

Sadlers Wells Community Woodland

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Newsletter No. 2 - March 2007

Welcome to the second newsletter of Sadlers Wells Community Woodland. News since the last newsletter includes (as some of you may have seen already in the Parish Link or the Bunbury Journal):–

1. Safety work has been carried out in the wood to make safe those fallen trees and branches which were believed to constitute a risk. The work was carried out professionally as it largely involved chain saw work as well as some tree climbing.
2. A Robinia Pseudoacacia had also to be removed professionally as this was found to be unsafe as its roots were beginning to become loose and it was threatening to fall over not only the adjoining public footpath but also on to an outbuilding belonging to a neighbouring owner. The tree will not be a great loss as it is not a native species. It was probably introduced into the wood about 90 years ago as its wood is good for furniture. We hope that some of the wood may be used for this purpose, although unfortunately the timber is of no real cash value due to the difficulty and expense of removing any timber from the site without decent access.
3. The base of the bridge has now been built so that access is now available to the new part of the wood and work has been done to clear a footpath down to the bridge.
4. The January storms do not appear to have caused any great damage in the wood. Three trees down by the brook were brought down by the gales, but none of these were of any significance. They will need to be cleared in due course to make sure that they do not cause any blockage in the brook itself.
5. Discussions are taking place with a view to some work in the wood being done under the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

6. The new woodland planted last year grew well during the summer despite the hot weather with very few losses and with most of the young trees growing out and above their protective tubes. We hope that they are not badly affected by the winter, and we look forward expectantly to seeing the new shoots in the coming spring.
7. Bunbury School have now started to use the wood for educational purposes and an article by Head teacher Alison Phillips follows later in this newsletter.
8. We now have our own notice board on the wall of the Village Hall which will be used to give notice of meetings, etc.

Introducing the trustees

No. 1 Ernest Croley

It may seem strange to start this series with someone who probably needs no introduction to most who live in the Village, but Ernest is our Chairman and had better be No. 1. He came to the Village nearly forty years ago, and first used the wood when living on the Whitchurch Road to take his then young daughter to the newly established play-group at the Outspan. Shortly afterwards, he was instrumental in rescuing and putting on a sound footing the Village Hall which had been closed on hygiene and safety grounds, followed later by the purchase and setting up of the Playing Fields and the Pavilion.

He was a member of the Parish Council for twenty four years, and Chairman on nine occasions. He was the Parish Tree Warden when concern was expressed about proposals to clear fell the wood, and in conjunction with Flintshire Woodlands prepared an alternative scheme to refurbish the wood and make it safe, which was put to and accepted by the Peckforton Estate. He then recruited trustees and set up the Sadlers Wells Community Woodland Trust in 2001 to try to secure the future of the wood for the Village. He has been Chairman since the trust was formed. He retired some nine years ago and for the past six years has been Verger at St. Boniface's Church.

He lives in The Square with his wife, Barbara, and claims his age is unknown as he has lost count, but admits to getting older and grumpier by the

year. His knowledge and his many contacts have however been invaluable to the Trust in getting us to our present situation.

The history of the wood

The wood appears to be of great antiquity and is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, where it says (in an English translation): -

“There is a wood i league long and one acre broad. It was worth iv. shillings, now xiii. shillings.”

A league is, of course, three miles but we had to contact Chester Record Office to find out what an “acre” meant as a measure of distance rather than the usual measurement of area. They replied that early in that millennium it appeared to mean either 22 or 220 yards, which is quite logical if the area of an acre is 4840 square yards which normally meant an agricultural strip 22 yards wide by 220 yards long.

This description fits with a long thin strip of woodland along the banks of a brook, and its remnants can be seen today running from the westerly side of the main A49 through Sadlers Wells, The Hawthorns and Darkie Meadow, Willow Brook, Bunbury Mill and out past Bunbury House in a northerly direction towards Alpraham. A long strip of woodland like this was often left because the land down by a brook was either so steeply banked or wet that it was of little use for agriculture. The original woodland clearance must have taken place long before the Norman Conquest if this long thin strip was all that was left when the Domesday Book was compiled.

Our wood therefore qualifies as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland which is defined as woodland which existed before 1600, but unfortunately it does not mean that you will find any really old trees. Trees of great antiquity are normally found in an open or parkland setting where they can grow or mature at their own pace. Trees in woodland have too much competition so that they grow tall and thin and rarely live much more than a hundred years.

Woodlands were too valuable to be left untouched. The wood was considered a valuable crop for building, maintenance and fuel. This means that

the trees were regularly harvested. The oldest trees in ancient woodlands are often to be found in significant positions along the boundaries where they acted as markers. In Sadler's Wells Wood there appear to be no boundary marker trees left, if there have ever been any.

When clearance by felling takes place, it can change the wood significantly as pioneer species take advantage of the newly created spaces. At Sadler's Wells there are trees such as sycamore and Robinia that would not have been part of the ancient scenery.

The ground flora, however, is made up of a range of woodland and wetland plant species that are likely to have been present on the site for many centuries, at least as far back as the Domesday record mentioned above. These plants had little or no commercial value, though some might have been used for their medicinal or domestic properties.

Most woodland in Britain have had little significant management since Tudor times apart from a fashion for planting game cover into them in the 19th century. Woodland management skills are very different now from those of the 16th and 17th centuries. It would be fascinating to be able to turn the clock back four or five hundred years and visit Sadler's Wells to see how the residents of Bunbury valued it at that time.

Mike Bourne and Tony Gentil

Forthcoming events

1. A talk has been fixed for Tuesday 3rd April at 7.30 p.m. at Bunbury Mill on the subject of "The Barn Owl" by John Holland of the Broxton Barn Owl Group. All will be welcome.
2. There will be a Summer Walk in the wood on Tuesday evening, 12th June with The Cheshire Landscape Trust and local tree wardens. Again, details will follow but numbers are limited to Friends of the Wood.

A Spring Walk in Sadlers Wells Wood

Spring has come early to the Cheshire countryside this year and a walk in Sadler's Wells Wood can be a fascinating experience. Fascinating that is, not because you need to know how to put one foot in front of the other, but rather because you need to know how to observe.

If you walk through the wood chattering and enjoying the fresh air you will miss a lot. The sounds of your progress will warn the wildlife and they will hide and keep quiet. On the other hand if you walk slowly or even sit quietly on one of the may piles of logs a door onto nature will be opened to you.

Listen for the sounds of the birds. At this time of the year they are staking out their territories and nesting sites. They are singing to announce their presence to rivals. Can you hear the loud repeated notes of the great tit saying, "Teacher! Teacher! Teacher! Teacher!"? You may hear a loud burst of 'churring' noise from the tiny wren. What lungs this bird must have to produce such a sound.

The winter visitors from northern Europe the fieldfares and redwings have probably gone back but in their place the summer visitors will arrive. Listen for the chiff-chaff which repeats it's own name incessantly. This is the first to arrive followed by the willow warbler with a sad wistful song, described in the bird books as a descending cadence.

You may hear leaves rustling and see them being thrown about. The blackbirds root through the dry autumn compost on the woodland floor throwing the discarded leaves over their shoulders in their hunt for food.

Sitting quietly in the inquisitive robin may approach to check just what you are up to and serenade you with a few quiet phrases. On windy days the mistle thrush can be heard singing from the top of the tallest trees. His name 'the storm cock' sums up his feistiness in the defiance of chill winds.

Sadler's Wells is a magical place for those to come to listen and tune in to the birdlife's conversations.

Tony Gentil

School Spring Project
Sadlers Wells Woodland

At Bunbury School we love taking part in whole school projects and to have the use of such a fantastic resource as Sadlers Wells Wood is a real bonus. We have therefore planned a project for this half term when every class will visit the wood with our friend Tony Gentil, who gave such a lovely talk in the school during the Autumn Term 2006. He has agreed to act as a guide for the children and his expert knowledge of plants and trees will be invaluable. We are going to pair up the younger children with older juniors for our visits and at the moment the staff are making



plans for follow up work that will not only concentrate on the geography and science curriculum, but will embrace the curriculum as a whole using the environment to inspire the children in art, writing, music, design technology and also awaken their thoughts and ideas about conservation, not only in the woodland but in the wider world.

We shall exhibit our work during the Summer Term in the school hall when we hope that parents and friends of the school will be able to see what a valuable educational resource we have on our doorstep.

Alison Phillips

Friends of the Wood

31st March sees the end of our financial year and annual subscriptions will therefore be due on 1st April 2007. The annual amount is £5-00 each as mentioned in the previous newsletter. The wood produces no income itself and we therefore have to raise all the money needed to pay for insurance, maintenance, etc. Your subscriptions are therefore very valuable to us, not only in themselves but also because they show a commitment from the local community which is a great help when we approach funding organisations for any grants available to enable the Trust to carry out its work. Early payment would be greatly appreciated and payment can be made either to Ernest Croley or Michael Bourne whose details are given at the end of this Newsletter. **New members** (who would like to support our

work to maintain and improve the amenity of the wood and to make it available for educational projects by the School and others) would be greatly appreciated. Please send your name, address (including e-mail address where applicable) and subscription to either of the above. All contributions will be gratefully received.

If anyone has any comments or queries regarding this Newsletter or the wood generally, please write or e-mail our Clerk, Michael Bourne.

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Trustees of the Charity

Ernest Croley (Chairman), Michael Bourne (Clerk), Bob Price, Tony Gentil, Eric Lord, Alison Phillips and Dr Katherine Hutchinson.