

Wayfaring is a journey of exploration inspired by the chalk landscape and ancient routes of the Icknield Way. Find out more at wayfaring.org.uk

Who built Basildon House?

Basildon Park estate was bought by **Francis Sykes** in 1771. Sykes had travelled to India in the mid 1700s and made his fortune in the **East India Company**.

Sykes demolished the old house and employed architect John Carr to build a Bath Stone mansion. The house was used by the Sykes family for entertaining their friends from London with hunting and fishing parties.



Did you know...?

Basildon House has an impressive collection of art works that includes Old Masters, 20th century engravings and paintings of the Grand Tour.



Taking Care of the Park

The National Trust looks after the Park and manages the woodland to keep it as it was when the house was built. Old and dead trees and logs are not cleared but left to age, rot and provide homes for fungi, insects, bats, animals and birds.

The Park covers 400 acres.



The House in the 20th century

The House was used as a hospital for injured soldiers from the Berkshire Regiments during the First World War. The property gave local soldiers a place to recuperate and learn new skills, and provided materials for the community.

In the Second World War it was used as a base for training soldiers and later as a prisoner of war camp.

In 1952 Lord and Lady Iliffe bought Basildon Park, which had been badly damaged during the war. They restored the house and enjoyed it for many years before gifting the property to the National Trust in 1978.



Did you know...

...at around the time the park was planted, an acre was set as the area a man with an ox could plough in a day?

Today, we would say the park covers around 160 hectares, a hectare is around the size of an international rugby pitch.



New trees are being planted all the time, and protected from grazing animals with fences. New hazel shoots are protected with cleverly designed structures that keep the animals away and yet allow the new shoots to grow up through the gaps.

Cattle graze in the woodland in the summer months and are usually rounded up for the winter to go indoors. Cows are naturally woodland browsers and like the shade from the trees. They eat the new tree shoots to stop the woodland becoming too dense and dark and their dung is good for the soil. In the winter of 2017, two cows managed to evade capture right through to the spring, they became known as the Basildon Two!



Things to look out for in the Park and the Woodland

There are around 200 bases of the US Army Nissen huts that were built in WWII.

See if you can spot the zigzag trenches also built by the army in WWII.



Remains of Nissen huts from WWII

Old Trees

Not far from the front of the house is a **Mulberry tree**, thought to have been planted in 1650. It is protected with a low fence but still produces lots of delicious mulberries.

To the right of the main house you will find some very old oak trees over 400 years old.



Did you know...?

When these trees were small there was Civil War in England, Shakespeare had died only 40 years earlier, average human life expectancy was about 40 years and yet these trees are still alive and healthy!



dormice box

Wildlife

Small boxes half-way up hazel trees provide safe homes for **dormice** (a very rare and protected species). They are shy creatures and like to climb the tree and go in through the back door.

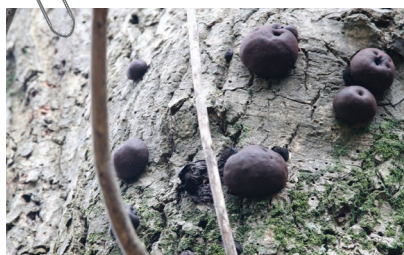
On a muddy day you can see lots of animal footprints especially **deer** and **badgers**. The badgers make their homes in the chalk where the soil is soft; the roots of the trees break up the chalk and make it easier for them to dig. Look out for the entrances to their setts.

Fungi

"Jelly Ear Fungus" and "King Alfred's Cakes" are fungi commonly found in the Park. King Alfred's Cakes look like small burnt cakes, they are very dense and they tend to smoulder rather than burn. Early travellers used to carry them smouldering from one camp to another to set up their next fires.



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King Alfred's Cakes ©Peter Spence

Chalk Grassland Flowers

At the far side of the Park from the House is the **Hidden Valley**, an area of chalk grassland, which provides a special habitat for many rare species. Look out for orchids in the summer.



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To download the full set of factsheets and lots of other useful resources: www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/publications-resources.html

Sources and Further information

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Woodland Management www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Chalk Grassland http://northwessexdowns.org.uk/uploads/File_Management/Publications/Special_Qualities/Land_Management_and_Biodiversity/biodiversity-chalk-grasslands.pdf