

Friends of Coombe Wood

Newsletter 42,
Spring 2021



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Chairman's Report

The Spring is well underway in the Wood, violets and many other flowers of the wood are shooting up or opening out. It is a great privilege to have such a wild area freely available where we can benefit from all the enjoyments of an ancient wood and especially at Springtime. We await eagerly each year for the bluebell season where we can enjoy the fragrance and the beautiful woodland carpet which is getting better each year. We are very grateful to our Secretary for writing about trees, most suitable since trees are the main feature of the wood and the name of the house where our other writer Susan Woolhouse lived as a child. To whom we are most grateful too.



The large tree obstructing the main bridleway has been cut away. We don't know who did this but express our gratitude nevertheless, but the public rights of way map shows it has been reported several times and it is not reported as resolved on their map. Since there are still many branches which need to be taken back to give full width to the bridleway, we will await an inspection by the Highways Authority from Chelmsford.

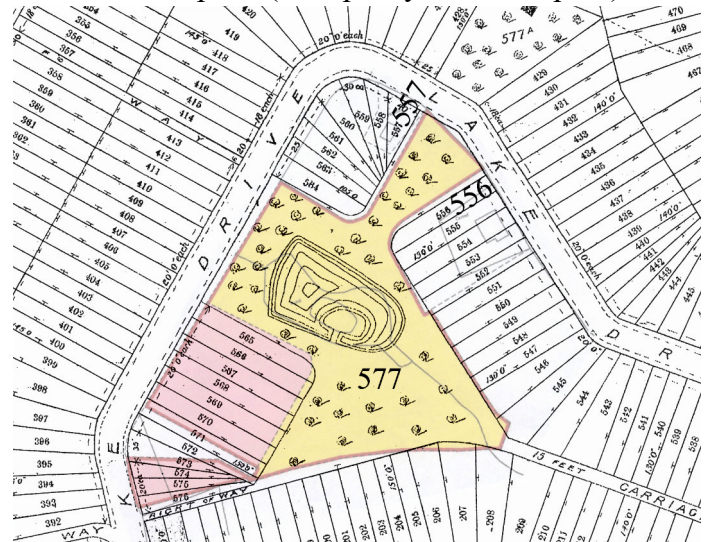


The effect of Covid19 has continued longer than we might have expected and we have not had a meeting with the Council on the ground to try and secure the marking of the boundaries of the Village Green where it opens from Lake Drive. It has been pointed out to us that some of this access has been affected by the build up of cleared branches at the southern end of this access point near "The Lake". It is still possible to use this route into the wood because there is a way through the barrier of branches. This particular access point is clear from the map on the Village Green noticeboards. It is one of the areas of the wood owned by Castle Point Borough Council as

by Gwyn Jordan

shown in the map below. The course of Lake Drive as it is shown continuing into the wood follows Bridleway No 87 which was recognised by Essex County Council and Castle Point Borough Council in a modification to the definitive map in 2012, TQ78NE with a width to be 3 meters. This bridleway is not marked in any way in the woods or on the ground after the public right of way, ie bridleway 88, after plot 414.

The coloured plots (both pale yellow and pink) are

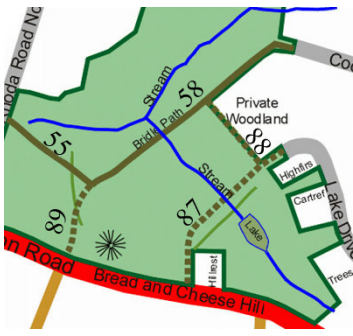


owned by the local authority. They are shown here superimposed on the original plotlands map. Both these coloured areas are now registered Village Green. Plot numbered 577 includes "The Lake" and shows the opening on to Lake Drive between plots numbered 557 and 556. This region will be invaluable to any future maintenance work in the region of the The Lake.

It helps coordinate our information if we show a plan with the bridleways marked. The small area copied, from our Village Green noticeboard, (below) also shows the "tongue" of village green that runs between High Firs and Cartref on the map.

Planning permission and the three bridleways around the private woodland.

Alan Morley has prepared a submission to CPBC, which they have acknowledged, where it is shown that the fence around the private woodland area does



not conform to the agreed planning permission. He shows how the wooden fence, rather than replacing the old wire and post boundary has moved out everywhere with reductions to the width of the bridleways that

run along the three sides. Many of you will have noticed this extending of the woodland plot and have reported it to us. We await the Council's response. His submission is for an enforcement order and Friends of Coombe Wood endorse this submission of Alan Morley's and hope to see this issue resolved.

Trees (Part One)

*I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a Tree
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast.*

These lines from the poem *Trees* by Joyce Kilmer were made famous by being sung by Paul Robeson in his deep, sonorous voice.

This article is not about Trees as an inspiration for poets or singers, but about the biology and ecology of trees, how they are born, how they live and, just as importantly, how they die.

Everyone probably thinks they know what a tree is, but there is no definitive answer to the question "What is a tree?". In the case of a woodland such as Coombe Wood, a useful definition would be:

"a plant having a permanently woody main stem or trunk, ordinarily growing to a considerable height, and usually developing branches at some distance from the ground" (dictionary.com).

This definition will exclude what are commonly called bushes, which do not have a main stem or trunk. The word shrub is also used for such plants, but it is also applied to small trees, so it is not so useful!

If you look at a tree, the most obvious part of it is the trunk, mainly because this is the part at eye level. A typical tree in Coombe Wood would have a diameter at chest height of between half a metre and one-and-a-half metres. (Foresters typically use the abbreviation DBH to refer to the size of a tree trunk. It stands for Diameter at Breast Height.)

What is not so obvious is that the bulk of the trunk you see at eye level is dead. The outer part, the bark, is mostly dead and the bulk of the wood within the tree is dead. Only a thin layer between these is alive. (There are also thin strands of living tissue, called rays, extending from this outer layer into the wood.)

This living tissue comprises several layers of cells.

Working parties

Once the Lockdown is fully over, and we have set up our Insurance, we hope to begin again with litter picks, bramble pulls and some dead tree work to help maintain the paths. Some of you have kindly sent photos of newly fallen trees and we are well aware of the many fallen trees in the wood.

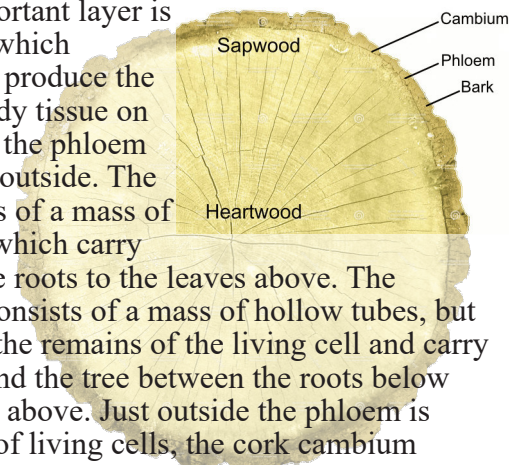
Annual General Meeting

Our next Meeting which will be an AGM will give us an opportunity to discuss the role of The Friends of Coombe Wood further.

This meeting will be in the early autumn at a time and date to be confirmed.

by John Rostron

The most important layer is the cambium which proliferates to produce the xylem or woody tissue on the inside and the phloem or bast on the outside. The xylem consists of a mass of hollow tubes which carry water from the roots to the leaves above. The phloem also consists of a mass of hollow tubes, but these contain the remains of the living cell and carry nutrients around the tree between the roots below and the leaves above. Just outside the phloem is another layer of living cells, the cork cambium

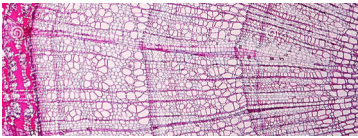


which produces the bark cells on the outside. These become converted to corky cells and die to become the bark. As the tree grows, the bark tends to split, giving the fissured appearance of mature trees. The bark is important in protecting the living tissue inside from damage by the weather, by pathogens such as fungi and by animals trying to get at the juicy bits inside.



The woody tissue comprises the bulk of the tree. However, only the outermost part (the sapwood) is actively carrying water. The remainder (the heartwood) consists of the hollow tubes which might be filled with air, or with resinous substances carried there by the rays mentioned earlier. This dead wood is what provides the tree with its strength to withstand the wind and weather. Because it is dead, the tree can tolerate the centre being eroded away to form a hollow centre with minimal loss of strength.

The tree will start to produce new xylem (and phloem) in the spring, when the sap is rising. These new, wide xylem vessels then carry water to the newly developing leaves. Later in the year, the rate of xylem production slows down, and the vessels have a narrower diameter, until xylem production ceases again in the winter. A consequence of this is that the wood takes on a banded appearance which

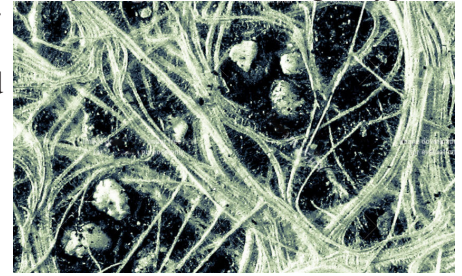


we recognise as growth rings. In a good year, the growth ring will be larger than in a bad year, so these growth

rings are a record of the weather patterns throughout the life of the tree.

Below ground, there are the roots. Like the branches in the canopy, the root system branches into smaller and smaller roots, each with a woody cylinder plus phloem to transport nutrients around. The root system has a horizontal spread rather more than the canopy above, but rather surprisingly, it only extends a few metres below the soil surface, and the bulk of the root system is often less than half a metre deep. This, of course, is where the moisture and nutrients are to be found. The tips of the rootlets are typically just a millimetre or so across and have a surface area that would not be sufficient to absorb water and

nutrients for the bulk of the tree above. This is done by an extraordinary association between the tree and soil fungi. The terminal rootlets bear a series of nodules called mycorrhizae. The fungal hyphae extend out into the soil and absorb water and minerals. Within the mycorrhizae, the fungal hyphae meet the vascular tissue of the tree and the water and minerals pass from the fungus into the tree. The fungus benefits from the tree by obtaining more complex nutrients. Without this association, a tree would simply not be able to gain sufficient water for its needs.



To be continued ...

By the way ...

This photograph of the woods shows the two commonest trees, Oak and Hornbeam. The Oaks are the ones with fairly straight, furrowed trunk and few, if any, side branches lower down. Hornbeam has a smoother bark and often have side-branches lower down. They often have small bunches of twigs erupting at various points along the trunk.

In the past, Coombe Wood was coppiced. This means that certain trees were cut down to ground level and the timber used for firewood and for construction. The stumps would produce new shoots which, after 10–30 years would grow into harvestable timber. Often only one of these shoots would survive, as in many of these seen here.



Living in the Woods – A Woodland Childhood

by Susan Woolhouse (Part One)

Woodland is the place I most want to be. There is something about it that always relaxes me. Being beneath trees, whatever the time of the year, whatever the weather, makes me feel sheltered and secure.

I was immensely blessed to be born and brought up where I was. My parents had struggled financially for several years after the Second World War. With three sons under 11, they began looking for somewhere they could live more cheaply. They found a plotland bungalow for sale which they could afford without a mortgage and they moved in the spring of 1951 to Trees, Lake(side) Drive. I was born in the bungalow at Christmas that year.



Trees only had a temporary licence, renewable every five years throughout my time there, as it was built of sub-standard construction and was on green belt land. To begin with, it consisted of four rooms and had no proper bathroom, no running water and no mains drainage. There was a cesspool as the lie of the land precluded mains drainage. The bungalow had been built, as I remember being told, by a

Mr Wright over a long period beginning before the war. It was timber and asbestos with a slate roof and some Crittal and some wooden framed windows. Water came from a rainwater-butt. The garden had been part of the woodland and had sweet chestnut,

hornbeam, ash and alder trees, and a small stream running down the plot. Brambles grew right up to the back door. The land sloped down steeply from Lake Drive at the front and continued, less steeply, behind the bungalow towards a ditch. There was a bridleway down into the woods from Thundersley Grove which ran parallel to Lake Drive at the bottom of the valley and just outside the back fence. The house could just be seen from the A13. One day, on a bus going up Bread and Cheese Hill, my mother was amused to hear a woman pointing out to her child "the three bears' house" down in the dip – Trees.

We did not have many names for places in the wood, nonetheless there were distinct sites which featured in our play. There was the Mount (now called the Kop), of course, the pond, the swamp and the island. At the side of the A13 the land sloped down to the woods steeply for a stretch almost as far as the Whist Drive bungalow (next to the Mount) and we would dare each other to climb up to the road. There was nothing to hold onto and sliding down was painful. Opposite the petrol station on Bread and Cheese Hill there were wooden advertising hoardings. We found that we could climb onto the back of these and walk along the narrow ledges of the structure. Below the "boards" cow parsley grew and, in spring, we enjoyed wading through and hiding amongst it. Right over the "back" of the wood and beyond the deep ditch which ran towards Rhoda Road, was an area of densely packed, low hawthorn and young oak trees with grass beneath. A similar area existed alongside the A13 going down from the end of the Coombewood Drive bridleway to Rhoda Road. Over on the St Peter's side of the woods, there was an area of low bushes with a path leading through to the church field. Either side of this path was an abundance of white and pink dog roses in summer. From an early age, I developed a mental map of the woods and do not remember ever getting lost. For instance, one day, aged four or five, I ran home alone from the Mount after someone upset me. From the time I was very young, I was out in the woods with my brothers. The eldest of them hung a rope from a chestnut tree on one of the slopes of the Mount and a constant stream of children used it as a swing. The strongest and more foolhardy used to dare each other to swing out and then "bail out" into a hawthorn bush until one boy actually did so and broke his arm. His father came and tore the swing down. The groove worn in the branch was visible for years afterwards.

Although well fed at home, eating occupied our time and minds quite a lot. In the autumn we collected hazelnuts, cracking them with our molars. A month or so later there were chestnuts to be had if we could open their prickly outer casings. We ate these raw most of the time, painstakingly peeling off the translucent inner skin. Unfortunately, they are not

easy to digest uncooked. On hot summer days we would buy R White's cream soda or cherryade from a greengrocery shop established in the shed of a house with a garden between Kenneth Road and Thundersley Grove, and sit on the slopes of the Mount drinking from the bottles. All year round, we used to cook potatoes in an open fire and day after day came home smelling of woodsmoke, much to our mother's dismay. When Princess Margaret was married and we had a day off school, my youngest brother and I really went to town, buying sausages, eggs and a tin of fruit to go with our usual baked potatoes; we had a veritable feast cooked over an open fire in the woods. None of these cooking fires ever caused any trouble; in later years, however, we once used a fire to clear an area of long grass over towards Rhoda Road when we were building a den and it got out of control to such an extent that we had to run and fetch water from a stream to put it out. Luckily, a neighbour's son, older and more sensible, came to help.

Keeping us children safe was a concern for our parents, although I do not remember it curtailing our wilder games. We were often gone for hours and had to be called in (loudly) for meals. Apart from tree climbing and den building, we engaged in many other hazardous games. We used new growth from hazels to make bows, arrows and spears and played at Cowboys and Indians, often hiding in bushes and piles of dry leaves to ambush each other. As a consequence, one of our friends received a nasty wound to his cheek from a sharpened arrow. Other times stones were thrown, resulting in a scar under my eye. Unknown children were responsible for this attack, but we may well have provoked them with name-calling. We dammed the ditches and waded amongst the mud of the swamp, even though at least two cesspools contributed their leakage to the contents thereof. A game that gave us a lot of fun for a time was to ride a homemade "trolley" (go-kart) down the slope from behind the Whist Drive bungalow (by the Kop) towards the swamp and to roll off it at the last moment, leaving the trolley to travel onwards into the mud. Another time, when I was about six, we played a game of ice hockey on the frozen pond.

There were few girls of my age living nearby so I was usually playing with boys. People would assume I was a boy too, as I was often dressed in my brothers' hand-me-downs and had short hair. My mother would not let me grow my hair until she considered I was old enough to look after it myself, as it was often tangled with twigs and leaves. We wore wellington boots most of the year and, when not wearing long trousers, they chafed my legs causing a more or less permanent ring around my calves. In the summer I would become covered in gnat bites to add to the inevitable bramble scratches and nettle stings.

To be continued ...