

# Hackfall

Newsletter 2

Spring 2005

## Hackfall Wood

**H**ackfall Wood is a wonderful evocative wood clinging to the slopes above the Ure Gorge. Its location and beauty has inspired many and its historic importance is well recognised. Perhaps not so well known is that the wood is of national importance for its wildlife and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This affords the wood protection from damaging operations and hopefully will secure its place in our biological heritage forever.

So why is it so important? It is the one of the best examples of ancient semi-natural woodland in the area and hosts, due to its diverse geology, a wide range of plant communities. So it is not one rarity in particular but the wood as a whole that singles it out for distinction.

However Hackfall does boast some uncommon species such as the wood fescue that is a tall, almost statue-like, grass that is found along some paths and scars. Other interesting plant species include the parasitic toothwort, thin spiked wood sedge, beech fern, herb paris, common cow wheat and wood stitchwort.

The wood divides on soil type with ash woodland cloaking the more base rich areas in the west and centre and oak dominating the more acid soils in the south and on the steeper slopes around Mowbray Castle. The most distinctive small stand is above Raven Scar where a healthy flora of bilberry and wavy hair grass lies under a sessile oak canopy.

In more waterlogged areas around the river, streams and flushes the ash is joined by alder and here one finds species such as opposite-leaved golden saxifrage and more rarely large bittercress.

A distinctive and rare habitat is found at the Alum Springs to the east of Grewelthorpe Beck. These are tufa deposits that are formed by base rich deposits and hold a rare *Crataneuron* moss community. Much is shaded now by trees but you can make out the Springs when looking up from Kent Seat. This is a sensitive and easily disturbed habitat, which will be conserved by maintaining the quality and quantity of the water supply, maintaining correct light levels and managing visitor access.



*Great Spotted Woodpecker at Hackfall  
Photograph: Morley Hedley c1952  
Courtesy of Mr & Mrs C Hutchinson*

The most notable feature of Hackfall apart from the views are the Spring flowers with wood anemone, lesser celandine and ransoms on the more moist land and dogs mercury on drier parts. Their profusion testifies to the underlying largely undisturbed nature of the woodland despite the woods varying fortunes over the years.

The wood is generally in a good condition, thanks to the sound management of the Woodland Trust, but

English Nature does have concerns in relation to the extent of sycamore. This widespread tree thrives in Yorkshire but perhaps too much! While it is welcome in many places, such as copses in otherwise exposed areas, as the only standard tree its prevalence throughout Hackfall is more contentious. It is so successful that it overtakes and out-competes other species. To address this the current plan is to ensure it doesn't spread any more by removing saplings and ring-barking some mature seed trees and to progressively thin to favour the ash, oak, rowan and bird cherry.

*Andrew Craven  
English Nature*

## Conservation Plan for Hackfall

In 2002 we completed a Conservation Plan for Hackfall. The plan was prepared to a brief drawn up by English Heritage with assistance and input from English Nature, The Woodland Trust and Hackfall Trust, The Landmark Trust, Harrogate Borough Council and North Yorkshire County Council. Its purpose was to help support the future conservation and management of Hackfall. It provided a record of the historic development of Hackfall and set out, via site surveys and analysis, to provide direction for its future conservation and management.

The overall policies and proposals that made up the Conservation Plan were broadly accepted by all of the interested parties - an achievement of which we were justly proud. However we still needed to gain more knowledge, particularly about Hackfall's natural history. Therefore in 2003 an application was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to help fund a number of ecological surveys. The HLF paid up and these surveys, now completed, will help to direct future works. With this work completed we were ready to apply to the HLF for further funding. But it is not as simple as that. The application involves a two stage process. Stage I is an

application to fund the necessary development works that will help the Hackfall Trust calculate exactly how much money will be required to fund a long list of projects. For example, it is accepted that Mowbray Castle is in need of repair, but until an architect, a surveyor and an archaeologist have drawn up detailed proposals, the cost of repair can only be estimated.

Last month the Stage I application was submitted in order to fund a wide range of development works involving buildings, paths, culverts, ponds, dams, steps and streams. A decision about the Stage I funding is expected this spring. The development works will then be worked up during next summer and a Stage II (and final ) application will be submitted in the autumn of 2005. A final decision is expected in the spring of 2006. Should this final application be successful, works could begin on the restoration of Hackfall. So there is still some way to go, and much now depends on the current Stage I bid, but because the HLF can offer up to 90% of the costs it is surely worth filling in a form - however complicated it may be.

*Patrick James  
The Landscape Agency*

## The Rustic Temple

This delightful photograph of the group of Victorians by the Rustic Temple is reproduced by kind permission of Mike and Judy Leathley.

The lady sitting in the foreground is Mike's paternal grandmother, Ethel Winifred Talent, and the gentleman standing on the rock over her right shoulder is his grandfather Oliver Leathley, as we are not sure of the exact



*The Rustic Temple  
Photograph: By kind permission of Mike and Judy Leathley*

or after they were married.

Oliver grew up at Lake House in Grewelthorpe and Winifred's family came from Ashton-under-Lyme, where the family business was a coach works. The Talents came to Grewelthorpe frequently to stay at their holiday home, Raby Cottage, and the family probably spent many happy hours in

date of the photo Mike does not know if this was before

the beauty spot of Hackfall.

## Lost View Restored

Late Summer 2004 was horrible but it brought with it two of the best things which have happened to Hackfall for years: the restoration by the Landmark Trust of the fallen arches of The Ruin; and the re-opening, thanks to the Swinton Estate, of the most famous of the views for which Hackfall was once renowned.

This is the view from Limehouse Hill up-river to its climax at the spire of Masham Church. To make it possible at all William Aislabie needed the help of Sir William

Danby, the then owner of Swinton. Between them they dug out a wide u-shaped hollow down the bank to the river on the Swinton side, which you will see when you go there.

This earthwork and the spectacle it revealed must have caused quite a stir, something like the Gormley Angel of the North, or the London Eye; because it got a mention from all the early visitors and was painted, most notably on a plate made by Wedgwood in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century for the Empress of Russia, Catherine the Great, part of a

huge dinner-service decorated with pictures of ðightsö from all over England, on each of the pieces. Most of the ðightsö got only one plate each, but Hackfall was famous enough to be given five or six.



*View of Masham Church from Limehouse Hill.  
Hackfall. 1863*

I never expected to see and enjoy this sight in my lifetime. For years it has been blocked by a well-grown plantation of Corsican Pine on the Swinton side. But what has happened is this: the plantation was due for a thinning and Norman Hutchinson, head forester at Swinton, most ingeniously managed that

operation so as to open up the view.

There is still a bit of clearing to do, mainly on the Hackfall side of the boundary wall. But the view is there, history has repeated itself and once again Hackfall is in debt to the Swinton Estate, and to Norman, for the recovery of one of its most admired features. Go straight down the Limehouse fields by the footpath from the bottom of Oak Bank and you will see what I mean.

*James Ramsden*

## C18th and C19th Travellers

News of the beautiful scenes at Hackfall must, at first, have travelled by word of mouth - but local publishers were quick to cash-in with guidebooks. Travellers often kept detailed notes of their visits and these were very popular when they were published. Without any of the posters and advertisements of modern marketing Hackfall's fame grew, and by 1801 more than 200 parties were touring the garden in each season.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the visit began at the gardener's cottage, now Hackfall Farm, opposite what was a simple entrance gate. Here, the visitors appreciated the stable for their horses. The gardener was also the guide to the gardens, and the incumbent in the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century was particularly well respected by the visitors, (who we should remember were from the upper echelons of society, this was not an age of mass tourism). One visitor recorded in 1795 that he was much

entertained by the honest intelligent converse of our conductor.

The visitor, exhausted by his tour of the gardens, was delighted to reach Mowbray Point (The Ruin) and to be able to take refreshments there. The gardener's wife also offered breakfasts and teas at the cottage. Local inns promoted themselves on the basis of their proximity to Hackfall and other attractions. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Unicorn Inn in Ripon offered a day trip to Hackfall with a pair of horses for 16 shillings.

Through many decades of change at Hackfall there has been one constant - the Yorkshire weather. A tourist in 1799 thought the garden a delight, even though it rained the whole time. He was however philosophical enough to conclude that at least he had seen the waterfalls in their full glory!

## The Ruin at Mowbray Point

At long last the Landmark Trust is able to report the happy news that the restoration of William Aislabie's ruin and banqueting house is complete. It has taken a very long time to get here, but the result surely speaks for itself. Its three small rooms have been restored as a bedroom, kitchen/sitting/dining room, and a bathroom. This highly unusual holiday accommodation, with all of Hackfall laid out before you, can now be enjoyed by anyone all year round, and some very positive press articles have already been generated. There is no doubt that the best way to experience the Ruin will be to stay here and we hope to arrange open days for everyone else who'd like to visit.



*The Ruin, East View*

organisations such as English Heritage and several charitable trusts. Likewise, the Ruin's future could not have been secured without the skills of all the craftsmen and women who have nurtured its fabric back into good health. It seems invidious to single people out, but special thanks must be due to John Maloney and his team of stonemasons who carried out the initial phase of repair, and to Barnard Thwaites of CAT Builders who saw the restoration through to completion.

Details of staying at the Ruin can be obtained via the Landmark Trust's booking office (01628 825925) or the website: [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk).

*Alastair Dick-Cleland  
The Landmark Trust*

The restoration would not have been possible without the help, particularly financial, of many people and

## STOP PRESS

### GOOD NEWS FROM THE HACKFALL TRUST

The Heritage Lottery Fund regional committee met in March to assess our bid and I quote from their letter: "We have decided to award your project a Stage 1 pass; also to offer a development grant towards working up a detailed access and audience development plan, a 10-year maintenance

and management plan, an education programme and **all of the restoration and landscaping works.**"

This leads me to hope that our Stage 2 application will succeed when we are ready to make it. It will cover the whole project, at not negligible cost."

*James Ramsden*

If you have any comments or would like further information please contact:  
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