

MURPHY'S FIELD

(New Use for an Old Field)

by Colin Bowlt

At the top end of Bury Street, almost opposite the entrance to Breakspear Road is Cannons Bridge Farm. It lies between the road and Park Wood, from which it is separated by the ancient boundary bank and ditch with the remains of the old plashed boundary hedge. The farm house is adjacent to, and probably at one time actually in, a small field which runs up to the stream, known locally as the Cannon Brook, that flowed along the edge of the hamlet of Park Hearne and nowadays feeds the Ruislip Lido. (See this Journal 2004). A Mr and Mrs Brown moved in to run-down Cannons Bridge Farmhouse in 1958 and began the task of restoration. The story of why and how they acquired a donkey and his amusing adventures was written up in the 1995 edition of this Journal.

Many older residents of Ruislip will remember Murphy the donkey browsing in this field as they made their way to the Lido. Sadly Murphy died some years back during the winter of 1994-5 and all that remains is an overgrown field with the last pieces of a wooden notice asking people not to feed the donkey, which the children liked to do, of course. The field is owned by Hillingdon Borough Council and it is proposed to make it an adjunct to our woods as an interpretation/experimental and visitor area, and to name it *Murphy's Field*. No early historic name is known.

Access to Murphy's Field is from Park Wood over the old boundary ditch via a wooden bridge constructed by the Ruislip Woods Volunteers, who have also constructed some benches where one can sit and ponder, or just sit. There will shortly be a notice board at the entrance detailing the various plants in flower and other items of interest such as any toadstools 'fruiting', or conspicuous mosses and lichens. A sinuous trail will lead around the site to view these and any experiments that may be set up, such as a study of Bluebell regeneration and hybridisation with the garden Spanish Bluebell. The existing trees and shrubs are to have names attached, with (we hope) more or less vandal-proof labels.

It is planned that information about the history of the site, such as the adjacent Cannons Bridge Farm and the former Canal Feeder, which runs very close to the brook at this point, will be displayed on the notice board along with things of interest in the nearby Park Wood.

It is not envisioned that the site should develop into woodland. Only low growing plants and shrubs will be allowed to develop, but the existing trees will be retained. This should be a low cost, low-maintenance scheme, but one that we hope will add interest to the Ruislip Woods, and preserve this historic paddock for the public.