

Friends of Coombe Wood

Newsletter 47,
Winter 2023



Chairman: Gwyn Jordan
Treasurer: Terry Isherwood
Secretary: John Rostron

Annual General Meeting

January 2023

The Annual General Meeting was held on January 5th, 2023 in the Small Hall of St George's Church, New Thundersley. John Rostron took the chair as Gwyn Jordan was ill.

John, as Acting Chair, took members through the activities of the previous year. This largely dealt with our efforts in relation to two encroachments of the Village Green.

The encroachment by the occupiers of *Hillrest* on the London Road is currently the subject of an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate, to which the Friends have responded. It may be some time before we get any response from the Inspectorate. (*See note at the very end of this Newsletter.*)

The second encroachment was by the then owner of the land just north of the bridleway near Coombewood Drive. The land has a new owner and a member of the local community has been trying to persuade the local Council to take action to require the owner to take the fence back to the position

Extraordinary General Meeting

The Chairman, Alan Morley reported:

An explanation was given by him on legal issues and protection that could be provided to prevent encroachment on our VG.

He had pointed out the need to increase the membership and the need to establish a legal fund so that committee members are not faced with the difficult decision to confront land grabbers directly.

Gwyn Jordan reported how he had been in contact with the owner of the land adjacent to the bridleway near Coombewood Drive. He had agreed with the owner that the Friends should mark out what they saw as the true boundary of the Village Green. The land owner agreed with this boundary, and shortly afterwards moved the fence to that position.

Alan questioned whether the new position of the fence was correct. He considered there were not enough members present to accept the current

of the old fence as it was when the Village Green was established.

The Treasurer reported that we had a healthy balance of around £2000. This was still in the ring-fenced account in the Treasurer's name, but we were almost there in restoring the original *Friends of Coombe Wood* account for regular use. When complete, the funds in the ring-fenced account will be transferred to the *Friends'* account.

At the **Election of Officers**, Alan Morley offered himself as Chairman with a promise to expedite the enforcement of the fencing encroachment. The Chairman invited a proposer and seconder and, in the absence of any other candidates, Alan was elected Chairman. The other committee members were happy to continue and were re-elected *en bloc*.

The full minutes of the AGM are available online at:

www.friendsofcoombewood.org.uk/Documents/AGM%20Minutes%20Jan%202023.pdf

26th October 2023

situation on the positioning of the fencing. A vote on this situation was taken but failed on a technical issue Alan would continue to take up issues with the surveyor's report and possibly consider getting another surveyor's report.

It followed that Michael Dearson and Eileen Peck offered their services to help FOC.

As Councillor Dearson and Eileen Peck have volunteered to help out, Alan is in communication with both as to how.

He pointed out that his availability would be limited because of his commitment to his wife in Africa and it is up to the community to recognise that they can't let their guard down to protect their VG.

It was voted that the committee be reinstated.

The minutes of this meeting will be available on the website after they have been confirmed at the AGM.

Annual General Meeting

The next Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Coombe Wood will be held on Tuesday January 16th in the Small Hall of St Peter's Church, Church Road, Thundersley at 7.30pm.

Agenda

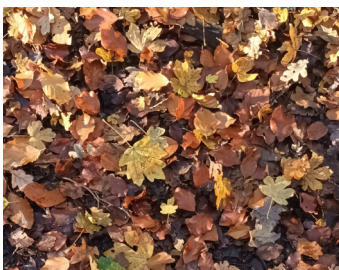
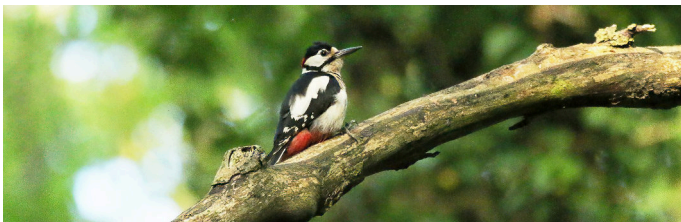
1. Minutes of the AGM held in January 2023
2. Minutes of the EGM held in October 2023
3. Matters arising from these minutes
4. Chairman's Report for 2023
5. Financial Report for 2023
6. Acceptance of the Financial Report
7. Election of Officers

Subscriptions

Don't forget that the (minimum) annual subscriptions of £5 are now due. The best way of subscribing is by Bank Transfer. The *Sort Code* is **20-70-93**; the *Account Number* is **80215279**; the *Account Name* is **Friends of Coombe Wood**; for *Payment Reference*, enter your name and the year. Use the link to our [Subscribe](#) webpage to tell us. If you cannot use

Great Spotted Woodpeckers

While searching for flowers in the stand of Wych Elms in the Wood I heard the sound of chirruping fledglings of a woodpecker. Although none of the Elms in the wood were showing signs of seeds, I was rewarded with a good view of a parent Great Spotted Woodpecker that had chosen a dead elm tree in which to make a nest. *Gwyn Jordan*



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January 16th 2024

8. Election of Committee
9. Publicity
10. New Constitution
11. Questions from the Floor

The Chairman's Report will include information about fencing encroachments into the wood and whether we need to take things further.

Questions from the Floor allows members to raise matters for the new committee to deal with.

BACS, then please send cash or a cheque (made out to Friends of Coombe Wood) to Terry Isherwood at 28 Thundersley Grove, Benfleet SS7 3EB.



Autumn Spectacular

While we may regard the Spring flowers as the greatest event in the Wood the images below show us that we have another show of colour - the Autumnal display. The colours show up so well with the lower angle of the sun at this season too. The Field Maple turns a lemon yellow while Oak, Chestnut and Beech take on more russet tones.

Gwyn Jordan



When is a Tree not a Tree? *by John Rostron*

In my first article on Trees, I defined a tree as: “a plant having a permanently woody main stem or trunk, ordinarily growing to a considerable height, and usually developing branches at some distance from the ground”. This corresponds with most people’s idea of a tree, but it does leave some things unanswered. For example, how high is a “considerable height”? 10 metres? 30 metres? One metre? Again, how high is “some distance from the ground”?

Botanically, a tree is a woody plant, that is one where there are permanent above-ground stems which consist almost entirely of wood, or xylem, the water-carrying vessels. In Coombe Wood, this would include many

shrubs or bushes such as Elder and Holly and even Gorse and Broom. Then there are many climbers such as Ivy, Clematis and Honeysuckle. Most people would consider Holly and Elder as small trees, but would not include the climbers.

Willows and Birches are typically thought of as trees, but both have dwarf species which rarely exceed 10 cm above ground level, though neither occurs in Coombe Wood.

Two plants of Coombe Wood in particular deserve a special mention: **Spurge Laurel** and **Butcher’s Broom**. These are both woody plants, but neither fall neatly into the usual description of tree, shrub or bush.

Spurge Laurel *Daphne laureola*

This is particularly common in the south-west corner of Coombe Wood. It typically reaches a



height of about one metre with a single woody stem topped by a crown of glossy green leaves. The topmost leaves (those of the current year) are brighter green than the lower leaves of the previous year.

It flowers (below left) very early, in January, and the pale yellow-green flowers have a faint scent. These flowers give way to a poisonous berry (above) which matures in the late



summer to a glossy black.

Butcher’s Broom *Ruscus aculeatus*

Butcher’s Broom grows in many of the ancient woodlands in Thundersley and Daws Heath, including Coombe Wood although it is not



common. It is regarded as an indicator species for ancient woodland. Rather surprisingly, it grows in a strip of gravel between the side path of my house and the fence. It has been there since at least 1975, when we moved in.

The appearance of Butcher’s Broom is like no other plant in the wood. Although it is a member of the Lily family, it is woody and much-branched, and it has no leaves. What do look like leaves are actually flattened stems known as phylloclades. The flowers are tiny and arise from the centre of a phylloclade (above left) . When fertilised they develop into a large, red berry in the summer (above right).

Foxgloves in Coombe Wood

By Gwyn Jordan

These foxgloves (right) are the first I remember in Coombewood. They are the sign of disturbance of the woodland floor. Ancient seeds that could have been dormant for many years have been brought into the light by the soil disturbance of the falling trees on the lower slopes of the sandy hill called the Kop. It is part of the cycle of unmanaged woodland that plants can appear through disturbance in new clearings produced by falling trees then to proliferate and again be lost under a regenerated canopy. Red Campion (below) can also appear in abundance for a short period in this way. The activity of badgers can also contribute. They seek out the sandy soils of the Claygate beds and Bagshot sands on the Kop near the fallen trees there.



Important News

I wanted to give you an update on 445 London Road. In short the appeal was dismissed and enforcement upheld . Determination date 1st August 2023
The timeframe for compliance was 10th October, but the owner asked for an extension to organise

from Councillor Michael Dearson

repositioning and the council have set 30th November when the owner has advised that the fence will be repositioned in accordance with the plan attached to the enforcement.

I will of course monitor and update.