

PLANT A TREE FOR LIFE AT SMITHILLS

Historically speaking, Raveden Wood is part of the Smithills Estate that borders Raveden Brook. It is a reasonably large, mature, broad leaved area of woodland, that covers approximately 29 acres. This is an ancient woodland site, that has a predominance of beech (55%) and oak (30%). The area has both the Sessile and English Oak species, with English being the most abundant. Sycamore makes up 10% and other species the remaining 5%.

Smithills is known to have had continuous woodland cover since at least 1600, hence its designation as an ancient woodland. Smithills Hall however, dates from the early 1300's and it is thought that the woodland was probably planted around then, possibly to provide timber for fuel etc. The trees actually in the area now, probably date from around 1820, when the importance of timber was declining. Raveden Wood itself is a very important site, not only as a source of pleasure and a haven for wildlife (The Bolton Natural History Unit has recorded 42 species of birds, 9 species of mammal, 2 species of fish, 2 amphibia and 25 species of butterflies and moths), but also one of the few remaining remnants of ancient woodland in this area (Greater Manchester has only 0.6% of it's land area given over to ancient woodland).

There is a problem at Smithills however, RHODODENDRONS. These plants, although popular with the General Public due to their evergreen nature and showy flowers are an invasive species. This species was first introduced from Southern Europe, being popular towards the end of the 19th Century often to provide cover for game. Here lies the problem. It's dense foliage renders the soil beneath, a sterile and lifeless environment, where a

deep leaf litter collects and then stagnates, unable to decompose, but also prevents regeneration of the surrounding flora. Rhododendrons can tolerate shady positions, and this has resulted in the rapid colonisation of large areas of the woodland, to the detriment of the native tree species and wildlife. The result is an area containing mainly over mature trees and few young trees to succeed them.

One of the principle aims of the site is to develop an uneven age structure, so that all age classes and developmental stages are represented, from seedling up to the mature tree. This is a long term plan and will take 60-70 years to complete. It is proposed to introduce more oak to a proportion of 50% and reduce beech, as this species provides too dense a canopy. It is also felt that other minor native species should be planted to increase species diversity and provide interest, especially as minor species on site are unlikely to regenerate naturally. Some of the possible species for inclusion in the programme include: **Wild Cherry, Bird Cherry, Small Leaved Lime, Crack Willow, White Willow, Alder, Rowan, Holly, Hazel and Wych Elm.**

Before the planting however, a programme of clearance must be undertaken. In the past the B.C.V. have worked hard to help clear the site of rhododendrons, and this has result in areas suitable for planting. The next task on our programme at Smithills involves a tree plant to help with the regeneration of the area. This will be mainly Sessile Oak, but I think there is also an opportunity here for us all to get involved on a more personal level.

Why am I involved? Just before

Christmas, my brother Michael lost his fight against cancer. Michael's death affected us all deeply, especially as he had been such a fit and energetic person up until a few months before he died. He was never happier than when he was walking the footpaths around North Bolton, or striding across the moors. Walking was not only a pastime; it was a way of life. Michael often started his walks by going via the woods around Smithills, one of his favourite places and an area that we, as a family, love. Because of this love, we thought it would be appropriate to do something more in keeping with Michael's lifestyle, rather than the usual forms of remembrance. On March 28th, the task for Smithills is the Oak planting to help regenerate the area. In addition to the trees being provided, I thought that it would be nice if my family contributed extra native species, to be planted as a celebration of Michael's life and personality. But I also thought that we could make this a day for celebrating life. If they wished, others could donate some trees as a personal celebration of their own or someone else's life, or maybe as a reminder of some special event. For example, what about an engagement tree Alan and Suzanne, or a birthday tree perhaps.

What does it cost? The trees start at approximately 30-50p each, depending on species and size, so are well within everyone's budget (although a holly is more expensive at around 3 pounds). Prices are reduced if you buy more than 25 (it's probably a good idea to plant a few so as to combat natural wastage and damage). Please let me know if you want some and I will arrange for the purchase of your trees from the Genesis Tree Nursery in Chorley, the suppliers of the stock already being provided for B.C.V.'s

Plant a Tree for Life at Smithills (Cont.)

oak plant. Their trees are all native species, and some are even grown from pure Lancashire stock. All the species recommended for inclusion are available.

To finish, I think it is appropriate to share with you, an extract from Michael's funeral:-

"The death of each of us is in the order of things. It follows life surely as night follows day. We can take the tree as it's symbol: The human

race is the trunk and the branches of the tree, and the individual men and women are the leaves which appear one season, flourish for a summer and then die. We too are like the leaves of the tree and one day we shall be torn off by a storm, or simply decay and fall and mingle with the earth at its roots. But, while we live we are

conscious of the tree's flowing sap and steadfast strength. Deep down in our very consciousness, is the

consciousness of a collective life, a life of which we are a part, and to which we make a minute but unique contribution. We die and fall, the tree remains, nourished to some small degree by our manifestation of life. Millions of leaves have preceded us and millions will follow us, but the tree itself grows and endures....."

Sue Caless