



Birch Wood, Rawmarsh, Rotherham



Birch Wood lies approximately 5 kilometres north of the centre of **Rotherham**, on the northern edge of **Rawmarsh**. Being situated on the urban fringe, **Birch Wood** is well used by local people. The **Collier Brook** runs west to east through the wood and towards the east there is a large area of wet marshland. A programme of woodland restoration and access improvement work is now taking place to restore the woodland to its former glory and to maximise its potential as a recreational and educational resource.



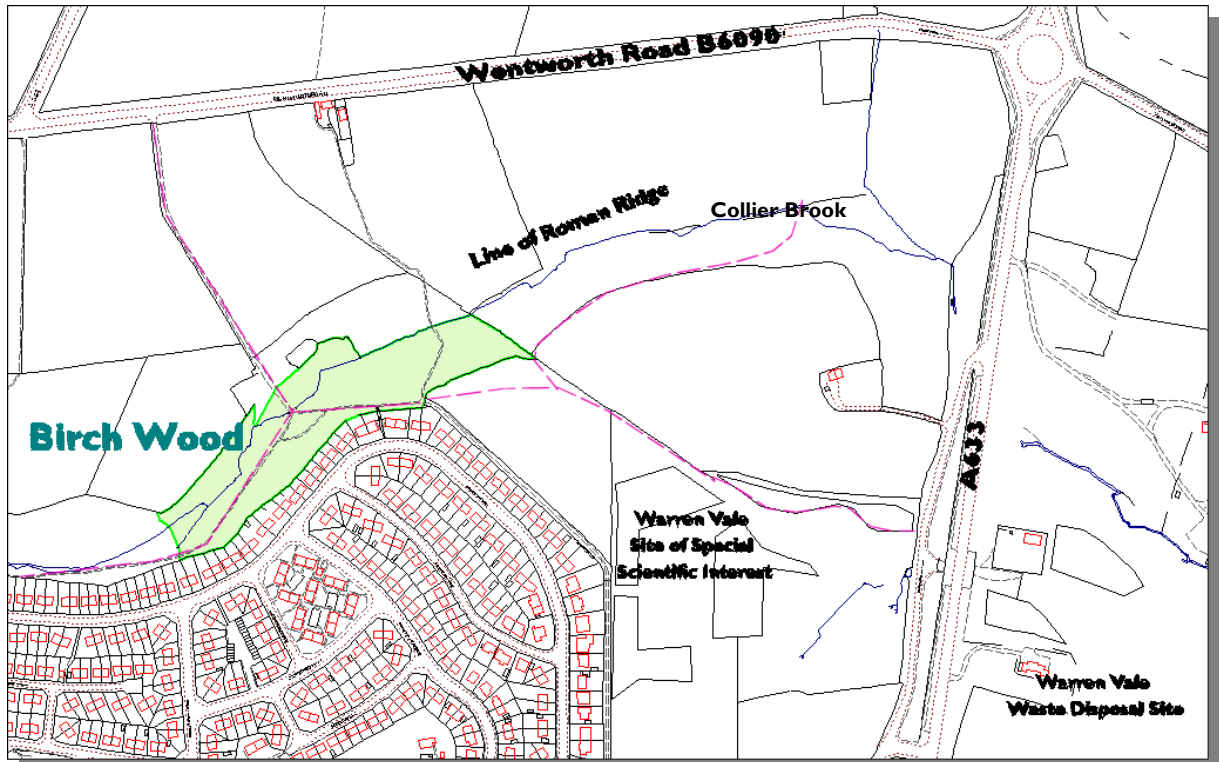
The dragon's head of the iron bridge in the centre of the wood which was designed by children from the local school and funded by the Fuelling a Revolution project.

HISTORY OF THE WOOD

The earliest record of the woodland itself dates from 1776 and it is also shown on an Ordnance Survey map dating from 1851, at which date it was shown in its present shape. To the north of the wood, in a small patch of what is now woodland the same map marks the 'Birch Wood Chemical Works'. This is marked as 'Chemical Works Cottages' until 1931. It may well be that the marshy area within the western end of the wood was originally a pond used to supply water to this works. The 1890 map also marks a colliery next to Warren Vale Road. This seems to have been closed by 1903 and had disappeared by 1930.

Although there is no documentary evidence showing that Birch Wood is an ancient woodland (more than 400 years old), this is strongly suggested by a number of other lines of evidence; - the **situation of the woodland**, in the sometimes steep-sided valley of the Collier Brook, is typical of ancient woodland sites, as is its **diverse ground flora**, which includes a number of plants typical of ancient woodlands, such as yellow archangel and wood sorrel.

Directly north of Birch Wood lies the southern arm of the '**Roman Ridge**', built between 450 and 600 AD to defend the Celtic kingdom of Elmet from the advancing Anglo-Saxons, as described for Wath Wood. These earthworks are a Scheduled ancient Monument. The bank to the west of the wood is covered with excellent grassland with a wide variety of grassland flowers but unfortunately the bank to the east has been ploughed.



Map to show Location and extent of Birch Wood, Warren Vale, Rawmarsh.



Aerial View of same area as map above.

NATURAL HISTORY

Despite the fact that Birch Wood has not altered in size or shape since 1851 it is dominated by non-native species; sycamore and beech. Few of the trees are old with the exception of a few mature beeches. Towards the eastern end of the wood the mix of trees includes more of the native oaks than the western section.

Birch Wood forms part of the **Warren Vale Local Nature Reserve** and should be viewed as one particular habitat within this wider area. Additional habitats include an area of **marshland** further down the stream with a superb stand of mature willows, an area of botanically rich **grassland** to the east of the wood and areas of young mixed woodland and **hawthorn scrub**. This mosaic of habitats makes this a very rich area in terms of its diversity of plant and animal life. Both pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats have been recorded in the area, and birds include sparrowhawk, song thrush and the summer visitors, blackcap and garden warbler.

Given the variety of habitats in the locality it is not surprising that a great diversity of insects have been recorded here. They range from the grasshoppers and meadow butterflies on the grasslands to unusual moths such as the small elephant hawk moth and the purple bar.

ACCESS

Although parts of the wood are quite marshy, a number of surfaced footpaths, some of which are Public Rights of Way, run both along the edges and through the centre of the wood.

Parking is available on nearby streets, although visitors doing so are requested to give consideration to local residents.

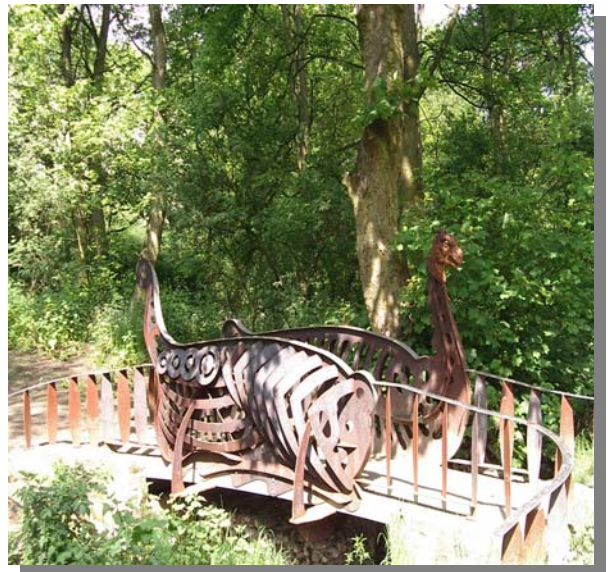
The area is also served by public transport.

MANAGEMENT

Under the *Fuelling a Revolution* project a management plan is being implemented by Rotherham MBC. The age range of trees in the woodland will be broadened by the selective thinning of mature trees in order to provide room for the natural regeneration of native species such as oak, birch and hazel.

Signs of neglect, such as litter and tipping, are being removed and controlled. In order to raise awareness of the history and natural history, recreational potential and management of the wood, a programme of educational and interpretative events is being run at the site.

As part of this, the superb bridge, designed



in the shape of a Viking longboat by local school children, was built and erected during 2002.

