



Oakfield Glen and Bashford, Carrickfergus.

Leader Peter Lyons, Woodland Trust

23rd May 2017

Up the airy mountain,
Down the rushy glen,
We daren't go a-hunting
For fear of little men;
William Allingham

Oakfield Glen was the place to see fairies, a good old fashioned magical woodland with a stream running through it.

Oakfield was once a country gentleman's residence, built in the early 1800s and decorated with fine gardens and exotic plantings.

It is listed in the *Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland* (Vol 1) 1844-45 as one of the principal residences of Carrickfergus. There was a mill race here, 1700-1800, and it powered a cotton mill.

While there are no traces of the house itself, the site is now a school, some features, including some of the Victorian bridges, and reminders of the garden plantings remain.

Plants such as **Apples** (*Malus domestica* sp.), **Irish Yew** (*Taxus baccata* 'fastigiata'), **Red Hazel** (*Corylus* sp.), **Periwinkle** (*Vinca major*) and **Roses** (*Rosa* sp.) are probably garden remnants. To the garden, from Europe and Asia, had come **Spanish Chestnut** (*Castanea sativa*) and the dreaded but decorative **Japanese Knotweed** (*Fallopia japonica*).

The area around the Black Sea is home to that popular Victorian plant **Cherry Laurel** (*Prunus laurocerasus*) and possibly the **Cherry** (*Prunus* sp.).

North America provided **False Salmonberry** (*Rubus spectabilis*), **Pick-a-Back Plant** (*Tolmiea menziesii*), **Snowberry** (*Symphoricarpos albus*), the majestic **Monterey Cypress** (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) and a large **Redwood** (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*).

About 10-15 years ago the **Woodland Trust** began the planting of native saplings as well as the giants of the wood - **Beech** (*Fagus sylvatica*), **Ash** (**Fraxinus excelsior**), **Oak** (*Quercus* sp.) and **Elm** (*Ulmus* sp.) good mixed woods need smaller trees, **Whitebeam** (*Sorbus aria*), **Alder** (*Alnus glutinosa*), **Hazel** (*Corylus avellana*), **Blackthorn** (*Prunus spinosa*), **Silver Birch** (*Betula pendula*) and **Downy birch** (*Betula pubescens*).



Chaffinch, adult and newly fledged



Not all saplings enjoy a long and happy life. In a clump of **Rowan** (*Sorbus aucuparia*), some appeared to have been ring barked and were dead. Possibly hungry rabbits.

Personally, I prefer the evening birdsong, one does not have to get up at such an unearthly hour to enjoy it. Birdsong included **Willow Warbler** (*Phylloscopus trochilus*), **Blackcap** (*Sylvia atricapilla*), **Chiffchaff** (*Phylloscopus collybita*), **Woodpigeon** (*Columba palumbus*), **Robin** (*Erithacus rubecula*), **Chaffinch** (*Phylloscopus collybita*), **Great Tit** (*Parus major*) and **Song thrush** (*Turdus philomelos*).

Also seen were **Jays** (*Garrulus glandarius*) and **Hooded Crows** (*Corvus cornix*). The variety an excellent example of a diverse habitat.

Then the wonderful sound a child (and the occasional adult) loves to hear, the chimes of an Ice Cream Van!

The Glen has open spaces as well as woodland and this was reflected in the species recorded.

(Cont'd)



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Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*)

Orchids with spotted leaves, not yet in flower, but potentially *Dactylorhiza* sp., and **Yellow Rattle** (*Rhinanthus minor*) were found in a meadow, also recorded were **Speedwell** (*Veronica officinalis*), **Bush Vetch** (*Vicia sepium*), **Hogweed** (*Heracleum sphondylium*), **Foxtail** (*Alopecurus pratensis*) and **Hairy Willowherb** (*Epilobium hirsutum*) and the more typical woodland plants of **Herb Bennett** (*Geum urbanum*), **Wood Anemone** (*Anemone nemorosa*) and **Primrose** (*Primula vulgaris*).

Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*) and **Hairy Sedge** (*Carex hirta*) like dampness but **Cocksfoot** (*Dactylis glomerata*) and **Annual meadow grass** (*Poa annua*) will grow anywhere.

Thick Ivy stems climbing around trees made the perfect place to see trolls, gnomes and goblins from the Edvard Grieg “Hall of the Mountain King”!

And the climber **Old Man’s Beard** (*Clematis vitalba*) was hanging down in Tarzan-like ropes.

And what of the “little men of Green jacket, red cap, And white owl’s feather!”? Keep an eye open for ten special new inhabitants – the mischievous fairy-like creatures are actually steel sculptures and are hiding in treetops throughout the woodland. The mystical Púca, who lurk in the treetops, are said to be the most mischievous of all the fairies. These unique sculptures, were designed by *Alan Cargo* and *Eleanor Wheeler*.

Somewhere in Oakfield Glen is a tree planted, by family and friends, in memory of *John Wilde*, for many years a doyen of the Club.

Bashfordsland Wood is owned by the local Council and has received funding from a **BIFFA** award. This award is a multi-million pound fund which awards grants to community and environmental projects across the UK. The fund’s money comes from landfill tax credits donated by Biffa Group Limited. This money is being used to remove invasive species such as laurel and rhododendron. There have been thousands of native trees planted, over 20,000 in total. There are wildlife ponds with a various water-weeds and tadpoles well advanced. The damp areas are a perfect home for a beautiful stand of **Flag Iris** (*Iris pseudacorus*). **Burdock** (*Arctium minus*) and **Knapweed** (*Centaurea nigra*) were added to the list.

New strategically-placed steel sculptures in the shape of leaves were created by artist *Kevin Killen*, with input from *Oakfield Primary School*.

Best memories of the night?

Light through beech leaves, the pungent smell of **Wild garlic** (*Allium ursinum*) was overlaid by the muskier smells of **Queen Anne’s Lace** (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), **Nettle** (*Urtica dioica*) and **Hawthorn** (*Crataegus monogyna*), fields yellow with **Buttercups** (*Ranunculus acris*) and an extremely vocal **Blackbird** (*Turdus merula*). Noticeable was the lack of litter and graffiti in a place obviously used and enjoyed by many people thanks to the hard work of Peter Lyons and his fellow volunteers of the Woodland Trust.

A final memento, a pretty badge decorated with woodland symbols. This is the Logo of the **Charter for Trees, Woods and People**, a project organised by over 70 organisations to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the 1217 *Charter of the Forest*, due to be launched on the 6th November 2017.

M. Allen
Ruth and Ernie Hunter, Margaret Marshall