

Friends of Coombe Wood

Newsletter 39,
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From your Chairman

Friends of Coombe Wood are sorry that you have not had a news letter for a while. Health and personal problems caused us to miss our deadlines but we have recently had a meeting and are now trying to get back on track. Various members have been keeping an eye on the woods and we have been reminded of our need to try and get some younger folk to help us. We are sending a belated membership renewal out by hand and hope to hear back from everyone. I have taken over as Chairman from Terry Isherwood who has done so much for the cause for so long. We are very pleased that he is still willing to help us as much as he can, but without being the chairman, and remains a member of our committee.

We have scheduled a special general meeting to which all our old members are invited. This is planned for the 19th September and will be in the John Pond Room in the wooden building, near the entrance to St Peters, at 7.30pm. At this meeting, we will be happy to sign up anyone who would like to be a member.

Our web site continues to be active, through the generous efforts of our secretary, John Rostron. You will find so much of the history of how the Village Green Registration status for the Wood was achieved, together with all the old news letters and so much more on the web site he operates for us: <http://www.friendsofcoombewood.org.uk>. On the web site there are interesting maps and some history of the ancient and newer parts of the woods and how, in 1900, it was all once part of a large area known as 'Thundersley Park Farm' stretching from Bread and Cheese Hill to the Church and all along Kenneth Road. The parts of that estate that we now

have registered with Village Green status include a large part of the really ancient woodland, an area characterised by the growth of bluebells. Some of the old pasture land of the farm is the more northerly part of the Registered Village Green and consists of much more recent woodland. For more on this see Newsletter No 34 on the web site.

The information boards have all been updated and we have added boxes with leaflets which include a map of the Wood. We plan to add a further information board at the graveyard entrance.

We hope to continue with litter picks and the clearance of brambles from some of the best areas of bluebells. The County have asked us on occasion to help remove fallen trees from the main bridle way and volunteers have done this.

Since we do not have the rights of land owners it is not clear how much we can officially do in the way of tidying up the Wood by removing fallen trees from the footpaths. We are in correspondence with the Open Spaces Society who can give legal advice on such issues. It would appear that there may be some issues that the local authority could become responsible for. The Open Spaces Society have written explaining that under Part 1 of the Commons Act 1899 the district council has powers to "make a scheme for the regulation and management" of a common, such management could include making bylaws and regulations for the prevention of nuisances and the preservation of order. But it would have to be explored whether moving fallen trees could come under this heading.

Gwyn Jordan

Woodland Church

The Rev. Andy Hudson, the rector of St Peters Church Thundersley has initiated "Woodland Church" initiatives. These are activities involving visits to the woods and times for refreshment back at the church hall. The last one celebrated the wise men and their journey to Bethlehem. A 'follow my leader' walk with a 'star' to guide the way took a route from the

church down to the stream and along to the western woods and back up the northern bank of the stream.

A halt in the large clearing near the crossing point of the brook presented an opportunity to think of the wise men by having a hunt for a hidden owl. In fact a good model of a Tawny Owl in resin which, though fairly obvious, proved almost impossible to spot

though very easy to see when pointed out. This may indicate the effective camouflage of Tawny Owls which sleep in trees in the daytime. Owls can often be heard in the Coombe Wood but are difficult to see.

Anyone interested in the “Woodland Church” can find the dates in the church magazine *Contact* available at the Council Offices or the Church Office.
Gwyn Jordan

The Trees of Coombe Wood

Coombe Wood is almost entirely Ancient Woodland, that is, it has been woodland since the first reliable maps in the 1770s. Like most Ancient Woodlands in the south-east, the predominant tree is Oak. However, there are two species of Oak found here: The Common Oak (also known as the Pedunculate Oak because the acorns are on stalks) and the Durmast or Sessile Oak, with acorns without stalks. The easiest way to tell them apart in summer is to look at the base of the leaves. In the Common Oak, the leaves have a very short stalk and there are a pair of lobes at the base of the leaf which extend



on either side of the stalk. In the Sessile Oak, there is a definite leaf stalk and the base of the leaf does not have lobes, but extends smoothly along the side of the stalk.



Although the Oaks are the dominant canopy trees, there are several smaller trees that form an understory. These include Hornbeam and Field Maple. Hornbeam is widely found as a coppice tree, but there has not been any coppicing in Coombe

Wood for perhaps fifty years or more. Consequently, many Hornbeams grow to a good height, up to 30 metres. You can easily recognize a Hornbeam at any time of the year by feeling a branch (or even the trunk). It has a distinct oval shape!

The leaf of a Hornbeam resembles that of an Elm, but the base of the leaf is symmetrical (Elm leaves



are asymmetrical). It also has a serrated edge and the whole leaf has a crinkly appearance, especially in the spring.

Field Maple (despite its name) is a woodland tree found throughout Coombe Wood as an understory species. Although it can grow as tall as the Hornbeam, it is typically smaller, and spreads out more.



The leaves of the Maple are distinctly lobed, almost like five fingers and they come off the stem in opposite pairs.

Other understory trees include Hazel, Holly and both the Common and the Woodland Hawthorn.

The Common Hawthorn is well-known and widespread, but the Woodland Hawthorn is largely confined to Ancient Woodlands. They can be distinguished by their leaves, their flowers and their fruit.

The leaves of the Common Hawthorn (right) are deeply lobed, including the lower part of the leaf, near the stalk. In the Woodland Hawthorn, the lobing is confined to the distal parts of the leaf (away from the stalk). (See the photo in the right column.)



When in flower, the Common Hawthorn has a single pistil (the part that receives the pollen). The pistil is the orange-brown object in the centre of the flower.

The Woodland Hawthorn has two pistils (below left). Here they are greenish-yellow.



Even when the petals fall, the pistils persist (above right), so that the two species can be easily distinguished well into the autumn. This photo also shows the leaves of the Woodland Hawthorn with the unlobed basal half.

Because each pistil leads to a single ovule, when the fruit matures, the Common Hawthorn has a single seed within the fruit; the Woodland Hawthorn has two seeds.

John Rostron



Bluebells and Bramble Pulls

Coombe Wood Village Green has become one of the best local bluebell walks. The clear stands of bluebells look best where they are unobstructed by fallen trees and overgrowing brambles (above).

Some of the best stands have been improved by the pulling up the brambles during winter, a procedure introduced by the late Terry Russell who took on so much work to secure the second Village Green registration. The pictures (right) show Terry Isherwood pulling out the brambles and carrying off the piles to a suitable place for rotting down in another area of the wood. This is one of the techniques used by Essex Wildlife Trust to maintain their beautiful stands of bluebells in Pound Wood. A

very good friend, the late Terry Welch helped the current Chairman improve one of the best bluebell areas, marked by John as Bluebell Dell on the maps.



This area has become all but impassable through falling trees and much overgrowth of cherry laurel, a garden escape. It is hoped we can map suitable

Woodpeckers

You will regularly see the Greater Spotted Woodpecker in the woods. But the Green Woodpecker is more often heard than seen. The plumage is very different and striking. Both have a swooping flight and a distinctive call. The Green Woodpecker seems to prefer foraging on short grass for ants and is seen in the gardens of the houses surrounding the wood. This one was photographed on a tree in one of the gardens of Lake Drive. If woodpeckers have young in the nest it is quite easy to see them coming regularly to feed them. The young often betray their presence by calling for food. There is a further woodpecker in Britain, the lesser spotted woodpecker. These are much rarer

areas for further bramble pulls and, with hopefully younger and fitter supporters, reintroduce this process.

Gwyn Jordan

and have not been reported for Coombe Wood. They are like the greater spotted but much more speckled and about one half the size.



Gwyn Jordan

Fallen Trees



Any visitor to Coombe Wood will notice the large number of fallen trees. This of course is an entirely natural process and allows in light and provides habitats for the woodland flora that would be competed out if there were no such natural clearings at all. But in Coombe Wood, especially in the most ancient southernmost part it could be argued that some tidying up would benefit wildlife as well as making the wood more attractive. Fallen trees

provide an essential habitat for many insects whose larvae become an important food source for birds and other woodland dwellers. But the habitat could be maintained by the arrangement of the fallen timber in places where they could still perform their natural role in the woodland ecology and yet permit us to maintain a more attractive landscape for walkers. Some fallen trees have already been moved because they were an obstruction to the bridle way and main paths. Essex County Council has powers to manage the bridle ways in this way and have asked Friends of Coombe Wood to offer help on occasion. Fallen trees can be an obstruction for a long time. In Thundersley Glen some of the trees that came down in the 1987 storm have still not rotted away. You will have already seen in the introduction that the Friends of Coombe Wood are giving their attention to this issue. If there are any legally minded folk who would like to advise us they are encouraged to become members.

Gwyn Jordan

Terry Russell

It was with sadness that some of us were present at the service on March 18th 2018 to celebrate Terry's life. He was a very energetic member of the Committee and took on a major share of the work to secure the Registration of the second Village Green, *i.e.* the area of Coombe Wood to the north and west of the main brook that runs through the wood. He also initiated the bramble pulls and encouraged us to arrange litter picks where the local council would provide equipment and collection of the rubbish. He also skilfully designed and built the information boards that you now see at the different entrances to the Wood. His energy, skill and driving force are all sadly missed and we thank Ros, his wife, for her continued interest in all that we do and convey our deepest sympathy.

