

**HOME WOOD,
BATHFORD**

(ST 794647)

A report

By

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HOME WOOD, BATHFORD (ST 794647)

An ecological survey to guide a Woodland Grant Scheme application

Abstract

Home Wood is an important landscape feature in the middle Avon valley with a definite value to bat species and possibly to dormice as well. It has a poor structure and is essentially secondary woodland with two small areas of more established woodland communities. With the exception of these more established areas the botanical interest of the site is low.

Overview (physical)

Home Wood occupies approximately 16ha of steep ground on the eastern side of the Avon valley in the Warleigh area of Bathford parish. The site incorporates the small area known as Dead Man Wood. The woodland has a south westerly aspect, overlies Jurassic Oolitic limestones and is largely free draining except for a broad area in the southern centre of the wood where a seepage has given rise to clay soils. Throughout the wood there are a number of steep gullies which run down the hillside; there is no indication that these carry water other than in periods of exceptional rainfall. Scattered through much of the centre of the wood are very large blocks of limestone which have either rolled downhill from quarrying work or have been extracted from within the site; whatever their origin they appear to have been in situ for a considerable length of time. Much smaller rock debris is frequent throughout the wood.

The wood has not been managed for at least fifty years and many boundaries are diffuse. Only the southern edge, adjacent to pasture, has an effective boundary of post and wire fencing, elsewhere the edges of the wood are defined by derelict stone walls and fencelines.

A system of tracks within the wood are shown on a map of 1902 but the majority of these are now hard to locate. A single branching trackway runs through the southern part of the wood and is solely used for recreational purposes; it would need upgrading to be useful for timber extraction or other vehicular access.

Only a small section of public footpath runs through the site – dividing the bulk of the wood from Dead Man Wood. However there is evidence of public usage of the trackway; horse riding, mountain biking and walking appear to be the main recreational uses.

Overview (Historical)

The B&NES Sites and Monuments register has three entries for this site:

- BN 11170: the wood itself is listed as it appears within the Ancient Woodland Inventory
- BN1836: The site of a Roman building at ST79796434
- BN4872: The site of a ruined building believed to date between 1830 and 1869 at ST79616438.

The remains of what appears to be an ancient bank lie within the eastern centre of the wood but this is not recorded on the SMR.

Overview (Ecological)

Flora

The site is essentially a secondary woodland with small areas of more established semi-natural vegetation in the centre and south, locally dominated by sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* which is present mostly as multiple stems derived from coppice stools. Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and beech *Fagus sylvatica* are locally common and there is a range of less frequent tree species including yew *Taxus baccata*, English oak *Quercus robur*, field maple *Acer campestre* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*. Ornamental plantings of conifers and non-native evergreens are frequent in the north of the site. The canopy is typically closed and approximately 15-20m in height. Some of the more mature trees are of considerable size.

The shrub layer is uniformly poor with the main exception to this in the extreme north of the site where cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* is frequent. Deer browsing may be a significant factor in the paucity of shrub species; evidence of roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* was frequent throughout the wood. Dead Man Wood has a slightly richer and more diverse shrub layer which includes much mature hazel *Corylus avellana*.

An unidentified tree species with a leaf indicative of the elm *Ulmus* family was recorded in the eastern centre of the site. Specimen material was not accessible. A broken line of lime trees (small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*) is present along the northern edge of the wood and would appear to be planted. However a number of small-leaved lime are also present in the eastern centre of the wood where the majority of the established woodland indicator species are to be found.

Even allowing for the fact that the survey was undertaken in July the field layer was poor. Indeed it appears that much of the woodland floor is dominated by ramsons *Allium ursinum* with hart's-tongue fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium* common; ivy *Hedera helix*, stinking iris *Iris foetidissima* and dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* are locally frequent. Pendulous sedge is locally common in the wetter parts of the wood, especially near the trackway. Evidence of a more diverse herb community was restricted to the eastern centre and the northern tip of Home Wood and to a lesser extent to Dead Man Wood. In these areas there is a ground flora indicative of well-established broad-leaved woodland that includes bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum*, yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galebdolon* and wood speedwell *Veronica montana*. Wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides* is confined to part of the damper southern central area and to the western half of Dead Man Wood; primrose *Primula vulgaris* is scattered and localised amongst the slightly more species rich areas.

Particular species of note include the following: Spurge laurel *Daphne laureola* found scattered throughout the entire wood; Bath asparagus *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* associated with the upper parts of the trackway; twayblade *Listera ovata* is present in the extreme north of the wood. Wood melick *Melica uniflora* is present along the western roadside wall as well as in association with the more established species rich herb community in the eastern centre and extreme north of the wood. Several clumps of trailing bellflower *Campanula poscharskyana*, a

garden escape, are present on a rock exposure on the eastern boundary of the wood.

Small slightly acidic areas are suggested by the extremely localised presence of wild cherry *Prunus avium* and lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina* in the western and eastern edges of the wood.

Along the eastern edge of the wood are two glade areas associated with old tracks. The northernmost of these is comparatively large and supports a variety of tall herb and grass species which are found nowhere else in the wood. The smaller glade is in the eastern centre and has a damper character and a range of tall herb and grass species associated with damper situations. Both glades are of particular value to invertebrates; it was notable that the only records of butterflies came from here.

Fauna

Apart from roe deer there was evidence of the following mammals: grey squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* (sightings and opened hazel nuts); red fox *Vulpes vulpes* (droppings); badger *Meles meles* (prints). Seventeen bird species were also recorded and are listed in the appendix.

There was no evidence of dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*. There is a record of this species from Winsley, 3km to the south of Home Wood, and the whole of the middle Avon valley would appear to offer excellent dormouse habitat. The lack of dormouse evidence could be due to the paucity of fruiting hazels in the wood: hazelnuts opened by dormice are the main evidence of dormouse presence at a site.

The site is immediately adjacent to known roost sites of the nationally endangered greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*. At least twelve other bat species have been recorded from this immediate area including another nationally rare species – Bechstein's bat *Myotis bechsteinii* – which favours large tracts of deciduous woodland.

The woodlands of the middle Avon valley are critical to the survival of greater horseshoe bats in this part of south west England. Encouraging a woodland structure that maximises invertebrate biomass as well as maintains sheltered microclimatic conditions will be essential objectives of any management of Home Wood. Greater detail on the habitat specifications for greater horseshoe bats are given in the appendix; a full list of all bat species recorded within a 2km radius of the site is also given in the appendix.

The invertebrate interest on the site is not known; however an invertebrate survey on the Brown's Folly Nature Reserve (Gibbs 2001) 1km to the north of Home Wood demonstrated that there is considerable invertebrate interest in this area. Brown's Folly has a woodland structure somewhat similar to Home Wood; the Brown's Folly survey indicated that the older, more established areas of woodland have a very rich invertebrate fauna especially associated with dead wood.

Detailed site descriptions

To provide greater detail in describing the structure of the woodland it is necessary to divide the wood into compartments and describe each individually.

1. Species-rich areas in the north divided by the northern track: A flora with ancient woodland indicator species also includes twayblade *Listera ovata*. Wood anemone, wood melick *Melica uniflora*, bluebell and yellow archangel are frequent south of the track.
2. Unsurveyed area north of the track; appeared to be mostly recent plantation of non-native species.
3. A thin strip either side of the Lodge where both native and non-native conifers and evergreens are frequent; north of the Lodge cherry laurel is particularly abundant and spurge laurel *Daphne laureola* occasional.
4. The eastern part of the centre of the wood. This is the most interesting area in terms of nature conservation and consists of a core of species-rich ground flora with a broad fringe of slightly less diverse ground flora. The core of this area is centred upon an old bank which has several large old coppice ash stools and mature field maple. It is possible that the bank is an ancient boundary feature that supported ancient woodland indicator species whilst adjacent areas were open ground; the woodland indicator species would then have spread out into the developing secondary woodland over the past 100-150 years.
5. The damper southern section of the wood. This is distinguished by large amounts of pendulous sedge and quantities of stinking iris. A small glade area and associated relict track in the east also support moisture-loving plant species such as hemp agrimony *Eupatoria cannabinum*. In the south west of the damp area there is a small area of coppice where trees and shrubs have been cut beneath a power line.
6. Dead Man Wood is a discrete part of the Home Wood complex and is separated from the main body of the wood by a relict dry stone wall. Dead Man Wood is distinguished by the large number of mature hazel and very rocky substrate. There is a fairly rich ground flora that is mostly found around the southern and western margins of the wood.

Management recommendations

The priority for management in Home Wood will be the maintenance and improvement of greater horseshoe bat foraging habitat. Greater horseshoe bats need large blocks of woodland as part of a suite of habitat types to provide a year-round food supply. Woodland invertebrates provide a food source throughout the year but are especially important in the winter.

Improving invertebrate biomass will not only improve bat feeding opportunities but also be of benefit to other mammals and bird species. Opening up glades and creating / widening rides will provide the ideal mechanism for increasing invertebrate biomass. These actions will also improve plant diversity.

Coppicing will also benefit invertebrates, plants, mammals and birds. However there must be effective deer control running in tandem with coppicing.

Diversification of canopy tree species would also be beneficial and there is the opportunity to clear areas of sycamore and replant with native broadleaved species. However given the possible presence of dormice in the area, it would be advantageous to keep a substantial amount of sycamore as the pollen of this species can be an important spring food supply for dormice emerging from hibernation.

Woodland owners must be encouraged to see bramble as an important part of a healthy woodland ecosystem, especially following coppicing or clearance work. Bramble is of great importance to birds, invertebrates and small mammals – including dormice.

Appendix

Plant species recorded from Home Wood and Dead Man Wood 16.7.02

<i>Tree and shrub species</i>	
Field maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>
Norway maple	<i>Acer platanus</i>
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>
Horse chestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>
Hedge garlic	<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>
Cow parsley	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>
Spotted laurel	<i>Aucuba japonica</i>
Buddleja	<i>Buddleia davidii</i>
Old man's beard	<i>Clematis vitalba</i>
Dogwood	<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Spindle	<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Hybrid larch	<i>Larix x kaempferii</i>
Wild privet	<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>
Wild cherry	<i>Prunus avium</i>
Cherry laurel	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>
English oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Wild gooseberry	<i>Ribes uva-crispa</i>
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>
Yew	<i>Taxus baccata</i>
Small-leaved lime	<i>Tilia cordata</i>
Wych elm	<i>Ulmus glabra</i>
Wayfaring tree	<i>Viburnum lanatana</i>
<i>Herbs and grasses</i>	
Goutweed	<i>Aegopodium podigaria</i>
Agrimony	<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>
Creeping bent	<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>
Bugle	<i>Ajuga reptans</i>
Ramsons	<i>Allium ursinum</i>
Burdock	<i>Arctium</i> sp.
False oat-grass	<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>
Cuckoo pint	<i>Arum maculatum</i>
Lady fern	<i>Athyrium felix-femina</i>
False wood-brome	<i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i>
Hairy brome	<i>Bromus ramosus</i>
Trailing bellflower	<i>Campanula poscharskyana</i>
Pendulous sedge	<i>Carex pendula</i>

Wood sedge	<i>Carex sylvatica</i>
Enchanter's nightshade	<i>Circaea lutetiana</i>
Creeping thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>
Ivy-leaved toadflax	<i>Cymbalaria muralis</i>
Cock's-foot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>
Spurge laurel	<i>Daphne laureola</i>
Broad buckler fern	<i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>
Male fern	<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>
Bearded couch	<i>Elymus caninus</i>
Broad-leaved willowherb	<i>Epilobium montanum</i>
Hemp agrimony	<i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i>
Wood spurge	<i>Euphorbia amygdaloides</i>
Giant fescue	<i>Festuca gigantea</i>
Goosegrass	<i>Galium aparine</i>
Sweet woodruff	<i>Galium odoratum</i>
Herb robert	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>
Herb benet	<i>Geum urbanum</i>
Ground ivy	<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>
Ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>
Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>
Yorkshire fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>
Hairy St John's-wort	<i>Hypericum hirsutum</i>
Square-stemmed St John's-wort	<i>Hypericum tetrapterum</i>
Himalayan balsam	<i>Impatiens glandulifera</i>
Stinking iris	<i>Iris foetidissima</i>
Twayblade	<i>Listera ovata</i>
Wood melick	<i>Melica uniflora</i>
Dog's mercury	<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>
Wall lettuce	<i>Mycelis muralis</i>
Bath asparagus	<i>Ornithogalum pyrenaicum</i>
Timothy grass	<i>Phleum pratense</i>
Hart's-tongue fern	<i>Phyllitis scolopendrium</i>
Wood meadow-grass	<i>Poa nemoralis</i>
Intermediate poypody	<i>Polypodium interjectum</i>
Soft shield fern	<i>Polystichum setiferum</i>
Primrose	<i>Primula vulgaris</i>
Meadow buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>
Creeping buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>
Japanese knotweed	<i>Reynoutia japonica</i>
Wood dock	<i>Rumex sanguinea</i>
Butcher's broom	<i>Ruscus aculeatus</i>
Water figwort	<i>Scrophularia auriculata</i>
Figwort	<i>Scrophularia nodosa</i>
Red campion	<i>Silene dioica</i>
Hedge woundwort	<i>Stachys sylvestris</i>
Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>
Wood speedwell	<i>Veronica montana</i>
Early / common dog violet	<i>Viola sp.</i>



