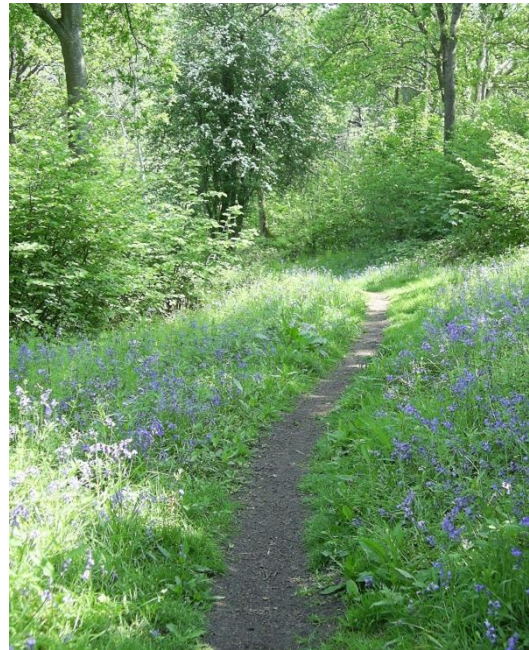


Mortimore's Wood Ancient Woodland & Local Nature Reserve

A small area of ancient woodland with a recorded history extending back for over 800 years. The wood has a diversity of plant and bird life which is only found in such old woodlands. Mortimore's Wood lies just one mile from the centre of the busy town of Chippenham, providing a haven of tranquillity from the bustle of modern life.



Bluebells adorn the wood in spring.

800 YEARS OF WOODLAND HISTORY

The history of Mortimore's Wood can, through documentary evidence, be traced back to the 12th century, at which time it formed part of the Royal Forest of Pewsham, a hunting preserve of the King, with strict laws controlling what the ordinary people could do in the Forest. Local people were allowed to graze their cattle & let pigs eat acorns in autumn [rites of *pasturage* & *pannage*], but they could not kill any deer or boar [both venison] and dogs had to be *lawed* [have their claws pulled out] before they could be taken into the Forest.

Unfortunately, these ancient woodland sites are disappearing at an horrendous rate. In Wiltshire alone the loss since 1945 amounts to more than 15,000 acres.

CENTURIES OF WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

For centuries this wood has been subjected to human management. It is widely accepted that there is no woodland in England that has not been subjected to management by man. Where it can be shown that a wood has a history dating to before 1600AD and contains mostly native species (as does Mortimore's Wood) then it is classified as *Semi-natural Ancient Woodland*.

The management regime used in this wood is *coppicing with standards*, in which few large trees are allowed to develop and the under-storey is cut every few years in a rotating cycle of sections, producing a crop of long, thin poles with numerous uses. This practice was previously very much more widespread in England than it is today. Records show that in the early 19th century, hop growing in Kent alone, used poles from 12-year-old coppice in quantities that required more than 20,000 acres of coppice product annually.

As the cycle of coppicing continues, each coppice stool grows wider, and eventually develops into a ring of live wood as the centre rots out. These rings become much larger than the tree would grow to be if left to grow naturally. A typical hazel left to grow as a tree will live for 60-70 years and reach a girth of around 80-100cm; compare that to the stool shown below!



An ancient hazel coppice stool, approx. 330cm girth.

Coppicing allows much more sunlight to reach the woodland floor than would be seen in wild woodland - compare the coppiced area of the wood with the area of high trees at the north end. This increase in light allows more flowers to develop, and more insects will feed on these. When subjected to coppicing over a long period of time woodlands take on a particular character, with a greater diversity of insects and birds than would be found in other woodlands (over 30 insect & 40 bird species identified in this wood.)

In Mortimore's Wood, surveys have identified over 60 species of ground flora, a very high level of diversity, in the coppiced area. A number of these species, along with several species of tree, are associated only with ancient woodland and are known as *indicator species*. The proportion of these within the wood is one of the factors that influenced its designations as a County Wildlife Site and, in 2007, Local Nature Reserve. The total of trees is 16 species, which is an unusually large range for woodland of this type and size. Four of these are indicator species, three of which [Aspen, Crab Apple & Holly] are present in unusually high numbers.



Speckled Wood butterfly.

Ancient woodlands are also an important store for atmospheric carbon (more so than newer plantation woods), mostly in their root complexes, and especially in those of established coppice stools or pollards. In these, it is locked away for centuries – our oldest pollard oak is estimated to be over 600 years old. They can therefore help to mitigate climate change; Mortimore's Wood stores carbon estimated to be equivalent to 500 tonnes of CO₂ with more added by every year's growth. It is consequently important for all such woods to be retained & maintained in the traditional way.

WORKING FOR THE FUTURE

In 1994, working with the landowner (Chippenham Borough Lands Trust), a volunteer group was formed to restore coppice management to Mortimore's Wood. It was at least 40 years since this was last done and the wood was becoming seriously overgrown, putting the flora of the wood in danger of lasting damage. The aim of the Volunteers is to restore, on a non-commercial basis, the management system which resulted in this diversity, to maintain the predominant character of the wood, and to improve access to some areas. This has included planting over 500 new trees in the last 25 years.

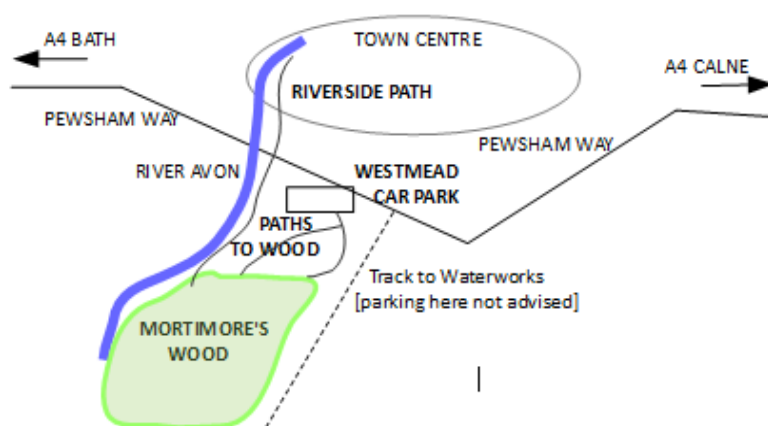


Volunteers clearing storm damage.

WORKDAYS:- work takes place between 10.00 & 1.00 on the second Sunday of every month. We meet at the main entrance to the wood shortly before 10.00. For safety reasons, we cannot allow children to participate in workdays.

CONTACT:- Paul - 01380 727339 or Colin on 01249 446541;
www.mortimores.org.uk

LOCATION:- The wood can be found approximately ¼ mile across country through the Westmead Country Area to the southern side of the A4 Pewsham Way. We recommend the use of the car park off Pewsham Way, between the Webbington Road & Canal Road roundabouts. The wood is 150 yards south of Sustrans route from Chippenham to Lacock.



ACCESS:- Open for pedestrians at all times; the site is partly on a steep slope. Paths can be slippery when wet; in winter, riverside path can be flooded. Regrettably the terrain makes access for those with mobility restrictions very limited and there is no access to the wood for wheelchairs.