



## Savernake Forest

On the eastern edge of the village of Wilton is the line of a Roman road which in ancient times ran from Winchester to Swindon. North of the Kennet and Avon Canal the road meets the southern boundary of Savernake Forest and then passes on through it.

The forest, now some 4,500 acres, is the remnant of a much larger forest which in the early middle ages would have included Wilton in its expanse.

From the Norman Conquest the forest has been owned by an unbroken line of hereditary “forest wardens”. The current owner is a family trust of the Earl of Cardigan, one of whose ancestors, the 7th Earl, commanded the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War.

It is the only ancient forest in Britain still privately owned. Leased to the Forestry Commission, it is open to the public. Criss-crossed by a network of rides, Savernake Forest offers an excellent array of routes for the walker.

In the 18th century, when the forest was still considerably larger, the famous landscape architect ‘Capability’ Brown was employed to plant a number of beech avenues in straight lines radiating out from a central point. These include the Grand Avenue which bisects the forest from the north-west to the south-east and at 3.9 miles is the longest tree-lined avenue in Britain.

The forest contains a number of monumental trees, the most famous being the Big Belly Oak, estimated to be 1,100 years old, which stands near the A346; the oak is one of the Fifty Great British Trees which were named as part of Queen Elizabeth II’s Golden Jubilee celebrations.

