

## BATHFORD HILL WOODS AND BROWNES FOLLY RESERVE

The area of Bathford Hill lies between Bradford Road to the west and the county boundary, which here runs along the path at the top of the hillside. Bradford Road was formed in 1795, before which there was no easy route. The area is known as Brownes Folly, after the tower at the top of the hill, and is mostly a nature reserve.

Access to the reserve is from the car park at the top of the steep hill towards Farleigh Rise. There is a footpath access only at the top of Prospect Place. This track takes the route of Fluester's Road, named after George Fluester and built to gain access to the extensive beds of stone extending southwards along the hillside. There is also a footpath via the stile at the top of the Wayacre Meadow near Mountain Wood.

This area takes in the steep wooded hillside and meadows to the east of Bradford Road. It is a well-used and beautiful natural area with extensive public access via a mostly well-maintained network of tracks, paths and steps, which give practical access to this steep area while maintaining its rural character. A large variety of flora and fauna can be found here, including rarities like Bath asparagus and horseshoe bats.

The northern area is a stunning mixture of limestone outcrops, trees, undergrowth and open grassed areas. The open swards just below Brownes Folly allow extraordinary panoramic views along the river valleys and beyond. Some low-key purpose designed seating would be good here.

Conversely, the hillside can be seen from the wider surrounding area and the high wooded hillside forms a dramatic and beautiful natural backdrop to the village. Seasonal and diurnal variations give immense character to the village setting.

Much of the hill is honeycombed with limestone mines and tunnels. Many were used as stores during WW2. Some of the mine entrances can still be seen, although access is restricted to protect the indigenous wildlife. The mines are long abandoned and the workings are now obscured with trees and undergrowth.

Brownes Folly tower, known locally as the Pepperpot, is actually just beyond the Parish boundary. It is a striking landmark and its outline on the highest ridge of the hillside can be seen from afar. A century ago the hillsides around the tower were almost completely open and the tower could be clearly seen; now it peeps out from its mantle of trees. The tower was built about 1845 by Wade Browne, a local landowner. (There is debate about the spelling of the surname). In 1938 there was a proposal to demolish the tower, which fortunately did not happen. The tower is currently closed and appears neglected but would afford magnificent views if ever accessible again.

The most southerly area, adjacent to the Bradford Road towards Warleigh Manor, is known locally as Sally-in-the-Woods after Sally Gibson, the widow of a Warleigh Manor gamekeeper who lived locally in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This area is older woodland and the Bradford Road is the only interruption to the dramatically dense foliage.

The nature reserve is owned by the Avon Wildlife Trust and was purchased by public subscription, with the help of the residents of Bathford, in 1972. When opened to the public it included Mountain Wood plantation, Steep Wood, Prigley Wood, Quarry Wood and Ash Wood, about 33 acres in all. In 1984 the reserve was nearly tripled in size with the addition of a further 63 acres southward along the hillside. The Trust maintains the reserve with volunteer help and the area is generally well husbanded although some of the recent fencing-off of certain areas has been controversial. There are useful information boards at intervals with maps and points of interest, although these are sometimes damaged. Occasional low-key seating along the pathways would be welcome.

As a protected area there are few pressures on the site. Walkers seem to keep to the paths and tracks so the wooded undergrowth is largely unspoilt. Most of the problems occur due to misuse and thoughtless actions. The swards below the folly are often scarred and could be destroyed by casual camp-fires and rubbish. The parking area, being away from public view, is spoiled by rubbish tipping. Mountain biking is banned but still happens and is eroding the paths. It is difficult to resolve these issues without undue regimentation, which would spoil the natural character of the site. As always, education may be the only solution.

## SIGNIFICANT FEATURES for the Woods and Folly area

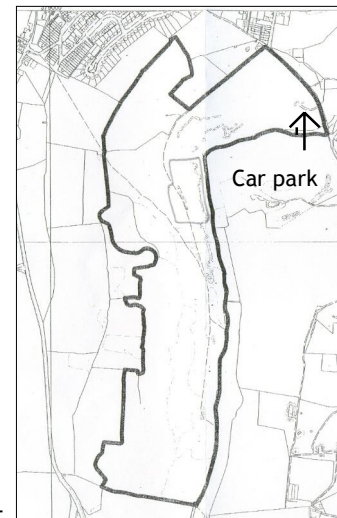
- Topography:** Steep north and west facing hillside. Panoramic views from open high areas.
- Access:** Restricted to pedestrian and forestry traffic. Network of well maintained paths and forest tracks some of which are historic routes. Parking area near Farleigh Rise.
- Settlement:** Unsettled.
- Morphology:** Old established and more recent woodland with some open grassed and meadow areas. Brownes Folly (Pepperpot) is important historic landmark building.
- Activities:** Tranquil recreational woodland and grassed areas with extensive public access.
- Space:** Dense woodland with open green areas. Contained woodland views with contrasting panoramas where woods open out to valleys.
- Buildings:** Stone built Brownes Folly, inaccessible at present.
- Construction:** Some sections of old dry stone field walls in northern parts. Unsightly, modern metal fencing to areas around Folly tower. Paths and steps formed with natural materials.

### GUIDANCE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure retention of unique rural character of area.
- Ensure protection of flora and fauna of area.
- Protect and maintain old stone boundary walls.
- No development.
- Ensure character of existing landmark building is retained.

### POTENTIAL ACTIONS & ENHANCEMENT SCHEMES

- Encourage refurbishment and possible reuse of Pepperpot.
- Explore alternatives to metal fencing if division of area is essential for land management.
- Explore ways to discourage fires, littering and casual misuse of reserve.
- Explore ways to allow controlled cycling without destruction of natural areas, for example raised timber cycle-ways.
- Possible extension of footpath network to other areas of reserve.
- Explore installation of low-key appropriate seating in areas below Pepperpot and along pathways.



Outline map of the wildlife reserve. Bathford village is at the top left corner.



Watercolour of a rock strata in the Browns Folly reserve

From the reserve view points there are many splendid views across the valley to Solsbury, Lansdown and Bathampton Down



**Avon**



Brownes Folly area pictures



Car park at top of Prospect Place



Lay by on A363—suffers from tipping



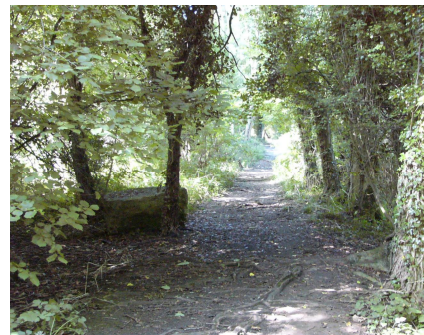
Bathford Hill & woods from Bathampton meadow



Open sward below the Pepperpot



Brownes Folly through the trees



Woodland path through the reserve



View across to Claverton Down



A limestone outcrop in the woods



Stone walls at the old field boundaries



Reserve boundary sign