

SOME PLANTS OF THE EYES

It is amazing how many birdwatchers trip around the Eyes - mainly over brambles - but few look down at the plants growing beneath their feet.

Orchids (Northern Marsh and Early Purple) can be found growing in four known localities, but not always together, and although I have only ever found one plant of Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), Centuary (*Centaureum erythraea*) grows commonly in open spaces.

Some plants are probably more indicative of the area when it was farmed. Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) and Bistort (*Polygonum bistorta*) grow alongside Weir Lane, along with a white narcissus, possibly from Wilgreaves Farm garden. Under the pipebridge runs 'Flag Lane', an old tarmac track at the side of a mature hawthorn hedge. Hops ramble over the hedge while underneath can be found Greater Stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*), Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*), Meadow Cranesbill, St. John's Wort and Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), and a small ground-hugging ivy - the only ivy I know of in the area. Bluebells near the Ferry would appear to be of the Spanish garden variety as they have broader leaves and flower bells on both sides of the stem.

It was probably a Ferryman who planted the perfumed Soapwort by the Canal on No. 1 bed, by the course of old Statham Lane. Apple of Peru (*Nicandra physaloides*), which I found growing there in 1981, probably came from garden rubble. I collected some seeds and grew them, but the parent plant was destroyed by a barge chain. A patch of Marram Grass can be found growing on the sand where the ramp goes up on to the bed and Musk Mallow (*Malva muschata*) grows again by the Canal (three known plants) and is one of our specialities.

The old meander on Butchersfield also holds plants which were once more common over the area. Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Common Skullcap (*Scutellaria galericulata*) grow by the river along with a mass of Lady's Smock (*Cardamine pratensis*), which is very attractive to butterflies. Sedges also grow here, along with a spectacular carpet of buttercups, and no-one in summer can miss the sheets of Biting Stonecrop (or is it tasteless - try chewing a piece) on the steelworks slag.

Many of these plants, of course, are locally confined, and in no way represent the dominant vegetation of the area. They are also more spectacular with 'pretty' flowers, unlike many smaller plants, with insignificant flowers which we all must overlook. Reports of other plants would be most welcome and if any plants are endangered by work in the area then we will endeavour to relocate them in a suitable habitat - Himalayan Balsam and Typha excepted !

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