

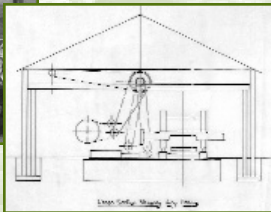
Woodland work and wildlife



Workers in West Blean. (From the collection of Doris Weston.)



A sawmill of similar type and date to that which stood here. (By kind permission Venables Brothers, Shropshire.)



Plan of The Sawmill's engine house. (Canterbury Cathedral Archives.)



Above left: Woodmen bark flaving in Thornden Wood, 1941. Above right: Timber in Cheyney's Wood Yard, 1938. (From the collection of Joan Cheyney.)



It is fitting that British wildlife is celebrated here beside the Blean, home to a variety of wildlife for hundreds of years, including bears and wild boar once upon a time.

Whilst today this great woodland is mostly managed by conservation groups for wildlife and quiet public enjoyment, not so long ago it would have been a bustling work place! Imagine the sights and sounds of woodsmen with horses and tugs, emerging from West and East Blean Woods, bringing felled trees to a steam powered saw mill located just yards away, in what is now known as Wealden Forest Park.

An area of about 4,100 acres (1660 ha) of the Blean nearby was once owned by the church and overseen by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. From the late 1830s, this woodland estate, known as Kent Woods, supplied the church's agricultural estates with fencing materials and timber for their farm buildings. Eventually it also supplied other local enterprises with a variety of woodland products. Oak, elm, chestnut, beech, ash and softwood supplied wheelwrights, boat builders, mines and coffin makers amongst others. Oak sawdust was even used for curing fish.

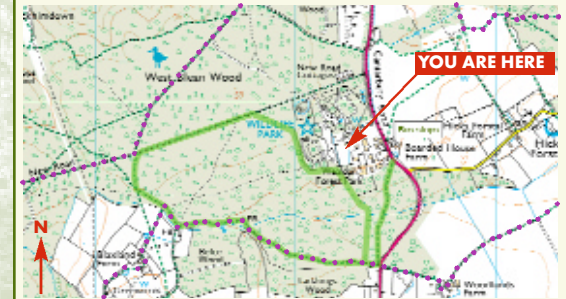
Originally woodsmen were thought to have created and used depots in the woods. Then in 1876 The Sawmill, as it eventually became known, was established. It started with the construction of two lodges or barns, but under the management of a forester called William Cheyney, this gradually expanded, and in 1919 a steam driven saw was installed. The steam engine ran on surplus and un-saleable wood, plus water from a newly sunken well, a pond and supplies from neighbouring farms. In 1964, the Church Commissioners sold these woods to a number of owners, including Wealden Woodlands (Kent) Ltd, who bought The Sawmill and some of the woodland. However, the mill completely closed at the start of the 1990s, as the level of demand for local wood diminished.

Much of the nearby woodland is now owned and managed by Kent Wildlife Trust, who are removing many of the heavily shading conifers, which were planted for their timber, and allowing natural regeneration of native broadleaf species of trees and other woodland plants. They are also creating new open heathland areas and managing them with livestock, which creates new habitat for a range of wildlife. Who knows, one day the wild boar may yet return!

wildlife

Walking in the Blean

Green Trail 2 miles (3.2 km) with link to bus stops



- Kent Wildlife Trust Green Trail
- Big Blean Walk

Information on walks from Tourist Information Centres or The Blean Initiative: www.theblean.co.uk

Please follow the Countryside Code:
Respect - Protect - Enjoy



Heath fritillary butterfly.



Highland Cow in West Blean Wood. (Mike Enfield, Kent Wildlife Trust.)

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.

Produced by



December 2011

Sponsored by

