

**WHEATA  
WOOD  
&  
PRIOR  
ROYD**

two ancient woods  
at Grenoside



**FUELLING A  
REVOLUTION**

The woods that founded  
the steel country



## VISITING WHEATA WOOD AND PRIOR ROYD

Access to the two woods is free and unrestricted at all times. There is a well developed network of footpaths and bridleways through the woods. The main footpaths are wide and dry and are suitable for pushchairs. Slopes are gentle except in the western part of Prior Royd. There are two dry-stone seating areas by the artist-craftsman Ian Boyle at the northern end of Wheata Wood.

There is a car park at the Community Centre in Grenoside and at the northern end of Wheata Wood half a mile north of the Old Red Lion (see map). There is also limited roadside parking at the top of Bower Lane. *First* bus service 80 goes to Grenoside.

The first impression after walking for a few minutes in either of the two woods is that you are definitely in a wood in the north of England and in the uplands. There is much silver birch (which grows well into the Arctic Circle) and downy birch, and rowan (or mountain ash) are dotted about.



Rowan



Sessile Oak

The other main trees native to the site are oak, mainly sessile oak, recognised from its stalked leaves and unstalked acorns, and holly which appears as thick clumps of shrubbery. Occasionally the climber honeysuckle, which flowers gloriously in June, scrambles over low shrubs and trees.



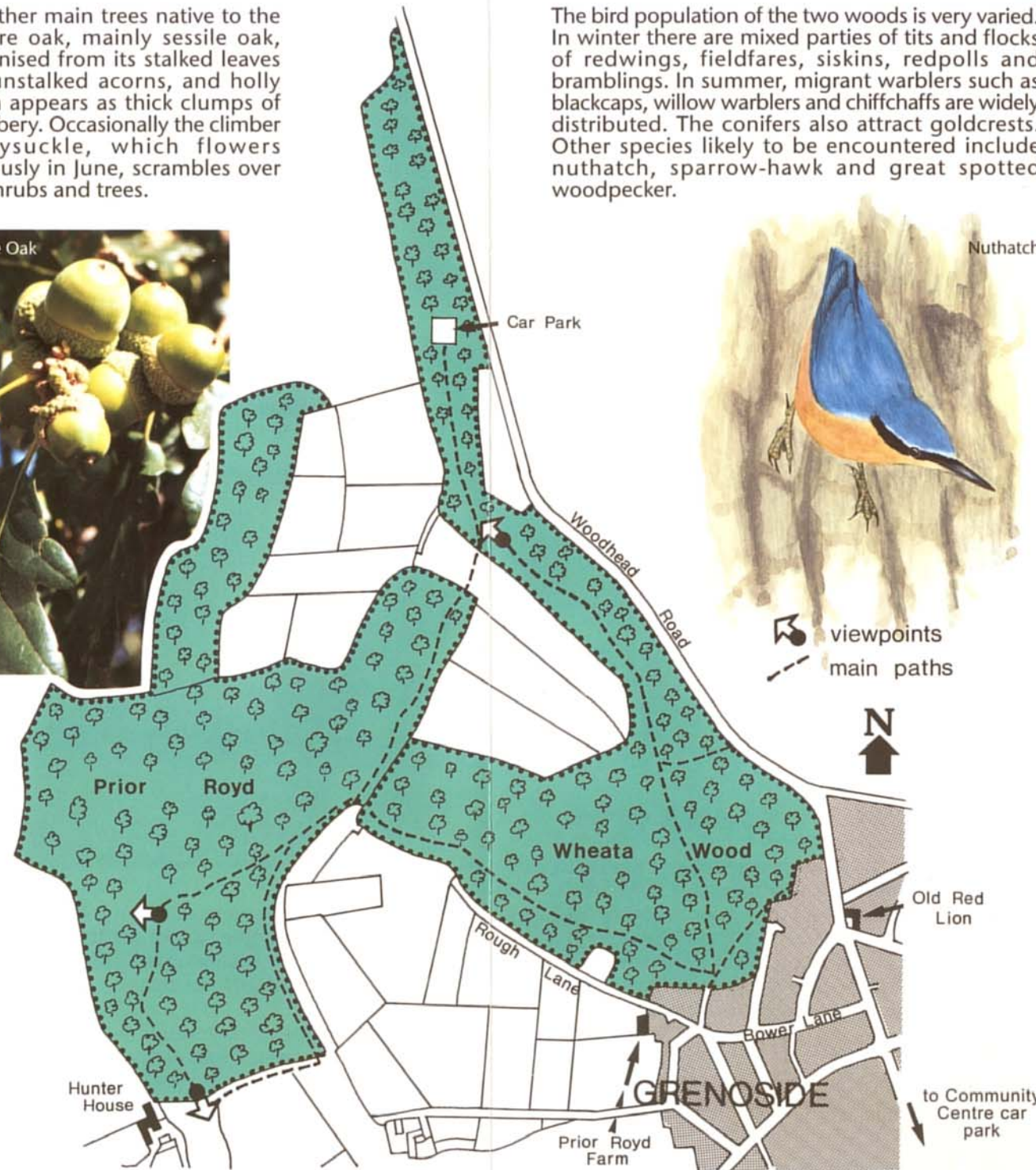
Bracket fungus on Beech

The woodland floor is mainly covered by tussocks of wavy hair-grass with occasional clumps of bilberry and patches of heather. Felling of the two woods was particularly heavy during the two World Wars and re-growth, particularly of birch, is often multi-stemmed. Bracket fungus is common.

The bird population of the two woods is very varied. In winter there are mixed parties of tits and flocks of redwings, fieldfares, siskins, redpolls and bramblings. In summer, migrant warblers such as blackcaps, willow warblers and chiffchaffs are widely distributed. The conifers also attract goldcrests. Other species likely to be encountered include nuthatch, sparrow-hawk and great spotted woodpecker.



Nuthatch



## ANCIENT WOODS

Wheata Wood and Prior Royd are examples of what woodland historians call **ancient woods**. This means that they have been in existence since at least AD 1600. It was only after 1600 that people in this country planted trees to create woods.

What this means is that an ancient wood is either a **primary wood** or an **ancient secondary wood**.

Primary woods are direct descendants of the primaevial forest that grew up from about 13,000 years ago after the end of the last Ice Age. They are the remnants of the original 'wildwood' that existed before our ancestors started to clear them for settlement and for plough land and grazing for their domestic animals.

An ancient secondary wood is a wood that for some time before 1600 was cleared of trees and used for settlement or farming, but which at some later date, again before 1600, became woodland again because settlement or farming were abandoned and reversion to woodland took place.

Wheata Wood, on fairly level land, and containing archaeological evidence that suggests that a large part of the wood was the site of an ancient farming landscape, is mainly an **ancient secondary wood**. On the other hand, the steep northern and western parts of Prior Royd could be **primary woodland**.

The archaeological evidence that shows that Wheata Wood is an ancient secondary wood and is so subdued it is only discernible to a professional archaeologist. The evidence is in the form of a series of ridges (called lynchets), low stone banks and the remains of a section of a boulder wall. The features are severely eroded and covered by vegetation. It is thought they represent the remains of an ancient field system dating from the Romano-British period (1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD).



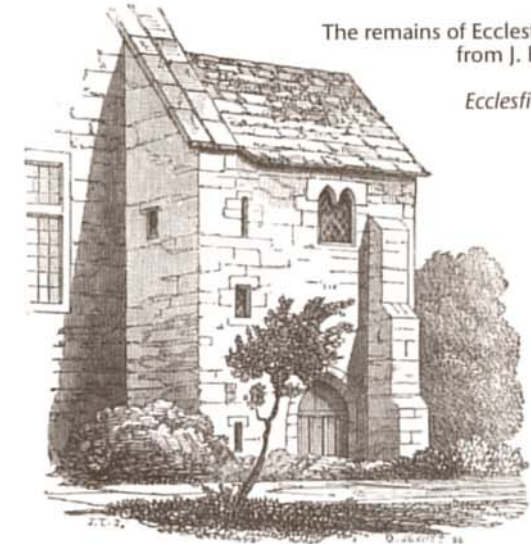
The area was then abandoned and reverted to woodland. The surrounding area was cleared over a long period of time leaving Wheata Wood and Prior Royd as woods in a farmed landscape. The shapes of the two woods, with sinuous and zig-zag boundaries are typical of ancient woods – woods that have been created by the slow removal of the surrounding woodland over a long period of time. The names of the surrounding fields tell of this process – they include *intakes* (land enclosed from wood or common), *stubbings* (cleared woodland with tree stumps still remaining) and *royd* (woodland clearing).

Looking into Prior Royd from the south across a field called the Stubbing



## THE MEANING OF THE NAMES OF THE TWO WOODS

The most likely explanation of the name 'Wheata' in Wheata Wood is that it is the name of a tenant or freeholder whose farmland included the wood. It is recorded in a surviving document written at Sheffield manorial court held in February 1484 that William Whett, son and heir of John Whett, claimed to hold a house and land called Birley Hollyns and a clearing ('assart') called Andrew Carr. These two places lie just to the south of Wheata Wood. In other deeds Whett is spelled Whete (1458) and Wheate (1562).



The remains of Ecclesfield Priory from J. Eastwood's *History of Ecclesfield* (1862).

The name Prior Royd is doubly interesting. 'Prior' refers to the fact that during the medieval period until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s it was the property first of the monks of St Wandrille in Normandy who had set up a priory at Ecclesfield and then, when the Crown confiscated the property of foreign religious houses, of St Anne's Priory of Coventry. 'Royd' does not mean wood but means clearing and this must refer to the farm attached to the wood.

By the early seventeenth century both woods had come into the hands of the earls of Shrewsbury and descended to their successors the dukes of Norfolk.

## THE PAST MANAGEMENT OF THE TWO WOODS

From the seventeenth century, and probably for long before that, until towards the end of the nineteenth century, the two woods were managed as **spring woods**. Prior Royd, as 'Prior Nall', was listed among 49 spring woods in Sheffield and Rotherham in a document written for the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shrewsbury between 1592 and 1616, and Wheata Wood was described as *a spring wood of 25 years growth* in a survey of the manor of Sheffield in 1637.

A **spring wood** was a **coppice wood** or more precisely a **coppice-with-standards**. In a coppice-with-standards most of the trees were periodically cut down to ground level to what is called a **stool** and from the stool grew multiple stems.



Some of the trees were not coppiced but allowed to grow on to become mature single-stemmed trees and these were the **standards**. In local woods most of the standards were oak trees.

During the nineteenth century the two woods were gradually converted into **canopy woods** in which all the trees were single-stemmed and grown on a long rotation. Planting of non-native trees also took place.

## WOODLAND CRAFTS AND INDUSTRIES

The reason why the woods were managed as coppice-with-standards for so long was because there were different markets for different sizes of trees. Timber trees were for building projects such as the cruck barn which still survives at Prior Royd Farm. There is a record in 1682 of a tree being felled in Prior Royd to provide planks for the floor of a farm tenant's wainhouse (where he stored his cart) and his hayhouse. And in 1718 a tenant at one of the Duke of Norfolk's water-powered cutlers' wheels was provided with seven trees from Wheata Wood for its repair.

A prime use for the coppice poles was for making charcoal which was the fuel for iron makers until the late eighteenth century and for some steel makers well into the twentieth century.



Oak poles made strong pit props and the bark of the oak timber trees and coppice poles was peeled for leather tanners. Ash and hazel poles made good springy brush and tool handles and birch brushwood was used for making besom brooms.



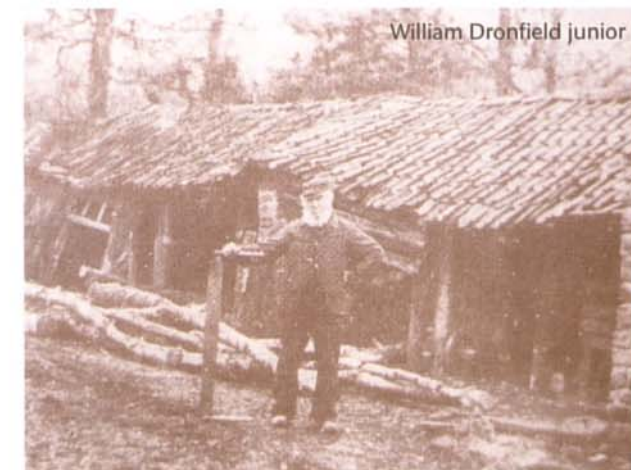
Besom makers

In the nineteenth century the Sharp(e) family of Grenoside specialised in making swill or spelk baskets which were woven out of lengths of thinly split oak. The oak was boiled to make it easier to split and there is a record of George Sharp ordering a long metal bath from Newton Chambers Ironworks at Thorncliffe in which to boil his oak poles. 'Sharp's wood oil', a small pond where they obtained their water supply, still survives in Greno Wood.

William Sharpe	Head	Mar	69	} Basket manufacturer Master empl. 3 men
Lydia	Wife	Mar	65	
Emily	Dau.	Unmar	33	Dressmaker
Henry	Son	Unmar	31	File Cutter
Herbert	GrdS	Unmar	3	—
Hawksworth.				

1881 Census extract for Lump Lane, Grenoside.

Members of the Dronfield family of Grenoside were clog sole makers. William Dronfield senior, born in north Derbyshire, embarked on his apprenticeship as a woodman in Dore in 1809, at the age of fifteen, before coming to Grenoside. He and his son, also called William, who died in 1916, operated from 'the woodyard' at the entrance to Wheata Wood at the top of Bower Lane. Besides making clog soles, they also made brush heads, mallets and tool handles.



William Dronfield junior

# A WALK ROUND THE VILLAGE AND THROUGH THE SURROUNDING WOODLANDS



Start in Main Street **1**. If arriving by car, park in the car park beside the Community Centre. Bus services 42 (SYT) and 474 (Sheaf Line) from Sheffield city centre (Flat Street) run along Main Street. From the car park on clear days there are good views towards Wentworth parish church, Hooper Stand and Keppel's Column in the middle distance. On the horizon the power station cooling towers at Ferrybridge, Eggborough and Drax can also be identified. A visitor to the area in 1639 said he could see Lincoln Cathedral and York Minster. But then he also called the heights above Grenoside and Wortley 'cloud-kissing mountains'!

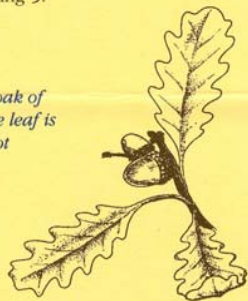
Walk northwards along Main Street, passing on the left **The Angel** public house and then, after crossing the top of Norfolk Hill, **The Old Harrow 2**. It is here every Boxing Day morning that the Grenoside Sword Dancers perform their age-old dance.

Turn left up Bower Lane **3**, then left again on Middle Lane, then right up Stephen Lane for a short distance before turning right again on Top Side. In this part of Grenoside there are still many stone-built cottages with their assorted outhouses, occasional farmhouses, and stone-walled cottage gardens, all helping to impart a village atmosphere. Near the lower of the two stone water troughs in Bower Lane is the old stone-walled village pinfold where stray animals were once impounded.

At the end of Top Side enter Wheata Wood, passing on the left at **4** the site of Dronfield's woodyard. Here in the 19th century, William Dronfield senior, and then his son William Dronfield junior made clog soles, brush heads and mallets (beetles).

Between **4** and **5** walk through Wheata Wood. This is an oak-birch wood with holly and rowan and planted beech and sweet chestnut. The trees grow over tussocks of wavy-hair grass, heather and bilberry. There is a large heather glade just before reaching **5**.

*sessile oak, the native oak of Grenoside's woods - the leaf is stalked, the acorn is not*

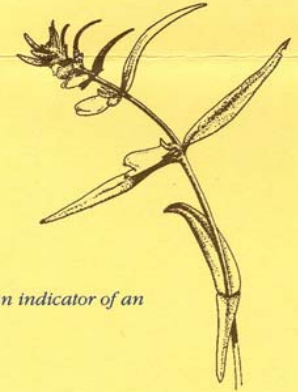


Between **5** and **6** follow the path just inside the northern arm of Prior Royd. Bracken is widespread here. The northern part of this section of the walk is through a birch thicket.

At **6** leave Prior Royd, cross a field and then walk through a beech plantation before reaching the Woodhead Road. Taking care, cross the road and enter Greno Wood at **7**. Join the path just inside the wood and walk north.

The path soon turns away from the road and becomes a sandy sunken lane bordered on each side by conifers (Scots Pine, Corsican Pine and Lodgepole Pine). On the sides of the path and in pathside glades heather and bilberry are widespread and oak and birch are regenerating freely. Towards the end of this section of the walk, shortly before the track begins to descend, look for the OS triangulation station hidden in the trees on the left-hand side.

At **8** take the right-hand fork and begin a long descent through the wood to the top of 'Sandy Lane' at **9**. Through much of its length, this section of the walk is a wide forestry ride used for extracting timber. It is often rutted and muddy in winter. To the right of the track are extensive stands of conifers but the walker is largely unaware of these because of the existence of a 'screen' of deciduous woodland in which sweet chestnut is widespread.



*common cow-wheat, an indicator of an ancient woodland site*

At **9** turn south-east along a wide and level ride. Between **9** and **10** it is much more obvious that the wood has been coniferised. The monotony is relieved, however, by the presence of wood ant nests and carpets of common cow-wheat. Join the bridleway from Woodseats and then just before reaching point **10** a diversion can be made on the right to look at the fields hidden deep in the wood. These are of medieval origin. In the Middle Ages small, irregular shaped fields such as these, created by clearing wood, marsh or heath, were called **assarts**. Such fields can also be seen at Wood Seats and between point **11** and the A61.

On the left hand side of the track at **10** is a large recently felled compartment. Young single-stemmed sweet chestnuts and oaks remain, and these together with the multi-stemmed regrowth from felled sweet chestnuts give the area the appearance of a recently felled coppice with standards.

At **11** look for the small pond among the trees. This is Sharpe's 'wood 'oyl' where willow, hazel and oak rods were once soaked for basketmaking.

From **11** continue along the track and then turn right up the side of the wood until Woodhead Road is reached at **12**. Turn left and retrace steps to Main Street.

