

By the middle of this century the north of the wood was managed differently to the south.

In the north all trees including standards were felled in the 1930's so today there is vigorous coppice and few standards.

In the south the standard trees were left so today there are many old oaks but the coppice growth is poor.

Sweet Chestnut

A The waymarked walk starts at Rayleigh Road, Thundersley in the woodland with many oaks. The broad bank is reputed to have been built during the second world war.

B A large beech tree to the left is unusual, beech are not thought to occur naturally in south-east Essex and this tree may have been planted at the end of the last century.

C The modern Prittle Brook is canalised as it flows through the wood, in the past it was probably an ill defined swamp, the remains of which survive in the pools beside the stream.

D Across the stream the path climbs up the hill and the trees change from willow to hornbeam, oak, sweet chestnut and birch on the hill top. Here there are few standard trees but the coppice is vigorous.

E The woodland on the hill top bordering the Deanes School was devastated by the great storm of October 1987. Much of the sweet chestnut coppice was uprooted leaving a

tangled landscape of craters and fallen trees. Heather had become scarce in the dense shade but is now likely to bloom again as more light reaches the wood floor.

F Descending the hill there is an old banked lane on the left between the wood and farmland. The distant landscape of wooded hilltops with farmland and suburbia in the valleys is typical of south-east Essex.

G At the base of the hill the path crosses a bank which marks the parish boundary between Hadleigh and Thundersley.

H The marshy clearing on the left was meadow until earlier this century when it was planted with poplars. Most of the poplars were damaged in the storm of October 1987 and felled.

I The path returns to Rayleigh Road through oak hornbeam woodland with wild service and rowan trees particularly numerous.



Pendulous Sedge



castlepoint

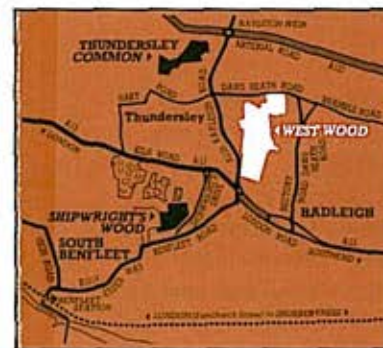
benfleet | canvey | hadleigh | thundersley

WOODLAND WALKS

IN SOUTH-EAST ESSEX

WEST WOOD

■ EXPLORE THIS ANCIENT WOOD WHICH ONCE BELONGED TO THE DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL



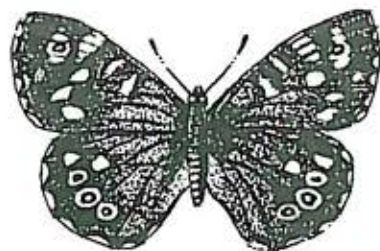
ACCESS
FROM RAYLEIGH ROAD (A129)
THUNDERSLEY,
ESSEX.

AREA
32 HECTARES

6

WEST WOOD

WALK SIX



Speckled Wood

WEST WOOD extends from the high ground of Dawes Heath down to the valley of the Prittle Brook.

For at least two hundred years the wood belonged to the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral and was managed as a coppice woodland. Coppicing is a traditional form of woodland management when trees are cut down, allowed to re-grow, then cut down again every 10–30 years.

The modern wood shows the influence not only of this traditional management but also of the changing soil conditions from valley floor to hill top.

West Wood is owned by the Church Commissioners and leased by Castle Point District Council. There is free access through the wood and a woodland walk has been waymarked. Cottage Plantation is privately owned.

A map of 1750 shows that the boundary of the wood has barely changed for two centuries.

During these two centuries the wood has been actively managed; few if any trees in the wood today were present then but many of the coppice stools survive having been cut down and re-grown many times since.

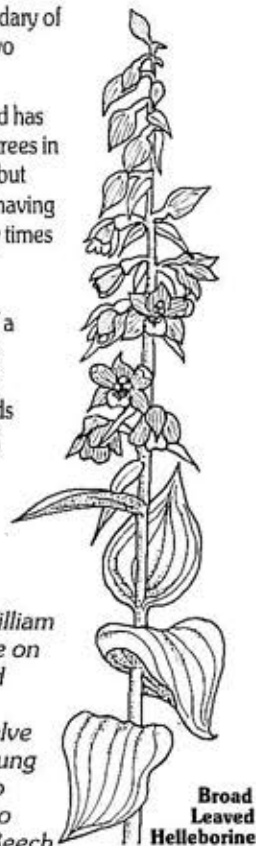
West Wood was the westernmost of a group of woods in south-east Essex owned by the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral, the other woods included Hadleigh Great Wood and Belfairs.

A series of leases survive which describe in detail how the woods were to be managed.

'the said John Blagdon and William Gibney . . . shall and will leave on every acre of the said demised woodlands from which any underwood shall be felled twelve such standells or stors of young oak and if there shall not be so many . . . of young oak then so many young elm Ash asp or Beech as shall make up the said number . . .

'shall and will sufficiently inclose the same and preserve the young springs of the said hereby demised woodlands from and against the treading bite and hurt of all manor of cattle'

Standells or stors are young trees, spring is coppice re-growth, asp is aspen.



Broad Leaved Helleborine

