

30 JAN 2004

Mortimores Wood Volunteers

Progress Report - January 2004.

The grant from the Community Woodland Network Grant Scheme was awarded to the Mortimores Wood Volunteers in October 2003 to purchase a long Reach Hedge Trimmer.

Receiving the award at this time allowed the group to purchase the Trimmer in time for our work day in November.

This tied in very well with our current work schedule (Winter 2003/04) which included the completion of the reduction in height of the boundary hedge.

The Volunteers had already been working to reduce both the width and height of the hedge before November with some success albeit slow. However, the use of the Trimmer was very efficient and completed the reduction of the upper boundary (see photos) in one work day!

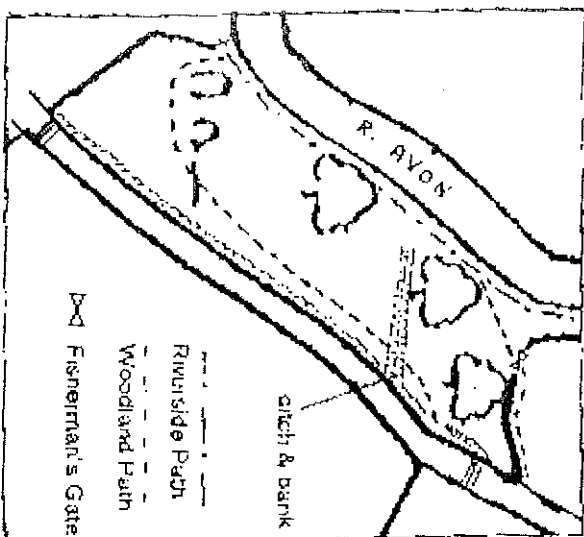
We will continue to use the Trimmer until after the next work day in February, when we will begin planting, mainly of hazel to increase density within the Woodland.

This power tool has been a great success and I am delighted to report that the Volunteers are now back on schedule.

Katie Griffin

Grants officer.

Mortimores Wood



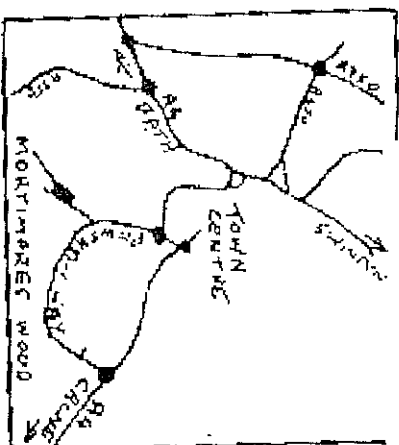
In 1994, in conjunction with the land-owner (Chippenhams Borough Lands Trust), a group of volunteers was formed with the aim of restoring coppice management to **Mortimores Wood**. It is at least 40 years since this was done and the wood is becoming seriously overgrown. There is noticeable die-back in several parts of the wood and the flora of the wood is in danger of lasting damage. The aim of the Volunteers is to restore the management system which resulted in this diverse range of flowers, though not on a commercial basis. It is hoped to be able to manage the wood to maintain its predominant character, whilst also improving access to some areas. Local schools are being encouraged to visit the wood as part of their environmental studies and to participate in such things as nest box siting and tree planting.

The early stages of restoration seem to be largely destructive as it is necessary to re-cut overgrown coppice and fell a number of immature trees. Rather less noticeable is that at the same time new hazel and oak seedlings are

being planted to restore the balance of the wood. Attempts to eradicate large amounts of bramble are also being made as this would otherwise smother the flowers which should be seen. As the work continues, the regular cycle of growth and cutting will soon become apparent and the flowers associated with it will continue to bloom in the years after cutting.

Mortimores Wood Volunteers have a regular work day on the second Sunday of each month from 10.00am to 1.00 p.m., to which all are welcome.

For further information please contact Anna and Damian Pinguey on 01249 659220 or Paul and Sandy Corbyn on 01380 727339.



Location

The wood lies about 200yds south of the A4 Pewsham Way, between the new Court House and Canal Road. Regrettably, due to the slope of the ground, wheelchair access is not possible at the present. Pedestrian access at all times, vehicle access restricted.



P R Corbyn 1996.

MORTIMORES WOOD

ANCIENT WOODLAND



A small area of ancient woodland with a recorded history extending back for over 800 years. The wood has a diversity of plant and wildlife which is only found in such old woodlands. Mortimores Wood lies just one mile from the centre of the busy town of Chippenham and is accessible along the new millennium cycleway, providing a haven of tranquillity from the bustle of modern life.

033 PEWSHAM WAY
CHIPPENHAM

800 Years of Woodland History

The history of **Mortimore's Wood** can be traced right back to the 12th century, at which time it formed a part of the Royal Forest of Pewsham.

This forest was a hunting preserve of the King and his chosen noblemen. Strict laws controlled what the people living near the forest could do within its bounds (for example dogs must have their claws removed so that they could not be used for hunting deer). The main purpose of these laws was to protect the deer and wild boar which the nobility liked to hunt.

One of the main boundaries of this forest was along the River Avon from the River Marden to the Semmington Brook. The forest lay to the east of this boundary, so confirming **Mortimore's Wood** as a part of it.



HAWTHORN

Over the centuries since, the wood has passed through the hands of a number of families, for a long time being part of the Lackham Estate. In 1855 the wood was acquired by the Lysley family, who still own land at Castle Coombe, then in recent years was bought by the Borough Lands Trust (archival records show that it was not part of the original Borough Lands grant).

Archaeological traces within the wood suggest that it was enclosed and divided into compartments by a series of banks and ditches (records from 1290 may also support this) which would be in keeping with a system of management called **coppicing**. This was a widely practised system throughout medieval times and right into the 20th century.

The history of the wood is still being researched, with recent finds of records from the Anglo-Saxon period, possibly as

far back as the eighth century. However, the origin of the wood's name still eludes our investigations!



BITTERSWEET

Woodland Management.

The earliest evidence for the management of woodlands in Britain comes from archaeological studies in the Somerset levels. Remains found here indicate that a system known as **coppicing** was in use as far back as 4000 years BC! Today it is generally accepted that there is no woodland remaining in Britain which has not been subjected to some form of management by mankind and so even our wildest looking woods are classified as semi-natural woodland.

Where a woodland has a traceable history dating to before 1600AD and is composed mainly of native species, as is the case with Mortimore's Wood, then the wood can be classified as **semi-natural ancient woodland (SNAW)**. These SNAW sites are becoming an increasingly rare resource. By their very antiquity they often contain a far greater diversity of wildlife of all forms than will be found in almost any other woodland. Unfortunately these sites are disappearing at an horrendous rate. In Wiltshire the loss since 1945 amounts to more than 15000 acres!

For several hundred years **Mortimore's Wood** has been managed as a coppiced wood, in which the under-storey of trees is cut down on a regular basis, encouraging very rapid new growth from the stump (up to seven feet in one season is possible). This new growth produces a crop of long, thin poles with a variety of uses e.g. hazel for hurdle making, oak bark for tanning.

The main coppice tree in the wood is the hazel, with mature oak and ash. Other notable trees include substantial amounts of holly and an unusually large crab apple.

Coppice management effectively thins out the tree canopy, increasing the amount of light reaching the woodland floor by up to twenty fold in the summer. The plants of the woodland floor do not, on the whole, like continual shade and respond spectacularly to the increase in light. Spring flowers such as primroses bloom profusely in the second spring after cutting, but they also need the shade which develops in later years to control grasses and other non-woodland plants which would otherwise smother them.

Not all plants of the woodland floor respond in the same way to the flood light after coppicing. Spring flowering perennials such as the primrose are present all the time but only flower well in the early years after cutting, only to re-appear in profusion when the area is cut again.

Summer flowering perennials are also always present but in extra light grow taller and bloom more profusely. Buried seed plants such as wood spurge die out completely in the shady years but leave long-lived seeds which lie dormant until the flood of light induces them to germinate.



BRAMBLE

A survey of **Mortimore's Wood**, conducted over the course of a single season, found **more than 40 species of flower**, some of which are only associated with areas which have long been wooded. If the coppice management ceases and the woodland canopy is allowed to thicken, then the plants on the floor will not get the sunlight they need and the flora which is characteristic of the area will decline and eventually disappear to be replaced with the comparatively poor range of plants found in a mature woodland.