



South East Woodland Archaeology Forum

No. 2

January 2011

Editorial

It's been nine months since the last newsletter so you are long overdue for another one.

We've had two meetings at Bedgebury Visitor Centre, one in April 2010 and the last one in November 2010. Both were very well attended and we were fortunate to have presentations of real interest. The cakes members brought were particularly well received!



Minutes of each meeting are available – please let me know if you'd like a copy and I'll email them. There is a summary of each one in this newsletter so you will know who gave a presentation and any other business which took place.

More meetings are in preparation for 2011, many of them visits to woods and areas with archaeological interest. There are full details in this newsletter of the next visit on 22nd January to Shorne Woods Country Park.

It would be great to get articles however brief and on any wood-related subject. A number of you have offered to produce something and I may get in touch to remind you!

David Brown



Front cover: Causeway Wood, Warbleton, East Sussex.



A significant beech coppice beside an ancient trackway in Dallington Forest

Volunteer Surveyors Required ...

The number of requests for woods to be surveyed has outstripped my ability to undertake them.

I have a huge backlog of woods which people have asked to have surveyed. They are mostly requests from private woodland owners, but there are also some from wildlife trusts and the RSPB. I have a list of 6 volunteers many of whom have been on training sessions with me last year, but I need to get more training in with them to provide them with the confidence to do surveys on their own. I'm looking for people with some expertise in woodland

archaeology who are prepared to give up their time to visit individual woodlands with the owner to help them get started with looking at the history of their wood. A quick survey can highlight features that would give them a starting point for research, and help them in making decisions about management as well.

Do you know of anyone who might be able to help, even if only for a month or two? The work will be totally voluntary, but I make a point of requesting travel expenses from the owner. On the positive side, they will be helping someone who will be grateful that you are prepared to share your knowledge to help them with woodland they really care about.

Visit to Shorne Woods Country Park

I hope you have already put the 22nd January in your diary

because we have been very fortunate in that Andrew Mayfield and Roger Cockett have given up their Saturday to show us round some of the features to be found in Shorne Woods Country Park in north Kent.

We meet in the car park at 10.30 and there will be tea and coffee in the visitor centre before we set off.

The centre has a cafeteria and a light lunch can be purchased there, or feel free to bring your own.

The afternoon has been set aside for those wishing to continue to look at the park with a further guided walk of an area of detached woodland.

There are a number of archaeological features you won't find elsewhere, many typical of the North

Downs countryside. Andrew and Roger have been involved in an excavation of 13th century Rundale Manor within the country park, and although this has now been 'winterised' you will be able to see where it is situated.

Directions to the venue can be found at http://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/countryside_and_coast/parks_and_open_spaces/country_parks/shorne_woods_country_park.aspx or for satnav users it's at DA12 3HX

Car parking is normally charged but Andrew has arranged for parking permits which will be available when you arrive. It would be useful to know approximately how many permits are likely to be required, so if you could email david@sewaf.org.uk and let him know that would be much appreciated.

Future visits

I am currently drawing up a list of woods which have something of

interest for future visits this year. We have outlines for three visits, one to a woodland near Lewes, one to Ashdown Forest and I will be organising a visit to my own wood near Heathfield later in the year. I

wondered if any woodland owners would like to host a group of interested members to look at the archaeology (or even look *for* the archaeology) in your wood. You aren't expected to provide refreshments for them – we will be grateful enough just to have the opportunity to see features we haven't seen before. Get in touch – david@sewaf.org.uk

Finding the History in My Wood

Introduction

This is the first of a series of short articles in which I hope to de-mystify some aspects of woodland archaeology. To many people, archaeology means digging holes with builders' trowels and Time Team-like excavations. But one thing I ought to point out is that digging holes is one of the last things archaeologists do; they have a look at the 'humps and bumps' first and record them, and that's what I want to help you to do.

My intention is to help woodland owners find out as much as they can about the history of their bit of woodland: its owners, the uses made of the wood, if it had always been woodland, what was growing there before the present crop, was it part of a larger estate, did it have trackways running through it, were rabbits bred there, what craftsmen worked there, and what was mined from that large hole. It's surprising what you can learn from the trees, the ground flora and the topography – what's there in front of you and has probably been preserved for many hundreds of years. Every woodland I have seen has evidence of its history in its trees and on the ground.

Don't be put you off doing anything in your wood in case you damage the archaeology. Clearly a digger driver can do a lot of damage in a very short time – and even driving a vehicle through the wood will damage any features it goes over. But there's no reason why we can't plant trees on woodbanks, just like anywhere else. It's because the trees have been there up till now with their roots keeping the soil where it is that we've got such a rich archaeological heritage in our woodlands at present. Foresters and archaeologists will tell you never to plant trees on features in woodland because you might damage them. If that advice had been followed over the last 1000 years we would have lost a large proportion of our woodland heritage by now through erosion.

No special equipment is necessary to undertake a survey, but a fair dollop of your time will have to be committed. But don't worry – you'll find it all becomes quite addictive. And it's not just adults who can get involved, kids are often better at seeing things than us. Perhaps it's because they're nearer the ground!

I manage a small wood near Heathfield (with lots of archaeology in it) so my perspective on woodland



archaeology will be from a management viewpoint. I'm asked by owners to help find the archaeology in their woods, so my experience is becoming quite varied.

So, where do you start?

It's either at the local archive centre searching for documents, or in the wood itself looking for evidence on the ground. You could start with either one or the other. Professional archaeologists (and I'm not one, though I'm going to be talking quite a bit as though I am!) are keen you start at the record office. I don't because I think that if you find something there on paper which suggests you should be seeing a feature on the ground, then you'll go back to the wood and your imagination will do the rest whether it's there or not. The best time of year to be looking for features in your woodland is in the winter when the brambles, bracken and other vegetation has died down. If you've got very little ground flora because the trees are shading throughout the year, such as dense conifer, then it makes little difference what time of year you survey.

I start by looking to see what's on the ground. And there is quite a knack to this. What you've got to do is work out which bumps and depressions are man made and which are natural. As I said, summer is probably not the best time to be looking because

the undergrowth is doing its best to hide what's underneath. But if you've had the wood for a while you'll be getting used to the flat bits, or the bumpy bits, even though you don't know how to interpret them. The question of whether they are natural or man made comes with experience, but I shall be giving you some help. There are only a limited number of common archaeological features and I will concentrate on those. If you've got something I don't mention then it's likely to be unusual and therefore of greater interest (and you can email me to come and have a look to see if I can work it out). When looking, bear in mind one rarely finds all the features in the first go – once your eye is in you'll re-visit some areas long after you think you've finished and realise you missed something.

You are going to need a large-scale map printed out on a sheet of paper to do your recording on and a notebook. The scale is up to you; I use 1:6250. If you are getting a grant from the Forestry Commission they will have sent you a large-scale map, and you could copy this and use it. The Ordnance Survey Explorer maps (with a scale of 1:25,000) don't give you enough room to plot features on. You need to make it larger and put grid lines every 100m on it. See the box to see how I do it to get a scale of 1:6250. Copyright on maps means you are not permitted to copy OS maps less than 50 years old for commercial use, but you are allowed to make a single copy for your own personal use.

I have said that no specialist equipment is necessary, and that is true. But if you fancy splashing out then some tape measures longer than 10 metres are useful. Using metal tapes in the wood is not to be recommended as they have a tendency to rust! A simple magnetic compass can also be quite handy for some situations. Don't be tempted to buy cheap ones – I bought one recently thinking what can go wrong

To make a 1:6250 scale map from a 1:25,000 scale map

Find your wood on a 1:25,000 scale OS map.

Set your scanner to scan at a resolution of 1200dpi.

Scan the bit of the map with your wood on.

Use graphics software (it depends what you have on your computer) to enlarge the scan by 4 times. Do this by multiplying the width of the scan by 4 to get a new width measurement. Then increase the size of the image to that figure.

While you still have the image in the software, reduce the resolution from 1200dpi to 200dpi.

It's now ready to print out at a scale of 1:6250.

You may wish to use the computer to put in vertical and horizontal lines to divide the kilometre grid of the OS map into 100m squares. This means placing 10 vertical lines and 10 horizontal lines onto your map inside the blue lines on the OS map.

with a compass. And guess what, after a while the needle kept coming off its mount and I had to hit it on a tree to get it back again! And the other gadget that's quite handy, but a little expensive is a GPS. Here we're on quite tricky ground. GPSs, like mobile phones, need a good signal (from satellites) to work. If you're under trees, the signal will be weakened; if you're in a steep valley (as you might be beside a stream) then it will be weakened further and you may not get a reading. The answer is go for the best one you can afford. The technology is improving all the time, so there's no point me recommending one when there is likely to be a better one on the market immediately after I write this.

Next time I will start looking at features you are most likely to find.

Brief Synopses of Meetings in 2010

21st April 2010

David Brown briefly reported on the woodlands surveyed by SEWAF and the surveys in progress.

Lyn Palmer gave us an update on the Weald Forest Ridge Project.

Nicola Bannister reported on a site meeting with many of the owners of Combwell Woods.

SEWAF AGM

There then followed an open discussion in which the following point was discussed:

- SEWAF's role in surveying woods vis-a-vis professional surveyors

11th November 2010

Neil Morris reported on work he had been doing in the Bigbury Hillfort area.

Nicola Bannister outlined the work she had been carrying out on the Historic Landscape Characterisation of Sussex.

Ruth Childs described aspects of routeways in the Weald.

Lyn Palmer gave us a progress report on the Weald Forest Ridge Project.

What does SEWAF do?

During the winter months (roughly October to April) SEWAF is asked to do quick surveys of woods. We don't charge anything for a survey and it comprises a reasonably comprehensive walkover with some archive work to back it up. Whereas we hope not to miss anything on the ground, we don't spend a lot of time in archive depositories. We aim to give the landowner an idea of whether they are likely to have features which are significant and how they might take the research further. Sometimes we do a written report, but often there is no call for one.

We've been asked

- by farmers to look at their wooded areas,
- by woodland owners to see what we can find
- by wildlife trusts to guide their management
- by estate managers
- by the Forestry Commission to highlight features prior harvesting operations
- by woodland agents to prepare a report for potential buyers.

Some of the woods are on private land and some are open to the public. We've been asked to look at woodlands in Kent, West and East Sussex, Hampshire and Essex. Some are large (the largest was 400 acres) and some are as small as 5 acres.

We are involved in a large Heritage Lottery-funded project with Lyn Palmer, working on the Weald Forest Ridge, an area stretching from Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells to Horsham.

We maintain a website providing information about archaeological and history groups in the south east, courses in woodland archaeology, who to contact in the event of a query, information about woodland archaeology in general. www.sewaf.org.uk

We work closely with the county HERs (Heritage Environment Record) and the county archaeology departments for East and West Sussex and Kent.

We can advise on who to contact for specialist information regarding the history of woodland in the south east.

We run a training programme for would-be surveyors (when we can).

We run a regular course for Plumpton Agricultural College at the Woodland Enterprise Centre at Flimwell: 'An Introduction to Woodland Archaeology'.

We usually have a stand at the Weald Woodfair at Bentley Wildfowl at Ringmer in Sussex and also have a presence at the Kent County Show at Maidstone in July.

We give talks to local interest groups about woodland archaeology and the Weald Forest Ridge project.

We provide conducted walks round woods to give people an insight into the archaeology emphasising that much woodland archaeology has never been recorded.

Your website

www.sewaf.org.uk

click on it