

PRESS RELEASE

REDISCOVERING SURREY'S FORGOTTEN WILDERNESS



New exhibition explores our heathland history

A new exhibition called 'Change on the Heath – Rediscovering Surrey's Forgotten Wilderness' comes to Reigate Heath from 25 June to 8 July. Produced by the Surrey Heathland Project, it explores how Surrey's heathland landscape has changed, along with the lives of the people who have lived and worked on it.

Surrey's heaths are well known for being home to rare wildlife. They also provide areas for recreation and places for people to experience something approaching wilderness – a rare thing in southeast England in the 21st Century. However, until relatively recently they were vital parts of everyday life for local people, providing fuel, food, building materials and a place to graze animals.

“Over the last 200 years our lives have changed out of all recognition, but few of us are aware that these changes are reflected in our heathland landscape,” said Dr Rob McGibbon, manager of the Surrey Heathland Project. Although heathland appears wild and natural, it developed largely as a result of people's actions, and continues to be intrinsically linked to our economy and lifestyle today. As people's use of the heaths has changed, so has the landscape.

One of the few remaining fragments of heathland in East Surrey is Reigate Heath which has a rich history ranging from Bronze Age barrows, public hangings, cattle fairs to horse-racing. To the majority of people who enjoy it today, the area is synonymous with the 50ha of common land owned by Reigate & Banstead Borough Council within which lie Reigate Heath Golf Club and the Mill Church. Designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserve for its heathland and acid grassland, the Heath is important not only for wildlife but for a great many other things. Many people visit the area for its fine views of the North Downs and the local landscape.

Come and discover this important part of our heritage at the cricket pavilion on Reigate Heath, Flanchford Road, Reigate from 25 June – 8 July. For further information visit www.surreyheathlandproject.org.uk, or ring 020 8541 9149.

Notes:

The Surrey Heathland Project carries out work to restore and manage heathland in Surrey and part of Berkshire, with support and funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and partners including the RSPB, English Nature and Surrey County Council.

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