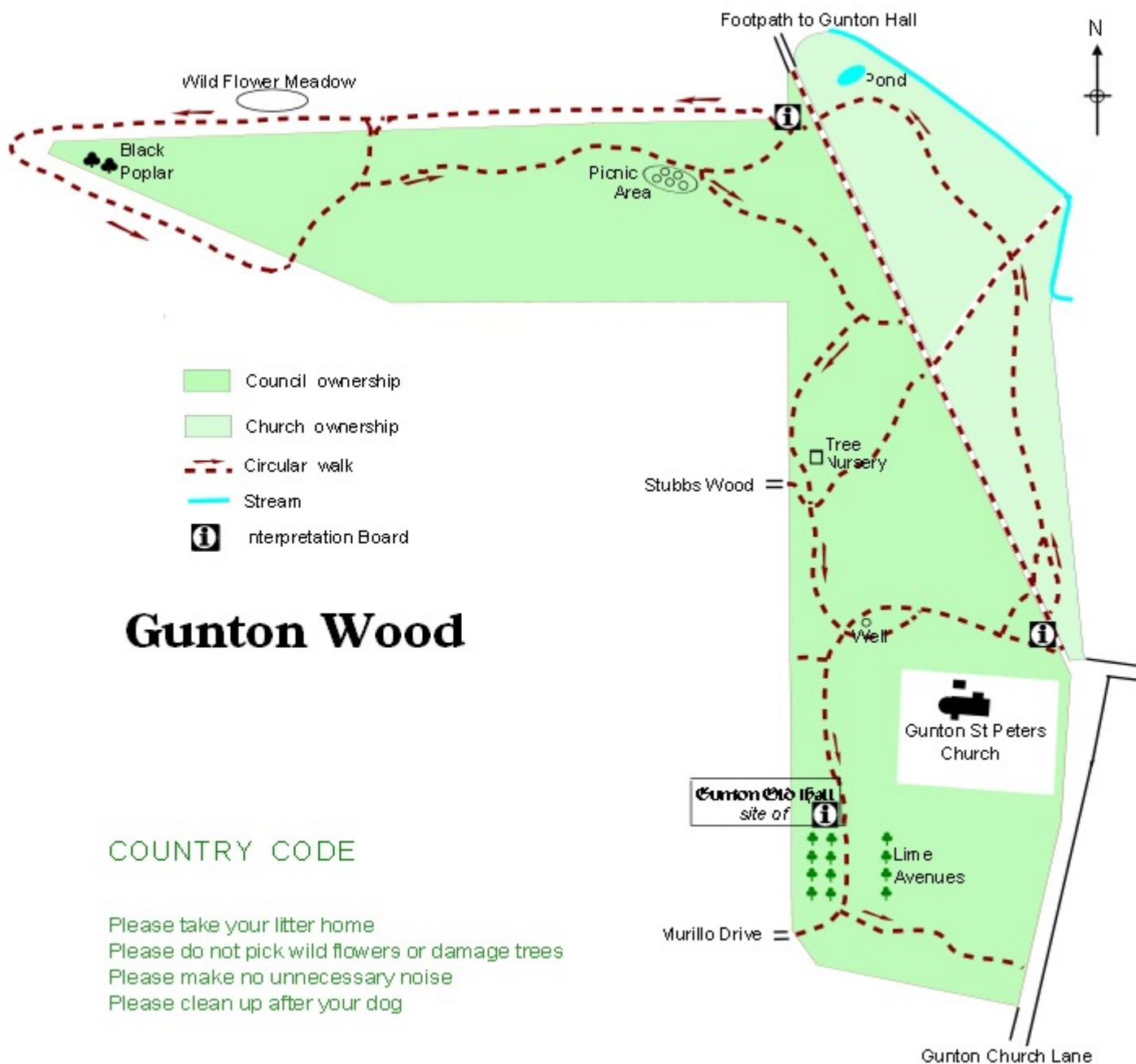
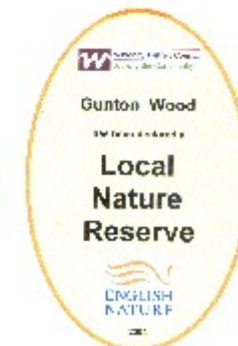




GUNTON WOODLAND COMMUNITY PROJECT



Gunton Wood

COUNTRY CODE

- Please take your litter home
- Please do not pick wild flowers or damage trees
- Please make no unnecessary noise
- Please clean up after your dog

A Step Back in Time

The word Gunton derives from *Gunni's Ton* meaning a Saxon settlement whose chieftain was named Gunni. Their Church, now called St Peter's, dates back to the 7th Century but only the lower half of its tower still remains, with most of the Church, as it is now, being rebuilt by the Normans.

The 12th Century Lord of the Manor, Richard de Gunton, would have lived in the Manorial Hall behind the Church. Over successive generations the Hall was demolished and rebuilt several times. Two of its more famous occupants were Sir Charles Saunders, the youngest ever First Sea Lord, and Hewling Luson who, in 1756, discovered a "bed of fine clay" on the estate, later to be used in making the world-famous Lowestoft Porcelain.

Just before starting his life at sea, Horatio Nelson is reputed to have spent some of his school holidays at the Hall with Sir Charles who taught him to shoot rabbits, although Horatio is said to have been so erratic with the shotgun that he terrified everyone around him!

About 1900, when Ernest William Fowler was Lord of the Manor, Gunton Old Hall played host to Lowestoft's high society with garden parties and other social gatherings in the ornamental woods that surrounded the Hall. These were halcyon days, but sadly it was not to last. Lacking in male heirs, the estate declined and in 1963, the part-Georgian and part-Victorian Manor House was pulled down after Georgina, the last survivor of the Fowler dynasty, died.

For more than 30 years, very little woodland management was done. Invasive sycamores, brambles and rank vegetation took over and public access to the wood became limited to the main footpath only. Such was the sad state of affairs in 1996, when a group of residents decided that they would attempt to restore the wood to its former glory, thus providing benefits to wildlife while, at the same time, giving full access to the public.



Gunton Old Hall c. 1900

The Project

It was clear from the outset that there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the project from residents of Gunton Park Estate, many of whom were keen dog walkers. The first public meeting held in early 1997 was well attended, receiving strong support from Waveney District Council and the Church, each part owners of the wood, and from Suffolk Wildlife Trust, who immediately began work on an Initial Field Survey and Management Plan.

Meanwhile, successful funding applications enabled the Group to purchase a full range of hand tools to be stored in a conveniently located tool shed. In March 1998 the Gunton Woodland Community Project was formally constituted with affiliation to the Trust for Conservation Volunteers who provided insurance cover for work parties. Field work began the following month with the clearance of a mountain of rubbish that had accumulated over the years. Regular work parties followed and the first milestone was reached on a snowy day in December 1998 when the Chairman of WDC, Councillor Frank Devereux, planted the first oak tree.

Sixteen years later, after more than 1200 work parties totalling some 38,500 hours, a band of willing volunteers still gather every week to keep up the good work. Undergrowth has been cleared, unwanted sycamores felled, paths cut and chipped, habitats, fences, gates and seats constructed and well over 4000 new trees planted. A wildlife pond has been established and the wood has become a favourite location for walkers, nature lovers and school parties alike.

The Group's efforts received the highest possible accolade in 2003, when it was among the first in the country to win the *Queens Golden Jubilee Award for Voluntary Service*. This was followed in 2004 with Gunton Wood being officially named a *Local Nature Reserve*, the first such declaration in Waveney for more than 10 years.

GWCP has gained national recognition as a model of how to make a success of an environmental restoration project using volunteer effort. Generous funding donations have been received from major companies as well as Group members. Many deep and lasting friendships have been formed and the social life of Gunton has been transformed with the Group's regular outings to places of interest both at home and abroad.

A Woodland Walk (allow 60 minutes)

A network of waymarked paths, covered in woodchips, permits wheelchair access throughout the year. Between January and June the woodland floor comes to life as snowdrops, aconites, daffodils, primroses, bluebells, orchids and foxgloves follow in continuous succession. But Autumn and Winter months also have their own attractions. A fine range of fungi can be found and, when snow has fallen, it becomes a wonderland of peace and serenity.

Because it was once part of the ornamental gardens surrounding the Hall, the wood supports a wide range of habitats and many different tree species, all of which provide homes for a rich variety of bird life; 55 different species have been recorded. Other woodland residents include foxes, muntjac, squirrels and a large population of great crested newts. Two parts of the wood have been deliberately kept in an unmanaged state for the benefit of any wildlife wishing to stay remote from human presence.

Your walk will take you past several key features including a well (discovered accidentally by a GWCP workparty and dating back to 1750 or earlier), one remaining and very old, black poplar (perhaps the most endangered tree species in Britain) and the magnificent lime avenues (which once framed the ceremonial driveway leading up to the front of Gunton Old Hall).

Three interpretation boards have been installed at various locations on the walk to provide further information. One of these, the 'history' board, describes the close association of Gunton Wood to the origins of Lowestoft pottery.

We hope you enjoy your time in Gunton Wood. Please note that, within easy walking distance, there are three other woods that are well worth visiting; to the North-East, Corton Wood and to the West, Gunton Nature Reserve and Foxburrow Wood.

Financial assistance is gratefully acknowledged from ExxonMobil, Shell, The Woodland Trust, Tesco, Co-Operative Soc, Waveney District Council, Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Gunton Park Residents Association, Gunton St Peters Church, local Businesses, Members and Friends of GWCP; together with expert advice from Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

For further information contact Barry Shimmield (01502-562527), or David Briggs (01502-515944) or visit our website at www.guntonwoodland.org.uk