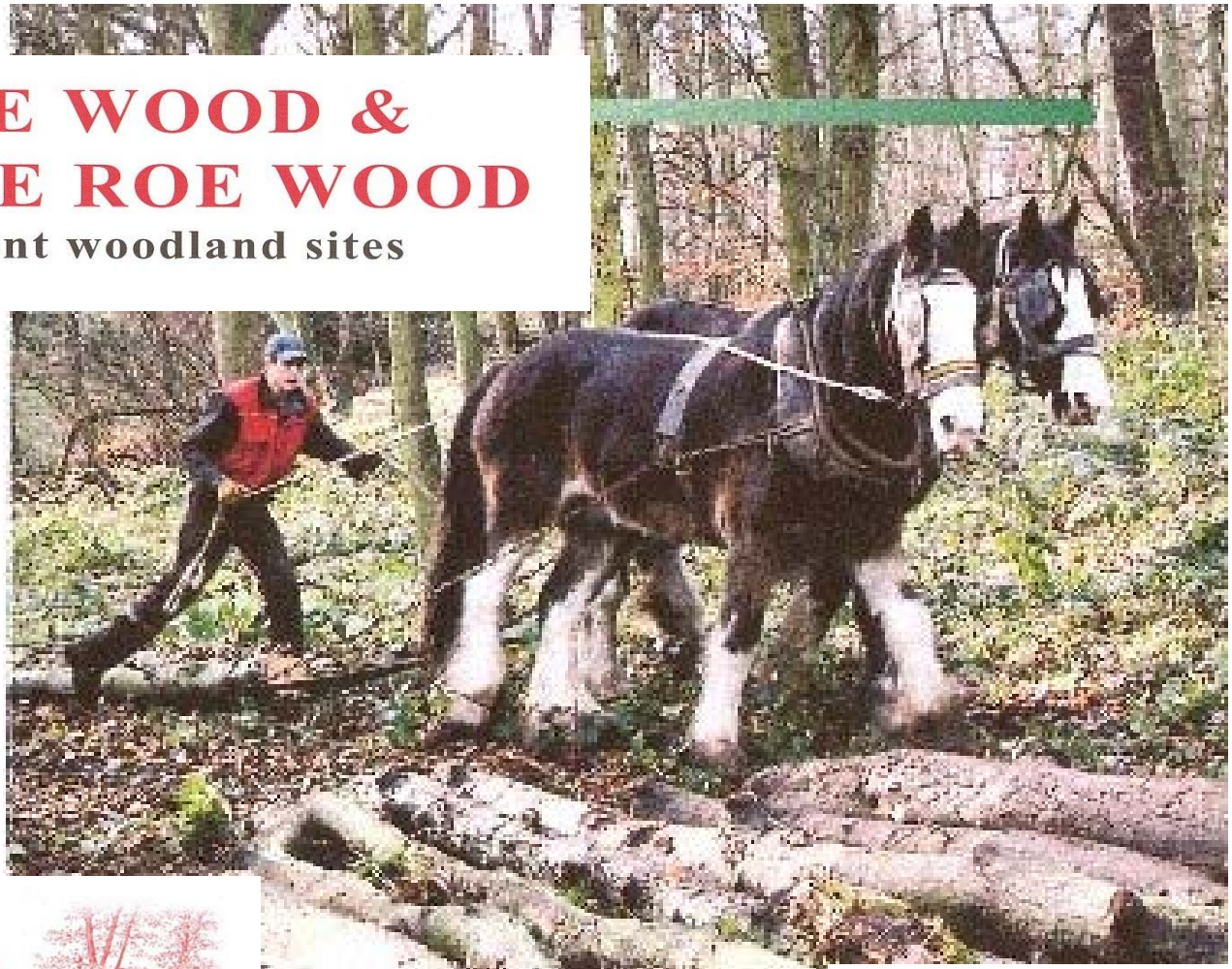
ROE WOOD & LITTLE ROE WOOD

Ancient woodland sites



FUELLING A REVOLUTION

The woods that founded the steel country

Sheffield City Council


Hazel nuts


Hazel catkins

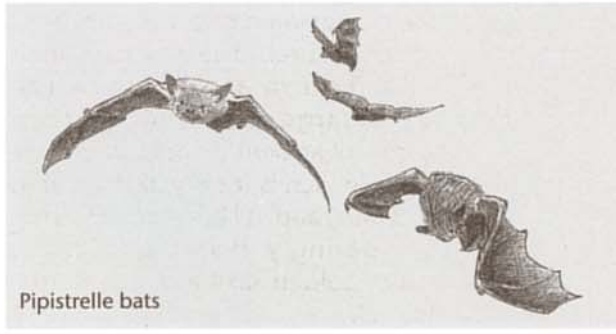
The most common trees found in Roe Wood are the native sessile oak (with its stalked leaves and unstalked acorns), ash, rowan and silver birch and planted beech (which was planted over a large area in the northern part of the wood at the end of the nineteenth century) and invasive sycamore.


Oak leaves

The shrub layer is poorly developed with occasional hawthorn, hazel, holly and guelder rose. The trees present today in Little Roe Wood are heavily influenced by the former presence there of a nursery and associated gardens. There are many non-native species including many sycamore and occasional common lime, poplar, beech, sweet chestnut, horse chestnut and weeping ash. Among the well-developed shrub layer of Little Roe Wood are the non-native rhododendron and cherry laurel. The ground flora is varied and patchy and includes in Roe Wood a large patch of heather. Indicators of ancient woodland include bluebell (which is locally abundant in both woods) and in Little Roe Wood the more sparingly distributed dog's mercury, golden saxifrage and yellow archangel.

The bird population of the two woods is very varied. In winter there are mixed parties of tits and flocks of mistle thrushes, redwings, fieldfares and bramblings. In summer the song of migrant warblers such as chiffchaffs and blackcaps can be heard in the woods. Other species likely to be seen or heard include common species such as wood pigeon, robin, wren and hedge sparrow and less common species such as nuthatch, sparrowhawk, tawny owl, treecreeper, great spotted woodpecker, lesser spotted woodpecker and green woodpecker.

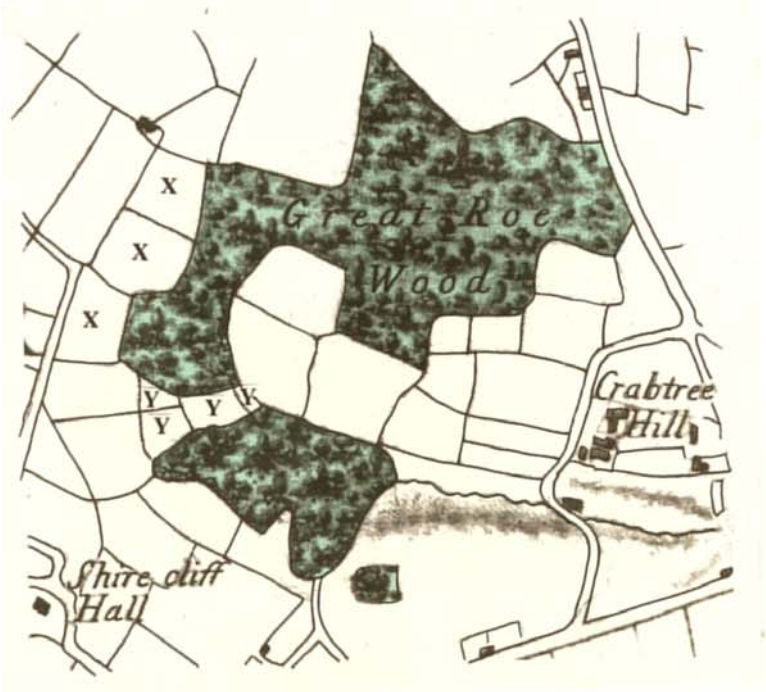
Pipistrelle bats may be seen on a dusk visit to either of the two woods in warm weather. The Pipistrelle is our smallest bat and it forages and roosts in old trees in both woods. Twenty-three bat boxes were erected on mature trees in Roe Wood in the year 2000.


Pipistrelle bats

CHANGING SHAPES, SIZES & NAMES

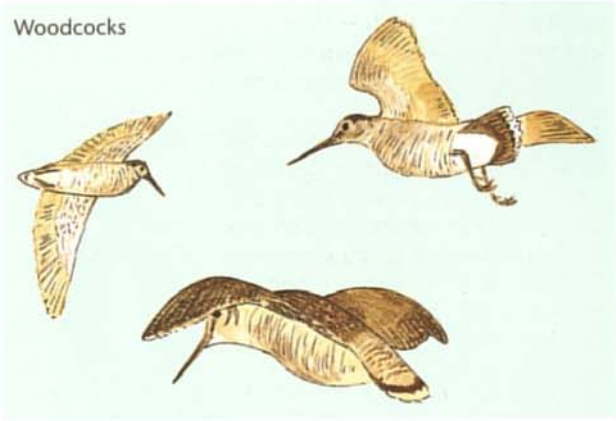
Roe Wood and Little Roe Wood were first mentioned in an undated document written sometime between 1590 and 1616 for the owner, the 7th Earl of Shrewsbury, who lived in Sheffield Castle. It was then one wood called Cockshutt Rowe. Felling of trees in the wood had last taken place twelve years before the document was written, and as the felled trees would have been at least twenty years old this definitely makes Roe Wood and Little Roe Wood ancient woods. An ancient wood is one that has been in existence since at least AD 1600.

The two present-day woods were still one wood in 1637 and still known as Cockshott Rowe but between 1707 and 1765 new fields were created by clearing parts of the curving western arm of the wood. These new fields are shown on the extract from William Fairbank's 1795 map of the parish of Sheffield by the letters X and Y. The new fields marked Y divided the pre-existing wood into two separate woods.



After their separation into two woods, the larger, northern part was referred to as Great or Far Roe Wood, and now just Roe Wood, and the southern part as Little Roe Wood. Nineteenth century clearances further reduced the size of Roe Wood.

The meaning of the name of the wood is obscure. Cockshutt or Cockshott in the early name Cockshutt Rowe and Cockshott Rowe means a woodland glade where woodcocks were netted.


Woodcocks

'Roe', spelt at various times as 'Rowe' and 'Roa' could have several meanings. It could be derived from the Old English word *ruh* meaning rough, referring to the scrub-like character of the site when it was named or it could be derived from the Old Norse word *ra* meaning rowan tree and which was sometimes spelt 'roa' in early documents. Rowan trees still grow in both woods.


Rowan

PAST MANAGEMENT OF THE TWO WOODS

When Roe Wood was first recorded at the end of the sixteenth century it was a well-established coppice wood. It was included in a long list of woods compiled for the 7th Earl of Shrewsbury entitled '*A briefe estimate of the springe woods belonging to his lordship's forges ...*' A spring wood was a **coppice-with-standards**. In such a wood most of the trees were cut back to ground level (coppiced) about every 20 years and they then grew back multi-stemmed. Among the coppiced trees some trees were left to grow as single-stemmed trees and these were the **standards**. The standards, which were mostly oaks, were used in building projects. The fact that the spring woods were said to belong to the Earl's forges suggests that most of the coppice wood would be made into charcoal for smelting iron.


Coppice-with-standards

Roe Wood, before and after its division into two woods, was coppiced regularly for almost the next three hundred years. In 1637, for instance, Cockshott Rowe was described as a spring wood covering 51 acres in which the coppice was said to be 24 years old.

Surviving eighteenth century records show that the coppice was felled in 1710-11, at mid-century and in 1780. In 1710-11 horses were used to move the coppice poles to the edge of the wood and bark was peeled from the oak trees and sold to leather tanneries where it was used to make a liquor for tanning animal hides. The coppice was also made into charcoal and poles were used to repair waterbanks at a water-powered site in Brightside.

Nineteenth century records are also very full. When the coppice was felled between 1812 and 1814 in the two woods, more than 1,100 mature standard trees were left standing together with more than 8,000 young standards (called wavers). Coppice management continued until almost the end of the century. In 1883, for example, when part of Great Roe Wood and the whole of Little Roe Wood were coppiced, the fall yielded more than 36 tons of oak bark from Great Roe Wood and more than nine tons from Little Roe Wood.

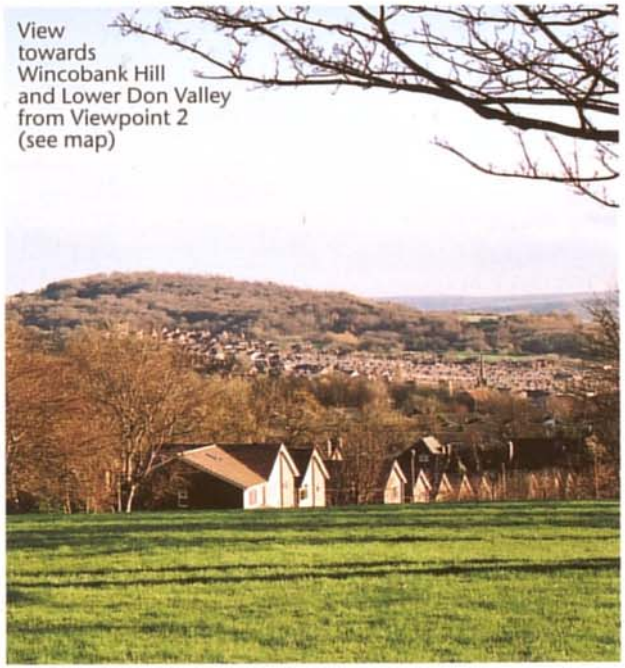
Bark Peeler

The last coppicing in Great Roe Wood was completed in 1890 when it yielded a large number of oak trees and smaller numbers of ash, alder, wych elm and cherry, 15 cords (piles of wood each weighing more than two tons) of branch wood for making into charcoal, 23 score of hedge stakes and more than twelve tons of bark. Almost all the trees were sold to John Swinscoe, a Sheffield timber merchant, but five alders were bought by William Dronfield, a clog sole maker from Grenoside.

CHANGED OWNERSHIP AND FUNCTION

By the 1890s both woods had been further reduced in size, mainly through the clearance of woodland to create allotment gardens and the establishment of a residence and a plant nursery for the Duke of Norfolk's woodward. Indeed, only the western half of the present Little Roe Wood is on the site of the original ancient wood and the rest is naturalized woodland which has developed in the former grounds of the house of the Duke's woodward.

In 1897 'The Roe Woods' were presented by the Duke of Norfolk, then Lord Mayor of Sheffield, as a gift to the City of Sheffield, 'to be used and enjoyed without any charge' as a recreation ground. The gift was part of the celebrations associated with Queen Victoria's visit to the city to open the new Town Hall.



View towards Wincobank Hill and Lower Don Valley from Viewpoint 2 (see map)

The two woods were further reduced in size in the early part of last century through sports ground extension and the expansion of allotments.

RENEWED MANAGEMENT OF THE TWO WOODS

Little active management for local people or for wildlife took place for nearly a hundred years. However, the two woods have seen a marked turn for the better since the late 1980s. In the 1990s the City Council and Sheffield Wildlife Trust embarked on a project in Roe Wood which involved selective thinning of trees, footpath improvement, litter clearance and environmental events in the wood. They also undertook some re-coppicing in the NW corner of the wood.

Students from Sheaf Training Centre planting trees on the 'bat corridor' between the two woods

As part of the Fuelling a Revolution and the Burngreave Community Forest Projects, renewed management is taking place in both woods. The emphasis is on sensitive thinning and group-felling to encourage regeneration and a diverse and uneven woodland structure, favouring native species of trees and shrubs. Invasive species are being controlled and signs of neglect such as litter and tipping are also being removed and access points and footpaths are being improved, maintained and clearly signed.