



South East Woodland Archaeology Forum

No. 3

October 2011

Editorial

A lot has happened since our last newsletter and I think I've got most of it in this newsletter.

In January we had a very interesting visit to Shorne Woods Country Park, saw many of its features and were shown parts of the excavation of Randall Manor.

The Weald Forest Ridge Project has designed a new logo (see below) and paid for a completely re-designed website. Do have a look at the website and let me know what you think of it. It has to be an improvement on my efforts to date.



We had a very successful meeting in June at the Ashdown Forest Centre and I'm most grateful to Vivienne Blandford for her very comprehensive minutes. Do read them because one of the issues raised was how members saw the future role of SEWAF – what would you like to see and hear, and where? You didn't have to be at the meeting to voice your opinion. Letters are welcome or a contribution on the new website.

At the Weald Woodfair in September we shared a tent with the County Archaeologists and the Weald Forest Ridge Project and seemed to attract a lot of interest, much to the surprise of local stall holders.



Our tent at the Weald Woodfair this year

Visit to Shorne Woods Country Park

It was overcast and threatening to rain, but nothing was going to put any of us off our SEWAF visit to Shorne Woods Country Park. Hosts, Andrew Mayfield and Roger Cockett were there to greet us and



Roger Cockett discussing an old hornbeam with us.

provide parking passes for the car park. In the visitor centre Roger had laid out a selection of maps and documents he had researched, clearly the result of a great deal of archive work. A warming cup of coffee and we went out for a two-hour walk round the country park looking at banks, ditches, lots of interesting old trees and a look at the on-going excavation of Randall Manor. It was explained how the features on the ground and the tree management tied in with local events and places. The enthusiasm of our guides made for a very worthwhile experience, and I hope we will be able to repeat it sometime, particularly for those who couldn't make it. And it didn't rain!



Click here to go to our new-look website

www.sewaf.org.uk

Future visits

Some of you have kindly offered your wood as a venue for a future visit.

I haven't had much spare time to organise wood visits this summer, but I hope to get around to doing so during the winter months and, of course, it's a time of

year when it's easier to see what's on the ground. If you would like to host a SEWAF visit, don't be put off by an apparent lack of archaeological features. You'd be surprised how much one can read into the history of a wood just by looking at the trees. So unless your wood is treeless, give it some thought.

Finding the History in My Wood

2. Identifying Features – banks and ditches

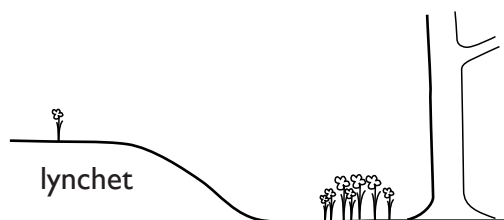
“I don’t think my wood has any archaeology in it” somebody said to me once. So, what are the chances of finding anything archaeological in your wood? And if you do, what is it likely to be? In all the woods I’ve looked at there has always been something archaeological, either in the trees, the ground flora or in the bumps on the ground. So the chances of working out something about the history of your wood is very high, unless you don’t have any trees!. Wherever your wood is, there are a number of features which are more commonly found than others, and we’ll look at those first.

Woodbanks are very a common feature and can be found either within the woodland or on the edge. If you’re not sure whether a slight rise in the ground is a bank or not, follow it. It may go nowhere, in which case it could be something else. If it does go somewhere then there’s a good chance it’s a bank. Does it go in a straight line, or is it wandering around? Does the bank have a matching ditch? The ditch may no longer look much like one. Over time it could have become pretty well filled in. What with deer crossing it and rainfall over several hundred years, there might not be much ditch left. It might look like a slight dip in the ground on one side of the bank.

So, is the bank straight or sinuous, and does it have either the remains of a ditch or not? Looking at each of these options –

Straight and no ditch – if the level of the ground on one side of the bank is higher than on the other (a sort of step), you could be looking at a lynchet.

A lynchet was the edge of an arable field, often on sloping ground and is usually medieval or older. Farmers have ploughed up to the boundary and turned, and that together with the effect of rain-washed soil on a downhill slope has caused the soil to build up at the boundary. It would once have been marked by stones, trees or a hedge. There probably

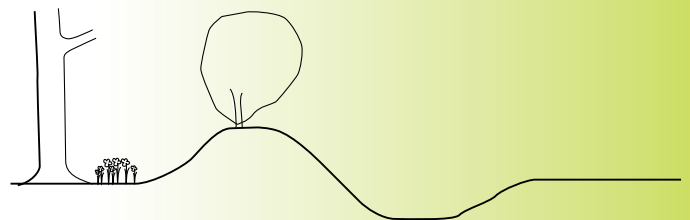


won’t be much of the original boundary markers to be seen, just the change in height. Lynchets are generally either straight or gently curved; they don’t tend to wiggle.

Straight and with a ditch – this would be somewhat unusual, but suggests a fairly recent boundary where a ditch has been dug, probably for drainage.

Sinuuous without a ditch – the most likely explanation for this is as an internal wood boundary. In other words, there was woodland on both sides of the bank and the bank marked the boundary between two owners of woodland.

Sinuuous with a ditch – this suggests that the woodland has medieval origins, and the medieval wood was on the side of the bank opposite to the ditch. In those days woodland owners were responsible for keeping livestock out of their wood (unlike now where the farmer is responsible). With no barbed wire available, they had to construct something within their boundary which was animal proof. So they dug a ditch on the outside, throwing the spoil up to form a bank. Dig down one foot and throw the spoil onto a bank, and you’ve got a two-foot high barrier already – it’s likely that the original bank was probably 4 feet high (two foot into the ditch and two foot above ground level).



They also had to grow a hedge on the bank to act as a final deterrent. It was very effective as long as the ditch was kept dug, and the hedge was laid. It seems likely that in many places this barrier was maintained until early in the 20th century, but certainly after the First World War, such practices tended to fall into abeyance. You may find stems of trees which have been laid for many years on such banks. If a ditch-with-bank runs through woodland it suggests that the side with the ditch had not been woodland at some time in the past.

You may realise from this that most ditches were not dug in order to drain water – in fact, many would have run parallel with the slope. But yours might be doing an excellent job of draining because it happens to run downhill. If it’s a ditch without a bank, then it might have been dug for drainage only. But do look carefully to see if there are the remains of a

bank somewhere along it, preferably with trees on it. Sometimes sections of banks have been flattened out by farmers, or squashed into a very faint impression of a bank by cattle. It sometimes gets to the point when you really can't be sure whether a farmer has re-dug a

ditch recently or whether you're looking at a historic feature.

We'll have a look at recording banks and ditches next time.



A ditch and bank wood boundary which has become neglected over many years. This one wiggles – it's sinuous – and is known to be medieval. You may notice that the ground level in the wood to the right is slightly higher than the level on the left in the field. This often happens when the field is arable and the soil level at the edge has been reduced by ploughing year after year. The opposite can also happen – the soil level can be higher on the field side and frequently the ditch has had soil ploughed into it and it can't be seen.

Snippets

Hut site flora

Dick Greenaway wondered if the SEWAF member who got in touch with him about the flora inside and outside the hut sites could get back to him, as he deleted the original email.

Free Advice for AONB woods

Did you know that you can get advice about tracing the history of your wood and free digital maps if you get in touch with Matt Pitts at the High Weald Unit? matt@highweald.info

SEWAF Meeting at the Ashdown Forest Centre June 2011

There was a good turn out for this meeting with approximately 28 members present.

The presentation by Chris Butler could not take place, due to a technical hitch, and will now do so at a later date.

Lyn Palmer the Weald Forest Ridge Project Officer gave a brief update on Heritage Environment Awareness Project (HEAP).

- Coming towards the end of the three year project which will end in March 2012
- The Survey, Identifications and Research Toolkits are being finalised
- They will be available online, hosted by the High Weald Unit (HWU) on their website.
- The CAB cards are being finalised and there will be hard copies to distribute
- The Wooded Landscape Conference was a great success and both the conference papers and presentations will be available online, hopefully by the end of July, hosted by the HWU.
- The Lidar data has proved to be very popular with many requests for the data of certain areas by members of the public and for professional use. A set of images are currently available on the HWU website searchable by grid reference. <http://www.highweald.org/component/finder/search.html?q=lidar+images>
- An interactive method of searching more directly for a chosen area is currently being worked on and will be available in due course.
- The Heritage Awareness Project will have a stand at the Weald Woodfair at Bentley on the 16th -18th September 2011 where some of the work and toolkits and the hard work of the last few years will be showcased. SEWAF will also be present.
- Nicola Bannister is currently assessing the Historic Landscape Characterisation data against the lidar data for the WFR and will be working with local groups in Nutley.
- Chris Butler and Vivienne Blandford are working on tracing the historic Pale (deer park fence) of Ashdown Forest also as part of the WFRP.
- Lyn is now beginning to write up the project.

AGM

David Brown ran through a brief overview of the current role of SEWAF which has 250 members on

email and 2 who are not. It is primarily run by David Brown but Lyn Palmer and Vivienne Blandford are members of a very informal committee which does not have any meetings other than the SEWAF events.

SEWAF's current remit is:

- Undertakes surveys of woodlands
- Hosts a website
- Attends the Weald Wood Fair
- Gives talks to interest groups
- Woodland walks where requested
- No charges have been made for these services or events to date.

In the future SEWAF will be the vehicle to carry forward the legacy of the HEAP and Casper Johnson, East Sussex County Archaeologist, gave a brief overview of the ideas behind the formation of SEWAF and opened the discussion on the direction SEWAF was most likely to take.

- Casper Johnson and Nicola Bannister met to discuss Standards for Surveying in Woodlands in 2007.
- In October 2007 at a Woodland Archaeology meeting the HEAP was discussed with a Heritage Lottery funded scheme to open up the discussion between landowners, community groups and archaeologists.
- For professional and work related commitments neither Casper nor Nicola were able to take forwards the idea of some kind of archaeological woodland group.
- Since 2007 David Brown has initiated the activities of SEWAF and, as a woodland owner himself, has brought many woodland owners to the Forum but there has been dwindling involvement from archaeologists. Fewer archaeologists attend the meetings than the very interested group of woodland owners.
- With the HEAP project coming to an end SEWAF is an ideal position to carry forward the legacy of this project by advising on the use of the toolkits, providing advice and equipment for survey work as well as its current activities.

To enable this to happen SEWAF may need to change and Casper opened up the discussion to members of the audience and various points were considered:

- Subscriptions
- Donations
- Affiliations with other Archaeological Societies-

Special Interest Groups within a particular society.

- Is there any interest in excavation?
- What do people most value?

Subscriptions

It was generally decided that this official route would involve unnecessary and time consuming work as this would involve a more formal approach and rigorous accounting procedures.

Donations

A large portion of the audience would be happy to pay for the individual events to cover costs.

Link to other groups

A link to the Sussex Archaeological Society is being investigated but SEWAF, as a group, also covers Kent and Surrey at the present time.

Excavation

80% of the audience would be interested in an excavation.

What do people most value?

Regular meetings with lectures	75%
Woodland visits to something specific	75%
Access to website	65%

One member of the audience would like some input for Primary School education and Matt Pitts from the High Weald Unit said that the High Weald Unit were

already running a project which involved schools.

<http://www.highweald.org/component/finder/search.html?q=schools>

Members of the audience were asked to put their names forward if they wished to be more actively involved. To date four people have come forward, Matt Pitts, Duncan Ferns, Roger Cockett and Cathy Lovell

The meeting adjourned for some delicious cakes and tea after which Vivienne Blandford gave a brief overview on the imminent walk round Tabell Gill and some current woodland issues.

David brought the meeting to a close and thanked those who had brought an amazing feast of cakes with them and said he hoped to have two indoor meetings a year with a couple of site visits to woodlands in the future.

Woodland Walk

Some dozen members enjoyed a stroll round the Pillow Mounds, charcoal platforms, enclosure boundaries and unidentifiable archaeology of Tabell Gill with lively discussion about possible explanations and interpretations. Unfortunately the rampant bracken and luxuriant chestnut coppice growth somewhat masked a good deal of the archaeological features. However it was good lesson in just how useful lidar imaging can be in these circumstances.

Vivienne Blandford

3rd July 2011

Are Ancient Woodland and Forest School Compatible?

Sensitively handled in my opinion the answer is, 'Yes'.

The ancient woodland adjacent to our school appears on a map of 1658. Little has changed since then and it still provides a home to dormice, woodpeckers, nuthatches and nightingales. Each spring bluebells, daffodils and wood anemones carpet its floor making islands of neglected coppice stools. A recent 'Village' development close to the wood has drawn in people who see it as an attractive area to walk dogs but do not understand its conservation needs. New paths appear regularly and there is a serious problem with trampling. Further development will entirely surround the wood in two years' time bringing with it higher usage and further degradation.

What to do to prevent this?

A chance remark by a colleague alerted me to Forest School, 'an inspirational process that offers children and young people regular opportunities to achieve, develop confidence and self esteem, through hands-on learning experiences in a local woodland environment' (Forest School Network). It is a long term programme delivered by a trained practitioner within a natural environment (not necessarily a forest) with a fire circle providing the focal point to all that happens. Most importantly Forest School is fun.

Here was the answer! Forest School would provide children with a unique educational experience at the same time as educating their parents as the children

passed their learning on.

The landowners Mid Sussex District Council gave their permission, Sussex Wildlife Trust provided experienced leaders and identified a suitable site, I thoroughly surveyed the area and in January 2010 we started our Forest School.

Every child in the school spends a minimum of twelve weekly sessions spread throughout the year exploring and experiencing the natural world in the wood. The sessions build their self esteem and independence through practical, hands-on experiences often requiring the use of tools such as bow saws and fixed blade knives. The site is cleared after each session leaving behind no sign of Forest School. I resurvey the site after each term and discuss signs of degradation and any possible need to relocate with Sussex Wildlife Trust.

Does it work? Yes! Parents tell me their children admonish them for trampling on plants, show them creatures living on dead wood and tell them of the other 'people' who inhabit the wood. Children take their parents and friends to see the Forest School site and parents ask me to verify information given to them by their children.

In time Forest School empowers participants to take responsibility for their own learning and development and many move on to take responsibility for conservation tasks such as coppicing or building nest boxes. Sussex Wildlife Trust is keen the children do this. Slowly they will learn the important place of the woodland economy in history and start to realise the true significance of 'lumps and bumps' found in



the wood.

Not running Forest school in our ancient woodland would remove an important opportunity to educate both our children and the community. People voiced initial objections and concerns about Forest School but each week as I carry the jerry cans of water and boxes of equipment to the site people smile and offer help saying, 'It's great the children are learning so much about the wood'. Drawing the local community

closer together is an unforeseen but welcome bonus of Forest School. It will be a long time before we achieve our ultimate goal of making the residents truly aware of the value of ancient woodland but this Forest School has been responsible for making a good start.

Perhaps some children will be members of SEWAF in the future? I hope so!

Sarah Witts

Forest School teacher
and co-ordinator.

