

## WYFOLD GRANGE, OXFORDSHIRE AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WALK

*by Nigel Peters*

### INTRODUCTION

One of the aims of SOAG's Wyfold Grange archaeology project was to organise a walk linking Wyfold Grange with other earthworks identified by the Chiltern Conservation Board's (CCB) 'Beacons of the Past' Lidar survey. The Lidar survey, Figure 1, shows Wyfold Grange at the north, with the Castle Grove hillfort to the southwest, and the Old Copse earthwork to the southeast. These have been linked together for a circular walk of 5 miles, including an extension to view Wyfold Court, the Victorian Gothic mansion built (by the then owner of Wyfold Grange), from 1871-76.

### RESULTS

The walk was trialled as part of the CCB's Spring Walking Festival, with the walk taking place on 23 May 2022. The walk proved popular and was fully booked some time in advance, with 14 members of the public joining 8 of the SOAG Wyfold project team. An enjoyable time was had by all, with the post-walk questionnaires showing that the members of the public were really interested in the way SOAG members explained the archaeological history of the area.

The CCB have now positioned a heritage display panel at Gallowstree Common Playing Fields (SU 688 802). The panel includes a detailed description of Castle Grove hill fort and the former gallows site (giving the village its name).

### WYFOLD WALK INSTRUCTIONS

There is car parking at the playing fields, so this makes a good start/finish point for the walk. The walk route is marked on the map (Figure 2). You are recommended to take OS Explorer map 171 'Chiltern Hills West' with you.

Note: this walk is on undulating ground, which can be muddy. There are some stiles to cross, so it is not suitable for those less mobile or with children's buggies. Throughout the walk, look for white arrows painted on trees, courtesy of The Chiltern Society, to indicate public footpaths, as a supplement to the county council signs which are at major junctions only.

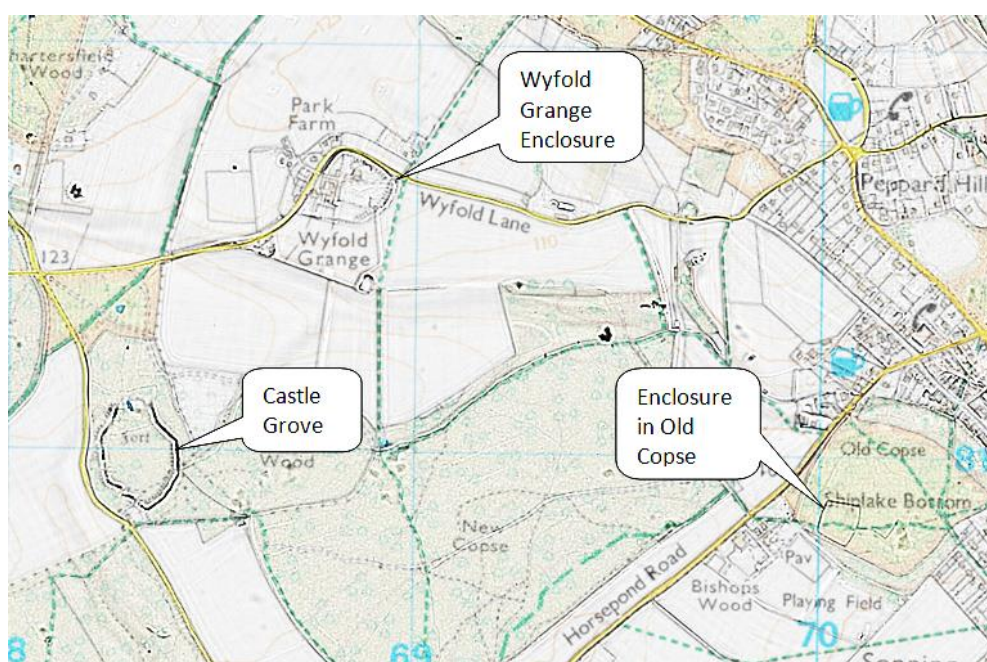


Figure 1. Lidar image overlaid on OS Explorer map showing Wyfold Grange, Castle Grove and the Old Copse enclosure.

(1) On leaving Gallowstree Common Playing fields, head past the cricket club practice nets and enter a woodland path. The path runs parallel to Horsepond Road. At the end of the path, turn right and cross the road, to enter a footpath directly opposite leading into Old Copse Wood, owned by the Woodland Trust. This is one of the few examples in the area of an ancient woodland. Soon after entering the wood cross a shallow earthwork, which you need to cross reference with the Lidar map to really appreciate the extent and nature of the enclosure. It is an interesting feature, date and use unknown, and will be the subject of further investigation by SOAG. Follow the woodland path until you reach the edge of the wood near housing at Sonning Common.

(2) Follow the path leading back at a right angle towards the old village well. Carefully cross the road and walk, facing the traffic, to the left for 50 metres. Enter a public footpath on your right, going through pasture fields and a small wood, giving lovely views towards Wyfold Lane, with Wyfold Grange and its surrounding Scots Pine trees visible on the horizon. Turn left and walk along Wyfold Lane towards the grange for 500 metres. This a quiet lane but beware of farm vehicles and the occasional car. The earthwork surrounding the grange fronts the lane, which is part of the medieval Goring-Henley drove road, discussed in our report *Landscape Archaeology at Wyfold, Oxfordshire*. The section of the earthwork removed by SOAG for dating purposes can be seen just past the entrance to the grange.

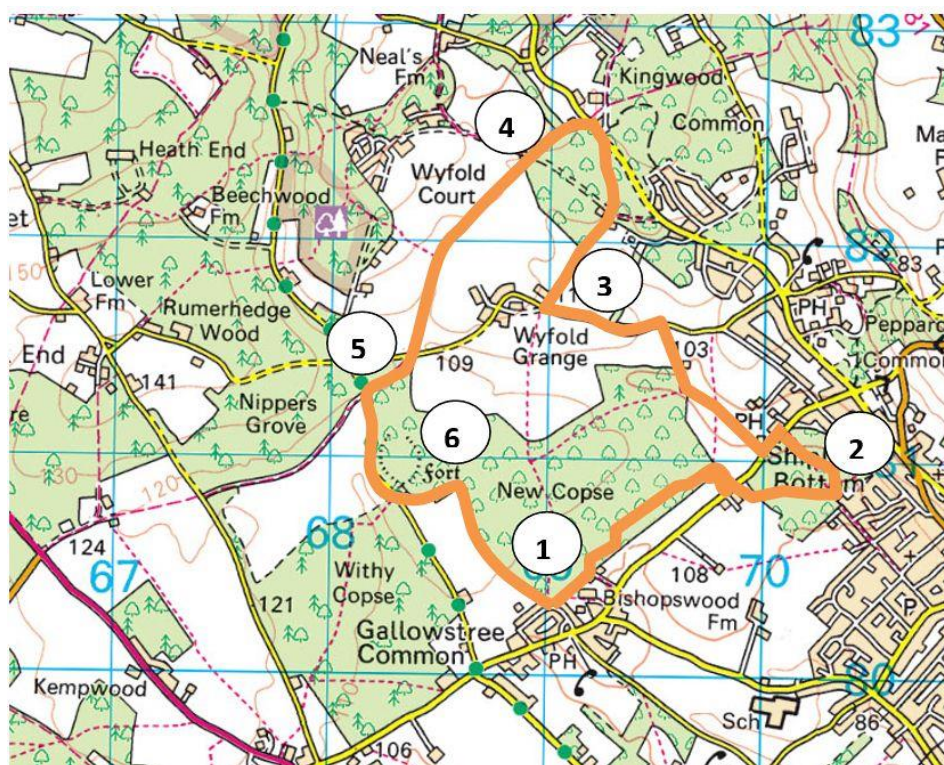


Figure 2. Route of SOAG Wyfold Archaeological Walk on OS Explorer map

(3) Retrace a few steps to the grange entrance, and opposite take the public footpath going towards Hazel Grove. Cross a private road heading to Wyfold Court, and turn left on a trackway for a short distance running parallel to the road at Kingswood Common.

(4) Turn left onto a bridleway which takes you back to the road leading to Wyfold Court. This gives a good view of the Victorian Gothic Mansion, built by Edward Hermon from 1871-76. Sold by his family in the 1932, the house became a psychiatric hospital before being renovated as luxury apartments in the 1990s. Hermon also owned Wyfold Grange. He demolished the medieval grange/manor in 1871, and rebuilt on the same footprint in 1871, whilst investing most of his wealth (he was reputedly the richest of the Lancastrian cotton and textile merchants) in creating this grand country house.

(5) The bridleway now passes a vineyard, increasingly popular in the Chilterns, before you come again to Wyfold Lane. Cross the lane, and almost immediately opposite, enter Wyfold Wood. Go past a pond, and exit the wood, turning left along a country lane, and proceed for 100 metres before entering the same wood on the left hand side.

(6) Going straight ahead you come to the embankment of the Iron Age hill fort known as Castle Grove. This is a scheduled monument. The earthwork embankments are largely in place, especially the side furthest from the road. Follow the embankment furthest from the road, walking in the ditch where possible, in a southerly direction until you leave the wood at Kate's Cottage. From here follow the path to the left through woodland. At a junction after 500 metres, turn right and return to Gallowstree Common playing fields.