

Friends of Coombe Wood

Newsletter 43,
Summer 2021



Chairman: Gwyn Jordan 01268 753742
Treasurer:
Secretary: John Rostron 01268 757984

Chairman's Report

We all anticipate that by the time this newsletter is distributed the main restrictions of the lockdown will be over. We have planned a meeting on Tuesday October the 12th at 7.00 pm, at the Small Hall at St George's Church (see below). We encourage as many to come as possible as we begin to think again how we can work to protect and do some sorting out on the Village Green.

The canopy of the tall trees in the wood has closed in and shut out the light and moved things on from woodland flowers towards the season of falling seeds and leaves and the appearance of the fungal fruiting bodies. Our Secretary's second article on trees helps us to understand their changes through the seasons and through their long life cycles.

We have brought to the notice of Castle Point Borough Council the continued threat to the piece of Village Green just North West of the property "Cartref" in Lake Drive. We were encouraged that in response they requested photographs to show the tipping that was obstructing that piece of Village Green. However nothing seems to have changed on the ground, as yet. This area, which is part of the plot 577 which includes the Lake or Pond, was highlighted in our last newsletter (No 42) with a map.

Annual General Meeting

The next Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Coombe Wood will be held on Tuesday October 12th at 7:00pm at St George's Small Hall, Rushbottom Lane, Thundersley. There is a car park between the main hall and the church. The entrance to the Small Hall is at the front (facing the road), up a short ramp.

It is some time (2016) since we had a proper Annual General Meeting for various reasons. Your committee called an Extraordinary General Meeting in September 2019 to revive the Friends and formed an interim committee to progress matters. This resulted in several subsequent newsletters and other matters reported by your Chair (above). The pandemic and social distancing has prevented us having a proper Annual General Meeting, but we do

By Gwyn Jordan

We have written to CPBC in relation to two enforcement notices relating to encroachment onto the Village Green, one concerns the new fence around the private woodland between the end of Lake Drive and the Coombewood Drive entrance into the Wood. Many of you will have noticed how the new fence encroached out onto the Village Green and bridleway. The other concerns the encroachment onto the Village Green at the East side of the property known as Hillrest on the A13 opposite the Wheelers restaurant. This encroachment was accompanied by the new wooden fence which was brought to our attention at the time of its construction. No changes in the boundaries have occurred since CPBC were notified of the encroachments and the more recent reminder through a letter to them from our Secretary. We have not heard anything from the Council on either these two issues. We shall be able to discuss our further action at the meeting in October.

We can all look forward to enjoying walking in the tranquil shades of the woodland during any hot summer days — though currently we have paths nearly as muddy as in the winter because of the recent heavy rains.

envisage that October should be free of any restrictions.

The AGM will cover the Chairman's Report, Treasurer's Report, Election of a Committee, plus any matters arising and questions from the floor.

The minutes of the 2016 AGM and the 2019 EGM are available from the Friends' website:

www.friendsofcoombewood.org.uk click on Documents on the green menu.

We will have some hard copies available at the AGM, or if you would like a copy in advance, contact the Secretary on the phone number at the top of this newsletter.

Terry Tokeley



We have to report the passing of Terry Tokeley, our treasurer, after a short illness. Terry and his wife Sandra were founder members of Friends of Coombe Wood when we met all those years ago, in 2002 in the church hall at St Peter's, to find a way of safeguarding our use of Coombe Wood and to

Trees (part two)

One of the most obvious features of most of our trees is that they shed their leaves in the autumn and grow a new set in the spring. This is because of the prevailing climate of our latitudes. The temperatures in winter are not sufficient to sustain the trees' needs. It is more cost-effective for the tree to shed its foliage in autumn and start afresh in the spring.



In the autumn, the pigments in the leaves are gradually destroyed, beginning with the green chlorophyll. Thus the leaves turn yellow, brown or

By Terry Isherwood

protect it for posterity. Both Terry and his wife were passionate about the woods and in 2008 he joined the committee when we made the second application to get Village Green status for the northern part of the woods. The southern part had been granted Village Green status at the first application but the northern part had been denied. For the second application Terry arranged the printing and collation of several copies of the application data pack through one of his contacts — hundreds of sheets free of charge.

Terry took over as treasurer in 2013 and continued to keep track of the pennies until the end of January 2021 when his health issues meant he had to relinquish this activity. Always one to 'roll up his shirt sleeves' and 'get stuck in', be it keeping the paths clear or litter picking, Terry would be there.

We all owe Terry a large debt of gratitude as his involvement through the years was essential to maintaining FoC as a viable organisation and instrumental in getting Coombe Wood registered as a Village Green. Part of his legacy is attaining Village Green status for Coombe Wood; now we can all enjoy it forever. Our thoughts and condolences go to Sandra.

By John Rostron

(in a few) red, giving the glorious colours of autumn. The tree then forms a layer of thick cells at the base of the leaf which cuts off the water supply to the leaf, which then dies and falls off the tree. The woodland floor becomes carpeted by a layer of dead leaves, known as leaf litter, which may be up to 10cm thick.

Over the next two or three years, this leaf litter becomes broken down into tiny fragments which are washed into the soil by the rain. In addition, some earthworms specialise in dragging down leaves into their burrows, which accelerates this decay process. The result of this decay is to release nutrients back into the soil where they become available to the tree's roots.

I said at the start that I would be looking at the birth and life of a tree, but what about death? If nothing catastrophic happens, then a mature forest tree such as an Oak can live for many hundreds of years. The trunk may be hollowed out through the activities of Woodpeckers which allow water and rotting fungi to enter and gradually rot away the inner wood. This will gradually weaken the tree which makes it more vulnerable to branches falling off which, in turn, will render it more susceptible to pathogenic fungi.

During winter gales, a tree may lose several branches. The scars these losses make will also allow access to the agents of decay.

Eventually the entire tree will succumb to gales and fall to the ground. As mentioned earlier, the root system is relatively shallow, as can be seen in the fallen Hornbeam below, and will be unable to hold the tree in place.



The rootball on this tree consists of many fibrous roots, but none extend more than about half a metre downwards



The rest of the tree, however, bereft of a source of water, will die and be invaded by agents of decay: wood-boring insects and fungi.



The fallen log (left) has been invaded by beetle larvae which feed on the rotting wood within. In doing so, they bring in the spores of wood-rotting

fungi which, in turn, will make the wood more easily broken down by the beetle larvae. Wood-rotting fungi typically appear as brackets such as the Dryad's Saddle (above right)



which can reach 20cm across and the smaller Crust Fungi (below).



Gradually, the wood fragments until it is almost sawdust-like. This will get carried by wind and rain into the soil below and around it.



After a hundred years or so, it will all have gone, absorbed into the ground below that originally fed it.

Living in the Woods - A Woodland Childhood

The land between Trees and Cartref was claimed by a Mr Courtney who built himself a small camp on the land and stayed there from time to time. Where he camped in a makeshift shelter, there were some old foundations as though there had once been a more substantial building. We were not supposed to speak to or approach this man, but that, of course, did not stop us, although we were cautious. Mr Courtney wanted to make some money from his land

*By Susan Woolhouse
(Part Two)*

and planned to have horse races in the woods. For this purpose, he cleared a track hedged with brushwood in the area which I think is now known as the Dell, near to the pond and on the A13 side of the ditch. My father was one day visited by two men who wanted to sell Mr Courtney's land to him for £50. My father could not afford to buy the land and saw no reason to anyway as we had use of it already and enough garden to cope with as it was. Years

later, we heard that Mr Courtney was seeking planning permission to put caravans in the wood but, to our great relief, nothing came of the plan in the end.

Mr George owned the small bungalow to the other side of Cartref. He worked in London or the outskirts running a second-hand business and liked to come for weekends and holidays. He did have a wife, but always came alone. There was no water in his little house so he used to ask the family at Cartref (good friends of ours) to fill buckets for him. It was Mr George who showed us a photograph of the lake that the pond and swamp had been when he was younger, which later inspired my youngest brother to recreate the lake in the 1970s. My brother reminded me recently that the land between Cartref and Mr George's house was supposed to be glebe land.

I loved the spring flowers in the wood and along Lake Drive and used to pick bluebells, red campion and shirt-buttons to take home as well as hazel catkins and pussy willow. I sometimes took hawthorn blossoms home as well, though my mother said they were supposed to be unlucky indoors. Each year I searched for primroses – the only place they grew was near Mr Courtney's camp and I decided they must have been planted there. I loved the celandines, the dog violets and anemones and the wood sorrel. We used to suck the sharp-tasting stems of the wood sorrel and the sweet honeysuckle flowers. There were purple spotted orchids as well and I am ashamed to say that we tried to transplant some to our garden at Trees. I really became interested in wildflowers when I was around twelve years old. I used to gather specimens and try to press them, but was disappointed with the results as the flowers lost their colours when dried. However, the more I searched, the more different flowers I discovered, finding a birds' nest orchid growing on the roots of the beech trees below the Mount, wood spurge and cow wheat amongst others. I astonished a biology teacher, I am sure, when I brought in more different wild autumn fruits than anyone else could find. I had previously not shown much interest in her subject, but plants fascinated me and I found the berries of bryony and guelder rose so beautiful.

Each year I waited for the first flowers and would make myself a small crown with them, then dance through the wood to celebrate the coming of spring. I was reading the Narnia books by C S Lewis by this time and, on one level at least, believed that the trees themselves were sentient and there were all sorts of spirits in the woods. I thought that if I just turned my head at the right moment, I would see them.

Wildlife was abundant. From the living room window, it was not unusual to see a spotted woodpecker or a treecreeper on the trunk of an oak

tree on our boundary. I used sometimes to see owls on the fence posts at the front of the house from my bedroom. I remember grass-snakes, adders and slow-worms in the garden as well as frogs and toads. Finding birds' nests in bushes and stumps filled me with wonder and delight at the size and design of the nests and the colours of the eggs. When a boy we knew said he had found a linnet's nest in the bushes near St Peter's, I was entranced by the very name of the bird. We used to catch newts in the pond and identified what we thought were several different species including the great crested newt. We found lizards on the sandy banks alongside the Mount. Once I was running along a path in an area of long grass and sunny clearings and nearly stepped on several adders coiled together and basking in the spring sunshine.

As a teenager I walked the woods with my brother's dog, with a transistor radio playing music from Radio Caroline in my pocket. At fifteen I would rush back from the school bus, change and hurry out into the woods and over to the church field, hoping to see a boy I liked the look of practising cricket on the church field. I never did manage to catch his attention or speak to him – the nearest I got was to talk to his mother who was also often out dog walking.



I have so many memories of our times in the wood – a friend of mine falling in the pond and having to change into some of my clothes to go home; another schoolfriend being chased by my brother who was teasing her by saying he had a slow-worm and would put it down the neck of her T-shirt; finding my eldest brother's initials carved on a beech tree; my exhilaration trying to run up one of the slopes of the Mount on a windy day; the smell of the chestnut trees; the platform we built twelve feet up a tree. In the very cold winter of 1963, we marvelled at the strange and beautiful change that the heavy snowfall created and pulled on overhanging branches to cover each other in snow. That winter we found birds frozen where they had perched overnight. In summer, revising for exams on the lawn at Trees, I listened to the drowsy calls of wood pigeons and the rasping warnings of jays. The time when we built a den near Rhoda Road, one of us climbed a small oak tree and waved and shouted from it and another raced off to the Mount in order to pinpoint the exact location of the den.

In the past, I feared that the woods would be spoilt by vandalism or be swallowed up by encroachment of those whose gardens bordered the area. Now it is reassuring that Coombe Wood is being safeguarded for future generations to enjoy.