



A Brief History of Queenswood

Queenswood is a fragment of the vast ancient oak wood that once stretched to the Welsh borders and beyond. It was held by the crown on and off throughout the ages and only changed its name from 'Kings Wood' to 'Queenswood' in the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. During the 17th century Queenswood became part of the Hampton Court Estate, which still borders the country park on the opposite side of the main road. During the First World War the woods were clear-felled to provide timber for the war effort.

How did Queenswood become a country park?

The land was originally purchased following a public appeal by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) in 1934 following concerns that land in this beautiful area was being sold off for holiday homes with no planning control to prevent this from happening. This was because the woods were clear-felled during the First World War to provide timber for the war effort and by the 1930s the woodlands, which had once been managed for the profitable timber and coppice products were no longer economically viable.

In 1935 the County Memorial Scheme was launched to provide a lasting memorial of the Silver Jubilee of King George V and, in agreement with CPRE, the land was handed over to Herefordshire County Council to be managed 'as an open space for the enjoyment of the public for all time'.

By now the woodland had started to regenerate and the hilltop was covered with the regrowth of young trees and dense scrub. A management committee was established and the first ranger was employed to start opening up the rides and thin the trees so that the public could enjoy the site.

In 1945 Sir Richard Cotterell, a neighbouring landowner, became chairman of the management committee and looked at planting the woodland for amenity. When the cost of planting the whole 170 acres proved to be too great, it was decided to focus on the central 47 acres which is now the arboretum. In 1953 Sir Richard, who was by then Lord Lieutenant for Herefordshire, launched a public appeal to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and raise money to plant rare and beautiful trees in this central section of the woodland.

Another public appeal was launched in 1987 which raised £150,000 and enabled major improvements to take place at the country park including the movement and re-erection of the timber framed buildings that now house the various indoor facilities.

How have the woodlands been managed in the past?

The present day woodland is the result of natural regeneration since the hillside was clear-felled during the First World War. Prior to this, records show that the woods were managed as coppice for at least two centuries and probably a lot longer. In fact historical evidence suggests that most of our woodlands would

have looked very different before the 19th century. There would have been very few of the large trees which make up a typical woodland today - instead trees were regularly harvested whilst relatively small.

The archaeology at Queenswood provides evidence of the intensity of woodland working here in earlier times. Centuries-old saw pits and charcoal burning platforms can be found on the hillside as well as numerous ancient holloways (sunken tracks) used by horses to extract the timber and stone from the woodland. By the 1930s the woodlands, which had once been managed for the profitable timber and coppice products were no longer economically viable as other materials (such as steel) were replacing wood in industry.

All of this may seem hard to imagine today - the woodland is now managed as a nature reserve and its ecological importance recognised by its designation as a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). More than 190 plant species have been recorded; this is high for a Herefordshire woodland and includes scarce species such as wood vetch and birds nest orchid.

Queenswood Heritage Gateway Project: Uncovering Queenswood

As part of the Queenswood Heritage Gateway Project which ran from 2018 to 2019, we recorded a series of interviews with those who knew Queenswood and have special memories. You can find many of these on the Queenswood YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCV3bk9lqrvzHjd2GAZRbMCg/featured?view_as=subscriber

If you are interested in finding out more about Queenswood, a publication: *Queenswood: Our Wood on the Hill* is available to buy from the Visitor Centre.