



### **The value of green spaces**

Two items caught the attention in last weekend's press. One was in Saturday's *Independent*, reporting on recent research which showed that the presence of local green spaces improves the health of residents across all social classes. The other was the lead story in the *South Manchester Reporter*, describing the efforts of Chorlton Civic Society to protect habitats for wildlife along the route of the new Metro line. Figuring prominently was Chorlton Civic Society member, Dave Bishop, also Chair of the Friends of Chorlton Meadows. Dave is an expert botanist, and talked to our last members' meeting about the amazing variety of fauna and flora he had found on his excursions along the Loop. He sends the following contribution to the Newsletter.

### **The Fallowfield Loop and biodiversity in South Manchester**

'It's hard to believe now that South Manchester was once a pleasant country district. For example, Elizabeth Gaskell's Manchester novel, *Mary Barton* (1848) opens in "Green Heys Fields" (near the present university) which was regarded as a beauty spot and place of rest by local factory workers. In his book *Manchester Walks and Wild Flowers* (1858) Leo Grindon describes one of his favourite walks from Northern[den] to Manchester. In those days it was possible to follow the north bank of the Mersey "for about a mile, and then across the fields to Platt and Rusholme". Grindon also wrote *Manchester Flora* (1859), an annotated list of all the plants to be found around Manchester. He was not a pioneer in this field. Two predecessors were John Bland Wood's *Flora Mancuniensis* (1840) and Richard Buxton's *A Botanical Guide* (1849).

Buxton was an Ancoats shoemaker who educated himself in the science of botany and was eventually inducted into the ranks of the Working Class Botanist Movement of South Lancashire. Thus he became acquainted with such remarkable naturalists as John Horsefield of Whitefield, James Crowther of Hulme and George Crozier of Shude Hill. It's surprising to note that many of the plants these men knew are still around. In the Mersey Valley you can find plants that Buxton recorded in the places where he found them! But it would be a mistake to claim that the local flora hasn't changed – we have lost several rarities and plants of specialised habitats (eg. corn field weeds), and also gained many "alien" species, a few of which are invasive, whilst others actually enhance local biodiversity.

Our local flora (and all the organisms which depend on it) faces many threats. Over-development and loss of open space is an obvious one, but mis-management of

remaining open spaces is a factor which is often overlooked. Many of our urban green areas are either “managed to death” or completely neglected, so as to become scrub and bramble choked wildernesses; neither approach is good for wildlife. What these spaces often need are proper management plans which are: (1) sensitive to the local characters and histories of the sites, and (2) specific about when planned interventions should occur (eg. exactly when in the year to cut scrub, trees and grassland).

The Fallowfield Loop is a fabulous local green space which I very much enjoy botanising along. There have been a few times recently when, exploring with friends or alone, I have felt close to the spirits of those old botanists like Buxton, Crozier *et al*, and even think that they might have been thrilled by some of my finds. I sincerely hope that Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop will consider developing a management plan which both enhances the biodiversity of the site and is acceptable to all users. If such a plan can be devised I also believe that the Loop could provide a model for how such things should be done.’

Thanks, Dave, for this contribution. We hope to discuss the challenge you have set us at our November members’ meeting (see below).

### **New grant applications**

Following our success with grants last year, we have three applications currently in the pipeline:

1. To the Transport Thematic Partnership, to install street name signs on all the road bridges that cross the Loop, so that users will easily know where they are. This has been successful, and the signs will be installed over the next few months.
2. To Old Moat Ward cash grant scheme to install an informational lectern at the Sherwood Street entrance to the Loop. We await a decision on this one.
3. To the Awards for All scheme run by the National Lottery, to support sculptor Rachel Ramchurn in producing sculptures for the Levenshulme section of the Loop, and running workshops in sculpting for the local community. Rachel will be coming to our November members’ meeting to discuss her project and to canvass ideas on where the sculptures might best be sited (see below). This application is still in process.

Following up last year’s grants, we plan to hold a publicity event at the new entrance to the Loop from Mauldeth Road West one weekend later this month, to celebrate the improvements made with the Chorlton Park Ward cash grant (tree and flower planting, bench and lectern installation, as well as the new entrance itself). We will circulate details to members via email once they are finalised.

We also have stacks of Community Mapping guides to the Loop left over from last year’s TTP grant. Anyone who could distribute some to their contacts (schools, community centres, health centres, etc.), please get in touch with David Beetham on 445 1524.