

Friends of Coombe Wood

Newsletter 48,
Spring 2024



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

Annual General Meeting *by John Rostron and Gwyn Jordan*

Our Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday January 16th. At this meeting the Chairman, Gwyn Jordan reported on two outstanding planning issues.

We have had two major concerns over recent times. One relates to the private woodland at the end of Lake Drive which has recently changed hands where the fence running along the bridleway number 58 was positioned too close to the bridleway and was actually on the Village Green itself. See the photo below left. The other major concern related to the property on the London Road near the top of Bread and Cheese Hill where about 20 feet of Village Green had been encroached upon.

The first of these issues had been presented to the local council by a request from Alan Morley that they

should be about three meters in from the existing fence but he didn't feel the other two boundaries were significantly out from those shown in the owner's trust deeds. After a request by Alan Morley that the boundary should be marked, three of the committee went into the woods and marked out the position of the Village Green following the line of the old post and wire fence evidence of which was still present on the trees and some from photographs that we had taken. The owner of the land agreed with this position and within a short time he had moved the whole fence back to the position of the old fence. See the photo below right. This old post and wire fence we believe was present at the time the Village Green was registered, and this represented a very satisfactory outcome.



put an enforcement order on the owner to reposition the fences. Nothing happened for a long time and eventually it was discovered that the local authority planning department did not feel it was a sufficiently good case on which to take any action. However, Alan Morley, after having spoken to the new owner of the plot concerned, instructed a surveyor to draw up a report on the boundaries. The surveyor suggested that the boundary along bridleway 58

The two photos above are of the bridleway and fence near the entrance from Coombewood Drive. The notice board is visible to the right. In the left-hand photo, the fence lies to the right of the two slanting trees in the centre of the photo. In the right-hand photo it has been moved to the left of the slanting trees. This repositioning carries on down the rest of the bridleway

Sue Speakman proposed and John Rostron seconded that we accept the current position of this fence. Members agreed, with none against, and with one abstention.

The second issue was that the owners of 445 London Road had extended their boundary fence about 20 feet to the east into the Village Green. The Council had issued an enforcement order requiring them to restore this back to their original boundaries. The owners appealed and the issue went to the Planning

A Tale of two Sites

We have recently been notified of two planning disputes involving open spaces. One was on a Village Green, the other was not.

The first involved Village Green 241, part of West Mersea where access to the northern part of the Village Green had been obstructed. In spring 2021, the access route had originally been temporarily and partially obstructed by works on behalf of the County Council to provide a flood barrier to that part of the coast. When this was complete, the local Sailing Club erected a barrier across the concrete apron giving access to the Club, which also limited access to part of Village Green. Such an obstruction is illegal under Section 12 of the Inclosure Act 1857 and Section 29 of the Commons Act 1876. The Sailing Club was reluctant to remove their barrier, but eventually relented in February 2022. There is now a Notice Board at the access point which reminds people that the area is a Village Green and has various statutory rights.

This demonstrates the importance of the Village Green Status in preventing restrictions to access of such registered land.

The other is a woodland site in Hawkwell where a small woodland is facing partial clearance so that a local resident can extend his garden. The woodland comprises Oak (some over 150 years old), Hawthorn and many wild flowers. Local residents have claimed that it is Ancient Woodland but it does not appear on the maps in Oliver Rackham's book on *The Ancient Woodlands of South-East Essex*. There are Tree Preservation Orders on all of the trees, but there is no other statutory protection.

Woodland Words

Woodlands have been part of the British landscape for millennia. During that time, they have acquired their own vocabulary. Some words relate to the woodland itself and some to the practices carried out within them.

Forest

The common usage of the word 'forest' today is a large tract of woodland. However, this was not the

Inspectorate. Eventually the Inspectorate found in the Council's favour and the owners have now restored their property boundaries to their original position. They did, however, leave a stretch of fence panels to the north-east of their boundaries.

Recently we have had discussions with the Council Officers who have concluded that the fence is not on land affected by planning restrictions. Thus, for the moment, we have agreed not to pursue this issue.

by John Rostron and Gwyn Jordan

The Local Council Planning Officers have advised that the area is of little wildlife value and recommended that the clearance should go ahead. However, at a recent meeting of Rochford Council's development control committee, the councillors rejected the proposal because of the public outcry.

Our chair, Gwyn Jordan, visited the site recently. He established that the strip of woodland belongs to the local authority. It was kept by the Council to give a buffer between the large new estate and the earlier development.

It is a very narrow dense mass of trees. Access can be had all along the side of the older estate.

The lower boundary is a very heavy wrought iron fence giving no access from that side.

The neighbouring householder had hoped to purchase enough to give them a larger garden. The local authority seemed pleased to be able to raise some funds. They were in favour. However, the strong opposition caused them to change their mind.

If any home was to take some of it into garden it would undoubtedly need fencing a fact that the opposition object to – as well as the loss of amenity, such as it is. The site offers no place to walk, just maybe to lose a dog or a child! Perfect place for birds to nest.

A site such as this could be protected from development if the local council issued an Article 4 Direction which would prevent anyone fencing off part of the area. However, given the circumstances, it seems that they would be reluctant to do so if it meant them losing a source of income.

by John Rostron

original meaning of the word. The word probably derives from Norman French and was used to denote a tract of land reserved for hunting by the nobility. Typically, the King gave the hunting rights to the local feudal barons in exchange for an annual supply of game (deer or wild boar) or other products (such as timber). These forests were not necessarily wooded, and there was no indication in the use of 'forest' to imply the presence of trees.

Today, the name forest is still used for some of the ancient hunting forests, notably the New Forest in Hampshire and Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. Both these forests still include extensive tracts of woodland. However, in many forests, the area has lost much of its woodland to housing, such as Waltham Forest

Parks

Parks had a similar origin to Forests but were enclosed to contain the game species within a substantial deer-proof boundary known as a *pale*, (the origin of the expression ‘beyond the pale’.) Again, the amount of woodland varied. There were several such parks in South-east Essex: Hadleigh, Rayleigh and Thundersley. About half of Coombe Wood was originally part of Thundersley Park.

Commons

Over the centuries, the aristocrats, as owners or tenants of much of the country, including woodland and open land, gave specific local people, called commoners, access to their land for specific rights. These ‘commoners’ were not necessarily the lower classes or peasants, but were probably the minor gentry and local yeoman farmers. The land over which they had these rights were called *Commons*. These rights included the right to pasture animals on the commons, either at any time or at certain times of the year. The New Forest Ponies are an example of such animals. Another right was *turbary*, the right to cut peat.

Pannage and Estovers

Two important rights enjoyed by some commoners of woodland were **Pannage** and **Estovers**.

Pannage is the right to bring your pigs into the wood in the autumn and winter to forage for acorns. These acorns were an important part of the pigs’ diet, giving a distinctive flavour to the pigs’ meat. (Notably the famous *Iberico* ham of Spain.) A consequence of the pigs foraging was that they churned up the surface layer of the soil, preventing the regeneration and regrowth of woodland herbs and trees. These domestic pigs replaced the activity of Wild Boar which would have had the same effect in previous centuries.

Estovers is the right to gather dead or fallen wood from the woodland or, in some cases, to cut wood. Much of this would have been for firewood but, depending on the agreement with the landlord, could be for house or boat building or repair. This would not include the right to coppice, which would be a valuable asset retained by the landlord.

Today, the local neighbours of a woodland with open access would think nothing of visiting a wood to gather firewood.

Woodbanks

Because a woodland was a valuable asset, the ownership of any woodland was demarcated. If livestock was allowed in the wood, then there would be a fence or hedge. If not, then the owners would create a woodbank. This is simply a ditch with a bank to one side where the soil from the ditch was deposited. Today many of these woodbanks persist after many centuries, even though the ownership on either side is unknown.



Coombe Wood has several such woodbanks. There is one (above) that runs between the access point on Rhoda Road North and the bridleway access on the London Road. The land to the south and west of this woodbank was cleared in the early twentieth century, but has regrown to form a well-developed secondary woodland. The photo above shows this woodbank, which actually has some trees growing out of it. The ditch part has been lost over time.



There is another notable woodbank (above) running from near High Firs (near the end of Lake Drive) and the rear of the house at 445 London Road (Hillrest). This woodbank may well mark the old boundary of Thundersley Park mentioned above.

The bank itself is not all that high, but the associated ditch still persists.

The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring

By Gwyn Jordan and John Rostron

March and April are marked by a display of Spring flowers in the wood. Some of the earliest flowers, from March onward are the Dog Violets (below centre), especially at the woodland edges where there is more light. The main displays, from March into April, are of the

Lesser Celandine (below left) and the Wood Anemone (below right), followed by great swards of Bluebells in April (below). These photos were taken in the plateau region just north of the London Road.



Bluebell Sward



Lesser Celandines



Dog Violets



Wood Anemones

Fly Tipping

By Sue Speakman

The Friends of Coombe Wood Committee has been made aware of fly-tipping in the Wood, most recently two double mattresses, and previously, builders' rubble and broken household items.

All these items were deposited via the entrance at the end of Coombewood Drive – presumably under cover of darkness and it is probable that, for the mattresses at least, there would have been a need to use a vehicle.

The Committee arranged for the removal of the items, but it is important that as supporters and users of the Wood, we remain alert to this type of issue, as not only is fly-tipping illegal, it is also disrespectful of the area and the community in which it happens.

The Rhoda Road North entrance to the Wood has also presented problems of a similar nature.

Sadly, in the last couple of weeks, vandals have seen fit to smash the Notice Boards in both entrances to the Wood, and we are currently in the process of trying to carry out the necessary repairs.

So we ask that if you see or hear **anything** which relates to fly-tipping, vandalism or any other misuse of the woodland, please do let us know by either using the "Contact Us" form on the website (www.friendsofcoombewood.org.uk) or, if preferred, in the first instance, by direct contact with Committee member Sue at 26 Coombewood Drive, SS7 3EA

Please help us to keep our beautiful woodland clean and safe for both users and wildlife alike.