

# Wath, Boyd Royd & Birch Woods

14



**FUELLING A REVOLUTION**  
the woods that founded  
the steel country

## The woods today

The northern part of Wath Wood is dominated by mature oaks and planted beech and the occasional Scots pine. The southern part of the wood is made up of dense young oak and birch. On the southern boundary are some old oak pollards. Boyd Royd Wood is a well-structured woodland of oak, beech, sycamore and ash. Birch Wood is a mixture of oak, beech and sycamore, with dense oak regeneration in places.

The ground flora in all three woods is poor with much bare ground beneath the beech trees in Wath Wood. Ancient woodland indicators in Boyd Royd Wood include bluebell and in Birch Wood you can find yellow archangel and wood sorrel. The climber, honeysuckle, is a feature of parts of both Wath and Boyd Royd Wood.

Birdlife in the three woods is rich and varied and includes sparrowhawk, great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch, tawny owl, blackcap and garden warbler. Brown long-eared and pipistrelle bats also forage along the woodland edges.



Buff arches moth



Tree roots in Wath Wood

## Management of the woods

As part of the Fuelling a Revolution project, renewed management is taking place in order to enhance the woods' value for wildlife and for local people. The emphasis is on selective thinning and coppicing of trees to encourage regeneration and a mixed woodland structure and improving access. The footpath on the Roman Ridge in Wath Wood has been diverted to prevent further erosion and disturbance.

## General information

To find out more about the woodlands' management and maintenance contact: the Woodlands Officer on 01709 822177; or look on [www.rotherham.gov.uk](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk) or [www.heritagewoodsonline.co.uk](http://www.heritagewoodsonline.co.uk).



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## The history of the three woods

Wath Wood and Birch Wood's histories are nothing like that of Boyd Royd Wood. Both Wath and Birch Woods were grazed as wood pastures. Wath Wood was a part of Wath Common and Birch Wood was part of Rawmarsh Common.

In a wood pasture trees were grown to use as building materials, for firewood or making into charcoal and as the raw material for numerous crafts. The lord of the manor or his tenants' farm animals were also grazed there from time to time. Cattle, sheep and horses ate the grass. Acorns were fed to pigs during October (this was called pannage) and holly would be cut for farmstock (this was called leaf fodder).

Wath Wood's use as a wood pasture ended between 1811 and 1815 when Wath Common was enclosed and was converted into a high forest plantation dominated by oak and beech by its two main private owners.

Birch Wood is a wooded remnant of the former Rawmarsh Common. It was part of a wood pasture. A marriage settlement of 1557 gave the new couple access to 'the common and woods of Rawmarsh for pasturing animals and for wood for their fires, hedges and houses'. Rawmarsh Common was enclosed in 1781.

Boyd Royd Wood is an ancient coppice wood. This is clear from the boundary bank with its external ditch which virtually surrounds it. The bank was once topped by a stone wall. Grazing animals were kept out of coppice woods during the first few years of growth as they would eat the young growth.

## Archaeology

The boundary bank surrounding Boyd Royd Wood is obviously an important archaeological feature. Even more important is the prehistoric linear earthwork called the Roman Ridge. This runs north of Birch Wood and is also a prominent feature in Wath Wood. In both cases it formed the ancient parish boundary between Wath and Swinton. There is still debate about the function of the earthwork and the date of its construction.



Fly agaric in Wath Wood

Despite its name it is not thought to be Roman. It was long believed to be prehistoric, built at the same time as the Iron Age forts at Scholes and Wincobank. More recently it has been suggested that it is of 'Dark Age' origin, built between 450-600 AD after the collapse of the Roman Empire, possibly to defend the Celtic kingdom of Elmet from the advancing Anglo-Saxons.



Common earthball

