Why are documentary sources important?

Documentary evidence is important because it provides specific evidence of past conditions, past events and past management practices which are often impossible to detect through site surveys alone. Also, it can confirm or overturn inferences from field surveys.

Woodland sites with a well documented history are more valuable than those where such information is sparse or entirely lacking. Sites where documentary evidence and landscape evidence can be integrated are more valuable still.

What kind of information can emerge from a documentary study of your woodland?

- The status of a woodland (Is it ancient?).
- Past management practices (Was it a wood pasture, simple coppice or coppice-with-standards?)
- Markets for wood, timber and other woodland products (Did changing markets lead to changing management practices?).
- Other past uses of parts of the site (e.g. is there documentary evidence of quarrying or mining?)
- Clarification of the status of different tree species (native or planted).
- Significance of boundary and internal earthworks.
- Woodland clearances and woodland extensions.
- Relationship to trackways, routeways and settlements.

Recommended Survey Approach

Ideally you should have in mind the creation of a comprehensive historical biography of your wood: the meaning of its name; its status (ancient or secondary); changes of ownership, past management practices; markets for woodland products; and the origin and meaning of archaeological features.

What is Ancient Woodland and Why is it Important?

Natural England’s Ancient Woodland Inventory defines ancient woodland as: *land that has had continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD.*

This date is used because archive documentary evidence indicates that there was little deliberate tree planting prior to 1600AD on ground which had not previously been wooded.

Ancient woodlands are important for a variety of reasons including:

- the range of wildlife found (Biodiversity)
- the Rarity of the habitat
- the longevity of their History
- the value placed on them by local Communities
- their overall Irreplacibility
- and their Unique archaeology and heritage.

Useful Publications


For further information visit www.ukceconet.co.uk or contact us at info@hallamec.plus.com or 0114 272 4227
Planning your research

Before you start it is important to plan your research due to the wide range of sources available. Below are some basic steps to help provide you with a structure to conduct your research.

1) Decide how much time you can spend on documentary research and what your budget might be.
2) Ensure that you are familiar with the woodland - make a visit if necessary to note down any obvious physical features or protected or interesting flora or fauna species.
3) Look on a modern map and note the nearest village and any place names or prominent features.
4) Consult your local library for any relevant local publications.
5) See if there are any local groups or individuals that may have useful information.
6) Identify the key questions you wish to address, such as:
   - Who have been the woodland owners?
   - How far back in time was the wood first recorded?
   - How was the wood managed in the past?
   - What crafts were carried on in the wood?
   - Are there records of clearance or planting?
7) Choose a couple of types of information to focus on initially. Maps are a good starting point.
8) Decide on a filing system.
9) Plan your visit to a library/archive centre or to the internet. Note opening times, whether you need to sign up as a member and any rules or restrictions.
10) Finally try to stay focused on addressing your initial set of questions but note any points of interest for future investigation.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Source of Research</th>
<th>How to find it</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
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<tr>
<td>Archives and Record Offices</td>
<td>To locate the appropriate archive or record office use the internet or a local directory. Every Local Authority has a Record Office.</td>
<td>These are the official repositories of administrative, legal and estate records for counties or other large administrative districts. Records may include detailed estate accounts of woodland management over long periods.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Libraries: Local Studies/Reference Section</td>
<td>To locate your nearest local studies library use the internet or contact your local authority.</td>
<td>These can provide you with printed materials such as books, pamphlets and trade directories. They may also have maps, photographs and records such as the census.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local authority planning or countryside departments</td>
<td>Use the internet or a local directory to find the details.</td>
<td>Such departments may have management plans containing historical and ecological information. They may also have the results of specialist archaeological surveys.</td>
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<td>Local Historic Environment Record Centres (H.E.R.) and Biological Records Centres</td>
<td>Many Local Authorities will have a Biological Record Centre and an Archaeology service or H.E.R at county level.</td>
<td>The H.E.R. may be able to provide you with some archaeological information for your woodland. The Biological Record Centre will hold some information about the wildlife and biodiversity within your area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local History, Archaeology, Natural History Societies and Groups</td>
<td>To locate any local groups use the internet or contact your local library or community centre.</td>
<td>Local groups may provide a good starting point for finding out about your woodland as they may already have been gathering information which is relevant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local people and Personal Recollections</td>
<td>Individuals, community groups or organisations may be able to provide local knowledge and history.</td>
<td>Advertising for information in your local library, newspaper or community centre may prove useful. The Oral History Society has useful advice on carrying out interviews: <a href="http://www.ohs.org.uk">www.ohs.org.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>Websites can be located through search engines such as Google.</td>
<td>The National Register of Archives: <a href="http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra">www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra</a> Directory of local history groups: <a href="http://www.local-history.co.uk/groups">www.local-history.co.uk/groups</a> Sources for old maps: <a href="http://www.cartography.org.uk">www.cartography.org.uk</a></td>
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