

Historical management of Captain's Wood

Captain's Wood was shown as 'Cutmore Wood' on ancient maps it is understood that 'Cutmore' devolved to 'Captain' over the course of time. Over the last 1000 years the wood has passed through the hands of various Bishops, noblemen and moneyed families including in 1550 the Bishop of Norwich, in 1620 Sir Michael Stanhope (Groom to the chamber of Elizabeth 1) and in the late 19th century Sir Richard Wallace. Until the 20th Century the wood was a small part of a much larger estate but the estate was broken up and what remains now is little more than a fragment.

Early maps show a landscape around Sudbourne radically different to that found today. A mosaic of wood pasture (open woodland typically grazed by deer or livestock) and heathland extended for several thousand acres and the boundary of Captains Wood can clearly be seen much as it is today.

However, much of Sudbourne Great Wood to the north has been cleared for agriculture in the last 70 years, as have the extensive heaths to the east and south. Today Captains Wood sits in a modern farming landscape of turf and potato production.

However, step into Captains Wood and you step back one hundred years or more into a woodland habitat of ancient trees and wild flowers where deer roam freely, barn owls hunt the clearings and 7 species of bat feed amongst the trees. Despite this apparent wildness the structure of Captains Wood is very much the work of generations of men. Wood pasture was a favoured sporting environment in the Middle Ages ideally suited to hunting deer on horseback. Right through to the early 20th century the wood was used for hunting and shooting. The 1883 map shows a building in the middle of the wood referred to

as the Luncheon Rooms which was no doubt a part of the social fabric of the time, providing a place of rest and recuperation during a days shooting or riding. No trace of this building remains today.

These early maps also show a 4 acre formal woodland garden towards the Sudbourne village end of the wood. Unusually, the gardens do not appear to be directly associated with a large house and their origin remains unknown. All that can be found today are a few exotic trees, crumbling walls and lines of thistle and nettle that follow the course of former walls and ditches.

Of the 140 acres purchased by the Trust, 90 acres is woodland and the remainder is grassland. The grassland areas that up until the 1990's were cultivated to grow cereals have since developed into acid grassland maintained largely by deer and rabbit grazing. The soils are light and free-draining allowing nutrients to quickly wash out creating conditions that are more akin to heathland soils. In time it is expected that the vegetation will become quite 'heathy' with gorse already becoming established.