

# Parish woodland surveys



There have been a number of surveys of woodland in the parish over the years. The tithe map of 1842 recorded the location and ownership of woodland but with no additional information. Ron Harrington of Plumpton College surveyed those on college land in 1982; in 2009 college students repeated the surveys. The parish tree warden – the late J. Tetley, covered 39 areas of woodland, most of them very small, in 1987 but we have not been able to locate the full report of his findings. In 1986 Robin Lang carried out a survey of 19 of 20 woodlands in the parish for the Sussex Trust for Nature Conservation (now the Sussex Wildlife Trust).

Last year the Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group (PW&HG) decided to repeat survey the woods covered by Robin Lang to see what changes there have been in the last 28 years. It would also provide opportunities for group members to build on their identification skills. The survey method is straightforward: we walk through as much of the wood as possible, listing plant species as we go, and then at the end go through the list assigning a score to each species (Abundant, Common, Frequent, Occasional and Rare), which often gives rise to debate because it is rather subjective but we usually reach a consensus without too many ruffled feathers.

It is going to be a continuing and long-term project for two reasons: the best time to survey woodland is restricted to a few weeks in springtime and, second, group members have only a limited amount of time to devote to surveys. So far we have surveyed seven woods, including one that Robin Lang was unable to visit in 1986, and next year we hope to finish and write up our findings. *JH*

## **A volunteer woodland surveyor writes....**

This spring I had the great privilege and joy of joining Jacqui Hutson, our wonderfully knowledgeable, and very patient, botanist in 'helping' to carry out three woodland surveys, along with a small group of other volunteers from the Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group. We were recording all species of flora we could find in Plumpton Wood South, Pig Wood, Grannies Wood and Letchmore Wood, off St Helena Lane, with kind permission of the landowners.

Off we went, with backpacks holding water and snacks etc, and with Jacqui equipped with reference books and magnifying hand lenses. These lenses allowed us to see the minutiae of various plants so that we could determine what species they were – an amazing experience for me. It was like looking into a different world, and certainly extended my curiosity regarding the beauty of plants' differences.

These surveys were an exciting new way for me to experience being in a wood. Rather than enjoying them in an all-encompassing way, we had to really look, and look hard – up, down, around and under – to appreciate the layers of change over the seasons. For example, we know that in winter the woods are fairly bare, with the remains of years of dead leaves covering the ground. Then, as the signs of spring begin to bud and green up, we get the lovely, white wood anemones. If we are lucky, as we largely are around here, these gradually give way to our extraordinary bluebells. As the foliage grows, it gradually covers up the earlier blooms. Hence the necessity to look under. In one wood the spring had progressed so quickly that it became a mission to find evidence of Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*, as I now know), one sign of an ancient woodland. You had to kneel down on wet verbiage and lift up newer leaves to reveal them.

The surveys were also a chance to appreciate the wonderfully varied shapes of trees, particularly those that have been pollarded, and those that were planted as 'boundary' trees. I was also struck by how very different the botany is of our various woods. There are those that are relatively limited in variety and others that are almost overwhelming in their richness.

The surveys are an experience I highly recommend, and a wonderful way to learn about the often-overlooked beauties of our local woodlands.

*Sue Bromage*

*Visit [plumptonwildlifegroup.weebly.com/](http://plumptonwildlifegroup.weebly.com/) for information about the group and forthcoming surveys and wildlife walks*