

Charnwood's Lost Jewel

Bluebells and Small-leaved Lime trees in Buddon Wood.

I enjoyed Peter Osborne's article 'Water, Water Everywhere!' in the last issue of The Quorndon Village Life. It brought back fond memories of walking across Swithland Reservoir when it was empty and looking at some of the features Peter talked about. In this article I want to explain how amazing Buddon Wood was, being the centre piece to Barrow Park, says **Ian Gamble**...

The reason for Buddon surviving as woodland over the centuries was probably due, in large part, to it being incorporated into a deer park. William the Conqueror gave his nephew Hugh d'Avranches, Earl of Chester, the Manor of Barrow including Buddon which formed woodland of some 400 acres as recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. At this time the Parish of Barrow was much larger than we see it today. It stretched to the north end of Mountsorrel and incorporated Quorn (which at that time might not even have come into being), parts of Woodhouse and Woodhouse Eaves, Beaumanor and the small communities at Maplewell and Charley.

The deer park of Barrow was situated in what was to become Quorn Parish. The village of Quorn probably came into existence between 1086 and 1153. The park incorporated all of Buddon Wood

and extended towards Woodthorpe. The park was first mentioned before 1135 and was the earliest recorded deer park on Charnwood, probably created by the Earl of Chester. By 1240 it covered an area of 360 acres containing not only Buddon Wood but also pastureland. In 1273 on the death of Roger de Somery, Lord of Dudley, the park was inherited by his four daughters and was divided between them. It is interesting to note that some low stone walls ran across Buddon, and one can only speculate that they were built when the wood was divided. The park contained two hunting lodges probably built after 1273, one was submerged under Swithland Reservoir and the remains of the other, a moated hunting lodge, lies adjacent to the Buddon Brook on meadow land close to Mill Farm. Adjacent to the submerged hunting lodge situated under the northern side of Swithland Reservoir, is the park's ford, where the old Kinchley

Road crossed the Swithland Brook near an ox bow in the stream. Over the following centuries the park became less important and appears to have ceased by 1481.

Situated immediately to the south of Quorn on a dome of granite, Buddon Wood occupied approximately three-quarters of a square mile. At one time, according to history books, it continued right across to Mountsorrel village, no doubt covering the uncultivated ground now the site of the Mountsorrel Granite Quarries.

My father was probably the last naturalist to visit the site prior to its being clear felled in the 1940s, and below is a compilation I have put together from articles he wrote in 1957, 1964 and 1996.

"Although, when viewed from the Charnwood Forest hills, Buddon hill looked like an elongated dome (like



Broad-bodied Chaser

a sleeping dinosaur!), in fact it was made up of numerous hillocks and ridges with many little valleys and hollows with wet ground containing sphagnum and other bog mosses. Buddon rises immediately out of the Soar Valley and gives the impression of being much higher than it really is and the hilly and rocky ground rises to 400 feet above sea-level. To climb up to the summit in the evening time was to experience considerable changes in temperature, and around dusk map-winged swift and gold swift moths were often plentiful in season, flying just above the bracken.

My earliest recollections of Buddon Wood, in the 1930s, were of its large size and sense of mystery – even after very many visits I still seemed to keep finding precious new spots - and each visit produced something new. I suppose the outstanding features were the vast numbers of Red Wood Ants and their great communal 'nests'. The wood also contained fine old Silver Birches many of which were peppered with the nesting holes of Great Spotted Woodpeckers. There was a magnificent

display of Bluebells in May, acres of the woodland floor being painted deep blue, especially along the western side of the wood, and their glorious scent detectable from the public footpath two narrow meadows' distant. There was a similar display of Wood Anemones along the eastern side of the wood in April. At this time the wood also held a large population of Green Woodpeckers which both fed and bred there. The nesting-holes were sometimes located low down in the oaks allowing wonderful opportunities for close observation. Because the old oaks contained many cavities this allowed roosting sites for a large population of bats. On warm summer evenings hundreds were disporting themselves over the wood and Swithland Reservoir including large numbers of Noctule Bats. At this time the wood also contained a large population of Badgers with circa ten setts, including a large sett in a splendid position near the summit of the hill. During May and June the woodland echoed with the sound of many Cuckoos and the song of Tree Pipits with their distinctive parachuting display flight. The old Cocklow Quarry on the eastern edge of the wood had a magnificent show of orchids: Southern Marsh and Common Spotted plus numerous hybrids could be seen on the floor of the quarry along with some dense colonies of Bee Orchid and numerous moss, liverwort and lichen species.

From what I remember of the woodland prior to felling I would estimate the age of the standard oaks to have been between 100 and 200 years but, as most were growing on shallow soils

over rock, they were probably older than they appeared. Most of the oaks carried much dead wood in their upper branches and trunks and this was home to many rare invertebrates. In past years the old oak trees were also festooned in Mistletoe and scarce lichens such as the Tree Lungwort. Many coppiced trees such as the Small-leaved Limes were obviously older than this and, as this particular species grew, and still grow in surviving areas of woodland, in discrete colonies, individual trees – probably connected by their root system – could represent ancient growths many hundreds of years old. Some old Hornbeam trees grew in the wood, and I understand that after being felled these were purchased by Messer's. M. Wright & Sons, the hosiery and webbing manufacturers at Quorn, to use for shuttles. Bearing in mind that almost all the oaks on Buddon Wood were, and still are, Sessile Oaks, it seems unlikely that the oaks present here were the result of planting and reforestation but would have been far more likely the result of natural regeneration.

The most exciting of Buddon's flowering plants was undoubtedly the beautiful, delicate, harebell-like Spreading Bellflower which was first discovered on the perimeter of the wood as long ago as 1743 by Dr. R. Pulteney and has never been known to occur elsewhere in the county; it continued to grow in one or two localities on the edge of the wood until recent years but has now apparently gone. Other rare plants which used to grow on the eastern borders of the



Spreading Bellflower.



Brazil Wood - a glimpse of what Buddon once looked like.

wood until recent years are the Birds-foot, Burrowing Clover and Hoary Cinquefoil. Space does not permit the mention of many of the plants known to have occurred on Buddon but some of the more outstanding ones have not only disappeared from there, but also from most, if not all, of their other known localities in the county. These include the Columbine, Golden Saxifrage, Goldenrod, Stagshorn Clubmoss, Brittle Bladder Fern and Wood Horsetail. Other characteristic plants of the wood include the Slender St. John's Wort, Wood Sage, Bilberry, Heather, Great and Hairy Woodrush and Small Cudweed the latter only known to occur at one or two other sites in the county.

Bilberry was plentiful and quite a feature in parts of the wood. By 1964, however, only one or two isolated clumps remained. As a direct result of this great reduction of bilberry, several rare Leicestershire insects whose larvae feed on this plant have almost certainly become extinct on Buddon, amongst them three species of moths, the Scallop Shell, Beautiful Snout and the Bilberry Pug; the last two species, incidentally, have, I believe, never been recorded elsewhere in Leicestershire.

Buddon wood was clear felled in the early 1940s and the wood from the old oak trees apparently went into providing pit props! During the war years Buddon Wood was much used by the American Airborne troops (stationed nearby on the Quorn House Park Camp) for manoeuvres, often with live ammunition, and the shell holes, which became water filled, were colonised by dragonflies and damselflies, including the striking Broad-bodied Chaser. After clear felling Nightjars soon found the high stony ground to their liking and during the 1940s and 50s up to four pairs bred there."

Although my trips onto Buddon Wood were infrequent much of my childhood had Buddon as a backdrop. Most of my summer holidays and spare time were spent in and around the Buddon Brook Meadows. I still, however, have some precious memories of walks through the wood but I can only share a few here.

On the 9th June 1962 my father showed me an Argent and Sable moth. This proved to be the last time this day flying moth would be seen

in Leicestershire. I would not see this nationally scarce species again until exactly 50 years later while visiting Bentley Wood on the Hampshire/Wiltshire border on the 9th June 2012! Another highlight for me was being shown my first Woodcock's nest on the eastern side of the wood in April 1965.

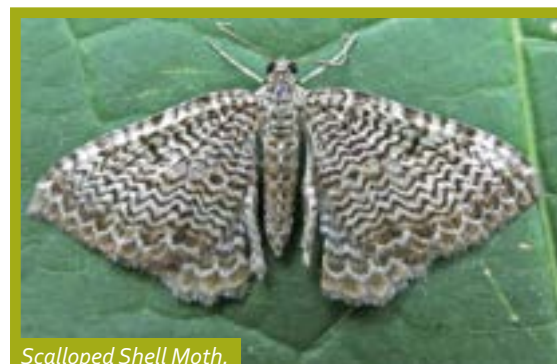
My father would, in time, rediscover two of Buddon's iconic plants. The first was the Goldenrod in 1967 and the second the Spreading Bellflower in 1985.

Just as the wood was beginning to recover from the wartime felling the planning permission granted to the Mountsorrel Granite Company in the 1940s to quarry the entire site, was acquired by Redland Roadstone Aggregates, so in 1974 quarrying began on the 24th September when Lord Beeching officially opened Buddon Wood Quarry. The rock being extracted was grano-diorite (granite), a particularly hard rock formerly used for making setts, kerb stones, steps, sills, lintels, walls, etc., but now used in the ever-increasing demand for road building. What was once a woodland has now become the largest man-made hole in Europe!

Prior to its clear felling, Buddon Wood was simply one of the best ancient woodland sites in Britain. Its woodland plant and invertebrate assemblages were outstanding. One example of just how rich the wood's invertebrate fauna was, is that when the Red Wood Ant became extinct on Buddon in the 1960s it also became extinct in Leicestershire. Its disappearance also saw seventeen species of beetle associated with their colonies becoming extinct too!

We have precious little ancient woodland left in Britain and even now fifty years after Buddon's loss we are still losing our few remaining ancient woodlands under train tracks, roads and quarries. I have frequently seen planners saying they will compensate by planting a few trees but how can this help when they have destroyed complex plant and animal symbiotic relationships that have been millennia in the making?

Written exclusively for *The Quorndon Village Life* by Ian Gamble.



Scalloped Shell Moth.



Argent and Sable Moth.



Tree Lungwort.



Bee Orchid.



Nightjar.