

Kings Wood history

The name Kings Wood originally applied to a small wood to the north of Kings Wood Lodge and on maps of 1823 this area bears the name Sanderstead Wood; the change of name may have been due to a mistake by the early surveyors of Ordnance Survey Maps.

The wood covers some 147 1/2 acres and is on relatively flat ground. It was purchased in 1937 under the Green Belt Act and is now public open space. It was originally laid out for shooting with wide rides dissecting the woodland. The beaters used to systematically work through each section, driving game towards the guns. The keepers cottage still stands in the woods and forms part of the Kings Wood Kennels complex where the Parks Department keeps the dogs used by the security section.

At one time each path crossing was marked by four tall conifers but few of these remain today. Before the war Kings Wood was a particularly valuable piece of woodland but during the war most of the best trees were removed by the army. The woodland was also disturbed by a flying bomb which landed amongst the trees; its shell remained there for many years.

There is the site of a Romano-British settlement on the northern boundary, a small farmstead undisturbed for 2000 years. Partial excavations were carried out by Mr. R.I Little during 1955 and 1959.

The site, which lay on the edge of a small valley in the wood was enclosed by a small semi-circular earthwork. During the dig of 1959 a chance strike by a pick axe hit a large Roman burial-urn. This led to the discovery of a small first century cemetery a few feet beyond the gateway to the settlement and alongside a short stretch of metalled road. In all five internments were excavated and thoroughly examined and it was found that all five burials were of babies and young children, representing the only children's cemetery of this period hitherto found in Surrey.

The archaeologists also surveyed the complex of ancient roads and trackways connecting the site to ancient trade routes. Both to the east and to the west of the farmstead run established Iron Age trackways and the Kings Wood site was directly connected to both.

Over forty Dean Holes were also found in Kings Wood, all of them silted up through the course of centuries. Excavation of one of the holes revealed a shaft sunk into the clay with flint to a depth of at least 10 feet 6 inches. Such shafts, when sunk in clay with flints areas are commonly regarded as smarling pits i.e. shafts or pits sunk to obtain chalk to spread on the fields.

Kings Wood was closely linked with an area of land now occupied by Atwood Primary School on the Limpsfield Road. In 1960 during building operations, some 20 holes were discovered and the contents, mainly pottery dating from 250-150 B.C., indicated that they had been used mainly as rubbish pits. One may have been the floor of a hut and others may have held timber uprights. All this indicated Iron Age occupation and this settlement was linked to the Kings Wood community by road.

May is one of the best months to visit Kings Wood when the ground is covered with Bluebells growing between the Oak, Sweet Chestnut, Birch and Hazel.

Like the Primrose, Wood Anemone and Violet, the Bluebell is able to compete with the tall bracken and brambles which cover the ground later in the season.