EXPLORE
PEEL PARK & WOODNOOK VALE
LOCAL NATURE RESERVES

Enjoy leisurely walks through the Accrington countryside, exploring woodland and heathland on your journey through history.
**Introduction**

Following a Heritage Lottery Funded project which was managed by The PROSPECTS Foundation in Accrington in partnership with Hyndburn Borough Council and Lancashire Wildlife Trust the two areas of Peel Park and Woodnook Vale were designated as Local Nature Reserves on 11th July, 2018. The two reserves are the largest Local Nature Reserves in Lancashire and as they are both easily accessible from Accrington they are a great way to get a wilderness experience just a few minutes walk from the edge of town. The sites are a haven for wildlife and also have historical interest and are a great way to get some gentle exercise in a natural setting.

**PEEL PARK**

Situated on the eastern edge of Accrington in East Lancashire, this is a very extensive and varied site, including woodland, heathland, grassland and mill lodges interwoven with an industrial legacy. It is easily accessible, with entrances from both urban areas and open countryside and connections to the wider Public Rights of Way network.

Over 20 different types of habitat have been recorded on the site, including broadleaved, coniferous and mixed plantation, semi-natural woodland, dense and scattered scrub, acidic, neutral and marshy grasslands, flushes, standing and running water, heathland, hedges, ditches and bare ground. The heathland is one of the most accessible areas of heathland in the County due to the network of improved footpaths. The number of flowering plants and ferns recorded on the site is over 300, of which more than 250 are native to Britain. In addition, over 120 mosses & liverworts, 70 birds, more than 40 invertebrates, 13 mammals, 9 fish and 4 amphibians have been found on the site so far but there are many more, especially invertebrates, yet to be discovered.

**WOODNOOK VALE**

Woodnook Vale has a range of habitats, including Ancient Woodland, wildflower meadows, various ages of planted woodlands, the beautiful valley of Woodnook Water, the largest visible stretch of river in Accrington and a former mill lodge at the key gateway from the town centre.

Sixteen different types of habitat have been recorded on the site, including broadleaved and coniferous plantation, semi-natural woodland including oak woodland, dense and scattered scrub, acidic, neutral and marshy grasslands, flushes, standing and running water, heathland and bare ground.

Areas of woodland alongside Woodnook Water, including Priestley Clough, have been identified as being Ancient Woodland, i.e. having been woodland since AD1600. However, some will be descended from the original woodland that recolonised the land after the retreat of the ice age some 10,000 years ago!

Many features of archaeological and historical interest lie within the site, including the old Accrington to Ramsbottom railway, (now part of the National Cycle Network), Platts Lodge as part of the Broad Oak Printworks, the weir on Woodnook Water as part of Woodnook Mill, Shoe Mill, Rothwell Mill and a former Smallpox Hospital (Hollins Wood). Significant medieval residences at Woodnook Farm and Hollins Hall leave little trace on the ground but their names live on in local neighbourhoods.
PEEL PARK

The largest Local Nature Reserve in Lancashire

Enjoy leisurely walks through the countryside and explore woodland and heathland on your journey to the summit.

Peel Park, the largest Local Nature Reserve in the whole of Lancashire, is situated on the eastern edge of Accrington. Overlooking the town, the reserve boasts a variety of habitats all very different in character including woodland, heathland, grassland and mill lodges. It is easily accessible by an extensive network of paths which provide access through the countryside and the opportunity for excellent views over Accrington and the surrounding area. Within the reserve are the remnants of the areas industrial heritage from the Plantation Mill site, which historically was used for printing, to the trenches on the summit, used by the Accrington Pals for practice before going to fight in the First World War in 1916.

IN TIMES GONE BY

The land at Peel Park was originally owned by the Peel family, a family of wealthy industrialists who made their name in the calico (cotton) printing industry during the 18th century. They were prominent in local and national society, most notably Robert Peel who was Prime Minister in 1841, and who is particularly remembered for his role in establishing the London metropolitan police force ('The Peelers or bobbies'). In 1909, Mr. William Peel gifted 14 hectares of land on The Coppice and an additional 23 hectares were purchased by the Council. As a mark of appreciation, the new amenity was called Peel Park.

The park was formally opened on the 29th September, 1909 with the ceremonial unveiling of the memorial to William Peel. This memorial is now known locally as 'the monument'. The monument was restored in 2009 which marked the centenary of the acquisition of Peel Park.

ACCRINGTON PALS & THE TRENCHES

The park has been associated with the Accrington Pals battalion, who were reputed to have trained on the Coppice in rough ground to the northeast of the memorial before going to fight in the First World War in 1916. More obvious are the narrow, interrupted ‘H’ shaped trenches which can still be seen across the plateau. Trenches of this nature were often excavated as anti-glider trenches on areas within 5 miles of strategically important sites such as armament factories during the Second World War.

ACCRINGTON STANLEY

Accrington Stanley's football ground, while they were in the 3rd league from 1921 to 1962, was located on what is now the large grass school fields at Peel Park Primary School.

HILLOCK FARM

Ruins are still visible by the main car park of an ancient farmstead known as Hillock Farm which was established in the medieval period. Evidence of the farm house can be seen on site which was built around the late 16th or early 17th century. The farm operated up until the early 20th century.
ARDEN HALL

Arden Hall was built in 1845 by Benjamin Hargreaves, the fourth son of Thomas Hargreaves (who lived at Oak Hill Mansion now Oak Hill Park). The Hargreaves family became one of the wealthiest families in the area as the result of a successful textile business and owned the local Broad Oak print works, the largest mill in Accrington. Benjamin died in 1880 and the hall became the home of a number of notable residents until it was finally demolished in 1948-1949.

The gates to the hall still remain in position and now form a welcoming entrance to the area. The servant’s quarters still survive as the Coach House which is now a private residence. The footprint of the hall is still visible and was subject to an archaeological dig in 2012. Further information about the findings of the archaeological dig can be viewed by contacting the local Council on 01254 388111.

PLANTATION MILL

Half way up Plantation Road, at the top of the cobbled lane is the site of a fulling mill (water mill) and later calico (cotton) print works. Very little remains of the mill today although some stone walls, bricks, pipe work and metal work can be seen upon closer examination of the area. The original mill dates back to the late 18th century, during its time it was owned by the Hargreaves family and run by the Grimshaw family who built Owl Hall and Plantation House as their residencies. The mill was closed in 1934 and demolished in the 1940’s.

NEARBY LANDMARKS

- Pendle Hill is 557m above sea level.
- Great Hameldon is 409m above sea level.
- Darwen Tower is 372m above sea level.
- Blackpool Tower is visible from the summit on a clear day.

1 circuit of the summit is around 1 mile! If you walk from the main entrance at Avenue Parade to the monument you will ascend 50m. From the Arden Hall entrance to the monument you will travel 0.8 miles and ascend 85m.
GIVING NATURE A HELPING HAND

Common Pipistrelles emerge from their roosts about 20 minutes after sunset to hunt for small insects, consuming up to 3000 midges in one night. They have a characteristic fluttery flight, with constant changes of direction as they hunt along woodland rides. They locate their prey by following the pattern of returning echoes from high frequency ultrasonic calls, which are a mixture of clicks and loud slaps.

Roe Deer have a warm red-brown coat in summer, moulting in the autumn to produce a thicker more greyish-brown winter coat. In winter, male Roe Deer cast and re-grow their short sharp antlers, the development of which is aided by blood vessels and nerves under a covering layer of velvet. Fights over available female deer during the summer rut can be violent and prolonged, with head-on battles occurring until one animal concedes by retiring.

75 bird boxes, 30 bat boxes and 8 owl boxes have been installed.

HABITATS

Peel Park including Arden Hall and The Coppice covers an area of around 50 hectares and consists of a range of habitats including woodland, heathland, grassland and standing and running water. A variety of flora and fauna has been recorded in the area including: Roe Deer, Red Fox, Daubenton’s and Pipistrelle Bats, Watervole, Hedgehogs and over 70 different bird species.

Images by Lee Aaron

Siskin
Jay
Goldfinch

Roe Deer

Images by Lee Aaron

Image by Lawrence Holt
WOODNOOK VALE LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Note: Most of the access paths shown here are permissive i.e. public use is by permission of the landowner. They are not necessarily Public Rights of Way - please contact Lancashire County Council for information on Public Rights of Way.
RAILWAY

The Accrington to Ramsbottom section of railway line was opened in 1848 and was notorious for its steep 1:40 gradient. The line was also unusual for crossing a mill lodge (Platts Lodge), originally the millpond for the Broad Oak Printworks. The original railway bridge over Nuttall St was widened in 1936 to allow lorries through to the industrial area. A datestone has been incorporated on the wall at the Nuttall St entrance to commemorate the rebuild. The line closed in December 1966.

The Five Arches Bridge at Shoe Mill remained until 1981 when it was demolished and replaced by the current bridge in 1992.

The Shoe Mill Baxenden Signal Box was situated near the Five Arches Bridge and operated from 1875-1962. In the valley bottom, you can see the remains of Shoe Mill. The cotton mill, thought to have been built in 1790, was powered by water but closed following a serious fire. Remnants of the buildings are clearly visible. The filled circular depression near the chimney is probably an old colliery shaft.

WOODNOOK VALE LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Wildlife flourishes where once there was a railway, mills and collieries...

Woodnook Vale Local Nature Reserve offers visitors around 50 hectares of woodland, heathland and wetland either side of the steep-sided river valley of Woodnook Water.

Starting close to the heart of the urban area near Accrington town centre Woodnook Vale is an extensive Local Nature Reserve of some 3.5 km in overall length and 1km across the valley as the crow flies. Moderate gradients along the greenway are counter-balanced by steep valley sides rising to high ground with extensive views. Woodnook Water flows through the valley. The uppermost part of the Local Nature Reserve at Rothwell Heights on the western side of the valley is prominent in the landscape and offers panoramic views taking in the whole of the Local Nature Reserve. From this elevated position there is an excellent walk down to Woodnook Water in the valley.

WILDLIFE

At least 61 species of birds, 291 plants, 13 fish, 108 invertebrates, 12 mammals including 3 species of bats have been recorded in Woodnook Vale.

INDUSTRIAL LEGACY

The wildlife is interwoven with an industrial legacy that includes demolished mill buildings, former mill lodges and the Accrington to Manchester railway line. The disused railway line stretching from Platts Lodge in Accrington to the Kearns Allens lodges at Baxenden is now a 2.8km multi-user trackway.

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Priestley Clough is Ancient Woodland which means it has been wooded since AD 1600. The woodland gets its name from John Priestley, a cotton manufacturer who once ran Woodnook Mill. There was a mill pond next to the Bath Street path which held the water to power the mill’s water wheel. Like the rest of the valley, the Clough has a long association with coal mining and its medieval name was Coal Pit Holme.

Priestley Clough has been a popular area for local people for many generations. It was perceived as a local beauty spot and several picture postcards of the area exist.

You can see Bluebells and Ramsons (Wild Garlic) in the woodland and Wild Cherry, Hawthorn and Dog-rose blossoms in the hedge-rows and scrub. You may hear Great Spotted Woodpecker and see Dipper along Woodnook Water. Meadow Brown and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies feed along the embankments in the sunny grassland; Speckled Wood butterflies bask in the woodland edge sunshine. You will see Pipistrelle bats flying in the tree canopy at dusk and dawn. The golden leaves of Beech and the red brown of Oak provide autumn colour. Look out for fungi on dead wood and amongst the leaf litter and acorns underneath oak trees. Watch Redwing and Fieldfare feeding on the bushes. Follow the tracks of Roe Deer and birds such as Blackbird and Robin in the snow.

Silver Birch is easy to recognise with its drooping branches, delicate leaves and white, papery bark which peels easily. They make pretty glades and young trees are often found invading patches of Heather.

Both types of native British Oak are found here: Sessile and Pedunculate Oak. The oaks can hybridise combining these two characteristics and examples of the hybrids can be found at Woodnook.

Roe Deer can often be seen crossing the old railway lines in the early mornings. All year round, you can see the Blue Tits, Great Tits, Bullfinches and Chaffinches flying from one side of the path to the other looking for food.

Deadwood is important for wildlife in woodland and any woodland management must include leaving some trees as standing deadwood for birds, insects and fungi. Look for dead standing trees with woodpecker holes and Bracket Fungi. You may also see piles of wood left after coppicing and tree felling which are habitat piles for ground beetles and other invertebrates.

Hollins Wood is a broadleaved plantation of Hazel, Oak, Norway Maple, Silver Birch and Alder with coniferous trees. It was also the site of a small pox hospital shown by overgrown brick foundations. Coppiced trees such as Hazel, creates sunny glades for butterflies like Speckled Wood. Wood from coppicing and felling is left to create habitat piles for wildlife. The adjoining field was planted up in 2012 and named Jubilee Woodland. Yellow-rattle can also be found in the field.

There are several areas managed as wildflower meadows in the reserve, these are cut and raked each year and will buzz with hoverflies and bees feeding on the flowers. Small Skipper butterflies will rest on the purple flowers in the sunshine. Large White and Meadow Brown butterflies can be seen flying along the disused railway line on warm days in late summer.
Patches of Heather and Bilberry survive on the banks up the railway line. To protect it, invasive non-native species such as Himalayan Balsam and Rhododendron are removed and Silver Birch and Ash trees are cut back. Heather is easiest to see when the pink flowers appear in August and is a particular favourite of bees.

Meadowsweet and Willowherb are rich sources of nectar for bees which will also visit Bramble, Dog-rose and Heather flowers. Delicate flowers of Enchanter’s-nightshade occur in patches on the path edge up the line. Brooklime can be seen in the ditch that follows the line.

The southern end of the railway has mining features. While most traces of Baxenden Colliery have gone, you can still see drift mine entrances at the Hurstead Street entrance.

Walk past Kears Allen Lodges to see remnants of Baxenden Station including the southbound platform. An engine shed and another platform edge can be seen in the transport yard of Hollands Pies. While Baxenden Station closed to passengers in 1951 the nearest bus stop on Manchester Road is still called ‘Baxenden Station’.

For the first time visitor to the area the reserve is best accessed from the car park next to the play area at Bullough Park off Willows Lane in Accrington BB5 0LW.

Bullough Park offers an excellent opportunity to access the wider countryside of Woodnook Vale, upon leaving the car park pass by the meadows managed for their wildflowers.

OTHER LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

HAWORTH ART GALLERY & TEA ROOM

While in the area why not visit the Haworth Art Gallery and see for yourself the world-famous Tiffany glass collection – the largest public collection in Europe. Free admission gives you access to 4 rooms dedicated to the collection, see fine examples of Louis Comfort Tiffany’s Favrile glass vases, mosaics, and tiles in both static and interactive exhibits.

The Gallery is located off Hollins Lane in Accrington, BB5 2JS and is open 12.00pm – 4.00pm (Except Mondays)

OAK HILL

Also in the area is Oak Hill Park, a fine example of a public park with a play area, duck pond, multi-use games area, tennis courts and a series of paths ready to lead you on a journey around the many other features of the formal parkland setting. On street parking is recommended for your visit on either Manchester Road BB5 2PQ or Hollins Lane BB5 2LB.
The reserves are located in the Accrington area.

Peel Park is located between Burnley Road (A679) and Manchester Road (A680) and the A56. The car park BB5 6HF is accessed from Peel Park Avenue (off Burnley Road). The main entrance is located at the top of Avenue Parade BB5 6QW. The entrance to Arden Hall is located at the top of Plantation Street (BB5 6RU).

Woodnook Vale is located between Manchester Road (A680) and Willows Lane. There is a car park at Bullough Park BB5 0LW and other entrances are next to Platts Lodge BB5 0PF, Royds Street BB5 2LH and Hollins Lane BB5 2QY.