



River Mole near Leatherhead by Gordon Jackson

Rivers and Lakes of the Surrey Hills

We may be known as the Surrey Hills National Landscape but our area also includes numerous water features such as rivers, canals and lakes. Indeed, it is water that has helped shape our landscape. Over geological time, water has carved out valleys, such as the Mole Gap, eroded softer ground such as chalk to help create the features of the North Downs and gathered in low points to form lakes and ponds.



St Catherine's River Wey
Photo: Ken Bare

Water is an essential requirement for life so it is unsurprising that human habitations started to form close to reliable water sources such as rivers. This water became important for livestock farming and to help irrigate and fertilise meadows. Until the industrial revolution, flowing water was also the primary power source for industry and continued to be essential once steam power was developed. Take a look at the Wey, Mole and Tillingbourne rivers and you will still find the sites of numerous mills.



Gatton Lake in November
Photo: Ken Bare

For many centuries, man has intervened in the works of nature to modify the watercourses for his needs. One obvious example is the creation of the Wey Navigations to improve year-round transport. Similarly, weirs and other 'improvements' have been installed to control flooding or to provide the head of water for mills.

Unfortunately, many of the 'improvements' have had longer term drawbacks. For example, flood control systems for one location have sometimes been found to exacerbate the problem elsewhere.

Our wildlife and biodiversity have also suffered. Fish migrating upstream to breed have found man-made barriers in the way. This has impacted upstream parts of rivers. Drainage of boggy areas may have made them more usable for human activity, but has also had longer term effects on creatures that need dampness – together with the plant species which make up nature's complex relationships.

We are finally waking up to the fact that improvements in one aspect of water management can have negative effects on others and are starting to think more holistically. But there is a long way to go before we halt the decline and begin to see improvements in biodiversity.

In this edition of the newsletter, we touch on a few aspects of Surrey's water features and invite you to enjoy a walk close to the water – an experience which can be uplifting throughout the year.

Ken Bare



Friday Street Waterfall
Photo: Ken Bare

Chairman's Views



Christa, Kate and Gordon hitching a ride. Photo Martin Bamford

Although the weather has been mixed, we have continued with our conservation efforts this winter, aided by funding from the DEFRA Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme that has paid for many of our tools and the hedges that our volunteers have planted.

It is now three and a half years since we welcomed Christa Emmett as our first employed Project and Volunteer Coordinator. At the time this was a leap of faith as we felt there was a real opportunity to develop our conservation activities, and we were lucky that the Surrey Hills Trust Fund agreed to provide some of the seed funding to make this happen. Christa was fresh out of university when she first started, and she and I spent a huge amount of time discussing how we were going to get the project off the ground!

As it has turned out the Society has gone from strength-to-strength thanks in large part to Christa's enthusiasm and dedication. The infographic shows the amazing impact that she has had on the conservation front, but she has also played a key role in developing our National Lottery Heritage Fund project, Growing Together, which you can read about on Page 7.

I cannot thank Christa enough for all she has done for the Society, and it is with great regret that we are having to say goodbye.

Over the last few months she has been transitioning into a new job as Wilder Communities Coordinator for Surrey Wildlife Trust. This is absolutely the right move for her as it will enable her to develop her skills in a larger organisation and I wish Christa every success in her new role.



As one chapter closes another opens. We are delighted to welcome Kate Bannister, who takes over Christa's role, having been involved with all our volunteer efforts over the winter. Kate has recently graduated from Falmouth University with a First Class, Honours BA in Marine and Natural History Photography and has a particular interest in moths. Her photographs have already been exhibited in London as part of the Emerging Artist Award and we look forward to making use of these valuable skills!



Introducing our New Trustee

Sat Luthra joined the Board of Surrey Hills Society in June 2024. Here she tells us a little bit about her background.

Born and brought up in Uganda, I trained as a teacher in the UK and moved here permanently in 1972 following Idi Amin's expulsion of Indians from Uganda. I now live near Newlands Corner, a place that reminds me of the Rift Valley in East Africa and reflects my love for open spaces. I believe it's essential to protect these areas for future generations. I am retired from Surrey County Council, where I specialised in teaching English to

children from diverse linguistic backgrounds. I also taught cookery at adult education centres. My guiding principle is 'service,' and I strive to live by it. Over the years, I have been involved in fundraising for charities such as Mencap, the Fountain Centre, and the Royal Surrey County Hospital, for which I took on the challenge of climbing Kilimanjaro. I also support the Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum and act as a liaison for Surrey Hills. In my spare time, I enjoy participating in U3A activities, including Chi Gung, calligraphy, and organised trips with the Anthropology group.



Rare Creatures in our Ponds



Toad Patrol

Until relatively recently, many parts of the Surrey Hills have been damp, wet places – especially in the winter months. The Victorians drained much of our land to make it more productive. Then, the Canadian military, based in Surrey during WW2, dug ditches and drains to create new playing fields and sites to build on. However, not all our ‘residents’ benefitted from these changes. The common toads that thrived in the marshy bogs are now, sadly, not so common.

Increasing traffic has also contributed to the creature’s demise. However, there are now growing numbers of helpers (known as Toad Patrollers) who brave the, often wet, early spring evenings to assist toads, frogs and newts whilst crossing roads to their chosen breeding pond.

Unfortunately, most of these amphibians choose dusk to cross the road and this coincides with evening rush hour. It is therefore important to have, literally, helping hands (and a bucket) to get them across safely.

In 2019 my village of Shamley Green formed an Environment Group in response to the Climate Emergency. One aim was to stop the continued decline of biodiversity in our area. I discovered that Shamley Green, due to its many springs and ponds, contained one of the few remaining large populations of toads in the county. I also met Regena Coult who almost single handedly had been trying to save the toads in our area for many years.

A group was formed and trained by Regena who is an active member of the Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group. We now meet every night from late January until the end of March to try to save as many of these little creatures as we can. And the good news is our amphibian population is increasing.

See www.shamleygreenenvironment.co.uk for more details.

Christine Howard DL



Common Toads

Fish Passes on the Wey



Godalming Fish Pass

Over the years, our local waterways have been modified to control flooding, improve navigation, support industry and facilitate leisure activities. Whilst these have all had direct benefits, they have also created problems for the fish that need to reach their upstream spawning grounds.

A weir or a lock is a pretty big obstacle if you are a fish, so fewer of them have made it upstream over the years. In turn, this has led to population changes in other species that rely on the fish as food or as part of their life-cycle.

Projects such as the Wey Fish Pass and Wetland Delivery Strategy aim to open over 100km of river to fish between the Thames at Weybridge and the Wey at Tilford. These fish passes form routes around manmade obstructions to



Burpham Fish Pass (courtesy Environment Agency)

- Improve river access for fish, such as barbel, chub, dace, trout and eel
- Help restore the health of the fish population
- Allow fish to find feeding or spawning grounds
- Provide gravel beds and shallow pools where fish can lay their eggs and young can grow.

Each pass has to take into account several variables including water flow, the local topography and the sensitivity of the site – with some (including two proposed locations

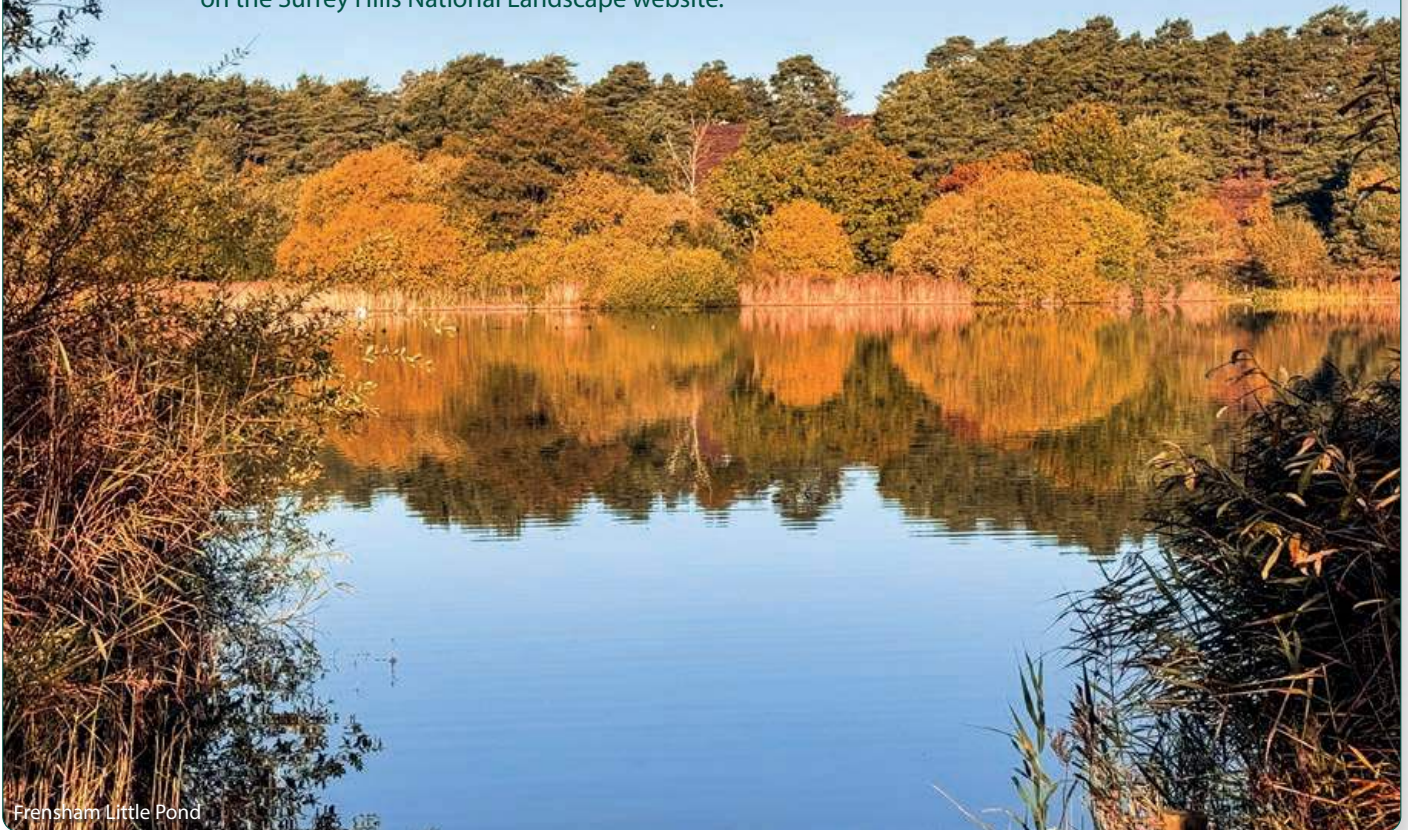
upstream of Guildford) being within Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The landscape scale pass near Burpham is based on creating a bypass channel, whilst the one above Godalming is more like a set of shallow steps with “bristle brushes” embedded in them.

This opening up of the river is a “work in progress” but should have major benefits for our fish populations and for general improvements in local biodiversity.

Ken Bare

Walking Trails around Water and Rivers in the Surrey Hills

The Surrey Hills offer a rich tapestry of walking trails that follow the tranquil banks of rivers and ponds, catering to both experienced hikers and casual walkers. Gordon Jackson reflects on some of his favourite spots, each brimming with natural beauty and historical significance. Unless otherwise indicated, more details of the areas described can be found on the Surrey Hills National Landscape website.



Frensham Little Pond

Frensham Ponds

Frensham Little Pond and Great Pond were established in the 13th century to provide fish for the Bishop of Winchester during visits to Farnham Castle. Today, these ponds are a sanctuary for wildlife, including various birds and dragonflies. The sandy paths surrounding the ponds are well-maintained, making them accessible for leisurely strolls. Visitors can picnic on the banks or explore further into the surrounding heathland. The circular walk around the ponds is especially breathtaking at sunset.



The Wey Navigation between Guildford and Godalming

The River Wey Navigations

The River Wey Navigations is one of the most popular walking routes in the area, winding through picturesque countryside and historic towns. Starting from Godalming, walkers can follow the towpath to Guildford, enjoying scenic views of the river, wildlife, and charming lock cottages along the way. The route spans nearly 9 kilometres and is relatively flat, making it suitable for all ages. For those seeking more adventure, the navigation continues past Guildford towards the Thames, offering additional tranquil and scenic exploration. The annual Guildford Lions Charity Raft Race in early July adds a touch of fun to the summer experience.



Guildford Raft Race by Dapdune Wharf

Photos by Gordon Jackson and Ken Bare



The Wey near Riverside Park

Riverside Nature Reserve, Burpham

This 30-hectare wildlife reserve, managed by Guildford Borough council, is located in north east Guildford along the River Wey. It boasts four main habitats: meadow, wetland, open water, and woodland. While there are various access points (see the council website), the route through Thorneycroft Wood, which leads to well-maintained boardwalks with beautifully decorated benches, is highly recommended. These paths allow visitors to traverse reed beds and enjoy a serene walk around the lake.



One of the sculptural benches at Riverside Park

The Tillingbourne

The Tillingbourne River flows from Leith Hill to its confluence with the Wey at Shalford. Historically, this river valley was one of the most industrialised in 17th century England, with approximately 50 water wheels powering mills that supported various industries, including weaving and gunpowder production. "The Tales and Trails of the Tillingbourne project", developed with National Lottery support in 2012, features seven moderately easy trails that explore the river's



Shere stream bridge

historical significance and its beautiful surroundings. My favourite walk starts at Shere and includes a walk through the picturesque village and across fields to Albury Park and the historic old Saxon Church, showcasing both natural and manmade river features.

The Mole Gap Trail

The Mole Gap Trail, a "Rail to Ramble" walk, begins at Leatherhead rail station and concludes at Dorking rail station, making for a simple return journey via train. This trail connects two historic market towns and offers stunning views of the Mole Gap, including England's largest vineyard at Denbies. Walkers can appreciate the river's scenic journey through the chalk of the North Downs, ancient woodlands, and parklands that have inspired many writers and artists.



The River Mole between Leatherhead and Dorking on the Mole Gap trail

Gatton Park

Gatton Park is a country estate encompassing 500 acres, with landscaped grounds designed by Capability Brown. Partially owned by The Royal Alexandra and Albert School and the National Trust, the estate is Grade II listed. Although much of the park and gardens are usually closed to the public, visitors can enjoy the walk around the lake on specific open days. However, at any time the views from the North Downs Way and the National Trust trail on the west side of the estate are particularly impressive.



Gatton Park Lake

In summary, whether walking along the tranquil River Wey, exploring the peaceful Frensham Ponds, or taking in the vistas at Gatton Park, the Surrey Hills is rich with opportunities for delightful walks around water and rivers. Each trail offers a unique experience, allowing walkers to connect with nature and appreciate the beauty of this remarkable region. With so many paths to explore, it's time to lace up your boots and embark on an adventure through the enchanting landscapes of the Surrey Hills!

Gordon Jackson

Farming in Protected Landscapes: Restoring a Pond, Restoring a Purpose

Thanks to the support of the DEFRA Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) programme, farmers and land managers in the Surrey Hills National Landscape have been able to create a legacy that goes beyond food production.

Since it started in 2021, the Surrey Hills FIPL programme has engaged with over 250 farmers and landowners, implemented 35 flood reduction projects, facilitated 200 educational

visits, and improved soil health across more than 3,600 hectares of land. Together, these initiatives are not only securing the future of local farms but also enhancing the environment for wildlife and people alike.

A shining example of the programme's impact is the restoration of an ancient dairy pond on the Hampton Estate at Puttenham. Overgrown and inaccessible, the pond has been

transformed with FIPL funding into a vibrant habitat, educational resource, and accessible destination for visitors.

The project included re-sculpting the pond, creating wheelchair-accessible paths and a dipping platform, and developing age-specific educational materials for children. Already, the pond has welcomed visitors, earning praise for its dual role as a habitat and learning site.

"Without FIPL funding, the restoration of this ancient pond would have been difficult" said Bridget Biddell from the Hampton Estate. "The funding has not only enabled the restoration of a freshwater habitat but has also given the pond a contemporary purpose. With signs and a dipping platform, the pond is now used by children and adults to learn and get excited about pond life."

The success of this project underscores the critical role that farmers play—not just as food producers, but as stewards of the land. Farmers and landowners in the Surrey Hills, supported by DEFRA and the FIPL programme, are proving to be champions for wildlife, landscape preservation and community education.



The Surrey Hills 2024 Partnership Day at Hampton Estate

The Emerging Surrey Hills Management Plan



The Surrey Hills from the Devil's Punchbowl

The time has come to review the existing Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan that has served us well. The emerging new Surrey Hills National Landscape ("SHNL") Management Plan follows a reflection on how the landscape has been conserved and enhanced over the last 75 years since the passing of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. It is proposed to outline the vision, principles and priorities for the next 75 years.

Greater emphasis is proposed to be given in the new Plan to the priorities of nature, people and climate which have become increasingly

important. The Plan also needs to have regard to Natural England's proposed extensions to SHNL if and when the Secretary of State approves them for designation.

The Consultation Draft Plan is expected to be published in March for a 10 week period. Then in June and July the constituent Surrey Hills Boroughs and District Councils will consider its formal adoption before it is hoped to be launched in September.

With the Government currently imposing significant increases in housing requirements on the constituent Surrey Hills borough and district councils for their local plans, there is a pressing need for robust planning policies in the Management Plan to prevent any housing land allocations from being proposed for the Surrey Hills. Simultaneously, there is a demand for more affordable housing. The current plan already supports appropriately designed, small-scale affordable housing schemes in villages, provided that arrangements are made to ensure they remain affordable in perpetuity. This approach is likely to be carried forward in the new plan.

The substantial pressure for development in the Surrey Hills necessitates vigilant and sensitive controls to prevent even small-scale incremental development. If permitted, such developments could collectively undermine the integrity of the SHNL over the decades, compromising its beauty and ecological value for future generations.

Your views on the new Management Plan and how best to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Surrey Hills will be very welcome. Please email the SHNL management team at info@surreyhills.org

Clive Smith – Planning Adviser

Growing Together: Fostering Inclusion and Conservation

In this article we focus on our transformative National Lottery Heritage Fund Growing Together project, which aims to promote inclusion and enhance conservation efforts within the Surrey Hills. Under the dedicated leadership of India Davies, our project officer, this initiative has begun to make significant strides in connecting diverse communities with the natural environment.

Since its inception, the Growing Together project has focused on engaging local groups and individuals, fostering a sense of belonging while encouraging active participation in conservation activities. By hosting workshops, community events, and volunteering opportunities, we have successfully brought together people from various backgrounds, allowing them to connect with nature and each other.

One of the key highlights of the project is our plan for the development of a community hub at Denbies vineyard, which will provide an accessible space for educational heritage activities. Participants can learn about the Surrey Hills National Landscape and its native flora and fauna and the importance of biodiversity—all while enjoying the therapeutic benefits of working outdoors and discovering sustainable gardening practices.



Fungi Fun at Nower Wood



The Akhwat Community Group

In addition to promoting environmental stewardship, Growing Together emphasises the importance of inclusivity. By partnering with schools, organisations, and community groups, we aim to ensure that everyone, regardless of age or background, can contribute to the conservation of the Surrey Hills.

As we continue to develop this project, we are thrilled to witness the positive impact it has on both the community and the environment. Very many thanks to the National Lottery players for supporting us through the Heritage Fund. Together, we are creating lasting connections and inspiring a new generation of conservationists who are committed to preserving the natural beauty of the Surrey Hills for years to come.



Publishing 'The Thousand Year Tree'

We are delighted by the success of the stunning new book, 'The Thousand Year Tree', which tells the story through time of Surrey's ancient trees. Taking the thousand-year-old yew trees at Newlands Corner as a starting point and bringing them to life through a mix of poems, illustrations and historical timelines, the book inspires children to really care about trees and understand the need to protect them.

The book, a publishing first for the Surrey Hills Society, was a collaboration between local author, Lucy Reynolds, illustrator, Katie Hickey



Our competition winners at the Guildford Book Festival

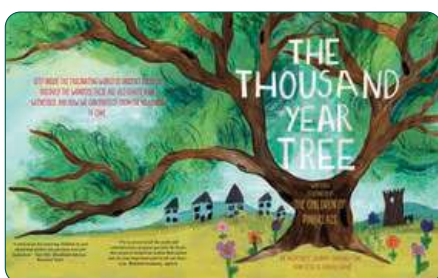
and the children in Pine Class from Weyfield Primary Academy in Guildford. The project was supported by the Guildford Book Festival, the Old Dungate Press, Surrey County Council and the Surrey Hills National Landscape, which secured funding from Defra's Access for All Fund. A special mention must also go to all 52 Surrey Libraries who ran a competition for children to design the endpapers of the book. Over 600 participated, far exceeding our expectations.

Through first-hand observation, along with a series of workshops, pupils learnt that although trees appear majestic and strong they are in fact very fragile and need protecting. The book is available for sale on Amazon, at Waterstones and other independent bookshops and this has ensured the message has reached a much wider audience.

The book's author, Lucy Reynolds, explained what made the project so special, "The children's creativity and hard work contributed to its enormous success, along with the range of partners involved who ensured the book reached its full potential. Its success has proved that this model works, paving the way for more sequels to come."

Given our current focus on pollution and water management, not surprisingly the sequel is likely to be a river, with The Tillingbourne and its incredible past being a firm contender.




















Susie Turner



Events programme March to June 2025

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. Our free walk every first Sunday of the month still needs to be booked.

DATE	EVENT DETAIL
Sunday 2 March ▲   	Explore Blackheath (am) Join Andy and Sue Rodgers on a moderate 6 km walk around Blackheath Common.
Wednesday 26 March	Talk by Ken Bare – Vice President of the Society (pm) Ken Bare will be giving a talk on the historic Chilworth Gunpowder Mills followed by afternoon tea.
Sunday 6 April ▲   	Guildford Nature Walk (am) Led by our President, Chris Howard, this walk will explore a special wetland area near Guildford.
Friday 11 April ▲   	A guided tour of Chilworth gunpowder mills (am) Ken Bare, our Vice President will be leading a walk around the Chilworth Gunpowder Mills, followed by an optional pub lunch at the Percy Arms.
Thursday 29 April	A return visit to Dunsfold Aerodrome (am) Following our visit to the aerodrome last year we are having a tour and detailed talk on the history of the site by military historian Paul McCue.
Sunday 4 May ▲   	Explore Forest Green (am) This is a walk around a lovely hamlet and the expansive common led by Martin Cantor.
Wednesday 7 May	A visit to the Shieling Garden, Tadworth (pm) This is a one acre garden restored to its original 1920 design. There are formal beds and shrubs, a large rock garden and many old trees with winding woodland paths.
Saturday 10 May  	Surrey Day (am/pm) A celebration of all that is great about our county. Surrey Day is set to return for a 7th year. This year's theme is "The 80th Anniversary of WW2". Listen all day on BBC Radio Surrey. More information at VisitSurrey.com
Thursday 22 May	Chairman's Day – Sondes Place Farm, Dorking and Denbies Vineyard (am/pm) We will be the guests of farmer and well-known broadcaster, Hugh Broom on his 320 acre family farm. We will then have lunch and visit Denbies Vineyard in the afternoon.
Sunday 1 June ▲   	Explore Hydon Hill (am) Join Society walk leader, Heather Aitken, on this walk with lovely views near Godalming.
Monday 9 June	Behind the Scenes at Polesden Lacey (am) We will meet for an introductory talk in the Copper Beech Suite and have a private 'behind the scenes' tour of the private apartments and then the Rose Garden. Afterwards guests can explore the rest of the house at their leisure.
Saturday 21 June  	Tree Walk with Pamela Holt (am) Join Pamela "The Society's Tree Lady" on an easy walk around Shamley Green where she will instruct us on tree identification, followed by an optional pub lunch.



Family friendly



1st Sunday Walk of the Month (free)



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](https://www.surreyhillssociety.org) **OR EMAIL:** info@surreyhillssociety.org
OR PHONE: 07530 949302 and leave a message

