

Sadlers Wells Community Woodland
Registered Charity Number 1105117



Newsletter No. 13 – Autumn 2012

Tony Gentil



It is with great sadness that we have to report that Tony Gentil died on 27th August at the age of 70. He had been diagnosed with an incurable brain tumour in March and had notified us that he was unable to continue as a trustee due to ill-health. Tony was one of the original trustees when the Charity was formed in 2001 and his support, knowledge and enthusiasm will be greatly missed. He was well known for leading walks round the Wood with his wife Liz. This photograph was taken on one of them a couple or so years ago.

Tony had a varied career in horticulture and forestry, and was a lecturer at Reaseheath College for many years. He had also since 1975 written a weekly gardening column for a group of local newspapers. For ten years he was in charge of the horticultural section of Nantwich Show, a post he had handed over in the last year to Adrian Caine. Over the last twenty years he established a collection of over 500 different fruit trees at his home at Aston near Nantwich and rescued several native Cheshire varieties, and he supported traditional mid-Cheshire gooseberry shows, particularly the one at Marton.

Helping the Environment
The Wood needs YOU!

In recent Newsletters we have asked for further volunteers. Since we have lost Tony Gentil and three of the other trustees are now over 80, the need for others to gradually take over various management tasks is now urgent and we hope that two or three people will come forward and make themselves available. We need help in the general management of the wood, organising two or three working parties a year and providing publicity to keep the Village informed of what we are doing and to attract new supporters to join the Friends of the Wood. If you feel that you can help in any of these areas, or know of someone else who would be willing, please contact us as soon as convenient. As we have said before, no particular skills are needed, just a desire to help the environment, and the number of hours will not be great.

Volunteers would be greatly appreciated. Please contact either Ernest or myself – details at the end of this Newsletter.

The thorny question of brambles

Brambles (*rubus fruticosus*) are a plant with which most people have a love/hate relationship. Their fruit can be rich and juicy but their spreading stems are full of thorns to trap the unwary so much so that in some parts they (and the wild rose) were known as 'lawyers' because it could be very difficult to extricate yourself if you fell into their clutches. There are reputedly some 400 types of bramble in Britain including microspecies, the differences being in size, taste and time of fruiting. Even locally, there are brambles with large, tasty fruit and others with fruit that are smaller and harder. Despite its name the fruit is not strictly a berry but a multiple drupe in that each fruit is a cluster of seeds surrounded by its own fleshy piece of fruit. A true berry has only a single seed.

Brambles were apparently often planted on graves in former times for the practical reason of deterring grazing sheep and mystical reasons of keeping the Devil out and the dead in! Some commercial foresters root out brambles thinking that they restrict young trees but others think they offer protection against deer. Blackberries do however need a certain amount of sunlight and, although natural in woodland, will be restricted where the woodland canopy closes over.

Blackberries are of course one of the best known foraged wild fruits and have been picked by country folk for millennia. Its seeds

were found in the stomach of a Neolithic man dug up in Essex. The fruit is made into jam and made into tasty blackberry and apple pies and crumbles, even blackberry and apple sandwiches. Other recipes include the old blackberry crowdie (with toasted oats, cream and rum or whisky) and a blackberry vinegar made of berries marinated with sugar in white vinegar to be served with grilled goat's cheese.

A recipe of a Scottish form of Crowdie (naturally using whisky) is as follows:-

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon of melted butter
- 4 to 5 tablespoons of medium size oats
- 1 cup of double cream
- 2 tablespoons of honey
- 1 tablespoon of Scotch whisky
- 1 cup of berries (eg raspberries, blackberries)
- Sprig of mint for garnish
- Optional; toasted almonds for garnish

Method

Lightly brown the oats in a pan coated with melted butter. Remove from heat and allow to cool. Reserve a small amount for garnish.

Beat cream until peaks form and add honey and then whisky. Fold in the toasted oats. Layer in a tall glass, beginning with a small amount of berries, then whipped cream mixture. Alternate layers of berries and cream, ending with a few berries. Garnish with toasted oats or nuts and a sprig of mint.

The recipe has not been tried so no guarantees, but if anyone does try it, comments would be appreciated.

The Tawny Owl

When the nest boxes in the Wood were checked and cleaned last year, one of the highlights was finding the remnants of an old nest in the owl box which we had put up. The most likely occupants would have been a pair of tawny owls which are the common woodland owl. The kee-wick and tu-whit calls are frequently heard at night when the owls do most of their hunting; their prey is quite extensive ranging from small mammals and birds to insects and worms.

The tawny owl is a medium-sized owl about 15 inches (38 cm) in length with a wingspan of over 3 feet (94 – 104 cm) slightly larger than a barn owl with a largish head, tubby body and mottled brown plumage. They are found across Europe (except for the far north and strangely only a few records from Ireland) and their range extends across Asia through to China although some of the Asian populations are patchy.

Like most owls, they have excellent vision which enables them to hunt in very low light levels, although not in complete darkness; they also have very good hearing to enable them to locate their prey. They can be very aggressive during the breeding season and nests should not be approached at that time. Young birds face many problems when they fledge and disperse and two out of every three may not survive their first year.

They were frequently considered a bird of ill-omen whose hooting was thought to foretell a death in the household. Even such an eminent Victorian as John Ruskin apparently viewed them with foreboding.

The future of the Wood

We recently had a visit from Dr Rachel Giles, the Local Wildlife Sites Officer of The Cheshire Wildlife Trust, and we discussed what would be needed in the future management of the Wood.

She pointed out that there were clearly two separate soil types in the old Wood; the upper part towards the public footpath was clearly much lighter and dryer compared with the lower damper area down towards the brook. The lower path almost entirely formed the boundary between the two areas. The upper area was frankly of limited interest but the lower area was much more diverse.

Regarding future management, her advice was as follows:-

1. The growing conditions in the upper area were poor and this is why the shrub planting in that area showed such poor results with field maple doing very badly. She was surprised that so much hazel had taken. She suggested that rowan or birch would be more suitable for this area.

2. There was a lot of holly but it was virtually all growing in the upper area and she would be inclined to leave all the healthy holly in that area. There was little holly in the lower area and most there could remain.

3. We should concentrate on native broadleaved species which occur locally and any beech, pine or larch should be kept to a minimum. Beech and sycamore saplings should be removed up to about 6" trunk diameter.

4. We should try to remove all garden escapes including Spanish bluebells.

5. Thinning of the new plantation should be carried out.

6. Nettles were something of a problem but would have to be accepted as they do have wildlife benefits. The area by the seat in the glade is now overgrown because the trees which have blown down have let the light in which has encouraged the nettles to grow.

She is going to let us have a written report so that the Trust can prepare a management plan for the next three years.

The thinning of the new plantation is something which we already had in mind. The trees have grown so well that in most areas nearly every other tree will have to be taken out.

Friends of the Wood

The annual subscription is a minimum of £5-00 each and the 2012/13 subscription **became due on 1st April**. The wood produces no income itself and we therefore have to raise all the money needed to pay for insurance, maintenance, etc. Your subscriptions are therefore very valuable to us, not only in themselves but also because they show a commitment from the local community which is a great help when we approach funding organisations for any grants available to enable the Trust to carry out its work. Thank you to those who have duly paid. Reminders have been sent to those whose subscriptions are still outstanding and early payment of any

still owing would be greatly appreciated. Payment can be made either to Ernest Croley or Michael Bourne whose details are given below; cheques should be made payable to Sadlers Wells Community Woodland.

Gift Aid is a valuable source of income and we would appreciate subscriptions being gift aided if you are able to do so and have not already done it. The amount of Gift Aid on a single subscription is only small but the total amount we get each year is significant.

And finally

A proverb from the Ivory Coast

“When in the middle of the river, do not insult the crocodile!”

I do not think that this applies to The Gowy though.

If anyone has any comments or queries regarding this Newsletter or the wood generally, please write or e-mail our Clerk, Michael Bourne. We would appreciate response from members to let us know whether we are heading in the right direction.

As mentioned in previous newsletters, if you see anything unusual or interesting in the wood, please let us know by telephone or e-mail as we would like to make a record.

Finally, if there is anyone who does not receive Newsletters by e-mail but would like to do so, please let me know by e-mail at the address below. It would save us postage or delivery, and you would have the benefit of photographs being in colour. An e-mail address would also be helpful for any other communications.

Contact us:

Ernest Croley; Tel 01829-260344

2 The Square, Bunbury, Cheshire CW6 9PW

E-mail ernest.croley@homecall.co.uk

Michael Bourne; Tel 01829-260944

Long Acre, Wyche Lane, Bunbury, Cheshire CW6 9PS

E-mail mjbourne249@tiscali.co.uk

Newsletter Editor Mike Bourne

Website address www.sadlerswellswood.co.uk

Trustees of the Charity Ernest Croley (Chairman), Michael Bourne (Clerk),
Bob Price, Eric Lord, Alyson Thacker and Dr Katherine Hutchinson.