

Friends of Coombe Wood

**Newsletter 40,
Spring 2020**



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Treasurer: Terry Tokeley 01268 753302
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From your Chairman

In these days when the global environment is under stress, we can be greatly encouraged by the asset of our large village green known as Coombe Wood

I can report as chairman that we have managed to fix a new notice board at the north west entrance to the wood at the corner of the graveyard. We were helped with this by a fencing firm who gave their services free of charge. This came about when we had finished preparing the notice board and discovered that it was very heavy and since we had used concrete spurs this time to prevent the posts rotting it was all rather difficult to see how we could manage to transport it and fix it up and especially to dig holes through the soil with the many roots. I noticed a man in Kenneth Road digging holes through really tough ground which included roots and fixing up a very neat fence and when I asked him if he might help, he said that he would. He came with the boss of his firm and carried the heavy notice board and the concrete spurs to the wood and then dug the holes and concreted them in. I told them as a reward for their kindness I would give them a mention in a newsletter. They are a firm at Eastwood, SGT Carpentry and Building, and the photo below shows the noticeboard being erected with one of their workers assisted by Terry Isherwood.



We are in discussion with an insurance company who seemed fairly confident they will be able to find a broker to give us reasonable coverage for the activities that friends of Coombe Wood wish to undertake. The three activities that I have requested insurance cover for are our arrangements for litter picking parties, the pulling up of brambles which are covering some of our best stands of bluebells and finally for the tidying up of fallen trees which have blocked some of the paths. In the past we have carried out some of these

Gwyn Jordan

activities without having any insurance but have now concluded it would be wise for us to get this kind of cover.

Recently we have had the trouble of fly-tipping in the south west corner of the wood by the side of Rhoda Road North. This problem was brought to our attention by a local member and we have sent a photograph to the local authority showing the discarded material. They have written to us to explain that the company, Pinnacle, who clear up these problems is unable to work on private land and so will therefore not be doing it. We have written to the local authority explaining the unusual position of the land and we trust they will see that they have some responsibilities to help keep order on the village green. I have sent the following paragraph through to them in an email

[Under Part 1 of the Commons Act 1899 the district council has powers to “make a scheme for the regulation and management” of a common, such management could include making bylaws and regulations for the prevention of nuisances and the preservation of order.]

The good news, all the rubbish has now gone!

Further to this we are exploring the possibility of bringing the council in to help with management in accordance with that information which we received from Open Spaces.

Most users of the wood will have noticed that Mark Evans is now fencing his part of the wood as was agreed with the local authority after his application. His rustic style of post and rail wooden fencing enhances the amenity of this part of the wood and makes it look as though we are still in the countryside.

Many leaflets have been taken from the boxes on our information boards and we can hope that the dissemination of this information will help to keep the Village Green secure and may encourage new membership of the “Friends of Coombe Wood”.

Some of you will have noticed that the so-called lake which is really more of a swamp has a much deeper breach in the retaining wall and this is something it might be nice to remedy. Since this part of the wood is known to belong to the council it should be easier to make some arrangements for management. Since so much of the wood is of unknown ownership this does make life more difficult for in truth, we only really have the legal rights to pursue the lawful sports and pastimes as described in our village green application and these don't really stretch to management.

Your committee hopes that our membership can be increased to help with the various activities that we plan and especially to include more energetic younger people!

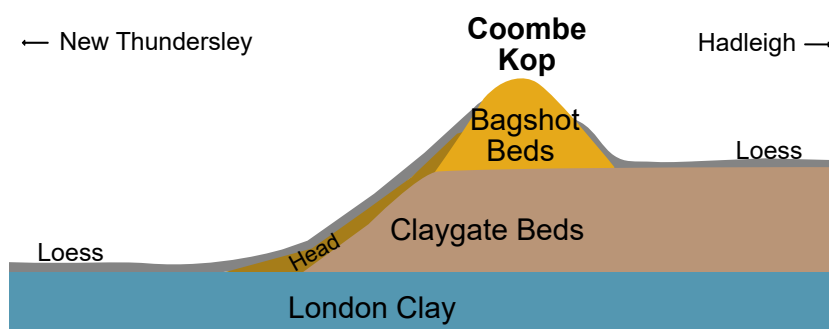
Our membership has declined and we believe this is partly because we have to request the payment of a membership fee every year. We would welcome ideas as to how we might be able to keep the membership without having to remind people every year to send in their fee. It might be good to email all members but this would require us to get permission but could be more effective than expecting our members to be reminded by the Newsletter with membership renewal slip. Any suggestions welcome here.

Our secretary, John Rostron, is doing a really excellent job with our website and we hope everyone is able to access this and to see the photographs that he puts on regularly to show the seasonal changes in the wood. The inclusion of all past newsletters provides an excellent archive and includes interesting historical information on Coombe Wood. We perhaps will be able to produce an index to this information which should assist with the finding of relevant information when required. We are especially grateful to him for taking the trouble to discover the interesting features of geology that underlie the amazing land formations within the wood.

The Geology of Coombe Wood

By John Rostron

Coombe Wood lies on a scarp slope between the higher ground of Thundersley Village and the lower ground of New Thundersley to the west. Those of you who live in this lower ground will be aware that the soil is heavy and clayey. This is because the underlying rock is the *London Clay*. This was deposited in a wide area covering much of Essex and North Kent in a shallow sea between 55 and 49 million years ago (MYA). Below the London Clay lies the Chalk in a basin whose edges crop up as the Chilterns and the Cambridgeshire hills to the north, and the North Downs to the south.



Around 49 MYA, the shifting conditions caused coarser particles to be deposited in alternating layers of silty clays and clayey silts. Gradually the particles became coarser and included fine sands in amongst the silts and clays. These layers are known as the *Claygate Beds*. Much of the slope and the upper parts of Coombe Wood are underlain by these Claygate Beds.



The photo below left shows an exposure of what are probably Claygate deposits by the side of Vicarage Hill. You can see the erratic layering characteristic of the Claygate deposits as the overlying sea currents varied over the millennia.

Eventually there was a distinct change and these deposits became coarser and more sandy. These deposits now form the *Bagshot Sands* or *Bagshot Beds* (named after the town in Surrey where they are much in evidence). The Bagshot Beds underlie much of

Thundersley Village eastward towards Hadleigh and north to Rayleigh. Within Coombe Wood, the only outcrop of the Bagshot Beds is the cap of Coombe Kop, the hill by the side of the London Road, east of the Bridle Path.

These rocks were all deposited in the *Palaeogene* (the first part of the Tertiary or Cenozoic Era commonly called the Age of Mammals). The youngest of these (the Bagshot Beds) are around 47 million years old.

There are no more geological deposits in this part of Essex until much later, just a few million years ago. In the intervening period, the sea level sank (or the land rose) exposing these rocks to erosion. In south Essex, much of this erosion was in the western part, extending as far east as Thundersley, thus the London Clay was exposed in the west and the Bagshot Sands remained in the east. Along the edge, on the scarp slope, the Claygate Beds were exposed.

Neither the Bagshot sands nor the Claygate silts and clays are particularly hard rocks, so over the intervening period, the superficial layers at the top of the slope gradually crumbled and some slid down the slope to accumulate at the bottom. These deposits are known as 'head' (presumably because it comes from the head of the slope). This erosion has left the summit of Coombe Kop with very little topsoil, as can be seen in the photo on the next page.

Over the millennia, the underlying rocks gradually crumbled and formed the superficial layer which became the soil.

The Ice Ages were a series of glaciations or cold periods over the past few million years. The Ice Sheet



which covered most of northern Europe did not reach as far as south Essex. However the weather must have been severe (possibly similar to Iceland today) and the vegetation would have been tundra. Because of the great mass of water locked in the ice, the sea level dropped and the land to the east of Britain was exposed as a dry plain (Doggerland).

Towards the end of the Ice Ages, the climate improved, but it also dried and was characterised by strong winds. These winds helped dry out the soils and whipped up the dry soil into silt-laden windstorms. These blew southwards from East Anglia and westward from Doggerland and, as the winds eased, they deposited around a metre or more of this silt over south-east Essex as what is now known as *loess* (also known as *brickearth*). In addition to the mineral particles, the loess additionally contains particles of humus (dead organic matter) which improves the tilth (a measure of soil quality) of the soil.

Thus the soil of the lower, western, parts of Coombe Wood is largely derived from this loess which may be a metre or more deep. On the slope itself, the loess layer is thinner as it has slid down the slope. On the upper, eastern, part of the wood the loess is variable in thickness.

There are two streams flowing through the wood which have both cut channels through these superficial layers.

The stream flowing westward from the lake forms a fairly shallow valley (below).



However, the stream flowing from the north to south in the western part of the wood has cut deep gullies, especially in the northern parts (below).



Paths and Dog Walking

By Gwyn Jordan

One of the major activities in the wood is the exercising of dogs and of course their owners.

It is difficult perhaps to prove but it may be largely due to their activities that the paths remain open and easily walked. The image on the right shows a picture of two of our latest members who have moved into the neighbourhood and have greatly appreciated the opportunity of walking with their dogs in the Wood and they were happy for me to include their photograph in the newsletter.



Coombe Wood has been largely unmanaged for somewhere near 150 years. We perhaps could congratulate ourselves on having such a wonderful and unmanaged wood. Of course, as members of the Friends of Coombe Wood we have no legal rights at all for management. This does not mean we cannot think about the future and what is really best for a wood of this kind.

In the old days this wood was a valuable source of timber, presumably for fencing, building and making fires as well as the collecting of bean sticks and various other country pursuits. The beautiful stands of bluebells within our Wood are apparently there as a result of the ancient practice of coppicing leaving coppice stools. This would have resulted in light reaching the woodland floor and giving rise to the beautiful spring flowers. The Wood is being invaded by laurels in places and no bluebells can grow under their dense shade and the same of course is true for holly. Perhaps we should pride ourselves for having an unusual wood where there is no management at all but the downside is that we may end up having a poorer wood. Anyone who is familiar with the woods

managed by the wildlife trust will have seen the benefits of making some clearings where butterflies and wildflowers can increase. Unmanaged woods also have fewer large specimen trees with many small spindly trees struggling with each other.

In the future attention might be given to some of these issues. But at the moment we recognise that the village green gives us no rights to do anything except pursue lawful sports and pastimes but, in the future, if some minimal levels of management can be undertaken by the local authority, some steps could be taken to make the Wood an even more beautiful place for the future. This item is included to keep discussion going and to see what kinds of ideas people have in the neighbourhood. With its very unusual land formation and geology as has been described in this newsletter by John Rostron and the large size of the village green we can be grateful that we have a very remarkable site from which we can benefit so greatly in a rather overcrowded south east corner of Essex.

Right of access remains for all

By Gwyn Jordan

Right of access remains for all as it used to be. As advised by Open Spaces

We have often discussed the fact that the result of granting secure access to people in the "Neighbourhood" of the Village Green through its registration might seem to have changed the rights of people outside the designated neighbourhood. However, in discussions with the Open Spaces Society, the charity with special interest in Village Greens and their protection, I am informed that the rights of no one outside the neighbourhood have been

changed by the granting of Village Green status to the wood. We all had freedom to use the wood being unaware of any restrictions to the contrary and this understanding was the basis of the Village Green Registration procedure. But Open Spaces have told me in conversation that someone coming from overseas even would still be able to use the wood as before the Registration. This may seem a fine point but it means that it is in order for us to let anyone know of the freedoms that exist. It is still true that the ownership of the woods is not affected by this.

Membership Renewals

If you did not renew your membership at the time of the last newsletter, may we ask you to do so now. The Committee recommends that the formal membership level remains at £5 per household to meet our ongoing administrative expenses. However, as we have stated previously, it is a fact that donations over and above the membership level do play an important part in our financing arrangements, and there has in the past been a most generous response to our requests for such donations. Once again any donations that you are able to make over and above the annual membership would be more than welcome.

Please complete the section to the right and return with your membership subscription to one of the following addresses:

Gwyn Jordan. 164 Kenneth Road, SS7 3AL

John Rostron, 431 Kents Hill Road, SS7 4AD

Terry Tokeley, 22 Coombewood Drive, SS7 3EA

Please make cheques payable to **Friends of Coombe Wood**
Enrolment/Renewal for:

Name

Address

.....

eMail

Telephone

Please enrol /renew my membership of Friends of Coombe wood for 2020 (£5 per household).

I agree to the Friends of Coombe Wood maintaining records of my details for membership purposes.

Signed

(Receipts will be given)

Best wishes and thank you for your continuing support,