

**AREA 5: PARISH OF RYTON ON DUNSMORE: RYTON WOOD, THE COPPICE, RYTON HEATH,
WOOD IN RYTON VILLAGE AND REDLAND LANE WOOD
PARISH OF BAGINTON: ROCK SPINNEY**

ECOLOGY (1)

Ryton Wood is a Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) since 1973 especially for its insects. It is an unplanted damp oak/hazel wood with small-leaved lime coppice, bluebells, wood anemone, red campion, common dog violet, wood sorrel, primrose, devil's bit scabious and broad helleborine. It has three types of fern which are widespread: bracken, male fern and broad buckler. Noctule bats and over 30 species of butterflies, including purple emperor, white admiral (the first recorded colony in the county (2)), purple and brown hairstreak, silver-washed fritillary and wood white, can be found here. It is also of high local importance for its saproxylic fauna (invertebrates living on decaying wood) and other invertebrates. The wood is of ornithological interest, having 87 species of birds and a diverse population of breeding birds including six species of warblers. Nightingales have bred here regularly, as have tree pipits and the three species of woodpecker (green, great spotted and lesser spotted). The site also supports breeding birds of prey, including hobby (9). In more recent years the wood appears to have been used primarily for sport shooting, the maintenance of the system of rides reflecting this use; a gas pipe was laid through the central ride in 1971. When the Trust acquired the wood in the 1980s it was dominated by neglected coppice and uniform age stands of oak. The policy of eradicating all non-native species has resulted in the removal of 35-40,000 sycamore, along with many turkey oaks and the only sweet chestnut (9).

The Coppice consists of coppiced pedunculate oak and hazel with wood sorrel and primrose.

Ryton Heath is planted ash with birch.

Ryton Village Wood is a Royal British Legion Club plantation with an understorey of rhododendron and laurel.

Redland Lane Wood is a plantation of oak, sycamore and ash with frequent standing dead wood. Red campion and wood aven can be found here and it appears to be an area with a mixture of old habitats.

HISTORY

PARISH OF RYTON ON DUNSMORE

There is relatively little documentary evidence for **Ryton Wood** so its history has to be constructed from the wood itself. Dating of the banks is difficult, the size of the largest suggesting it is medieval. **Shrubbs Wood** at the south-west corner and **Forest Wood** at the south-east corner are in different parishes (see **Area 7**), with large wood banks on their sides of the parish boundaries. The acute bank marking the boundary between **Forest Wood** and **Ryton Wood** suggests it is probably 18th or early 19th Century (6).

Where woods have expanded from their medieval boundaries, the original wood bank remains inside with a new one typical of its period constructed at the new edge. A whole sequence of differently aged wood banks may therefore be seen in one wood, recording the changes in its size and shape. This is seen at **Ryton Wood** where the central embanked third of the wood of about 70 acres may well be the same woodland noted for Ryton in Domesday Book 1086 (2). This records some '*silva*' (probably wood pasture, 18: p121) in the manor of Ryton, held by Turchil of Warwick, covering 80-120 acres, the precise area depending on the shape of the '*silva*'. Turchil's son, Siward, gave the mill of Ryton to Thorney Abbey, Cambridgeshire, and subsequent confirmations of the grant added 'easements' (*rights of access*), presumably for the miller to take wood for fuel and for repairs to the mill from **Ryton Wood** (4b).

Areas north and south of the eastern half of the wood are surrounded by large wood banks, typically 7-10m across the bank and external ditch whereas smaller banks and ditches surround much of the rest of the wood. It is likely that the main use of the wood for many years was as coppice with standards to provide timber and firewood. It has obviously been managed for many centuries and the structure may therefore be considered

artificial, but less so than most local woods; there are few, if any, examples of comparable size which are undamaged by inappropriate plantings. Of particular interest is the occurrence of several areas of small-leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*) in the form of coppice stools, relict coppice and small trees derived from layers and isolated maidens (9).

Later medieval references to woodland in Ryton are relatively few. In 1239 a deed involving 80 acres, in 1246 an agreement including 40 acres and, towards the end of the 13th Century, a reference to 100 acres of wood in Ryton, are all suspiciously round numbers. Thomas de Ardern held a total of 120 acres of woodland in the parish, part freehold and part by rent; in 1282 he handed over land including 10 acres of wood to the Hospitallers of St John and in 1286 the whole manor of Ryton, still owned by the Hospital in 1547 (6). A grant of land under the wood was made in 1335 (4b).

In 1593 a two-year lease, reserving the great trees and oak saplings for timber, recorded three coppices: the **Great Coppice**, **Hales Coppice**, and **Murryn Slade**. The coppices also appear in Ryton estate accounts of 1607, either in rentals or in lists of sales of wood. Between Christmas and Candlemas 'in the whomeward parte of the great Coppice woode', and in the 'further parte' of the same, woodland was sold by hags, acres, or poles, all ways of describing areas marked for cutting; buyers came from Eathorpe, Stretton, Wolston, Grandborough, Leamington, Marton, and Thurlaston. These accounts also refer to the sale of 3,460 faggots (bundles of sticks, twigs and small branches) for use as fuel (4b).

The Inclosure Award of 1763 shows **Great Coppice** now named **Great Wood** (the current **Ryton Wood**), also **Hales Coppice** (the present **Coppice**), both with William Dilke's name; there is no record of **Murryn Slade**, of unknown location and presumably gone by this time. The location of **Ryton Heath**, now a wood, is shown as open fields (3).

Ryton Wood appears in its present site on a map of 1726 where it is shown adjoining the parish of Bubbenhall (see **Area 7**) and extending into Bubbenhall as **Shrubbs Wood** (4b). Some 50-100 acres of the northern edge of **Ryton Wood**, still shown as woodland on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map, were lost to sand and gravel extraction in the 1960s (16) and are now part of Ryton Wood Meadows, a Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire Reserve.

Ryton Village Wood and **Redland Lane Wood** are recent plantations (1).

PARISH OF BAGINTON

A map of the Tithe Apportionment of 1841 (3) shows four woods of which only **Rock Spinney** (probably once **Rough Wood**) remains, 2 acres apportioned to Rev. Bromley. **Baginton Spinney**, also apportioned to Rev. Bromley, is shown on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map but is now gone (16). **Baginton Grove** (28 acres apportioned to William Grimes) is shown on an estate map of 1766 adjoining a mill on the R. Sowe and may be the 'millegroue' of 1469 (4:p42); it is not on the 1888 OS map so had gone by then. **Whitmore Wood** (10 acres apportioned to Rev. Whitmore), the location of which now lies within the boundary of Coventry (see **Area 3**), is also not shown on the 1888 OS map so had gone by then (16); it may have been the **Whytmore Copies** recorded in 1529 of which there is no medieval record (4: p42).

Big Rough, situated along the R. Avon and marked on the 1888 OS map, has also now gone (16).

Sources of information:

1. *Ecosite notes (Habitat Biodiversity Audit, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust)*
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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*
- 4b. *Wager, S.J. A short history of Ryton Wood (unpublished).*
6. *Morfitt, D.R.(1988b) A short summary of evidence for the 'ancient' status of Ryton Wood - documentary, archaeological and ecological*
9. *Richard Wright, R. (2007) Management plan for Ryton Wood SSSI*
16. *Ross, A. (2020) Dunsmore Woodlands GIS project*
18. *Rackham, O. (1986) The History of the Countryside*