

= Ruislip Woods =

Ruislip Woods is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and national nature reserve covering 726 acres (294 ha) in Ruislip in the London Borough of Hillingdon . The woods became the first national nature reserve in an urban area of England in May 1997 , receiving the Green Flag Award in 2006 . Ruislip Local Nature Reserve at TQ 090 899 is part of the national nature reserve .

Evidence of Bronze Age settlements has been found within the woods during archaeological excavations . Timber from the woods has been used in the building of several nationally significant buildings , as well as locally ; the Great Barn at Manor Farm was built from oak from the woods .

Ownership of the woods passed with the manor from Ernulf de Hesdin to Bec Abbey and on to King 's College , Cambridge over the years , until Park Wood was sold to the local authority . The remaining woods were purchased from other owners and Ruislip Woods was formed .

= = History = =

Use of the wood has been dated back to the Bronze Age , after a barbed spearhead was discovered by a metal detector user . During an excavation of the findspot in 1984 the spearhead , measuring 4 @. @ 75 inches (121 mm) in length , was found to have been lying in an oval pit with fragments of pottery , indicating it to be the collection of domestic waste from a settlement .

The woods are the remains of the dense woodland which would have covered the county of Middlesex from prehistoric times . Woodland was cleared over time for farming and housing .

Following the Norman conquest of England in 1066 , Ernulf de Hesdin was given the manor of Ruislip , which included the woods , in recognition of his service to William the Conqueror . In 1087 , Ernulf de Hesdin passed the manor to the Bec Abbey . During the Abbey 's ownership , timber from the woods was used in the construction of the Tower of London in 1339 , Windsor Castle in 1344 , the Palace of Westminster in 1346 and the manor of the Black Prince in Kennington . Locally , the Great Barn on the Manor Farm site was constructed of oak from the woods . King 's College , Cambridge became lords of the manor in 1451 .

The manor of Ruislip became part of the Ruislip @-@ Northwood Urban District , though it remained under the ownership of King 's College , Cambridge . A town @-@ planning competition led to a design being chosen that envisaged the clearance of much of the woods and historic sites in Ruislip to make way for 7 @, @ 642 homes , enough for 35 @, @ 000 residents , across the manor . A planning scheme adapted from the original was presented to the public in February 1913 and was approved by the Local Government Board in September 1914 . The outbreak of the First World War halted all construction work , by which time only three new roads had been completed . It did not resume again until 1919 .

In February 1931 , the woods were included in a sale by King 's College to the urban district council . Park Wood was sold for £ 28 @, @ 100 , with Manor Farm and the old Post Office included as a gift to the people of Ruislip . King 's had also wished to present the wood as a gift but was required by the University and College 's Act to receive payment as it was the trustee of the land . Middlesex County Council contributed 75 % of the cost , as the urban district council argued that many of those who would make use of the land would be recreational day @-@ trippers from outside the district . Under a 999 @-@ year lease , the council agreed to maintain the wood and ensure no new building was constructed without the permission of the county council . An area of the wood to the south was not included in the lease agreement and three residential roads were later constructed on it .

Copse Wood was purchased by Middlesex County Council and London County Council in 1936 for £ 23 @, @ 250 , being joined by Mad Bess Wood in the same year . The urban district council , together with Middlesex and London County Councils , purchased the 186 acres (75 ha) wood for £ 28 @, @ 000 in a compulsory purchase from Sir Howard Stransom Button .

In 1984 , Battle of Britain House , which had been built in Copse Wood in 1905 by Josef Conn , was destroyed by fire and the ruins demolished . The house was originally a private home , but during the Second World War was used by the United States military to train saboteur agents for missions in occupied France .

On 21 May 1997 , the woods became a national nature reserve , the first in an urban area of England . The Ruislip Woods Trust was established that year as a charity dedicated to the conservation of the woods , while encouraging greater public interaction with them .

In June 2008 , a new off @-@ road cycle trail was unveiled in Bayhurst Wood , named after the former head of democratic services at Hillingdon Council in recognition of his long service to the borough . The " David Brough Cycle Trail " , covering 2 kilometres (1 @.@ 2 mi) , was officially opened on 24 June .

= = Flora and fauna = =

The main species of trees in the woods include English oak , sessile oak , hornbeam , beech , silver birch , wild service tree , aspen , rowan , field maple , crack willow , wild cherry , hazel and holly .

Wild flowers are also in abundance around the woods , and include common knapweed , harebell , rosebay willowherb , heather , bluebell , woodanemone , yellow archangel , snowdrops and honeysuckle .

According to the London Borough of Hillingdon , the most common species ' of birds found within the woods are mute swan , Canada goose , robin , green woodpecker , jay , nuthatch , lesser spotted woodpecker , greater spotted woodpecker , cuckoo , sparrowhawk , tree creeper , tawny owl , willow tit and woodcock .

Cattle are grazed in Poor 's Field each year to maintain the level of the vegetation . Wild mammals include foxes , hedgehogs , stoats , weasels , mink , grey squirrels and badgers . Several species of bat also live in the woods .

= = Management = =

The reserve covers four woods : Park Wood , Mad Bess Wood and Copse Wood in Ruislip , with Bayhurst Wood in Harefield . Poor 's Field and Tartleton 's Lake in Ruislip are also part of the reserve . There is no definitive explanation as to why Mad Bess Wood received its name , although one theory is that it was named after a female landowner who patrolled the wood looking for poachers .

The woods are managed by the London Borough of Hillingdon , which inherited them from the former Ruislip @-@ Northwood Urban District . The council maintains the volunteer @-@ run Ruislip Woodlands Centre in the grounds of Ruislip Lido , a reservoir within Park Wood . Ruislip Woods received the Green Flag Award in 2006 .

The woods were coppiced on rotation throughout the years with the timber being sold to local tanneries . By the time King 's College took ownership of the manor , the woods were let out for pheasant shooting . Coppicing of the woods continues today , under a 20 @-@ year rotation to aid in the natural growth of the woodland .

Ducks Hill Road and Breakspear Road North pass through the woods in Ruislip and Harefield respectively .