

COUNTY: KENT SITE NAME: TOWER HILL TO COCKHAM
WOOD

DISTRICT: ROCHESTER UPON MEDWAY

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Local Planning Authority: ROCHESTER UPON MEDWAY CITY COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 765714 Area: 47.9 (ha.) 118.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 178 1:10,000: TQ 77 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968 Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This site was formerly known as Lower Upnor Quarry and Cockham Wood; there is an extension and a number of small deletions. Part of the site will be listed in the 'Geological Conservation Review'.

Reasons for Notification:

This site is of both biological and geological interest. It contains woodland representative of that on Tertiary deposits in Kent and supports a rich insect fauna. In addition, Upnor Quarry exposes a complete Tertiary stratigraphic sequence.

Much of Cockham Wood consists of neglected coppice, principally ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, with oak *Quercus robur* standards. The shrub layer, which is especially varied towards the central part of the wood, is dominated for the most part by elm *Ulmus* spp., field maple *Acer campestre* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. However, many other shrubs are also represented including some characteristic of base-rich soils, such as dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, and others of more acid soils, such as honeysuckle *Lonicera perichlymenum*. Amongst the ground flora brambles *Rubus fruticosus*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, and nettles *Urtica dioica* are generally dominant.

To the west of the wood is an area of dense scrub, but with grassy clearings maintained by rabbits. Elm suckers and hawthorn dominate the vegetation. The ground flora here are sparse, though the clearings support a number of herbs typical of calcareous pastures including yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* and ploughman's spikenard *Inula conyza*.

A narrow grassy zone, dominated by sea couch-grass *Elymus pycnanthus*, occurs at intervals along the junction between woodland and intertidal mudflats. Minor slippages and wave action have led to erosion of this habitat. A number of scarce

species were formerly found in this zone but only one, bithynian vetch *Vicia bithynica*, remains.

Tower Hill and Lower Upnor Quarry are sandy areas which support a very rich insect fauna. Of particular note are the aculeate hymenoptera (bees and wasps), about a third of all British species being found here including 7 nationally rare species.

The geological interest of Upnor Quarry may be defined as follows:

The Upnor Quarry exposes a complete Tertiary age stratigraphic sequence from the Thanet Sands, through the Woolwich and Oldhaven Beds, into the lower part of the London Clay. The Woolwich and Oldhaven Beds are of particular interest, both in the sedimentary evidence they afford of depositional conditions, and in the abundant molluscan fauna that they yield. The complex lateral facies changes in these formations makes Upnor a vital site to be viewed in comparison with other Palaeogene localities in the eastern London Basin.