

Tree Warden Walk – Wednesday 28 March 2012.

Gill, the Tree Warden, invited me to join her on this walk some time ago. I was pleased to accept as I felt it would be good to know more about the area I work and to hear about the historic boundaries that Gill mentioned would be part of this walk. The day dawned sunny and bright and despite having loads to do in the office I set off to join my fellow walkers, camera at the ready. What a treat was in store.

We started the walk at the cycleway gates in Park Road and walked down the old railway cutting towards Quarries Copse which I was informed was enclosed by Sir John deLisle in 1643. The Ryde to Newport Railway was started in 1872 and was completed in 1875. One of the Directors of the Railway was Mr George Young who had big ideas. He started a model farm which boasted the first steam tractor. Enroute we passed pussy willows, may and blackthorn (from which I was told the fruits are called sloes which of course make sloe gin). These shrubs were planted along the railway line to protect the farm animals grazing alongside, but on the 1875 inaugural run of the railway a small flock of sheep and some cows were killed. We walked down to Whippingham Station which is now a private house. I was told that this station is a mirror image of the station at Ashey. Part of the old platform is still visible which used to measure 235 feet long. The station was ahead of its time as it had Ladies and Gents Toilets and a signal box. Legend has it that the station was built for Queen Victoria who only used it once, as did her daughter, Beatrice. Another legend is that a dog jumped out at Whippingham Station and got to Havenstreet before its owner.

We passed a wonderful display of Celandines (the lesser Celandine I was told), which was apparently Wordsworth's favourite flower. We walked down between Belmont Park and Fattening Park. Belmont Park is the younger of the two and was originally named Mount Misery, a bleak, treeless area. This was sold to Queen Victoria in 1845, with Queen Victoria promptly renaming this Belmont, which possibly translates into "beautiful hill". Queen Victoria sold Belmont Park to Henry Pinnock in 1876 who started the planting of trees.

We went into Fattening Park which is an ancient woodland. This was named as Vattening Croft in 1440 which is thought to be a derisory name for an area where animals are fattened. We were shown a magnificent oak tree (possibly 200 years old) which marked the boundary of Fattening Park which was all fields until 1876. Fattening Park copse was enclosed in 1536 but it is not known why by. Gill explained how to tell if a tree has been under stress and how the tree is made up, with a whole chemical process going on. I will never take trees for granted in the future – they are amazing. I was informed that Fattening Park is one of the best managed woods around and is a very special wood as it is an area of Significant Natural Concern (SINC). Dogs mercury was pointed out, which is indicative of very ancient woodland. We saw anemones (also known as the wind flower). These only come out in the sunshine. We also passed wonderful clumps of primroses, as well as lungwort and even a couple of early bluebells.

I found out that spring flowers come out before the leaf canopy of the trees to enable the flowers to get sunshine and light. Where woods are coppiced the trees can spread their crown, rather than be restricted. It is said that one man takes a lifetime to manage a wood as this can only be carried out in stages. King Henry the VIIIth and his daughter decreed that if a landowner had a wood and coppiced it for his own use he had to leave 20 - 21 standard trees. We saw a magnificent Ash tree also known as Yggdrasil – "Tree of the World". I was told that Ash Trees are "fickle" being female one year, male another and then even both together, with no pattern to this other than what takes the Ash trees fancy.

Gill's walks are advertised in the County Press, as well as on the Parish Council website and on the noticeboard at the Parish Council office in Brannon Way. Come and join in with one of the walks – you will not be disappointed. Hopefully you will also go away with a new respect for trees (as I have) and see how wonderful nature is.