

Dibbinsdale Heritage Trail

Looking at the Local and Natural History
of
Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve



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www.stevenround-birdphotography.com

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Produced by

The Friends of Dibbinsdale in conjunction with Wirral Ranger Service.

The Wildlife of Dibbinsdale

The wildflowers of Dibbinsdale

Spring in an ancient woodland is a spectacular time. Before the canopy of leaves casts a shade over the ground, a mosaic of white anemones, bluebells, and yellow celandines carpet the woodland floor. On Bodens Hey Meadow, conservation work has successfully increased the variety of flowering plants, including orchids. A wild flower trail is available at the Rangers' Office and guided walks often take place in Spring.



Trees of Dibbinsdale

The ornamental Victorian plantings in Brotherton Park include Holm Oaks, Giant Sequoia, Monkey Puzzle trees and Yew trees. Other trees are now being introduced to extend the 'arboretum'. In the valley can be seen many varieties of native willows and wet woodland trees like alders.

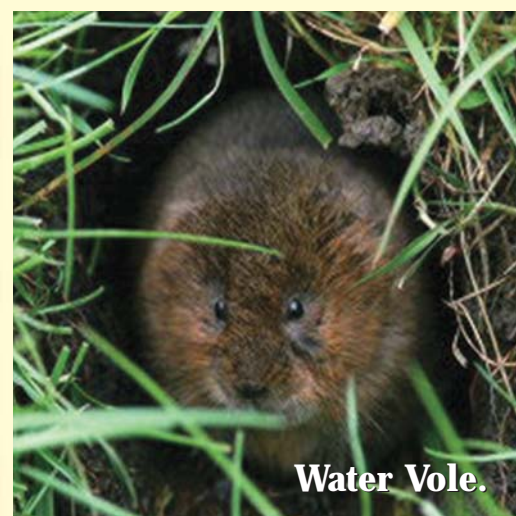
In the ancient woodland oaks and ashes dominate the canopy with an interesting mix of mature understorey trees like hornbeam and cherry. An extensive range of fungi are also present in the reserve and are best seen in autumn and winter. A tree trail around Woodslee Cottages is available from the Rangers' Office.

The Birds of Dibbinsdale

The varied habitats at Dibbinsdale, woodland, wetland and grassland, provide homes for a diverse range of birds including sparrowhawks, tawny owls, woodpeckers, nuthatch, treecreepers, heron, kingfisher, skylark and partridge. The woodland birds are best seen in the winter months when the leaves have fallen from the trees. A programme of bird box construction and monitoring has continued for many years. Bird species lists and guides are available on request from the Rangers' Office.

Mammal Project Work

There is an ongoing programme of work to improve habitat for water voles and other mammals. At the Ladybridge and Babbs Meadow, pools have been excavated and the material used to create banks for water vole burrows. Trapping and monitoring of voles takes place on the meadow and reedbeds. At the Otter Tunnel and elsewhere, surveys of bat activity and roost monitoring takes place. Otter holts have been constructed at several locations in the hope that one day otters will return to Dibbinsdale.



Water Vole.

The Royal Forest of Wirral

The Forest of Wirral was a place for hunting undertaken by kings and nobility. Deer and wild pigs were hunted in what was an extensive woodland. The Forester of Wirral was in charge, maintaining the hunting rights. The first appointed forester was Alan Sylvester in 1120 and his title was passed on through inheritance. The Wirral Horn was the symbol of office for the title which still exists. The office involved the administration of strict forest laws that regulated what people in the area could and could not do.



Woodslee

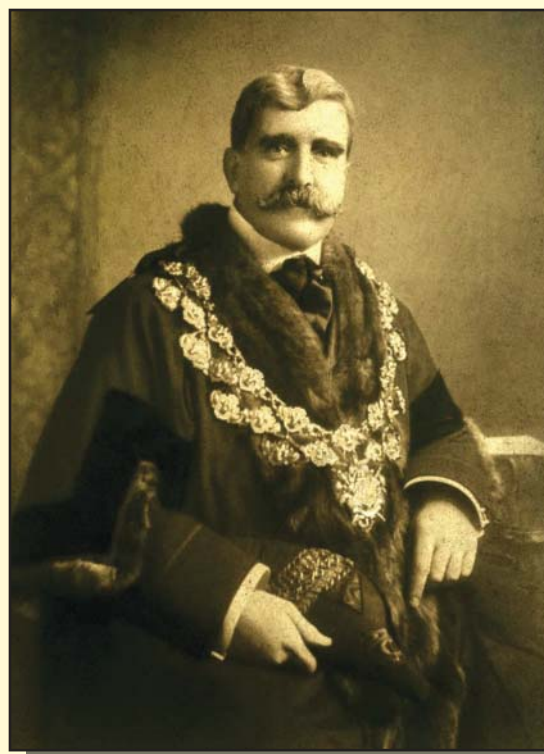
In 1866 the Mr S.K. Mainwaring sold the Woodslee Estate to a Mr Robert Rankin, a Liverpool Merchant, who then proceeded to build a large house on the site as a wedding present to his daughter when she married a Mr David McIver, a shipping magnate. The house, which was completed by 1870's, stood near the present car park, cottages and the edge of the valley. The yew trees mark the garden behind the house which faced east towards the monkey puzzle tree. The servants quarters, stables and coach house still stand and are now private residences. There is also a lodge house near the entrance on Spital Road.

The rangers' office, volunteer base, nature centre and walled garden are owned and maintained by Wirral Council

Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve

Lord Brotherton

Lord Edward Allen Brotherton of Wakefield purchased the Beyer Company dyestuff factory in Magazine Road, Bromborough in 1917. He also bought Woodslee Estate two years later with the plan of setting up a chemical research laboratory under the name 'Port Rainbow'. However, due to cheap imports of chemicals from Germany after World War 1, he changed his mind and converted the buildings at Woodslee into flats and cottages for his key employees. The facilities of the estate included cricket and bowling areas with pavilions and two tennis courts. Lord Brotherton donated the land to the council and Brotherton Park was created. During the 2nd World War the house was occupied by the army and Woodslee became a prisoner of war camp. The chief chemist at Brotherton Works was Mr J.H. Wilson who lived for a while in one of the ground floor flats at Woodslee House. His son, Harold, went on to become Prime Minister and when retired Lord Rievaulx and Governor of Hong Kong.



Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

In 1978 the Nature Conservancy Council (now Natural England), identified most of Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This was mainly due to the presence of the largest remnant of semi natural 'ancient' woodland in Merseyside. The Local Nature Reserve was created by combining Brotherton Park with land south of the railway donated by the Lancelyn Green family.

Friends of Dibbinsdale

The Friends were established to help support the conservation and management of the reserve. If you would like to join the Friends and help look after the reserve, contact the Rangers' Office.

Tel: 0151 334 9851
www.dibbinsdale.co.uk



Bromborough Mill

Until the 1930's an ancient water mill stood close to Spital Road Bridge. Spital Dam was part of the control of water used to power the flour mill. The mill also used a windmill and a steam engine to provide power at one time. The windmill was situated above the dam, it was demolished in 1878. From here the Dibbin runs through a heavily industrialised area (Port Sunlight and Bromborough Pool) and enters the Mersey at what was once Bromborough Dock. Drainage work in 1979 uncovered one of the old mill's gear wheels. The mill ceased working in 1940.



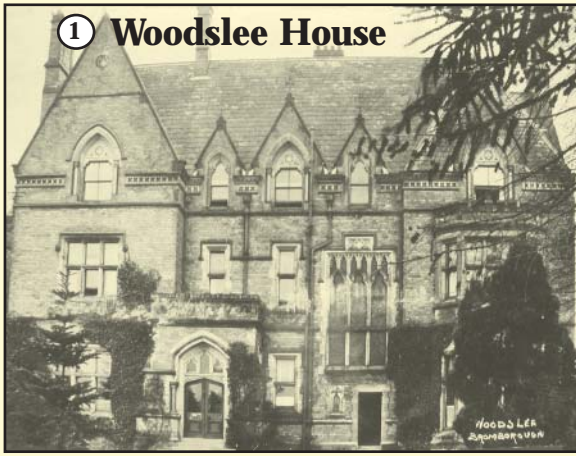
Brotherton Centre Facilities

The nature centre, courtyard and walled garden are available for public use and educational visits.

The range of different habitats in the reserve make Dibbinsdale a place of outstanding natural beauty and a unique place for environmental study.

Conservation work in the reserve is ongoing and follows a management plan updated in 2008.

For information about events and activities undertaken in the reserve, contact the ranger on 0151 334 9851, or visit the council website www.wirral.gov.uk



① Woodslee House

Built in the 19th century along with Woodslee House (left) which was demolished in the 1940s. The Victorian Estate and walled garden was donated by Lord Brotherton in the 1930's and is known as Brotherton Park.



② River and Floodplain

③ Babbs Meadow reedbed

Common reed, which can be seen growing here, is a valuable plant for nature conservation. Reeds filter polluted water and help create a cleaner, wildlife friendly river environment for a variety of rare birds, insects and mammals. The water vole, otter and kingfisher are encouraged to live here along with Daubenton bats, moorhen and heron. Efforts are made to prevent the encroachment of willows that will turn the land into a wet woodland. Measures to hold back the water, especially in summer, are designed to provide a better habitat for fish, amphibians and water invertebrates like dragonflies.



⑫ Bromborough Mill

The site of the mill dates back to the Domesday record of 1086. It was originally a water mill.

⑪ St Patrick's Well

Providing drinking water for the owners of the mill in past times, the well is said to have been blessed by St Patrick who came from Ireland in 432 AD. The small 'clatter' bridge crosses a surface drain leading up to a pipe from Spital Road. A filter bed, or 'swaile', has been created here to intercept polluted run off from the road. Close to the path up to the car park, there is an old sandstone quarry.

⑩ Red Sandstone cliffs

The red sandstone rocks that form the valley are from the Triassic Period. It is these rocks, formed in the semi desert environment of 200 million years ago, that saw the Cheirotherium dinosaur leaving footprints around a former inland sea. The steep cliffs that can be seen here have been created by glacial flood waters escaping to the Mersey and carving through the sandstone ridge around 15,000 years ago. The river valley through the reserve leading through to Poulton Bridge was originally tidal until Spital Dam excluded sea water in the 19th Century.

⑨ Wetland conservation

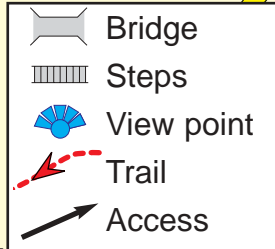
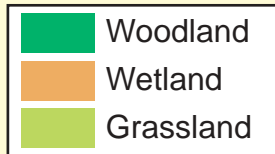


Babbs Meadow reedbed is part of a wetland conservation corridor which stretches through the reserve, containing many pools either side of the river. These act as oases, or refuges for wildlife in what is an urban watercourse.

⑧ Bromborough Wood



Celandines, anemones and bluebells carpet the woodland floor in April and May.



④ Otters Tunnel and Patrick Wood

The coming of the railway (Birkenhead to London) in 1840 created this bridge to cross the marshland of the Dibbin Valley. Otters were frequently seen here when the railway was being constructed. Numbers of otters have declined nationally in the 20th Century, but the population is now increasing. The tunnel with the river flowing through was boarded up in the 1990 as a bat hibernating roost. Kingfishers are also returning to the valley. Patrick Wood is owned by Cheshire Wildlife Trust. Within this private wood is a petrifying well and the remains of a sandstone building. The limestone water comes to the surface through the sandstone, leaving a limestone 'residue', hence petrifying.

⑤ Willow Carr.

From the viewpoint on Spital Field can be seen the spread of this wet woodland. Crack willows and goat willows are adapted to this marshy ground. On the river banks nearby are ash and alder trees.

Spital Field is the remains of a landscaped domestic rubbish tip that was in use in the 1970's. Elm, alder, lime and wild cherry trees were planted alongside the railway. White poplar with its 'handkerchief-like' white underside was planted on the slope. From the viewpoint you look over to the ash-oak woodland of Bromborough and Marfords Wood in the distance.



⑥ Bodens Hey meadow



The name of 'Bodens Hey' comes from the old farm estate map of the Lancelyn-Green family who once owned the land. The grassland habitat plays a valuable part in the biodiversity of the reserve. The grass is cut and baled in summer as part of a meadow restoration scheme. Without the cutting or grazing of the land, the meadow would become scrub with less wildlife value.

⑦ Ladybridge and Marfords Wood

At this point there is a little wooden bridge on the footpath to Raby Mere from Bromborough Rake Station. It has always been known as 'The Ladybridge'. It goes back to the early years of Edward I about 1274, when grants of land were being made by the Abbey of St Werburgh. One of these grants was made by the squire of Poulton - Lancelyn. He granted the right to construct a bridge over the Dibbin using wood from Marfords Wood (meaning 'Ford at the boundary'). With the grant came permission to fodder pigs in the woods over winter. From its connection with the Abbey of Chester (St Werburgh) the name may have been 'The Bridge of Our Lady'. The Lancelyn Green family continue to own Marfords Wood, which is managed by Wirral Council on a 'peppercorn' rent of one acorn per year. The woods are an ancient woodland and the remains of the Forest of Wirral.

For more detailed information about the wildlife, conservation management and local history of the reserve contact the Ranger based in Woodslee Cottages, Spital Road, Bromborough, Wirral CH62 2BJ. Tel: 0151 334 9851 (www.dibbinsdale.co.uk)