

Your Parks & Countryside

Helping people shape the future of where they live

Wilfred Owen Green

5 acres of greenspace in the heart of Oswestry

This area of public open space was formerly known as Oswestry Town Green, The 5 Acre Site and even the Railway Land and was landscaped for the first time in 2010, over 40 years after the railway left. In that time the site was neglected and used for quiet informal recreation by local people.

Since the official opening on the day the schools broke up for the summer holidays in July the site is proving to be extremely popular for visitors of all ages, as a pleasant walk from eastern Oswestry to the town centre and as a place for picnics and play. There have been some teething troubles with litter, wear and tear and some boisterous spirits amongst some visitors, but this is always to be expected on popular public open space. Story continued on page 2.



Ash Thomas, burning the invasive species of *Rhododendron ponticum* at Colemere

Countryside Apprenticeship

Neil Robinson is the Estate Team Leader and gives us an insight into the countryside apprenticeship scheme he coordinates.

In March this year, the Parks and Countryside Sites Team set up two new apprenticeship posts for carrying out practical works on its sites throughout the county.

Story continued on page 3

Nature vs. Nurture

A Day in the life of a Shropshire Council
Arboricultural Officer

The Parks & Countryside Sites Team manage around 130 sites covering just over 1700 acres of land in the open countryside and in urban greenspace. Thankfully many of these sites have trees and these of course need managing to ensure their safe to the public and contribute to the biodiversity of Shropshire.

Craig Watkins is an Arboricultural Officer and recently joined Shropshire Councils Environment Team. Over the last several months Craig has been assessing the condition of trees on these sites and has highlighted the excellent cross departmental working relationship that exists between our teams.

Story continued on page 4

Editorial

As you can see, the Outdoor Recreation Service newsletter continues to adapt to a rapidly changing world ensuring its survival.

The newsletter is to be produced in an electronic format only from now on and will be emailed to everyone on the mailing list or can be found on the Shropshire Council website, together with all the back issues.

Shaun Burkey
Newsletter Editor
Tel: 01691 624448

Wilfred Owen Green Shropshire Council inherited this area of neglected land in April 2009 and quickly sought to bring in external funding to redesign the site to give Oswestry a Green it could be proud of. After extensive consultation with local residents a design was drawn up that offered a well managed Green that had both formal elements of short mown grass and seating to wilder areas of wildflower meadows, an orchard, woodland edge and scrub offering the visitor a taste of the wilder country-



The site in 2003



The site in 2010

side in the centre of a large market town. Play provision has featured strongly in the design, several items of play equipment together with features of mounds, boulders and even a 40metre raised turf labyrinth encourage natural imaginative play.

The social and economic benefits Wilfred Owen Green will bring to Oswestry will be significant and long lasting. There is already a very positive and relaxed atmosphere on the Green with many local residents de-

lighted that the area is receiving the care it has long needed. The catalytic effects of the Green are already being felt on the neighbouring Cambrian Heritage Railway project which is now striving forward to produce an excellent visitor attraction with steam engines, a visitor centre and café.

The Green was recently awarded the Mary Hignett Trophy for an important environmental project in 2010 by the Oswestry and District Civic Society.



Peter Owen & Chairman of the Council, Cllr. Malcolm Pate at the naming ceremony

To honour the memory of Oswestry born war poet, Wilfred Owen, the site was recently re-named the Wilfred Owen Green. The official naming ceremony took place in October, members of the Wilfred Owen Association, together with Peter Owen, the nephew of Wilfred attended as guest of honour.

This is only the beginning for the site, now that we have a distinguished title for the area we can build upon this success and allow the area to be enhanced as a hub of remembrance and somewhere to celebrate the heritage of Oswestry.

The ecology of the site will be carefully moni-

tored in the years to come to maximise the biodiversity of the site and to allow the area to become even wilder in a carefully managed way that blends into the neighbouring 2.5ha site of Shelf Bank which will be designated a Local Nature Reserve in the near future.

Throughout the autumn of 2010 we will be establishing a 'Friends of the Green' group to enable local people to have a direct influence on the management, use and future of the site, please contact Shaun Burkey if you are interested, Tel: 01691 624448

Wilfred Owen Green can be accessed from Ambleside Road and Brookhouse Road or from Sainsbury's car park and is near the Railway Museum.

Funding; £80,000 - Natural England's Natural Asset Fund, £50,000 - Playbuilder programme, £30,000 - Advantage West Midlands, £10,000 - Shropshire Council

Shaun Burkey
Conservation & Community officer



The Labyrinth as seen from Wat's Dyke on Shelf Bank

Countryside Apprenticeship

Continued from front page....

Ash Thomas and Chris Brayford were recruited to the team and started their training under the day to day supervision of Neil Robinson, Estates Team Leader.



Chris servicing a strimmer at the Weeping Cross depot, Shrewsbury

The Apprenticeship Scheme provides a one year fixed term contract for Ash and Chris, during which time they will gain experience in carrying out practical work on our sites, including tasks such as habitat management, installation of site furniture, maintaining paths and boundary structures. This work is also supported by day release to Walford and North Shropshire College, where under the guidance of Roger Sorsby, college tutor, the two apprentices are each working towards an NVQ2 qualification in Environmental Conservation.

Both the practical work and the recognition of their achievements through the NVQ qualification will place the apprentices in a better position for pursuing a long term career in the environmental sector. In the Parks and Countryside Team, we benefit from being able to have more staff on the frontline looking after our sites, in the context of contributing to the education and training of young people in the county.

Chris and Ash had the following to say about the apprenticeship scheme:

Chris – “I started on the scheme with only a bit of knowledge about working in the countryside. In the last few months, I’ve learnt a lot of new skills and now feel confident that I can go out and do a task like putting up fencing, knowing that it is going to be a good quality piece of work when it is finished. Doing the NVQ does involve a fair amount of paperwork, but Neil and Roger do keep an eye on us, making sure that we keep a record of the work we’ve done.”

Ash – “ My long term goal is to work in tree surgery. Working for Shropshire Council is helping me get more experience and skills, and lets me work outdoors which is what I really enjoy. Every day is different, and because we work all over Shropshire, I get to see many different types of site – and I get paid!”

Neil Robinson , Estates Team Leader

Walking for Health - go on, have a go, its good for you.

Shropshire Council’s ‘Walking for Health’ co-ordinators are taking the lead in developing and promoting health walks across Shropshire. As part of the national Walking for Health (WfH) campaign, the walks aim to encourage people who take little or no exercise, to do regular short walks in their communities and improve their health.

The project is delivered by a team of three co-ordinators in Shropshire – Mick Dunn in North Shropshire and Bridgnorth; Becky Johns in Shrewsbury, Atcham and Oswestry; and Ian Pearmain covering the South of Shropshire as part of the Mayfair Community Centre in Church Stretton. Each co-ordinator is responsible for identifying and supporting communities in need of provision and recruiting a cohort of local volunteer walk leaders to lead safe and efficient walks throughout Shropshire’s unique and unspoilt landscape. WfH is the largest national body promoting and setting the standards for led health walks. To develop links with WfH and increase your community’s physical activity levels, please contact your area co-ordinator or visit www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk

Becky Johns
Walking for Health
Coordinator



Nature vs. Nurture

Continued from front page....



Craig Watkins
inspecting an Ash tree

Trees are the largest longest-lived organisms upon the earth. Within our towns they may be the largest structures in most residential streets and open spaces and are only dwarfed by high-rise buildings. Globally they are crucial in maintaining the delicate balance of nature allowing the continuance of life.

Trees contribute to our mental well being, with open spaces containing trees for shade and recreation. Trees provide seasonal variations of flower, leaf, fruit, autumn colour and winter silhouette.

As trees grow they are continually changing through their dynamic nature. Trees respond to environmental changes both locally and globally. Locally these may be a response to pest, disease, fungal pathogens and local environmental weather patterns; this is seen as alterations in the trees form and changes in vitality. These changes are

predominantly positive for the trees survival, but in some circumstances they may present a negative notion for the trees long term future, but a positive one in conservation terms.

As an authority we are responsible for our land holdings and the trees which stand on them, we have a “duty of care” to maintain these sites in a safe manner. For this reason Natural Environment and Parks and Countryside have created a close working partnership in the process of the tree risk management. Arboricultural Officers periodically survey all the trees as part of a cyclical program, identifying areas which require more detailed surveying based on the trees location and public access. All the trees are surveyed using “Visual Tree Assessment” (VTA), a process of observing the tree in its environment looking at its structural and physiological condition.

During the VTA process defects are often found, but these may not necessarily be a problem and can often be managed through remedial works and/or monitoring as part of the cyclical survey programme. Arboricultural Officers use their professional judgement and expertise to make appropriate recommendations. They consider the type and extent of the works, how this will affect the long term future of the tree and the impact on its locality and in the wider landscape. Veteran trees for example are trees of high conservation importance due to the dependence of other organisms that use the tree for their survival; these include mammals, invertebrates and fungi etc, the veteran trees natural features such as deadwood, cavities and decay all provide a niche for these creatures to inhabit. Veteran trees may not be considered safe in some circumstances, but their conservation and historical importance requires them to continue to remain and be monitored and managed appropriately. In this respect trees will not be removed unless it is deemed absolutely necessary, and where trees have a high ecological importance, wherever possible the decision will be to leave the tree or its associated habitat niches, for the benefits of conservation.



The Pontfadog Oak
Just over the border into Wales. This ‘green monument’ dates back 1500 years and requires very special care and attention.

Young or newly planted trees may also be surveyed, and although generally not considered as potentially hazardous as larger ones, they may receive works to remove minor defects that have the potential to become significant future defects. By carrying out these remedial works the trees will provide a much longer contribution to the wider landscape as they reach maturity without receiving unnecessary surgery works in the future.

Craig Watkins
Arboricultural Officer, Environment Team

Tri UK Shropshire Triathlon

Sporting opportunities in the natural environment

If you can swim a distance of 1500m then jump on a bike and cycle 40km followed by a 10km run then the award winning TRI UK Shropshire Triathlon may be just your thing. Ellesmere's TRI UK Shropshire Triathlon was recently awarded the West Midlands Regional Event for 2010 by the Triathlon England West Midlands Regional Committee. The first Shropshire Triathlon was held in 1992 and was a relatively low key event.



Since then it has hosted various national level events including the Age Group and Elite Championships, and has also been a qualifying event for the World Championships on six occasions. During this time there have been a number of changes to the routes and the central venue which have helped to improve the event for the benefit of the athletes, the spectators and the local community.

The event is situated in the Cremorne Gardens (alongside the Mere) in Ellesmere. The Gardens are a natural amphitheatre for the race generating atmosphere and providing a superb setting for spectators and competitors. It is organised by the Leisure Development Service of Shropshire with the support of Shropshire Councils Parks & Countryside Sites Team, Ellesmere Town Council and many local groups.

Covering the classic Olympic distances of a 1500m swim in the Mere followed by a 40km cycle section heading into North Wales followed by a 10km run on tough and undulating very quiet lanes. The swim is in the beautiful Mere adjacent to the Cremorne Gardens where the athletes rack the bikes in transition and traders offer food and merchandise. It is very atmospheric and attracts large numbers of spectators who participate fully in supporting the competitors. The cycle course goes out onto varied flatish, and at worst a rolling course along the Shropshire and Welsh border. The course is especially well patrolled and controlled by experienced volunteers to allow athletes a trouble-free cycle, before once again entering transition and setting off on a testing but closed road run.



Holly Lawrence— Women's winner 2010

The Organising Committee comprises a range of mainly local organisations including:



Ellesmere Town Council, Shropshire Council, Ellesmere Round Table, Ellesmere Rotary Club, Oswestry Olympians - OOTri Club, North Shropshire Wheelers Cycling Club, Ellesmere Sub Aqua Club, Shrewsbury/Walsall/Ellesmere Canoe Clubs and West Mercia Police These bodies help to provide volunteers on the day and deal with any issues which arise prior to, and following the event. The committee is a democratic body with the best interests of the local community at heart and promoting Ellesmere and Shropshire for tourism and economic development. The triathlon is an excellent example of Shropshire Council's aspiration to provide a range of complimentary sporting opportunities within the natural environment.

Next years Triathlon event will be held on Sunday 5th June and will again be a qualifying event for the World Championships which will take place in Beijing, China later in September. For further details or if you would like to Just Tri it! contact Alan Penton, Leisure Development Manager on, Tel: 01743 255071

Alan Penton
Leisure Development Manager

FEATURED SITE—Oswestry Racecourse

Elevated Tranquillity

High on the rising hills to the west of Oswestry, nestling between the mountains of Wales and the open expanse of the Shropshire plains, lies the peaceful Oswestry Racecourse Common, a 22 hectare countryside treasure that shelters a wealth of beauty, tranquillity and history unique to this part of Shropshire.



Carpets of British Bluebells at the Racecourse

Two miles from Oswestry, the site stands on the 1000ft hilltop of Cynr y Bwch (Welsh for 'Horns of the Buck') which was historically seen as the barrier between the "Kingdom of England and the Principality". Thus it has outstanding view points giving excellent vistas into both England and Wales.

The site provides a quiet relaxing location for visitors to enjoy a ramble or an amble through a varied patchwork of scrub, scattered trees, bracken, and wildflower rich grassland. These habitats in turn support a wide range of birds, animals and insects making the area an exciting place to visit for those with a passion for wildlife. What better reason is needed to justify a visit and enjoy some well deserved 'quite time', taking advantage of the informal and public footpath network providing access for both horses and walkers alike to the wider countryside.

History

Racing started on the common back in the 1700's with the aim of bringing together the local landowners and gentry of England and Wales, and in the 1800's the course was laid with Cumberland turf by French prisoners of the Napoleonic Wars.



The Janus Horse

The development of the railway spelled the end to racing on the site as people could travel to grander racecourses. The last race meeting was held in 1848 – the very same year that the Shrewsbury to Chester railway line opened.

Signs of this historic use are still evident, with much of the figure-of-eight racetrack forming the main walking route around the site. The remains of the grandstand are to be found on the south common, along with the 'Janus Horse' – a double headed horse sculpture. One head facing into England and the other into Wales.

The Racecourse was designated a Wildlife Site back in 1999, and is a registered common with local grazing rights.

A car park is located at the south common providing ample parking, with Offa's Dyke long distance national trail running along the main ride.

Management Work

Historically the common was grazed by local commoners who would have kept cattle and sheep in nearby small holdings. This would have maintained a short managed turf suitable for both grazing and racing alike.



Bilberry
Vaccinium myrtillus

In recent years grazing here has all but ceased as the agriculture climate across the country has changed. As a result trees and bracken have had a chance to grow unchecked. Without a bit of TLC and sympathetic management the common will revert to woodland if positive work is not undertaken, and we will lose this unique site with its rich and varied wildlife and habitat.

Management work carefully follows the management plan recently agreed by Shropshire

Council who manages the site, and local interest groups and residents. Great efforts are also being undertaken by the local ranger team to remove encroaching trees to provide and maintain the mosaic of open grassland and trees/scrub cover which is ideal for supporting a wide range of wildlife including birds such as the bullfinch, linnet and song thrush, and plants such as heath bedstraw, bilberry, heather and tormentil.



Bullfinch
Pyrrhula pyrrhula

Harvey Morgan
Countryside Ranger

SEVERN VALLEY COUNTRY PARK SUPPORTERS GROUP.

The Severn Valley Country Park supporters group was formed in 2009 by a group of volunteers and supporters to raise funds for wildlife enhancing projects on the country park.

The park and its wildlife areas are a hugely valuable asset to the villages of Alveley and Highley and the surrounding area and to the public in general. The aim of the Supporters Group is to continually improve the biodiversity and environmental benefits to wildlife on the park for the ultimate benefit of society. The funds we raise are solely for the benefit of wildlife and the public's enjoyment thereof and is in no way connected to Shropshire Council, which is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the park. The most recent project we have undertaken has been the purchase of some Dutch-Elm disease resistant elms which we hope will go a long way to restoring the large gap left after mature elms were lost to Dutch-Elm Disease. This project was aimed at replacing the food source, i.e. elm leaves, upon which White Letter Hairstreak butterfly larvae feed. Several other invertebrates will also benefit and we may one day see a few large, mature elm trees once again.

It is projects such as this that we wish to raise funds for, to give some of our endangered wildlife a helping hand.

To join SVCP Supporters Group costs £1.00 per year or donations welcome. Please telephone 01746-780763 (Bill Watkins).

Your help can make a real difference.



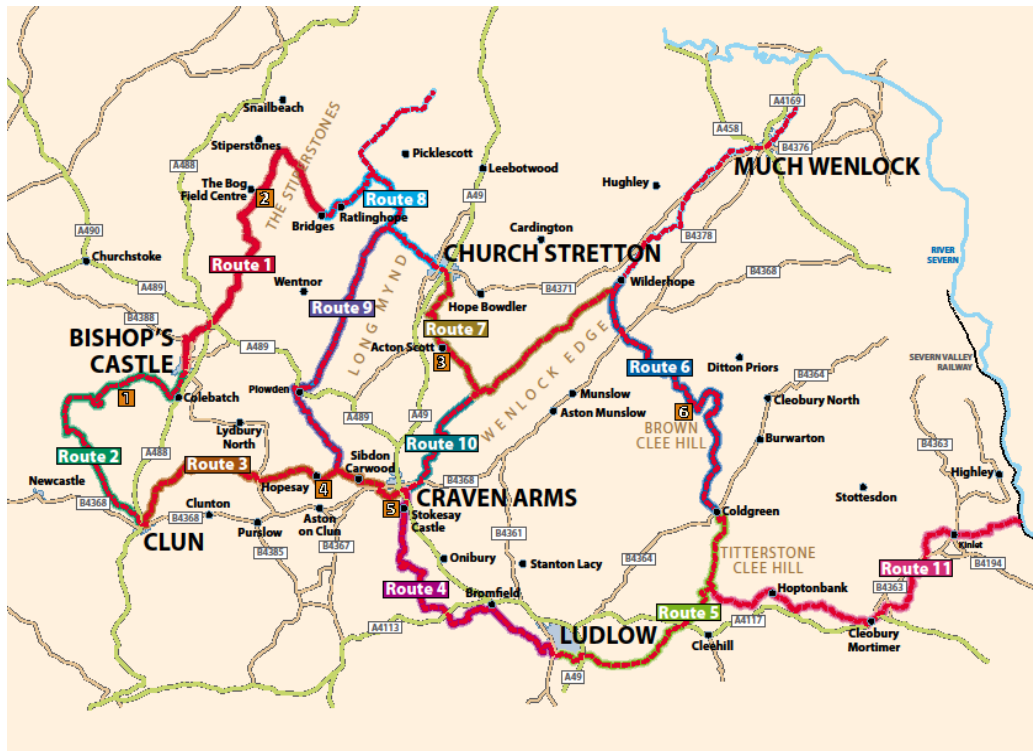
Bringing back the elms to Severn Valley

Don Bannister
Chairman of Severn Valley Country
Park Supporters Group.

The Shropshire Way

Since 2007 a programme of updating the Shropshire Way long distance footpath has been underway. The first stage was to improve and extend the Shropshire Hills section in the south of the County. The route was tweaked, new sections added, 6 new circular routes created, a new guide book written, podcasts recorded written and the website updated with everything made downloadable from it.

For more details see www.shropshirewalking.co.uk



A map showing the new routes and the small brown squares show the start of the circular walks

This has proved to be very popular with locals and visitors alike and many businesses along the route have noted an increase in trade.



When the BBC Countryfile presenter, Julia Bradbury, filmed here she said: *"When the Shropshire Way was planned local walkers were asked to get involved which I think is fantastic. They are the real experts - people who know the terrain because of first-hand experience. We filmed a small section of the walk from Bromfield to Stokesay Castle which was just lovely - if it's typical of the entire walk people have a real treat in store. The new circular routes take you to castles and hill forts, through woodlands and fields...enjoy."*

Extending the Shropshire Way into north Shropshire

So what's next? We are going to carry on building on the success in the south, but how? At the moment the existing trail goes north to Wem and then on to Whitchurch. It goes nowhere near the north west of the County, an area so important in our industrial history; no where near the Meres and Mosses, areas of international importance for its flora and fauna; no where near the canals that were the motorways of their age. Our plan is to link walking in this part of the County using routes along the canals, the River Severn and parts of Offa's Dyke.

So how are we planning to do this?

There are 3 projects over the next 2 years being funded by the LEADER programme, Pughs Ltd and the Ramblers.

The first project is to re-route the trail along Wenlock edge from Wilderhope Manor to Ironbridge. The new route will follow the old railway line up to the top of Wenlock Edge, through the railway tunnel and on the path at the top of Lea Quarry. Six new circular walks will be established, podcasts recorded and a new guide book written.

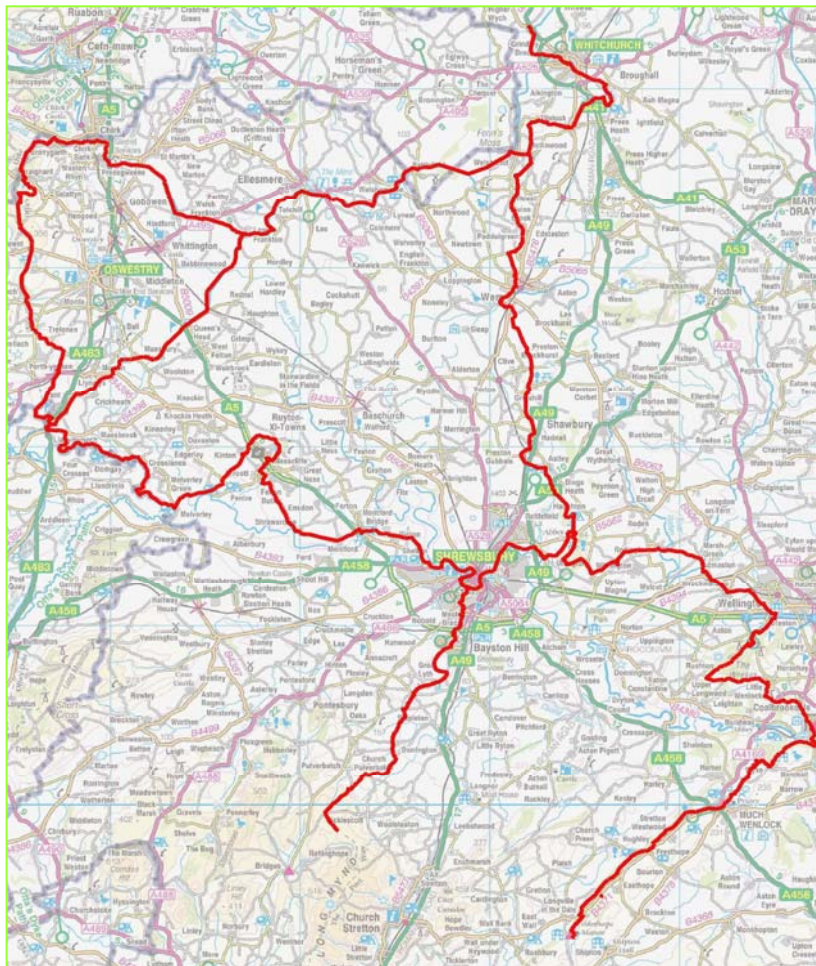
Oswestry is the centre of the second project with a loop being established from Llanymynech to Chirk to Ellesmere and back to Llanymynech. The canal towpaths will be used for much of the way. These sections will take walkers to places steeped in the industrial heritage that made this area so important in times gone by. Again there will be circular walks, a new guide book and podcasts.

The last project is to improve the routes from The Long Mynd into Shrewsbury. In addition to improving the existing link a new walk will be created taking the walker all the way along the Stiperstones ridge, through Snailbeach with its well preserved lead mine, over Earls Hill and re-joining the existing route at Lyth Hill.

Funding is still being sought to finish the rest of the planned routes from Shrewsbury to Llanymynech, Ellesmere to Whitchurch and Shrewsbury north to Whitchurch.

Then, who knows, maybe stage 3 taking this wonderful long distance footpath to the North East of the County.

For more information on the Shropshire Way or the projects call Jim on 01743 255067



Plans to re-route and extend the Shropshire Way long distance footpath to the north west of the County

Jim Stabler
Access Development Officer

Contact Us:

Parks & Countryside Sites Team

Outdoor Recreation,
Shropshire Council, Shirehall,
Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, SY2 6ND.

Email: parks@shropshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01743 255957

Countryside Access Team

Outdoor Recreation,
Shropshire Council, Shirehall,
Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, SY2 6ND.

Email:
countryside.access@shropshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01743 255061

Offices & Depots around the county:

North Shropshire

Parks & Countryside Sites Team
Swan Hill, Ellesmere,
Shropshire, SY12 0DQ.
Tel: 01691 624448

Ellesmere Park Managers Office

Mereside, Ellesmere, SY12 0PA.
Tel: 01691 624280

Ellesmere Visitor Centre & Boathouse Restaurant

Shrewsbury Road, Ellesmere,
SY12 0PA
Tel: 01691 622981 & 01691 623852

Central Shropshire

Weeping Cross Depot
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY5 6HY.
Tel: 01743 359199

Southern Shropshire

Severn Valley Country Park,
Chapel Lane, Alveley, Bridgnorth,
Shropshire, WV15 6NN
Tel: 01746 781192

Access Maintenance Team

Old Nils Quarry, Pontesbury Hill,
Pontesbury, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, SY5 0YH
Tel: 01743 791984



The Hollies on the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve, Shropshire.

Shropshire Trees No.4 Holly *Ilex aquifolium*

Shropshire Name: Hollin

Growth Rate: Slow

Stature: An evergreen broadleaf native tree, narrow crowned and conical. Regular branching when young, becoming straggly with age, height—up to 65ft, (20m)

Conditions: Grows almost everywhere but prefers drier acidic / neutral soils, shade tolerant.

Wildlife / Landscape Value: An excellent tree for wildlife; holly blue butterfly caterpillars feed on the leaves, bees thrive on the summer flowers aiding the production of berries which are good for birds in the winter.

Uses: The wood is hard and white, making good kitchenware. Never attempt to hedge-lay holly on cold frosty days, the wood becomes very brittle.

Folklore: Believed to be unlucky to cut down since it is one of only a few British evergreens and represents eternity and the power to ward off evil.

Veteran Holly The finest group of old holly trees in the county can be found in the Stiperstones NNR, the largest recorded so far having a girth of 317cm.

Visit the Woodland Trusts website for more information at www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk

