

Wheata Wood and Prior Royd were acquired by Sheffield City Council in 1983. They are two of 23 Sheffield woods which formed part of a project located in the South Yorkshire Forest area in Sheffield, Rotherham and Barnsley, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, called **Fuelling a Revolution: the woods that founded the steel country**. The project's name is derived from the fact that for centuries the woods provided the fuel (charcoal) for South Yorkshire's iron and steel industry.

Management of the woodlands is carried out in order to enhance their value for wildlife and local people. Access to the woods is actively promoted and schools are encouraged to use the woodlands through guided visits and by the provision of educational materials and a website found at: www.heritagewoodsonline.co.uk

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

Trees and Woodlands Section
Parks and Countryside Service
Sheffield City Council
Level 3, Moorfoot Building
Sheffield S1 4PL
Tel: 0114 250 0500
email: parksandcountryside@sheffield.gov.uk

If you want to get involved in conservation activities in the Grenoside area please contact Grenoside Conservation Society,

c/o Richard Godley
36 School Lane
Grenoside S35 8QU

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

This leaflet has been devised and written by Mel and Joan Jones. The photographs are by Joan Jones and the watercolours and maps by Bob Warburton.



VISITING WHEATA WOOD AND PRIOR ROYD

Access to the two woods is free and unrestricted at all times. There is a well developed network of footpaths and bridleways through the woods. The main footpaths and bridleways are wide and dry and are suitable for pushchairs. Slopes are gentle except in the western part of Prior Royd. There are two dry-stone seating areas by the artist-craftsman Ian Boyle at the northern end of Wheata Wood.

There is a car park at the Community Centre in Grenoside and at the northern end of Wheata Wood half a mile north of the Old Red Lion (see map). There is also limited roadside parking at the top of Bower Lane. First bus service 66 goes to Grenoside.

The first impression after walking for a few minutes in either of the two woods is that you are definitely in a wood in the north of England and in the uplands. There is much silver birch (which grows well into the Arctic Circle) and downy birch, and rowan (or mountain ash) are dotted about.



Rowan



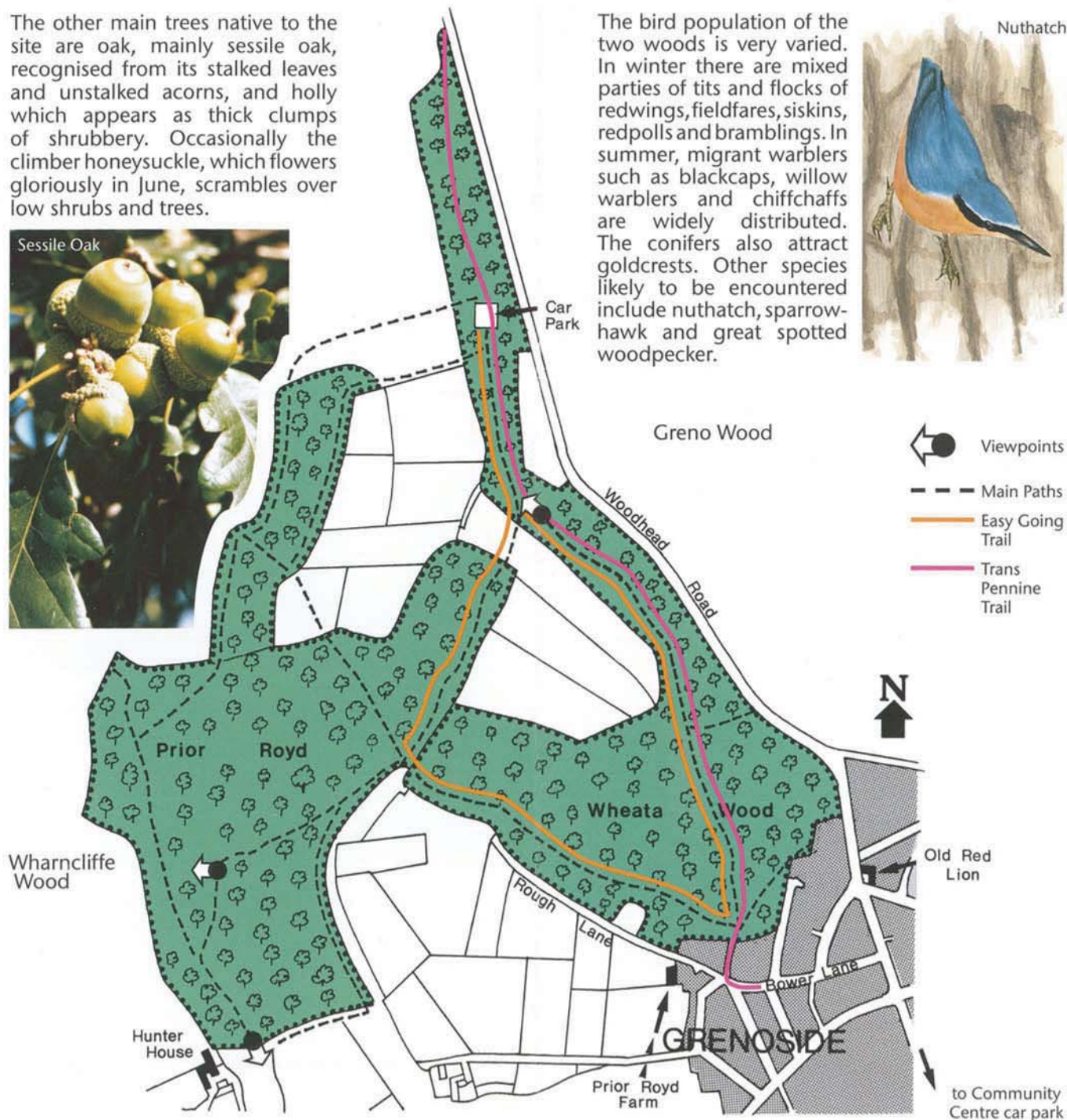
Bracket fungus on Beech

The woodland floor is mainly covered by tussocks of wavy hair-grass with occasional clumps of bilberry and patches of heather. Felling of the two woods was particularly heavy during the two World Wars and re-growth, particularly of birch, is often multi-stemmed. Bracket fungus is common.

The other main trees native to the site are oak, mainly sessile oak, recognised from its stalked leaves and unstalked acorns, and holly which appears as thick clumps of shrubbery. Occasionally the climber honeysuckle, which flowers gloriously in June, scrambles over low shrubs and trees.



Sessile Oak



The bird population of the two woods is very varied. In winter there are mixed parties of tits and flocks of redwings, fieldfares, siskins, redpolls and bramblings. In summer, migrant warblers such as blackcaps, willow warblers and chiffchaffs are widely distributed. The conifers also attract goldcrests. Other species likely to be encountered include nuthatch, sparrowhawk and great spotted woodpecker.



Nuthatch

During the second half of the nineteenth century much planting of trees not native to the site, mainly beech and sweet chestnut, took place in Wheata Wood. It was in this period that the wood was extended as a narrow plantation alongside Woodhead Road. Conifers occur in two small areas: in the western part of Wheata Wood there is a small plantation of Scots pine, and larch has been planted at the northern end of the most northerly extension of Prior Royd.

In spring and early summer the woodland floor in the two woods is sprinkled with flowering plants that are largely restricted to ancient woods because they find it difficult to colonise new sites. These include bluebell, wood anemone, wood sorrel, wood speedwell, wild garlic (ramsons) and the much scarcer common cow-wheat.



Common Cow-wheat

Another noteworthy feature of the two woods is the stone walls that surround them. When the woods were managed as coppices it was important to keep grazing farm animals and deer out of the woods when the coppice was young. There are



past records of tenants' farm animals being taken from the woods around Grenoside and im p o u n d e d in the village pinfold. A fine then had to be paid before they were released. There is still a surviving village pinfold in Bower Lane, now part of a garden.



WHEATA WOOD & PRIOR ROYD

two ancient woods at Grenoside

FUELLING A REVOLUTION
The woods that founded the steel country



ANCIENT WOODS

Wheata Wood and Prior Royd are examples of what woodland historians call ancient woods. This means that they have been in existence since at least AD 1600. It was only after 1600 that people in this country planted trees to create woods.

What this means is that an ancient wood is either a **primary wood** or an **ancient secondary wood**.

Primary woods are direct descendants of the primaeval forest that grew up from about 13,000 years ago after the end of the last Ice Age. They are the remnants of the original 'wildwood' that existed before our ancestors started to clear them for settlement and for plough land and grazing for their domestic animals.

An ancient secondary wood is a wood that for some time before 1600 was cleared of trees and used for settlement or farming, but which at some later date, again before 1600, became woodland again because settlement or farming were abandoned and reversion to woodland took place.

Wheata Wood, on fairly level land, and containing archaeological evidence that suggests that a large part of the wood was the site of an ancient farming landscape, is mainly an **ancient secondary wood**. On the other hand, the steep northern and western parts of Prior Royd could be primary woodland.

The archaeological evidence that shows that Wheata Wood is an ancient secondary wood is so subdued it is only discernible to a professional archaeologist. The evidence is in the form of a series of ridges (called lynchets), low stone banks and the remains of a section of a boulder wall. The features are severely eroded and covered by vegetation. It is thought they represent the remains of an ancient field system dating from the Romano-British period (1st to 4th centuries AD).



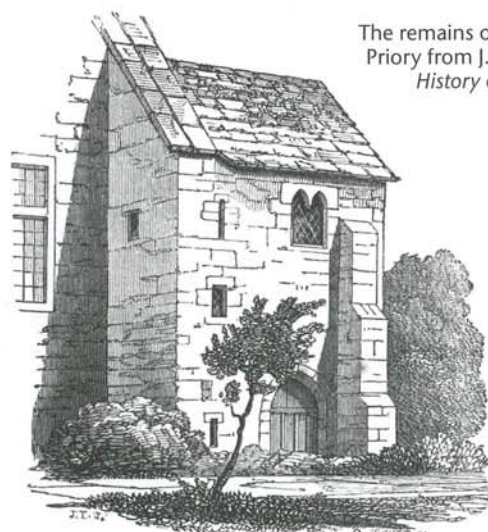
The area was then abandoned and reverted to woodland. The surrounding area was cleared over a long period of time leaving Wheata Wood and Prior Royd as woods in a farmed landscape. The shapes of the two woods, with sinuous and zig-zag boundaries are typical of ancient woods – woods that have been created by the slow removal of the surrounding woodland over a long period of time. The names of the surrounding fields tell of this process – they include *intakes* (land enclosed from wood or common), *stubbings* (cleared woodland with tree stumps still remaining) and *royd* (woodland clearing).

Looking into Prior Royd from the south across a field called the Stubbing



THE MEANING OF THE NAMES OF THE TWO WOODS

The most likely explanation of the name 'Wheata' in Wheata Wood is that it is the name of a tenant or freeholder whose farmland included the wood. It is recorded in a surviving document written at Sheffield manorial court held in February 1484 that William Whett, son and heir of John Whett, claimed to hold a house and land called Birley Hollyns and a clearing ('assart') called Andrew Carr. These two places lie just to the south of Wheata Wood. In other deeds Whett is spelled Whete (1458) and Wheate (1562).



The remains of Ecclesfield Priory from J. Eastwood's *History of Ecclesfield* (1862).

The name Prior Royd is doubly interesting. 'Prior' refers to the fact that during the medieval period until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s it was the property first of the monks of St Wandrille in Normandy who had set up a priory at Ecclesfield and then, when the Crown confiscated the property of foreign religious houses, of St Anne's Priory of Coventry. 'Royd' does not mean wood but means clearing and this must refer to the farm attached to the wood.

By the early seventeenth century both woods had come into the hands of the earls of Shrewsbury and descended to their successors the dukes of Norfolk.

THE PAST MANAGEMENT OF THE TWO WOODS

From the seventeenth century, and probably for long before that, until towards the end of the nineteenth century, the two woods were managed as **spring woods**. Prior Royd, as 'Prior Nail', was listed among 49 spring woods in Sheffield and Rotherham in a document written for the 7th Earl of Shrewsbury between 1592 and 1616, and Wheata Wood was described as a *spring wood of 25 years growth* in a survey of the manor of Sheffield in 1637.

A spring wood was a **coppice wood** or more precisely a **coppice-with-standards**. In a coppice-with-standards most of the trees were periodically cut down to ground level to what is called a **stool** and from the stool grew multiple stems.



Some of the trees were not coppiced but allowed to grow on to become mature single-stemmed trees and these were the **standards**. In local woods most of the standards were oak trees.

During the nineteenth century the two woods were gradually converted into **canopy woods** in which all the trees were single-stemmed and grown on a long rotation. Planting of non-native trees also took place.

WOODLAND CRAFTS AND INDUSTRIES

The reason why the woods were managed as coppice-with-standards for so long was because there were different markets for different sizes of trees. Timber trees were for building projects such as the cruck barn which still survives at Prior Royd Farm. There is a record in 1682 of a tree being felled in Prior Royd to provide planks for the floor of a farm tenant's wainhouse (where he stored his cart) and his hayhouse. And in 1718 a tenant at one of the Duke of Norfolk's water-powered cutlers' wheels was provided with seven trees from Wheata Wood for its repair.

A prime use for the coppice poles was for making charcoal which was the fuel for iron makers until the late eighteenth century and for some steel makers well into the twentieth century.



Oak poles made strong pit props and the bark of the oak timber trees and coppice poles was peeled for leather tanners. Ash and hazel poles made good springy brush and tool handles and birch brushwood was used for making besom brooms.



Besom makers

In the nineteenth century the Sharp(e) family of Grenoside specialised in making swill or spelk baskets which were woven out of lengths of thinly split oak. The oak was boiled to make it easier to split and there is a record of George Sharp ordering a long metal bath from Newton Chambers Ironworks at Thorncliffe in which to boil his oak poles. 'Sharp's wood oil', a small pond where they obtained their water supply, still survives in Greno Wood.

William Sharpe	Head	Mar	69	} Basket manufacturer
Lydia	Wife	Mar	65	
Emily	Dau.	Unmar	33	Dressmaker
Henry	Son	Unmar	31	File Cutter
Herbert	GrdS	Unmar	3	—
Hawksworth.				

1881 Census extract for Lump Lane, Grenoside.

Members of the Dronfield family of Grenoside were clog sole makers. William Dronfield senior, born in north Derbyshire, embarked on his apprenticeship as a woodman in Dore in 1809, at the age of fifteen, before coming to Grenoside. He and his son, also called William, who died in 1916, operated from 'the woodyard' at the entrance to Wheata Wood at the top of Bower Lane. Besides making clog soles, they also made brush heads, mallets and tool handles.



William Dronfield junior