

December

Weather Report

Regarding the weather, this month could be divided quite neatly into thirds. The first ten days were wet and windy. All types of rain fell from torrential to persistent drizzle, and in St. Leonards approximately 8 miles south of our wood an average December month's worth of rainfall had been recorded by the end of the first week. When combined with gales and strong winds predominantly from a south-westerly and westerly direction it is hardly surprising that the very mild daytime maximum temperatures of 9 - 13 C were largely unappreciated as it wasn't really fit to be outdoors more than absolutely necessary.



7th December. A full stream with waterfalls gushing over debris along its course.



The 11th December started with a frost followed by a cold (6 C) calm, sunny day. This was the start of the next distinctive spell of weather. A high-pressure system settled over southern Scandinavia resulted in typically cold, sunny days with light easterly or northerly breezes, daytime maximum temperatures of 2 - 4 C and heavy overnight frosts. The significant volume of water that had accumulated in the pond at the beginning of December froze. These conditions persisted until the 22nd when the wind changed to a southerly direction and the temperature rose to 8 C during the day.

The final third of the month was characterised by some grey, misty, damp early mornings and evenings, a mixture of sunny and cloudy afternoons, mainly light westerly or south-westerly winds and maximum temperatures of 8 - 10 C. It rained late in the day and overnight on the 25th and 28th. The rainfall total for December was 94mm.

Extracts from Rodney's Diary

7th December

Walk round whole boundary to check for damage after wet and windy spell. One dead birch found hanging over fence to north of old shed cut down and cleared. Another larger dead birch found looking as if it might fall into the field further east - will check and clear next visit. Otherwise nothing looking to cause any problems, although several old dead trees have uprooted or snapped off but fallen in areas where they can stay and rot. Large amount of standing water in pond now after prolonged wet spell.

11th December

Tidied up felled logs around new 'Wolf clearing'. Most cut to length and stacked on log pile, others stacked in piles until tractor and trailer available. Ground very wet and main ride very slippery.

21st December

Ground frozen and frosty all day so had no problem driving in and out. Good tidy up around picnic site and burn up of old stacks. Better sections cut to log length for wood stove and taken home. Pond completely frozen over but stream running well.



The pond completely frozen over

Topic for December- the History of Long Wood

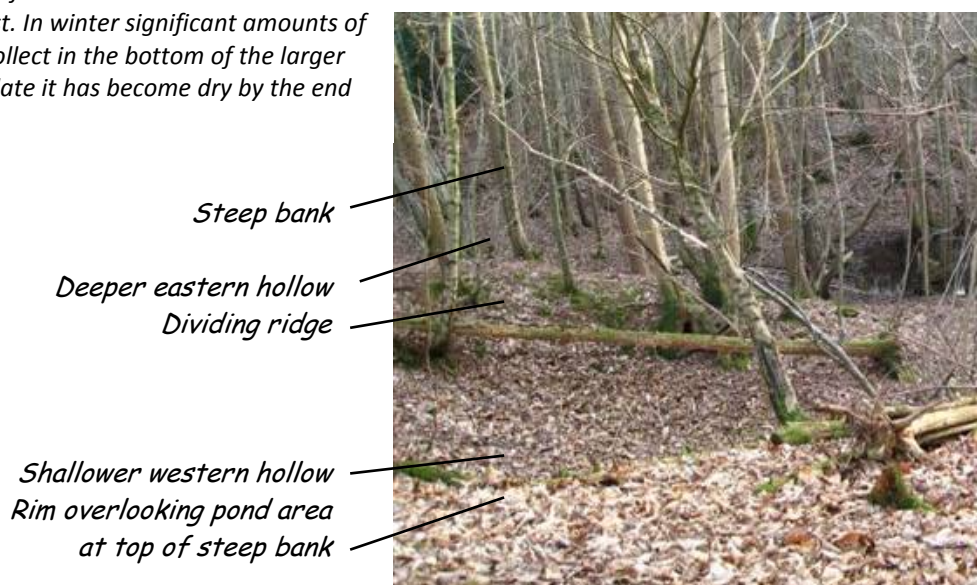
We purchased Long Wood because we needed fresh air, a place to play, to walk and 'root around' in, somewhere to pleasantly while away the hours. We certainly had no notion or intention of carrying out any historical research, despite the fact that from the moment I first walked through the gate and imagined the presence of wolves it was obvious that our names would merely be the latest additions to a very, very long list of custodians and inhabitants.

Some puzzles

As we rambled around poking and prodding, familiarising ourselves with our new acquisition, we began to notice certain features - lumps, bumps, dips, hollows and ditches, often partially hidden beneath undergrowth, fallen branches and windblown trees. Being naturally inquisitive we started to debate the possible origins of these anomalies and the realisation began to dawn that there was certainly more to this self-contained little plot than we had anticipated.

By far the largest and most obvious feature was what we initially referred to as 'The Dip', a deep, cross-sectional lop-sided **W** shaped hollow, surrounded on three sides by steep banks. Dark, murky water had collected in the bottom, although not enough to drain out through a narrow channel leading from the south-eastern corner.

A view of the pit from the rim on the northwestern side looking east. In winter significant amounts of water usually collect in the bottom of the larger hollow, but to date it has become dry by the end of the summer.



Rodney located an outcrop of yellowish-brown rock, recognisable as ironstone, protruding from the end of a sloping ridge separating the two hollows and because we already knew this had been one of the materials used to construct the local village church, we concluded our 'Dip' was probably attributable to ironstone extraction.

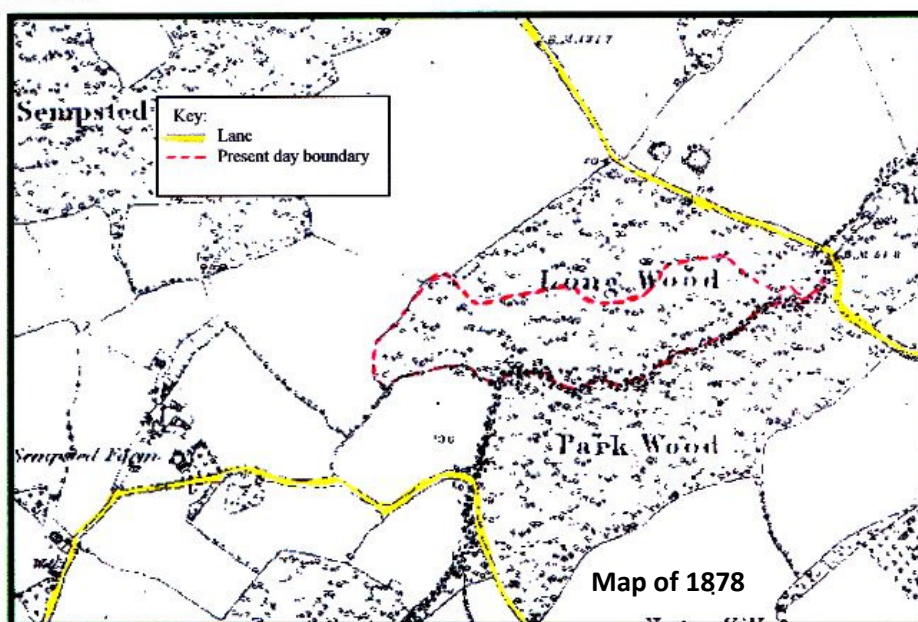


St. James the Great

A much smaller oval shaped hollow measuring approximately 4.5 metres by 2.7 metres discovered to the west of the quarry, we joked could be anything from a hole left by someone reclaiming buried treasure to a World War II bomb crater and deliberated whether it might be safer filled in and flattened.

Some answers

When an acquaintance enquired about our woodland one day and asked if it was classified as 'ancient', I realised there were now so many questions raised but unable to be answered that research was required to at least provide a basic overview of what we actually possessed. This is where the Internet proved to be invaluable. A request made through Google for old maps of the area produced a copy of the Sussex Ordnance Survey sheet published in 1878.



It depicted Long Wood not as a rectangle but a diamond shape expanding to fill the present field to the north, bordered by the lane on its north-eastern side.

The Forestry Commission web site provided a Land Information Search Map, proving Long Wood was indeed registered as ancient woodland, a term used to describe ground which has been under continuous tree cultivation since at least 1600 AD.

Rebecca Harvey from the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group who visited our site in September 2006 to offer much needed advice on conservation and management explained that due to the history of the High Weald Area, she would expect Long Wood to have *always* been woodland. The word 'Weald' comes from the German 'Wald' meaning uncultivated wilderness, and this is how the area remained until the 14th century when traditional farming techniques created a landscape of small irregular fields, farmsteads and woods linked by hedgerows. It has changed very little since.

According to her records, she revealed the northern section of our wood had been cleared some time after 1930.

Rebecca agreed with our supposition that 'The Dip' was most probably an old ironstone pit but surprised us both by enquiring whether we had found any slag in the vicinity. In response to our puzzled expressions, she waded into the stream and almost immediately fished out a knobby blackened lump measuring about 5 centimetres across. It was thrilling to think this could be a waste product from a small-scale iron smelting operation carried out on site, but unfortunately our euphoria was short-lived because when the lump was broken apart, it revealed itself to be no more than a typically contorted chunk of iron-rich sand stone.

Further investigation and searching were obviously going to be required to determine whether Long Wood contained any definite proof of early iron manufacture.

Woodlands in the High Weald were heavily exploited for their ore from the late Iron Age until the end of the Middle Ages. The ironstone in Long Wood occurs at the juncture of the Tunbridge Wells sandstone to the north-west and west of the plot with the Wadhurst clay in the south and east. After being dug up it would have been washed to remove any clay. It would then have been broken into smaller pieces using hammers and roasted in a fire in a shallow pit to chase off the moisture. Once cooled it was broken into even smaller pieces to be smelted in a primitive bloomery furnace, fashioned from the surrounding sandy-clay soil. Wood for fuel and converting into charcoal was obviously readily available. Air would have been forced into the simple furnace with bellows and the slag, if molten enough, removed through a tapping arch at the bottom. By the end of the process when the furnace was nearly empty of charcoal, a bloom of iron would have adhered to the base of the wall.



View along the woodbank looking north. Many decayed stumps are clearly visible between outgrown coppiced hornbeam with oak standards.

Rebecca also pointed out the woodbank along the western boundary and to quote her report 'It was fantastic to see such a well preserved saw pit.' Oh dear! How could we ever have considered filling it in! The Landmanager Report sent to us by FWAG certainly gave us a lot to think about. Having had our interest aroused in the archaeological remains we were now responsible for preserving, I wanted to find out about their origins and purposes.

The next logical step should have involved contacting an expert on the subject to ascertain exactly what they thought might have taken place in our wood with approximate dates for the workings, but our desire to protect our privacy and isolation, combined with my preference to 'let sleeping dogs lie' undisturbed in the past where they belong, temporarily proved to be stronger than the need to know. I decided to carry on investigating alone.

Further evidence

From a much later era than the iron smelting, the sawpit is evidence of the processing of felled timber on site rather than removing it to a local timber yard. A rectangular pit was dug close to the main track out of the wood, marked on my plan for as far as I was able to trace the disused route. The pit is on slightly sloping ground, which helped with drainage, and the spoil would have been thrown out on the downside slope in order to create a level platform to support the trunk. When in use it would have been deep enough to allow an under-sawyer to work from beneath, but over the years, leaves, twigs and silt have accumulated to result in the shallow oval-shaped depression we have in Long Wood today.

The sawpit photographed from the eastern end looking west. Spoil from the pit was piled on the left hand side and the old track runs parallel, close to the right hand bank. It is not easy to take a picture that adequately gives an idea of the configuration of the feature – although apparently filled with



leaves; it is actually about 1 metre deep.

On the western boundary are the remnants of an historic external wood-bank demarcating the limit of our territory. It has an asymmetric profile with a ditch, and a bank on the side of the wood, along the top of which was originally a row of coppiced trees forming a hedge, but this has long since outgrown.



Remains of the woodbank and ditch on the western boundary

The main function of the construction, in the days before barbed wire, was to keep out grazing animals in order to protect growing coppice and young trees.

Other ground and surface remains that also provide evidence of how the woodland would have been worked and managed in the past include a network of small drains and gullies all leading down into the stream that forms the southern boundary. They peter out to the north just inside the field fence but we presume that they would have continued in this direction prior to Long Wood being made significantly smaller sometime during the last century. However it is not just earthworks that can help to explain the history of the wood. I have already mentioned the old coppiced trees at the western edge of the site but there are others growing singly in the eastern compartment that were probably either used as living permanent sign

posts for an owners area of woodland (if it has ever been maintained by separate individuals), or as markers for rotational coppice areas.

In a process called stubbing, the trees were cut back to approximately one metre above the ground so that when they grew there would be a multi-branched tree with a short thickened trunk. During my attempt to map our plot, I noticed several of these veteran trees were actually on two north south lines.

Hornbeam marked number 4 on the map



Even the composition of the ground flora within a wood can be of assistance when trying to date the land. Many woodland plants are poor colonisers and establish themselves very slowly, so it is possible by surveying the species present to deduce whether the wood is ancient, more recently planted or if there has been any major ground disturbance. During the latter half of the last century lists of 'indicator species' were drawn up, their content varying from region to region, of flowering plants and ferns that were more likely to be found growing in ancient woodlands than anywhere else. So far I have recorded the following plants growing in Long Wood that feature on the South East Ancient Woodland Indicator Species List:

<i>Hard Fern</i>	<i>Early Purple Orchid</i>	<i>Three-veined Sandwort</i>
<i>Scaly Male Fern</i>	<i>Goldilocks Buttercup</i>	<i>Wood Anemone</i>
<i>Pendulous Sedge</i>	<i>Moschatel</i>	<i>Wood Speedwell</i>
<i>Barren Strawberry</i>	<i>Pignut</i>	<i>Wood-sorrel</i>
<i>Bluebell</i>	<i>Primrose</i>	<i>Yellow Archangel</i>
<i>Early Dog-violet</i>	<i>Ramson / Wild Garlic</i>	<i>Yellow Pimpernel</i>

I believe I will probably be able to add to the total when more of the sedges, grasses and ferns have been positively identified. On my walks photographing plants and fungi I continued to contemplate our

large and rather scenic pit from all angles, unable to resist imagining what might have been extracted from it.

I was also searching for a feature called a charcoal platform that I had read about in articles on woodland archaeology. Charcoal required to power furnaces and forges producing iron was made by stacking poles from coppiced trees in an inverted basin shape, covering the construction with turfs or grass, then burning it for a number of days. But how do you recognise where this might have taken place? A prolonged period of heavy winter rainfall washed mouldering leaf litter down the slopes toward the stream, leaving several long stretches of footpath exposed as bare earth. I couldn't fail to notice patches, several metres across, in the south-eastern



The colour of soil next to this patch is a marked contrast, even when damp.

corner and to the south of the pond where the soil was jet black in stark comparison to the yellowish colour on either side. Was this evidence of charcoal platforms or merely locations where previous owners had found it convenient to light a bonfire?

I think this might be the time to stress that probably the best advice we came across at the outset of our new venture was to spend the first year doing little more than surveying the area and drawing up a management plan, otherwise it is easy to see how through sheer ignorance, important features can be lost forever!

Curiosity got the better of me!

A course was advertised at the Woodland Enterprise centre entitled 'Discover the Hidden Archaeology of Woodlands' and I immediately booked two places. One of the speakers at this event was David Brown representing the Wealden Iron Group, an organisation that carried out extensive research into the history of the iron industry

in the High Weald region. Experienced in assessing the origins of various lumps,

bumps and dips, he very kindly offered to visit Long Wood and hopefully solve the conundrum of our pit once and for all.

However despite searching the stream, he was unable to retrieve any nuggets of slag and also remarked the sheer size of the excavation was not typical of those where iron ore had been extracted, leaving us still with more questions than we had answers for.

Just what did someone consider was so much more valuable than timber, that workers were instructed to dig so deep creating such



Exposed outcrop of ironstone rock visible at the tip of a ridge which partially separates the two hollows in our 'pit'

huge mounds of spoil, over such a significant area? David's evaluation of rock protruding from a ridge in the northern section of the feature was of a good quality building stone, leading us to debate whether we had perhaps come full circle back to our original opinion, because

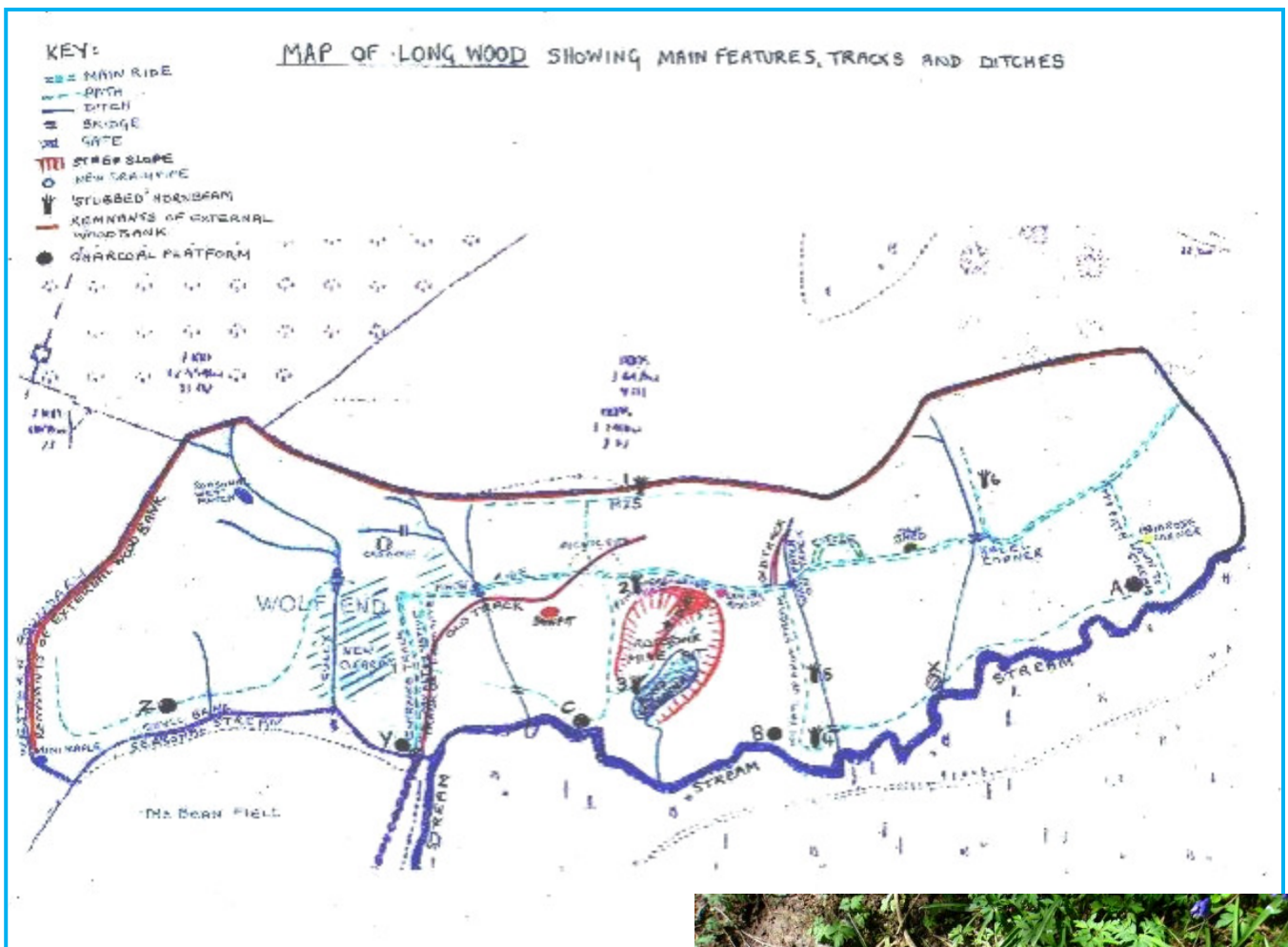
the material is certainly an excellent colour match

with blocks mortared into the tower of St. James the Great, the local parish church.

Our options are now to either take a pickaxe to the face that might have been the final one worked, consult historical maps and documents for any records of trade in raw materials removed from Long Wood or accept and manage the mysterious 'Dip' as a scenic attraction in our landscape.

David's visit was by no means a wasted journey though. The existence of charcoal platforms measuring approximately eight metres across on flattened ground close to the stream was affirmed, two being given global positioning references.

Three positively identified sites have been marked A,B,C on my map. Locations lettered Y and Z are patches of a comparable size with the distinctive deep black topsoil, encouraging me to hazard a guess that a row of charcoal platforms extended the length of our wood.

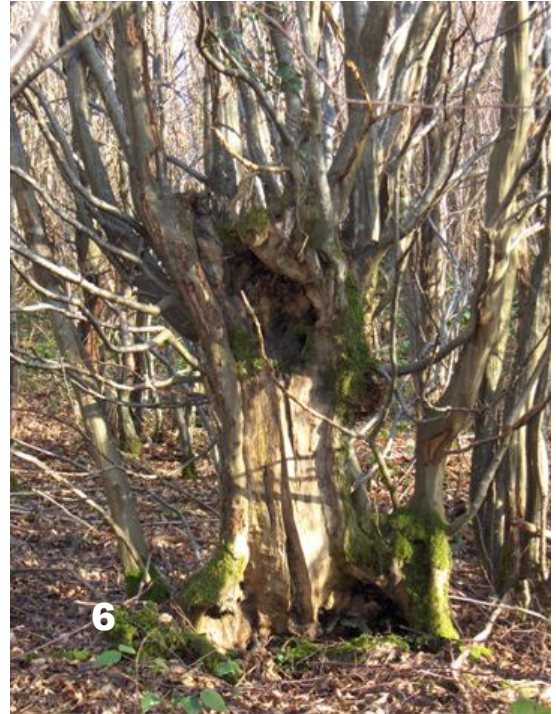


X on the map above is a similarly flattened area dug into the sloping ground (see picture) but although we took several samples we failed to find any variation in the regular yellowy-brown colouration of the soil.



Wood colliers may have lived on site in wooden huts, so possibly this is a place of settlement but excavation would be pointless because any timbers will have without doubt long since rotted away and the workers, at the very bottom of the social scale, had few material possessions.

Ancient coppice stools in Long Wood shown below. Numbers refer to the above map.



View to the left is of the northern woodbank between the caravan and picnic site, looking west, with outgrown coppiced hornbeam and sweet chestnut along its length, also many gaps where trees have died. We had somehow managed to walk close to the raised bank on the side of our wood for months without noticing it. Instead of a ditch adjoining the bank there would probably been a track, bordered on its northern edge by the woodbank for what had previously been Park Wood



In general conversation David intimated that the northern boundary close to the caravan displayed features consistent with an original woodbank, which would only make sense if our holding had existed as a separate entity in the past, rather than a percentage of the larger area of woodland depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of 1878.

This comment actually led us to uncover the most exciting facts to date. We had believed the information provided by the historical map without question, whereas we should have taken more notice of what we were really seeing every time we walked along the M25 to the Picnic Site.

Discoveries in the County Record Office

One morning when the weather was too inclement for outdoor activity we decided to visit the County Record Office in Lewes in the hope of finding maps featuring Long Wood either before or after 1878.

We saw the map and accompanying Tithe Apportionment document produced in 1844 as part of the process undertaken by the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836 to replace a system of annual payments in kind, usually to the church, with one which calculated a monetary value for individual pieces of land. It listed Robert Days as both the owner and occupier of Long Wood in addition to five other areas of woodland in the vicinity, proving what we had begun to suspect - up until this date at least, our wood existed within virtually the same boundary as it does today.

To the north lay Park Wood owned and occupied by a wealthy landowner named Herbert Barrett Curteis and to the south, across the parish boundary following the line of the stream, were the grounds belonging to Tufton Place estate.

Tithes were paid as a tenth part of all produce from a particular piece of land but disappointingly we discovered woodland was normally exempt (although in some areas

charcoal, acorns and mast were tithable) and by common law nothing was ever payable on minerals or anything that formed part of the freehold. This makes it seem highly unlikely any records exist of materials or products extracted from Long Wood.

Further delving into historical papers did however reveal ownership of our little plot as part of Sempstead Place and the Manor of Knoll back to the Piers family in 1541. By 1692, in order to clear debts, two Piers brothers were forced to sell the estate to Gabriel Eagles of Uckfield.

In 1707 the property formed part of that conveyed to Ferdinando Penkhurst esq. to settle a dispute of some kind. The next mention we found was in 1783 when Joseph Stevens on behalf of Mr. Day and William Collins purchased the land from Sir John Lade. A disagreement over the measurement of Long wood at Sempstead Farm together with a valuation at £15 an acre is recorded in letters dated September 1830, which also describe damage done in the woods at Sempstead by hop-pickers under the pretence of taking 'sear-wood'. Mr. Day instructed his tenant Mr. Thomas Austin to keep people out of the woods and take any found causing damage before a magistrate.

We still do not know who owned our wood after Richard Day or when it was incorporated into one larger area with Park Wood to the north as depicted on the 1878 Ordnance Survey map. We need to be mindful of the probability the people who owned the land were not necessarily those who worked it. Research in the local village might possibly reveal families who passed down traditional skills through generations and have documentation or memories of ancestors who were coppice workers or charcoal manufacturers.

It appears slightly confusing that the name of woodland forming part of Tufton Place estate across the stream to the

south is also Park Wood, but as the parish boundary follows the line of the stream the two woods are actually in different parishes.

So much has happened to this small plot of land in the High Weald of Sussex over the centuries it is hardly surprising I have always been aware of an intangible atmosphere pervading the place and am beginning to comprehend that apart from the last thirty years when the focus has shifted towards recreation and the bio-diversity of habitats, Long Wood had since early times been valued as a source of important raw materials both plant and mineral, constantly occupied and managed by skilled workers to maximise the output.

I wonder what all the ghosts make of our efforts to remove non-native species, encourage natural re-generation, conserve wildlife and bask in the sunshine on the Picnic Site whilst eating our sandwiches!



Target notes for 2008

1. To find out about and hopefully become involved in the Rother Woods Butterfly Conservation Project, attending training days and guided walks to learn how to recognise and help halt the decline of some of the rarest species of butterflies and moths.
2. Research how to set up an insect trap. I need to start to attempt to identify some of the insects and 'minibeasts' that live in and visit Long Wood in order to create a species list.
3. Photograph, research and try to identify liverworts.
4. Photograph, research and try to identify lichens.
5. Carry out a plant survey on the new Wolf Clearing, because this will be the first full year in many that the ground has been exposed to daylight. Apart from a few ferns at the northern and southern extremities and some fungi, this area has been devoid of woodland floor vegetation since our ownership began.
6. Continue to monitor and record dates flowering plants come into bloom.

Conclusion

What have we learnt? An incredible amount in such a short space of time. We are fully aware of this being only the tip of an enormous iceberg of knowledge though, as there is still so much to discover, explore, experience to gain.

Once we had overcome the initial hurdle of not knowing where to begin and had been nudged in the right direction, the hard work commenced but the playing did not have to stop - sometimes the two even become intermingled.

We still need the confidence to trust our own judgement because although areas of woodland might have many similarities, each is also unique and regarding some of the minor details we must follow our instincts to make decisions specifically suited to our situation. We will learn from our mistakes.

When I attempted to find information on flora, fauna and relevant history, I was amazed there were so few reference books available. Those that were had often taken the authors a lifetime of research to produce, and were consequently rather expensive. It is astonishing that such incredible strides have been made in the fields of science and technology over the last hundred years, but minute plant life trodden on by humans for centuries and fungi so essential for both the survival of trees and natural recycling processes, still retains secrets and waits to be officially classified.

I am intrigued how threats of impending climate change will impact upon English woodland. I will continue to keep weather records and dated photographic records of plant development. Will some species adapt or slowly diminish to be replaced by others? Will there be evidence of changes in animal behaviour? Will dormice sleep less? Only time will tell.

At the beginning of this book I stated our objective was to hand Long Wood on in a better condition than we had found it. But we may have to accept the possibility that with 'global warming' appearing to become a reality, the restoration of ancient woodland as it used to be is no longer an achievable option. Instead we may need to concentrate on our wood's long-term survival as woodland, but maybe in a somewhat altered state.

Stub Talk

Vision clouded by tears of pain and frustration, leaning heavily on a stick, I drag my inflexible frame along the path towards the stream virtually oblivious to my surroundings, concentrating on the undulating, twig-strewn surface in front of my feet. I pause momentarily where the track abruptly changes direction and cast a backward glance at the old stubbed hornbeam standing sentry there.



"My structure like yours, is the legacy of a past that cannot be altered.

You have a choice.

Either remain enveloped in self-pity,

or look through the window at my heart to the verdant lushness, the brilliance of blooms in the warm spring sunshine.

Feel the comforting heat on your skin.

Hear the breeze as it whispers through the soft new leaves, the buzzing of tiny insects, the calls of the birds and the constantly gurgling, tumbling stream negotiating obstacles in its path.

Smell the pungent aroma of wild garlic wafting up from the waters edge.

Distract your mind and entertain your senses.

Enjoy your walk."