



Between the Lines

Land of Oak & Iron Mapping Project Newsletter

February 2019

This edition contains a report on our February volunteer meetings; an update on progress made and a brief visit report on the Regional Resource Centre, Beamish. "Provenance and citations" discusses how we reference our data sources, and "Why study ancient woodland?" explains why and what we may find.

Volunteer meetings February 2019

Meetings in February saw tracing of township boundaries and woodlands approaching completion. We now start considering our early industries by mapping waggonways and mills. In the landscape area, defining ancient woodlands leads us to some of the pre-OS maps. The digitisation process is progressing in the background with an initial map ready for launch during April.

The meeting at Clara Vale Village Hall was well attended and, despite some difficulties with getting internet access, the venue was well suited to our needs. Our return to The Lodge in Consett, saw further progress on mills and we are advised that public wi-fi should be available in the near future.

Four mapping group members visited the Regional Resource Centre at Beamish to investigate archive material primarily relating to waggonways. There is a vast amount of information relating to the North-east of England at the Centre. Cataloguing, is an on-going task and with the help of the very knowledgeable Resources Co-ordinator, we pored over old maps for several hours and came away with a long list of references to share with the group. We have provisionally arranged a return visit to continue our research on Thursday 21st March. Please contact us if you would like further details.

Provenance and citations

It is critical that whatever information arises from the project is accurately sourced and provenanced – whether that is maps, historic documents, anecdotal evidence, or oral history. The simplest means of initially accomplishing and maintaining this principle is to ensure that layers on our digital map are locked into the sources from which they are derived. So, we might have several layers which locate and image historic industrial sites – and these can easily be visually combined – but each layer comprises material derived from a single, or identifiable sources (such as the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey or the RAF Post-war aerial photographic coverage).

Layer protocols will be maintained by the small team responsible for generating the digital files. Accuracy of

information will be achieved using two stage moderation process. By mapping volunteers working in teams a level of self checking is achieved. When information is transferred to a digital format, it will be checked and moderated by the team responsible for that activity. For the participants gathering data for maps, each source is given its own permatrace overlay, marked with the source and numbered according to the underlying 1:25000 base sheets: NY96 etc followed by the source, e.g. HER (Historic Environment Record) and the date that the source was accessed.

Each source tracing will be identified and matched with its digital counterpart. Documents in public or private archives should be referenced by the place/organisation then catalogue number. Historic environment records should be referenced by their HER number. Grid references should be 8-figure – e.g. NY2501 4691. Woodlands identified in the area that have an Ancient Woodland inventory number should be referenced by this. A data recording sheet for ancient woods developed by the Bernician Studies Group can be used (with kind permission from the BSG) in fieldwork.

Bibliographical references for data should be in the Harvard standard (and we will refer to the following website for style guidelines: <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/documents/public/Harvard-Referencing-Handbook.docx>)

Examples:

- Adams, M. 1999 Beyond the Pale: some thoughts on the later prehistory of the Breamish Valley. In Bevan, B, (Ed) *Northern Exposure: interpretive devolution and the Iron Ages in Britain*. Leicester Archaeology Monographs 4: 111-122
- Adams, M. 2002 The haunt of saints and shamans. *The Northumbrian* April/May 2002: 23-26

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Why study ancient woodlands?

Ancient woods are those which have been in continuing existence since 1600 or before – rather an arbitrary cut off point when you think that many woods were established more than a thousand years ago. Still, one has to start somewhere.

Like boundaries, woods are stable elements in the landscape – stable because they provide a whole variety of resources that humans need: wood for construction and fuel – especially for firing ovens and for the charcoal used in forges; bark for tanning; leaves for fodder, nuts as winter food and for fattening pigs and cattle; habitats where other useful plants grow and where animals may be hunted. Medieval court records tell us just how valuable these woods were, when someone sued a neighbour for encroaching on their patch.

It is tempting to think that woods were felled and cleared for hungry furnaces or for shipbuilding; in fact, much primeval forest cover was cleared for grazing thousands of years ago in the Bronze Age; what remains is merely a fragment, but it was generally managed sustainably. Trees were felled in cycles (a process called 'coppicing') – every eight years for hazel; every 12 or 15 for ash or oak, and so on, ensuring a permanent, sustainable supply of poles and underwood. Some trees, the so-called standards, were allowed to grow to maturity to fell for large timber. But felling is not the same as clearing: most cut trees (pines, larches and spruces aside) grow again.

Even when an ancient wood has disappeared, its former presence may be signalled by a 'woody' place name, such as 'shaw', 'hag', 'grove' or 'hirst'. One of the most common place name elements, 'ley', is a place where woodland was once cleared for agriculture or settlement, a process known as 'assarting'. Gelling, M, 2002, *Signposts to the Past: Place names and the History of England*, Phillimore & Co Ltd; is a good place to start when looking for more information about place names.

Ancient woods, perhaps surprisingly, don't often contain the really old individual trees that we find in hedgerows and parks. But there are clues to their existence. If it was recorded on the earliest maps of the 18th and 19th centuries there's a good chance it's been there for a long time. Woods whose edges lie on township or parish boundaries are likely to be very old; and those woods where a

suite of niche flora thrive are excellent indicators of their age and stability.

The Derwent Valley is one of the most densely wooded areas of the North-east, and this reflects three or more processes in the evolution of the landscape. One is that woods tend to survive better where the land is difficult to plough – often the steep sides of denes. Secondly, the use of local trees often coppiced oak, for charcoal making, in the early steel industry (before coal could be 'distilled' to make coke) helped to maintain woods' value as landed assets. And then, the Derwent has always been an important boundary between the Tyne and Wear.

Buried in the long-evolved soils and ponds in old woods are pollen stores that can tell us much about land use change in the surrounding countryside; and beneath the earth banks that often enclosed woods, protecting them from poachers (both four and two legged), ancient soil profiles can tell us about the landscape of the deep past. The remains of ploughed fields, industrial sites and dwellings still visible in woods offer clues to both the age of the wood and to what the land was used for before, relatively undisturbed by modern farming or residential development.

Medieval and later records that mention woods offer important clues about who owned what land and how it was used; and it is clear that woodland in general was once much more highly valued than it is now. And, when one thinks about it, many of the professions and trades revolving around woodland exploitation are still preserved in our surnames: Tanner, Turner, Barker, Cooper, Carter, Wright, Coleman and many more. Woods are treasure troves of information, waiting patiently to be explored.

Coming up in March:

Monday 11th March 2019, [The Lodge](#), Laburnum Avenue, Blackhill, Consett, DH8 5TA

Tuesday 26th March 2019, [The Winlaton Centre](#), North Street NE21 6BY (in Winlaton village, not Winlaton Mill)

Please register to attend using the links above.

