

33 new members joined us in the last quarter and our membership now stands at 2,857. We would like to extend a very warm welcome to the following new members.

Paul Allum

Martin Edser

Susan Hinton

Zhongying Jiang

Ashley & Michele Reeve

Anne & John Vincent

Helen & Steve Artlett

Simon Greenly

Martin Holliss

Julia & Matthew Kelynack

Greg Rhodes

Peter Walsh

Jill Clements

Andrew & Linda Hall

David & Judith Holmes

Andrew & Ingrid Mclean

Ken Slaughter

Pat & Peter Winney

Paul Downham

Daryl & David Hartley

Aaron Huykman

Alan & Lisa Pryce

Paul Smith

We have learned with regret of the death of:

Cecil Hinton

Peter Farley

Eric Lefley

Joan Nailard

Paul Chalmers

It is encouraging that the number of new members joining us has picked up over the summer and autumn, but we still see some members lapsing. Perhaps the economic situation is a factor but, given our modest subscription rates, the benefits that members receive and the importance of subscriptions to us, we do urge our members to renew if at all possible. If you have friends or contacts who are not already members, why not persuade them to join?

John Tovell
membership@weyandarun.co.uk

John Wood - a life of dedication

We have been saddened to learn that our Vice-President John Wood MBE died on 5th September in Didcot, Oxfordshire at the age of 85. We express our sympathy to John's widow Joy and his family. John and Joy were very much a team; Joy took the job of Membership Secretary for several years and always seemed to be on hand to help out at events.

John Wood was truly a key figure in our early history and development. John joined the Wey & Arun Canal Society (which later became the Canal Trust) in December 1971. In the early days John and his family, including two young sons (Nick and Andy) enthusiastically participated in practical restoration. Andy remembers: "every Sunday driving up to the portion of the canal in early clearance stages, being armed with a variety of tools and implements, and pointed toward a section of what appeared to me to be a soggy jungle and told to cut, clear and clean, whilst Dad was generally off strategising or chatting up the next reluctant landowner. At the end of the day there would be the obligatory fire, with jacket potatoes in the embers."



John Wood wearing his MBE award

John had huge enthusiasm and commitment. Clearly he was destined to be at the centre of the management group. He was soon on the Southern Section committee of the infant Society, dealing with fundraising. Later he was Chairman of the Southern Section. At the first Annual Meeting of the Wey & Arun Canal Trust in 1973 there were 15 vacancies on the board and 21 candidates. Despite being recommended to stand by joint founder John Markwick, John was unsuccessful at that first meeting but was elected to the board in 1975. He became Hon. Secretary and held the position for 22 years. Before the Loxwood Granary office was set up, it was John's address in Lancing that was on all our publicity. In 1986 John became Company Secretary and in 1989 Vice-Chairman.

In 1996 there was a major controversy when some members proposed a motion of no confidence in the board. The motion was defeated but by the following year there was a new management group – long-serving Chairman Peter Beresford, John Wood and others stepped down from the board. Some of the group then took a permanent back seat but John's enthusiasm was still strong. He took on the important jobs of Recycling Manager (waste paper collection was an important source of income), Talks Panel Organiser and later Archivist.

Marvellous organisational skills

With the setting up of the Granary office in Loxwood, John put his energy into organising our records. Initially, this was in filing cabinets (John's 'index to the numbered files' was like gold dust at the time) but later John keenly supported work to digitise the collection, starting with a vast number of photos, many of which John took himself – he was skilled with his camera.

The early years saw many challenges and John's calm, patient and persistent approach must have been an invaluable asset. There was little that John did not know about the canal and he was always happy to share his knowledge. He not only knew the infrastructure but also all the people involved – volunteers, neighbours, landowners, local councillors, sponsors, supporters and the less favourable.

John Wood - a life of dedication *(continued)*

In 2000 John was appointed MBE by Her Majesty the Queen for services to Conservation and Canal Restoration in West Sussex. In 2012 John published his book 'The Wey-South Project', covering the years 1966 to 2009. This is a fascinating read and an indispensable reference source for current members and future historians. 2009 saw the completion of the Loxwood High Street Crossing project and for John this was the greatest moment of the Trust's history so far.

John never enjoyed very good health so his time as a 'navvy' was limited. By about 2013 the physical challenges of driving or even sitting at a desk began to overwhelm him. John moved away from Sussex and the job of carrying the canal cause forward was left to his successors, most of whom John had patiently trained. We try our best, but people like John Wood are truly irreplaceable.

Alan Johnson adds: John's family got the 'canal bug' from a holiday cruising the Thames (they probably hired a cruiser from 'Maid Boats' at Thames Ditton). In his day job, he managed sales and advice in a camera shop.

John was kind, friendly, always helpful and consistently hardworking, especially during his 22 years as Hon Sec. He was always willing to handle mundane admin tasks, including managing a mail-order service and handling enquiries from the general public. His patience seemed virtually inexhaustible.

Though always modest, polite and rather reticent, John was proud to own an almost uniquely short car number plate: A 30 (the 30th car registered in London). He inherited this from his father who owned and hired a fleet of limousines. Apparently when BMC launched their first post-war 'baby' Austin - the A30 - they made a derisory offer for the plate which the family rejected.



Sir Malcolm Marshall, Paul Vine, Peter Beresford, John Wood, Peter Longley and Peter Foulger at Brewhurst Mill in 1998



Between Newbridge and Northlands 1973 (John Wood in glasses right, his son Nick far left)

On hearing of John's death, Ian Lauder wrote to us :

My wife Lesley and I were deeply sad at the news that dear John Wood MBE was no longer with us. I would like to make it clear that John was in no way the target of the 1996 vote of no confidence in the board. The vote was about a reluctance at that time to forge north despite the cost and some forceful opposition, rather than continue with excellent but disconnected work in the countryside where the public could see no progress. John told me that he was taking a back seat because he was not feeling as fit as he wanted to be. So with John's quiet calm encouragement, north it went and immediately attracted support in finance and membership, and it is still eating up the miles in full public view today.

Richard Crook

We were sad to hear that Richard Crook has recently died. I vividly remember that at the first members' meeting I attended (probably in 2002), we heard that our website had been out of action for four months because the webmaster had been seriously ill and no-one else knew the password. True, in those days our website was not so essential as it is now, but in around 2003 Richard was truly our saviour as he took on the job of webmaster and worked very hard for us until handing over in 2017. Richard was awarded our John East Trophy for 2009.

Richard was an IT professional who came across as somewhat shy and unassuming. If you asked him to do something, it would unfailingly get done. We did not see him frequently after he moved to Essex in around 2005, but of course most of his work could have been done from the moon (provided it had a good Internet link).



Meet the volunteers

Mark & Lorraine Feeny

When and how did each of you first become aware of the canal?

Mark Age 14, I went on a bike ride through Sidney Wood with a friend – who is now my brother-in-law! He had just bought a copy of the first edition of London's Lost Route to the Sea. We found flytipping and some skeletal remains of locks.

Lorraine My father grew up around the Cranleigh area - so I have always been aware of it.

When and how did each of you first start volunteering?

Mark In 2019, two days after I took early retirement from my job, I joined the Midweek Working Party. My first job was to help clearing the towpath at Drungewick.

Lorraine Wey-South in 2016 asked for volunteers to scan archive documentation. I was then asked if I would take on the organising of the folders and files of the scanned archive material.

What's been your involvement as volunteers?

Mark With Chainsaw and Felling training under my belt, I'm involved in the team that fells, processes and pulls the numerous problem trees we have. At Tickner's Heath Depot, I oversee the maintenance and servicing of our mechanical equipment and the storage and supply of materials. Lorraine and I help with the Poddle – I check the walkers in, and then make sure they have remembered to donate!

Lorraine As the Archivist, I take the work of the scanning team and check these photos and documents for quality. I collate them into the correct sequences, and then store them in the relevant folders in our 'cloud' database. It's fascinating to see the restoration tale told by the pictures, with muddy ditches and derelict bridges and locks slowly and steadily coming back to life.

How have you made things better for our organisation?

Lorraine With the help of a team of scanners, I have improved access to our documents, maps, detailed plans, contracts and thousands of photos. Previously, these were stored in boxes. Nearly all are now scanned - more than ten thousand items.

We both also help with 'stuffing' copies of Wey-South into envelopes, and we hand-deliver locally.

Mark I have championed the use of an Eder Power Winch for pulling fallen trees out of the canal – quicker and easier than manual winching. We can now drag trees hundreds of yards to a suitable processing area and hardly break sweat.

At the Depot, we're improving storage areas, equipment maintenance and working practices.

What makes your day?

Mark We get to meet interesting people along the canal when working - from the rich and famous, to country folk who have a number of tales to tell to anyone who'll listen.

Lorraine Volunteers come and go, and memories fade – but the archives hold a fixed

record of what we've found and done. I have a lifelong interest in history – and this is real history at my fingertips.

Do you visit other canals?

Mark Yes, on day trips or while on holiday. Usually, we walk and cycle the towpaths.

Is there still a day job?

Lorraine No, both of us took early retirement. Mark was an IT geek before IT was a thing. He started as a computer operator and ending up as a Systems Consultant. I was a data-prep supervisor, retiring when an Office Data Administrator.

How did you meet?

Lorraine We met at work in 1978. We married in 1982 and our two adult children now have children of their own.

What are your other interests?

Mark Mainly motorsport, especially rallying, both forest and road events. I had a TR7 V8 for several years which I drove in forest and tarmac events. As a couple we also used to enter navigational road events. On the shorter night events Lorraine would drive, with me on the maps. The longer daytime rallies would see us reverse the roles. We did quite well over the years. Importantly, we had a golden rule – if we couldn't get the navigation to work, we'd head to the pub. Abandoning a rally is so much cheaper than a divorce!



We now organise two Classic Car Tours a year, in May and August. Several of the Midweek Working Party take part. And currently, I'm Chairman of Guildford Motor Club.

Lorraine We're fans of several other sports, including those being played by our grandchildren.

Do you talk 'canal' at home?

Both Yes!

What's your message for readers thinking of volunteering?

Mark The most strenuous thing in my job was lifting a mug of tea. So volunteering came as a bit of a shock to me. But do persevere. I'm now fitter and lighter than I've been for years. Cancel your gym membership and join our free green gym where the members actually talk to one another. Oh, and it's not unknown for us to have a debrief at the pub afterwards.



John Wood took the left-hand picture in 1976, looking through the bridge under the Downs Link towards the canal and the site of the original Birtley Bridge. Possibly John was on site for the Birtley Breach repair work. The right-hand picture is from a very similar viewpoint in November 2023 and shows the new lifting bridge (Birtley Bridge 2). Sometime in the last 47 years the Downs Link bridge has been upgraded as well. Below: John Wood signs copies of his book at our 2012 Annual Meeting in Pulborough.

