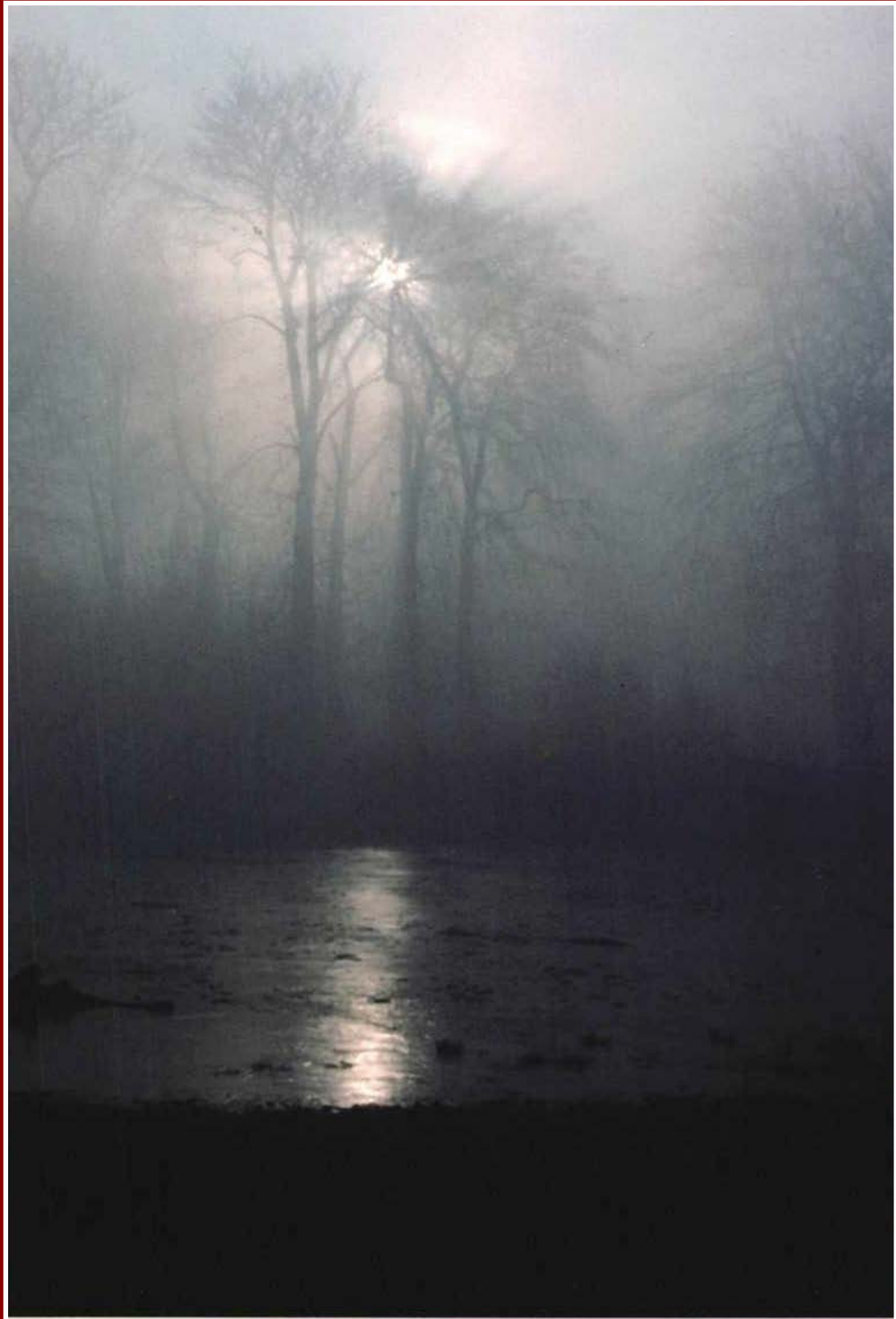


# Nature Conservation in Brent



**Ecology Handbook 31**

London Ecology Unit



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The London Ecology Unit wishing to thank the London Borough of  
Brent for its assistance in producing this handbook.

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Designed by Jane Wood

Readers should be aware that although many of the sites  
described in this book are freely accessible, many others are  
private. In some cases they can be visited by permission of the  
owner. The fact that they are described here does not necessarily  
mean that they are accessible and readers should be aware of the  
laws of trespass.

Front cover  
Winter morning on the top of Barn Hill  
*Leslie Williams*

Back cover  
The spider *Araneus quadratus* in its web at Barn Hill  
*Leslie Williams*



## Foreword

It is sixteen years since the first handbook in this series was  
published by the Greater London Council. It set the scene for an  
innovative programme of work which has grown enormously over  
the years. Since 1986 the philosophy and practice advocated in  
that first handbook has become widely accepted by the London  
boroughs. This work has been undertaken by the London Ecology  
Unit working to a joint committee of London boroughs, the  
London Ecology Committee. Over this period, 22 handbooks have  
been published dealing with ecology and nature conservation in  
individual London boroughs. Together these handbooks go a long  
way towards a nature conservation strategy for London.

When the Ecology Unit was established in 1986, a handbook  
for Brent was the first in this series of books on individual  
boroughs. This was a slim volume describing only 17 sites of  
importance for nature conservation. A comparison of this earlier  
handbook with the present volume demonstrates the enormous  
advances which have been made since that time.

Each of these handbooks has had a vital role in providing the  
basis for boroughs to address nature conservation in their Unitary  
Development Plans. They have also provided invaluable advice for  
the management of important habitats throughout London. The  
handbooks have been used by the London boroughs as a basis  
for policy decisions in both Planning and Leisure Services. But  
their appeal goes much wider than the London borough councils.  
Places of importance for nature conservation are described in a  
popular style to encourage public appreciation and enjoyment of

nature. Recent handbooks have included a series of wildlife walks  
as pull-out supplements.

The Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992 gave new impetus to  
nature conservation at both global and local levels. Biodiversity  
has become a new buzz word and biodiversity action plans are  
now being developed throughout the UK. The new Greater  
London Authority will be required to produce a Biodiversity Action  
Plan for London as one of the Mayor's Strategies.

In April 2000 the London Ecology Unit will be absorbed into  
the new Greater London Authority. Whilst *Nature Conservation  
in Brent* is the last ecology handbook produced by the London  
Ecology Unit, we are now moving into a new dimension where  
biodiversity conservation takes its place within an integrated  
framework of planning and land management for Greater London.  
The approach developed by the London Ecology Unit over the  
years provides an important foundation for future work on  
biodiversity and it is to be hoped that the GLA will complete the  
picture for London over the coming years.

I would like to pay tribute to all the staff of the London Ecology  
Unit who have produced this series of handbooks, and to the  
enormous number of people in London who have contributed in  
many different ways through their specialist knowledge. Whatever  
decisions are made by the GLA regarding the future of work in this  
sphere, these handbooks will provide an important legacy and a  
lasting record of the Unit's work.

Professor David Goode  
Director  
London Ecology Unit

March 2000

# Acknowledgements

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The quality of the book has been greatly enhanced by photographs which have kindly been loaned by various people; these are acknowledged individually on the appropriate pages.

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# Publications by the London Ecology Unit

This book is one of a series of publications produced by the London Ecology Unit. Other titles in the series are:

- 1 Ecology and Nature Conservation in London
- 2 A Guide to Habitat Creation
- 3 Nature Conservation Guidelines for London
- 4 Woodland, Wasteland, the Tidal Thames and two London Boroughs
- 5 Nature Conservation in Brent
- 7 Nature Conservation in Hillingdon
- 8 London's Meadows and Pastures
- 9 Nature Conservation in Croydon
- 10 Nature Conservation in Greenwich
- 11 Nature Conservation in Waltham Forest
- 12 Nature Conservation in Southwark
- 13 Nature Conservation in Harrow
- 14 Nature Areas for City People
- 15 Nature Conservation in Hounslow
- 16 Nature Conservation in Ealing
- 17 Nature Conservation in Newham
- 18 Nature Conservation in Kingston upon Thames
- 19 Nature Conservation in Islington
- 20 Nature Conservation in Barking and Dagenham
- 21 Nature Conservation in Richmond upon Thames
- 22 Nature Conservation in Sutton
- 23 Nature Conservation in Community Forests
- 24 Nature Conservation in Camden
- 25 Nature Conservation in Hammersmith & Fulham
- 26 Nature Conservation in Lambeth
- 27 Nature Conservation in Tower Hamlets
- 28 Nature Conservation in Barnet
- 29 Nature Conservation in Merton
- 30 Nature Conservation in Lewisham

Also:

Building Green – A guide to using plants on roofs, walls and pavements

From 1st April 2000, the London Ecology Unit was absorbed into the new Greater London Authority. Its publications are still generally available from boroughs, from bookshops and from some libraries in London. They can also be obtained by post from the GLA. For more details please send a SAE to:

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London SW1P 3PY

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# Introduction

This handbook describes the wildlife habitats of the London Borough of Brent and the initiatives by the Council and others to protect and enhance sites of importance for nature conservation in the Borough. It is number 31 in the London Ecology Unit series of handbooks on the ecology of the London area. The book is relevant to anyone living in, working in or visiting Brent, and aims to help people get to know more about the local wildlife, as well as to increase their enjoyment of local open spaces through a better understanding of the ecology. The walks booklets, inserted in the back cover, should help people to explore some little-known corners of the Borough: we trust they will also serve to bring some of the theoretical information alive.

The book tries to show a full ecological picture of the Borough at the time of writing, and also describes the past land use so that the basis for the present pattern can be understood. Sites of nature conservation importance are described regardless of ownership, accessibility, or planning designations. Of course, wildlife is not restricted to such sites, and many places in Brent which are not described have some features of value. Whilst most of the sites described are accessible to the public some are not, and each site description indicates whether that site can be visited or not. The laws of trespass should always be heeded.

As well as informing the public, these handbooks are also designed to meet the needs of planners and land managers to assist their work on nature conservation. This may involve individual decisions on development control, or revised policies in the Unitary Development Plan, when this is reviewed. It must be stressed that the handbook has no statutory basis in itself, although some local planning authorities have taken steps to formally adopt elements of handbooks as statutory planning policy. The information on public open spaces should serve as a useful reference for the Parks Service staff in drawing up management strategies which seek to protect and enhance biological diversity. The handbook will also be of value to schools, in providing ideas on what to look out for in nearby open spaces.

The technical data are drawn from many sources. The starting point was the Wildlife Habitat Survey, carried out for the Greater London Council by the London Wildlife Trust in 1984-5, together with a follow up survey undertaken by the London Ecology Unit in 1986. This was the basis for our earlier and much briefer handbook on the ecology of Brent (number 5 in the present series). To provide information for this book, the Borough was resurveyed between 1997 and 1999, and these data were supplemented by information from many other people, such as Borough officers, local naturalists and historians, and members of local societies. The draft of this handbook was widely circulated for comment in 1999. Many people

therefore have contributed information and comment: this has helped to build up a fuller picture of the ecology of the Borough.

It is not possible here to provide full species lists of plants and animals found by the Unit and others in the many sites described: rather, we concentrate on the species that characterise the habitats, provide interest, or contribute significantly to the evaluation of the sites.

The Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992 gave an important new impetus to nature conservation at both global and local levels. As a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Government made a commitment to nature conservation, which encompasses not only rare or endangered species but also the diversity of commonplace plants and animals and their habitats. It has now become widely appreciated that these are, in their way, as much a part of our cultural heritage as more pristine wilderness.

The programme of Agenda 21, which also stems from the Rio Summit, has increased public awareness of the need for sustainable development and nature conservation. At the local level, this process works by setting up partnerships between local authorities and a wide range of representatives from local communities, the business sector and voluntary organisations. It seeks action promoting developments which meet the requirements of today's citizens without compromising the needs of future generations. An integral part of Local Agenda 21 should be the preparation of a local Biodiversity Action Plan. This local plan should ensure that national policy and targets for biodiversity – expressed in *Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan* (1994) and *Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report* (1995) – are translated into action at a local level. In addition to helping to achieve national objectives, a local Biodiversity Action Plan should also identify targets and implement action for habitats and species which are of local concern or importance. The first volume of the London Biodiversity Action Plan\* has been published and the second volume will follow. The Plan will set the context for borough-level plans, and work has been undertaken on a local Biodiversity Action Plan for Brent. This will identify species and habitats in the greatest need of protection and set targets for their conservation. The present handbook should serve as a useful tool in this process.

The Borough Council recognises the importance of wildlife and green spaces to people living in Brent, and pursues policies to defend sites of interest from development and to manage its open spaces with nature conservation in mind. It also has a strong programme of initiatives in the field of environmental education, including the establishment of nature areas in schools. It is intended that this book will be a useful tool in that process.

\* *London Biodiversity Audit (Volume 1 of the London Biodiversity Action Plan)*, London Biodiversity Partnership, 2000

# 1 The landscape and geology of Brent

## Location and character

The London Borough of Brent lies right in the centre of north-west London and stretches from Kilburn, where it is only two miles (three kilometres) from Marble Arch, out to Northwick Park, half a mile (less than one kilometre) from Harrow-on-the-Hill. It lies entirely to the west of the old Roman Watling Street, which, as the A5, now forms the majority of the Borough's eastern boundary apart from a short variation at West Hendon. Brent's neighbouring boroughs are Camden and Barnet to the east, Harrow to the north and west, and Ealing, Westminster, Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea to the south. It covers an area of 4,421 hectares, and is home to over 244,000 people.

The Borough is divided into two by the North Circular Road (see Figure 1). Development from the 19th century dominates the area within the North Circular, whilst most of the development north of the North Circular is from the 20th century. This division also corresponds fairly closely with the two pre-1965 Boroughs of Willesden and Wembley, which make up the modern Borough of Brent. The impression in Kilburn, Brondesbury, Willesden and Harlesden is of street upon street of Victorian housing, and the few open spaces which break this up – Paddington Cemetery, Queen's Park, Roundwood Park and Willesden New Cemetery – are also Victorian in origin. In fact, Willesden Green and Brondesbury Park were mostly not built-up until the first few decades of the 20th century, but it is only beyond Harlesden and Willesden that 20th century architecture, particularly from the 1920s and 1930s, comes into its own. This was Metro-land, which between the Wars came to mean a whole vision of life, and led to the rapid growth of Neasden, Wembley, Kingsbury, Queensbury and Preston. Rural Middlesex disappeared under a tide of bricks and mortar; now the only place in Brent where what was lost can be fully appreciated is at Fryent Country Park. The three major post-war housing developments, Stonebridge, Chalk Hill, and Church End at Willesden, are now in their turn being redeveloped to provide low-rise, more friendly environments.

Fryent Country Park and the Brent Reservoir are the two largest wildlife sites in Brent today. The Grand Union Canal runs through the southern edge of the Borough, and extensive railsides criss-cross the area. Major parks such as Gladstone Park, Northwick Park, Roe Green Park, Quainton Street Open Space and Woodcock Park, together with the open spaces in the Willesden and Kilburn areas mentioned above, make up much of the rest of the greenspace.

The two strategic centres in the Borough are Wembley and Kilburn, with other main town centres at Willesden Green, Cricklewood, Kingsbury and Harlesden, and smaller centres at Preston, Neasden, Kenton, and Alperton.

Apart from these various centres, industry and employment is concentrated in three particular areas: firstly to the west of the Edgware Road, especially around the North Circular Road; secondly from Dudden Hill through Neasden to Wembley Park; and thirdly in the Park Royal and Alperton areas on either side of the Grand Union Canal. Smaller concentrations are to be found at Kingsbury, Queensbury and North Wembley, but in some of these, factories

have been demolished and redeveloped, or await redevelopment, to the usual superstores and retail outlets. Now, as the Millennium is reached, the best-known feature of Brent, Wembley Stadium, is to be redeveloped to become the new national sporting stadium for the 21st century.

## Rivers and streams

Residents and travellers in the past would have been far more aware of the lie of the land than we are today, and would have possessed detailed knowledge of the local rivers and streams. They were prominent features of the landscape, difficult to cross, likely to flood, and bordered by marshes, trees and rich agricultural land. Now great stretches of these rivers have been diverted from more sinuous courses and confined within concrete straight jackets, over the vertical sides of which you must peer for a glimpse of the water. Urban development comes almost to their edges, or indeed sometimes right over the top, the watercourse being hidden in a covered culvert. Most people in Brent today, therefore, are quite unaware of their rivers. They do not pause to look over the parapets of bridges as they hurry along busy town streets; indeed they probably do not even notice the bridges themselves. Nor do they stop to consider, as they toil up the steep slope from Wembley Park station towards Barn Hill, for example, that they are climbing up the sides of a river valley. The watercourses only become prominent in times of exceptional flood.

The River Brent (figure 1) cuts through the centre of the Borough, running east-west just north of the North Circular Road. The formative feature of the Borough is the valley carved by this sizeable river.

At the eastern end of the valley is the Welsh Harp or Brent Reservoir; at about two kilometres long it is the largest water body in north-west London, and is shared with the neighbouring Borough of Barnet. North of the North Circular Road, west and downstream of the reservoir, two side valleys have been formed by tributaries of the Brent, the Wealdstone Brook and the Wembley Brook. The Wealdstone Brook rises in the Borough of Harrow, entering Brent at Kenton, and then passing to the west of Barn Hill to Wembley Park, where it meets the main river. Several other streamlets, now mostly underground, run into the Wealdstone Brook. One small, un-named stream can still be seen on the northern edge of Barn Hill. This stream enters the Gaderbrook, just before it joins the Wealdstone Brook at Preston. Crouch Brook joins the main stream near the modern Carlton Avenue East, and the Wellan joins it underground near Forty Green. The Wembley Brook is shorter. Marked on a map of 1910 as Rowlands Brook, it is first visible from a footpath between Lyon Park Avenue and Station Grove; upstream of here it seems to have been covered over. It then flows under the lines between Wembley Central and Stonebridge Park, before following the northern side of these, ending its brief journey at its confluence with the Brent near Stonebridge Park station.

South of the North Circular Road, the Borough is drained by a stream called the Slade, which is now almost totally underground. The culverting started during the winter of 1920-21. The Slade rises near Cricklewood Broadway and from there follows its subterranean course westwards, passing along the southern side of Gladstone Park. On the west side of Dudden Hill Lane an old bridge parapet can still be seen opposite Mulgrave Road. From here the Slade used to flow through an area of what is now allotments and roughland as far as the Metropolitan line, and its valley can just be detected. Another former bridge parapet lies next to the footpath alongside the Metropolitan line, to the east of Neasden station, at the point where the stream passes under the line. To the west of Neasden Lane, and

the Dudding Hill Loop goods line, a reed bed survives, and this would have been fed with water by the Slade (see Br.BI 6 – C). The stream emerges into daylight for some 250 metres in a housing estate off Brentfield Road, where it can clearly be seen to be flowing from east to west (see Br.BI11). Just before Brentfield Road, it disappears again, passing under the North Circular Road and reaching the Brent at Tokyngton Recreation Ground, where its last few metres can be seen. The south-eastern corner of the Borough in the Queen's Park and Kilburn area is drained by the Westbourne, also mostly underground, which rises near Whitestone Pond on Hampstead Heath and flows via the Serpentine to reach the Thames at Chelsea.

North of the Brent river valley and the North Circular Road, the land rises up in a series of low hills. The highest point in the Borough is Wakemans Hill at 92m: this lies in the triangle between the Edgware Road and Kingsbury Road, and was extensively excavated for gravel in the 1930s. The street names – Summit Close, Hill View and High Croft – indicate its location on an A-Z map. It is entirely built up, unlike Fryent Country Park further to the west, which has survived as a large and much-loved landscape of meadows, hedges, ponds and woodland; its highest point, on Barn Hill, is 86 metres above sea level. There are several additional but slightly lower hills on this side of the river further downstream, near Wembley Park and Wembley Stadium, and at Elmwood Park and The Pimple near the boundary with Harrow, as well as One Tree Hill near the Ealing boundary.

South of the North Circular Road the terrain is flatter. Only Dollis Hill rises steeply from the river valley, just to the south of the Brent Reservoir, reaching to just over 70m in height. Being the only prominent feature south of the river, it provides extensive vistas over the flatter land of Willesden, Kensal Green and Kilburn in the south of the Borough, and beyond to central and western London. These can be enjoyed from Gladstone Park, a fine open space on the southern slopes of Dollis Hill. A slightly lower hill stretches westwards through Willesden Green, with the prominent hill in Roundwood Park at its edge.

## Geology

Seventy million years and more ago, what is now the London area was covered by a tropical sea. Countless microscopic marine creatures lived and died in this sea, and their calcareous bodies sank into the ooze on the sea bed. Over millions of years this became consolidated into the thick beds of chalk which today underlie the whole of the London basin.

Subsequently, immense geological forces raised the land above the waters, before it sank once more beneath the surface of another sea. This cycle was repeated several times, at each time another layer of material accumulating on the sea bed, the composition depending on the prevailing conditions. The most significant layer for Brent (and for most of London) was a thick layer of London Clay; fossils of crocodiles and palms found in the clay, as well as an elephant and a hippopotamus at Wembley Park, indicate warm waters and nearby land at this time. Eventually the sea became shallower and the more sandy and silty Claygate Beds and Bagshot Beds were deposited on top of the clay. Fragmentary fossil leaves have been found in clay layers in the Claygate Beds.

Finally the land rose above sea level again, for the last time to date. Some buckling of the layers had begun earlier, but more major folding began after the London Clay had been laid down, and included the Alpine Uplift, when Africa came into contact with Europe, some 20 million years ago. The multi-layered sandwich of chalk, London Clay and other strata was buckled, with the London



area sinking into a shallow basin rimmed to north and south by hills. Erosion has since stripped off the overlying strata from these hills, exposing the underlying chalk of what we now call the Chilterns and the North Downs. Erosion also stripped off some of the layers within the London Basin, removing all the Bagshot Beds and almost all the Claygate Beds from what is now the Borough of Brent; only a small area of the latter remains, at Willesden Green (see figure 2). The underlying London Clay is exposed over most of the rest of the Borough. It weathers to a slightly acidic, heavy clay soil, not one favoured by gardeners.

More recent strata underlie relatively small areas of the Borough. Deposits of gravels occur on Dollis Hill, in St Andrew's Churchyard

at Kingsbury, around the Harrow Road near Stonebridge Park, and near West Hendon Playing Fields. These were laid down by rivers running north through Brent to join the Thames when the latter pursued a more northerly course, running eastwards from near the southern edge of the Chilterns to the coast near Clacton-on-sea. More recent still are the gravels and alluvium which have been deposited along the courses of the River Brent and its tributaries, the Wealdstone and Wembley Brooks. Most recent of all, of course, are the man-made strata in the form of rubble on sites of demolished buildings, railway ballast and other artificial substrates; all of these affect the local ecology.

## 2 The history behind the landscape

### Before the Norman Conquest

Five thousand years ago, almost all the Borough except for the river flood plains was covered with thick forest, primarily of oak, and interspersed by a mosaic of glades, opened up by winds and the deaths of trees, and maintained by grazing herbivores.

The main evidence of the Romans in Brent is the presence of Watling Street, a Roman road now forming much of the Borough's eastern boundary in its modern form of the Edgware Road. Watling Street ran from Dover to St Albans, and later on to Chester. Other Roman evidence is to be found in the walls of Old St Andrews Church at Kingsbury (see below). One of the main Saxon trackways to the north came up from the Thames at Westminster to follow the present-day Dudden Hill Lane and Neasden Lane, before turning away via Salmon Street, Barn Hill and 'Eldestrete' (Honeypot Lane) to Hertfordshire. Where it runs across Fryent Country Park it is known as Hell Lane, and is marked by hedges.

The name Brent goes back to the Old English *Brigantia* and meant holy or high river. The name of Willesden first appears as *Wellesdune*, meaning 'the hill of the spring', in a charter of 940. In this, Athelstan, the grandson of King Alfred the Great, gave ten manors in Willesden-cum-Neasden to the monks of St Erkenwald at St Paul's Cathedral. Eight stalls in the cathedral bear still the names of the manors: Willesden, Neasden, Oxgate, Twyford, Harlesden, Chamberleyne Wood, Brondesbury and Mapesbury (although some of these names, for example Brondesbury, are actually post-Conquest). The location of some of these old manors is obvious, but for others it is less so. The area of Oxgate is today commemorated by Oxgate Lane and Oxgate Gardens, off the Edgware Road to the north of Dollis Hill. The name probably referred to a gate to stop oxen straying onto Watling Street from the neighbouring pasture land. The medieval remains of Oxgate Farmhouse can still be found in Coles Green Road (see next section). Twyford was where Twyford Abbey is today, in Park Royal, just over the Borough boundary in Ealing. The site of the Manor of Brondesbury, and subsequently Brondesbury Park, is where Manor House Drive is today. Chamberleyne Wood was in the neighbourhood of the modern Chamberlayne Road. Mapesbury is marked today by Mapesbury Road, on the north side of Willesden Lane. Mapesbury House stood on the site until it was demolished in the 20th century. Mapesbury and Chamberlayne are still the names of modern Council wards. The name Neasden means "nose-shaped hill".

Kilburn took its name from the Kele-bourne stream, which in its turn was derived from the Old English *cyne-burna* (royal stream) or possibly *cyna-burna* (cow's stream). The Kele-bourne was the upper part of what is today known as the Westbourne. This river did not obtain the name *Westbourne* until the 19th century. It now runs underground from Hampstead Heath, through Kilburn, surfaces to form The Serpentine, before going underground again to reach the Thames at Chelsea. Another stream is described in a Saxon charter of 767, which refers to a stream called *Liddinge*. By 1401 it was "water called Lydding" and by 1453 it was *Le Weldebroke*. Now it is the Wealdstone Brook.

Wembley first appears as *Wemba's lea*, the farm or homestead of Wemba. This name appears in a charter of 825 by which King Beornwulf gave to Archbishop Wulfred 100 hides of land (about

12,000 acres) at Hearge (Harrow), Herefrithingland, Wemba's Lea and Geddingcgum (Yeading). In Saxon times, England was divided into hundreds, and each hundred had its own court to decide local affairs. The moot (or meeting place) of Gore Hundred was in a triangular field at Gore Farm; the site is now marked by Moot Court, off Fryent Way near Kingsbury Circle. Wembley was a hamlet of Harrow Parish until 1894, and the Elders of Harrow, together with other local parishes, would have met at the Hundred of Gore. A mention of Kingsbury, just before the Norman Conquest, came when King Edward the Confessor gave a third of the fruit growing in his woods at 'Kyngessbryrig' to Westminster Abbey.

The oldest building still to be found in the Borough is St Andrew's Church at Kingsbury. The church's flint and rubble walls incorporate a sarsen corner stone, brought to the area by a glacier, and Roman tiles, suggesting earlier occupation of the site. It is often referred to as a Saxon church, and does have features which are usually regarded as Saxon, although other evidence suggests a post-Conquest date of about 1200. It is the only Grade 1 Listed Building in the Borough.

### Brent between 1066 and 1700

A convent of 13 Benedictine nuns was established in what is now Kilburn in 1139, close to the present-day Brent/Camden boundary. It was closed at the time of the Reformation, but the ruins were still visible in the 18th century. "Bronnesburie" was named after a 12th-century canon of St Paul's named Brand. Brondesbury was one of the prebendal estates carved out from the parish of Willesden by St Paul's. Although during the Middle Ages the thick forest was mostly reduced to meadow and pasture, 69 acres of woodland still survived in Brondesbury up to the 17th century. Cattle were kept, with a milkhouse and cheese-room on the Brondesbury Estate.

Harlesden is mentioned in the Domesday Book, as is Willesden. The principal survivor of the former village of Willesden is the parish church of St Mary. St Mary's was famous in medieval times for its image of 'Our Lady of Willesden', which was supposed to have miraculous properties. It became a place of pilgrimage, but the fairs and other festivities attached to the pilgrimages became a scandal. Finally, in 1538, by order of Thomas Cromwell "all the notable images unto which were made anie especial pilgrimage and offerings were utterlie taken away and burnt at Chelsea by the Lord Privie Seal". The earliest parts of the present church date from the 13th century, although the church is recorded as early as 1181 and the font is Norman. In many parish churches, the font is the oldest survivor, even when the rest of the church has been completely rebuilt.

A truly amazing survival is Oxgate Farmhouse, on the west side of Coles Green Road and just to the north of the junction with Crest Road and Oxgate Lane. It was formerly known as Upper Oxgate Farm, in the days when there was more than one farm here. This, the only remnant of Willesden's agricultural past, is the oldest domestic building remaining in the Borough. It has a wooden signboard with the date 1483, but the present building dates mainly from the 16th and 17th centuries. As mentioned in the section above, Oxgate was a pre-Conquest manor. A track along the line of the present-day Oxgate Lane linked Watling Street to the Oxgate

farms. The boundaries of the farm fields changed little between the 17th and 19th centuries. Sheep and cattle were reared, and there was a tannery here in the 17th century. At the end of the 16th century, what is now Dollis Hill was called Daleson Hill. It later became Dolly's Hill before assuming its present name.

In the Domesday Book, 'Chingesberie' was held for the King by Ernulf de Hesding. Although there is earlier work within its walls (see previous section), the fabric of Old St Andrew's Church in Kingsbury is chiefly 13th century, although the south door is of the 12th century. The Black Death affected the small settlement of Kingsbury, and in 1350 the deaths of at least 13 people "at the time of the Pestilence" were presented at Kingsbury Manor Court. A Grove Farm is mentioned in 1276 as being held by Richard Grove from the manor of Edgware. The estate was considerably enlarged in the late 15th century. By the end of the Elizabethan period, what was then Groves Place was a typical medieval farmhouse. It had a yard enclosed on three sides by buildings, and included a pond and orchard. In 1609 the house was broken into and goods worth £14 11s., mostly linen, clothing, curtains and carpets, stolen. In 1664 the house was assessed for possessing nine hearths. The house was located just to the east of Stag Lane, where Grove Park Special School is today.

For all of the Middle Ages, Wembley was a part of Harrow and was served by Harrow parish church. This remained the situation until 1894. John Lyon, who founded Harrow School in 1572, lived at Preston Hill. His house survived as Lyon's Farm until 1960, when it was demolished to be replaced by John Perrin Place. Preston probably originated as 'the Priest's farm', and was first recorded in 1194.

Another notable building in this area, but also lost during the 20th century, was Uxenden. Uxenden means 'the fort or hill by the water'. The water was the Wealdstone Brook. In the 16th century, Uxenden Manor was located on the western slopes of Barn Hill; it was then the residence of the Catholic family of Bellamy. It was at Uxenden, in 1586, that Anthony Babington and his associates found their final refuge after the foiling of their plot to kill Queen Elizabeth and put Mary Queen of Scots on the throne. They had somewhat unwisely been toasting the 'success' of their enterprise in London taverns before the event. After their arrest they were put in the Tower and executed "with the utmost barbarity". The Bellamys too suffered badly for their support of Babington; one was hanged at Tyburn, another died in the Tower and two committed suicide. The house was demolished in 1932 when the Metropolitan (now Jubilee) line was extended to Stanmore.

At the time of the Domesday Survey, Kingsbury had enough woodland to support 1200 pigs. Taking each pig as representing one acre (0.41 hectares) of woodland, this corresponded to at least 485 hectares of woodland and represented at least 65% of the parish. This was high compared with the average of 15% for Domesday England and 30% for Middlesex. The latter figure actually 'hid' a densely wooded area in the north and north-west of the county, including Kingsbury. By 1438, the All Soul's College records indicate clearance in the parish, from an area primarily of woodland to one in which separate woods were surrounded by other land uses. The All Souls College maps of 1597 show an assart landscape in which fields had been cut out of the original forest, leaving some woodland, and a large number of woodland belts and hedgerows around the fields. An estimate by Leslie Williams (from whose paper much of the information about woodlands in Kingsbury is taken – see Williams, McLauchlin and Harrison 1987) puts a percentage of woodland at this time, both in wooded belts and hedgerows around fields, as 22%, with 78% of the known area of the parish as fields.

Assarting was more usual in Kingsbury Parish and this influenced the landscape of the eastern half of Fryent Country Park. In Harrow Parish, the open field system was more common and this affected the western half of the Country Park. The hedgerows at Fryent Country Park are known to date back at least to 1597 (since they can be seen on the All Souls College maps of that date), and possibly from as far back as the 13th century. On the western (Harrow) side of Fryent Way, these enclose fields which probably also date from several centuries before 1600. Many of the surviving hedges in the Northwick Park and Sudbury areas are also very old. There are some particularly fine surviving hedges at The Pimple (see Chapter 11). Much of the area round Barn Hill itself was still wooded in 1469, but is marked as fields in 1547.

Alperton was first recorded as Ealhbert's farm' in 1199.

### The 18th century

An interesting map from the end of the 18th century shows the open fields and commons of the time. Within what is now Brent, commons are shown at Willesden Green, in the area of Wembley between the present-day King Edward VII Park and the Stadium, around Sudbury Hill, to the north of Forty Avenue, and at Roe Green. Open fields are particularly numerous around Willesden, Alperton, and from Wembley northwards to Kenton. The areas which come in neither category would have mostly been grassland. These were particularly noticeable to the south-east of Willesden, and in the whole north-east of the Borough between Willesden, Wembley, Kenton, and the Edgware Road. This was because the poorly drained, clay subsoils in Brent were unsuitable for most arable farming, and the main agricultural use in the 18th century was hay farming and pasture. By the early 18th century, woodland only occupied about 4% of Kingsbury Parish, compared to the figure of 22% some 130 years earlier. This fell to about 1% in 1819 and to 0.2% in 1839. Rackham (1980) notes that Middlesex lost a higher proportion (93%) of its 1086 woodland between then and 1895 than any other English county.

Kilburn, in the 18th century, had been known as Kilburn Wells and attracted the wealthy out from London. The well was just over the present boundary with Camden, and had quite an influence on the area in the 18th century, rivalling Sadler's Wells. As usual with mineral wells the water had a bitter taste, but it was also said to be more strongly impregnated with carbon dioxide than any other spring in England. In 1773 it was advertised as "a happy spot, equally celebrated for its rural situation and the acknowledged efficacy of its water".

In the late 18th century, Humphry Repton landscaped the grounds of Brondesbury House to turn them into a park. This was located on the south-west side of Willesden Lane and covered what is now Manor House Drive.

Before the 19th century, Willesden was a rural area of considerable charm with small hamlets such as Neasden and Harlesden. a few large houses, farms and the village of Willesden itself. Settlement was mostly along the High Road, between Chapel End at Willesden Green and Church End, and grouped round the parish church of St Mary. Arable farming still predominated, the move to dairy farming coming later. A survival from this period, which can still be visited and enjoyed, is the Grange Museum of Local History. This was built in the early 18th century as the stables of a large house called *The Grove*.

Deadman's Hill, to the south-east of Wembley (now the Harrow Road), originally crossed the River Brent via a ford and later a wooden footbridge. Between 1660 and 1700 a stone bridge was built. This eventually came to give its name to the area. At that time

the river looped towards the south-east, and the ‘Stone Bridge’ was near where Hillside today meets Wyborne Way, opposite the *Coach and Horses* pub. The meander was shortened before 1818, opening the more direct route followed by the River Brent today, and necessitating a second bridge for the Harrow Road in addition to the original one. For many years the Brent was forced to follow its old route by the building of a weir across the by-passed route. Subsequent changes are detailed below (see ‘The London & North Western Railway and the Bakerloo’).

Two artists were particularly active in the area during the late 18th century and both of them painted the *Coach and Horses*. The better known was George Morland (1763-1800); his painting of the inn was entitled ‘Alehouse Kitchen’. London’s West End was his normal home, but to escape from his creditors he lodged at Kensal Green in the home of his engraver, William Ward, whose sister he married (Ward soon after married Morland’s sister). The family quartet did not stay together for long, but some of Morland’s finest paintings were done whilst he was at Kensal Green. Apart from his one of the *Coach and Horses*, there was also ‘The Idle Laundress’ (this was thought to have been set at Willesden Green where there were many laundries) and ‘Parents Visiting the School’ (supposed to be Kensal Academy). Julius Caesar Ibbetson (born 1759) also painted in the Brent area, including Stonebridge, especially in the six years from 1787 when he lived in Kilburn. His portrait of the *Coach and Horses* was entitled ‘The Anglers’ Alehouse’.

Humphry Repton was also employed by Richard Page between 1792 and 1793 to landscape the Wembley Park estate. Page owned this large agricultural estate, which at that time included Barnhills (sic) Park. At Barn Hill, Repton’s original design included landscaping the summit with woodland, and planting a belt of trees around the hedges at the foot of the hill.

Groves Place at Kingsbury is mentioned in the previous section. In the late 18th century, Grove Park Mansion was added to the original Elizabethan core. The mansion was approached by a tree-lined drive from the Edgware Road, along the line of the present Grove Park, although tradesmen had to use the back entrance from Stag Lane. The house looked over extensive lawns and parkland towards the Edgware Road.

The areas of Sudbury and Northwick Park were largely demesne farms in the late 18th century. In Elms Lane, high up and close to Elmwood Park, are a small group of 18th (and 19th) century cottages. At the junction of medieval lanes, these would once have been on the edge of Sudbury Common. Most of the Northwick Park area was part of Sheepcote Farm, which was largely owned by Lord Northwick.

### The 19th century before the railways

The new century started with the opening of the Paddington Canal in 1801. At first this terminated at Paddington Basin, but when the Regent’s Canal from Paddington to Limehouse was brought into use in 1820, barges could travel from Brent right through to the London Docks. Once the Regent’s Canal was open though it became increasingly important to find a good water supply to feed London’s canals, which as they extended and became busier, were needing more water. The initial solution, on the opening of the Paddington Canal, had been the construction of Ruislip Lido in the early 1800s. Supplies of water were still inadequate, and ideas for a reservoir on the River Brent were put forward in 1803, then deferred because of the cost. By 1809 a plan was revived to take the water from the Brent, via a feeder direct to the canal. The Canal Feeder was constructed shortly after from Kingsbury, through Willesden to Lower Place. However, water shortage continued, exacerbated by

the opening of the Regent’s Canal. Accordingly, the Regent’s Canal Company decided to implement the plans for a reservoir in the Brent valley. Detailed planning of the Brent Reservoir began in 1833, and the Canal Feeder was incorporated as the reservoir outlet; the first stage was completed in 1835. A small extension was made in 1837, and the final stage of 1854 was commemorated by the short metal posts along the shores; these bear the Prince of Wales’ feathers and the date 1854.

In the 19th century, Alperton emerged as a local centre for brick and tile manufacture. This was helped by the opening of the Paddington Canal. Industrial activity was established alongside the canal in the second half of the 19th century and, as described below, this continued right through the first half of the 20th century.

Dollis Hill House was built in 1824. The house, its grounds and gardens form what is now Gladstone Park.

Willesden remained a village until the 1870s, which was long after the opening of the first railway in the area in 1837. There were also villages at Harlesden, Brondesbury, Oxgate, Mapesbury, Kilburn, Stonebridge, Dudden Hill and Dollis Hill. Interestingly, all but the last four of these were amongst the manors given to St Paul’s Cathedral in the charter of 940. The best descriptions of the area in Victorian times are to be found in the novels of Harrison Ainsworth, who lived at Kensal Green from 1834 to 1853. He kept ‘open house’ and there he was visited by Dickens, Thackeray, Landseer, Maclise, Cruickshank and other eminent writers and artists of the day.

So far as agriculture was concerned, there was a steady move from arable to dairy farming, as cattle were no longer allowed in the Metropolis. An interesting map of land utilisation, at the start of Queen Victoria’s reign, shows most of the Borough under grassland. Arable land can be seen around Willesden, Alperton, Northwick Park and Kingsbury. Three areas of woodland appear: one running south from Forty Lane to the Wealdstone Brook through what is now Chalk Hill; the second around the southern end of the present Silver Jubilee Park; and the third at the northern end of Fryent Country Park. The changes in agriculture during the 19th century can be seen by looking in the Northwick Park area. In 1806, the estates of Lord Northwick covered large areas of Wembley and Harrow. The majority (746 acres) was meadow, 302 acres were arable and 104 acres were pasture. By 1863, 62% of the estate was under hay production, and this trend continued until the 1880s. By 1891 pasture was replacing hay production.

Apart from agriculture, laundering was the chief occupation as the local water was unusually pure and soft. Cricklewood was also renowned for its laundries (as was Acton in nearby Ealing). In the words of John Betjeman:

“... Midland, bound for Cricklewood  
Puffed its sulphur to the sunset where that Land of  
Laundries stood.”

There were also brickworks in this area, but brickmaking was a seasonal occupation, so brickmakers married laundresses who earned money for the family in the idle months of winter.

The hundred years from 1837 to 1939 transformed Brent. 1837 was the year that the first railway trains steamed through the area, and by 1939 suburban development was almost complete, largely thanks to the impact of the railways. The changes over this period are best described line by line.

### The London & North Western Railway and the Bakerloo: Kilburn, Kensal Green, Willesden Junction, Harlesden, Stonebridge and Wembley

In 1837, the London & Birmingham became the first railway to open through Brent, and in 1846 the L & B became part of the London & North Western Railway. For many years, the LNWR neglected its potential suburban traffic in favour of main line passengers to the Midlands and beyond. In fact of all the railways entering Victorian London, it had probably the least direct effect on London’s growth. At first there was no suburban service at all, and the only intermediate station between Euston and Watford was at Harrow. A Mr Neele, some time around 1844, found this out the hard way: “On one occasion, travelling from Euston by a train I fully expected to call at Kilburn (where he lived), I found myself landed at Harrow about 5.0 p.m.; there was no train due back until 7.0 p.m.” One would think that, before travelling, he would have checked that the station he wanted actually existed, but perhaps Victorians had more of a sense of adventure than we do!

What is now Kilburn High Road station was established in 1851-1852. Development took place on the Ecclesiastical Commissioners’ Kilburn Park Estate between 1859 and 1867. That, and the opening of Brondesbury station on the North London Railway in 1860, brought more people to the area. By 1879, when its Metropolitan Railway station opened (see next but one section), Kilburn was turning into the commercial centre it still is today. Despite the LNWR’s lack of enthusiasm, London was expanding through Kilburn and Queen’s Park towards Willesden. The arrival of the Metropolitan Railway to the north also stimulated housing. Queen’s Park was opened to the public by the Corporation of London in May 1887.

Kensal Green became fashionable after the opening of Kensal Green Cemetery in 1832, and by the 1860s it was a quite separate community to the north of the Harrow Road, opposite the main gate of the cemetery. It was quite distinct from the dense streets of Kensal New Town to the south-east, on the other side of the canal. By the start of the 20th century, the fashionability of the area had gone down. This followed the building of the denser streets of Kensal Rise to the north as far as the North London Railway.

Willesden Junction was opened in 1866, with both low-level and high-level platforms, but the place was so confusing that for years it was known as “The Wilderness” or “Bewildering Junction”. It was rebuilt in 1894, but many would still think the nickname appropriate more than a hundred years later. The station encouraged the spread of houses around it, but this was mainly thanks to the good service on the North London Railway to the City at Broad Street (see below). At first, development was for prosperous commuters, whose large villas still remain in Craven Park and Nicoll Road, but later development was of row upon row of small, terraced houses, aided by the introduction of workmen’s tickets in 1885 on the stations out to Willesden. The population of Willesden was 751 in 1811, 27,000 in 1881, 115,000 in 1901 and 184,000 in 1931.

Harlesden’s main development took place during the 30 years from 1880 until about 1910. Land adjacent to the grounds of Roundwood House was bought and formally opened to the public as Roundwood Park in May 1895. The adjacent Willesden New Cemetery had been opened in 1891. By the First World War, the suburbs of Kilburn, Willesden and Harlesden “consisted of long streets of terraced red or yellow London-bricked houses, with projecting bay windows, mullioned in stone, that overlooked small handkerchief-sized front gardens. The rear of some of the larger houses had a slate-roofed extension covering the kitchen and

sometimes a lavatory... A straggle of privet separated the occupants of the house from the noise and dirt of the street, and afforded a little sparse privacy in densely-packed surroundings. At the rear..was a small yard, perhaps even a tiny garden... The outside of most houses presented a universally dismal view, for brown paint was the order of the day.” (From *London’s Underground Suburbs* – Edwards and Pigram.)

Beyond Willesden Junction were fields, although the once rural surroundings were spoiled by the vast LNWR sidings at Stonebridge Park, established between 1873 and 1894. Despite this, a development here in 1875 of some 60 small villas was described as “ideal homes for City men.” The by-passing of the original loop of the River Brent at Stonebridge (which the Harrow Road crossed at the first Stone Bridge) is mentioned above (‘The 18th century’). By the end of the 19th century, the much shorter by-pass became the main stream, leaving an elongated stagnant pool, surrounded by fields, to show where the Brent used to run. During the winter of 1905/6, the half of the old arm of the Brent on the north side of the Harrow Road was filled in; the southern half was culverted much later. Just before the First World War, the river (including the by-pass) was straightened between the Harrow Road and Stonebridge Park station, and this process was continued west of the station as well as in Tokyngton Recreation Ground before 1937. By the Second World War, the River Brent was looking very different from the natural course it had originally followed.

The early development of Wembley had been around Wembley Green and Wembley Hill. What is now Wembley Central only became possible when the station opened in 1844 on the London & Birmingham Railway. However, the effect on development here was slow, and the agricultural landscape continued for some years. Wembley Central only began to grow during the years from 1880 to 1895. Trams arrived in 1908, encouraging further expansion, but, as with Willesden, expansion at Wembley before the First World War was mainly due to the Metropolitan Railway.

By the early years of the 20th century, growth of traffic on other railways, and new Tube lines, forced the North Western to try and develop their suburban traffic beyond Willesden. They opened the “New Lines” (on which the present-day stopping trains run) between Kensal Green and Harrow in 1912.

The real stimulus to development close to the line came from the extension to the Bakerloo. This reached the surface at Queen’s Park in early 1915, in which year Tube trains first ran between Paddington and Willesden Junction, and in 1917 they ran on to Watford Junction. Between Queen’s Park and Watford they shared the New Lines with suburban trains. Development alongside the Bakerloo to the north of Wembley was slow at first. Industry appeared at North Wembley during the First World War, and British Oxygen opened in 1918. After 1920, though, development was spectacular and all along the New Lines and Bakerloo, villas multiplied and new stations opened. Wembley Hill Garden Suburb was advertised in 1933 with “houses of superior appearance and built of carefully selected materials”. The main shopping centre at Wembley was well-established by the late 1920s.

### The Hampstead Junction Railway: Brondesbury Park

The Hampstead Junction Railway was opened in 1860 between Camden Town and Old Oak Junction at Willesden, and from 1865 trains ran directly to Broad Street in the City of London. Brondesbury station was also opened in 1860, but Brondesbury Park and Kensal Rise stations did not follow until later. As a result housing was developed from the late 1860s in the Brondesbury

Park area for merchants and City professionals. Brondesbury House became a school. Christ Church was opened in 1866, and in 1867 the new district was named Brondesbury. By the early 20th century the population of Brondesbury had increased eight-fold as new development extended as far as Willesden Green. Brondesbury Park station opened in 1908.

What is now Paddington Cemetery was inaugurated off Willesden Lane in 1855, and many of the large Jewish population of Brondesbury were buried there, including Baron Mayer de Rothschild and Sir Anthony de Rothschild. Brondesbury Park has still retained its character to the present day, despite the conversion of many of the large houses to flats after the Second World War. Further west, though, through Kensal Rise to Willesden Junction it is the “row upon row of small terraced houses” that prevail, mostly built during the years from 1880 until the First World War.

### The Metropolitan Railway: Kilburn, Willesden, Neasden, Wembley Park and Preston

In 1879, the Metropolitan Railway was extended from Swiss Cottage via Kilburn to Willesden Green, and in the following year on to Harrow-on-the-Hill. An early railway guidebook stated that “Amongst the charms of Kilburn is its proximity to the country. Within half an hour’s walk, the pedestrian is among trees and fields and pleasant places.” Even in 1880, this must have seemed a slight exaggeration. *Suburban Homes of London* in 1881 described Willesden: “Although at present there are so few houses in this locality, many buildings are in course of formation: and no doubt, considering the desirability of the site and its easy communication with London, many more will follow.” All the fields to the south of the Metropolitan Railway were quickly replaced by street after street of houses, the spread of these also going northwards along the Edgware Road as far as Cricklewood.

Of the area around the extended line to Harrow, another account of the time said that “The whole neighbourhood is still more rural than any part of the country within the same distance from the interminable brick and mortar wilderness of London. The district about Kingsbury and Neasden is intersected by green lanes and field paths bordered by flowering hawthorn hedges, whilst the River Brent meanders through them.” When Neasden station opened in 1880, the hamlet of Neasden was so small that the name of the nearest village (Kingsbury) was also used as part of the station name. Thus it was Kingsbury & Neasden station until 1910. By then the Edwardian streets of Neasden had crept up the slopes of Dudding Hill and Dollis Hill, and the station became Neasden & Kingsbury. It was not until 1932 that the suffix was finally dropped. By then, Neasden was very much a place in its own right, and in any case the Stanmore branch was about to open, when Kingsbury would have its own station (see the next section).

Up to the 1890s, Dollis Hill was a “pretty little hamlet” but, by 1900, the population had increased eight times over. To keep some open space in the face of advancing development, 96 acres of land around Dollis Hill House were bought by Willesden District Council, and formally opened to the public in May 1901. The new park was named Gladstone Park, after the former Liberal Prime Minister, who had been a frequent guest of the Earl of Aberdeen at Dollis Hill House between 1882 and 1896. Dollis Hill station opened on the Metropolitan line in 1909, nearly 30 years later than any of the other stations between Baker Street and Wembley Park, and after the considerable agitation of the Dudding Park Estate Company and other local developers.

Maintenance for the Metropolitan Railway was carried out in the early days at Farringdon and at Chapel Street works near the Edgware Road. Facilities were very limited, and in 1881 the Chairman of the time (Sir Edward Watkin) told shareholders that there was no point in having workshops on land that you could sell for large sums. He followed this by informing them that there was cheap land at Neasden where there was a level surface and “country air for the people you employ, and we shall be able to do our work there more rapidly.” In this manner Neasden Works came about. Contracts were placed by 1882 for the repair shops and streets of workers’ cottages: the latter were at first identified only by letters, but “B Street” was not terribly inspiring and, later on, names associated with far-flung places on the Metropolitan were used, for example Quainton Street, Chesham Street and Aylesbury Street.

Other development alongside the line was slow. John Betjeman recalls how, just after the Great War, “what a pleasant walk one could take by leafy lanes and elmy fields of Middlesex between Preston Road station on the Metropolitan to the newly electrified Kenton station on the extension beyond Queen’s Park of the Bakerloo.”

What is now the best-known place in the area did not really get going until the 1920s, despite earlier valiant attempts. In the words of John Betjeman, in his television programme *Metro-land*:

“Beyond Neasden there was an unimportant hamlet where for years the Metropolitan didn’t bother to stop. Wembley. Slushy fields and grass farms.

Then, out of the mist arose Sir Edward Watkin’s dream.

An Eiffel Tower for London.

Thousands, he thought, would pay to climb the Tower, which would be higher than the one in Paris.

He announced a competition – 500 guineas for the best design

Never were such flights of Victorian fancy seen ...

In 1890 the lucky winner was announced

It had Turkish baths, arcades of shops, and

Winter Gardens ...

It was to be one hundred and fifty feet higher than the Eiffel Tower.

But when at last it reached above the trees, and the first stage was opened to the crowds, the crowds weren’t there.

They didn’t want to come.

Money ran out. The tower lingered on, resting and rusting, until it was dismembered in 1907.”

After the tower had been demolished, Wembley Park became a place for early flying displays and circuses, and an 18 hole golf course was laid out near the site of the future stadium. (In fact, the turf of the golf course was eventually used to create the famous pitch.) Apart from these, the area around Wembley Park was virtually undeveloped until 1924. It was in 1924 that the British Empire Exhibition came to Wembley Park; it lasted through to 1925. The traffic for this broke all records, with 740 Metropolitan trains leaving Baker Street every day in an almost unbroken line. Some 107,520 trains were run to Wembley during the first season and they carried 11.5 million passengers. The centrepiece of the exhibition was the Empire Stadium, built where the tower had once stood; it was actually completed a year earlier than the rest of the exhibition, in time for the Cup Final of 1923. As the Millennium is reached, this is to be redeveloped. What remains of the rest of the exhibition is rather harder to find. The Wembley Park Trading Estate is now on the site, but the former Palaces of Arts and Industry can still be found on one side of Olympic Way.

At Preston were the grounds of the Uxendon Shooting Club, and in 1908, when the Olympic Games were held in London, this was chosen as the place for the Olympic Shooting Contest. The Club and the 27 inhabitants of the area petitioned the Metropolitan Railway in March 1908 for a halt to be built at Preston Road bridge. It was a simple, two platform halt on the eastern side of the bridge, with the Club paying for half the cost. Boards on the platform read “Stop here for Uxendon Shooting School Club”. On the western side of Preston Road was Harrow Golf Course, and there were also tea rooms set in orchards for visitors to the locality. This also led to the opening of private sports grounds for inner city firms in the years leading up to 1920.

Beyond, at Northwick Park in 1905, the Harrow School Land Trust obtained the greater part of Sheepcote Farm “for the purpose of preventing further development”.

### Metro-land: Neasden, Dollis Hill, Wembley Park, Kingsbury, Queensbury, Preston Road and Northwick Park

A map showing the built-up areas of Brent in 1914 showed, not surprisingly, Kilburn. Cricklewood, Willesden, Harlesden, Wembley and Alperton to have the main concentrations of population. An arc through Brondesbury Park to Neasden still awaited the builders. All the rest of the Borough, to the north of Willesden, Harlesden and Wembley, was undeveloped. The picture was transformed over the next quarter century, and the prime, although certainly not the sole, mover in this was the Metropolitan Railway, and the means was Metro-land.

At the time of the First World War, the word *Metro-land* was just an advertising idea. In 1919 the Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Limited was formed in order to cater for the large demand for houses after peace was declared, and the forces demobilised. In the 1920s and 1930s people wanted a better and cleaner existence than they had had before the War, with access to fresh air and the countryside, and it was during those two decades that the Metropolitan Railway wooed its passengers with advertisements to “Live in Metro-land.” The Metropolitan realised that by building houses on the land they owned near the line, not only would they increase their income from house sales, but they would increase their fare revenue once the new house owners started commuting back to their jobs in London on Metropolitan trains. In this respect, the company was unique in that it had legal powers to grant building leases and to sell ground rents. On these new estates, the prospective householder could arrange for their own architect or builder to erect a house, or they could buy a home already completed. Metro-land came to mean a whole vision of life – “a suburban paradise within reach of green fields and woods, quiet well-ordered avenues of houses with indoor sanitation and gardens.” Places such as Dollis Hill, Preston Road and Kingsbury were the creation of the Metropolitan Railway, as they either did not exist or were insignificant hamlets before the railway was built.

The new company told investors that “It is fortunate for prospective purchasers that the large new residential estates at Neasden and Wembley Park are controlled by such an organisation as the Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Limited.” Neasden grew rapidly in the late 1920s and the 1930s, with vast estates of terraced houses covering the high meadows above the new North Circular Road and the “Kingsbury Reservoir”. The growth of Neasden was also boosted by the opening of the North Circular Road in the early 1930s. Neasden, aided by its regular mentions in *Private Eye* from the satirical paper’s inception in the early 1960s,

became synonymous with suburbia. One survival in the locality was *The Grange*, the old farmhouse survived behind its brick boundary wall to become the Grange Museum of Local History. Nearby, though, Neasden House, a Regency mansion which in 1850 had been described as being situated “in a quiet and elevated position on the slopes of Dolleys Hill” was replaced by parades of shops. Even as late as 1933, when the Post Office Telecommunications Research Station was built in its elevated position in Brook Road, much of Dollis Hill was still farmland, unlike the majority of Willesden. Oxgate, in the north-east of the Borough, remained as one of the last of these farming areas, and only disappeared with the spread northwards between the Wars of council estates from Dollis Hill. The farm cottages on Oxgate Lane were also demolished at this time (although, as mentioned above, Oxgate Farmhouse survives in Coles Green Road). By 1939 Dollis Hill was almost completely built up, housing many people who had moved out from Kilburn and Brondesbury. During the Second World War, the Telecommunications Research Station was taken over by the Government, as it was an ideal location for a wartime communications centre, being near central London, yet outside the Luftwaffe’s main bombing target areas. Winston Churchill used Dollis Hill as his main communications centre. In case the Germans invaded, an RAF flying boat would always be on standby on the Brent Reservoir. Churchill would have been whisked away by car down Brook Road to the plane and flown to Liverpool, where a ship was permanently moored to take him to Canada.

One of the first estates the company bought was Chalk Hill at Wembley, with plots on offer by 1921 (and all sold by 1929). It was described as “In a picturesque locality within close touch of London, yet in open country.” From the middle 1920s, housing estates began to grow along the roads from Chalk Hill up the slopes of Barn Hill. Most of the original Barn Hill of Humphry Repton had become a private golf course in the 1890s, but this fell into disuse during the First World War. Wembley Urban District Council purchased the 44 acre Barn Hill as an open space in 1927. So far as the farmland to the east of Fryent Way was concerned, this was purchased by the Middlesex County Council in 1938 and leased to a local farmer. In the early 1970s, the fences were removed and it was opened to the public. A Metro-land brochure of 1927 described this area as “one of the healthiest spots near London ... Hundreds of houses are being built in the neighbourhood, including Barn Hill, Townsend Park and Forty Lane.” At the time the Barn Hill Estate was being built, it was noted that “to the north there are wide spaces of attractive, open countryside.” A substantial part of this “attractive open countryside” survived to become the wonderful Fryent Country Park, but much of it also became lost under the rapid development that followed the opening of the Stanmore branch in 1932.

When the Brent Reservoir was constructed, the surrounding area was sparsely populated, and by 1876 the population of Kingsbury was still only 662. However, by 1898 the reservoir was “hardly clear of the last houses in Cricklewood”. Even so, in the 1920s, Kingsbury village remained rural in spite of the British Empire Exhibition of 1924-5 being only a mile down the road at Wembley Park. The line to Stanmore led to the most rapid housing developments of all in this area. The branch between Wembley Park and Stanmore was opened by the Metropolitan in 1932, becoming part of the Bakerloo line in 1939. It was much harder to construct than had been anticipated, and amongst the heavy works was the diversion of the Wealdstone Brook. The Metropolitan Estates developments included the Kingsbury Garden Village Estate in Neasden and Kingsbury. Here the literature informed prospective

buyers that “Peace and quiet prevail, and the stretches of country around offer plenty of opportunity for invigorating exercise to those who are inclined to walking and cycling.” The Metropolitan station at Kingsbury and its flanking shops were soon swamped by a huge length of shopping parades, and by the end of the 1930s there were even two cinemas. St Andrew’s Church at Kingsbury was brought stone by stone from Wells Street, St Marylebone, in 1933, where it had originally been erected in 1845-1847. At Kingsbury, it stood close to the old church, which it had replaced. By the time of the Second World War, the only open land left was Roe Green Park and what is now Fryent Country Park. One developer even called Kingsbury “the Queen of north-west London suburbs”. Elsewhere, in another attempt to attract house buyers: “There are no steep hills, yet the estate is sufficiently high to give splendid views over the countryside.” This countryside is now Fryent Country Park.

The name of Queensbury was the winner of a competition run by a Golders Green estate agent (Percy H Edwards) to come up with a title for the new district to the north of Kingsbury. Traffic on the railway grew only slowly, possibly because the Metropolitan charged main line fares. People found it cheaper to go to Edgware by bus and take the Hampstead Tube. Queensbury was the most rapidly developed estate in north-west London. The landscape was largely flat, and devoid of natural features. In the years immediately before the First World War, the London Aerodrome was built to the east of the Edgware Road, at Hendon. Part of the Grove Park Estate was sold to the aircraft manufacturing company “Airco” in 1915, and in 1916 Grove Park House itself was sold to Airco. The main drive of the mansion was concreted to form today’s Grove Park (see also *The 18th century*), and part of the estate became an airfield. This was Stag Lane Aerodrome, which was founded by William Warren in 1917 for war training. Amy Johnson had learned to fly there for £4 an hour after the War. The De Havilland Aircraft Company also had a factory there, where they built the famous Tiger Moth. De Havilland eventually moved part of their factory, as well as their flying operations, to Hatfield, and the aerodrome closed in 1933. By 1934 the land was for sale and by 1938 was covered by thousands of semi-detached houses. Queensbury attracted many lower income families, and as well as in London, employment was provided by the local companies who set up along Honeyput Lane. Grove Park House itself became a boys school in 1924, which moved away in 1939. The house was pulled down at the end of the 1940s, and Grove Park Special School was built on the site in the 1960s.

The London Passenger Transport Board came into being in 1933 and soon after taking over and unifying all the different lines, it instituted its New Works Programme which lasted right through to the War. One of the final stages of this programme in 1939 saw the Bakerloo line extended from Baker Street to Finchley Road, where it reached the surface. From Finchley Road, it took over the Metropolitan’s old slow local tracks to Wembley Park, and from there the Bakerloo ran on to Stanmore, replacing the Metropolitan over this section. The first red trains ran to Stanmore at the end of November 1939.

So far as the area around and beyond Preston Road station, on the ‘main’ line, was concerned, it also saw no development until after the First World War. By the 1920s, Preston Road was being advertised as a palliative for “the nerves of strained Town workers ... a place where pure air blows in from the Chilterns.” In 1926, Preston Road was still only a wayside halt where visitors would alight to see the new houses of the Grove Estate “... only eight minutes from the station... in an orchard setting of particular charm”. By the early 1930s, the houses on the Barn Hill Estate were

reaching down to Preston Road. The station was rebuilt in 1931 on the Harrow side of the road. At this time, when the whole area was busy with builders and “the smell of new paint, of wood being burnt to clear the sites”, the merits of the various developments were being proclaimed: “on fine summer Saturdays, Preston is one of the brightest places near London. To the north there are wide spaces of attractive, open countryside.” Much of this was soon to disappear once the Stanmore branch was opened. The Harrow Golf Course gave way by the late 1930s to streets of relatively small houses.

Northwick Park station opened in 1923 and the local farms started to break up in the 1920s. The Northwick Estate, between Northwick Park and Kenton, made much in an advertisement of 1927 of its “perfect rural surroundings and lovely views”. To the north of the line, the high class Woodcock Dell and Woodcock Hill Estates were built. The former was “On the site of the old Woodcock Dell Farmhouse. The large sports ground of Messrs Selfridge directly adjoins the estate, adding much to preserve the attractive features of the open countryside.”

In 1936, Middlesex County Council and Wembley Urban District Council approved the acquisition of the Northwick Park Estate. Harrow School, who through the Harrow School Land Trust had bought the land in 1905, were against the sale, but were eventually persuaded by assurances that the land would only be used for public open space. Part of it was subsequently used for Northwick Park Hospital and Harrow Technical College (now part of the University of Westminster).

Golf courses at Neasden and Wembley Park had been sold in the 1920s and built over. Elsewhere, other estates by developers not connected with the Metropolitan Railway were completed, and by the end of the 1930s the urbanisation of what is now Brent was almost complete. The population of the Borough of Wembley had been 4,500 in 1901; by 1951 it was 131,000.

### The Ealing & South Harrow Railway, and the Piccadilly line: Park Royal, Alperton and Sudbury

The Ealing & South Harrow Railway was built by the District Railway and opened between Ealing and South Harrow in 1903. It was London’s first surface electric railway. By the First World War, the line through Alperton and Sudbury still ran through open and almost deserted countryside. In 1932, Piccadilly line trains started to run on from Hammersmith to South Harrow, and between 1925 and 1939 the entire area became closely built over with houses; pockets of industry also grew up.

One of the first stations was Park Royal & Twyford Abbey; despite its impressive name, it consisted of nothing but a simple corrugated-iron shack, reached by a flight of steps from Twyford Abbey Road. The surroundings were open, but to the east lay Park Royal, a new 102-acre London show ground for the Royal Agricultural Society. However, despite the new rail line and fanciful name, attendances at the shows in 1903, 1904 and 1905 were poor, and the Society abandoned Park Royal in 1905.

In 1903, Alperton station opened initially as Perivale-Alperton, although it was in the centre of Alperton. The surroundings consisted of a few houses and some long-established factories on the banks of the Paddington Canal. (Perivale, which was over a mile across fields to the west, was dropped from the station name in 1910.)

Sudbury Town was something of a misnomer when it opened, as all Sudbury consisted of in 1903 was a few scattered houses, a farm and a brewery – all a good half mile from the station. Victorian

development in Sudbury had reflected its proximity to Harrow School. At the western end of the settlement, another station was opened in the form of an iron hut, set in open country, and named Sudbury Hill. Few passengers were attracted at the start, the fact that the service terminated at South Harrow not helping. Sudbury Town station had only 60,000 bookings in its first year. District line trains started to run beyond South Harrow in 1910 but they were only hourly for much of the day, although increasing to a 20-minute service the following year. A few streets of small houses appeared around Sudbury Hill and Sudbury Town stations between 1910 and 1914, and Wembley spread towards Alperton station. Alperton Cemetery was founded (as Wembley Cemetery) in 1917. Suburban growth around the line really took off from about 1928. Activity at Twyford and Alperton was intense from this date, whilst new streets on either side of the line between Sudbury Town and Sudbury Hill filled up between 1930 and 1936.

In the early 1930s, Government money was on offer to combat unemployment, and the chance was taken to use some of this to improve the service through Sudbury, by extending the Piccadilly line to run over the route. Park Royal & Twyford Abbey station was closed in 1931 and a new station opened nearly a mile to the south, on Western Avenue. Annual traffic at Sudbury Town had increased from 60,000 to 1.3 million, and so the station was rebuilt. The new station opened in 1931 – one of the finest examples of an inter-war public building in London, it showed the importance that Sudbury had by then achieved. Alperton and Sudbury Hill stations were also rebuilt in 1932. In 1937, the Georgian mansion and grounds of what is now Barham Park were bequeathed to the Borough of Wembley by George Titus Barham (who was to have been Mayor at the time he died). The park was opened to the public soon afterwards.

Heinz built a large factory in the mid 1920s at Park Royal, on the north side of the Grand Union Canal. They continued to use the canal up until the 1960s for transporting in goods such as beans and tomato puree and sending out canned products. Another major canal user was Guinness; boats laden with barrels of stout were once a common sight. The huge Guinness brewery was constructed in 1935 on the site of the former Royal Agricultural Society Showground. It was designed by Giles Gilbert Scott (who was also responsible for Battersea Power Station). Also at Park Royal, Waterlows opened a printing works in 1936, close to the Grand Union Canal, and there the *Radio Times* was printed.

### Other railways

Two further railways should be mentioned, and although these did not have as much effect as the others, they did still help to shape Brent.

The Great Central Railway was opened in 1906 between Marylebone and High Wycombe, passing through Wembley and Sudbury. Among the facilities provided were large sidings, carriage repair buildings and engine sheds, as well as the Gresham Road estate of 154 houses – this is now a conservation area. Impressive stations were provided on the line, but passenger usage was always relatively low; it now forms the Chiltern Line.

The Dudding Hill Loop, in the form of the Midland & South West Junction Railway, was opened to freight trains in 1868 between Cricklewood and Acton, a function it still performs to this day.

However, in 1875, a station in Stonebridge opened, where the newly aligned Harrow Road crossed the line. First known as Harrow Road,

it was renamed Stonebridge in 1884, and finally Harlesden in 1901. This helped to open up the area for housing development, and some fine residences were built to house the middle classes in country surroundings. Another station at Dudding Hill opened at the same time as Harrow Road and a regular passenger service commenced. The new railway was successful for a few years until, in August 1880, traffic was adversely affected by the opening of what is now Neasden station on the Metropolitan Railway. The Midland Railway withdrew passenger services between 1888 and 1893, and finally closed to passengers in October 1902.

### After the Second World War

After the Second World War, many of the large houses in places such as Brondesbury were converted into flats. This process accelerated in the 1980s. During the 1960s, huge estates at Stonebridge and Chalkhill were built, replacing smaller-scale streets, as well as at places such as South Kilburn and Church End (Willesden). As elsewhere, the problems of developments on such a scale soon became apparent; during the late 1990s major improvement works started at Stonebridge, Chalkhill and South Kilburn, designed to make them more human in scale.

The 1980s saw significant losses of manufacturing industry in the Borough. Well over 20,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing since 1981. The food and drinks industries are the main ones left in the form of firms such as Heinz, Guinness and United Biscuits. In contrast during the 1980s and 1990s, major food stores were developed on former industrial land in out-of-town locations at Neasden, Colindale, Alperton, Kenton and Honeyput Lane. These are away from the traditional shopping parades, and have contributed to the decline of the latter. The major change to the road system was the widening of the North Circular Road during the 1990s. This also resulted in the demolition of the old aqueduct which took the Grand Union Canal over the road, and its replacement with a twin trough aqueduct in early 1993.

Although green space has been lost in the 1980s and 1990s, in the shape of former sports grounds, allotments, hospital grounds and railway land, some new parks have been opened. Brentfield Open Space and Grove Park are recent examples. Parks, open spaces and cemeteries are also increasingly being managed for wildlife and this too is a positive step. The wildlife area at Tokyngton Recreation Ground is a good example – this was created in the late 1980s as compensation for the loss of parkland when the North Circular Road was being widened. Plans are now afoot in the new Millennium to return the River Brent, including through Tokyngton Recreation Ground, to a more natural-looking course.

The most famous symbol of Brent, Wembley Stadium with its twin towers, is being demolished and rebuilt at the start of the 21st century but, in recompense, Brent gained in the 1990s one of the most spectacular buildings in London – the Swaminarayan Hindu Temple. This remarkable building rises like a gleaming white wedding cake or ice sculpture from the streets of brickwork and pebbledash of suburban Neasden.

Brent Town Hall in Forty Lane was built between 1937 and 1939 for Wembley Urban District Council. The former Boroughs of Willesden and Wembley were separated by the River Brent. When they were joined in 1965 to become a single Borough within Greater London, it was natural that they should take the name *Brent*.

### 3 Wildlife habitats in Brent

Lying well within the confines of London, the Borough of Brent is indeed fortunate in possessing two extensive and relatively natural areas, which are special both for wildlife and for its enjoyment: Fryent Country Park and the Brent (or Welsh Harp) Reservoir. In the former, the visitor can ramble through a pastoral landscape of fields and hedgerows. The chief feature of the latter is the large and seemingly natural lake enclosed by greenery; it is one of the best places in London to watch birds.

Most of the other areas of wildlife interest in the Borough are more obviously of human origin. One of the best is the Grand Union Canal, an entirely artificial construction which is of less specialist interest for nature conservation than Fryent Country Park and the Welsh Harp, but provides exceptional opportunities for the appreciation of the natural world in an urban and industrial part of the Borough. A network of railway embankments, cuttings and sidings provides undisturbed and near continuous scrub and woodland habitat stretching well into the south of the Borough. This is augmented by the several watercourses which also trace through the area north of the North Circular Road. Parks, cemeteries and churchyards make up most of the other places described in this book.

#### Grasslands

The term 'grassland' covers a multitude of conditions. At one end of the spectrum is the monotony of amenity and sports turf, where little but the quantity of mud varies through the year. At the other end is an old hay meadow, where the passing of the seasons is marked by the growth and flowering of many different plants and the cutting of the crop.

In foregone times, England possessed a wealth of meadows and pastures, rich and varied in the plants and animals they supported. Sadly, the vast majority have been lost or degraded in nature conservation terms, especially during and since the Second World War, by development or by agricultural improvement: herbiciding, fertilising, draining and re-seeding. The use of broad-leaved herbicides kills most wild flowers, leaving grasses, sedges and rushes; the addition of fertilisers favours the faster-growing coarse species at the expense of the less competitive ones; drainage also improves fertility, and removes the specialist plants which thrive in damp conditions; and ploughing and reseeded with forage grasses can obliterate the previous sward.

The most important grasslands for nature conservation are therefore those with a long history of traditional management. One of the best and most extensive examples of this habitat in London can be enjoyed at Fryent Country Park. A few of the fields have probably never been improved, and these contain a rich flora, including several uncommon plants such as great burnet and pepper-saxifrage. The latter is found on the slopes of Barn Hill. This area may have been ploughed at some time, but for the past two centuries a more or less continuous history as grassland is likely. Although some other fields were ploughed to grow food in the Second World War, and in the late 1960s and early 1970s, careful management is allowing them to recover at least some of their former glory. Appropriate management has also benefited butterflies: some twenty species are now recorded regularly here, of

which about nine are grassland species. The park also contains many ponds, about 11 kilometres of hedges, and scrub and woodland. These provide the range of conditions required for farmland birds such as green woodpecker, kestrel, whitethroat, lesser whitethroat, willow warbler and linnet.

Fryent Country Park certainly contains the best grassland in Brent, but extensive and varied areas also border the Brent Reservoir. Further interesting examples can be seen elsewhere in the Borough. A good place to look is in old churchyards or cemeteries. These are not usually dosed with fertilisers, although herbicides are sometimes used; mowing around gravestones is a time consuming and expensive task, so the mowing regime is often more relaxed than in a park or recreation ground. This relatively benign management regime allows plants such as primrose, Lady's bedstraw, common bird's-foot-trefoil and cuckooflower to thrive. Some of these may be relicts – plants which were present when the field was taken over for a burial ground and which have survived ever since. Others have colonised and found conditions to their liking. Yet others, such as primrose, may have been planted: who knows?

A much rougher kind of grassland is to be found in unmanaged or infrequently managed places, particularly alongside Brent's railways. This is usually dominated by false oat-grass, a tall grass which cannot tolerate much cutting or grazing and so is less common in managed areas. Another coarse grass, common couch, is abundant in abandoned allotments. Rough grassland rarely contains uncommon plants, but it is valuable for animals. It can attract insects such as grasshoppers, meadow brown and skipper butterflies, seed-eating birds such as greenfinch and goldfinch, and even supports colonies of slow-worm. Rough grassland can be an ephemeral habitat; left alone entirely, it soon turns into scrub, and eventually into woodland.

At the opposite extreme is the close-cropped amenity turf found in parks, sports fields and road verges throughout the Borough. Gulls, crows, starlings, thrushes and pigeons can be seen feeding on these by day, looking for earthworms and smaller prey; at night foxes visit for the same purpose. Apart from this, such habitat has little to interest wildlife. Where chemicals to kill earthworms are used, such as on bowling greens, the interest is reduced even further, though even here pied wagtails sometimes forage for small invertebrates.

Attractive and useful grassland habitat has been re-created by Brent Council in several parks. Such enterprises are not as easy as might be imagined. Throwing wild flower seeds into turf is doomed to failure; even if the seeds germinate, the young plants cannot survive competition from established vegetation. The existing turf is best stripped off or herbicided. Another danger is from aggressive plants such as docks and thistles. If seeds of these are present in the soil or blow in, then they may thrive and out-compete the desired slower-growing plants. However, such 'weeds' are greedy and need plenty of nutrients, particularly phosphorus. The answer lies in using infertile soil, e.g. by stripping off the topsoil and exposing the subsoil. Management is a third important influence in determining the success or otherwise of created grassland. Mow too often and the plants cannot flower and set seed; mow too seldom and coarse species invade; mow all the area at once and

you may obliterate whole colonies of butterfly caterpillars and other insects feeding on the grass stems and other plants. One place where the Borough evidently successfully managed all these factors is at the southern end of Tokyngton Recreation Ground, where a pretty meadow has been created, which includes plants such as Lady's bedstraw, musk-mallow and oxeye daisy.

The areas described above are neutral grassland; in other words they contain plants which grow on neutral soil, neither particularly alkaline nor acidic. There are no natural chalky soils in the Borough, although calcareous grassland is found on imported substrate at the eastern end of Neasden Recreation Ground, by the Brent Reservoir. It is conceivable that small patches might also occur alongside the railways, as the stone used for railway ballast is sometimes alkaline in reaction. Sandy and gravelly substrates often give rise to acidic soils. Areas of acidic substrates in the Borough are few in number, and most have been built on. The sheep's sorrel and sheep's-fescue in part of Gladstone Park suggests a dry and acidic soil derived from the aptly-named Dollis Hill Gravel which occurs on top of the hill. The summit of Barn Hill is also capped by Dollis Hill Gravel, and varying quantities of downwash gravels and sands cover the slopes. Small areas of dry, acidic grassland occur here, containing sheep's sorrel, pignut and burnet-saxifrage. Acid grassland also occurs on the Taplow Gravel to the north and south of the Brent Reservoir. In addition, there may be patches of acidic grassland along the railways.

#### Wetlands

The Borough is drained by the River Brent and its tributaries the Wealdstone and Wembley Brooks. The rivers have been so affected by urban development that, by and large, they have been transformed into mere culverts supporting relatively little aquatic life. The Brent itself has been dammed to form the Brent Reservoir, which, by contrast, is one of the most interesting wetland ecosystems in the whole of London, despite being artificial in origin. It is also one of the most attractive and accessible.

The reservoir, which crosses the border between Brent and Barnet Boroughs, was built to provide top-up water to the Grand Union Canal, and was completed in 1835. Its waters are not used for drinking, and this has been of fundamental importance in its development as an important wildlife site. Unlike many reservoirs, its banks are of earth, not concrete: marsh, reed bed and wet woodland have developed around the edges; and access is largely unrestricted. The reservoir has been notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest by English Nature. It supports nationally significant numbers of shoveler and gadwall, in addition to a wide variety of other waterfowl. It is now also an important breeding site for common tern and great crested grebe. The flora of the banks vies with the birdlife for ecological interest, with species such as broad-leaved helleborine, common spotted-orchid, southern marsh-orchid, greater spearwort and flowering-rush.

The catchments of all the streams in the Borough are on impermeable London Clay, and are also largely in urban areas, with much hard surfacing. Consequently the water runs off rapidly after heavy rain, instead of soaking slowly through the vegetation and soil. As a result, the flow tends to be rather 'flashy', with low flows in dry spells but rapid increases after storms, risking flooding. Before the area was built up, the river could have overflowed its banks and flooded adjacent land without serious consequences. This is no longer possible since so much low-lying land has been built on and people expect their properties to be protected from flooding. The rivers have been straightened and their banks made smooth with toe-boarding or culverting to allow storm water to pass

as rapidly as possible. Of course, this spells disaster for the aquatic ecosystem.

In the past, urban streams and rivers have been used as convenient waste disposal facilities. The Thames became so polluted that in the 19th and early 20th centuries it stank, and was largely devoid of life. Today, untreated sewage is not discharged to rivers, but taken to sewage works for processing. Nevertheless some pollution does reach Brent's streams, particularly from storm-water runoff from roads and other hard surfaces and from illegal domestic connections (for example from washing machines) to the surface-water drainage system.

Canals often have higher water quality than many urban streams. The Paddington Branch does not receive treated sewage, but some urban runoff is discharged into it, and oily bilge water and diesel spills add to the pollution load. The canal is fed, via the main line of the Grand Union Canal, from the Frays River. This river water, though otherwise of good quality, carries sewage effluent, which is high in phosphates. In the slow-flowing conditions of the canal, these chemicals can promote excessive growth of algae. As a result, the Environment Agency classifies the water quality of the canal in Brent as 'E: Poor' (the 5th out of 6 categories). Despite this, the canal supports roach, perch, bream, gudgeon, pike and eels, and where emergent marginal plants are allowed to survive, damselflies and dragonflies can be found.

Due to these influences, the heavily built up Borough could not be expected to possess high-quality streams or rivers. However, there are two lengths of the River Brent which retain some measure of naturalness: at Quainton Street Open Space and at the north end of Tokyngton Recreation Ground. Here the river still twists and turns; at Quainton Street low toe-boarding retains the lower banks, but north of Tokyngton, the bed and banks are more natural, with gravel shoals on the inside of a bend. The feasibility of returning the rest of the course of the Brent through Tokyngton Recreation Ground to a more natural state is being investigated; this would be a major boost to the wildlife of the area. An island and backwater has been created where the Wealdstone Brook flows through Woodcock Park. Nature conservation interest elsewhere along the River Brent and the Wealdstone and Wembley Brooks resides as much in the trees and bushes on the banks as in the aquatic ecology.

Ditches have not always been so badly affected. Some at Northwick Park contain interesting wetland flora, and doubtless would be found to possess a valuable fauna if this had been studied. Ditches towards the centre and north of Fryent Country Park provide habitat for narrow-leaved bitter-creed, a nationally rare plant. This is not found elsewhere in London (or Essex), and was considered extinct in Middlesex until rediscovered here in 1985, 84 years since the last record.

A final waterway to be mentioned is the Canal Feeder, which used to take water from the Brent Reservoir to the Grand Union Canal, but is now redundant. This is similar to the main canal in that it is artificial, with vertical sides, although much smaller. Useful marginal vegetation has developed in some sections.

In the days when the landscape was still rural, a pond would have been found in every meadow used for grazing, with additional ponds near farmsteads. These were often in the corners, where grazing animals from two or three fields could get access. Once the land was built up, the ponds became redundant, and were filled in. Happily, 12 old ponds survive in Fryent Country Park, one dating from Repton's time. At least 15 ponds have been created recently. Ponds have also been dug alongside the Brent Reservoir, at Roundwood Park, Quainton Street Open Space and elsewhere, although several of these are now in need of attention. In contrast,

many schools have thriving ponds; examples are at Barham Primary School, Byron Court Primary School and Donnington Primary School (see Chapters 6 and 11).

### Woodland and scrub

The Borough would once have been naturally covered in woodland, but it has gradually been cleared for agriculture and more recently for development, and there is sadly little in Brent today. However, the Borough possesses several small woodlands, together with many splendid old hedgerows and miles of undisturbed scrub habitats alongside railway lines.

One of the most natural-looking woodlands is that crowning the summit of Barn Hill. However, this is not, despite appearances, of ancient origin, but planted alongside existing hedgerows in 1793 as part of Humphry Repton's landscaping of the area. The trees include oak, field maple, beech, hornbeam, ash and elm. The elms were badly affected in the 1970s by Dutch Elm Disease, but the roots have thrown up copious suckers. A few plants of wood anemone, a species associated with old woodland, occur here. Heath groundsel, an uncommon plant, is associated with the scrub, open hedgerow banks and grassland at Barn Hill.

Another block of woodland composed of native species lies to the rear of the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre. This is dominated by English oak. All three species of woodpecker are seen here, and tawny owls and foxes have bred in the wood. Less mature oak woodland occurs further along the north bank of the reservoir, on the boundary with Barnet Borough. This originated from hedgerows bordering an old track which follows the Borough boundary and is still visible among the trees. Doubtless at some time past grazing or cutting of the grass in the adjacent field declined or stopped, and the hedgerow trees spread out into the grassland by seeds or suckers. It surprises many people that oak is a pioneering tree in such situations, as it is more often thought of as a tree of old woods. However, in fact it is good at colonising new ground, being spread by jays, who bury acorns in the ground for later use. Some of these, of course, are never consumed, and survive to germinate the following spring. Purple hairstreak butterflies feed on the leaves of the oaks here.

Woodland of a very different kind lies on the opposite side of the Brent Reservoir, on the low-lying land adjacent to the reservoir between Neasden Recreation Ground and the River Brent. Here the ground is damp and prone to flooding, and willows and alder, native trees well suited to this environment, have colonised or been planted. The tangle of vegetation and wet conditions make the area almost impenetrable, providing seclusion for the reed and sedge warblers nesting here or in the reed beds at the water's edge. A very rare crane fly has been recorded here.

Smaller blocks of woodland occur elsewhere in the Borough. Trees surround the former Ducker bathing pool near Harrow-on-the-Hill. A corner of Gladstone Park was planted with trees between 1988 and 1990, and is maturing well. Four new woodlands have been planted at Fryent Country Park since the mid 1980s. These contain ash, alders, willows and other species, and will be managed as coppice with standards. A former orchard is being re-established in Fryent Country Park, near Salmon Street, and a cobnut plantation has been planted alongside the orchard. Collectively, these new woodlands at Fryent Country Park probably now equal the area of the Barn Hill woodland. Small woodlands are also being planted at One Tree Hill Open Space and at Chalkhill Sports Ground.

A good proportion of Brent's woodland and scrub lies along the railways, where trees and shrubs have seeded themselves in the undisturbed land. These are usually mixed with grassland and

herbaceous vegetation such as false oat-grass, nettles and great willowherb. The woodland and scrub comprise a mixture of native species, such as birch, ash, willows, hawthorn and bramble, and those originating from abroad, especially sycamore and Japanese knotweed. These areas are not accessible to the public, but this does have the advantage of allowing wildlife to enjoy them undisturbed. In spring and summer, the insect life of such a complex habitat is enjoyed by insectivorous birds such as chiffchaff and whitethroat, whilst in autumn and winter hawthorn and bramble berries support blackbirds, thrushes, redwings and other birds and small mammals.

Bramble is an important source of nectar for insects, including meadow brown and speckled wood butterflies, and provides wonderful cover for birds nesting low down or even on the ground, such as wren, dunnock and chiffchaff. Dense patches of bramble are common alongside railways, and in some other places which are also not intensively managed. It is a particular feature of the nature area at One Tree Hill, where people can also enjoy its fruit in the autumn.

### Hedges

A fascinating study of Brent's hedgerows has been undertaken by Leslie Williams and others (Williams et al 1987 and 1988, Williams 1989). Surviving hedgerows and timber-sized trees were located throughout the Borough, and the locations of these were then compared with maps which showed former field boundaries dating from times when the area was still rural in character. Evidence of 520 sections of hedgerow totalling almost 31 kilometres were found. Many of these are no longer real hedges, the shrub layer having gone and only the hedgerow trees and perhaps remnants of a bank and ditch surviving. Some 1200 old hedgerow trees were found, most of them oak.

So many remnants of old hedgerows have survived because they often defined ownership boundaries, and thus the edges of land acquired for development. Internal field boundaries were often removed during urban development, but elements of those on the edges, such as trees and banks, survived.

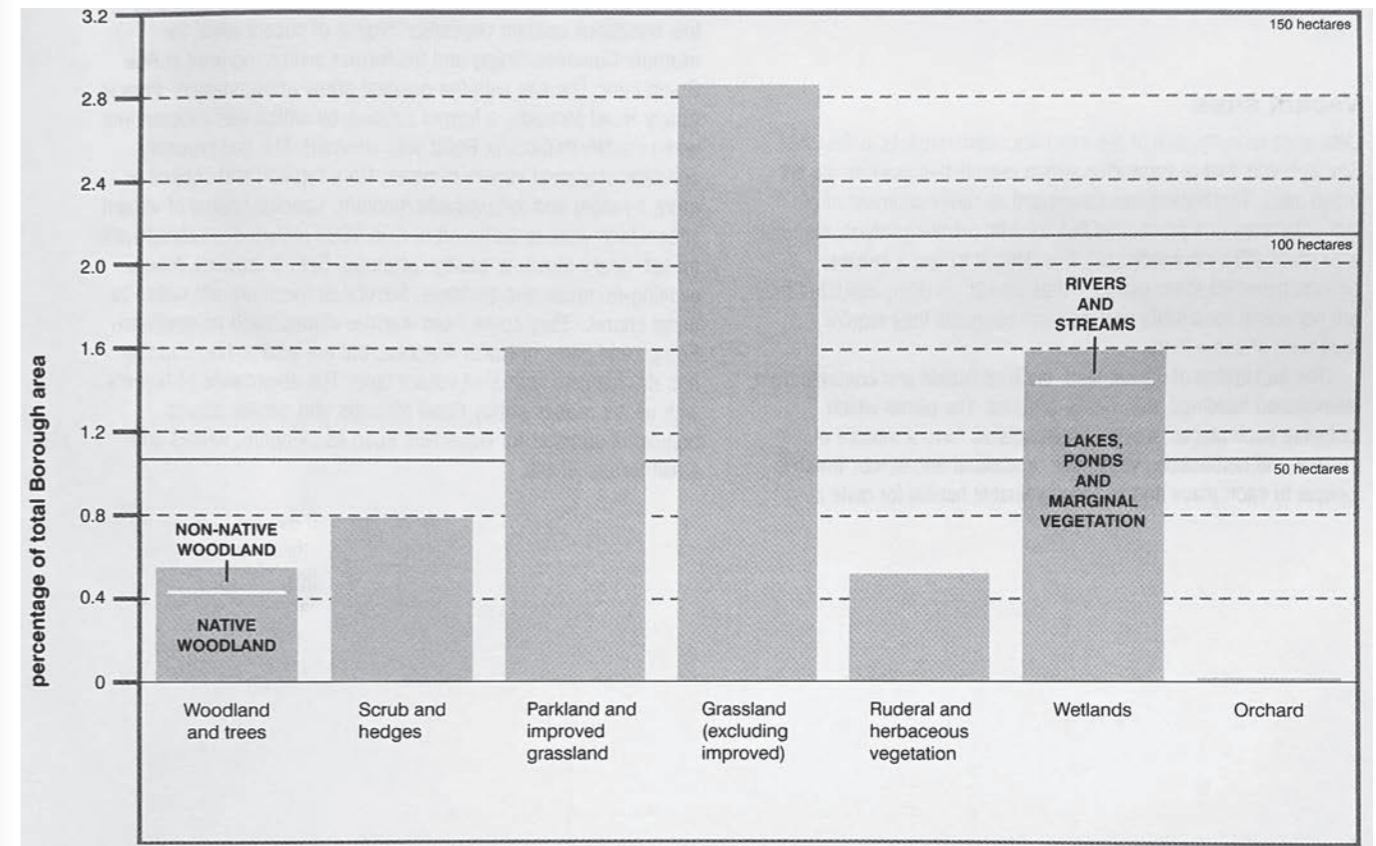
Hedgerows in urban areas benefit urban wildlife, make an important contribution to the local landscape, and are fascinating historically. However, they make little contribution to the conservation of uncommon species. For example, shrubs associated with old hedgerows, such as dogwood and wild roses, were seldom found in the hedges now surrounded by urban development. These, by contrast, tended to contain garden privet and non-native trees such as horse-chestnut and sycamore. Williams points out that once a hedge is within an urban area, it is unlikely to be managed any longer as a hedge. Neglect, tipping and further clearance to provide room for other land uses are all agents in the extinction of the original species. The hedge also becomes isolated from others, restricting natural colonisation.

Many of the best rural hedges are to be seen in Fryent Country Park. This delightful open space is characterised by a pastoral landscape of meadows divided by fine mixed hedges, now totalling more than 11 kilometres in length. These contain uncommon trees and shrubs, such as wild service-tree, wild cherry, Midland hawthorn, crab apple, dogwood and spindle, as well as 200 old oaks. Many attractive flowers grow in the hedge bottom, among them bluebell, red campion, greater stitchwort, common bird's-foot-trefoil, meadowsweet and great willowherb, with pride of place going to great burnet, a rare species in London, and to narrow-leaved bitter-cress, a nationally scarce plant, which is strongly associated with hedgerows at Fryent Country Park, especially the

FIGURE 3

### Extent of habitats documented during the 1984/85 Survey of Brent

Areas are given both in hectares and as percentages of the total area of the Borough. Private gardens were not included in the survey, and not all parkland was documented



herbaceous edge (see also 'Wetlands' above). Many birds enjoy the varied opportunities of these hedgerows and their trees and hedge bottom flora, with seeds, berries and insects to feed on and a diversity of structure for nesting and roosting, as well as song posts from which to attract a mate and defend their territory. Most of the hedges on the part to the east of Fryent Way were, in fact, cut down in 1967 by the tenant farmer. Fortunately they have since regenerated.

### Parks, churchyards, cemeteries and gardens

Brent contains numerous parks, varying in size from diminutive areas such as Rainbow Park near Cricklewood to the extensive grasslands of Gladstone Park. Combined with private gardens, these make up a significant proportion of the unbuilt space of the Borough.

Grassland in parks has already been mentioned above. Shrubberies and groups of trees in parks and gardens offer cover in which common birds can nest and feed, but their value depends on both species and vegetation structure. A single specimen tree or bush is unlikely to be greatly prized, offering too little seclusion; denser vegetation is safer for both nesting and feeding. Berry-bearing species, especially holly and ivy, produce resources for blackbirds and song thrushes from autumn to spring, and plants subject to attack by aphids, caterpillars and other invertebrates

provide vital food for tits and other insect-eaters. Many native trees are valuable in this respect, although some non-natives also support copious quantities of invertebrates. An example is the much-maligned sycamore, which plays host to large numbers of aphids, as well as being caterpillar food of some of our larger moths. Its flowers produce valuable nectar for bees and other insects early in the year, when little else is flowering.

Cemeteries and churchyards are similar to parks in that they generally consist of open grassland punctuated by trees. However, the grass between closely-spaced gravestones is more awkward to mow than the unbroken swards of parks. The less intensive mowing regime allows a greater range of plants to flourish and, again unlike most parks, to flower. Typical of such places are common bird's-foot-trefoil, creeping cinquefoil, oxeye daisy and creeping and meadow buttercups. Spiked sedge and cuckooflower are two less common plants found in cemeteries and churchyards in Brent.

Several of the larger parks and cemeteries merit inclusion as Sites of Borough Importance, especially those that possess dense shrubberies, interesting grassland or features such as nature areas. Others have been selected as Sites of Local Importance.

Private gardens are small individually, but when considered *en masse* amount to a sizeable proportion of the Borough, especially in the suburban areas to the north of the North Circular Road. Despite the constant disturbance to wildlife in such places, the presence of trees and shrubberies, borders and lawns is sufficient to support

typical urban birds such as blackbird, wren, blue tit, great tit and robin. Strips of adjacent back gardens may provide sufficient habitat for greenfinch, blackcap and even great spotted woodpecker, as well as hedgehogs. Foxes may also have their earths in suburban gardens. Garden ponds can also make a useful contribution, especially for frogs, smooth newts and even damselflies, especially if they and the surrounding garden are managed with wildlife in mind.

### Vacant sites

Until quite recently, one of the most abundant habitats in the Borough was that of vegetation which establishes itself on vacant urban sites. This habitat has decreased as redevelopment of old industrial sites has proceeded but, as with private gardens, the total area must still be considerable. It is difficult to find a suitable generic name for these places. "Wastelands" is often used, but they are not waste for wildlife and the term suggests they require treatment of some kind.

The substrates of vacant land, such as rubble and concrete from demolished buildings, are mostly artificial. The plants which colonise such places, many of them aliens, form a mixture of ruderal and herbaceous vegetation, grassland and scrub, which is unique to each place and provides valuable habitat for quite a

variety of birds, butterflies and other fauna. If the soil is sufficiently fertile, the flora of vacant sites can change quite rapidly, as bramble and scrub move in.

Many of the larger vacant sites in Brent have now gone. However, fragments can be found throughout most of the Borough, along disused railways, derelict buildings and other places, perhaps awaiting a new use. Several sites described in this handbook contain vegetation typical of vacant sites, for example Guinness Siding and the former swimming pool at Roe Green Park. The site with the greatest show of "wasteland" flora is Abbey Road Mounds, a former rubbish tip which was recontoured when the North Circular Road was widened. The soil probably consists of a great variety of types, from top soil and subsoil to more a rubbly and inhospitable medium. Species typical of vacant sites which were to be found here in 1998 included perennial wall-rocket, hoary mustard, bristly oxtongue, Oxford ragwort, fennel, evening-primrose and buddleia. Several of these are not native to these shores. They come from warmer climes such as southern Europe and parts of North America, but are also at home in the hot, dry habitats typical of vacant land. The abundance of flowers with nectar makes Abbey Road Mounds and similar places popular in summer for butterflies such as skippers, whites and small tortoiseshells.

## 4 The role of the Borough Council

### Introduction

The London Borough of Brent plays a vital role in ensuring that environmental issues and the Borough's wildlife in particular are given a high profile in the services that it provides. The Council's initiatives in Local Agenda 21 commit it to an agenda for sustainable development in the 21st century, in partnership with the whole community, through its Local Agenda 21 Action Plan. The Parks Service is leading the Brent Biodiversity Action Plan for the Council. As an education authority, the Council has a responsibility to promote environmental education in schools and encourage the use of school grounds and wildlife-rich open space as outdoor 'classrooms'. As owner of a large acreage of green space, it is in a position to manage land in ways sympathetic for wildlife and still fulfil its obligation to provide sports pitches, ornamental gardens and other public facilities. Finally, as the Planning Authority it has a duty to recognise Brent's wildlife resources and take steps to ensure that they are safeguarded and not compromised by development proposals and land use changes.

### Land management

The Parks Service is responsible for the management of a considerable number of the Borough's open spaces. The vast majority of these now have management plans or management briefs that identify habitats and prescribe maintenance schedules designed to conserve and enhance wildlife value. Whilst some of the management is undertaken by contractors working for the Council, increasingly important is the contribution made by volunteers, particularly groups associated with a specific wildlife site, for example the Welsh Harp Conservation Group, the Barn Hill Conservation Group, and the Brent Group of London Wildlife Trust. Other groups are involved with Gladstone Park, Gibbons Recreation Ground, Roundwood Park and Neasden Recreation Ground. (See also Chapter 5, The role of voluntary organisations.) In any one year a significant number of volunteer days are spent carrying out conservation tasks as well as recording and monitoring plants and animals. In addition, volunteers supply useful information on the condition and potential problems that may threaten a nature reserve, thereby effectively providing an unofficial wardening service.

Brent Parks Service (and some other Council services) have an Environmental Management System, and the Service has achieved ISO 14001 certification. This includes targets for improving the environmental quality of all parks and open spaces. Other targets include reducing and composting green waste, pesticide reduction programmes, organic farming, woodland creation and management, and improving the wildlife value of grasslands and ponds.

Council Officers are also available to give advice on nature conservation to members of the public and private landowners. This is achieved through both formal and informal meetings, guided walks, illustrated talks, articles in the local press, and written and verbal responses to inquiries.

### Planning and development control

As the local planning authority, the Council is required to prepare a Unitary Development Plan (UDP) which sets out a framework of

policies against which planning applications and development proposals can be assessed. It also highlights ways in which the Borough's natural and built environment can be protected and enhanced. The UDP has taken many years to prepare and been the subject of wide-ranging consultation that generated a very large number of responses. This document directs how Brent's physical environment will alter over a ten year period and provides the safeguards that the Council can impose to ensure that the Borough's wildlife is protected from injurious development schemes. To further demonstrate its commitment to nature conservation, the Council designated Fryent Country Park as a Local Nature Reserve. It intends to declare more in the future; the Brent Reservoir is one example.

The UDP for Brent was adopted in February 1996. The list of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation which appeared in the UDP was based on a desk study by the London Ecology Unit in 1991 of all the information available at the time, including air photographs. A re-survey of the Borough was undertaken by the Unit between 1997 and 1999 in preparation for this handbook. The list of sites in this book has been used to update the revised Unitary Development Plan.

Whilst it is not necessary to reproduce the complete text of policies relating to wildlife and nature conservation in this handbook, the following are specific issues on which guidance is given in the UDP: SSSIs and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance and their protection; wildlife corridors; the Brent Reservoir; Fryent Country Park; the creation of new wildlife habitats; derelict sites and nature conservation.

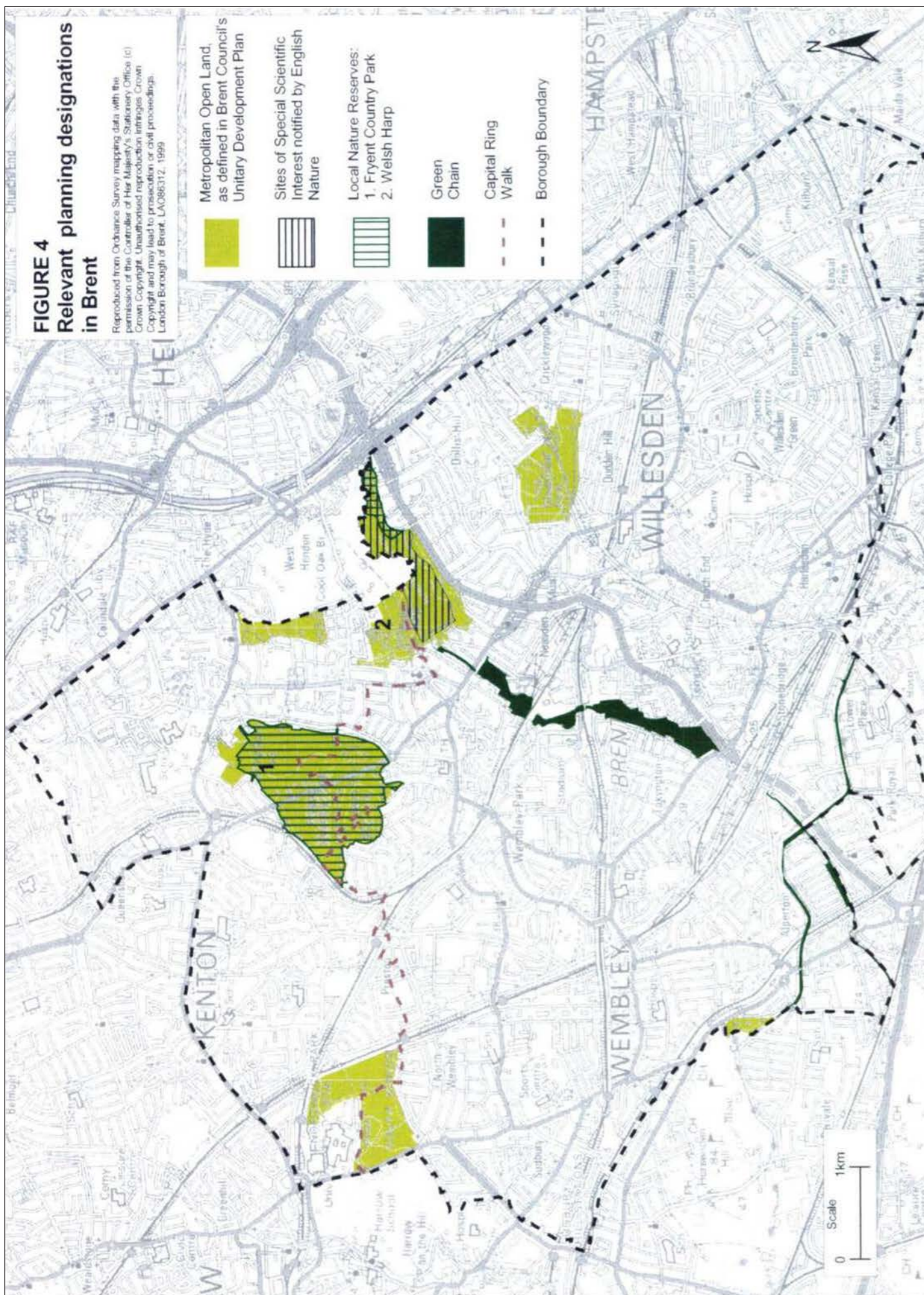
The UDR which includes maps, is available for inspection at Brent House and most local libraries.

### Brent Biodiversity Action Plan

Local Biodiversity Action Plans are being prepared by many local authorities and other agencies in the United Kingdom. This is part of the UK commitment to the Convention on Biological Diversity signed at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 as part of the International Agreement on Sustainable Development. The local Biodiversity Action Plan delivers the natural environment element of the Local Agenda 21 process (see below).

The aim of the Biodiversity Action Plan in Brent is to improve the natural environment of the Borough. Several factors contributed to the approach to this: the need to conserve the habitat that has survived in the Borough; the largely urban environment of the Borough and its multi-cultural population.

Brent's Biodiversity Action Plan is an evolving process, as the view is taken that a lengthy document, by itself, will not improve the biodiversity of the Borough. It is the commitment to implement the biodiversity action plans that is important. Some local authorities have devoted considerable resources to the production of detailed documents, but the Brent plan makes reference to the considerable documentation that is already available locally. It then summarises this information and explains the local co-ordination required for action.



Brent Parks Service is leading the implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan for Brent Council. Its main targets are:

- To create a better natural environment, encompassing parks, gardens, nature areas, trees, woodland, greens and other features
- To increase the populations of wildlife
- To increase the size and value of the wildlife habitats in Brent
- To involve the community in these targets, for example by extending the activity of the existing conservation and community groups
- To maximise the output of produce (e.g. hay and woodland products) and of benefits (e.g. landscape, wildlife and quality of life) from the habitats in Brent.

The draft Biodiversity Action Plan was approved by Brent Council's Environmental Services Committee in March 1999.

### Brent's Local Agenda 21 Action Plan

At the first Earth Summit, over 150 nations pledged support for an international plan of action for sustainable development into the 21st century, known as Agenda 21. Brent's Local Agenda 21 will contribute to achieving the Council's vision, values and key commitments contained in its corporate strategy for 1998-2002.

One of the key commitments is to "Create a Quality Environment". The Council intends that every decision it takes will give due regard to the environment. It does not mean, unfortunately, that the most environmentally-friendly option will always be chosen, but all factors, including environmental impact, will be weighed up fairly and accountably and wherever possible the decision made will minimise that impact.

### New Leaf

New Leaf is a membership-based, environmental charity, established in Brent in 1992. It is a partnership between residents, community groups. Brent Council and local businesses. Among other things, New Leaf is involved with Brent Council in the development of a Local Agenda 21 for Brent. New Leaf manages the Council's Local Agenda 21 Action Fund, which offered groups the opportunity to apply for grants of up to £1,000 for environmental projects. The charity works to improve the local environment by raising awareness of environmental issues through public events and newsletters, acting as an information exchange, and carrying out environmental improvement projects. They have experience in leading public consultations, for example the early stages of creating an urban community garden, and the River Brent Improvement Project.

## 5 The role of other organisations

Many organisations, including statutory, private and voluntary bodies, have important roles to play in conserving and enhancing Brent's environment and wildlife.

Of the statutory organisations, **English Nature** (or, to give it its full title, the Nature Conservancy Council for England) is the Government's advisor on nature conservation issues in England. This includes responsibility for notification of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs). English Nature must be consulted on the declaration of Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), and should also be consulted on any threat (for example through development proposals) to protected species, such as bats, great crested newts or slow-worms. There is one SSSI in Brent and that is the Brent Reservoir, and one LNR in Brent in the form of Fryent Country Park, although it is proposed that part of the Brent Reservoir will be declared an LNR in the near future.

The **Environment Agency** (EA) has a range of duties, powers and interests from flood defence to regulation of water quality and resources, fisheries, conservation, recreation and navigation issues. Among other duties, it also regulates potentially polluting industrial processes. In accordance with the principles of sustainable development, the Environment Agency will advise local authorities to use their planning powers to ensure that watercourses and floodplains can fulfil their principal functions while contributing effectively to the environment. The Environment Agency also recommends that development should be planned and built around the needs of the watercourse and/or floodplain.

Several private individuals and organisations own land of nature conservation value. In Brent, the most important of these are London Underground, Railtrack and British Waterways. Brent's network of railways includes large areas of excellent wildlife habitats, which are important in their own right and which may function as green corridors, allowing plants and animals to spread around the Borough. Whilst the overriding duty of **London Underground** and **Railtrack** is, of course, to ensure a safe and efficient railway, there is no reason why this cannot normally be compatible with sympathetic management of railsides. The Grand Union Canal, the Brent Reservoir and the Canal Feeder form part of **British Waterways'** 2,000 miles of the nation's historic network of canals and inland waterways, much of which is over 200 years old. Today the waterways are valued as a leisure and recreation resource, and many still serve as land drainage and water distribution systems. British Waterways is committed to its role looking after a valuable national asset with activities focused on leisure, tourism, heritage, wildlife and regeneration.

**Thames Water** works closely with nature conservation organisations to help protect wildlife whilst carrying out improvements to water supply and waste water services. Thames Water owns two sites of nature conservation importance in Brent: Dollis Hill Rough and Willesden Reservoir.

Voluntary and volunteer-based organisations are usually formed to meet a perceived need not fulfilled by the statutory or private sectors. This need may concern a global issue, such as climate change, or a very local issue such as the protection or management of a single site. A distinction should be made here between voluntary and volunteer-based organisations. The former may have paid staff: for example, the London Wildlife Trust and the Royal

Society for the Protection of Birds. The latter are reliant on volunteers only: for example most local conservation groups. Voluntary environmental groups may vary from international organisations, such as Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature, to regional ones, such as the county Wildlife Trusts. Volunteer-based organisations tend to be more local, as with groups which help to look after a particular park, or campaigns to save a site from development; the latter may often be temporary in nature, disappearing when the particular matter of their concern is resolved.

An advantage of all these organisations over statutory authorities and private businesses is their freedom to express views and carry out campaigns without the need to take account of any official statutory or corporate position. They can raise public awareness of issues, put pressure on local and national government and offer advice to the statutory and private sectors.

The **Welsh Harp Conservation Group** has been active since 1971. The group helps manage the reservoir for nature conservation, including undertaking practical management tasks. They have a particular interest in ornithology and have organised dredging work, construction of rafts and islands for breeding birds, viewing hides for visitors, tree planting and bird surveys.

The **Barn Hill Conservation Group** is active in the conservation of Fryent Country Park. Projects include habitat management of woodlands, hedgerows, hay meadows and ponds, and restoration of Hell Lane and the orchard at Bush Farm. They are active in managing and improving the footpath network. Projects are held each weekend. On Thursday mornings the group is involved with the restoration of Roe Green Walled Garden; here they also run a tree nursery to grow local trees for planting at the Country Park.

The **London Wildlife Trust** (LWT) is a voluntary organisation, founded in 1981, with over 6,500 members, and a staff of 28. Much of their work locally is undertaken by volunteers, for whom the Trust provides support, training and advice. The Trust is involved in the Biodiversity Action Plan process, contributing directly at a national, London-wide and borough level.

As well as producing awareness-raising documents, such as *Wildlife Facts*, and campaigning reports, the Trust publishes *Wild London* three times a year and *Going Wild In London* (the programme of events), and members also receive the Wildlife Trusts' *Natural World*. The Trust is actively involved in environmental education with all age ranges (adults and children), and in both the formal and the informal education sectors. This includes providing advice to schools, interpretative materials for schools and elsewhere, and doing guided walks. Wildlife gardening is also becoming ever more central to the Trust's work. They have a Centre for Wildlife Gardening in Peckham. The London Trust manages around 55 nature reserves across London, campaigns on the protection of and threats to the Capital's green spaces, and runs hundreds of events annually through its 30 borough groups and Wildlife WATCH, the junior wing.

The London Wildlife Trust is not as active now in Brent as in many boroughs, although there is considerable overlap between the Borough Group and Council officers, and many of the projects carry a dual name. Between 1987 and 1990 considerable work was undertaken through the efforts of the Trust's North West London Regional Officer, Janice McCaskie, especially at the Grange

Roundabout, Paddington Cemetery and Gladstone Park (see Chapter 10).

The **Brent Group** of the **London Wildlife Trust** organises practical conservation projects in parks and open spaces throughout the Borough. Particular successes have been compiling a database of trees at Gladstone Park, and organising laying the perimeter hedge around the park, as well as projects at One Tree Hill, Neasden Recreation Ground, Old St Andrew's Churchyard and Gibbons Recreation Ground. The Group have worked with Brent Parks Service to redesign the wildlife area in Roundwood Park, and the park apprentices started practical work in January 2000.

The **London Walking Forum** is an umbrella group with an overview of walking provision in London. Among its main objectives are the establishment of a London-wide network of waymarked walks linking open spaces, green chains and the wider countryside, and promoting walking by groups currently under-represented in countryside recreation, including black and ethnic minority groups and women. One of the Forum's projects is to create two key orbital routes around London. The London Outer Orbital Path (LOOP) is a 150 mile walking route passing through the best countryside of the outer London boroughs. The nearest part to Brent is through the Green Belt in the northern part of the Borough of Harrow, but it is easily accessible by public transport. The Capital RING is a 72 mile circular route running around London within a 5-10 mile radius of Big Ben. In Brent the RING passes through the Welsh Harp Open Space, Fryent Country Park, Preston Park and Northwick Park.

The **Wembley History Society** and the **Willessden Local History Society** are recipients of planning applications from Brent Borough Council: their purpose is the preservation of local artefacts of historical interest. The societies are members of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, and hold an extensive archive at the Cricklewood Library and Archive of Brent Council. People are encouraged to make use of these archives, and schools in the Borough will soon be able to access these by computer.

**Gladstone Park Consultative Committee** includes several local residents and community groups, in addition to local Councillors and officers from Brent Parks Service. The group brings together a range of viewpoints and interests to decide upon the future improvement of the park. The group organises some activities of their own and is involved in the annual Gladstone Park Fun Day.

The **Kingsbury Walkers** recently clocked up 15 years of their Wednesday afternoon walks at Fryent Country Park. In addition to providing walks for the public, they keep an eye on the park, and their feedback to Brent Parks Service is much valued.

The **Friends of Fryent Country Park** were formed initially to help protect the Country Park. The Group has specialised in three main areas. Firstly, they have organised or assisted with the annual Brent Countryside Day. Secondly, they planted several tonnes of daffodil bulbs over the course of three winters along the grass verges of Fryent Way; these now produce a spectacular display each spring. Thirdly, the Friends support other activities, including the "Natural Magic" series of children's activities during the year.

The **Friends of Gibbons Recreation Ground** are concerned with the future of this site. The Friends are keen to incorporate nature conservation into the developing plans for Gibbons Recreation Ground and alongside the Canal Feeder.

The **Friends of Neasden Recreation Ground** are a relatively new group, only launched in October 1999. They aim to improve access, security and wildlife at Neasden Recreation Ground.

The **Friends of Roundwood Park** is a new group, launched in March 1999. The Friends are dedicated to improving standards and sustaining facilities within the park, acting as a consultative body to

Brent Parks Service, and representing the views of users. They also organise practical projects and fund-raising events. They are also proposing to introduce a fun day, to be held in the summer months.

The **British Trust for Conservation Volunteers** (BTCV) is the country's largest conservation charity which enables people to undertake practical projects to protect and improve the environment. Each year 84,000 volunteers are trained and equipped to work on environmental projects on over 20,000 sites in the United Kingdom. In addition, the BTCV supports a network of 1200 local groups and 700 affiliated schools. The BTCV London area office runs day long and residential conservation projects in all the boroughs of London and in the surrounding countryside.

The **London Natural History Society** (LNHS) collates records of animals and plants within 20 miles of St Paul's Cathedral. It runs a programme of field trips and indoor meetings for its members, and publishes an annual journal, *The London Naturalist* and an annual *London Bird Report*, as well as atlases of the distribution of various floral and faunal groups in the London area (Montier 1977, Burton 1983, Plant 1987 and Plant 1993). LNHS is currently working on a new atlas of breeding birds.

The **London Environmental Education Forum** (LEEF) was initiated by the London Ecology Unit in 1992. The Forum aims to develop, promote and facilitate the delivery of environmental education in the Greater London area, through the formation of a support group of practitioners. LEEF is concerned with people of all ages and from all sectors of society. Membership is open to anyone with an active interest in environmental education in the London area. Regular workshops are run by the Forum.

The **Learning Through Landscapes Trust** was established in 1990 to promote improvements to the environmental quality and educational use of school grounds. It provides information and advice, produces publications, runs training courses and carries out research. It has now established a London office.

The **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds**, with its junior wing the **Young Ornithologists Club**, is the largest nature conservation charity in the country, owning and managing numerous nature reserves throughout Britain and campaigning on issues affecting the conservation of birds in the United Kingdom and abroad. It has a network of local members' groups which organise talks, film shows and field trips.

The **World Wide Fund for Nature** (WWF) is the largest independent conservation organisation in the world. It began in 1961 and has grown into an internationally respected institution. WWF has the primary aim of solving environmental problems that threaten all forms of life in the natural world. WWF-UK spends one third of its income on projects in the United Kingdom, which protect sites and/or are aimed at education and awareness. On a local scale, WWF-UK has a network of over 240 local groups, undertaking a variety of activities, which range from traditional fund-raising to campaigning and environmental awareness work. Local amenity societies are concerned with all aspects of improving the quality of life in their local areas. This frequently includes protection and enhancement of open spaces and nature conservation sites.

In Brent, local groups include Sudbury Court Residents Association, Brent Association of Disabled People, Barn Hill Residents Association, Birchen Grove Residents Association, Brent Federation of Allotment and Horticultural Societies, Mapesbury Residents Association, Preston Amenities Preservation Association, and Roe Green Village Residents Association.

A number of other community and youth groups in the Borough are involved with nature conservation activities from time to time.

## 6 Environmental education

The growth in interest in ecology and related subjects at the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s led to increasing importance being placed on environmental education in schools. Since then, the climate for environmental education in schools has cooled somewhat (even if the real one has been doing the opposite). Environmental education has never been a subject in its own right in the National Curriculum, nor is it inspected by OFSTED unless requested by the school. It is true that ecological and other environmental issues find a place in the primary science and geography curricula, but the overwhelming emphasis in recent years has been on literacy, numeracy and (to a lesser extent) information technology. So, the status of environmental education depends heavily on individual schools and teachers. For example, many related issues can be introduced through texts for the Literacy Hour. Environmental centres have been using this opportunity, as has the London Wildlife Trust through its publication *Literally Wild*, which has been sent to every primary and special educational needs school in London.

Another positive development at primary level is the inclusion of Citizenship in the National Curriculum. Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their local environment and to participate in decision making. That, however, is not a new ideal! Learning Through Landscapes has for many years encouraged schools to adopt this approach, recognising the educational value of the process of transforming school grounds. Brent Parks Service also offers support. They encourage a 'whole school grounds' approach, with the aim of using all their premises for environmental education in some way. This means more than just using an odd corner as a nature area. The Parks Service offers free advice, contractual design, landscaping and management.

Nature areas, though, are certainly extremely valuable, and over 40 schools in the Borough have one. They can be outstanding resources for ecological projects. Depending on size, they can offer a pond, hedgerow, bushes, log piles, a wildflower meadow and more. The main advantage of such a resource is that travel is eliminated. Furthermore, a school nature garden is seen much more frequently by the students. They will be aware of seasonal changes and can participate in long-term experiments and projects. There is greater flexibility; lessons can be switched around in the event of bad weather, and work can be fitted more easily within scheduled lesson time, preventing the necessity for rearranging the timetable and obtaining staff cover. Altogether, a nature area can be a very valuable asset to a school.

However, it is important to realise the limitations of a school nature area. A major disadvantage is that it requires maintenance, just as the school buildings do. Whilst this can be an educational process, few teachers have the time or experience to follow a site management plan. This may result in the garden degenerating over the years into a patch of aggressive urban weeds. Before embarking on such a project, a school must fully consider the after-care requirements of living systems, not only during term time but also during the holidays. There may be a single enthusiastic teacher looking after the nature garden, but problems may occur if this person leaves. Schools can, of course, arrange to have their nature areas managed by contractors, as most schools already do for the major part of their grounds. Other people connected with the school

may help out; some of the examples in this book have seen much hard work put in by parents and governors. In some cases this complements or even replaces the efforts of the teaching staff. School nature areas are inevitably small and therefore can provide only a limited understanding of the diversity of the natural environment. They should complement field trips to larger, more diverse sites, and not be seen as a substitute for such visits.

At secondary level, most GCSE syllabuses in science and geography require students to undertake fieldwork. However, the logistics of timetabling usually make such opportunities few and far between. Moreover, the extent of these opportunities is not the same for all students; it depends on their subject choices. Given all the other academic and social demands on teenagers' time, there is little doubt that, for most, environmental education plays a very small part in their lives.

However, Brent is blessed with a number of sites which provide valuable outdoor 'classrooms', particularly the Brent Reservoir and Fryent Country Park. These provide a range of habitats for study. For example, Fryent Country Park provides opportunities for using hedgerows and ponds. Brent has a residential field centre in Hampshire – the Gordon Brown Education Centre – and is also fortunate to possess a Field Study Centre within the Borough – the Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre. This is situated on land adjacent to the Welsh Harp Open Space and has recently been refurbished. It serves the full range of school needs, as well as the adult community. It is a training provider for the Environmental Task Force (part of the New Deal Initiative) through which young unemployed adults receive training in practical conservation management. It has also hosted more technical courses for professional ecologists and amateur naturalists. Its address and telephone number are given in Appendix 1.

For certificate and degree courses, there is often a requirement for students to undertake individual project work. A list of possible projects, to a large extent linked to the Borough's Biodiversity Action Plan, is maintained by the Parks Service. Other study programmes can be arranged to suit the needs of each student. Several volunteers from local community groups are involved with, and in some cases lead, monitoring projects as part of the Brent Biodiversity Action Plan. A limited number of work experience placements are also available with the Parks Service each year.

Brent Parks Service leads the Borough's lichen monitoring, linking an understanding of air quality and pollution, and the effects these have on wildlife and human health. A newsletter, *Brent Lichen News*, and an information pack are available for students and schools. For the wider public, a series of guided walks is available throughout the year. Some of these are led by volunteers from the local community. The Friends of Fryent Country Park organise a "Natural Magic" series of walks for children.

Places for families to visit which have some form of 'facilities' include the Welsh Harp Open Space (where the facilities are in the commercial 'Greenhouse' garden centre), Gladstone Park, and Roundwood Park. The last one has both a cafe and toilets, and although there is a limited amount of wildlife it is a pleasant formal park. Other sites have potential but no other amenities at present: for example, Roe Green Walled Garden.

Interpretative events in Brent parks include the annual Kingsbury

## The schools in the Borough have a good range of wildlife habitats



▲ The nature garden at Wembley High School is found in an enclosed courtyard (see Chapter 6) *Ian Yarham*



▶ Children at Byron Court Primary School enjoying the summer sunshine in their nature reserve (see Chapter 11) *Kim Williams*

◀ The children at Northview Primary School in Neasden examine the school pond (see Chapter 6) *Elaine Clarke*



▼ The wildlife area at Barham Primary School in Wembley is unusually large (see Chapter 11) – *Ian Yarham*



Open Day, Brent Countryside Day, Gladstone Park Fun Day, Gibbons Recreation Ground Fun Day, and open days at Roe Green Walled Garden. The Parks Service can also provide speakers for talks.

Of the 40 plus wildlife areas in Brent's schools, three are of sufficient merit in terms of quality of habitats, size, and level of use to be included as sites in this book. These are at Barham Primary School in Wembley, Byron Court Primary School in North Wembley and Malorees Infants and Junior Schools in Brondesbury Park; they are described in Chapter 11. Four others are described below. They are to be found in a special school, two primary schools and a high school. This illustrates the range of schools which have created their own nature areas.

**Grove Park Special School, Grove Park, Kingsbury, NW9**

This school was opened as Oldfield Road Special School in 1928, and, after two other moves, it finally settled at Grove Park in 1968. The school has 85 children between the ages of two and 19, taken from ten boroughs. All the children have physical difficulties or are in delicate health.

At the back of the single storey buildings is a pleasant, quiet, secluded area, bordered by back gardens. Within this 'wild garden' are some fine trees, including ash, horse-chestnut, Turkey oak, cherry and sycamore. Bramble and ivy are to be found along the boundary nearby, and the ivy scrambles up some of the trees. Chunks of tree trunks and logs have been left on the ground, and a large hollow ash tree has been cut down, but is now resprouting.

Nearby is a small nature area, enclosed by a low fence. This has tiny ponds with concrete slabs across for access, logs for minibeasts, a compost heap of leaf mould, and a 'fallow area'. The nature area is divided into four and used for growing vegetables. Cherry, apple, pear and other young fruit trees are also present, together with a larger, non-native alder. Elm, sycamore and hawthorn overhang from an old hedge at the back. At the time of writing, none of this seemed to be wheelchair accessible.

Elsewhere in the school grounds are raised planters, including a herb garden, as well as a bird table, all visible outside the classroom windows. The planters are ideal for children in wheelchairs to be able to observe plants at close hand. A greenhouse is used to raise tomatoes, which are then sold to pay for seeds for the planters. Nearby is a pergola and a wonderful yew tree, covered with ivy.

The school has a 'green notice board' and puts posters and pull outs on it from groups such as Friends of the Earth. Visits are also frequently made to other outdoor sites such as the disabled access trail at Fryent Country Park, College Farm in Finchley and the Brent Reservoir.

**Donnington Primary School, Uffington Road, Willesden Green**

This school is located close to Roundwood Park. It has 242 pupils, aged between 3 and 11, and occupies a fairly cramped site.

A small pond existed close to Donnington Road, on the north side of the grounds, but had not been developed. In 1996 the decision was made to bring the area round the pond to life. The children were asked what they would like to see in this area and this formed the basis of what was subsequently done. The Brent Ecology Unit provided advice to locate the wild flowers suggested by the children.

Parental help was called upon to assist in the manual labour. The palisade fencing was built over the Easter holiday by three fathers, who also broke up the ground around the pond. Each class was given a propagator and seeds; one type of flower was allocated per class, making it easy for them to identify which plants they had grown once the seedlings had been planted out. Each class also

planted spring bulbs, and donations of cuttings and plants helped to transform the pond garden.

The aim is for the garden to be as organic as possible, and a recycling and composting site has been created. Other features include a herb garden close to the pond, and just outside the fencing are two vegetable patches where tomatoes, onions and lettuces are grown. Nearby, some grape vines have been planted. The enthusiastic parents' association 'Friends of Donnington' help to maintain the garden, and children visit the garden for science lessons. The major problem faced by the garden is that it is only separated from the busy Donnington Road by a wire fence, and rubbish is often thrown over from the road. For this reason, the pond is kept covered by wire mesh, except when the garden is in use. On the other hand this obviously well-cared-for nature garden is a good advertisement for the school when seen from the road.

**Northview Primary School, Northview Crescent, Neasden. NW10**

Northview is a small, single-form entry school of 210 pupils, plus a 25 place nursery. Built in 1960, it is tucked away at the end of a cul de sac, on a very compact site. Because the low-rise buildings take up most of the centre of the site, the school aims to have greenery all the way round the edge of the grounds. At the back of the grounds, up against a factory wall, is a raised, south-facing grass bank. The grass is close-mown and in the middle of it is a small pond. This was designed and instigated in 1991 by four constables from Harlesden Police Station, and was enthusiastically dug out by the children over two days. At one stage the pond contained fish, but these have now gone and frogs are present instead.

Behind the pond, and up against the walls, are dense shrubberies. These have matured well, and the bird song present adds an aura of peace to the area around the pond. Two bird tables stand on the grass. Each class uses the wildlife area at some stage for projects such as study of the life cycle of frogs, or the different types of birds to be seen. Maintenance of the pond and other wildlife areas is shared between the staff, parents and children.

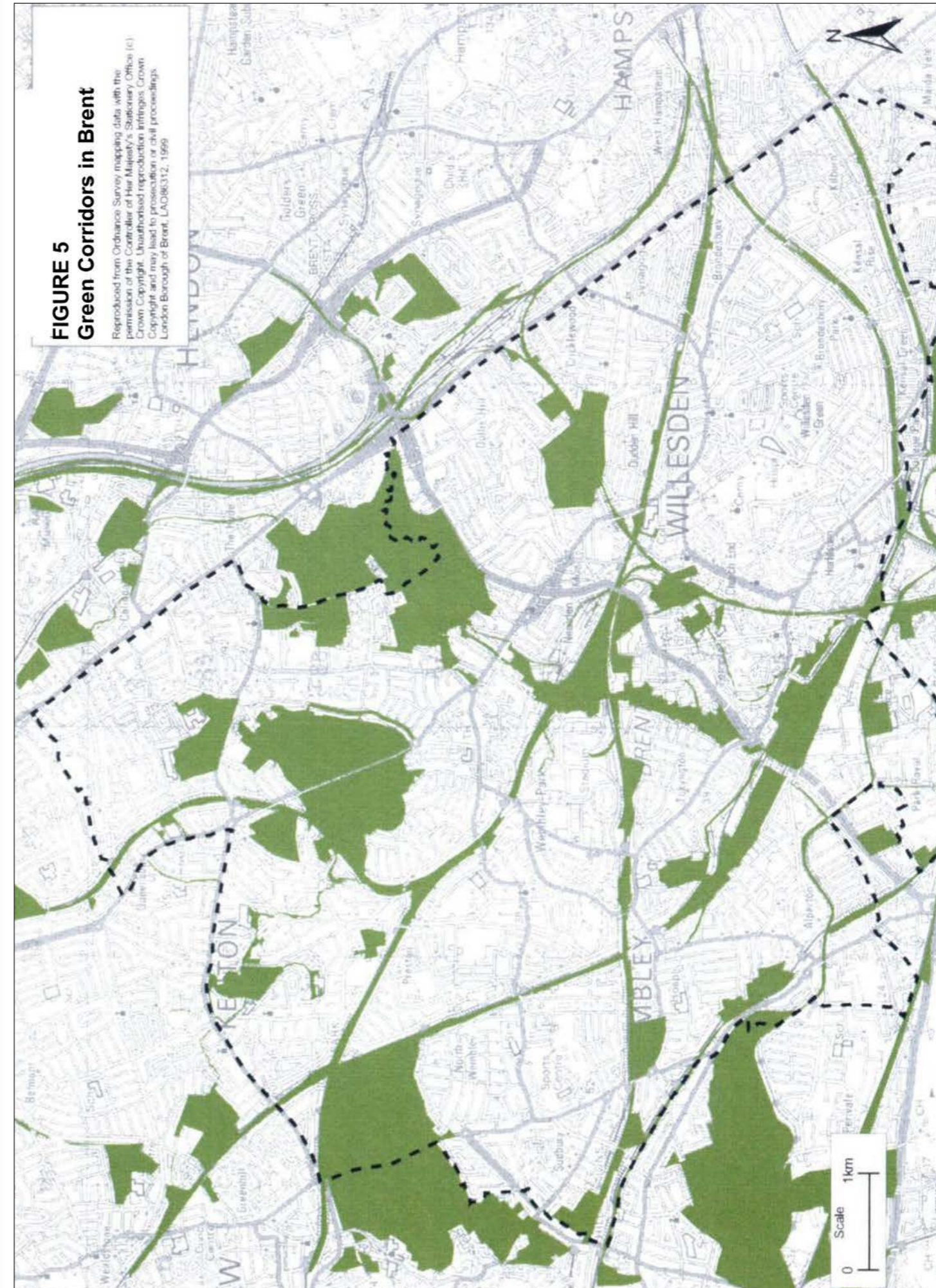
Close by is a fine foxglove tree, but at the time of writing this was being damaged by building work on an adjacent site; the new building is so close to the tree that it is pushing up against its branches. At the southern end of the grounds, and backing on to some fairly wild back gardens of houses in South View Avenue, is another dense shrubbery, this time with a fox earth present. The foxes are occasionally seen by the children. Bird nest-boxes have been put up nearby. At the other end of the school, the infants' playground has raised flower beds with adjacent seating areas.

The main way the grounds could be improved further is by allowing areas of longer grass and having one or two small wildflower meadows.

**Wembley High School, East Lane, Wembley**

Located right in the centre of this large school, this small nature garden is completely surrounded by corridors and classrooms, so it can be viewed from adjacent windows. The area where the garden is now was previously a patch of waste ground. When Richard Doggett, Head of Biology and Science at the school, and his wife were killed in a car crash in 1994, it was decided to create a garden in their memory.

The pond was dug in 1997; this was mainly undertaken by the teachers and some of the children. The pond now looks very attractive. Yellow iris, marsh-marigold, greater spearwort, soft-rush, pendulous sedge and water-lilies are well-established in or on the edge of the pond. The pond is topped up occasionally; it contains fish, as well as frogs and newts.



## 7 Deciding which sites are important

The decisions leading to the selection of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance in Brent were based on the policies, criteria and procedures of the London Ecology Committee (LEU 1994). These procedures were also adopted by the London Planning Advisory Committee, and recommended in statutory planning guidance. Sites have been graded and are shown in figure 7 (inside rear cover). More detailed information on site boundaries is available from the address on page iv. A list of the sites in Brent described in this handbook is given in the Contents. Many of these sites are linked into a network of Green Corridors (figure 6).

### Sites of Metropolitan Importance

Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation are those sites which contain the best examples of London's habitats, sites which contain rare species, rare assemblages of species, or which are of particular significance within large areas of otherwise heavily built-up London. They have the highest priority for protection. The identification and protection of Metropolitan sites are necessary, not only to support a significant proportion of London's wildlife, but also to provide opportunities for people to have contact with the natural environment.

Brent contains the whole of one Site of Metropolitan Importance, Fryent Country Park. In addition, part of two other Metropolitan sites, the Brent Reservoir and the Grand Union Canal, lie within the Borough.

In the text, Metropolitan sites are identified by the prefix M, followed by a number taken from a list of sites identified over the whole of the Greater London area. Sites of Metropolitan Importance are not therefore numbered consecutively within the Borough.

### Sites of Borough Importance

These are sites which are important in a Borough perspective; damage to these sites would mean a significant loss to the Borough. Borough sites are divided, on the basis of their quality, into two grades, but it must be stressed that they are all important on a Borough-wide view. In Brent, six Sites of Borough Grade I Importance are identified and 15 of Borough Grade II Importance. The former includes "Raiiside habitats", which are found right across the Borough.

Sites of Borough Importance are identified by an Br (for Brent) and B (for Borough) prefix, followed by their grade (I or II), and then a number taken from a list of sites for the Borough. This number does not represent a rank of importance.

### Sites of Local Importance

A Site of Local Importance is one which is or may be of particular value to nearby residents or schools. These sites may already be used by schools for nature study or be run by management committees mainly composed of local people. In total, 17 Sites of Local Importance have been identified in Brent.

Local sites are particularly important in areas otherwise deficient

in nearby wildlife sites. Built-up areas more than one kilometre from an *accessible* Metropolitan or Borough site, or equivalent site in a neighbouring borough, are defined as Areas of Deficiency. Further Local sites in or near the Area of Deficiency are chosen as the best available to alleviate this deficiency. Where no such sites are available, opportunities should be taken to provide them by habitat enhancement or creation, by negotiating access and management agreements, or by direct acquisition.

There are four Areas of Deficiency in Brent. The largest stretches in an arc from the western end of Stonebridge Park Sidings, past Wembley Stadium, through to North Wembley and on across Vale Farm Sports Ground as far as Elmwood Park. Only two Local sites could be identified within this area. One of these is Elmwood Park at the extreme western end, where there is partial access to the areas of wildlife interest. The Pimple, an attractive little park with mature hedges and trees, is a well placed Local site, just outside the western end of the area. The second site actually within the boundaries of the Area of Deficiency is the Wembley Park section of the Wealdstone Brook. Most of this is in a concrete channel, viewable only from road bridges, whilst the best part is only properly accessible for the residents of a housing estate. The significance of even a small accessible Borough site such as St John's Old Burial Ground in Wembley can be appreciated by looking at figure 7. King Edward VII Park is very strategically placed but unfortunately its ecological interest is at present minimal, and as a result it does not have even Local site status.

A second Area of Deficiency is in the extreme north of the Borough, in Queensbury. Roe Green Park would have alleviated this, but as its main ecological feature, the walled garden, is only open occasionally, it does not count as an *accessible* Borough grade site. At present there are no accessible Local sites to relieve this deficiency. Kingsbury Hospital Wood would help, but at present it is not accessible to the general public. Eton Grove Open Space is very well-placed, but it does not have sufficient nature conservation interest to make it a Local site.

The other two Areas of Deficiency are towards the heavily built-up south-eastern part of the Borough. One of these stretches between Brondesbury Park and Willesden Green station, and the other is at the very south-eastern tip of Brent, in the Carlton Vale area, south of the main line out of Euston. Again the difference a single site, in this case Paddington Cemetery, can make is seen from figure 7. Queen's Park is also very strategically placed but it is only classed as a Local site.

For the Carlton Vale Area of Deficiency, the nearest potential sites are in the Maida Vale area of the City of Westminster: Paddington Recreation Ground and Randolph Gardens Open Space, next to St Augustine's Church, Kilburn. However, although ecological enhancement of both these is proposed, at present the first is only classed as a Local site in Westminster and the second has no

formal nature conservation status. The southernmost tip of this corner of Brent, around Malvern Road, is not within the Area of Deficiency as it is less than one kilometre from Meanwhile Gardens in Kensington and Chelsea. Meanwhile Gardens is to be found on the south side of the Grand Union Canal and west of Great Western Road. With its ponds, wild flower areas, trees and strong community involvement, it would have been a Borough site if it had been located in Brent. The Grand Union Canal, on the other hand, in this area cannot be regarded as giving 'hands on' experience of nature; although there is the towpath, what little vegetation exists is much more limited than further west, beyond Kensal Town footbridge.

The best candidate to help reduce the Brondesbury Park Area of Deficiency is Queen's Park, should its ecological interest be increased sufficiently to make it a Borough site. The Corporation of London (who own and manage Queen's Park) have now made a positive start in this direction.

### Green corridors

Green corridors are relatively continuous areas of open space leading through the built environment and which may link sites to each other and to the Green Belt. They often consist of railway embankments and cuttings, roadside verges, canals, parks, playing fields and rivers. They allow some animals and plants to penetrate further into the built-up area than would otherwise be the case and provide an extension to the habitats of the sites they link.

Figure 5 shows a network of connected open spaces in Brent, leading from the Green Belt to the north along the corridors formed by the railway lines, the two main tributaries of the River Brent (the Dollis Brook and the Silk Stream), and the Grand Union Canal, towards the more central areas. Note that these are not shown in full beyond the Borough boundary.

Most of the main sites are within this corridor network. Of the Borough Grade I sites, only Dollis Hill Rough lacks a corridor connection, although it comes within 60 metres of Gladstone Park. Of the Borough Grade II sites, Paddington Cemetery, Roundwood Park and Willesden New Cemetery, Grange Roundabout Nature Area, St John's Old Burial Ground in Wembley and Willesden Reservoir lack a corridor connection, although St John's Old Burial Ground is only 50 metres from the wooded embankment of the Chiltern Line. Many of the Local sites lack corridor connections.

### Sites in neighbouring boroughs

Sites within the Borough of Brent are of value to people in neighbouring boroughs. In turn, as listed in Chapter 12, there are several sites in the adjacent areas of neighbouring boroughs that are important to people from Brent.

## 8 Sites of Metropolitan Importance

### M6 Grand Union Canal

Grid ref: TQ 195 832  
 Length in Brent: 3.5km  
 Area in Brent: 12 ha

The whole of the canal system in London, including the Grand Union, Regent's and Hertford Union Canals, is considered to be of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation. The canal network is a strategic amenity and ecological feature providing important recreational and educational facilities and supporting a wide range of plants and animals, some of them uncommon or rare in London.

Three and a half kilometres of the Paddington Branch of the Grand Union Canal run across the south-west of the Borough of Brent, from the boundary with Hammersmith and Fulham at Acton Lane to that with Ealing at Manor Farm Road. The canal itself provides valuable habitat for fish, waterbirds, aquatic plants and invertebrates, and the adjacent land forms a narrow strip of terrestrial habitats. The towpath provides the public with free access at all times, and is an attractive and popular place for a walk or run. Its pleasant, quiet atmosphere is appreciated by many people.

Walk 2, at the back of this book, follows the canal for its entire length in Brent, joining it at Acton Lane and leaving it at Manor Farm

Road. That walk gives a summary of the ecology and history along the route; the account below goes into somewhat more detail, whilst still following the canal from east to west.

#### History

The Grand Junction Canal opened in 1794 to link London and the Midlands via Brentford, where it left the Thames. Almost as soon as the canal opened, it became obvious that a closer link with central London was necessary, and indeed the route for a new branch line was actually surveyed in 1794. Work began in 1797 after various hassles over land purchase were sorted out. The route left the Grand Junction at Bull's Bridge near Cranford and headed north towards Northolt, then east towards London, terminating at Paddington. (The extension via the Regent's Canal to the Thames at Limehouse did not open until 1820.) The Paddington Canal opened to traffic in 1801. In 1929, it became part of the Grand Union Canal.

The Paddington Canal was an instant commercial success and transformed Paddington into a thriving inland port. The progress of boats on the new link was fast as there were no locks, unlike the alternative route via Brentford where there were several, including a flight of six at Hanwell. Alperton soon became a flourishing brick and tile-making centre. Companies built their own wharves alongside the canal, and some cut their own private docks and

arms linked to the main canal. The transport of goods such as sand, gravel, building materials, coal and hay kept the canal busy right up to the 1950s.

A typical user was the huge Heinz factory, on the north side of the canal at Park Royal. This was built in the mid 1920s and until the 1960s the company used the waterway as a supply route to bring in beans and tomato puree by boat from the London Docks, and to send the canned products in the opposite direction. A large "57" (now gone) facing the canal showed the importance of the waterway to Heinz. The "57" and "Heinz" signs now face the main road entrance in Waxlow Road, showing which is nowadays the transport route into and out of the factory. There is still a small company sign on the canal frontage for the benefit of people on boats and on the towpath opposite. What cannot be missed is the strong smell of baked beans!

On the other side of Abbey Road, and on the southern side of the canal, was the Guinness wharf. Guinness was formerly also a great user of the canal, and boats filled with barrels of stout were once a common sight on the waterway.

The canal crossed the River Brent by an aqueduct right from the start, but in 1933 a new concrete aqueduct was built to the south of the earlier one to take the Grand Union over the new North Circular Road. A burst occurred to this in 1962, resulting in serious flooding. The 1933 aqueduct was demolished in February 1993, when the North Circular Road was widened. A wider and longer twin channel structure was assembled adjacent to the old structure and pushed into line with the canal during March 1993. By co-incidence, another major flood occurred in January 1999 on the adjacent North Circular Road, beneath the Abbey Road bridge; this, however, was nothing to do with the canal, but was the result of a burst water main.

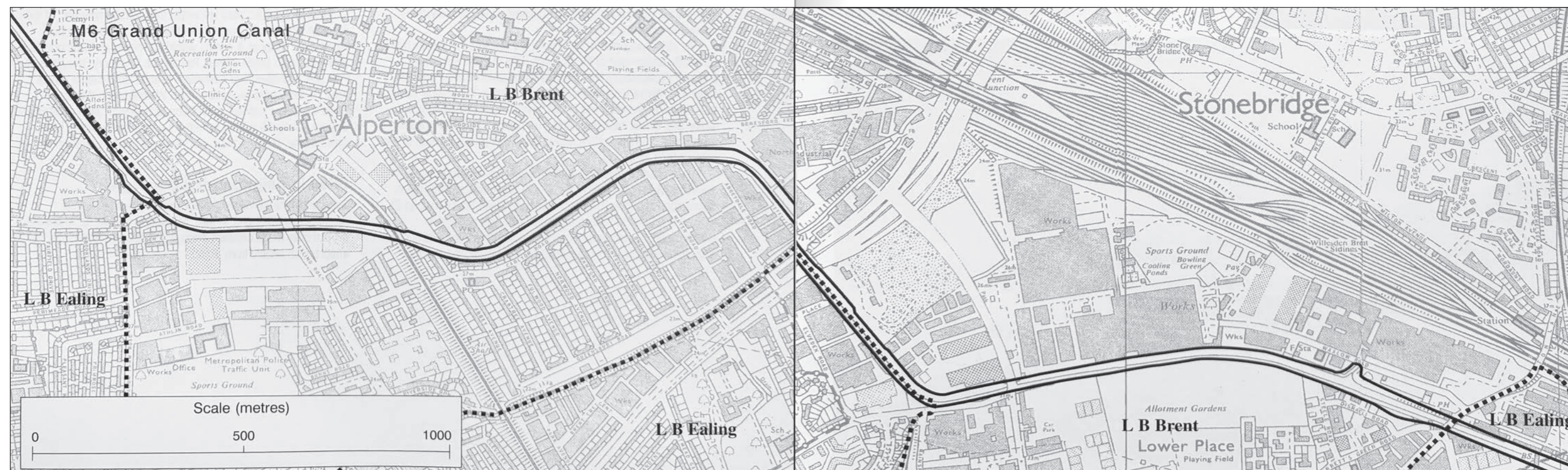
The canal system was a vital route for both local and long distance transport of goods until the early 20th century, when it succumbed to competition with road and rail transport. Since then, although the commercial use of the canals has almost ceased, an equally important recreational function has taken its place, and the Grand Union Canal is now extremely popular with anglers, pleasure boaters, joggers and ramblers.

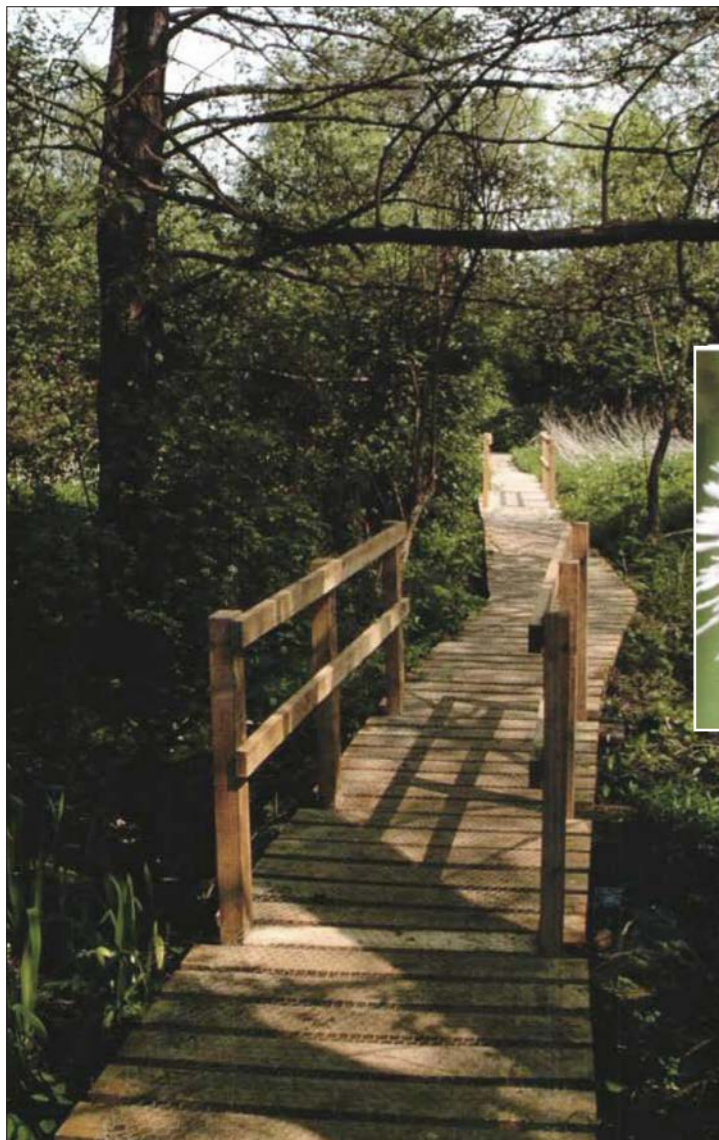
#### Ecology

The first stretch of the canal in Brent, travelling out from London, is very attractive. Beyond the *Grand Junction Arms* a line of fine crack-willows on the north side dips into the water, and a grey heron can often be spotted motionless on one of the branches, or nearby. Families of mallards and coots also find shelter underneath these trees and make forays out on to the open water. On the opposite side of the canal, to the south of the tarmac towpath, a gently sloping bank has been landscaped. Trees have been planted and a seed mix sown, which, now that the area has matured, helps to shield the industrial units beyond. A pleasant rough path leaves the towpath to amble through the wild flowers and behind the trees before rejoining the canal further along. The trees include crack-willow, Italian alder, hawthorn, white willow, false-acacia, aspen and young ash trees, as well as various ornamental shrubs such as firethorn and roses. A variety of flowers brighten up the path in summer, including common mallow, cut-leaved crane's-bill, goat's-rue, common knapweed, tufted vetch, creeping and meadow buttercups, spear thistle, red clover and red campion. Benches along or overlooking the towpath add to the charm of this part.

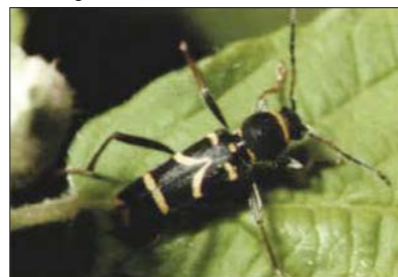
The canal is relatively wide here, and widens further opposite the western end of the landscaped bank. This is where the Canal Feeder (see site Br.B11) flows in; it is a short stretch of open water

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▲ The Heinz factory between Harlesden and Park Royal contrasts with the colourful towpath of the Grand Union Canal *Meg Game*



▲ *Clytus arietis* at the Brent Reservoir. This is a timber-boring beetle, distinguished by its yellow chevron – *John Dobson*

▲ *Volucella zonaria* – Britain's largest hoverfly, as seen at the Brent Reservoir. Very common in some years around London, it is scarce elsewhere in Britain *John Dobson*

▲ The new boardwalk on the south side of the Brent Reservoir *Leo Batten*



▲ *Tetanocera elata*, a fly which feeds on slugs is found at Brent Reservoir – *John Dobson*



▲ Looking across to the southern shore of the Brent Reservoir – *Leo Batten*

after it reappears from under Waxlow Road, following a lengthy underground section. The Feeder has good marginal vegetation on the west side, such as reed sweet-grass and hemlock water-dropwort. Another advantage of the Canal Feeder is that narrow boats are able to use its entrance to turn round!

Further west, the long stretch as far as Abbey Road is almost devoid of vegetation on the north side as the old loading and unloading frontages of the Heinz factory come right to the edge of the water. Some minor landscaping has been carried out further along so that employees can sit and enjoy the canal at break times. The opposite side of the canal opens out to look across old allotments. These have turned into a relatively rough grassland and, towards Abbey Road, a number of warehouses have been constructed on part of these former allotments. However, by summer 1999, a quarter of the former allotments remained undeveloped.

An almost continuous strip of vegetation separates the towpath and the water; goat's-rue, field horsetail, meadow vetchling, selfheal, common mallow, bindweed, black medick and greater bird's-foot-trefoil grow within this strip. A notable plant to be found here is common fleabane, with its attractive deep yellow flowers in late summer. Usually found in marshes and wet meadows, its undivided and wrinkled, woolly leaves are most distinctive. When burnt, its smoke was supposed to drive away fleas: hence its name. It was also used as a cure for dysentery, but with dubious results. In late winter, when the vegetation is at its shortest, colt's-foot, with its dandelion-like flowers, brightens up the pathside. Most prominent of the flowers in the summer are the lilac and white flowers of goat's-rue. This native of southern and eastern Europe, and western Asia, was introduced to Britain about 1568 as a fodder and garden plant, and became naturalised on waste ground.

Crack-willows follow the line of the fence, separating the towpath from the former allotments. Also accompanying the fence the whole way, almost to Abbey Road, is a ditch, wet in some places and dry in others, hidden in parts and visible elsewhere. The ditch contains reed sweet-grass, great willowherb, reed canary-grass, celery-leaved buttercup and field horsetail. Another attractive feature along this part is a thick and uninterrupted hedge between the towpath and the ditch. It consists of hawthorn, field maple, blackthorn, elder, hazel, hornbeam, white bryony and English elm. The elm is in the form of suckers, regenerating from the mature trees, which succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease. When they reach a certain size, these too start to die in their turn.

To the west of Abbey Road the canal and its surroundings become a little more mundane. At first there is little or no greenery between the towpath and the canal, although further along there is an unmown strip between the two as the North Circular Road is approached. Hogweed and common mallow are the most prominent species along here. Trees grow beside the towpath for a short distance beyond the first bend; ash, hawthorn and elder are all abundant, with extensive ivy on the trunks. The water is retained by solid concrete walls, but on the far side of the canal, a variety of willows (including crack-, weeping, goat and grey willows) dip down to the water. The willows, together with ash, elm, elder and field maple, give the canal a sheltered feel, but then a more open section is reached before the North Circular Road is crossed. Immediately before the road, on the far side, is an area of rough vegetation near some containers; this is part of the Abbey Road Mounds site. The aqueduct over the North Circular is the half way point of the canal in Brent.

Beyond the widened aqueduct, the River Brent is crossed, although this can easily be missed as trees line both sides of the

canal and the river is some little way below. Industrial units close in on both sides of the canal until the next bend is reached. The dominant plant here is Japanese knotweed, but giant hogweed also occurs along this stretch. A patch of skullcap grows between the towpath and the water and its deep blue flowers appear in pairs between June and September, each pair facing almost the same way. The flowers have a large leafy outgrowth on the back which resembles a Roman helmet or *galerum* (the scientific name of the plant is *Scutellaria galericulata*).

The canal is tree-lined as it bends westwards again, helping to hide the industrial premises which still lie beyond both banks. Goat's-rue and broad-leaved everlasting-pea are the dominant flowers alongside the water for some way, the latter, with its crimson blooms, visible from quite a distance. Beyond a footbridge the canal straightens again, and the factories on the southern side are replaced by the back gardens of Carlyon Road. At first a line of trees shields them, but the trees peter out and the garden fences then come right up to the towpath. Goat's-rue is still the main flower by the water, but on the other side in several places are groups of emergent plants such as sweet-flag, yellow iris, hemlock water-dropwort and yellow-cress. After the canal passes under the Piccadilly line it is only a short way to Ealing Road. To the south, a B&Q store overshadows the water, but, in front of the red and black building, trees and shrubs soften the landscape. These include elm, hawthorn and several fine hornbeams, as well as a bank of guelder-rose, with its shiny red berries, near the railway bridge. Amphibious bistort can be seen both floating on the water and growing on the ground beside the canal, clearly displaying why it is called amphibious. False fox-sedge also grows by the towpath, with creeping bent, great willowherb, Michaelmas daisy, gypswort, goat's-rue and horsetail. Across the water is another thin band of trees and shrubs: birch, strawberry-tree, buddleia and a very large weeping willow drooping over the surface.

The vegetation thins for the final short section within the Borough, between Ealing Road and Manor Farm Road. Native shrubs have been planted alongside the towpath, and these include small-leaved lime, spindle, hazel and elder. Dogwood and its black berries are particularly noticeable in autumn. There is little to soften the far side of the canal except for vast banks of brambles. Finally, and appropriately (since it was the first species mentioned after leaving Acton Lane), is a fine crack-willow by the bridge at Manor Farm Road.

Animal life in and around the canal includes an excellent and diverse population of fish, which attract black-headed gull and grey heron. Other fishing birds which are fairly common include the common tern (in season) and the cormorant. The kingfisher is seen, although only rarely. The stretch to the west of Acton Lane is a particularly good place to spot a grey heron. Though usually rather shy birds, they can often be seen fishing beside the northern, less disturbed edge of the canal; their patience and expertise are the envy of the numerous human anglers. The latter report roach, perch, bream, carp, pike, tench, eel, and gudgeon among their catches. Water birds breeding beside the canal include mallard, Canada goose, coot and moorhen; pied and grey wagtails can frequently be seen chasing insects at the water's edge. The blue-tailed damselfly breeds in the canal; its larvae spend at least two years beneath the water before the attractive black-and-blue adults emerge. Pipistrelle bats have been seen along the canal to the west of the North Circular Road. At dusk they can be observed hawking for flying insects, most frequently near bridges.

The canal and towpath are owned by British Waterways. Management and maintenance of the towpath is the responsibility

of British Waterways, and there is free public access to it at all times. Brent Parks Service are responsible for the landscaped bank opposite the *Grand Junction Arms*. The nearest stations for the canal are Harlesden for the eastern end and Alperton for the western end.

**M35 Brent Reservoir (or The Welsh Harp)**

Grid ref: TQ 215 871  
Area: 102 ha (49 ha in Brent)

Despite its urban location, the Brent Reservoir is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating places for naturalists within a wide area of north London, and its significance for nature conservation is recognised in its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Its value lies chiefly in the high numbers of overwintering wildfowl, diversity of nesting waterfowl and uncommon communities of wetland plants. Walk 4 (at the back of this book) takes a look at the northern side of the reservoir.

Just over half the site lies within the Borough of Brent, the rest being in Barnet. The reservoir itself and the immediate marginal land is owned by British Waterways, whilst some of the marginal lands are leased either to Brent or Barnet Councils. The Councils also own and manage large areas of public open space adjacent to the reservoir.

**History**

The opening of the Paddington Canal in 1801 exacerbated an already serious water shortage for the canal system to the west of London. This shortage had existed ever since the Grand Junction Canal opened between Brentford and the Midlands in 1794, and had only been partially helped by the completion of Aldenham Reservoir in 1795. Ruislip Lido was completed in the early 1800s as an additional source of water, and plans for a reservoir on the River Brent were also formulated in 1803. However, the large amount of land required, together with the cost, soon led to the indefinite deferral of the reservoir proposal.

The water shortage did not improve and in 1811 the Canal Feeder (see site Br.B11) was completed to take water directly from the Brent at Kingsbury to the Paddington Canal near Harlesden. This only helped temporarily, and when an Act was authorised in 1812 to construct the Regent's Canal between Paddington and Limehouse, the Regent's Canal Company decided to implement the plans for a reservoir in the Brent valley. The area chosen lay between what is now known as Old St Andrew's Church, Kingsbury, and the Edgware Road, and consisted of grazing land on either side of the Silk Stream and River Brent. A dam was to be constructed across the River Brent a short way downstream from its confluence with the Silk Stream, and the reservoir would fill naturally behind this.

An old track passed across the valley from Woodfield House in the north to Neasden House in the south. The route of this old trackway can still be clearly seen amongst the trees on the north side, as far as the water's edge. Detailed planning of the Brent Reservoir began in 1833, and it was to incorporate the Canal Feeder as the reservoir outlet. The reservoir was substantially completed by 1835, as confirmed by a tablet on the wall of Old St Andrew's Church. This records the death by drowning of four brothers of the Sidebottom family of Mount Pleasant, Roe Green, in August 1835. Three of them, aged 11 to 17, were drowned whilst bathing, and the eldest brother, aged 31,

drowned trying to save them.

Later a small extension was added to the reservoir, the whole of the first phase being finally completed at the end of 1837. On the night of 16th January 1842, the dam embankment partially collapsed and the resultant surge of water wrecked 13 barges and 16 boats, and drowned several people, as well as livestock. The main cause was a seven-day period of non-stop rain. As a result of this disaster, a reservoir attendant's cottage was built, so that a careful check could be kept at all times on the level of the water.

An addition was made to the reservoir in 1853-5: metal posts, bearing the name of the Regent's Canal Company, the date 1854 and the Prince of Wales' feathers, date from this time. The dam was also increased in height and length at the same time, and the attendant's cottage had to be demolished and resited to the north. The new lake was soon adopted by water birds, and many rarities were recorded by Victorian naturalists, including Frederick Bond, the founder of *The Zoologist* magazine, and J H Harting, author of 'Birds of Middlesex' (Harting 1866). It also became a popular spot with Londoners, who came by train for picnics, fishing or even (in the cold winters of the late 19th century) ice-skating championships. Many of these activities were centred at a large public house, called the *Old Welsh Harp*, which stood near Staples Comer. Although the original pub was pulled down when the Edgware Road was widened, its name lives on as the popular name for the reservoir.

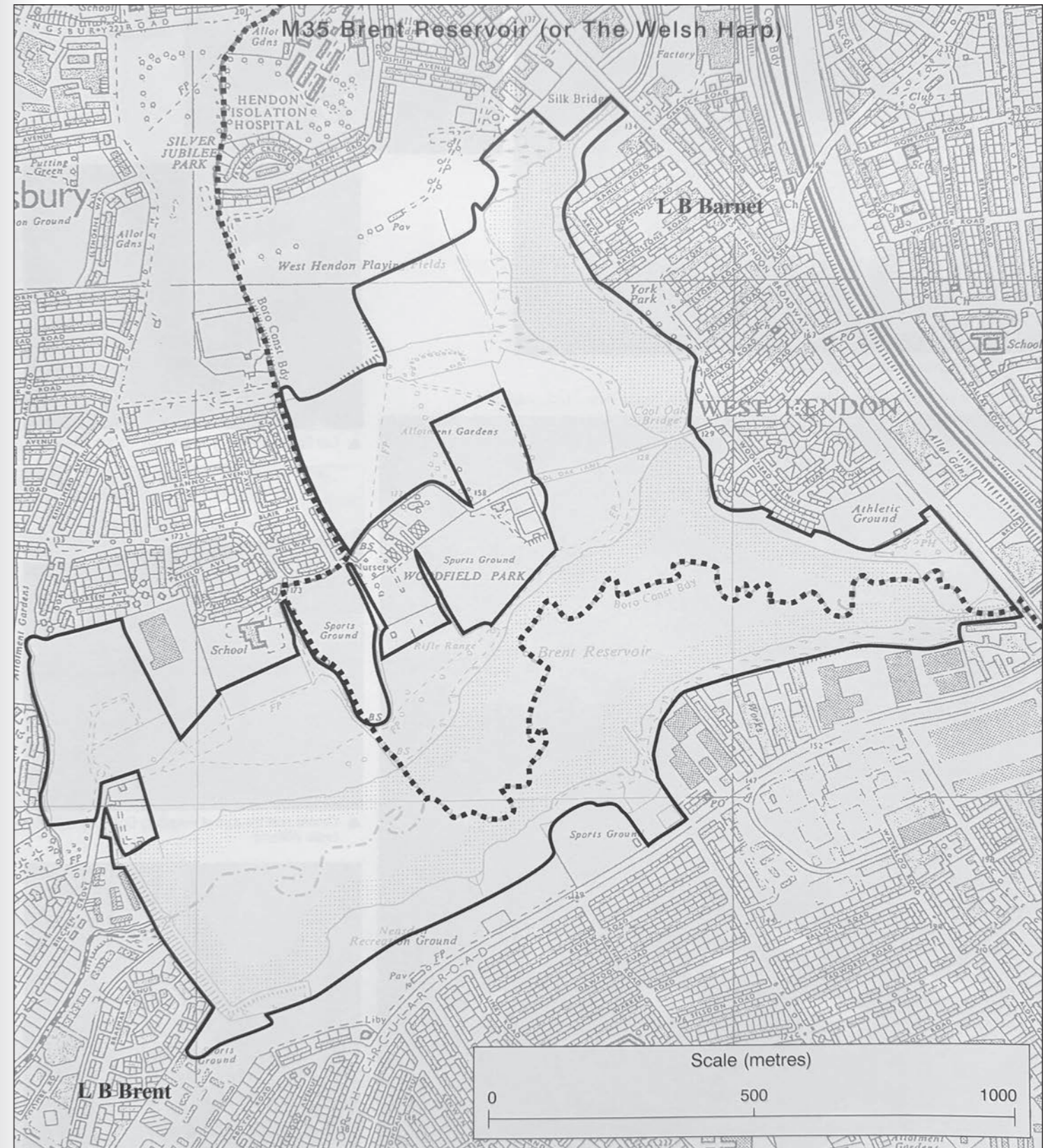
During the Second World War, an RAF flying boat would always be on standby on the reservoir. The reason was that Winston Churchill was using the nearby Post Office Telecommunications Research Station in Brook Road as a wartime bunker. If the Germans had invaded, the plan was that Churchill would have been whisked along by car down Brook Road to the plane. He would then have been flown to Liverpool where a ship was permanently moored to take him to Canada.

Whilst the surrounding neighbourhood has changed beyond recognition since those days, the Brent Reservoir has retained importance both for recreation and wildlife. Today it also plays an important role in flood defence. The management has to cater for all three demands.

**Major habitats**

The reservoir contains about 51 hectares of open water, and is roughly boot-shaped, with its main body following the valley of the River Brent, and the northern arm following the Silk Stream. It is rather different in structure from the typical drinking water reservoirs in the London area. Except for the concreted western end (near the dam), it has largely "natural" earth banks, with relatively gently sloping sides. This allows marginal vegetation to become established along much of the shoreline, providing cover and nesting habitat for birds. It is also much shallower than a drinking water reservoir. Long-term siltation has reduced the average depth to about two metres; the maximum is some seven metres. This presents potentially good feeding habitat for diving and dabbling ducks. However, as the reservoir also plays a role in flood storage, the water level can rise sharply after heavy rain, threatening any waterside nests which are not attached to floating structures. The sluice gates are now operated by an automatic mechanism, and the water level fluctuates less than in the past.

Since the catchment of the feeder streams is now largely urban, the reservoir tends to suffer from pollution, including oil run-off from streets. Oil booms and trash traps have been constructed across both the Silk Stream and the River Brent; these help to reduce oily surface films and unsightly litter, though oil and heavy



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metal deposits in the bottom mud are still a problem. The water is rather eutrophic, due to high levels of nutrients from sewage effluent in some of the source streams; this causes algal blooms. There was extensive growth of waterweed in the summer of 1999,

characterised by rigid hornwort and Nuttall's waterweed, together with common and fat duckweeds.

The main reservoir is well used for sailing and wind-surfing, especially at week-ends, with up to 100 boats out at once. This

# The Brent Reservoir (Welsh Harp)



▲ Great crested grebes nesting – Leo Batten

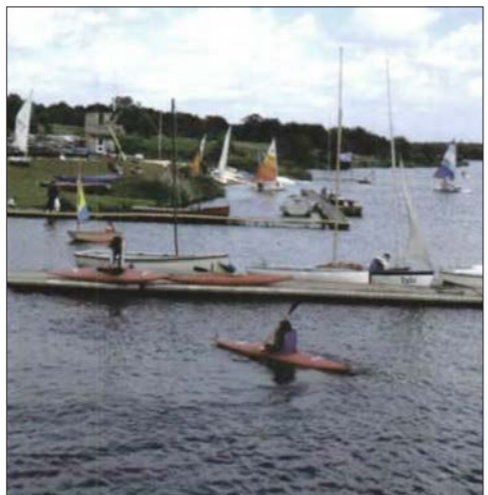
▼ Swans glide peacefully by only a short distance from the North Circular Road – Leslie Williams



◀ Flowering rush at the water's edge is a beautiful sight  
Leslie Williams



▲ Cub Scouts helping to clear willow – Leslie Williams



▲ Canoes near the dam at Kingbury Open Day in 1995  
Leslie Williams



▲ Southern-marsh orchids photographed on the north side, in Brent – Leo Batten

drives off all but the most tolerant wildfowl, such as Canada goose and coot, from the main body of the lake. However, a chain of rafts and islands cuts off a secluded refuge of undisturbed water along the eastern shore. This is especially valuable for shy species, such as shoveler and gadwall. Its calmer, shallow water also provides good feeding conditions for ducklings. Sailing and canoeing also take place in the part of the northern arm near Cool Oak Lane bridge. There is another refuge area for birds at the northern end of the northern arm; when recreational pressure on the reservoir is severe, some dislodged birds can also find refuge here. A few small islands and rafts serve as loafing and nesting sites.

Over the past twenty years, extensive areas of reed bed, swamp and marsh have grown up on the silt deposits around the margins of the reservoir. This is particularly well developed along the eastern shore and northern arm. Stands of sea club-rush, common club-rush and great and lesser reedmace line the water's edge. The reed swamp grades into a tall marsh community of wetland herbs such as great willowherb, purple-loosestrife, yellow iris, water-pepper, water mint, common fleabane, gypsywort, meadowsweet, wild angelica, Indian balsam and reed canary-grass. It also contains some rather incongruous, but highly colourful, garden escapes, especially Canadian goldenrod and vast clumps of Michaelmas daisy.

Along some stretches of the eastern shores and the eastern side of the northern arm, the vegetation has succeeded to dense, almost impenetrable willow carr woodland, grading into damp willow woodland further back from the waterside. Crack-willow dominates the tree canopy together with white willow; several of the shrubby willow species, for example osier, goat willow, grey willow, almond willow and various hybrids, are also present. Alder and hawthorn are frequent in some areas. A number of small pools within the wood serve as further wildfowl retreats.

Along the northern shore there is a mixture of wooded areas, with oak, ash, willow and hybrid black-poplar trees, and rough grassland with tall herbs, which merges into marshland nearer the water. A mosaic of rough grassland and scrub has developed on the drier ground on the west side of the northern arm, including on a former rubbish tip. Together with the neighbouring allotments, this provides good feeding habitat for small birds. To the south of West Hendon Playing Fields, a recent plantation principally of native trees provides additional cover. A small area of naturally-colonised secondary woodland has grown up near the Environmental Centre, on a plot which had previously been prepared for a cemetery. The site also contains several old hedgerows, some of which pre-date the reservoir. A double hedge with bank and ditches near the northern shore of the main lake is a fragment of the old trackway referred to above; here it marks the Barnet-Brent boundary.

**Bird life**

The bird life is undoubtedly the site's greatest attraction for naturalists. The reservoir is very important for over-wintering wildfowl, which migrate into this country mostly from continental Europe and further east. The site attracts both dabbling and diving ducks; dabbling ducks are those that feed by straining the surface water or up-ending, whilst diving ducks dive right under the water to seek their food.

The numbers of individual species fluctuate considerably from year to year. When the SSSI status was first granted in 1950, the reservoir was one of the best sites in the country for smew – a small black and white diving duck from the Baltic area. However, this is now a rare bird here. Today the site is more important for

dabbling ducks, with peak winter counts of shoveler and gadwall from 1993-5 averaging 109 and 82 respectively. This is over 1 % of the national winter population for both species (which is regarded as a nationally significant level). The count for October 1999 recorded 241 shoveler, 180 gadwall and a staggering 924 coots. It is also a good site for teal (average peak winter count 1993-95, 79) and mallard. Amongst the diving duck, tufted duck reached a spectacular 580 in 1995, whilst pochard reached 42, although more impressive flocks of up to 150 could be seen here a few years ago. The winter 1995-6 was particularly good for diving duck. This is perhaps because the reservoir had been drained the previous winter, which possibly improved the aeration of the bottom mud and hence winter feeding conditions for the birds.

Cormorant and grey heron can often be observed roosting on the rafts and islands. Large flocks of gulls, chiefly black-headed gull, congregate on the open water, especially from July through to the following spring. Numbers are usually most spectacular straight after the breeding season. Impressive numbers of snipe are recorded in the marsh and reed beds, with up to 24 seen in 1995, and up to 50 in some previous years. These areas also provide cover for the water rail, a curious, secretive species which is more often heard 'squealing' in the rushes than seen out in the open. Bitterns occasionally overwinter here.

Perhaps even more remarkable is the range of species which breed on the site. Over the past twenty years, this has been one of the best sites in London for breeding great crested grebe, with up to 41 pairs in 1990. However, the nests are susceptible to flooding when the water level rises, with inevitable consequences for the young. Only two broods were successfully reared in 1993, although by 1996 there was a partial recovery, with about 30 pairs attempting to nest, about half of them successfully. Little grebe breed every year, although numbers fluctuate, and there are at least one or two pairs of breeding pochard. Shoveler is an occasional breeder, and birds are often present at the Brent Reservoir in the summer. Teal bred here for the first, and so far only, time in 1991. The tiny ruddy duck, an "escaped" North American species which has recently become established in the wild in this country, also breeds here. Moorhen and large numbers of mallard, tufted duck and coot nest every year, and mute swan most years.

Rafts, originally introduced to provide roosting platforms for wildfowl and a screen from the sailing area, have been eagerly adopted by common terns. In 1999 a record 31 pairs of tern nested, and no less than 100 birds of assorted ages were seen flying in a wildfowl count in late July that year. At times the reservoir provides less than an ideal feeding habitat, due to its murky water and oily films, which impede the visibility for fishing. However, in these conditions the birds disperse to nearby park lakes, canals and even the ponds on Hampstead Heath to forage, returning to the reservoir to feed their young.

The reed beds have expanded enormously since the 1970s. Reed warbler numbers peaked in 1990 with 43 singing males, and sedge warblers in 1989 with at least 18 pairs, although numbers of the latter have declined dramatically since then; reed bunting regularly breeds. Whitethroat, lesser whitethroat, blackcap, willow warbler, chiffchaff and linnet nest in the rough grassland, woodland and scrub. Grey wagtail and pied wagtail bred on the site in 1995, and kingfishers have begun to nest here once again. Tawny owl, sparrowhawk and kestrel also breed on the site.

Whilst high nesting or over-wintering numbers are important in assessing the site's importance for nature conservation, for the local birdwatcher the sheer range of species is a source of inspiration. In 1997, a total of 148 species was recorded. Many

rarities have been seen, especially during the spring and autumn passage. Some of the more unusual records for the 1990s included Slavonian grebe, bittern, night heron, purple heron, little egret, great white egret, blue-winged teal, Iceland gull, ring-billed gull, white-winged black tern, long-eared owl, hen harrier, goshawk, osprey, cuckoo, pied flycatcher, yellow-browed warbler and penduline tit.

#### Mammals, amphibia and reptiles

Pipistrelle and noctule bats feed over the reservoir. Smooth newts, toads and frogs are regularly observed in the reservoir and nearby ponds. Lizards were observed on broken concrete near Cool Oak Lane bridge in the 1960s, and elsewhere in the mid 1980s, although their continued survival is thought unlikely. A small number of slow-worms were introduced some years ago near the Youth Sailing Base. Like many urban lakes, the reservoir has also been the recipient of red-eared terrapins, which can regularly be seen basking in the marshy areas. Their presence is unwelcome as they are predators of young wildfowl. Water shrews have recently been reported from the site.

#### Invertebrates

The invertebrate fauna of the site is also of considerable interest, both for wetland species and those associated with old grassland, woodland and hedgerows. Eight Red Data Book species and over 60 Nationally Notable species have been recorded here, as well as many other uncommon invertebrates. The butterfly list for the site has now reached 26 species and includes white-letter hairstreak. The damselfly and dragonfly list totals 13 species, including the nationally uncommon ruddy darter.

John Dobson, a local entomologist, has found several interesting invertebrates in three woodland habitats near the reservoir: the wet woodland along the south-east edge of the reservoir, and especially wet flushes here; the dense woodland within the grounds of the Environmental Education Centre; and dry woodland adjacent to Wood Lane. Old hedgerows which run through the latter two of these have provided historical continuity, and allowed an ancient woodland element in the invertebrate fauna to survive. The mixture of short turf, bare soil and light scrub between Neasden Recreation Ground and the reservoir is also particularly valuable for invertebrates. All these need careful management if the fauna is to survive.

Mr Dobson found a particularly interesting short-palped crane fly, *Lipsothrix nervosa*, in shaded flushes and permanently muddy stream-sides in densely overgrown woodland and willow carr. It is only known from Britain, is in decline, and is a National Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species. The crane fly breeds in wet decaying wood, and populations are likely to be lost if sites dry out, even for a short period, if shading is removed, or if ditching or other inappropriate management is carried out. A threat at the Brent Reservoir is from pollution from the adjacent industrial estate.

Other scarce species at the site include the day-flying long-horn moth *Nemophora fasciella*, the ground-nesting solitary bee *Lasioglossum malachrus*, the wetland ground beetle *Demetrias imperialis*, and the hoverfly *Myolepta dubia*, which breeds in rot-holes in horse-chestnut and oak trees. The moth list totals 164 species, including pine hawkmoth, maiden's blush and emperor moth, which are all scarce in Middlesex.

#### Plants of special interest

The site is also remarkable for its wild flowers. Five species of orchid have been recorded in recent years. Broad-leaved helleborine grows in damp woodland near the eastern marsh, and common

spotted-orchid occurs in grassland on the northern and southern shores. Southern marsh-orchid can be found in the northern and southern marshes, and a pyramidal orchid was discovered in the eastern marsh in the 1980s. Bee orchid was discovered on rough ground in 1994.

The marsh areas support many other uncommon species, for example flowering-rush, cyperus sedge, fringed water-lily, greater spearwort, marsh woundwort, great burnet and square-stalked St John's-wort. Golden dock, a London rarity, has been found on drying silt.

Some of the dry grassland also contains interesting plants. Burnet-saxifrage grows abundantly in an area of rough grassland over rubble-filled soil near Cool Oak Bridge. Patches of acidic grassland which contain abundant sheep's sorrel can be found on the Taplow Gravel soil along the northern shore of the main lake, and pignut also grows here. The London rarity heath groundsel has also been recorded.

#### Access

Most of the site is open to the public, with a network of paths, starting, for example, from Cool Oak Lane, Birchen Grove and Janson Close. Two hides provide excellent bird watching facilities in the eastern marsh. Serious bird watchers can obtain a key from the Welsh Harp Conservation Group (WHCG); see Appendix 1 for their address. Brent Council organises an annual event, Kingsbury Open Day, which includes wildlife walks around the reservoir. Brent Council's Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre is jointly managed by Roe Green Junior School and Copland Community School. It provides environmental education for Brent education establishments from nursery to college level, and for any other schools in the surrounding boroughs. Information on courses and charges are available from the Head of Centre on 020 8200 0087. Public guided walks are organised occasionally by Barnet Council's Countryside staff and the Welsh Harp Conservation Group.

#### Lottery funding

With the financial support of Guinness Ltd., through their 'Water of Life' initiative, access on the southern side of the reservoir has been improved for all visitors, including those who are disabled, as well as for parents with push chairs. In March 1999, Brent and Barnet Councils, in partnership with the land owners, British Waterways, and many local organisations, were successfully awarded £420,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Work on implementing the 18 separate projects included in the bid started in the autumn of 1999 and will be completed by December 2001. These include improved access for all, viewing platforms, visitor information and interpretation, upgraded car parking and various habitat improvements, e.g. reed beds, dredging, bird rafts and tree planting. The Guinness Water of Life initiative acted as a catalyst for the successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid. The management plan has been reviewed and updated, and this will help guide the future development and protection of the reservoir and its surrounding open spaces. Linked to this is the proposal for the establishment of a Local Nature Reserve.

#### Management

Management is a complex exercise requiring a balance between the needs of amenity, water sports, nature conservation and flood defence. This is largely undertaken by the two boroughs, British Waterways and the Welsh Harp Conservation Group, in consultation with other bodies.

The two Local Authorities have set up the Welsh Harp Joint

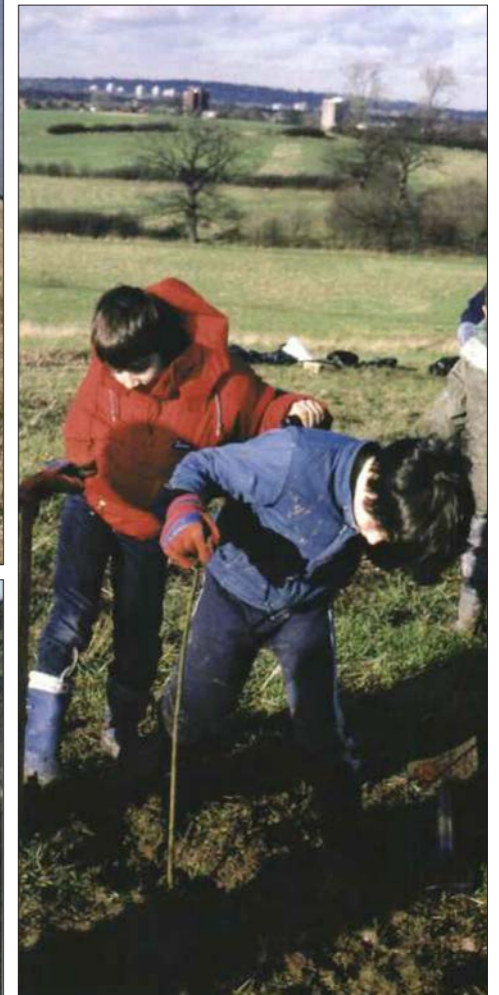


▲ Haymaking at Fryent Country Park  
Leslie Williams

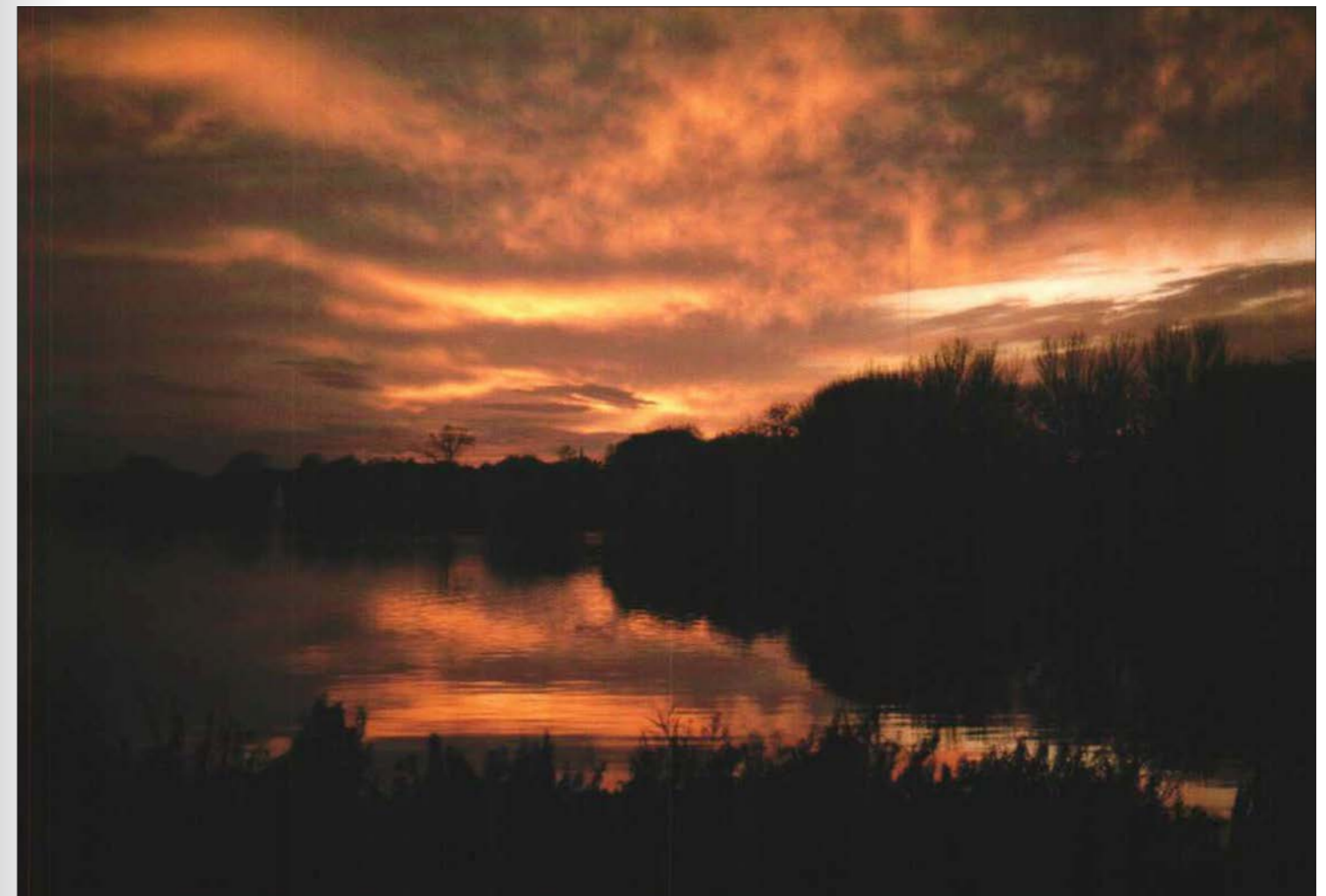


► When the Brent Reservoir was drained, the course of the River Brent emerged from underneath the waters  
Leslie Williams

▼ The 20th Willesden Cub Scouts planting trees at Fryent Country Park – Leslie Williams



▼ The reds and golds of a magnificent sunset over Brent Reservoir – Leslie Williams



Consultative Committee (WHJCC) to encourage dialogue between the different interest groups. The Environment Agency has drawn up a draft Water Level Management Plan for the SSSI to enable the nature conservation status of the site to be safeguarded.

Whilst sailing and nature conservation have many common requirements (for example a preference for clear water and a pleasant landscape), there are inevitable differences, such as the need for open wind-swept water for sailing, versus sheltered water for ducklings. Undoubtedly the lake could support many more wildfowl if there was no boating activity. Wildfowl vary greatly in their tolerance of disturbance: excessive recreational pressure has its most severe effects on the more sensitive species, such as teal or gadwall, which cannot be observed in 'ordinary' park lakes, leaving little but the ubiquitous gulls and Canada geese. Secluded refuges are therefore vital in maintaining a diversity of bird life.

Practical conservation work is consequently aimed at increasing the carrying capacity of the refuge areas. This has involved cutting back willows, dredging, creation of islands and digging of channels to restrict access to the water's edge in the most sensitive areas. In the longer term, it is hoped that continuing problems of water quality in the feeder streams and silt build up in the lake can be addressed.

Much of the practical conservation work is carried out by members of the WHCG, in consultation with the Councils. For heavier tasks, such as raft-building, volunteers working out community service orders under the Probation Service have sometimes been employed as well as Barnet Conservation Volunteers, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, the Herts/Barnet Countryside Management Service and the Brent Group of the London Wildlife Trust. The WHCG also carries out bird monitoring, publishes an annual bird report and is currently preparing a book on the wildlife of the site.

## M36 Fryent Country Park

Grid ref: TQ 195 876  
Area: 108 ha

It is surely a miracle that the rural landscape of Fryent Country Park has not been submerged by the tide of suburbia which laps its margins. The park occupies a commanding position on Barn Hill with a network of fields and old hedges extending down the slopes. A relatively modern road which bisects the park is the only major intrusion: earth banks each side reduce the impact of the traffic a little, but also restrict the view from cars. Perhaps this is why the delightful landscape of Fryent Country Park is surprisingly little-known in the area.

Leslie Williams provides a fascinating account of the history of the area in a paper on dating the hedgerows of Fryent Country Park, which total some 11 kilometres (Williams, 1985). Historically, the park can be divided in two by an old boundary between the parishes of Kingsbury and Harrow (it was not until 1894 that the parish of Wembley was created out of part of Harrow). This runs roughly parallel to and a little to the west of Fryent Way. It is probably of Celtic origin, and incorporated along much of its length a trackway known as Hell Lane, which was part of a track from Westminster to Stanmore, and on to Hertfordshire. This appears to have fallen gradually into disuse by about 1690. The histories of the sections of the park each side of the boundary are interestingly different.

The Harrow side, to the west of the parish boundary, consisted largely of enclosed fields from a relatively early date. Some of the

hedges separating the fields were in existence by the time of a manorial survey of 1547, but there was further subdivision of fields later on. For example one large field, Great Hydes, was divided in two by a hedge some time between 1547 and 1609, Upper Hydes, the upper portion, being again divided in two between 1699 and 1724, and Lower Hydes was divided in two by about 1862, and into three by 1947 (by which time it had also been severed by a railway and housing). A few hedges are thought to be relicts of the woodland that was here originally, but most were planted to subdivide existing fields.

In 1086, when the Domesday survey was compiled, the Kingsbury side was divided into two holdings, and contained a large area of uncultivated, probably wooded, land. There were to be many subsequent changes in manorial ownership, but in 1441-2 Kingsbury Manor was granted to All Soul's College, Oxford, who then retained the land for centuries, leasing it for farming. The College's map of 1597 shows that by then many small, irregular fields had been cleared from the woodland, a process known as assarting. Thin strips of woodland separated many of the fields. The origin of many of the hedges on this side of the parish boundary was therefore from the original woodland, rather than from planted trees and shrubs.

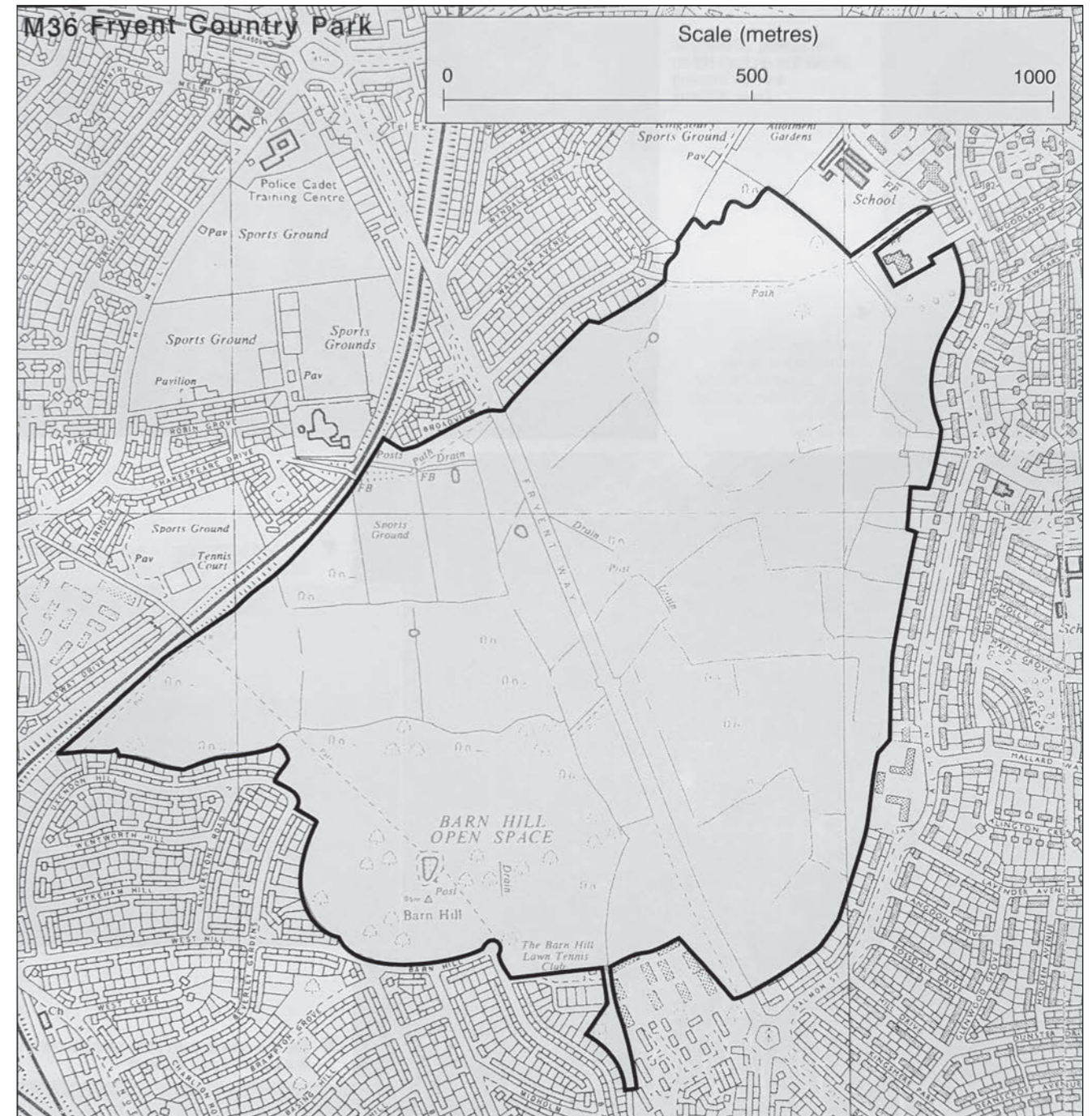
It is not known when the original woodland of Barn Hill was cleared. Much of the area round Barn Hill itself was still wooded in 1469, but is marked as fields in 1547. By the early 1790s these fields were part of the Barnhill Estate of Richard Page, a major landholder in the area who also owned 'Wembley Park'. Page employed Humphry Repton to landscape both his parks. At Barn Hill, Repton landscaped the summit with woodland and planted a belt of trees around the hedges at the foot of the hill. From about 1895 until the early 1920s, Barn Hill was a golf course, before being purchased as an open space by Wembley Urban District Council in 1927.

Middlesex County Council acquired the land to the east of Fryent Way in about 1938, and farming continues to this day. In the early 1970s, the fences were removed and it was opened to the public. The whole open space was renamed Fryent Country Park in 1984. 'Fryent' was taken from the word 'Friant', being the home of the minister of St Andrew's Church at Kingsbury whose grounds once lay in the ownership of the 'Freren' – the Knights of St John of Jerusalem. Freren was Norman French for the brothers (i.e. the Knights of St John).

Barn Hill, the highest point in Fryent Country Park, rises to 86 metres above sea level, a smidgen loftier than Horsenden Hill, a few miles to the south-west; it is capped by free-draining Dollis Hill Gravel, but the rest of the park lies on London Clay. The main habitats are grasslands, hedgerows, ponds, scrub and woodland.

Grassland comprises the majority of the area, and most is managed as hay meadow. Many of the fields were ploughed in the Second World War to increase food production, and again in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but they are now recovering a rich fauna and flora, due to judicious management for hay. The hay meadows are managed organically without the use of any pesticides or artificial fertilisers. In 1998, Brent Council achieved the Soil Association Organic Standard for the hay crop, so can use their organic symbol in association with the hay. The meadows are subject to annual inspection and certification. Hay making usually takes place in July and August. The grass is cut, spread and left to dry in the sun for a few days, then is collected, baled and loaded for transport to another farm.

Several areas, which may have escaped the plough, contain a particularly rich flora, with abundant great burnet, a plant



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characteristic of old wet meadows and which, in London, is almost confined to the boroughs of Brent, Harrow and Barnet. Fryent Country Park probably contains a significant proportion of the London population of this graceful plant. Most of the other hay fields contain plentiful buttercups, clovers and vetches amongst a sward of meadow foxtail, rye-grass, timothy, bents, Yorkshire-fog and other grasses, although false oat-grass is now the most frequent grass in many of the hay meadows. In total, well over a hundred species of wild flower have been found, including rare or notable plants such as meadow brome, sneezewort, devil's-bit scabious, pepper-saxifrage and adder's-tongue. Pepper-saxifrage, for example, grows on the slopes of Barn Hill on land which probably has a more-or-less continuous history as grassland for

the past two centuries. The grasslands are monitored annually in June.

Many of the hedges and hedge bottoms are rich in both herbaceous and woody plants, including Midland, hybrid and common hawthorns and wild service-tree. Colonies of the nationally rare narrow-leaved bitter-cress have recently been found in ten ditches and hedgerow bottoms; the previous record for this species in the old county of Middlesex was 'near Harrow' in 1901. The southern banks of the Gaderbrook were reprofiled in 1998 to improve the landscape and wildlife value; the Gaderbrook also supports narrow-leaved bitter-cress. Over a kilometre of hedgerow has been replanted since 1983.

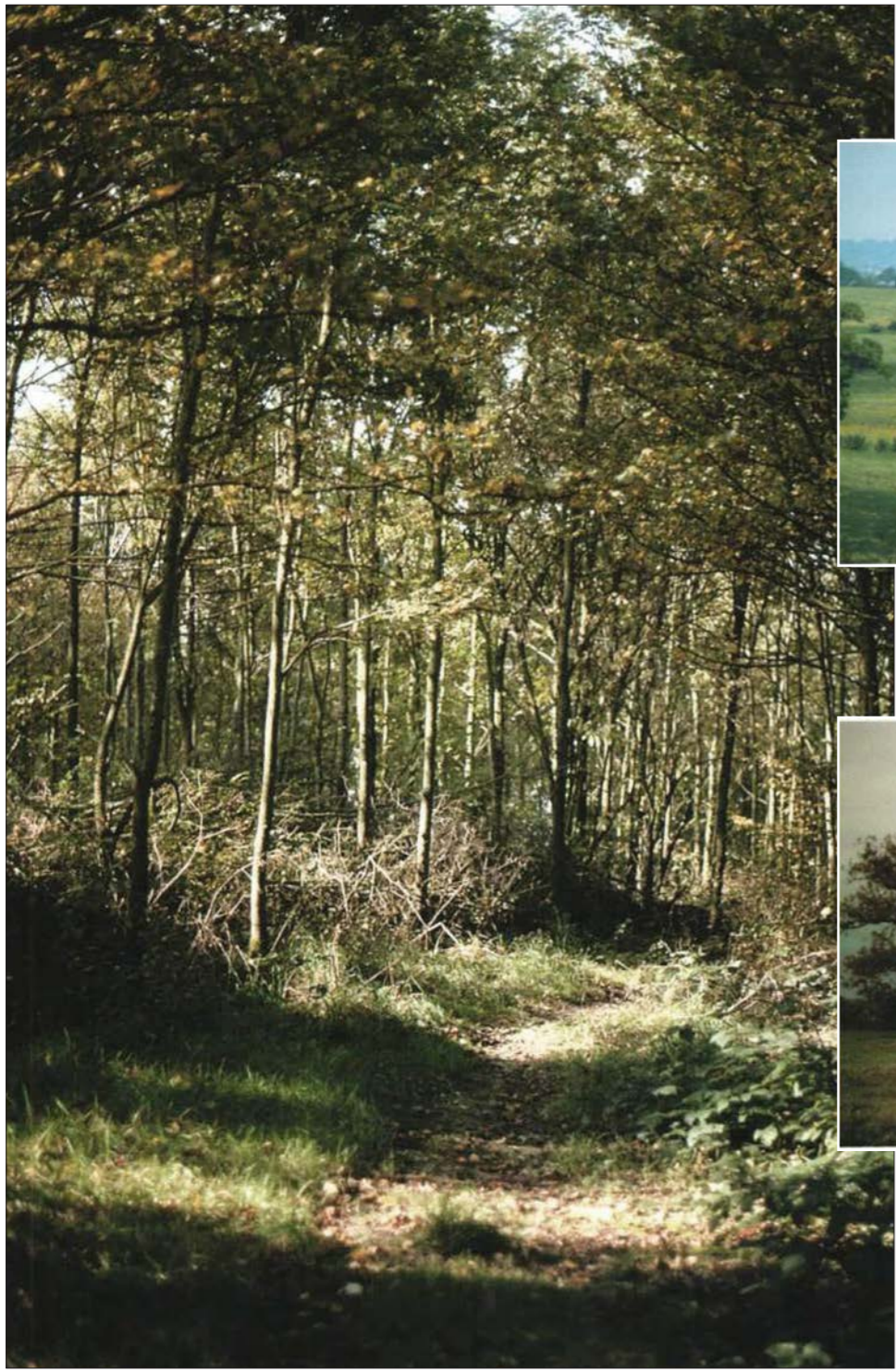
The woodland crowning the summit of Barn Hill and forming a

# Fryent Country Park



▶ The striking silhouette of an oak tree on Barn Hill on a winter morning  
*Leslie Williams*

◀ Great burnet, with its extraordinary wine-red flowers, is one of the rarer plants to be found at Fryent Country Park  
*John Archer*



▼ The field pattern can be well seen towards Gotfords Hill – *Leslie Williams*



▼ The fine oaks at Bush Farm are particularly attractive in autumn – *Leslie Williams*



◀ The woodland surrounding the summit of Barn Hill only dates from 1793 – *Leslie Williams*

▶ Fryent Country Park has a magnificent array of old hedgerows  
*Leslie Williams*



▼ A comma butterfly settles on a thistle at Barn Hill in high summer – *Chris Gardiner*



▶ Cutting the hay – Gotfords Hill in the background  
*Leslie Williams*



▼ Rural crafts at the 1994 Brent Countryside Day  
*Leslie Williams*



▼ Winter mornings at Barn Hill have an atmosphere all of their own – *Leslie Williams*



belt around its lower slopes includes oak, field maple, beech, hornbeam and elm. The elms were affected by Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970s, but many of the root systems survived, even if the main trunks did not, and these continue to send up suckers. A few plants of wood anemone occur in the woodland, and heath groundsel can be seen in the grasslands and hedgerows. The mature woodland on Barn Hill is being under-planted with trees.

Four new woodlands have been planted since the mid 1980s: Beane Hill, Lower Hydes, Eastland and Summers Croft. These contain ash, alder, willows and other species. They will be managed (cropped) as coppice with standards. Near Salmon Street, a former orchard is being re-established, and a cobnut plantation has been planted alongside the orchard.

The park contains 12 old field ponds, one dating from Repton's time, and 15 ponds which have been created more recently. These support a wealth of wildlife; six species of dragonfly have been seen. The ponds are most attractive and enhance the rural landscape. Frog spawn has been monitored since 1983, and the quantity increased dramatically as ponds were restored or new ones made, although droughts caused some setbacks.

Twenty-four species of butterfly have been recorded in Fryent Country Park; about twenty species are seen regularly. These include purple hairstreak, a very large population of meadow brown, and speckled wood and gatekeeper, both of which have colonised and are increasing. A weekly butterfly count by the Barn Hill Conservation Group was started in 1986. About 76 species of birds have been observed, including one record of quail, which was seen and heard calling in June 1983 on two successive days. More frequently encountered species include sparrowhawk, kestrel, treecreeper, nuthatch and all three species of woodpecker at any time of the year, whitethroat, lesser whitethroat and willow warbler in spring and summer, and fieldfare and redwing in winter. Three slow-worms were seen in 1999, and a nationally rare midge,

*Dixella attica*, has been found in the park.

Fryent Country Park is managed by Brent Parks Service for recreation and wildlife conservation. Grassland management has been described above. Gaps in the hedges, especially those of the reduced assart hedges on the Kingsbury side, are being replanted. Many of the hedgerow trees have been lost, so new ones are being encouraged to grow up. A series of activities for the public is run throughout the year, details of which can be obtained from the Brent Parks Service (see Appendix 1). Barn Hill Conservation Group, made up of keen volunteers, is also actively involved in the management of the park and undertakes or assists with much habitat work, such as pond restoration. They also cleared vegetation from Hell Lane between 1991 and 1993; this had become very overgrown. The group have re-created the fruit orchard near Salmon Street (it was previously here in 1597); this contains a mulberry bush, old varieties of apples and pears, and Kentish cobnuts. The group takes seeds from trees and shrubs in the park and grows them on in part of the walled garden at Roe Green Park. When they are large enough, the young plants are returned to the park and are used for reinstating hedgerows or creating new woodland. Barn Hill Conservation Group also campaigns on issues to do with the park. A Fryent Country Park Joint Consultative Committee was set up, but is now dormant.

There is free public access to Fryent Country Park, which is crossed by a network of footpaths. There are very fine views from Barn Hill southwards to beyond Wembley Stadium, and westwards to Harrow-on-the-Hill, but in other directions trees limit the panorama. In many ways, Gotfords Hill to the east of Fryent Way is a finer viewpoint as most of Fryent Country Park can be picked out, and there are good views beyond. Walks 3 and 4, at the back of this book, visit Fryent Country Park and look in a little more detail at some of the individual fields. The nearest stations are Kingsbury and Wembley Park.

## Fungi at Fryent Country Park



▲ Sulphur tuft grows in large clumps throughout the year on the stumps of all kinds of trees, including conifers. The cap is bright sulphur yellow, tinged with brown in the centre – Leslie Williams

▲ Dryad's saddle occurs commonly on elm stumps  
Leslie Williams



▼ Hairy sterile is seen here on dead beech  
Leslie Williams

◀ Glistening ink-cap grows in clusters on or by the stumps of a variety of trees at any time from late spring onwards  
Leslie Williams



▶ A rooting shank is found in shade on a woodland floor  
Leslie Williams



## 9 Sites of Borough Importance: Grade I

### Br.BI 1 Quainton Street Open Space

Grid ref: TQ 203 859  
Area: 4.6 ha

The uninspiring setting of Quainton Street Open Space – the traffic-ridden Neasden Lane, with its petrol station and drive-through hamburger restaurant – contrasts strikingly with the scenery laid out behind the earth banks which shield it from the road. To the right the River Brent winds its way silently southwards, to the left is the smaller watercourse of the Canal Feeder, and ahead a path to trees and grassland invites the visitor onwards.

The central section of grassland is mown once or twice in the late summer and early autumn, with mown paths left through it for walkers. Trees and shrubs ring the area, which contains a good assortment of wild flowers. Creeping buttercup is among the first plants to flower, its shiny yellow petals set off by the copious white blossoms of nearby hawthorn bushes. In high summer a wider range of colours is provided by great and rosebay willowherbs, goat's-rue, yarrow, bird's-foot trefoil, common vetch, Lady's bedstraw and creeping thistle. Creeping thistle is often regarded as a pernicious weed, and so it can be, but it is valuable for wildlife as it provides plentiful nectar and seeds, popular with bees, butterflies and seed-eating birds such as goldfinches. Woody species here include ash, elder, crack-willow, blackthorn, oak, dog-rose, sycamore, silver birch and white poplar; some of these have been planted, but others have colonised of their own accord.

The smaller of the two watercourses, the Canal Feeder, on the eastern side of the Open Space, was opened c1811 to convey water from the River Brent to the Grand Union Canal (see Br.BI 1 for its history). The Feeder here is vertical sided; it still contains shallow water, although very little aquatic vegetation is present. It is bordered on one side by trees and shrubs typical of damp conditions, such as alder and willows, and further south by brambles and other plants of rough ground. At the southern end of the Open Space it is very obvious that the Feeder is not a natural feature, as it lies well above the level of the River Brent, to which it is connected by a small channel dropping down the intervening slope.

A pond in a hollow was created by volunteers in the early 1980s within Quainton Street Open Space, with funding from the Brent Inner Area Programme. It has since been enlarged with a JCB by Brent Parks Service, but despite this it is not that easy to find as the vegetation surrounding it is fairly high. It is close to the Canal Feeder, some 100 metres from Neasden Lane. Frogs and newts are being encouraged to breed here. The fact that the pond usually dries out in summer will help these amphibians; fish, which may eat tadpoles, cannot survive in a seasonal pond, but frogs and newts have left the water by summertime. Amongst other vegetation, the pond supports a thriving population of water-plantain, a graceful plant with heads of small white flowers.

South of the pond a side path leads down alongside the connecting channel to a secluded stretch of the River Brent, which forms the western edge of the Open Space. The water

flows peacefully in a seemingly natural bed on its way to meet the Thames at Brentford. The flow depends on the settings of the sluices at the Brent Reservoir dam not far upstream, and the level of water in the river can rise disconcertingly rapidly when these are opened. The channel is wide enough to include shingle shoals, a useful feature for invertebrates. The earth banks of the river are steeply shelving, and are covered in trees and bushes, such as ash (another species which enjoys damp soil), sycamore, field maple, hybrid black-poplar, blackthorn, cherry (probably natural or self-seeded) and Japanese knotweed. Moorhens and mallards are often to be seen here, and it is also worth listening out for a piping whistle, a precursor to the flash of blue of a kingfisher hunting along the watercourse. Included within the site is an area of woodland behind Barnhill Road on the other side of the river; like all the other woodland here, this is managed by Brent Parks Service. The river continues its sinuous course until it disappears under the railway line to the south.

A further section of land is included in this site, which is part of Chalkhill Sports Ground. A walk southwards leads past rough grassland and trees between a housing estate and the river, then over the Brent to an expanse of flat amenity grassland. This contains few wild flowers apart from yarrow and ribwort plantain, and is not included as part of this site, but alongside the railway is a former BMX track. The hummocky ground and the varied structure of the vegetation provide a contrast to the flat, mown grassland adjacent. The tyres left here harbour hundreds of snails. Here can be found dog-rose, its pale pink flowers well defended by vicious spines all along the stems. Its orange fruits or hips were picked to make rosehip syrup, a rich source of vitamin C, and much used in the last war, but today's visitor is more likely to be interested in the copious quantities of blackberries which grow here. A plant which should definitely not be touched, however, is giant hogweed, as its juice can cause severe blistering. A few of the other plants growing here include its smaller and native relative hogweed, as well as perennial wall-rocket, wild mignonette, creeping cinquefoil and perforate St John's-wort. Along the western side of Chalkhill Sports Ground is a fenced-off strip of woodland and scrub which provides a nice secluded area for birds to nest and feed.

Quainton Street Open Space is a most attractive place to visit, and is easy to get to, being so close to Neasden Lane and the North Circular Road. There is free access at all times from Neasden Lane, the Chalkhill Estate and other points. Residents of local housing estates follow the pleasant footpath through it to reach Neasden Lane and the shops and buses. Brent Council hopes eventually to build a bridge over the railway, allowing longer walks through Quainton Street to Tokyngton Recreation Ground. However, the railway is so wide here that this is not an easy task, and the cost of such a bridge, which would need to be about 200 metres long, would probably be enormous. More likely to happen in the short term is the Borough's plan to create a continuous woodland joining up all the existing separate woodlands. This will run from Neasden Lane to Chalkhill Sports Ground, taking in the former BMX track, and back to include the fenced-off woodland behind St David's Close.

The nearest station to Quainton Street Open Space is Wembley

Park, from where a walk along the southern edge of the Chalkhill Estate, close to the railway, leads to Chalkhill Sports Ground. Otherwise the 297 bus from Neasden or Wembley Park stations or the 182 from the latter will drop you at the Neasden Lane end.

### Br.BI 2 Dollis Hill Rough

Grid ref: TQ 223 862  
Area: 2.7 ha

Back in 1972, this site was known as Brook Road Allotments. In that year, John Betjeman was filmed here during the making of *Metro-land* (an evocative television programme about the impact of the Metropolitan Railway between Baker Street and far-flung Buckinghamshire). The clearly active allotments were described by his guide (the broadcaster and naturalist Eric Simms, who lived in Dollis Hill and studied the local bird life) as "the second most interesting part of the well-known Neasden Nature Trail". (The main feature of the trail was Gladstone Park.) Betjeman was told that within half a mile of here, 92 different species of bird had been recorded, including 900 pairs of house sparrows; an observer would certainly not see anything like 900 pairs today – they would be lucky to see a tenth of that number, as the house sparrow has been in serious decline during the 1990s for reasons that are not totally apparent.

By the mid 1980s, the allotments had fallen into disuse and only the occasional leftover such as raspberry now gives any indication of the site's former identity. It is not accessible, so the view through the fence from Brook Road has to suffice. This is one of the highest places in Brent; from Brook Road there is a clear view of the Brent Reservoir, with its sailing boats, to the north, and beyond to West Hendon Playing Fields with a backdrop of houses climbing up to Wakemans Hill. Its height attracted Thames Water, who at one stage planned to build an underground reservoir on the site and this is still a possibility.

From Brook Road, it can be seen that Dollis Hill Rough has an excellent mixed structure, which must still be very good for birds as it is relatively undisturbed. It has a reasonably dense cover of bramble, plus a mixture of tall herbs, scrub and young woodland with well-spaced trees, including two stag-headed oak. More information about stag-headed oaks is given in the description of Northwick Park (see 3rd paragraph).

Other trees on the site include sycamore, pedunculate oak, Turkey oak, dead and regenerating elm, ash, willow, elder, hawthorn and cherry. At the south-east corner, close to the new flats of Woodridge Close, is a strip of elm scrub, with cow parsley beneath, and nearby is an avenue of beech and horse-chestnut. Back in the main part of Dollis Hill Rough, buddleia and dog-rose are amongst the more prominent shrubs.

A dry ditch runs the length of the site, adjacent to Brook Road; the pale yellow flowers of evening-primrose brighten this side of the site throughout the summer. A little further south, but still next to the Brook Road fence, is a former pond. A survey in 1998, by the consultants SGS for Thames Water, revealed that this supported species indicative of moist soils, including soft-rush, yellow iris and creeping bent. The hollow may hold shallow water following heavy rain, but SGS did not consider the water would be retained for long enough to support a permanent population of newts – a pity since the surrounding habitat seems ideal for the non-aquatic part of the newts' lifetime.

Elsewhere, a good variety of common species are to be seen, including hemlock, rosebay willowherb, great willowherb,

creeping thistle and the more impressive spear thistle, michaelmas daisy, cat's-ear and Russian-vine. At the northern end of the site, secondary woodland has developed, merging into the long back gardens of some houses in Brook Road. Oak, sycamore, elder, hawthorn, raspberry and dog-rose grow here, partially masking the piles of rubbish spilling from the back gardens through broken fences into the old allotments. At the southern side too, the trees have grown quite high, especially the sycamores. This part has become quite wild, with bramble, elder, birch, holly and firethorn. It provides a fine outlook for the flats at Westmeath House, Neville Close and Greencrest Place. Between the access road at the back of Neville Close and the garages of Westmeath House is a lawn, merging at its eastern end into a dense tangle of thistle, bramble, cow parsley, elder and holly. A line of fine old sycamores follows the edge of the lawn and towers over the garages.

On the other side of Brook Road is the former Post Office Telecommunications Research Station. During the Second World War, this was taken over by the Government and was used as a main communication centre, and also as a wartime bunker by Winston Churchill.

*Additional note: Just before Nature Conservation in Brent was printed, this site was cleared of most of its vegetation prior to constructing a new covered reservoir. When completed, this will be sown with wildflower seed and some trees will be planted round the edges.*

### Br. BI 3 Northwick Park and the Ducker Pool

Grid ref: TQ 167 871  
Area: 20 ha

What is now Northwick Park was the fields of Sheepcote Farm until the 20th century. The park is named after the Lord of the Manor of Harrow, the largest landowner in the district in the early 19th century. Lord Northwick, as he was, lived at Northwick Park, a mansion at Blockley in Worcestershire. He enclosed the commons in the Harrow area with great enthusiasm. This added to the suffering of the agricultural labourers of the area, who were faced with agricultural depression, crops ruined by bad weather, loss of their common grazing lands, and wages below subsistence level. None of this found any sympathy from Lord Northwick, who was probably the most hated man in the area; it is strange that a park which is now of benefit to all in the area commemorates somebody who tried to deny local people access to this land.

In 1905, the Harrow School Land Trust obtained most of Sheepcote Farm to prevent it being developed. Sheepcote Farm was the home of Thomas Grimwade, farmer and inventor of desiccated milk, which was shipped out to Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War. In 1936, Middlesex County Council and Wembley Urban District Council purchased the Northwick Park Estate as additional open space for the people of Wembley. Part of the area was subsequently used for Northwick Park Hospital and Harrow Technical College (now part of the University of Westminster). As much of the park's existing natural landscape as possible was to be retained, but with considerable additional tree planting and landscaping. All the hedgerows and hedgerow trees were to remain, as was the field immediately south of the hospital boundary – this subsequently became a pitch and putt course. The fine hedgerows are still one of the major features of



▲ The Brent Group of the London Wildlife Trust on a visit to Old St Andrew's Churchyard, Kingsbury  
Leslie Williams



▲ A northbound Bakerloo line train heading towards Wembley Central passes one of the finest sections of railside habitat in Brent  
Ian Yarham

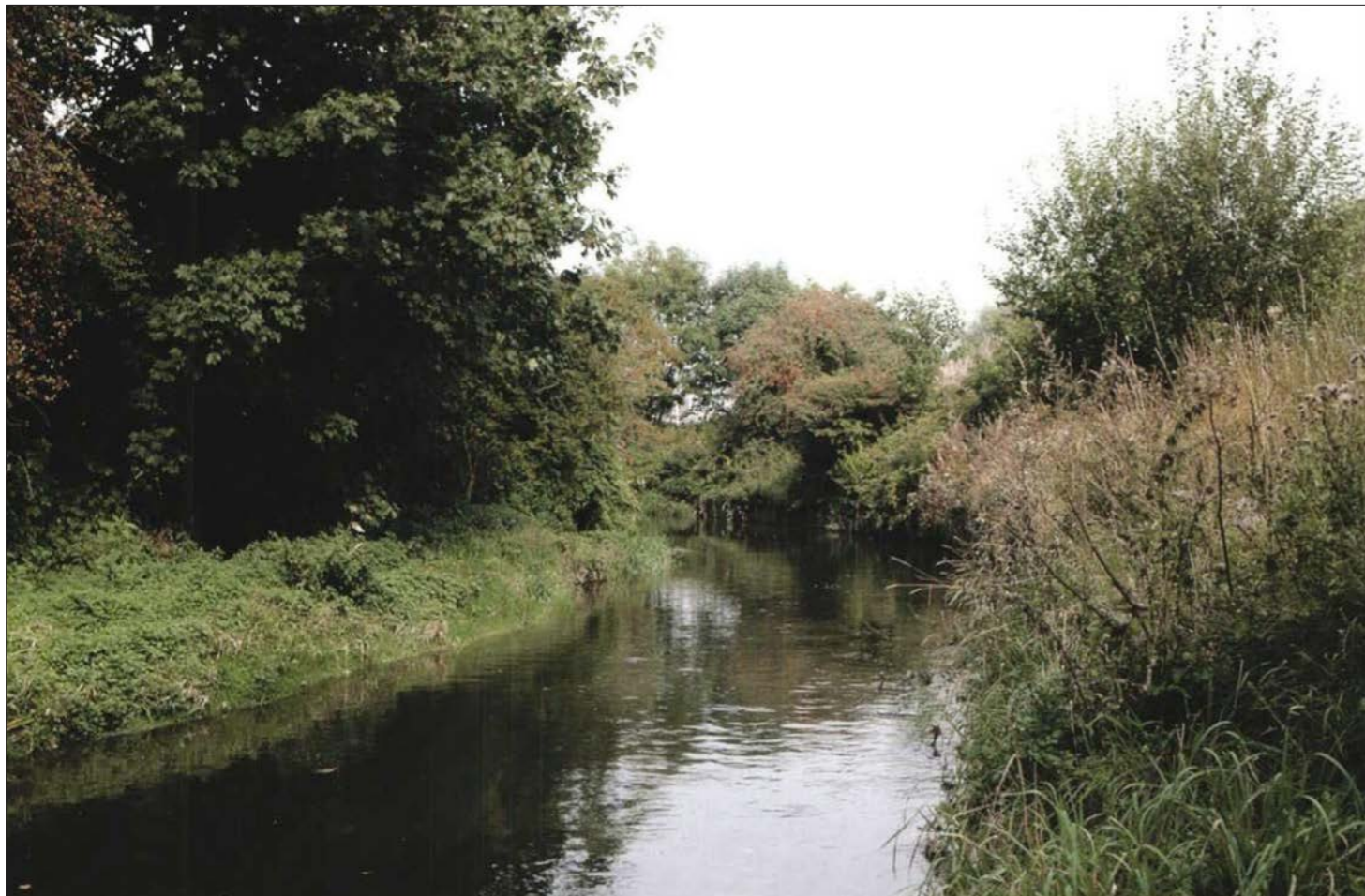


◀ The former BMX track at Chalkhill Sports Ground is now part of Quanton Street Open Space  
Ian Yarham

▶ The former pitch and putt course at Northwick Park has a wide variety of grasses. Harrow Church spire can be seen in the distance  
Ian Yarham



▼ The River Brent flows through one of its more natural sections at Quanton Street Open Space – Meg Game



Northwick Park. Much of the land in Northwick Park was raised by landfill in the late 1960s, and subsequently the south-western part of the park was largely obliterated by tipping in the mid 1990s; this raised the level of the ground by several metres. The derelict outdoor swimming pool of Harrow School, called the Ducker, and surrounding woodland occupy the north-west corner of the site.

The oldest features are the hedges. These include English oak, field maple, ash, alder, crack-, white and grey willows, blackthorn, elder, dogwood, common hawthorn, and field and dog-rose. Some of the old oaks are 'stag-headed': their upper branches have died back, the bark has fallen off, and the exposed underlying wood has become bleached the colour of antlers. Although trees in this state look as if they are in their death throes, this is a very slow process, and such trees can survive for decades or even centuries. The dead and dying timber, with its flaking bark, knots, holes and other micro-habitats, is a very important resource for invertebrates, as well as for some birds. Sadly it is sometimes necessary to remove dead branches, for fear that they might fall and injure someone below.

Old hedgerows often contain a rich hedge-bottom flora, and this is true here. Red campion, cow parsley, greater stitchwort, meadow vetchling, great willowherb, perforate St John's-wort, hedge woundwort, Lords-and-Ladies, lesser celandine and common dog-violet are all to be found beneath the network of hedges in Northwick Park. One of the more distinctive plants is the large population of stone parsley. This is in the same family as the parsley used for cooking, a family characterised by strong-smelling plants such as parsnip, carrot, fennel and dill. However, unlike these, stone parsley exudes a disgusting odour 'somewhat resembling that of nutmeg mixed with petrol', as a well-known botanist once described it.

Most of the hedges contain a stream or ditch; perhaps this saved them from clearance, for it is less profitable to remove a hedge if you also have to deal with a water course. Here it is worth noting how low the ditches are in relation to the surrounding land. Prior to the first land-raising in the late 1960s, the streams ran through low-lying grassland. Two streams flow through the site. One originates on the slopes of Harrow Hill, flows under Watford Road, through the Ducker (for which it was the source of water), and then along the western edge of the mown grassland of Northwick Park (and the eastern edge of the tipped area). The other emerges from a large iron pipe close to the exit from Northwick Park station, then heads southwards, alongside the hospital site and from there to the southern boundary. An unshaded section contains meadowsweet and galingale, the latter planted here. Near the southern boundary is an unusual find – sea club-rush. Otherwise the streams and ditches are mostly heavily shaded by the hedges, which have doubtless expanded upwards and outwards since the days when they needed to be stock-proof and were regularly laid and trimmed. Indeed the hedge which runs alongside the stream emanating from the Ducker is so thick where it runs to the west of the mown grass that it is difficult to see the stream at all. The lack of light restricts the wetland flora, but water mint, yellow iris, celery-leaved buttercup, false fox-sedge and the graceful pendulous sedge are all to be seen, particularly where the canopy overhead is less dense.

The majority of the grasslands of Northwick Park are re-seeded with rye-grass, a hard-wearing species often used for amenity turf, and are regularly mown; these have not been included as part of the wildlife site described here. However, there

are two grassy areas of greater nature conservation interest. The first is a small triangle east of the University buildings, which contains a reasonable selection of common plants. The other is the far more extensive former pitch and putt course immediately to the south of the hospital. The grass here has been left to grow long, and in summer this is a most attractive field, surrounded by hedges, and giving a fine view of Harrow Church spire and Harrow School Chapel. The sward contains a surprisingly wide selection of grasses, making it useful for learning identification, but not so good for hay fever sufferers. Grasses present include meadow foxtail, sweet vernal-grass, rye-grass, meadow barley, Yorkshire-fog, false oat-grass, red fescue, tufted hair-grass, cock's-foot, timothy, common bent, velvet bent, and its close relative, but more curiously-named, creeping bent – quite a list for a single meadow. No doubt a more thorough search would locate other grasses as well. Many wild flowers are present too, though in disappointingly small numbers. The more colourful species include meadow buttercup, oxeye daisy, common sorrel, lesser stitchwort, creeping and spear thistles, prickly lettuce and yarrow. Active ant hills show that these insects are enjoying the relaxation of the mowing regime, and butterflies whose caterpillars feed on grasses, such as meadow brown and skippers, abound in summertime.

Woodland surrounds the old Ducker bathing pool. Its origin is revealed by a concrete post inscribed: "This coppice and the trees by the Bridge planted in 1907 were the gift of Old Harrovian W.F. Fladgate MVO." The species present include common hawthorn, holly, horse-chestnut, common lime, sycamore, cherry, Scots pine, London plane and elm. The pool and its immediate surrounds no longer belong to the school, but to the Swaminarayan Mission which once intended to build a temple there. Their application for planning permission was turned down following a public inquiry, and a beautiful temple was eventually built in Neasden. Although there is no access to the Ducker itself, a public footpath passes through woodland to the north of it. Near the end of the former pitch and putt course the woodland is but a sliver, but its width increases as Watford Road is approached. The wood caught the gales of October 1987, and many trees were toppled or damaged, but this in fact increased its value for nature conservation, transforming what was a rather even-aged plantation into one with much more structure to the vegetation. Dead boughs still cling to some trees, and there is a tangle of dead wood lying on the ground, providing niches for fungi, mosses, invertebrates and other organisms. The shrub layer is well developed, and composed of elder, hawthorn, bramble, garden privet, yew, laurel, rose and elm suckers, and the canopy is a mix of native and non-native species, such as horse-chestnut, hybrid black poplar, ash, lime and pine. A well-structured wood such as this, with multiple tiers of vegetation, provides far more interest for wildlife than a more open one. For example, many birds, including blackbird, song thrush, dunnock and blackcap, nest quite close to the ground, in bramble or thick bushes; a wood without a good understorey will not provide the cover they need. A wider range of food items to sustain birds throughout the seasons is also available in a complex habitat.

According to Gilbert, bats roost in the trees at the Ducker, which were also hosts to one of London's last rookeries. There were 11 nests in 1987, but these and the trees suffered badly in the storm of that year. Only three pairs of rooks returned the following year and no young were reported.

The landscape alongside Watford Road is quite different from the rest: tipping in the mid 1990s raised the land surface in

mounds up to five metres or more above the former level of the ground. Some areas were re-seeded with rye-grass, and a few trees have been planted on the eastern side, but other sections were apparently left to re-vegetate naturally; bare ground was still present in 1998, although this will probably soon disappear as soil fertility builds up and further plants become established. There are plans for a golf course here.

Like the topography, the vegetation is varied; much of it is still young, although the bushes along one of the original hedges survive in a dip. Many of the plants to be seen in 1998 were those typical of disturbed or infertile ground. Members of the pea family can tolerate impoverished soil as they ‘fix’ nitrogen in special nodules in their roots; these are well represented here by lesser trefoil, white clover, yellow melilot, smooth tare, goat’s-rue, meadow vetchling and bird’s-foot-trefoil. Other plants typical of difficult, open habitats to be seen here include mugwort, wall barley, scentless mayweed, common toadflax, purple toadflax and weld. Not surprisingly, both common and spear thistles are present, as well as another most attractive member of this family, musk thistle, which is also called nodding thistle because of its slightly pendant flower heads. Finches which come to feed in autumn probably enjoy the seeds of musk thistle as much as the other two species; they also extract the seeds from the tall dry heads of wild teasel. The lack of any formal access to this land benefits the birds, though not the visitor, allowing relatively shy or locally uncommon species such as whitethroat and bullfinch to breed here.

There is free access to the park. It is well worth visiting, particularly in the spring when the hawthorns are in bloom and the birds are in full song, or later on when the grasses in the old pitch and putt course are in flower. The southern exit from Northwick Park station leads straight into the park, and South Kenton station is also only a short walk away.

## Br.BI 4 Old St Andrew’s Churchyard, Kingsbury

Grid ref: TQ 207 868  
Area: 1.2 ha

Most people in the area will know St Andrew’s Church as the one with the tall spire at the southern end of Church Lane. Although built in 1847, it was not to be seen here until 1933; in that year it was moved stone by stone from its original location of Wells Street in Marylebone. The congregation at Kingsbury then used the new church, instead of the tiny original church of St Andrew’s. The latter is often quoted as being Saxon, although it is mostly of the 13th century. Alterations and restoration took place in Victorian times. However, red Roman tiles can be seen in the walls, as can a sarsen corner stone which was originally transported to this area by a glacier. Old St Andrew’s Church is the only Grade 1 Listed Building in the Borough.

Walking from the very busy and noisy Church Lane, across the area of mown grass surrounding the new church and through a hedgerow into the shaded old churchyard, is like stepping back in time. The place is very peaceful, the main jarring note being the graffiti sprayed on the church and some of the graves.

The churchyard has developed over many centuries. Much of it lies on an outcrop of Boyn Hill Terrace gravels. The combination of gravel and other thin soils supports an interesting flora typical of rural churchyards, but including a number of introduced species. Three sedges are to be found: grey sedge, spiked sedge

and the locally rare prickly sedge. One of the most unusual plants to be seen here is goldilocks buttercup, which is mostly associated with very old woodland. It flowers early in the spring, and once gone over its narrow, dark green leaves are very hard to spot. Stone parsley, to the south of the old church, looks rather like cow parsley, but the petroly stink of its leaves reveal this much less common species. Other plants here include reflexed stonecrop, perforate St John’s-wort, meadow vetchling, red campion, primrose, common bird’s-foot-trefoil, common dog-violet, hedge woundwort, red valerian and green alkanet. The latter two have either been planted or seeded in from nearby gardens, as they both spread easily. The central area around the old church is now dominated by the overgrown trees of a Victorian planting scheme.

Much of the churchyard is very overgrown, with rampant bramble and scrub. Most of the gravestones are invisible because they are buried beneath vegetation. A number of informal and narrow grassy paths wind their way through the wilderness, although a wider path, with graves alongside, passes to the west of the church. The long-term management plan is to reduce the bramble and to remove the lower branches of some of the trees, leaving meadow and rough grassland in partial shade.

The place is surrounded by old hedgerows with large oak trees; they also contain mature wych elm, known from only two other hedgerows in Kingsbury. Wych elm is rather more resistant to Dutch Elm Disease than English elm, although trees may succumb in the end, unfortunately. The oaks along the northern boundary (as you approach from the new church) are particularly impressive. One of these hedges, on the south side, bounds Old Church Lane, which is here a very old sunken lane; remnants of the opposite hedge can be seen on the other side of the road. Another hedge with a rich ground flora occurs at the eastern end of the churchyard and then follows a stream northwards for half a kilometre. The churchyard is also noted for its variety of birdlife, butterflies and other insects. Tawny owl, great spotted woodpecker, blackcap and goldcrest are among the birds to be seen, whilst butterflies such as the speckled wood flit through the shade on summer days.

There is free public access to the churchyard. Visits to the churchyard by parties of schoolchildren can be made from the adjacent Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre. They do not need to book, but if they make a prior arrangement with the Wembley History Society, the latter may be able to provide a volunteer guide. See Appendix 1 for their address and telephone number. The churchyard is still owned and managed by the Diocese. Walk 4 (at the back of this book) visits the churchyard on the way from Fryent Country Park to the Brent Reservoir. An 83 bus from Wembley Park, Wembley Central or Alperton stations, or a 302 from Kensal Rise, Willesden or Neasden passes by Old St Andrew’s Churchyard.

## Br.BI 5 Brent Bends

Grid ref: TQ 201 856  
Area: 2.9 ha

The outstanding feature to be seen here is one of the somewhat more natural stretches of the River Brent in the Borough. Also included is the final 100 metres of the Wealdstone Brook, after it has passed through the culvert beneath Atlas Road.

Much of the course of the River Brent has been straightened and put into a concrete straightjacket, in order to reduce the risk

of local flooding by allowing the water to flow rapidly and unhindered out of the area. John Betjeman phrased it much more eloquently in his poem *Middlesex* than we could ever hope to:

Gentle Brent. I used to know you  
Wandering Wembley-wards at will,  
Now what change your waters show you  
In the meadowlands you fill.

In former times the river in spate would have overflowed its banks, and adjacent land would have been inundated. These low-lying areas would not have been built on, both because of the flood risk and because they were often very fertile; some were managed intensively as water meadows. However, urban development gradually encroached on the natural floodplain as building land became scarcer. At the same time people have come to expect nature to be tamed, and that we should be protected from natural disasters such as flooding. Since fewer and smaller flood meadows were available to contain excessive water, other approaches had to be taken, for example to hurry the water downstream by straightening the channel and smoothing the banks. Of course the increased flow then exacerbated flooding downstream, so further river engineering might be needed there too, in a chain reaction.

This site and the river downstream of it provide a classic example of the difference between a somewhat more natural river channel and one that has been engineered. Through most of Tokyngton Recreation Ground the river follows a relatively straight course, set in a uniform vertical-sided concrete culvert; there is little in the way of vegetation except algae. By contrast, the river’s sinuous course here, upstream of the park and north of bridges conducting the railway and Great Central Way across the valley, is rather more natural. In fact the course has been altered, and the land surface has been raised by tipping, but at least the river’s route is not straight and the banks not vertical or made of concrete. Gravel shoals on bends of the river are again not natural, but they still provide valuable shelter and specialist habitat for invertebrates and fish fry. The banks are of gravel or earth, and clothed in a tangle of bramble, Japanese knotweed, Indian balsam, goat’s-rue and bindweed beneath elder, hawthorn, sycamore and quite a few crack-willow trees. A spit of shingle has accumulated in the slack water on the inside of one of the sharper bends, with high, near-vertical eroded banks of rubble and clay on the other side overhung by sycamore, elder, willow and ivy. Grey wagtails may sometimes be seen here, and pied wagtails more frequently. This must surely be the haunt of a kingfisher. One section of the bank facing south-east is more open, a warm, sheltered flowery slope covered in a diverse mix of rough-ground species, such as goat’s-rue, buddleia, Japanese knotweed, perennial sow-thistle, colt’s-foot, perennial wall-rocket and wall barley.

An overgrown tarmac path which follows the eastern bank of the river is flanked on both sides by trees, including wild cherry, white poplar and fine ashes. These, and the fact that the path and river are set well below the level of the surrounding ground, give this relatively small area the atmosphere of a secluded woodland. At the northern end of this site the river emerges from under the wide set of railway lines between Neasden and Wembley Park, under which it had disappeared at the southern end of Quainton Street Open Space, just upstream.

Unfortunately there is at present no access to this site. At the time of writing, a culvert under land adjacent to the railway had been repaired, but removal of a landslip and tipping was awaited.

The Council, the Environment Agency, New Leaf and other partners are working on a feasibility study for an ambitious plan to restore the river from here downstream through Tokyngton Recreation Ground (see also Br.BI 5). Flood alleviation, recreation, landscape and wildlife would be the main elements and the river would then act as a ‘greenway’ for the new Wembley Stadium development.

## Br.BI 6 Railside habitats

Area: 93 ha

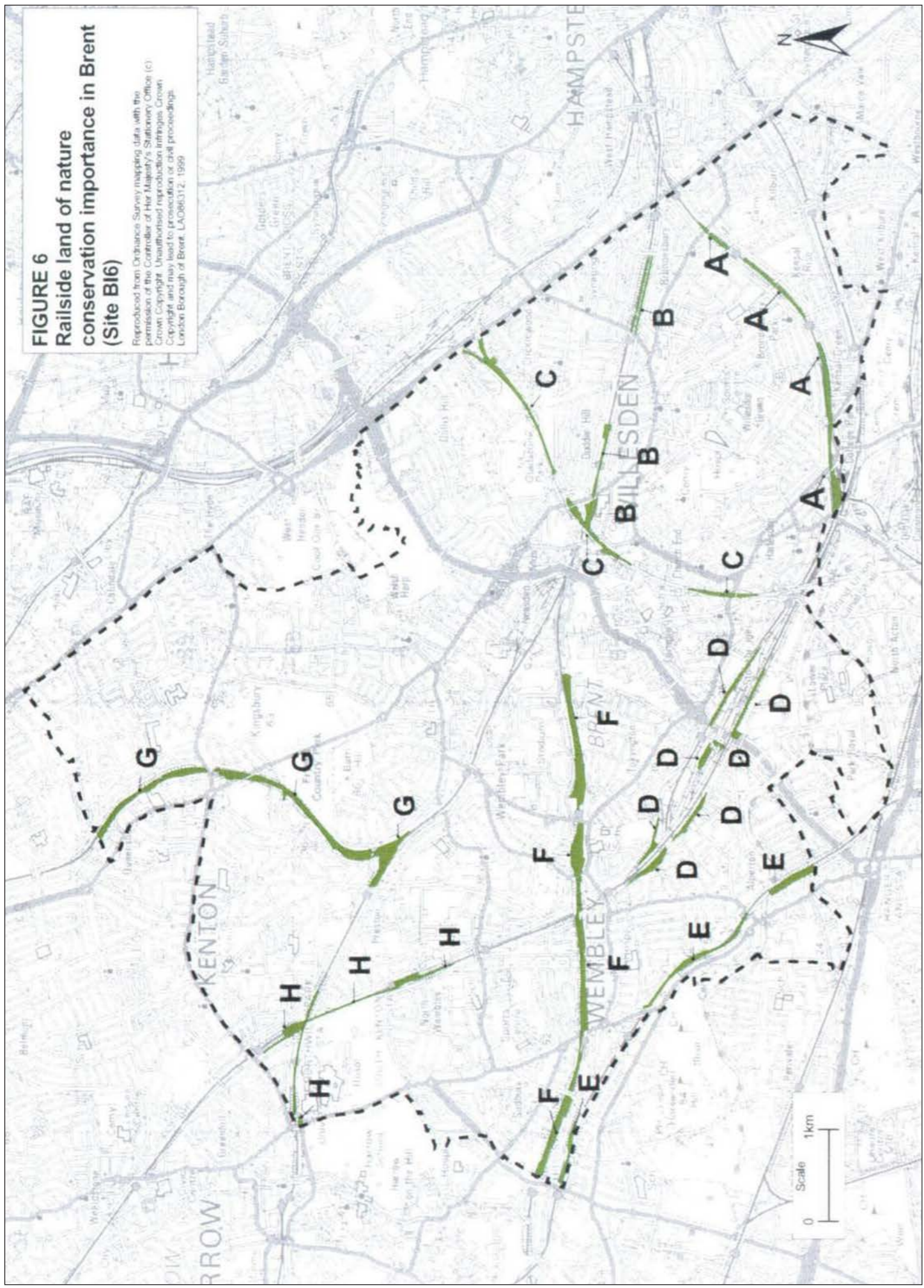
A network of railway lines crosses the Borough, and the land beside them, especially embankments and cuttings, is often a haven for wildlife. Public access is prohibited for safety reasons, and vegetation is usually allowed to develop naturally except where it conflicts with the safe and efficient operation of trains. These railside habitats thus provide excellent opportunities for plants and animals, corridors for the spread of wildlife and, particularly where cuttings are involved, a pleasant outlook for travellers.

Brent is one of the few boroughs that have three different operating histories for the various railway lines that pass through. Firstly are the lines operated solely by London Underground; in Brent this means the Jubilee line north of Wembley Park and the Piccadilly line through Alperton and Sudbury. Secondly are the lines with adjacent tracks over which Underground and privatised train companies operate; in Brent this consists of the Metropolitan and Jubilee lines between Kilburn and Wembley Park, and the Metropolitan on to Harrow-on-the-Hill, which share their wide corridor with the Chiltern Line to Amersham. Additionally, the main and suburban lines out of Euston to the north share their corridor between Queen’s Park and Kenton with Bakerloo line trains. Thirdly are the lines formerly solely operated by British Rail but now owned by Railtrack. These are actually in the minority in Brent, consisting of the Silverlink Metro between Brondesbury and Willesden Junction, the Chiltern Line between the North Circular Road and Sudbury Hill Harrow, and the Dudding Hill Loop goods line between Cricklewood and Harlesden.

The various Underground lines have been electrified since before the Second World War, although the Metropolitan still operated steam locomotives on some passenger trains until 1961. Over the last sixty years or so there has therefore been no need to manage most of the lines to reduce fire risk, unlike the British Rail linesides, where steam locomotives were still to be seen until 1967. British Rail management kept the vegetation low and predominantly as grassland. As these areas tend to have had broadly similar histories during the last 40 years, they have much the same range of habitats, even though they are found in a network throughout the Borough.

The vegetation which develops naturally alongside railways in Brent, and elsewhere in London, tends to be a mosaic of trees, bushes, tall perennials, grassy vegetation and ruderal species, the proportions depending on the substrate and the frequency and nature of management. The mixture of vegetation of different heights, species and structure provides food, breeding sites and shelter for a wide diversity of birds, reptiles, mammals and invertebrates. For reptiles, for example, the railside lands are the most important habitat in the Borough. Most unmanaged areas would eventually become woodland if left unattended indefinitely, but the timescale for this process varies.

In recent years, the woody vegetation has continued to cause



problems with sightlines, leaf-fall and interference with trackside equipment, and more intensive management has again been introduced. This tends to mean periodic removal or cutting back of trees, especially large-leaved deciduous species such as sycamore, horse-chestnut and ash, from areas close to the track. While this can look drastic at the time, involving the clearance of substantial areas, and seems destructive, it is often of benefit to wildlife by helping to maintain the diversity of habitats. In some respects it is similar to the traditional woodland management practice of coppicing in its effects. The woody vegetation is rejuvenated, so that it grows vigorously from the cut stumps. This greatly increases the amount of light that reaches the ground flora, and benefits species that cannot tolerate the heavy shade under mature scrub or woodland.

On sidings and along the track itself the substrate is usually dry, stony railway ballast, and such areas may be frequently and heavily disturbed by herbicide treatment, cutting, burning, movement of rolling stock and pollution. The structure and species composition of the vegetation is correspondingly variable, depending on the interplay between and the severity of these factors. On inhospitable or relatively disturbed ground the vegetation is sparse and low-growing. Typical plants here include rat's-tail fescue, squirreltail fescue, perennial wall-rocket, common toadflax and, in particular, Oxford ragwort, a native of the hot dry slopes of Mount Etna, a volcano in Sicily. Buddleia bushes may also colonise. Good examples of these early stages of plant colonisation can be seen alongside the Silverlink Metro tracks at Willesden Junction and at the extensive Stonebridge Park Sidings.

The vegetation is denser on more natural and less intensively managed substrates on the sides of embankments and cuttings. Open patches are often dominated by false oat-grass, a tall, competitive grass which is particularly successful on unmanaged ground; it is intolerant of both mowing and grazing. It may be interspersed with stands of Michaelmas daisy, rosebay willowherb, bramble, Canadian goldenrod, broad-leaved everlasting-pea and other plants, and large bindweed often drapes over the top like a green blanket. Various ornamental shrubs, such as cotoneasters, spread to railsides from plants beside stations or in nearby gardens.

In time, without management, the proportion of scrub increases, almost always including bramble, and often with hawthorn, elder, blackthorn and, in recent years, Japanese knotweed, which can take over great lengths of embankment and exclude many other plants. Eventually woodland becomes established; this is faster on more natural soils, for example on the sides of cuttings and embankments, as on the Marylebone to High Wycombe line near Wembley Stadium and north of Barham Park. The first trees are often birch, sycamore and ash, with oak following later. The most widespread species on railsides is sycamore and, in places where the soil fertility and moisture regime are suitable, it can completely dominate any woodland that develops. While sycamore is to be discouraged where it is invading an ancient woodland, on railsides the extensive areas of sycamore woodland that occur provide useful habitat for animals; for example tits enjoy gleaning aphids from the leaves. Woodland is scarce in Brent, and so the woodland along the railways is particularly valuable.

All the railside land in Brent is inaccessible for safety and operational reasons, and this prevents the direct involvement of local people. However, access to railside land has been negotiated in several places elsewhere in London, where land can be

securely fenced from the track, and nature reserves created. The wide embankments between New Cross Gate and Forest Hill in south-east London, for example, have no fewer than three educational reserves. If an educational reserve was to be created in Brent, the two best candidates would be to the south of Wembley Central station, or where the Jubilee line separates from the Metropolitan line to the north of Stanmore Junction. In both these cases there are wider than usual areas which could feasibly be separated from the active lines to leave a viable, accessible nature reserve. Meanwhile views from bridges, adjacent roads and parks have to suffice, whilst the view for rail travellers is always of interest.

For those on foot, amongst the best places to appreciate the variety of the lineside habitats are; the footbridge east of Lyon Park Avenue near Wembley Central station; the footbridge between Northwick Avenue and The Ridgeway, to the south of Kenton station; the footpath west of Harrow Road towards Willesden Junction; and from Gladstone Park, Northwick Park, Fryent Country Park, One Tree Hill, Maybank Open Space, Barham Park and Sherren's Farm Open Space.

Although several areas of railside habitat adjoin Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, and add to the habitats of those sites, all the best railsides in Brent are included in the site described below. These are mapped in Figure 6. It has to be an arbitrary cut off to decide which railsides to include within this site and which ones to leave out, but all vegetated railside land in the Borough is useful. Even narrow strips of ruderal vegetation beside the tracks provide a linear continuity, and the difficulty of surveying railsides should be considered; valuable habitats and rare species may remain undiscovered.

**A: Silverlink Metro between Brondesbury and Willesden Junction**

Better known in more recent years as the North London Line, this was opened in 1860 between Camden Town and Old Oak Junction (Willessden), and was then called the Hampstead Junction Railway. After 1865 trains ran directly to and from Broad Street in the City of London, but this service ceased in the 1980s when Broad Street station closed. Since 1985 the line between Brondesbury and Willessden Junction has been served by trains running between North Woolwich and Richmond. Willessden Junction was opened in 1866, with both low-level and high-level platforms being provided. Passengers were given no indication from which the next train would be leaving and so with this, and the maze of entrances and passages, the station became known as "Bewildering Junction" or "The Wilderness". The station was rebuilt in 1894, but many of its present-day users would still consider the earlier nicknames appropriate.

This line runs in a fairly wide cutting all the way between Brondesbury and Willessden Junction. At Willessden Lane this is dominated on both sides by roughland, with typical plants such as mugwort, bindweed, bramble and thistle; sycamore and Lombardy poplars are the main trees here. The cutting is at its widest to the south of Bathurst Gardens, where again typical railway habitat is of sycamore-dominated woodland, scrub and neutral grassland with tall wildflower communities.

At Willessden Junction there is a good opportunity to study the lineside habitats at fairly close quarters. From the Harrow Road bridge over the Silverlink Metro lines, some steps descend to a footpath which passes between several lines on the way to the station. A good view is to be had from the south side of the path

of how plants colonise even the most unpromising ground. In between the eastbound and westbound Metro lines, the substrate is very stony, with old rail lines either left *in situ* or dumped, and heaps of stones piled up. Buddleia and perforate St John's-wort dominate, and mugwort, Michaelmas daisy, false oat-grass, Oxford ragwort and hogweed also grow here. This is an early stage in the vegetation succession, and far less bramble is present than in later stages.

For the latter, the gaze should be switched to the north side of the path, where again there is an unusually good view from the footpath. Here the vegetation has clearly been growing for much longer, and in summer it is up to a metre or two high. Mostly grassland, dominated by false oat-grass, it has an area of bramble and mugwort in the centre, grading to grasses closer to the tracks. Michaelmas daisy, creeping thistle and bramble are abundant, whilst more colour is provided by rosebay willowherb, buddleia, Canadian goldenrod and Oxford ragwort. Beyond a little-used double track is an embankment leading up to the back gardens of the houses in Tubbs Road; here the vegetation has evolved further, with a number of sycamore trees, and a tangle of bramble and bindweed beneath. A similar mix of species grows on the embankment facing the westbound Bakerloo line platform.

#### **B: Metropolitan line between Kilburn and Neasden**

In 1879, the Metropolitan Railway opened a double track extension of its earlier line from Swiss Cottage to Willesden Green, and a year later the continuation to Harrow-on-the-Hill came into use. In 1894 they added a second pair of tracks between Finchley Road and Harrow; these now convey Chiltern Line trains out of Marylebone. Between 1913 and 1915 the Metropolitan Railway added two more tracks between Finchley Road and Wembley Park; two of the tracks were taken over by the Bakerloo line in 1939, and transferred to the Jubilee line in 1979. This very wide corridor therefore now includes six lines, but the embankments between Kilburn and Willesden Green stations, and in the Dollis Hill and Dudden Hill Lane area, are still of sufficient width to be included as part of this site.

The linesides through this section are divided into two, separated by a gap of just under a kilometre. The easterly section between Mapesbury Road and Willesden Green station has a variety of mature trees, scrub and grassland on the sides of a gently sloping cutting. Some of the mature trees to be seen are in the adjacent large back gardens. The bridges at Mapesbury and Lydford Roads give good views of this stretch.

West of Park Avenue, new housing has been built close to the Metropolitan tracks, along the north side, demonstrating the attrition of railside habitats to urban development. To the west of this, a steep embankment takes over again on the north side of the tracks. This is covered with planted false-acacia trees, which have now reached ten metres high, as well as a smaller number of rowan, apple, cherry, Portugal laurel, Turkey oak, lilac, hawthorn and elder. Spanish broom brightens up the bank with its yellow flowers, but otherwise the usual plants dominate: bramble, cow parsley and garlic mustard beneath the trees, with nettle, bramble, thistle and bindweed at the bottom of the slope. At the top of the slope is a flat area, previously used for sports, but now turning into rough grassland. Now known as Burnley Road Open Space, this small park will be disappearing under more housing, although a narrow strip adjacent to the railway will continue to be managed as open space. However, on the north side and overlooking Gladstone Park Primary School, is a steep wooded bank, heavy with cow parsley in springtime. This will be

preserved, and it provides a very pleasant aspect from the southern end of the playground.

Between Dudden Hill Lane and the Dudding Hill Loop goods line is a very colourful slope; this can be partially viewed from the former, but is better seen by visitors to the Dudden Hill Nurseries. Tufted vetch, great willowherb, oxtongue, spear thistle, common knapweed, yarrow, creeping thistle, common toadflax, red clover, Canadian goldenrod, Spanish broom, common mallow, rosebay willowherb and goat's-rue are just some of the flowers brightening up this bank in the summer. The slope across to the south of the lines is similar, but has more bramble and rosebay willowherb. Close up to the goods line, which passes over on a bridge, is a fine group of ash, birch and false-acacia trees. The vegetation alongside the Metropolitan and Jubilee lines peters out at this point, but continues up on to the Dudding Hill Loop, as described below.

#### **C: Dudding Hill Loop between Cricklewood and Harlesden**

The Dudding Hill Loop was opened to goods trains between Cricklewood and Acton Wells Junction in 1868. The line was used (with a five year gap from 1888 to 1893) by passenger trains between 1875 and 1902. It is still used by enthusiasts' specials, and remains an important freight link. Because of this it is, at present, the quietest and probably least-known line in the Borough, a fact to the advantage of wildlife. The line arcs round the south-eastern part of the Borough, and only really comes to the public's notice in Gladstone Park and where it is on an embankment in the Church End area of Willesden.

It enters Brent from Ealing Borough. After passing over Acton Lane, the line heads through Craven Park in a tree-lined cutting. It can be seen from the road bridges and also from the housing estate to the north of Craven Park.

To the west of Taylors Lane Power Station it is on an embankment again. This is observed on Walk 1, at the back of this book (see **F**). The line passes by St Mary's Churchyard, Willesden, separated by a line of trees from the wilder part of the churchyard. On the other side of the line, alongside some old sidings, is a small reed bed. This interesting survival is on the line of the mysterious, and now largely underground, River Slade, which could have provided the original source of water. Reed beds can linger on for decades, long after the water source which gave rise to them has dried up. Railside scrub here includes willow, sycamore, birch, oak, hawthorn and bramble.

After crossing over Neasden Lane and the Metropolitan and Jubilee lines, the Loop enters a wide cutting along the northern side of the Dudden Hill Nurseries. The north-facing slope presents a very different picture from the adjacent Underground lines (see **B** above), possessing taller, more woody vegetation dominated by Japanese knotweed, bindweed, rosebay willowherb and thistle. A fine, five metre high, overgrown hawthorn hedge separates the nursery from the cutting, running the full length from Dudden Hill Lane almost to the railway junction. The south-facing slope consists mostly of regenerating elm. To the east of Dudden Hill Lane, the sides of the cutting are more colourful in the summer. The bright pink flowers of broad-leaved everlasting-pea are particularly noticeable on the northern side, as are rosebay willowherb, bindweed and ragwort, whilst buddleia adds its lilac-coloured flowers to the southern side.

The line makes a good adjunct to Gladstone Park, which it crosses at the foot of the slope. A line of aspens follows the Loop through the eastern half of the park, and false oat-grass, great

willowherb, creeping thistle and buddleia make up much of the rest of the vegetation. Bittersweet, Canadian goldenrod, Michaelmas daisy and rosebay willowherb also help to brighten up the linesides, which are easily seen through the fence from the park.

The footbridge over the line at the eastern edge of the park gives a good view in both directions. To the east, past the derelict Dudding Hill Junction signal box, the Loop splits and curves away either northwards or southwards under the Edgware Road. Away from the immediate proximity of the lines, trees are present in larger quantities. The northern curve changes from a low embankment to a steep cutting. The southern curve remains on a steep embankment throughout. A good belt of trees dominates to the west of the Edgware Road, whilst to the east the trees appear to be younger.

Adjoining the south side of the southern curve, some 200 metres west of the Edgware Road, is a small newly-created park known as Rainbow Park. It is reached from Wotton Road, opposite Langton Road. The area nearest the road has an attractive walled playground, whilst the northern half of the park contains dense shrubbery, including broom, hazel, elder, roses and willow. This provides valuable additional habitat for birds such as dunnock, wren and robin. As this shrubbery is a useful addition to the railside corridor, it has been added to this site.

#### **D: Harlesden to Wembley Central, including the Wembley Brook**

This is the most complex of all the linesides described here, mainly due to the huge area of sidings at Stonebridge Park, established between 1873 and 1894. These extend for three kilometres, from Harlesden almost to Wembley Central, and at their widest are 350 metres across. Passengers on Bakerloo line trains, or stopping services out of Euston, at first follow the northern edge of the complex, from where they can see the embankment near the Stonebridge Park Estate. Just before Wembley Central station, the Bakerloo and stopping services pass under the main line to emerge on its southern edge. Shortly after coming into the open again, the Wembley Brook is crossed and hereabouts is the highlight of the railsides west of Harlesden.

The London & Birmingham Railway opened from Euston to Boxmoor in 1837 and on to Birmingham in 1838. In 1846 it became part of the London & North Western Railway. Suburban trains were diverted in 1912 to run over the "New Lines", which had just been built; these follow the route used today by Bakerloo line trains. The latter first operated over this section in 1917.

Between Harlesden and the North Circular Road, the sidings are in varying stages of abandonment. Vegetation increases as the North Circular is approached, with the typical tall and colourful railside flowers. Look out especially for the spectacular great mullein (or Aaron's rod) between June and August. This produces a dense spike of yellow flowers on stiff stems up to almost two metres tall. This is a good spot for butterflies, crickets and bees, and kestrels hover overhead. Although the sidings are not included within the site boundaries, the embankments along the northern and southern edges have been added. The latter can be viewed from Abbey Road Mounds.

A high mound just north of the North Circular Road is covered in species-rich grassland, including meadow vetchling and abundant burnet-saxifrage; this warm and sunny south-facing slope is probably good for butterflies, and possibly also reptiles. Nearby is Stonebridge Park station, surrounded by dense Japanese knotweed and bramble; the sight of blackberry bushes

laden with fruit must tempt waiting passengers to eat any within reach.

Further west still, the embankment along the southern edge of the lines between Heather Park Drive and Highmead Crescent is almost completely covered by scrub; it is probably a good area for nesting birds.

Finally the highlight of this stretch is reached, and fortunately this is the most easily observed, as a very long footbridge crosses the various railway lines to the north of Lyon Park Avenue. The Wembley Brook, a very short tributary of the River Brent, originates just to the west of Ealing Road but is first seen above ground from a footpath between Lyon Park Avenue and Station Grove. It passes under the Bakerloo and local lines, and through an attractive and untouched segment of habitat between these and the main lines. Scrub and young woodland of oak, ash, hawthorn, damson and crack-willow hide the brook, although from the footbridge you can trace its route by the dip in the landscape. Pride of place, though, belongs to a small reed bed, which can be glimpsed from Bakerloo and Silverlink trains. Away from the brook is rough grassland, extending to the north almost as far as Wembley Central station. This excellent secluded woodland and woodland edge habitat must be good for invertebrates and for birds.

Looking north from the footbridge towards Wembley Central station, another very fine area of habitat, some thirty metres wide, lies to the east of the lines. A metal fence divides this flat strip of land down the middle. Scattered scrub of bramble, hawthorn and birch comprises about half the area; most of the remainder is covered in grassland and herbaceous vegetation, with abundant goat willow and willowherb, hogweed, thistles and Canadian goldenrod. Another small reed bed can be observed, although this appears not to be immediately on the line of the Wembley Brook. However, this was undoubtedly originally supplied with water by the brook, even if this is no longer the case.

After it has passed under the main lines, the brook emerges in a deep, vertical-sided channel. The footpath down from the railway bridge crosses the stream here. The watercourse is heavily shaded by poplar, hawthorn and bramble, precluding significant aquatic vegetation. After this, the stream continues eastwards through undisturbed woodland and scrub. Large and sturdy hawthorns, bramble, sycamore, hybrid black-poplar, elder, nettle and a non-native dogwood fill the area between train sheds to the south and a footpath along the side of some playing fields. This path branches off the one that crossed the lines, and follows a high, double fence, past a school to Tokyngton Avenue. The fence is such an effective barrier (it also has razor wire on top) that it is difficult to see into the woodland, never mind catch a glimpse of the brook, which is actually quite wide and pleasant along here. For wildlife the plus factor is that the habitat is undisturbed, and there is no tipping of rubbish. A fine oak marks the point where the Wembley Brook continues behind the back gardens of Tokyngton Avenue, on its way to the Brent at Stonebridge Park.

#### **E: Piccadilly line between River Brent and Sudbury Hill**

This was opened as the Ealing & South Harrow Railway in 1903 and used as a test track for electric trains, but was taken over by the Piccadilly line in 1932. Three sections of the line have been included within this site.

The first lies between the River Brent and the Grand Union

Canal, to the south of Alperton, where the relatively wide embankments on either side of the line can be viewed from the riverside footpath or the canal towpath, or Carlyon Road in between. At the southern end, scrub is quite extensive; more open patches have a dense understorey of nettles and bramble. Broad-leaved everlasting-pea and Spanish broom in particular add a splash of colour. The habitats are more open near the canal, consisting of roughland and grassland with some pruned oak trees, the lower branches of which have been lopped off.

The second section is alongside One Tree Hill, extending from the footpath under the line alongside Clifford Road as far as Bridgewater Road. The scrub and woodland on the linesides provide much more in the way of nature conservation interest than the adjacent mown grassland in the park. The scrub here is dominated by hawthorn with some pedunculate oak. However, to the north this quickly becomes oak woodland, with hawthorn, elder and bramble. This length is well seen from the adjacent parkland. The grassland and scrub-covered linesides did extend southwards, almost to Alperton station, but during 1999 bank stabilisation work alongside the southern half of the park necessitated removal of the vegetation there.

The third section between The Rise and Sudbury Hill station varies in depth and width. Viewed from the small open space at the western end of Sudbury Heights Avenue the cutting is minuscule; on the north the linesides are very narrow, whilst on the same side as the park it is fairly wooded, with suckering elm. Further east it is wider and more wooded. To the west the cutting widens, with mature trees and much bramble; this can be viewed clearly from the bridge on Greenford Road.

#### **F: Chiltern Line between River Brent and Sudbury Hill Harrow**

This is possibly the best of all the lines in Brent from a nature conservation viewpoint. It was opened in 1906 by the Great Central Railway to take trains from High Wycombe into its then new terminus of Marylebone. The line was built through open country, yet impressive stations were provided. However, passengers tended to opt for the parallel (now Piccadilly) line, and by 1968 the service was said to be the sparsest in London. Plans were afoot to close it between Neasden and Northolt and divert its trains into Paddington, but it has survived, and its very wide cuttings and embankments provide a superb wildlife corridor.

After the Chiltern Line branches to the west of Neasden, it keeps parallel to Great Central Way before crossing the River Brent. The linesides widen to form an extensive cutting between Wembley Stadium and Sherrin's Farm Open Space, from which there is a restricted view over the high concrete fence. The north side consists of a dense thicket of regenerating elm, and the southern side has a mixture of elm scrub and bramble. To the west of Wembley Stadium station as far as Park Lane is an unusually wide and deep cutting. Atop the northern bank is an extensive area of scrubby woodland, comprising a mixture of elm, hawthorn, sycamore, ash, oak, goat willow and holly. A smaller area of woodland of similar composition occurs to the south. Taken as a whole, this is one of the largest areas of woodland in the Borough and provides a home for woodland birds such as long-tailed tit, robin and blackcap. Beyond Park Lane is a good range of habitats, and rough grassland, scrub and fairly young trees can be seen from Park Lane bridge. Birch, ash, sycamore, hawthorn, white willow and dead elm as well as elm suckers form the tree and shrub layer, whilst beneath is bramble, thistle,

Japanese knotweed and nettle. Between the tracks is an area of dry grassland.

Travelling westwards the railway continues on an embankment passing over the lines out of Euston and a number of minor roads before reaching Barham Park. From the park, the south-facing slope of the embankment can be easily viewed over a low wire fence. Towards the eastern end the vegetation is thick and impenetrable, providing seclusion for birds. Beneath is raspberry, ivy, bramble, dog-rose and, clambering over other plants, traveller's-joy. Further west, but still alongside the park, the embankment is much higher and suddenly becomes open grassland. Barham Park is one of the best places in the Borough to appreciate the ecological importance of railsides.

The line continues on an embankment to the west of Sudbury & Harrow Road station and then into a cutting as far as the Borough boundary alongside Sudbury Hill Playing Fields. The footbridge from Sudbury Crescent to Roundtree Road, which crosses over the line, gives a good view of this corridor. Maybank Open Space on the south side also gives a good view of this section, particularly at the western end where the line enters another wooded cutting. Maybank Open Space itself is mostly treeless and featureless, with little but close-mown grass. Alongside the railway, however, is an area of former allotments incorporated into the park. It consists of rough grassland with a few very common wild flowers, such as hoary cress, common field-speedwell and black horehound, as well as patches of bramble.

#### **G: Jubilee linesides from Stanmore Junction northwards to Queensbury**

In 1932, the Metropolitan Railway opened a branch through open country, from Stanmore Junction (between Wembley Park and Preston Road) through to Stanmore. Comparatively wide cuttings and embankments were constructed for much of the way, despite the Company enthusing that "the work presents few engineering difficulties, the district for the most part being fairly level". The substantial earthworks that were in the event required through the heavy clay here have ever since required costly maintenance. It also had to cross the Wealdstone Brook twice, which was diverted into new channels. Spoil from the Kingsbury cutting provided much of the fill for the nearby embankments. Within five years of opening the district had become largely built over. From 1939, Bakerloo line trains took over running the service and this was transferred to the Jubilee line in 1979.

Where the Jubilee line diverges from the Metropolitan line at Stanmore junction is one of the finest railside sites in Brent. The Wealdstone Brook passes in a deep sloping channel through a wedge-shaped area of land at the same level as the lines; it supports limited quantities of marginal vegetation. Elsewhere the vegetation is a mix of grassland, scrub and trees. Wayfaring-tree, an uncommon shrub or small tree with very attractive creamy-white flowers, grows in a damp patch. There is a wide range of other woody vegetation, including many elm suckers, which are the remnants of former elm trees. Japanese knotweed, false oat-grass, tufted hair-grass and rosebay willowherb are major components of the non-woody vegetation. The whole area must be a haven for birds.

After crossing The Avenue, the Jubilee line curves round, with the Wealdstone Brook at the foot of its eastern embankment in a concrete culvert shaded by shrubs. The embankment is clothed with ruderals and rough grassland, but also trees such as white

and crack-willows, and some fine hybrid black-poplars. After the brook is crossed again, the line follows the western edge of Fryent Country Park, thus linking the park to the Green Belt. Further on, trains pass through a cutting of hawthorn and bramble scrub, with much rosebay willowherb. As Kingsbury station is approached, woodland, dominated by false-acacia and underplanted with exotic shrubs, takes over.

Between Kingsbury and Queensbury stations, the wide cutting continues, again with rather open, false-acacia dominated woodland, bramble scrub and much rosebay willowherb. Oak appears to be colonising. To the west lies Kingsbury Hospital Wood, which links up with the Jubilee lineside. After Queensbury station, the line passes into the Borough of Harrow.

#### **H: Northwick Park and Kenton railsides**

As described above (B and D), the Metropolitan Railway first ran trains between Willesden Green and Harrow-on-the-Hill in 1880, and 14 years later added a second pair of tracks, over which the Chiltern Line trains now run. This crossed the earlier London & Birmingham Railway, dating from 1837 with extra tracks added in 1858, 1875 and 1912. Bakerloo line trains first appeared here in 1917.

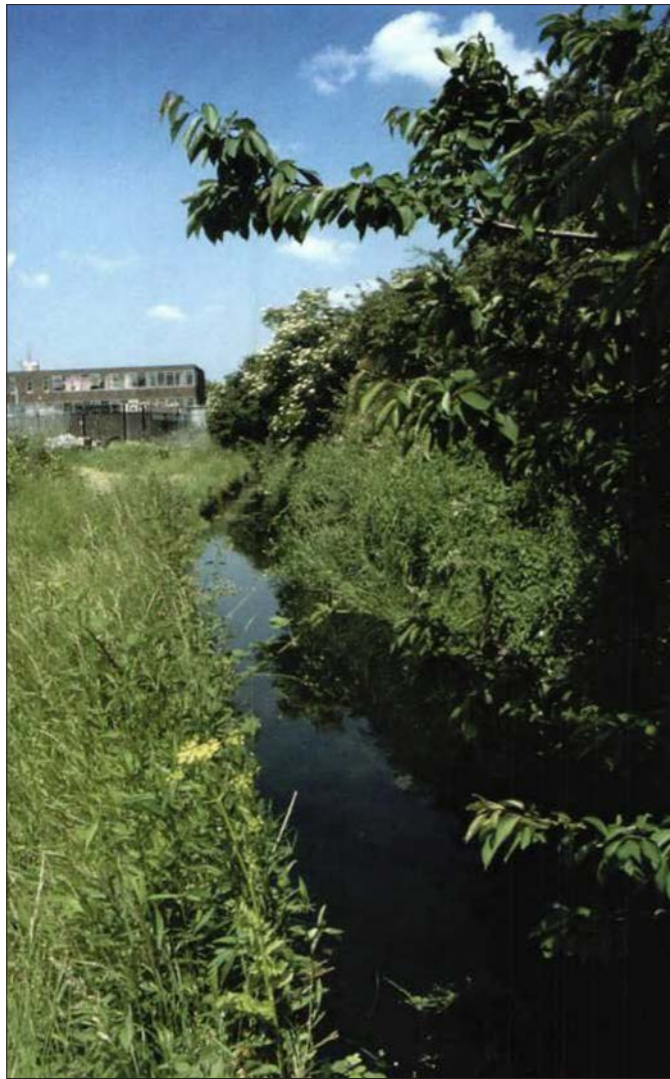
These railsides are quite easily seen, since Northwick Park borders the lines to the south and west, and two footbridges provide additional views. An excellent vantage point, from which the value of railside habitats can be appreciated (and also how easily they can be lost), is the footbridge between Northwick Avenue and The Ridgeway, just south of Kenton station. The cutting is wide and is densely covered with oak and ash woodland, with some sycamore and hybrid black-poplar. As usual, the older trees lie further from the tracks. The more open

areas are dominated by bramble. This forms dense cover, and is appreciated by many birds and animals, including foxes. Towards Kenton station, grassland tends to become more widespread near the tracks.

However, on the east side near Kenton station, a large portion of railside land has been lost to a Sainsbury's development, and particularly to its car park. Nothing of what was here before has survived, and indeed the tarmac of the car park has been taken almost as close to the railway lines as physically possible. Only a minuscule strip of landscaping has been planted between the two.

South of where the Metropolitan line passes over the main line, the railside corridor is not so wide or so wooded as further north. The trees which appear to be alongside the lines are actually mostly just within Northwick Park on the west side, or within back gardens on the east side. Most are relatively young. As the narrow embankments are more open, they support typical rail-side grasses and herbs: false oat-grass, cow parsley, thistle, nettle, bindweed, rosebay willowherb, Canadian goldenrod and mugwort. The eastern edge of Northwick Park gives a reasonable view of the embankment, especially looking down from the footbridge leading from the park to Conway Gardens. The eastern side of these lines is excluded from this site, apart from south of South Kenton station where the embankment is again relatively wide. A good mixed habitat is to be found here, consisting of trees, shrubs, bramble, tall herbs and grassland. Oaks are particularly prominent.

The northern edge of Northwick Park is also the best place to see the rather higher embankment leading up to the Chiltern and Metropolitan lines. There are some fine mature trees here, and also to the west of Northwick Park station, leading up to and in the middle of the large roundabout at the junction of Kenton Road and Watford Road.



▼ The River Brent flowing through Tokyngton Recreation Ground towards Stonebridge  
lan Yarham



## 10 Sites of Borough Importance: Grade II

### Br.BII 1 The Canal Feeder and River Slade

Grid ref: TQ 210 847  
Area: 6.8 ha

When the Paddington Canal opened in 1801, the need for water to supply it became an increasingly pressing problem. Aldenham Reservoir, completed in 1795, was not sufficient and nor was Ruislip Lido, completed in the early 1800s. Plans were prepared in 1803 to bring water from the River Brent by creating a reservoir, but the amount and cost of the land required soon put an end to this scheme. However, the idea remained to take water directly from the Brent to the Paddington Canal and, after an initial deferment, land was acquired for a canal feeder to run from the Brent at Kingsbury to the canal at Lower Place near Harlesden. The Canal Feeder opened c1811, but this alone was not sufficient to solve the problems of water supply, particularly when the Regent's Canal opened eastwards from Paddington in 1820. When the Regent's Canal Company began construction of the Brent Reservoir in 1833, they incorporated the Canal Feeder as the means of taking the water from the reservoir to the canal. At that time, of course, it ran through fields, and it was only in the 20th century that its present urban setting completely engulfed it. Most of the water required for the canal is now pumped from the Frays and Colne Rivers in western London, so the Feeder is redundant. Nevertheless the whole length remains extant, although several sections are in covered culverts, and some water still flows from the Brent Reservoir down to the canal. The Canal Feeder is owned by British Waterways.

plants, such as perforate St John's-wort, wild parsnip, great willowherb, common vetch, smooth tare and silverweed. The water is up to half a metre deep and appears quite clean, supporting amphibious bistort, yellow iris, floating sweet-grass, reed canary-grass and great willowherb. There is abundant rigid hornwort in the water, and also curled, lesser and small pondweeds. In summer, blue-tailed damselflies are a frequent sight over the water, and emperor dragonflies can also be seen. Unfortunately not all of the local residents value this amenity, judging by the amount of rubbish and number of shopping trolleys tipped from the footbridge. However, plans are afoot to realise the potential of the Feeder as an amenity here, in conjunction with the local community. The final stretch from here to Brentfield Road is bordered by rough grassland but is inaccessible.

To the west of Brentfield Road the Feeder is again bordered by rough grassland or mown amenity grassland. This section is accessible from Meadow Garth, but the path reaches a dead end in each direction as the gates at Brentfield Road and Twybridge Way tend to remain locked.

After this the Feeder runs through the Stonebridge Park Estate, from which it is accessible. Here it is largely bordered by amenity grassland, with scattered trees. The Stonebridge Housing Action Trust has plans to upgrade the stretch of the Feeder through the estate, and at the time of writing these are being pursued with Brent Council's Agenda 21 section and Thames 21. The latter is a joint initiative between several organisations whose primary objective is to prevent and remedy litter in and around London's rivers. The initial plans are for a linear park and to improve the Feeder itself. This will be by modifying the banks to encourage wildlife, vary its width to encourage a steadier flow rate, and improve its long term maintenance. Consultation will take place with residents; implementation will be subject to agreement with British Waterways.

The stretch of the Feeder described here is between Drury Way (south of the Metropolitan Underground line) and the railway at Stonebridge. Upstream of this, the Feeder is included as part of two other sites: Quainton Street Open Space and Harp Island.

Between Drury Way and the North Circular Road, the Feeder lies in a culvert, flanked by Japanese knotweed and trees and shrubs such as osier, crack-willow and field rose. There is no public access, although it can be seen from a car park. South of the North Circular Road, the watercourse is again confined by low vertical concrete walls; the water quality is sufficient to support small fish. Access is from the southern end of Woodhey Road: a short footpath beyond some posts leads to the Feeder, which is here bordered by amenity grassland. Its nature conservation interest would benefit if some of the vegetation could be left to grow longer. Near Bridge Road the Feeder passes through allotments, all of which are in use.

The stretch of the Feeder south of Milton Avenue, to where it disappears under the railway, is especially interesting. Here it is generally fast flowing and clean, with a gravelly and sandy bed. The water is shallow, and beds of water-cress extend well into the stream from each bank, with smaller quantities of gypsywort and celery-leaved buttercup. It is enhanced by a tiny park with weeping willows, giving access from Milton Road along the southern side of the water course. This short section shows how pleasant the Feeder would be if some re-modelling could be achieved.

This is all but the Feeder's last appearance above ground: only its final few metres remain, at its exit to the canal beyond the railway and some industrial buildings. This can be seen from Waxlow Road, and across the canal from the towpath near Disraeli Road.

Also included in this site is a section of the River Slade, running through a housing estate built on the former Neasden Hospital. The Slade rises in Cricklewood and enters the Brent in Tokyngton Recreation Ground; however, this appears to be the only remaining visible section as the rest has been culverted below ground. This relic is to be found to the east of Brentfield Road; it runs in a concrete culvert about two metres deep and three across, and is fenced securely. Narrow strips of vegetation line the tops of the culvert, and contain trees such as ash, crack-willow and alder,

It is at Bridge Road, downstream of the allotments, that the wildlife interest of the Feeder becomes apparent, at least to those tall enough to see over the high parapet of the bridge. There is access to the adjacent Gibbons Recreation Ground, and this is a good place to listen out for the springtime songs of tits, wrens, blackbirds and other birds nesting in the bramble, hawthorn bushes and sycamore trees alongside the stream here. One of the most interesting and potentially attractive stretches of the Feeder lies on the western edge of the recreation ground, near a footbridge. Here the watercourse is bordered on the north side by trees and shrubs, and on the other by rough grassland containing a good range of

▲ The Canal Feeder is at its most attractive where it passes through Gibbons Recreation Ground  
lan Yarham



► Buttercups add a blaze of yellow to Paddington Cemetery in May  
lan Yarham



◀ The Brentosaurus in Gladstone Park was carved by Tim Worthington in 1995  
Leslie Williams



▲ The notice board at Gladstone Park explaining the story of the Brentosaurus includes six poems by local children  
lan Yarham



► The formal flower beds in Roundwood Park bring visitors from far and wide  
lan Yarham



together with giant hogweed, cow parsley, bramble, wild teasel, false oat-grass and other plants typical of such places.

Walk 1, at the back of this book, takes a look at the Canal Feeder at the western end of Gibbons Recreation Ground.

## Br. BII 2 Paddington Cemetery

Grid ref: TQ 245 838

Area: 10 ha

The first impression of Paddington Cemetery from the entrance off Willesden Lane is of a typical burial ground, with tidy graves set in neat lawns below ornamental trees. First impressions are deceptive, however; the far end of the cemetery is managed as a wildlife area, and even the regularly cut lawns contain a surprising quantity of wild flowers.

In 1855, Paddington Burial Board built one of the first of the public cemeteries to follow the 1852 Metropolitan Interment Act, which aimed to relieve the overcrowded urban churchyards. It occupied 24 acres (10 ha) of land in rural Willesden, and at the time of its opening, the only houses nearby were a few scattered dwellings along Willesden Lane. Thomas Little, who had already designed the chapel for Nunhead Cemetery in Southwark, laid out a series of paths in the shape of a horseshoe. Trees were planted along the paths, a lodge built on either side of the entrance, and two Victorian Gothic chapels erected in the centre of the cemetery grounds. These are now listed buildings. The original cemetery is nearly full, and the only burials taking place here are in existing family plots; however, a new section opened recently on the northern edge of the cemetery.

Many Victorian and Edwardian worthies are buried in Paddington Cemetery, most of whose names have been forgotten today. They include Edward Beesley, President of the London Positivist Society from 1878 to 1900, Danny Maher, an American-born jockey who won the Epsom Derby in 1902, 1905 and 1906 and Jabez Burns, preacher, author, philanthropist and temperance reformer, who delivered an annual temperance sermon each year from 1839 – 75.

Also buried here (but in an unmarked grave) is Arthur Orton, the claimant in the famous Tichborne trial of the 1870s. In 1854, Sir Roger Tichborne, heir to a fortune, set off round the world from England to try to forget a disastrous love affair. On the way back from South America to England, the ship he was on sank with the loss of all on board. A new heir succeeded, but Sir Roger's mother never gave up hope that he was alive and advertised all round the world for information that would help her locate her son. In 1866, Orton, a cattle slaughterer from Wagga Wagga in New South Wales, and formerly of Wapping, came forward and claimed to be the missing Sir Roger Tichborne, and heir to the family fortune. There were a number of discrepancies; Sir Roger weighed nine stone, had a tattoo on his left arm and spoke fluent French, whereas Orton was a somewhat hefty 24 stone, had no tattoo and could not speak a word of French. The school Orton claimed to have gone to was different from Sir Roger's, his army history was different, and he mentioned meetings with his grandfather who had died before Roger was born. However, Sir Roger's mother insisted that Orton was indeed her long lost son, although she possibly did this to spite her husband's family. Orton claimed his inheritance, taking five years to prepare his case, but just before the case opened Sir Roger's mother died. The rest of the family were not so gullible, and despite the fact that more than 100 witnesses stated under oath that Arthur Orton and Sir Roger Tichborne were one and the

same person, the court was not fooled either. In a trial lasting over 100 days, and at a cost of £90,000, the Tichborne family successfully resisted the claim. The case collapsed and Arthur Orton was immediately arrested and charged with perjury. By the expenditure of an even greater sum and a trial lasting 188 days, the Crown convicted Orton and sentenced him to 14 years in prison. The longest ever British trial had spanned 1,025 days. Orton served ten years, then returned for another attempt on the Tichborne fortune. When this failed he ended up exhibiting himself around the music halls, and died in a cheap lodging house on April Fool's Day, 1898. In 1999, the story was made into a film *The Tichborne Claimant*.

Many of the original oak, lime, horse-chestnut, yew, field maple, London plane and Scots pine trees planted by Thomas Little in Paddington Cemetery survive to this day. These provide roosting and feeding places for birds, and some, such as mistle thrush, nest high up among the branches. Some of the large oaks on the perimeter may pre-date the cemetery, as remnants of former field boundary hedges. On the north-east side, not far from the entrance, is an oak which appears on the 1816 Inclosure Award map. To celebrate the new Millennium, yew, oak and holly trees were planted in March 2000 to create new habitats for songbirds such as robin and song thrush. Each tree has a commemorative plaque and local people were invited to take part. Beneath and between the trees throughout much of the cemetery stretches a green, even sward which is actually quite odd: it contains such an abundance of common wild flowers that there seems little room for the grasses. Creeping cinquefoil and white clover are the most prevalent, with selfheal, bird's-foot-trefoil, dandelion, rough hawkbit, daisy, common mouse-ear, common sorrel and autumn hawkbit also abundant, and small quantities of oxeye daisy. Creeping-Jenny is also present; this plant naturally grows in old, damp woodlands, but it is attractive and it is often planted in gardens (and, presumably, burial grounds), where it thrives if conditions are right. To the south of the chapel, where the grass is mown less often, the yellow flowers of autumn hawkbit and the mauve of selfheal show up.

London Wildlife Trust were involved in an improvements project during 1988 in conjunction with Brent Council, and following public meetings. The work mainly consisted of a planting programme of trees, shrubs and wild flowers in the southern part of the site, the creation of a hedge, changing mowing regimes of some areas of grass, and the installation of bird boxes. Work was carried out by Trust staff, volunteers and local schoolchildren, and funded by the Council's Inner Area Programme (75% Government, 25% Brent Council). A leaflet was also published in 1988, but direct involvement of the Trust in management of the cemetery ceased in 1990, although the Brent Group of LWT have undertaken some survey work since.

To see the main wildlife area it is necessary to walk through this attractive cemetery towards the southern end. Many of the species in the more regularly mown grassland can also be found in the wildlife area, but here their flowers can be enjoyed too, as the grass is only cut once a year, allowing the plants to blossom and set seed. Additional species to be seen here, which are not evident in the more formal part of the cemetery, include common knapweed, hoary ragwort, greater bird's-foot-trefoil, figwort, meadow vetchling and tufted vetch. The species complement has been increased by planting, and this explains the presence of a small quantity of sneezewort, a plant more usually found in old meadows. The reduced mowing regime allows caterpillars to feed on the grasses and other plants, the nectar of the flowers provides food for



▲ A colourful sweep of flowers at Abbey Road Mounds brightens up the side of the North Circular Road in summer – Ian Yarham



▲ London Wildlife Trust volunteers clearing out the pond at Tokyngton wildflower area Leslie Williams



▼ The path through Tokyngton wildflower area at the southern end of Tokyngton Recreation Ground – Ian Yarham



▲ The dam wall of the Brent Reservoir dominates the eastern end of Harp Island Leslie Williams

▲ The Grange Roundabout Nature Area in Neasden, seen from the footbridge in November Ian Yarham



butterflies, and the seeds are enjoyed by birds.

Nest boxes have been put up in many of the trees to encourage a greater number of birds to breed in the cemetery, and shrubs such as hawthorn, dog-rose and hazel have been planted to provide cover, food and further nest sites. The cemetery is used by the nearby Salusbury School for nature study. They have a gate in their wall leading directly to the wildlife area.

Paddington Cemetery is open from 8am Monday to Friday, and 10am on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. It closes at 8pm from May to August, 7pm in April and September and 4pm in winter. For some reason the A-Z street map marks it as Willesden Lane Cemetery, but Paddington Cemetery is its official name. It is well worth visiting this green oasis, which is only a short walk from the hectic Kilburn High Road. The nearest stations to the entrance are Brondesbury and Brondesbury Park; Queen's Park and Kilburn are a little further.

### Br. BII 3 Gladstone Park

Grid ref: TQ 220 858  
Area: 25 ha

Dollis Hill House was built in 1824 by Joseph Finch, the last surviving member of the Company of Moneyers and their Apprentices. It replaced a smaller residence, and what is now Gladstone Park was originally the grounds and gardens of this mansion. The park's name came from the time when the Earl of Aberdeen lived here, and when, between 1882 and 1896, the Prime Minister, W E Gladstone, was a frequent guest. The house, which still survives, although badly damaged by fire, is surprisingly small for such a large park. In the walled garden is a sundial with a pedestal formed by an 18th century baluster from old Kew Bridge.

In 1898 a movement began to buy the park and open it to the public. However, this met local opposition, partly because of the expense, but also because the area was not built up at the time and it was felt that a public park was unnecessary. A newspaper of the time pictured Dollis Hill Lane as a 'delightfully rural approach to the house, winding its way through the greenest of fields, with hedges and blackberry bushes either side'. Fortunately there were people of vision around who could see that Dollis Hill would not be like this forever, and the park was eventually purchased despite the objections. Private donations helped, and Gladstone Park was formally opened to the public in 1901 by the Earl of Aberdeen, who had been the host when Gladstone came here to relax in the then rural surroundings. The purchase price paid by Willesden District Council was £50,000.

Gladstone Park is now Willesden's largest formal park. Most of it lies on the south-facing slope of Dollis Hill. According to the geological map, the underlying substrate is London Clay, although the top of the hill, each side of Brook Road, is on gravel, aptly called Dollis Hill Gravel. This is a gravelly, sandy and in part clayey deposit from the ancestral Thames, when it flowed further north than its present course. The vegetation suggests that patches of these essentially well-drained deposits have downwashed from higher up to come to rest on parts of what is now the park.

As in most town parks, the bulk of Gladstone Park is managed as short-mown amenity grassland of little nature conservation interest. The park south of the railway lines is excluded, as it consists almost entirely of sports pitches, which need to be kept mown. Until the start of the 1920s, the River Slade ran along the southern edge of the park, close to where Kendal Road is now. More about this lost river is given in Chapter 1 and on page 59, but

if it had survived above ground it would have added to the interest of this part of the park.

A good deal of the area north of the railway also comprises a rather uninteresting sward, dominated by rye-grass and also containing a range of other common plants, such as dandelion, autumn hawkbit, yarrow, creeping buttercup, ribwort plantain, daisy, and abundant white clover. However, on the sloping ground, especially towards the west, a shorter, less verdant sward predominates. Here the commonest grass is a subspecies of sheep's-fescue, *Festuca ovina* subspecies *hirtula*; this normally grows on well-drained acidic soils, endorsing the suspicion that this area of the park at least is on gravel, not clay. This hypothesis is given further support by the abundance here of sheep's sorrel, a plant typical of poor, dry and acidic soil. Even more plentiful is autumn hawkbit, with its dandelion-like flowers. If one flower stalk gets cut off, the plant can produce another from its growing point set in a rosette of leaves close to the ground, protected from the mower. It only takes a few weeks for the shoot to flower, so as long as mowing is not too frequent (which it does not need to be, on the impoverished soil), the turf turns a wonderful rich yellow in late summer and autumn, to the enjoyment of the park's visitors.

There are two small damp areas in the grassland, one near the lower edge containing yellow iris, and a larger one higher up. These may indicate former spring-lines or seeps. The larger was one of several wildlife features made in the park between 1988 and 1989 in a collaboration between the Borough and the London Wildlife Trust. An old ditch was excavated, and planted with species typical of wet ground, such as willows, purple-loosestrife, great willowherb and yellow iris. Unfortunately the pond that was created is very seasonal and frequently dries up.

More wetland vegetation can be seen around a sinuous pond perched at the top of the park; presumably this rather artificial site was chosen as it could be seen well from the house. Inevitably, the water tends to be a muddy grey-green, due to the number of waterfowl present and the amount of bread which visitors throw for the birds, not all of which gets eaten. Apart from rain, mains water is used to keep the pond topped up. The water also accumulates leaves each autumn from the overhanging weeping and crack-willows, horse-chestnut, ash and other trees. Nevertheless the pond is an attractive and useful feature, where mallards and other water birds can be seen close to. A box has been put up on one of the trees, for tits to nest. Clumps of hard rush, great willowherb, yellow iris and sedges grow along the sunnier edges of the lake. A fine vista over the park extending from Harrow-on-the-Hill to central London can be enjoyed from here.

There are many fine trees in the park, including the beginnings of an arboretum near the railway, but these do not provide the multi-layered woodland structure required by many birds. Establishing a woodland was therefore one of the wildlife projects undertaken jointly by the London Wildlife Trust and the Borough, and funded by the Council's Inner Area Programme (75% Government, 25% Brent Council). This was planted in the north-east corner of the park, near the intersection of Dollis Hill Lane and Park Side. As elsewhere, notices have been put up to explain what is going on. Many of the trees and shrubs (ash, field maple, hazel, hawthorn, dog-rose and elder) have grown well, and the area already has a woodland feel to it. The hazel is being coppiced, allowing new shoots to grow and letting light reach the woodland floor. Nestboxes were put up on suitable trees, especially for tawny owl, whose nesting sites in elm trees had been destroyed by Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970s. Commencing in 1998, and continued in 1999, a hawthorn perimeter hedge was laid along by Parkside.

Near the woodland is the 'Brentosaurus' – a wooden sculpture commissioned by the Borough from Tim Worthington in 1995. On a board nearby are six poems by children from Gladstone Park Primary School about how the environment was unpolluted in the Brentosaurus' day, and the need to reduce pollution today.

One area is included here that is not formally within the park. This is a triangle of land near the railway. There is no access, but it can be seen over the green-painted iron railings. This largely unmanaged land contrasts with the formal parkland, and gives a more secluded and varied habitat, containing plants such as hoary ragwort, creeping cinquefoil, false oat-grass, white melilot, creeping and spear thistles, cow parsley, meadow vetchling, scentless mayweed and bramble. Habitat of this nature is also provided by land alongside the rail lines through the park, which greatly adds to the value of the area for nature conservation. This is described under Railside Land, site Br.BI 6.

A leaflet *The Wildlife of Gladstone Park* was published by Brent Council and London Wildlife Trust in 1988. The majority of Gladstone Park is accessible at all times. The nearest stations are Dollis Hill and Neasden.

### Br.BII 4 Roundwood Park and Willesden New Cemetery

Grid ref: TQ 220 839  
Area: 20 ha

**Roundwood Park** is located very close to the centre of Harlesden and is a vital green lung to people living in the area. It has a number of amenities, including a cafe, an open air theatre, a playground, an aviary, a bowling green and a wildlife area. Walk 1 visits some of the main features.

In the 19th century this site was adjacent to the grounds of Roundwood House. The land for the park was purchased from Messrs. Perkins and Weston for £15,000, with the help of private donations; the park was opened to the public in May 1895. Five miles (eight kilometres) of drainage and two miles (three kilometres) of paths had to be laid, and 14,500 trees were planted. A lodge was built to house the gardener. At the time of the park's opening it was described as a "veritable Garden of Eden, without the serpent", and much was made in the opening speeches of the fact that the park was now permanently protected from development and would remain so, even when all the beautiful green fields that people could see around them had been developed.

As the park is entered through the main gates, by a small green alongside Harlesden Road, its topography can be seen to consist of a centrally placed hill with the lower parts of the park on the periphery. Just inside this entrance, and beyond the lodge, are two attractive, small ponds, backed by marginal and herbaceous plants. Nearby are formal flower beds, surrounded by mown grass. Throughout the park are some fine trees, including native species such as pedunculate oak and white willow, whilst non-native species include exotic oaks, limes, Norway maple, horse-chestnut, plane, cedar, and Lombardy poplar. Some of the oaks pre-date the purchase of the park. Dense shrubberies provide cover for birds such as blue tit, dunnock, wren, blackbird and robin. The mown grassland contains common flowers: daisy, dandelion, white clover, yarrow and bird's-foot-trefoil for example. The top of the hill has been covered with tarmac, whilst some other parts of the park are rather dull with just mown grass and tarmac paths.

One piece of the park has been specifically set aside as a

wildlife area. Along the southern edge (past the Roundwood Lodge Cafe and bowling green from the main entrance) is a fenced-off area with picnic tables, and inside a further fence with a stile in the corner is the wildlife area. The main feature is a pond with a central island, the latter being of a size that makes the pond look more like a moat. A crack-willow tree dominates the island, although it suffered damage to its roots when the pond was dug. Hemlock, a poisonous member of the carrot family, is very prominent on the island, and elsewhere in the reserve. By 1999, the pond liner had become punctured, with the result that the water level was very low; in fact water was generally confined to the southern arm, and at times it was completely dry. A number of wet-loving plants were clinging on, even in the dried-up parts of the pond: celery-leaved buttercup, branched bur-reed, great willowherb, gypsywort, duckweed and reed sweet-grass. The area surrounding the pond was fairly thick with thistle, nettle and hemlock, and this made access difficult. However, this seclusion allowed sedge warblers to breed here in May and June, and the frenetically-rapid, scratchy song of these migrants from Africa could sometimes be heard. Visitors could also look out for a great spotted woodpecker. Unlike the sedge warbler, the great spotted woodpecker lives here all the year round, and its "chip chip" may be heard in the park in any season.

It was realised that urgent management was needed in the wildlife area to make it more attractive, and prevent visitors from having the impression that such areas always end up as unsightly and unkempt – it contrasted badly with the neat and tidy flower beds near the cafe. The pond needed relining, clearer paths were required, and the thistles and nettles were so rampant that they were preventing other plants from growing. Practical work began in January 2000 and was undertaken by the Brent Parks Service apprentices. Some of the pond liner had to be buried, but the wetter area was retained. The thistles and nettles were drastically cut back. The only negative aspect of this work was the loss of the sedge warbler breeding habitat.

Elsewhere, the formal south-eastern corner is most attractive visually, but the northern parts of the park could be brightened up, perhaps with wildflower grasslands.

Roundwood Park is owned and managed by the Borough, and is accessible during daylight hours. There is an active group, 'The Friends of Roundwood Park', whose details are given in Chapter 5 and Appendix 1. The nearest stations are nearly one and a half kilometres away, and so the best way to reach the park is by bus, as described at the beginning of Walk 1. In 1999 Roundwood Park received a Green Flag Park Award.

**Willesden New Cemetery** is so-called to distinguish it from the enlarged churchyard at St Mary's. It is part of the large open area between Willesden and Harlesden which also includes Roundwood Park and two adjoining Jewish cemeteries (one orthodox and one liberal). The latter have very close-packed graves, and so their ecological interest is minimal. However, Willesden New Cemetery has a little more room between its graves for an attractive grassland to have grown up, and so it has been added to the adjacent Roundwood Park for the purposes of this book. Both are accessible to the public and both are managed by the Borough.

The Willesden Burial Board opened the cemetery in 1891. At a stone-laying ceremony for the two brick chapels, the newspapers of the day, together with the names of the Board, were placed in bottles beneath the foundation stone of each chapel. One local dignitary standing in for the absent vicar was unsure how to propose a toast: "Success to the cemetery would look as though he wished the cemetery to be filled as soon as possible."



◀ The Wealdstone Brook is an attractive feature as it flows through Woodcock Park  
Ian Yarham



▶ Selfheal is seen in many grasslands in Brent, particularly in the cemeteries and churchyards  
Meg Game



▼ In autumn, St Mary's clearly has the atmosphere of John Betjeman's poem 'In Willesden Churchyard'  
Ian Yarham

▲ St Mary's Churchyard, Willesden, here seen in early June with oxeye daisy much in evidence  
Ian Yarham



The cemetery is flat, the chief feature at first glance being the trees. The main avenue of horse-chestnuts leads southwards from the entrance in Franklyn Road; this fine avenue also includes fastigate hornbeam, various conifers and Lombardy-poplar. This crosses a narrower avenue of limes and horse-chestnuts, which runs east-west right across the cemetery. At the crossover point is a car parking area where the brick chapels, which had become vandalised, used to be. These uniquely-styled Renaissance Dutch chapels were demolished in 1986.

The majority of Willesden New Cemetery contains closely-packed graves, with narrow paths of grass between them. However, the frequency with which the vegetation is cut has been reduced and this allows many of the plants to flower, which looks most attractive in summer. The older graves are particularly worth searching out. Oxeye daisy is the most obvious of the flowers, especially at a distance. Creeping cinquefoil and selfheal are profuse throughout the cemetery, although their yellow and mauve flowers respectively have to be looked for much closer to the ground. Other flowers adding to the diversity include nipplewort, yarrow, bird's-foot-trefoil, dove's-foot crane's-bill, common knapweed, meadow buttercup, meadow vetchling, black medick, purple toadflax, common field-speedwell, hop trefoil and bittersweet.

False oat-grass is prominent on some graves. Common on railsides, this grass is relatively intolerant of mowing and so is thriving here only in the places which are not regularly mown. Most notable here is spiked sedge, which can be found towards the east of the cemetery in between some of the graves. This species, which is uncommon in London, is mostly found on heavy, damp soils; it is one of a group of sedges which are quite hard to identify. It is found, however, in St Mary's Churchyard, a short walk away. This could well be due to the fact that the same mowers and personnel are used at both sites: many other plants are also common to the two places.

The cemetery is a good place to look for common birds and butterflies; foxes are fed by a local resident.

Recent sympathetic management has allowed the ecological interest to develop, and a relaxation of the mowing regime in other parts of the cemetery would allow this to increase still further. If possible, the use of herbicide should be reduced. The cemetery, at present, does not have the "neglected" appearance that some people object to, and yet is colourful enough to be attractive. Willesden New Cemetery is owned and managed by the Borough. The only entrance is in Franklyn Road and it is open until 8pm between May and August, 7pm in April and September, and 4pm from October to March. Walk 1 passes the end of Franklyn Road and so it is possible to make a diversion and visit the cemetery. Otherwise the nearest station is Dollis Hill, just over one kilometre away.

### Br.BII 5 Tokyngton wildflower area and the Brent

Grid ref: TO 200 846  
Area: 4.4 ha

This site consists of a delightful wildflower meadow and pond, together with the culverted section of the River Brent through Tokyngton Recreation Ground.

The wildflower meadow and pond lie at the southern end of Tokyngton Recreation Ground, near the junction of Harrow Road and the North Circular Road. They were created in recompense for

a small loss of parkland when the North Circular Road was widened. The land was re-contoured, ensuring infertile soil lay on top, and the area was seeded with a wild flower mix. 'Desire-line' paths are kept mown through the wildflower area. The pond was made using a pond liner.

The grassland looks most attractive and flowery throughout the summer. Oxeye daisy is prominent: this white daisy is one of our prettiest wild flowers, and is included in almost every seed mix. Its abundance usually declines as the meadow matures, as it is a short-lived perennial and requires some disturbance of the soil to re-seed itself. Large patches of the yellow-flowered Lady's bedstraw and the coarser white hedge bedstraw clamber over the grasses, contrasting with upright spikes of the beautiful pink flowers of musk-mallow and darker hues of common mallow. Purple is more in evidence in the late summer, as common knapweed comes into flower. Other attractive plants to be seen here include bird's-foot-trefoil, tansy, white campion and goat's-beard. An unusual form of creeping thistle with white flowers grows near the western edge.

The pond lies roughly in the centre of the meadow, in a dip and surrounded by mounds that shield the noise of the nearby traffic somewhat. Several interesting marginal species have been planted here. Water mint is the most easily identified, by the sharp and delicious smell the leaves exude when rubbed. Water dock is also difficult to miss, with its enormous leaves, a metre or so long: when in flower the stem can be up to two metres tall. Two further robust plants here are purple-loosestrife, which produces tall spikes of purple flowers, and branched bur-reed, with leaves somewhat like those of iris. By contrast, celery-leaved buttercup has to be searched for here, as it is a much smaller plant with inconspicuous yellow flowers.

Through most of Tokyngton Recreation Ground the river follows a relatively straight course set in a uniform vertical-sided concrete culvert: there is little in the way of vegetation except algae. Amenity grassland with some planted trees stretches away on each side. Most of the nature conservation interest is provided by a narrow strip of rough grassland and scrub on the upper banks of the river; these at least provide cover for birds and other animals. Pied and grey wagtails prospect in the channel when the water is low, but the culvert is too hard and smooth to provide them with any abundance of invertebrates to eat, although at the northern end of the park the culvert is somewhat wider, allowing gravel shoals to develop. Here too steep banks above the culvert are covered in crack-willow, hawthorn, blackthorn, bramble and Japanese knotweed, and the path on the eastern side of the river is bordered by a bank of scrub, mainly of hawthorn so dense that it excludes much development of vegetation on the ground. Scrub also clothes the adjacent railway embankment.

As mentioned in the description for Brent Bends (Br.BI 5), the Council, the Environment Agency, New Leaf, and other partners are working on an ambitious plan to restore the river from where it goes under the North Circular Road, right the way up to where it emerges from under the Metropolitan and Jubilee lines. Flood alleviation, recreation, landscape and wildlife would be the main themes, and it is planned to carry out work early in the 21st century. If it goes ahead it would be a wonderful boost to the ecology of the area.

There is free access to the wildflower meadow and the rest of Tokyngton Recreation Ground. The most convenient station to visit this site is Stonebridge Park, which is 200 metres from the meadow. Walk 1, at the back of this book, visits the meadow after crossing the North Circular Road, and then follows the Brent northwards to Great Central Way.



▲ The pond is the centrepiece of the Walled Garden at Roe Green Park  
Ian Yarham



▲ The old hedgerows at The Pimple are so thick that they appear almost as woodland belts  
Ian Yarham



▲ Pond dipping is always popular with children, as seen here in the Roe Green Park Walled Garden  
Leslie Williams

▶ Ground ivy, a plant of hedges and woods, is related to mint. However, it exudes a strong disagreeable smell, rather than a pleasant one  
Meg Game

▼ Dense shrubbery at Barham Park provides good habitat for birds  
Leslie Williams



## Br.BII 6 Harp Island

Grid ref: TQ 206 865  
Area: 2.1 ha

This unlikely sounding name (in Brent anyway) conjures up images of Greenland, harp seals and ice floes. The clue to where this site is to be found lies in the first part of its name. Immediately below the dam of the Brent Reservoir, the River Brent continues its journey to the River Thames at Brentford, whilst to the south of the Brent the Canal Feeder also leaves the dam on its roundabout route to the Grand Union Canal at Harlesden. In between the Brent, the Feeder and Neasden Lane is a new housing estate called Harp Island Close. This dates from 1986, and a factory was previously located here. The site described below consists of the lengths of the Canal Feeder and the Brent from the foot of the dam as far as Neasden Lane, together with two areas of woodland or scrub just below the dam.

The history of the Canal Feeder is described elsewhere (Chapter 2 and Br.BII 1). Its main function now is as an amenity, although its water does still reach the canal. In this section it is moderately slow-flowing and has fairly clear water; small fish can be seen. The Feeder has vertical banks, but they are only about half a metre high, and vegetation straggles over them to give a pleasant green aspect. At the Neasden Lane end, a glimpse through the railings shows buddleia, nettle, bracken, hogweed, great willowherb, burdock, elder, ash and large bindweed all competing for space on the banks.

Away from the main road, and proceeding in the opposite direction to the flow, the first hundred metres are open and sunny, but then the waterway is shaded by trees and shrubs, such as goat willow, ash and cherry. Along here it runs alongside the garage access at the back of houses in Braemar Avenue. Further up still, tall ash trees overhang the banks to form an attractive stretch leading up to the bridge from Braemar Avenue into Harp Island Close. Beyond this bridge is a natural bank on the north-western side, providing good potential for creating marginal vegetation. From the bridge, great willowherb, redshank and goat-willow can be spotted, as well as the odd milk crate in the water!

A very attractive wooden footbridge leads from Harp Island Close back to the south-eastern bank. From this bridge is a most impressive view of the Brent Reservoir Dam, only about one hundred metres away; the Canal Feeder can be clearly seen flowing from its foot. The vegetation on each side is so thick that the channel of the Feeder appears as if it is completely natural, flowing between goat willow, hawthorn and Japanese knotweed on the left, and the same species as well as great willowherb on the right. Two large clumps of reed canary-grass grow in the water. The pool of water attracts many birds; grey herons can be seen here, and waders on migration, such as common sandpiper, occasionally stop to feed here.

The footbridge passes into a pleasant little hawthorn woodland, which extends to the foot of the dam. A few ash and apple trees can also be found, with bramble, ivy and nettle below. Look out for the pretty, small yellow flowers of wood avens during the summer months. The fruits of the plant have hooked bristles which easily catch on to clothing or fur. Sparrows and blue tits can be spotted from the path, and the song of the reed warbler and blackcap can also be heard.

Back on the other side of the Canal Feeder, and between it, the River Brent and the dam, is a triangle of damp land, which is now a dense mixture of willow woodland, great willowherb and Japanese knotweed. A footpath leading from the wooden footbridge to the

Brent, along the northern end of Harp Island Close, leads into this surprisingly wild area.

When the Brent is reached, the footpath turns to follow its concrete bank, with the new houses and their gardens on the left. Because of the vertical channel, the river has restricted interest, although there are some shingle banks in the water, which help provide habitat for invertebrates. Sycamore, elm and elder, with an understorey of bramble and ivy, line the top of the far bank, whilst the vegetation on the side of the path is more limited – mainly patches of Japanese knotweed and bramble. However, there is also much buddleia; this attracts butterflies such as peacock and painted lady. The main interest along here is the birds; song thrush, blue tit, great tit, blackbird and robin were all seen when this stretch of river was surveyed, whilst moorhens were swimming in the water. Kingfishers and grey wagtails are regularly seen on the river and Canal Feeder, and breed most years. The footpath leaves the bank before Neasden Lane, and the main road is reached via Coombe Road, some 100 metres from where you started.

It appears that there is free access to the paths of Harp Island Close, to the wooden footbridge and to the hawthorn woodland beyond. The privacy of the householders, though, should be borne in mind when walking around here.

## Br.BII 7 Abbey Road Mounds

Grid ref: TQ 194 835  
Area: 4.4 ha

Known locally as 'Twyford Tip', this large irregular tip of waste material used to rise up to the south of the North Circular Road between Stonebridge and Hanger Lane. When the road was widened in the 1990s, and Abbey Road was extended northwards, the tip was re-moulded into two large, steep mounds. Now they are covered in vegetation, these provide a rather more pleasant vista for travellers than the unprepossessing urban surroundings of Stonebridge and Park Royal. Both mounds are at present largely covered in tall herbaceous vegetation but, as time passes, they will be invaded by scrub and trees. The beginning of this process can already be seen in scattered buddleia and patches of bramble.

At present, the vegetation is dominated by annual or short-lived perennial species. Yellow-flowered members of the cabbage or crucifer family (from their four-petaled, cruciform flowers) are often a prominent component of such vegetation, and Abbey Road Mounds is no exception. Perennial wall-rocket, with attractive lemon-yellow flowers, can be enjoyed in profusion here. It prefers warm, dry sites, and spread into London last century, first via derelict chalk pits and then the ballast and clinker of railway sidings (Burton, 1983); the sides of these mounds are ideal for it. Another common crucifer here, this one with smaller and darker flowers, is hoary mustard, a plant which is spreading rapidly in London. In addition, scentless mayweed, bristly ox-tongue, common mallow, black horehound, Oxford and common ragworts, perforate St John's-wort, bush vetch, green alkanet, fennel, creeping and spear thistles and white melilot all contribute to the colourful summer sward.

Several taller plants rise above these lower-growing species. The beautiful pale yellow flowers of evening-primrose are easy to spot when in bloom, whereas the spiny brown seedheads of wild teasel are visible year-round. These latter were once used to 'tease out' the fibres of wool for spinning, hence its name, although fuller's teasel, a close relative, was found more suitable than our native wild species and was cultivated for this purpose. The red-

spotted stems of hemlock grow up to two metres; this relative of cow parsley is extremely poisonous, and was given to Socrates to drink at his execution. Even more impressive is great mullein, of which a small quantity was to be found on the eastern mound in 1998. This is a biennial, producing a rosette of leaves at ground level the first year, followed the next by a fine spike of yellow flowers. The thick, flat woolly leaves lead to its alternative names of Adam's flannel, donkey's ears, and, more recently, the Andrex plant (Mabey 1996). Other plants also grow here, but it is not worth listing many more as the flora of rough unmanaged ground such as this changes from year to year.

No access has been provided to the western mound, which towers up behind a garage, but paths lead the visitor from a footbridge over the North Circular Road along the side of the more gently sloping eastern mound to Abbey Road, or southwards past the Best Way store. Ornamental and native shrubs have been planted on the slope of the eastern mound facing the North Circular; these will eventually grow into a useful barrier between the path and the road. A more mature section of scrub already exists on the sides of a little ravine which takes the path alongside Best Way. For wildlife this is a nice complement to the rest of the site, providing sheltered feeding and breeding places for common birds. The noise of the traffic thundering (or, quite often, crawling) along the North Circular Road is abated here, another advantage to songbirds, which are thought to breed less successfully near busy roads as their songs, which they use to attract mates and defend their territory, are drowned by the noise of vehicles.

Although this site may not be of the best for breeding birds, the seeds of teasel, thistle and other plants provide ample food for birds such as linnets and goldfinches, which pass though in small, twittering, feeding flocks. This is also a good place to watch for a kestrel hovering overhead, on the lookout for voles, other small mammals and invertebrates in the grassland or alongside the road. The mounds also provide excellent habitat for butterflies, especially the warm, flowery and grassy south-facing sides, where species such as small and Essex skippers, small and green-veined whites and tortoiseshells can be seen in abundance at the appropriate times of year. The fauna of the site is supplemented by habitat alongside the nearby railway lines, which are described elsewhere (see Br.BI 6).

The nearest station to Abbey Road Mounds is Stonebridge Park. Alternatively, the mounds are only a short diversion from the towpath of the Grand Union Canal at the Abbey Road crossing.

## Br.BII 8 Coronation Road Pastures and Guinness Siding

Grid ref: TQ 190 825  
Area: 2.1 ha (1.7 ha in Brent)

This pleasantly varied site, within the shadow of the huge red brick Guinness Brewery dating from the mid 1930s, has two distinct parts. The larger to the west and south of Coronation Road consists of a former kitchen garden between the foot of the Piccadilly line embankment and Coronation Road. Towards the east this narrows to become a wooded belt between the top of the cutting carrying the Central line and adjacent freight lines, and Coronation Road. This wooded part is bisected by the footpath which leads to Park Royal station. The smaller part of this site consists of part of the old siding, branching off from the above-mentioned freight lines into the Guinness site. The siding is no longer used but reaches almost as far as the Grand Union

Canal, ending close to Twyford Abbey Road.

The main value of Coronation Road Pastures lies in its undisturbed quality, and the fact that it forms a valuable addition to the nearby railside habitats. With its rough grassland and hedgerows, it is like a slice of remnant countryside that has somehow survived; this is mainly because of its location between the railways and the sports ground of the main Guinness site. Along Coronation Road is a dense hedge of hawthorn and elder, giving few views in from the road to the pastures. At the northern end, a hedge of ash, elder and elm, adjacent to a dog exercise area, has a gap half way along with a locked gate; this provides a good view of the pastures. The grassland can be seen to consist of rough grass and 'roughland'. Nettle and giant hogweed are particularly dominant, whilst Yorkshire-fog, cock's-foot and false oat-grass are the main grasses present. The latter, which is *the* typical railside grass, is here partly due to the proximity of the railways but also signifies a lack of grazing and mowing. The range of flowers found within the grassland indicate that the grassland has not been subject to excessive agricultural improvement in the past, and includes bird's-foot-trefoil, common knapweed, sun spurge, common toadflax, yarrow, creeping cinquefoil, Lady's bedstraw and meadow buttercup; these become easier to find amongst the grasses further south, close to where the Piccadilly line crosses over the Central line. Nearby, next to the Piccadilly line fence, is a patch of crack-willow indicating a damper area. The grass in this part seems to be cut occasionally.

The site supports slow-worm and common lizard, as well as a range of common grassland butterflies. A wide variety of birds appreciate the pastures, and these include wren, great tit, greenfinch, blackbird, robin, blackcap, mistle thrush, dunnock and house sparrow. Old beehives, presumably originally kept by a Guinness employee, add interest to the site.

As the site bends eastwards and narrows, it becomes quite dense woodland, mainly of hawthorn, horse-chestnut and hybrid black-poplar; this shades the bramble, cow parsley, nettle, creeping thistle, bittersweet and rosebay willowherb beneath. Along the roadside is a tall, former hedge of hawthorn, whilst a line of horse-chestnuts follows the top of the railway cutting. Although quite impenetrable, this woodland can be viewed from Coronation Road and from the footpath to Park Royal station. The wooded part is in Ealing, as the Borough boundary here switches from the north side of the Central line corridor to the south side of Coronation Road.

A little further east along Coronation Road, an enclosed footpath leads off to the north, just prior to a bridge over the old single track siding. After a short distance, the footpath reaches a footbridge crossing over the siding, which it then follows as far as Cumberland Avenue. Hawthorn, elder and sycamore are the main trees along the course of the former siding, along with a roughland of bramble, buddleia and false oat-grass. Michaelmas daisy, wild carrot and tufted vetch also straggle over the disused track. Although the siding extends beyond Cumberland Avenue, we have terminated our site here.

The future of this whole site is subject to change. A major redevelopment of the Guinness site is proposed. As part of this, a link road from the A40 is planned to provide a western gateway into the Park Royal estate; this would pass through Coronation Road Pastures. To the north-west of the link road, the pastures would become public open space. To the south-east of the link road, the narrow woodland belt would be mostly retained. Another new link road would affect part of the Guinness Siding. It is to be hoped that any new public open space will retain the best of the existing features, such as the hedgerows, and will allow for the survival of

the slow-worm and lizard populations.

Although the adjacent linesides form such a vital adjunct to this site, they have not been included as part of this site as they are in the Borough of Ealing and also, of course, extend some considerable distance.

Coronation Road Pastures and the Guinness Siding are both owned by Guinness, and there is at present no public access. They are a short walk from Park Royal station on the Piccadilly line, and slightly further from Hanger Lane station on the Central line. There are, however, interesting views into the site from Coronation Road, Twyford Abbey Road, and various footpaths nearby.

## Br.BII 9 Grange Roundabout Nature Area

Grid ref: TQ 214 858  
Area: 0.32 ha

In terms of its location, this must be a contender for the most unlikely wildlife site in London. The large roundabout at the junction of Neasden Lane and Dudden Hill Lane has a constant stream of traffic passing around it, and anybody who did not know the area would be forgiven for not seeing any reason to go there. Indeed, when approaching from the direction of Neasden station, there seems to be no way across to the roundabout; a fence on the other side partly shields it and would seem to prohibit access. However, from the side near Neasden Parade, a footbridge soars over the traffic to its centre where the visitor will find the Grange Museum on the eastern half, and on the western half a nature area.

The Grange was built in the early 18th century, and was originally the stables of a large house called *The Grove*. In 1810 the stables were transformed into a Gothic residence, and called *The Grange*. It remained a private residence until 1971. In that year, changes to the road system swept away all the outbuildings and the Borough of Brent converted The Grange into a museum of local history, a role which it very successfully fulfils to this day. Within the grounds is an attractive small herb garden. For opening hours of the museum and details of what is on, telephone 020 8452 8311.

Neasden Grange Roundabout was the London Wildlife Trust's highest profile project in the Borough during the late 1980s. Originally the large and busy roundabout was typically rye-grass and trees, surrounded by a double crash barrier and planted on the inner edge by berberis. Between 1988 and 1990 topsoil was removed and a pond excavated, mounding the material in banks around the perimeter. Shrub and tree planting of typical native species took place. Some ornamental evergreens were planted for winter screening, together with daffodils for a winter display. The pond was laid with a butyl liner bedded on to sand, and a boardwalk/jetty was installed so that visitors could appreciate the pond. With the demise of their North West London Regional Officer Post, London Wildlife Trust's involvement with the project ended in 1992.

The nature area is partially enclosed by a hedge of native plants, such as hawthorn, dog-rose and field maple, as well as ornamental species such as firethorn; the intention is to help shield the nature area from the ever-present traffic, but the present hedge needs more shrubs to help it in the battle.

Pride of place goes to the pond, which is some four by eight metres, and is surrounded by rough grassland with a band of standard trees. The pond retains some water during most summers, but this tends to be of fairly poor quality as the only source is rainfall and road run-off. Many of the originally-planted species survive: branched bur-reed, yellow iris, trifid bur-marigold,

water-plantain, great reedmace, blue water-speedwell, jointed rush, gypsywort and galingale. Despite all this, the nature area as a whole, and the pond in particular, needs some attention.

The surrounding grassland is brightened in summer by a number of wild flowers, some of which one would normally expect to find in a grassland such as this, and others are survivors from a seed mix which has been sown in the past. Yarrow, bird's-foot-trefoil, mugwort, ribwort plantain, common mallow, creeping thistle, bittersweet, scentless mayweed, weld, black medick and white clover come into the former category, whilst fodder burnet, wild carrot, wild teasel, greater knapweed, common knapweed, oxeye daisy and Lady's bedstraw probably came with the seed mix.

Ash, horse-chestnut, sycamore and common lime are the trees masking the footbridge and shielding the encircling traffic, whilst willows overhang the pond.

Despite its unlikely setting, Grange Roundabout Nature Area has tremendous potential. As it is between the footbridge and the museum, literally hundreds of schoolchildren walk past it, and many of them sit out by the nature area to eat their packed lunch.

The nature area is not the responsibility of the museum, even though they share the roundabout. Museum staff have attempted some management in the past, but they obviously have enough to do running the museum, and perhaps it is its out-of-the-way location that puts Grange Roundabout Nature Area some way down the list of priorities.

It is well worth a trip to visit the museum and nature area. The nearest station is Neasden, involving a walk of about 300 metres. The nature area is accessible at any time.

## Br.BII10 St John's Old Burial Ground

Grid ref: TQ 178 851  
Area: 1.2 ha

St John's is the parish church of Wembley and is situated off Wembley High Road and within a short walk of the town centre. As the inhabitants of Wembley were ministered to by the parson of Harrow Church, there was felt to be no need for a church at Wembley until its population had increased sufficiently. Eventually St John's was built in the 1840s to a design by Sir George Gilbert Scott. It was consecrated on 30th June 1846. In the churchyard lies Sir William Perkin, born in 1838 and one of the greatest organic chemists of his time. He developed the first completely fast mauve dye, which he manufactured at a small factory at Greenford. Helped by the fact that mauve was Queen Victoria's favourite colour, his fortune was made. He retired at 35.

The churchyard is relatively large, with graves set among grass and scattered trees. It presents an atmosphere of a country churchyard, especially towards the far end, where the traffic noise is muffled. The site includes what at first looks like an old garden to the north of the church, now accessible from the churchyard, as well as an area to the south of St John's Hall. The site lies on London Clay.

Rye-grass tends to dominate the turf. To see such an abundance of this species is usually depressing for the botanist, as it suggests that few other plants will be found. Happily, this is not the case here, a reminder that first appearances can be deceptive. Many common plants occur in the churchyard, such as selfheal, wood avens, germander speedwell, creeping cinquefoil, creeping and meadow buttercups, oxeye daisy, primrose, herb-Robert and common bird's-foot-trefoil. These can all be seen in many other places in the Borough, but that should not stop us enjoying them in

this setting. Two slightly less common plants here are creeping-Jenny and common dog-violet, both associated with shady habitats. Creeping-Jenny is doubtless of garden origin here. The word ‘dog’ when applied to plants is pejorative, and here reflects the lack of scent when compared with its relative the sweet violet. More interesting still is cuckooflower, which is plentiful in the churchyard. This sends up delicate pale pink flowers in late April and early May, soon after the cuckoo arrives in England and begins its song. Of course the bird is no longer heard in Wembley, and the plant named after it is rare in the Borough, although, like the cuckoo, it would have been common when the area was still farmed.

Several of the trees planted in the churchyard are worth study. There is a small-leaved lime on the north-east edge; this was one of the most abundant trees when Britain’s climate was warmer some 5,000 to 8,000 years ago, but it needs a hot summer to produce fertile seed, so when temperatures cooled its abundance declined, and it is now one of Britain’s rarer trees in the wild. A fine oak tree grows nearby, and there are several ash and false-acacia trees in the churchyard. Two fig trees are to be found to the east of the church; the large one near the path produces a lot of fruit, whilst the other one in the hinterland is less prolific. A walnut tree should produce nuts in a warm summer, but unfortunately the one here does not.

To the north of the church is what looks like an old garden; this is surrounded by scrub and trees of value to birds and other animals, especially as it is relatively undisturbed. A number of buildings used to be here, including St John’s Parish School, the Sexton’s House, the Borough Mortuary and the Brigade Hall; the last of these went in the 1990s. The grounds of St John’s Hall contain similar habitat, but these are less secluded, being next to Wembley High Road. Green and great spotted woodpeckers are frequently seen and heard, as well as jay, pairs of bullfinch, chaffinch and wren.

The churchyard immediately surrounding the church is owned by the Diocese, whilst the eastern part of the churchyard is owned by the Borough. There is free access at all times to the churchyard, the ‘old garden’ and the grounds of the church hall. The site, a delightful little green interlude between the busy streets of town, is used as a short cut from Crawford Avenue to the High Road. The church welcomes visitors to the grounds and building; St John’s Church is open each morning. It is only 250 metres from Wembley Central station.

## Br.BII 11 Wealdstone Brook from Kenton to the Jubilee line

Grid ref: TQ 177 886

Area: 4.2 ha

The Wealdstone Brook rises in All Saints’ cemetery at Harrow Weald, and now runs underground for most of its course within the Borough of Harrow. To the south of Kenton Road, after it has flowed into the Borough of Brent, it appears in the open next to Woodcock Hill, then runs through Woodcock Park. This is its most attractive and natural section. After it leaves the park, the brook flows in a concrete culvert, passing to the west of Barn Hill and on through Wembley Park to join the River Brent. The northern section from Kenton to where it first flows under the Jubilee line is described below, the short middle section to where it emerges south of the Metropolitan line tracks is included in Br.BI 6 (Railside habitats), and the final part is described under Br.L 4.

Called “Liddinge” in a Saxon charter of 767, the first time the Wealdstone Brook’s name appears in a recognisable form is as “le Weldebroke” in 1453. It has also been known as the Kenton Brook, the Preston Brook and Fortie Brooke. The brook was obviously attractive, with a natural course, well into the 20th century; John Read describes it as “one of the most perfect little streams anywhere, abounding in dace, roach etc., swimming among the water lilies”. Floods had for long been a problem in the area. The Vestry Minutes of 1854 depict the bad state of the road between Preston and Kingsbury. Surveyors promised to deepen and scour the watercourse, by which the “great flood of water” would be carried by the brook. What was proposed for it in 1854 was, of course, nothing compared to what was done to it in the 20th century, when a concrete or brick-lined channel was constructed to take the brook, with vertical walls up to three metres high. Only in a few places is vegetation able to obtain much of a foothold in or near the water; the main greenery is alongside the tops of the walls, helping to mellow the otherwise stark appearance of the watercourse.

The first sight of the Wealdstone Brook in Brent is 50 metres to the south of Kenton Road, where it emerges from a concrete culvert. It can be seen from Woodcock Hill before it flows under horse-chestnuts and hawthorns, and over some small weirs. The next viewpoint is from the bridge leading into Retreat Close; here the river bed is some six metres wide. A gravelly shoal has been formed in this section, above the normal water level, and plants such as brooklime, with its pretty blue flowers, great willowherb and amphibious bistort, add colour. On the southern side of the stream is a dense woodland strip, some 15 to 20 metres wide, and consisting of hawthorn, hornbeam (both living and dead), dog-rose, wild privet, field maple, alder and elder among other species, whilst beneath, copious ivy and bramble drape over the side of the brick culvert. The woodland is fenced off from the green next to Woodcock Hill by a low wire fence. The strip is possibly an old hedge, which has had more recent planting added. Further to the east, as Woodcock Park is approached, it narrows and ends by the time the footbridge at the entrance to the park is reached.

From this bridge, a most attractive view opens up eastwards. To the right, the southern half of Woodcock Park is closely mown with a few scattered trees, mostly young, though a few large horse-chestnuts, weeping willows and poplars also come into the picture. To the left, the northern half has rather more in the way of shrubberies and specimen trees: copper beech, single-leafed ash, dawn redwood, cedar, holm oak, Oriental plane and at least three fine old oaks. The shrubberies are mostly beneath the ornamental trees. Ahead though, the Wealdstone Brook flows through a four metre wide, semi-natural course with banks that ease up into the park. The stream has a gravelly bed and is shallow, although the water is a little discoloured in places. Some fine trees rise nearby, particularly horse-chestnut, hawthorn, elder, birch, sycamore, white willow and hazel. Underneath is nettle, Michaelmas daisy, bittersweet, bramble and dogwood. Further east, the banks become more steeply shelving and open – nettle tends to take over here, with much cow parsley, thistle and bramble.

The brook splits into two just over 200 metres after entering the park. The original course flows to the south, whilst a straighter channel has been dug to the north – the two meet up again some 80 metres further east. The island between the two branches of the river is accessible via a stone structure, built into the river bed where the two first diverge. The original course of the river has low wooden toe-boarding, is slower flowing and seems very clean. However, it is shaded and consequently has no marginal vegetation.

On the island, an area of rough amenity grassland is to be found in the centre, surrounded by large horse-chestnuts. A few other trees occur, such as sycamore and common lime, and shrubs include spindle and holly. It is the sort of place one loved to find as a child.

South of the original course, and bounded to the west by the main part of the park and to the south by tennis courts, is a nature area. Here a number of trees have been planted and the grass has been allowed to grow long. However, so far only common wild flowers have appeared, such as creeping thistle, cow parsley. Oxford ragwort and red clover. However, these have already attracted butterflies, including gatekeeper.

After leaving Woodcock Park, the Wealdstone Brook is back in a brick culvert and flowing over a concrete bed. The gravelly shoals in the water seem to have gone and the tops of the walls are bordered and heavily shaded by trees and shrubs, including horse-chestnut, hazel, field maple, hawthorn, dog-rose and ivy. By the time Falcon Way is reached, sand and gravel have returned, but unfortunately no aquatic plants. Birch, crack-willow, traveller’s-joy, dog-rose and alder form a narrow band to the west, whilst to the east of the bridge the tree and shrub belt becomes thicker. Hawthorn, cherry, dog-rose and bramble grow here, as well as a splendid Indian bean-tree; this has beautifully scented, white foxglove-like flowers in late summer.

Walking southwards along Falcon Way, what looks like a copse of tall trees can be seen in the distance. This is actually the most attractive section of the Wealdstone Brook (albeit a short one) beyond Woodcock Park. Lindsay Drive forms a large circle, with the brook flowing peacefully through its centre among trees. When close-up, the trees are seen to include some particularly large crack-willows, some of which do have cracked boughs. The brook is constrained by brick walls with steep, sloping banks above. It is enclosed by a wire fence and so cannot be accessed, but can be well seen from the bridges where it enters and leaves the circle.

After leaving Lindsay Drive, the brook flows on for almost a kilometre before the Jubilee line is reached, much of the way in a concrete channel. The trees and shrubs along the tops are much the same as before; overall these shrubberies, even though planted, are of great benefit for small birds. This is the view to the south of Lindsay Drive, where a footbridge crosses the brook between Hargood Close and Belvedere Way, on either side of Preston Hill and to the south of Ledway Drive. In only one other place has anything been made of the fact that the Wealdstone Brook is present: on the eastern side to the north of Ledway Drive, where new flats have been built. Between the flats and the stream, trees and shrubs have been planted in a parkland setting, and the watercourse has been given a semi-natural bank. What was here before can be seen by glancing across to the other side, where a high brick wall borders the water.

One other small area has been included in this site, because it borders the corridor formed by the brook. At the northern end of Belvedere Way is a small green which until relatively recently was regularly mowed. Mowing has now been reduced. A wildflower seed mix has been sown, and, although rye-grass still dominates the sward, dove’s-foot crane’s-bill, wild carrot, common vetch, field scabious and other flowers can be enjoyed.

## Br.BII 12 St Mary’s Churchyard, Willesden

Grid ref: TO 213 848

Area: 1.9 ha

St Mary’s Church is by far the oldest building in Willesden, with parts of the church going back to the 13th and 14th centuries, although the church is recorded as early as 1181. The earliest surviving brass is to Bartholomew Willesden, who died in 1492.

The original churchyard fronts on to a roundabout at the junction of Neasden Lane and the High Road, whilst at the back the churchyard has been extended to form an L shape.

John Betjeman knew the church and wrote a poem about an earlier time when it was still partly set in the countryside, although pollution from factories had already damaged the stone. *In Willesden Churchyard* includes within its verses:

Come walk with me, my love, to Neasden Lane.  
The chemicals from various factories  
Have bitten deep into the Portland stone  
And streaked the white Carrara of the graves  
Of many a Pooler and his Caroline,  
Long laid to rest among these dripping trees;  
..These elmy lanes of Middlesex and climb  
A stile or two across the dairy farms  
Over to Harlesden at the wicket gate?  
..The sun would send  
Last golden streaks of mild October light  
On tarred and weather-boarded barn and shed.

The nature conservation interest of many churchyards is greatest immediately around the church, as that is the area, obviously, that has been longest established. Also, it has the oldest graves, and is less likely to have descendants insisting that the grass nearby should be closely-mown. On the other hand, the vicar and congregation often want the immediate surrounds extra neat and tidy. In the case of St Mary’s Churchyard, however, the further you move from the church, the greater the interest to be found. This culminates in the nature area, which forms a triangle at the far, northern, end.

One or two trees ‘hide’ the nature area from the rest of the churchyard and a line of trees marks the longest side of the triangle where it borders the Cricklewood to Acton goods line (the Dudding Hill Loop). The majority of the trees, especially round the edges, are horse-chestnut, but small-leaved lime, as well, can be found within the grassland; a number of seedlings from the former occur too. At the far corner is a bank of nettles, and bramble and large bindweed give good “woodland edge” habitat. This secluded triangular area contains few gravestones, and so the grassland, which forms the majority of the area, can be left uncut throughout the summer. The extensive presence of false oat-grass, which is intolerant of mowing, is indicative of this.

The most interesting find within the nature area is spiked sedge, which occurs in such large patches that it is quite dominant in places. Down at the same sort of level are areas of creeping cinquefoil, with its yellow buttercup-like flowers, meadow vetchling, bird’s-foot-trefoil and common vetch. More prominent from a distance are the mauve flowers of common knapweed and the strange round seed heads of wild onion. Meadowsweet, presumably planted here, is thriving, and produces a fine show of strongly-scented, creamy-white flowers in late summer. Indeed it is a member of the rose family, but tends to like damp conditions. Its aromatic properties led to it being gathered, dried and strewn on the floors of medieval houses to mask unpleasant smells. It was

also used to flavour drinks and to sweeten mead, hence its name. The nature area is also a good area for butterflies such as meadow brown and skippers.

The main part of the churchyard is mown every few weeks. It is a shame if you catch it just after it has been cut, as otherwise it is quite colourful with oxeye daisy in large patches, while selfheal, dove's-foot crane's-bill, creeping cinquefoil, sheep's sorrel, bird's-foot-trefoil, lesser stitchwort, germander speedwell, creeping buttercup, yarrow and daisy give a range of hues.

There is scope for mowing less often as the colourful wild flowers look so pretty, and attract butterflies and other insects. Paths could be cut through the grass to indicate to the visitor that a laxer mowing regime was part of a deliberate management policy, and perhaps an interpretative notice board could be erected. The same mowers and personnel are used as at Willesden New Cemetery and many of the plants are common to the two.

The Borough manages the whole churchyard, although the part immediately around St Mary's is owned by the Diocese whilst the larger burial ground is owned by the Borough. The churchyard is accessible at all times. The church and its grounds are visited on Walk 1. The nearest station is Neasden, some 700 metres away.

### Br.BII13 One Tree Hill

Grid ref: TQ 178 840

Area: 0.9 ha

The site we refer to here as One Tree Hill forms only a small part of the park by that name, and consists of some former allotments. The larger park is composed of short grass and scattered trees of relatively little ecological interest. However it does offer respite from the bustle of the city and at its highest point, denoted by a Trig Point, central London, Wembley Stadium and the Green Belt north of Harrow can all be seen. Apart from the former allotments, the main ecological "reservoir" at One Tree Hill is provided by the embankments of the Piccadilly line, which runs alongside the western side of the park. In 1999, bank stabilisation work on either side of the tracks alongside the southern half of One Tree Hill removed all the vegetation. It remains to be seen if and how quickly this will recover after completion of the work. The fine linesides alongside the northern half of the park remain. These are not included as part of this site, but are included elsewhere (see Br.BI 6).

One Tree Hill was bought in three phases by the Council – in 1921, 1926 and 1938 – and appears to have been named after the single tree then on the hillside. The park is based on London Clay, not the gardener's favourite soil. Therefore it is likely that the people who worked the allotments would have extensively modified this by introducing compost and fertiliser.

The old allotments are separated from the short mown grass by an old hedgerow, which includes hawthorn and elm, the latter affected by Dutch Elm Disease. The old allotments are now a mosaic of roughland, broad-leaved woodland and tall grassland. Wild teasel and creeping thistle penetrate the dominant bramble cover within the roughland, whilst yarrow, hawthorn, great willowherb, nettle, field bindweed, hoary ragwort and Michaelmas daisy are readily visible for those who would stop to look. Included in the woodland species are hawthorn, ash, elder, pedunculate oak and ivy. Grasses present in the sward include species such as common couch, Yorkshire-fog, cock's-foot, common bent and false oat-grass.

This mix of habitats creates a layered environment that attracts

a greater variety of fauna than the adjacent park. The dense vegetation provides cover for nesting birds such as robin, great tit, blue tit, blackbird, blackcap, wren, wood pigeon, crow and magpie. Goldfinches and linnets feast on the seed heads of abundant teasel plants, whilst blackberries produced by the ubiquitous bramble are enjoyed by a variety of animals, including some species of small mammal, birds and, of course, humans.

The almost south facing slope of One Tree Hill begets a warm environment excellent for invertebrate species. An informal footpath laces downwards through the waist-high vegetation, but in 1999 had become very overgrown. In fact, much of the area is impenetrable, a feature which is beneficial for nesting birds.

The mix of habitat types at One Tree Hill, and the variety of species found there, make it a valuable conservation site. It is also an important educational resource for the neighbouring school.

One Tree Hill is accessible at all times, and there is no barrier to entering the former allotments other than where the vegetation prevents this. Walk 2, at the end of this book, visits the site.

### Br.BII14 Roe Green Park

Grid ref: TQ 196 889

Area: 15 ha

The original Row (sic) Green was located around the junction of what is now Roe Green Lane and Hay Lane. By mid-Victorian times Roegreen House and its small park were to be found to the east of Roe Green Lane, in the vicinity of where Fairfields Crescent is today. By the early 20th century, Roe Green House had become Fairfields, which is still there today. The agricultural landscape changed in the 1930s, when the Metropolitan Railway opened its line through Kingsbury to Stanmore. Amidst the rapid development of the area, part of Roe Green Park was laid out over the fields of Valley Farm, retaining some of the trees and hedges which are still to be seen within the park today. The other part of the park comprised the lands of Roe Green Farm, which had been built in Stag Lane in 1894 by James Buchanan, the whisky distiller. Valley Farm House was demolished in the 1950s, but Kingsbury Manor House, with its walled garden, still survives. This estate was built as a country retreat for the Duchess of Sutherland, who by then (1899) had become the wife of the MP for Islington.

Most of Roe Green Park is managed formally, but there are at present four areas of particular value for nature conservation, and which are of interest in different ways: a nature area in the main part of the park, a walled garden, the Manor House gardens, and a former swimming pool which has been filled in and fenced. The mown grass of the majority of the park presents little to interest the naturalist; it is dominated by rye-grass; other species are few in number. However, a line of stately oak trees crosses the park, all that remains of a former field boundary when what is now the park was still in agricultural use. A scatter of old oaks and relicts of elm hedges no doubt have similar origins. Oaks, especially old trees, can be very important for nature conservation, supporting specialist invertebrates in nooks and crannies, and dead and decaying wood, in addition to providing large quantities of caterpillars and other insects for birds to eat. Shrubberies and ornamental trees, such as London plane, holm oak, weeping willow and fastigate hornbeam, have evidently been planted when the park was laid out or more recently; they provide some limited habitat for birds and invertebrates.

Amongst this formality, the nature area, which is situated near the western edge of the park, comes as quite a surprise. It consists

of long grass and a mix of native and non-native planted trees: hornbeam, oak, false-acacia, wild cherry, silver birch, rowan, Scots pine and other conifers. The vegetation between is allowed to grow long, and contains an unusual variety of grasses for a small area, such as tufted hair-grass, Yorkshire-fog, false oat-grass, creeping bent, red fescue, wall barley, cock's-foot, rye grass, meadow fox-tail and timothy. The list of non-grass species is more disappointing, although the creeping and meadow buttercups, lesser stitchwort and creeping thistle all add colour to the sward. In any case, the grassland will become more shaded, restricting the flora beneath, as the trees mature and the area turns into open woodland. A sign explains the purpose of the nature area.

The old Walled Garden, just to the north-east of Kingsbury Manor House, was the original kitchen garden to the house; it is being adapted as a demonstration wildlife garden. The work is being undertaken by the volunteers of Barn Hill Conservation Group and Brent Council's Parks Service. The more traditional garden features include a shrub border and flower, vegetable and fruit beds. As these merge into the wildlife garden there are beds devoted to herbs and to plants that resist drought. The garden is run organically. Three compost bays are situated towards the middle of the garden, screened by a hawthorn hedge. Hedgelaying is practised here as a demonstration of the craft.

A circular brick pond is the centrepiece of the garden and is an original feature. Grey herons occasionally visit in search of fish, but the underwater caverns enable the goldfish in the pond to retreat from them at short notice. Fish are excluded from the larger, natural, pond; this is devoted to amphibians and other pond life, which would be eaten by predatory species such as carp. Newts and common frogs breed here, dragonflies are present, and the pond is much used for pond dipping by children. A drystone wall is constructed in the traditional Pennines style, although it is smaller and is made from reclaimed stone and concrete! Drystone walls are valuable for wildlife since the crevices and gaps between the stones provide protection from the cold of winter, and the heat and drought of summer, for amphibia and other organisms. Lichens have speedily colonised the stone.

The Manor House gardens surround the house on two sides, and are bordered with a belt of trees and shrubs. These include a number of horticultural specimens that are rare in London. There is also a thatched 'summer house' and a pond with newts.

Barn Hill Conservation Group runs a tree nursery in the walled garden, using seed collected locally. Once the seedlings are established, the young trees are transplanted to an area behind the walled garden, and later they are planted at Fryent Country Park and elsewhere. Some 200-300 trees each year are produced. Volunteers work at the garden each Thursday morning and welcome visitors and helpers.

A final area of nature conservation interest within the park is alongside Kingsbury Road. It is a former outdoor swimming pool, which was filled in following a drowning accident, and fenced off. This now supports a colourful community of species typical of open, unmanaged land, including creeping thistle, broad-leaved dock, hemlock, Oxford ragwort, goat's-rue, bristly oxtongue, common vetch, creeping buttercup, white clover, scentless mayweed and, rather more surprisingly, red campion. Bramble is the first indication that, if the old swimming pool continues to be left unmanaged, it will gradually develop into scrub and, eventually, woodland. At present the vegetation must be a haven for seed-eating birds; if left to develop, it will become attractive to a much wider range of birds, including warblers such as blackcap which nest in scrub and woodland.

There is free access to the park; the Walled Garden is open on Thursday mornings, and often at other times but telephone Brent Council Parks Service on 020 8937 5619 to check. The Manor House gardens are not accessible to the general public. There is no access to the former swimming pool, but it can be seen through the surrounding wire fence. The nearest station is Kingsbury, which is only 300 metres from the western edge. Walk 3 (see the back of this book) visits Roe Green Park.

### Br.BII15 Willesden Reservoir

Grid ref: TQ 226 841

Area: 1.15 ha

Celebrating its centenary in 1999, this covered reservoir holds 2.5 million gallons. At the time it was built, it bordered houses to the north and west on the edge of Willesden Green, but away to the south-east were fields. Willesden Reservoir appears from Harlesden Road and Donnington Road as a grassy hill, rising up to a flat top. It is approached up a driveway from Harlesden Road, and past some old blue metal gates a tarmac path leads up this steepest side to the top. The north and south sides are slightly less steep, whilst the east side borders the back gardens of the houses in Peter Avenue, which are on the same level.

The bulk of the area, including the sides and top of the reservoir, consists of grassland, with a reasonable range of colourful wild flowers. However, these are not so varied as one might expect bearing in mind that the reservoir has been here so long, and in that time herbicides have presumably not been used. The grass is rarely allowed to grow any longer than five inches (12.5 cms), so that any problems with the reservoir can be more easily spotted. Also fairly regular cutting prevents scrub invasion, which would affect the structure. The cuttings are then left where they are, and not removed from the site. The frequent mowing and the non-removal of the clippings explains why there are not more wild flowers.

Most prominent of the wild flowers within the grasses are common knapweed, ribwort plantain, ground-elder, red and white clovers, creeping and meadow buttercups, meadow vetchling, creeping cinquefoil and the tiny yellow flowers of hop trefoil and slender trefoil. On either side of the path leading to the top are earthy banks: mouse-ear hawkweed grows near the top. The thin soil, especially on top of the reservoir, also means that many of the plants would not grow very tall, even without cutting – dove's-foot crane's-bill and common vetch come into this category. Here, the former includes a white-flowered variety, rather than the more common pink. Both bird's-foot-trefoil and greater bird's-foot-trefoil grow here; the former is low-growing and adapted to survive the mowing regime. Greater bird's-foot-trefoil is very uncommon in Brent. The main grasses are Yorkshire-fog, creeping bent, red fescue and false oat-grass.

Several tall sugar maples line the foot of the southern slope, with cow parsley beneath. In the north-east corner is a tangle of nettle, bramble and creeping thistle, below trees of oak, cherry, elm, pear and plum. Ivy clammers up the trees. Fox paths lead from the edge into this thick vegetation. Birds, too, appreciate this corner. Elsewhere are patches of brambles, particularly near the buildings on the site. A number of ant hills can be found in the grass on the lower slopes. Six-spot burnet moths abound in the summer, feeding on the nectar of flowers such as clovers.

Willesden Reservoir is owned and managed by Thames Water. There is no public access, although views can be had from Harlesden Road and Donnington Road, some fifty metres away.

## 11 Sites of Local Importance

### Br.L 1 River Brent west of Stonebridge

Grid ref: TQ 186 832  
Area: 6.6 ha

This is the final section of the River Brent before it flows into the neighbouring Borough of Ealing; in fact for most of this length the river defines the Borough boundary, with the southern bank in Ealing and the northern in Brent. Also included here is a small park, known as Abbey Estate Open Space, and some overgrown allotments.

The river is culverted throughout this section, and flows in a concrete-lined channel some three metres deep, which ensures that water passes through the area as quickly as possible without being impeded by a sinuous course or by vegetation on the banks or along the water's edge. Flood defence work such as this becomes necessary once the flood plain of a river has been built on, as it has here; housing, industrial development and roads come right up to the edge of the river, allowing no latitude should the river overflow its banks.

The concrete straightjacket greatly restricts the value of the river for nature conservation. There is little mud or shingle, and negligible aquatic or marginal vegetation. Consequently there is not much suitable habitat for aquatic invertebrates, and little to support birds, whether they feed on vegetation or prey on invertebrates etc. or, like many waterside birds, a mixture of these. Where there are stones on or near the river bed, for example near where the river passes beneath the Piccadilly line, mud and other debris can accumulate and provide some limited opportunities for aquatic life; small weirs also help oxygenate the water. In places such as these, groups of mallard ducks can often be seen looking for waterweeds or invertebrates to eat. A slightly richer aquatic environment exists to the west of Ealing Road, where patches of reed sweet-grass, amphibious bistort and jointed rush grow at the edge of the river. Here a lucky visitor may spot a grey wagtail, a smart bird with a grey back, yellow and white underparts, and a long tail which it bobs repeatedly; it pokes around along the edge of the water in search of insects and molluscs.

There is a strip of vegetation at the top of the river banks along much of the river, mostly composed of trees and shrubs. Self-established sycamore, elder, willow, buddleia, bramble and ivy have been supplemented by planted hazel, dog-rose, rowan, alder and other species, which both improve the wildlife habitat and make the river more attractive. Less welcome in some respects are Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed. These were originally imported to Britain to be grown as ornamentals in gardens, but they have subsequently colonised the wild. Both are indeed attractive, and have some value for wildlife, but unfortunately they are also aggressive, with the capacity to colonise large areas and crowd out other vegetation. In addition, the sap of giant hogweed induces blistering when affected skin is exposed to sunlight. Another, but more harmless, import is a small fig tree which has taken root half way up the culvert wall to the west of Ealing Road; how the seed arrived here should perhaps be left to the imagination.

Some areas of the bank top are dominated by plants of rough ground, such as scentless mayweed, hoary mustard, bindweed,

couch grass, false oat-grass, common nettle, creeping thistle, mugwort, hemlock and prickly lettuce. The latter has a distinctive way of positioning its vertical leaves in a north-south plane; a line of spines runs down the back of the leaves, and it is curious to think that an eastern Mediterranean form of the plant was probably the ancestor of today's garden lettuce.

Also included in this site is an area of former allotments just to the west of the Piccadilly line and on the south side of the river, in the Borough of Ealing. Soon after these were abandoned in the 1980s, rough grassland took over, with only a few competitive species such as docks, thistles, mugwort and hogweed present, whereas now bramble and Japanese knotweed seem to predominate. Extensive stands of reed canary-grass could be found near the railway embankment, where the ground was damp. Along the northern edge, beside the river, a line of trees and shrubs, including alder, hazel, holly, hawthorn and field maple, was planted in 1987, following completion of the River Brent Flood Alleviation Scheme by the former Greater London Council and Thames Water Authority.

On the opposite bank and east of the Piccadilly line is another addition to the site: Abbey Estate Open Space. This is a long, thin and fairly recently laid-out green space between the estate of the same name and the river, alongside Queensbury Road. Mounds in an otherwise flat park provide visual variety, and these and other areas have been planted with a range of trees and shrubs, mostly native to Britain, including field maple, hawthorn, hazel, birch, holly, hornbeam, small-leaved lime, wild privet and blackthorn. An informal path follows the boundary fence, providing good views of the river.

The park and the mixed vegetation along the top of the river bank provide good habitat for common birds in an area of the Borough generally lacking the suburban gardens which elsewhere support so many of them. It is worth watching – and listening – for blue and great tits, blackbird, long-tailed tit, goldcrest, dunnock, robin, greenfinch and even perhaps mistle thrush.

Good views down the river can be obtained from the bridge at Abbeyle Road, Abbey Estate Open Space, a footpath along the north side of the river near Riverside Gardens, and from the west side of Ealing Road.

### Br.L 2 Meadow Way Copse

Grid ref: TQ 209 888  
Area: 0.16 ha

One of the smaller sites described in this book, Meadow Way Copse nonetheless provides a pleasant green background to the short footpath leading from Meadow Way to Springfield Mount. The elevated location lies just to the south of Wakemans Hill Avenue, the highest point in Brent.

The footpath is tarmaced and has a low wire fence on either side. On the western side is just a narrow strip of vegetation, mainly of cherry laurel with much ivy beneath. The main feature here is a magnificent oak, which probably pre-dates the surrounding houses. No access exists to this part.

To the east of the path, however, a gate in the wire fence leads

into an area of trees and shrubs. It is well-structured, and the shrub layer is sufficiently dense to give cover for a variety of common garden birds. Two fine old oaks, rooted in neighbouring back gardens, tower over the copse. Within the copse itself, elder, sycamore, cherry laurel, garden privet and Pissard's plum can be found. Ivy carpets the ground, leaving little room for other plants, although bramble, nettle, cow parsley and variegated yellow archangel also make an appearance.

The main blot on this little woodland is the quantity of garden and other rubbish, especially away from the footpath. At the time of our visit, litter, bottles, sacks of garden waste, and even a large section of garden fence, had been left within the shrubbery. Fortunately, wildlife will carry on regardless, but the impression it gives the human visitor passing by is one of neglect and lack of interest, which is a shame.

Robin and blackbird are amongst the birds to be seen and heard in Meadow Way Copse, and birds nesting here will visit adjacent gardens.

### Br.L 3 Kingsbury Hospital Wood

Grid ref: TQ 190 894  
Area: 0.24 ha

Within the grounds of the former Kingsbury Hospital (originally built as Willesden Isolation Hospital at the start of the 20th century) there are reminders of the rural landscape that would have occurred here prior to the all-engulfing tide of suburbia, which spread across this part of north London in the 1930s. Mown lawns, which still support the wild flowers of former pasture, indicate that within living memory this area was occupied by small fields, the quintessence of traditional English countryside.

A small woodland forms the main feature of nature conservation interest. However, this has developed recently and occupies the site of the hospital's decommissioned filter bed. The dominance of crack-willow, with an understorey of elder and hawthorn, indicates that this is a damp site. Even the name of the adjacent Honeypot Lane is a reminder of how wet the whole area once was; Honeypot is nothing to do with bees, but indicates the state of the lane in winters long gone, thanks to the exceedingly sticky Middlesex clay. The field layer of ivy, cow parsley, wood avens and bramble indicates that this woodland has arisen from an area which was previously open ground. Although small, this almost impenetrable thicket provides a valuable refuge for birds, and is likely to provide habitat for breeding species such as blackcap, great tit and, possibly, great spotted woodpecker.

It is linked by a tree-line, consisting of oak, sycamore and white poplar, to the scrubby embankments of the adjacent Jubilee line; the latter is part of the "Railsite habitats" site – see Br.BI 6. This link provides a tenuous but nevertheless valuable green corridor to the more extensive habitats along the railway embankments. It is somewhat ironic that the railway corridor, which was the pre-cursor of suburban development within the surrounding area, is a feature which now strengthens the nature conservation interest of the remaining habitats on this site.

The wildlife associated with Kingsbury Hospital Wood provides a valuable local nature conservation amenity – birds in particular will visit neighbouring gardens. It is hoped that, as part of any redevelopment of the hospital, the woodland and contiguous areas of wildlife habitat can be retained and enhanced. At the time of writing, however, the hospital lies derelict, and the only sight of the wood is the tops of the trees, seen from Honeypot Lane.

### Br.L 4 Wealdstone Brook – Wembley Park section

Grid ref: TQ 187 867  
Area: 4.2 ha

The upstream section of the Wealdstone Brook, from Kenton to where it flows under the Jubilee line, has already been described elsewhere (see Br. BI 11). For a short while the brook flows along the foot of the Jubilee line embankment, before diving under the line again, and then under the Metropolitan line, close to Stanmore Junction, to emerge near Elmstead Avenue. The stream from here to just before it flows into the River Brent forms this site.

There are no parks along this stretch of the Wealdstone Brook, and so glimpses from road bridges are the only way that the brook can be seen. Unfortunately, the use of concrete in constraining the watercourse has been as prolific as in the previous section, and vegetation has to struggle to obtain a foothold. The first glimpse at Elmstead Avenue is typical – a three metre deep, concrete culvert. Any trees and shrubs are found beyond the tops of the walls; cherry laurel, hawthorn, ash, crack-willow and bramble are upstream from the bridge, but even these are absent downstream.

The brook is next met flowing under Forty Avenue, where the profile and the vegetation alongside are similar, and sadly changed from 1887, when H.J. Foley described a walk along Forty Lane which crossed a "picturesque little streamlet with green rushy banks and overhanging willows". At least there are still a few willows along the stream, but they now mostly overhang concrete walls rather than rushy banks. The best part of the Wembley Park section of the Wealdstone Brook is nowadays to be found between Forty Avenue and Wembley Park Drive. Unfortunately, it can only really be appreciated by the residents of the new housing at Elliot Close; their lawns run down to a semi-natural, sloping bank, with nettles, false oat-grass and creeping thistle partly shielding the clear, slow-flowing water. Across the other side, cherry, dog-rose, birch, sycamore and crack-willow form a narrow strip at the ends of back gardens. By the time that the brook reaches Wembley Park Drive, close to Wembley Park station, it is back between vertical concrete or brick walls. Looking upstream, dense trees and shrubs crowd round on both sides – elder, oak, hawthorn, ash, sycamore and crack-willow – but nevertheless some light still manages to reach the water. The greenery is a pleasant contrast to the hard landscape and noise of Wembley Park.

Another short stretch leads between Wembley Park Drive and Olympic Way, and has quite a pleasant little garden. On the other side of Olympic Way, a tall office block overshadows a depressing concrete channel, which contains the brook, but little else. Mown grass and a car park surround it. It is again a far cry from 1887, when the indefatigable H.J. Foley was hereabouts observing "the water crawling slowly along, partially concealed by the rank sedges and tall rushes with it is almost dammed up. Its banks are crowded with flowering herbs of all kinds".

The rest of the Wealdstone Brook's course to the River Brent lies through the Wembley Park Industrial Estate. The trees alongside are bigger, but the concrete also seems more extensive. In any case, the brook can only be seen near the western end of this last section, where it flows under two parts of North End Road. Further to the east, a line of trees seen across car parks or behind factories is the only sign of the river corridor. The final place where it ought to be seen is at Atlas Road, but here it has been put underground, to emerge a little further on and flow for another 100 metres before reaching the River Brent. This final section is included in site Br.BI 5 above. At Atlas Road, only a distant view of trees to north and

south indicates these final parts of the Wealdstone Brook before the Brent is reached.

## Br.L 5 Brentfield Open Space and Leicester Road

Grid ref: TQ 208 844

Area: 1.4 ha

Taylor's Lane Power Station, with its two tall chimneys, is visible from widely-scattered parts of Brent. It towers over this site, which consists of a new park, only opened in 1992, and two nearby areas of roughland.

Brentfield Open Space is rather a strange little park that one stumbles across by accident when looking for somewhere else. It was not marked on the A to Z five years after it was opened, and the two entrances are easily missed. The northern one is alongside a footpath, close to allotments and on the way to Gibbons Recreation Ground. The southern one is some little way down Leicester Road, which to all intents and purposes appears from Brentfield Road to be a private access to Taylor's Lane Power Station.

In the 1980s, the site of the open space was a car park, so that is a welcome change of use. Brentfield Open Space is fairly small but various mounded areas have been created to add interest. From the top of some of these can be viewed the dramatic skyline of the Swaminarayan Hindu Temple to the north-west. Three quarters of the park is covered by short mown grass. On the mounds and round the periphery, however, trees such as birch, pines and narrowleaf ash, and shrubs such as dogwood, ivy, Oregon-grape, Japanese quince and shrub roses have grown up well. Some of these provide shelter for birds such as dunnock and blackbird. A number of plants have crept in from the roughland just beyond the boundaries of the open space, and from further afield; these include salsify, a member of the daisy family with purple flowers, prickly sow-thistle, hawkweed ox-tongue and mugwort.

Just outside the southern gate of the park is Leicester Road, and a bank of old clinker all along the far side. Leicester Road continues past the entrance to the power station and bends to the north round its eastern boundary to meet Gibbons Road (where it changes from road to footpath alongside allotments). This second part of Leicester Road is hemmed in between Taylor's Lane Power Station and Gibbons Road Substation; it has high walls on either side, above which loom the paraphernalia of electricity production. A narrow path now runs along one side, while a colourful roughland flora has grown up along the rest of this part of Leicester Road, as well as on the clinker banks outside Brentfield Open Space.

Anybody wanting to practise their powers of identification of common wild flowers would find Leicester Road a good place. The list is long: bramble, buddleia, Oxford ragwort, mugwort, nettle, hogweed, common vetch, black horehound, black medick, Russian comfrey, dove's-foot crane's-bill, horse-radish, hoary mustard, perforate St John's-wort, broad-leaved everlasting-pea and hawkweed ox-tongue. They have origins from all over the world, and just a couple of examples illustrate this. Russian comfrey, a vigorous hybrid of the native common comfrey and rough comfrey, was introduced from Russia to be grown as a fodder plant. It is now widely distributed throughout London. Horse-radish is a member of the cabbage family. It was introduced to this country from the Near East in the 15th century and has since escaped from gardens into hedges, and on to roadside verges and river banks. The sauce is derived from the root.

On the northern part of Leicester Road are a number of ant hills, which usually signify a habitat undisturbed for some time. Butterflies such as skippers, and cinnabar moths, abound; the caterpillars of the latter exclusively eat the leaves of ragworts, which they can rapidly strip bare.

Brentfield Open Space is owned and managed by the Borough, while Leicester Road is owned by Powergen. Both parts of the site tend to be used by people as short cuts, usually those who know the area well. Improved signage might help to make the park better known, and perhaps extra interest could be created by adding a small wildflower meadow. On the other hand the park is already remarkably pleasant, and areas of wild flowers can be seen, literally, right outside the gate. Walk 1 briefly visits both parts of this site.

## Br.L 6 Grove Park and Tramway Brook

Grid ref: TQ 204 896

Area: 0.6 ha

This site is made up, as its name suggests, of two distinct parts; it is to be found just behind the Asda store in Colindale.

Grove Farm was almost certainly the land first held by Richard Grove in 1276-7 from the manor of Edgware. Located just to the east of Stag Lane, by 1597 Groves Place was a typical medieval farmhouse, and in the late 18th century Grove Park House was added to the original Elizabethan core. The tree-lined drive from the Edgware Road followed the line of the present-day road, Grove Park. On either side of the drive was parkland which would have included what is now this site. The house was pulled down after the Second World War.

Grove Park was until recently a sports ground lying to the north of the road of the same name. At some time during the 1990s the level was raised by tipping and it was then turned into a small park. The main part now consists of amenity grassland. On the southern side, this is at the same level as the road, but on the eastern and northern sides, and to a lesser extent the western side, steep banks slope down to the neighbouring land; it is on these slopes that the chief wildlife interest is to be found.

Lombardy poplars line the foot of the eastern slope, helping to shield a car park beyond. The bank itself comprises tall grassy vegetation and a fair amount of scrub: creeping thistle, bramble, hogweed, cleavers and false oat-grass are found here, the last-named familiar from railsides. Towards the north, this bank becomes more grassy.

Turning to the northern bank, there are several hybrid black-poplars, as well as elder, goat willow and hawthorn. As these sides are not mown (a fact reflected in the dominance of the false oat-grass, which hates repeated cutting), the flowers on the bank are mostly fairly competitive species, such as goat's-rue, creeping cinquefoil, rosebay willowherb, hogweed and ragwort. However, look out in the early spring for the yellow, daisy-like flowers of colt's-foot, and in summer for the attractive flowers of red campion, more usually found in hedgerows and woodland edges. The large flowers of oxeye daisy on their long stems brighten up the banks in the summer.

If it is open, a gate in the north-east corner leads to Capitol Way, which passes the Asda car park on one side and some new flats on the other. Round a bend and beyond the flats is a bank of old spoil at the roadside, and this has now been colonised by a colourful collection of common flowers. Not surprisingly, many of the species are the same as at Grove Park, but others found in a

recent survey include nipplewort, spear thistle, poppy, bittersweet, buddleia and bristly ox-tongue. Nipplewort is another member of the daisy family; its buds have a nipple-like appearance and the plant was once recommended as a cure for sore nipples. The flower heads of spear thistle are almost twice the size of creeping thistle, and its very spiny leaves are also larger.

A small car park lies on the other side of the bank, and on one side a belt of elder and hawthorn, with bramble and nettle beneath, shields a small stream. This is the Tramway Brook, a tributary of the Silk Stream which it meets just beyond the Edgware Road, in Colindale. It was named after the Colindale Tram Depot on the Edgware Road. Here the brook has been culverted to pass under Asda, but rubbish has blocked the entrance to the culvert. The stream has formed a lake back from this, leaving two large oaks with their roots under water, and a new block of flats with rather wet foundations. The flats replaced a small wood during the 1990s, so perhaps this is a case of nature striking back. The margins of the brook are quite muddy and natural here, but the water is turbid so it is difficult to see what is in it.

Upstream, the brook passes behind an industrial estate and can only really be viewed again from Stag Lane. Here again it emerges from a culvert to flow alongside the edge of the car park of the Stag Lane Medical Centre, and beyond this it can also be seen over a low wall alongside the access road and car park to the Brent Sikh Centre. The water here too appears polluted and no plants could be identified in the water. Near the Medical Centre, the banks are covered by bramble, creeping thistle and hawthorn, with some elder, mugwort and ivy. Further east, near the Sikh Centre, the banks are almost completely covered by nettle, with cow parsley, black horehound, herb-Robert and red valerian. There is a fine old oak near the stream.

Grove Park is freely accessible during daylight hours, with entrances on all except the eastern side. The Tramway Brook can best be seen from Capitol Way, near the Asda car park, or from Stag Lane.

## Br.L 7 The Pimple

Grid ref: TQ 166 864

Area:1.1 ha

This is another hill top open space, like the nearby Elmwood Park, although the views are not so extensive as they are more obscured by the surrounding houses and trees. The fields hereabouts once belonged to Sudbury Court, a basically 17th century house but now much altered, which still stands just to the west in Sudbury Court Road. When the rising tide of suburbia engulfed them in the 1930s, parts of four fields were retained to make a small recreation ground. Some of the hedges and field trees were kept, to form the most attractive and ecologically valuable features of the site.

The majority of the site in terms of percentage is mown grass, with a fine old oak at the highest point and a weeping willow nearby. There are a number of seats on which to rest. Writing of percentages, however, gives little idea of the feel of the place, as the eye is drawn immediately to the hedges, which are a mass of blossom in early spring. Three old hedgerows have survived on this site: two in the north-west part of the park, meeting at right angles, and one further south. A fourth has been lost: this ran southwards from the oak at the highest point to take in what is now an isolated field maple, close to the southern boundary. The hedgerows are now so thick that they are more like woodland belts, and in places it is possible to walk through them as

if they were. Blackthorn is the dominant constituent of these hedges, hence the blossom. Autumn, of course, is the other time to appreciate them: "the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" as Keats wrote. Blackthorn bears masses of bluish-purple berries (or sloes) between August and November. These are extremely acid and astringent to the taste, but are used to make a pleasant jelly as well as sloe gin, made by soaking the sloes in gin, which turns pink. The other main component of the hedges is field maple, which it is unusual to find in such quantity; many of the trees are old. The southern one also contains dogwood and dog-rose, whilst the northern ones have large quantities of damson. The fruit of damson is very similar to sloe in appearance but tastes much sweeter, intermediate between a sloe and a plum. Old hedgerow oaks give added height and habitat. In the hedge bottoms, bramble and ivy dominate, the latter clambering up the tree trunks.

A veteran oak tree with a broken crown stands in the grassland near one of the hedges. Gnarled old trees such as this, with flaking bark, dead wood, holes, and sap runs, can support rare and uncommon insects. They should never be tidied up, unless public safety is at risk.

The Pimple is owned and managed by the Borough. It is completely surrounded by back gardens with only two paths in between the houses giving access: one from Campden Crescent to the east and the other from Pasture Road to the west. It is open during daylight hours and the nearest station is South Kenton, just over a kilometre away.

## Br.L 8 Queen's Park

Grid ref: TQ 242 832

Area:12 ha

In 1885, the land on which Queen's Park is now located was offered, along with Highgate Wood, to the Corporation of the City of London as a gift by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners "for preservation as open spaces for ever". The Corporation was happy to accept Highgate Wood, but not so keen on Queen's Park because of the anticipated maintenance costs. The Commissioners, however, insisted it was both or nothing. At that time the Corporation's income for the preservation of open spaces was very limited: it was provided by the 'City Cash's Fund', the main source of which was the duty on coal coming into the Port of London. Fortunately for the future residents of Kilburn, the generous bequest of a William Ward came to the rescue. He provided a sum of money "for the creation of some fund for the benefit of the poorer classes". Some £3,000 of this was used by the Corporation to lay out Queen's Park.

The park was formally opened in 1887 by the Lord Mayor "for the free use and enjoyment of the public for ever" and named in honour of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee of that year. On the opening day "the great majority of the vast crowd was composed evidently of the respectable class", allaying fears of a "probable invasion of Kilburn by the cream of London ruffianism".

The park chiefly consists of trees, spanning a range of ages, and mown grass, and when first seen looks all very neat and tidy. Pride of place among the trees must go to the oaks, most of which pre-date the park, and most venerable amongst these is an extremely gnarled pedunculate oak with a hollow trunk and iron railings around it; it is to be found near the eastern end of the central avenue. Most of the trees in the park are in avenues alongside the paths, either around the periphery or along the east-west axis mentioned above. Horse-chestnut and London plane

dominate these avenues, whilst ash, lime, rowan, pear and beech can also be found. In the north of the park, an area has been fenced off for pitch and putt, and within this are a number of weeping willows. In some parts of Queen's Park, such as towards the northern edge, the horse-chestnuts are sufficiently close together for it to be quite shaded underneath during summer, and the ground beneath is quite bare.

Along this northern side of the park, near Chevening Road, the manager has tried to introduce a more natural approach. A woodland walk has been created alongside the existing mature trees; where there are breaks in the canopy, whips of native species, such as hazel, wild cherry, oak and elder have been planted to thicken it up and vary the age structure. Here, as elsewhere, any dead wood on trees is being left *in situ* if it is safe, or else in piles under the trees. Stumps are no longer removed, and staff were considerably encouraged when a stag beetle was found here in June 1999. Next to the path, a hedge of beech, hazel, blackthorn, hawthorn and holly has been planted. Adjacent to this is a ribbon of land where mowing has been stopped, and wild flowers and grasses introduced via turves and plugs. This recent change in management is to be applauded, and will undoubtedly add interest to the park. Many visitors will appreciate this. As it is, the park is very popular with local residents and is well used.

Amenity grass in most of the park generally contains few wild flowers, although large quantities of autumn hawkbit can be found towards the north-east of the park, and creeping buttercup, daisy and selfheal are widespread in the lawns in a garden in the south-east corner. This also contains shrub beds, which provide a small amount of nesting habitat for birds such as dunnoek. Many of the shrubs are berry-bearing, which is also useful for birds. A fine collection of trees is also present here. Inside the garden, next to Harvist Road, a wildflower area has been created, half of it sown and half of it in the form of wildflower turf; mowing of this area will only take place twice a year. It is to be hoped that this area will thrive and add to the diversity of the park.

There is a fine children's playground on the western side of the park, an attractively-painted bandstand and, near the central avenue, a cafe. Just outside this is a sculpture of an ostrich-like bird, produced by a local artist; it is titled *Mbuni*. A small children's farm is to be found close to the garden.

Queen's Park is still owned and managed by the Corporation of London, and is freely accessible at all times. The nearest stations are Queen's Park and Brondesbury Park, and a visit can easily be combined with one to Paddington Cemetery, which is close by.

## Br.L 9 The Old Orchard

Grid ref: TQ 207 843  
Area: 0.25 ha

You will search in vain on the map of Brent for The Old Orchard, and in any case would probably not be looking in the Stonebridge area. This tiny park is near the northern edge of the Stonebridge Park Estate, behind the road called Stonebridge Park. The name of the park gives away its origin. In 1904, the area was still mostly fields; Brentfield Road was called Dog Lane, although Stonebridge Park (the road) was shown with houses on both sides between Harrow Road and Barrs Road. By 1935, what is now The Old Orchard was surrounded by buildings.

The main entrance is from Stonebridge Park, just north of the junction with Gloucester Close. Even at this entrance there is no notice board of any description, and to someone not knowing the

area it could be a private garage access next to a row of houses. A tarmac path leads into the park and widens out into a parking area along its southern edge. A strip of rough vegetation follows this southern boundary, and includes nettle, bramble, Oxford ragwort, elder, prickly lettuce, creeping thistle and false oat-grass. From here, The Old Orchard stretches behind the Victorian houses of Stonebridge Park; these houses have direct access into the park via gates from their back gardens, and this makes it seem almost like a private facility for their residents.

The main interest in the park, as is to be expected, comes from its trees. These include old pear trees, presumably from the former orchard, as well as several younger trees, such as birch, as well as about a dozen sycamores. The grass beneath is not mown very often, and a few common flowers can be identified: spear thistle, smooth hawk's-beard, common mallow, creeping buttercup, common ragwort and common field-speedwell, and abundant white clover.

In the north-western corner is an area of former garages, where, at the time of our visit, there was a tangle of denser vegetation, with white melilot as the most prominent flower. When in flower, melilots have a peculiar, sweet odour, which by drying becomes stronger and more agreeable, exactly like the smell of new-mown hay. Mellilots have been much valued as herbs, being the main ingredient of melilot poultices. In the words of Gerard, the Elizabethan physician and herbalist: "Melilote boiled in sweet wine untile it be soft, if you adde thereto the yolke of a roasted egge, the meale of Linseed, the roots of Marsh Mallowes and hogs greece stamped together, and used as a pultis or cataplasma, plaisterwise, doth asswge and soften all manner of swellings."

From this corner, there is a way out to Barrs Road, but as an entrance this cannot be recommended as it could best be described as "next to the derelict mini-market and past the dumped rubbish next to the 'Dumping of rubbish is prohibited' notice".

Considering its size and location, The Old Orchard is a pleasant place and surprisingly little tipping of rubbish has taken place within the park itself. It could, with a little careful management, better signage, and tidying up of the two entrances (particularly the one from Barrs Road), make a good, enclosed wildlife area. It is owned and managed by the Borough's Housing Department. There is free access during daylight hours.

## Br.L 10 Elmwood Park

Grid ref: TQ 162 861  
Area: 2.5 ha

This little known park, in the westernmost extremity of the Borough, possesses possibly the finest views in the whole of Brent. It is approached from Elms Lane, a very old track which dates from at least medieval times; some 18th and 19th century cottages are passed near the corner with Sudbury Court Road. A grassy entrance between houses leads up hill from Elms Lane into the main part of Elmwood Park. From here the view extends beyond the wide open spaces of Vale Farm Sports Ground to central London, and further round to Hampstead Heath, Barn Hill and the Green Belt.

The grass in this part is kept mown, so it is difficult to see what flowers are present, although cat's ear, white clover and yarrow still appear in the short sward. A number of old oaks, including one very large specimen right at the summit of the hill, possibly date from a former hedgerow. Old oaks can support a large variety of invertebrates. These in turn provide food for birds. Blue tits, for

example, feed their young on the copious number of caterpillars which feed on oak leaves. A more obvious, but rather scrubby, hedge runs along the northern edge, whilst a line of old horse-chestnuts separate the western side from some allotments.

Part of the allotments have been allowed to grow wild, and for that reason have been included as part of this site. Young oak, as well as ash and sycamore saplings have crept in to the southern half. Bramble predominates, although some creeping thistle, false oat-grass and regenerating elm also occur.

On the southern side of the park is the main feature of ecological interest. This is a woodland strip which is dominated by ash and elm, the latter including both living and dead stems, and a few elder bushes are also present. The woodland clearly took a severe blow at the time of the main Dutch Elm Disease outbreak, but is now regenerating. However, it is only a matter of time before the new elm suckers grow to sufficient size to succumb in their turn to the disease. There is much young ash in the woodland and this will gradually become the more prominent tree species. Beneath the canopy are nettle, bramble, cow parsley, hedge woundwort, wood avens and garlic mustard, as well as much ivy. An old fence line crosses the wood, and just beyond this are back gardens and houses. In summer, speckled wood butterflies flit through the sunny glades.

Elmwood Park is owned and managed by the Borough and is freely accessible during daylight hours. There is no access to the allotments, although these can be clearly seen over a fence.

## Br.L11 Alperton Cemetery

Grid ref: TQ 174 841  
Area: 4 ha

The Borough boundary makes a detour to include this fairly small cemetery within Brent. It is adjacent to Sudbury Golf Course and not far from Horsenden Hill, both in the Borough of Ealing. The Grand Union Canal forms its south-western boundary.

Alperton Cemetery was founded in 1917 as Wembley Cemetery, a name it retained until 1946 when it was officially renamed Alperton. The first interment took place in 1918. The red brick, Perpendicular chapels were designed by the Wembley Borough Surveyor in 1937.

The cemetery, with its mown grass and scattering of unprepossessing ornamental trees, seems an unpromising place to look for anything of nature conservation interest. The grass is cut on a 10-14 day cycle in the growing season. The blades are set low enough to satisfy visiting relatives, but sufficiently high to allow at least the smaller wild plants to flower. A close look at the sward is needed to reveal its composition. Bent grasses and creeping cinquefoil tend to dominate the sward, but one of the characteristics of this place is the quantity of bird's-foot-trefoil. This delightful member of the pea family is a characteristic of short grass; it is able to produce some of its yellow and orange flowers so close to the ground that they escape the lawn mower. Over 70 local names have been recorded for this plant, including eggs and bacon, granny's toenails (presumably referring to the twisted pods), and, more puzzlingly, cuckoo's stocking. Bird's-foot-trefoil is the preferred food-plant of the common blue butterfly. Also common here are meadow and creeping buttercups, oxeye daisy, yarrow, common knapweed, selfheal and autumn hawkbit, common but attractive plants which, if allowed a few weeks to flower, can provide colour from spring through to autumn. A few primrose plants grow in the far north-east corner.

The primroses may have been planted by visitors, or they might be remnants of the former landscape. The latter theory is supported by nearby hedges along the boundaries of the cemetery, which contain fine old oak trees which must surely pre-date the graves. The hedges also contain hawthorn, elder, elm and holly, together with a few species not native to Britain. The hedge bottom flora is quite rich, and extends out into the grassland of the cemetery. Common dog-violet is abundant, its attractive purple flowers, like many woodland plants, appearing early in the spring. Bugle, which is uncommon in Brent, also grows near the hedge; it flowers rather later than the violet. A little further from the hedge is a small quantity of Lady's bedstraw.

The cemetery must of course be run first and foremost as a burial ground. However, the managers have been able to relax the mowing regime in an area next to the golf course to benefit the primroses and other flora which grow here. In due course it may be possible to extend the area where the grass is only cut a few times a year, or where a gap of a month or two is left in order to allow attractive plants to flower.

## Br.L 12 Barham Park

Grid ref: TQ 170 851  
Area: 10 ha

This large and popular park, close to the centre of Wembley, has a variety of interesting features and considerable scope for increasing its present, rather limited, nature conservation interest.

Barham Park was originally the house and grounds of James Crab in the 1790s, and was later occupied by the Copland family. By the 1840s, a house had been built in the grounds, known as Sudbury Lodge, and this became the home of George Titus Barham, managing director of the Express Dairy Company, which his father had founded. George Titus Barham was to have been Mayor of Wembley in 1937, but died prior to taking up office. He left his Georgian mansion and grounds to the Borough. The mansion – Sudbury Lodge – has gone, but the foundations show through the turf, and the gardens survive. A Georgian house in the park, Old Lodge, remains as a public library.

On first reaching the park, whether from the east or west, the first impression is of acres of closely-mown grass. Towards the north-east corner, close to the railway line, is an area of young pines. Mowing in between these has been stopped, but unfortunately the sward does not, at present, contain many species. A few flowers, such as creeping buttercup, creeping thistle and white clover, have grown up, and perhaps the meadow could be enhanced by adding more species from pot-grown stock.

The main wildlife habitat to be seen from the park is not actually part of it. This is the railway embankment along the northern edge (part of site Br.B1 6), which grades from dense scrub to grassland as you move from east to west. This provides a useful reservoir for plants and animals, including birds, which then appear in the park. Elsewhere in Barham Park are scattered single specimens and avenues of trees, including hybrid black-poplar. London plane and oak. Along by the railway fence are some very old white poplars; these gnarled specimens have a variety of nooks and crannies in which birds can breed or search for invertebrates to eat.

Near the southern side of the park is the attractive, formal, walled garden, with bedding plants providing summer colour. To the north of this is the "Maple Garden", again a fairly formal area which includes a pergola made up of a greenhouse where the glass has been taken away. To the north of this again is a fine line of fairly old

hornbeam trees. A grassy path between these and the railway fence links up the eastern and western ends of the park.

Barham Park is owned and managed by the Borough, and is accessible at all times.

## Br.L13 Wembley Park Sports Field

Grid ref: TQ 194 865  
Area: 0.25 ha

Walking northwards from Wembley Park station, along Bridge Road, on the left are the Wembley Park Indoor and Outdoor Sports Grounds. Just before the traffic lights at Forty Avenue, a small “wild” area can be seen through the high wire fence. Despite the uninspiring setting, this is actually a relic of one of the woodland belts planted by Humphry Repton in the 1790s, when he landscaped the Wembley Park estate.

Seemingly left to its own devices and unmanaged, it is primarily an open canopy woodland with some fine native oak trees, as well as elm and ash, and some non-native oaks. A large standing oak stump provides dead wood habitat for invertebrates, which in their turn encourage common garden birds, although they would have difficulty in making themselves heard in this very busy and noisy location.

Below the tree canopy are shrubs and rough grassland. The grasses are not the usual sports pitch rye-grass, but species such as cock’s-foot and false oat-grass.

Wembley Park Sports Field was owned by London Underground Ltd and is now owned by Hawksbrook Leisure. It is private. The wild area does not appear to be accessible, even from within the sports club area, but a reasonable view of it can be had through the fence from Bridge Road, and a rather more limited view from Forty Avenue.

## Br.L14 Brett Crescent Backland

Grid ref: TQ 207 840  
Area: 0.12 ha

This former garden is located to the north of Hillside (part of the main road between Harlesden and Wembley). It is next to Brett Crescent, one of the main approaches into the Stonebridge Park Estate, and is passed by large numbers of people every day.

The site at first view looks like a small woodland with a few large ash, sycamore and horse-chestnut trees; ivy climbs up the trunks. Beneath these grow many saplings and bushes including ash, sycamore, privet and elder. Bindweed and bramble are much in evidence. A fine row of small-leaved limes lines the southern edge. An area of grassland is at the eastern end next to a relatively new brick wall built behind the Conservative and Unionist Club in Morland Gardens. Patches of roughland, consisting of mugwort, thistle, dock, and Japanese knotweed, are also within the site.

A garage was formerly sited between the backland and Hillside, but this was demolished during 1998 and the whole site, including Brett Crescent Backland, was fenced around. The owners, Stonebridge Housing Action Trust, are developing the site for community facilities, but at the time of writing the backland remains much as before. It is good for wildlife, and birdsong is abundant in spring. The fact that wildlife appreciates it, and that large numbers of people walk past and perhaps enjoy a fleeting glimpse of nature, is the reason that the site is included in this book. Wildlife sites are at a premium in the Stonebridge Park area and if it could be

retained in some form within the proposed development, and access could be arranged, this would be a useful addition to the wildlife resources of the area.

## Br.L 15 Barham Primary School Wildlife Area

Grid ref: TQ 174 847  
Area: 0.15 ha

The wildlife area at Barham Primary School is a superb facility for children. The school has about 650 pupils between the ages of four and eleven, and is located just south of Wembley Hospital, at the end of a cul de sac. At the far side of the buildings is the playground, and beyond this is a large mown field. The northern end of the field has been fenced-off, and within this a wildlife area has been created. It is unusually large for a school, being some 80 metres long and 15 metres at its widest.

There is some historical interest within the wildlife area in the form of five fine mature oak trees, which are thought to be some 130 to 150 years old. These stretch in an east-west line from one end to the other, marking the line of a former hedge, which shows up on old maps.

In 1987, a pond was created here which was some two metres by one metre, but in 1996 this was enlarged by digging out with a JCB, and relining with a butyl liner and matting. The pond is now ten metres by five metres and has matured well. British Telecom supplied old telegraph poles for the bridge across the southern edge, and a parent who owned a nursery supplied the plants. Nuttall’s waterweed now dominates the pond, and yellow iris grows at the edge. The water does not need to be topped up and the pond appears to be in good condition. No fish live in the pond, and this allows a wealth of frogs and newts to breed here.

Just inside the entrance to the wildlife area are picnic seats under the shade of two of the large oak trees. Beyond the long northern side are the back gardens of the houses in Chaplin Road, and dense bramble, elder and hawthorn grow along much of the boundary. Another hawthorn hedge has been planted to make the boundary between the school field and the wildlife area more natural. At the western end is a meadow. Other features of interest include logs to look under, and a pit with leaf litter for beetles. Foxes and squirrels are resident, and butterflies are common here in the summer.

In view of the size of the pond, children are not allowed into the wildlife area at break times, but a class at a time visits under supervision to study science, art, geography and conservation. The science includes pond dipping, drawing diagrams, labelling, the using of keys to identify species, and looking at food chains.

Some maintenance is carried out by Brent Parks Service, but otherwise it is largely left alone. This is one of the finest school nature areas in Brent, and it is good to see the positive use the school makes of it.

## Br.L 16 Byron Court Primary School Nature Reserve

Grid ref: TQ 171 869  
Area: 0.1 ha

This excellent nature reserve shows how the enthusiasm of a limited number of people can transform a little-used part of a school’s grounds into a wonderful resource. It is also an education

in how many different features can be fitted into an area without seeming overcrowded.

The school is an attractive low-rise 1930s building, just to the south of Northwick Park. The project was started in 1982, when logs were placed round an area of the field, which was then allowed to grow wild. A pond was dug and a liner installed in 1983, at the same time as the first hedgerow of hawthorn, willow and oak was planted round the edge of the future reserve. Another hedgerow was added in 1985.

By 1991, urgent management was necessary; brambles and thistles were removed, and pathways cut through the grass. In November of that year, an orchard was started with the aim of planting local varieties of fruit trees, and helping to preserve a small number of interesting old species. It now has apple, plum, apricot, pear, cherry, mulberry, redcurrant, blackcurrant and gooseberry, as well as a Kentish cobnut tree.

There are 550 children in the school between the ages of four and eleven. The nature reserve is located just outside the hutted classrooms of the youngest children. The whole school from the reception classes right through to Year 6 use it to study art, mathematics, English and science. A ‘wildlife club’ meets every Tuesday after school for one hour. Twenty children, together with the team of three adults (the Welfare Assistant, the Caretaker and a dinner lady) who maintain the nature reserve, are involved.

A thick hedge separates the orchard, at the eastern end of the reserve, from the rest of it. The orchard is run on organic lines; a number of ant hills in the grass add interest. A herb garden occupies one corner. A gate gives access through the paling fence, which separates two sides of the orchard from the adjoining field.

A separate gate from the school field leads into the remaining three quarters of the nature reserve. The hedge has grown up well, and the trees give quite a woodland feel to parts of the reserve, particularly at one of the far corners where there is a wildflower area. Although shaded, this is colourful in spring and summer; creeping buttercup, herb Robert, wood avens, bittersweet and forget-me-not provide the colour, with cleavers here as well. Nearby are patches of nettles; the children are warned about these, but at the same time told the advantages of having them, particularly that caterpillars of tortoiseshell and peacock butterflies feed on the leaves. Speckled wood and holly blue butterflies have been seen.

The attractive pond is centrally placed. It does not contain any fish, allowing frogs and newts to breed, although ducks descend on the pond for three or four days at a time and eat the frog spawn. Aquatic vegetation includes abundant water mint; children enjoy the smell of the leaves. The pond merges into a boggy area which contains yellow iris.

A butterfly and bee garden contains species such as buddleia and foxglove, which are attractive for invertebrates. Next to this is a mat for newts and frogs from the pond to hide under, and there are various log piles which children can examine for fungi or search for small animals hiding underneath.

Byron Court Primary School Nature Reserve won the Brent Green Leaf Award in 1994.

## Br.L 17 The Orchard – Malorees Infants and Junior Schools

Grid ref: TO 239 841  
Area: 0.2 ha

The largest wildlife area in any school in Brent, this also has an interesting history. The name Malorees comes from the Manor of

Malorees, which in turn was named after Peter Maloure (sic) who was a Justice of the Peace living in the reign of Edward II. The Manor of Malorees grew to be a very large estate and included the parishes of Paddington, Chelsea and Fulham. It eventually came into the possession of Henry IV who granted it to All Soul’s College, Oxford. All Souls Avenue, a little way to the west, commemorates this.

What is now The Orchard lay in the grounds of Brondesbury House. It was part of the first landscaping job of Humphry Repton, when in 1789 he was employed by Lady Salusbury of Brandesbury (sic) Manor House. Repton produced red leather books (his so called Red Books) of paintings of the existing landscape with an overlay showing what he proposed. The Red Book of Brondesbury still survives, and is today in a library in Washington D.C., U.S.A. A few years back it could be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, when it was lent for an exhibition there. The Orchard was never built on, as until recent times it was part of the park. Brondesbury was the last manor house left in Willesden. When it was demolished in the 1930s, Manor House Drive was built on the site just to the north of the school grounds.

A map from the early years of the 20th century quite clearly shows Brondesbury Park, whilst Lady Adelaide Home is shown on the site of the schools. This was a home for boys until it was demolished about 1950. Malorees Infants School was then built in 1952 and the Junior School in 1958.

The Orchard is located at the far end of the school playing fields, and is a huge area for a school to have: some 100 metres long and 25 metres wide. As its name suggests, it is an old orchard with a number of mature trees, particularly apple, but also pear and cherry. Pride of place though goes to an enormous black mulberry tree, which is far too tall to be able to pick the fruit. This tree might even have been planted in Repton’s day.

The orchard is divided into two parts by a low wooden fence. The northern part contains a pond surrounded by stone slabs; tall dark green spikes of water horsetail in a planter make an unusual and attractive addition to the pond’s flora. Tutsan near the pond has presumably been planted, but hedge bedstraw not far away might be a remnant of former flora. The vegetation is kept fairly low in the vicinity of the pond, to permit access, but to the north are dense mounds of bramble. These are in a slight clearing from the many ash, apple and other trees which grow in the nature area, and the sunlight promotes flowering and fruiting, producing food for butterflies, bees and birds, as well as humankind. The brambles also provide excellent nesting habitat for wrens, robins and other birds. A family of foxes also live here.

An old hedge separates the nature area from the rest of the school grounds. It is largely comprised of common hawthorn and garden privet, and the abundance of the latter indicates that the hedge was planted. However, several hybrid hawthorns (a cross between common hawthorn and the much rarer Midland hawthorn) and the fact that the hedge is growing on a slight bank suggests that its history is more complex. Perhaps the privet was planted into an old hedge which had become gappy.

Apart from the mulberry mentioned earlier, the southern section of the nature area contains fewer fruit trees. Several young ash and oak trees grow near the southern end and give a woodland atmosphere to the place, and a few suckers indicate what was doubtless once a fine elm tree. However, sections of old paths and low walls buried beneath the vegetation are intriguing reminders that this was once a landscaped orchard.

## 12 Important sites in adjacent boroughs

This is a list of sites which are important for wildlife close to, but outside the boundaries of, the Borough of Brent. It is not exhaustive.

### City of Westminster

Paddington Recreation Ground TQ 255 827

### Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Kensal Green Cemetery TQ 234 825  
Grand Union Canal TQ 235 824  
Meanwhile Gardens TQ 247 819

### London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Kensal Green Cemetery TQ 229 825  
St Mary's Cemetery TQ 226 825  
Wormwood Scrubs Park TQ 220 819  
Grand Union Canal TQ 212 829

### London Borough of Ealing

Guinness Mounds TQ 190 824  
Twyford Abbey TQ 190 832

Cleverley Crescent Leisure Gardens TQ 184 831  
Brent River Park North TQ 170 827  
Horsenden Hill TQ 160 844  
Ealing Northern Sports Ground TQ 150 853  
Grand Union Canal TQ 169 841

### London Borough of Harrow

Wood End Railway Crossing TQ 146 858  
Harrow-on-the-Hill TQ 159 870  
Belmont Nature Walk TQ 163 895

### London Borough of Barnet

Silk Stream and Burnt Oak Brook TQ 207 903  
Golders Hill Park TQ 255 868  
Brent Reservoir (part) TQ 219 876

### London Borough of Camden

Hampstead Cemetery TQ 249 856  
West Hampstead Railsides and Westbere Copse TQ 244 852  
Hampstead Heath TQ 257 865

## 13 Walks in Brent

The inclusion of walks has become a regular and popular feature of our handbooks. The four walks to be found inside the back cover of this handbook have been designed to traverse some of the places described in more detail elsewhere in the book.

The first starts at Roundwood Park, visits the church of St Mary, the oldest survivor of the medieval village of Willesden, and its attractive churchyard, then goes on to see Brentfield Open Space, the Canal Feeder and the amazing Swaminarayan Hindu Temple, before crossing the North Circular Road to see the colourful wildflower area in Tokyngton Recreation Ground. Finally the River Brent is followed northwards as far as Great Central Way.

The second walk follows the full length of the Grand Union Canal within Brent, before looking at One Tree Hill.

The third takes in Roe Green Park, before looking in detail at the western side of Fryent Country Park, including the ancient trackway known as Hell Lane, and the summit of Barn Hill.

The fourth concentrates on the eastern side of Fryent Country Park, including Gotfords Hill, going on to see Old St Andrew's Church and its churchyard, before spending some time alongside the Brent Reservoir.

None of the walks is particularly long. The first two are only three miles each, while the third is just over two miles and the fourth is nearly five miles. Most of the walks can, without too much trouble, be combined with each other so that two can be completed in a single day. This is especially the case with 3 and 4, where, after completing Walk 3 and walking down to Wembley Park station, one stop on the Jubilee line to Kingsbury returns to the start of Walk 4.

The best of these walks for disabled access would have been Walk 2 along the canal, but installation of a motor cycle barrier just west of Acton Lane and another one immediately west of Abbey Road severely limits any wheelchair access. Generally the walks are not particularly good for wheelchair access because of the lack of a continuous route without difficulties. Of the major sites in this handbook, the best ones for wheelchair access are the western end of the Grand Union Canal, Paddington Cemetery, Roundwood Park (but not the nature area!), Willesden New Cemetery, Tokyngton Recreation Ground and wildflower area, St John's Old Burial Ground in Wembley, St Mary's Churchyard in Willesden and Roe Green Park. Special wheelchair-accessible paths have been laid out on the eastern side of Fryent Country Park (in the vicinity of Bush Farm), on the southern shores of the Brent Reservoir at Neasden Recreation Ground, and on the northern side of the reservoir at the Welsh Harp Open Space.

The individual walks can be completed in a morning or

afternoon, or even on a summer's evening, but there is much to see en route and people might prefer to devote a day to each. Some details of where to eat are given. However, do not necessarily take the mention of a cafe or pub as a recommendation, as standards do change. As always, we include the proviso that the walks were correct when last checked but that details can and do change. When on the route, do not spend too long looking for a feature which may no longer be there. It should also be remembered that bus routes change, and not all run on Sunday. Bus details can be checked by ringing 020 7222 1234. Train services can also be affected by engineering works, especially at weekends.

These walks can be muddy in places, particularly in winter, so have suitable footwear. The wild flowers will be at their best in spring and summer, and so the walks will tend to be more enjoyable then. Walks 1 and 2 are least affected by mud, as most of their routes are on tarmac or other hard surfaces. Walks 3 and 4 are particularly affected by wet conditions where they cross Fryent Country Park, but again this is a site best visited in spring and summer. However, Walk 4 also takes in the Brent Reservoir, whose surrounds can again be very muddy, but here winter is a good time to see the largest numbers of birds, while autumn or spring are best for spotting rare migrants on passage. Even in summer, though, the numbers of birds on the reservoir make it worth taking a pair of binoculars.

The importance of personal safety should be borne in mind. Substantial parts of some of the routes chosen can be lonely; to an extent that is why they are chosen, as it gives the chance to leave the noise of the urban environment behind for a while without having to travel into the country. This applies particularly on Walk 1 to St Mary's Churchyard, Brentfield Open Space, areas near the Canal Feeder, and in Tokyngton Recreation Ground; on Walk 2 along the Grand Union Canal and in the old allotments at One Tree Hill; on Walks 3 and 4 in Fryent Country Park, and at the Brent Reservoir on Walk 4.

It was enjoyable preparing these walks; it is hoped that they will similarly be enjoyed by both residents and visitors, who will then see what a variety of wildlife and history is to be found in the locality.

Look out too for other walks in Brent. The Capital RING, instigated by the London Walking Forum (see Chapter 5), passes through Welsh Harp Open Space, Fryent Country Park, Preston Park and Northwick Park within the Borough, on its way from Hendon to Harrow-on-the-Hill. Bob Gilbert's Green London Way follows a fairly similar course within Brent.

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## Appendix 1: Useful addresses

**Barn Hill Conservation Group**  
c/o Roe Green Walled Garden  
Roe Green Park  
Kingsbury  
London, NW9 9HA  
Telephone: 020 8206 0589 or  
020 8937 5619

**Black Environment Network**  
UK Office  
9 Llaniwen Uchaf, Llanberis  
Wales LL55 4LL  
Telephone: 01286 870 715

**Brent Archives and Local History**  
Cricklewood Library and  
Archive  
152 Olive Road  
Cricklewood  
London NW2 6UY  
Telephone: 020 8937 3540

**Brent Council  
Director of Cemetery &  
Mortuary Service**  
Clifford Road  
Alperton  
Middlesex HAO 1AF  
Telephone: 020 8902 2385

**Brent Council  
Director of Environmental  
Services**  
Brent House  
349-357 High Road  
Wembley  
Middlesex HA9 6BZ  
Telephone: 020 8937 5002 or  
020 8937 5302

**Brent Parks Service  
Community Park Officers**  
Barham Park Office  
660 Harrow Road  
Wembley  
Middlesex HAO 2HB  
Telephone: 020 8937 5619 or  
020 8452 3106

**British Herpetological Society**  
c/o Zoological Society of  
London  
Regent's Park  
London NW1 4RY

**British Trust for Conservation  
Volunteers**  
80 York Way  
London N1 9AG  
Telephone: 020 7278 4293

**British Trust for Ornithology**  
National Centre for Ornithology  
The Nunnery, Nunnery Place  
Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU  
Telephone: 01842 750050

**British Waterways**  
London Region  
The Toll House  
Delamere Terrace  
Little Venice  
London W2 6ND  
Telephone: 020 7286 6101

**Butterfly Conservation**  
PC Box 222  
Dedham  
Colchester  
Essex CO7 6EY

**Countryside Agency**  
South-East & London Region  
4th Floor  
71 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6ST  
Telephone: 020 7831 3510

**English Heritage**  
23 Savile Row  
London W1X 1AB  
Telephone: 020 7973 3000

**English Nature**  
Ormond House  
26-27 Boswell Street  
London WC1N 3JZ  
Telephone: 020 7831 6922

**Environment Agency**  
Team Leader  
Conservation  
Apollo Court  
2 Bishops Square Business  
Park  
St Albans Road West  
Hatfield  
Hertfordshire AL10 9EX  
Telephone: 01707 632300

**Friends of Fryent Country Park**  
c/o Roe Green Walled Garden  
Roe Green Park  
Kingsbury  
London NW9 9HA  
Telephone: 020 8206 0589 or  
020 8937 5619

**Friends of Roundwood Park**  
Roundwood Lodge Cafe  
Roundwood Park  
Harlesden Road  
Harlesden NW 10  
Telephone: 020 8838 1414

**Friends of the Earth**  
26-28 Underwood Street  
London NW1 7JQ  
Telephone: 020 7490 1555

**Gladstone Park Consultative  
Committee**  
c/o John Hoskins  
150 Anson Road  
London NW2 6BH

**Grange Museum**  
Neasden Roundabout  
Neasden Lane  
London NW10 1QB  
Telephone: 020 8452 8311

**Greater London Authority**  
Strategy Directorate  
Romney House  
43 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 3PY  
Telephone: 020 7983 4317

**Greenpeace**  
Canonbury Villas  
London N1  
Telephone: 020 7865 8100

**Kingsbury Walkers**  
c/o Roe Green Walled Garden  
Roe Green Park  
Kingsbury  
London NW9 9HA  
Telephone: 020 8907 2836 or  
020 8937 5619

**Learning Through Landscapes  
Trust**  
Third Floor  
Southside Offices  
The Law Courts  
Winchester S023 9DL  
Telephone: 01962 846258

**Local Agenda 21**  
Environmental Services (Policy  
and Performance)  
London Borough of Brent  
3rd Floor, Brent House  
349 High Road  
Wembley  
Middlesex HA9 6BZ

**London Amphibian &  
Reptile Trust**  
Ground Floor, 61 Weston Park  
London N8 9SY  
Telephone: 020 8341 1434

**London Bat Group**  
c/o 165 Monkleigh Road  
Morden  
Surrey SM4 4EQ

**London Mammal Group**  
67A Ridgeway Avenue  
East Barnet  
Hertfordshire EN4 8TL  
Telephone: 020 8440 6314

**London Natural History  
Society**  
c/o British Museum (Natural  
History)  
Cromwell Road  
South Kensington  
London SW7 5BD

**London Walking Forum**  
c/o Lee Valley Regional Park  
Authority  
Myddleton House  
Bulls Cross  
Enfield, Middlesex EN2 9HG

**London Wildlife Trust**  
4th Floor, Hading House  
47-51 Great Suffolk Street  
London SE1 OBS  
Telephone: 020 7261 0447  
e-mail: londonwt@cix.co.uk  
home page:  
[http://www.wildlifetrust.org.  
uk/london/](http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/london/)

**London Wildlife Trust – Brent  
Group**  
c/o Roe Green Walled Garden  
Roe Green Park  
Kingsbury  
London NW9 9HA  
Telephone: 020 8937 5619

**The Metropolitan Public  
Gardens Association**  
3 Mayfield Road  
Thornton Heath  
Croydon CR7 6DN  
Telephone: 020 8689 4197

**New Leaf**  
Elliott House  
Victoria Road,  
Park Royal,  
NW10 6NY  
Telephone: 020 8621 6321

**Royal Society for the  
Protection of Birds**  
The Lodge  
Sandy  
Bedfordshire SG19 2DL

**Thames 21**  
c/o Corporation of London  
Walbrook Wharf  
Upper Thames Street  
London EC4R 3TD  
Telephone: 020 7236 1281

**Welsh Harp Conservation  
Group**  
c/o Roy Beddard  
43 Kenerne Drive  
Barnet  
Herts EN5 2NW  
Telephone: 020 8447 1810

**Welsh Harp Environmental  
Education Centre**  
Birchen Grove  
Kingsbury  
London NW9 8RY  
Telephone: 020 8200 0087

**Wembley History Society**  
c/o Linda Theobald  
4 Stewart Close  
London NW9 8AJ  
Telephone: 020 8200 0211

**Willesden Local History  
Society**  
c/o Vera Thompson  
12 Kynaston Close  
Harrow Weald  
Middlesex HA3 6TQ  
Telephone: 020 8954 1312

**World Wildlife Fund (Harrow  
and Wembley Volunteers'  
Group)**  
c/o Mrs Beryl Gibbons  
16 Neeld Crescent  
Wembley  
Middlesex HA9 6LW  
Telephone: 020 8902 1309

## Appendix 2a: Plant names used in text

English names are given with their scientific equivalent. Scientific nomenclature follows Stace (1997).

### A

**Adder's-tongue** – *Ophioglossum vulgatum*  
**Alder** – *Alnus glutinosa*  
**Almond willow** – *Salix triandra*  
**Amphibious bistort** – *Persicaria amphibia*  
**Apple** – *Malus domestica*  
**Apricot** – *Prunus armenaica*  
**Ash** – *Fraxinus excelsior*  
**Aspen** – *Populus tremula*  
**Autumn hawkbit** – *Leontodon autumnalis*

### B

**Bee orchid** – *Ophrys apifera*  
**Beech** – *Fagus sylvatica*  
**Bellflower** – *Campanula* sp.  
**Bindweeds** – *Calystegia* spp.  
**Birch** – *Betula* sp.  
**Bittersweet** – *Solanum dulcamara*  
**Black currant** – *Ribes nigrum*  
**Black horehound** – *Ballota nigra*  
**Black medick** – *Medicago lupulina*  
**Blackthorn** – *Prunus spinosa*  
**Bluebell** – *Hyacinthoides* sp.  
**Blue water-speedwell** – *Veronica anagallis-aguatica*  
**Bogbean** – *Menyanthes trifoliata*  
**Bracken** – *Pteridium aquilinum*  
**Bramble** – *Rubus fruticosus* agg.  
**Branched bur-reed** – *Sparganium erectum*  
**Bristly oxtongue** – *Pieris echioides*  
**Broad-leaved dock** – *Rumex obtusifolius*  
**Broad-leaved everlasting-pea** – *Lathyrus latifolius*  
**Broad-leaved helleborine** – *Epipactis helleborine*  
**Brooklime** – *Veronica beccabunga*  
**Buddleia** – *Buddleja davidii*  
**Bugle** – *Auga reptans*  
**Burdock** – *Arctium* sp.  
**Burnet-saxifrage** – *Pimpinella saxifraga*  
**Bush vetch** – *Vicia sepium*

### C

**Canadian goldenrod** – *Solidago canadensis*  
**Cat's-ear** – *Hypochaeris radicata*  
**Cedar** – *Cedrus* sp.  
**Celery-leaved buttercup** – *Ranunculus sceleratus*  
**Cherry** – *Prunus* sp.  
**Cherry laurel** – *Prunus laurocerasus*  
**Cleavers** – *Galium aparine*  
**Cock's-foot** – *Dactylis glomerata*  
**Colt's-foot** – *Tussilago farfara*  
**Common bent** – *Agrostis capillaris*  
**Common bird's-foot-trefoil** – *Lotus corniculatus*  
**Common club-rush** – *Schoenoplectus lacustris*  
**Common couch** – *Elytrigia repens*  
**Common dog-violet** – *Viola riviniana*  
**Common duckweed** – *Lemna minor*  
**Common field-speedwell** – *Veronica persica*  
**Common fleabane** – *Pulicaria dysenterica*  
**Common knapweed** – *Centaurea nigra*  
**Common lime** – *Tilia x vulgaris*  
**Common mallow** – *Malva sylvestris*  
**Common mouse-ear** – *Cerastium fontanum*  
**Common ragwort** – *Senecio jacobaea*  
**Common reed** – *Phragmites australis*  
**Common sorrel** – *Rumex acetosa*  
**Common spotted-orchid** – *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*  
**Common toadflax** – *Linarla vulgaris*  
**Common vetch** – *Vicia sativa*  
**Copper beech** – *Fagus sylvatica* var. *purpurea*

**Cow parsley** – *Anthriscus sylvestris*  
**Crack-willow** – *Salix fragilis*  
**Creeping bent** – *Agrostis stolonifera*  
**Creeping buttercup** – *Ranunculus repens*  
**Creeping cinquefoil** – *Potentilla reptans*  
**Creeping thistle** – *Cirsium arvense*  
**Creeping-Jenny** – *Lysimachia nummularia*  
**Crested dog's-tail** – *Cynosurus cristatus*  
**Cuckooflower** – *Cardamine pratensis*  
**Curled pondweed** – *Potamogeton crispus*  
**Cut-leaved crane's-bill** – *Geranium dissectum*  
**Cyperus sedge** – *Carex pseudocyperus*

### D

**Daffodil** – *Narcissus* sp.  
**Daisy** – *Bellis perennis*  
**Damson** – *Prunus domestica* ssp. *insititia*  
**Dandelion** – *Taraxacum* sp.  
**Dawn redwood** – *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*  
**Devil's-bit scabious** – *Succisa pratensis*  
**Dog-rose** – *Rosa canina*  
**Dogwood** – *Cornus sanguinea*  
**Dove's-foot crane's-bill** – *Geranium molle*  
**Duckweeds** – *Lemna* spp.

### E

**Elder** – *Sambucus nigra*  
**Elm** – *Ulmus* sp.  
**English elm** – *Ulmus procera*  
**Evening-primrose** – *Oenothera* sp.

### F

**False fox-sedge** – *Carex otrubae*  
**False oat-grass** – *Arrhenatherum elatius*  
**False-acacia** – *Robinia pseudoacacia*  
**Fastigiate hornbeam** – *Carpinus betulus* “Fastigiata”  
**Fat duckweed** – *Lemna gibba*  
**Fennel** – *Foeniculum vulgare*  
**Feverfew** – *Tanacetum parthenium*  
**Field bindweed** – *Convolvulus arvensis*  
**Field horsetail** – *Equisetum arvense*  
**Field maple** – *Acer campestre*  
**Field-rose** – *Rosa arvensis*  
**Fig** – *Ficus carica*  
**Figwort** – *Scrophularia* sp.  
**Firethorn** – *Pyracantha* sp.  
**Floating sweet-grass** – *Glyceria fluitans*  
**Flowering-rush** – *Butomus umbellatus*  
**Fodder burnet** – *Sanguisorba minor muricata*  
**Forget-me-not** – *Myosotis* sp.  
**Fringed water-lily** – *Nymphoides peltata*

### G

**Galingale** – *Cyperus longus*  
**Garden privet** – *Ligustrum ovalifolium*  
**Garlic mustard** – *Alliaria petiolata*  
**Germander speedwell** – *Veronica chamaedrys*  
**Giant hogweed** – *Heraclium mantegazzianum*  
**Goat's-beard** – *Tragopogon pratensis*  
**Goat's-rue** – *Galega officinalis*  
**Golden dock** – *Rumex maritimus*  
**Goldilocks buttercup** – *Ranunculus auricomus*  
**Gooseberry** – *Ribes uva-crispa*  
**Great burnet** – *Sanguisorba officinalis*  
**Great mullein** – *Verbascum thapsus*  
**Great reedmace** – *Typha latifolia*  
**Great willowherb** – *Epilobium hirsutum*  
**Great yellow-cress** – *Rorippa amphibia*  
**Greater bird's-foot-trefoil** – *Lotus pedunculatus*  
**Greater knapweed** – *Centaurea scabiosa*  
**Greater spearwort** – *Ranunculus lingua*

**Greater stitchwort** – *Stellaria holostea*  
**Green alkanet** – *Pentaglottis sempervirens*  
**Grey alder** – *Alnus incana*  
**Grey sedge** – *Carex divulsa*  
**Grey willow** – *Salix cinerea*  
**Ground-elder** – *Aegopodium podagraria*  
**Guelder-rose** – *Viburnum opulus*  
**Gypsywort** – *Lycopus europaeus*

### H

**Hairy tare** – *Vicia hirsuta*  
**Hard rush** – *Juncus inflexus*  
**Hawkweed oxtongue** – *Pieris hieracioides*  
**Hawthorn** – *Crataegus monogyna*  
**Hazel** – *Corylus avellana*  
**Heath groundsel** – *Senecio sylvaticus*  
**Hedge bedstraw** – *Galium mollugo*  
**Hedge woundwort** – *Stachys sylvatica*  
**Hemlock** – *Conium maculatum*  
**Hemlock water-dropwort** – *Oenanthe crocata*  
**Herb-Robert** – *Geranium robertianum*  
**Hoary cress** – *Lepidium draba*  
**Hoary mustard** – *Hirschfeldia incana*  
**Hoary ragwort** – *Senecio erucifolius*  
**Holly** – *Ilex aquifolium*  
**Holm oak** – *Quercus ilex*  
**Hop trefoil** – *Trifolium campestre*  
**Hornbeam** – *Carpinus betulus*  
**Horse-chestnut** – *Aesculus hippocastanum*  
**Horse-radish** – *Armoracia rusticana*  
**Hybrid black-poplar** – *Populus x canadensis*

### I

**Indian balsam** – *Impatiens glandulifera*  
**Italian alder** – *Alnus cordata*  
**Ivy** – *Hedera helix*

### J

**Japanese knotweed** – *Fallopia japonica*  
**Japanese quince** – *Chaenomeles speciosa*  
**Jointed rush** – *Juncus articulatus*

### K

**Kentish cobnut** – *Corylus* “Kentish Cob”

### L

**Lady's bedstraw** – *Galium verum*  
**Large bindweed** – *Calystegia silvatica*  
**Lesser celandine** – *Ranunculus ficaria*  
**Lesser pondweed** – *Potamogeton pusillus*  
**Lesser reedmace** – *Typha angustifolia*  
**Lesser stitchwort** – *Stellaria graminea*  
**Lesser trefoil** – *Trifolium dubium*  
**Lilac** – *Syringa vulgaris*  
**Lime** – *Tilia* sp.  
**Lombardy poplar** – *Populus nigra* ssp. *italica*  
**London plane** – *Platanus x hispanica*  
**Lords-and-Ladies** – *Arum maculatum*

### M

**Marsh woundwort** – *Stachys palustris*  
**Meadow barley** – *Hordeum secalinum*  
**Meadow brome** – *Bromus commutatus*  
**Meadow buttercup** – *Ranunculus acris*  
**Meadow foxtail** – *Alopecurus pratensis*  
**Meadow vetchling** – *Lathyrus pratensis*  
**Meadowsweet** – *Filipendula ulmaria*  
**Michaelmas daisy** – *Aster* spp.  
**Mouse-ear hawkweed** – *Pilosella officinarum*  
**Mugwort** – *Artemisia vulgaris*  
**Mulberry** – *Morus* sp.  
**Musk thistle** – *Carduus nutans*  
**Musk-mallow** – *Malva moschata*

### N

**Narrow-leaved bitter-cress** – *Cardamine impatiens*  
**Narrowleaf ash** – *Fraxinus angustifolia*  
**Nettle** – *Urtica* sp.  
**Nipplewort** – *Lapsana communis*  
**Norway maple** – *Acer platanoides*  
**Nuttall's waterweed** – *Elodea nuttallii*

### O

**Oak** – *Quercus* sp.  
**Oregon-grape** – *Mahonia aquifolium*  
**Osier** – *Salix viminalis*  
**Oxeye daisy** – *Leucanthemum vulgare*  
**Oxford ragwort** – *Senecio squalidus*  
**Oxtongue** – *Pieris* sp.

### P

**Pear** – *Pyrus communis*  
**Pedunculate oak** – *Quercus robur*  
**Pendulous sedge** – *Carex pendula*  
**Pepper-saxifrage** – *Silaum silaus*  
**Perennial sow-thistle** – *Sonchus arvensis*  
**Perennial wall-rocket** – *Diplotaxis tenuifolia*  
**Perforate St John's-wort** – *Hypericum perforatum*  
**Pignut** – *Conopodium majus*  
**Pinappleweed** – *Matricaria discoidea*  
**Pine** – *Pinus* sp.  
**Plane** – *Platanus* sp.  
**Poppy** – *Papaver* sp.  
**Portugal laurel** – *Prunes lusitanica*  
**Prickly lettuce** – *Lactuca serriola*  
**Prickly sedge** – *Carex muricata*  
**Prickly sow-thistle** – *Sonchus asper*  
**Primrose** – *Primula vulgaris*  
**Purple toadflax** – *Linaria purpurea*  
**Purple-loosestrife** – *Lythrum salicaria*  
**Pyramidal orchid** – *Anacamptis pyramidalis*

### R

**Ragwort** – *Senecio* sp.  
**Raspberry** – *Rubus idaeus*  
**Rat's-tail fescue** – *Vulpia myuros*  
**Red campion** – *Silene dioica*  
**Red currant** – *Ribes rubrum*  
**Red fescue** – *Festuca rubra*  
**Red valerian** – *Centranthus ruber*  
**Redshank** – *Persicaria maculosa*  
**Reed canary-grass** – *Phalaris arundinacea*  
**Reed sweet-grass** – *Glyceria maxima*  
**Reflexed stonecrop** – *Sedum rupestre*

**Ribwort plantain** – *Plantago lanceolata*  
**Rigid hornwort** – *Ceratophyllum demersum*  
**Rosebay willowherb** – *Chamerion angustifollum*  
**Rough hawkbit** – *Leontodon hispidus*  
**Rowan** – *Sorbus aucuparia*  
**Russian comfrey** – *Symphytum x uplandicum*  
**Russian-vine** – *Fallopia baldschuanica*  
**Rye-grass** – *Lolium* sp.

### S

**Salsify** – *Tragopogon porrifolius*  
**Scentless mayweed** – *Tripleurospermum inodorum*  
**Scots pine** – *Pinus sylvestris*  
**Sea club-rush** – *Bolboschoenus maritimus*  
**Selfheal** – *Prunella vulgaris*  
**Sheep's sorrel** – *Rumex acetosella*  
**Sheep's-fescue** – *Festuca ovina*  
**Silver birch** – *Betula pendula*  
**Silverweed** – *Potentilla anserina*  
**Single-leaved ash** – *Fraxinus excelsior* var. *diversifolia*  
**Skullcap** – *Scutellaria galericulata*  
**Slender trefoil** – *Trifolium micranthum*  
**Small pondweed** – *Potamogeton berchtoldii*  
**Small-leaved lime** – *Tilia cordata*  
**Smooth hawk's-beard** – *Crepis capillaris*  
**Smooth tare** – *Vicia tetrasperma*  
**Sneezewort** – *Achillea ptarmica*  
**Soft-rush** – *Juncus effusus*  
**Southern marsh-orchid** – *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*  
**Spanish broom** – *Spartium junceum*  
**Spear thistle** – *Cirsium vulgare*  
**Spiked sedge** – *Carex spicata*  
**Spindle** – *Euonymus europaeus*  
**Square-stalked St John's-wort** – *Hypericum tetrapterum*  
**Squirreltail fescue** – *Vulpia bromoides*  
**Stone parsley** – *Sison amomum*  
**Sugar maple** – *Acer saccharum*  
**Sun spurge** – *Euphorbia helioscopia*  
**Sweet chestnut** – *Castanea sativa*  
**Sweet vernal-grass** – *Anthoxanthum odoratum*  
**Sweet-flag** – *Acorus calamus*  
**Sweet-grass** – *Glyceria* sp.  
**Sycamore** – *Acer pseudoplatanus*

### T

**Tansy** – *Tanacetum vulgare*  
**Timothy** – *Phleum pratense*  
**Traveller's-joy** – *Clematis vitalba*  
**Trifid bur-marigold** – *Bidens tripartita*  
**Tufted hair-grass** – *Deschampsia cespitosa*  
**Tufted vetch** – *Vicia cracca*  
**Turkey oak** – *Quercus cerris*  
**Tutsan** – *Hypericum androsaemum*

### V

**Velvet bent** – *Agrostis canina*

### W

**Wall barley** – *Hordeum murinum*  
**Walnut** – *Juglans regia*  
**Water dock** – *Rumex hydrolapathum*  
**Water horsetail** – *Equisetum fluviatile*  
**Water mint** – *Mentha aquatica*  
**Water-cress** – *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*  
**Water-pepper** – *Persicaria hydropiper*  
**Water-plantain** – *Alisma plantago-aquatica*  
**Water-purslane** – *Lythrum portula*  
**Wayfaring-tree** – *Viburnum lantana*  
**Weeping willow** – *Salix x sepulcralis*  
**Weld** – *Reseda luteola*  
**White bryony** – *Bryonia dioica*  
**White campion** – *Silene latifolia*  
**White clover** – *Trifolium repens*  
**White melilot** – *Melilotus alba*  
**White poplar** – *Populus alba*  
**White willow** – *Salix alba*  
**Wild angelica** – *Angelica sylvestris*  
**Wild carrot** – *Caucus carota*  
**Wild cherry** – *Prunus avium*  
**Wild mignonette** – *Reseda lutea*  
**Wild onion** – *Allium vineale*  
**Wild parsnip** – *Pastinaca sativa*  
**Wild pear** – *Pyrus pyraster*  
**Wild privet** – *Ligustrum vulgare*  
**Wild service-tree** – *Sorbus torminalis*  
**Wild teasel** – *Dipsacus fullonum*  
**Willow** – *Salix* sp.  
**Wood anemone** – *Anemone nemorosa*  
**Wood avens** – *Geum urbanum*

### Y

**Yarrow** – *Achillea millefolium*  
**Yellow-cress** – *Rorippa* sp.  
**Yellow iris** – *Iris pseudacorus*  
**Yew** – *Taxus baccata*  
**Yorkshire-fog** – *Holcus lanatus*

## Appendix 2b: Alternative English names for plants

Many plants are known by a variety of names in different books. Names used in this handbook largely follow those recommended by the Botanical Society of the British Isles and used in Stace's (1997) New Flora of the British Isles. For readers familiar with other texts, some of the commoner alternatives are given below. Many of these have been used in some previous Ecology Handbooks, which took English names from Clapham, Tutin and Warburg's (1981) Excursion Flora of the British Isles.

### B

**Bittersweet** – Woody nightshade  
**Blackthorn** – Sloe  
**Bramble** – Blackberry  
**Buddleia** – Butterfly-bush

### C

**Celery-leaved buttercup** – Celery-leaved crowfoot  
**Cleavers** – Goosegrass  
**Common club-rush** – Bulrush  
**Common knapweed** – Hardheads, black knapweed  
**Common toadflax** – Yellow toadflax  
**Creeping bent** – Fiorin  
**Cuckooflower** – Lady's smock

### R

**Redshank** – Persicaria, red-leg  
**Reed canary-grass** – Reed-grass  
**Rowan** – Mountain ash  
**Russian-vine** – Mile-a-minute

### F

**Fat duckweed** – Gibbous duckweed

### G

**Galingale** – Sweet galingale  
**Garlic mustard** – Hedge garlic, Jack-by-the-hedge  
**Great mullein** – Aaron's rod  
**Great reed-mace** – Bulrush, cat-tail  
**Great willowherb** – Great hairy willowherb  
**Greater bird's-foot-trefoil** – Large bird's-foot-trefoil, marsh bird's-foot-trefoil  
**Grey willow** – Common willow

### H

**Heath groundsel** – Wood groundsel  
**Hoary cress** – Hoary pepperwort  
**Holm oak** – Evergreen oak

### I

**Indian balsam** – Himalayan balsam, policeman's-helmet

### L

**Lords-and-Ladies** – Cuckoo-pint, wild arum

### P

**Pedunculate oak** – English oak  
**Perforate St John's-wort** – Common St John's wort

### T

**Timothy** – Cat's-tail, greater cat's-tail  
**Traveller's-joy** – Old man's beard, wild clematis

### W

**Water dock** – Great water dock  
**Weld** – Dyer's rocket  
**Wild cherry** – Gean  
**Wild onion** – Crow garlic  
**Wood avens** – Herb Bennet

### Y

**Yellow iris** – Yellow flag

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To provide a London-wide reference, Borough and Local site numbers are given the prefix Br. for Brent

