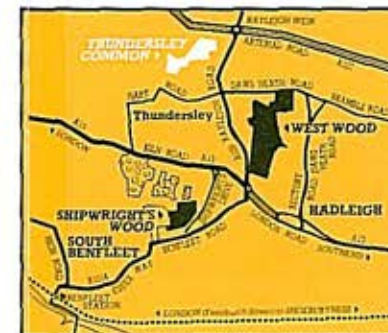
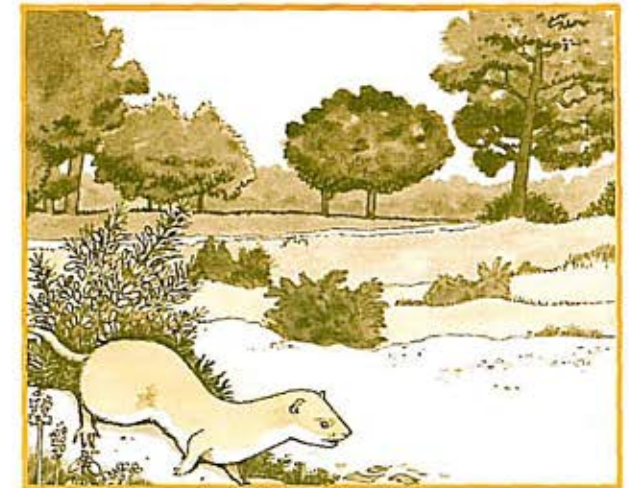


WOODLAND WALKS IN SOUTH-EAST ESSEX

THUNDERSLEY COMMON

■ ONE OF THE FINEST SURVIVING HEATHS IN ESSEX



ACCESS
FROM COMMON
APPROACH &
KINGSLEY LANE,
THUNDERSLEY,
ESSEX.

AREA
14
HECTARES

5

Possibly part of the common was once a managed wood – many of the plants, – midland hawthorn, wild service, wood anemone and bluebells – are characteristic of ancient woods.

The northern slope is rich in heathland plants. The purple flowered milkwort, the yellow cow wheat, and the mauve cross leaved heath all grow in the islands of heather and gorse among grasses and sedges.



Common Milkwort



Alder Buckthorn

Yet within each of these islands lies the basis for their destruction – hundreds of young trees set seed each year, and if they are not cleared then the heath will soon turn to woodland and the rare plants will disappear. The management of the common seeks to strike a balance so all these varied plants survive.



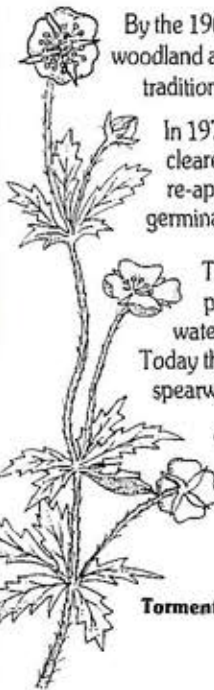
By the 1960's much of the common had become woodland as the earlier plans were forgotten and traditional grazing stopped.

In 1972 much of this recent woodland was cleared and the heathers and other scarce plants re-appeared as long dormant seeds were able to germinate.

The southern plateau has a series of marshy pools – these were once used for washing water and for the commoners ducks and geese. Today they have scarce plants such as the lesser spearwort.

On the drier ground the yellow flowered tormentil is common and there is a small patch of heather.

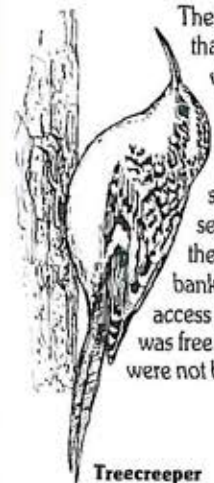
Tormentil



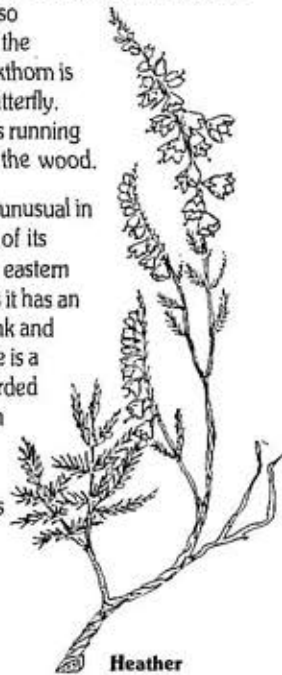
Oak, hombear and hawthorn are the commonest trees in the central woodland, but there are also aspen, birch, alder buckthorn and the midland hawthorn. The alder buckthorn is the food plant of the brimstone butterfly. There is a curious series of ditches running north-south a few metres apart in the wood.

The common is unusual in that along part of its western and eastern boundaries it has an ancient bank and ditch. There is a superb pollarded service tree on the western bank. Usually access to commons was free and they were not banked.

Treecreeper

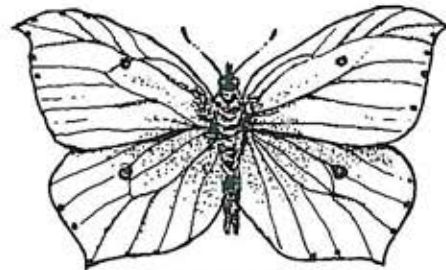


Heather



THUNDERSLEY COMMON

WALK FIVE



Brimstone

THUNDERSLEY COMMON is considered to be the finest surviving heathland in Essex with many scarce and distinctive plants.

Today it is managed as public open space by Castle Point District Council; formerly it was a common with local residents grazing cattle and horses and collecting water and firewood.

Its continued survival as heathland requires careful management – if it is mown too often the scarce plants will disappear, if it is left uncut it will soon turn to woodland.

The Common is in three areas:– a flat plateau with marshy pools, off Common Approach; a central wood; and a northern area, with heather, gorse and bracken, sloping down to Kingsley Lane.

There is free access over the Common. At times the grass may be left uncut to encourage the rare plants. Beware of adders!

The transition from common land to public open space has not always been easy.

At the beginning of this century Rochford Rural District Council acquired the common but the Council's plans prompted a long poem 'The Poor Thundersley Commoners Complaint' which was published in the Southend Standard of 1901. The poem opposes plans to turn the common into a formal park and describes how the commoners used the area and valued its wildlife.

The Poor Thundersley Commoners Complaint

*If they lay out our beautiful Common
Into a park so rich and gay
They must first call outsiders in
For we are not willing to pay*

*In winter time we can cut wood
When our fires are growing low
Or cut some bracken for the pony's food
For we are poor enough you know*

*We get the sweet scent from the flowers
And they are all in their natural state
And the song of the nightingale in hours
When you stop out a little bit late*

*The children's cry is not too late
To leave the Common in its natural state
For them to play on that Common once more
Where their fathers and mothers have played before*

Cross-leaved Heath

