

RUSHBEDS WOOD, BRILL, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY BY MICHAEL FARLEY
AND THE RUSHBEDS GROUP



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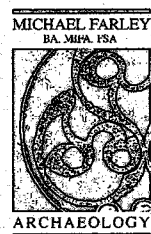
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PREPARED FOR

THE COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL
AND THE FORESTRY COMMISSION

MICHAEL FARLEY ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE RUSHBEDS GROUP
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Rushbeds Wood, Brill: an archaeological Survey

By Michael Farley and the Rushbeds Group

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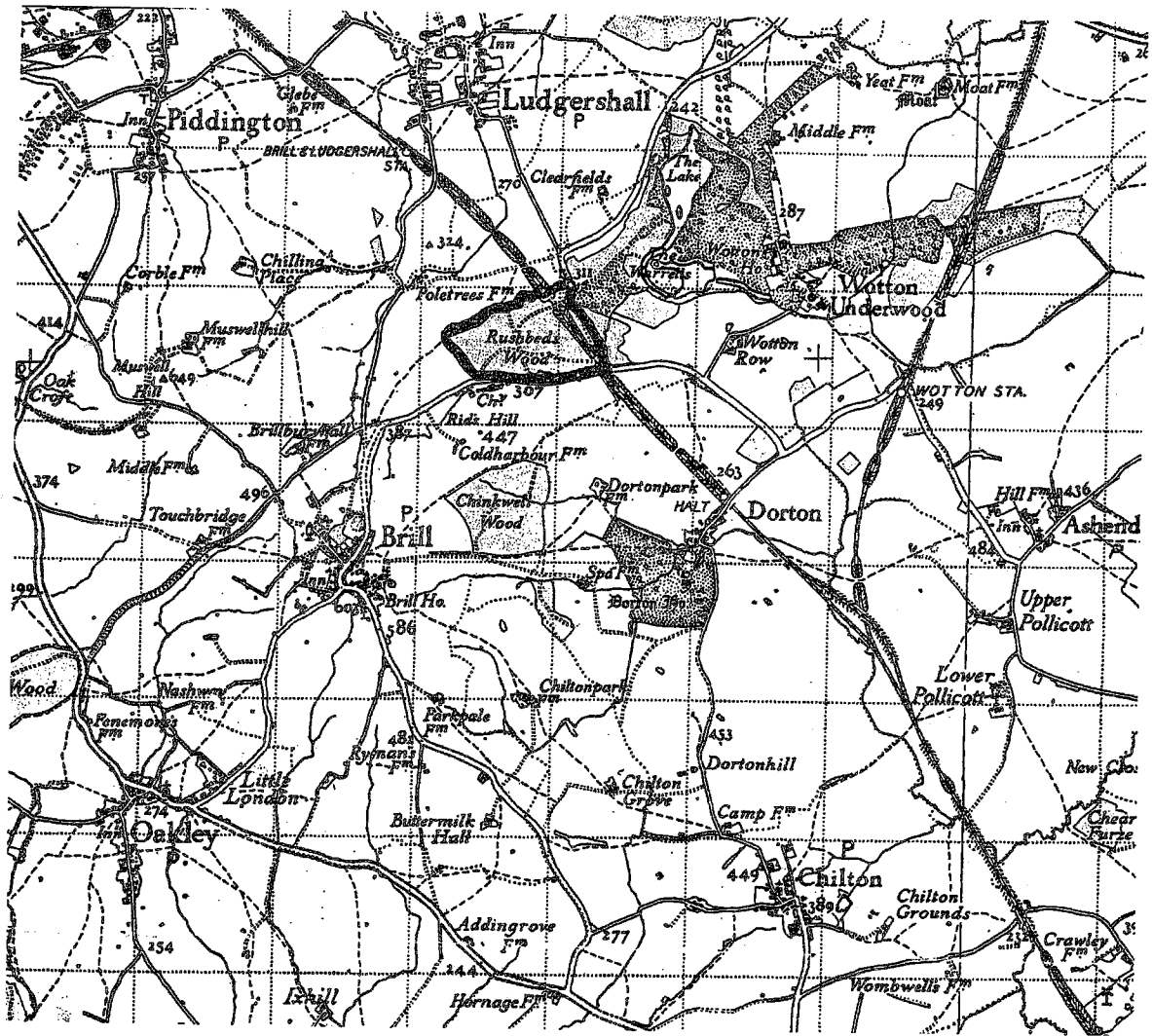


Fig.1 Location map, Rushbeds Wood, Brill, Buckinghamshire outlined

Rushbeds Wood, Brill, Buckinghamshire.

An archaeological study by Michael Farley and the Rushbeds Group.

1. Abstract

The first detailed archaeological study of a wood in the former Bernwood Forest area of Buckinghamshire located a significant wood boundary over 700m long of sinuous form, possibly late medieval, and examined a parish boundary feature which may reflect the line of a Saxon charter boundary. Some presumed 'ancient' woodland, cleared in the early nineteenth century, was found to have ridge and furrow beneath it. A short study of documentation relating to phases of clearance was carried out. Some unusual, late, narrow 'ridge and furrow' was noted. Features associated with the Wotton Tramway were also recorded.

2. Introduction

This survey of Rushbeds Wood (Fig 1 and Fig 2) was commissioned from Michael Farley Archaeology as part of the Bernwood Ancient Hunting Forest project by Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service, with funding from the Forestry Commission. Volunteers were from the outset to make an important contribution to this first detailed archaeological survey of woodland within the Buckinghamshire Bernwood Forest area.

The study below looks briefly at the history of Bernwood, notes the sources available for the history of Rushbeds which was a part of it, describes the results of the survey in the field and provides a short integrated summary.

3. Historical background.

3.1 Bernwood Forest; an introduction

There are many general descriptions of the role that forests and forest law played in medieval and later England, including for example Astill (1988), Cantor (1982), Havins (1976), Rackham (1976, 1980 and 1986) Thirsk (2000) and many individual forests, chases and parks have received detailed attention such as Whittlewood, partly in Buckinghamshire (Jones and Page 2003) and Bernwood, within which Rushbeds lay. A major study on Bernwood, *Bernwood; the Life and Afterlife of a Forest* edited by John Broad and Richard Hoyle was published in 1997 and the reader is referred to this work for background information. A list of documentary sources available for the Forest area has also been prepared by Mark Page and is available from the County Archaeological Service (Page M 2002).

Although 'forests' in the medieval period commonly included not just woodland but, for example, arable land and commons also, once defined – essentially as hunting grounds



2. Aerial view of Rushbeds from the south cut by a line of the Great Western Railway Company. The course of the Wotton Tramway lies within trees on the southern margin of the wood. © M Farley

for the monarch – they became subject to crown administration, albeit sometimes devolved; in particular they became subject to restrictive forest law. The extent of their boundaries was therefore of great importance, and frequently disputed.

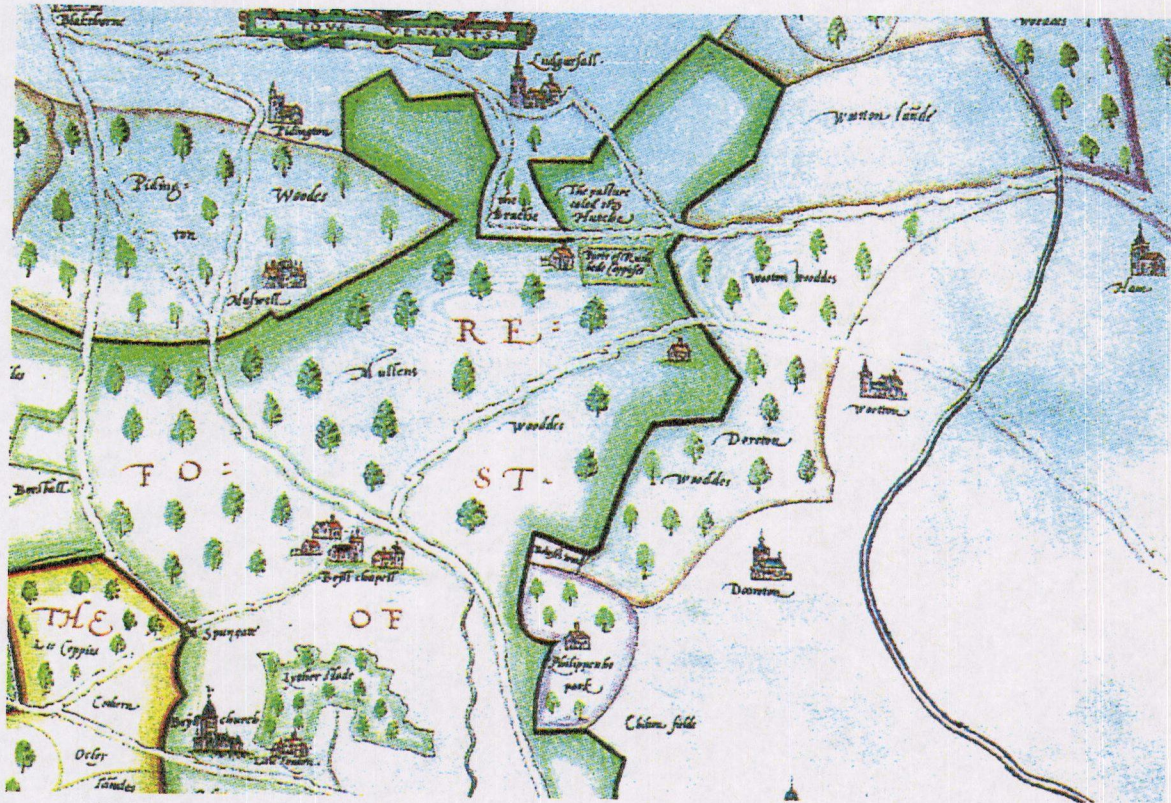
Bernwood Forest at its greatest extent in the late twelfth century, covered a substantial part of north-west Buckinghamshire. By the late thirteenth century the area defined as Bernwood Forest had shrunk to a much smaller area centred on Brill, a royal manor where the prison for forest trespassers was also sited (VCH II, 136). This smaller area remained generally stable being of similar extent when later shown on a map in 1590 (Fig 3), consisting of the three parishes of Brill, Boarstall and Oakley (Hoyle and Broad 1997). Its general location is also indicated on Speed's map of 1610 (see front cover). Bernwood, like other forests, was always much influenced by the royal forester and in particular, as Hoyle notes of its later life - 'From May 1546 to the disafforestation of Bernwood in 1632, the history of the forest is intertwined with the fortunes of the Dynham family of Boarstall.' (in Broad 1997, 35) John Dynham is variously described as being 'farmer of the forest of Bernwood' and Warden of the Forest. Hoyle describes in details the disputes and other issues, which had to be resolved in the decade before disafforestation, for example between the landowners and those with common rights. By the formal end of disafforestation (that is the removal of forest law which did not necessarily resulting in complete clearance of trees) a large part of Bernwood, formerly crown land, had been sold off, although the crown retained some land. Bernwood's history after disafforestation is linked to individual landownership histories.

3.2 The map evidence available for Rushbeds Wood

Although it has not been possible to make an exhaustive study of maps showing Rushbeds, those which are fairly accessible are discussed below.

An interesting but highly schematic and distorted map of 1580, 'The Diddershall House Map', part of which is reproduced here as Fig 4 (Lipscomb 1847) shows Brill, Ludgershall and Wotton but the routeways in the area of Rushbeds are unfortunately difficult to reconcile with known routes and the wood cannot be certainly identified. The map has been reoriented in Figure 4 so that north is at the top of the figure and some re-orientated village names have been added.

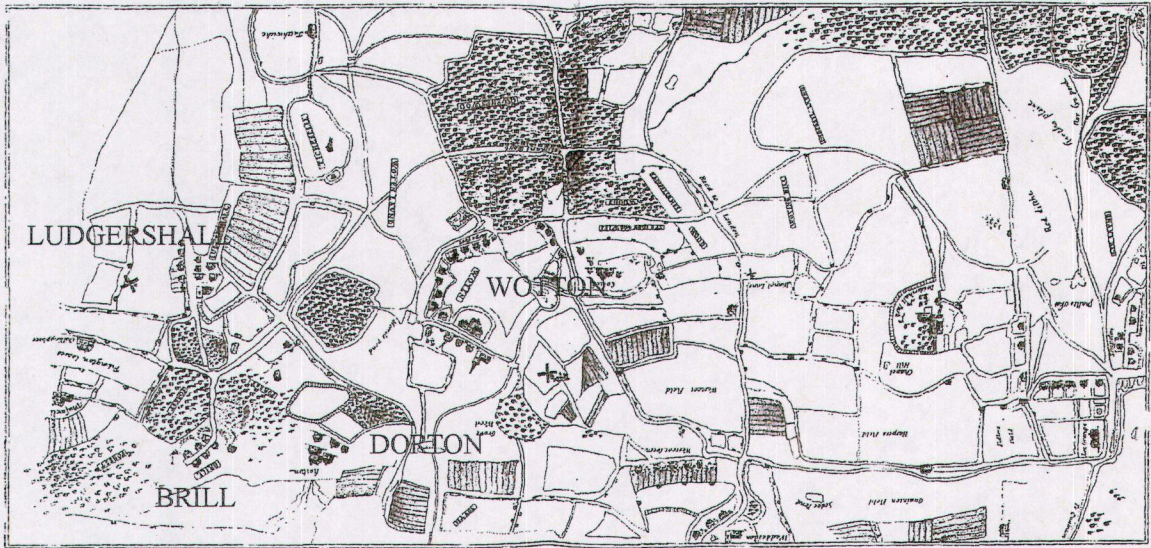
Rushbeds first certainly appears on the map of 1590 noted above, as a rectangular area 'Parte of Rushbeds Coppises' lying a little south of an east-west route which at its west end turns north to Ludgershall (Fig 3, and see Elvey 1963 and BRS 1964). On the north side of this route is an area marked 'The pastures called the Hutche'. Both 'Rushbeds Coppises' and The Hutche lay just within the northern boundary of Bernwood, which is also marked on the map. Schematic woodland is shown all round Rushbeds on the south and east. Although schematic, a number of villages are shown and the east-west route can with some confidence be identified as a surviving green lane which commences in the west by Poletrees and Lapland Farms joining the present Kingswood Lane on the east (Fig. 3a) and then continuing on a made road to the modern A41 (Fig.1) The map also shows a building immediately west of Rushbeds; this might have long vanished or could represent either Lapland or Poletrees Farms.



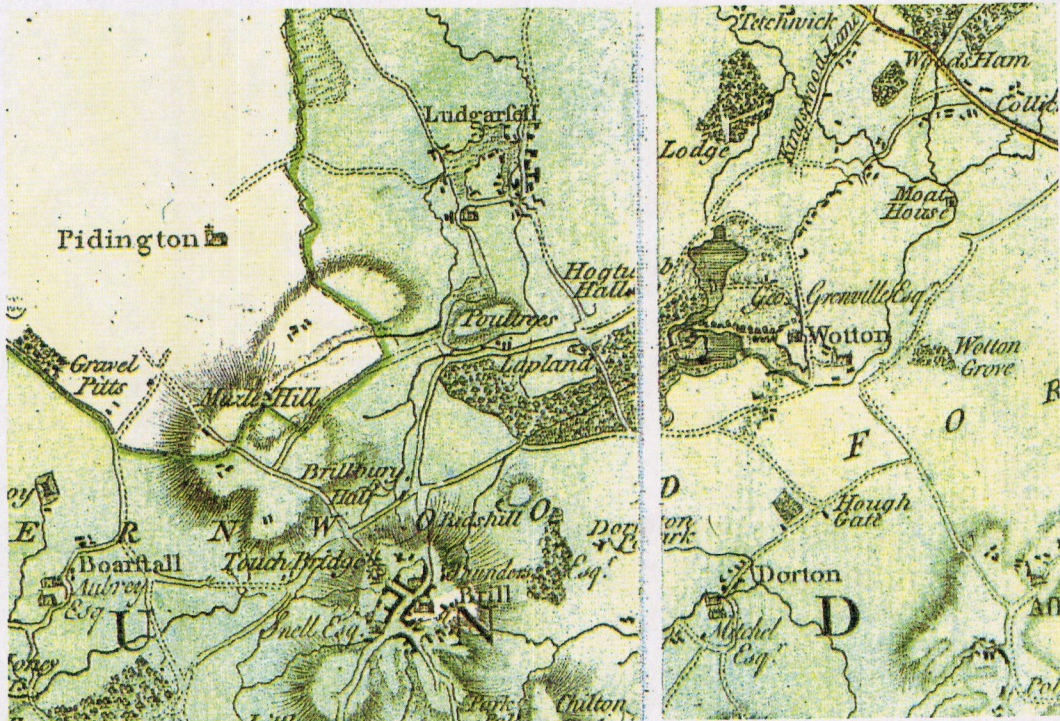
3a. Detail of Bernwood map of 1590 showing 'Parte of Rushbeds Coppice'



3b View today looking east along the lane by Poletrees and Lapland



4. The Tudor 'Doddershall House' map, re-oriented with north at the top, with added village names.



5. Jefferys map of 1770. Rushbeds Wood, not named, south of 'Lapland'

As Rushbeds has been singled out specifically within an area of woodland, it must have had particular significance for the map maker, although the Rushbeds depicted could be either what was later to be called Upper or Lower Rushbeds, or indeed both (see Documentary evidence further on). That there was clearly an area of defined pasture (The Hutche) close to the wood boundary is of interest. Adjacent to this is another piece of land running south from Ludgershall, 'the Brache', whose name indicates a recognised assart, and a little east of The Hutche is Clearfields Farm, a name whose origins lie in the word 'clere' being Old French for glade (EPNS 1925, 119). The boundary of the northern margins of the wood had already clearly been much altered by assarting. The process of clearance is discussed briefly below.

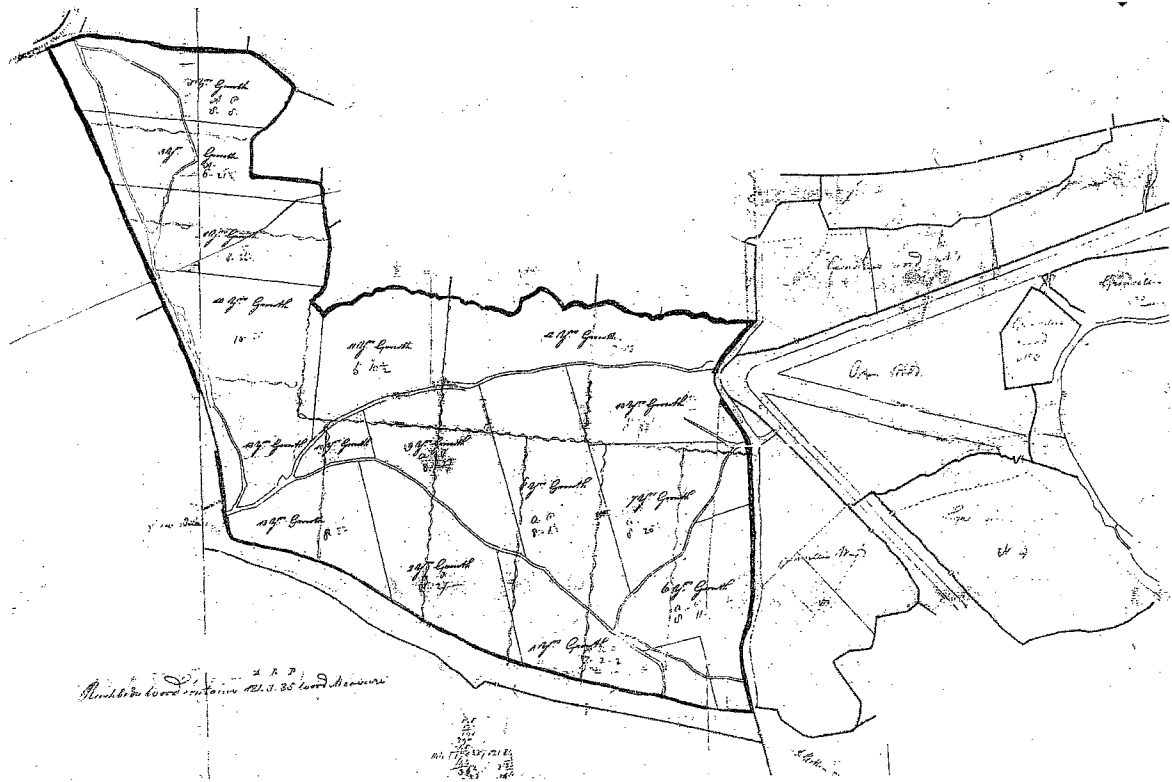
Jefferys county map of 1770 (Fig. 5) does not name Rushbeds but does show the wood and also the east-west routeway noted above. It also shows what would now be called Kingswood Lane on the eastern margin of Rushbeds. There is open land on the northern side of the wood except at the western end where a tongue of wood extends to 'Poultrees' and 'Lapland', both noted above. This tongue of wood is now pasture, will be further discussed below. The map also shows the equivalent of the modern Dorton road running east-west on the south side of the wood, and a stream running SW-NE through it.

Two interesting maps among the Grenville Estate papers in the Henry Huntington Library, California, were noted by Elvey (1963), one of 1788, the other of 1812. Photocopies of these were made available by Mrs. B. Woodell and are reproduced here (Figs. 6 and 7) with acknowledgement to the library.

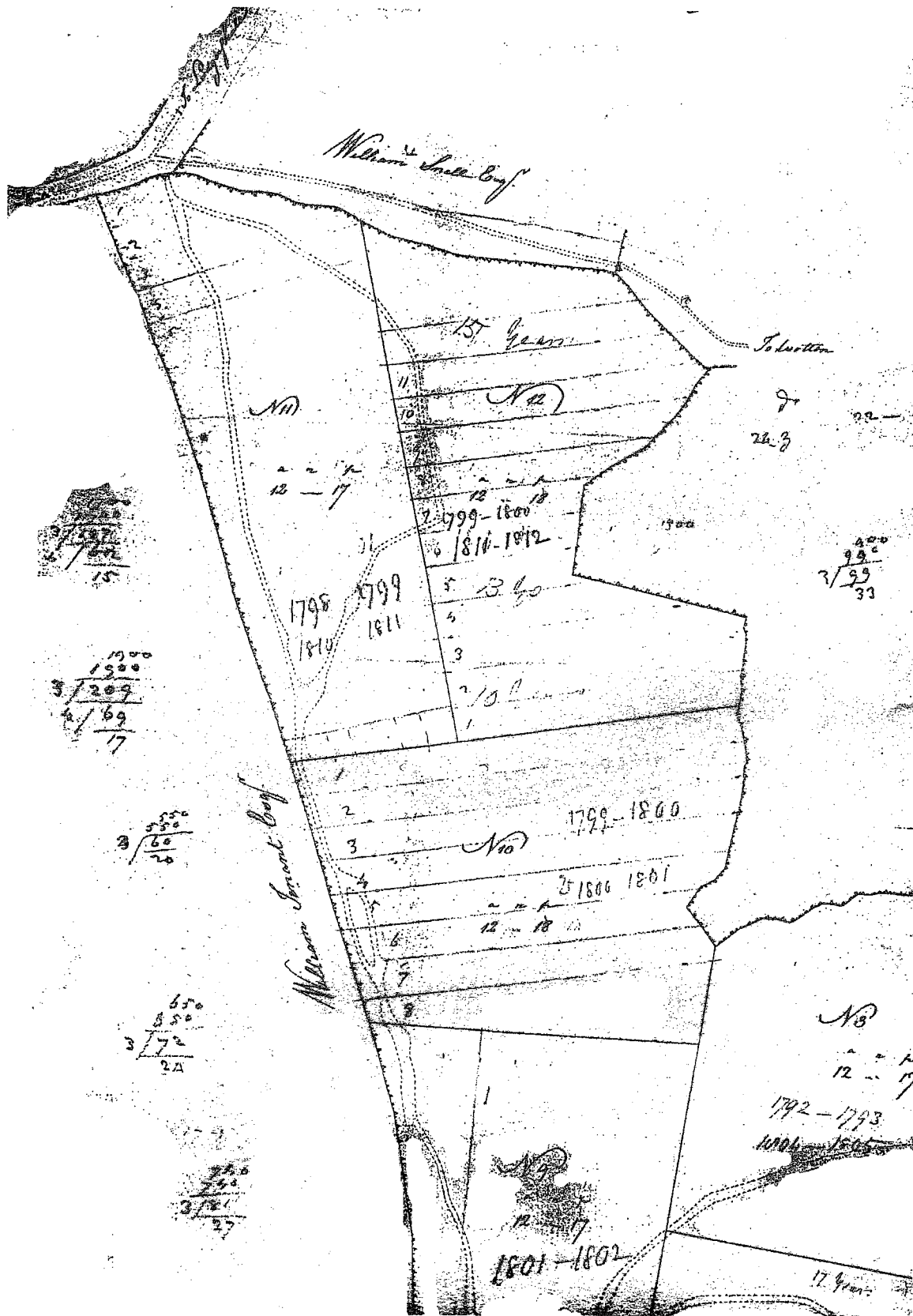
The 1788 map (Fig. 6) prepared shortly after Jefferys map noted above, shows the entire wood, including its northern 'tongue', marked up into coppice compartment ('coupes') with the age of the wood in each compartment e.g. '40 Yrs Growth' and '2 Yrs Growth' with acreage, the latter not always easy to read. The divisions are marked with single lines, diagonal in the main wood and horizontal in the NE sector, but these overlies a preceding, rectilinear division of the area indicated by wavy lines. These may reflect a coppice regime already in existence or alternatively have been a proposed first draft. The course of what might be either paths or streams is also indicated. The latter seems more likely as one on the western boundary appears to divide round a small 'island'.

The 1788 map shows one other feature of interest, namely that three open 'vistas' from Wotton House on the east, converge at Kingswood Lane and Rushbeds Wood on its west side. It is possible that construction of these vistas caused a road diversion (see on).

The 1812 map (Fig 7.) is unfortunately incomplete and shows only the northern tongue of woodland. The divisions it shows are, with the exception of one north-south division, on an entirely different alignment to either of the two earlier phases of division shown on the 1788 map. The underlying map base is, however, the same, as can be seen, for instance, by comparing the paths or streams noted above. Two main divisions are in turn subdivided into numbered strips and years are indicated within, e.g. 1799-1800 and 1811-1812. At first glance these might be considered a revised coppicing arrangement but the boundaries of the northern two compartments (one of which has numbered strips) are precisely matched in 1853, by field boundaries (see on).



6. The Grenville coppice map of Rushbeds of 1788. (Henry Huntington Library)



7. The Grenville map of the northern 'tongue' of Rushbeds, 1812. (Henry Huntingdon Library.)

Bryant's map of 1825 (not illustrated) broadly accords with Jefferys map, but adds a lodge in the south-east quarter of the wood which would be roughly where 'Woodside Cottage' is today.

By the time of the 1853 tithe award map, the two northernmost woodland divisions of the 1812 map have both become fields as noted above (which were later further divided NE-SW by a ditch). The award map is not reproduced here but on Fig. 8 the southern boundary of the two 'new' fields noted above, which then also became for a period the new northern boundary of the wood, is indicated together with a number of field names. The two new fields are called Wood Ground in the award. By 1900 edition of the OS six-inch map the final part of the tongue of woodland had been cleared giving the remaining woodland the shape that it has today on its north side.

Although at first sight this northern tongue of wood might be thought to be 'ancient' wood, surprisingly, it can be shown to have been secondary having been on land previously arable (see on).

3.3 . Documentary evidence available for Rushbeds Wood

Consideration of documentation relating to Rushbeds was not a primary object of this study but some background research has been carried out by the study group and the writer. The extensive documentation available on the Wotton Tramway is discussed further on.

A perambulation of Bernwood of AD 1298 (VCH II, 132) which proceeds clockwise, describes part of the boundary of Bernwood Forest which must pass by Rushbeds. The interpretation below identifies some places, commencing at Ludgershall:

- 'Lotegershale'
- 'The Brechs' [probably 'the brache' on a map of 1590] ...
- 'and then proceeding following 'Todeleshall Corner' [probably Tattershill Wood', marked on e.g. on Bryant's map of 1825]]
- 'And from thence between the King's Wood and the wood of Richard Grenoile de Wotton.'

The last entry is helpful. Richard Grenville ('Grenoille' above) who held Wotton Underwood, had 'Grenvilles Wood' (as it is marked on later maps) as his western boundary. Rushbeds Wood and Grenvilles today are on opposite sides of a surviving boundary - the Brill-Wotton parish boundary. Presuming the interpretation of the perambulation above is correct, then it is apparent that Rushbeds was not separately named in the perambulation as it formed part of the Kings Wood.

In a letter dated 1985 in the possession of Mrs B Woodell, Rachel Thomas who contributed to the Broad and Hoyle study of Bernwood (1997), notes documentation relating to protested enclosure of Over [Upper] and Nether [Lower] Rushbeds in the 1570s and 1580s in the *Acts of the Privy Council 1575-77*, p326 and in the Lansdowne Manuscript 47, nos 3 and 5 in the British Library. These references have not been

checked but are clearly relevant to the fact that Rushbeds was selectively depicted on the 1590 map (above).

Disafforestation of Bernwood formally commenced in the 1620s and concluded in 1632, but its aftermath produced various disputes.

A survey of Upper Rushbeds Coppice of July 1651 in the National Archives, long after the main business of disafforestation had been completed, describes the location of both Upper and Lower Rushbeds (E317/Bucks/16: see Appendix 1). Numbers in bold have been added for discussion below:

All that Coppice or Wooded Ground commonly called or known by the name of the Upper Rushbeds Coppice bounded with the lane leading from Brill to Wootton called Wootton Lane towards the South East **(1)**, and the land of ... [??] Lewis Esq. called Lower Rushbeds Coppice towards the North East **(2)**, and the lane called Largasall lane leading from the aforesaid Towne of Brill to Largasall towards the North West **(3)** containing by admeasurement One Hundred Acres Two Roods and Thirty Six Perches which at an Improved Rent we value to be worth per Ann£50 5s 6d

(1) The 1590 map noted above, shows a routeway to Wotton passing south of Rushbeds. This must be the equivalent of the modern Dorton Road which bounds the wood on the south, and is 'Wotton Lane' above.

(2) As Lower Rushbeds is stated to be north-east of 'Upper Rushbeds' and the area north-east of Rushbeds is now open fields, presumably Lower Rushbeds has been cleared since 1651 leaving what can now be called Upper Rushbeds.

(3) Although this route is not shown on the 1590 map it exists today and clearly did then.

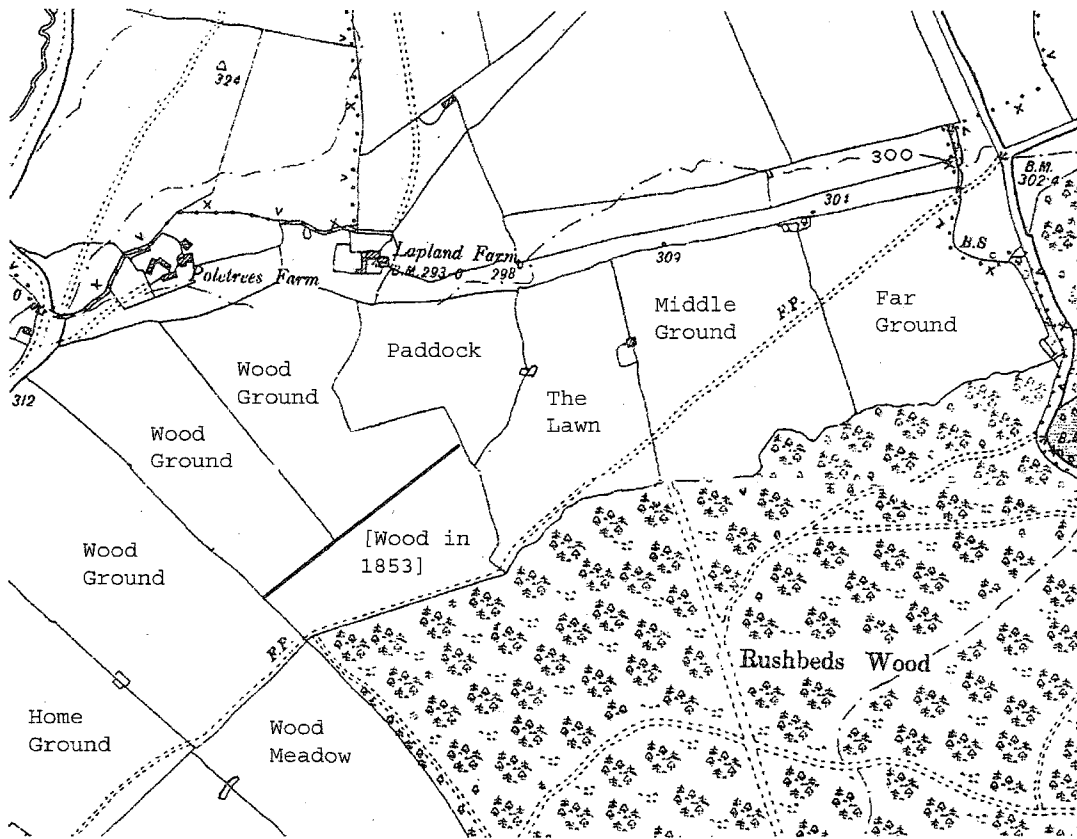
The document goes on to state that although held by the late Sir John Denham [the king's warden in the sixteenth century] Denham had formerly agreed to settle Rushbeds, apart from 20 acres, on the king.¹ Despite this judgement, Hoyle (in Broad 1997, 70) notes that Denham had at the time of settlement acquired 60 acres of Rushbeds 'with an option on the purchase of the remainder'. It may be noted that the mapped late nineteenth century acreage of Rushbeds was still 103.3 acres.

Richard Grenville describing his own estate and woodland at adjoining Wotton Underwood in 1657, a few years after the 1651 survey, is not entirely flattering:

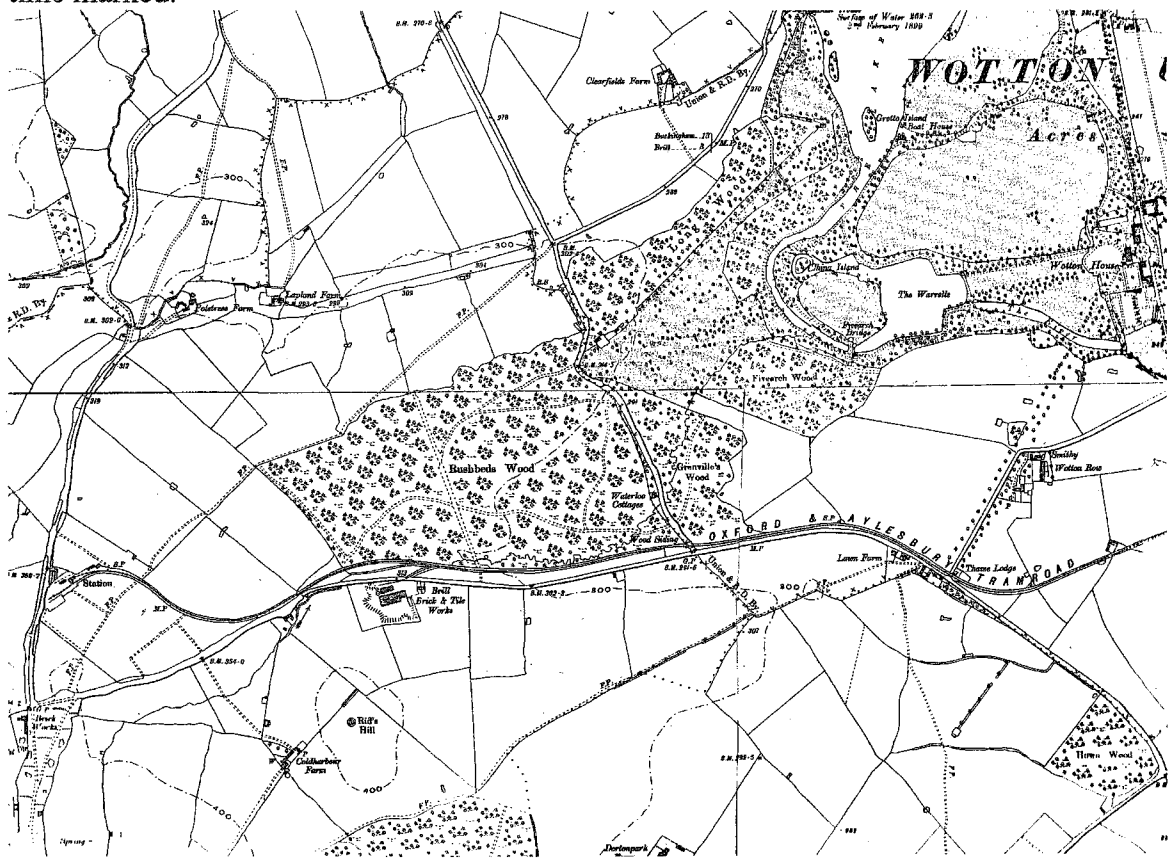
... it lieth in ye Vale of Aylesbury in an exceeding durty clay-soyle and although some of ye inclosed pastures are indifferent good ground, yeat are ye inclosed woods very bade for wood by reason of their wetness and coldness ... and much annoyed with winter floods, by reason of ye waters which fall downe into them from Ashenden hills and Brill hills and of ye small crooked winter brookes which runne ye sayd towne and feildes ..

(Anon 1942, 134-5).

¹ VCH IV, 15 notes other documents relating to this dispute.



8. Map of field names from Tithe Award 1853, with northern boundary of wood at that time marked.



9. The course of the Wotton Tramway, shown on this 1900 OS edition as 'Oxford & Aylesbury Tramroad'

According to Lipscomb (1847, I, 602) an 'old terrier' shows the Mercers Company holding land in Wotton and also 'Rushted Woods' and 'Clerefields'. More research is needed to trace the woods ownership, however at the time of the tithe survey in 1853 the wood had become part of the Grenville estate at Wotton.

Although the area around the wood has not been intensively studied there is much evidence available for the gradual process of clearance, particularly on the northern side. The names The Brache and Clere have already been noted. In 1305 a parcel of land at 'Les Clers (now Clearfields farm) by Ludgershall estimated at 138 ½ acres' was granted away from the forest and similarly 'Le Wecche' later the 'Hutche' shown on the 1590 map (Hoyle in Broad 1997, 25). By the mid-seventeenth century the demand for arable had fallen and much former arable in the area was down to pasture, for example a court case shows from 1675-9 Clearfield rotated between grazing and mowing (Broad 1997, 79)

3.4 Other sources of evidence on Rushbeds Wood.

Although not particularly informative in itself, an 1858 painting by Edward John Nieman, from Brill Hill, in Buckinghamshire County Museum, shows the wood, and in the distance behind it Wotton House

The wood as an SSSI has been subject to extensive survey by the Nature Conservancy Council, BBONT and its successor BBOWT describing its botanical characteristics,

There are several runs of vertical air photos of the area with the County Archaeological Service and the writer was recently able to take some colour oblique shots, a few of which are reproduced in this report.

4.0 The Wotton Tramway

There are a number of interesting descriptions of the construction and operation of the Wotton (Brill) Tramway which ran along the southern margin of Rushbeds Wood (Fig.9, shown as the 'Oxford & Aylesbury Tramroad), including Jones (1974), Melton (1986) and Simpson (1985). These writers also include a number of photographs and plans. Although there is much relevant archival material in the UK including the London Metropolitan Archives (Acc 1297/MET10/314 and 534), Melton notes that some 900 letters and accounts of the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos which relate to the early history of the line are in the Henry Huntingdon Library, California (although some have been microfilmed and deposited in the University of London Library). The information and quotes below are principally from Jones and Simpson.

The tramway was constructed as a branch from Quainton Road off the Aylesbury and Buckingham Railway, as the 'Wotton Tramway'; a private venture by the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos who had an estate at Wotton and who owned all of the land it

crossed apart from two short sections. A contemporary paper describing the lines' construction, was given to the Civil and Mechanical Engineers Society (Melton 1986)

From Quanton Road, at the lines fullest development, there were the following halts, stations and sidings:

Waddesdon Road, Westcott and gasworks siding, Wotton and church siding with a branch to Kingswood Lane, then via Thame Lodge, Wood Siding station – adjacent to the SE corner of Rushbeds, Brickyard siding – the northern end lying within Rushbeds and recorded by Simpson (1985) as Cotton's Lane Gate and the terminal at Brill which was 6.5 miles from Quanton Road. In addition a construction siding was used for the building of Waddesdon Manor. The Wood Siding station (Fig. 9 and Fig. *), which was adjacent to Rushbeds, had to be moved slightly west following construction of the Great Western line which cut through the east of the wood. The Brickworks Siding as its name implies, served a brickworks, which ceased operation in 1911. This was replaced by the Hay-loading Machine Works, a factory which used the line for import of raw materials and the export of finished machines. This in turn ceased operation in the 1920s

Work on construction of the line commenced in September 1870 using estate workers for the trackbed. Intended originally as a horse tramway, the contractors laid the rails on longitudinal timber sleepers. Watercourses were 'carried under the line by agricultural or glazed stoneware pipes, brick culverts being used in one or two places only' (Jones 1974 and see this study). There were no bridges or significant cuttings. The longitudinal sleepers were of Norwegian timber but the transomes were of estate timber. Both were treated with preservatives. 'The rails, rolled in South Wales, were of bridge pattern (see Fig. 23) weighing 30 pounds per yard (14.9kg/m); main line rails today weigh 56kg/m. The use of light-weight rail and the lack of conformity to the rail regulations of the day would later restrict both the engine axle loadings and the speed. The maximum allowable speed was 12mph but 5mph was more normal

Much of the line was in use by November 1871, the whole length by April 1872. In January 1872 an engine had been introduced, partly because of a late decision to allow passengers. Jones gives a full description of this engine. Goods traffic outwards consisted of hay, straw, dairy produce, grain, timber and in winter, cattle for London markets; later, bricks went from the Brill Brickworks and bricks and tiles from the Brick and Tile Works via the Kingswood branch. There was soon a considerable range of inward traffic including coal, road metal, manure (from London stables), ale, groceries, hardware, parcels etc. The line was described by Jones as 'primitive'.

There was a failed attempt to secure an extension of the line from Brill to Oxford. In upgrading preparation, the original rails and sleepers were replaced in 1894 with 50 pounds per yard (24.8kg/m) flat-bottomed rail and conventional cross sleepers. A number of other minor works were carried out including better fencing. This allowed the regulation speed to rise to 12mph but still restricted the engine size.

In 1890 the Metropolitan Railway Company acquired the line and made further changes. In 1907 an easement was granted to the Great Western Railway which passed under the tramway at Wood Siding adjacent to the south-east corner of Rushbeds. This line also

severed part of the wood. On the 20th July 1907, the Geological Association (Morley Davies 1907) decided to take a trip here during construction of the cutting for this railway. They walked through Rushbeds Wood, observed the Dorton cutting which 'will eventually be forty feet deep but at present only the upper half has been excavated', noted fossils from the adjacent tunnel and also from the Brill brickfield before 'a return was made to London by the 8.10 train from Brill.'

By that date the line had again been relaid, re-sleepered and re-ballasted for the entire length. Second-hand bullhead rails fixed by chairs to sleepers, were used allowing the use of main line engines. The speed restriction was raised to 25mph. In 1935 the London Passenger Transport Board, which had by then acquired the line, decided to close it. The last train ran on 30th November 1935 and all of the rails, sleepers etc were put up for tender. Jones gives details of sales at individual stops; for example at Wood Siding the waiting room, crossing gate oil lamps and the station sign were sold.

An account of 1901 from *Black's Guide to Buckinghamshire*, on Brill, is worth quoting:

'A mile from the village, on the north side (*Ludgershall* road), is the station of the *Brill and Quainton* steam-tram, which is the only rail connection for the village. This belongs to the *Metropolitan Railway Company* and runs in connection with their trains on the main-line at *Quainton*. It consists of one third-class carriage of the 'underground' pattern, with van etc. There are four trams each way in the day, and they stop at *Wood Siding*, *Wotton*, *Westcott*, and *Waddesdon*, between the termini. The total fare is 6½d.'

5. *Recent history of the wood*

The ownership history of the wood after it left Grenville hands has not been fully researched, however, at some point the Merchant Venturers of Bristol acquired the land. In 1948 'felling started in the wood by a Yorkshire timber-merchant who clear felled the oaks, hornbeam, ash, aspen and birch, leaving only the uncommercial maple.' (Briggs CF nd).

In 1952 the land was leased to the Forestry Commission who fortunately did not replant it. The wood was bought by BBONT in 1983 the purchase being of the land from Mr PEH Honour of Coldharbour Farm, Brill and of the freehold of the trees from the Forestry Commission. A further 11 hectares (27.2 acres) the Lapland Farm extension, was bought from D. Vernon (Briggs CF nd, who gives some details of management e.g. with an MSC team)

The wood including some of its surrounding meadowland and the railway cutting are listed as an SSSI under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981. The full citation for the SSSI can be found on at www.english.nature.org.uk/citation. In summary, it is described as an area of ancient broadleaved woodland bordered by unimproved meadows with an exceptional invertebrate fauna including over 30 species of breeding butterfly. The woodland layer contains many species indicative of long continuity of tree cover.



10. Old ash coppice in Rushbeds.

Two informants have related stories that there was some kind of Second World War presence in Rushbeds Wood. No evidence for this has been observed on the ground, however a 'Camp Site (dis)' is shown on modern OS maps in, or adjacent to, Long Wood to the NE on Wotton land (mostly open land on the 1900 OS map Fig. 9), and Wormell (2001) states that 'Canadian troops were billeted in temporary buildings, mainly in Long Wood and the fields (now woodland) between the big lake and Kingswood Lane; concrete foundations ... are still to be seen'. It is likely that this was the principal site not Rushbeds itself (CASS 6695).

6. Methodology of the study in the field

Five visits to the wood were made by the Rushbeds Group, the first visit being on 12th November 2005 when a search was made for any evidence of earthworks or other archaeological features, the remaining visits being devoted to mapping the results. Although visibility is quite limited in coppiced wood such as Rushbeds, no significant additional features came to light following the first visit during subsequent work, giving some confidence that no significant features were missed. A few very shallow linear features were observed with a depth less than 0.25m but these appeared to be former natural watercourses.

Survey was based on a 1920 edition 25" map which gave better woodland definition than the modern OS series and was carried out by simple survey methods using offsets from sighted lines with optical squares and tapes at 1:2,500 scale. The survey overall was designed to comply with recommendations of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) Level 2 (RCHM(E) 1999).

At the conclusion of the field survey, Mike Furness of Land Access Ltd joined the group to increase their awareness of botanical features and to comment on observations the group had made related to specific features. His report is attached as Appendix 2.

7. General character of the woods

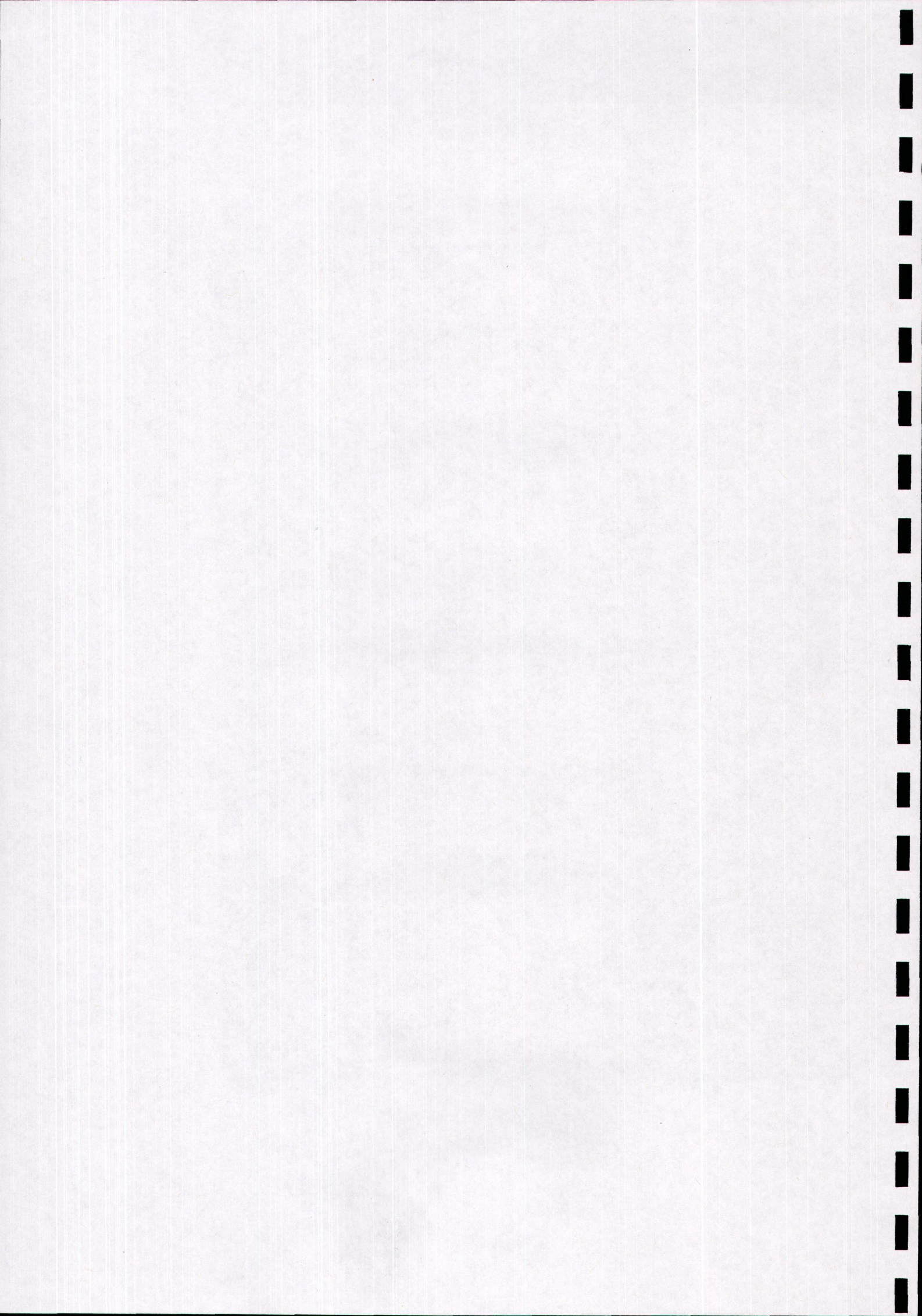
Although the bulk of the wood falls in Brill parish a small area on the east side falls in Wotton Underwood.

The geology beneath the woods is Upper Jurassic Ampthill Clay on the south side, adjoining a band of the Oakley Member to the north (marls and limestone, exposed in the railway cutting). Much of the land to the north and east of the wood is of the West Walton formation – a silty mudstone (BGS 1995).

There are no distinctive topographical features within the wood itself; the interior is fairly level and all of the small streams associated with it drain to the east towards Wotton, being culverted at the railway cutting and under Kingswood Lane. The Ordnance Survey maps only one stream, running adjacent to the Wotton Tramway. This has marked meanders implying low-energy. There are traces of other streambeds on the east side of the wood. In an account of adjoining Wotton in 1657 (Anon 1943, 146) the presence of a furlong called Rusbrooke may be significant. None of the streams have apparently had



11 General view of Rushbeds Wood, Brill looking south with Poletrees and Lapland Farms foreground, adjacent to the old east-west routeway, and ridge and furrow. The lake of Wotton House can be seen to the top left and the industrial buildings now occupying Brickworks Siding centre-right.. © M Farley



their courses modified; the 'bed' element of the wood name does not indicate any formal structure. It has also been pointed out that there are probably also more sedges than rushes within the modern wood.

Rushbeds is bounded on the north, west and east by grassland and on the east by Kingswood Lane, on the east of which are the woods and grounds of Wotton House, formerly part of the Grenville estate.

Apart from a few pathways and a principal NW-SE ride, tree cover is fairly dense as the woodland had earlier apparently been completely cleared and there is substantial coppice regrowth, much of it from old coppice (Fig. 10).

8. Field survey results

Botanical aspects of the woodland are described in its SSSI listing, and see M. Furness report (Appendix 2) and are not further noted below except where they have a particular bearing on visible earthwork features. It may be noted that no pollards, often a characteristic of boundaries, were present. Throughout the wood are scattered standards estimated at up to 200–250 years old.

8.1 Ridge and furrow

Examination of several runs of existing aerial photographs of the area around Rushbeds and new photographs taken by the writer on a flight on 4.12.05 (Figs. 11 and 12), show some ridge and furrow on the north side of the wood; a little on the south side of the Dorton Road which borders the meadow on the south side of the wood, and some to the east of the parish boundary in Wotton Underwood (ref CASS: Run 499: 12.3.1985; Run 216 and 217: 23.1.1976; unnumbered 1990s 'MPP ridge and furrow' runs.). The area immediately north and west of the wood was checked on the ground also. The resulting distribution is shown on Fig. 13.

No ridge and furrow was observed within the present wood. This is fairly conclusive evidence that the land beneath has not been arable since the late Saxon period (although it could in theory of course have been pasture). The absence of ridge and furrow does not, however, preclude the possibility that cultivation could have taken place at some earlier period, for example the Romano-British. Surface traces of cultivation this early, rarely survive in Buckinghamshire, however even within 'ancient woodland' the existence of earlier occupation can be demonstrated elsewhere. 'Ancient' should be regarded as a relative term.

Ridge and furrow was formerly widespread in Buckinghamshire north of the Chilterns, and is clear evidence of medieval open-field strip cultivation (see for example Hall 1995). Although vigorous later ploughing may level it, traces can normally still be detected from the air.



12a. Closer view of classic ridge and furrow formerly under woodland with fields of narrow ridge and furrow to the right (west). © M Farley



12b. Ridge and furrow beneath former woodland looking north towards Lapland and Poletrees Farms.

The 'standard' width of ridge and furrow in Buckinghamshire, observed by the writer over the years, is around 10 metres. The ridge and furrow noted adjacent to Rushbeds is of two forms, either close to this 'standard' or distinctly narrower. The two forms are depicted schematically on Fig. 13 with each unit numbered, as follows:

1. 8m width
2. 8m width (see ground photo Fig 12b).
3. Apparently 'standard' width present from air photo but unclear on ground
4. Ditto; appears to converge on 1 and 2.
5. Possible traces of standard width on the ground but unclear.
6. Ruler-straight ridges 4-5m width. Not a traditional medieval plough-form and presumably post-medieval.
7. Ditto. Note, 6, and 7 are separated by a broad, low, linear bank NE-SW, possibly a water management feature rather than a headland.
8. No clear evidence either from aerials or on the ground

The significance of this pattern in relationship to available mapping will be discussed further on.

One other related feature was noted. The long field bordering the wood on the south (G on Fig. 14) is crossed in a N-S direction by a series of broad, shallow irregularly-spaced gullies which are between 5-10 metres wide, with centres between 8 and 20 metres apart. These appear to be artificial but are too irregular in width and spacing to be ridge and furrow. They are probably intended for drainage, the fall being from the north side of the road towards the general direction of the wood. It might not have been worth creating these, in view of the small amount of land they drain, if the Dorton/ Wotton road was in its present position. They might relate to a period when they drained a larger area, perhaps, for instance, if the road was slightly further from the wood than it is at present. There is no direct evidence for this but further west towards Brill the road is markedly wider with broad green verges.

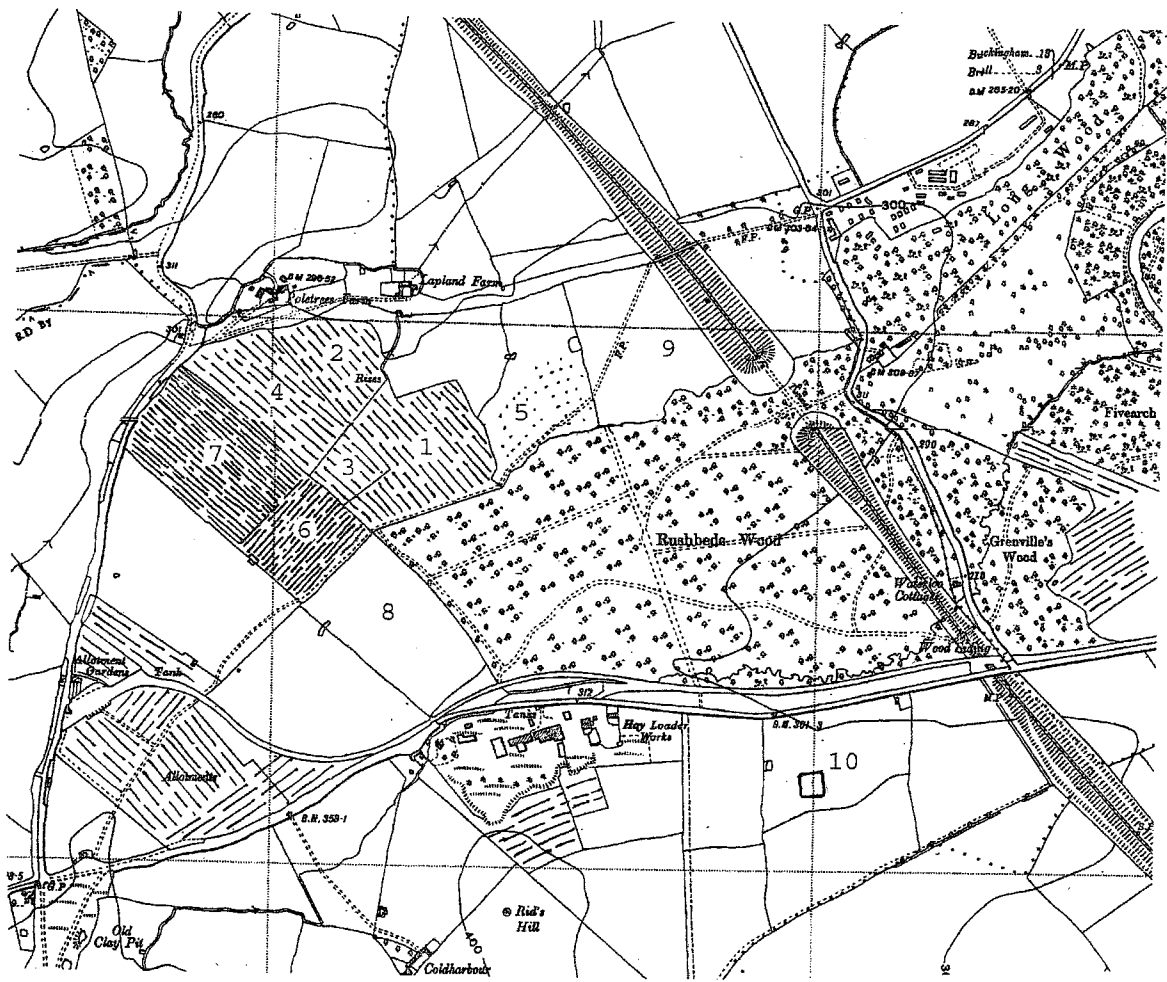
Traces of a small stream, indicated largely by vegetation, cross the same field diagonally SW to NE. This land was called Cottams on the tithe award of 1853.

In fields south of the wood, a small rectangular feature, not subsequently checked on the ground, was observed on air photographs and recorded in the SMR record, (Fig. 13, 10)

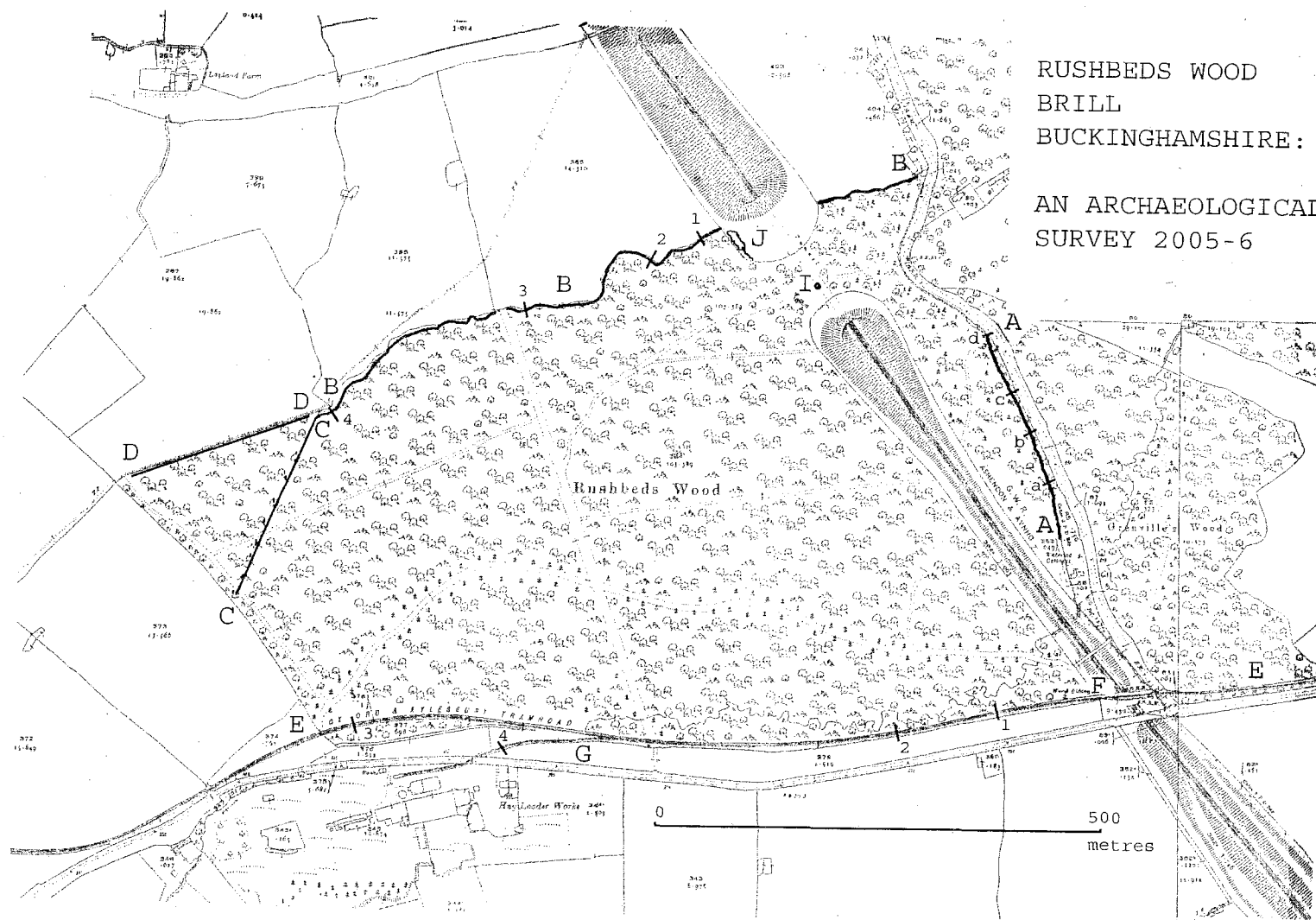
8.2. Character of the boundaries of the present wood (Fig. 14)

(i) Southern boundary.

There are now no specifically woodland features marking the southern boundary of the wood but this is not perhaps surprising since the Wotton Tramway hugs the southern margin. Photographic evidence shows the tramway in its later days running through trees, but it is likely that when been constructed, in order both to avoid felling and to facilitate future management, it would have been largely constructed in open land. At intervals a ditch accompanies the present southern woodland boundary (particularly clear



13. Sketch-plot of ridge and furrow. See text for description of numbers.



14. Results of survey showing mapped boundaries (A-D) and other features, also position of profiles.

at the western end) but it is likely that this has been recut at intervals to keep the trackbed dry. There are occasional mature trees along this margin (see on for tramway description)

(ii) The western boundary

The western boundary is straight and is followed by a ditch inside the wood 1.5m wide x 0.3m deep. Its form suggests that the wood may have been truncated on this side in relatively recent times.

(iii) The northern boundary

The westernmost length of the northern woodland boundary (D-D on Fig. 14), is defined by a very low, straight bank 1-2m wide and 0.2m high with a slight ditch 1.8m wide x 0.2m wide on its north side; two trees on it appear to have once been part of a laid hedge (Fig. 15). This boundary reflects the line established following clearance of the northernmost tongue of wood discussed above, however, it also reflects the southern limit of the earlier ridge and furrow. As it seems to be continuous with bank B described below, it seems more likely to belong to the earlier (medieval) phase rather than the later phase of clearance.

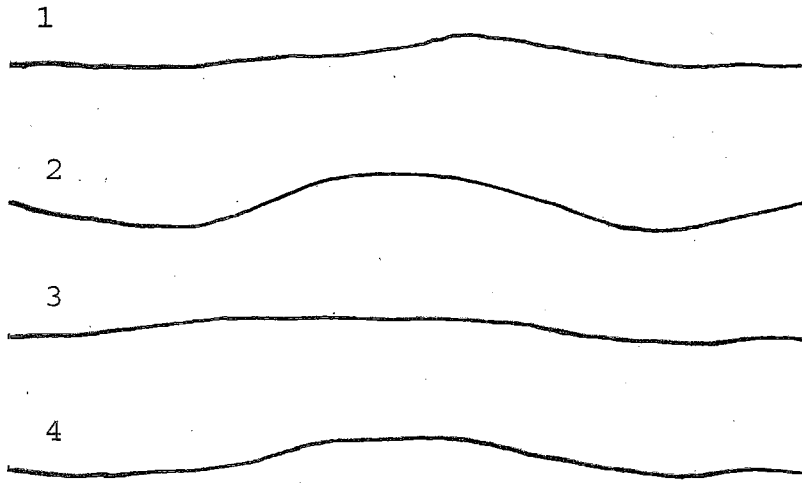
For the whole of the remaining length to the east, running within the wood south of two fields as far as the railway cutting and beyond to the east, a distance of over 700 metres, there is a very well-defined bank (B-B). It takes the form of a c.3m broad, low bank up to 0.4m high accompanied by a shallow ditch on both sides (for profiles see Fig. 16). The whole has a width of about 5.0m. As can be seen from the OS map, the wood boundary is sinuous, but the earthwork boundary which broadly follows the mapped wood edge although almost entirely within it, is even more so (see Fig. 14). On rare occasions it just loops north beyond the wood into the present field. It is clear that the present wood has expanded beyond its earlier boundary, in a few instances, at its western end, by several metres. East of the railway line, which cut through it, the bank continues to the road. The section on railway land has not been surveyed. Although its course is clear east of the railway cutting to the road, its general appearance has unfortunately been affected by dumping from the adjoining property on the north.

This bank does have on it some mature trees which M Furness estimates at 200 years or older, and also old coppice stools, however, as both are also common within the main wood it does not appear to have any particularly distinct botanical characteristics. On the bank were emergent shoots of primrose and bluebell. Its sinuous plan-form suggests that when built, its course was determined by standing features which could not be disturbed, for example standards which had to be protected. It seems very likely that it was initially constructed *within* woodland, albeit possibly as a marker preparatory to the land to the north being cleared. It clearly did not follow a surveyed line. Although fairly broad it is quite low and does not have the substance of a bank designed either to keep stock out of the wood or deer within it. Rack ham notes, for instance, that medieval wood boundaries 'normally have relatively massive banks and ditches ... usually at least 30 feet [9 metres] in total width.' (1976, 115,117). Its substantial length of over 700 metres and similar character along its length, implies that it was constructed at one period of time. Determining a closer date for its construction would require further study of the history of clearance between the present wood boundary and the previously noted east-west route

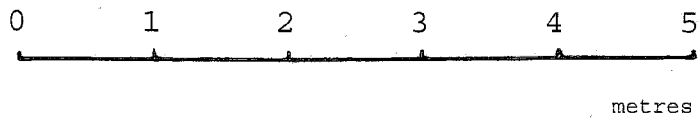
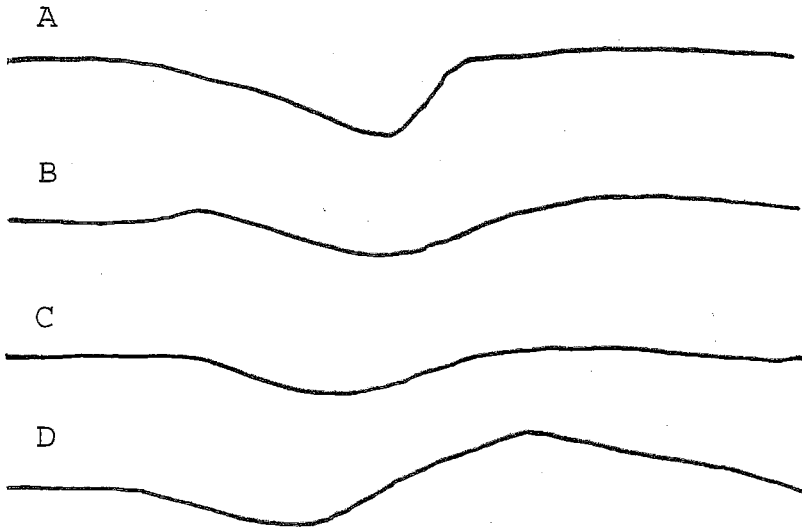


15. Evidence of a former laid hedge on boundary D.

Rushbeds Wood: Boundary B



Rushbeds Wood: parish boundary A



16. Profiles across boundary B and parish boundary (A).

to the north. Was the routeway once the limit of the wood, for instance; does it in turn have a defined southern boundary feature?

It is possible that the Rushbeds bank was thrown up during the extensive re-organisation which took place from the disafforestation period into the early seventeenth century. However, an earlier, medieval clearance, such as took place at Clearfields, cannot be ruled out at this stage and it may be noted that the intervening meadowland is botanically rich. It also joins on to bank DD described above. The writer is inclined to favour a medieval date for this bank also.

(iv) The eastern boundary

The present eastern boundary of the wood, a little east of the parish boundary is Kingswood Lane – leading towards the hamlet of Kingswood. Although it is likely that this was an old lane there seems to be no clear map evidence for its early existence. It follows, however, or is followed by, the parish boundary between Wotton and Brill which is of considerable antiquity, probably Saxon, for nearly 250 metres. The history of the boundary is discussed below (see section 10). Although not particularly distinctive in form, it is followed by a clear ditch up to 0.5m deep often with a slight bank on the east (profile Fig. 16 lower). A length of its southern end was not accessible as it first ran into private property and then coincided with the railway boundary, however, a short length may survive towards the Dorton road. Its northern end coincides with a modern road ditch and loops round the western end of a vista from Wotton House. This loop may be coincidental but could be a product of creation of the vista. If this was the case it is hard to understand why the parish boundary was also shifted.

Further north beyond the study area the parish boundary is clearly visible on the ground as an earthwork feature (CASS 2135).

8.3 Hedges leading off from the wood

Two old broad hedges lead off the northern side of the wood. Although neither were investigated in detail their southern ends at least contained no earthwork features. This is particularly surprising for the westernmost was formerly the eastern boundary of the tongue of woodland noted previously on late eighteenth century maps. Both contain mature oaks.

8.4 Internal woodland features

A few very shallow internal features (25cms or less) were noted but the great majority of these appeared to be the beds of dry streamlets or extinguished footpaths.

One significant internal division was recorded, a ditch running NW-SE at the western end of the wood (D-D' on Fig. 14). This was c 2.0m wide and 0.20m deep. It doesn't relate to any of the coppice plans, however there is at least one old coppice stool growing within the ditch so it is not recent. It tapers out just short of the northern boundary banks

BB and DD, however, where its alignment meets DD there is a slight depression in that banking, suggesting that it might cut it and be later in sequence. .

Adjacent to the railway boundary in the north-east corner of the wood, a low sub-rectangular mound, flat-topped was recorded measuring about 26x 12m and about 0.6m high J on Fig 14). Its form like a rectangular tadpole it had a lower tail running off to the south-east. It is possible that this was associated with construction of the adjacent railway cutting, the 'tail' possibly being a barrow-run..

Within the wood not far from this was a semi-circular hollow (I on Fig. 14), 3m across by 0.8m deep with a railway sleeper embedded in its base, presumably a recent disturbance.

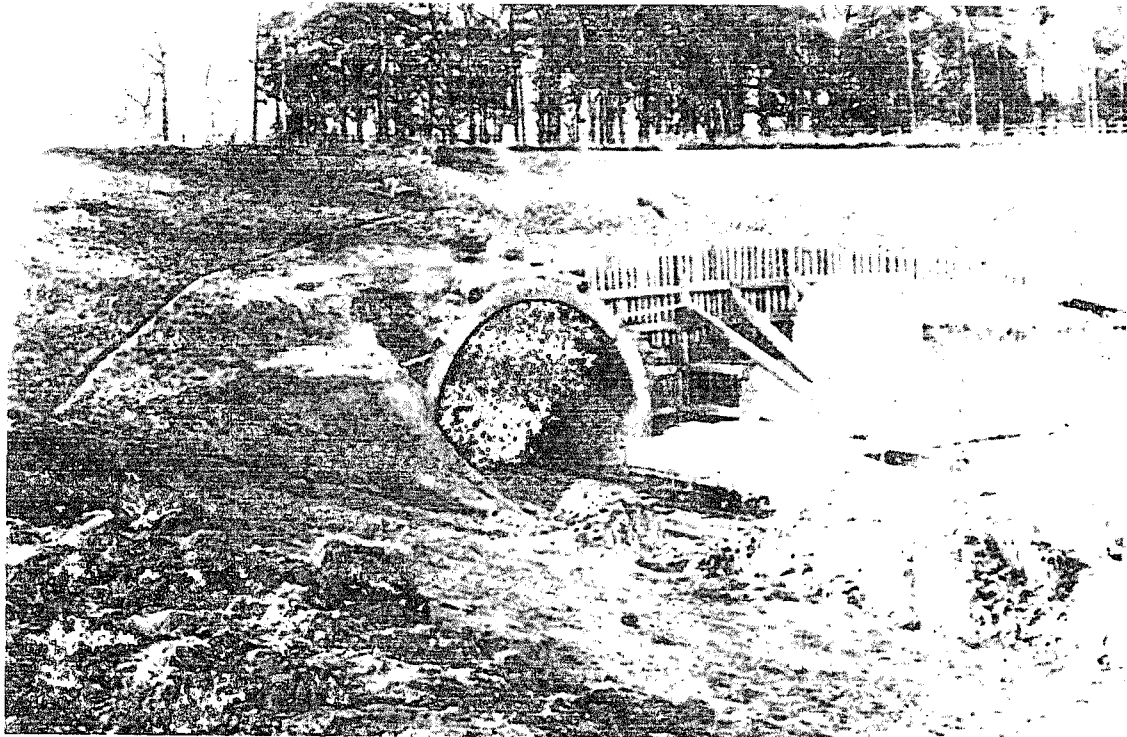
A curiosity of the railway construction may be noted at this point. The line is in a cutting except where it would have cut through Grenville's main access to the wood, lying at the apex of the Wotton vistas (Fig. 9). Here there is a tunnel. It might have been thought easier to make a continuous cutting and to build a bridge, however, the even character of the ground above the tunnel and the evidence of a photograph (Fig. 17) show fairly conclusively that even the tunnel was not of cut-and-cover construction but was literally 'tunnelled'. This must have been to meet the specific requirements of Grenville.

A broad ride runs through the centre of the wood on a NNW-SSE alignment, defined by shallow ditches (see Fig. 14). It is not shown on the 1788 map but appears on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps. Briggs (nd) notes that in the course of an MSC project in 1983-4 this ride was cleared and the ditches on either side 'deepened considerably and several broken conduits were cleared'.

8.5 Tramway and bridges, sidings, boundaries etc

The course of the tramway at the south-east corner of the wood is not now apparent, nor the site of Wood Siding, although the position of the demolished tramway bridge constructed to carry it over the later GWR Ashendon & Aynho railway in 1911 can be seen (Fig 18) as can a mature oak tree visible in early photographs of Wood Siding station. For most of the remainder of the route to the west the trackway is clear and fringed by trees on both sides (Fig. 19). Beyond the wood to the west, the trackway is indicated by a hedgeline on its northern side, but the actual course is not apparent on the ground. There are some pieces of loose concrete in the grass in this area.

The gradient through the wood rises gently towards the higher ground of Brill. Overall the surrounding land slopes down slightly from raised ground on the south, towards a small meandering stream which accompanies much of the route on its northern side. The trackbed has three culverts running beneath it). The eastern and most obvious one (adjacent to profile 1 on Fig. 14) is built of red brick with a stoneware pipe within it (Fig. 20). The bricks (112 x 68 x 230) mm here are largely laid in alternate rows of headers and stretchers. This may be an original culvert as described above.



17. Construction of the tunnel which protected Grenville's access to Rushbeds Wood (and his vista). From Watts and Barrington 2000, 119



18. Base of bridge which formerly carried Wotton Tramway across the GWR line can be seen on right.

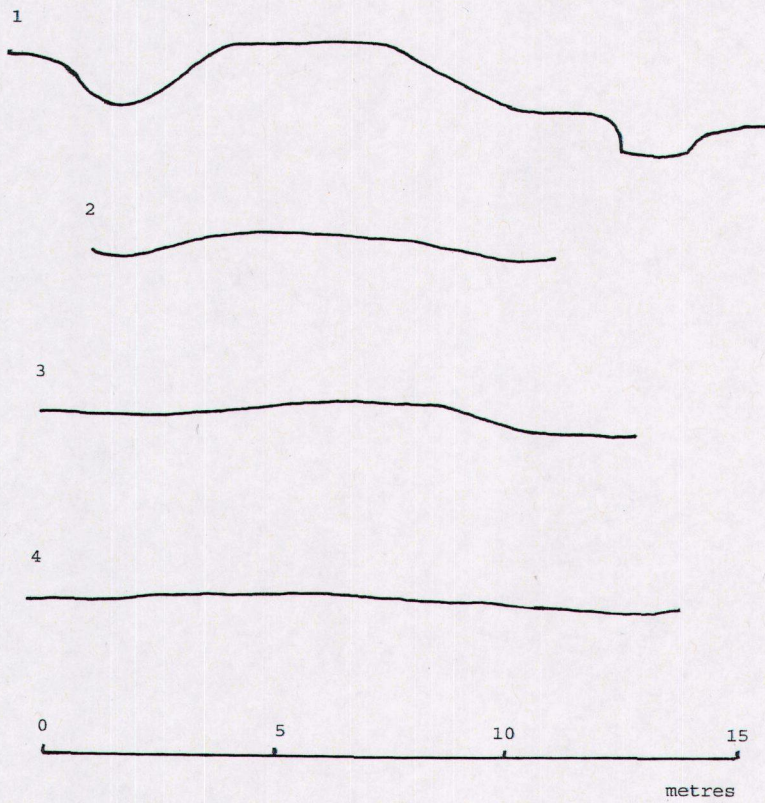


19. View along Wotton trackbed looking west.



20. Culvert carrying stream beneath trackbed.

Profiles through Wotton Tramway trackbed



21. Profiles across Wotton Tramway trackbed.



22. Sleepers in fencing of southern railway boundary.



23. Bridge head rail from Wotton Tramway used as fence posts



24. Solid rubber Dunlop tyre beside trackbed



25. Coding on solid rubber tyre.



26. Spiked iron tractor tyre beside tracked vehicle.

Three profiles have been drawn through the trackbed (which is generally on a low embankment) and a fourth through the Brickworks Siding, shown on the later editions of the OS maps as the 'Hay Loader Works' (Figs. 14 and 21). Here the embankment is very slight but its course is marked by half-a-dozen mature trees. Although the brickworks which the siding served was closed in 1911, the hay-loading machine works was established on the same site; this also ceased in the 1920s to be replaced by a timber works.

On the south side of the track, beyond the Brickyard Siding, an interrupted line of eleven sleepers set vertically, marks the southern boundary of the track (Fig. 22). These were probably from the second phase of raiing having been lifted and re-used during the third episode of rerailing and sleepering.

A fence on the east side of the visitors car park uses a section of the first generation bridge rail as a straining post (Fig. 23)

As was noted earlier, a substantial sale followed the closure of the line and it is likely that both sleepers and trackbed material were largely removed at this time.

Construction of the GWR Ashendon & Aynho line later than the Wotton line, necessitated a new road bridge, a bridge for the Tramway, a third bridge a little to the north (the present entrance to the wood) and the tunnel noted above

Finally items from machinery occur adjacent to the trackbed:

(a) Iron wheel with solid rubber tyre marked Dunlop 120 850 and 130 FOR 881 from ??? with trees growing through it (Figs 24 and 25).

(b) tractor wheel (Fig.26). This type of steel wheel was used on both Fordson and John Deer tractors before 1939 when replaced by rubber. For a few years during the war the steel wheel was reintroduced as rubber was hard to obtain (Quinn 1995, fig, p. 117 and internet site).

9. History, interpretation integration

This low-lying woodland appears to have suffered little disturbance over the centuries. The presence of streams and some evidence for former watercourses means that it might hold environmentally interesting deposits which would benefit from e.g. pollen analysis.

The oldest feature visible in the wood is probably the parish boundary on the east side, which could in theory, relate to the course of an early charter of Wotton ('wood-town' EPNS 1925,113). The bounds, in Old English, were of an estate at Wotton granted by King Berthwulf in 845 and are described by Reed (1979, 184-187) and re-interpreted by Baines (1979). Baines, incidentally, believes the Wotton estate was at some time broken off from a large early 'multiple estate' of Celtic origin that still existed in the sixth or seventh century AD, the core of which was to become the royal manor of Brill (Baines 1993).

It cannot be proven that the boundary between these two landholdings has remained constant but it is likely. The boundary points cited are sketchy but those near Rushbeds are given here out of interest with Baines interpretation of the boundary names, namely: *Cissedebeorg*, *Feowertreowe hyl*, *Eanburge mere*, *Tihhanhyl*, and *ut bigeht*.

The location of each of these points is arguable. Both Reed and Baines accept the present parish boundary of Wotton as the Saxon estate bound, and that it proceeds clockwise. Reed commences in the north and Baines, accepted here, commences at the southernmost point.

Cissedebeorg and Feowertreowe hyl. Both of these names are thought by Baines to refer to the same point, the highest point of the parish, a finger of land which reaches up to the hill at Ashendon. Baines believes *beorg* here to mean barrow, and although he does not mention the fact in his text, nineteenth-century Saxon finds at Ashendon do indeed indicate a grave near this high point.

Eanburge mere could mean either Eanburh's boundary or her 'mere' (lake). Baines favours the latter, citing Rushbeds Wood as being low lying and waterlogged. Although the wood is low-lying, no evidence was found during the survey to indicate the existence of any permanent expanse of water at or near the wood but the 'parish' boundary both within the wood and north of it is reasonably clear (see above). To add to the confusion, however, the Wotton lakes probably originated as a 'mere' (see Tudor map in map in Schultz 1939) although the lakes themselves were probably created by George London 1704-14 and remodelled by 'Capability' Brown. (Pevsner 1994, 766). They would have been fed by the Rushbrook. Both interpretations have some merit.

Baines then presumes the boundary follows the existing boundary, partly along a stream to *Tihhanhyl*. Baines relates this to Tittershall Wood at a junction of Wotton, Brill and Ludgershall parishes, but see his argument.

The process of forest clearance has briefly been discussed above and it is very likely that the sinuous northern wood boundary (B) represents a stage of that process, possibly of later medieval date although this suggestion would require more research. The western length of the northern boundary (D) at first glance might be thought to be eighteenth century/nineteenth in date, however, as the former tongue of woodland to its north was secondary woodland, the area previously having been under cultivation, this bank could like bank B also represent an earlier medieval phase of clearance.

The straight diagonal boundary (C) does not fit any mapped coppicing arrangement and its purpose is not known; there is more than one old coppice sitting in the ditch so it is not recent but its alignment appears to cut bank DD indicating it might be later than this. The general absence of internal boundary features indicates that coupes were defined by appearance rather than clear existing boundaries.

The ridge and furrow, as has previously been noted, is 'standard' width beneath the cleared 'secondary' woodland, but narrow outside this zone in two fields to the west. The latter is nonetheless very pronounced and the indications are that it is pre-eighteenth century and probably before machine ploughing. There was clearly an intent to create a

ridge but it could not have been done with a traditional 4 ox plough. The form deserves further research.

10. General conclusions

The survey has shown that although Rushbeds Wood lacks the striking number of woodland-management features recorded in some woods (e.g. Derring Wood, Smarden, Kent: Bannister 2002) or direct evidence for settlement and associated earthworks found in many Chiltern Woods (e.g. Pike 1995 and Morris 1998), it is not without interest. It soon became evident that in order to do the wood justice, account should be taken of the land in the immediate vicinity, and probably more time could certainly have usefully been spent on documentary research in order to elucidate the interesting history of woodland retreat. The significant northern boundary-feature identified was slight enough to have been overlooked in the past and yet has distinctive characteristics whose identification may be of value elsewhere. That woodland shown on Jefferys map, often taken as a benchmark for ancient woodland in the county, was not ancient at all, is also of some interest, as was the distinctive character of some of the associated (presumably post-Tudor) ploughing. Other woodland in the Bernwood forest area would clearly benefit from similar study.

11. Management Recommendations

The current woodland management regime which is largely carried out by hand, is entirely compatible with preservation of the surviving earthwork features. In the event that machinery were to be utilised in the future then machine movement of any kind should be closely controlled in the vicinity of the earthworks .

The principal path through the south of the wood follows the course of the tramway but comes to an abrupt end about 2/3rds of the way along its length where it meets the main NW-SE ride. The remaining course of the tramway to the west through thick vegetation can only be followed on the ground with some determination. It would be useful if a pathway could be cleared along the remainder of the route to link with the existing entrance at the SW corner of the wood.

When the existing interpretation boards are replaced, it would be helpful to make some reference to the findings of this report and perhaps also on BBOWT's website.

12. Acknowledgements

The following individuals who constituted the Rushbeds Group, gave time in the field and a number also carried out background research:

Gillian Beckley
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Andrew Wallace
Sarah Wright

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Appendix 1

A Survey of Upper Rushbedds Coppice

August 1651

Transcript and accompanying notes re document ref: National Archives
E317/BUCK/16

[Transcription and notes by Mike and Gillian Beckley]

Transcript

A survey of a certain Coppice or Wooded ground, with the Rights members and appurtenances thereof, lying and being in the parish of Brill, in the County of Buckingham, reputed to be parcel of the possessions of Charles Stuart late King of England, made and taken by us whose names are hereunto subscribed in the Month of July 1651, by virtue of a Commission grounded upon an Act of the Commons of England assembled in Parliament for sale of the Commons Manors and Lands heretofore belonging to the late King, Queen and Prince, under the Hands and Seals of five or more of the Trustees in the said Act named and Appointed.

All that Coppice or Wooded Ground commonly called or known by the name of the Upper Rushbedds Coppice bounded with the lane leading from Brill to Wootton called Wootton Lane towards the South East, and the land of... Lewis Esq. called Lower Rushbedds Coppice towards the North East, and the lane called Largasall lane leading from the aforesaid Towne of Brill to Largasall towards the North West containing by admeasurement One Hundred Acres Two Roods and Thirty Six Perches which at an Improved Rent we value to be worth per Ann ...£50 5s 6d

Memorandum

I Memorand: We find by our Particulars, and also upon our Examination of certain persons that the aforesaid Coppice, or Woody Ground was late the lands and possessions of Sir John Denham Knight, deceased, And that upon the disafforestation of the forest of Bernwood in the County of Buckingham by a decree of the Exchequer in the Eighth year of the late King Charles, and exemplified under the said Exchequer Seal in Anno Domini 1634: and directed by the then Commissioners for the said disafforestation on the behalf of the said late King, and the said Sir John Denham Knight on the behalf of himself, By which said parties it was then agreed (but upon what Consideration we know not) that the aforesaid Coppice, or Woody Ground called Upper Rushbedds specified to be upon the said Agreement One Hundred and Four Acres, should be conveyed and settled by the said Sir John Denham unto the use of the said late King, his Heirs and Successors for ever (except, and reserving to the said Sir John Denham the woods thereon growing), And also it was agreed by the said Commissioners that Sir John Denham having the Rectory of Brill, should have set out, and allotted him out of the said One Hundred and Four Acres, Twenty Acres thereof, for, and in lieu of all and satisfaction of all such Tythes as he could claim within the area of the Allotments assigned the Commoners and Tenants within the

said forest. And the said Commissioners did further assign, and set out of the said Coppice Six Acres thereof, (vidit), to Christopher Gregory and Thomas Gregory, of the aforesaid parish of Brill being to them three acres apiece for their allotments out of the said forest, which said six acres so allotted, was by the said parties upon the allotment thereof taken, severed and divided from the other part of the said Coppice, or Woody Ground, and by them, or by their Assignees or Assignees now... now possessed, and enjoyed, for that by aforesaid admeasurement we find the said Coppice to be One Hundred Acres Two Roods and Thirty Six Perches, out of which the aforesaid Twenty Acres assigned to the said Sir John Denham in lieu of Tythes being yet not taken out, nor divided from the other part of the said Coppice, we reprise, and then the remains of the said Coppice, and Woody Ground will be Eighty Acres, Two Roods and Thirty Six Perches, which according to our aforesaid value cometh unto per Ann £40 0s 8d

2 Memorand: Also we are likewise informed that by agreement of the said Commissioners with the said Sir John Denham that there should be assigned to him, and his heirs for ever, from the said late King, Twenty Pounds per Annum in lieu of his office of free forester, and other Royalties, and his other claims within the said forest of Bernwood, to be paid in money by the said late King yearly, or otherwise he was to be assured so many acres out of the said Coppice as should be worth Twenty Pounds per Annum: But by reason we know not whether the heirs, or Assigns of the said Sir John Denham are paid, and assured the same sum of twenty Pounds per Annum out of other lands, or revenues of the said late King, we forbear to reprise the same.

5 Memorand: We find the said premises in the occupation of Lewis, Esq, who pertains to hold, and enjoy the same in right of his wife, being grand child and heir unto the aforesaid Sir John Denham, Knight, And affirmeth that the aforesaid premises were reconveyed by the said late King unto the said Sir John Denham and his heirs, but his writings being not at present in the way, whereby to make Good the same upon our Survey thereof, but offers his attendance upon the Hons. The Trustees and Surveyor General: for his swearing the same according to the directions of the Act of Parliament, for the sale thereof.

In Abstract

3 Memorand: We find growing upon the aforesaid Eighty Acres Two Roods and Thirty Six Perches much young timber, which we estimate to be worth Four Hundred and Fifty Pounds.

4. And also about forty acres of under wood, the other part thereof, being cut the last year, which said forty acres we value in gross to be worth One Hundred and Twenty Pounds: which valuation we have made by reason that the said Sir John Denham was only to have the wood thereon at the Time of the Agreement: And whether the same may or doth relate to what is now growing, and being thereon, we humbly recommend the same to better judgments.

The Sale..... of the aforesaid Coppice cometh unto per Ann £40 0s 8d

*The previous are certified to be the discovery of Mr John Urlim
This Survey was presented the first day of August 1651. (Signed)*

Hugh Webb

Notes:

1. The disafforestation of Bernwood is dated to 1632 - 4, which is consistent with the information here.
2. Sir John Denham (or Dynham) was Lord of the Manor of Boarstall as well as Forester of Bernwood: he died in 1634, but his wife Lady Penelope Denham held Boarstall Tower for Parliament in 1644 before it was taken by the Royalists, who partially destroyed it. Lady Penelope restored the manor after the Civil War: her grand daughter Margaret married the (William) Lewis mentioned in the document. Brill and Boarstall later passed through female heirs to Sir John Aubrey, whose family held them for many years. It is not clear how Rushbeds Wood passed to the Wotton estate, but the Grenvilles of Wotton did acquire a number of parcels of land in the area in the eighteenth century as part of their work on Wotton House and Park.
3. This document gives new background to the comments previously noted from VCH 4,15: it is clear from this that the King "acquired" the wood from Sir John Denham in 1634 on the promise to compensate him for his loss of office and lands: however it appears from the wording that the King's promises were not kept and the Memorand: 5 (which from its sequence may be a later addition) indicates that William Lewis as Sir John's heir through his wife Margaret claimed that the land was reconveyed back to him by the King, and so claimed the wood back in 1652 on the basis of this report and survey.

*Will Mar
Richard Sadler
Sir ... Congreve*

Appendix 2:

Rushbeds Wood Saturday, 18th February 2006: Report of archaeology site meeting

Mike Furness B.Sc. Ecol. Sci., Woodland Consultant.

Purpose:

As part of a wider programme to develop volunteer archaeological surveying in woodlands in the ancient Bernwood Forest area, a team of volunteers have been working under the guidance of archaeologist, Mike Farley, exploring features of Rushbeds Wood.

In addition to the man-made features recorded on and in the land itself, it was considered important that the volunteers should recognise that the structure of the woodland and features of the trees themselves also represent a living archaeology, reflecting woodland's generally long, intensive use by man. As an ecologist and woodland consultant, Mike Furness was brought in to spend one session giving the volunteers an introduction to the trees and woodland of the study site.

Issues covered

The session was informally divided into three parts; firstly, an introduction to woodland history, secondly, a walk and talk around the wood looking at specific trees and their interpretation and, finally, a consideration of what the woodland could tell us about a bank and ditch feature which had been the subject of particular study by the group.

1. During the introduction the woodland in the immediate vicinity of the car park meeting place was used to illustrate points about woodland history, these included;
 - Woodland structure – high forest, coppice, coppice with standards, pollards, wood pasture.
 - Primary and secondary woodland, including 'wild wood', plantations on ancient woodland sites and plantations on previously farmed land.
 - Coppicing – history, techniques, uses of the crop, economic importance, conservation benefits and current management issues.
 - Woodland species composition – National Vegetation Classifications, SSSI citations, relationship to geology.
 - Clear felling – a consideration of the ecological impact cf. the landscape impact.The particular history of Rushbeds Wood was considered as evidenced by the abundant coppice stools but paucity of old trees on the site and the almost complete lack of pollards.

2. A round about route was chosen to take in as many of the main species of tree found in the wood as possible. During this walk the group looked at the identification of the various species in winter and, where they had been coppiced, also looked at the particular responses to coppicing, particularly the tendency or otherwise to form large open stools as indicators of age. Consideration was also given to the emerging ground flora, particularly ancient woodland indicator plants. However, the early stage in the season precluded an in-depth study of the herb layer.

The tree species considered included;

- ❖ Hazel (one of the site's main coppice species)
- ❖ Aspen (which is in relatively unusual abundance on the site)
- ❖ Ash
- ❖ Oak (*Q. robur*)
- ❖ Downy Birch
- ❖ Blackthorn
- ❖ Grey willow
- ❖ Poplar sp.
- ❖ Field maple

3. Finally, the ditch and bank mapped by the volunteers was considered. It was noted that there were some mature oaks on the bank and these were tentatively aged at 200-250 years. It was also noted that there were some coppice stools on or encroaching onto the bank. As noted above, the time of year precluded detailed examination of the ground flora, however, it was noted that some primrose and wood anemone were present on the bank along with higher numbers of bluebells.

Conclusions

Although Rushbeds Wood is not particularly species rich for its trees, it does contain many good examples of old coppice stools indicating many centuries of previous management (although much is now neglected).

Simple pointers were given to aid winter tree-identification, along with advice about the inherent difficulties and the need to look at the whole tree.

It was concluded that the northern bank and ditch feature must be more than 250 years old and it was speculated that, as it meanders so tightly, it may have been selectively dividing up particularly valuable trees or coppice stools between owners.

Feb. 2006.