

# **Sadlers Wells Community Woodland**

Registered Charity Number 1105117



Supported by the  
**Heritage Lottery Fund**

## **Newsletter No. 8 - Spring 2010**

Welcome to the Eighth Newsletter of Sadlers Wells Community Woodland. Recent news since the last newsletter includes:-

a) A large Ash tree down by the brook split badly during the autumn and a large part of it had to be cut down by a tree surgeon for safety reasons.

b) The Cheshire Landscape Trust kindly made some more shrubs available and these were planted in the old wood towards the end of last year to increase the amount of under-storey.

c) The School have said that they would like some seating to be provided in the wood to be used when the children are having lessons there and it is proposed that some of the timber taken out of the old Ash tree should be used to make some simple log seats.

d) It is hoped that the bluebells which were planted last year will become established and we shall be waiting to see how many have survived. Some were undoubtedly taken by squirrels last year soon after they were planted.

e) The new plantation has been growing almost too well and some of the trees will need pruning and shaping in late summer or early autumn. This is something that we can do ourselves and a working party will be organised at the appropriate time. Bob Price has offered to give professional guidance as to what is required.

### **Introducing the trustees**

#### **No. 6**

#### **Dr Katherine Hutchinson**

Katherine Hutchinson lives in Spurstow and is the trustee presently nominated by Spurstow Parish Council, which has the power under the constitution of

the Charity to appoint one trustee because the area of the new plantation over the brook is actually in that parish.

Katherine was born in Bedfordshire but moved to Lancashire on the edge of the moors at the age of 8. The moors were wild and exciting but you could not grow anything in the garden. She went to school in Somerset from ages 13-18 and loved the lush greenery and the peat bogs. She went to medical school in London and enjoyed the course but not the lack of green space. On qualification, she joined the surgery in Bunbury as a GP in 1982, later moving to a practice in Tattenhall and now Nantwich.

She and her husband Stephen bought a large field some 23 years ago on the Somerset/ Devon border and planted it with trees. They do not know yet whether it has been a good financial investment but have had great fun looking after the trees and watching them grow.

She has been a member of Spurstow Parish Council for several years.

## **Chairman's Notes**

Well at long last it is beginning to happen. Spring has arrived; the first woodland flowers have made themselves visible; the woodpeckers are noisily at work; the first butterfly has been seen and we can now take stock of what the winter has left us.

Considering the severity of the winter, the Wood has survived remarkably well. We had an early problem with an ash tree that was brought down by the autumn gales. It finished its days relying on a neighbour for more than just moral support. Mike called on the services of the dreaded tree surgeon and he cut the tree into fairly long lengths, which are hopefully too heavy to move easily. In the event we were able to turn a problem into an opportunity. Bunbury School asked if we could provide seating for the children visiting the wood. It was thought that this might be visually intrusive but a neat solution was already with us. The lengths of timber are to be re-arranged so that they will form an open-air classroom, positioned in the glade by the entrance to the wood. Our thanks go to Andie Fairclough for his agreement to provide the muscle to effect the repositioning.

The other damage had a more human cause. Fifteen yards of the hedge separating us from the Whitchurch Road has been destroyed, almost certainly by a vehicle. We have asked County Highways if it is their responsibility but I expect that, in the end, we will have to sort out what is a rather nasty tangle. We found a number plate in the area so if you have lost a number plate with the lettering R161MJM please contact us, so that arrangements can be made for its return.

The arrival of spring and the prospect of summer coming remind us that, once again, we shall be having working parties. If you have never been on a working

party I would encourage you to consider joining us. It is far from an unpleasant experience and it gives the opportunity to be outside in a pleasant environment with a group of people who are (mostly) quite sociable. There is always someone to give guidance and if it all gets too much you can always just sit and watch the others suffer. We already have several jobs in mind. First the ever-lasting litter pick. Whilst the litter is fairly well under control, the current output is still supplemented by items that were obviously dumped in the twenties and thirties. Broken bottles and pieces of glass are the worst enemies. An early job is to clear away the dead stalks left by last year's nettles, which tend to look rather untidy and make it more difficult to deal with this year's crop when it arrives. This job has the advantage that it allows us to show off our amazing array of machetes and other jungle survival tools. If that is not for you and you feel adventurous, why not bring your Wellie boots and help to clear out the brook. If, on the other hand, you prefer something more sedate then you might find that trimming the growth that overhangs the walks is your strength. This is a pretty key job this year because, in the autumn, we shall be planting some extra shrubs to more clearly define the pathways.

Later this year we will have to adapt to new skills. The new plantation is growing with extraordinary vigour, perhaps because it was planted on land that had been grassland for many decades. We have not yet reached the stage of thinning but some of the trees have not behaved themselves and are growing in ways, which, if left unattended, would cause our successors problems. Bob Price, who is, as you probably know, a Chartered Forester, has agreed to instruct and supervise us in a little tree surgery. It will be a chance to learn as well as to do something, which is both useful and enjoyable.

## **The historical ownership of the wood**

We purchased the wood from the Peckforton Estate in 2006 but inspection of the old tithe maps held by Chester Archives which were produced between 1835 and 1851 show that the owner at that time was John Downes and that the wood was part of Brownhills Farm. According to the tithe records, John Downes and the Downes family (including the Estate of his late father also John Downes) owned several other farms in Woodworth Green and Haughton. A look at the Census records between 1841 and 1881 showed that John Downes the younger was originally an attorney but was later described as the owner of land and houses, living in Welsh Row, Nantwich at Number 50. The censuses refer to several servants/housekeepers but do not mention any wife, so he may never have married. There is a record of a baptism of a John Downes at Nantwich in 1807 and a death in 1890.

The Peckforton Estate presumably acquired Browhills farm and the wood from him or from his estate on his death.

The Tithe Maps and ownership records provide a fascinating insight into what the area looked like in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; there were, for instance, then very few properties built along the main road. A look at Haughton shows that Haughton Moss was a large open area between where is now The Old Mission Room and Moss Farm. If you are interested, the maps and records can be viewed online at [www/cheshire.gov.uk/tithemaps/TwinMaps.aspx](http://www/cheshire.gov.uk/tithemaps/TwinMaps.aspx). The site may initially show that Cheshire County Council no longer exists but the links bring you to the right place in the end. The website also allows comparison between the tithe map and the current ordnance survey map and the ordnance survey maps of 1875 and 1910.

## **Nettles – Friend or Foe?**

You will have noticed that the new plantation has been growing a very good crop of nettles as well as the trees which we planted. Nettles (*Urtica dioica*) like fertile, muddy and slightly disturbed ground and particularly soil rich in phosphates which is why they are often found near human habitation and land used for agriculture. Phosphates can remain in the soil for centuries and ancient nettle patches (with other phosphate lovers such as cleavers and elderberry) often indicate the site of deserted villages and dwellings.

Last year we tried cutting the nettles back in the centre of the plantation in the summer leaving those on the outside of the path to provide food for butterflies, etc but this was not a success because areas had to be left unmown due to birds found to be nesting among the stalks, and also the nettles grew back so rapidly that there was little benefit. Since we do not wish to use chemicals unless absolutely necessary, this year we shall simply cut them down in the autumn when they are dying back to keep the area tidy. As the young trees grow however, the leaf canopy will close over and the reduction in the sunlight falling to the ground should mean that the nettle growth will be much reduced.

Nettles are a host plant for many insects and are the favourite food for the caterpillars of many moths and butterflies, including small tortoiseshells, peacocks and red admirals. Nettles also provide food and shelter for ladybirds who feed on aphids. The aphids found on nettles are a good food source for

ladybirds as they appear early in spring and they are apparently specific to that species of plant so gardeners need not worry that those on nettles will go on to attack roses and vegetables. Nettles also produce a large quantity of seeds which are much appreciated by birds.

Nettles do however also have some uses for the benefit of humanity providing food and clothing and being used for medicinal purposes; they have been used as food for centuries and are rich in minerals and vitamins. Nettle soup and porridge are very old recipes and Samuel Pepys praised the excellence of nettle porridge in his famous diary. During the last war, Ambrose Heath (1941) recommended that “a poached egg on a bed of dandelion or nettle puree covered in cheese sauce is an almost perfect meal, containing every one of the foods which we are being told to eat, body-building, protective and energising”. Even modern chefs have used nettles in their cooking. Nettles can also be used to make a tea, a beer and puddings. The Cornish Yarg cheese is often wrapped in nettles and a nettle cheese is produced in Northumberland.

Nettles have been used therapeutically since Greek and Roman times, particularly using the stings to reduce painful joints in the same way that bee venom has been used to relieve arthritis. They were used in medieval times as a diuretic. The famous seventeenth century herbalist Nicholas Culpepper recommended the use of nettles to “consume the phlegmatic superfluities in the body of man, that the coldness and moisture of winter has left behind”. He also suggested the juice of the leaves as a treatment for gangrenes and scabies. Dried leaves made into a powder can also be used for staunching the flow of blood from small cuts. Nettle extracts are said to treat eczema, gout, anaemia, hay fever and some prostate problems. It is also said to be anti-inflammatory, antiparasitic, antiseptic, a digestive stimulant, a menstrual promoter, a cure for head lice and a hair stimulant. In short, a cure for almost everything.

Nettle fibres have been used for string and cloth-making from earliest times and it is reported that Germany used nettles to make military clothing in the First World War when cotton was scarce. Apparently though, it takes about 40kg of nettles to make a single shirt. Research is said to be continuing to find whether there are any ways to grow and harvest nettles commercially to make cloth.

Nettles are good to put on compost heaps in view of their mineral content but roots are best left out as they will grow again at the slightest opportunity. Nettle leaves can also be soaked in water for a month or so and the result, when diluted, can make a good fertiliser.

Nettles are said to be good for horses if eaten when wilted and even to benefit such problems with horses as sweet itch and laminitis.

There is a book out at the moment called “101 uses for stinging nettles” including beer, dandruff treatment, making friendship bracelets, making fertilisers, fly repellent and dyes (green from the leaves and yellow from the roots) and flavouring an omelette. It is also proposed to hold a “Be nice to nettles week” in May 2010.

You try all these uses at your own risk as I am sure that they would not meet modern day requirements.

It is well known that their stings are a protection against nettles being eaten by grazing animals. The so-called dead nettles of the lamium family mimic nettles in their looks so they get left alone as well.

Everyone is aware that dock leaves are good for treating nettle stings but the juice from the nettle stems themselves are also good for that purpose as it is a natural antihistamine, but this seems to assume that you can extract the juice from the stems without getting stung several times more.

The New Zealand tree nettle (*Urtica ferox*) has been known to kill horses and dogs and there are species of nettles in Indonesia whose stings are so powerful that the effects can last for weeks and can even be fatal.

If they can do half the things that are claimed for them, there is more to nettles than meets the eye!

Mike Bourne

## Forthcoming events

We will be holding another woodland walk and we are pleased that again Tony Gentil and his wife Liz will be on hand to explain and identify what there is about. This time we intend to hold the walk one Sunday afternoon in September so that there will be different things to look at compared with previous walks which have been in early summer. Further details will be circulated and posted on our notice boards on the Village Hall and at the entrance to the wood nearer the time.

## Friends of the Wood

The annual subscription is £5-00 each and the 2010/11 subscription **is due on 1<sup>st</sup> 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. Please treat this as your subscription reminder. Early payment would be greatly appreciated and payment can be made with the slip attached to this Newsletter either to Ernest Croley or Michael Bourne whose details are given below. **New members** (who would like to support our work to maintain and improve the amenity of the wood and to make it available for educational projects by the School and others) would be greatly appreciated. Please send your name, address (including e-mail address where applicable) and subscription to either of the above. All contributions will be gratefully

