

# **Sadlers Wells Community Woodland**

Registered Charity Number 1105117



Supported by the  
**Heritage Lottery Fund**

## **Newsletter No. 9 - Autumn 2010**

Welcome to the Ninth Newsletter of Sadlers Wells Community Woodland. Recent news includes:-

1. We had a stall at Village Day as usual and were able to welcome several new members. Our thanks go to Ann Wall and Alison Black for organising it and to Ann for our regular quiz.

2. The outdoor classroom has now been created in the Wood for use by the School and is situated in the glade on the left hand side near the entrance.

3. As most of you will have read in the Bunbury Link, unfortunately the notice board at the entrance to the wood has been vandalised twice in the past three months, the second time within twenty four hours of it being repaired. John Holland kindly did the first repair replacing the armoured glass free of charge. On the second occasion, special material was used of the type used for aircraft windows and there may be a charge for this as it is more expensive. Considerable force must have been used on each occasion to break the armoured glass and on the first occasion the vandals also tried to set fire to the notice board and also the small notice board near to the other entrance by the main road. Unfortunately, since the earlier part of this paragraph was written, the notice board has again been vandalised, the damage being found on 9<sup>th</sup> November. This time they had not been able to break the composite plastic used instead of glass but had damaged the frame which seems to be easily repairable.

4. A woodland walk took place on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September led by Tony and Liz Gentil who discussed the fruits and berries found on the walk and other matters of autumnal interest. We are grateful to Tony and Liz for enlightening us about the Wood which we enjoy.



5. Early Birds Pre-School, who had won some trees from the Woodland Trust in a draw arising out of the collection of Sainsbury's Active kids vouchers, kindly offered them to us and hazel and bird cherry were planted in the old wood on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November. Several children and their parents attended and enjoyed contributing to the actual planting. Our thanks also go to Early Birds and those involved.

## **Chairman's Notes**

### **The Wood in My Life (Again)**

In my last piece about the development of Sadlers Wells Wood as a community wood, I described our early involvement when the Wood was threatened with clear felling. I described how Strutt & Parker, the managing agents for the Peckforton Estate had agreed to a scheme prepared by Flintshire Woodland ourselves and funded by the Woodland Grant Scheme, to refurbish the Wood as an alternative to clear felling it. This made the future of the Wood secure at least for the medium term. We were, however, aware of the old adage that the only safe way to secure a view for the future is to buy it. Thus it was that I wrote to Strutt & Parker expressing our desire to buy the Wood. In retrospect that was an amazing piece of cheek. We did not have any money to buy the Wood and without ownership of the Wood, we were not in a position to apply for the grants that we would need to enable us to do so. Let me explain. Almost universally the grant giving organisations have turned their backs upon making grants for the purchase of land. The name written on a set of deeds is not their concern. Their real concern is to know how their grants will help towards achieving the objectives for which they have been given money. The Sadlers Wells Wood purchase might, therefore, be financed, not because it is a fine ancient woodland, but because it could improve leisure and educational opportunities, or whatever other objective the particular funding organisation was charged with. That was a lesson we had to learn. Tick the right box, rather than espousing a good cause, that is the way forward.

In February 2000 we wrote to the agents for the Peckforton estate asking if we could buy the Wood; on 23rd January 2006 the purchase was completed. So what were we doing in those years, apart from growing six years older? It has to be said that the Estate had no priority reason for selling the Wood. Why should they have when selling had little advantage to them and it must have seemed a relatively minor matter? It also has to be said that an old established Wood will have accumulated a range of issues that have to be teased out and dealt with before a sale can take place. We all owe Trustee Mike Bourne our thanks for making a lifetime's experience in conveying agricultural land so readily available. We never had to worry about being outgunned in legal matters.

The most important issue was that of the boundary of the Wood itself. There was a lack of clarity about the boundary at the Whitchurch Road end of the Wood but that was easily resolved. Far and away the most significant issue was an idea to purchase the land south of the brook (infant River Gowy). It was also a strange twist of fate that launched the idea. The original proposal was to clear fell the surviving fragment of what had been the much larger mediaeval Sadlers Wells Wood. In response to widespread criticism the suggestion was made that a new wood should be planted alongside the old

and when it had grown somewhat then the existing wood should be felled. As the main aim of the objectors was to retain the ancient wood, the idea was a non-starter and was quickly dismissed. It did, however, serve a purpose, because it suggested the possibility of extending the Wood on the South (Spurstow) side of the brook. That would enlarge the Wood and make it an altogether more significant entity. If the boundaries were drawn correctly, it would also restore a part of the ancient boundary. The line of the old ditch and hedge boundary could still be seen especially if you were lucky enough to see it on a sunny winter's day when the low sun throws all the workings in the field into sharp relief. That is now the approximate boundary of the new wood, starting from the Whitchurch Road to the line of the old hawthorn hedge, which grows in such profusion at right angles to it. The path at this point follows what we believe to be a long established Badger trail. When we eventually came to decide the route of the new path and realising what determined creatures Badgers are, we thought that it would be better to go with them rather than try to start our own track. We did not realise it at the time but that extra land was to cause a long delay because it introduced a third party to the negotiations; the land was subject to a long-term agricultural tenancy. That tenancy had to be surrendered and the estate had to negotiate compensation terms with the tenant. There were a few tense moments during the long gaps between discussions but details were eventually settled and the additional cost became part of the purchase price.

Discussions progressed slowly but by August 2002 Strutt and Parker wrote to the Trust to say that they were prepared to sell the 3.54 acres of Sadlers Wells Wood and the extra land at a price of £10,000. This extra area eventually turned out to be 2.12 acres and it is now the new wood. Many conditions were attached to the offer, most of which related to things like access, neighbouring properties and the like. Any student of law would probably delight in them but to us they were all issues that had to be examined. Amongst the things that were included were items of substance. For example, liability for the vendor's legal and surveying costs and the nature of the restrictive covenant prohibiting development. There was also need for a statutory declaration to secure access from the public road; there was an obligation to fence the site to a specification that had to be agreed. It was a succession of hurdles that sometimes seemed more like Grand National Fences. . There were also other minor items.

To their credit, the Estate did not question our ability to raise the necessary funds and were prepared to continue talks with a group who were proposing to buy land from them but who did not have any money. Finally the Trust was able to draw the loose strands together and an application for funding was made to the Heritage Lottery fund on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2005. We received their offer of funding in a letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2005 it seemed like Christmas. It certainly increased the pace of events because by October we had received a draft contract for the sale and by January 2006 it was completed. A lot happened in that period because there were still normal contract conditions to agree. Most prominent, but not the most significant, was the agreement for the Estate to buy back the land on an agreed basis if the Trust decided to sell it within the first twenty one years.

There was pressure to complete the purchase because a new planting season was upon us and there were lots of things to do first. The contract specified that a fence be erected around the property and the precise line had to be agreed at the same time as

maintaining good relations with our new neighbour. It was nonetheless a proud and thankful Mike Bourne and Ernest Croley, assisted by Phil Mayers, who hammered the first pegs into the ground to claim the new wood for the Trust.

The trees were funded by a grant from the Forestry Commission and because the Commission would only accept grant applications from owners or tenants and because the particular scheme that we had in mind was time limited, the Estate applied for the grant on our behalf. That application was then transferred to us. At last and after what seemed a lifetime, we were able to look forward to what we always wanted to do, which was to organise the planting of some trees. The new wood was quickly created by the planting of 800 trees all of local provenance. The mix was and is pedunculate oak, ash, small leaved lime, wild cherry, field maple and crab apple. The Oak were especially welcome because they were grown very locally at Haughton Hall and donated by Philip Posnett. Why not test yourself to see if you can recognise the species in their winter state?

This piece has concentrated on the purchase of the land and the indeed, without that, the process could not even have started. That is, however, only a small part of the total story, but the Wood in its present state stands as testimony to the hard work and generosity of the people who rolled up their sleeves. The Wood has no income, other than voluntary contributions and its continued health is a testimony to the ongoing good will which it enjoys.

Ernest Croley

## **The blackbird**

### **Sing a song of sixpence**

The blackbird is a bonny bird  
 I love his morning suit  
 And song in the spring mornings heard  
 As mellow as the flute.  
 (Part of a poem by the 19<sup>th</sup> century poet John Clare)

You may have wondered at the humble blackbirds' role in the well known nursery rhyme. It was however apparently practice in Tudor times to bake a surprise pie for the entertainment of guests with live wild birds or animals being inserted under the crust immediately before the pie was presented at the table so that "when the pie was opened", the escape would amuse those present or more probably cause consternation. I doubt whether the birds would be in the mood to sing when they were released. Alarm calls perhaps, but not their beautiful song.

Many naturalists in the past considered the song of the blackbird to be the most beautiful and melodious of all British birds signifying the onset of spring and beating even the thrush and the nightingale, the nightingale being thought fine only in small doses. As well as its fine song, blackbirds are also noted for a nervous disposition with their "chink-chink" alarms calls going off at regular intervals. They are particularly to be

heard when there are cats or owls around, or at dusk when someone is stealing the remaining daylight.

They may have had some reason to be nervous of the night, because in the past they were hunted for food. All members of the thrush family were eaten in earlier times and prices were even regulated by law – sixpence a dozen in 1370; ten pence in 1575 and a shilling in 1633. It is reported that blackbirds were hunted and eaten as recently as the bitter winter of 1947, cooked in a pie with carrots and bacon.

Blackbirds also have a generally good reputation, compared to most other black birds and animals which are associated with evil or bad luck.

Blackbirds are found over most of Europe, except for the Arctic regions, and their range now extends into the northern parts of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt, and also into Israel, Jordan and Turkey, with a few isolated breeding populations across Asia as far as Sri Lanka and China. You may have noticed, particularly in the recent cold winter, more blackbirds than usual in your garden. Blackbirds tend to migrate westwards in winter to avoid wintry conditions on the continent and spend the winter with us augmenting the numbers of our usual resident population.

Mike Bourne

## **The wood in all seasons**

Woodland is a magical place at any season. In Spring the newly emerging leaves are fresh and green and hold the promise of a new cycle of life. The summer visitor woodland birds, the chiffchaff and willow warbler, compete for nesting sites with the resident robins, blackbirds and wrens.

By summer the leaf canopy has closed over, shutting out some of the glare of the sun. Breaks in the crowns of the trees let in shafts of sunlight in which hoverflies dance and dart. There is a peacefulness to the summer woodland, a time of plenty for all its residents.

Autumn brings new colours and smells. Green leaves enter the fashion parade of browns and golds and carpet the ground in a rustling layer. As they start to decay in the damper atmosphere, they give off a distinctive smell of warm rotting leather. An army of fungi push their heads through the leaf mould and release their spores onto the breeze.

Winter arrives and locks the woodland in a still, cold, calm silence. The trunks of the trees and the tracery of the branches now dominate the scene as you walk along the winding paths. The giant stone columns of our cathedrals drew their inspiration from places such as these.

Residents of Bunbury are indeed fortunate to have the woodland of Sadlers Wells on their doorstep. It has two distinct faces; on one side of the brook mature woodland dominates and on the other a young, vibrant, teenage mix of ash, oak, cherry and small leaved lime are developing in what was, until recently, a grazing ground for cattle.

A walk through Sadlers Wells Wood is an enjoyable experience at any time of the year. As an educational resource, it is invaluable for people of any age and young people in particular. The wood is not manicured or managed like a garden or public park. The wood is inspected regularly and trees that are felt to be dangerous are felled, cut up and left to become part of the woodland floor.

Tony Gentil

## A plea to dog owners

The Wood is a popular venue for people walking with their dogs, and it is easy to assume that an animal defecating in the Wood is merely adding to the creating of leaf mould and humus. However, this is not the case and there are problems caused not only by the mess but also the risk of parasite infections to anyone who comes inadvertently into contact with it, particularly children. Earlier this year, an outside group who were intending to do a project with the School in the Wood cancelled it because of the amount of dog faeces which they found. We therefore ask that everyone who uses the Wood is careful to clear up after their dogs, and we are grateful to those who already do so; there is a bin provided at the entrance to the Wood for this purpose.

## Bunbury Primary School

The school has used the wood in a similar way to last year with Y5 taking part in outdoor maths learning, estimating tree heights etc. Year 3 have walked through the wood collecting specimens for the forest project. Year 1 took part in their creative fairytale adventure in the woods and Foundation are about to go on their usual walk and talk through the wood.

Alyson Thacker

## Friends of the Wood

The annual subscription is £5-00 each and the 2010/11 subscription **became due on 1<sup>st</sup> April**. A few are still outstanding and those will have received a subscription reminder. Early payment would be greatly appreciated and payment can be made either to Ernest Croley or Michael Bourne whose details are given below. **Gift Aid** is a valuable source of income and we would appreciate subscriptions being gift aided if you are able to

do so and have not already done it. The amount of Gift Aid on a single subscription is only small but the total amount we get is significant.

**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**

The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, but the second best time is now.

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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