



This leaflet has been produced by the Heritage Lottery funded **Fuelling a Revolution: the woods that founded the steel country** project. Renewed management of the woodlands is being carried out to enhance their value for wildlife and for local people. Access to the woods is being promoted and schools are being encouraged to use the woodlands through the provision of educational materials. The **Fuelling a Revolution** website can be found at www.heritagewoodsonline.co.uk

For more information about the project or to get involved contact the:

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Sheffield's ancient woods are places to cherish and enjoy. Please respect them.**

This leaflet has been devised, written and illustrated by Mel and Joan Jones, with the map by Bob Warburton.

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY

From the late middle ages until the second part of the nineteenth century Sheffield's ancient woods were managed as **coppices**, or to be more precise as **coppices-with-standards**. In this kind of woodland management, most of the trees were periodically (every 15-30 years) cut down to the ground to what is called a stool and from the stool grew multiple stems, called coppice or underwood. Some trees were not coppiced but allowed to grow on to become mature single-stemmed trees and these were the **standards**. The standards were of various ages. The coppice provided **wood** and the standard trees provided **timber**. The timber trees, mainly oak, were for building projects. Some outstanding examples of timber-framed buildings are open to the public. For example, standing on the edge of Sheffield's main bus station is a public house called the *Old Queen's Head*. This was formerly called the 'Hall in the Ponds' and was probably a banqueting house in Sheffield deer park. Even more imposing than the *Old Queen's Head*, is Bishops' House Museum which stands in Meersbrook Park. The east and west wings of this yeoman's house are timber-framed and were built between 1500-1550.

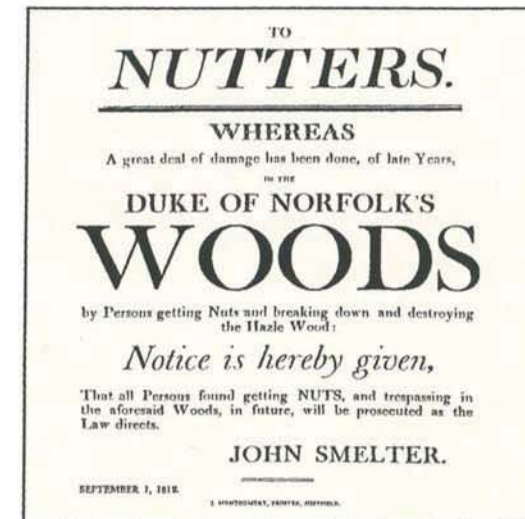
The most commonly surviving type of timber-framed building within Sheffield is the cruck building. In a cruck building, the weight is carried on pairs of curving timbers called cruck blades which rise from or near the ground and meet at the apex of the roof. The blades were selected from naturally bent standard trees. One of the best surviving cruck buildings in Sheffield is Oaks Fold Barn which stands at the entrance to Concord Park.



The oldest recorded and most important use of coppice poles was for charcoal-making. Although the market for charcoal for iron smelting gradually disappeared in the eighteenth century with the spread of the use of coke, charcoal continued to be important in the Sheffield area for making blister steel in cementation furnaces well into the twentieth century, although charcoal-making itself had died out by the First World War. Charcoal-making could be a threatening business with spreading fires and asphyxiating fumes a constant danger. Deep in Ecclesall Woods is a stone monument, now enclosed within a wrought-iron fence, to Thomas Yardley, 'wood collier', who was 'Burnt to death in his Cabbin on this place Oct 11th 1786'.

Another important fuel made from coppice wood between c.1575-1750 was whitecoal which was used in a mixture with charcoal in lead smelting. Whitecoal was small slivers of wood, dried in a kiln until all the moisture was driven out. The remains of whitecoal kilns survive in many of the woods in the south of the city in the form of large depressions, usually on sloping ground.

Sheffield's coppice woods also provided the raw materials for a bewildering variety of crafts and industries. Stout oak poles made good pit props; oak bark was used for making the liquor used by leather tanners to make the animal skins pliable for working; hazel rods were woven into hurdles; oak, hazel and willow were used in basket making; alder, which was easy to work and waterproof, made excellent clog soles; and ash and hazel made springy brush and tool handles. Holly was grown in special woods called 'holly hags', and the trees were coppiced and pollarded to provide 'leaf fodder' for sheep, cattle and deer in winter. And brushwood was made into besom brooms and bundled together to make faggots for heating bread ovens or for protecting river banks. The brushwood was called 'tynsell' or 'rammel', the latter word still being used in Sheffield to mean rubbish.



Sheffield's coppice woods were valuable items, and were particularly vulnerable in the first few years after they were coppiced. For this reason they were surrounded by stockproof fences either in the form of banks with external ditches or, more commonly, high stone walls. These woodland boundary features often survive and are important archaeological features. The woods had also to be protected against human thieves and trespassers, and autumn, when berries and fruits were ripe, and winter, when firewood supplies were low, were particularly sensitive times of the year.

When coppicing gradually came to an end many woods were sold to or presented as gifts to the City Council mostly for recreational purposes. Then for almost a century, these publicly owned woods were largely neglected and unmanaged. There was a real danger that the city's woodland heritage would be squandered.

Things began to change for the better in 1987 when the City Council approved a city-wide Woodlands Policy to ensure the protection and perpetuation of the ancient woodlands surviving in the city. But the real breakthrough came in 1999 when the success was announced of a £1.5m bid by the South Yorkshire Forest Partnership to the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore 35 woodlands in Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham. The five-year project called *Fuelling a Revolution - The Woods that Founded the Steel Country* includes 23 of Sheffield's ancient woods. The future of Sheffield's ancient woods now looks much better than it has done for almost a century.



Look out for family events in Sheffield's woodlands



SHEFFIELD'S ANCIENT WOODLAND HERITAGE

FUELLING A REVOLUTION
The woods that founded the steel country



SHEFFIELD'S ANCIENT WOODLAND HERITAGE

When people in other parts of the country hear for the first time about Sheffield's ancient woods, their first reaction is disbelief, then surprise, and finally envy. There are upwards of eighty ancient woods within Sheffield's city boundaries, including one – Ecclesall Woods – of nearly 300 acres (121 hectares). What other British city can match these statistics? The answer is none. **Sheffield is the best-wooded city in the country.** The surviving woodlands are reminders of the city's long industrial history, being the source of charcoal and whitecoal, the oldest and longest-used of its smelting fuels. And the resident or visitor is almost always aware of the woods in the landscape even though they cover only a small fraction of the total area. The woods cover the scarps and back slopes of the highest edges, and on lower ground they hang on steep valley sides almost into the heart of the urban area.



WHAT IS AN ANCIENT WOOD?

It is a wood that is known from documentary evidence or from a combination of archaeological, botanical and geographical clues to have been in existence since at least AD 1600. The significance of the date 1600 is that it was only after that date that trees were planted in this country to form woods. An ancient wood is either a **primary wood** or an **ancient secondary wood**. A primary wood is a direct descendant, never cleared, of the 'wildwood' that grew up and covered virtually the whole of Great Britain after the last Ice Age between 13,000-7,000 BC. Primary woods are likely to be those in boggy sites or on very steep slopes. Much more common are ancient secondary woods which occupy sites that were cleared at some point before 1600 for settlement or farming, then abandoned, again before 1600, and reverted to woodland. Because they have been woodland for so long the ancient secondary woodlands share the characteristics of primary woods. And it is the inherited characteristics of ancient woods – their sites, their shapes, their variety of plant life, and the animals that inhabit them – that make them so special and magical. **They take us back to the roots of our history and are irreplaceable.**



CHARACTERISTICS OF ANCIENT WOODS

Ancient woods are often in the farthest corners of parishes and townships, often right on the boundary. In the Gleadless valley are a number of ancient woods, including Hang Bank (= steep slope), Rollestone Wood and Lees Hall Wood that abut on the Meers Brook which means 'boundary stream'. This used to be not only the boundary between Sheffield and Norton parishes, but also the ancient boundary between Yorkshire and Derbyshire, and before that the boundary between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Northumbria and Mercia. Ancient woods are 'left-overs' that have been attacked by axe over a very long period of time. Sheffield's ancient woodland boundaries, therefore, tend to be sinuous or zig-zagged.

The distribution of trees and shrubs in ancient woods changes rapidly in response to soil and drainage conditions. An ancient wood is full of surprises as tree species suddenly disappear and others take their place within a short distance. Woolley Wood is perhaps the most varied of Sheffield's ancient woods. Sessile oak, with its stalked leaves and unstalked acorns, gives way to single specimens or

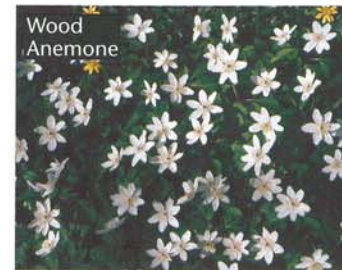


small groups of native rowan, ash, alder, silver birch, downy birch, wych elm, holly, hawthorn and hazel and planted trees, such as beech, hornbeam, sweet chestnut and lime. But most glorious of all is the native wild cherry which is in full blossom in April.

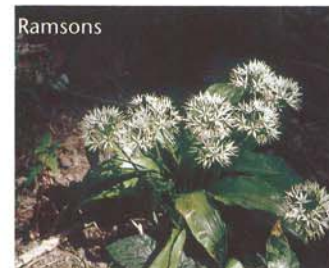


Bluebell

outside ancient woods. This is because they are generally slow colonisers. The bluebell is the best known of these ancient woodland indicators. Other widely distributed wild flowers largely restricted to ancient sites and found throughout Sheffield's ancient woods include wood anemone, wild garlic (ramsons), wood sorrel, yellow archangel, yellow pimpernel and the attractive grasses wood melick and wood millet.

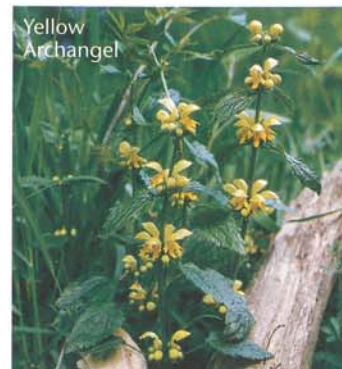


Wood Anemone



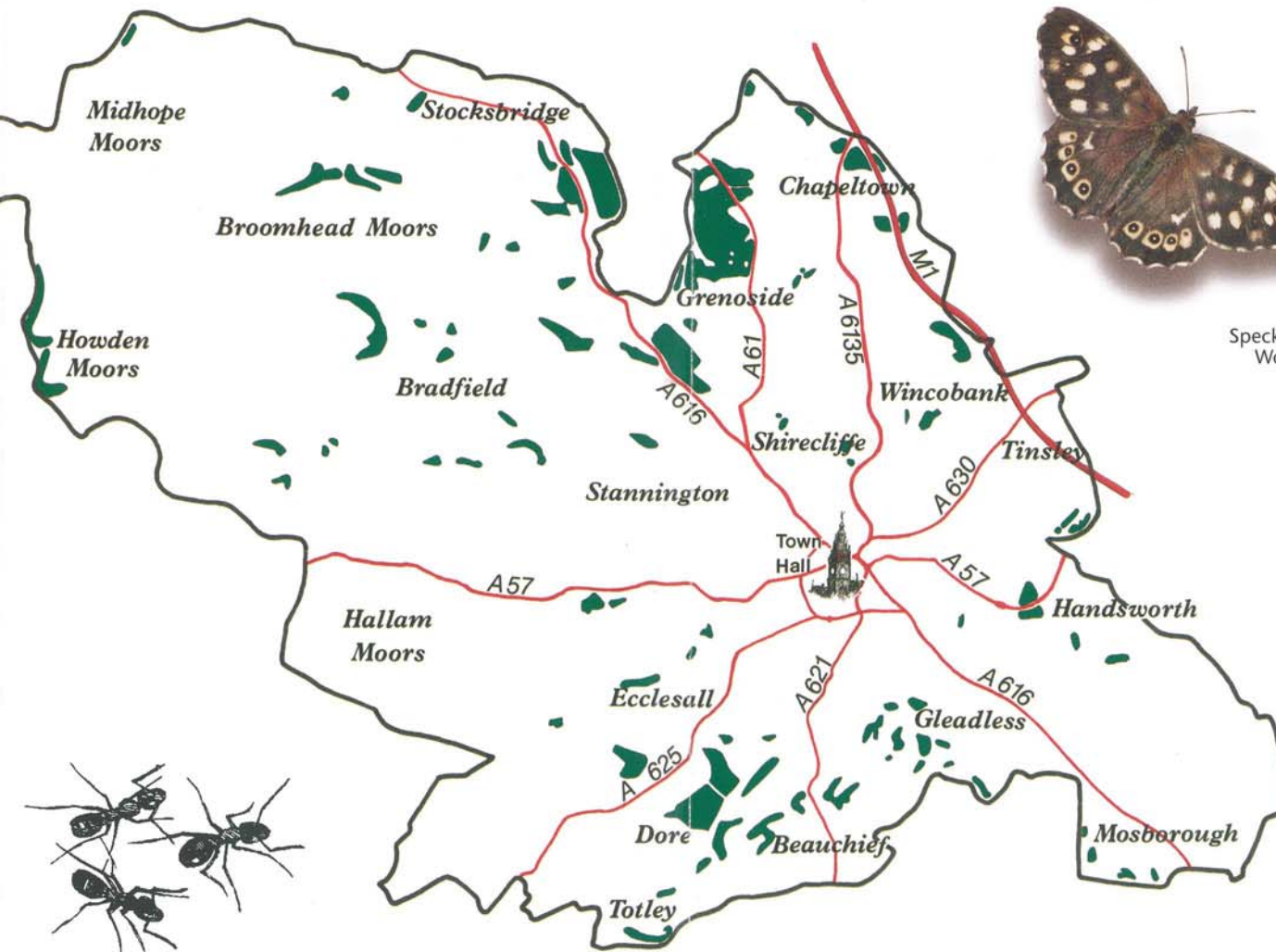
Ramsons

nests in every habitat: crows, herons and sparrowhawks in the canopy; tawny owls, nuthatches, redstarts (rarely), the three native species of woodpecker and five species of tit, in holes in trees; treecreepers under the loose bark and willow warblers, wood warblers, chiffchaffs and blackcaps on or near the ground.



Yellow Archangel

One of the greatest pleasures of visiting an ancient wood is to see the shafts of sunlight on the carpets of wild flowers in spring and early summer. Many of these woodland flowers are rarely found



Speckled Wood



Among the insects of Sheffield's ancient woods the butterflies, for example, the brimstone, the holly blue and the increasingly widespread speckled wood are the most conspicuous, but the most interesting woodland insect is the wood ant which is restricted to the woods at Grenoside. Their nests, sometimes more than a metre across and a foot or two high made from twigs, leaf fragments, leaf and grass stalks, soil and small stones and absolutely teeming with life, are found on the south-facing edges of paths and rides to catch as much sun as possible.

MAP OF ANCIENT WOODS IN SHEFFIELD

All the woods shown on the map are known or are very strongly believed to have been in existence since at least 1600. Almost all of them are still broadleaved woods, but a few have been coniferised. No modern plantations are shown. Most of the woods are in the ownership of the City Council.

