



Grange Park Woodlands, Rotherham.

Whilst the dull drone of the heavy traffic on the nearby motorway provides a background to a walk through the woodlands of Grange Park, the stunning views, the spring flowers, the surprising iron sculptures and the variety of ancient trees are ample compensation.

These woodlands form an extremely important landscape feature. They are familiar to the thousands of motorists who, travelling north on the M1, cross the Tinsley viaduct with the twin cooling towers find themselves within the next mile following the broad Blackburn valley between the ancient woodlands of Woolley Wood and Wincobank Wood on the west side and Grange Park Woodlands to the east. Travelling south the woodlands create a dramatic gateway to the steel city; a graphic reminder of the importance of the local woods in providing the fuel for the early iron industry, as well as a fitting introduction to England's most wooded city.

This site actually comprises five woodlands situated within the golf course and farmland of Grange Park, which lies on the edge of Kimberworth, approximately 4 kilometres west of the centre of Rotherham. At the eastern edge of the park, towards the village of Droppingwell, the land still bears the heavy scars of former coal mining activities; spoil heaps and disused railway lines. Across Droppingwell Road, however, there is easy access to the large and attractive area of

public parkland which forms part of an imaginative sculpture trail which begins at the car park near Blackburn Junior School.

All five woodlands are long and thin



Thundercliffe Grange, viewed from across the M1 motorway, is framed by the ancient Grange Park woodlands.

in shape, following the steep scarp slopes or the valley bottoms. **Walkworth Wood** is the largest and is joined to **Barber Wood**, which in turn merges into the woodland of **Ockley Bottom**. To the west, tracing the course of a wet valley bottom, lie the adjacent woodlands of **Gallery Bottom** and **Kennel Wood**. In total, the Grange Park Woodlands have an area of more than 30 hectares.

The woodlands and adjoining parkland are popular places for formal and informal recreation and, as well as being prominent features of the local landscape, they form a gateway from the edge of Rotherham to the open countryside. Grange Park is the setting for a public golf course and incorporates a bridleway and a number of other Public Rights of Way.

The History of Grange Park

The woodlands of Grange Park are now owned by Rotherham Borough Council. They were purchased from the Earl of Effingham, whose mansion, Thundercliffe Grange, built in 1777, still stands close by at the western end of Barber Wood. Most drivers catch only a glimpse of the house as they speed past. It is now owned by a housing cooperative and, although split into a number of residences, has been little altered inside.

Gallery Bottom Wood once formed part of the medieval Kimberworth Deer Park, first mentioned in the 13th century, whilst Walkworth Wood is first mentioned as a coppice woodland belonging to the 7th Earl of Shrewsbury in a document dating from around 1600. These two woodlands are therefore ancient woodlands, meaning that they are known to be more than 400 years old. Although there is less documentary evidence relating to the other woodlands in Grange Park, their steep slopes and rich flora strongly suggest that these too are ancient.

As well as being ancient, the woodlands are of historic and archaeological interest in other ways. Walkworth Wood and Gallery Bottom contain 'bell pits' associated with shallow coal mining, and the latter also contains the remains of three fish ponds thought to be associated with Kimberworth Deer Park. All of the woodlands are bounded by old stone walls and in some cases, by boundary banks.

Life in the Woods

Most of the woodlands are dominated by mature oak together with smaller amounts of birch, beech, sweet chestnut and



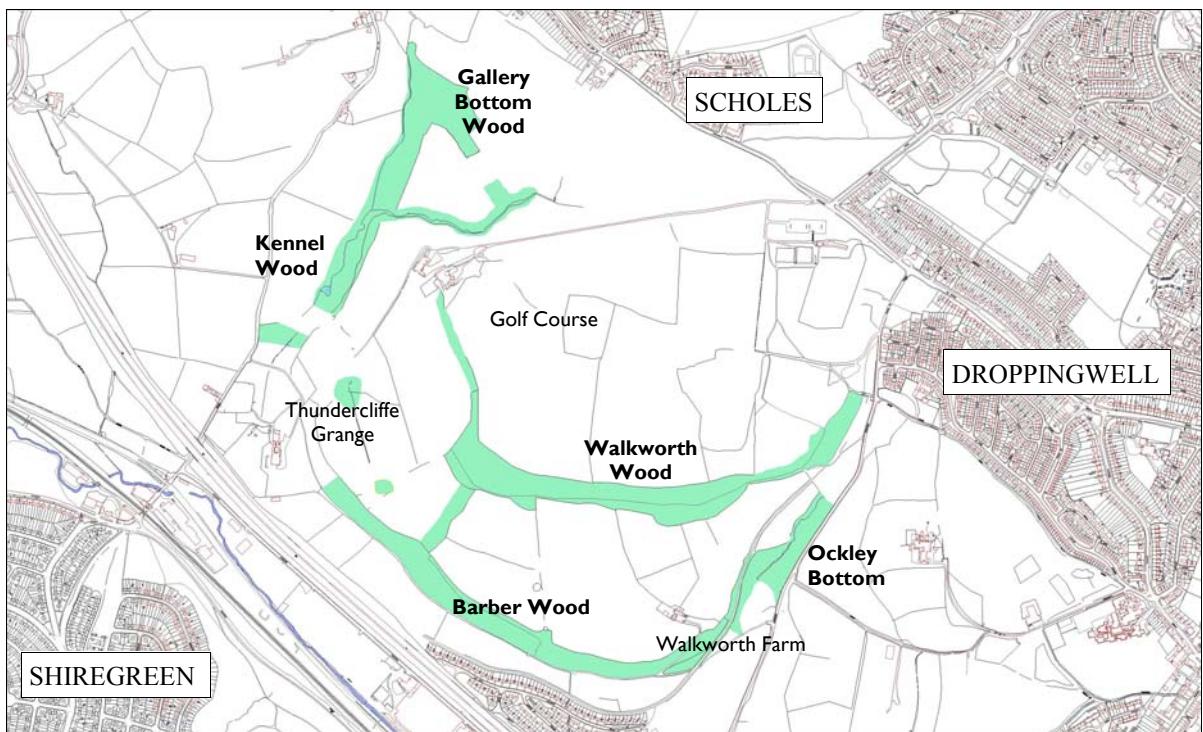
The view from Walkworth Wood, across the golf course towards Woolley Wood

sycamore. The exceptions are Kennel Wood and Ockley Bottom which, as well as oak and sycamore, have mature wet alder woodland, a rare feature in the Rotherham area. Ockley Bottom, Kennel Wood and Gallery Bottom each support at least fifteen ancient woodland plant indicators including wood sorrel, remote sedge, guelder rose, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage, wood speedwell and wood anemone.

At least four species of bat are present and the woodlands also support a range of interesting and unusual insects and other invertebrates. There is also a diverse range of birds including kestrel, sparrowhawk, green and great-spotted woodpeckers, cuckoo, little owl and song thrush.

Woodland Management

Under the *Fuelling a Revolution* programme, woodland restoration and access improvement work is taking place to restore the woodlands to their former glory and to maximise their potential as a recreational and educational resource. Some thinning and group felling will be carried out in order to create a more



Map to show the extent and Location of the Woodlands of Grange Park.



Aerial View of the same area as the map above.

varied woodland structure and to encourage the development of young oaks. Control of rhododendron, a non-native and highly invasive species, is required in Barber Wood.

Access to the woods will be improved by upgrading the path system, with a focus in Barber Wood in particular being to provide access for less able-bodied people. Work is required to prevent access by motorcyclists and to reduce problems of fly tipping and vandalism and this will be partly achieved by restoring the historic and visually important boundary walls.

Finally, the potential of the site as an educational and recreational resource is being further developed through guided walks, events relating to the natural history and historic interest of the site, children's events and practical management tasks.

A WALK THROUGH THE HISTORIC WOODLANDS OF GRANGE PARK

From the signposted footpath on Grange Lane follow the driveway towards Thundercliffe Grange but turn off onto the footpath to the left about 100 metres before the house. You are now entering-

BARBER WOOD

Barber Wood, which takes its name from **Thomas Barber**, its 16th century owner, mirrors the long arc-like shape of Walkworth Wood as it follows a similar steep slope further down the hill. It seems likely to have been this shape and size for several centuries for the nearby Walkworth Farm is recorded as having been in existence in the 15th century.

We know that by the 18th century it was in the hands of the **Earls of Effingham** who gradually incorporated it into the landscaped grounds of Thundercliffe Grange. This involved the planting of non native trees, like the beech. Cutting into the steep sandstone slope of the wood are three old quarries, one of which is said to have provided the stone for the building of the house. The wood itself certainly creates a dramatic backdrop to the house.

After 1860 Thundercliffe was no longer the principal residence of the Earls and it



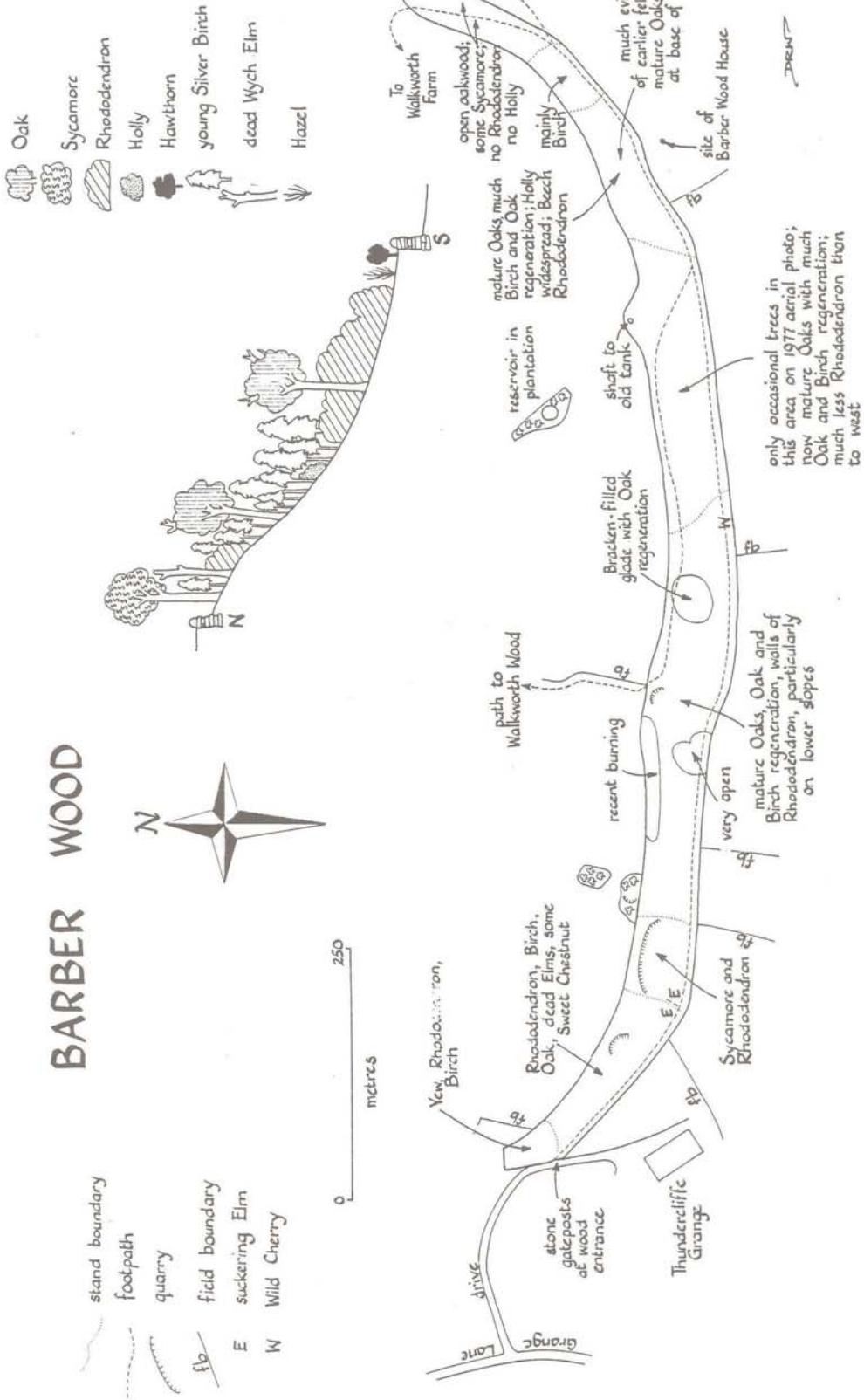
The path near the site of Barberwood House

BARBER WOOD



0 250 metres

- stand boundary
- footpath
- quarry
- field boundary
- E suckering Elm
- W Wild Cherry



passed to John Baring who sold it to Dr. Daniel Pettigrew who lived at **Barber Wood House** until the 1940s. In 1944 the ownership was conveyed to Rotherham Borough Council. The woodland had been neglected for many years by this time. Sycamore and rhododendron had been allowed to run wild and now require control.

There are a number of man-made features in the wood. It is almost entirely encircled by walls, in various states of repair, of an unknown building date. There are also some features associated with the construction of Barber Wood House, a lodge built near the bottom of the wood in the 1840s for the staff of the 6th Earl of Effingham. Near the top of the wood is a brick opening to a large underground water tank which was constructed to supply water to the house, which was demolished in the 1960s.

Trees and Plants

It would appear the Barber Wood, like Walkworth Wood, was originally a birch/oak wood with an understorey of holly. Today this pattern has been very much complicated by planting, vandalism and the invasion of non-native trees. There is also a marked difference in the character of the woodland as you walk through from the west. It is at this end, near to the house, that rhododendron forms dense thickets. There are also a number of yew trees, beeches and sweet chestnuts, all of which have been planted at some stage. As you walk further look out for some quite large elms as well as wild cherries.

Following the footpath beyond the farm track to Walkworth Farm brings you into- **OCKLEY BOTTOM**

Although it is becoming quite overgrown and naturalised, the footpath that you are now following was once the course of a mineral railway line which served the extensive **Grange Colliery** at the top of the hill off Upper Wortley Road.

This section of woodland, once a part of the far more extensive Dropping Well Wood, has been greatly affected by mining activities, spoil tipping and neglect for the last hundred years and is only now beginning to recover. Even so you will be aware of many signs of vandalism and misuse which the current management plans aim to combat.



There are 10 sculptures altogether which form part of the Kimberworth and Blackburn Roundwalk, starting at either the Engine Ponds at Kimberworth or the playground at Blackburn.

Don't be shocked if you come across a life-sized figure lurking beside the path! It will be one of the mysterious cast iron figures of Yaiza, Carer of the Wild, which are dotted along a **sculpture trail** through Ockley Bottom. You can make up your own story that they tell.

The most varied route through the wood can be followed by turning right at the tall stone gatepost and following the path down and along the stream. In spring there is a



The path into Ockley Bottom

good show of celandines and wood anemones as well as a carpet of bluebells; all indicators that you are in an ancient woodland. This is quite a wet area and you will notice that there are many **alders** growing here in a group, an unusual feature in an ancient wood like this. The stream itself is quite heavily polluted and is best avoided.

Shortly after rejoining the railway track footpath take the path on the left which almost doubles back up the hill. You can now follow the path through-

WALKWORTH WOOD

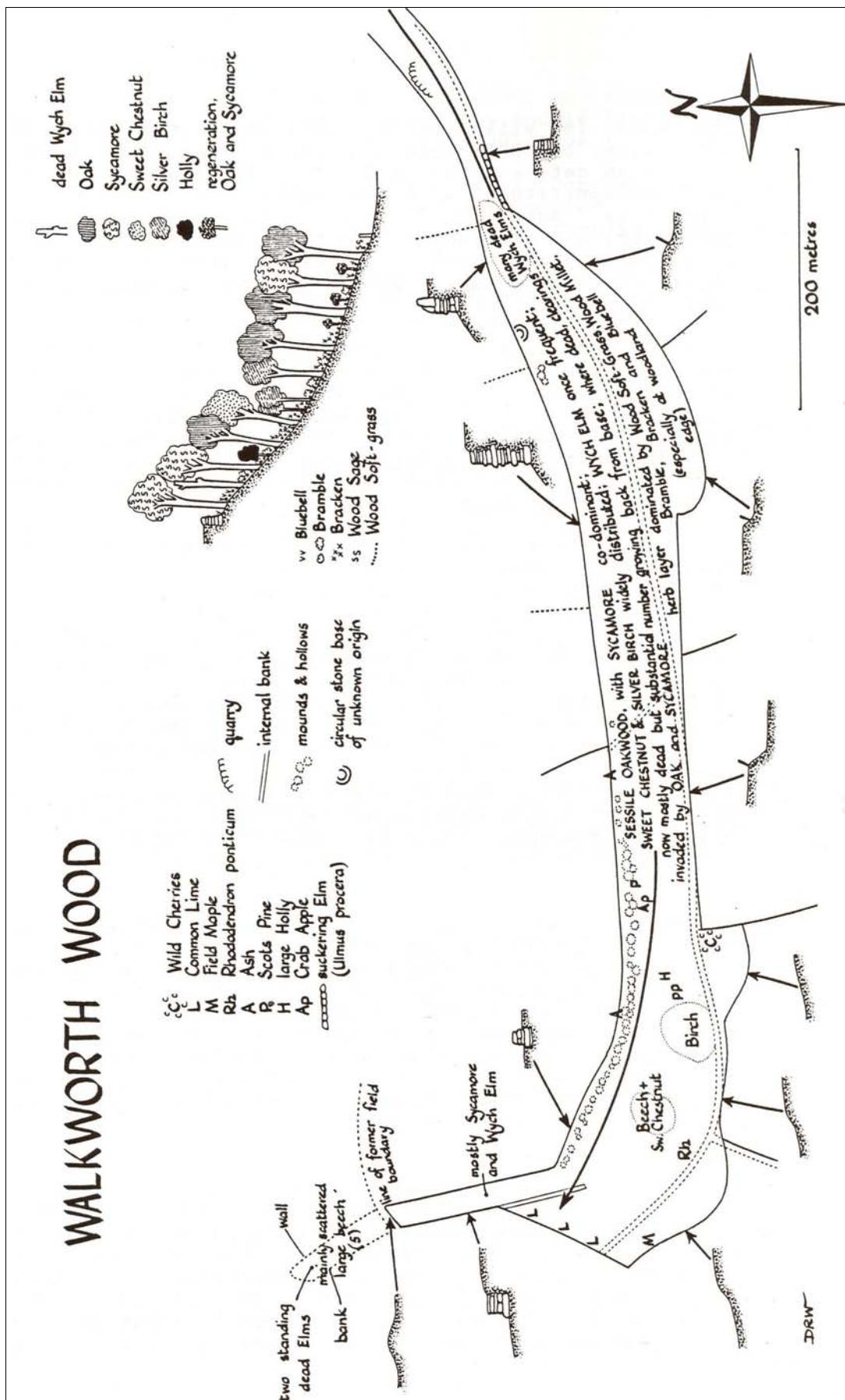
The long, narrow arc-like shape of the wood reflects the site, for it occupies a steep south facing slope. The Silkstone coal and ironstone seams outcrop along the base of the slope.

The earliest reference to the wood occurs in the list of spring woods (meaning coppice woods) written around 1600, belonging to the 7th Earl of Shrewsbury's forges, a clear indication that the wood was supplying wood for **charcoal** to use in smelting the local iron ore. The wood was managed in this way throughout the 17th century but in 1727, after it came into the hands of the Earls of Effingham, no further management plans exist and it is assumed that the wood became part of the extended and landscaped Grange Park.

Walkworth Wood displays many of the built features that are typical of local ancient woodlands. In particular it is surrounded by the remains of the **banks and walls** which would have been built to prevent stock from straying into the wood and grazing on the young growing trees.

Running along the top end of the wood is a series of humps and hollows which mark the position of shallow **bell pits** working the coal and ironstone seams. There is also a mysterious circular stone base just inside the wall at the top of the wood. It has been suggested that this could mark the position of a **wood collier's (charcoal burner) hut**.

WALKWORTH WOOD



In its natural state the wood must have been predominantly a silver birch/ sessile oak wood with some elm but this has long been disturbed by the management of the wood as a **coppice** followed by long neglect and planting with other non-native species such as sweet chestnut. You will be able to spot many **large sweet chestnuts** along the path. Look out for their twisting, rope like trunks, long leaves and spiky shelled nuts. The ravages of Dutch elm disease has taken its toll as there are many large dead standing wych elms towards the eastern end of the wood.

Today the composition of the wood therefore reflects its long and complicated history. Although it still retains some of its character as an oak/birch wood other trees are widespread, particularly the sweet



chestnut, sycamore and ash, especially at the top, and beech. Some of the tall wind-shaped beeches which form most of the westward extension of the wood create a very striking image.

Although the ground flora is relatively poor the usual plants which indicate that this is likely to be an ancient wood, such as bluebells, dog's mercury, yellow archangel and wood sage, are all present. Looking down into the field below the wood in spring time you will see a scattered carpet of bluebells, a sure sign that the wood was once more extensive than today.

Little detailed work has been done on the insect and bird life of the wood but, considering its long narrow shape with extensive edges there is no doubt that this will be rich. It is known that amongst the birds breeding in the wood are great spotted woodpecker, blackcaps, spotted flycatcher, treecreeper, willow warbler and grey partridge.

Follow the path through the wood and up the hill where it begins to thin out.

Look out for the many woodland butterflies, small tortoiseshells, commas, speckled woods and brimstones which like to sun themselves on the sandy path at this point.

The views from this point are well worth the short climb. To the north the spoil heaps of old colliery workings, long since abandoned, can be spotted on the hillside whilst across the motorway Woolley Wood stretches to the left with the expanses of Greno Wood in the far distance towards the right. It is here that the mature beech trees, shaped by the west wind, create such a dramatic statement

along the hilltop. Towards the clubhouse of the golf course (which, incidentally, is open to the public for drinks and food and has fine views) ash trees predominate. In winter their bare branches hang with messy clusters of brown 'keys' looking for all the world like dirty pieces of rag. Around the car park look out for the tall lime trees whose strong sweet scent you will smell in July. You may hear a low drone of the thousands of bees who are working the nectar filled flowers.

Follow the path around the clubhouse and across the drive. Follow the broad footpath which leads into-

GALLERY BOTTOM WOOD

Gallery Bottom, unlike the other Grange Park woods, once formed part of the medieval **Kimberworth Deer Park**, first mentioned in the 13th century. The park had been in the ownership of the Dukes of Norfolk until 1727 when the Duke's holdings were split and The Earl of Effingham inherited Gallery Bottom. Kennel Wood was added to his holdings by purchase in 1771. It was shortly after this that Thundercliffe Grange was built.

The deer park itself had been in existence since the 13th century as a source of venison, rabbits, game, fish and timber but by the 1650s it had been largely disparked and let to tenant farmers.

Just within the southern boundary of Gallery Bottom are a series of **ponds**, now largely silted, which may well be survivals of the ancient fishponds, the boggy floors of which are covered with golden saxifrage and wood anemones. This area is basically an alder wood with some old hawthorns,

planted hornbeams and the ubiquitous sycamore.

The extensive length of **stone walling** which runs up the eastern side of the valley and out across the golf course marks the ancient boundary of Kimberworth Park. Along much of its length the wall is built into a substantial bank, on the outside of which is a ditch. It is suggested that this is the remains of a **medieval woodbank**, constructed to contain the park animals and prevent them from browsing in the young coppice.

In 1600 it was recorded that there were 300 acres of spring wood (coppice) in the park. In 1656 the coal pits and spring wood were let to Lionel Copley, the ironmaster of Sprotbrough Hall.

The two woods follow the valley bottom along the ancient parish and township boundary in a zig-zag pattern, suggesting that they are surviving relics of greater areas of woodland. These would have been unattractive settlement sites and it is doubtful that they have ever been cleared.

This is not to say that they have never witnessed industrial activity. The Silkstone coal seam outcrops in an arc through the southern half of Gallery Bottom and the whole of Kennel wood is on the lower coal measures. As well as this three ironstone seams outcrop in the wood. It is therefore not surprising that there is widespread evidence of mining activities in the woods, including open casting in the 1950s.

The woods retained much of their original form until the last century when open cast mining operations in the late 1930s destroyed a large area to the east and later a swathe was cut through the southern end of Kennel Wood and the valley filled in as part of the creation of the golf course.

Today the two woods constitute one of the most important coal measure woodland sites in the region.

BIRD LIFE

These areas of woodland have a particularly rich and varied bird population. A number of surveys have been carried out and over 50 species recorded. These include the more common woodland birds as well as sparrowhawk, spotted flycatcher and hawfinch, which may well have been attracted by the hornbeams. Woodcock have also been recorded in 1989.

A particular feature of the woods is the number of birds which nest in holes and behind dead bark such as marsh tits, tree sparrows, woodpeckers and treecreepers. The availability of such sites has been increased through the spread of Dutch Elm Disease.

Walk across the little bridge and follow the path through the wood to the left.

This area was planted with pine, larch and beech some 30 years ago. A little further on you will see what this looks like. It is characteristically even aged and the trees are closely spaced. Little light comes through the thick canopy and there is very little ground or shrub layer.

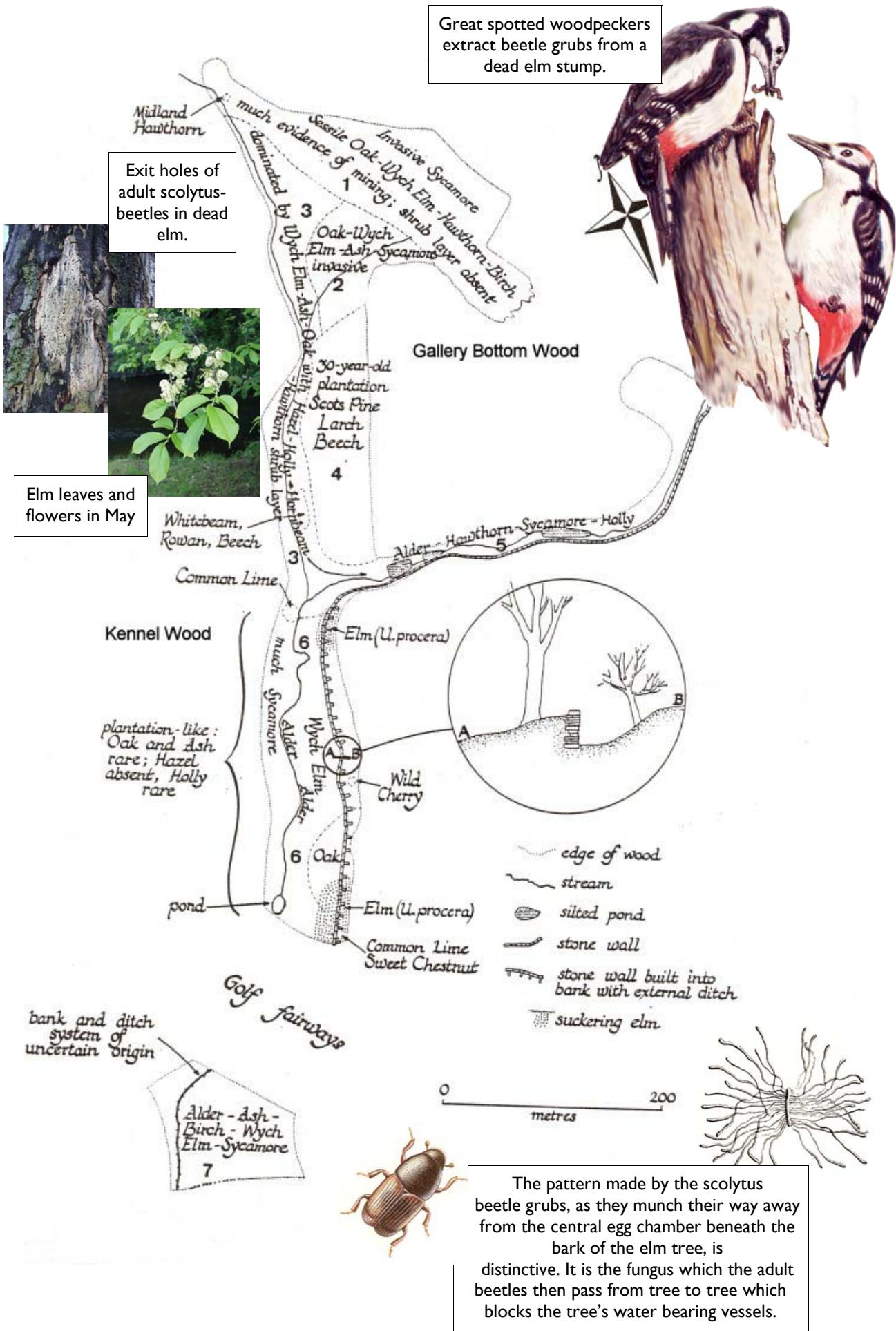
It is here, however, that the effects of clearing, thinning and consequent regeneration can be seen. Over the past few years, as part of the *Fuelling a Revolution* project successive areas of the plantation have been cleared and the timber used. It is fascinating to see how quickly the woodland is regenerating. Small trees, ash, oak, alder and sweet chestnuts have sprouted through the abundant herb



Gallery Bottom Wood.
Foxgloves and seedling trees regenerating in the woodland glade cleared of the thick conifer and beech cover in the previous two years.

growth, predominantly foxgloves. These more open areas now form a striking contrast to the adjoining areas of coniferous plantation.

Beyond this, the north end of Gallery Bottom is a distinctive area of large oaks, wych elms and birches. There are also a number of large hawthorns which almost assume the character of canopy trees. There is little shrub layer and the ground flora is largely composed of creeping soft grass, wood millet, bramble, bracken and bluebells. It is worth looking out for a variety of ferns including lady ferns, male ferns and broad buckler ferns which all benefit from the sheltered position of depressions left by old mining activities.



You can now either leave the top of the wood or retrace your steps and follow the stream down into-

KENNEL WOOD

This part of the wood follows the steep stream sides down the valley and the path is narrow and slippery in places. In terms of its ecology it is by far the most interesting part of the wood. The trees in this section are basically oak, ash and elm and there are many hazel trees. There is a rich field layer of bluebells, red campion, ramsons and yellow archangel. **Traveller's joy**, a rare plant in this area, is also present.

Further down the path follows a steep sided damp stream valley and, despite the invasive sycamores, the wood is still characterised by alders, a typical wetland tree which creates a woodland called a '**carr**'. The presence of lime and sweet chestnut indicates that planting has taken place in the past.

The most interesting aspect of this part of the wood, however, is the presence of so many elm trees. Although few are now over four metres tall, the larger trees having been killed by a heavy infestation of **Dutch Elm Disease**, there are hundreds of smaller trees which have come up from suckers or growing back in coppice from the bases of older trees. In the area to the southern end there are 550 elms, most of them young, all of which appear to be suckering from the base of three older trees which are dead above the base. These trees are thought to have been planted on the boundary as part of an ancient hedge.

The delightful ponds with the ducks and dragonflies bring us out of the south end on Kennel Wood.

You can now carefully cross the fairway and follow the footpath back down the hill towards the start.

The maps of the individual woods were drawn by Bob Warburton and are reproduced, by permission, from 'Rotherham's Woodland Heritage' by Melvyn Jones.

Speckled wood butterfly;
a familiar sight in woodland glades and edges in the summer months.

