

COUNTY: KENT SITE NAME: CHURCH WOODS, BLEAN

DISTRICT: SWALE, CANTERBURY

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Part of the site is a National Nature Reserve (NNR)

Local Planning Authority: SWALE BOROUGH COUNCIL. Canterbury City Council

National Grid Reference: TR 109603 Area: 297.07 (ha.) 733.76 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 179 1:10,000: TR 16 SW, TR 06 SE
TR 15 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951 Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The site is Grade I in 'A Nature Conservation Review' and was formerly known as Blean Woods. Part of the site is managed by The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds as a reserve. A small area has been deleted from the site in the north-west corner.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site is one of the most extensive areas of broadleaved woodland remaining in the Forest of Blean and is representative of these woodlands which are situated on London Clay. One nationally rare species of butterfly the heath fritillary is present and in addition an outstanding assemblage of invertebrate species has been recorded.

The traditional coppice with standards management of the woods has, together with climatic, soil and other factors, given rise to the great biological interest currently present. In addition to the sweet chestnut, numerous native species of tree are found in the coppice with hornbeam, hazel, beech and oak among the most frequent. Both pedunculate and sessile oaks are found, as coppice and as standards, but sessile oaks are more abundant. There is much birch present in the coppice and in less productive areas.

Brambles *Rubus fruticosus*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bluebells *Hyacinthoides nonscripta* tend to be the dominant plants of the woodland floor but many other species are present. A number are more or less restricted to woodland such as this which has remained free of total clearance for centuries. These include greater woodrush *Luzula sylvatica*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*, butcher's broom *Ruscus aculeatus* and wood melick *Melica uniflora*. Several small trees and shrubs also fall into this category – wild service tree and midland hawthorn are most frequent here.

Many of the woodland rides have a rich flora, with such species as beautiful St John's wort *Hypericum pulchrum*, purging flax *Linum catharticum*, common centaury *Centaureum erythraea*, common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and wavy hair grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and on the most acidic, gravelly soils ling heather *Calluna vulgaris*.

Numerous uncommon invertebrates have been recorded from this site and especially from the National Nature Reserve, including beetles, millipedes and bugs. A good range of woodland birds is present, including three woodpecker species, eight warblers, and six tits. Several species which regularly breed here are elsewhere rather scarce in East Kent; these include woodcock, nightjar, redstart and wood warbler. The area has especially good numbers of nightingales.