

Broad Character: Woodland

Character Type: Woodland

Regional Perspective: Southern England

Compiled by Seazone Solutions Ltd / M A Ltd, January 2011, after comment from D Hooley, English Heritage

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

The Character Type Woodland includes the Sub-types:

- Ancient woodland
- Plantations

Coastal woodlands were often important in providing timber and other materials for boat building and other coastally-focused activities. Patterns of woodland also form distinctive elements of the coastal landscape visible from the sea, aiding position-finding from ships.

Ancient woodlands have been defined by Peterken (1981) as woodlands that have had a continuous history of woodland cover since at least 1600 A.D. The different forms of ancient woodland are discussed by Natural England at www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/gis/tech_aw.htm .The current distribution of ancient woodland and the different types of woodland in the region is related to its soils, underlying geology and land use history (Cox 1997), with examples being found in the New Forest, Parkhurst on the Isle of Wight, along the upper reaches of the Hamble River and at Old Park Wood near Bosham on the edge of Chichester Harbour.



View of the New Forest from Lyndhurst (© English Heritage)

Further to the east, the more fertile soils of the coastal plain within West Sussex have a long history of agricultural production and support few ancient woodlands.

Plantations are areas deliberately planted with trees on new sites to supply the demands for wood from industrial and domestic use. Very few plantations date from before 1700 and those from the 18th and 19th centuries were generally of small scale and unintensively managed. This changed with the establishment of the Forestry Commission in 1919 due the difficulties Britain had encountered in meeting wartime demands on timber (www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/CMON-4UUM6R). Today, the Commission plants over 24 million trees each year and looks after nearly a million hectares of land, including the New Forest and Firestone Copse and Parkhurst Forest on the Isle of Wight.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

The surviving ancient woodlands would have been managed and formed important elements of the working landscape for many centuries. Medieval farmers and craftsmen would have exploited them as pasture grounds, sources of fuel, coppice wood and timber.

In southern Hampshire, the predominantly heavy clay soils support some extensive tracts of ancient semi-natural woodland. The New Forest is one of the most famous areas of ancient woodland in the region. It was created as a royal forest in c.1079 for the private hunting of (mainly) deer (www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/li_history). The system of Forest Law was devised which issued stiff penalties to those damaging the forest habitat or poaching game in the Royal Forest. This had significant impacts on those living in and around the forest and who depended on it for their own survival. Forest Law was upheld by Verderers (judges) with Agisters (stockmen) and commoners (land users) managing the land. These terms are still used today and a Verderers Court still meets quarterly in Lyndhurst.

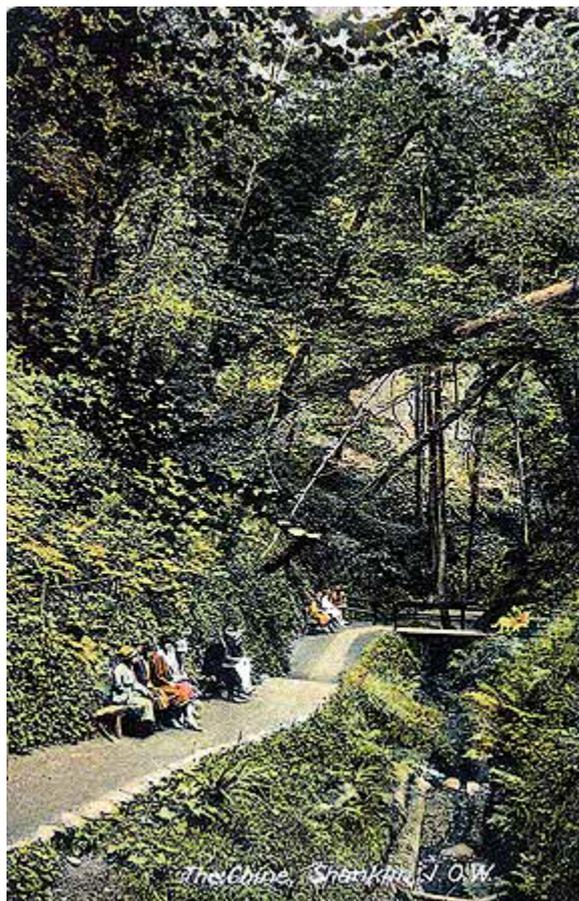
The region's coastal woodland has long served as a resource for supplying coastal boat-builders. In more recent centuries the New Forest became a source of timber for the Royal Navy. Plantations were created in the 18th century for this purpose, and then again in during the First and Second World Wars. The Forestry Commission was established in 1919 due the difficulties Britain had encountered in meeting the wartime demands on timber (www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/CMON-4UUM6R). During the Second World War the Commission forests produced more than 51 million cubic feet of wood. As the New Forest was one of the most mature forests, it bore the brunt of the felling. Today, the Commission is responsible for nearly a million hectares of land, including (as well as the New Forest) Firestone Copse and Parkhurst Forest on the Isle of Wight.



View of the village of Cadnum in the New Forest (© English Heritage)

Bucklers Hard, part of the Beaulieu estate in the New Forest, is a shipbuilding village that was originally planned by the 2nd Duke of Montagu as a base, 'Montagu Town', for the import of sugar from the islands of St Vincent and St Lucia in the West Indies. In the event, the French seized the islands and the village became a shipbuilding community. The village consists of two lines of cottages leading down to the beach where, from 1698 to 1827, wooden-walled ships were built. For almost a century, wood was under the control of the family and descendants of the master builder Henry Adams. Among the ships they supervised were *HMS Euryalus* and *HMS Agamemnon* for Nelson's fleet.

Ancient woodland on the Isle of Wight includes small areas on the shore of the Solent and the larger area of Parkhurst Forest to the north-west of Newport, Isle of Wight. The site is partly a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It consists of ancient woodland, relict heathland and plantation woodland. The woodland is owned and managed by the Forestry Commission.



Woodland at Shanklin Chine, Isle of Wight c1930 (© English Heritage)

Rich deposits of ironstone in Sussex have been exploited from the early Iron Age but made heavy demands on local timber resources. By the Elizabethan period, stands of ancient timber were particularly valued by the Royal Navy who wanted it to build ships. To ease the conflicting demands on timber a law was passed in 1581 to prevent the setting up of any new iron works in some parts of Sussex. Another law sought to preserve trees within 12 miles of the coast to protect the interests of the important Sussex ship building industry (www.westsussex.info/iron-industry.shtml).

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

Patterns of coastal woodland provide one of the distinctive landscape components visible from the sea. Those patterns are culturally defined and combine with variation in topography and other cultural features and aspects to give a sense of place and position to mariners and coastal users alike.

Many of the areas of woodland and plantation in the region are accessible to the public. These are visited and valued for a number of reasons, ranging from the leisure opportunities they provide (walking, cycling, watersports on the coastal zone) to the sense of peace and remoteness enjoyed in other areas.

Some areas also have a strong cultural significance as reminders of the maritime and naval connections of the region, for example the boat building village of Bucklers Hard in the New Forest.

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

Many woodland and plantation areas in the region have public access and are enjoyed by large numbers of people. The Forestry Commission actively promotes public access, providing car parks, way marked routes and interpretation boards.– The New Forest National Park is described as “an outdoor classroom for all ages” containing a unique landscape, abundant wildlife and important cultural heritage. Its website (www.newforestnpa.gov.uk) highlights the key topics and issues facing the Park and contains educational student and teacher areas. Woodlands have considerable potential for creating an educational and outreach package bringing together their recreational, cultural, historical and ecological aspects.



Woodland clearing in Dorset (© English Heritage)

The Woodland Trust hosts events and campaigns to raise awareness of woodlands and provides activities and learning resources on its website (www.woodland-trust.org.uk).

There is an opportunity to research the maritime aspect of coastal woodlands. This could include their role in providing timber and other materials for boat and ship building, investigating the maritime-related activities carried out by local coastal woodland communities, or researching the representation of coastal woodlands on historic charts and in works of art (McInnes, 2008).

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

The restoration of sites with ancient trees requires special care: ancient trees and decaying wood habitats are very sensitive to rapid changes in their microclimate (www.woodland-trust.org.uk). Other factors affecting woodland in the region include sea level rise and an increase in saturated soils and soil salinity which could have a detrimental effect on the woodland and wooded hedgerows which link ancient woodland – a problem particularly associated with stream valley sides and managed coastal realignment areas. Greater storm frequency and intensity could also damage woodland and trees (Hampshire County Council, 2010).

On the positive side, existing trees hedges and woodland are a considerable contributor to landscape and seascape character. The effect of improving provision for access to the coast through the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 may have a radical effect on accessibility and therefore the ability to experience this coastal/estuarine Character Type.

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

This Character Type contributes strongly to the general character of the region's landscape/seascape. As a whole, the survival of ancient woodlands and the historical features within them in Southern England is relatively high and much of it is protected through designations such as SSSI or National Park status. The New Forest National Park Management Plan contains a broad strategic and aspirational approach designed to guide the long-term management of the National Park.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

- Cox, J, 1997 South Coast Plain and Hampshire Lowlands Natural Area Profile
Hampshire County Council, 2010, Hampshire County Integrated Character Assessment 2
Status: Draft March 2010 South East New Forest Coastal Plain
- McInnes, R, 2008 Art as a Tool in Support of the Understanding of Coastal Change. The Crown Estate. Marine Estate Research Report
- Peterken, G F, 1981 *Woodland Conservation and Management*
- Tapper B, Johns C. 2008. *England's Historic Seascapes. Consolidating the National Method. Final Report*, Historic Environment Service Cornwall County Council on behalf of English Heritage, Cornwall

WEBSITES

- www.forestry.gov.uk
www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/CMON-4UUM6R
www.iknow-hampshire.co.uk
www.newforestcentre.org.uk
www.newforestnpa.gov.uk
www.woodland-trust.org.uk/