

# Archers' Walk

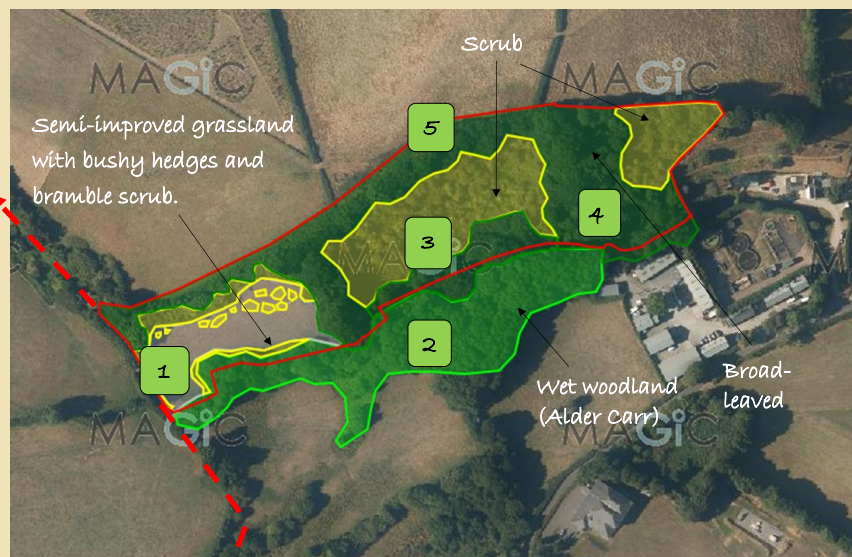
## A journey through time and space

Supported by



View of Steep fields—mid 1970's;  
photo courtesy of the Cronin family

The site through which Archers' Walk runs was probably cleared of ancient woodland by medieval farmers. Maps from the 1880s show the meadow at the western end as an orchard, with two fields to the east. The easternmost field was reportedly ploughed by horses and planted for corn during the Great War (1914-1918). In 1966 the fields passed from Newhouse Farm to brothers Tom and Sam Archer, whose cattle grazed the land, with the eastern fields periodically swaled (burned) to control gorse and scrub. From the early 1970s, swaling ceased and the site started its reversion to the woodland that you see today. Tom and Sam created the Archers' Walk permissive footpath in 2020 as the family's legacy of their 500-year history in Christow.



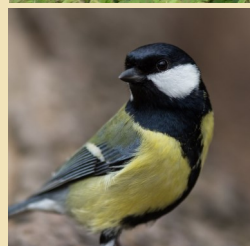
Wood Lane footpath to the church

Some of the plants and butterflies you might see in the Meadow (left to right): small skipper seen feeding on common knapweed, marbled white, common blue with its food plant birds foot trefoil and above that, red fox.

Point 1



Marbled White by Elliott Fairs



Great Tit by Col Frankland  
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Chiffchaff; Natural England CC BY-NC-ND 2.0



Green Woodpecker; cvtperson  
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Slow-worm

**1. The meadow** This small field, once an orchard, has received no grazing in the last few years. Rabbits are the main grazers now! The steep, free-draining ground currently supports tussocky grassland, which in places is quite species-rich. Look closely and you can see many vole tunnels running through the grass 'thatch' and amongst the grasses are the flowering herbs knapweed, birds-foot trefoil and agrimony. Bushy hedges and bramble scrub enhance the grassland habitat providing nesting opportunities for birds and nectaring sites for bees, butterflies and other invertebrates. It is a good site for butterflies with marbled white, small skipper, meadow brown and ringlet just a few that you can see there in the summer. Chiffchaff sing loudly from the hedges, great tit and blue tit are frequent visitors and robins nested in the bramble scrub in 2020. If you are lucky you may spot a green woodpecker feeding on ants at the top of the field where the grass is shorter. Reptile monitoring has revealed that slow-worms (a legless lizard) are in the Meadow too.

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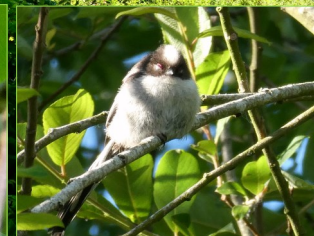


## Point 2



2. The **wet alder woodland** provides opportunities for cavity-nesters like the great-spotted woodpecker (look out for the woodpecker holes way up in the alder trunks). The tiny, insectivorous wren (above), the most numerous species found at Steep Fields in 2020, favours the wet woodland and the adjacent mature woodland where the damp ground and fallen timber promote lots of insect prey. Marsh Marigold (above) in spring is a distinctive feature of this woodland.

## Point 3



Birds of scrub habitat; the migrant blackcap (left), family groups of long-tailed tit (centre), the brightly coloured bullfinch (right).



Manx John  
CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

## 3. Scrub woodland - Ecological succession in action

Succession is the process by which a natural community or ecosystem moves from a simple level of organisation to one that is more complex. This field was short-grazed pasture in the 1970s, but through minimal intervention over decades has gradually developed into scrub and young woodland with a varied structure, supporting a very different community of species. It is still evolving and the central glade of bramble and bracken, which currently acts as a 'nursery' for young trees, preventing browsing by deer, will in time be suppressed by the shade created by the maturing tree canopies. Hawthorn, blackthorn and elder may remain in the understorey but hazel, holly and oak will start to dominate. Bluebells, dog's mercury, primrose, ferns and other plants of the woodland floor will gradually spread into these areas from the existing woodland and hedge boundaries, either by seed or expanding roots, runners and bulbs. The area may look very different in 40 years time.

## Point 4



Dormouse by Zoë Helene Kindermann CC BY-SA 4.0



Early Purple Orchid by Disda fi we CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

4. **Broadleaved woodland** The mature hazel coppice is underlain by a stunning show of bluebells in spring. Other plants you will see include yellow archangel, hart's tongue fern, dog's mercury and over 250 spikes of early purple orchid were recorded on site in 2020. Look out for nibbled hazel-nuts as there are dormice present at Steep Fields and in the surrounding hedges. Mature oak and ash support birds such as treecreeper and nuthatch.

5. The **grown-out holly hedge** offers berries for winter visitors such as fieldfare and redwing and our resident blackbirds.

## Treecreeper



By Edwyn Anderton CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

## Point 5

The information on this sheet is drawn from ecological surveys conducted by Elliott Fairs and Fiona Freshney, 2020.