

NORSEY WOOD SOCIETY

Summer 2010 Newsletter | Issue number 130

Founded 1977

www.norseywood.org.uk
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Please send us your comments, stories, sightings, news by writing to:
norsey@hotmail.co.uk

Norsey
Wood
Society
founded 1977



AN ILLUSTRATED TALK

VANGE MARSHES and the proposed development of BOWERS MARSH



Marc Outten
RSPB Warden
South Essex
Marshes

NORSEY WOOD EDUCATION CENTRE
OUTWOOD COMMON ROAD
MONDAY 14th JUNE at 7.45pm

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NWS Newsletter Sponsored by
Norsey Woodland Crafts

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Peasants Revolt – Battle of Norsey Wood 1381

▪ Julian Whybra

Most Billericay townspeople know that in 1381 there occurred the Battle of Norsey Wood, the last act of the Peasants' Revolt; few know any details. The little that is known comes from the Westminster Chronicle, attributed to Robert of Reading, and the Historia Anglica of Thomas Walsingham.

By the time the battle occurred, the Peasants' Revolt was all but over. Wat Tyler*, the Revolt's leader, had been killed, King Richard II had reneged on all his promises and assurances to the people, and the king's armies were mopping up the pockets of resistance in the shires. The Essex rebels were not prepared to give up their struggle without one final effort. They sent out a summons for a general mobilization at Great Baddow and at Rettendon, threatening that every able-bodied man not attending would have his house burnt down. Over the next two days messengers covered the entire county, church bells pealed, fires were lit, and men marched to the assembly points, gathering horses and tools on the way. On 27th June 1381 the mobilized peasant armies met and made camp on the eastern approaches to Billericay and the records state that the men of Essex chose to make their stand adjacent to a wood north-east of Billericay.

The site of the Battle of Norsey Wood is likely to have been in the area of the present Norsey Farm Estate backing on to the land between Norsey Wood and Forty Acre Plantation/Potash Road, although many of the peasants would have been hunted down afterwards in Norsey Wood itself. It is more than probable that the Deerbank along Norsey Road formed part of the peasants' defensive formation.

The rebels were not militarily-minded. Their only defensive measures were to dig ditches on the flanks of the camp and to chain carts together, as their fathers had done at Crécy. Their few real weapons - bows and rusted daggers - were supplemented by scythes, sickles and staves. They stayed round their camp-fires, raging against injustice in their lilting Essex accents, and waited through the night determined to stay in the field to defend their new-won freedoms. They did not even bother to post sentries. Just before dawn on Sunday 28th June 1381 a well-armed force of King Richard II's men, under Thomas of Woodstock, the Earl of Buckingham, and Sir Thomas Percy, charged over the dew and, in one shock, broke through the unguarded entrenchments, smashed the flimsy barricades, and began to slaughter the men of Essex. The Essex peasants were no match for war-horses and men-at-arms with spears, axes, and swords. Undisciplined, they broke their barely-formed ranks and the battle became little more than a rout. Some stood and were cut down. Many fled into the wood and were hunted down. Some grouped themselves into the old Saxon fighting-rings and made an orderly retreat, beating off their attackers, picking up stragglers, and retiring like true soldiers. The King's men killed some 500 Essexmen; many were buried in the churchyard at Great Burstead (there is a persistent tradition that Wat Tyler is also buried there). All the horses (over eight hundred of them) were captured.

The remaining rebels fled to Colchester where they tried in vain to persuade the people to support them and to close the town-gates. Then they fled to Sudbury hoping to join up with the men of Suffolk; instead they found the county already pacified and royal forces attacked and routed them. The survivors went off to Huntingdon where they were also chased off. The last band made a stand at Ramsey Abbey where twenty-five were slain and the rest dispersed, becoming outlaws to remain at large for a long time.

Continues on page 3.../

EDITORIAL

Recent Committee Items

Billericay Greening campaign
Basildon Wildlife and Countryside Forum:
local planning issues
Visit to Wat Tyler
Communication with the membership
Norsey Wood management plan
Deerbank Erosion second survey
Dr Croft and her work in saving the Wood
Recent survey in Norsey by the Essex Field Club
Recent coppicing

Editorial

▪ Tony Mullord

Well, Norsey has been a popular place to visit this Spring and rightly so. The Spring flowers have certainly been magnificent. It is also good to hear from the Essex Field Club botany group that the Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage has been rediscovered in the Wood, particularly as numbers of this plant have been declining in the County.

Popularity, unfortunately, has its downside and one result is the increase in 'unofficial' paths being created. These are particularly noticeable on the left of the main ride going away from the Centre. It is nice to get up close to nature but in doing so, the space for nature is gradually decreased.

In this issue we have the regular update from Chris, a look back to the 14th century and more. This issue is the sixth in the new format and we would like to have feedback and to hear of any problems you might have; perhaps with the size of the print. Please let us know!

Finally, an apology. In the last issue, I mentioned that back issues of the newsletter were available for perusal in Billericay library and directed you to where they could be found. Soon after publication, however, when I went to put the latest issue in the folder, it had been moved! The two folders are now to be found (at the time of writing!) as you enter to the left by the window, opposite the newspaper and magazine racks.



King Richard and rebels 1381

The king's armies then moved systematically through Essex dealing with local resistance and settling debts as they went. At Chelmsford and Colchester it is recorded that men were sentenced to death in batches and in the streets of Essex towns disembowelling and hanging continued briskly. As many as nineteen victims were seen hanging from a single beam in one street; others were half-hanged at one street corner after another before being mercifully despatched after the fourth or fifth occasion.

England might well have become a better land for its people had the rebels won. But they did not win, yet the effort itself was no failure. The rebel cause has remained part of England's heritage; its impetus swept on through every phase of our history, for the cause of freedom is a living cause; it is the flame that can be smothered but not extinguished. And we should rightly be proud of the part Billericay played in it.

*Despite the pretensions of a local country park there is not one scrap of evidence to suggest that Tyler came from Basildon. There are though historical references to his having come from Dartford, Deptford, Maidstone, and Colchester. He certainly led the rebellion from Kent.

CONTACTS and WEBSITES

- NWS officers – please see panel on the back page
- Norsey Wood Ranger 01277 624553 (if urgent 01268 550088)
 - Countryside Services (BDC) 01268 550088 www.basildon.gov.uk
 - Norsey Woodland Crafts 07884 171147 norsey.woodland.crafts@blueyonder.co.uk
 - B's NE's (Billericay's Nature Explorers) c/o Norsey Wood Information Centre, Outwood
 - Common Road Billericay CM11 1HA billericaynatureexplorers@basildon.gov.uk
 - Friends of Queens Park Country Park 07775998794 c/o 31 Gt Wheatly Rd Rayleigh
 - Mill Meadows Society 01277 630849 www.millmeadows.org.uk
 - Living Landscapes Area 34 01277 630849 chair@millmeadows.org.uk
 - Wat Tyler Country Park 01268 550088 www.watylercountrypark.org.uk
 - Wat Tyler webcam www.southendrspb.co.uk/serspbcam/webcam.htm
 - Essex Wildlife Trust 01621 862960 www.essexwt.org.uk
 - South Essex Wildlife Hospital 01375 893893 <http://southessexwildlife.org>
- R.S.P.B –
 Chelmsford and S Essex Group 01621 892045 www.rspb.org.uk/groups/chelmsford

NEWS IN BRIEF

Visit to Wat Tyler Country Park 24 April
 ▪ **Cliff Mullett**

You might remember Wat Tyler as a rather remote and scruffy place. Well, it's still 10 miles from Billericay over a level crossing at Pitsea but no longer scruffy. A party of our members was shown round by Steve Prewer in a visit lasting almost three hours against the two hours scheduled, thanks to Steve's enthusiasm. The main building of the old dynamite factory has been transformed to house a large hall fully equipped for conferences, exhibitions, concerts and other events. There are a number of smaller rooms for educational purposes or meetings, an interactive exhibition room displaying the history of the factory, a café, and a shop. The RSPB centre has been moved to a newly renovated building and the buildings around the "village green" are being renovated.

In the open air, new paths have been introduced and scrub cleared for the benefit of wildlife and so that the embankments built to guard against blast from explosions are now visible. The bird hides have been retained looking over the creek and wetlands to the new RSPB reserves. A new station has been built for the miniature railway which is being extended as have the children's play areas.

We recommend a visit for families or anyone interested in wildlife or the history of the area.

Other Dates/Events in the District
 ▪ **Editor**

Bird Surveys

Other Events

- 19th June Exhibition at Sun Corner. Billericay Town Council's 'Green Day' event
 contact: 01277 625732
townclerk@billericaytowncouncil.gov.uk
- 19th June 10:30am Mill Meadows, Wildflower Walk
 Meet at scout hut in Greens Lane
- Farm
- 26th June Mill Meadows, B'sNEs
 Midsummer Fairy Ball
SUSANNAH_HERVEY@hotmail.com
- Norsey Wood Open Day
 26th September 12 noon - 4pm

Ranger's Report

▪ Chris Huggins



Well, despite the rather mixed weather, the last two weeks have probably been the busiest here that I can remember, with over 3500 cars in the last two weeks. No doubt the recent TV programme created a lot of interest in the Bluebells, and I have had a number of very favourable comments, often from first time visitors very impressed with the sight. One chap called in yesterday to say that the natural beauty of the wood had brought tears to his eyes! In addition to the Bluebells it seems to me that many of the spring flowers have been impressive this year, with the Wood Anemones and Wood Forget-me-nots particularly notable, as well as good shows of Lesser Celandine and Yellow Archangel. We're still looking into ways of funding the expansion and smartening up of the car park, but finance is difficult at the moment.

The work party has been hard at work clearing brash from the winter's coppicing and creating a dead hedge around the coupe. There seems to have been an influx of new blood, which is welcome (not that the 'old hands' aren't still valued!) and attendance has increase with 16 or 17 on many occasions. Removal of the logs will be delayed until the summer in order to avoid the vehicles involved damaging the spring flowers. Later in the year a small number of habitat piles will be created using the remaining brash. These are used by invertebrates, small mammals and reptiles. We may also need to have a small number of bonfires later in the year to clear any excess brash that remains. The completion of the work should result in an impressive show of wild flowers in spring 2011. The second year after coppicing is generally thought to provide the best conditions for woodland flowers to flourish.

The clearance of the fence line around the old meadows from Norsey Close down to the stream by the railway line in preparation for fencing and grazing has been completed. The next stage is the installation of a water trough and fencing which will hopefully take place this year. We can then begin the search for some animals to help manage the site.

Last week I joined fellow Essex Bat Group members at Thorndon Country Park to conduct some bat surveys of the site. This proved very interesting with several species possibly recorded – literally, by recording their (sometimes!) diagnostic echolocation calls. I'm hoping the Group will return the favour later in the year and conduct some bat surveys in Norsey Wood. I'll let you know the results if we manage it.

The Essex Field Club Botany group came to the wood a few weeks ago and were excited to rediscover several patches of Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage (pictured above left). Not a showy plant but reduced in number in Essex, possibly due to decreased moisture, so it is important that it is still here. Unfortunately the same can't be said for the species of *Sphagnum* mosses that were present here, as new searches proved negative.

The Dormouse monitoring season has come round again, and some new tubes have been installed to help us record numbers, so if you fancy helping out with the box checks, with the prospect of seeing a declining and elusive creature (pictured above right), please let me know.

Many thanks,

What if?

What if the railway line that borders part of Norsey Meadow had not been constructed?

In 1883, documents were delivered to the Office of the Clerk of the Peace for Essex in Chelmsford at the beginning of the process which, it was hoped, would lead to a new railway line being approved. This line, called the Mid Essex Junction Railway would run between Ingatestone and Pitsea.

Its route would enter our locality near Lawness Farm on Mountnessing Road, pass close to Gooseberry Green and then veer towards Laindon Common after cutting through the area between Mountnessing Road and Western Road. This would have brought it close to where Station Road is now. (Could the possibility of the building of this line have given rise to the naming of Station Road here? Probably not, since the farmland here was not sold for development until about four years after the present line to Wickford and beyond was built.) After crossing Laindon Common, the line would pass near St Mary Magdalene, Great Burstead and proceed onwards towards Pitsea.

If this line had been approved and built, it is unlikely that local landowners would have agreed to a second line passing through Billericay to Wickford. Thus, Norsey Meadow would not have had the protection of a permanent barrier from the later developments which swallowed up farmland to the south. The developers of the houses and roads along Meadow Rise might well have been given permission to build on what is now Norsey Meadow, right up to the very Deerbank bordering the Wood.

The results of this could have been similar to those which have affected the Wood along Norsey Road: destruction of much of the Deerbank, unauthorised back garden gates, fly tipping, garden waste deposits which have created non-native plant introductions and building waste.

In spite of the occasional shattering of the peace by a train passing, the existence of the line has protected our Wood from much unwelcome incursion.

Greening Billericay

▪ Paul Hudson



You will probably have heard already of the "Greening Billericay" campaign which was publicised in the January edition of the "Billericay Town Crier". Three members of the Society's Committee and a number of other members of the Society attended the Public Meeting held at Emmanuel Church on 23rd March.

The aim of the campaign is to convince as many Billericay residents as possible that they can personally do something to reduce the town's "carbon footprint". Disturbingly, statistics show that Billericay's carbon footprint - the amount of carbon dioxide, or CO₂, which we produce per person - is 20% above the national average. This no doubt reflects the general prosperity of the area with an above average proportion of larger houses, many households with more than one car and high levels of ownership of electrical and electronic equipment.

The Town Council has established a Working Party to promote the campaign, which is part of a national initiative which started at Petersfield in Hampshire. It was good to see that many young people are involved, with members of the ATC and Youth Town Council assisting with the running of the meeting.

The evening began with a number of presentations explaining the objectives of the campaign and the progress being made elsewhere. Those attending were then asked to select which they felt were the three most important initiatives which the campaign should adopt as its priorities, from a prepared list of 15 options. These were all actions which residents could take which would both reduce their CO₂ output and save money. Initiatives such as burning more wood, in place of fossil fuels, and buying more locally-produced food were not therefore on the list, though they could feature in later stages of the campaign.

The three actions selected as priorities were:

1. Turning lights off when leaving a room
2. Walking if a journey is less than a mile
3. Turning off stand-bys.

Together, these initiatives could reduce the CO₂ output of the average household by 175kg (about 400 lbs) a year and save £48.

There will be a Fun Day on the Green at Sun Corner on Saturday 19th June when various groups and individuals will be demonstrating and promoting a number of the CO₂-saving initiatives. I hope as many members as possible will attend and will give the campaign their support.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Nature's Calendar

▪ Cliff Mullett



Every year we wonder when the bluebells are going to come out. For some years I have been watching for seasonal events in the wood and entering the dates on the Nature's Calendar web site (<http://www.naturescalendar.org.uk/>) which enables national trends to be charted. The most noticeable events are the opening of the spring flowers where I have records from 2001. Taking every two years my most complete records are as follows

Flowers open	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
snowdrop		2 Feb	9 Feb	17 Feb	27 Feb
wood anemone	21 Mar	18 Mar	1 Apr	21 Feb	1 Apr
lesser celandine	7 Mar	18 Mar	1 Apr	4 Mar	1 Apr
bluebell	28 Mar	8 Apr	17 Apr	4 Mar	8 Apr
First leaf					
elder		2 Feb	28 Feb	7 Feb	4 Mar
hawthorn	28 Mar	5 Mar	30 Mar	18 Feb	1 Apr

There seem to be some inconsistencies but I have noticed, however, that cold periods delay the buds opening and a few warm days bring them on quickly.

Norsey Woodland Crafts

▪ Simon Stock

It has been a very busy few months with working on two large orders for the Girl Guide Association and also for Thurrock Council (Langdon Hills Country Park). The latter has just been completed and a variety of benches, tables and chairs are now being installed within the country park. While working on this order it has brought a number of visitors into the Wood Yard to have a closer look at what was being made and this included the local Gazette, who should be running an article about the benches etc shortly.

I have had the first charcoal burn of the year, which will be unloaded and bagged soon and hopefully we will get a BBQ summer. Bean poles are still currently available but unfortunately I have now sold out of pea sticks.

A variety of products are available ranging from whistles and puzzles through to carved mushrooms, planters and rustic furniture along with what I would say is a very nice abstract carving in Larch (see attached photo).

To finish I would like to mention something that was said at a recent Norsey Wood Society open meeting. It was along the lines that you should make time to go into the wood and stop and look and listen to your surroundings.

These words struck a cord with me that I work in a wonderful place but do not spend the time to appreciate it. If I walk through the woods I'm looking at timber stacks working out what I need to extract for orders and what new things I could make from an odd shaped piece of timber.

I have now started to try to put sometime aside each week to walk into the wood and to sit and to look and to listen to what is around and it's surprising what can be seen and heard: the array of flowers, the songs of birds and the foraging of the animals and not forgetting the beauty of the trees.

So I would recommend to everyone to try finding that little bit of time to stop in the wood and to really take in the surroundings in such a special place, it's definitely worth it.

The main opening time for the yard is Sunday 9.00am to 3.30pm when all current products are on display. For week day opening times, to make an enquiry or place an order please feel free to contact me on 07884 171147 or via e-mail at norsey.woodland.crafts@blueyonder.co.uk

Kindly note that the yard will be closed on Sunday 6th June for a well deserved holiday.

Friends of Queens Park Country Park

Meet each last Saturday in the month at 10.30 for a work party, to carry out whatever is necessary. Membership forms can be obtained from Tricia Smith, 31 Gt. Wheatly Road, Rayleigh. Tel: 07775998794 or Andy Butt 220 Rosebay Avenue, Billericay

B's NE's (Billericay's Nature Explorers)

▪ Susannah Hervey

Contact:

billericaynatureexplorers@basildon.gov.uk or Billericay Nature Explorers, c/o Norsey Wood Information Centre, Outwood Common Road, Billericay CM11 1HA.

Mill Meadows Society

The Mill Meadows Society is currently working on the programme for next year. As and when events are arranged, they will be published on the web site www.millmeadows.org.uk and posters will be put on the Mill Meadows and Norsey Wood information boards.



Events

OPEN MEETINGS

Monday 14th June at 7.45pm at the Norsey Wood Information Centre. An Illustrated talk on 'Vange Marshes and proposed transformations of Bowers Marsh' by Marc Outten, the RSPB Warden, South Essex Marshes.

Sunday 26th September OPEN DAY at Norsey Wood from 12 noon to 4pm.

Monday 25th October at 7.45pm at the Billericay Day Centre, Chantry Chase, High Street.

An illustrated talk on 'The World Garden at Lullingstone Castle' by Jim Buttress.

Future Events

If you know of any future events which may be of interest to members, do not forget to tell us so we can include them in the next issue

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