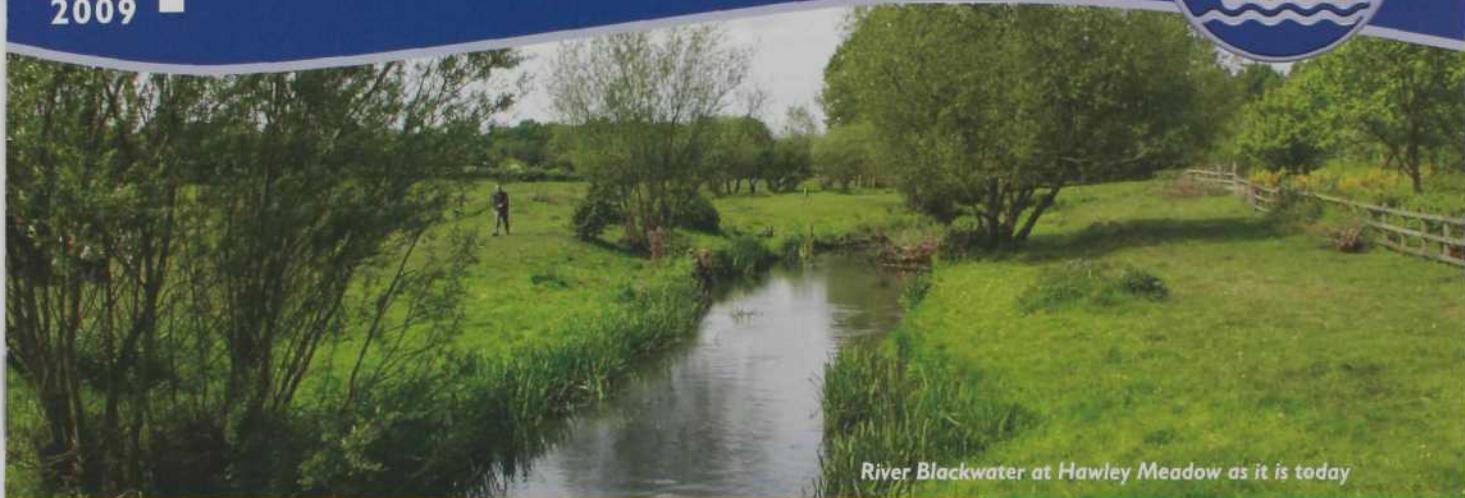


BLACKWATER VALLEY

Special

2009



River Blackwater at Hawley Meadow as it is today

CELEBRATING THE BIG

30



Welcome to our special anniversary issue – marking 30 years of working in the Blackwater Valley. Looking back through the archives it quickly became apparent how much the landscape has changed during that time. We hope the pictures featured give you an idea of just how much.

Today the Valley has many areas which are lush and green as a result of all the trees and shrubs planted, whilst the water quality of the river has vastly improved benefitting all kinds of wildlife. Access to the river has opened up and numerous new recreational facilities have been developed.

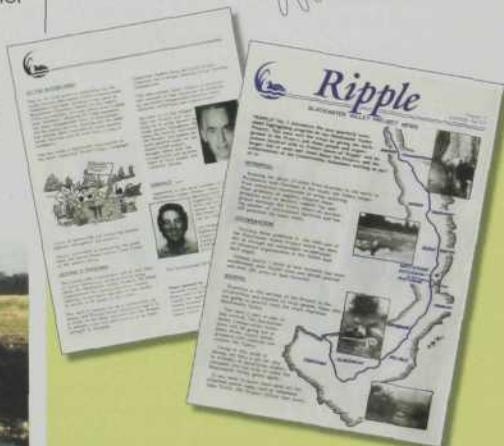
All of this has been the result of a lot of planning, hard work and effort, from a great many people. Naturally there have been problems during that time, but the plusses from all the work more than compensates for the disappointments.

In this issue we briefly summarise the story of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership as well as sharing the memories of some of the many people involved.

We hope you enjoy our brief trip down memory lane.



River work at Hawley Meadow during the 1980s



Our very first newsletter, *Ripple*, published in 1984, was the predecessor of today's *Blackwater Valley News*

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... naturally by design

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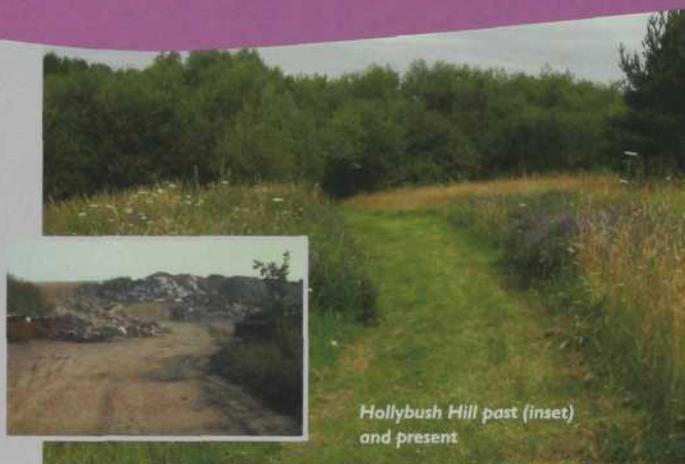
The Blackwater Valley Project is 30 years old



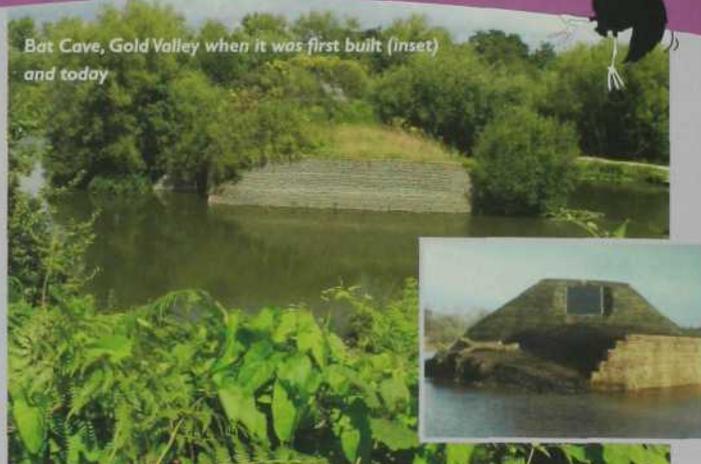
Tongham Woods in Spring

A BRIEF HISTORY

THE BIG
30
Blackwater
Valley
Countryside
Partnership
1979 - 2009



Hollybush Hill past (inset)
and present



Bat Cave, Gold Valley when it was first built (inset)
and today

Steve Bailey has been part of the Blackwater Valley team since 1989. The current Manager, he offers a personal view of the many changes in this article by Christine Reeves

Just 60 years ago much of the Blackwater Valley was still farmland. But over the following 30 years it became increasingly used as a 'backyard' of the neighbouring towns. Sewage works, refuse tips, scrapyards, overhead and underground services marred those parts not already transformed by the extensive gravel workings. In short it exhibited all the worst characteristics of the 'urban fringe'.

Despite this dereliction the Valley still possessed areas of considerable charm. It offered a number of recreational opportunities and was a recognisable open gap, which helped to give identity to the urban areas on either side. Recognising this, the County Councils of Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire joined forces with seven of the area's District Councils, to combat the effect of years of neglect. A joint strategy was published in 1971 followed by a comprehensive landscape report in 1976. As a result the Blackwater Valley Project was established in 1979 with the aim of bringing as much of the Valley into recreational use as possible.

The first ten years

The early years saw large-scale improvement schemes such as the restoration of mineral workings, rubbish tips and derelict land. In 1984 and 1985 the Countryside Commission and the Sports Council, funded two project officers to inform people of the continuing improvements and encourage opportunities for active involvement.

From its inception, when it concentrated on a few small schemes, up to 1986 the Project developed into a co-ordinated programme spending over £100,000 a year. In its first seven years the team chalked up an impressive list of achievements:

- 15 miles of footpath constructed;
- 23,000 trees and 50,000 shrubs planted;
- Over 250 acres of derelict land restored;
- Seven new footbridges built across the river.

They also established a volunteer conservation group, which held its first task in May 1984. On the recreational side their extensive programme of activities ranged from guided walks, windsurfing, cycling and canoeing to angling courses and fundays.

Visual changes

In 1989 Steve Bailey was appointed on a six-month temporary contract. Some 20 years later Steve is still part of the team as the current Manager. He is better placed than most to comment on the changes. "The Valley was very grotty in places when I first came. One of the first jobs the project had undertaken was the preliminary restoration work

to the former Ash Vale Tip – now known as Hollybush Park. When I arrived this former landfill site had just been covered with soil so the entire area was very open and desolate."

Although Steve has been involved with much of the Valley's transformation, changes are not always obvious.

"The thing about so much of what we did – and still do – is that you don't see change happening, even from year to year, because it all happens so gradually. You remember tree planting sessions that took place at a site many years ago, but it's often only when you look at old photographs that you realise just how much the trees have grown. It then brings home the impact our work has had on the Valley."

"... we created access to the river and people suddenly became more aware of their surroundings."

When it was first established the Blackwater Valley Project had a very different role to the one it fulfils today, working with the Planning Departments of the various councils who were responsible for restoring old landfill sites and cleaning up the area.

"When I arrived the project was still in the very early stages and because everything was new there was very little actual habitat management work involved," recalls Steve. "The paths were new and wide and we were planting up the newly created sites, so there was no cutting grass and overgrown vegetation or checking trees to ensure they were safe. Our role was primarily to promote the newly developed sites in the Valley to get the local population to use them."

Range of activities

The team had to be very creative about how they promoted the Valley and archived leaflets from the time illustrate the range of activities they organised. Steve remembers that they did a great deal of work with schools and has fond memories of the fun adventure trails they ran for schoolchildren at Rowhill. But opening up the area had the greatest impact:

"Prior to our work access to the river had been mostly across fields through informal paths and routes, but as we created a new footpath network we also created access to the river and people suddenly became more aware of their surroundings."

In 1990 a fully-fledged service was established called the Blackwater Valley Recreation and Countryside Service with a staff of four, including Steve, who had become Countryside Manager.

Impact of the road

The new Service now faced a big challenge, construction of the Blackwater Valley Road, the A331. This had a tremendous effect on the

Valley and the nature of the team's work. The new road was to be built in three sections to connect the A30 and M3 with the A31 at Runfold. Work on the northern section – from the M3 Frimley interchange to North Camp – began in March 1992. About a year before that, Hampshire County Council drew up plans to rescue threatened wildlife. Consultants recommended capturing the small mammals, amphibians and reptiles and moving some to other parts of the Valley and others to safe compounds.

Over the next two years hundreds of small creatures were removed to safety from the paths of construction vehicles, whilst many plants were uprooted and re-planted elsewhere.

The road apart, the 1990s was a period of great activity. Spring 1992 saw the first edition of the **Blackwater Valley News**. In June 1993 the team moved to Ash Lock Cottage and the first Crazy Coot Challenge was held. In November 1993 the National Rivers Authority announced that improvements to the river's water quality was a priority. Staff continued working closely with local Planning Departments to ensure the Valley remained a Strategic Gap and that the best recreational and wildlife improvements were carried out. In 1999, after ten years with the team, Steve Bailey became Service Manager.

New millennium, new name

The new Millennium brought changes. The Sports Council stopped funding the sports project officer and funding in general was a problem, resulting in staff numbers decreasing. The Service underwent another name change becoming the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, reflecting its partnership working with other organisations, like the Wildlife Trusts and Environment Agency, as well as its local authority partners. Through hard work and careful negotiation the Partnership established a stable funding formula and the team numbers increased again as it took on site management work.

Throughout its history a visible public face has always been important and this continued. In 2001 the first issue of the **Blackwater Valley Path** book appeared. Subsequent publications included **Blackwater Valley Dragonflies** (2003), **Blackwater Valley Butterflies** (2005) and **Blackwater Valley Circular Walks** (2005). Embracing new technology a new website was launched in 2002.

Over the past three decades the nature and emphasis of the work carried out by the team has changed from getting people to use the Valley to specific site management, which forms the bulk of the current work. Steve believes that one of the team's many successes has been to develop and work on projects that have improved the Valley's

biodiversity.

"Perhaps the biggest change has been in and alongside the river. In the early days the river water was heavily polluted, and supported few fish, but as the team started promoting the path, the river and the new greenspaces so the public started to get involved."

A volunteer group known as the Water Walkers was established, they were asked to report any pollution incidents or problems along the river whenever they saw them. The raised public awareness no doubt focussed the attention of the newly formed Environment Agency, discharge standards to the river for waste water became tougher and pollution incidents decreased. BVCP and its partner organisations carried out many habitat improvements along the river, complementing the improved water quality.



Steve Bailey in the early 1990s

"... volunteer groups will provide our legacy for the future."

"The river is much healthier now, the fish numbers have improved dramatically and a major highlight has been Otters returning to the river catchment after a 50 year absence."

On reflection...

Despite having worked in the Valley for so many years Steve still has some unfinished jobs.

"Perhaps one of my biggest disappointments is the fact we have still not yet achieved the best route for the riverside footpath."

The proposed path route passes through a number of privately owned sites. Development proposals have been made for all these sites and landowners have agreed to create the path as part of their planning conditions. Unfortunately the developments have not gone ahead. It's out of our control but it's disappointing nevertheless.

The one achievement Steve is most proud of is the team's work developing volunteer conservation groups in the Valley.

"As well as our own conservation group, I'm very proud that we've managed to build up volunteer groups at Moor Green Lakes, Tongham Wood, Snaky Lane and the new group at Southwood Woodland. These groups will provide our legacy for the future."



The path at Frimley Hatches



At one time the river was badly contaminated



Industrial site backing onto the river



Tongham Wood past (inset) and present

The Valley on My Doorstep

THE BIG
30
Blackwater Valley
Countryside
Partnership
1977-2007



The path and river at Aldershot

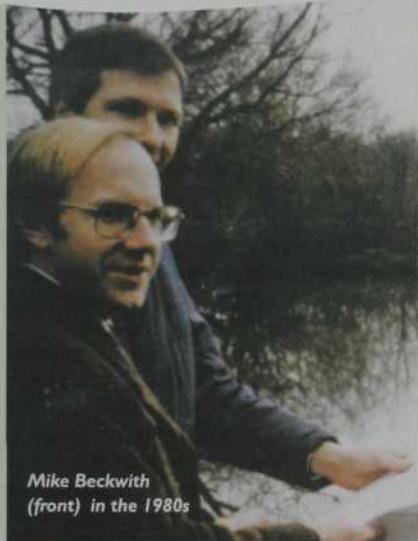
Wow! 30 years of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. It doesn't seem possible. Yet the Blackwater Valley has always been a part of my life. Growing up in Aldershot in the 1960s and 1970s I would often explore the nearby countryside, walking my dog or just having fun with my friends.

At that time the Basingstoke Canal was dry – we were warned not to play in the dry bed as there were reputed to be lots of adders nesting there. I never found out how true that was because my survival instinct kept me well away! Unlike the Canal, however, the Blackwater River always flowed. In fact wherever we went the river always seemed to be there and it was a source of great fascination to young boys.

But I mustn't paint too idyllic a picture. The river, which we've since got used to calling the Blackwater Valley, was a no man's land of rubbish tips and gravel pits, of breakers' yards and brambles. It was the forgotten edge of Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire. The place where all those things people don't want near them were put.

Era of tremendous growth

This was also the era, however, of tremendous housing growth throughout this area. The closest places to Greater London that could be developed were places like ours – just outside the Green Belt. People could increasingly work in London while living in the 'countryside'.



Mike Beckwith (front) in the 1980s

There was, and still is, a real threat that a new Blackwater Valley city could emerge, created through the gradual development of the countryside gaps.

Both of these factors – the dumping ground that the river valley had become, and the threat of rampant urbanisation - led to a new way of thinking 30 years ago, and thank heavens that people had the foresight to act when they did. The concept of the Blackwater River Valley was born!

Early objectives were to ensure that every council's planning strategy was coordinated so that we were all pushing in the same direction to achieve what we see today, while on the ground the creation of a path along the whole length of the river seemed an impossible ambition. Yet over the following ten years both of these objectives were substantially achieved under the leadership of the first manager of the Blackwater Valley Project – John Tickle, now head of Countryside at Hampshire County Council.

Popular objectives

The Partnership was created with every district and county council contributing an agreed share of the costs. It wasn't long before all four town councils in the Valley decided to add to this with voluntary contributions to help the Partnership achieve their extremely popular objectives.

Over those early years a number of former tips were gradually restored, and breakers' yards and gravel pits brought under tighter control. People started to enjoy the river valley in greater numbers, finding it changing from that unattractive, dirty place into a tranquil countryside haven. New recreation and sporting facilities appeared and the toughest obstacles to completing the riverside walk sorted out one by one.

Later on, an incident where a number of people developed rashes, after a raft race organised by the Mr Bumbles pub in Blackwater, led to an organised campaign to get the water quality of the river itself sorted out. During dry periods the majority of the water in the river is from the various sewage treatment works along the valley, carrying away our waste water into the Whitewater, then the Loddon and eventually the Thames.

This campaign, which was led by our second manager, Leigh Thornton, was very successful. Many volunteers got involved as Water Walkers. Mostly they were people who already regularly walked along a particular stretch of the valley, but what they all did was keep an eye out – for people dumping rubbish, for major pollution incidents and for anything else which would harm the quality of the river. This led to some successful prosecutions of serious polluters. After several years some major works were also carried out at the Camberley Sewage Treatment Works and two other sites were closed. The result was a dramatic improvement in water quality!



Adrian Collett in October 1993 opening the footbridge over the river and railway at Sandhurst

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING

Having completed 30 years as an officer at Guildford Borough Council in a number of different posts and having spent the majority of these years as the Council's officer representative with the Blackwater Valley, I must be one of the longest continuous serving reps.

Over these years I have seen the BVCP take ideas and proposed actions for separate pieces of land owned by different authorities, organisations and individuals and turn them into an area that is recognised and used by thousands of people. This could, in my view, only have been achieved by working in partnership and jointly engaging an extremely dedicated

team to ensure things actually happened.

The team has obviously changed over the last 30 years but the number of managers has been relatively few and even these are still involved with the Blackwater Valley in different ways. I'm sure this bears testimony to the love of the area that these managers and their equally loyal staff clearly show in all they do. I must be careful at this point as I don't want this to start sounding like an Oscar acceptance speech, but I really do feel this to be true.

There have also been many challenges over this period, one of the most major being the construction of the Blackwater Valley Road.

Special memories

Two particular incidents sum up this whole transformation for me. The first was when I suggested in the 1990s to my father, who still lived at the family home in North Town in Aldershot, that we take the dog for a walk along the river valley. He had spent many years avoiding the Blackwater River, remembering how awful the valley had been. He was astonished at how much things had changed and absolutely delighted!

The second was when we had a family friend from Japan staying with us. Her name is Ai and she was very keen to see all the sights – London, Windsor, Winchester, Stonehenge, The Cotswolds. But one morning she had a couple of hours to spare, so I suggested we go out and get some fresh air along the River Blackwater. She wasn't overly impressed with this idea, but she agreed that she hadn't seen much of the English countryside close up, so off we went.

We parked at Horseshoe Lake and walked along the river path. It was a warm summer's day and within a few minutes a pair of swans swam by. Then a gaggle of ducks appeared around the next bend, while some cormorants perched in the trees at Moor Green Lakes. Then we were particularly lucky to see a heron in the distance, waiting to catch a fish from the river. Ai was absolutely enchanted! It was time to return, but she said that if she had another gap in her schedule



Grey Heron



Adrian Collett (2nd left) at the opening of Hawley Meadow bridge in 2006

she'd like to explore the Blackwater Valley more. It had clearly made an impression!

In recent years funding of the Partnership has been a constant worry. Funding pressures faced by our constituent councils, combined, it has to be said, with a degree of complacency about the Blackwater Valley, has led to some challenging problems, which still face us. There is a real danger that the great progress that's been made could be lost, but there's also a widespread appreciation of just how much has been achieved and a determination to make sure that we don't only maintain that but go on to face new challenges, such as developing more leisure and recreational facilities; enabling better access to the valley, particularly for people with disabilities; fighting the regular threats from developers, who'd build on every blade of grass if they could, and looking after the path and the other facilities that we now have.

Enthusiasm and dedication

We have always been blessed with particularly enthusiastic and dedicated staff and now is no exception. We have a great team, led by the dynamic duo of Steve Bailey and Sue Dent, who are steering us through these difficult times brilliantly. We have also been blessed over the years with an astonishing army of volunteers, who do tremendous work throughout the valley every week of the year. Without them many of the tasks just would not get done and the Valley would be much the poorer place for that. Another group of volunteers has formed the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust, led by Dave Pilkington,

which seeks funding to tackle a different range of projects that would not otherwise happen.

I know that my predecessor as chair of the Partnership, former County Councillor Dudley Keep, shared my enthusiasm for the Blackwater Valley. We are both very aware of how the Blackwater Valley has embedded itself in the hearts of many over the past 30 years – leading to this enormous volume of voluntary involvement.

The future...

The future will clearly involve an increased role for the Valley in local lives as the pressures on the Thames Basin Heathlands, which are the habitats of three rare species of ground-nesting birds – the Dartford Warbler, the Nightjar and the Woodlark – mean that alternative places are sought for people to enjoy the countryside and walk their dogs. The challenge will be to make sure that the Blackwater Valley can meet this need while continuing to improve and provide that vital haven which we can all retreat to from time to time.

The record of the past 30 years shows that this can be done, and that there is widespread support and affection for the Blackwater Valley. We must go forward, therefore, with optimism that what has been achieved so far is just the start. The best is yet to come!

Adrian Collett

Chair, Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership Members' Group



Moor Green Lakes

FORWARD

Again, as the Partnership was in place with such a knowledgeable team, I'm sure this helped to ensure that a number of benefits for nature conservation and recreation were achieved from what could have been an extremely damaging project. A number of sites were enhanced for flora and fauna as mitigation measures, new connecting foot/cycle paths were constructed and even an artificial bat cave built. However, one of the most noticeable things to show the value and status of the Partnership was when the coot logo was placed on bridges over the new road.

Another important plus for the Valley has been the work by the Partnership Team



The Coot logo on one of the bridges

with private landowners, especially regarding mineral extraction sites. Without the trust and rapport built up over the years the full range of benefits for site restoration may not have been achieved. This partnership also extends to site maintenance.

There are many other important aspects I could mention such as volunteer working and publicity through website and other forms of communication, but I have probably already written too much...

Even though a huge amount has already been achieved for the Valley, there are still many more worthwhile things that can be done and challenges to overcome. As the current Chair of the Officers' Group I would just like to encourage all those involved with the Partnership to think back for themselves on how valuable the BVCP has been and to do all they can to ensure it continues.

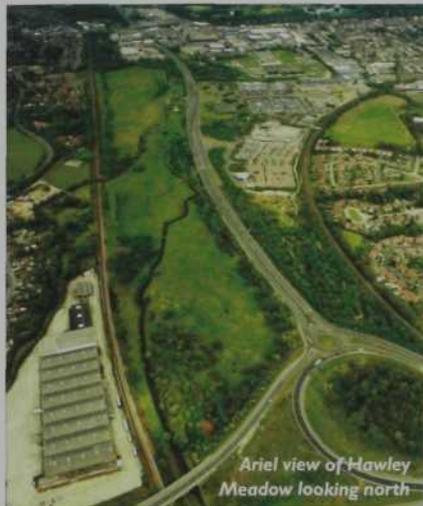
Mike Beckwith

Chair, Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership Officers' Group

THE RIVER BLACKWATER

... naturally by design

When a section of the Blackwater River through Hawley Meadow had to be constructed to make way for the new road everything was not as simple as it seemed.



Aerial view of Hawley Meadow looking north

At one time nature's design would have been replaced with an 'improved' straight and deep channel, but these have proved devastating for wildlife and hopeless at preventing flooding so that more recently river engineers have turned back to nature for inspiration. The National Rivers Authority (NRA) and the Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC) have jointly sponsored research by a team led by Professor Robert Sellin, of Bristol University, to come up with a design for the new section of the Blackwater River.

River flooding in Britain causes millions of pounds worth of damage every year so there is quite an incentive to come up with a design that will help reduce the problem. The SERC Flood Channel Facility (FCF) at HR Wallingford Ltd has formed the focus for river hydraulics research in Britain since 1985 and it has now been used to come up with a solution for the Blackwater.

In its natural state a river normally constructs for itself a channel capable of carrying a flood flow that reaches the top of the river bank about once a year. Anything more than this flow will result in flooding of the surrounding area. This is a natural process which, while providing fertile land for agriculture and good deposits for mineral extraction, is not compatible with the more recent trend in the Valley for residential and commercial development.

Where there is significant developments in the floodplain, river engineers are required to provide a channel that floods only once every 50 years. The result is an oversized channel requiring continuous maintenance to ensure

it remains free of silt and does the job it's designed for.

To get round this problem engineers have followed the lead given by nature and adopted a two-stage channel design. In this case the river is 'allowed to do its natural thing' within a narrowed and deepened floodplain.

The inner river channel probably floods once every six months instead of 50 years but the water is contained within the new floodplain. The advantages are that a whole range of environmental objectives can be met at the same time, the river retains its natural shape (which is largely self-maintaining) and its value to wildlife. The problem is that the natural design is hard to recreate because of the complicated hydraulics involved.

This is where the Flood Channel Facility comes into its own. The facility is large enough for an undistorted model scale of one-fifth natural size to be constructed, which is rare in a river models, and minimises the uncertainty of scale effects.

The design criteria for the new section of the River Blackwater included the provision of a good habitat for suitable plant and animal species (especially fish and birds) and a river corridor that enhances the visual environment and is accessible for compatible leisure uses.

With the model it was possible to try out the effect of various design features on the river flow, such as shallow depressions in the river bed intended to provide pools for fish at times of low flow.

The floodplain area has also been designed to provide a firm dry surface at a higher level for maintenance vehicles while, at the same time, encouraging the development of marsh conditions on the margin of the inner channel.

Now that the new section has been constructed the work is not over. For the next four years the river will be monitored and the results of tests will be compared with those from the model to see how accurate the predictions were. If the exercise is a success the River Blackwater will be leading the way in 'natural' river engineering.

This article first appeared in the Science & Engineering Council's 1994 Summer Bulletin.



Hawley Meadow in flood



From August 1991 to August 1999 I was Manager of what was then the Blackwater Valley Recreation and Countryside Management Service. The Service was set up to build on the work of the original Blackwater Valley Project as a permanent body to promote the Valley and continue a programme of enhancements, events and opportunities.

I came to the Valley from working in Kings Cross for London Wildlife Trust, so the big open spaces were really exciting! I recall at interview being taken up to Moor Green Lakes (which was still being worked) and thinking wow!

The Team at the time consisted of myself, dry witted Yorkshireman Alan Williams (Sports and Recreation Manager), passionate and dedicated Tim Morton (Promotions Manager), super efficient Jackie Steele (Information), massively enthusiastic Sue Tullett (Ranger) and the one and only Steve Bailey as Countryside Manager.

We were based in a Portakabin within Rushmoor's Council Depot on what is now Sycamore Park. A salubrious setting to say the least, where windsurfer and bat box rubbed shoulders with bin lorry and gritter.

Planning

A lot of the work was around planning and forward thinking, development of wildlife habitat, running sports promotional events and activities, marketing and promotion of what the Valley has to offer and – of course – work on the Blackwater Valley Road. Work was due to start on this imminently and a lot of time went into mitigation measures including snake and lizard rescues. Sue was taken on full time to carry out this work and then continue as Wildlife Liaison throughout the road construction. A lot of heavy landscaping had taken place in the Valley around Hollybush Park through to Frimley Hatches (much of which disappeared under the Road) where old tips had been capped off and landscaped and some of the lakes brought in to alternative use. Future works were already being negotiated around proposed gravel extraction in the north and south of the Valley. I recall how in 1991,



Lakeside Nature Reserve in the 1980s...



Turf cutting ceremony at Watchmoor Park 1995 showing Adrian Collett (left next to) Leigh Thornton

MANAGING CHANGE

THE BIG
30
Blackwater Valley
Countryside Partnership
1991 - 1999



talking about projects due to complete in 2001 seemed so far away...

We produced regular newsletters (in the pre-internet days) and tried to make these with popular appeal to reach the great non-initiated. We adopted Sunday Sport style headlines including 'Inch High Alien Choked my Goldfish' and 'Army Finds Tank in River'. We certainly got good feedback from this approach and I like to think it worked.

On the move

In around 1994 the Team moved to Ash Lock Cottages, vacated by the Canal Authority as the new Canal Visitor Centre opened. It was attractive, plenty of space, rustic and all those things... but boy was it cold in winter. However it was ours and has been the actual and spiritual base for the Team ever since. It became very much a home for our volunteers too. I am sure their superb efforts will be amply praised elsewhere, but I recall some wonderful people being involved - Hugh Warren, Eric Hood, Gill Alexander, Edie Cripps who did the newspaper clippings, Greg Nuthall, Terry Sadler, Gabby McGarvey and her three young daughters and of course dear old Gerry Stanley, the namesake of Gerry's Copse.

Some staff came and went. Roselyne Skeffington arrived as Visitor Promotions Manager, Tony Anderson joined up as Ranger, and then additionally Amanda Simpson, as contract work on the BV road developed.

For a brief time we had our own Visitor Centre at Frimley Business Park. This was a

well meant bit of Planning gain, but in the end, 'we was robbed' as they say (but I didn't, of course).

Creating new habitats

Our work in the Valley continued to develop, and whilst every year the budget got cut, we seemed to keep moving forward. We were instrumental in getting Horseshoe Lake Watersports Centre up and running, along with the complex of lakes around Moor Green and Blackwater Valley Leisure. Hawley Meadow was taken on board and a conservation management plan put in place. Fabulous new habitats were created in Lakeside Park and surrounds, we got a new surfaced path all along the relief road, new sections of footpath throughout the Valley, recorded new species appearing for the first time, or re-appearing after many years... the list goes on and on, with much of the work being innovative and leading edge, nationally.

We also held big events such as the Kite Festival at Aldershot Park and the Crazy Coot Challenge triathlon using the BV Path, Canal and Ash Ranges. These were great fun, good for raising the profile and for getting people out and about.

Continuing involvement

I moved on from the Valley - not far - to the Basingstoke Canal, then on to Kent County Council for a few years. But the draw of the Valley was too much! I am now back locally as Green Space Manager at Surrey Heath, so I'm

really pleased to continue my involvement.

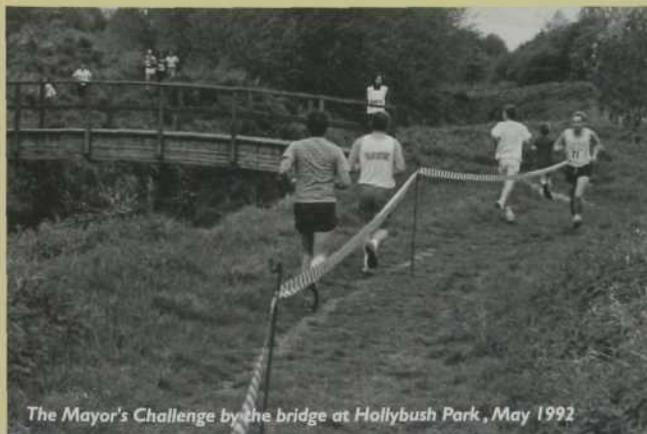
But the best thing is going out with my three children to Horseshoe Lake sailing, Moor Green with binoculars, biking along a bit of BV footpath or admiring the cowslips along the side of the Relief Road and telling them 'we did that'.

Leigh Thornton

Manager of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership 1991 - 1999



... Lakeside Nature Reserve today.



The Mayor's Challenge by the bridge at Hollybush Park, May 1992



Ranger, Sue Tullett, known as The Lizard Lady

"... the Blackwater Valley has embedded itself in the hearts of many over the past 30 years ..."



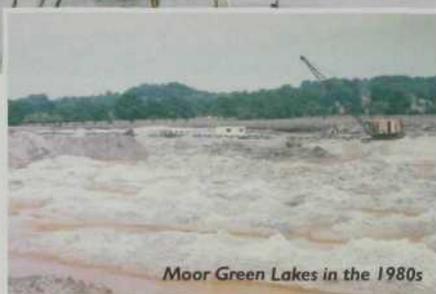
Moor Green Lakes today

WANTED! Your pictures and memories

Can you remember what the Blackwater Valley was like 30 or even 50 years ago? Do you have any pictures of what the Valley looked like before the road was built? If you have lived in the area all your life perhaps you have a personal memory of visiting the river

or seeing some wildlife. Whatever it is we would like to hear from you.

As part of our 30th anniversary celebrations we would like to build up an archive of written, visual and verbal memories. If you can help please send them to us at the address



Moor Green Lakes in the 1980s

below marking your envelope 'Memories' or ring Christine Reeves on 01252 331353.

SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE

Councillors and planners usually get a bad press. So what a pleasure to be celebrating the 30th birthday of an outstanding project that was started back in 1979, due to the vision and foresight of our local councillors and planners.

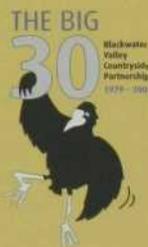
Thanks to the commitment and hard work of all those involved, including many, many local volunteers, the Valley has been transformed. Those who knew it in the 60s

and 70s will remember it as a blot on the landscape. Littered with old gravel workings and shabby backyard industries, it was a graveyard for old cars and seemed to be the place where everyone went to tip their rubbish. There was little or no public access and most people locally were ashamed of it. And they were right to be.

What a transformation. It is now an area

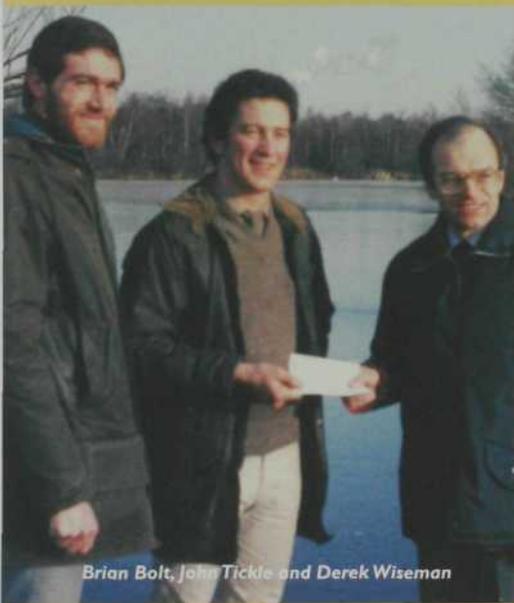
to be proud of. We have a riverside path, more than 20 miles long, country parks, nature reserves and a host of leisure facilities. Thousands of local people enjoy these every year. It is an area for quiet strolls and contemplation, vigorous exercise, school projects and nature conservation. The Valley really is the green lung for the busy urban area around it.

This success reflects the hard work of the project team. It is invidious to pick out individuals, but those I have worked with closely included a succession of inspirational and dedicated managers, such as John Tickle, Lisa Creaye, Leigh Thornton and Steve Bailey. They have been supported by many others. We must not forget the massive contribution of scores of local volunteers, all of whom have given their time to help create the Blackwater Valley that we love, enjoy and are rightly proud of.

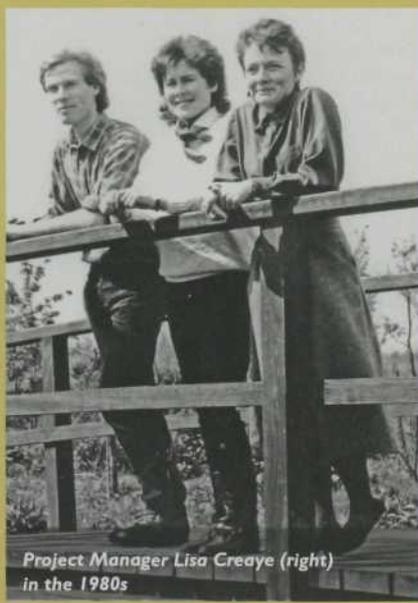


John Edwards
Director of Community and Environment
Rushmoor Borough Council

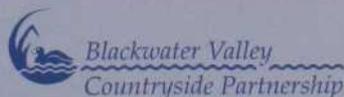
John Edwards joined Rushmoor Borough Council in 1987 as Head of Planning Policy. His job involved overseeing the Blackwater Valley Project when it was first set up and John Tickle, the first project manager, reported to him.



Brian Bolt, John Tickle and Derek Wiseman



Project Manager Lisa Creaye (right) in the 1980s



The Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership comprises Hampshire County Council, Surrey County Council, and the District, Borough and Town Councils of Blackwater & Hawley, Farnham, Guildford, Hart, Rushmoor, Sandhurst, Surrey Heath, Waverley, Wokingham and Yateley.