



Friends of Ecclesall Woods

Newsletter January 2015.

www.friendsofecclesallwoods.org.uk



Goat Willow. Distributed round the Woods, with a lot in the Donkey Field.

Happy New Year to all.

I'm writing this as snow falls heavily outside, and only evergreen trees and shrubs light up the landscape. It won't last; soon we will walk easily again. And a cold snap is really bad for pests, various.

Linda Evans, Chairman

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FEW Events

All under the auspices of Sheffield Environment Weeks. Non-members welcome.

Saturday 18 April 2015. Dawn Chorus Walk, 6 am. Led by Paul Medforth. Meet at entrance to Wood 3 opposite Beauchief Gardens bus stop.

Saturday 18 April 2015. Archaeology Walk. 10 am to about noon. Led by Geoffrey Hartland. Meet outside Woodland Discovery Centre, Abbey Lane

Saturday 2 May 2015. Bluebell (and other flowers) walk, 10 am to noon. Led by Linda Evans. Meet outside Woodland Discovery Centre, Abbey Lane.

Saturday 23 May 2015. Bird Identification Walk, 10 am. Led by Paul Medforth. Meet outside Woodland Discovery Centre, Abbey Lane

Membership Renewal

Our Membership Secretary, Lorna Baker, is out of action at least till Easter, because of illness. She has made arrangements for membership renewals to be taken care of while she is away. However, mistakes may be made in Lorna's very efficient system. If you should have had a renewal form with this newsletter and it isn't there, please download one from our website, friendsofecclesallwoods.org.uk, and send it in with your subscription. If you have already renewed, and get a renewal form, just ignore it.

We all wish Lorna a successful response to treatment and a speedy recovery.

Common Species in Sheffield's Woods

A lively booklet, with chapters covering birds, insects, mosses, fungi and more, with many pictures.



FEW published this booklet in 2008, with the help of grants from Awards for All and the J. G. Graves Memorial Trust. Only 500 copies were produced, and these were distributed to all members of FEW and every school in Sheffield. The booklet has been unavailable for some years, and many people, members and non-members, have been frustrated in getting a copy.

Now, thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund grant, we have a reprint. Any member who does not have a copy can pick a free one up at the Woodland Discovery Centre. We are reluctant to post them to members, as the cheapest post is £1.17 each.

The booklet will be on sale to non-members at a price not yet agreed.

Footpath Group

The Footpath Group has been amazingly active through October, November, December 2014. Most often, there are 7 people working on maintenance and upkeep of the Woods, and the minimum on any day has been 5. One of the main activities was leaf blowing. This makes the paths easier to walk on, and means the paths are not widened and eroded by walkers picking their way round the edges. Long-term, it means less rebuilding of paths, which is still a main preoccupation on the 17 km of path within the Woods. This doesn't include "desire lines", which are paths made by walkers taking a specific line off the path network enough times to make a track. The group cleared the catchment cage and sump where a stream goes underground opposite Millhouses Park, put up one of the new information boards by Collier's Pond, cleared some streams and drains, improved a path by spreading and tamping down aggregate, and litter picked frequently. The group think that we are getting much more litter deposited in the Woods than we used to. Please could anyone seeing litter being dumped remonstrate, take a picture, or at least make notes about the offenders. Low litter has really been part of the reason why we've had the Green Flag award for some years now, and increased litter could cause us to lose it. And if the footpath group are litter picking, they can't do other, more useful, jobs in the Woods.

If you'd like to join the Footpath Group, they meet every Tuesday morning at 9.30 am, and work till about noon. Contact Jane Beresford, janeanden@gmail.com, or David and Judith Smith, dajusmith@live.co.uk. if Jane is away.

In November 2014, a group from Abbeydale Rotary Club spent 3 weekends clearing brambles at the Abbey Lane end of Wood 1. This has now become a yearly event. We thank David Shepherd, and the Rotary Group, very heartily for their contribution.

Ecology Group

Report from Irene May.

The responsibility for the ecology group is shared by 3 people

Marilyn Small mhs1910@gmail.com
Sue Jackson Chris.jackson@zen.co.uk
Irene May Irenedeborahmay1949@gmail.com

This year the group surveyed the ditches and boggy areas in Ecclesall Woods. As a result we have gained a good picture of where they exist and their associated flora. There was not much vegetation in the very wet areas but quite a bit on the periphery. For a detailed plant list please contact one of the coordinators listed above. Thank you to everyone who took part in the survey.

For 2015 we are going to survey nuisance plants. The ecology group has consulted Jane Beresford from the footpath group and we have agreed to look at the presence of Japanese knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, skunk cabbage, Cherry laurel and Rhododendron.

If anyone is interested in helping with the survey please contact one of the coordinators listed above.

The Parks and Countryside services have been helping us to improve our map presentations and as a result we have two new bluebell distribution maps displayed in the Discovery Centre. Have a look --they show an overall marked decline in the presence of bluebells from 1999 to 2012.

Comments from Linda Evans.

Why are the bluebells declining? Some of them have been trampled out of existence, especially since the usage of the Woods has increased considerably over the period, we think. Some may have hybridised with the Spanish bluebell, but the survey didn't distinguish, and this would probably give us more bluebells not fewer. The surveys were carried out by different people, so maybe their judgements varied; it seems unlikely that they would all have varied in the same way. I think we must accept that there has been a real decline in the frequency of bluebells, and we don't know why. Make sure you see them this year -- they are still a staggeringly beautiful sight, and the scent is wonderful.

HLF Grant

In 2011, FEW and the Parks and Countryside Department of Sheffield City Council applied for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, with FEW as the lead partner. We were successful, and received a grant of £50,000 for improving the interpretation of the Woods to adults and schoolchildren. Most of the work would be done by Parks and Countryside, with FEW carrying out specific tasks. We have designed 7 new interpretation boards, now erected round the Woods close to various historic features. We were involved in investigations into archaeological features at the top of Wood 1. We have revised the old leaflet on the Archaeological Trail, to remove features that are no longer visible -- e.g., there was a 200-year-old oak in Wood 2, on Abbey Lane, which is no longer there -- and to include new features of interest, like Collier's Pond. These leaflets are available free at the Woodland Discovery Centre. And, as mentioned above, we have a reprint of the booklet, "Common Species in Sheffield's Woods", which has been out-of-print for some years.



Straight after the boards were installed, I photographed them all on Sunday morning. This board was near Rycroft Mill, and I caught a walking family reading it. They said they liked it.

All the boards have a QR symbol for mobile phones, which will take you to the FEW website for more information.



This board, on Geology and woodland history, was installed by the "concrete" bridge over the Limb Brook. I want to thank Peter Kennett for his work on the geology of the Woods and on this board. Peter gave the talk at the AGM in 2013 on the geology of Ecclesall Woods.

2014 AGM.

At the last AGM, we had a talk from Dr. Toby Pillatt, on new features of archaeological investigations of Ecclesall Woods. We saw some aerial LIDAR photographs, which look through trees to show features on and just under the ground. We heard about the mapping near Cow Lane. And (a special enthusiasm of mine) we heard about an attempt, in April 2014, to make white coal in a Q-pit. This is difficult, because no-one living has actually seen any white coal, let alone the process for making it. But Toby and his team had some success, and found that a lot more research and experiments would be needed for complete success.



Toby and his group dug a pit, with a covered tail projecting about 1.5m. At the entrance to this tunnel, a fire was lit; you can see the projecting sticks in the right foreground, and some ash, but not the fire itself. Pieces of wood to be dried out to make white coal went in the pit. It was soon obvious that the smoke should be confined, and the wood protected from rain -- hence the heap of conifer branches with smoke emerging through them.

Also at the AGM, Linda agreed to serve as Chairman for at least one more year. Which means that newsletters will resume, though not necessarily every quarter. If you want more regular newsletters, please help by sending me articles, photographs, snippets -- even woodland jokes. Email at linda.evans2709@gmail.com

Ecclesall Woods Craft Courses.

A full and interesting programme for spring 2015. For details and booking, look at the website

Sunday 15th February 2015 - 9:30am - 4:00pm

Introduction to Woodland Coppicing - £85

Learn about the management of our native woodland Ecclesall Woods

Wednesday 18th February 2015 - 9:30am - 4:00pm

Make your own Flowerpot Character (ages 12+) - £35

Create your own rustic flowerpot character

Saturday 21st February 2015 - 9:30am - 4:00pm

Intro to Woodland Hand Felling - £85

Learn how to fell small trees by hand and how to process them ready for use as firewood, craft material and brash

Saturday 14th March 2015 - 9:30am-4:00pm

Bronze Making & Smelting & Casting

Looking at the evidence for the first use of metals

Saturday 21st March 2015 - 9:30am - 4:00pm

"Against The Grain" Wood Sculpture Course - £80

Learn the art of creative wood sculpture on large pieces of timber