

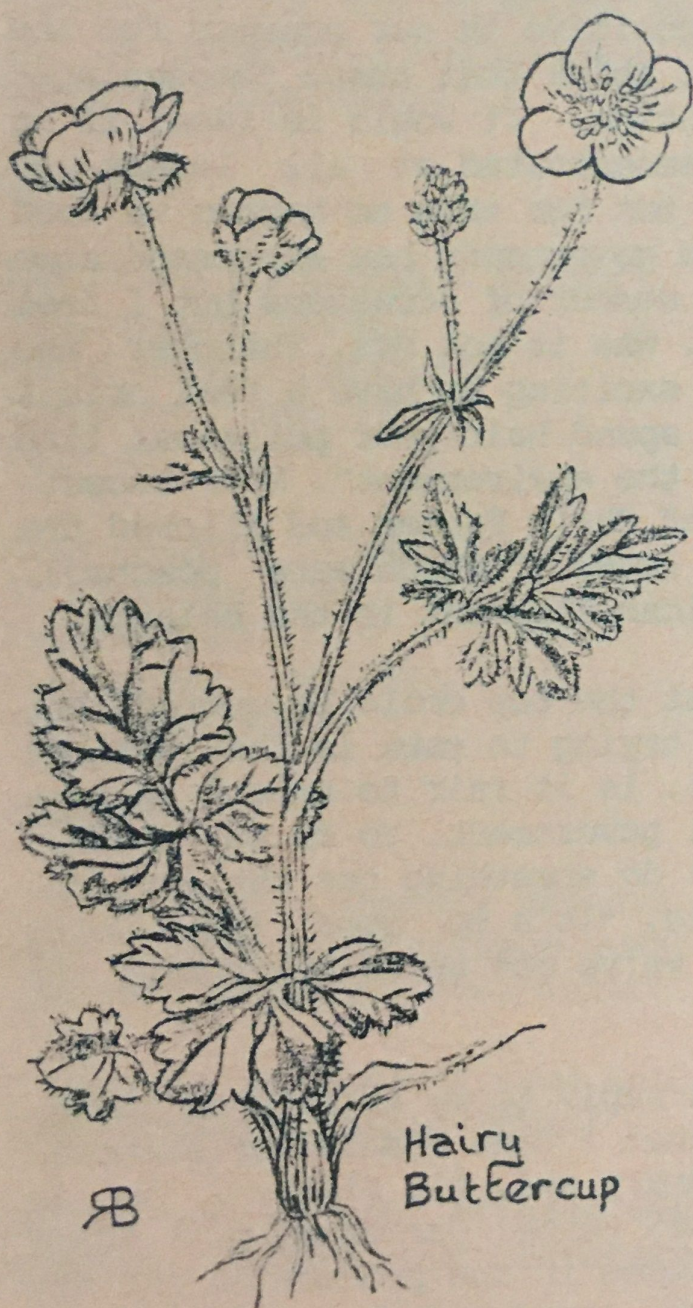


Newsletter of the Manchester Wildlife Trust

The Magpie

Number 16

Spring 1990



Hairy
Buttercup

RB

Gone but not forgotten

Business Parks,
Councillor replies

Plants in the
Mersey Valley

Withington
Hospital

and more.....

Editorial

Editor, Ian Brown 437 7040

Some of our longer standing readers may have noticed that the sketch on the front cover of **Magpie** usually depicts, either the season, as in the falling leaves on the cover of the previous autumn edition, or wildlife which has been seen in the Manchester area, such as the Long-billed Dowitcher (spotted at Broad Ees Dole) on the cover of autumn 1988. Unfortunately the cover sketches of both this and the previous **Magpie** have drawn your attention to a subject of some actual or possible disaster. The Hairy Buttercup is shown this time because its habitat on Ivy Green, by Chorlton Brook, has recently been destroyed during canalisation work on the banks undertaken by the River Authority. We would prefer to be more positive in our concern for the environment (we usually are), but think that these "happenings" should be brought to your attention. It would be ideal if an environmental concern could be demonstrated at all levels of society and in all walks of life but for this to happen we need a strong lead from the top. The government has expressed some concern for the environment on a number of occasions but I feel that we have yet to be convinced. Was it not Mrs. Thatcher who said of the Falklands War "It is exciting to have a real crisis on your hands when you have to spend half your political life dealing with humdrum issues like the environment". More recently she countermanded the wishes of Chris Patten and allowed the sale of Hong Kong's ivory stocks (some of which were poached), thus putting the fate of the African Elephant in the balance.

Many examples of such behaviour at the top could be quoted, but space is scarce. The point I am trying to make is that without a strong lead from the highest, is it fair to expect us mere mortals, including those in local government, to do any better. Mrs. Thatcher once said, "We must do something for the environment". In response, Ben Elton said, "It's no good just doing something for the environment, we've got to do everything for the environment". I'll buy that!

Councillor Arnold Spencer, in his reply to my article on business parks (see page 7), implies that I take absolutist stances. Well I looked it up in the dictionary and, all right, I am an absolutist, or at least trying hard to be. For example, I think that no product should be produced if the product or the by-products of its manufacture cause damage to the environment.

Indeed it ought to be demonstrated that products which we use or consume are actually beneficial to the environment and instead of insisting on minimum levels of pollutants in consumables such as water, we should insist that our food and drink contain nothing but what is good for our health. This may be held by some to be unrealistically idealistic but I believe it is something for which we should be aiming, and in the short, rather than the long term. **Environment Now** call this the "Zero Option" and in the coming months you will be able to read all about it in that publication. It could make things just a touch awkward for such as I.C.I. and the motor industry but such high standards should not be impossible to attain.

(Apologies for the excessive use of the word "environment", but it is important, and maybe I have misunderstood the meaning of the word "absolutist".) //

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T-SHIRTS

by Anthony Phelps

I have found a company who can print T-shirts, sweat-shirts etc with a very small minimum quantity, at reasonable prices (for the most expensive sweat-shirt, only £12.50).

I want to get some printed with the **Magpie** logo and the wording "Manchester Wildlife Trust".

Be the envy of your friends with an (almost) exclusive designer garment. Contact your Secretary for further details.

(The Secretary's daytime telephone number is 829 5457)

Plant Life in the Mersey Valley

Part 2 - Meadow Plants

by David Bishop

Unlike many of the river valleys in the Manchester area the Mersey Valley (M.V.) has never been extensively industrialised; instead, it represents the remains of an old agricultural landscape. Much of the land was originally grassland, the grass cut for hay or used for grazing. People up and down the M.V. still refer to, "the meadows" and for good historical reasons.

The quality of the grassland was maintained by controlled winter flooding which deposited layer upon layer of rich silt. Chorlton's local historian, Mr. John Lloyd, quotes an old local farmer who could recall opening the sluice gates during the second flood of winter; the first flood was not used because, "it brought down all the rubbish".

A by-product of this annual regime of winter flooding and summer cropping was a rich and diverse flora. The Nineteenth Century Manchester botanists, Richard Buxton and Leo Grindon recorded plants such as: Green-winged orchid, Meadow saxifrage and Adder's tongue fern which are now rare on a national scale and certainly absent from the modern M.V.

The Twentieth Century, of course, tore this old and carefully nurtured landscape apart with its usual brutal and ill-considered savagery. Rubbish tips, sewerage works, golf courses and sports pitches all took their toll, followed by gravel extraction and motorway construction. Remaining scraps of meadow were either badly over-grazed by tenant's livestock or allowed to grow out until they fell prey to local children with matches (in the summer of 1976 one of the few extensive areas of original grassland on Chorlton Ees was ruined by fire).

In the early 1970s decisions were taken to improve the mess that the M.V. had become. Unfortunately the local authorities proceeded with more enthusiasm than knowledge and more scraps of old meadow were obliterated by tree planting (planting trees is not a universal solution to all conservation problems and can be counterproductive!).

Amazingly you can still find a few meadow plants but it's a sorry tale and many are declining.

On the following page is a partial list:

C = Common, L = Local, L.F. = Locally frequent, V.L. = Very local, R = Rare.

English Name	Latin Name	Flowering Time	Status in M.V.	Description of Plant
Lady's Smock	<u>Cardamine pratensis</u>	April-June	C	4-petalled white to lilac flowers borne on leafy stalks arising from a rosette of leaves.
Bistort	<u>Polygonum bistorta</u>	June-October	L.F.	Patch forming member of the dock family with salmon pink flower spikes. Leaves edible when young.
Lady's Mantle	<u>Alchemilla vulgaris</u>	May-Sept.	R	Member of the rose family (!) with palm-shaped lobed leaves and a cluster of tiny, yellow/green flowers.
Ox-eye daisy	<u>Leucanthemum vulgare</u>	May-Sept.	L.F. But declining	A big white daisy with flowerheads 25-30mm across.
Great Burnet	<u>Sanguisorba officinale</u>	June-Sept.	L.F. but at risk!	Another (odd) member of the rose family with dense, oblong dark red flowerheads. Always gets mildew at end of summer!
Hay-rattle	<u>Rhinanthus minor</u>	May-Sept.	L	A semi-parasitic (on grasses) annual with small, yellow, "snapdragon" flowers protruding from inflated calyces.
Meadow Cranesbill	<u>Geranium pratense</u>	June-Sept.	V.L.	A big, blue wild geranium with flowers 25-30mm across. Leaves deeply cut.
Sneezewort	<u>Achillea ptarmica</u>	July-Sept.	V.L.	A close relative of Yarrow with small white, creamy centred daisy flowers and linear, minutely toothed leaves.



Space does not permit me to include clovers, buttercups, dandelion-like composites, plantains and (of course!) grasses; they will all have to wait for future articles.

Of the plants that are on the list, Ox-eye daisy appears to be declining (for reasons that are not clear); Great burnet is at risk from habitat destruction - the Water Authority destroyed one of our best colonies last year (in fact, in their zeal for perfectly uniform and regular river banks they have destroyed the habitats of four of our rarest wildflowers recently - including the one colony of Hairy buttercup - if only they were as enthusiastic about cleaning up water pollution!); Meadow cranesbill seems to be increasing and there is a colony of Hay-rattle spreading nicely on the (elevated) field by Chorlton Ees car park.

In the summer of 1988, Ian Brown and I visited Austria and I shall never forget a hay meadow in a river valley near where we stayed. (I remember it well - Ed) It contained no particular rarities, just bistort, buttercups and white-flowered umbellifers but the effect was magical; a banded, pastel haze of pink, green, white and golden-yellow, moving and rippling in the breeze; fine healthy countryside in good heart, valued and cared for. I thought "the Mersey Valley looked like this once". It could easily do so again but sadly, I very much doubt that it will (it will probably get turned into a business park!).

References

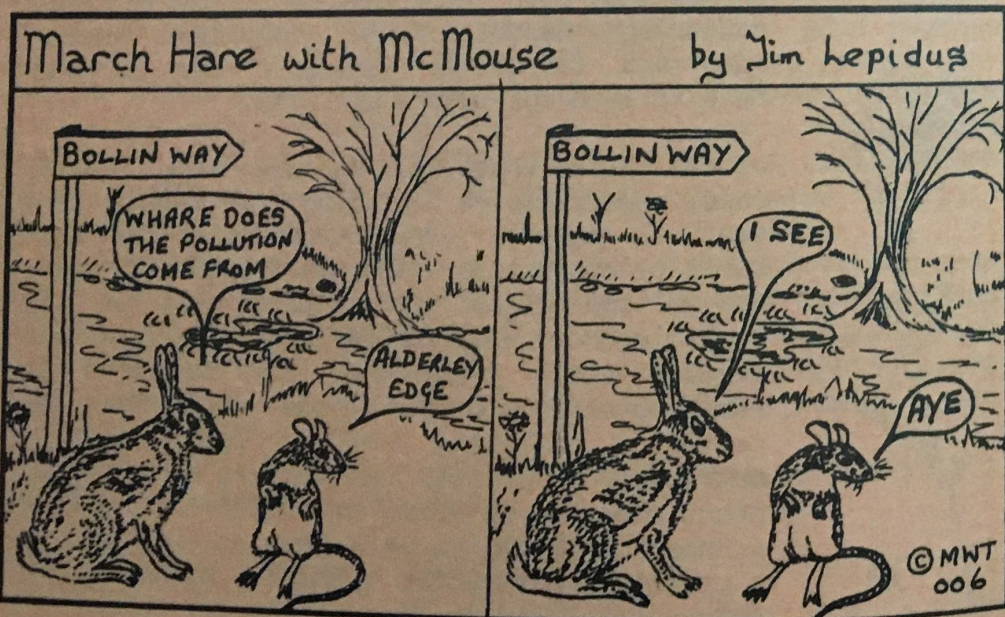
1. "The Township of Chorlton-cum-Hardy" by John Lloyd, 1972.
2. "Buxton's Guide" * by Richard Buxton, 1849.
3. "The Manchester Flora" by Leo Grindon, 1859.
4. "The Wild Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe" by Fitter, Fitter and Blamey, 1974.

* abbreviated title.

Addenda to previous article (Part 1 - Woodland Flowers)

Dog's Mercury occurs in Stenner Lane, Didsbury not Ford Lane.

I did find Soft Shield Fern but it is almost certainly a garden escape. My thanks to Audrey Franks and Vera Gordon (vice-county recorder) for this information. //



Business Parks

by Councillor Arnold Spencer

In your last edition Ian Brown provided us with an article on 'Business Parks'. What the article lacked in factual accuracy it more than made up for in humorous content, eg a cutting reference to the 'Biological Illiteracy' of Manchester City Council. At the risk of being 'defensive' could I give another perspective to the controversy.

The large business parks in which the Council has played a part have not all involved the net loss of public open space. Where sports pitches have been lost, the Council has secured alternative facilities before agreeing the disposal (eg Siemens, Sharston Green, YMCA). In addition, although some land that was not in use for sports pitches has also been lost (eg Simonsway) the Council has also over the same period acquired land for open space purposes (eg former Duchess of York Hospital lands) notwithstanding the difficult financial position.

Several of these schemes have recently come to fruition because the market has been such as to make this possible, but the land allocations to this end were made years ago and were public knowledge. Examples here include the Apollo site at Ardwick, the Siemens site and the Simonsway proposal. Thus, it is not accurate to present this as a recent trend, but rather it is the coming to fruition of a long-term policy to promote employment growth in the City which can only be realised when market circumstances are such that people are willing to undertake development.

At least one of the cases listed (described as 'Palatine Road Oasis') is an unsought private sector development, which is not yet determined but is likely to be recommended for refusal. In this case, the Council actually promoted a Tree Preservation Order to retain the existing wooded environment in the face of a development threat. Another case (that of the Shirley Institute) is a response to a long-standing financial problem on the part of a well-known Manchester institution, where the Council has done its best to help but has been very tough over approvals. A third case (described as 'Tesco', which I take to be the former Christie Playing Fields) doesn't fit into this

category at all, because the Council has successfully resisted Tesco developing a superstore on this site (and, indeed, granted consents on two other previously developed sites which have meant that Tesco are no longer interested in Christie Playing Fields) but has said it is happy with the idea of a B1 use on this site, for which a scheme is currently under negotiation which would have far less effect on the natural ecology of the site than would a Tesco superstore.

The wildlife aspects of landscaping proposals are looked at carefully. The Creation of a lake/pond at Sharston Green is a good example of this, as is the care that has been taken in dealing with Simonway to secure the environment of the existing newt colony based on sound ecological advice. The Sharston proposal, in particular, will create the opportunity to improve Hollyhedge Park in ecological terms, so that what is available for local people to enjoy is enhanced and so that wildlife habitats are secured.

Whether any individual scheme adds to the totality of jobs available in Manchester is always going to depend to a degree on the circumstances of the particular case. To take one particular example where the article is wrong, however, the Siemens development is not a transfer of headquarters from Congleton, since the existing Congleton plant is essentially a manufacturing plant with a limited headquarters operation tacked onto it; because the company now deems it worthwhile to provide a proper northern headquarters. It should be recognised in any event that jobs being moved around (because companies do need to move sometimes) is often better than losing them from the City through decentralisation, which certainly was happening in the past, because this can be the difference between Manchester citizens losing or retaining their jobs.

There is no intention that all open space will be lost, and it is quite clear from the very full public consultation that has taken place on these matters, the people of South Manchester feel very strongly about this issue. It is simply incorrect to describe what has been happening as '... will swallow up almost all of our urban open space, from the YMCA Playing Fields to Heald Green Farm except for public parks and woods'. The aim is to manage the environment through the planning process as best as we are able, to meet the needs of all the citizens of Manchester; and this requires balanced judgements in all the

circumstances rather than absolutist stances.

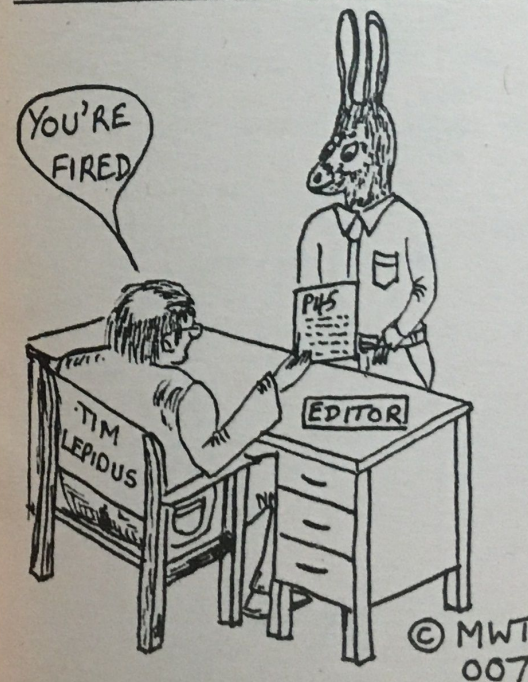
The fact of the matter is that the Council does have a 'chronic shortage of cash', and has to use whatever means are available to it (including the re-use of land resources) to alleviate this problem. Rather than blame the Council for this, it would be better to argue at the political level for Councils to be adequately resourced so that the need to dispose of land assets to raise cash is taken away.

Throwing the Panns Wood Rural Studies Centre into all of this is really mixing up the issues. The Council has not taken a decision about this, nor has it even decided at the time of writing whether it can afford to maintain the Rural Studies Centre as an educational asset (see point 7 above). No one can stop twinkles in developers' eyes, or even the making of offers but this is not at all the same thing as promoting developments of this kind. //

(Councillor Arnold Spencer is the Chair of Highways Committee and the Vice Chair of Planning Committee.)

DEFINITION

SSSI = Site selected for Superstores and Industry



Membership Renewals.

If your membership is due for renewal, there will be a red R and the month due in the space below. Please send your subscription to the Treasurer, Unity Kelly. We thank you very much for your continued support.

For those of you who read the autumn 1989 copy of *Magpie*, you will remember that I promised to keep you posted about further developments. You can probably guess that, until recently there haven't been many developments - but that's Urban Wildlife Conservation for you!

We decided that waiting for a firm answer from the hospital was not the best use of our time, and set dates for the survey of the land, starting in February, planning to visit the site once each month. The idea is to get to know exactly what was there, and to do a little there each time.

On Sunday the 11th of February (see the latest Events list for the next work days), we arrived at 10 a.m. It was sad not to see more of our membership, in fact we were only four in number (the committee). Ian Brown and Unity Kelly started the survey, and noted the first wildflowers on the site - Coltsfoot. We also noticed the leaves of Daffodils (probably not native), and a small clump of Bluebells.

Whilst this was going on, Mike Garnham and I started some clearance work, pulling up some of the vast number of saplings (mainly Sycamore and Horse Chestnut) which crowd the ground. We left a few of the more straight specimens, to provide us with some stakes later on. Habitat piles were built, to store all the 'waste', which will hopefully encourage mammals and small birds to nest.

I started to cut up a tree on the edge of the site, which had fallen over in the strong winds, although there was a lot of dead wood, and it would probably have collapsed without the storm's help! This work was carried out using some of the new tools the Trust now owns, which proved most useful. The money for these came from the Tool Fund (see previous newsletter), and the money raised during the Coffee Morning in Chorlton. These tools will enable us to carry out a lot of Woodland and Grassland Management work in the future, both at the hospital, and at Hough End Clough.

There is so much varied work to do on this site, apart from the usual tidying up, including coppice planting, battening on the wall for climbing plants such as Ivy, fitting (building?) nest

boxes, possibly (depending on permission being obtained) felling two Horse Chestnuts to open up clearings, digging a pond (from scratch - something that I have not yet done), and routing and laying path material where necessary.

So, if you would like to join in, and, in doing so, meet other members of the Trust (including your Secretary), then please come along ... No experience necessary ... Full training given.

WRONG DIRECTIONS

an apology from your Editor

The location of the woodland at Withington Hospital was incorrectly given in the last newsletter. This should have read, "The site is to be found at the junction north of Nell Lane and east (not west) of Princess Road." It would appear that your editor does not know his east from his elbow!

IT'S A MICKEY MOUSE WORLD

by Ian Brown

It appears that we could lose Rainham Marshes (a wetland of great wildlife importance) in Essex. The reason for this loss - a Disneyland type theme park. To quote Indian Farmer, Rathore Singh, whose land is threatened by a similar development, "Why do they need 28,000 acres for a rat, a duck and a few swings?"

WOODLAND VANDALISM

by Ian Brown

You may have read all about it in a newspaper or seen it on the television but I think the tale is worth retelling. On Thursday the 1st of March at about 10 o'clock of the forenoon a team of men with bulldozer and chainsaws demolished a 3½ acre wood at Longsight Lane in Cheadle Hulme, in two hours flat. Involved in this act of vandalism were Builder, John Harrisson (Broadway, Bramhall) the alleged owner of the land, D. Tommis (Surveyors), and others. The trees were felled without a license, and if, as we hope, the Authorities press for the full penalty allowed by the law, the fine could be £1000 a tree. The Forestry Commission had numbered the felled trees and the highest number I saw was 137. That could amount to quite a fine, which could be a deterrent to others in the future. The wood is virtually the only one in S.W. Stockport. There is a lot of work to be done to resolve this matter but the long term aim of the residents and others concerned with wildlife conservation must be to restore the wood to its former glory. More of this anon.

STOP PRESS

PARRS WOOD RURAL STUDIES CENTRE TO CLOSE?

The Manchester City Education Committee has delayed closing the Centre until April the 5th, by which time the Friends of Parrs Wood must come up with firm alternative proposals for running the Centre, or closure is certain and the land will be sold. It is hardly fair to impose such a deadline, even if the Friends were takeover experts. A commercial sponsor is to be sought and we hope this can be achieved. We appreciate that problems with the Poll Tax are causing severe cuts to be made in educational spending but feel that closure of Parrs Wood is a rather short sighted policy. We believe that the Rural Studied Centre has been selected for the axe in order to create the most protest. Should such a fine environmental educational establishment be used as a political football? Hopefully, when the current recession has run its course there will be resources available to fund such luxuries as environmental education! We will leave it to you to decide who is to blame for this situation but if we fail to provide our children with a practical education on the natural world, how much hope can there be for any improvement to the environment. Do YOU want to support the Friends of Parrs Wood? Of course you do. Then contact Unity Kelly (226 4583) and find out how you can help keep the Rural Studies Centre open. Once it closes, it is hardly likely to reopen and certainly not in such ideal surroundings as the Green Oasis it now occupies.

I HARE THEY'RE
TRYING TO FIND
A COMMERCIAL
SPONSOR FOR THE
RURAL STUDIES CENTRE



THEN PARRS WOOD
SHELL BE SAVED



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(IS THAT ALL
RIGHT JON? T.L.)

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