[redacted]

From: Bob Williams [redacted]
Sent: 11 October 2021 20:32
To: Aldridge, Steven
Subject: Ancient Woodland Adjacent to Lea Castle site, Wolverley, Worcs
Attachments: 1838_Wolverley_Tithe_Map_Extract_-_Figure_9_Archaeological_DBA.pdf; LeaCastleWoodland-NLS-OS-25in-1881.jpg; James_Ward_-_Lea_Castle_from_above_the_Woods_1814_Google_Art_Project.jpg

Importance: High

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hi Steve

As I advised, I have asked one of my colleagues to look into the ancient woodland issue and his findings are below.

If your colleagues are still of the opinion that the woodland is ancient, perhaps they will send their proof of this to us so that we can look at the issues again.

Regards
Bob

Robert Williams

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From: Mark Singlehurst
Sent: 11 October 2021 19:19
To: Bob Williams [redacted]
Subject: Ancient Woodland Adjacent to Lea Castle site, Wolverley, Worcs
Importance: High

Hello Bob,

I have now looked into the Ancient Woodland question at Lea Castle, Wolverley, in some detail and this is an account of my findings.

First of all, the sites identified on the Worcestershire Habitat Inventory and Ancient Woodland Catalogue as "Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland" (ASNW) are as follows:

- WOLVERLEY LODGE (87023) is the name given to the woodland that curves around the west and northern edges of the proposed quarry's "Phase 1", immediately to the east of which used to be the Lea Castle mansion and its formal grounds.
- WOLVERLEY CARR (87026) is the woodland occupying the land between the two arms of the Staffs. & Worcs. Canal, to the north-west of the site, which is actually shown as marsh, not woodland on the 1881 Ordnance Survey 25" map!
- RESERVOIR WOOD (87024) is a rectangular block of woodland to the north-east of the site, above Wolverley Lodge. The northern part of this block is shown as rough grassland, with a few scattered trees, on the 1881 map. This one is only mentioned in Cody Levine's 7/10/2021 email to Steven Aldridge, and not in any of the earlier consultation responses.

To be formally classed as 'ancient', the woodland in question must have existed before 1600 and continuously since then, as in the definition you sent to me the other day. To prove this needs a combination of documentary and map evidence and also the presence of several ancient woodland indicator plants, such as wild service tree, bluebells, primroses and herb paris. Just the presence of indicator species is not enough, by itself, to prove the wood existed prior to 1600 – some documentary evidence is needed as well.

According to the Desk-Based Archaeological Assessment previously prepared for this site, the earliest known map covering this area in detail is the 1838 Wolverley tithe map, the relevant extract from which is attached. Unfortunately, this map shows the plot boundaries and reference numbers, but does not clearly distinguish between woodland and grassland. Faint, blue-grey outlines indicate which land was either woodland or pasture, with yellow outlines indicating arable fields, but that's as far as it goes. All earlier mapping was not at a large enough scale to show such natural features as woodland or field/plot boundaries.

The first map to clearly show the extent of the woodland was the 1881 25" Ordnance Survey; the relevant extract is the second attachment here. The names used above appear to be modern; none of this woodland is named on any OS map of any date that I have seen. As mentioned above, the Wolverley Lodge woodland existed by that date and part of Reservoir Wood, but Wolverley Carr was just marshland! That was still the case on the 1938 OS map, so the current woodland there can scarcely be called 'ancient'!

Similarly, Axborough Wood, at some distance to the east and on the edge of Wolverley parish, is classed as ancient semi-natural woodland in the county inventory and elsewhere (such as the 'Kidderminster North Green Infrastructure Concept Statement'), yet the Victoria County History of Worcestershire states that Axborough Wood was first planted after the Enclosure of the parish fields in 1775 – so, again, that fails to qualify as ancient woodland (ASNW) by the 'pre-1600' criterion.

Since the mapping evidence is not of much help, I looked at the general history of Wolverley and Cookley: it appears that Burgred, King of Mercia, granted a charter in AD 866 which allowed pasture for 70 pigs in the wooded common known as 'Wulfferdinleh' [= Wolverley, Worcs.] and the gathering of timber for building purposes and as firewood. Wolverley was then one of the most wooded parts of England, although the regular practice of large-scale coppicing and compartmented wood pasture were already in existence at that time. An incidental side effect of the coppicing activity was the establishment of woodland flowers such as primroses and violets.

At the time of the Domesday Book (1086), Wolverley had no woodland available for pannage (i.e., grazing pigs), but after the Manor of Wem was created, the Lord's tenants were granted various rights, including pannage, in the Lord's 'North Wood'. The settlement of Wolverley may have involved the clearance of the western margin of North Wood, which was mentioned in 1304. North Wood is believed to have lain on the eastern boundary of Wolverley.

The account of Wolverley in the Victoria County History of Worcestershire (VHCW) states that there was some 372 acres of woodland in the parish. Some of this was ancient, i.e. Birch Wood, Bodenham Wood and Cookley Wood (made up of Spring and Solcum Coppices). The draft version of the Wolverley Conservation Area Character Appraisal also calls Middle Wood "semi-ancient", although where this is I have not been able to ascertain. Birch and Bodenham Woods are near the parish's western boundary and Cookley Wood is some distance away to the north-west, with Solcum Coppice lying to the south of Blakeshall Common and Spring Coppice being in the north-west corner of the parish.

Wolverley lay within the Forest of Kinver for a while after 1066, but was outside the boundaries of the Forest as recorded in 1300. No mention was made in the VCHW of the woodland to the immediate north and west of Lea Castle. The Lea Castle mansion was built around 1809 and it seems that some plantations were created at that time as part of its parkland landscaping. A drawing of 1814 already shows the house surrounded by woodland (= third attachment).

According to the archives of the *Worcester Journal*, the Lea Castle Estate included commercial woodland grown for timber by February 1818, which grew near the Staffs. & Worcs. Canal and was mostly fir and elm, with some sycamore, poplar and small numbers of other species. This does not, therefore, sound like ASNW. The *Morning Chronicle* for 27/11/1819 included a sale advertisement for the Lea Castle Estate, referring to a total size of over 1,300 acres and the inclusion of ornamental plantations and woodland. *"The property is finely wooded and the plantations are in a very thriving state."* This suggests recently planted trees rather than pre-existing ancient woodland.

Finally, the plant known as *Cephalanthera grandiflora* (the white helleborine, a non-native species) was recorded in Lea Castle Woods before 1867 by Scott (the author of a history of Stourbridge) and at Knight's Walks, Wolverley in 1789, by Dr Stokes. That this was an introduced species again seems to suggest that the woods at Lea Castle may have been created to beautify the mansion rather than already being there before it was built, though that cannot be proven.

In summary, the Habitat Inventory would appear to be a rather unreliable source as to what is truly ancient woodland, in the sense defined by Natural England and the Woodland Trust. I suspect that the Council's ecologists lack the necessary map or documentary evidence to prove that the woodland around the former Lea Castle really did exist before 1600, so it would be interesting to know what evidence they think they have for drawing that conclusion. Whilst it is clear that extensive woodland did exist in this area by the 9th century, we cannot now be sure of its exact location and extent, since Wolverley is quite a large parish and includes more than one settlement. Nor can we be sure that all the existing woodland is ancient; in fact, some of it clearly isn't, such as the area now called 'Wolverley Carr'.

I think we should therefore challenge the assumption that the woodland at Wolverley Lodge, Wolverley Carr (especially) and Reservoir Wood is ancient semi-natural woodland, unless the Council can produce any convincing and conclusive evidence that such is the case (which I rather doubt). The woodland may still have significant ecological value, but that is not the same thing as being 'ancient'.

Hope that helps.

Regards,

Mark Singlehurst

Lea Castle August 1844

National Library of Scotland
Leabharlann Nàiseanta na h-Alba

Worcestershire VIII.7
Revised: 1881, Published: 1883
Size: map 64.4 cm x 96.6 cm (25.344 x 38.016 inches), on sheet ca. 76 x 104 cm (ca. 30 x 41 inches)

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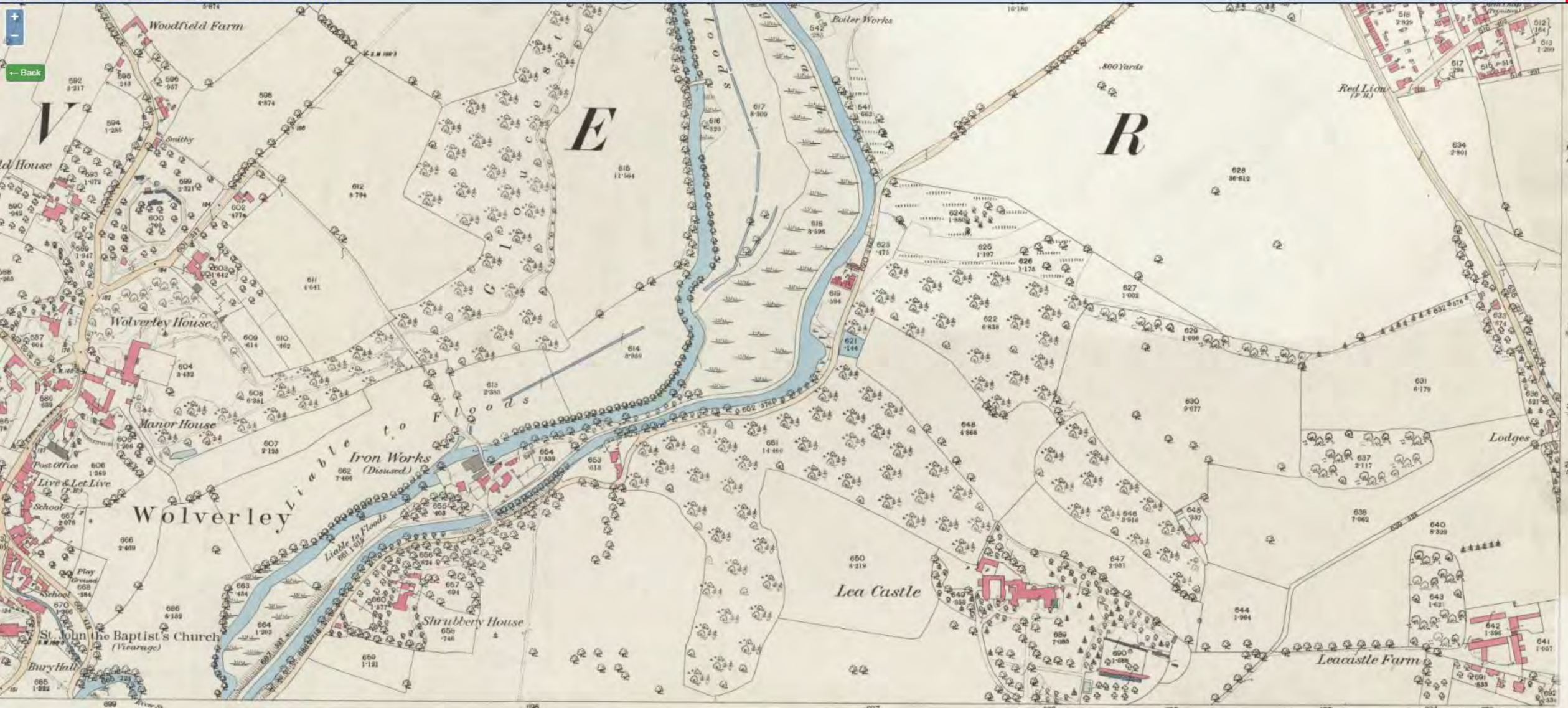

Extract of the 1838 Wolverley Tithe map

Figure 9