

Flowers and Ferns

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Introduction

The Lancashire village of Dunsop Bridge claims to be at the centre of the British Isles, and plants representative of most geographical regions in the British Isles can be found in Lancashire. Our islands have an oceanic climate dominated by the Atlantic Ocean and the North Atlantic Drift, but the influence of the enormous Eurasian landmass on Lancashire is minimal so that it has hardly any plants typical of a continental climate. Similarly the county is neither far enough north nor has high enough mountains to have many arctic or arctic-alpine species.

The landscape is profoundly altered by human interference. Most of the lowland mosses (raised bogs) were drained in the nineteenth century and the remaining fragments are small and much modified. Grasslands are almost all rye-grass monocultures, but here and there fragments of traditionally managed neutral grasslands survive. Similarly many much modified ancient woodlands survive in the river valleys (cloughs), whilst in the Silverdale area a mosaic of woodland and limestone pavement provides a series of special habitats in that region.

The 'big' rivers of the county, the Mersey, Ribble, Lune and to a lesser extent the Wyre, have their own interesting plants, although little is left of the Mersey's natural flora. Other wetland habitats are extensive but apart from Hawes Water are almost all man-made. The large numbers of marl pits on the boulder clay regions of the county are the oldest, followed



River Ribble at Sawley.
(Malcolm Edmunds)

by the canals. The huge reed beds of Leighton Moss developed following the failure of the pumping engine. Reservoirs and gravel pits were also built or dug and now support their own interesting plant life.

This chapter covers both flowering plants and ferns. However many people forget that flowering plants include grasses, sedges and rushes; plants with small flowers lacking the showy parts typical of garden plants. Similarly many trees lack showy flowers and are often not thought of as flowering plants.

Ferns lack flowers altogether but the large leafy spore-bearing plants are familiar. Amongst the ferns and related plants are the horsetails and clubmosses. Whilst many horsetails are common and one, Field Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) is a difficult garden weed to eradicate once it is established, the clubmosses are less well known, yet have particular associations with Lancashire (Box 4.1).

Wood on limestone pavement, Challan Hall Allotment.
(Peter Wakely, *English Nature*)

