



Devil's Punchbowl Hindhead

## Celebrating our Surrey Hills Woodlands

The woodlands of Surrey are the epitome of English charm and beauty. There is 22.4% woodland cover in the county and 6% of that is ancient woodland. A woodland is classed as 'ancient' if trees have been growing there for over 400 years, so it has had time to develop a rich and diverse ecosystem. On page 7 we explore the importance of the complex network of underground woodland connections between trees, fungi and bacteria.

Historically, the Surrey Hills were even more wooded. Chiddingfold Forest, a large oak woodland that was once home to a royal hunting lodge, was cleared for agriculture

in the 18th century. Similarly, most of the oak woodland at Puttenham Common was cleared in the 19th century for farming and housing. On page 3 we look at the many uses our ancestors found for the trees they felled.

There is now a huge push to plant more trees. Trees absorb carbon dioxide through photosynthesis, converting it into oxygen and storing the carbon in their wood and roots.

As part of Surrey County Council's ambition to be a carbon neutral county by 2050, their Climate Change Strategy sets out a target to facilitate the planting of 1.2 million new trees (one for every resident) by 2030.

Yet care needs to be taken to plant the right tree in the right place. There are many factors to consider including soil type, nutrient availability, climate and weather patterns as well as human land use. Paying regard to local wildlife and their habitat needs is also key. In practice we need to ensure there is a broad mix of trees to promote biodiversity and tackle climate change. For example, over an 80-year period a Douglas fir will absorb over 3,700 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>, whilst an oak only absorbs about half that amount in the same period. Oaks are a so called "foundation species" with many other species relying on them for survival and of course they have a far longer life with many specimens surviving over 500 years. On average a mature oak tree can support anywhere from 300 to 500 different

species of insects, birds, mammals, fungi, and other organisms and about 2,300 species in total are known to be associated with the oak.

There's a huge body of evidence to show that woodlands can be beneficial to well-being, reducing stress levels and improving mental health. In our centre spread we highlight some of the many woodlands that can be explored in the Surrey Hills.

Sometimes old trees develop their own lore and mystique. The Witch's Broom Tree in Abinger Roughts is one such tree. Estimated to be between 200-300 years old, the unique shape and eerie appearance of this ancient beech have made it a popular spot for artists,



Douglas Fir, Shere Woodland



The Witch's Broom, Abinger by Rebecca Nizar

photographers and ghost hunters alike! It is said that the tree's twisted branches were caused by witches tying their brooms to the tree while they held their meetings. One of many trees in the Surrey Hills with a colourful history!

Gordon Jackson



## Chairman's Views



It has been an incredibly busy summer for the Society. We have had some fabulous events and our conservation and outreach activities go from strength to strength.

One of the highlights was our participation with Surrey Hills Arts at the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show. Our activity making bamboo bug hotels went down a storm with children and adults alike. Now we are looking forward and planning for the winter months.

On 29 November the Surrey Hills Symposium is a key event in the Surrey Hills calendar. This is an annual event that focuses on issues related to climate change, biodiversity, and sustainability in the Surrey Hills National Landscape. The symposium brings together experts and members of the public to discuss these issues and identify ways to address them. It's hosted by the University of Surrey and includes speakers from a variety of organisations, including conservation groups, academics, and local businesses. The goal is to foster collaboration and action to protect and enhance the natural beauty of the Surrey Hills for future generations. This year our theme is going to be "Woodland Wonder – the future



*Our stall at Hampton Court*

of our trees and woodlands in a changing climate". Please do come – it is open to everyone and it's free!

You may have noticed that we now frequently refer to the Surrey Hills National Landscape as opposed to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or AONB. One of the main proposals of the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes was for AONBs to be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources and renamed as National Landscapes. The renaming was to better reflect their national importance with something more streamlined and which elevated them alongside National Parks.

In 2021, the Surrey Hills AONB Board agreed to adopt the National Landscape name following the lead of the Cotswolds Conservation Board's adoption, which formally became the first National Landscape by name. However, it has taken a little time for all the AONB's in the UK to develop their branding and ensure that everyone adopts a joined-up approach. We are now at a point where most AONB teams are ready to sign off their new logos. The Surrey Hills 'seed' logo will still be retained as part of the national rebranding, and you can expect to see the new identity rolled out over the coming months.

*Gordon Jackson*

## Pamela Holt – Our "Tree Lady"

As a founder member of the the Society I have very much enjoyed seeing our programme develop and meeting so many friendly and interesting people. The talks, tours behind

the scenes and visits to places I did not know existed (Godstone caves are a recent example) have helped to widen my appreciation of the Surrey Hills.

I was born at St. Lukes Hospital, Guildford and studied locally, including at Merrist Wood and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. RHS Wisley did not accept women students on their Diploma course when I began my career in horticulture, which was a shame as my family home in West Horsley is an easy cycle ride away.

My work has taken me far and wide from the West Country to Manchester. During my career I worked at garden centres, private gardens and estates to Home Office Approved Schools, the Somerset College of Agriculture and I moved from horticulture to tree officer in several London boroughs. Starting in Horticulture and retiring in Arboriculture has earned me the nickname of 'The Tree Lady' within the Society. I very much enjoy imparting some of my knowledge to enthusiastic members during the plant and tree walks that I give as part of the Society's events programme.

*Pamela Holt*



*Our Members on a Tree Walk with Pamela*



# How we traditionally used our woodlands

The woodlands of Surrey have acted as a source of materials for thousands of years. Wood has been the basic raw material for everything from buildings to transport vehicles, implements, household items and, of course, fuel.

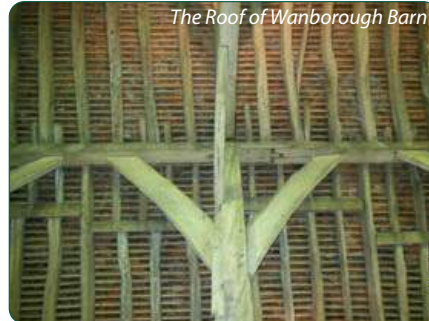
Today, we tend to use the term “wood” very loosely but, with the exception of the main beams of houses, the major use throughout history has been of the smaller (younger) growth – often called underwood. With woodland management, a crop of underwood could be taken every year in a sustainable manner. Trees grown to maturity were the exception – there needs to be a good reason to wait until a tree-trunk is of large dimensions. Such full-grown trees were known as “Timber”.

In medieval times, Chiddingfold and its surroundings were important as a glass making area and large numbers of ironworks are recorded across the Weald. Both of these industries were heavy users of charcoal which was obtained by coppicing local woodlands.



It would not have been in the interests of either industry to exhaust the supplies of wood for charcoal and thus woodland management was a key part of maintaining a thriving business. Yes, both industries declined locally, but this was mainly due to socio-economic reasons – for example the availability of cheap coal and coke further north and the reduced labour costs which arose from its use.

In construction, the large load-bearing beams would have come from timber which was selected for its size and shape. Even here, the builder would have used as small a tree as was practicable. Apart from where a matched pair of beams was required, the task of cutting the full length of a beam would have been avoided as much as possible by selecting thinner pieces. It is noticeable in many old buildings that the lesser pieces of wood are



of smaller diameter – often rough cut so the original shape and size is still visible. This is also very evident when sections of wattle and daub infill are exposed. The wood here is of small diameter, sometimes split lengthways to maintain equal size, and in some cases with bits of bark or moss still attached.

Farm wagons, carriages and other forms of transport were made from wood right up to the early 20th century. In Surrey, we are lucky to have detailed information about the construction of these from writers such as George Sturt of Farnham with his book “The Wheelwright’s Shop”. Even today we talk about “coach-built” vehicles to describe high-end customized transport.

At home, wood was an important component of many things. Wooden bowls or platters and besom brooms (produced from local silver birch) would have been common. More skillful craftsmen would have produced furniture and other specialized items. Making bespoke items from wood is still a local craft. The strong Arts & Crafts heritage of Surrey has also given us a flashback to the functional but elegant wooden items of a bygone era as can be seen in numerous houses of that era.



Understandably, being a very wooded county, wood was a basic fuel for most people. Historic records abound in information about what underwood could or could not be taken by the tenants and others in many places. The commoners right of estovers - the right to cut and take wood (but not timber) – is now a

rare privilege but would formerly have been an important asset.

Woodlands also played an important role by providing a source of food for animals and humans. Although it died out in the Middle Ages, another commoners right – pannage – allowed swine to be let loose in woodland at certain times to eat the acorns. Grazing in wood-pasture would also have been a significant component of agriculture through the ages. However, this would have needed to be controlled to avoid the animals eating the new growth from coppiced woodlands. One way of managing this situation would have been to pollard the trees so that new growth commenced above the head height of the animals.



Finally, we tend to think of woodland as being blocks of trees, but hedgerows and parkland containing individual fully grown trees were also a major source of the larger “timber”. Take a look at many old hedgerows and you will still see very mature trees rising above the hedge-line and complementing the lower growth which acts both as a boundary and wildlife corridor.

Ken Bare





# Exploring the Woodlands *of the Surrey Hills*

Climate change has made us all far more aware of the value of trees in helping to reduce greenhouse gases, but trees also have a significant well-being value. Early memories of childhood may include tree climbing, playing hide and seek in the woods or simply reading about Winnie the Pooh's adventures in the 100 acre wood; and who doesn't feel better after a stroll among the trees, whatever the weather. In fact, it is scientifically proven that ten minutes deep breathing among the trees, lowers blood pressure. Surrey, the most wooded county in England, provides us with a wealth of choice when it comes to enjoying woodland walks.



Winkworth Arboretum

In autumn, it is tempting to return to the most familiar woodlands- Polesden Lacey, Hatchlands or Winkworth Arboretum, but why not try visiting some of the less familiar places?

Abinger Roughts, where Charles Darwin walked while staying at Abinger Hall, has an abundance of mixed woodland. Also worth a visit is nearby Piney Copse, once owned by E. M. Forster, who purchased the wood, when living close by to prevent it from being developed into housing.

To the east of the county, Staffhurst Wood, near Oxted, has remained wooded since Saxon times and the mix of oak, ash, beech, hornbeam and hazel provides stunning autumn colour as does the woodland surrounding the nearby Titsey Estate. To the west, Chiddingfold Forest provides a mass of colour from its mix of broad-leaved trees including oak, birch and ash. Leith Hill is thought of as a popular picnic spot in summer, however, the mix of oak, beech and chestnut trees all provide vivid autumn colour. Also in autumn, the banks of the Wey Navigation, lined with deciduous trees, look glorious with colour from the red and gold hawthorn leaves to the yellow and brown chestnuts.



The River Wey near Burpham





Leith Hill from Ockley



The Sheepleas in snow



Bluebells in Chantry Woods

The combination of water and trees can be equally stunning in winter. The trees along the Wey canal look particularly magical when covered with snow, as does the Tillingbourne waterfall hidden deep in the Wotton Estate, which can be seen from a short distance by walking through the woods. Sheepleas nature reserve near Horsley is another hidden gem, perfect for a winter walk in the snow. Just south of Holmbury St Mary, Hurtwood's millenium pinetum is well worth exploring in winter, for the majestic scots pines and wonderful views. While usually an autumn favourite, Winkworth Arboretum with its beautiful Winter Garden and Holly Walk makes for a wonderful winter walk.

In spring and summer our woodlands take on a very different feel, with dappled shade and a wide variety of flora. Cucknell's Wood and Chinthurst Hill both near Wonerh are worth a visit. Spring blossom and wild flowers are in abundance in Norbury Park, between Dorking and Leatherhead, where a leisurely walk among the trees may be rewarded with spotting one of several rare orchids or even the bright blue flash

of a kingfisher darting along the banks of the Mole. Bluebells are also stunning in Chantry Woods, over 200 acres of spectacular woodlands and meadows, near Guildford.

Also known for its fabulous display of bluebells is Frank's Wood named after Frank Longhurst, a National Trust woodsman, who is said to have planted three acorns: one for the mice, one to fail and one to grow into an oak tree. The mile long trail on Leith Hill, is now known as Frank's Walk.

Finally, a special place to visit whatever the season is Langley Vale First World War Centenary Wood near Epsom. The Regiment of Trees is the most stunning feature, displaying twelve sandstone figures commemorating the 2nd London Division of Kitchener's New Army. An impressive line-up of oak porthole posts similarly symbolises the British warships sunk in the Battle of Jutland, alongside thousands of trees which were planted to honour those who lost their lives.

*Susie Turner*



Springtime at Norbury Park



Langley Vale Battle of Jutland Memorial Portholes



## News from Surrey Hills Arts Orchard Portraits

This two year project culminated in a 7-screen video installation in the stone hall at West Horsley Place. Choreographer Rosemary Lee led multiple movement workshops in different communities across Surrey before selecting the people for the final films. She worked with 6 senior performers and 60 children. As an artist, Rosemary had been drawn to the aged orchard at West Horsley Place when travelling around Surrey. The various fruit trees in the walled garden have their own individual characters and the senior performers all connected with a specific tree to respond to through slow meditative movements. Spending time up close to the trees brought about a deep connection and calmness.



*"The orchard has such a still, timeless quality, I love its quiet wildness. I was drawn particularly to the human sized trees, so old now and past their best fruiting days but living through each season, and home to beautiful lichens and mosses. I imagined senior performers in contemplative partnership with these trees and equally imagined a throng of school children exploring the orchard with youthful energy."* Rosemary Lee

Rosemary Lee collaborated with filmmaker Roswitha Chesher and worked with the participants extremely closely as they explored their chosen trees. In contrast to the senior performers, the 60 school children burst through the orchard in moments of joy and discovery. The exhibition runs from July – November and is then on tour in Limerick.



You can listen to a wonderful podcast of the project by Whistlestop Arts as part of their Walking With Artists series ([whistlestoparts.org](http://whistlestoparts.org)). This includes interviews with the artists, West Horsley Place staff and the participants. It gives a great insight into the various experiences of all involved and as the children said: "This was the best day of our lives!"

We hope to see Orchard Portraits exhibited back in Surrey but in the meantime, you can view a short compilation of the films on our website ([surreyhillsarts.org](http://surreyhillsarts.org)).

Ali Clarke

## Trees – A Planner's Perspective

Trees are obviously important in hiding very many buildings in the Surrey Hills area and views from higher ground out across other land in the distance, even looking towards London.

However, I often come across individuals attempting to justify development proposals in the AONB by claiming that the development would be hidden from public view by trees or by promising to plant numerous trees and hedgerows to screen the development.

The issue with the first argument is that if it were to be accepted in the densely wooded Surrey Hills AONB, it could set a precedent that would allow for numerous developments, ultimately undermining the quality and integrity of this nationally protected landscape.

In the second case, it's important to note that trees and hedgerows take several years to effectively reduce the visual impact of development, and they can sometimes obstruct existing scenic views of the public landscape. Therefore, this argument can also be used too frequently to justify undesirable development. Nonetheless, incorporating

landscaping into acceptable forms of development is usually desirable.

In both cases, it is dangerous for planning decision makers to rely upon existing or proposed trees and vegetation to screen development because they rarely exceed the lifetime of a development. Trees can be lost for a multitude of natural causes, such as disease or old age or through humans

removing them. Landscaping conditions attached to planning permissions requiring retention of the planting or replacements only last for 5 years. They can then be removed. Sometimes the incentive can be to open up landscape views for the occupants resulting in the development then becoming open to public view.

Clive Smith





## The Woodwide Web

When wandering through a woodland in the autumn, we often marvel at the fabulous fungi that display an array of vivid colours, shapes, and sizes. However, it could be said that what is found underneath the woodland floor is even more weird and wonderful.

Whilst mushrooms might look impressive, most of the fungal organism is found under our feet and is made up of a wide-spanning network of threads known as mycelium. These threads, wrap around and into tree roots, helping to transfer water, nitrogen, carbon and other minerals in a large underground system. This special interaction, found between certain fungi and tree roots, is known as a mycorrhiza. Within the woodland ecosystem, the mycorrhizal interaction between plants and fungi is mutually beneficial. Certain types of fungi provide trees with minerals and nutrients via the root system and in return, the tree provides sugars from photosynthesis.



Bracket Polypores



Agaric Fungus

The joint effect of multiple mycorrhizal interactions across a woodland helps to facilitate the sharing of resources between individuals and species and therefore, the network has been dubbed 'The Woodwide Web'. For example, research has shown that Mother Trees in some species, which are usually the biggest and oldest trees in the forest, share their sugars with saplings that are shaded out, helping to promote growth. Sick or dying trees have also been shown to release their resources into the network for the benefit of other healthier trees to use. If being eaten, trees can also warn their neighbours to raise their defences, by sending messages through the fungal network and can even protect plants against certain pathogens. Even more fascinating is that certain tree species, such as the Douglas Fir favour genetic relatives or kin, when sending out resources such as carbon or nutrients.

It is thought that this network could be nearly 500 million years old and is crucial to the health of woodland ecosystems. Within the temperate climate of the Surrey Hills, mycorrhizal fungi networks are extensive. These vast networks promote carbon sequestration and therefore, are imperative in our fight against climate change. However, mycorrhizal networks are also crucial to biodiversity. Increasing the nutrient richness of the soil promotes plant diversity but also supports the growth of key plant species, which in turn support incredible species diversity and richness. For example, a common oak tree is known to be associated with at least 2300 species of birds, fungi, invertebrates, lichens, and mammals. Without the support of the mycorrhizal network, species such as this would not be able to thrive and therefore the network is vital in underpinning our woodland ecosystems.

*Christa Emmett*

## Promoting Sustainable Access to the Surrey Hills

Over the summer months, we are a little limited with what practical conservation work we can do, due to ground nesting bird season and therefore, these past few months, we have focused on access.

In July, with the help of two fantastic groups of volunteers, we audited two Rail to Ramble routes (Shalford – Chilworth and Chilworth – Gomshall). The purpose of these audits was to identify existing site furniture (gates, stiles etc.) and to install directional signage for the routes. The aim is that all Surrey Hills Promoted Routes will be signed, in line with the aims of the Surrey Hills Promoted Working Group. The Rail to Ramble routes are designed to incorporate a walk with a train station and are part of a series of 10 walks devised by members of the Society alongside other volunteers. They take in beautiful scenery and aim to promote sustainable travel to the Surrey Hills. Thank you to all volunteers who were involved, your help was invaluable.



Rail to Ramble audit near Shere



Dead hedging at Newlands Corner

Of course, access should always be balanced with conservation, within a protected landscape. Bearing this in mind, we have been supporting the Surrey Choices Growth Team with their dead hedging work at Newlands Corner. Corporate groups from both Unum and Pfizer have joined forces with the Growth Team, creating dead hedges around the ancient Yew Trees to protect them from root compaction. The dead hedges were made from blackthorn, birch, holly, and other native species and will also help to support wildlife and nutrient cycling as well as acting as a natural barrier.

Looking ahead, we are already gearing up to a busy autumn and winter season of hedge planting and tree popping. Keep your eyes peeled for community events to get involved with!

*Christa Emmett*





















# Events programme

## November 2023 to February 2024

Below is a brief list of planned events we are running.

There is much more detail on our website and a link to a booking form which needs to be filled in whether an event is free or has a cost.

We run a free walk every first Sunday of the month but this still needs to be booked.

DATE	EVENT DETAIL
Sunday 5 November  	<b>Explore Caterham</b> We will take a leisurely walk through this charming historic town with many old buildings and a picturesque town centre.
Wednesday 8 November	<b>Horsley Towers with a talk on Ada Lovelace</b> Join the President of the Society Chris Howard for a repeat visit to this historical home of Lord Lovelace whose wife Ada Lovelace is known as the "mother of computing".
Thursday 16 November	<b>Over Here – The lives and legacy of the wartime Canadians in Surrey</b> A fascinating talk by Lorraine Spindler on the Canadians in Surrey during the second world war and their impact on the county.
Wednesday 29 November 	<b>Surrey Hills Symposium</b> This year's Symposium at the University of Surrey is entitled 'Woodland Wonder – the future of our trees and woodlands in a changing climate.' Book your free ticket through Eventbrite.
Sunday 3 December  	<b>Newlands Corner Christmas Pop-up</b> The Society will be attending this Christmas event with many interesting activities for all ages and great ideas for Christmas presents.
Saturday 9 December    	<b>Pre-Christmas walk from Belmont School</b> Our annual event starting from historic Belmont School and walking up to Holmbury Hill fort followed by mulled wine and mince pies.
Saturday 16 December 	<b>Christmas wreath making</b> One of our most popular events, gathering natural materials and then returning to the hall to make your own door wreath.
Wednesday 27 December  	<b>Walk off your Christmas Pudding</b> For the second year running we will be hosting this traditional event with two walks in the Blackheath and Dorking areas for your convenience.
Sunday 7 January    	<b>Explore Leatherhead</b> Come and enjoy a relatively short, flat walk around this important and picturesque town in the Surrey Hills. We will take in many hidden and important historical buildings with some of the walk being alongside the River Mole.
Sunday 4 February    	<b>Explore Oxted</b> Oxted sits at the foot of the North Downs and it appears in the Domesday Book of 1086. We will have a guided walk around this historical town which will be relatively easy.
Monday 12 February	<b>Guided tour of Painshill Park</b> We will have our own guided tour of this 18th Century garden. It includes many stunning views, dramatic follies, a serpentine lake and a Crystal Grotto followed by refreshments.

Please note that there are several additional events being organised throughout this period which are not yet finalised.  
Kindly keep an eye on the website for further details.



Family friendly



1st Sunday Walk of the Month



Dog friendly but kept on a short lead throughout the walk



Signposting for events

When booking yourself on a walk please make sure that you are fit enough to cope with the category stipulated.



Easy



Moderate



Challenging

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION visit our website OR EMAIL: [info@surreyhillssociety.org](mailto:info@surreyhillssociety.org)

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