



Common Oak

Environmental Group, of Brambles, Bracken and Birch/Willow re-growth. This clearance has encouraged the growth of Sphagnum Moss and other typical bog plants.

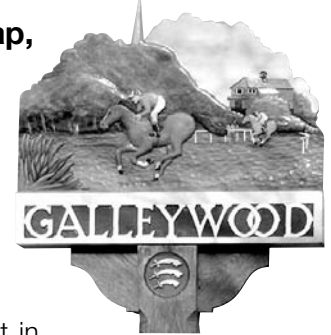
Return to The Horse and Groom approach track and turn right, cross the Margaretting Road and proceed down **Bridleway 79** past Stables Nursery. Look for the Plum (Yellow Gage) trees along the fence line just after the entrance to the old racecourse buildings. In late July they are prolific with small, round yellow gages. Turn right at the yellow gage tree and walk down into **MW2** to find a large Sweet Chestnut. It is rare to find a genuinely wild Sweet Chestnut because they do not germinate freely. There are other smaller wild Sweet Chestnuts near to **Bridleway 80** which is adjacent to the probable source trees in the rear garden of 'Farthings'. Along **BR80** you will also find some Hornbeam. Return to the main Common up **Bridleway 80** turning left onto **Bridleway 79** at 'Farthings' and then after 50 metres turn right onto **FP47**. Follow the fence line round the Council depot to the old racecourse finishing post. Along this fence line you will see Small Leaved Lime, Yellow Gages and Cherry trees. Cross the car park approach track and follow the track along the top of the Napoleonic defences. On the western end of the bastion you will see a fine Walnut tree. The green rounded fruit which you will see in late July/early August contains the familiar crinkled nut with its edible kernel.

*Acknowledgements: Readers Digest: 'Trees and Shrubs of Britain.'
Walk devised by Malcolm Stuart. Layout by Matthew Johnson.
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The Common Tree Trail

4 km – 1½ hours. You will be walking through bracken, gorse and brambles in places so will need suitable clothing.

Mapping: Galleywood Parish Footpaths Map, OS Explorer™ 183, OS Landranger™ 167. Chelmsford Borough Council leaflet on The Common 10 Year Management Plan.



The Common Tree Trail starts at the main car park off the Margaretting Road (**TL 703025**). Trees on The Common are predominantly Oak and Birch. Other varieties specific to particular areas, or more prevalent in them, are mentioned below. The sketch map showing the wooded areas is taken from CBC's leaflet on the first ten-year management plan 1995 to 2005. **W1** etc. is used to designate wooded areas, **MW1** etc. is used for mature woodland, and there are two shelter belts **SB1** and **SB2**. Footpaths and bridleways are numbered as on the Galleywood Footpath Map.

Restoring Heathland

The RSPB book 'Lowland Heathland' says 'There is a cultural argument for attempting, when restoring heathland, to re-establish the character of the landscape, reflecting its historic tree cover, rather than aiming for open heathland, whatever the history.'

Cross the racecourse finishing straight on **FP47** to join **Bridleway 79** and walk south past **SP1** down through **W8** to the Wood Farm approach road looking for the coppiced Oaks. Wood Farm itself is shown on the Chapman and André map of 1777 as Gally Wood. There is a persistent local rumour that oak from this wood was taken to build a vessel for the Royal Navy around the time of the Napoleonic Wars.

From the Wood Farm approach road take a look south down the lower Common to see the remains of an attempt by the Rural District Council in the 1950's to plant an avenue of trees shading the footpath from Galleywood to Bakers Lane. On the east side of the Stock Road the small copse **W7** alongside the Glebe Farm Cottages approach road contains Horse Chestnut and Elm as well as the usual selection of trees.



Woodland Succession

Oliver Rackman in his book 'Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape' describes the succession of woodland as 'the natural tendency of almost any land in Britain is to turn into secondary woodland. Let a field be abandoned – as has happened to many fields down the centuries – and in ten years it will be overgrown with scrub (which is young woodland) and difficult to reclaim; in thirty years it will have tumbled down to woodland'

Young woodland does not look great but it is, as Rackman describes, a natural progression, if left alone, to mature woodland. The scrub of young woodland protects those trees which will eventually become the mature woodland and is a valuable resource for biodiversity.

Return up the racecourse finishing straight observing the apple trees on the edge of **W6**. Take the track through **W6** passing east round Brick Kiln Pond to where the racecourse ends at the point where it used to cross the Stock Road on race days. Look out for a dead Birch tree to the south-west of the pond and see if you can spot the woodpecker in residence.

In **W6** you will be able to identify the boggy areas by the stands of Goat Willow. Other varieties of tree in this area are Aspen, Rowan, Holly and Elder.

Walk up the racecourse to join **FP47** at the end of the access road leading from the Margaretting Road to the cottages. On the way you will pass one of the very few Ash trees on The Common and a magnificent Sycamore, which shows signs of having been coppiced some fifty years ago, and has now grown into a very healthy mature tree. Coppiced trees often live longer than trees with a single trunk.

Turn left along **FP47** for 150 metres then turn right to join **FP49** and walk towards the Margaretting Road passing the Napoleonic remains, the southern intermediate bastion which defended Galleywood Fort. **FP49** passes through **W3** which contains Laurel, Rowan and Holly as well as the usual Oak and Birch. The rough area of land between **W3** and the Margaretting Road was cleared of trees in 2004 to encourage the regeneration of lowland heath. Because the trees in this area were not uprooted they are now starting to grow back.

Cross the Margaretting Road and continue north on **FP49** to St. Michael's Church

where there are two Scots Pine at the Church gate. From the Church take the footpath west through **W1** towards the old tip site, now a level grassed area on the north side of the Margaretting Road, and walk anti-clockwise round the edge. You will see many fine Oaks and plenty of fruit including Blackberries, Apples, Plums and Elderberries.

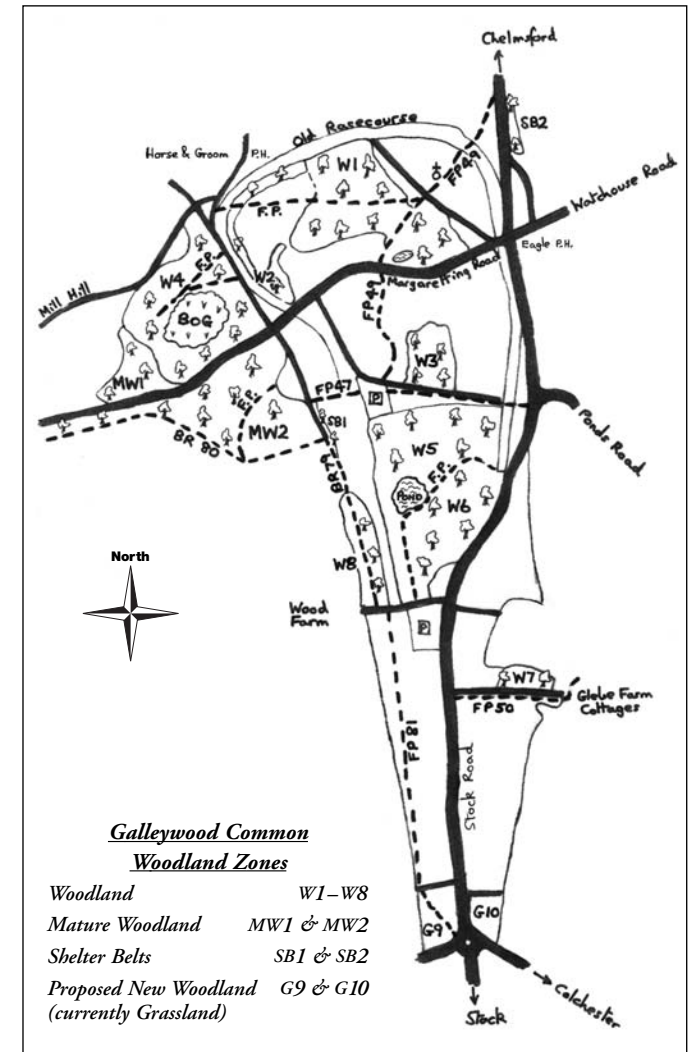
In a little copse on its own opposite the entrance to the car park is a multi-stemmed Prunus which has a modest crop of yellow plums in late July/early August. The north side of the old tip site is being colonised by Aspen but this is being controlled by coppicing.

From the old tip site walk north towards the Horse and Groom public house. **W2** was partially cleared of trees in 2005 to give a larger area for the regeneration of heather.

The Oak trees round the old racecourse have been retained to provide a screen between The Common and The Horse and Groom car park.

Walk west over the lowland heath area taking care as there are many tripping hazards with stumps of cleared trees and gorse. Cross The Horse and Groom approach track down into the bog area of

W4. This bog area is cleared twice a year, by The Great Baddow and Galleywood



ASH There are few Ash trees on The Common as it prefers a rich alkaline soil.

ASPEN Country folk used to believe that the constant trembling of its leaves in the slightest breeze indicated some secret grief or guilt on the part of the Aspen 'some said the guilt was that of having provided the wood used for The Cross on which Christ was crucified'. Certainly 'to tremble like an Aspen' became a common expression, though what makes the leaves quiver in the wind is now recognised to be the extreme flattening of the long stalk on which they are borne.

Constantly throwing up suckers to form new trees, the Aspen pioneers the colonisation of new ground but nowhere is it an abundant species.

BIRCH, together with Willow, Aspen, Hazel and Rowan, are 'pioneer' species that quickly colonise bare ground. Birch takes root readily in poor soils, and its almost weightless seeds are blown far. Its thin leaves soon rot, enriching the soil for more demanding species such as Oak and Beech; their seedlings grow into tall trees that deprive the protecting birch of light, eventually killing it.

GOAT WILLOW or Great Sallow comes into the public eye once a year when its golden, male catkins are used to decorate churches on Palm Sunday. The female catkins are less spectacular but their smooth silky surface has gained the tree its popular name of 'pussy willow.'

Goat Willow flowers early and provides the bees with both pollen and nectar when few flowers are out. The tree is pollinated by wind and reproduces easily from seed colonising waste ground, particularly in damp spaces.

HAWTHORN Sometimes called 'May' because it flowers around May Day, or 'Quickthorn' since it is traditionally used as a quick sprouting hedge for field boundaries. In country areas, destruction of a Hawthorn is believed to invite peril, and to bring the blossom indoors is to court disaster.

HOLLY Many a Holly Tree was spared the woodman's axe in days gone by because of a superstition that it was unlucky to cut down a Holly Tree. The superstition probably arose because of the trees evergreen leaves and its long lasting berries, leading people to associate the tree with eternity and the power to ward off evil and destruction. In addition the Holly has long been a symbol of Christmas. Another tradition associated with the Holly Tree is that a good crop of berries is a warning of a hard winter on the way; in fact this is merely a sign of a fine summer just passed.

HORNBEAM The name refers to the trees tough wood. In old English 'Horn' meant hard and 'beam' was a tree. The wood is ideal for butchers' blocks, mallets, balls and skittles and in earlier days was used to fashion wagon spokes and cog-wheels.



Horse Chestnut Leaf

HORSE CHESTNUT The tree was introduced to Britain from the Balkans in the late 16th century; but it was not until some two hundred years later that chestnuts were used to play conkers. Before that the game was played with cobnuts or snail shells.

The wood is pale cream or brown and has been used for toys and, being absorbent, for making trays in which to store fruit. The tree grows rapidly on most soils, but requires plenty of space.

LIMES The Limes on The Common are the small-leaved variety. Limes have been planted to give shade throughout man's history. For humbler folk the Lime is a Holy tree, ranged along village streets to protect the peasants from evil.

Lime wood, being soft and even grained is ideal for carving and turning. Because it does not warp, lime wood is still used for the sounding boards and keys of pianos and organs.

OAK Few kinds of woodland are as rich in life as an Oak wood. This is partly due to the fact that it is 'climax vegetation' – the culmination of a succession of plant communities growing and competing on the same piece of ground. Also an Oak wood's open canopy allows a lot of light to reach the forest floor; and the soft leaves of the Oak rot quickly when they fall, forming a rich, mild leaf mould. These conditions support an abundance of other tree and shrub species, particularly Ash, Hazel and Holly, and encourage a wide variety of plants to grow. These in turn provide food and cover for many animals, insects and birds.



Common Oak

Green woodpeckers hunt insects and beetle larvae in the bark of Oak trees. The galls or growths called Oak Apples and the greenish-red spangled galls on Oak leaves are caused by the grubs of gall-wasps.

Plants such as Primroses, Violets, Ferns and Bramble thrive due to the rich soil and plentiful light.

ROWAN is beautiful in the Autumn, its ripe red berries attracting the birds. Sometimes called Mountain Ash but not related to the Ash. The Rowan was planted outside houses and in churchyards to ward off witches. Its strong flexible wood was used for making tool handles and also longbows as an alternative to Yew.



Scots Pine at St. Michael's Church

SCOTS PINE is the only Pine native to Britain. James Parry in the National Trust book 'Heathland' says that the twisted Scots Pines are good examples of character trees which can enhance the heathland landscape and also merit consideration as worthwhile components in the wider heathland context. A lone Scots Pine on heathland is immortalised by A.A. Milne in the story 'Tiggers Don't Climb Trees'.



Sweet Chestnut

SWEET CHESTNUT was probably introduced to Britain by the Romans who dried the chestnuts slowly over an open fire and then ground and mixed them with milk to make a form of porridge called Polenta. British summers are too cool for the chestnuts to ripen to full size.

SYCAMORE The Sycamore is Europe's largest Maple, growing to 35 metres, and is sometimes known as the Great Plane or Great Maple. It was often planted around farms to provide shade and keep the dairy cool.



Sycamore

Sycamore wood is creamy white, easy to work and does not warp; these qualities make it popular for furniture and decoratively grained pieces are used for veneers and for musical instruments.

WALNUT A native of Asia Minor, the Walnut was imported to Rome from Greece in about 100BC. The Romans carried the fruit with them when they conquered Britain as a prized fruit and as a source of cooking oil. However the fruit that spawned this tree most likely came from the old tip site opposite the car park.

The resemblance of the peeled Walnut to the human brain led to the medieval belief that it could cure mental disorders.



Walnut Leaf