

My first planting of trees and scrub took place in the new car park area, followed by the hedge at the side of Park Lane (still to be constructed – see image). The ground consisted of heavy, sticky clay, which stuck to your boots making it very hard work.



We used to do quite a lot of work in Ladywood, thinning out scrub and trees, with the longer-term plan of producing a viable, ongoing crop of hazel coppice. Unfortunately, the coppice idea did not progress beyond 2 or 3 years at most. During this time a local thatcher was invited to collect suitable hazel for thatching. His small billhook was as sharp as a razor and he would not let anyone handle it. Maintenance of the rides involved mowing them with the flail (we could not use the bridge and had to drive all the way round to the back of the wood to gain entrance) and cutting back encroaching undergrowth. In return we had the wood as a source of stakes and binders for our annual hedge laying. In one fairly large patch of the wood there were English bluebells followed by a large number of orchids.

Back in the earlier years, machine storage was between the reception area and the cottage. Space was limited by a large playhouse (fort/bailey) for the Bradshaw children and a large willow tree. Because of this the flail had to be driven up to the sheep field at the end of the day and the cutting head disconnected and left inside the gate. The flail would then be driven back to the cottage area. When needed the flail would be driven back to the sheep field, and the cutting head reconnected. In the summer this would pretty well be a daily event.

A while ago, when the moats were dredged, the majority of fish were taken out and transferred to other waters by NT fish 'experts'. In the Terrace moat several carp of up to 10lb were collected and much to the excitement of the men doing the work they discovered we also had a few Crucian Carp which are becoming increasingly rare as they can interbreed. The dredged silt was spread over Elm Meadow covering a patch of some 150 orchids which were all but destroyed – we now get an annual showing of about half a dozen, if we are lucky. A year later, the meadow was a mass of thistles which were cut down with the flail 2 or 3 times that year and again the following year. This somewhat surprisingly brought them well under control.

In more recent years, we had (on different occasions) two students ('Z' and 'D') joins us volunteers. 'Z' had an extremely good knowledge of both flora and fauna, and was almost 'obsessed' with avoiding anything that might endanger the wildlife. On one occasion, as we were unloading vegetation, a very small beetle was seen to crawl away and down a hole in the back of the 'mule'. We then found ourselves busily trying to find a way of removing the base of the 'mule' in order to save this creature from whatever dangers it might encounter in its chosen hiding place. 'D', on the other hand, was obsessed with chocolate. Chocolate brownies, 'flake' bars and Easter eggs were all enjoyed at every opportunity. Both 'Z' and 'D' fitted in and worked well - 'D' was probably the most capable person at Lyveden when it came to reversing trailers.

Over a few years, we transplanted snowdrops onto the corner of the drive leading to the Manor House and the Barn. Unfortunately, they were all buried during the building of the new car park and access road. We also planted a lot more primroses to the moat bank facing upper lane. These now make a grand display. Some five years ago there were a pair of little owls nesting in a rabbit burrow adjacent to the top car park and one year a baby was found perching in the New Field stairwell.

For at least 3 years of reed pulling in the moats, I would be in the water pulling the reeds out and throwing them onto the bank. My fellow volunteer ('B') would be on the bank picking them up and loading them into the trailer. 'B' being 'B' didn't bother with a fork of any sort, he would pick up great bundles in a bear hug and lug them to the trailer. At the end of the day he closely resembled a large smelly, black, runny candle. How he kept his car clean even after getting out of his overalls is unknown.

Talking about 'B', he once organised a BBQ (in the ditch in Old Manor Green). He had ordered a metre of boerwors (South African - a long sausage) from his local butcher and when he came to cook it he got into a right state declaring that it was only half a metre. The situation was not helped by the rest of us saying it was a metre. To calm him down someone passed him down a beer which he opened and put on the ground, someone else, also trying to mollify him rolled a fat log down the bank for him to use as a beer table, but unfortunately it rolled off course and flattened the beer. More laughter did not help the situation.

Just remembered, a person who should remain nameless ('M'), filled the quad with diesel instead of petrol. Unbelievably Mark was quite laid back about it and helped to drain the system and get it going again. It took quite a while.