

Sadlers Wells Community Woodland

Registered Charity Number 1105117



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Heritage Lottery Fund

Newsletter No. 6 - Spring 2009

Welcome to the Sixth Newsletter of Sadlers Wells Community Woodland. Now that the wood and its management have become established and all the immediate projects have been completed, there are fewer major improvements to report. Maintenance of the wood is however always ongoing and working parties will continue to be needed to keep the wood up to the standard we would like to achieve. News since the last newsletter includes:-

a) In November, pupils from Bunbury School joined us in planting out some shrubs and small trees given to us by The Cheshire Landscape Trust, including guelder rose, wild cherry (*prunus avium*), blackthorn and euonymus or spindle. Most were planted in the old part of the wood to provide a more varied under storey to the mature trees.

b) The bench has now been put in place in the clearing on the left hand side near the entrance to the wood. It has been positioned to allow views down to the stream which forms part of the River Gowy and we hope that its position near the entrance will be an encouragement for the less mobile to visit the wood and enjoy its atmosphere.

c) Our application for the wood to be registered as a Site of Biological Importance has now been considered and a draft of the proposed registration has been prepared for the approval of the Trust. There are a few points to be discussed and we are awaiting a response on these. We are disappointed that it is only proposed to register the wood as a Grade C category, but while the wood may historically be ancient semi-natural woodland which existed before 1600 which would normally justify a Grade A rating, it must be accepted that the wood contains at present only a limited number of features of scientific interest and no trees of any great age. We have however asked that a reference to its history should be included in the registration.

d) We have just been informed that we have been awarded a Grassroots grant by Cheshire Community Action towards the anticipated expenditure for the current calendar year. This is very welcome as it means that we shall not have to fund much expenditure out of capital for the time being. It does not in any way reduce our need for your support as without it, grants simply would not be available. Please therefore let us have the continued benefit of your

support and if you could introduce any new Friends of the Wood, so much the better.

e) Our Grassroots Grant has enabled us to purchase a much better notice board for the entrance to the Wood and arrangements are being made for this to be installed. The existing notice board there will be re-erected at the Whitchurch Road entrance.

Introducing the trustees

No. 5 Eric Lord

Eric Lord is one of the two trustees nominated by Bunbury Parish Council. He has been a member of the Parish Council for seven years and is currently the Tree Warden for the Parish. He has also represented the Parish Council on the team who are drawing up our Village Design Statement.

Eric, originally from Rochdale, has lived in Bunbury for about 35 years now, so just about qualifies as a resident! He was formerly a research scientist with Shell at Carrington and Thornton, and later a consultant for quality management and is a member of the Chartered Quality Institute. Other interests have included badminton, walking and ballroom dancing.

Chairman's Notes

As I write, I can see the first signs of the miracle that we call spring. How do all those bulbs know that it is time for each in sequence, to send out the shoots that will soon turn into flowers? This year they could be excused for delaying a little after all the cold weather. Cold it certainly was, but the harsh weather has left few signs of damage in the Wood. We do not have the trail of damage that the high winds of last winter left. Do I tempt providence; are the March winds still going to empty their burden of snow on us? It would be a shame if we followed the pattern of long cold springs that we have seen too often in recent years.

Our late season working parties allowed us to finish clearing the windblown trees left over from last year. When we finished we found that we had been gifted a glade near to the entrance to the wood. We have added a bench seat and because it is near to the Wood Entrance we hope that it will be accessible to everyone, particularly the less mobile. A little holly clearance and there will be a clear view of the Infant River Gowy. In conjunction with the School and the Cheshire Landscape Trust, we were able to organise a planting day on 26th November which resulted in the planting of approximately one hundred trees and shrubs. Many were planted near to the seat and we are waiting to see if our efforts will be rewarded.

Whilst our hardy volunteers have helped us achieve our initial targets, there is still much, we hope enjoyable, work to be done. Creating our glade revealed the poor state of the Gowy, which is littered with broken branches and general detritus accumulated during the winter. Drainage needs to be improved because some of the trees near to the brook are standing in water. Only a few species of tree with special adaptation can live in waterlogged ground and the trees in that area are not in that category. We could lose some well-established specimens if remedial work is not undertaken.

The Rabbit population, both in the wood and adjacent areas, has been greatly reduced but the rabbit holes remain a hazard to incautious feet and ankles. We need to fill in the offending holes on paths and around tree roots as well as repair fences damaged by our unwelcome guests.

In the coming season we might well have to start dealing with problems caused by success. More people are visiting and we hope enjoying, the wood than ever before but trees do not grow well, or even at all, in compacted ground and we need to give some of the ones in high traffic density areas a little help. There is no intention of restricting access to any part of the Wood; that is the last thing that we would want to happen. If you do find a shrub growing in front of a tree, there will always be an alternative route a yard or two away.

We do not wish to turn the wood into a garden and we would like to leave it as natural as possible but there are a few things that we might do to repel some of the latter day invaders. For this reason we do not want your garden rubbish which can contain all sorts of things that owe more to globalisation than nature. One of the sufferers is the Bluebell, which is now an endangered species. More than half the world's population lives in this country and many of those have been hybridised (raped?) by the Spanish Bluebell. Perhaps in retaliation for what we have planted on the Costa del Sol. Older residents may remember Sadlers Wells being full of Bluebells in the spring. This has declined, perhaps because of the closing of the canopy. There are still some Native Daffodils towards the West end of the Wood, but, sadly, those towards the East end are hybrids and a mixture of garden escapes. We can get native Bluebell seed and I would be interested to hear from anyone who would like to join a small team interested in restore the natives to their rightful place.

Normal parties will resume as soon as we are confident that Spring will not slip back a season without giving us a warning. They are a wonderful opportunity to burn off a few calories and to enjoy the open air.

Ernest Croley

The Mighty Oak

There are over 50 types of Oak spread across Europe, North America and Asia. Of these only two are native to the United Kingdom. Botanically these are *Quercus Robur* and *Q Petrea*. (*Quercus* is the Latin word for Oak). *Q Robur* commonly known as the Pedunculate or English Oak, is the more widespread and is a typical lowland tree dominant, for example, across the Cheshire Plain and these are the oaks to be found at Sadlers Wells. *Q Petrea*, known as the Sessile or Durmast Oak, is more often to be found growing on the less fertile and more hilly areas of the north and west of the UK. Oak timber is both strong and durable, and it was ideal for ship building, providing the 'hearts of oak' for the fleet which destroyed the Spanish Armada. It is still widely used today wherever strength and quality is valued, in construction work, furniture manufacture and for many other uses.

The only other Oak likely to be encountered fairly often in woodland locations is the Turkey Oak, *Q. Cerris*, which as its name implies comes from SE Europe and Asia Minor. Unlike native oaks its timber is weak and therefore useless for manufacturing. It does however make a fine amenity tree, often growing to an impressive height, taller than either of the native varieties, and it was often planted as a specimen in a parkland situation, for example.

Other Oaks, such as the North American Red or Scarlet Oaks, together with the several evergreen types from the Mediterranean region, can also be found growing in Cheshire, sometimes in woodlands but more often as part of a formal landscaped area.

As well as the weakness of its timber, the Turkey Oak has a distinguishing hairy acorn cup and whiskery tips to its branches. Its leaves are much narrower and longer than those of both the native types and its bark is lighter in colour and less deeply fissured.

The American Oaks are different to the natives in their spectacular autumn leaf colouring, hence their name Scarlet or Red Oaks. Evergreen Oaks have an obvious characteristic in their name and included in these is the Cork Oak, *Q. Subor*, and the Holm Oak, *Q. Ilex*, whose juvenile leaves are often spiny, resembling those of holly.

The biggest oak in Cheshire is the Marton Oak in a private garden near Joddrell Bank. The base of its trunk measures approximately 44 feet in circumference and although the trunk is now completely hollow, it is still very much alive producing leaves and acorns in season.

Bob Price

More about Oaks

Oaks are one of the most prolific trees in their general support of wildlife; it has been estimated that an oak tree can host up to 500 different forms of insects and birds, a figure way ahead of any other. However, whilst an

oak can support the greatest variety of species, there are other trees, such as the sycamore, which can provide a greater source of food in terms of weight and numbers, although a much more limited variety.

Oak wood has a very high density, great strength and hardness with an attractive grain, which is why it has proved very popular in furniture making and building work. Its high tannin content also makes it resistant to insect and fungal attack. In a recent edition of the Antiques Roadshow from Bodnant Gardens, they were examining a Welsh dresser from Flintshire and showed that the main part of the dresser had been made from Pedunculate Oak as this was very good to work, but the back had been made from Sessile Oak which had a much coarser grain which was not able to be worked to such a good finish. Oak is also used to make barrels for wine production as using an oak barrel can beneficially affect the making of the wine. French, American and, more recently, Slovenian Oak is used and the type of oak affects the colour, flavour and bouquet of the wine as does toasting or charring of the barrel.

Acorns were widely used in olden times to feed pigs who were often turned out loose into the forest to forage. Acorns have also in the past been ground down to make a substitute for coffee and even a type of bread. Oak apples or galls were used in the past to make a type of ink.

The oak also features very frequently in history and mythology being a symbol of rugged strength and steadfastness. It is considered to be the national tree of England, Wales, France, Germany, Poland, the United States, Latvia, Serbia and Lithuania. In many times and cultures, the oak has been venerated and it was often associated with the supreme god of their pantheon such as Zeus, Jupiter and Thor. In ancient times, kings and other earthly rulers would identify themselves as representing these gods and wear crowns of oak leaves. Even in more recent times, parishes would have their Gospel Oak, a prominent tree at which extracts of the Gospel would be read out at the beating of the bounds at Rogationtide.

The Major Oak in Sherwood Forest is said to be where Robin Hood and his merry men met to plan their exploits, but in truth unromantic scientists say that the tree itself does not appear to be anything like that old. There are Topless Oaks at Bradwell Park in Leicestershire which are said to have been pollarded in 1554 as a sign of mourning after the execution of Lady Jane Grey who had lived at Bradwell Hall. More notably, the future Charles II hid from the Roundheads in the Boscobel Oak following defeat at the Battle of Worcester and May 29th was ordained to become Royal Oak Day in 1660 on the restoration of the Monarchy.

In the Celtic world, the oak is the tree of doors, a gateway between worlds. The Druids often worshipped and practised their rites in oak groves and it has been said that their name was probably a Gaelic version of their word for oak 'duir'. So if anyone hears any strange noises coming from Sadlers Wells one night, it might be the teddy bears finishing their picnic, or it might be something much more sinister!

Mike Bourne

Woodland Walk – Tuesday 9th June

We will be holding another woodland walk in the evening on Tuesday 9th June and we are pleased that again Tony Gentil and his wife Liz will be on hand to explain and identify what there is about. Further details will be circulated and posted on the notice boards nearer the time.

Friends of the Wood

The annual subscription is £5-00 each and the 2009/10 subscription **will be due** on 1st April. 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. Please treat this as your subscription reminder. Early payment would be greatly appreciated and payment can be made with the slip attached to this Newsletter either to Ernest Croley or Michael Bourne whose details are given below. **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, and cheques should be made payable to Sadlers Wells Community Woodland.

As mentioned in a previous newsletter, if you see anything unusual or interesting in the wood, please let us know by telephone or e-mail as we would like to make a record.

A final thought

Did you know that apparently almost a quarter of the ponds in the country are to be found in Cheshire thanks to the endeavours of those in times gone by who extracted marl (a type of clay) for use as fertiliser. Old marl pits can often be told from natural ponds by a more regular shape and the fact that they rarely have any brooks or ditches feeding them or draining them.

If anyone has any comments or queries regarding this Newsletter or the wood generally, please write or e-mail our Clerk, Michael Bourne. We would appreciate response from members to let us know whether we are heading in the right direction.

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Trustees of the Charity Ernest Croley (Chairman), Michael Bourne (Clerk), Bob Price, Tony Gentil, Eric Lord, Alyson Thacker and Dr Katherine Hutchinson.

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 Friends of Sadlers Wells Wood - Subscriptions 2009/10

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