



South East Woodland News

Promoting thriving woodlands in England's most wooded region

Issue 6 Spring 2006

Forests of History

Have you ever walked through woodland and seen strange earthworks? Wondered why some woods contain tall clean stems and others multi-stemmed shrubs rising from the ground? Or pondered why there are odd mounds, ponds and banks? These could be archaeological features, especially if you are in an ancient wood, providing evidence of how our forefathers lived in and worked the woods.

Some archaeological features are derived from the direct working of the woodland and are only found in woodlands: sawpits, charcoal hearths and woodbanks. Others, like quarries and ponds, are not directly related to the wood's past, being typical of more recent woodland. A mosaic of such features can build up a picture of the wood's history. Woodland habitats can help such features survive, preserving archaeological sites, which would otherwise be destroyed by intensive land management. However, trees and shrubs can cause damage. The presence of a feature indicates they have reached equilibrium with the surrounding environment.

Woodland managers should be careful not to disturb this balance. However, by the same token, woods are dynamic habitats, continually changing and being modified by man, creating archaeology for the future. Foresters need to be careful not to keep archaeological remains as museum pieces but integrate their management with the other management objectives for the wood, whatever they may be.

Dr Nicola Bannister, Ashenden Farm, Biddenden, Kent.
Taken from D. Bannister (1996): Woodland Archaeology in Surrey © Surrey County Council.



Woodbank dating from 1243 at Thornton Wood near Canterbury (photo: Debbie Bartlett, Landscape Architect, Ecologist & Rural Development Consultant, Canterbury).



Ancient woodbank covered with dog's mercury (photo: J. Morris, Chilterns Woodlands Project).

Editorial

A New Year and an opportunity to take stock of the past year and look forward to the future. This is the theme of this issue of the South East Woodland News (SEWN).

Looking back: this issue focuses on the important role woodlands have played in the history of the South East. From the ancient hunting forests of the Bernwood and the New Forest to the Chiltern's beech plantations, historically woodlands have been an essential part of life here. We'll look at how this cultural importance is serving to encourage woodland conservation work today.

The future: the South East now has a regional website dedicated to its Regional Forestry and Woodland Framework:

www.forestry.gov.uk/seeingthewoodforthetrees.

Back issues of this newsletter are available from the website's Publications and Resources Centre. You can also subscribe to the free E-News Bulletin, a quarterly email with news, events, funding and new publications in South East England.

Sadly, this will be the last paper issue of the South East Woodland News. The next issue – looking at the legislation and liabilities affecting woodlands and their owners – will be produced electronically and e-mailed to subscribers. To receive the newsletter electronically you will need to re-subscribe by email. Please see *Subscribing to SEWN* on page 4 for more details.

Thank you to all this issue's contributors.

Alec Rhodes, *Editor*

How to... Care for woodland archaeology

Many ancient woods are likely to contain features of archaeological interest that help explain the history of the wood. Some are important and can easily be damaged during forestry operations.

The first step in their protection is to survey the woodland for archaeological features and record your findings. Sketch mapping can be a useful method to do this. A good starting point for your survey is to check with the County Archaeologist whether there are any Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) in the wood. Archaeologists can usually be contacted through the local planning authority. SAMs are protected by law and you will need consent from English Heritage to carry out work affecting such monuments.

The most common features in the South East are:

- Sawpits and charcoal hearths
- Quarries
- Boundary and internal banks and ditches
- Veteran trees, ancient coppice and old hedges – important historic features to retain and protect where possible.



Sawpit (photo: J. Morris, Chilterns Woodlands Project).

Once you have completed your survey mark out extraction routes and stacking areas, avoiding archaeological areas of interest on the map.

Issue copies of your map(s) to those doing the work and mark off sensitive areas with hazard tape or temporary fencing. Other useful tips are:

- Use brash mats to cross sensitive areas.
- Do not fill or excavate pits.
- Avoid planting into archaeological remains such as banks.

For a summary of how to protect archaeology contact The Chilterns Woodlands Project: 01844 355503 or email woodlands@chilternsaonb.org. The Project also periodically runs Woodland Archaeology Training Days.

Signs of life – animals of the past!

As the theme of this issue is about woodland history it might be a good time to reflect on what once lived in our woodlands. Apart from the pleasure of knowing about strange creatures that once roamed our forests, there is relevance for us today. Ecologists now believe that, before the influence of man, our woodland was not as dense as we once thought. Large herbivores such as aurochs and elk would have kept large spaces open. Within such open spaces many of the plants and insects we now appreciate would have established themselves.

Regularly managed woodlands have maintained this situation for several thousand years but as more areas have become neglected so our butterfly populations, for example, have declined. Thus you will often hear of schemes to get wild cattle back into woodland and restore open heath in an attempt to restore conditions.



Wild boar are once again living free in English woodlands (photo: Neil Sollis).

Beavers, wolves and bears all disappeared about 750 years ago from the south of England, however there is less ecological justification for their reintroduction. Unless perhaps we take note of the desire to promote what we now call 'wet woodlands' or seek to control the dramatic overgrazing of our woods by deer with no natural predator. Grey squirrel numbers would certainly be reduced by the reintroduction of pine martens and polecats but we would have to be careful that any reintroductions of red squirrels were not eaten! Reds only disappeared from the South East in the forties and fifties and of course still survive on the Isle of Wight where the greys cannot out-compete them.

One creature that we thought was gone forever in the 17th century was the wild boar. However, escapees have formed strong and growing colonies in Sussex over the past 20 years and are of increasing concern to farmers. Maybe they should be a concern to us all. Some say that bluebells are scarce in the rest of Europe because wild boar devour their bulbs with relish!

Alan Betts, *FC Conservator, South East England*

Success story... Clowes Wood archaeological project

Canterbury Woods Research Group have been studying woods in the Blean for a number of years. Last March, funded by the Blean Local Heritage Initiative, and helped by other local enthusiasts, the group set out to survey the archaeological features in Clowes Wood, a 236 ha mix of conifers, broadleaves and heath.



Measuring a woodbank and ditch in Clowes Wood (photo: The Blean Initiative).

A team of volunteers undertook extensive desk research to find out as much as possible about the site before beginning the field survey over the autumn – archaeology is more easily seen when trees have shed their leaves.

A comprehensive report has been produced for the wood's owners: the Forestry Commission. This identifies and describes 110 features and provides an insight into the wood's history (floor tiles in Canterbury cathedral were made in Clowes Wood!). It will serve as a valuable guide for future woodland management, ensuring these features are protected.

To find out more about the Blean: Canterbury's ancient woods, see www.theblean.co.uk

Keepers of Time

'Keepers of Time': a Statement of Policy for England's Ancient and Native Woodland, draws attention to the diverse value of ancient and native woods, 'a living cultural heritage', from their rich wildlife to their contribution to historic landscape. The document highlights the many threats these woodlands face: climate change, pollution from farming, poor management and neglect or loss to housing development.

The policy and objectives display a clear commitment to conserve, enhance and protect these woods over the coming years.

Keepers of Time and an accompanying Action Plan are available on the Forestry Commission website: www.forestry.gov.uk/keepersoftime

The Land Information Search

The Land Information Search (LIS) is a free service available on the Forestry Commission's website.

This map-based interactive service enables you to check whether any designations, such as SSSIs or Ancient Woodland, affect your woodland.

The LIS offers two types of search:

- Basic – allows you to run a search within and around a circle of a selected size by clicking a point on the map.
- Advanced – allows you to draw a more detailed shape, e.g. woodland boundary on the map, and search against the shape.

Guidance on using the LIS is available on line.

The Forestry Commission is now also able to supply you with maps for the purpose of Grant and Felling Licence applications.

The LIS can be accessed via

www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d6dfkmm. A Map Request Form can be obtained from or your local Forestry Commission office or at www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d6d8hxr

Ask the expert...

Why are archaeologists interested in what happens in woodland?

Woodland has been an important resource for people since 'the earliest times' and is important in increasing our knowledge of the past. There are woods that are hundreds of years old containing evidence of earlier land use including burial features, fields and houses. When focusing on nature conservation and peaceful recreation it easy to forget just how busy woods once were. In many parts of the country these features survive best in woodland, having been ploughed down in areas of arable cultivation.

The links between woods and people in the wider landscape of farms, villages and towns are crucial to our understanding of the past and can help inform future management. In particular, the use of woods as a part of any renewable energy strategy is an area where the past can be informative.

Tim Yarnell, *Historic Environment Adviser for the Forestry Commission*.

For more information on the historic environment and woodland see: www.forestresearch.gov.uk/heritage



Battle of Trafalgar commemorated

21 October 2005: the bi-centenary of the British Navy's defeat of combined French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar.

To commemorate this defining moment in British history the Trafalgar Oaks 200 partnership planted 200 oaks overlooking Portsmouth Harbour, creating a symbolic landmark that links the ancient Forest of Bere, where trees for naval shipbuilding were grown, with Portsmouth Harbour, where the Navy used the trees.



Local dignitaries, RN officers and FC staff plant a commemorative oak at Portsmouth harbour (photo: Richard Withinshaw, The Portchester Society).

Other plantings in the South East took place at 'Neptune Wood' at the Northmoor Trust near Didcot and 'Phoebes Wood' at Millets Farm Centre near Abingdon. In Kent the Woodland Trust, who have led the Trafalgar Woods initiative are planting 'Victory Wood' near Lamberhurst, in commemoration of Admiral Nelson's flagship.

The Trafalgar Project is part of the Woodland Trust's Tree For All programme, an ambitious children's tree-planting scheme, with plans to help plant 12 million trees over the next five years; see www.treeforall.org.uk

Good reading

Some further reading on the historic importance of Britain's woodlands and countryside:

Forests and chases of England and Wales c.1500-c.1800: towards a survey and analysis, edited by J. Langton and G. Jones.

Describes plans for a study into the cultural significance and survival of Forests and Chases in England and Wales. Oxbow Books, 2005, £25 (orders@oxbowbooks.com).

The history of the countryside by O. Rackham. Describes the changing character of Britain's countryside. Weidenfeld & Nicolson History, London. Hardback 1986; Paperback, 2000; £14.99.

Forest Vert

Historically, Forest Law protected 'vert and venison' in huge areas of England that were 'mered and marked' for the purpose of protecting hunting. Vert describes the trees and vegetation that the forest animals lived in or ate. Within the Forests it was a crime for anyone, irrespective of land ownership, to alter vert so as to reduce the feed and shelter of deer.

Forest Law was concerned with timber trees only in so far as they provided cover and could be shredded, lopped and topped for winter deer feed. Underwood called 'nether vert' or 'low boys' was more particularly protected, especially if it provided fruit, leaves or succulent shoots in winter, such as crab apple, wild pear, rowan, thorn, elder, holly and ivy. In 1016, King Canute's Constitutions of the Forest imposed a swingeing fine of £1 'if any man cut down a holly tree, or any other tree, that beareth fruit for the beasts of the Forest'. In 1617 part of Charnwood Forest was being 'ruined' 'by selling all the holly and thorn trees there'.

In 1769 a statute was passed to protect 'all Hollies, Thorns, and Quicksets growing upon his Majesty's Forests and Chases'. The abundance of holly remarked on in the New Forest, Cranborne Chase and other Forests in the 19th century still reflected the deer's needs.

Dr Jack Langton, *St John's College, Oxford*

To read more about Dr Langton's work on the Forests and Chases of England and Wales visit: info.sjc.ox.ac.uk/forests/

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