

Briefing Note on Stiddicombe Wood

The 10 acre wood (shown on 18th C. maps as a "brake") belongs to Evans Estates 1956 Ltd who also lease the fundus of the Estuary from the Duchy of Cornwall. It was planted ca.1900 with a mixture of species in which sweet chestnut predominates. The Scots pines which were a feature along the water's edge were lost in the storms of 1989/90 and the southern end of the wood was severely damaged at this time. The wood, which has no commercial value because of its inaccessibility, was never thinned and the increasingly dense canopy at the north end has led to a loss of bluebells and other wild flowers. The surrounding wall was not maintained and ingress of tenant's cattle has been one reason why the wood was not regenerating as a mixed plantation; another has been the establishment of sycamores and the ravages of the squirrel population.

Stiddicombe is the only wood in its Parish which hosts a public right of way, providing access for children interested in wild-life and variety for those walking the Avon Estuary Walk. It is also a focal point on the estuary for sailors, complementing the lime kiln at Stiddicombe Creek and the oak wood on the other side of the creek. It is also rich in bird song and affords a sheltered view of shelduck in the creek and, egrets and swans on the main waterway.

In 2002, the Trustees of the Estate generously decided to invest £5000 in the regeneration of the wood. The project is in the hands of Mr.George Seager Berry, their forestry consultant, and Mr. Terry Lane, a woodsman employed by the Estate. The Forestry Commission grant-aided the replanting of wind-blown and other nonproductive areas and members of the Aune Conservation Association raised £1500 to ensure that the best environmental practices can be afforded.

Phase 1 consisted of:

- a) An ecological survey by Dr.Peter Beale who is an authority on the environment of the Avon
- b) Thinning of the chestnuts at the north end of the wood and removal of sycamore saplings and dangerous trees. The chestnuts were cleaved to provide stakes, struts and corner posts to fence out the cattle
- c) Installation of kissing gates at the two entry points of the Avon way
- d) Improved signage (provided by SHDC Coast & Countryside service). At the same time the signs along the Avon Walk and the footbridge across the brook were repaired as part of the Coastal Path Jubilee
- e) The commissioning of two new permissive footpaths through the wood in addition to the ancient right of way which follows a track along the western edge of the wood.
- f) Trial planting of saplings

Phase 2 featured:

- g) Planting of 155 saplings of mixed species in 4 coupes in the wood to afford an even canopy. These include 6 Scots pines, three of which formed part of a planting ceremony.
- h) Placing of bird and bat boxes, which together with the "eco- piles" formed by brush wood from the felled trees will provide a habitat for wild life.

The Estate and ACA are aware that the wood will need a measure of after-care. Squirrels are likely to continue to be a problem and the ground vegetation, which has become more vigorous because of the increased light following the thinning, will need to be managed to allow the saplings to establish themselves. We are all determined that the wood will continue to afford a habitat for a rich variety of wildlife and pleasure to walkers along Avon Estuary Walk.

In July 2009, as an additional attraction to the wood, a group of volunteers from the ACA and the Evans Estate managed to manoeuvre a memorial bench to the late John Crawford (erstwhile ACA Chairman) into position at the seaward end of Stiddicombe Wood, looking out over the river towards Villa Crusoe. This was no mean task owing to the lack of conventional vehicular access! The bench was made by Steve Baddeley from timber taken from Stiddicombe, itself, and funded by generous donations from ACA members. It is massive but surprisingly comfortable. The ACA hopes that the

bench will offer walkers a chance to draw breath and enjoy the quiet beauty of this fantastic site. John had always envisaged that one or more benches would form part of the Stiddicombe Wood project.

The collage below gives some impression, anti-clockwise from top left, of 1) clearing the ground 2) hefting the bench into position 3) the bench in all its glory 4) the magnificent view of the river from the bench.

