

Backwell Environment Trust

Registered Charity No. 1109406

Bulletin 13 – Autumn 2008



Annual General Meeting

Saturday November 15th 2008, 2:00pm

Backwell Parish Hall

followed by

An illustrated talk by trustee Ian Chambers on the wildlife and development of Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve.

For the AGM, the hall will be open from 1:30 pm with displays and information about BET and some linked organisations. Trustees and some of our advisers will be around before and after the meeting to answer any queries or note any suggestions about BET and its activities, past, present and future.

In the morning the Community Owls Project will meet in the hall from 9:30am to 12:30pm

BET AGM NOVEMBER 15TH 2008

AGENDA

- **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on November 10th 2007**
- **Treasurer's Report**
- **Chairman's Report**
- **Election of officers and trustees**
- **Any other business**

The Annual Report for 2007 – 2008 and a nomination form for trustees and officers is included in this bulletin.

The minutes of the last AGM and annual accounts will be available at the meeting.

Introduction and Contents



Our latest lavishly illustrated bulletin has quite a lot in it partly because we are coming up to the AGM (Nov 15th 2.00pm Parish Hall) and nearing the end of our reporting year, and partly because so much has happened. To help you find your way around, the contents are as follows:

- i) **Formal Notice of AGM and Agenda.**
- ii) **A Big 'thank you' to all our members and supporters who have made possible the purchase of Cheston Combe Wood South.**
- iii) **BET's Official Annual Report.**
- iv) **Annual Report on the management of our Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve (JSWNR).**
- v) **Proposals for winter work in JSWNR. (There is a useful map to help you find your way around).**
- vi) **BET and Legacies. Please consider it.**
- vii) **Backwell Community Plan. Please support it!**
- viii) **The Sycamore. Our regular tree feature by Dr Terry Smith, author of the 'Natural History of Nailsea' which we heartily recommend. Please buy it!!**
- ix) **Report of our grand charcoal burn. Buy a bag of JSWNR charcoal at Backwell Post Office!!!**
- x) **The Community Owls Project.**
- xi) **A reminder of our activity days.**
- xii) **Nomination form for trustees and an appeal for help.**



A Big 'Thank You' to all our members, supporters and to YANSEC

BET members and supporters are a generous bunch. Donations are often received with membership fees and this has allowed us to build up a surplus over the amount we need to keep in reserve to cover insurance and contingencies such as dealing with dangerous trees.

We have used this surplus to support our forthcoming purchase (we hope) of Cheston Combe Wood South. A substantial contribution to a project from an applicant such as BET undoubtedly increases the chance of receiving a grant and we believe this was a significant factor in our success. When the wood was offered to us, an appeal for further funds generated more support and then having found we could not use our own funds for seed funding (the Charity Commission would not allow it) another appeal produced still further donations by members. As well as all these individual gifts we are very grateful to Backwell Parish Council who agreed to fund the gap between what we needed for the seed funding and what we had received, and to Bristol International Airport for a substantial donation. We would also like to acknowledge help from Nailsea Footpath Group and Nailsea Running Club both of whom regularly use the rights of way through both old and new woods. Parker's estate agency has also helped and Backwell Post



Office provides ongoing support with printing/copying etc. We are also grateful to solicitor Barbara Hunt of Gregg Latchams WRH who has offered to undertake conveyancing of the new wood free of charge.

Our biggest thanks go to YANSEC for the provision of the bulk of the funding. Their grant to us is one of the largest they have ever made and will provide a permanent amenity for Backwell and surrounding parishes.

And there is more. At the same time as appealing for donations for seed funding we also made grant applications to cover the sum required. Grant applications are by their nature very uncertain and so we could not avoid making the appeal for donations

Although at the time of going to press I have not received any written confirmation, I have had a telephone call informing me that a grant has been awarded to cover the seed funding. If this is confirmed and you made a donation to the seed fund you should receive back with this bulletin the cheque you generously gave along with our sincere gratitude. It was a great comfort to know that if no grant had been forthcoming we would have been able to proceed with the purchase.

Bill Charnock

BET ANNUAL REPORT **Oct 1st 2007 to Sept 30th 2008**



BET's formal objectives as they appear in our Charity Commission registration are shown in the box at the end of this report. In practical terms we have to manage our holdings to promote biodiversity and environmental good practice and to create a valuable recreational and educational resource for Backwell and the public in general.

This report is divided into four sections. First, management of our present holding which we now call the Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve; second, progress on acquisition of the southern part of Cheston Combe Wood to extend the reserve; third, an account of the activities we have undertaken in the reporting year and fourth, a short section that covers administration of the trust and related items.

1. Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve (JSWNR)

A comprehensive account of the management and development of the reserve over the reporting year has been prepared by trustee Ian Chambers who leads our work teams in the woodland. The main points may be summarised as the creation of habitats such as woodland glades, wildflower meadows and a pond, the control of invasive species such as bracken and progress on the archaeological features in the wood namely the lead mines, limekiln and warrener's cottage. In addition we have, with the aid of a grant from the North Somerset Local Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (LALSF), commissioned and received a report arising from a professional survey of the ecology of the woodland to underwrite our long term (20 year) management approach to biodiversity enhancement.

This report concentrates on the 'easy access' trail which was completed in the reporting year also using a generous grant from the North Somerset LALSF.



At the start of the year we had constructed a small car park at the eastern end of the wood and a 50m length of path across the horse ring (see map on page 10). This year we have been able to complete the project by connecting the car park to the horse ring, a distance of around 90m, and extending the horse ring path to the Jubilee Stone, a further 150m or so. We have also installed a

kissing gate which can be negotiated by a wheelchair and sturdy benches placed strategically along the route. Information/interpretation notice boards have also been erected at each end of the wood. The trail was officially opened on June 21st by Andy Hull of Backwell Access Group who advised us on the project.

The car park and access route make for easy access to the top half of the wood by anyone who needs a wheelchair-friendly track or just the use of the benches to rest along the way. As a condition of our planning permission the car park must be kept locked but the combination is available by application to any of the trustees.

2. Cheston Combe Wood South

This wood, which lies on the right hand side of Cheston Combe as you ascend and also bounds Cole's quarry, is owned by the quarrying company Cemex UK Ltd. It covers 6 hectares (15 acres) as compared to the 4 hectares (10 acres) of JSWNR.

We had written to Cemex UK Ltd about a possible acquisition a number of times and eventually received a response which led to site meetings with their land agent in October 2007 and March 2008. An offer to sell to us was also made in March 2008.

Thanks to the generosity of its members, BET was solvent but it was clear that the purchase would only be possible with the help of a substantial grant. Unfortunately the Aggregates Levy, which would be the obvious choice for a grant application because of the quarrying connection, was under review and in suspension. Accordingly applications were made to the local representative of the Landfill Levy, YANSEC (Yanley and North Somerset Environmental Company), and to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

After a site visit YANSEC agreed in August 2008 to fund that major part of the purchase price which BET could not finance alone. Unfortunately one of the conditions of a landfill levy grant is that an independent third party must give a sum equal to 10% of the grant back to the Landfill Levy company involved ('seed funding'). Even more unfortunately, the Charity Commission, who we consulted, ruled that we could not give BET funds to a third party to make this donation.

This meant it was necessary to go back to our members to provide the seed funding independently and not through BET. The response was tremendous and thanks to the generosity of members, supporters and to Backwell Parish Council the seed funding has been raised.



Backwell or Badger Cave

The story has another twist. At the end of August the Aggregates Levy re-opened for business and confirmed that seed funding was an eligible project for an application. Thus two applications have been made, one to North Somerset and the other to Natural England who are both agents of the Aggregates Levy but who make grants on different criteria. So the position at the end of the reporting period is that we have raised the seed funding by donation but we may be able to return these donations to our supporters should one of our grant applications be successful. A resolution is expected before the end of October 2008.

Short of the seller withdrawing, it appears that the wood is secured and it is our intention to manage and develop it on the same lines as we have adopted in the Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve. Permissive paths will be created and another 'easy access' trail may be possible. The acquisition also brings the nature reserve to the back door of the junior school.

Finally we understand that before Cole's Quarry existed the combe it replaced was known as Badgers Combe. Thus we have decided to name the new wood **'Badgers Wood'**.

3. BET Events and Activities

In addition to our twice-monthly activity sessions working on the reserve which, in the reporting period involved **1,508 man/woman hours** of woodland management activity, the trust has organised a number of specific events as follows:

Sept 15th 2007. Trustees Avril and Michael Marks led a bat survey.

November 10th At our AGM Lucy Corner, standing in for her sick husband Tim, made a presentation on the work of the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC). This is where observations of plants and animals can be recorded, see website – www.brerc.org.uk

On **Tuesday, 15th January 2008**, local expert Robin Prytherch spoke to a group of more than 35 members on 'The Buzzards of North Somerset' which he has been studying for more than 27 years.

Also in **February** Chris Sperring of the Hawk and Owl Trust led a rewarding owl prowling around both sides of Cheston Combe. It was a clear, still evening and we were fortunate enough to both hear and see tawny owls at close quarters.

On **February 21st and 28th** we surveyed our ruined warreners' cottage under the supervision of County Archaeologist, Vince Russett. On each occasion a number of members and supporters attended and were trained in the surveyor's art.

On **March 1st** a well attended geological walk around the wood and surrounding area was led by Andrew Matheison of the Avon Geology Group.

On **March 8th** our ornithological expert, sixth former Philip Chapman, led a very well attended (20+) early morning birdsong walk followed by breakfast.

On **April 2nd** a party from Ravenswood School supported by Forest of Avon staff visited the wood using our permissive car park (possibly for the first time) and designed wooden marker posts for our 'easy access' path.

On **April 5th** sections of the limekiln were restored using traditional lime mortar under the expert guidance of Adam Mackenzie (see photograph above).

On **April 17th** our County Archaeologist, Vince Russett, again came and supervised the surveying of the ruined warreners' cottage and the limekiln.

On **May 8th** five residents from St Christophers Special School, Westbury Park with six care staff visited the Jubilee Stone using our 'easy access' path.

On **May 17th** Philip Chapman again took out a twenty strong party to study birdsong.

On **May 25th** a group of around twenty very willing volunteers from St Andrew's Church helped us with bracken pulling in some of the reserve's wildflower meadows.

On **Saturday June 21st** we held the grand opening of our 'easy access' path together with a woodland open afternoon involving displays, bug hunts, plant identification, guided woodland walks, children's activities and refreshments.



Saturday June 28th BET participated in and manned an information stand at the all day Open Meeting in the Parish Hall to discuss the Village Community Plan.

July 12th Another bat survey evening was held in association with the Avon Bat Group.

Monday July 21st A meeting was held at the Parish Hall to discuss the setting up of a Community Owls Project for Backwell. Tawny owls are regularly heard in our wood and little owls and barn owls may visit Backwell Common.

Sunday August 17th A traditional charcoal burn was held in the field adjacent to JSWNR.

Tuesday 2nd September JSWNR's dormouse boxes were checked for the first time by Jill Brown with the able assistance of a group of BET volunteers.

Tuesday September 16th A Community Owls Project survey was led by Chris Sperring MBE focussing mainly on tawny owls and developing survey skills.

4. Trust Administration

Trustees' meetings

The trustees have met on nine occasions during the reporting period usually on a weekday evening at Backwell School. Note that since its inception the trust has allowed and encouraged all members to attend and participate in these meetings.

Bulletins

Three bulletins have been issued in the reporting period. In the last we made the transition to colour and to illustrations.

Membership

On October 1st 2008 there were **263** members, compared with **229** at the same date in 2007.

Backwell Lake

BET remains part of a loose association of local naturalist groups which negotiates on biodiversity management issues with Wessex Water who own the Lake.

BET is supporting the Backwell Access Group which is aiming to persuade Wessex Water to make the lake perimeter accessible to wheelchairs.

Formal reports to the Charity Commission

BET has submitted to the Charity Commission as required, formal reports and accounts for the period from Oct 1st 2006 to Sep 30th 2007. Accounts for the current period will require independent examination and certification prior to submission because of the substantial funds received in respect of the 'easy access' trail.

Conclusion

I believe this annual report demonstrates that we are achieving our formal objectives.

Bill Charnock 12/10/08



BET's Constitutional Objects



(selected from model objects suggested by the Charity Commission)

- To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment by promoting biodiversity.
- To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment.

Woodland Management Report

October 2007 - 2008

During the last year the ever-willing BET volunteers have again been busy working on a wide range of projects throughout the woodland. Our three main aims over the past twelve months were to increase the range of habitats, improve access and to highlight the reserve's incredible archaeological heritage.

1. HABITAT CREATION

Woodland Glades

a) The lower sections of the woodland are by far the oldest on the reserve and consequently have had the time to develop a rich ground flora, which is especially impressive in the



springtime. Unfortunately the density of trees in this part of the woodland had become so high that it was having a detrimental effect on the propagation of the spring flowers. To address this problem, approximately one in three of the dominant ash and hawthorn trees were therefore coppiced to open up the canopy and let in the dappled sunlight. The increase in light levels produced a spectacular display of bluebells in the spring of this year, all of which were able to successfully set seed. Hopefully in the coming years this spectacular woodland floral display

should continue to improve as sunlight is now once again able to reach the woodland floor.

b) Three other small glades have also been created in the woodland. Two have been made where early purple and/or common spotted orchids were struggling to survive under the heavy shade and the third was



selected to increase light levels in the lower part of the 'coupe' wildflower meadow. This section of the reserve is quite unique as it is the only known part of the woodland to have an acidic soil (pH = 5.7). This has consequently permitted a wide range of acid-loving plants to thrive in this



particular area. One of our main reasons for creating this third glade was to try to re-establish bell heather which had been absent since the last plant died out several years ago. To our great delight in September, numerous plants of bell heather flowered for the first time as did another variety of heather (ling), which was recorded on the reserve for the first time.

c) The wildflower meadow surrounding the Jubilee Stone has always been an impressive sight during the summer months. This year small trees comprising of turkey oak, ash and hawthorn

have been coppiced on the edges to increase the size of the grassland allowing the many species of wildflower present to spread out and increase in number.

d) Glades have also been continually cleared of bracken to encourage the regeneration of wildflowers. We have both pulled and bashed it now a total of nine times since 2006 and it appears to be finally running out of steam!

Wildlife Pond

A pond has been created in one of the many 17th century opencast mining pits to be found in the woodland and a clearing made in the surrounding canopy to let in light.



Pond Site ~ November 2007



Pond ~ May 2008

Within a few weeks of its completion, whirligig beetles and pond skaters had arrived and over the summer months both damselfly and dragonflies have been seen skimming over the surface. In addition to its obvious benefit to the reserve's many amphibians, the pond has also served as a much needed water source to a whole host of other species.

Rare Species

Ten dormouse boxes have been put up throughout the woodland to serve as summer nesting sites for Jubilee Stone Wood's rarest mammal.



Hibernating Dormouse



Yellow Bird's-nest



Tawny Owl Chick

The reserve's rarest plant, the Yellow Bird's-nest, also made another appearance this year and has now been confirmed by the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) as being the only known specimens in the whole of North Somerset.

Tawny owls were also recorded nesting on the reserve this year indicating that our woodland management work is benefiting the prey species of these spectacular birds.

2. IMPROVING ACCESS

This year we completed our 300-metre 'easy access' trail that starts from the small car park off Cheston Combe top road and runs all the way to the fantastic viewpoint at the Jubilee Stone. This trail has been designed to have a level and secure surface to make it especially suitable for people who are less mobile.

In addition to the trail, three benches have been installed along the route (plus a fourth placed next to the pond) to allow people to rest and enjoy the peaceful woodland scenery.

Four sculpture posts have been installed which pupils from Ravenswood School, Nailsea designed after they visited the reserve earlier in the year.

We have also installed two notice boards at the two main reserve entrances describing the woodland, its history and highlighting forthcoming events.



3. ARCHAEOLOGY

The BET volunteers have been extremely busy this year surveying, excavating and restoring the many fascinating archaeological features to be found on the reserve.

Lead Mines

One of the 17th century subterranean lead mines has been cleared of vegetation to make it more visible from the path and an interpretation board erected.

Warrener's Cottage

The cottage was surveyed with the County Archaeologist Vince Russett in the spring of this year. The results of this will hopefully give us a more detailed insight into its original layout. Surrounding vegetation has also been removed and an interpretation board erected.

Limekiln

Our largest archaeological project of the year has been the excavation and restoration of the 19th century limekiln. We estimate that approximately 4 tons of rubble has now been



removed from in front of the kiln which has revealed for the first time in over 100 years the structure's original design. As the kiln was found to be in such good condition only minimal restoration work has been necessary. The kiln and surrounding area was also surveyed in conjunction with the County Archaeologist earlier in the year.

CONCLUSIONS

All the changes to the woodland that were performed during 2006/7 are now well on the way to successfully establishing themselves into the ecosystem of the reserve. These changes, together with those performed during this past year, will hopefully lead to an increase in the

number of species recorded on the reserve and also make the existing habitats more suitable for the plants and animals that are already present.

Ian Chambers

Proposals for Winter Work in Jubilee Stone Wood

Over the past three years, Jubilee Stone Wood has been slowly transformed into the impressive nature reserve it is today by the use of sensitive woodland management techniques. Although I feel we are getting very close now to achieving our goals, myself and other trustees have suggested some possible final modifications to the reserve and we would be grateful to have your comments.

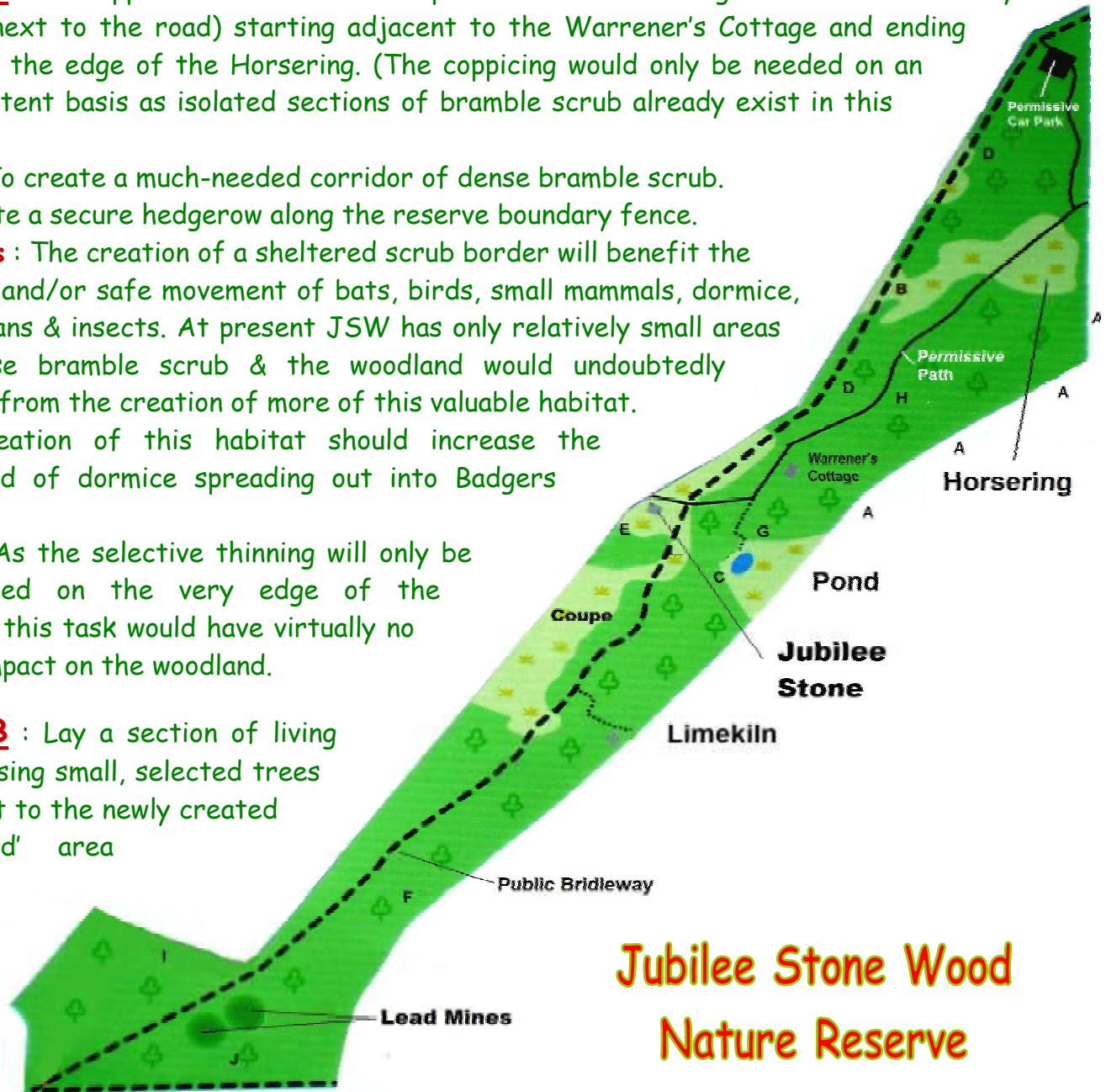
Task A : To coppice small trees to a depth of ~ 5metres along the reserve boundary fence (next to the road) starting adjacent to the Warrener's Cottage and ending close to the edge of the Horsering. (The coppicing would only be needed on an intermittent basis as isolated sections of bramble scrub already exist in this area).

Aims : To create a much-needed corridor of dense bramble scrub.
To create a secure hedgerow along the reserve boundary fence.

Benefits : The creation of a sheltered scrub border will benefit the feeding and/or safe movement of bats, birds, small mammals, dormice, amphibians & insects. At present JSW has only relatively small areas of dense bramble scrub & the woodland would undoubtedly benefit from the creation of more of this valuable habitat. The creation of this habitat should increase the likelihood of dormice spreading out into Badgers Wood.

Note : As the selective thinning will only be performed on the very edge of the reserve this task would have virtually no visual impact on the woodland.

Task B : Lay a section of living hedge using small, selected trees adjacent to the newly created 'scalloped' area along the



bridleway. The total length would be about 30metres but as all larger trees would be retained, individual lengths of laid hedge would probably not exceed 5 metres in length.

Aim : To let in more light to the wildflower-rich meadow & to open up the superb view of the Failand Ridge to visitors.

Benefits : A living hedge with many large trees retained will benefit bats, birds, small mammals, dormice, amphibians & insects.

Task C : Creation of a second pond in the depression approximately 2 metres downhill from the first.

Aim : To create a smaller, shallower, more overgrown pond with a larger section for bog plants at the upper end.

Benefits : This design of pond would be especially suitable for newts as well as other amphibians.

Task D : Cut bridleway edges to a minimum width of 2 metres and to a height of 3 metres.

Aim : To comply with the law concerning the trimming of bridleways.

Benefits : Will improve access for both people & horses.

Task E : To re-erect the possibly ancient shaped stone lying approximately 10 metres down from the Jubilee Stone.

Aim : To increase the historical/archaeological interest of the reserve.

Note : The County Archaeologist Vince Russett was very interested in this stone. Whilst it could just be the remains of an old entranceway through a long lost wall it has the possibility of being an engraved boundary marker.

Task G : Ring bark 3 selected ash trees in pond coupe.

Aim : To remove the top leaves from these 3 trees whilst letting them re-grow from their base.

Benefits : This would enable an additional 2 hours of sunlight to reach the pond each day which would benefit the pond's water quality and assist the surrounding plant & animal life.

Task H : Ring bark single ash tree in an existing clearing located between the Warrener's Cottage & Horsering.

Aim : To remove the top leaves from this tree whilst letting it re-grow from its base.

Benefits : The removal of the upper leaves from this tree would increase light levels at ground level & hence benefit the regeneration of the shaded plant-rich clearing below.

Task I : Coppice small hawthorn & ash trees to a depth of up to 10 metres back from the boundary fence adjacent to the area coppiced during the winter of 2007/8.

Aim : To increase the number of spring wildflowers & to enable the more interesting trees such as cherry, silver birch & crab apple to set seed and multiply in the woodland.

Benefits : This will increase the range of trees on the reserve which at the moment is primarily dominated by hawthorn & ash. Wildflowers & insects would also benefit due to the expanded sheltered glade that would be created.

Task J : Coppice medium (up to about 15inches diameter) ash trees in King's Clearing to increase light levels to the under-story.



Aim : To restore the extremely poor ground flora & to allow the more interesting trees (crab apple, witch elm, silver birch) to thrive.

Benefits : This will increase the variety of trees on the reserve, allow the regeneration of the ground flora and make the whole clearing far more wildlife friendly.

Ian Chambers



The Future is in our Hands

Backwell Environment Trust, since its inception in 2005, has already made a huge contribution to protecting and restoring the beautiful countryside surrounding our village. Regrettably, more and more, our local wild places are coming under increasing pressure from development and if they are not protected they could soon be lost forever. BET already owns and manages Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve covering some 10 acres and hopefully soon we will increase the area under our protection to 25 acres when we acquire Badgers Wood. However it is becoming clear to us that if BET is to continue fighting for the peace and tranquillity of rural Backwell we shall need today's supporters to help us secure the future by remembering the Trust in their Wills.



BET is realistic enough to know that we cannot hope or expect to keep our countryside completely unchanged forever. But we can and must ensure that the best of it is protected so that we, in our turn, can pass it on to succeeding generations to treasure. I firmly believe that the long-term survival of the spectacular historic countryside around Backwell is far too important to be left to chance. All of us have already been fortunate enough to have inherited a wonderful legacy of natural beauty from those who came before us. We must ensure that this long tradition of care for wildlife and the countryside continues well into the future.

So if you can, please consider leaving a lasting legacy to BET. You can be assured that any gift you give, however large or small, will make a huge difference in protecting our local natural world for future generations to cherish.

Ian Chambers



Backwell Community Plan

In common with many other villages in North Somerset, Backwell is developing a Community Plan. This plan will give us a detailed picture of what we all think our village is like now, how we would like it to be in the future and what we need to do to get there. When complete it will be used to tell central and local government and other organisations what the people of Backwell actually want in their village so they can take our views into account when formulating future policies and planning services. At present the plan is in the consultation stage and we need to know what topics you would like to feature in the forthcoming village questionnaire.

So We Now Need Your Help!

The Community Plan Steering Group is therefore asking BET members and supporters for their views on environmental and other issues in Backwell and need to know the real issues that concern you. This could include for example, village character (eg shopping facilities, 'eye-sores', litter, dog fouling, flower beds), recycling, nature reserves/green spaces, footpaths/wheelchair-friendly paths, public transport, local food or any other village issue that is important to you.

We would be really grateful if you could let us know your views.

Please send your ideas to:

Ian Chambers : e-mail : chimpychambs@yahoo.co.uk

Mail : The Byre, 24 Backwell Hill Road, Backwell, BS48 3PL or telephone : 01275 463315.

Also, why not consider joining one of the Community Plan Action Groups and get even more involved in shaping the future of Backwell?

Ian Chambers



Sycamore

Another native tree with opposite leaves
by Dr Terry Smith

Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)

In the UK, it seems that Sycamore is not a truly native tree, originating in central and southern Europe. It was first recorded in England in 1282 when it was depicted on the tomb of St Frideswide, the patron saint of Oxford. However it has adapted itself very successfully to the English climate and it is often the dominant tree in some woodlands. Since the leaves open very early in the season, it is at an advantage over other trees that must tolerate its shade. It is also rabbit resistant, very fast growing and highly fecund. Some of its vigour may be related to the fact that it has twice the number of chromosomes of other *Acers* ($2n=26$), implying that it is probably an allotetraploid, a hybrid formed between two quite different *Acer* species a very long time ago. A chromosome doubling ($2n=52$) then enabled it to be fertile. The name Sycamore is derived from its confusion with *Ficus sycamorus*, the Mulberry Fig. The name *pseudoplatanus* means 'false plane', suggesting the similarity in the leaf shape, both having five distinct lobes (see photograph of Sycamore above). The dark reddish-pink petioles are quite distinctive. Strangely the Sycamore in the USA is the name given to the American Plane *Platanus occidentalis*.



The Tolpuddle Martyrs were said to have met under a Sycamore tree in Dorset when plotting their rebellion in 1829. A pressed leaf was taken to Australia when they were deported and this became the emblem for the Trades Union Movement. Sycamore wood is said to be essential for the construction of the backs of violins. The very white wood is used for making cooking spoons and rollers. The specific leaf fungus called Tar Spot (*Rhytisma acerinum*) is characterised by black spots on the leaves about 1 to 2 cm in diameter, which can be very severe in some years, though the trees appear to recover in the following season. Sooty bark disease caused by the fungus *Cryptostroma corticale* is more serious.



Both Sycamore (a maple) and Ash have opposite leaves. These trees may be found in Jubilee Stone Wood, together with the Field Maple, a close relative of Sycamore. This is usually a fairly small tree or bush, with leaves that are much smaller than those of the Sycamore, and in common with all maples the leaves are opposite. Many different *Acer* species are grown as ornamentals, some originating in the USA. Typical of these are the Snake Bark Maples like *Acer hersii* that may be found in Colliers Walk in Nailsea. Perhaps more familiar are the red maples (*Acer rubrum*), responsible for the brilliant fall coloration of the woodland in New England, and the Japanese cut-leaved maples (*Acer palmatum*).

Thanks to Terry for this article, the fourth in the series. If you would like copies of the first three on Oak, Yew and Ivy, please let us know.

Charcoal Burning in the Woodland

In August of this year BET, with the help of Trustee and Woodsman, Alex Arthur, held a traditional charcoal burning event in the field adjacent to Jubilee Stone Wood. Since 2006 we have been using coppicing (where the tree is cut off at ground level and allowed to re-grow) to open up the woodland canopy and allow the once heavily shaded ground flora to thrive once more. One advantage of this work has been a plentiful supply of sustainably managed hardwood, some of which we have used for the production of charcoal - naturally made in a traditional way.

Charcoal burning has had a long history and can be traced back at least a thousand years into Britain's past. In Medieval times it was as important to the industries of the day as coal was to be in the Industrial Revolution some 500 years later. Its main uses during the period were in the smelting of metals (primarily iron, copper and zinc) and in the production of gunpowder. The great advantage of charcoal over wood is that charcoal will burn at a much higher temperature, typically around 1,100 °C, which made it especially suitable for metal production.



For every 10 tonne of wood that went into the kiln, approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ tonnes of charcoal would be extracted at the end of the process. It therefore made good sense to locate the kilns directly in the woodlands that were being coppiced to minimise the movement of the heavier wood. The woodsman would always stack the wood very carefully to minimise the space between the logs and then finally cover the whole log pile dome with soil or turf and set it alight. The skill was to carefully restrict the airflow into the kiln; too much air and the wood turns to ash, too little and the kiln would go out. During the conversion process the charcoal maker had to be constantly on hand to adjust the air flows through the kiln - a task usually required every two hours or so day and night. Initially the smoke would be whitish in colour but would slowly turn pale blue when the process was nearing completion. The kiln would then be sealed and allowed to cool for a couple of days. Charcoal burners had to live in the woods for weeks at a time, often in isolated locations. They consequently usually had a slightly dodgy reputation with the local community and many a mother would warn her children to stay well away from them there strange men in the woods!

These days the largest proportion of the charcoal we use goes into fuelling our summer BBQ's but unfortunately 97% of it is imported, typically from tropical mangrove forests. (Luckily for us however, Backwell Post Office now sells Jubilee Stone Wood hardwood charcoal that burns much hotter and longer than the imported product). During our day we successfully



fired our (more modern) metal kiln and produced around 35 bags of top grade charcoal when the kiln was finally unloaded two days later. We all ended up a bit grubby but were happy in the knowledge that we were keeping alive an ancient country tradition in the historic woodlands above Backwell.

BET would like to express their sincere thanks to Roger Fortune and Gary Lake for generously allowing us to use their field for our traditional charcoal burn.

Ian Chambers



Community Owls Project

The Community Owls Project is now up and running! In July we had an introductory meeting at which Chris Sperring MBE, Conservation Officer for the Hawk and Owl Trust, gave an informative presentation to explain the aims of the project which is run in partnership with Bristol Zoo. This was followed by an 'Owl Prowl' in September for the group, again led by Chris, around the BET woodlands on both sides of Cheston Combe. We were fortunate to enjoy a fine, still evening and were able to pick up tips on survey techniques and identifying tawny owl calls. Since then, members have met to agree the area we wish to survey. We have been quite ambitious in deciding the size of our area and in the number of species, but we are hopeful that we will be able to collect records for tawny, little and barn owls. From these we will be able to decide how many of each type of nest box we need and the best locations for them. We will be constructing the flat pack nest boxes provided under the scheme by Linda and Keith Hall of Specialised Nest Boxes on the morning of 15th November, before the BET AGM in the afternoon. Nest boxes will be put in place in Dec/Jan and then we just have to wait to



see if they are put to use! Chris will come back in late spring to check for occupants and to ring any owlets.

If you are interested in being involved in the project, or would like any further information, please contact me. If you are reporting seeing or hearing owls it would be helpful if you could include details such as date, time, location, weather conditions etc.

Carrie Riches (01275 462908)
Community Owls Project Local Co-ordinator.



Activity Days - on the Second Thursday and the Fourth Saturday of every month starting at 10 am on both days and continuing for 2 hours or as long as your energy lasts.

The tasks will change as the year progresses and can vary according to your strength and interests. Please wear stout footwear, suitable clothes (long sleeve tops and long jeans or trousers are advisable) and, if possible, bring garden gloves. Tea and biscuits are always provided! Meet at the lower entrance to the wood off Church Town from 09:45 for a 10:00 start – or 'phone in advance to find out where we shall be working (01275 463315).

BET AGM 2008

Nomination Form for Officers and Trustees



All members are entitled to stand for election as officers and trustees of the Trust. If you would like to get involved at this level please complete the nomination form below and return it to the current chair as our constitution does not allow nominations to be made at the AGM. Your proposer must of course be a member.

If you would like to discuss the prospect of becoming a trustee and/or if you have no one to propose you, again please contact the chair or another trustee. The trustees meet monthly to discuss and decide the Trust's plans and activities. We are limited to a maximum of 12 trustees but non-trustees are welcome to attend and participate in our meetings without the right to vote on decisions.

Position: Chair, Secretary, Treasurer or Trustee	Name of candidate:	Name of proposer:	Signature of proposer:	Candidate's acceptance of Nomination: (Signature)

If you would like to say something about yourself and why you are standing for the committee, please do. This could be read out at the AGM if there is an election.

If you would like to get involved in other ways there are of course our twice monthly activity sessions in the woods. We could also use help on administration, for example booking meeting rooms, taking minutes, keeping membership records, dealing with correspondence, etc.

If you can help please contact me or any trustee.

Bill Charnock, BET Chairman
17 Church Town, Backwell, BS48 3JQ
Telephone : 01275 462083