

Friends of Park Wood – A Walk In The Wood



History:

Park Wood was originally part of the Forest of Bere, a royal hunting forest established soon after the Norman Conquest. The Forest extended from the River Meon in the west to Havant in the east, with its southern boundary represented by Purbook heath Road and its northern boundary crossing the London Road to the north of Longwood Avenue. However, today Park Wood is totally enclosed on all four sides by: London Road, Queens Road, Wallis Road and Deanswood Drive/Treeside Way producing an area of some 3.5 hectares.

How has this shrinkage occurred?

As is so often the case – economic considerations provide the key. During the late Eighteenth and throughout the Nineteenth Century the Forest was reduced in size being divided by enclosures, landlord gifts of parcels of land and straightforward commercial sale. One such sale around the time of the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 and further purchases of land in the following twenty years saw the creation of the Hart Plain Estate at the hands of William Friend. The estate of some 400 acres included his residence Hart Plain House arable and pastureland and woodland including Park Wood which was maintained as a pleasure ground for the enjoyment of the Friend family and guests.

Following the death of William Friend in 1836 (and his subsequent burial in Catherington Churchyard alongside that of his wife Elizabeth) the estate passed to other members of the Friend family until 1899 after which time the estate was sold piece by piece.

Hart Plain House (in the vicinity of Windsor Road beyond Milton Road) provided the estate's focal point as well as the main home for the Friend family, thereafter passing into private ownership until the 1930s. Around this time the house was bought by a builder, presumably with development in mind, and it started to fall into disrepair before being finally demolished in 1959/60 during the development of this area. The name of Hart Plain House is perpetuated in the apartment block near the Health Centre located just off the Milton Road.

The western half of Park Wood was purchased in 1910 by Dr F E Beddow , a doctor of science who had moved to Portsmouth to become Head of the Department of Chemistry in the Municipal College. He built a large, west facing, 'Arts and Crafts' style house, known as Park Wood House, in the middle of his plot, on a track joining Queens Road to Wallis Road. He purchased the remainder of the Wood from the Hart Plain Estate in three lots, the last (the eastern meadow) in 1922.

Until his death in 1953 Dr Beddow maintained his estate in very good order and Park Wood continued to be managed as ornamental woodland. On his death his estate was placed in trust for the benefit of his housekeeper, Miss Ellis, who lived in Park Wood house until 1970 when it was sold to a local couple. Thereafter the trustees were charged with selling the estate to create funding for a public library. This led to several attempts by the trustees to secure planning approval for some 80-95 houses to be built across Park Wood. Whilst these were refused other modest applications did allow the construction of a small number of houses at the western edge of the Wood.

In 1986 the remaining Park Wood was designated as a local amenity and leased to the Borough Council for 3000 years while the freehold was transferred to the University of Southampton in 1989. Havant Council sublet the Wood to the Woodland Trust as management agents for 199 years in 1991. During the 1990s some remedial work was undertaken to reverse the deterioration in the Wood that had occurred following Dr Beddow's death but more effort was needed to restore the Wood to its former glory. The answer came in the form of the Friends of Park Wood which was inaugurated in 2000 and continues its voluntary work today.

Entrance:



Welcome to Park Wood and to this Walk in the Wood. To begin with spend a little time looking at the Welcome Board which gives you an insight to the history of the Wood as well as information on the trees, shrubs, flowering plants as well as the wildlife in the wood.

Now leave the display board and follow the path on your left until you reach Marker Post 1

Marker Post 1:



Feel free to sit on the bench near marker post 1 as you look across what is known as the Eastern or London Road Meadow. The hedgerow along the London Road includes hawthorn, oak, ash and common limes. However, it's impossible not to be impressed by ...



the Great English Oak which stands in front of you; its wide spread showing it grew to maturity over some 175 years in a relatively open area. Dr Beddow's Jersey cow 'Gillie' lived in the meadow in the 1940s and the meadow was cut for hay until the 1970s. Young oaks have regenerated naturally as the meadow ceased to be used.

Now leave the bench, turn right past the marker post 1 and as you enter the wooded area cross two small wooden bridges. The first crosses the ditch at the boundary between wood and meadow; the second crosses the ditch which drained the walled garden

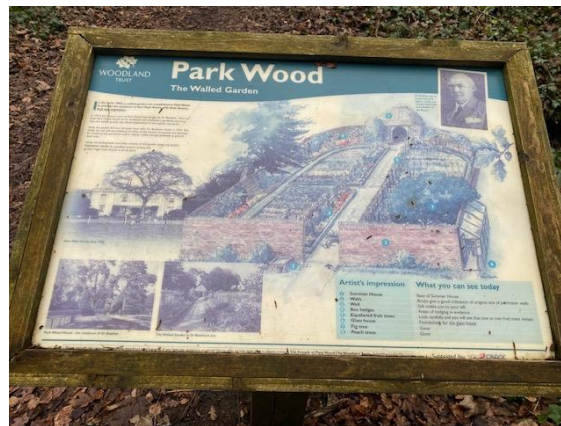
Marker Post 2:



Feel free to sit on the bench near marker post 2 (noting the carvings on either end!) as you read the following:

During the time of ownership by the Friend family in the nineteenth century a Walled Garden was constructed within the Wood, a short distance from Hart Plain Lodge House, 199 London Road. This property has provided the home for John Chaplain between 1841 and 1871 when working as an agricultural labourer and carpenter and then between 1876 and 1903 for Harry Hopkins, the Estate's gamekeeper, with his wife Jane and eleven children (eight of whom survived to adulthood). Harry had the use of the garden at the Lodge and also tended the walled garden in Park Wood. The garden probably provided vegetables, fruit and flowers for the estate.

A few steps to your left along a narrow path and you will come to a display board.



The board shows how the garden would have looked in its prime. On your right the southern wall of the garden is just visible at ground level and there is considerable natural regeneration mainly of ash and willow. Other trees are mainly birch, oak and yew. Celandine and wood anemone flower in the spring and spotted and twayblade orchids in summer.

Now retrace your steps back past the bench and follow the path past some fine yews and as you come to the yew in the middle of the path take the left fork over the small bridge over the drainage ditch.

You will see in front of you the restored 'ditch and bank' which separated the core woodlands from the second meadow area. This feature certainly dates back to the enclosure period and may be older still. Coppiced hazel is prominent along the bank.

A hydrological survey did not reveal any springs within Park Wood; the drainage ditches serve to collect surface water and channel it into the main surface water drain which flows under London Road.

Having crossed the bridge continue up the path with the former meadow to your left:

Marker Post 3:



Looking back down the path just walked you will have noticed a large oak stump surrounded by brambles. This is all that remains of an enormous oak which marked a corner on the boundary between the parishes of Catherington and Farlington, which formerly ran through the south-east corner of Park Wood.

You will have also gone past regenerated young oaks, probably saplings at the time of the storm of 1987 and now some 40 years on, growing into maturity. Behind these oaks lies the meadow which, like the London Road meadow, was cut for hay each year until the late 1970s. Indeed cows were kept in the meadow until the late 1960s.

You will also see beyond the meadow, a fence line marking the boundary of the rear gardens of properties in Wallis Road. The earliest of these properties were constructed in the first years of the 20th Century, as part of the reduction in the size of the Hart Plain Estate. For example, held at the 'Heroes of Waterloo' public house, a sale was organised on June 15th 1904 offering 27 plots for purchase. This led to the construction of Wallis Road and the first houses in it. Those houses you can see were probably built at later dates.

Leaving the meadow behind you follow the path curving right over the ditch. A fallen oak can be seen across the ditch on the right. Pass two large yews and return to the wooded area going straight across at the little crossroads onto the clearing with the bench.

Marker Post 4:



Feel free to sit on the bench as you take in the contents of the Beech Glade.

A very fine yew (probably the oldest in the wood) stands at the south side of the glade. In the centre, opposite the bench, is a group of five splendid beech trees and the edge of the glade is carpeted with bluebells in the spring.

Turning through 180 degrees and you can make out a further fenceline marking the western boundary of Park Wood. Four privately owned residential houses lie on the far side of this fence including the house that was built on the site of Park Wood House following its destruction by fire in the mid-1990s.

Now leave the Beech Glade by following the track to your left and at the fork follow the track that will lead to you straight on to the shade provided by yet another mature yew tree.

Marker Post 5:



As will now become clear, a key feature of Park Wood is the number of mature yew trees such as this example. The yew is one of the longest-lived native species in Europe. This has made it a symbol of death and doom, but it provides food and shelter for woodland animals. Mature yew trees can grow to 20m. The bark is reddish-brown with purple tones and peeling. The yew is probably the most long-lived tree in northern Europe.

Look out for the evergreen, year-round needle-like leaves which grow in two rows along a twig. Underneath, the needles each have a raised central vein.

Yew is dioecious, meaning that male and female flowers grow on separate trees. These are visible in March and April. Male flowers are insignificant white-yellow globe-like structures. Female flowers are bud-like and scaly, and green when young but becoming brown and acorn-like with age. Unlike many other conifers, the common yew does not actually bear its seeds in a cone. Instead, each seed is enclosed in a red, fleshy, berry-like structure known as an aril which is open at the tip.

Yew trees are associated with churchyards and there are at least 500 churchyards in England which contain yew trees older than the buildings themselves. It is not clear why, but it is thought that yew trees were planted on the graves of plague victims to protect and

purify the dead, and also in churchyards to stop commoners from grazing their cattle on church grounds as yew is extremely poisonous to livestock.

Did you know that the Romans believed that yews grew in hell.

From here you will see a gate in the corner which gives access to Queens Road but in order to complete your walk, retrace your steps down the track and follow it round to the left until you come to an open glade with an unmistakable art feature.

Marker Post 6:



The Feet were commissioned by the FOPW and sculpted from one section of oak trunk split to form the two feet, by a chainsaw artist. A third 'foot' can be found at the northern entrance to the Queen's Inclosure on Park Lane, Cowplain.

As you continue your walk you will go past a decaying tree trunk, a remnant of the 1987 storm, left in place to provide a habitat for various insects, fungi and mosses.

Marker Post 7:



The marker post stands at the foot of yet another mature yew itself marking the start of a yew glade of further fine specimens many of which were damaged by the heavy snow in 2010 leading to several boughs having to be removed. On the ground near the tree and marker post you can make out the remains of the floor within the Summer House which marked the northern end of the walled garden.

Continuing on your return to the London Road meadow. This is now cut in the autumn to encourage generation of wild flowers. You will pass (or indeed enjoy sitting on) a memorial bench to your left. This was erected in memory of people who appreciated the value of woodland and enjoyed this wood.

We hope you enjoyed your walk!

If you did why not consider becoming a Friend of Park Wood yourself? It's very easy to arrange by emailing fopwsmembership@gmail.com. Alternatively for more information have a look at the Friends of Park Wood website at <https://www.park-wood.org> where you can find out what we, as volunteers, do for our local natural resource for all to enjoy. In addition check out our Facebook page at Friends of Park Wood – Waterloooville.