



# Wyre Forest Study Group

## A Visit to Kingswood

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Nigel Dobson-Smyth at Manor Holding Rosemary Winnall

Kingswood is a detached part of Stottesdon parish, presumably acquired to give access to forest resources for a manor in an area of more open county. Kingswood, and Winwoods adjoining it to the north, lie on a down-faulted block of that part of the Coal Measures that has coarser and less variable rocks, and so soil and topography more amenable to agriculture than the greater part of the forest, so Manor Holding, probably the initial medieval settlement, could have been a subsistence farm. Two more holdings, Upper and Lower Kingswood Farms, would have extended the farmed area later. Coal mines were established on Lower Kingswood and Winwoods land in the eighteenth century and worked into the nineteenth, with one

Winwoods mine re-opened briefly in the 1920s. A modern bungalow completes the hamlet. The curious field beside Dowles Brook down by the 'Experimental Pool' and called 'Hopyard Plantation' on the Stottesdon Tithe Map also belonged to Kingswood. The fields have been sold from Upper Kingswood Farm, and its barns converted for residential use.

Manor Holding has a meadow and two small orchards in the angle between Kingswood Lane and the track to Winwoods, to the north. 'Field in the Wood' south of the lane is no longer part of the holding: when I first knew it, an old lady who kept sheep there lived at the holding. When she moved away, I poked around the house and outbuildings. You could see daylight through the walls of the timber-framed house and poke fingers through the lath and plaster, and there were remains of barns, sheds and pig sties, changes in ground level and enigmatic bits of wall suggesting a very long period of modification.

On a fine Wednesday in February, we met Nigel Dobson-Smyth at the end of Kingswood Lane. He is the owner and part-occupier of Manor Holding and has restored and extended the house and barns, using local stone and lime mortar, he and his wife doing much of the work themselves. As we walked along the lane we passed two bungalows which, when I first knew the lane, were shacks formed from railway carriages, and a stone cottage and adjacent ruined building on a very narrow plot on the north side of the lane. Nigel told us of his interpretation of the history of Kingswood, pointing out that the lane is both an ancient routeway and a significant boundary, evidence being the substantial ditch and bank, and the hedge with its formerly layered trees on massive old stools, on the north side. The cottage beside the lane could have been established to control timber extraction, since deeply incised tushing tracks converge on it. Reaching Manor Holding, we walked over the meadow, noting the ridge and furrow, which



Members of the WFSG walking down the holloway

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had shown up on the Wyre Forest Lidar Survey. Nigel pointed out the ditch forming the western boundary, fed by a pond in the upper orchard and emerging as a spring on the other side of the lane. Towards the top of the meadow, humps and a hollow are thought by Nigel to have been a bell pit, suggesting an earlier mining history than is recorded nearby. Some old apple and pear trees have survived, and Nigel has planted more. Rosemary Winnall drew our attention to the enormous number of Yellow Meadow Ant hills, and we puzzled over a circular area of different vegetation towards the bottom of the meadow.

The Stottesdon Tithe Map (1848) shows that the meadow was then three units, Little Field in the angle between the Kingswood Lane and the Winwoods track, Lower Orchard, a narrow plot running west from the house, and The Meadow. The First Edition OS Map (1832) has The Winwoods track as the main route and turning west north of the house between The Meadow and Lower Orchard to join the lane, which at that time was less important than the track, perhaps because that was then the better route to transport coal.

We left Manor Holding, and passing Upper Kingswood farmhouse were invited to look at the work its new owners were doing on their pond and its surroundings: rather too much hard surfaces for many of our tastes, but having taken out a lot of the vegetation filling up the pond, they have divided it into 'wild' and 'garden' areas, and mallard and moorhens are happily living there. They have divided the field that remains to the property, which Lidar survey shows also had ridge and furrow, and which appears on the Tithe Map as Cherry Orchard, into pens for goats, pigs, chickens and geese.

As we walked down past Lower Kingswood Farm, I pointed out the remains of the bank and ditch surrounding the house and yard and the nearer fields, which have been identified as an Iron Age enclosure. Part of the ditch retains water, and the Tithe Map gives field names 'Big Meadow and Water, Spring Leasow and Moat Meadow. A few years ago, when some clearance was in progress in the yard close to the house, I was able to see massive stonework which appeared to be part of a wall. We continued down a footpath which becomes a hollow way, pausing to look at the remains of a building, which we concluded, at least for part of its history, had been a cottage rather than a barn, having some plaster on the inside, and I now find that the Tithe Map shows the remains of an enclosure around it as Garden Close.

We had a comfortable lunch stop on the bank of the hollow way with the warm sun on our backs, before crossing a field whose land-form has long puzzled me but is probably geologically determined, and down to the footbridge over the brook which bounds the forest at the bottom of Kingswood and Winwoods land, and into Longdon Orchard. Studiously ignoring mossy hummocks which could have housed snow fleas, and stopping only to consider flushed areas, and to look at some seeds wedged into crevices in conifer bark which we thought might be a nuthatch's larder, we clambered up to the pipeline and crossed its access fences to the bottom of the Winwoods land. Rosemary Winnall has been monitoring a strip seeded for wild flowers which runs up the field and we were interested to see how its flora has developed. Back on the Winwoods track, we headed back to Kingswood, noting the evidence for the coal pits in the fields as we passed.



The ruin, Kingswood

Rosemary Winnall