

ASSESSMENT OF WOODLAND AT AYLESFORD QUARRY, AYLESFORD, KENT



SWAT Archaeology

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Abstract

SWAT Archaeology was commissioned by Aylesford Heritage Limited to undertake a survey of woodland located to the north-east of Aylesford Quarry at TQ 72571 59447 (Figure 12).

The survey of the woodland and archive data produced no evidence for surviving woodland pre-dating the post-medieval period.

The woodland has suffered from massive post-medieval quarrying evidence of which can be seen on the OS Historic Mapping and especially the LIDAR image (Figures 3-11. Plate 1).

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Background

SWAT Archaeology was commissioned by Aylesford Heritage Limited to undertake a woodland survey on land at Aylesford Quarry, Aylesford in Kent (Figure 12). The woodland is part of a much larger site mostly given over to quarrying. The site area is a quarry that now form lakes located at Tottington Farm, north west of Aylesford village. Aylesford is a civil parish situated on the River Medway, 4 miles northwest of Maidstone, in the county of Kent and the southeast of England.

1.2 The area is characterized as fields predominantly bounded by tracks, roads and other rights of way and active and disused sand, gravel and clay workings. The sand and gravel quarry cover an area of c.5000 sqm and have been in existence for over 100 years beginning to the northeast of the Aylesford church. It is divided in two by Bull Lane into the East Quarry and the West Quarry. In the early years they were known as 'Wagon's Pit' but were later referred to as 'Aylesford gravel pit'. They are a good source of gravel, flint, lower greensand chert, ragstone, sandstone and clay.

1.3 Agricultural fields bound the woodland, to the north of the East Quarry; the Rochester Road is located just east of the East Quarry, the High Street and an area of low-density residential development are found just south and beyond this the River Medway. A sewage treatment work bounds the west lake to the southwest

1.4 The woodland in question is located above the open water quarried out areas and situated to the north-east (Plates 6, 7) of the East Quarry.

1.2 PLANNING BACKGROUND

Swale and Thames Survey Company (SWAT Archaeology) have been commissioned to carry out a woodland survey by Aylesford Heritage Limited given the impending changes in the national status of ancient woodland.

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Background

An Archaeological Desk Based Assessment of the entire site was commissioned and undertaken by SWAT Archaeology in 2016 (SWAT Archaeology: *An Archaeological Desk Based Assessment of Aylesford Quarries, Aylesford, Kent*). The full archaeological and historic background for the site is presented in this document and is not considered necessary to repeat in this report.

2.2 Project Aims

The assessment was aimed to determine the heritage significance of the area of woodland under investigation.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The methodology use for this survey was guided by standard historic methods and guidelines for historic landscape survey as published by Historic England and recommendations set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in their Standards and Guidance of which the surveyor for this

project was Dr Paul Wilkinson who is a Corporate Member of the CfA (Membership No. 1759).

3.2 The methodology used was a walkover survey to identify and record any historic landscape features which would have included any evidence for quarrying, coppicing, woodbanks, ponds, sawpits etc. Any identified features were to be recorded on pro-forma sheets and plotted by GPS on to a digital site plan and any features identified photographed.

4.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 The area of woodland surveyed has been identified by the Local Planning Authority as Ancient Woodland in '*A Revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Tonbridge & Malling Borough, Kent (Report and Inventory Maps March 2010)*'. This usually means woodland is thought to have been in place since 1600 AD but given the inaccuracy and paucity of 17th century maps more usually from the 1800's. The NPPF definition in the Glossary, **Ancient woodland**: An area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD.

4.2 Philip Sansum who compiled the survey for Tonbridge & Malling Borough was kind enough to comment on the woodlands significance:

'The assessment leading to the inclusion of this site (at TQ730595) on the revised Ancient Woodland Inventory was desk-based. The site, a shaw surrounding a chain of four ponds, together about 1 ha in size, is depicted as wooded on a range of large scale maps spanning the period from the 1790s to the present (suggesting continuity of woodland land-use). None of these sources, at the times of their production, indicated a recent-planted origin for

the shaw (although planting of trees may have taken place on the site as part of its management).

Therefore, for the shaw not to be ancient woodland it needs to have arisen in the period between ~1600 and the 1790s, on land which had previously been unwooded for a substantial period of time. At the time of the revised inventory's compilation (2008-2010), which included a systematic search of the then available digitised estate maps in Kent Archives) no evidence had emerged for this.

This particular shaw is apparently the result of historical establishment of trees and scrub on the slopes left by former workings (gravel, sand or clay extraction, for instance) and the subsequent development of vegetation which has historically been managed as a small farm woodland resource (ancient woodland areas of this type may or may not contain aged trees – it is the continuity of land-use and habitat which is being identified, not populations of individually ancient trees).

This type of small woodland is very common across the Weald. Archival work in Kent and Sussex has shown that a general assumption of 'recentness' (i.e. post 1600 origins) for these pond- or pit-shaws is not sustainable. Its irregular shape and position in the interstices of a field system of some antiquity is closely comparable with other sites whose status as woodland in the 17th and 18th centuries is attested by estate maps. These include sites topographically analogous to this one, i.e. overlying the Gault Clay and in close proximity to Quaternary sand and gravel deposits' (Philip Sansum email 24/07/2015).

4.3 However, the woodland is not present on the Saxton map of 1575 (Cover) the Andrews Dury map of 1769 (Figure 1) and the Hasted map of 1778 (Fig. 2).

Furthermore, the internal ponding which is a direct result of quarrying can be identified on the 1868 OS map (Figure 5) and the OS map of 1961 (Figure 6).

5.0 SURVEY RESULTS

5.1 The walkover survey produced very little of archaeological significance (Plates 2-5). The wood comprised standard trees, evidently self sown with Sweet Chestnut. As the LIDAR image shows the interior of the wood has been quarried out producing deep hollows which are now ponds (Plate 1).

Much of the interior of the wood has been quarried away producing deep hollows now filled with water and steep slopes. The boundaries of the wood were checked for earthworks and there are two archaeological features, the boundary earthworks or woodbank c.1.2m high externally and c.1.6m internally which have been heightened in recent years and the hollow-way of the track bisecting the wood and running north-south and shown in a red line on the LIDAR image (Plate 2). Coppiced stools were evident across the wood (Figure 4) but did not define an earlier boundary. No trees of significant woodland heritage value were observed (veteran standards, pollards, boundary stubs or ancient coppice).

5.2 The survey of the woodland produced no evidence for surviving landscape features pre-dating the post-medieval period.

5.3 The woodland has been significantly affected by post-medieval quarrying which would have destroyed any pre-existing features (Plate 1).

The assessment leading to the inclusion of this site (at TQ730595) on the revised Ancient Woodland Inventory was desk-based and did not involve any field work which has now identified that post-medieval quarrying on a massive scale has destroyed any indicators of 'Ancient Woodland'.

5.4 No Ancient Woodland Indicator species were identified during the archaeological walkover but none were expected under a re-planted non-native canopy of Sweet Chestnut coppice. The criteria for identifying ancient woodland indicator plants are enshrined (for the South-East) in Appendix 5 of English Nature's document '*Ancient Woodland guidance material for Local Authorities* (Kirby and Goldberg 2003) and would have been consulted.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 There is no mapping evidence for 'Ancient Woodland' on any maps pre-dating c. 1795.

6.2 The site walkover and survey identified post-medieval quarrying on a massive scale which will have destroyed the majority of the woodland and dates from at least the 1860's (Plate 1 and Figures 4, 5).

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Wilkinson P. *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment on Land at Aylesford Quarry, Aylesford, Kent.*

'A Revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Tonbridge & Malling Borough, Kent (Report and Inventory Maps March 2010).