

Friends of Park Wood Newsletter Winter 2023

Work Parties

With the onset of the colder months our broadleaf trees are dropping their leaves as the shorter winter days mean that there is less light to absorb, and the trees can save their energy by becoming dormant and stop further growth until the spring also our wildlife is now either hibernating or some bird species have migrated to warmer climes. Either way our countryside is quieter although we do welcome species that prefer the colder arctic conditions in summer for whom a British winter is relatively mild. Late October to mid-March is the time for the traditional tree management work like planting, coppicing, or laying and our activities in Park Wood over the next few months will reflect this seasonal work.

Dates for your diary

Sunday 3 1st December - New Year's Eve Walk in the Wood 10 a.m. Introduction to 'Woodland Conservation' - A stroll around the wood with our chair Pete looking at the wood in winter and explaining why we manage the wood the way we do.

Wednesday 3rd January 2024 - Work Party

Sunday 28th January - Work Party

Wednesday 7th February - Work Party

Sunday 25th February - Work Party

Wednesday 6th March - Work Party

Work parties will involve extending the area of coppicing that we started last year, as well as working around the meadows to maintain areas of grassland that is being shaded out by fast growing species mainly willow and removing invasive non-native species that we don't want in the wood. All our work parties start at 10 am and finish around lunch time.



New footbridge and other work in the Wood



The Woodland Trust has replaced the last of the old footbridges on the southwestern corner of the London Road meadow.

At the same time their contractor moved the carved bench in the meadow after a tree inspection and the same day de-silted the pond area and feeder ditches.





Between August and October, friends have been busy cutting and raking the two meadows to keep the current diversity of grassland and woodland edge plant species.

In September our regular Wednesday group had a go at greenwood working for a morning trying their hands at using a shave horse and pole lath as well as some traditional hand tools. Andy James managed to turn out a mallet on the lath.

Havant Conservation Groups Forum

Peter Wallbank was instrumental in getting the TCV to organise a meeting of the forum on the 4th September. The meeting was held at the Newlands Community Centre in the Berewood Estate. It was well attended by many representatives from groups across the borough as well as a councillor and Craig Stainton Estates Manager for the Borough Council.



The estates team is taking an active interest in supporting local community groups who undertake practical action to care for their local green spaces. Starting in the New Year the team will be holding further forum meeting and training events for local volunteers.

If anyone is interested in finding out more, please talk to our Chair Pete Hodges.

Future activities

Since the pandemic we have run hardly any public events or anything other than workdays. In 2025 the group will be celebrating its silver anniversary.

Suggestions please for ways we could celebrate this achievement. Put your thinking caps on. In the past the group has run easter trails, winter activities and three woodland festivals. Ideas please!

And if anyone wants to help contact Pete

The Sycamore Gap Tree

At the end of September, I just happened to be on holiday in Northumberland when news broke of the mysterious felling of the Sycamore Gap Tree on Hadrian's Wall (No this is not a confession, I was soundly snoring in my bed so before you ask, I didn't do it!!!). Amazing that news of a tree being felled could knock every other news story off the front pages and tv news headlines.

The northeast regional news programme came from the scene of the crime on the first day of reporting and since then the police investigation has been followed enthusiastically by the media. Likewise, there has been both speculation and an outpouring of emotion on social media. Memorial gap tree branded hoodies for sixty pounds went quickly on sale to profit from the public outpouring of grief. It wouldn't have surprised me if the government had ordered the lowering of flags and declared a state of mourning.

So why all this fuss about one tree and that tree a Sycamore to boot? It's not like there aren't many sycamore trees, they are one of the most common and widespread species to be found in the UK. In the case of this particular tree. Why do so many people feel such an attachment to it? Most of the population would never have seen this tree in real life. It is the power of the modern media. It became iconic when Hollywood came calling. Remember Kevin Coster taking Morgan Freeman to the tree during their journey to his castle home in the movie Robin Hood Prince of Thieves. Odd



because it was a long detour, given they landed in Dover and were going to Nottingham, a more accurate film title might be Robin Hood Rubbish Map Reader.



It was regularly used as a location for films and TV programmes. Growing by an ancient monument, in the middle of a U-shaped gap with a beautiful backdrop and skyline, blessed with a perfect outline, it was a very photogenic tree. Its image was on a myriad of publications including the OS map cover for the area. In short

it was a media star of the tree world, a celebrity in the arbour cosmos. In 2016 it was voted 'Tree of the Year'. People knew this tree in the same way they know celebrities or the royal family – unlikely to ever meet but very familiar.

Ironically, Sycamore has over the years, had bad press in conservation circle. It is seen as a relatively recent introduction to the British Isles. As a human introduced species rather than getting here naturally without human intervention Sycamore has been regarded as a sort of woody weed. Disapproved of because it colonises too easily in our woods and grows faster than other broadleaf species. Often compared to Oak when talking about its conservation value for diversity of species with roughly 350 species identified on Oak whereas less than a tenth of that number are found on Sycamore. This has led to many conservation tasks involving thinning Sycamore in order to favour other slower growing native trees.

Here's the thing about Sycamore, it may be a relative newcomer to the UK, but it is a tough tree. It will grow in exposed windy and cold upland areas with hardly any soil which is why the tree at Sycamore Gap was able to cling on there and thrive. Sycamore can withstand urban pollution and will grow on the poorest of soils making it ideal for cities or reclaimed ex-industrial landscapes. Moreover, mature specimens especially field trees can be absolutely beautiful and magnificent trees. In the Northumbrian village of Lesbury, I photographed a spectacular Sycamore on the village green. The timber is wonderful for turning and carving. With tree diseases like Ash Die Back, threatening our native species, Sycamore is at last being appreciated for its positive qualities and becoming recognised as a more important tree in our landscape.



In the press and on social media various experts have given their opinion as to the future of the stump - will it coppice? Should we plant a replacement sapling grown from a graft or seed. The wisest counsel I've seen was from my friend Jon Stokes of the Tree Council. He said 'wait and see what happens'. Ironically whoever did the dastardly deed technically did a reasonable job with the felling cut. The stump is very likely to survive and will send up new shoots in due course. The best way to encourage coppice regrowth is to restrict access to the stump by grazing livestock. This might also enable any dormant seed in the ground to germinate. Sycamore is notoriously difficult to kill. Provided the stump is left without any treatments and undisturbed the chances are that next spring the press will be reporting buds appearing on it.

Being in a UNESCO world heritage site, excavation of the ground is not permitted in case it disturbs the archaeological interest which complicates ideas of replanting. So, let's just allow nature to happen. It won't look the same and won't have any sort of impact on the scenery for many decades. That classic photogenic tree is probably lost for ever. If we were that desperate to have an identical tree, we could always ask Peter Jackson to make an artificial copy like he did for his Hobbit film. They had to have a younger party oak at Bag End scaled down by 60 years from the original oak that they filmed 10 years earlier for Lord of the Rings films. That mature tree was dead when they transplanted to the film set. The realistic looking artificial tree is still on the Hobbiton film set which is now New Zealand's busiest tourist attraction.

As sad as it is to see this tree felled the most important aspect of the whole business should be that we mustn't take our big mature and veteran trees for granted any longer. The sad truth is many of our veteran trees are under threat whether for development or because they are deemed to be potentially a nuisance like insurance companies threatening litigation about subsidence. If any good is going to come out of the whole sorry business, then let it be greater public awareness of the threats to our trees and woods. A proper memorial to the Sycamore Gap Tree would be legislation to recognise the historic value of our veteran trees putting them on a par with ancient monuments and legally treat these natural ancient monuments accordingly.

Pete Hodges
Chair of the Friends of Park Wood

Membership

Just a reminder that membership of the Friends of Park Wood runs from the 1st of April to 31st March each year.

Membership Application

Membership is due annually on 1st April each year. It is open to all those who are interested in or care for Park Wood. All friends will receive regular Newsletters with updated information on Park Wood.

NAME

ADDRESS

POSTCODE **TELEPHONE No**

E-MAIL

I / we support the objectives of the Park Wood Project and apply to join The Friends of Park Wood. Membership covers everyone living at the same address. I enclose a donation towards the Friends of Park Wood; a minimum donation of £5.00 is suggested.

Signed

Please return this form to the Secretary:
Maureen Nye, 6 Deanswood Drive, Waterloooville, PO7 7RB. Tel: 02392 232942 Email: maureenye@ntlworld.com
