

# Ranmoor Society

May 2007

News

## Sheffield Botanical Gardens Past Present & Future

In March, Meg Jullien showed us some fine examples of her photography, which recorded both the parlous state of the Botanical Gardens before its recent £7million renovation and the many exciting developments that have taken place since.

She also gave us an insight into its early history. The 18 acres were originally purchased from Joseph Wilson, owner of the Sharrow snuff works, after 80 leading Sheffield citizens had in 1833 petitioned the Master Cutler to form the Sheffield Botanical and Horticultural Society and establish a botanical garden. A national competition held to create a design for the gardens, pavilions and lodges was won by Robert Marnock, then gardener at Bretton Hall. He received the £10 prize and was appointed as the Garden's first curator in 1834. The 100-metre long glass pavilions however resulted from a collaboration between Marnock, Benjamin Broomhead Taylor (he won the second prize of £5) and Joseph Paxton, who had judged the competition and who had already cut his teeth on the new glasshouse at Chatsworth.

When the Gardens were opened to the public in 1836, some 12000 visitors paid to enter (two shillings on the first 2 days or one shilling for the following two days). In 1840 Marnock left to become curator at Regent's Park but the Botanical Gardens flourished under curators John Law and John Ewing despite some early financial difficulties.

Promenade concerts, military bands and illuminations were typical attractions for the Victorian upper middle classes, not to mention firework displays, tightrope walkers, sword dancers, and bears in the specially constructed bear pit. However until 1898 most of Sheffield's population were excluded by the entrance prices, as normally only shareholders and annual subscribers (10/6 per annum) were admitted. Bankruptcy loomed in 1898 and it was the action of the Town Trust that prevented the Gardens being sold for building land. Thereafter, uniformed commissionaires controlled entry, now open to everybody if they purchased tickets and provided they were clean, sober, free of disease, and not disposed to swearing or political pontificating! The Town Trust still owns the Gardens, but after 1951 Sheffield Corporation took over their management.

By 1984 the Gardens and its pavilions had fallen into disrepair. The Friends of the Botanical Gardens were formed in that year, and since then they have raised

£1.25 million of matched funding necessary to secure a Heritage Lottery award of £5million. This was the largest amount raised by a "Friends" group in the country and has been responsible for initiating a new era in the Gardens' history.

## Summer Programme

### May 15<sup>th</sup> *Trace the History of Your House*

We will be specifically looking at four Ranmoor houses and the means by which several of us have been able to collect historical information about their construction and occupants. We hope to sufficiently enthuse you to investigate either your own house or others local to you. We will certainly not be demonstrating that the process is an exact science, but we hope to cover the most likely local information sources. We will have Archive material, including street directories, census information, sale plans, planning applications and various old maps, available for members to consult.

### May 24<sup>th</sup> *Ranmoor Summer Walk*

This time the theme is Ranmoor's Grade II listed gems, an assortment of 14 buildings and edifices. We will look at several hidden corners that many of you may not know of, still less have visited on a warm summer evening. This is deliberately designed to be non-arduous ramble, which will start at 6.30 p.m. sharp at the top of Storth Lane and finish between 8.30 and 9.00 p.m. in the close vicinity of the Ranmoor Inn! Those who cannot make the start time may like to join us at the junction of Hangingwater and Fulwood Roads, which we hope to reach by about 7.10 p.m.

### June 19<sup>th</sup> *People and Places in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ranmoor*

In compiling the Ranmoor Archive we have built up a detailed picture of some of Ranmoor's influential Victorians, their land holdings, their mansions, and their sources of wealth. The house deeds that current residents have lent us have been interpreted by Peter Warr in the light of other material in the Archive. He will be selecting a number of examples of local people, and will illustrate their stories with photographs and maps. In addition, census information for the Ranmoor area will be described to show the development of the suburb in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.



## Sheffield's Woodland Heritage

In April, Professor Mel Jones reminded us that remarkably Sheffield contains no less than 35 areas of ancient woodland. With 6000 acres of woodland still lying within the Metropolitan District, it is the best provided city in the country in this respect. The term "ancient" denotes those woods that we know have been in existence since 1600. They are likely to be remnants of the natural woodland that clothed Britain after the last Ice Age retreated. These remnants include Smith's Wood (in Ranmoor; see below), Blackbrook Wood (Redmires), Little Matlock Wood (Stannington), Ecclesall Woods, Hutcliffe Wood, Chancet Wood, and Ladies Spring Wood in South West Sheffield.

These would have been well known to our medieval ancestors, and until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century would all have been working woods. In Domesday times, over 20% of the Sheffield area was wooded and animals were allowed to graze within their confines. Gradually coppice management superseded the wood pasture tradition as the population grew, and more woodland was cleared for farming.

Conservation through "coppicing" became increasingly important and involved cutting particular trees down to the ground (leaving a stump or stool), following a strict coppice cycle and

preventing animals from damaging young growth. "Coppicing with standards" aimed to leave a proportion of the tree cover to mature as timber. Keepers or "woodwards" looked after coppice woods, kept a lookout for trespassers and thieves, and pursued such miscreants in the courts. Collecting firewood, nuts and berries and even the taking of short cuts through the wood was considered as an act of trespass. When the coppice had matured, restrictions became more relaxed and tenants were again allowed access to the woods with their animals on payment of a due. Otherwise, most woodlands were carefully protected with stock-proof fencing, hedges, and banks and ditches.

Mel Jones also covered many of the ancillary crafts that characterised such woodland areas, such as charcoal burning, leather tanning, turning, clog-making, besom-making, coopering, and basket making. The importance of these to the local culture and economy are covered in interesting detail in his book Sheffield's Woodland Heritage, now in its third edition.

IF YOU RECEIVE A YELLOW SUBSCRIPTION FORM WITH THIS NEWSLETTER, YOU HAVE NOT YET PAID YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2007! PLEASE RETURN THE FORM IF YOU WISH TO CONTINUE.

### Smith's Wood Garden Open Afternoon

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July 3.00 - 5.00pm**

This is a rare chance to see at close hand part of Ranmoor's own "ancient" woodland. Shelagh and Geoff Marston have invited members of the Society to view their garden, which includes a small part of Smith's Wood, and to see how they husband it to maintain it in its "original" state. Their land contains the lowest part of the wood and is behind the houses on Riverdale Road. It also includes part of the Oak Brook itself, the old boundary between Upper and Nether Hallam.

Their address is 62 Endcliffe Hall Avenue. The garden is best approached from Riverdale Road (where parking is a little easier), up the little service lane that runs alongside number 60 Riverdale Road (marked by a big railway sign). This is almost opposite its junction with Oakbrook Road. Walk up the lane beyond the garages to the 1970's house behind. This can be muddy in wet weather, but if you wish to subsequently walk down to the boundary with the Oak Brook, where it is usually muddy, wear or bring old shoes.

We have it on good authority that on this particular afternoon cups of tea will be available!

### Remaining 2007 Meetings

May 15 <sup>th</sup>	Trace the History of Your House	Members
May 24 <sup>th</sup>	Ranmoor Walk	Gerald Eveleigh
June 19 <sup>th</sup>	People and Places in 19 <sup>th</sup> Century Ranmoor	Peter Warr
July 1 <sup>st</sup>	Garden Open Afternoon 62 Endcliffe Hall Avenue	Shelagh and Geoff Marston
September 18 <sup>th</sup>	Personalities in the Cutlery and Edge Tool Trade (esp. Ranmoor)	Joan Unwin
October 16 <sup>th</sup>	Transport; The Impact of the Motor Car in Ranmoor	Andrew Swift
November 20 <sup>th</sup>	The Story of the English Inn	Howard Smith

### Ranmoor Society Committee 2007

Chairman:	Andrew Swift	268 5158
Secretary:	Gerald Eveleigh	230 1992
Membership Sec:	Shelagh McDonald	230 1048
Treasurer:	Gill Battye	230 1596
Archive Coordinator	Peter Warr	230 9174
Planning Matters:	David Barber	230 4717
General Matters	Carolyn Feeley	230 7421
Minutes Secretary	Reg Cleaver	230 9876