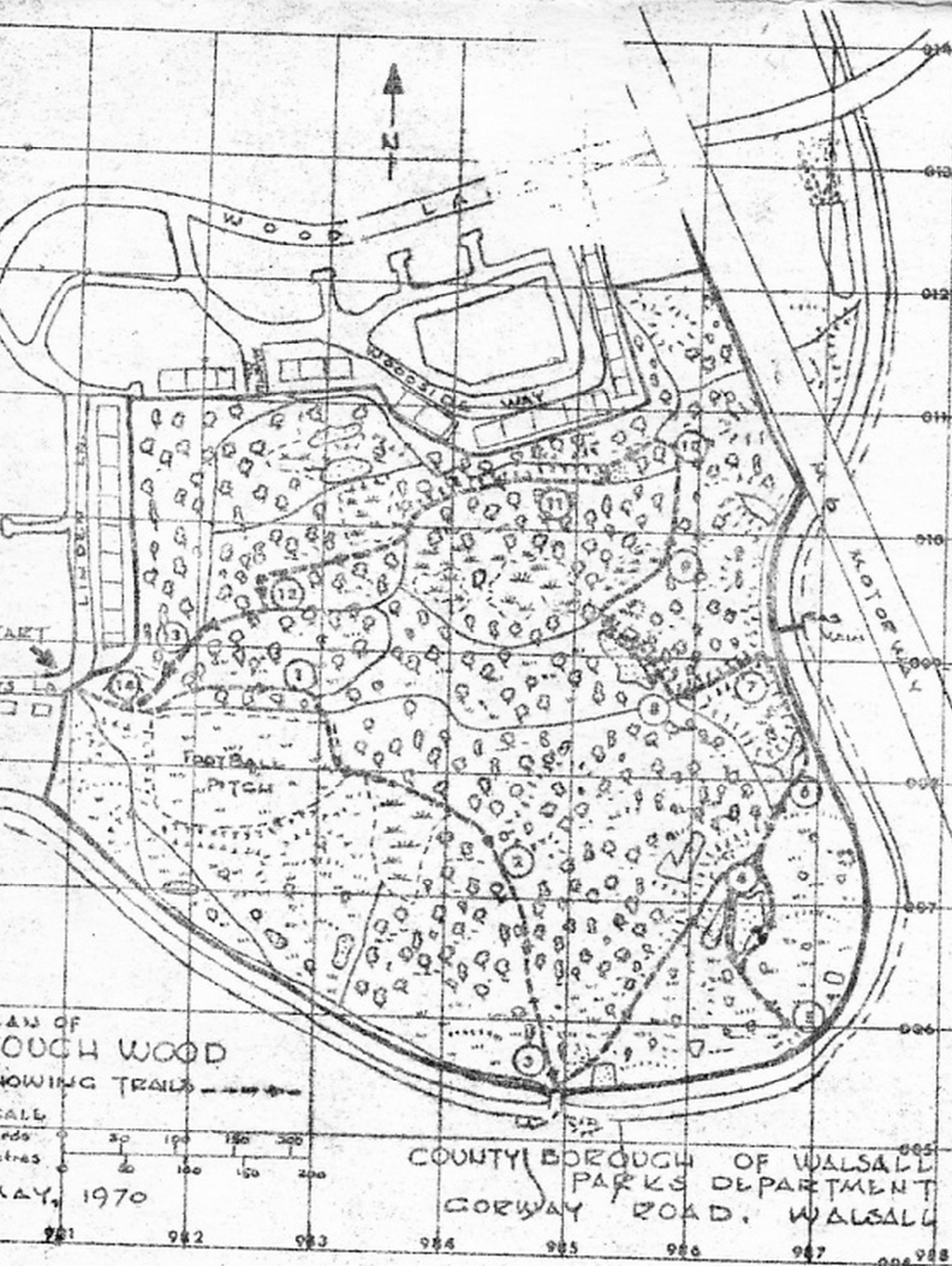


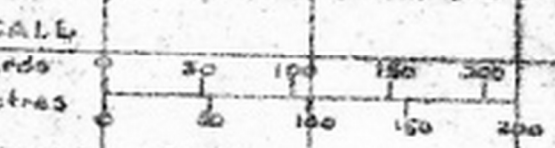
ROUGH WOOD

Nature Trail





MAP OF BROUGH WOOD
SHOWING TRAILS



MAY, 1970

COUNTY BOROUGH OF WALSALL
PARKS DEPARTMENT
CORWAY ROAD, WALSALL

981 982 983 984 985 986 987 988

ROUGH WOOD NATURE TRAIL
1970

This Nature Trail has been devised by the Walsall Civic Society in close co-operation with the County Borough Parks Department, and the West Midlands College of Education, as a Conservation Year contribution.

It is hoped that it will give pleasure to Nature lovers, assist in developing powers of observation, and encourage an interest in our environment generally.

Historical

The whole area has at some time been seriously disturbed by man's industrial developments, but little activity of this kind has taken place over the last 100 years and Nature is gradually healing the scars and restoring a new state of natural conditions.

The Canal was cut in 1793 - before the days of railways - and it must at one time have been the main route in the district for industrial traffic in Coal, Lime, Iron and Clay.

Geological

The South Staffordshire Coal measures in this area are made up of alternating layers of Coal, Ironstone and Clay.

Coal has been obtained both by surface workings and by mining from numerous shallow shafts, and there is evidence of subsidence in many places.

Coal mining from shafts gradually came to an end towards the close of the 19th century, but there was an outburst of coal getting by delving during the 1926 strike and the very many small shallow pits which are dotted around between the Oak trees in the northern area were dug at this time.

Many of the old surface workings are now filled with water and provide a wealth of interesting plant and insect life.

General

Rough Wood, Short Heath, is situated just over 2 miles north of Willenhall in the main catchment area of the River Tame, and it has an area of about 70 acres. It now belongs to the recently enlarged County Borough of Walsall.

It is bounded on the South and East by the Wyrley and Essington Canal, and on the West by Short Heath.

The northern half of the area is heavily wooded, mainly with good Oaks and Birches, and it is bounded by the newly built Woodside Housing Estate.

The southern half also has some woodland, but it is mainly open country or scrubland with some dense Hawthorn thickets.

As a result of subsidence, much of the central area is covered by a series of shallow pools, most of which dry up in the summertime. Here can be found many plants that are characteristic of bogs and marshes.

ROUGH WOOD - NATURE TRAIL NARRATIVE

The Trail starts from the end of Hunt's Lane, Short Heath, along a track going eastwards, but as soon as it gets to the football field the Trail turns North into the wood on the left, and after about 20 yards, turns right again along a footpath going parallel to the edge of the wood.

This wood is typical of much of the woodland in the British Isles and most of the trees are Oaks and Birches but Hawthorn and Holly are quite frequent and Alder and Crab Apple trees can be found.

A patch of Ivy is present at the entrance to the wood and Honeysuckle can be seen twining itself up some of the trees. Couch grass grows in the well lit areas, but most of the ground is covered with Meadow grasses.

Bluebells are common; Primroses and Wood Sage have to be looked for. Male ferns grow and should be distinguished from the more common Bracken.

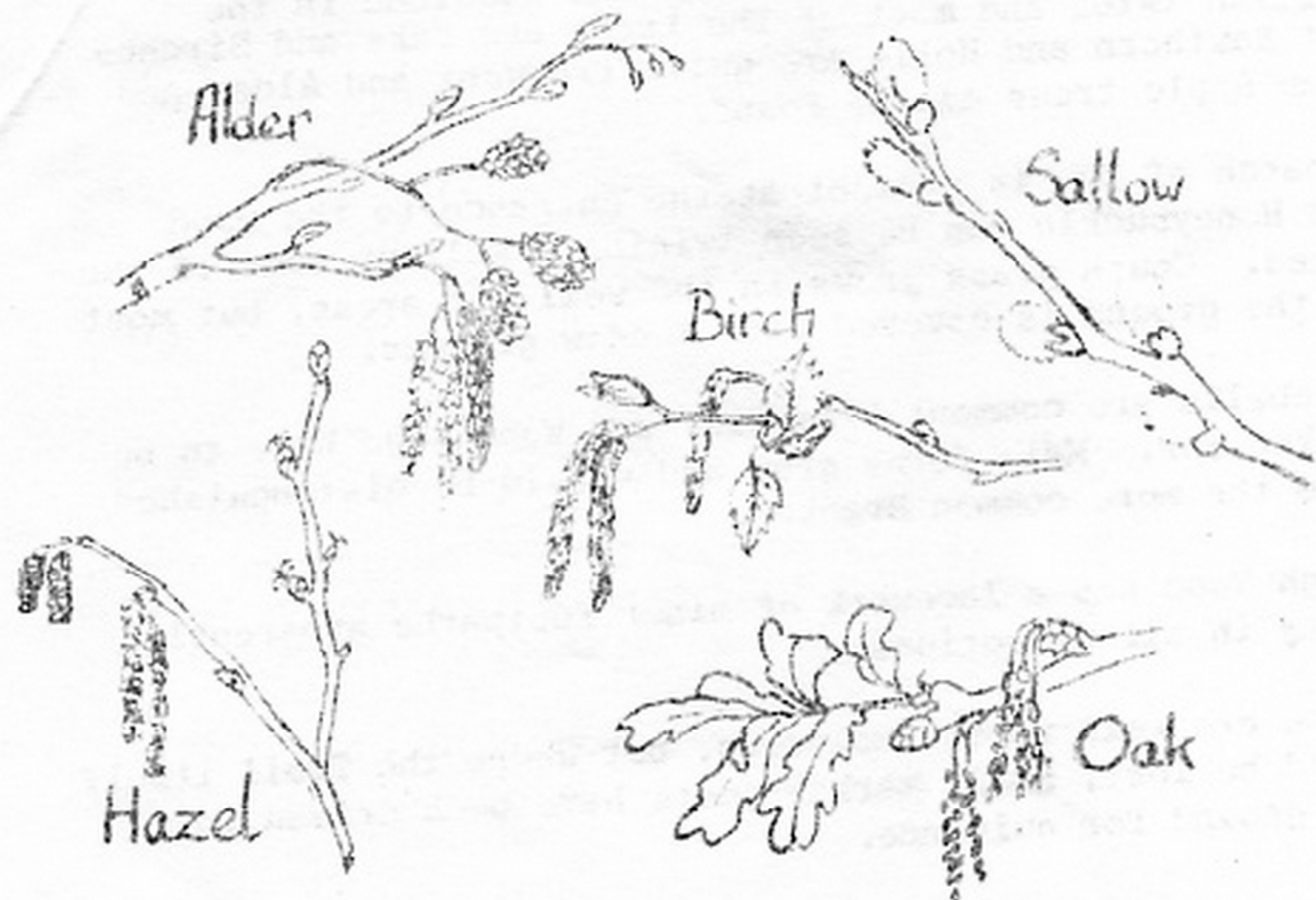
Rough Wood has a lacework of minor footpaths apparently going in all directions.

These are well worth exploring, but where the Trail itself could be lost, small marker posts have been driven into the ground for guidance.

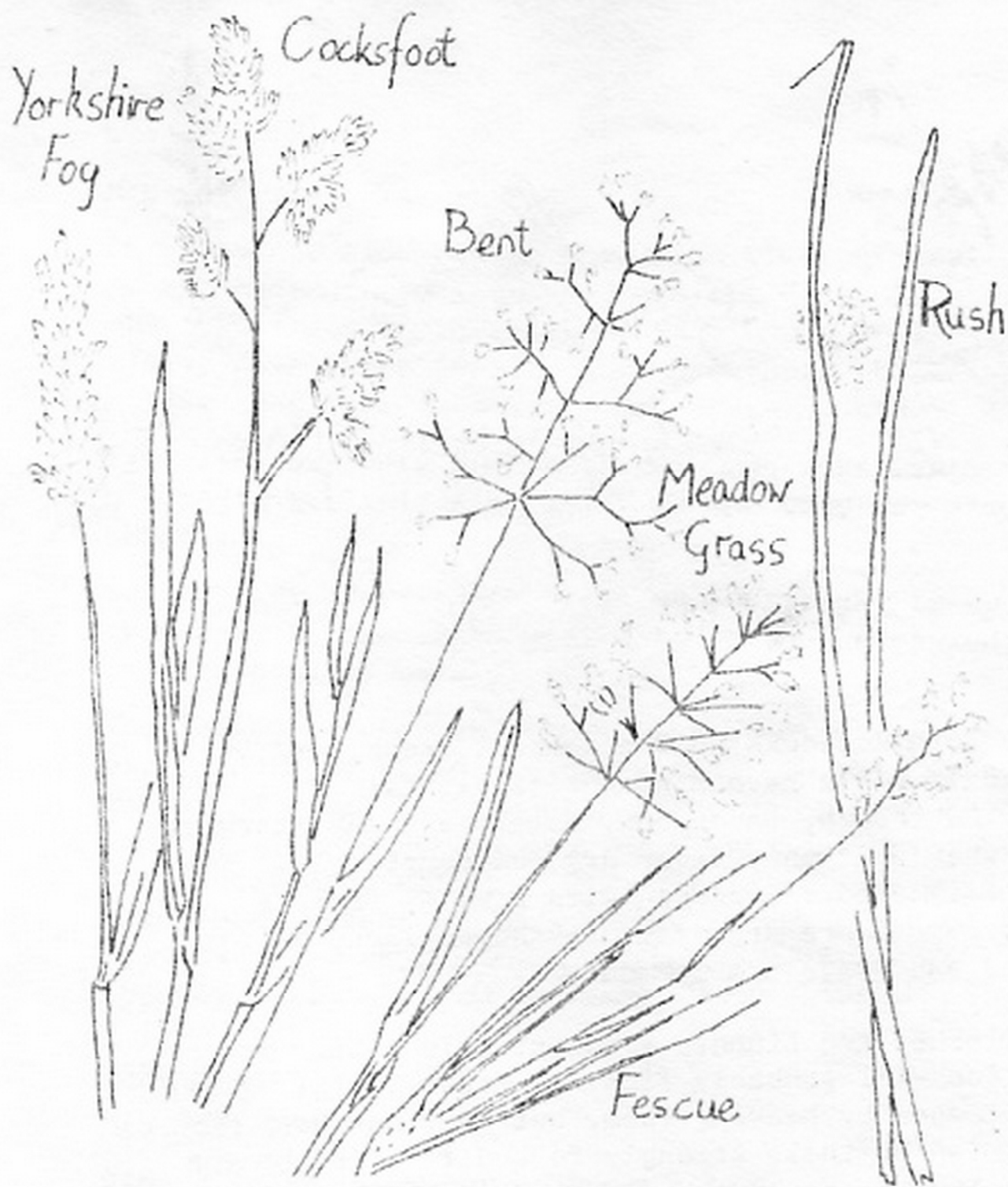
Stop 1.

Map Reference
98270086.

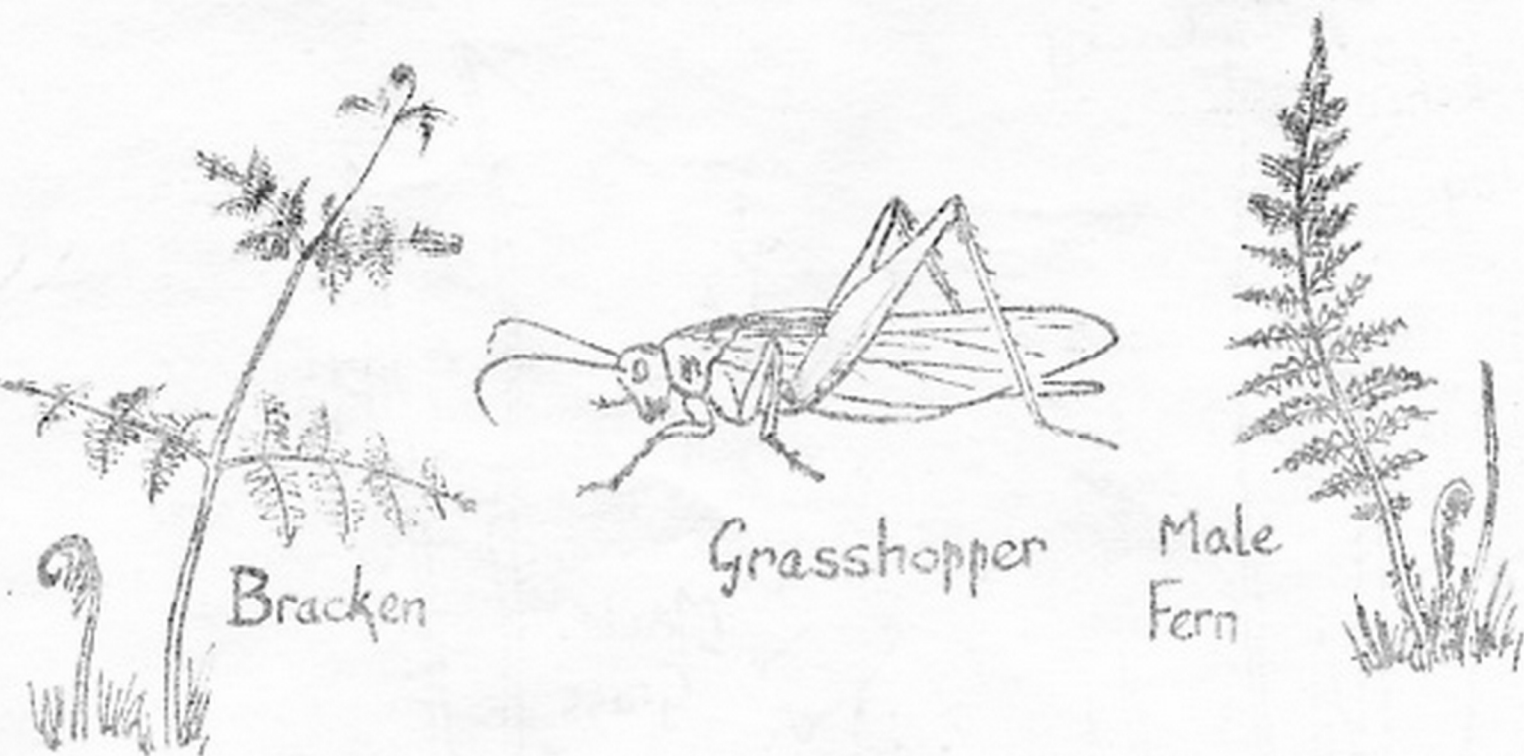
The marker is on an oak tree which is probably around 150 years old. Nearby can be seen a large Silver Birch tree and a solitary Alder which can be identified by the small cone shaped catkins that can be found at all seasons of the year. There are also some small Elderberry bushes.



The trail now turns south-east and after passing the goal posts goes along a winding path over some open and rather poor marshy country. The commonest tree is now Hawthorn and the few oaks which do grow tend to be stunted.



The drier areas have been colonised by Gorse, Broom, Dog Roses and Brambles, and small plants of Sheep Sorrel are abundant. Their leaves have a sharp taste and they are sometimes used in salads. The grasses are Cocksfoot, Fescue and Yorkshire fog. Polytrichum, the largest British moss, forms occasional clumps.



Sedges form tussocks in the dampest areas, and the many small pools have a number of plants: Bitter Buttercup, Ladysmock, Watercress and Starwort, which show that they never dry out completely. The green filamentous pondweed with a slimy feel is Spirogyra. There are many Grasshoppers and Spiders in here and Frogs are common.

Greenfinches and Linnets frequent this area. Your attention will probably first be drawn to the Greenfinches by hearing them, but they can be identified by their strongly forked tail and by the gold coloured bar on the wings of the adult males.

Magpies and Jays both nest in the adjacent thickets and they can often be heard or seen, but they are always wary and rarely let you get very close to them.

Shortly after entering a more heavily wooded area, the Trail comes to Stop 2, where the marker is on a Sweet Chestnut tree.

Stop 2.

Map Ref: 98450071

On the other side of the path is a clump of smaller Sweet Chestnut trees and besides the Oaks, Birches and Hawthorn trees there are some poor Rowan or Mountain Ash trees, some exceptionally tall Elderberry bushes which almost look like trees, and one ordinary Ash.

Ash trees are very common in the hedgerows in the Midlands, but this Ash is one of the very few growing in Rough Wood.

The thicket of Hawthorn trees on your right is so dense that very little light gets through to the ground, which is consequently bare of plants.

The Trail now goes into more open country again, with a ditch and damp ground on the right. In this area are a number of small Black Poplar trees which are easy to identify in the Spring when they produce a big somewhat purple coloured catkin. There are also some Willow trees which bear bright yellow catkins in the Spring. Notice also Hazel, Gorse, Broom, Stinging Nettles and lots of Rosebay Willow Herb (Fireweed).

Stop 3.

Map Ref: 98480054

Stop 3 is on the Bentley Wharf Bridge over the Wyrley and Essington Canal. This is a high point and one can get good all round views. Note the date - 1891 on the girder of the bridge and that the bridge has once been roughly twice as wide - this is not the original bridge.

Notice the vertical grooves in the walls of the canal banks under the bridge for stop locks and the horizontal grooves in the bridge abutments worn in by tow ropes.

The name implies that there was once a wharf hereabouts from which the coal dug up in the area could be loaded into canal boats and carried away. The nearby pond now overgrown with Reed Mace was once this Bentley Wharf into which the narrow boats turned to get them out of the traffic in the canal. The pond is no longer connected with the canal.

Across the bridge is a deep Blue Clay Pit which is now derelict and is in the process of being filled in. This blue clay was used for making best quality tiles and bricks.

Similar deposits of blue clay are believed to exist under this part of Rough Wood and 25 years ago Willenhall Council only just acted in time to prevent the felling of the trees to allow these clay deposits to be developed.

If this had happened, Rough Wood would probably now be derelict land just like that across the canal instead of being the site for a pleasant Nature Trail.

The canal at this point is slightly North of the line of the geological feature known as the Bentley Faults.

Leaving Stop 3, the Trail turns right at the bottom of the bridge abutment and goes past the end of the old Wharf Pool and through some scrubland.



where Gorse, Broom and masses of Rosebay Willow Herb are growing with here and there the tall stalks of Hogweed. There are also some much larger Black Poplar trees and more Willows.

Foxes have an earth in this area.

Stop 4.

Map Ref:
98620072

At this point in the Trail there are two interesting ponds. The one on the right is full of Reed Mace and it is surrounded by dense scrub, but the one on the left is much more open and is full of interesting kinds of life.

This pond is one of the largest permanent pools in Rough Wood. At the South end a zone of water plants is well developed. Amongst the Reed Mace and Rushes are Watermint with a "peppermint" smell and Water Parsnip.

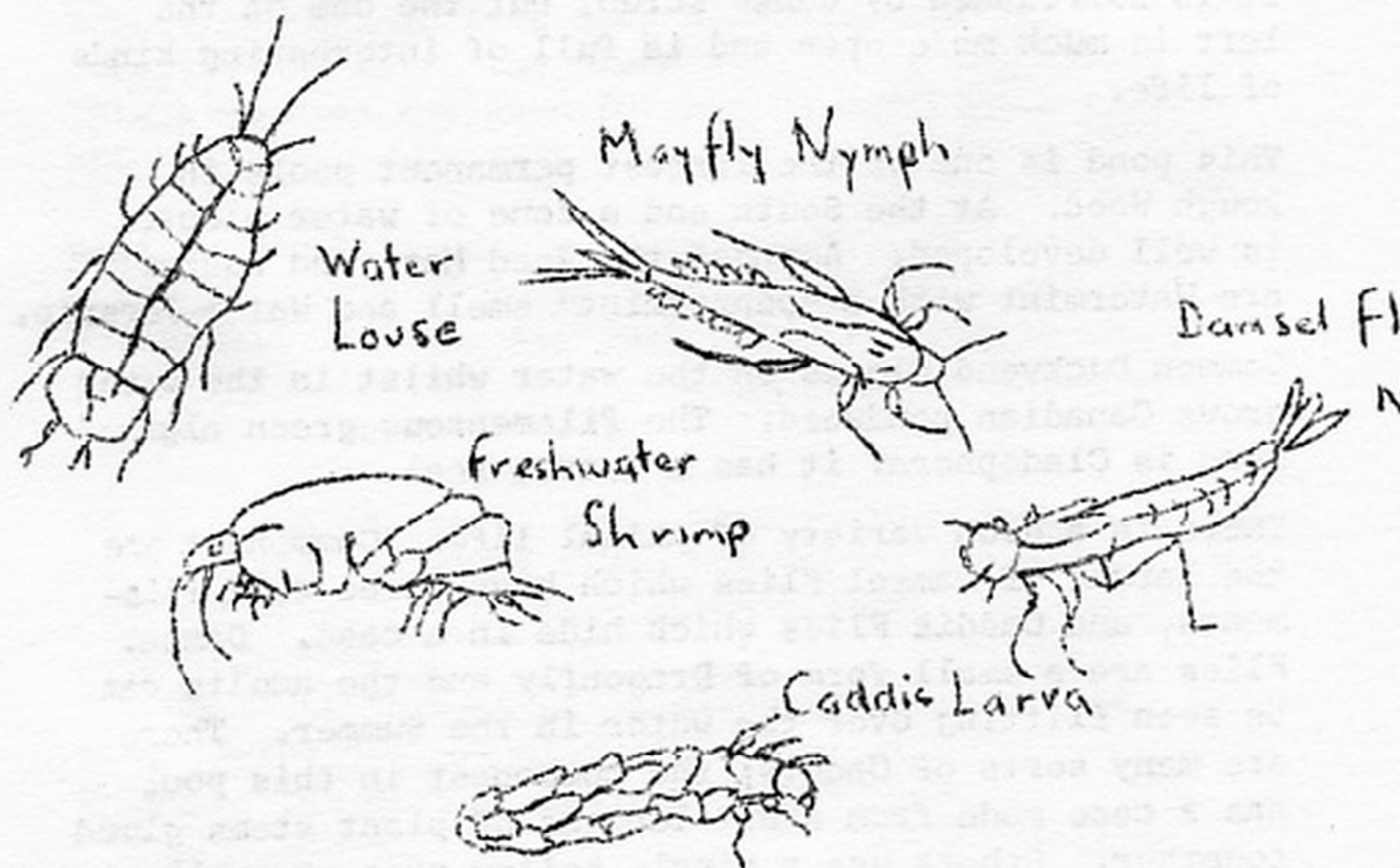
Common Duckweed floats on the water whilst in the water grows Canadian pondweed. The filamentous green alga here is Cladophora: it has a coarse feel.

There is a good variety of animal life. Commonest are the larvae of Damsel Flies which have three tail filaments, and Caddis Flies which hide in a case. Damselflies are a small form of Dragonfly and the adults can be seen flitting over the water in the Summer. There are many sorts of Caddis; the commonest in this pool has a case made from short lengths of plant stems glued together. Others use a single hollow stem or small stones or grains of sand. Several sorts of water beetles and Asellus, the Water Louse, are common. Water Spiders and Water Scorpions are present.

Two types of mollusc have been found here: the Orbshell Cockle which has two shells and the Ram's Horn Snail with a single shell. Sticklebacks are common. The larger fish are Roach and Rudd which have been introduced. Frogs and Toads both spawn here.

This pond is worth a visit all on its own if you are equipped with a suitable net. Specimens caught should be released again after identification.

Moorhens generally nest on the Reed Mace pond.



The Trail goes between the two ponds and then climbs up to Stop 5 from which good views can be obtained on a clear day. (See PANORAMA on pages 12 and 13).

Stop 5.

Map Ref: 98700060

This little knoll is not a natural hillock, but is all that now remains of the abutment of a bridge which used to cross the canal at this point.

Why do you suppose that the canal makes this strange half circle round Rough Wood instead of going straight across it? Its course reminds one of the contour lines one sees on maps. This is the clue, it is following a contour line, which is a line joining points of equal height above sea level. Canals cannot go up or down hills like roads, but have to follow contour lines or have locks provided to lift boats up or lower them down from one stretch of canal at one level to another stretch at another level. Notice that there has been another stop lock at this point. These stop locks make it possible to drain sections of the canal when repairs have to be made.

From this viewpoint, the Trail goes back along the path from Stop 4 nearly to the ponds, and then bears right to go round the Eastern side of the pond nearest the M.6. and it soon rejoins the pathway from Stop 3.

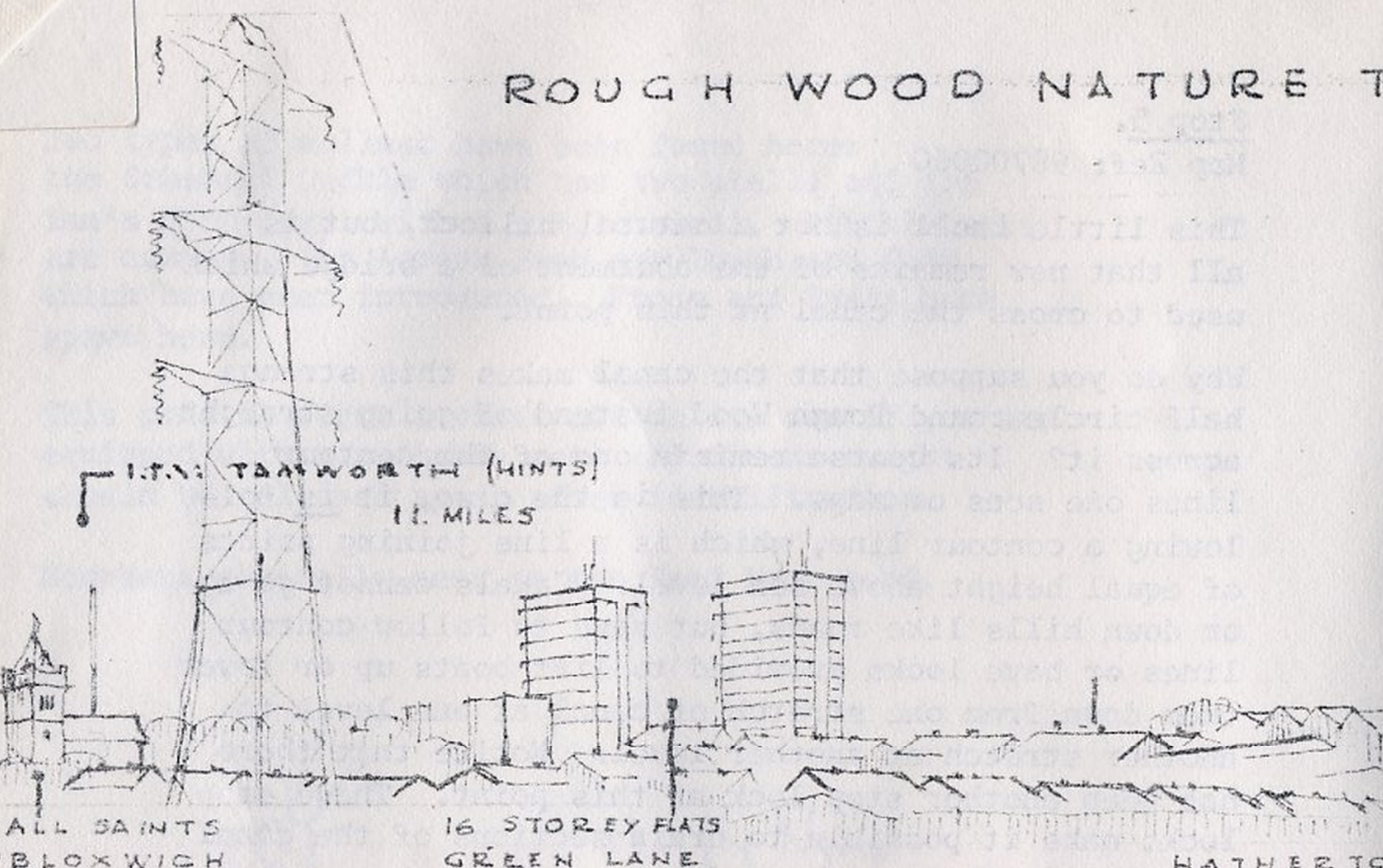
Stop 6

Map Ref: 98670078

Although smaller, the pond here is even richer in pond life than the pond at Stop 4 and it has different things living or growing in it.

In addition to the plants growing in the earlier ponds, Watercress, Curly Pondweed, Water Crowfoot and Ivy-leaved Duckweed can be found.

ROUGH WOOD NATURE T

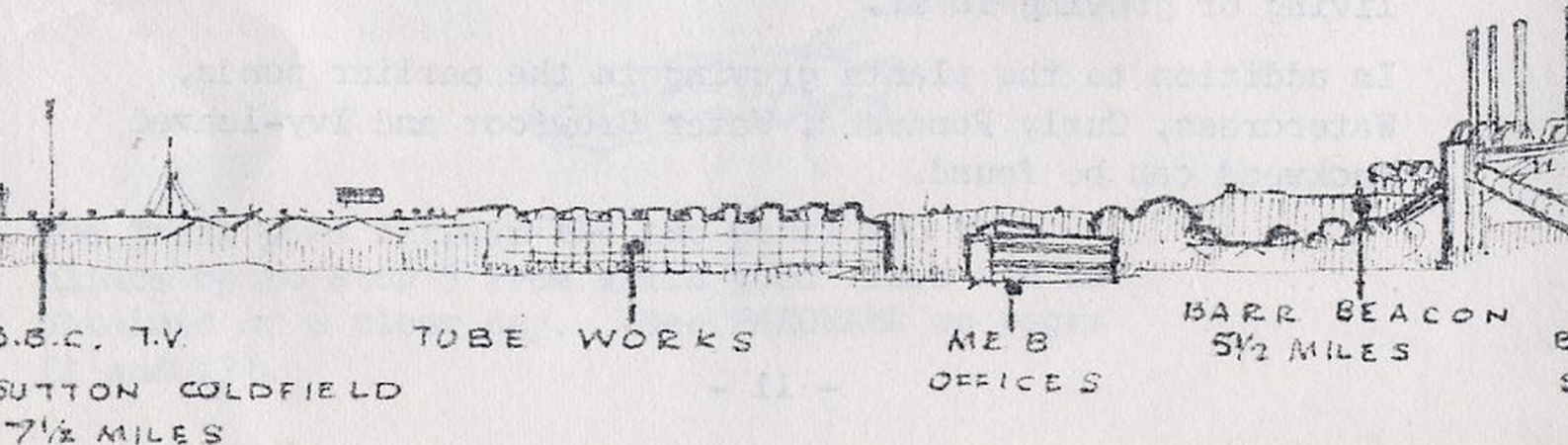


ALL SAINTS
BLOXWICH

16 STOREY FLATS
GREEN LANE

HATHER TO

NORTH EAST



S.B.C. T.V.

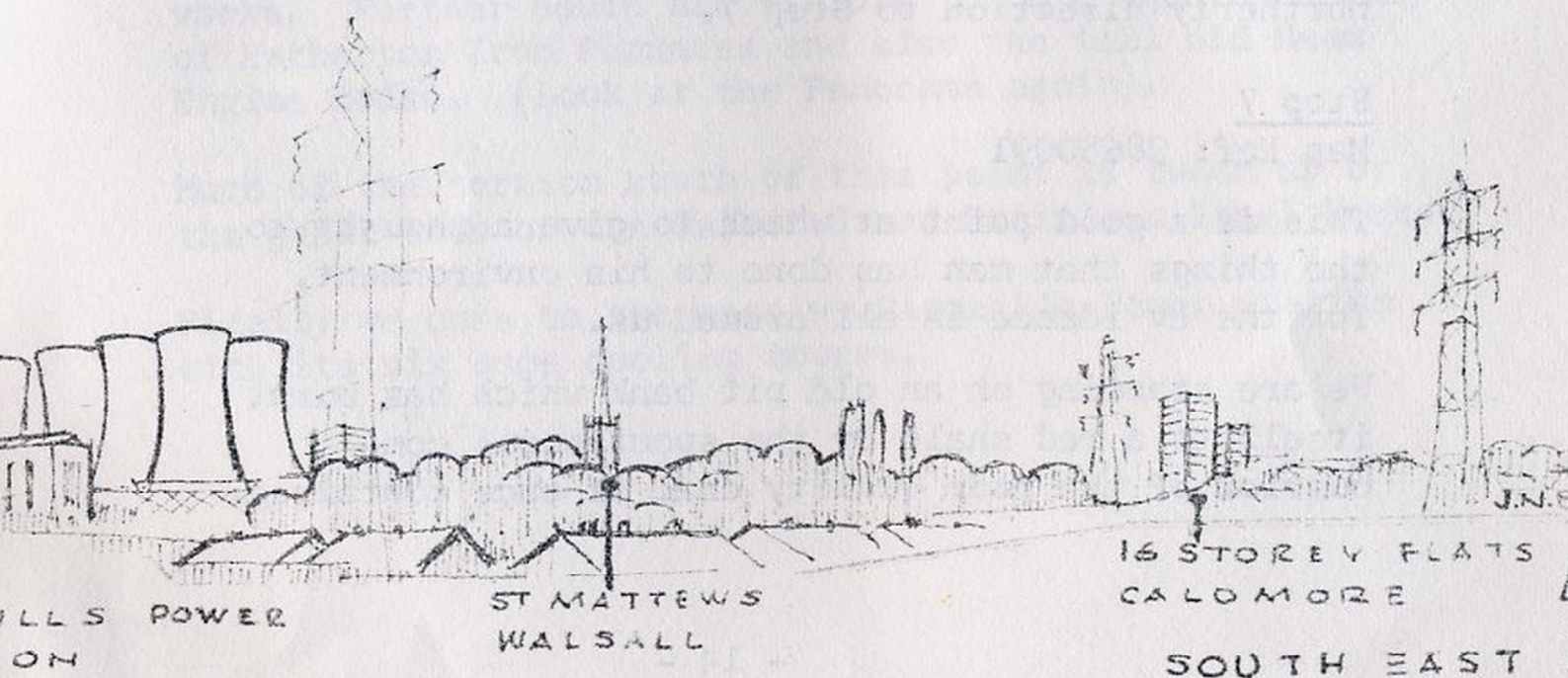
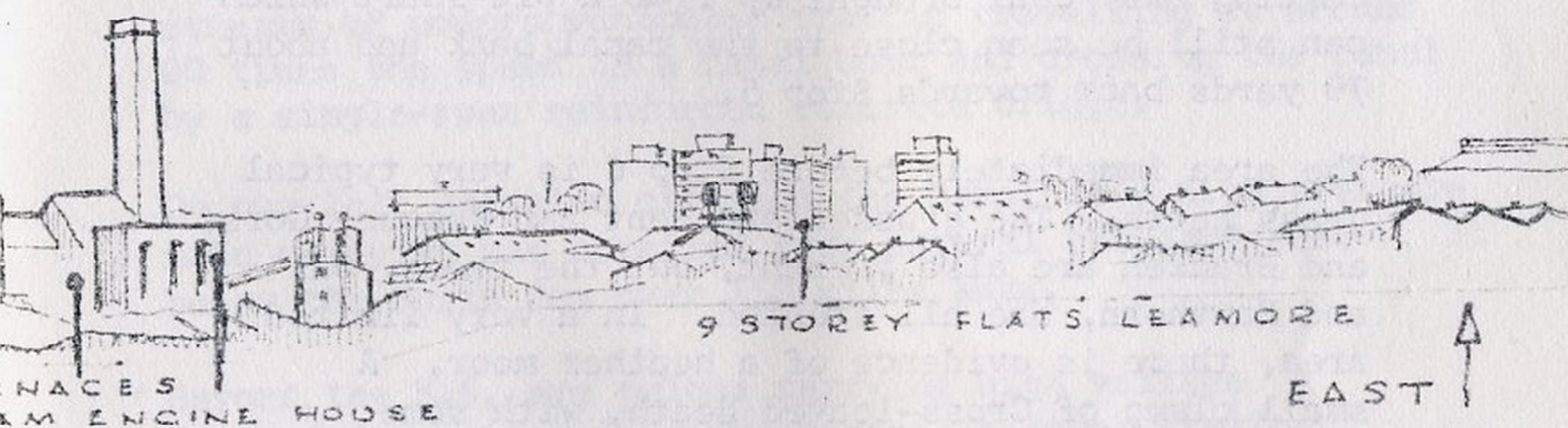
SUTTON COLDFIELD
7 1/2 MILES

TUBE WORKS

ME B
OFFICES

BARR BEACON
5 1/2 MILES

L PANORAMIC VIEW NORTH EAST TO
SOUTH EAST FROM STOP FIVE.



The commonest Caddis in this pool makes its case from pieces of leaf chewed from plants. In addition to the insects found in the other pool, Silver Water Beetles, Pond Skaters, Whirligig Beetles, Water Boatmen and five varieties of mollusc can be found here.

Behind you as you face the pond and higher up is another nearly dried up pond. Years ago this was another wharf connected to the canal and used for carting away coal brought up from a pit shaft which can still be seen close to the canal bank and about 70 yards back towards Stop 5.

The area immediately before Stop 6 is very typical grass heath. The grasses are Bent and Fescue; Gorse and Bracken are also present, but the trees, Oak and Hawthorn, are all stunted. In a very limited area, there is evidence of a heather moor. A small clump of Cross-leaved Heath, with some Wood Sage, Hardheads and Sorrel is a relic of a once extensive heathland, covering much of the Midlands before the Industrial Revolution.

From here the Trail goes along the canal bank in a northerly direction to Stop 7.

Stop 7

Map Ref: 98650091

This is a good point at which to give a thought to the things that man has done to his environment, for the evidence is all around us.

We are standing on an old pit bank which has burnt itself to a red shale by the spontaneous combustion of the poor quality coal it once contained.

In front of us is the old Canal down which very few canal boats now go. It is interesting to reflect that John Wilkinson the famous Iron Master of Bradley will have had the limestone which he got from the Hay Head and Three Crowns quarries east of Walsall brought to him via the Daw End Canal up to Brownhills, and back along the Wyrley and Essington Canal past Rough Wood on its way South to Bradley.

Just beyond the canal is the new M.6. Motorway with its streams of modern vehicular traffic travelling at around 20 times the speed of a canal boat and crossing the canal by a single-span reinforced concrete bridge.

On our left and also crossing the canal is a high pressure main carrying gas obtained from several thousand feet below the North Sea over 150 miles away.

Beyond the M.6. are pylons carrying high voltage electricity cables from the Birchills Power Station.

In the lower ground beyond the Motorway and on either side of Bloxwich Church we can see the five old square chimneys of the Imperial Smelting Company's Zinc spelter works. Further South are visible the big square chimney of Hatherton Iron Furnaces and also the tall old Beam Engine House. (Look at the Panorama again).

Much of the horizon south of this point is taken up by the gable ends of the Talbot Stead Stainless Steel Works.

Finally we come to the massive Birchills Power Station with its six huge cooling towers.

From Stop 7 we start on our return journey and turn Westwards up a gulley cut through the old pit bank.

This spoil heap consists mostly of batt clay. Note that on our left it has been completely burnt out and is red in colour, but that on our right there must have been less carbonaceous material present and parts of it have not been burnt and it still looks black. Iron stones can be found on these spoil heaps. These heavy stones are mainly Iron Carbonates containing 40-50% of Iron and around 30% of available Carbon dioxide.

Stop 8

Map Ref:

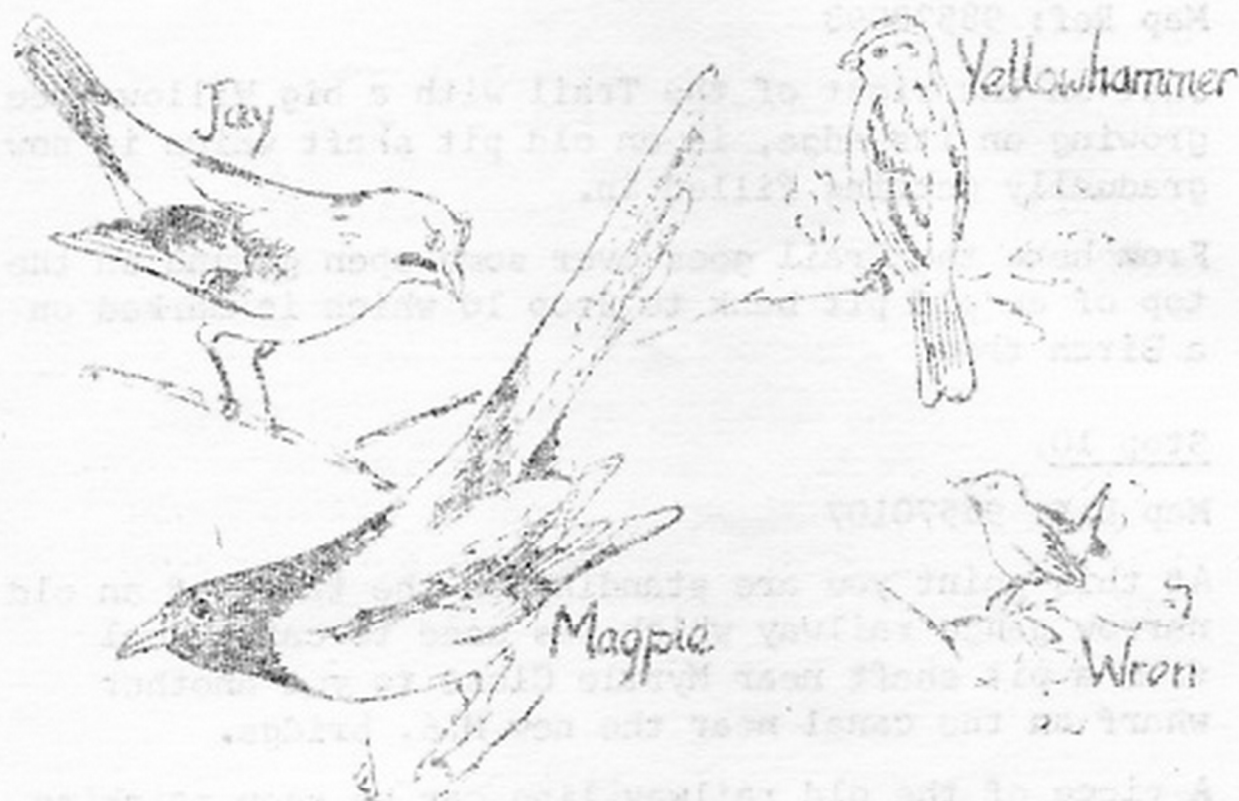
98570086

This stop is at the meeting point of five pathways. There is nothing of especial interest but it is a pleasant spot at which you are likely to see or hear all sorts of birds. There are Pheasants in the scrubland in front of you and Moorhens on the pond. Willow Wrens and Chiffchaffs can be heard in the Summer, and Greenfinches, Linnets and Yellowhammers all through the year.

Crows, Magpies and Gulls can often be seen flying over.

The Trail now goes along the North East side of a shallow pond which has resulted from subsidence produced by mining away the coal from underneath it.

If time is running out, the path leading straight ahead in a westerly direction will take you back to the starting point.



At the end of this pond, the Trail comes to a good path running at right angles to it. Just on the left a small water course draining the large central wet area of the wood has cut a groove through the red shale forming the path. This is almost the only flowing water in Rough Wood and though it is so small, Flatworms and Water Lice have been found there. The marshy area in front supports a dense growth of Sphagnum mosses and Polytrichum moss grows in the drier areas.

Duck and the occasional Snipe visit this area.

The Trail now turns right, and when the path forks, keeps to the right again up a slope.

Stop 9.

Map Ref: 98570098

Just on the right of the Trail with a big Willow tree growing on its edge, is an old pit shaft which is now gradually getting filled in.

From here the Trail goes over some open ground on the top of an old pit bank to Stop 10 which is marked on a Birch tree.

Stop 10.

Map Ref: 98570107

At this point you are standing on the track of an old narrow gauge railway which was used to carry coal from a pit shaft near Myrtle Close to yet another wharf on the canal near the new M.6. bridge.

A piece of the old railway line can be seen sticking up through the cinder path at this point.

We now again turn our backs to the M.6. and go westwards back on our return journey.

Note the very large Elderberry bush on the left where the Trail takes a left bend, and the backs of the houses in Woodside Way showing through the trees on the right.

About 30 yards past the Elderberry bush, the Trail turns left down a grassy slope, and in 20 yards comes to a cross path.

Straight in front, but off the Trail, is a clump of about ten Alder trees. Some of these are very old, but some are young trees growing up to take their place.

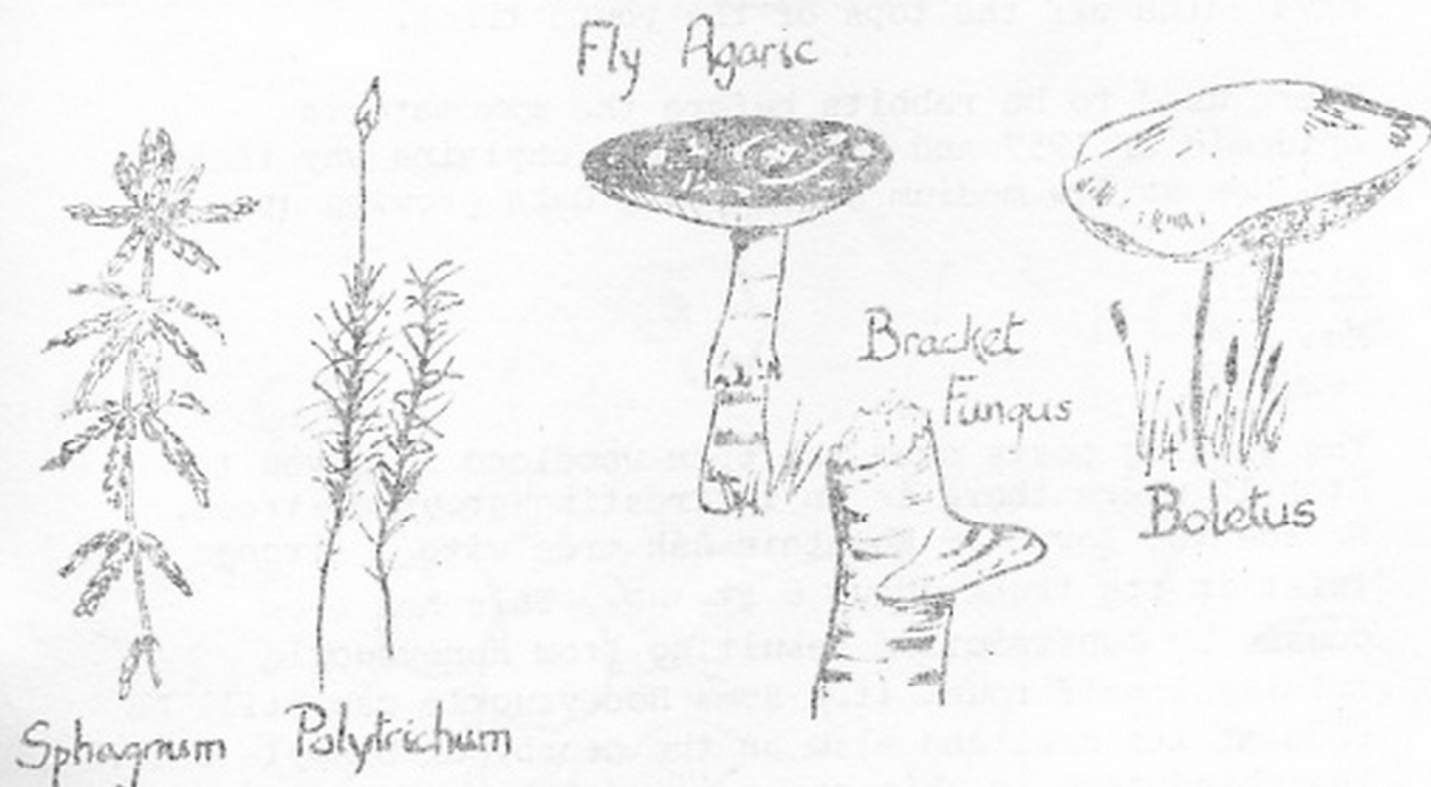
The Trail turns sharp right and proceeds along a track at the bottom of the pit bank.

Stop 11

Map Ref: 98480102

The marker is on an Oak and nearby is a good Crab Apple tree. The ground to the left of the Trail is very marshy with many dying Birch trees and much other decaying vegetation. The Birch Bracket fungus can be found at all times of the year, and in the autumn several kinds of Boletus, which have pores instead of gills, are common, as also is the spectacular but poisonous red-capped Fly Agaric.

Children should be warned that although most fungi are harmless, some are highly poisonous, and no fungus should ever be eaten unless it has been positively identified as an edible one by a real expert. There is NO simple way of sorting out poisonous fungi from harmless ones.



The Trail continues along the bottom of the pit bank until it meets a path coming down from the bank and it then turns left onto this path and crosses some marshy ground.

Just before it reaches another drooping Crab Apple tree on the left, it turns sharp right over about 110 yards of pleasant open woodland.

Notice the masses of young Oak seedlings growing all round the trees. Quite possibly these young Oaks are the descendants of the Oaks which grew in the old Cank (Cannock) Forest which used to cover this part of the Midlands in the Middle Ages.

It is unusual to see so many seedlings growing round trees and from this it can be deduced that Rough Wood cannot now have a lot of small mammals like squirrels or rabbits, or the acorns would have been eaten before they could grow. It can also be concluded that none of the larger mammals like cattle or sheep can have been allowed to graze in Rough Wood, for they would have eaten off the tops of the young trees.

There used to be rabbits before the myxomatosis epidemic of 1957 and 1958 and that explains why there are now so few medium sized young Oaks growing up.

Stop 12

Map Ref:
98260097

The guiding posts over the open woodland lead you to Stop 12 where there is an interesting group of trees. Notice the Rowan or Mountain Ash tree with a strange twist in its trunk about 6 ft. up. This has been caused by constriction resulting from Honeysuckle twining itself round it. Some Honeysuckle can still be seen at its base and also on the nearby Crab Apple tree. The third tree in this group is an Ash, and not far away is another Crab Apple tree and several more Rowans.

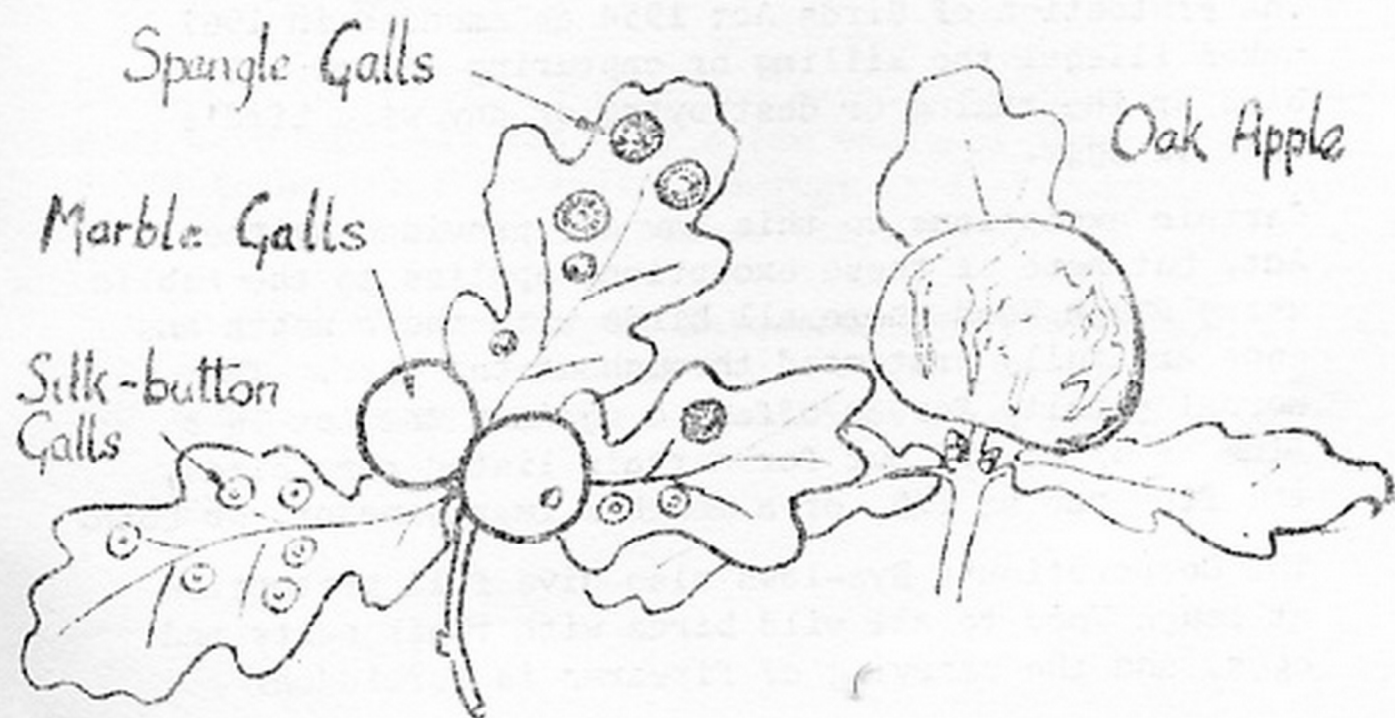
Just past Stop 12 there is a path at right angles and the trail turns left along this for about 45 yards until it meets another better path at right angles to it, and here the Trail turns right.

Notice the witches broom in the Birch tree at this point. This can be caused by a fungus.

After Midsummer, on the underside of almost every leaf on the Oak trees will be found the small galls made by Gall Flies. Gall Flies are a kind of wasp.

Another insect causes a large swelling on the twigs of Oaks - this is the Marble Gall and these galls were once used for making ink.

The Oak Apple is a similar but larger gall and some trees in this area are very badly infected.



This path is now leading back to the houses near where the Trail started and in about 120 yards it comes to Stop 13.

Stop 13.

Map Ref: 98200092

This is a convenient place to see if anything has been learnt about the various kinds of trees which grow in Rough Wood for close to this spot can be seen Oak, Birch, Rowan, Alder, Hawthorn, Holly, Hazel, the Wayfaring Tree, Elderberry, Wild Rose, Honeysuckle and Alder Buckthorn.

Stop 14.

Map Ref: 98140085

You are now nearly back to the starting point, but Stop 14 has been provided as a collecting point for anyone who has got lost to go to.

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The Protection of Birds Act 1954 as amended in 1967 makes illegal the killing or capturing of any wild bird or the taking or destroying of any wild bird's nest or eggs.

Certain exceptions to this Law are provided by the Act, but none of these exceptions applies to the Public using Rough Wood where all birds with their nests and eggs are fully protected throughout the year. The normal penalty for an offence against the Act is a fine of up to £5, but for certain listed rare birds, the fine can be £25, or a month's imprisonment, or both.

The Corporation's Bye-laws also give full protection at Rough Wood to all wild birds with their nests and eggs, and the carrying of firearms is forbidden.

Lists of the Flora and Fauna which it is known can be found at Rough Wood, giving both their scientific and popular names, have been prepared as appendices to the narrative and are also obtainable on request.

The Flora, which includes nearly 200 kinds of flowers, trees, sedges, grasses and rushes, has been compiled with the assistance of Mr. E. S. Eedes of Newcastle who hopes shortly to publish his Flora of Staffordshire. Over 70 species on this list have been found so far this year.

Roughly 20 species of birds are resident in the Rough Wood area throughout the year and when summer migrants are taken into account probably about 25 different species of bird attempt to nest there and more would do so if they were not disturbed.

The lists of Birds, Insects and Pondlife are far from being complete and the smaller mammals and the fungi have hardly been surveyed at all.

It should be explained that the authors of this narrative have unfortunately had only a few weeks of this Spring in which to do their surveys, and that it is intended to produce a revised narrative before long.

Corrections and additional information to add to the lists would therefore be most welcome. Where appropriate the map references of new finds should be supplied.

The following popular books will be found useful for elementary or field studies:-

Flowers:	Pocket Guide to Wild Flowers McClintock & Fitter	Collins 30/-
Birds:	Pocket Guide to British Birds Fitter & Richardson	Collins 25/-
Fungi:	Guide to Mushrooms & Toadstools Lange & Flora	Collins 30/-
Pond Life:	Animal Life in Fresh Water Mellanby	Methuen 25/-

Frederick Warne publish a whole series of Observer Books on Natural History subjects which are of pocket size and are useful and inexpensive.

Natural History Meetings and Rambles are organised by the following local Societies:-

The South Staffs. Naturalists Society,
Hon. Sec. Mrs. E. Preece, 28 Richmond Road,
Wolverhampton. Wolverhampton 21034

The West Midland Bird Club (Staffs. Branch),
Hon. Sec. Mr. B. Craddock, 44 Haling Road,
Penkridge. Penkridge 733

Staffordshire Nature Conservation Trust,
Hon. Sec. Mrs. M. Castellan, The Lane Cottage,
Ellastone, Ashbourne, Derbys. Ellastone 385

The Walsall Rambling Club,
Hon. Sec. Mr. N. H. Taylor, 10 Featherston Road,
Sutton Coldfield. 021-353-2332

Rough Wood, Short Heath, is the property of Walsall Corporation and the Nature Trail is administered by the Borough Parks Department, Gorway Road, Walsall. (Telephone: Walsall 26418)

Copies of this Booklet and of the Technical Appendix (which contains check lists of the flora and fauna), and general information concerning the Nature Trail may be obtained from the Parks Department, any Walsall Corporation Library; or from the Woodlands Primary School which is near the main entrance to Rough Wood.

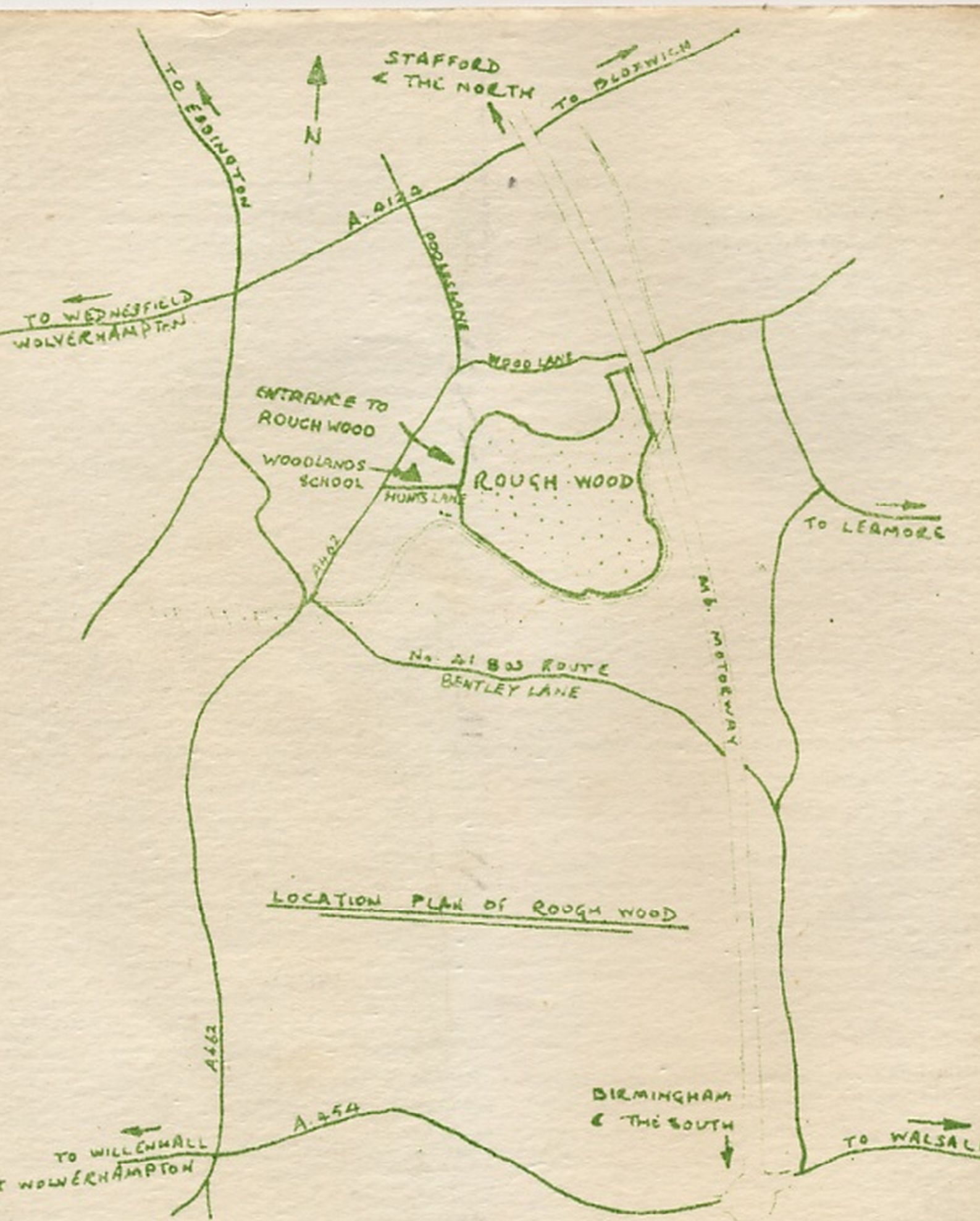
Any correspondence about the Booklet should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary of the Walsall Civic Society, 129 Lichfield Street, Walsall. Telephone: 29796

The Parks Committee are grateful to the Walsall Civic Society for promoting this Nature Trail, and to the local naturalists and others who have produced the Narrative Booklet. The contribution of the West Midlands College of Education in preparing the appendix and in assisting with the narrative has been particularly valuable.

The idea of creating Nature Trails in Walsall originated from the Assistant Cub Scout Commissioner of the Scout Association.

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This narrative booklet has been printed and published by the County Borough of Walsall Parks Department at very short notice and it is hoped to produce a revised and reprinted edition later this year.



LOCATION PLAN OF ROUGH WOOD



STAFFORD
& THE NORTH

TO BLOFELWICH

TO EDINGTON

TO WEDNESFIELD
WOLVERHAMPTON

ENTRANCE TO
ROUGH WOOD

WOODLANDS
SCHOOL

HUNTS LANE

WOOD LANE

ROUGH WOOD

TO LEAMORE

No. 21 BUS ROUTE
BENTLEY LANE

M.B. MOTORWAY

LOCATION PLAN OF ROUGH WOOD

A. 462

A. 254

TO WILLENHALL
WOLVERHAMPTON

BIRMINGHAM
& THE SOUTH

TO WALSAL