

Friends of Coombe Wood



Newsletter 44
Autumn/Winter 2021

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From your Chairman

The Friends of Coombe Wood are keeping up their vigilance and protection of the woods and their activities can be seen by looking at the minutes of the committee meetings which are recorded on the website. The outcome of the two enforcement orders outlined in previous newsletters is still awaited from Castle Point Borough Council. We have not recently planned any litter picks but are very happy that some voluntary litter pickers have been to Coombe Wood. We are also grateful to the person who has wiped the green off the acrylic display covers on some of the notice boards. It is worth featuring the new bridge over the stream that was not installed by Friends of Coombe Wood (below).

The autumn provides us with a different way of



studying the trees of the wood where normally so much is above our heads in the canopy that we cannot see exactly what species we have. But when the autumn comes it seems as though all the information is falling down with the leaves to the forest floor. Just by looking at the leaves we can get a very much better impression of the different types of tree and their frequency. A lot of the woodland is covered with the leaves of the Hornbeam, perhaps the most common tree in the wood.

Near the foot of the sandy hill we call the Kop,



where the Sweet Chestnut trees grow I was surprised

By Gwyn Jordan

to see a lot of more or less circular whitish yellow leaves mixed up with some of the Sweet Chestnut leaves (right). Initially I thought I had discovered an Aspen tree but on looking around I recognised the deeply fissured bark of a very tall tree that was actually a different kind of Poplar probably a hybrid Poplar. There are several tall Poplars in Coombe Wood and they grow perhaps to be as tall as any of the trees in the wood, there are one or two of them



growing along the sides of the stream or brook that runs through the wood. These are all male trees which are much more common than the female. I found one female tree growing on the opposite side



of Bread and Cheese Hill in Glen Road. The female catkins are very distinctive being like large hairy white caterpillars whereas the male are like reddish non furry caterpillars the red coming from their anthers. I also noticed near the Poplar leaves a

few reddish and orange leaves on the forest floor (above), these are an indicator of a cherry tree. On looking around I saw the trunks of both the Poplar and a nearby Cherry (right), but these trees were first noticed by seeing their fallen leaves. Leaves initially fall in a fairly fresh



state although they have generally lost their green colour and they soon shrivel and form part of the leaf litter on the forest floor but the fresh fallen leaves show us the outlines of the leaf shapes and their autumn colours.



Studying the fallen leaves is an interesting activity during the autumn woodland, maybe we will all be able to brush up our identification of the trees on the woodland floor.

Epping forest is renowned for its great display of fallen Beech leaves giving the

famous copper coloured carpet. But we can enjoy our

own though smaller display from a small stand of Beech at the southern end of Bridle Way 58 (left) on its northern side just before it reaches Rhoda Road North. This group of Beech also shows some encouraging natural regeneration, maybe indicating there will be more beech in the future in Coombe Wood.



In the more central area of the Wood, if a few fallen leaves are brushed away, it is easy to see the many germinating Bluebell seeds. (left) They germinate just as the temperature drops and remain suspended in this state till early in January when they send out shoots and start getting established.

The Woodland Trust

The Woodland Trust has been in existence for many years. I have been a member for over 25 years, and enjoyed many of their local woods. They also provide information regarding other woods in our area, maintained and managed by other organisations. More of that later.

Woodland Trust is a charitable trust, dependent upon its members who pay a monthly amount (variable – you pay what you want). It also receives donations to help it in its work which is centred on Planting, Restoring, Protecting and Maintaining the woods it is responsible for, currently in excess of 1,000 woods nationwide.

Locally, the Woodland Trust is responsible for Wheatley Wood in Rayleigh, Swan/Cygnets Wood at Stock and Paddock Copse, Canewdon.

Their website provides information about local woods, by accessing Woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/find-woods. This covers woods managed or

A Plotland History

The woods today comprise mostly the undeveloped parts of the old Coombe Wood Estate that was sold off as plotland before the first world war; the old plotlands map is reproduced here. With typical plots at 20 feet wide by some 200 feet deep I guess the marketing ploy was to sell you two or more adjacent plots for your mansion in the woods — we don't know how much a plot cost. The estate was bounded on the east by The Main Road, now Kenneth Road, and to the north it ended at the rear of the gardens of the houses on the north side of Coombe Wood Drive. Beyond them was the Vicarage Grounds now occupied by Kingston Way, Fox Meadows, the clinic, Kingston Primary School and the Church field *etc.* To the south it stretched to Bread and Cheese Hill. These boundaries can easily

By Peter Hughes

owned by Castle Point, Southend, Rochford, Essex Wildlife Trust, Basildon plus some privately owned woods. Interestingly, Coombe Wood does not feature, despite there being other privately owned woods on the list, nor does Belfairs.

In this area of Essex we are lucky to have such a large number and variety of woods on our doorstep. I am sure many of you have already visited most of these, but there may be a few you did not know about.

A visit to any of these is worthwhile, although my personal favourites are Thundersley Glen/Shipwrights Wood, West Wood, Hockley Woods and Swan/Cygnets Woods, especially when the bluebells are out, plus of course our own Coombe Wood.

I hope you will take advantage of these facilities, and if you feel inclined to join the Woodland Trust the website will assist. Members receive regular communications, including a magazine called *Broadleaf*.

By Terry Isherwood

be found today. The western boundary is harder to find as it is bit wavy but starting at Rhoda Road North, the first part from Bread and Cheese Hill to the start of the houses on the eastern side of Rhoda Road North is somewhere in the woods, the boundary from thereon is in the existing housing development. Eventually most of the flattish plots, like those adjoining Kenneth Road and in Thundersley Grove, were built on, although most of the current housing is post WW2.

Studying the old plotlands map for Coombe Wood Estate shows what was envisioned. I guess they expected dwellings to be erected on most of the plots, a proper housing estate, but I wonder whether this was ever practical given the steepness of the slopes.



Notice how Coombewood Drive and Lake Drive were going to carry on eventually curving south to emerge on Bread and Cheese Hill. Lake Drive would have followed the direction of the existing unmade byway turning left at the end of Lake Drive, down the slope and straight on across the stream and up the other side to emerge on Bread and Cheese Hill alongside the bungalow opposite Wheelers restaurant, where there is still a dropped kerb. Coombewood Drive would have carried along what is now the made-up bridleway to emerge onto Bread and Cheese Hill opposite Catherine Road, where there is now a steel hoop. A new road, Waggon Hill, was to spring from bottom end of Coombewood Drive and go north following the wavy edge of the estate. Today the gardens of the properties in Rhoda Road North include the western Waggon Hill plots and come up to meet the edge of Waggon Hill.

The people who laid out the estate for development had some grand ideas, at least on paper. Plot 249 on the corner of Kenneth Road was for a hotel; it is now part of the Thundersley Congregational Church site. Notice that the 15 foot carriage way/right of way running from the hotel site to Coombe Kop behind the plots bordering Bread and Cheese Hill has been lost over time. From there, plots 248 thru

226 stretching down the hill were for shops. (Shops on the map are given a background of dirty yellow.) Whilst we are on shops, Coombewood Drive was to have a parade of shops at the Kenneth Road end, plots 22 thru 35 on one side and 329 thru 341 on the other. More shops were planned at the junction of Coombewood Drive and Waggon Hill including an off license, plots 386 thru 391, 157 thru 176 and plots 77 thru 86 — a proper shopping centre that!

Notice plots A thru E being designated as Garden Sites, I am guessing allotments. The main brook wanders down as now to end in a pond where the current concrete culvert is. This was a flood prevention scheme in the 1960's, I think, the brook being piped under Rhoda Road North.

So what happened is conjecture, really. We have not been able to find out how many plots were actually sold and, since there was no land registry then, there is no public central record of the sales. The turmoil after the first world war could well have left families unaware of their deeds and the plots just forgotten. Someone, somewhere has got the deeds. However, as a Village Green, it is protected in perpetuity against development for us to enjoy.

The Margin of the Wood

By Gwyn Jordan

When the spring flowers of the woodland fade away with the darkening of the canopy, woodlands can show beautiful arrays of wildflowers at the margin where the light is not shaded out. However, we still have some Wild Honeysuckle in the woods where a little light gets through, sometimes by the paths.



But the flowers that grow by the side of bread and cheese hill on the edge of the wood provide an interesting and varied display. We have a yellow "ribbon" of the Oxford Ragwort running much of the way along this border.



This flower is interesting for the way that it has fanned out though the country following the major roads. It is a variant of the more regular form of Ragwort a familiar site in wild meadowland. It has a looser, less stout form and has small dark points to



the bud scales below the flowers for which a magnifying glass is useful for identification.

Another interesting flower that spreads on the wind and which is seen on the verge is the purple Salsify, (a relative of the yellow Goatsbeard).



This is a striking flower which on close inspection shows the curly stigmas which have pushed their way up the tubular anthers revealing the pollen . This is a common mechanism in the Aster family which includes the Dandelion, again a flower worth getting a magnifying lens on.

