

Creating Meridian Wood

The Story of how the wood came into existence

By David Gedye

It all began in 1994 I was invited to be Bluntisham's village tree warden, a grandiose title which didn't fully describe the more modest role the Parish Council wanted me to take on.

Shell plc had, for several years, been sponsoring a tree planting scheme with the aim of increasing the number of trees across Britain. Huntingdon District Council participated in the scheme and the District Council Tree Officer was in charge of planning where the trees were planted. In the early years they notified Parish Councils that trees were available, but Parish support was patchy and, in 1994, District adopted a new approach. They passed the responsibility for scheme planning to individual Parish Councils. The District Tree Officer would co-ordinate the ordering of the trees, but Parishes were responsible for planning how many trees they wanted and where they would plant them. Parishes that wished to be involved in the scheme had to return a slip specifying an individual, a Parish Tree Warden, to be the contact for the scheme. Bluntisham Parish Council wanted to participate and muggins, that's me, was hurriedly asked to take on the co-ordinating role.

Only a few Parish Councils got their act together in 1994 and I was told to order 100 trees. I submitted the Parish order on 1st October 1994 and the mix of native trees, which turned out to be pot grown trees, four feet high, was delivered to my house in November. All I had to do was find somewhere to plant 7 Ash trees, 20 Aspens, 10 Crab Apples, 30 Field Maples, 3 Horse Chestnuts, 15 Oaks, 15 Wild Cherry and 3 Wild Pears.

Fortunately, Peter Searle came to the rescue and agreed the trees could be put along the edge of his field adjacent to Mill Lane. Several years earlier a copse of trees, I believe that this was the one and only previous tranches of trees the parish had taken up when the scheme was first introduced, had been planted on the left at the far end the lane as you walk away from the village. In the spring of 1995 the trees, which for me, would be the first of many annual Parish plantings I organised, were planted by Peter on the right hand side of the lane. Now mature trees, both plantings contribute to the rural feel of the lane and provide shade and shelter to those who walk along it.

In each of the succeeding years the District Council managed to get greater Parish involvement. With more demand, the annual number of trees allocated to

participating parishes was reduced to 50 and then 25, though that smaller number was also down to us running out of suitable places to plant trees.



Mill lane – Home to the first of the 'Parish Planting Scheme' trees

Shell supported the scheme until 2000 after which Huntingdon District Council continued to finance the regular supply of trees. Bluntisham's participation in the scheme, along with home grown trees such as the walnut trees I planted along the right hand side of Mill Lane and the line of Turkish Hazels along the left hand side of the Hall's access road, contributed 700 trees to the Parish. The majority were planted in the park but others were planted in different locations, anywhere it was felt they could be left in peace to develop to full maturity, though not all sites were as safe as originally thought. The line of flowering cherry trees put in on the right as you enter the village from Earith, was cut down to make way for the cycle path.



The large 'S' of trees at the Colne Road end of the park and the circle and copse of trees at the bottom corner of the park, were Parish Planting Scheme trees



Colne Road - The trees to the left extended the earlier row of trees planted by the Parish in the 1950s

Appointing individuals to the role of Parish Tree Warden meant there was a network of enthusiasts who would not only plant the trees, but would care for them. Tree survival rates for Parish Planting Schemes were generally 90 to 100 percent of the trees planted.

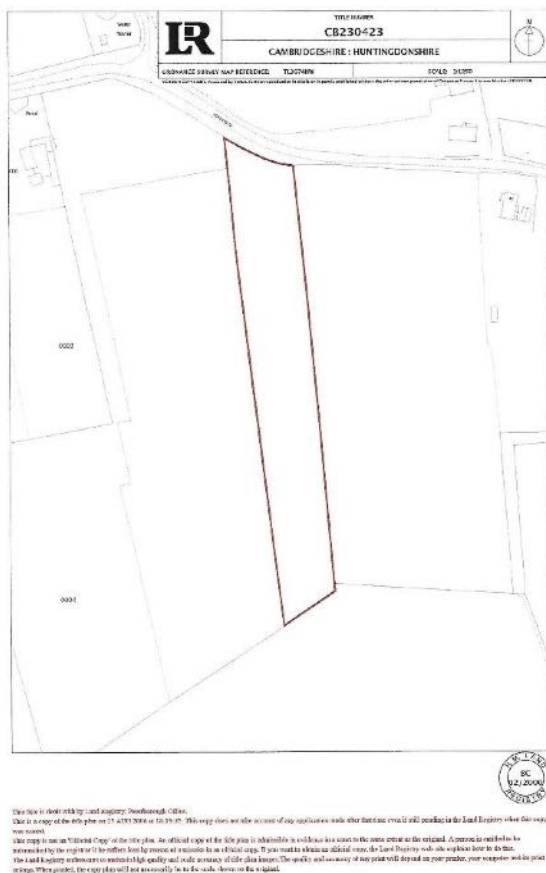
But back to Meridian Wood. As the Millennium approached, the District Council copied Parish Tree Wardens in on a circular received from the Woodland Trust. For their Millennium project the Trust had applied to the National Lottery Heritage fund and was successful in obtaining a grant to fund a project they titled "*Woods on your Doorstep*". Their goal was to create 200 new woods across the country. The defining characteristic of each wood would be its ease of access to the local community. Another of the Trust's objectives was to put woods into areas of the country that were lacking in woodland. I put the idea to the Parish Council which jumped at the opportunity to participate. All we had to do was earmark an area of land suitable for a permanent wood.

Some of the participating communities were enthusiastic enough to fund-raise to buy the land that became their woods. In Bluntisham, we already had two areas of allotment land, the current Mill Lane site and an area on the Heath Road leading out of the village. The former was well used. The Woodend allotments were unused.

They had originally been used to grow plums and gooseberries but over time the enthusiasm for fruit allotments had waned and, ironically, given the location of the water towers in the village, the area lacked a water supply and wasn't suitable for growing vegetables. With the trees and gooseberry bushes cleared, the plot had, for many years, been rented out to local farmers to grow wheat or any other suitable crop. This site was earmarked for the wood and I was asked to put a proposal to the Woodland Trust to request participation in their project.

Initially the Trust was reluctant to take us on board. The Woodend site was only 2.5 acres (1 hectare) in size. To create a sustainable wooded area The Woodland Trust preferred sites that were 5 acres or more. However, geography was our strong card. Cambridgeshire was well known for its lack of trees and there hadn't been any other applications from the County. The Woodland Trust needed to tick the box that their project was nationwide. We won the argument and were enrolled into the project which, in the end, added eight new Millennium woods to Cambridgeshire. We had crossed the starting line but there were other hurdles to cross to complete the course.

Having identified a suitable area of land the Parish had to prove it owned it before it could be leased to the Woodland Trust. There was also finance to raise. The Trust set a minimum financial target for each new wood which they would match on a £2 for every £1 raised basis. Our target was £12,100 to be raised by 7th January 2000.



There was no paperwork to prove the Parish Council owned the allotment land, but there was proof they received rent from it which implied ownership. A submission was made to the Land Registry which registered the Parish Council's ownership under Land Registry title number CB230423.

The ninety-nine year lease between the Parish and the Woodland Trust was drafted. Bluntisham became wood number 169.

We also had to give thought to a feature to be located within the wood which would reflect the arrival of the new millennium.

CB230423 Meridian Wood Land registry map

Bluntisham Millennium Wood Appeal
(PLEASE WRITE IN CAPITALS)





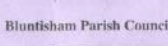

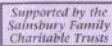
I would like to support the creation of a new wood with my pledge of:
 £..... Amount in words:.....
 Please tick if you are a UK taxpayer
 I understand that this pledge will be redeemable by the Woodland Trust if the Trust is able to proceed with the Bluntisham Millennium Wood project

Signature.....
 Mr/Mrs/Miss/MS.....
 Address.....
 Postcode.....

Please return this form to:
 David Gedye, 16 Colne Road, BLUNTISHAM, Huntingdon PE17 3LU
By 7th January 2000
 Please tick if you are already a Woodland Trust member
 Supporter No (if known).....

Can you get the taxman to help ?
 Whatever the amount you give it will be a help, but if you pledge £100, or more, we can claim back tax on your donation from the Inland Revenue.
 Any surplus raised over the target figure will go towards the long-term management of this millennium wood (estimated at £8,592), after which any additional surplus will go towards other Woods on Your Doorstep sites. 99VBCJB

Do call if you would like to discuss your pledge or any aspect of the project.
 Key contacts: David Gedye (Local co-ordinator) on 01487 840963, or Andrea Miles (Woodland Trust) on 01892 513733.

 A MILLENNIUM PROJECT SUPPORTED BY FUNDS FROM THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
 Huntingdon District Council
 Cambridgeshire County Council
 Forestry Commission
 Bluntisham Parish Council
 The Woodland Trust, Autumn Park, Dysart Road, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 6LL. Telephone (01476) 581111 • Fax (01476) 590808
 Supported by the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts

 **Bluntisham MILLENNIUM WOOD appeal**

However you choose to celebrate the new millennium, there's one simple thing we all can do...



...plant trees

To mark this historic time we want to work with you to create a new wood for Bluntisham. This will be your millennium wood - a lasting way to commemorate our shared moment in history, and a gift to all future generations who will live in and around Bluntisham.

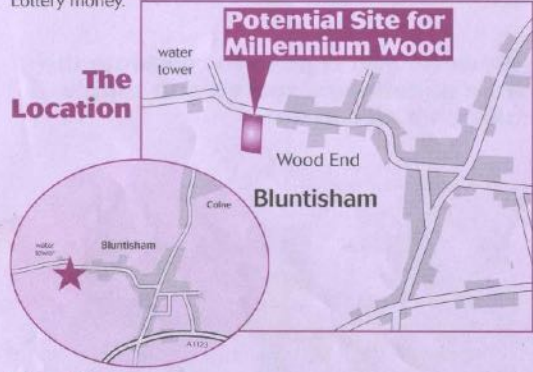
We need your help to make this happen

The appeal went out to the village to raise the funds needed to sponsor the project. The financial target was reached by 7th January 2000.

The Background

The Woodland Trust is the UK's leading woodland conservation charity. Woods on your Doorstep is our national millennium project - its aim: to create 200 new woods, each within easy walking distance of a town or village in England and Wales. The project is backed by the Millennium Commission with National Lottery money.

The Location




The Plan

Together with local people we want to raise enough money to plant a wood on the 2.5 acres of land shown on the map above. We want to work with you to design and create a unique native wood to mark the new millennium. You can be involved throughout the project. You can even help plant the trees. The Woodland Trust will then look after the new wood, making sure it is well cared for and always open for quiet enjoyment.

To succeed we need to raise £12,100 by 7th January 2000

Why you should support the Bluntisham Millennium Wood Appeal:

- This wood will stand the test of time. It should be here for the next 1,000 years, or more.
- This is a chance for everyone to work on something **together** for the new millennium.
- A new wood is good for wildlife.
- The wood will be a place where local children can learn about nature.
- With your help we can design the wood to fit in with, and enhance, the local landscape.
- 64% of the total project cost is already in place.



We don't want your money today; we just need a promise from you - a pledge

We will only ask you to redeem your pledge if our campaign is successful. Please use the form overleaf to pledge a donation to the Bluntisham Millennium Wood Appeal.

Will you help us raise the remaining shortfall ?



Bluntisham Millennium Wood Appeal

14 November, 1999

Dear Fellow Villager

None of us can miss the fact that the "New Millennium" is coming. The Dome and the London Eye are the projects that make the national headlines, but we also have the opportunity to create our own local Millennium landmark.

Ideas for a Millennium project were sought at the Parish Council AGM in April. From that meeting has developed the theme that we plant a Millennium Wood on Bluntisham Heath, using former allotment land which has been donated to the project by the Parish Council. A promotional stand at the School Carnival in June and, most recently, the meeting held in our village hall have indicated strong support for the project and we hope you are already aware of it. If you aren't, then this letter and the enclosed pledge form should fill the gap.

Why a wood?

Those who know the area of old will remember when the village was surrounded by orchards with their supporting wind breaks of trees and hedgerows. In the spring the plum, apple and pear trees in flower were a sight to behold and in the autumn the trains would stop at Bluntisham Station to take the harvested fruit to market. We can't go back to those days but we can do something for future generations by creating a reminder of the importance that trees played in our rural economy, while also creating a leisure facility that can be used and enjoyed by all.

Woods need long term management and the proposal was enthusiastically received by the Woodland Trust, which will take on the management of the site. More importantly, through its help, the village has been included as one of the nine new woodland sites to be established in Cambridgeshire under the "Millennium Woods on Your Doorstep" project. This means we have already been provisionally granted nearly two thirds of the funding required to establish the site.

To qualify for these grants we need your support to raise the £12,100 balance required to ensure the projects success.

Any surplus raised over this sum will then go towards the endowment that will provide for the long term security of the site.

Time is of the essence if we are to be successful. We have until 7th January to raise the money. We do not want cash or cheques at this stage, just your promise to donate funds when asked to do so. The enclosed pledge form gives further information. Every pledge to donate to the project, however small or large, will contribute to our success in creating an amenity that will outlive us all. The Woodland Trust will contact you to redeem your pledge in February / March 2000. Please pledge as generously as possible and act now by returning your form in the enclosed envelope either directly to my house at 16 Colne Road, Bluntisham, or via one of the mail boxes set up in the village shops.

The pledge form should answer many of your questions, but if you wish to know more about the project please don't hesitate to ask me or other members of the steering committee.

Please return your pledge form and let us know you support the project.

Yours sincerely

David Gedye
Project Co-ordinator

Steering Committee David Gedye 840963; Tony Sloan 840817; Martin Taylor 841354; Mark Ulliyett 841425
Andrew Richardson 841075; Keith Lipscomb 842207

Promotional leaflet and appeal letter

The money was raised within a month of the appeal letter going out. With land, money and lease in place, attention turned to planning the layout of the site. It wasn't a simple case of planting trees. The site came with two particular problems: the water towers, or more significantly the water mains serving the towers; and an 11 Kv overhead powerline which cut diagonally across the site.



Cambridge Water Company provided a map of their pipes

The water towers receive their water from a tower on the Gog Magog hills on the outskirts of Cambridge. When the first tower was built in 1937, Bluntisham benefited from a piped mains water supply that serviced every property. The towers also supply water to many other communities and, over the years, four water mains were laid across the field. Cambridge Water Company wasn't against our wood but

understandably, the company didn't want us to plant deep rooted large trees like oaks across the water mains.

The 11 Kv line was easier to deal with. A simple case of not planting tall growing species within 20 feet or so either side of the line.



Meridian Wood Design

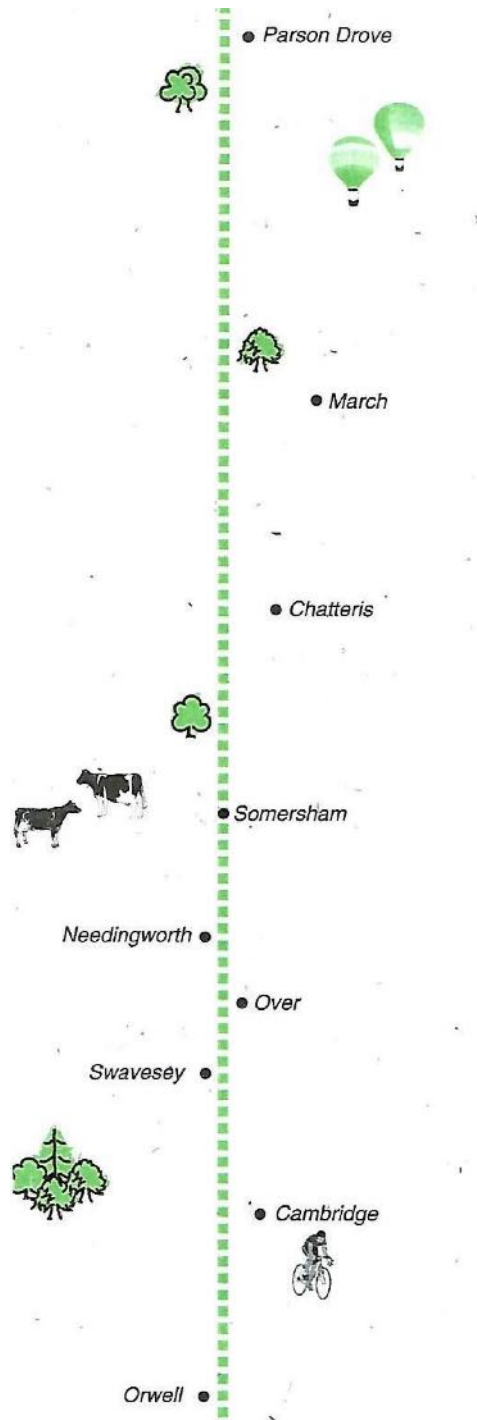
The design problems were overcome by locating paths over the water pipes and under the power cables and ensuring only shallow rooted species were planted nearby

The final decisions that needed making before we could start planting were:

- What species were to be planted?
- What Millennium feature could we include within the landscape?
- What name should we give the wood?

It was decided the planting should reflect the history of the area. Bluntisham had been known for its fruit growing and while we didn't wish to establish an orchard, it was felt that fruit bearing trees like wild plum and crab apple should be among the mix. There was also the area at the road end of the wood, an 'island' hemmed in by the water pipes underneath. Set within this 'island' we now have an orchard of Cambridgeshire greengages, a feature that links the wood with our village's fruit growing history.

The planting plan put large trees like oak and ash away from water pipes and cables with shallower rooted, lower growing trees filling in between. The Woodland Trust supplied some 1,000 trees, all bare rooted whips (small 1-2 year old trees) but we also had larger trees that we had held back from the Parish Planting Scheme and several villagers had grown trees that they were keen to add into the mix. We weren't short of trees. For a wood located adjacent to the Greenwich 0° meridian, a human sundial was the obvious feature and "Meridian Wood" the obvious name for the project.



The 0° meridian line, established by international treaty in 1884, runs from north to south dissecting Eastern England along a line from Tunstall, on the coast north east of Hull to Peacehaven on the south coast. It cuts Somersham in half and runs to the west of Bluntisham village

Tree Species planted in Meridian Wood

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Ash | <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> |
| 2. Bird Cherry | <i>Prunus padus</i> |
| 3. Cherry Laurel | <i>Prunus laurocerasus</i> |
| 4. Crab Apple | <i>Malus sylvestris</i> |
| 5. Dogwood | <i>Cornus Sanguinea</i> |
| 6. Field Maple | <i>Acer campestre</i> |
| 7. Guelder Rose | <i>Viburnum opulus</i> |
| 8. Hawthorn | <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> |
| 9. Hazel | <i>Corylus avellana</i> |
| 10. Holly | <i>Ilex aquifolium</i> |
| 11. Hornbeam | <i>Carpinus betulus</i> |
| 12. Oak | <i>Quercus robur</i> |
| 13. Silver Birch | <i>Betula pendula</i> |
| 14. Spindle | <i>Euonymus europaeus</i> |
| 15. Spruce | <i>Picea abies</i> |
| 16. Walnut | <i>Juglans regia</i> |
| 17. Wayfarer Tree | <i>Viburnum lantana</i> |
| 18. White Poplar | <i>Populus alba</i> |
| 19. Wild Cherry | <i>Prunus avium</i> |
| 20. Wild Privet | <i>Ligustrum vulgare</i> |
| 21. Wild Pear | <i>Pyrus pyraeaster</i> |
| 22. Wild Service tree | <i>Sorbus torminalis</i> |
| 23. Willow | <i>Salix alba</i> |
| 24. Willow Contorted | <i>Salix babylonica</i> |

Ready to Go - 1st December 2000



From the entrance gate (above) and the bottom of the field (below)



To overcome the risk of straight lines the site was prepared by tapping chestnut stakes in at random to mark where trees were to be planted.

Planting day, Saturday 2nd December 2000



The village turned out in force, old and young



By the end of the day the trees were in, staked, and with tree guards and weed suppression mats around them.



The author, and subsequent first wood warden, ready to do his bit

In addition to the trees the Woodland Trust installed seats, a kissing gate entrance to the wood and a suitable notice board.



The final item installed was the human sundial set to GMT. When the clocks go forward in the summer, you are out by 1 hour.

In the early years there was little to do other than wait for the trees to grow. When they were sufficiently well established, the tree guards and weed mats were removed. By this time suckers and self-set trees were creeping into the areas we hadn't planted. Thus began an annual cycle of wood maintenance which, if not kept up, will eventually result in the wood becoming overgrown with brambles and the paths becoming restricted. To keep the wood open and enjoyable to use, it is necessary to do an annual programme of sucker suppression, the removal of unwanted seedlings and general cutting back of any branches overhanging pathways. In the early years there was a problem with people nipping behind the high hedge adjacent to Heath Road to do their business. The Woodland Trust arranged to have the hedge laid. An annual cutting programme keeps it permanently low. There has been no repeat of the problem since we made the wood readily visible from the road. On-going maintenance is the key to the wood's future success as an asset to the village.

When planning the wood we discussed with the neighbouring land owners, Tim and Shirley Rose, the impossibility of stopping people from walking along their field headland to link into the Nobles Lane footpath. The Roses kindly left a wide enough headland strip as a permissive path connecting the two. It had also always been a hope that one day we would be able to incorporate the Greenwich meridian line into the wood. So, when the Parish Clerk asked for my opinion about house building in the adjacent Higham's Field, I stated I had no objection, especially if we could get a Meridian Wood 'win' from the developer. The Roses' arrangement had served the village well but, if houses were to be built on Higham's Field we could repay the Rose family's generosity by creating a permanent link and returning their headland to them. The developer fenced off a strip of land at the bottom of the field which was given to the village as a permanent link connecting Meridian Wood to the Nobles Lane footpath.



In 2021, the former 'headland' footpath (left) was replaced by a fenced in path



Meridian line 



OS Pathfinder map 950

The Meridian Line crosses the A1123 at Priors Field farm. It passes through the Meridian oak and to the right of the water tower.

A marker embedded in the High Street pavement in Somersham, marks the lines ongoing path



Somersham's Meridian marker

Many years ago there was a project put in place to plant trees along the Greenwich meridian line. That ambition was to create a line of trees which, if they grew large enough, could be seen from space. A person unknown planted trees on the line at either end of Higham's field. The oak at the bottom of the field is the only survivor. We don't know if it can be seen from space but the advantage of the new footpath is that it takes walkers past the Meridian oak tree. We hope to make a feature of it.



A further win from the building of the houses on Meridian Close was the creation of the tarmac footpath running behind the hedge in front of the houses. The path creates a safe link between the entrance to the wood and the end of the Woodend pavement. We truly can say Meridian Wood is a wood on your doorstep.

I have been the Woodland Trust's volunteer warden taking care of the wood ever since its creation. More recently, others in the village have helped me with the work. My hope is that there will always be villagers willing to look after the wood. It was a community project created by community effort and deserves to be cared for by the community.

My other hope is that, if there is ever further building on Higham's field, the Parish can win a further tract of land, wide enough to be planted up with trees, to create a vegetation link between Meridian Wood and Nobles Lane.



PLEASE ENJOY MERIDIAN WOOD, A LOVELY PLACE TO WALK AND PLAY

Some footnotes and photographs:

In the final count eight new woods were created in Cambridgeshire.

The seven other Cambridgeshire 'Woods on your Doorstep' Woods are:

Muchwood & Mary's Wood, Ramsey
Clarks Corner, Wandlebury near Babraham
Priory Wood, Burwell
Tweens Towns Wood, Guilden Morden
Castle Camps Millennium Wood, Castle Camps
Girton Wood, Girton
Cow Hollow Wood, Waterbeach



Local papers took an interest in the projects

The Greenwich 0° Meridian Line

The zero degree line was originally used to set GMT (Greenwich meantime) which in turn set the time zones of the world. It was agreed by International treaty in 1884. The line, known as the Airy transit circle came into use in 1851 when it replaced the previous line, the Bradley Meridian created in 1738. The Bradley Meridian is approximately six metres or 0.15 seconds to the east of the Airy Meridian. The Airy line is still used by cartographers when drawing up Ordnance Survey maps. However, don't waste your time using your mobile phone's navigation system to prove the accuracy of the line's location. Google maps and Sat Nav established a different 0° line to run their systems. Their line is several degrees to the east of Greenwich's Airy line

Wild flowers in Meridian Wood



I hoped wild flowers would play a part in the wood's development and was delighted when I saw a wild orchid appear (see left). I was a little less delighted when, two weeks later, somebody had dug it up and stolen it. There have been no more since then

Over the years we have tried establishing wild flowers in the wood. Sadly without much success. It has proved to be too dry for both foxgloves and English bluebells. (I have removed any Spanish

bluebells and request people don't plant these flowering thugs in the wood) There has been some success with Aconites and snowdrops. Hopefully as the wood develops, it will become more suitable for wild flowers.



Keeping paths open and clear of overgrowth is an important part of wood maintenance

10th Anniversary party – 22nd August 2010



Advertised & site cleared, ready for set-up



Party games and food

Food from the wood

As the wood matured it increasingly provides food for humans and wild life



Sloes for Sloe Gin and greengages for eating and making jam



Hawthorn, Rosehips and Guelder Rose give colour and food for wild life



Stones from fallen greengages make winter food for mice and the trees are home to squirrel dreys

There have been visitors



24th September 2006 - East Anglian Tree warden forum meeting

They toured the wood and held their meeting in the village hall



And some caused problems



In the early years the wood was a popular place for weekend camping and parties. All I asked was that once they had gone, I wouldn't be aware they had ever been. Sadly, that was rarely the case and on several occasions I had to gather up abandoned tents, sleeping bags and other rubbish.



In 2017 there was the case of the dump truck stolen from the cycleway construction site. The thieves drove the dumper across the fields from the main road (see the lovely tracks) They came into the bottom of the wood and drove up to the entrance gate where, having earlier cut the chain and opened the gate, they had a low loader trailer waiting to take the dumper away. Despite the tracker embedded on the dumper, it was never seen again. The tracking device was removed and discarded in the Earith industrial estate

The hedge adjacent to Heath Road before it was laid



Spectacular as it was, we decided that it was better if the hedge was laid so that the front end of the wood was open and in clear sight of passing traffic.



2007 December - the newly laid hedge

THERE HAS BEEN GREAT SATISFACTION IN CREATING AND
CARING FOR THE WOOD. AN ASSET TO THE VILLAGE.

For information on the Greenwich meridian go to:

<http://www.thegreenwichmeridian.org/tgm/articles.php?article=5> (accessed January 2023)

Article published 11th January 2023