



Thursley Common by Gordon Jackson

Nature, Community and Safeguarding the Future

The drought this summer has brought into stark relief the precarious balance for nature and the impact for the public of damage to nature sites.

Wildfires and crop fires have been rife across the country, with the Surrey Hills facing its share – including fires at West Horsley Place, Chobham Common, the Conisbee family's Barrack's Farm in Fetcham and Riverside Park Nature Reserve at Guildford. The drought has seen ponds and rivers disappearing, prompting an

Environment Agency rescue of fish dying as a section of the River Mole dried up.

As extreme weather becomes more frequent, it's even more important for us to act together as a community to protect the natural places Surrey residents love and visit.

The Society's Surrey Hills Rangers play a vital role in encouraging landowners to make, or allow, nature improvements on their land, and mobilising volunteers to deliver vital restoration work. This can build resilience to extreme

weather in our natural spaces. Planting the right trees in the right place, for example, can reduce flooding risk, conserve water in dry spells and provide much-needed shade, with a cooling effect of around 10 degrees – offering respite for wildlife and human visitors.

This work is not only preserving and improving local nature for the next generation; action in the Surrey Hills is also contributing to national and global targets.

Successive Governments have committed the UK to the global '30 by 30' target: ensuring 30 percent of land and sea are effectively managed and protected for nature by 2030. In practical terms, this means moving from assuming designated nature sites are in good condition 'on paper' to actively restoring habitats, improving protected sites and connecting green spaces.

In the Surrey Hills, we have the highest woodland coverage of any protected landscape in England, much of it 'on paper' within protected sites. Yet much of our woodland isn't effectively managed and is in declining condition, with wildlife numbers and rare habitats such as our chalk downland suffering as a result.

To find out more about the valuable work of the Rangers towards '30 by 30', and how you can help, read more in our centre spread.

Em Adler, CEO



Surrey Hills near Effingham

Chairman's Views

The Surrey Hills Sheep Parade



Sheep Parade. Photo: Martin Bamford Photography



This summer the Surrey Hills welcomes a rather unusual new flock. The Surrey Hills Sheep Parade 2026 brings together 13 life-sized sheep, each individually decorated by a Surrey artist, to celebrate the important role sheep have played – and continue to play – in shaping our landscape.

Launched at Denbies on 26 August, the flock will appear at locations across the Surrey Hills during late summer and autumn before eventually being auctioned for charity. As well as being colourful and entertaining, the Parade carries an important message. Conservation grazing is vital to maintaining our precious chalk grasslands and their remarkable biodiversity, while the campaign also reminds everyone enjoying the countryside of the importance of keeping dogs under control and on leads around livestock. It is a wonderful example of art, farming and conservation coming together to tell the story of our living, working landscape.

Lesley Crofts Retires

This edition also gives me the opportunity to say a heartfelt thank you to Lesley Crofts, who is retiring after several years as our Events Coordinator. Since 2019, Lesley has been the cheerful and highly efficient presence behind our events programme, giving invaluable support to the Events Team and regularly liaising with participants. Much of her contribution has been behind the scenes, but she has truly been the glue that has helped make our events programme work.

On behalf of the Society, thank you Lesley, for everything you have done. We wish you a very happy and well-deserved retirement.

Gordon Jackson



The Society's Newest Recruit



Jo Jones,
Event Coordinator

Behind the scenes of all of the Society's walks, talks and events there is a huge amount of organising – we're like a swan, apparently gliding seamlessly to each event but paddling furiously underneath to make it happen! Not only is our amazing team of events volunteers constantly at work, we have a wonderful Events Coordinator pulling it all together behind the scenes and on our website. Lesley Crofts recently left the position after 7 years of service for our members and she has handed the baton to our newest member of staff, Jo Jones. Jo has worked in the health and, more latterly, the education sectors. She brings with her a wealth of

organisational and people skills, organising our events programme online, creating innovation and streamlining our systems, providing a huge amount of coordination and broaching every new task with a smile on her face and a 'can do' approach. We're hugely pleased to welcome Jo to the team.

If you would like the opportunity to share your passion for the local area by helping to create events that people love to participate in, our events team has a number of openings. Please contact Jo Jones to find out more jo.jones@surreyhillssociety.org

Em Adler



Rail to Ramble: Shalford to Chilworth

Why not leave the car behind and discover one of the Surrey Hills' most scenic walking routes? The **Rail to Ramble:**

Shalford to Chilworth walk, looked after by the Surrey Hills Rangers, is a beautiful five-mile trail linking two stations on the North Downs Line, making it easy to explore by public transport.

Starting at **Shalford Station**, the route passes through the tranquil Shalford Water Meadows before climbing through Chantry Wood to join the North Downs Way. Along the way, walkers are rewarded with stunning panoramic views across the Surrey Hills and a visit to the Grade II-listed **St Martha's Church**, perched atop St Martha's Hill.

The walk finishes at **Chilworth Station**, taking in another fascinating local landmark, the historic **Chilworth Gunpowder Mills**, a reminder of the area's industrial heritage. The route covers approximately **8km (5 miles)** and takes around **2½ hours** to complete.

Walkers should note that the route includes uneven and sandy paths, some steps, and a challenging uphill climb to St Martha's Church. Some sections can also be muddy after wet weather. While there are no public toilets at either station, local cafés and pubs in the area provide facilities and refreshments.

This route is not waymarked, so be sure to follow the directions provided on the Surrey Hills website. For more information and to download the route guide, visit: <https://surreyhills.org/activity/shalford-to-chilworth/>

■ **DISTANCE:** 5 miles (8km)

■ **DURATION:** 2½ hours

■ **GRADIENT:** 140m

■ **ACCESS:** Rail via Shalford and Chilworth stations.



**Surrey Hills
National
Landscape**

Newlands Corner Yew Tree Path Improvements

Visitors to the 1,000-year-old yew trees at Newlands Corner may recently have noticed some welcome improvements, thanks to the Surrey Hills Society's Ranger service. A previously worn, uneven and root-strewn descent leading to the boardwalk has been transformed into a more accessible path, making it easier for visitors, including those with limited mobility, to enjoy these magnificent and historic trees.

Working with Surrey Choices, who provide person-centred support to disabled, autistic and neurodivergent people, volunteers laid more than 25 tonnes of material to create the new route. Further work has included reinstating a dead hedge around the yew site to help protect the sensitive area. The dead hedge serves several important purposes. As well as preventing soil compaction caused by visitor footfall, which can damage the trees' roots, it also creates valuable habitat for invertebrates, small mammals and birds.

The project is an excellent example of how improving access to the countryside can go hand in hand with conservation, helping more people enjoy this special place while protecting it for future generations. Below are some pictures of the rangers and their team at work.

Sam Jones, Access and Ranger Lead



West Horsley Place – Ranger Volunteers in Action

West Horsley Place has become a regular base for Surrey Hills Society's Ranger activities since an agreement was established at the beginning of the year to support the estate every second Tuesday of the month.

From maintaining rights of way and clearing scrub to hedge planting and tree care, our volunteers have contributed more than **252 hours** of work, the equivalent of over **10½ days**, delivering lasting benefits for people, nature and place. The positive impact of this work is already being seen. Following our scrub clearance efforts, West Horsley Place was able to create its new and much-loved **Willow Walk**, which recently received the Judges' Prize in the **West Horsley in Bloom Awards**. The partnership continues to provide valuable opportunities to enhance the landscape and improve habitats across the estate. Throughout the autumn and winter months, volunteers will be helping to plant more trees, care for existing hedgerows and support a range of conservation projects.

As always, additional support from Society members is warmly welcomed. Whether you can join us regularly or just occasionally, volunteering is a rewarding way to make a real difference while enjoying time outdoors in this special place.

Kate Bannister, River Ranger



Meet the Volunteer

Andy – Giving Back to the Surrey Hills

We asked one of our regular volunteers Andy, some questions about his time with the Surrey Hills Rangers!

What drove you to get involved with the ranger service?

I signed up to volunteer with the ranger service as I had just retired and wanted to do something practical outdoors to help the Surrey Hills where I've enjoyed walking for many years.

What sort of work have you done with us?

So far I've taken part in a great variety of projects including hedge planting, footpath restoration/clearing, dead hedging and footpath surveys.

What's been your biggest highlight to date?

I've appreciated the opportunity to do regular work at West Horsley Place as our house almost backs on to the estate and I often walk through the many paths.

What would you say to Society members thinking of getting involved?

Just do it. It's a very friendly group of people and there's a lot of flexibility to take part as much or as little as you like. The Surrey Hills National Landscape needs you!

This autumn and winter, there will be plenty of opportunities to get involved with the ranger service, from coppicing and tree planting to habitat management and countryside conservation projects. To join our volunteering mailing list and hear about upcoming activities, email volunteering@surreyhillssociety.org

Sam Jones



Photo: Giordano Panini from Pixabay

100 Years Since Agatha Christie's Disappearance at Newlands Corner

Newlands Corner in Surrey is forever linked to one of the greatest mysteries in literary history. On 4 December 1926, Agatha Christie's car was discovered abandoned near a chalk pit at Newlands Corner, with its headlights left on and personal belongings still inside. Christie herself had vanished, prompting a major police search and attracting national and international attention. Eleven days later, she was found alive at a hotel in Harrogate, Yorkshire, having checked in under the surname of her husband's mistress.

Today, visitors can follow a scenic circular walk, The Deer Walk, from the Newlands Corner visitor area, taking in sections of the North Downs Way, ancient woodland, chalk grassland, and stunning views across the Surrey

Hills. The route offers a unique opportunity to explore the landscape connected to Christie's story while enjoying one of Surrey's most beautiful countryside locations.

This year to mark 100 years of her disappearance, you can join our Chairman and CEO on the **6th December**, for a special Agatha Christie-themed talk and walk, exploring the history of her disappearance and a walk around the historic Newlands Corner site. The event combines fascinating historical insights, literary heritage, and spectacular scenery, making it a memorable experience for mystery lovers and walkers alike.

Jo Jones

Heathland Artworks Celebrates 10 Years at RSPB Farnham Heath

Surrey Hills Arts is celebrating the 10th anniversary of Heathland Artworks, its annual art trail at RSPB Farnham Heath.

Popular with walkers, families and first-time visitors alike, the trail showcases a unique outdoor exhibition of site-specific artworks created by students from the University for the Creative Arts. Set within the beautiful heathland landscape, the trail offers visitors the chance to experience contemporary art, while exploring one of Surrey's most important nature reserves.

Every year the four-month exhibition is the culmination of six months of research and creative development. Following a lecture on Art and Landscape in January, students visit Farnham Heath to learn about the RSPB's conservation work and the special habitats found on the reserve. They then explore the site's wildlife, history and geology, responding to their discoveries with an inspiring and diverse range of artworks that encourage visitors to see the landscape in new ways.

This year's exhibition features **Through My Quiet Lens** by **Smilika Guduru**, a wind-driven mobile that transforms recycled copper and copper-dyed fabrics into a tactile reflection of Farnham Heath's bark, stems

and grasses. Through hand-punched copper panels and layered tassels, the artwork celebrates the beauty of subtle details and the hidden structures found throughout nature.

Visitors can also experience **Summer Breeze** by **Ami Ellis** – echoing the quiet vitality of a gorse bush through a three-dimensional, pixelated form, this sculpture reflects the fragmented digital lens through which we increasingly perceive our surroundings.

Another highlight is **Protector of the Heath** by **Claire Scott**, a sculpture depicting a mythological guardian surrounded by native plants, gathered twigs and ceramic heathland butterflies. Inspired by folklore and traditions of nature guardianship, the work symbolises ecological awareness and a deeper connection with the natural world.

The circular trail culminates in **We Are All Earth** by **Katherine Bouleau**, a striking suspended installation inspired by the heath's ancient past as a shallow sea rich in plankton.

Heathland Artworks runs until the end of October. For more information, visit www.surreyhillsarts.org/heathland-artworks-trail or pick up a leaflet at the entrance.

Photos: Alienor Sarrazin



Protector of the Heath



Through My Quiet Lens



We Are All Earth



Summer Breeze

Growing Together at RHS Wisley



Many of our readers will have seen previous articles about our **Growing Together** project, which ran through 2024 and 2025. This was an ambitious programme which aimed to bring under-represented groups into the Surrey Hills – bringing the benefits of our beautiful National Landscape to a wider range of people. The project included nearly 100 events which delivered an exciting programme of nature-based activities and built-up confidence in visiting and travelling to nature sites.

We're happy to announce that the Surrey Hills Society will be providing a range of legacy events – the **Growing Together** series – which will bring together diverse groups with our traditional members for exciting walks and talks.

The first of these events will be at the RHS Wisley site, bringing behind the scenes

insights from experts at the gardens, including information on the wildlife friendly gardening measures employed at Wisley, a group tour, and a group indoor picnic.

The event will be taking place from 10.45am to 3pm on Tuesday 29th September just after National Inclusion Week. The walk brings together two groups from the Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum with our members to explore Wisley together.

This event is kindly being offered, with limited free spaces, by the RHS Wisley team. You can find out more and sign-up on our events page – www.surreyhillsociety.org/events/ – but be quick to ensure you don't miss out as we expect this event to fill-up rapidly.

Em Adler

Connecting with Nature

One of the great pleasures of Surrey Hills Society events is that they encourage us to slow down. Whether we are gliding quietly along the Basingstoke Canal or strolling across the boardwalks at Thursley Common, we begin to notice the natural world in a way that is all too easy to miss in our busy daily lives.



On board Rosebud

Our boat trip on the Basingstoke Canal in May was a reminder that this remarkable 32-mile waterway is far more than a historic navigation. It is a living green corridor linking woodland, lakes and wetlands, providing a refuge for wildlife in the midst of our increasingly developed landscape. As *Rosebud* manned by volunteers from the Basingstoke Canal Society drifted almost silently through the water, members watched great crested grebes shepherding their striped chicks across the water, while Canada geese proudly guarded their newly hatched goslings along the towpath.



Canada Goose sheltering its goslings



Great Crested Grebe and chicks

A few weeks later, our free guided walk at Thursley Common took us into one of Surrey's most remarkable National Nature Reserves. The extensive bogs and pools are among the finest remaining areas of lowland heath in southern England and provide ideal conditions for dragonflies and damselflies. At this time of year, the air seems alive with movement.



Damselflies

For many of us, dragonflies are simply flashes of colour, but stopping to watch them reveals extraordinary behaviour. Four-spotted Chasers perched obligingly for photographers, while brilliant blue damselflies formed their distinctive heart-shaped "wheel" as they mated amongst the reeds. Every pool seemed to offer another surprise and another opportunity to marvel at insects whose ancestors first flew the Earth more than 300 million years ago.



Four Spotted Chaser



Kelleys Skimmer

What struck many participants on both outings was how quickly conversations gave way to quiet observation. Cameras were raised, binoculars focused and people simply watched. The excitement was not in seeing something rare, but in taking the time to appreciate what was already there.

That, perhaps, is one of the Surrey Hills Society's greatest strengths. Our events introduce members not only to beautiful places but also to a richer way of experiencing them.

Gordon Jackson

Autumn 2026 Events Programme

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
Wed 23rd September	A tour of The Hope Mausoleum with lunch at Deepdene Golf Club A special guided tour of the Hope Mausoleum, in the Deepdene Estate with an expert from Dorking Museum, followed by a delicious lunch afterwards at Dorking Golf Club.
Tues 29th September	RHS Wisley Growing Together Event Following on from National Inclusion Week, this event will include a group tour with RHS experts, including wildlife friendly gardening advice, and a group indoor picnic. The walk brings together two groups from the Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum with Society members and friends.
Sun 4th October	Free Walk of the Month – Explore Lovelace Bridges Discover the fascinating Lovelace Bridges on a short, guided walk through the East Horsley countryside. These ornate brick and flint bridges are a unique local heritage feature.
Sat 10th October	AGM – Juniper Hall, Mickleham, Dorking You are invited to the Surrey Hills Society's Annual General Meeting with updates on the charity's progress.
Wed 14th October	Discover Brockham's bonfire-building History Discover the story behind Brockham's famous Bonfire Celebration, one of Surrey's most spectacular annual events. Learn how the dedicated volunteers became the Brockham Emergency Response Team (BERT) with the option of a short, guided walk exploring Brockham's village.
Fri 16th October	Behind the Scenes at Pierrepont Farm An exclusive behind-the-scenes visit exploring how farming, conservation, health and wellbeing, accessibility and rural enterprise come together at Pierrepont Farm.
Sun 25th October	Autumn Colours Photography walk at Headley Heath Local photographers from the Bookham Camera Club will provide expert advice on how best to capture the rich Autumn colours and views in digital photographs while exploring the stunning site.
Sun 1st November	Free walk of the Month – Explore Shere Woodlands Join the Society's Chairman and President on this woodland walk, with a social coffee beforehand.
Sat 14th November	Ripley Farmers' Market A unique tour around Ripley Farmers Market, meeting some of the key volunteers and then enjoying lunch at The Talbot Inn.
Sat 28th November	Wreath making at Wonersh near Guildford A social wreath-making event with products from the local countryside - making a stunning decoration to welcome guests into your home this Christmas.
Sun 6th December	Free Walk of the Month – Agatha Christie historic walk To mark 100 years of her biggest mystery join us for a special Agatha Christie-themed walk, exploring the history of her disappearance and a walk around the beautiful Newlands Corner site.
Sun 27th December	Walk off your Christmas Pudding – Chinthurst Hill, Shalford Get your walking boots on post-Christmas and enjoy this 3 mile walk around the Shalford area, with great views over to the South Downs.

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



www.surreyhillssociety.org
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