

The woods of a holy city

The University of Kent at Canterbury offers students and visitors wonderful views of the cathedral city of Canterbury. However, just out of view lies another more ancient national treasure, whose history is intertwined with this world heritage site - the Blean. Within this large area of ancient woodland are smaller woods with names that tell of this history - Church Wood, North Bishopden Wood and South Bishops Den Wood.

Canterbury has been synonymous with Christianity in England since the arrival in 597AD of Augustine, who was sent by the Pope to convert the Saxons, and became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. Today it continues to be the seat or 'cathedra' of the Archbishop, Head of the Church of England and worldwide Anglican Communion.

The church and its institutions became substantial landowners in the area. The Domesday Book of 1086 recorded that 9 of the 12 local manors were owned by either the Archbishop, St Augustine's Abbey or the Cathedral Priory. Each of these manors incorporated sizeable areas of Blean woods, which by the 11th Century is believed to have covered an area similar to that which it covers today - approximately 11 square miles.

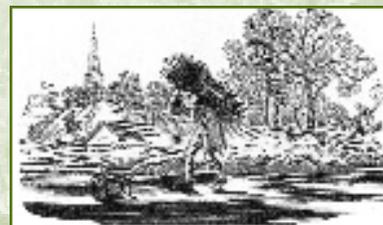
The woodland provided their ecclesiastical owners with wood for construction and an income in the form of timber products, such as faggots (bundles of wood for heating and cooking), and pig pasture. Institutional ownership resulted in centuries of well organised management and conservation. Remnants of ditches and woodbanks remain that once marked boundaries and provided protection for young saplings from the grazing animals.

Today the Blean is mostly owned and managed by organisations such as the Forestry Commission, Natural England, Kent Wildlife Trust, RSPB, and The Woodland Trust. Whilst the woods continue to provide materials for local industries, collectively these organisations work to conserve and enhance this ancient woodland for wildlife and its heritage, as well as for the peaceful enjoyment and benefit of visitors.

The tradition of 'Pannage' - the feeding of pigs on woodland nuts. ('Les tres riches heures - Novembre' Duc de Berry.)



St Augustine, depicted in Westminster Abbey.



Man carrying a 'faggot'. (Thomas Bewick.)



A 1718 map of Christ Church Wood, then owned by the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church, now known as Church Wood. The map appears upside down as it is drawn with south at the top! (Canterbury Cathedral Archives.)



Closest public access points to the Blean.
 Orange - by public footpath Blue - by car.
 Both routes are approx. 1.2 miles (1.9 km)

Please follow the Countryside Code
 Respect - Protect - Enjoy



Canterbury Cathedral choir. (Diane Comley.)



Towering columns of Blean trees. (Diane Comley.)



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. For information about walking in Kent visit www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent.

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