

Coroner's Wood – Technical note

This note is to inform the Warburton Neighbourhood Plan in respect of the present status of Coroner's Wood, the woodland running westwards along both sides of Red Brook from Warburton Lane in the east. It is our understanding that no single Government organisation has the responsibility to identify or schedule ancient woodland, although of course Natural England, the Forestry Commission, County Ecology Units etc all have an interest. The Government 'Magic Map' does have an ancient woodland data set, but as the Woodland Trust state, areas of ancient woodland are being discovered all the time.

The following represents some of the more important evidence supporting the fact that Coroner's Wood is ancient woodland.

Government Guidance

'Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions' 14th Jan. 2022

Includes the following,

'It's any area that's been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. It includes:

- ancient semi-natural woodland mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration
- plantations on ancient woodland sites - replanted with conifer or broadleaved trees that retain ancient woodland features, such as undisturbed soil, ground flora and fungi

They have equal protection in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Other distinct forms of ancient woodland are:

- wood pastures identified as ancient
- historic parkland, which is protected as a heritage asset in the NPPF

'Wooded continuously' does not mean there's been continuous tree cover across the whole site. Not all trees in the woodland have to be old. Open ground, both temporary and permanent, is an important component of ancient woodlands.'

The Woodland Trust

The Woodland Trust has information on Ancient Woodlands as follows;

'Ancient woodland indicators'

The presence of various animal and plant species indicates that a site has been largely undisturbed woodland for a considerable length of time. These are known as 'indicator species'. Specific plants are most commonly used as indicators of ancient woodland as

these provide the easiest and most accessible way to assess ancient status. Which indicator species are present will depend on geographical location, but it's always true that the more indicator species present, the more likely it is a woodland is ancient.

Some other groups of species are also very good ancient woodland indicators – these include lichens, insects (particularly those associated with decaying wood, known as 'saproxylics') and also molluscs (slugs and snails).'

The Trust then lists Ancient Woodland Indicator Species, including;

'Bluebell *

Wood anemone *

Primrose *

Lily-of-the-valley

Wild garlic *

Dog's mercury *

Red campion *

Barnacle lichen

Lungwort lichens

Lemon slug

Spindle

Small-leaved lime

Wild service tree

Scaly male fern

Hard fern

Hart's tongue fern *

Hazel gloves fungus

Pendulous sedge

Violet click beetle'

(Species marked * are present in Coroner's Wood, others may also be present. It should be noted that the species present in any area of ancient woodland vary considerably and it is generally accepted that there is some variance from the south of Britain to the north of Britain.)

The Trust then advises on historical features commonly encountered in ancient woodland, as follows;

'Historical features

Humans have relied on woods for fuel, food and shelter for centuries. We can still see signs of industry and management in woods which can help confirm their ancient status:

Tree management is visible in woods through coppiced and pollarded trees.

Coppiced trees have been cut back down to ground level resulting in the regrowth of many new stems. These stems would be left to grow for a few years then harvested for fuel.

Pollarding is the practice of cutting back upper branches of a tree for the growth of a dense head of branches. These long upright branches were ideal for fences, posts and construction.

Industry in woodland is more varied. Ancient woods house remains of charcoal production, mine pits, ore roasting hearths and furnaces, though they're not immediately obvious. These industries were based in woods for their steady supply of wood fuel.

Boundaries in woodland often look like banks and ditches, sometimes with overgrown hedges and ancient boundary trees. These can be from old deer parks, livestock management or parish boundaries, and some even correspond with old maps.'

The Warburton Parish Council View

Ancient woodland is commonly associated with deer parks and particularly with deer park boundaries, which Coroner's Wood clearly is. The artificially scarped deer park 'pale' runs all along the southern side of Coroner's Wood and additionally Manchester University Archaeology Unit has suggested that there are remnants of 'salters' (deer leaps) to the northern end of the wood.

We know that the deer park was first referenced in 1469 and its existence is indicated in Christopher Saxton's Map of Cheshire in 1577 and in John Speed's 'Map of Lancashire' of 1610. We also know that there were some cottages within the extreme east and on the perimeter of the woodland on the Tithe map of 1839, possibly associated with willow-weaving, (widely-practiced in the area) but by far the greater part of the wood south of Red Brook was known as 'The Holmes', meaning hollow or holly and a name frequently associated with deer parks. A few coppiced hazel bushes are also scattered through the wood.

We as a Parish Council, have concluded that Coroner's Wood is very clearly ancient woodland and consistently advocated this, arguing strongly that as such, and in compliance with Government advice it is an 'irreplaceable habitat' and should be treated as such in planning decisions.

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