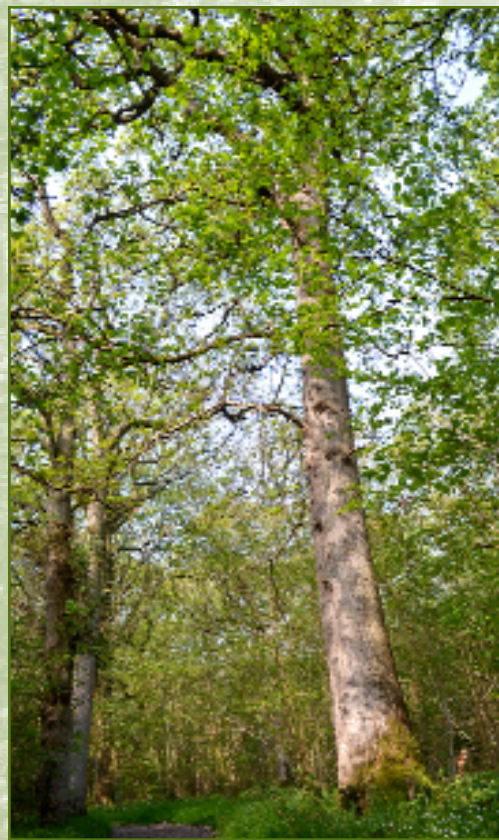


# The mighty and marvellous oak



Magnificent oaks in Church Wood. (Diane Comley.)

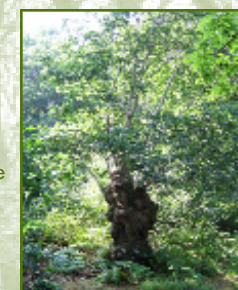
The oak is one of the country's best loved trees. There are many in the Blean, and a rather splendid specimen nearby on Hernhill village green that was planted in 1936.

There are two forms of native oak in the Blean: sessile, which is the most common, and pedunculate or English oak. They can be distinguished by their acorns as well as their leaves. A number of trees have also been found to be natural hybrids of the two species.

The history of oaks in the Blean goes back thousands of years. Pigs were once driven into the woods to graze on fallen acorns and other nuts - a practice known as 'pannage'. Coppiced oak was used for charcoal, pit props and firewood, and its bark provided tannin for Canterbury's medieval leather industry. (Coppicing is when trees are cut back almost to ground level, allowing new multiple stems to grow from the stump.) Larger oaks were valued for their timber, although Blean oaks are generally slow growing, which produces relatively twisted and shorter lengths of timber. This can be seen in the old buildings and medieval barns which used Blean oak. For hundreds of years, oak standards have been interspersed with sweet chestnut or hornbeam coppice.



Our native oaks:  
Pedunculate (left) - acorns have a stem.  
Sessile (right) - no stem.



Pollarded oak.

Oaks are found throughout the Blean, there are areas of oak high forest, and a remnant of oak coppice can still be found in Ellenden Wood. Most of Blean's oaks are relatively young, at around 100 - 140 years old. The oldest oaks in the Blean are pollards, dating back as far as the 17th century. Pollarding is like coppicing, except the branches are cut back at about head height on the trunk, usually to prevent livestock eating the regrowth. However, these pollards were mostly used as boundary markers. One such lovely old tree, known as the Pollard Oak, can be found at the junction of Great Den Lees, Grimshill and Church Woods.

When it comes to biodiversity, the oak is a remarkable tree. It can live for many centuries, and over its lifetime, and even after it has fallen, it supports a staggering amount of life. It provides a home and food for many birds, small mammals, mosses, lichens, fungi and at least 350 species of insects. Its leaves rot to form a rich leaf-mould on the woodland floor, providing nutrients for worms, insects and ground flora to thrive. For this, for its beauty and for all the above reasons, we can see why the oak is such a favourite.



The tradition of 'Pannage'.  
(*'Les tres riches heures - Novembre'*  
Duc de Berry.)



Sweet chestnut coppice with oak standards.



Stag beetle - their larvae like to feed underground on rotting oak.



Dead wood - full of life.

the Blean is just minutes away...

Covering over 11 square miles, the Blean is one of the largest and most distinctive areas of ancient woodland in England, important nationally for both its wildlife and its history. The Blean has been a working woodland for over a thousand years, and continues to provide woodland products, including firewood and fencing materials, for local people. The splendour and tranquillity of this special landscape can be enjoyed on a network of paths and trails. This panel is part of a series of 18 located around the Blean. To see all 18 panels, visit [www.theblean.co.uk](http://www.theblean.co.uk). For information about walking in Kent visit [www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent](http://www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent).