

AREA 1: PARISH OF COOMBE FIELDS: COOMBE WOODLAND, LITTLE WOOD, HIGH WOOD and OLD POOLS

ECOLOGY (1)

Coombe Woodland has probably the best range of species of bats in the county due to the proximity of woodland, grassland, water and suitable buildings for them to inhabit. Also of note in this woodland are the *giant woodwasp*, a harmless 25mm long mimic of the hornet, and the heronry, one of only half a dozen in the county (2).

High Wood is ancient semi-natural woodland. The centre was felled in 1972 and the edges retained as woodland belts which are of secondary origin. It is possible that some derelict hazel coppice has remained. A nightingale has been heard here in the past.

Little Wood is a small area of ancient woodland with oak and hazel coppice, also bramble and bluebell.

Old Pools is a small strip of fairly open mixed woodland with no evidence of management. It contains an avenue of old lime coppice, and also oak, ash and birch standards and hawthorn and hazel in the understorey. The ground flora is varied and includes red campion.

HISTORY

Coombe Abbey is situated in the southern half of Smite, a now deserted medieval village. Recorded in Domesday Book 1086 is '*silva*' (probably wood pasture, 18:p121) measuring 250-350 acres. Roger de Moubray endowed the Abbey with all the land of Smite which Richard de Camvill held for him and which had been given for the foundation of an abbey. In the **12th Century**, Henry de Rokeby gave Coombe Abbey (see **Area 2**) half of his wood which was in Binley (4:p44).

The Cistercian monastery at Coombe Abbey was broken up in 1589 as a result of the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII and given to the Earl of Warwick; he sold it to Robert Kelway whose heiress married Lord Harington, guardian of Princess Elizabeth, sister of Charles I and future Queen of Bohemia. Coombe Abbey was sold to the Craven family in 1620 and subsequently lived in by Elizabeth and her twelve children after the Restoration in 1660. Elizabeth died in 1662 and the Cravens remained living there until 1923, when it was sold by auction (3).

There are no detailed records of the Abbey's lands until the 16th Century but a number of woods have been identified, several of which seemed to have survived into the 20th Century. The earliest record is of **Combe Woods** in 1261 and in 1333 a wood called **Wodegrange** is mentioned. Also part of Coombe Abbey's lands in 1538 was **Swynstie Grove**, in Wood Grange in the parish of Binley, and likely to be **The Grove**, marked on a map of 1823 between New Close Wood and Birchley Wood (see **Area 2**). **Hill Park Wood** was identified in 1537 as a wood or coppice but its location is unknown (4:p44/45).

Frith Wood, now called **High Wood**, possibly included the adjacent **Little Wood** as it was larger than High Wood is today. It was first mentioned in 1652, 170 acres near the grange pool on Wood Grange and by the ground called **The Parke** (4:p46); it is now reduced to a perimeter of secondary woodland. The Enclosure Award map of 1742 for the adjacent parish of Brinklow (see **Area 2**) shows that **High Wood** was called **Comb Wood** but the typed award of 1995 uses High Wood (3); in 1766 it was called **Combe Wood** (4:p45).

Two small woods near Coombe Abbey, names unknown, are marked on a Craven Estates map of 1888 but are now gone (16).

There is no historical information for **Old Pools**, in the south of the parish and adjoining the Grove in Binley Woods (see **Area 2**).

Sources of information:

1. *Ecosite notes (Habitat Biodiversity Audit, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust)*
2. *Tasker, A. (1990) The Nature of Warwickshire*
3. *Local Record Office, Warwick (Moffatt, R. 2017/18)*
4. *Wager, S. J. (1998) Woods, Wolds & Groves: the woodland of medieval Warwickshire, British Archaeological Reports British Series 269.*
16. *Ross, A. (2020) Dunsmore Woodlands GIS project*
18. *Rackham, O. (1986) The History of the Countryside*