

Friends of Coombe Wood

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From your Chairman

Gwyn Jordan

The more I discover the scarceness of wild places where I am free to roam the greater becomes the value of the registered Village Green we call Coombe Wood. So often when out and about we are constrained by narrow paths and signs saying, **PRIVATE**, just when we had hoped we had found a new place to walk. Here in our little corner of the County we do have a very good group of open spaces, as recorded so well by Oliver Rackham in "The Woods of South-East Essex." This book is still available via the internet. Coombe Wood, which is described well in that book, provides a really wild place where we are free to roam and look for flowers, trees and birds to our heart's content. Our freedom is protected by the designation of the area as both a Village Green and through two Article 4 Directions. One covers most of the wood except the area to the north and east of the Graveyard. This northern area is covered by a second Direction. These are perhaps not so well known and maybe we should make the protections offered and their existence better known. The Article 4 Directions, issued by Castle Point Borough Council, require Planning Permission for 'the erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall, or other means of enclosure' within the designated area. If you would like to inspect these Directions for yourself, they can be found at the Council's website at:

<https://www.castlepoint.gov.uk/download.cfm?ver=9836> for the main part of the wood and
<https://www.castlepoint.gov.uk/download.cfm?ver=9818> for the north wood.

I discovered that such a "Direction" has been publicised by Braintree District Council with notices placed alongside two large fields near Halstead opposite the Brookes Nature Reserve, an SSSI. Anyone following this up discovers that it requires planning permission to put up fences or to change the nature of the fields so marked. It seems like a good idea to give more information about the article 4 directions in operation over Coombe Wood. Maybe we should show this on our notice boards. This regulation still operates irrespective of the ownership of the land in Coombe Wood. The whole area covered is shown green in the maps on our noticeboards.

Two infringements of such regulations were brought to the attention of the local Council by member Alan Morley requesting that the Council should make an Enforcement Order for each. The Council has issued such an order for the new fence in the wood near the A13 by the property opposite the Wheelers Restaurant which was erected without planning permission. The owners of the property appealed and the Council brought this to everyone's attention by placing notices near the new fence in the wood. Friends of Coombe Wood have written in to make the case for the illegality of such new fencing on Village Green and on land under an article 4 direction.

The other infringement is the misplaced fence by bridleway 58, which is around the private woodland plot at the end of Lake Drive. Planning permission had been granted for the fence, but not for the position that the fence was erected. We still await clarification of the Council's intentions on this issue and

two of our committee members have been talking to Councillors to help find out what stage the Council has reached in regard to this issue.

We have also written to the Council about the amount of hardcore and other tipping along Lake Drive on the Village Green section actually owned by the Council and we still wait for their report on this.

We hope that everyone who enjoys Coombe Wood will see that the intention of the Friends of Coombe Wood is simply to secure the freedoms granted in the Village Green Status and under the Article 4 Directions for all users of the Wood and hopefully protect such privileges for the future. Although, in English law, anyone can make a claim for

Why does Coombe Wood look the way it does?

This might seem to be a strange question. What do you mean by ‘the way it looks’? If you look at different woods, you will see lots of trees. After all, a wood is a collection of trees. However, different woods are made up of different kinds of trees. I’m not referring here to the different species, but to the different growth styles.

What you might think of a typical tree, with a fairly straight trunk without any side-branches, plus a canopy at the top marked by numerous side-branches, is known as a Standard tree and is the natural form it might take without intervention by humans. Much of Coombe Wood has many Standard trees, mostly Common or English Oak, *Quercus robur* and Ash, *Fraxinus excelsior*. Even within this definition, there can be variations. Although a typical standard will have a straight trunk before branching, there are variations as to how high the branching starts. Within any patch of wood, most of the standard trees will begin branching at about the same height. If you compare patches of woodland, you will probably discover that in those with a low density of standards, the branching will start lower down than in a patch with a higher density.

what is called “squatters rights” or “adverse possession” this requires fencing in and claiming land for exclusive use and it is hoped that Coombe Wood will be protected from such losses by the continued watchfulness of the users and by the publicising of the existence of the Village Green status and the Article 4 Directions.

The QR codes here provide links to the Article 4 Directions for the Main Wood (left) and the North Wood (right).



by John Rostron

One explanation for this is that if there is a high density of young trees, they will be competing with each other for the light and those that grow faster towards the light will be more likely to succeed and make up the eventual canopy. This results in many, more closely-spaced trees with long trunks. If there is less competition then the trees will branch earlier and have shorter trunks.



The other growth style that you will frequently see in Coombe Wood is a Coppiced tree. This is very much the result of human intervention. Most coppiced trees in the wood are Hornbeam, though there are some coppiced Chestnut. Coppicing is the process of cutting down the trunk of a tree to near ground level every 10–20 years. The long-term result of this is a ring of trunks

arising in an approximate circle known as a coppice stool. This process is repeated every cycle but in the second and third cycles, fewer trunks will be selected. The consequence of this is that the stool gradually grows in diameter, and this can give some approximation to the age of the stool.



The practising of coppicing has been used extensively in woodland management over many hundreds of years and has created the characteristic Coppice-with-Standards of many of our Ancient

Woodlands. Note that the term ‘Ancient Woodland’ does not mean that the woodland has been there since time immemorial. It simply means that the woodland has been known to exist on that site in the oldest known maps of the area. In the case of Coombe Wood, this would be the maps of south-east Essex published by Chapman and

André in 1772–1774, although the Ordnance Survey map of 1840 is probably more reliable. The evidence suggests that much of the ancient woodland was felled and the wood has regrown fairly soon after, with the result that most of the standard Oaks are between 100 and 200 years old.

The south-west corner of the wood between Rhoda Road, London Road and the bridleway is much younger, secondary woodland. It had been felled in the nineteenth century or earlier and did not begin to regrow until at least the late 1930s. Thus the trees are much younger than in the rest of the wood.

Similarly, the North Wood, to the east of the Graveyard is also relatively young – less than 50 years old. It is a mix of Hawthorn, Hornbeam and fairly young Oaks.



Flowers and their Habitats in Coombe Wood

Because of the valleys and hills, Coombe Wood provides slightly different conditions in different places. We have all discovered that some plants find our gardens more suitable to them than others. We have different soils and different levels of nutrients and humidity making diverse habitats in our gardens, where plants that suit survive and those that are not so suited struggle and perhaps disappear from the place altogether. This phenomenon was highlighted by the famous Essex Gardener, Beth Chatto, who died in 2018 at the age of 94 and who has left us the wonderful garden she created from nothing where she emphasised the importance of habitat with the motto “right plant right place.”

Coombe Wood provides different habitats where different plants flourish in the places that suit them. I show a few of the plants that grow in the wood and wonder how many different habitats they highlight. The tree canopy covers most of the different areas but even so differences in conditions lead to a variety of different habitats. The so-called Lake

By Gwyn Jordan

supports a few plants that only grow in that location. Here are nine images each of which might be said to be a plant which characterises a certain type of habitat in the wood.

I think we all recognise the areas where the **Bluebells** grow but to emphasise their habitat it is worth thinking about where they do not yet flourish, for instance on the top of the Kop (the sandy hill) and in the recent woodland to the north. Neither do they grow in the areas of the wood subject to flooding.



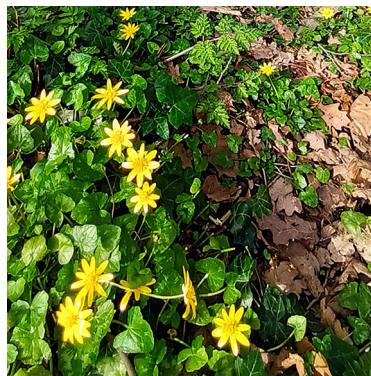
Cow Parsley characterises the northern wood close to the church field — a young wood that was scrubby grassland about fifty years ago and grazing



when the farm still existed over one hundred years ago. This shows that habitats can change and there are cycles of change in woodlands where coppicing takes place.

Wood Anemones are signs of ancient

woodland and characterise the plateau by the A13 at the entrance opposite Glen Road. They have flourished in this location since for at least 70 years. They spread by rhizomes and form groups with identical features like these with a pink hue



which may be said to be a clone.

Lesser Celandines are more widely spread; they flourish near the Wood Anemones but also grow in damp places like the banks of the streams and in areas that are subject to flooding.

Butcher's Broom is a fascinating plant for the "leaves" are in fact flattened widened stems bearing flowers in their centre. They grow in deep shade and I only know of one small group in Coombe Wood near the entrance opposite the restaurant leading to the Kop. It also grows in the very oldest part of Thundersley Glen in an area that dates back over a thousand years. (It also grows wild in my garden! – Editor.)



Hawkweed occupies a habitat where none of the other plants grow. It flourishes alone with some grass on the top



of the sandy hill called the Kop beneath the Sweet Chestnut trees which amazingly have survived some of the recent storms even though many have scars of fire at their bases. Hawkweeds are

very difficult to classify but this one seems to be *Hieracium umbellatum* a plant that likes dry places and flowers late in the year. Although botanically interesting it lacks the attractiveness of many other woodland flowers and amongst the group of flowers that are borne on the top there are usually some that are turning over and only one or two in good condition at any time.

Spurge Laurel grows in the South Western corner by the bridleway near the group of beech trees. It is a *Daphne* but lacks the bright colour and scent of its cousins but it does keep its leaves through the winter though, like them, it flowers very early in the season.



The little **Speedwell** is seen providing interest for an ant that may be finding springtime nourishment, it only grows in strong light by the side of the wood. Although a common plant of

gardens and may even be regarded as a weed there, it is well worth inspecting with a hand lens.

Violets are especially found on the rising land forming the west bank of the principal brook. There are different kinds of violets but the woodland violet, often called the dog violet, has no fragrance unlike the deep purple violets we like to grow in our gardens. These also find their way into the wood and grow in stands on the western bank too.



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