

# Friends of Coombe Wood

Newsletter 46,  
Winter 2022



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## From your Chairman

Sometimes I wonder if it would be good to have a bench in the woods, but then we have the question as to the best location, for much of the pleasure of a stroll in the woods arises from the changes of the scene. I often recall these words:

“When through the woods and forest glades I wander, and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees”

and then I have to concentrate for it is easy to miss the song of the birds through simply not listening carefully. The Blue Tits are regular “chirpers” flitting about in the canopy, foraging among the higher branches. I thought I recognised the high-pitched squeaks of one in the northern part of the Wood and stopped and stood still until I had a clear view and this confirmed my identification made merely



through the song. I went back with Trevor Coates and photographed them and confirmed the identification.

No two days in the Wood are the same, the light, the weather, the season and the variable terrain and different types of trees make for regular pleasure, even in the twilight when we are most likely to see foxes, badgers or hear the owls. The unfailing pleasure of a stroll in Coombe Wood brings to mind the lines from my favourite poet reflecting on the scenes accompanying his daily walks near Olney.

## Gwyn Jordan

“Scenes must be beautiful which daily viewed  
Please daily, and whose novelty survives  
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years.”

From *The Task* by William Cowper.

A typical view of the woods today (Wednesday, 26 October 2022 at 12.58) is shown in the photo below.

I was intrigued that my phone also recorded that the location was “Middle Valley, West Bank, 64 Rhoda Rd N, South Benfleet SS7 3EH” it is approximately half way along the Bridle Way



No 58 and I think “East Bank” might have been more accurate or even the words “Coombe Wood” but the location information given by phone cameras is quite amazing.

If we had higher definition data it could be useful for us to “map the whole Wood” for confirmation of boundaries and also for posterity.



# Trees better seen from outside the wood

*by Gwyn Jordan*



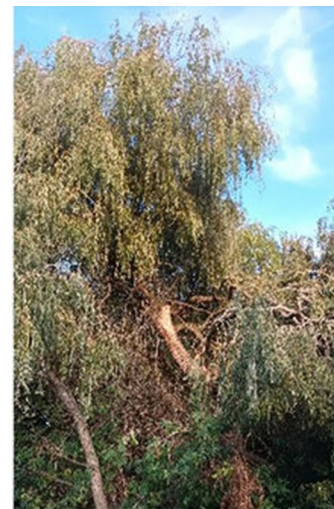
Ash



Oak



Chestnut



Weeping Willow

A tree standing in splendid isolation in the open shows a very different appearance from one surrounded by competitors in the wood. With this in mind I purposely walked along the outside of the Wood down Bread and Cheese Hill and along Rhoda Road North. The trees give a different indication of their sizes and their form from such a view.

Hornbeam, though perhaps the commonest tree in the Wood, does not make a good showing from the side of the Wood alongside the Bread and Cheese Hill. The hornbeam is the dominant tree in the bluebell area in the inner wood (below) and shows how the trunks are so much more clearly visible from within the Wood.



## What has been happening in the wood?

What has been happening in the Wood? Or to the Wood? Well, not a lot since the last newsletter.

There have been a number of planning issues affecting the Wood. The incursion into the Wood by the owners of 445 London Road is currently with the Planning Inspectorate. The Council issued an order to the owners requiring them to restore the fence to the original boundaries. The occupiers appealed to the Planning Inspectorate against this. The Friends submitted evidence in February this year to the Inspectorate supporting the Council and countering the owners' submission. This is now where it stands. The Inspectorate has made no decision as yet.

There is currently nothing in the Council's web page for Planning Information for other properties adjacent to the Wood on Lake Drive or on the London Road.

**by John Rostron**

Some time ago, the owner of the property at the end of Lake Drive and adjacent to the Wood erected a post-and-rail fence around his property. He had planning permission to erect a fence, but the Friends of Coombe Wood have maintained that the fence is outside his boundary, notably along the bridleway, and encroaches into the Village Green as shown in the Village Green documents. We have taken this up with the owner, and with the Council, but to no avail. We do get the impression that the Council is reluctant to pursue this case.

We could pursue this further, but we believe that this would have to be through the courts. We also believe that the owner would maintain his position as the owner of the land under dispute and would be willing to defend the matter in the courts. Were we to do this we could incur costs of several thousand pounds, even if we should win.



We are therefore proposing to our members that we raise this matter at the Annual General Meeting in January with a resolution whether to proceed with this matter or not.

## The Coombe Wood Elms

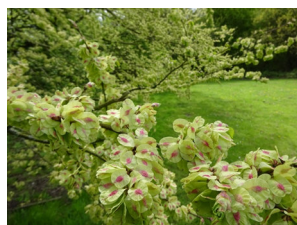


Although Dutch Elm Disease, a fungal disease spread by bark beetles, has devastated our native elms, Coombe Wood may be providing a haven for some recovery. There are different types of elm, the number depending on whose classification you follow. Some specialists have described over sixty species but others recognise only two or three. (see Brian Eversham, *Elms, etc.*, the Wildlife Trust BCN) The latest DNA studies show that many of the different varieties are in fact members of the same species. I think we are safe to say that there are three different species or types. The classic old English Elm was the main fatality resulting from the Dutch Elm disease. These are the great trees so characteristic of John Constable's paintings that graced Thundersley up to the 60's and 70's. This type of elm still grows extensively along the margin of the wood especially alongside the

**By Gwyn Jordan**

A13, but the trees succumb to the disease when they are about 20 feet high and around 15 years old. However, Coombe Wood has many elms growing deep within the Wood especially a good stand on the Northern bank of the main stream about 70 yards from that stream and roughly the same distance from the Eastern boundary.

The picture to the left shows a stand of elms growing well. One has lost its top and has probably succumbed to the Dutch Elm disease but the others are strong and healthy and they are producing seed as evidenced from fallen winged seeds in the leaf litter. It is difficult to see the reproductive structures up in the canopy



but the seed is easily seen in the group of elms near the school just outside the Wood on the Eastern border of the Church field.

The seeds are large and appear very early and correspond to what we should call the Wych Elm. The leaves confirm this identification though there is a very large variety of leaf sizes and degree of serration as seen in the fallen leaves.

It appears that the Wych Elm is more resistant to the Dutch Elm disease and it is also possible that we have in Coombe Wood a resistant variety of this Wych Elm that could eventually lead, in time, a rather long time, to the recovery of the great English Elms which characterised our countryside. It is good to think that our Village Green may be helping in the possible recovery from this Dutch Elm disease. Apart from the English Elm, and the Wych Elm, another reasonably distinct type is the Smooth-leaved Elm. I have seen a good specimen of this on Two Tree Island near the skate park but it is the only specimen of this that I know of locally. I

include a photograph of characteristic leaves to show their shape and relative size.



## Those Autumn Leaves

At this time of year, two features of trees are apparent. Firstly, the leaves change colour and secondly they fall off.

Changing colour is a feature of all of our deciduous trees. They lose the green, and begin to show various shades of yellow, red and brown. The original green colour is the pigment chlorophyll, important in the process whereby carbon dioxide from the air is converted to sugars. Chlorophyll is a large and complex molecule and it is worthwhile for the tree to break it down and recycle its component carbon content to store in other parts of the tree. The other pigments giving the reds, browns and yellows are less complex and it is not worthwhile for the tree to recycle these, so they remain in the leaf.

Autumn leaf fall (or dehiscence) is a feature of the temperate zone, where we live. For any tree, there is a trade-off between keeping the leaves alive through the winter, which takes energy, and shedding them in autumn after absorbing any useful components (such as chlorophyll). Note that after the leaves are shed and fall to the ground, they are subject to decomposition by soil organisms and leaching by rain. Thus many useful organic compounds and minerals are washed into the soil and are made available to the tree in the spring.

## Christmas Trees

Here are a few short notes about some trees particularly associated with Christmas, though none of these are found in Coombe Wood!

Christmas Trees are not native to Britain. They are usually Norway Spruce, commonly grown as trees for timber. The small trees we buy at Christmas are the thinnings from the extensive plantations in many upland parts of Britain.

## Annual General Meeting

Our next Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday January 5<sup>th</sup> in the St George's church small hall, where we had it last year, at 7.30 pm. I will be sending out an agenda and the minutes of the last AGM by email. I will also have copies of these available at the meeting.

There will also be a motion whether to initiate legal proceedings against the owner of the fence as mentioned above.

Don't forget that annual subscriptions of £5 are now

The first Christmas Tree at home is often attributed to Prince Albert who imported Spruce from his native Saxony for Christmases in the royal household at Osborne House in the Isle of Wight in 1840. However, Queen Charlotte is said to have imported a Christmas tree for Christmas at Windsor as early as 1800.

## Frankincense and Myrrh

These were two of the traditional gifts brought by the Magi to the nativity. But what are Frankincense and Myrrh? Both are obtained from certain shrubs and trees that grow in semi-arid regions. These trees produce gums, which arise when the tree is injured. The sap from the outer wood (sapwood) flows outward and sets as a resin. This resin is harvested and dried. The trees themselves are deliberately slashed to encourage further flow of the gum and thence the resin.

These resins have a slightly bitter taste and are said to have antiseptic properties. They are used widely in the drier parts of the old world for chewing, mouthwashes and salves for healing wounds. Frankincense is used today as an incense by burning it in a thurible (or censer), but was more widely used in biblical times for ritual purposes. Myrrh today is mostly used dissolved in oils as an unguent and aromatic.

These resins are not all that expensive today compared with gold (about £65 to £120 per kilogram for these resins) and one could guess that the price in biblical times was, like today, much less than that of gold. So why bring gifts of Frankincense and Myrrh to the nativity?

Biblical scholars argue that they were symbolic. These resins were widely used then in religious ceremonies. Gold would symbolise monarchy or high office, Frankincense would symbolise deity and myrrh would symbolise death.

by John Rostron

due. The best way of subscribing is by Bank Transfer. The *Sort Code* is **20-25-25**; the *Account Number* is **63847071**; the *Account Name* is **T Isherwood**; for *Payment Reference*, enter your name and the year. Use the link to our Subscribe webpage to tell us. If you cannot use BACS, then please send cash or a cheque (made out to T. Isherwood) to the Treasurer at 28 Thundersley Grove, Benfleet SS7 3EB.

