West Berkshire Countryside Society

West Berkshire Countryside Society was formed in January 2012 by merging four long-established environmental groups. These were *The Friends of the Pang, Kennet & Lambourn Valleys*, *The Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group, The Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers* and *The Pang Valley Barn Owl Group.*

Our remit is to continue their work of promoting and improving the landscape of West Berkshire by practical conservation work and by introducing people to the countryside, its work, history and wildlife - through the medium of talks and conducted walks – of which this is one.

Members of West Berkshire Countryside Society currently pay a £15 annual subscription for individual and family membership to provide a financial resource. Those members who wish to, make up volunteer working parties to undertake practical conservation tasks.

Non-members are very welcome to join our conducted walks for which we make no charge. Non-members are also welcome at our talks for which we make a small charge.
If you would like more information about our activities or would like to join us and help with our work, please visit our website:

www.westberkscountrysidesociety.org.uk

The Commons Agreement.

This was negotiated in 1974 between the owners of the Commons (Yattendon Estate) and Ashampstead Parish Council. It is registered with the Land Registry (LC/224003/74) **and is binding on any future owners of all or part of the Commons.**

Under the agreement those people who had registered Common Rights with-drew their registrations and the Estate agreed to allow the Parish Council, and thus all Ashampstead Parishioners, the right to cut and carry away furze and bushes from the Commons and to collect sticks and fallen branches for firewood, if not too large and for domestic use only. It also grants right of access to all parishioners to the whole area of the Commons.

References:

Phillips R. *Trees in Britain, Europe and North America.* Pan Books 1978

Mitchell A & Wilkinson J. *The Trees of Britain and Northern Europe.* Collins 1989

Greenaway, D. The Commons of Ashampstead, Berkshire. In *Landscape Archaeology & Ecology Review.* 2010

Rackham, O. *Woodlands* Collins 2006

Greenaway D. *From Pasture Woodland via Deer Park and Common, to Cultural Severance: A Case Study of the Commons of Ashampstead, Berkshire.*in *Cultural Severance & the Environment.* Rotherham I.D (Ed)

West Berkshire
Countryside Society

‘The Trees of Ashampstead Common

A walk around Ashampstead Common to look at its Veteran and other Trees in Winter. (With History thrown in)

The walk starts near ‘The Cottage’, Sucks Lane, Ashampstead Common, RG8 8QT

About a mile or 1.3km.

Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 159 – ‘Reading, Wokingham & Pangbourne’ will be useful

There is a short, modestly steep hill on this walk. Paths are generally sound but may be muddy and uneven.

The Trees of Ashampstead Common

The geology of the Common comprises various mixtures of sands and clays over a bedrock of chalk. The soils deriving from this are a very acid (pH <3.5) and infertile Berkhampstead Series at the start of the walk that were exposed on the surface at the end of the last Ice Age and were leached of their nutrients. South of the road we move onto Winchester Series - a more alkaline and fertile loam. In the valley bottom is Frilsham Series - heavy clay and flints with acid but more fertile Swanmore Series along the ridge to the west.

For the most part the canopy of the woodland is composed of mixed, native, deciduous trees such as oak, beech, sycamore, ash, and sweet chestnut with a number of native conifers such as larch, yew and Scots pine. Further tree planting over the last 100 years has included more unusual, ornamental trees, originally grown to be freestanding specimens, that have now become incorporated into the canopy. The woods also contain an understory of silver birch, larch, elm, cherry, rowan and service tree.

Tree species are apt to be present in their favoured soil type so that oak, for instance, prefers the acid clays and beech the alkaline, chalky soil on the slopes. Sweet chestnuts favour the acid soils at the top of the hill. Ash is happy to grow on almost any soil.

Ancient trees were not planted and were managed using 'woodmanship' techniques which relied on natural regeneration and then maintenance by pollarding and coppicing.

Oak, chestnut, ash and beech provided small timber and firewood. Holly's upper leaves have no spines and have a high calorific value. They were pollarded to keep them out of the reach of animals and harvested and ricked in spring to provide an important winter feed for livestock. Before the influx of grey squirrels, hazel would have provided food from the nuts as well as material for hurdles, building and fuel.

Sweet chestnut leaf and nuts

English Oak (pendunculate)
Note: acorns on stalks

Sessile Oak
acorns on twigs

Hazel

Beech nuts

Cedar of Lebanon

Hazel

A short history of the area.

Almost all of the soils are permeable so rain runs through them and there is very little surface water. This has limited human habitation and the infertile soils have prevented cultivation For the last 6,000 years and until the early 20th century it has been grazed as **Pasture Woodland**.

In the 13th century large areas of manorial waste were enclosed with banks and ditches to create **deer parks** or were managed intensively to produce timber and wood..

A park on the Commons was built between **1235 and 1240** by the lord of Bradfield manor. He built a bank with a hedge or fence on top and with a ditch on the inside that we can trace for 3½ miles. Two park lodges and a pond were built and there were gates across the roads. Later a **Pillow Mound** - an artificial rabbit warren - was provided. **Fallow deer** were introduced,

In building the bank the remains of a **pottery industry** was buried on the western edge. It had thrived for 200 years selling pottery as far a field as Oxford and Reading.

The park went out of use about 1600 and the area reverted to a **common** where manorial tenants grazed animals and gathered firewood and bedding. **Pollard trees** were created. (See opposite). Nominated pollards were often included in the lease of a property as a source of fuel.

This history of use has developed a **very rich ground flora**. On-going studies have identified well over 200 species.

Until County Councils were formed in 1888 Parish Councils looked after parish **roads**. They dug material from the cheapest sources - the road side waste and the commons. This produced the many **shallow pits** close to roads. Chalk quarrying for chalk and lime to sweeten the acid soils produced the **deeper pits**.

About 1900 the Common was owned by Dr Watney of Buckhold House (now St Andrew's School) who planted many exotic trees (See opposite)

During **World War 2** the Commons were used by the army and remains of huts can still be seen.

Sweet chestnut

Veteran sweet chestnut pollard

Sweet chestnut to illustrate ‘spiralling’

Ancient sycamore (Not at Ashampstead Common)

Sycamore leaves

Multi-stemmed beech and leaf

Yew

Wellingtonia

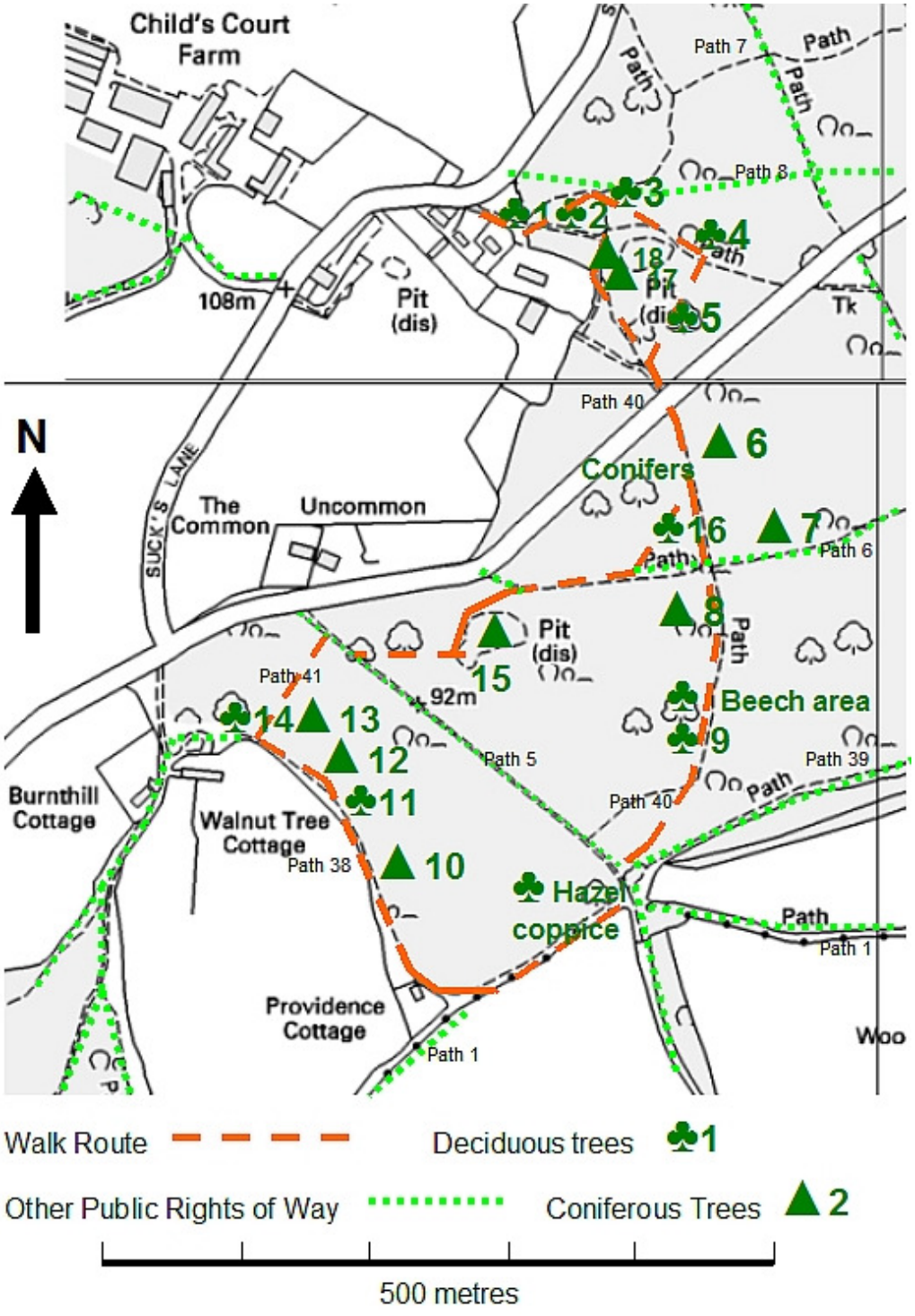
Western hemlock

English oak (pendunculate)

Ash leaves

English oak pollard

Ash coppice stool (Not Ashampstead Common)



No.	Species		Remarks
1	**Sweet chestnut**	*Castanea sativa*	Form caused by grazing bark damage
2	**English oak**	*Quercus robur*	Standard
3	**Sweet chestnut**	*Castanea sativa*	Complex pollard
4	**English oak**	*Quercus robur*	Pollard c.250 years old
5	**English oak**	*Quercus robur*	Pollard c.250 years old. Dying.
6	**Yew**	*Taxus baccata*	
7	**Western hemlock**	*Tsuga canadensis*	The taller trees on either side are a Douglas fir and a Coast redwood.
8	**Yew**	*Taxus baccata*	
9	**Beech**	*Fagus sylvatica*	Multi-stem form caused by grazing in youth.
10	**Coast redwood**	*Sequoia sempivirens*	The needles are flat like the yew. The world's tallest tree is this species.
11	**Sweet chestnut**	*Castanea sativa*	Note the spiral twist. Cause unknown
12	**Wellingtonia**	*Sequoiadendron giganteum*	The needles 'dangle'.
13	**Wellingtonia**	*Sequoiadendron giganteum*	
14	**American lime**	*Tilia americana*	
15	**Sycamore**	*Acer pseudoplatanus*	The **Soldier's Tree**. Note the engraving
16	**Sessile oak**	*Quercus petraea*	
17	**Wellingtonia**	*Sequoiadendron giganteum*	
18	**Cedar of Lebanon**	*Cedrus libani*	The branches lie more level than on a Atlas cedar.