GROVE WOODS

WALK FOUR

Grove Woods are located between Rayleigh and Eastwood, forming a haven for both people and wildlife, between the suburban development of Rayleigh and the intensively farmed land of the Rochford area. They can be reached from Grove Road or Consamara Road, Rayleigh. The area is naturally nature reserve of common hedgerow plants and rustic garden plants: oak, hawthorn, sallow and hawthorn. The woods are an important site for the preservation of the local flora and fauna. The woods are managed by Rochford District Council to maintain the rich variety of plants.

In the Domesday Survey of 1086, this land was part of Rayleigh and owned by the Crown. The Park would have provided deer for the Crown and was a valuable asset. In 1344 the Park was sold and a number of small farms established. In 1876 four of these farms - Lime House, Rayleigh Lodge, Whitehouse and Eastwood Lodge, were sold by auction. Joseph Henry Ratcliffe Moloney, Twenty years later, bought 11 plots on the corner of Grove Road and Lancaster Road at £4 15s. 6d. a plot. At this time (1874), a farm labourer’s wage was £11 1s. 4d. a week, and a bottle of beer was 3s. 4d. The area was then grown, and there were no mains water or drainage. The only fresh water was from wells, the remains of which can still be seen.

By the 1940s, the area was showing signs of neglect. A large brick built house in Lancaster Road was destroyed by bomb blasts during the Second World War. Many of the plots were abandoned and invaded by oak trees and hawthorns, which were to create the modern woodland. The overgrowth and new trees and bushes, which were to create the modern woodland. The area was then grown, and there were no mains water or drainage. The only fresh water was from wells, the remains of which can still be seen.

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A short trail has been marked through these Woods. Follow the yellow arrows and the directions below.

1. **Leave the car park and turn right up Grove Road before passing through a stile into the Woods on your left. Continue along this path.** On your right is a small clearing fringed by ash trees.

2. **The ditch and bank to the left are the remains of an old tarred hedge which is clearly shown on the old tithe maps. The hedgerow elms survive as young suckers and the rotting trunks of the mature trees.**

3. **Cross the ditch and enter the dense woodland; this spruce is typical of the woodland, usually dominated by oak and from which has become established during this century. Continue through this woodland to a line of hawthorn, which were planted as a hedge between plots this century.**

4. **The woodland to the south has been thinned to leave a few oaks and to let more light reach the wood floor. If you look carefully you can see a series of hedges and furrows approximately 2.5m apart; these are relics of early drainage when this area was farmland.**

5. **From the hedge turn right through woodland, back across the elm hedge and into an orchard. The orchard was established at the beginning of the century when the surrounding hedge was planted, subsequently it was abandoned and invaded by scrub which has recently been cleared and new fruit trees established.**

6. **The ruins of the building and a well can still be seen in the north of this plot.**

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