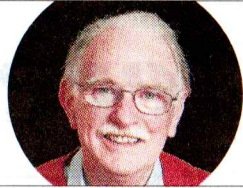


Horsham Society

Oliver Farley



Horsham's secret waterway

How many towns or cities do we know by their rivers? The Danube and the Seine, Vienna and Paris? Towns owe their position and their importance often to the fact that they straddle a river, reflecting the historic importance of rivers as transport facilitators for miles and miles. Long before modern days, people depended on rivers for the arrival of goods from far away and the dispersal of their own surplus produce to other markets. For centuries, rivers have been the highways of continents.

Has Horsham missed out? The town is not built along a river bank, no graceful bridges are reflected in swirling waters and no wharfs, docks or quays testify to by-gone commerce. But we have a river, and a really valued one too. The river snakes down from the forest and coils around the south of the town, almost protectively, before it meanders off to Barns Green where it decides its fate in a southern turn and heads eventually for the sea. It starts up in St. Leonard's in Hawkins Pond which most of us know as the first hammer pond we come to travelling east along Hammerpond Road towards Buck's Head. It has an 84 kilometre



Amberley Wildbrooks. ©Deirdre Huston/Sussex Wildlife Trust

course from here to Littlehampton, linking on the way with the Rother which is of a size with the Arun, starting way to the west beyond Petersfield.

Oddly enough, many of us are more familiar with our home river in its appearance further south than we are locally. We know about the tidal rushes that push the river backwards, the importance of the river for Amberley Wildbrooks and the Arundel wildfowl reserve, yet we could spare a thought now and then to the origins of these waters and the imperative to keep

the sources clean. All too easily pollutants are carried into the stream, from industrial waste, to carelessly disposed domestic oil or excess fertilizers from farms. Accumulated waste products soon build up to damaging proportions and none of us want to see the lower river, or indeed any of it, awash with dead fish.

The responsible body for waterways in these parts is the southern regional office of the Environment Agency, which also oversees regulations for air and land use. Nationally, the Agency manages 36,000

km of rivers and 5,000 km of coastline which puts our little stream in context. It commands substantial funding too with a budget of £585 million, three quarters of which comes from its own earnings.

Of course we do our own bit too and not least is keeping a watchful eye on the river and its condition. We even walk all round it and the town at least once a year, and this year it's arranged for Saturday 15th of July. The walk starts at 10.00am at Horsham Rugby Club, Hammerpond Road. Further details are available on the website: horsham.community/2017-annual-riverside-walk.

Do come along and enjoy our secret asset. It flows along so temptingly that there's surely time to investigate just around the next corner, that flowing bend, the curve ahead, the twist beyond that ... and so on to the sea.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 259038.