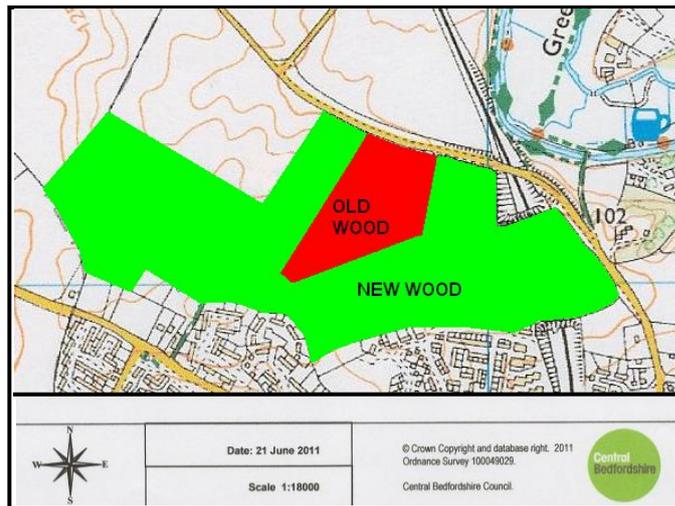


The History Of Linslade Wood

By Dave Booth

Introduction

The woodland consists of two parts, the old wood, known locally as “Bluebell Wood” consisting of 5.4ha (13.5 acres) and the newer woodland consisting of 27.5 ha (68 acres). The newer woodland was planted in the 1990’s, but the old wood has existed for several hundred years, as part of Linslade Manor. The complete woodland is bounded by Stoke Road on the north side, on the southern side by several housing estates all built during the early 1970’s, and on the east and west sides there are fields.



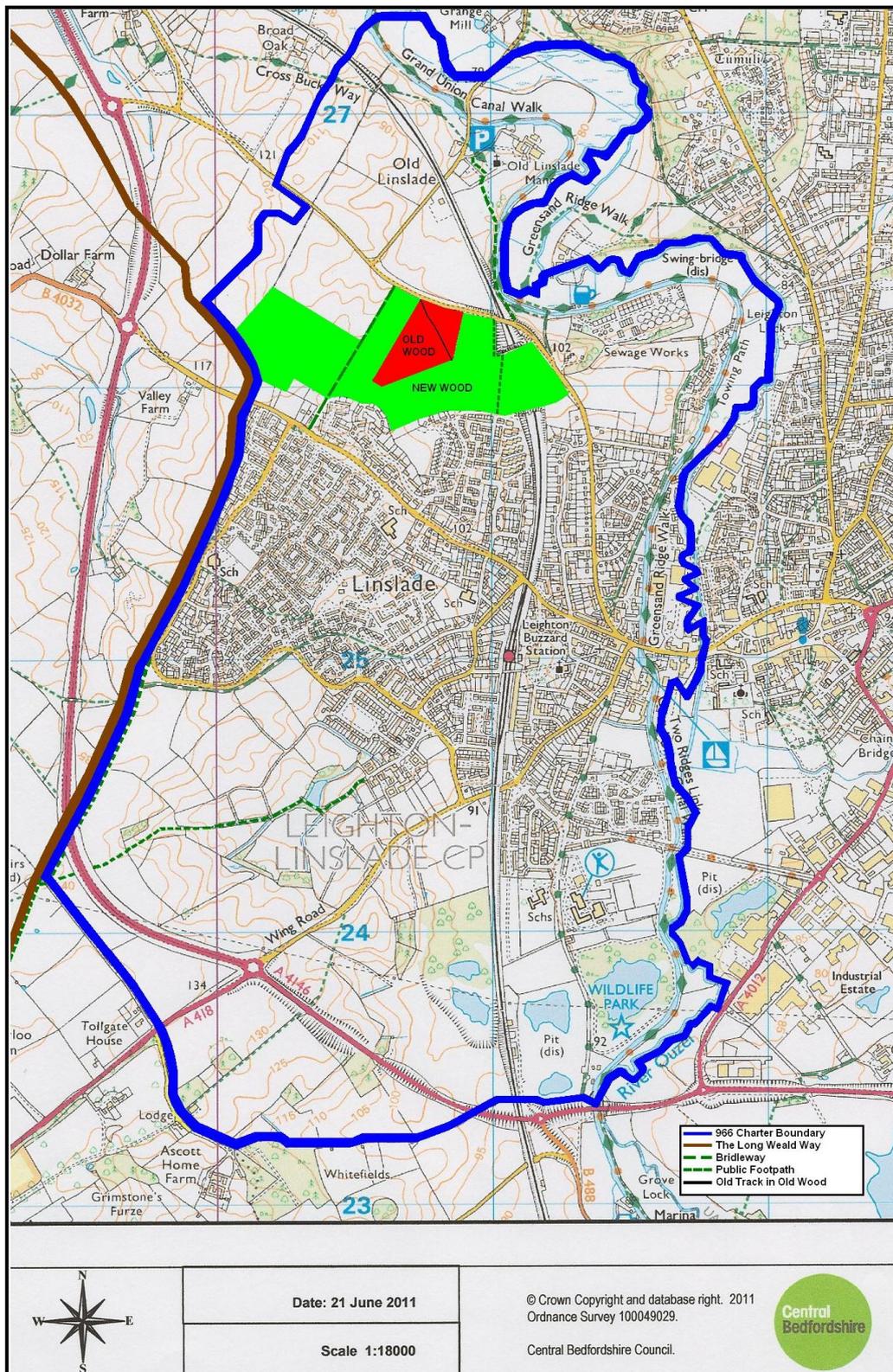
Map showing the old wood surrounded on three sides by the new wood

Contents :-

- A Short History of Linslade Manor**
- History of the Woodland**
- Woodland Management**
- Public Rights of Way**
- The Railway**
- Acknowledgements**
- Bibliography**

A Short History of Linslade Manor

In 966 King Edgar granted Linslade to Elgiva in a charter. Elgiva was the wife of his brother, King Edwy who died aged twenty in 959. This charter is one of approximately two hundred charters to have been granted in Anglo Saxon England. Significantly this 10th century charter is one of only three such charters that exist in Bedfordshire. This charter details the boundary of the land as shown in the map below. The boundary also became the parish boundary of St Mary’s church. On the death of Elgiva she left Linslade to King Edgar.



The boundary of Linslade as described in the 966 charter

Prior to 1066 Linslade was held by “Alwin, Queen Edith’s Man”. Queen Edith was the wife of King Edward the Confessor and sister of King Harold II, who was defeated by William the Conqueror in 1066. By 1086 the land had been given to Hugh de Beachamp, one of William the Conqueror’s knights probably for services rendered during the conquest. During the last part of the thirteenth century the male line of the Beauchamps ended when John de Beauchamp died in the battle of Eversham 1265. His sister Maud, married to Roger de Mowbray, inherited. There was a tenant named Lucy, whose family appears to have

been in residence from the 13th century. In 1460 Sir William de Lucy died childless, in possession of the manors of Linslade, Cublington, Chelmscote and Stewkley. His niece Elizabeth inherited. She was married three times, and she died in 1498. Her heir Richard Corbet, was her son by her first marriage. The Corbets remained Lords of Linslade Manor until 1821. The manor house was next to St Mary's Church Old Linslade. The Corbet's family seat was Moreton Corbet in Shropshire. In 1821 the estate was broken up with the manor being sold to William Pulsford, who held the manor until his death in 1862. The manor passed to his daughter Anne, wife of Sir William Goodenough Hayter. Their son Sir Arthur Divett Hayter subsequently became Lord of the Manor, becoming Lord Haversham in 1906. His widow Lady Henrietta Haversham sold the manor in 1919 to William Simmons, a local miller owning Leighton Mill. On his death in 1929, the manor went to his nephews Frederick Buckmaster and Frederick Tooley, who were also millers and both inherited Leighton Mill.

In 1966 Buckmaster and Tooley sold the manor comprising 236 acres to Dorothy Leake of Beaconsfield for £50000. She became the landlord with her husband Harold being her tenant. In August 1981 Dorothy Leake sold the old wood known as Bluebell Wood to Bedfordshire County Council for £10750. The remainder of the manor estate continued to be farmed.

History of the Woodland

The new woodland's western boundary hedgerow, runs alongside the 10th century charter boundary, from the western side of the water reservoirs along the woodland edge to the north west. This boundary is also accompanied by the route of the Long Weald Way, which F G Gurney states in 1924, runs from Wing (Littleworth) to Rislip Farm in Soulbury. Weald would normally mean a large area of woodland, but with the clearing of forest to the north of the Vale of Aylesbury, it came to mean an elevated stretch of open country. Along its length the Long Weald Way runs over a ridge of high ground.

Between the bridleway and the western edge of the woodland the ground rises and falls in many places. This area was known as the Coombes, the area of the new woodland being Upper Coombes and the adjacent area now planted with fast growing willow for use as bio mass was known as Lower Coombes. Over the area of the Coombes, seven mounds were known to have existed, and were noted in the 966 Anglo Saxon charter as "hlaws", translated as burial mounds. Whether these were barrows or just hillocks is unknown. They existed for a long time as the land was heathland, being described in 1837 as "a waste of heath and furze" (old name for gorse), with a very rough surface like that found in Linslade Wood, which was the natural surface of the drift-covered sand. During the building of the railway one large mound was apparently used in the building of the railway. Any information that the mounds could have yielded has been lost, as the remaining mounds were levelled and ploughed, when farming of the area was started by Sir Arthur Divett Hayter towards the end of the 19th century.

Lady Elgiva spent her last years living at Wing actively managing her many estates including Wing and Linslade. During this period this area was border country as the Danes occupied land to south and east of Linslade. The 966 charter shows that classical open field cultivation had reached Soulbury on the Linslade boundary, but it is not clear as to whether it had arrived in Linslade.

Linslade is mentioned in the Domesday Book, but there is no mention of Linslade Wood. However it is known, that slaves were commonly used at that time as swineherds, and that

woodland was used to feed swine. The Domesday Book is known to have inconsistencies in recording woodland, but it did record 5 slaves in Linslade. This tenuously suggests Linslade Wood already existed at that time.

A court roll of 1602 refers to a coppice called "Le Linchelade Grove". Linchelade is one of many names that Linslade was known by over the last millennium. A survey of the manor was undertaken by an Edward Cherry on 24th February 1661 which included a hand drawn map of "The Grove". The plan outline closely resembles the present outline of the old wood. This is supported by evidence of boundary ditches which can still be seen in the old wood today, in places on the western and eastern edges, and also on the southern edge by the south western corner. In 1681 the dower lands (a widow's share of her husband's estate) for Lady Elizabeth Corbet, included "The wood or coppice called the Grove".

In the early 19th century the junction of Old Linslade Road and Stoke Road was not in the present location, but immediately opposite the north west corner of the old wood. From this point what appears to be an ancient track crosses the wood to the south east corner. This track appears on many maps through the years, including the current ordinance survey maps. The track is still visible in places and is sunken at times, suggesting some age and use over a long period. The direction of the track, coupled with the line of the early Old Linslade Road suggests that the track was part of a longer route. Any trace of the track extending beyond the old wood has been lost, and indeed the route of the track in the old wood is now being overtaken by vegetation in many places.

The rearrangement of the junction of Old Linslade Road and Stoke Road seems to have been done during the mid 19th century, possible in order to straighten the Old Linslade Road which previously had a couple of sharp bends in it.

Frederick Buckmaster enjoyed game sport, and was part of the Wadden Chase Hunt. Before the second world war he employed a gamekeeper, who bred chickens and game birds in the woodland, utilising a hut mounted on wheels, which was kept where the main southern rear entrance to the old wood is now. Shooting parties were held by Buckmaster in and around the woodland.

During the second world war, the local Home Guard under Lieutenant Brian Rush, used the woodland for training purposes. They cleared several trees on the west side, where there now grows a patch of bracken in a small open area. This vantage point allowed them to set up a machine gun post for the defence of the town and the railway, from enemy troops advancing along Stoke Road from the direction of Stoke Hammond. *(The gap in the tree cover where the trees were felled is visible in the 1946 aerial photograph below, on the left hand side of the wood, unfortunately the original photo needs to be viewed with a magnifying lens).*

A prisoner of war camp was established on the west side of the junction of the bridleway and Soulbury Road, with approximately 200 Italian and German prisoners. The camp consisted of a number of wooden huts which remained there until the 1950's. The camp was controlled by the regular army, with many of the prisoners working on local farms. *(Two rows of huts are visible to the left of centre on the 1946 aerial photograph below).*

After the war a Mr Quivener farmed a small holding on the site of the camp, until the present three houses were built in the 1980's.



*Aerial Photograph taken by the RAF in 1946
The sun was shining at the time creating some shadows.*

Local residents recall that the old wood was quiet for wildlife and had a young appearance during the 1950's, following a number of trees being removed apparently by a contractor working for the Council. In this post war period, timber was in short supply, this is the most likely cause for the removal of the trees. This left the old woodland with mainly young trees and just a few older ones, including two large old Beech trees on the western boundary which are probably around 150 to 200 years old. Many of the present larger trees were probably young trees left behind during the felling operation. The presence of Dog's Mercury and Bluebells suggests that woodland cover has been maintained for a considerable time. In 1980 the Bluebells were noted as being mainly on the northern half of the wood, but have since covered nearly all the woodland, and have started to spread into the newer plantation.

The Leakes sold the old woodland to Bedfordshire County Council on 17th August 1981 for £10750.

During the 1980's the Leakes planted a line of young trees on the west side of the northern end of the bridleway. Alongside the field which is now planted with fast growing Willow trees, for use in the future as bio mass for burning in the production of electricity.

Trevor Smith became the Bedfordshire County Council's manager for the woodland. Later the Leakes decided to plant the new woodland around the old bluebell wood. Trevor Smith became involved, producing a planting plan for the trees of the new woodland. Planting was completed in phases during the early 1990's, starting with the plantation on the slope to Stoke Road along the eastern edge on the old wood, and ending with the plantation west of the bridleway towards Stoke Hammond. It was planted by contractors assisted by local

residents, with trees supplied from the County Council's tree nursery at Clophill. Grants from the Forestry Commission were obtained by the Leakes to support the woodland management, although little management was carried out by them.

The new woodland was unsuccessfully offered for sale during 1998/9. The new woodland was put into the Leake Woodland Trust until its sale in March 2009, to Bedfordshire County Council immediately before the Central Bedfordshire Council came into existence. Trevor Smith is currently the Council's manager for both the new and old woodlands.



The bridleway in June 1991 showing the line of new trees on the left, planted in the 1980's, with cereal crops growing on both sides



The bridleway in June 2011, twenty years later, showing the Willow for use as bio mass growing on the left, and the new woodland on the right. Both photographs taken by the author, looking north east along the bridleway towards St Mary's Church at Old Linslade

Woodland Management

Access to the wood in 1981 was difficult, as the footpath from the Stoke Road layby was only clear to the top of the slope. In 1990 Bedfordshire County Council created the wide circular pathway around the wood, improving access from the Stoke Road entrance. In 1982 Bedfordshire County Council removed a number of dead Elm trees from the south west corner area, replanting with mainly Cherry, but also Ash, Beech and Lime trees in 1983. There are also several old Norway Maple trees which are not native, that were probably planted much earlier.

The Greensand Trust took over management of the old wood for Bedfordshire County Council in 2000, establishing monitoring by two volunteer site wardens in 2001. After Central Bedfordshire Council took over both areas of woodland in 2009, the Greensand Trust began managing them as one wood, currently utilising a team of nine volunteer site wardens and organising volunteer working parties. (*See reference on this website to helping the Friends of the Wood*).

With the Greensand Trust rangers and volunteers working together the following items have been provided :-

- 2003 Two dog waste bins, fencing at the Old Wood Stoke Road and main rear entrances, “No Vehicle” signs added to bridleway and public footpath sign posts.
- 2004 A flight of steps at Stoke Road lay by entrance, kissing gate at Knaves Hill public footpath entrance, horse steps at Stoke Road bridleway entrance, notice boards at the main rear entrance to the Old Wood.
- 2005 Notice box at Stoke Road entrance to the Old Wood.
- 2006 Several “No Motorbike” notices around the woodland. Horse steps provided at Soulbury Road bridleway entrance.
- 2009 Updated “No Motorbike” notices around woodland.

In 2009 the council provided new signs at all main entrances and two new notices boxes for the new woodland, installed by contractors. They also improved visibility at the Stoke Road end of the bridleway by removing part of the hedgerow.

A tree preservation order was placed upon the trees of the old wood on 6th February 1980. An attempt to develop some of the newer woodland by the Leake Woodland Trust on 26th January 2004, resulted in a small area of the newer woodland being clear felled. A temporary tree preservation order was quickly arranged for the whole of the new woodland, which was later confirmed as permanent. The Friends of the Wood were formed soon after. (*See else where on this web site for their story*).

Since 2006 the Friends of Linslade Wood have undertaken many tasks, such as maintaining and widening footpaths, briar management, and Hazel coppicing.

A hard surface cycle track was constructed between Knaves Hill and Stoke Road in 2009, as a condition of one of the grants obtained towards the purchase cost of the newer woodland. The first mobile phone radio mast was erected around 1990, by the Orange mobile phone company, and this was extended in height during 2002. The second one was built for the O2 mobile phone company during 2006. In 2007 a new water pipeline was laid underground, running from the covered reservoir on Soulbury Road through the woodland, along the footpath, to the bridleway and then down its length, to cross Stoke Road on its way to the reservoir in Eastern Way Heath and Reach.

Public Rights of Way

The bridleway (*See above map*), which crosses the woodland from Stoke Road to Soulbury Road, was once part of a route from Old Linslade to Wing. The 1884 Ordinance Survey Map shows the bridleway continuing towards Wing as a footpath, after crossing straight across Soulbury Road. Part of the route, where the Bideford Green housing estate was built in the late 1960's, has now been lost. After crossing the area of Bideford Green estate area the footpath would have joined the route of the Long Weald to continue onto Wing. Currently a footpath leaves Derwent Road as the road bends at its most western point. This footpath follows the route of the Long Weald onto Wing. Currently the bridleway stops at Stoke Road, but F G Gurney in 1924 found evidence of it continuing across the field opposite, towards the manor house. This would have taken the bridleway across the route of Old Linslade Road when its junction with Stoke Road was at the north west corner of the Old Wood. The road was realigned in the mid 19th century moving the junction to its present position, possibly to remove two bends. The bridleway would have crossed the Old Linslade Road where the bends existed.

The public footpath which crosses the woodland over Tunnel Hill from Stoke Road to Soulbury Road, was once part of a route from Old Linslade to Southcott. The 1884 Ordinance Survey Map shows the footpath from where it currently stops at Knaves Hill, continuing in a straight line on to meet the junction of Rock Lane and Southcott Road. The subsequent building of Leopold Road, St Mary's Way (late 1940's) and Rowley Furrows (early 1970's), covered parts of the original footpath, although they followed the original line. On top of Tunnel Hill the footpath zigzags through the hedgerow. This is where the footpath was slightly diverted during the building of the railway tunnel cutting. Until the 1990's this zigzag had a small white painted gate at each end, to guard the fields at each side of the hedgerow. The footpath continues across Stoke Road, to the opposite side of the railway line, to go alongside the canal arriving at St Mary's Church yard. Before the building of St Mary's Way and Rowley Furrows, the footpath on this stretch traversed the fields of Knaves Hill and Tunnel Hill, alongside a hedgerow containing a line of Oak trees (*see the aerial photograph above*). This footpath is referred to on the maps of the 1830's as Church Way.

The footpath would have been used by church worshipers from Southcott after the building of St Mary's Church. Before then they would have used a footpath which still leaves Southcott towards Wing joining the route of the Long Weald at the point where it leaves the charter boundary (*see above map*). The church at Wing is believed to have been established in the 7th century. Elgiva has been credited with using some of her wealth to refurbish the church. Similarly the people of Old Linslade would have used the bridleway to worship at Wing until the building of St Mary's church. St Mary's was built by Simon, grandson of Hugh de Beauchamp around 1165.

By 1801 the population of Linslade which still covered the parish of St Mary's including Southcott, had dropped to 203. With the building of the canal in 1800, and the railway in 1838, the population had risen to 883 in 1841 and to 1309 by 1851, with the growth occurring in the area now known as Linslade. This resulted in building of St Barnabas Church in 1849, further reducing the use of the footpath, as the area now called Old Linslade had very few residents, and the use of St Mary's decreased.

The Railway

The towns people voted at a public meeting in 1831 to accept the building of the railway, by the London to Birmingham Railway Company, which became the London and North Western Company in 1846, and then the London, Midland and Scottish Railway in 1922, before becoming British Railways in 1948. Objections by landowners caused Robert Stephenson the engineer, to divert the railway from its intended route between the canal and All Saints Church, to a route further out of town, taking it under Jackdaw Hill, now known as Tunnel Hill. The enabling Act of Parliament in 1833 allowed the purchase of the land required. The initial twin track tunnel 265 metres long, was driven at great expense and the death of several workers, through what was found to be hard ironstone rock. Two construction companies went bankrupt in the process. A Bronze Age Dagger was found during the excavations. Some of the rocks extracted during the construction were later used for the foundations of the St Barnabas School, now the Linslade Community Hall. The tunnel vent shaft to allow smoke and steam to escape is still in the new woodland to the east side of the public footpath at its highest point. The railway opened on 17th September 1838 with the first station being built just 160 metres south of the tunnel. A new station was constructed on the present location in 1859, along with the construction of the second tunnel to the east of the original tunnel to carry a new relief line. Traffic on the line continued to increase, a fourth track was needed and this resulted in the construction of the third and final tunnel to the west of the original tunnel, which was opened in 1876. This last tunnel is the narrowest of the three and can cause a lot of turbulence when a train goes through it at high speed. The track was electrified in 1966. During the planning for provision of the overhead equipment consideration was given to changing the tunnels to a large cutting. Fortunately for the new woodland this did not happen, and the track beds were lowered in the tunnel bores instead. Both the north and south entrances to the tunnel have a Department of Environment grade 2 listing for special interest.

During the construction of the railway Stoke Road had to be realigned to cross the railway over a bridge, constructed between the location of the old road and the tunnel portal.



The Northern Tunnel Portal in 2011

Author: Dave Booth

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Dave Booth and his wife Sue have been residents of Linslade for 32 years, working as volunteer site wardens with the Greensand Trust for Linslade Wood since 2001, and are founder members of the Friends of Linslade Wood.