

Historic Environment Assessment of Frith Wood, Billericay



Client:
Basildon Borough
Council

Date:
August 2018





	Name	Signed	Date
Author	Maria Medlycott		2/8/18
Approver	Richard Havis		2/8/18

For further information

Please contact:

Tim Murphy
Historic & Built Environment Manager
Place Services
Essex County Council
County Hall Chelmsford Essex CM11QH
www.placeservices.co.uk
tim.murphy@essex.gov.uk
03330-0320847

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Historic Environment Assessment for Frith Wood, Billericay

By

Maria Medlycott, MA, MClfA, FSA and Dr Chris Thornton, PhD, FSA, FRHistS

1. Summary

Place Services of Essex County Council have been commissioned to carry out a Historic Environment Assessment of Frith Wood, Billericay. The assessment considers both the known and potential heritage assets within and adjacent to the wood, their character and significance and the documentary and cartographic evidence relating to the history of the wood.

2. Introduction

2.1 Aims

This assessment aims to:

- establish an overview of the documentary and cartographic history of the site;
- identify known heritage assets on the site;
- consider the potential for additional, as yet unknown, remains to be present;
- consider the significance of the site

2.2 The Study Area

The site is located to the south-east of the historic settlement of Billericay in the historic parish of Laindon. Frith Wood is centred on TQ6700393212 (Figure 1). A study area covering an area of a 500m radius around the wood has been assessed for the purposes of this study.

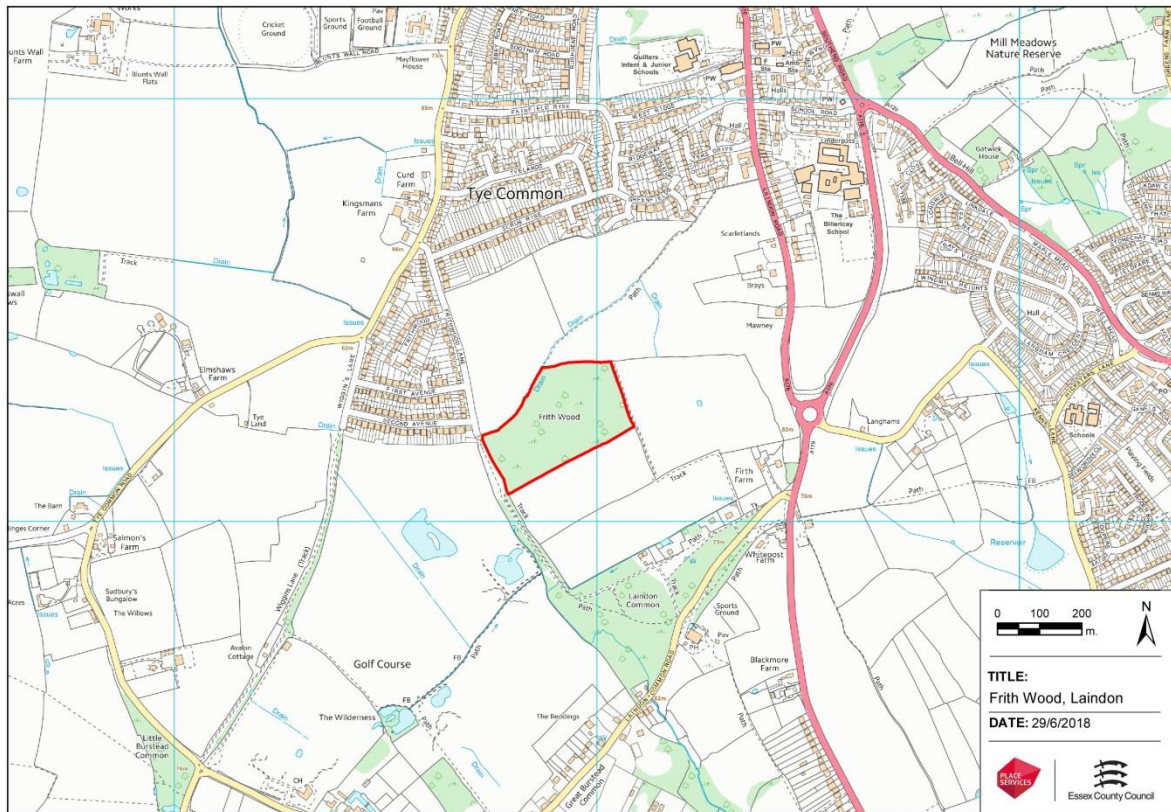


Figure 1 Site location plan

2.3 Geology, Topography and Ecology

The site geology is mapped by the British Geographical Survey as Claygate Member, a derivative of London Clay. There is an outcrop of Bagshot sands to the north-east and head deposits to the south. The source of the River Crouch lies to the immediate south-west of the site in Laidon Common and the field ditches and woodland boundaries drain into this. Frith Wood is located on the eastern valley slope, with the land rising gently from 65m OD at the south-western corner of the wood to a high point of 100m on the Billericay ridge some 700m to the north-east of the site.

Frith Wood has been identified as Ancient Woodland and is a Local Wildlife Site.

Ba12. Frith Wood (6.3 ha) TQ 669932

Frith Wood is actively managed ancient woodland of Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) and Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) coppice with standards of Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*) and Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*). Understorey species include Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Elder (*Sambucus nigra*), Crab Apple (*Malus sylvestris*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*). The current coppicing regime allows for a varied and species rich flora with Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*) and Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) being prominent species. Aspen (*Populus tremula*) dominates some of the recently coppiced areas.

This site forms part of a valuable chain of Sites, including Laindon Common immediately to the south.

UK BAP Priority Habitats: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland

Selection Criterion: HC1 – Ancient Woodland Sites

Rationale: The site features in the Ancient Woodland Inventory and supports key indicator species, justifying the HC1 criterion.

Site Selected: 1992

Revision Schedule: Full Local Wildlife Site review in 2004; Reviewed annually during SLA 2007-2009 without change.

2.4 Methodology

This assessment has been carried out in line with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for desk based assessments (CIfA 2012), and follows the requirements of Paragraph 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

This document comprises an assessment of available sources for heritage assets within a 500m radius of Frith Wood.

Sources included:

- Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER)
- Historic documentary evidence
- The National Heritage List for England: Listed Buildings (LB), Monuments (SM) scheduled under the Ancient Monuments Act 1979
- Historic and Modern Ordnance Survey Mapping
- British Geological Survey mapping
- Archaeological Data Service Collections
- Reports relating to excavations undertaken in the area

3 Planning Background summary

3.1 National Planning Framework

In March 2012, the government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Section 12 of the NPPF, entitled Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment provides guidance for planning authorities, property owners, developers and others on the conservation and investigation of heritage assets.

Paragraphs 126 to 141 contain the heritage specific policies in the NPPF, but other policies expressly apply to the historic environment also.

The objective of the policies is to maintain and manage change to heritage assets in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance (see definition of “conservation (for heritage policy)” in the NPPF glossary). That significance is the value of a heritage asset to this and future generation because of its heritage interest, which may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. This significance may derive not only from its physical presence but also from its setting.

In order to make a sound decision a planning authority needs to understand from the applicant the significance of any heritage asset affected (paragraph 128). This may require some investigative work, but the information to be supplied with the application should be proportionate to the asset’s importance and the potential impact.

When determining applications the authority should take into account the Government objectives as expressed in the overarching definition of sustainable development and particularly (paragraph 131):

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of all heritage assets (whether designated or not) and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities, including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

4 Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 Historic Environment Record

A search of the Essex Historic Environment Record (HER) within the Study Area identified 30 records within 500m of Frith Wood (Figure 2, further details of these are in Appendix 1).

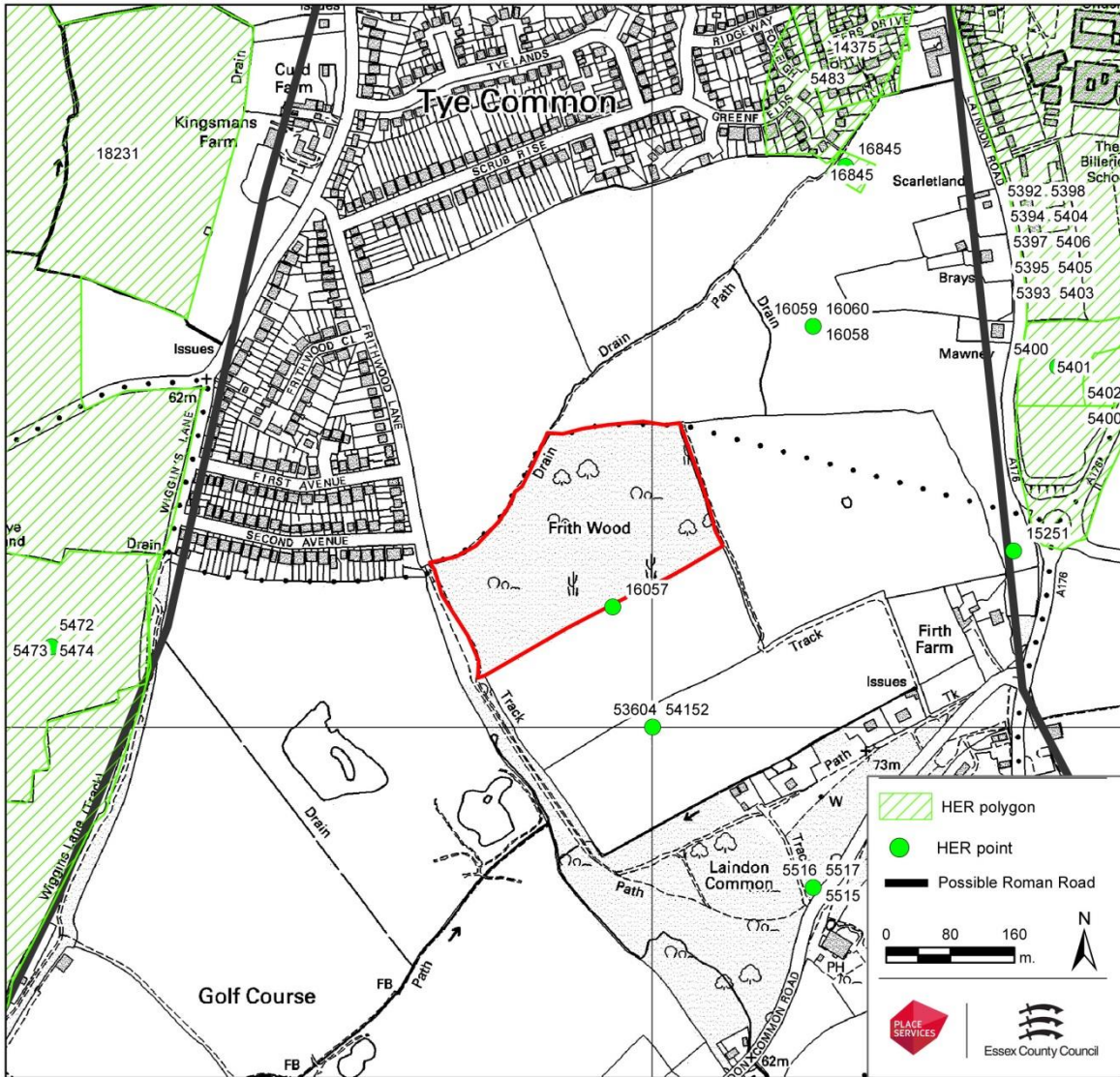


Figure 2 Historic Environment Record data

The earliest evidence for activity in the area comprises the find of a Mesolithic/Neolithic flint, however it was discovered during metal-detecting and its location is not certain. The earliest evidence for settlement in the vicinity of Frith Wood is in the form of the find of two Bronze Age objects from the south-eastern boundary of the Frith Wood (HER 16057). One of the items has been identified as a Middle Bronze Age palstave, the other is an unknown object type. This group has the appearance of being a hoard or part of a hoard. It can be presumed that there is a Middle Bronze Age settlement somewhere in the vicinity. There is a cropmark of a possible ring-ditch at Kingsmans Farm (HER 18231). This is most likely to represent a Bronze Age burial barrow; although a Roman date is not impossible.

By the Later Iron Age there is known to have been a settlement, with an accompanying cremation cemetery, located 500m to the north-east of Frith Wood (HER 5392-3, 5401). This was succeeded by the Roman settlement at Billericay School (HER 5393-7, 5402-3). The settlement appears to have been village sized, with houses set within individual plots of land facing onto a track/market-place. Burials were located to the north, east and south of

the settlement. Other features included a Roman pottery kiln, corn-drying ovens and a number of deep pits. The findings relating to the late Iron Age and Roman settlement have been published (Medlycott, 2010).

There is further evidence for Roman settlement 400m to the west of Frith Wood at Wiggins Lane, the evidence comprises Roman tile, pottery and possible features, and is suggestive of a Roman farmstead or villa site (HER 5472-4). Roman coins have been metal-detected on Laindon Common some 400m to the south, again their presence would suggest Roman settlement in the vicinity. The site is flanked by two postulated Roman road routes, one following the line of Wiggins Lane and the second flanking the Billericay School Settlement approximating to the line of Laindon Road, neither has been definitively confirmed on the ground.

There is no archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity in the vicinity of the site, but the presence of activity in this area during this period can be postulated from documentary sources. Laindon is first mentioned c. 1000 AD in the List of St Paul's manors, demonstrating the historic longevity of its association with the Bishops of London and St Paul's Cathedral (Reaney 1935). It is included in the Domesday Book as part of the Bishop of London's holdings, at which point it was split into two manors and had the woodland for 100 pigs (Rumble 1983).

By the medieval period a landscape of roads, tracks, commons, woods, farms and fields appears to have been in place, which persisted into the post-medieval period. The cropmarks of field-boundaries at Kingsmans Farm (HER 18231) may be medieval in date. Medieval coins have been recovered by metal-detecting from the area, including an Edward IV half-groat (HER 5515) from Laindon Common.

The evidence for the post-medieval period comprises the stray finds of coins and of a vessel, all recovered by metal-detecting. There is extensive evidence for quarrying to the north-east near Billericay School. A 17th-18th century pottery kiln was investigated by the Billericay Archaeology and Historical Society at Land south of Quilter's Field, this was probably associated with the neighbouring Kiln Farm (HER 16845, 5483). It appears to be an outlier of the post-medieval stock pottery industry.

4.2 Cartographic evidence

1777 Chapman and André map

The earlier Chapman and André map of 1777 (Figure 3) does not depict Frith Wood, but this is not evidence that it did not exist at that date as the mapmakers were not entirely reliable on the presence or absence of landscape features such as woods and marshes. Thrift Farm is shown as is Laindon and Great Burstead Common (mislabelled as Little Burstead Common).



Figure 3 Extract from Chapman and André Map of 1777

1805 1st edn. OS map, Old Series

The 1805 Old Series 1st edn. OS map shows Frith Wood to the north of Laindon Common (mislabelled Little Burstled Common)

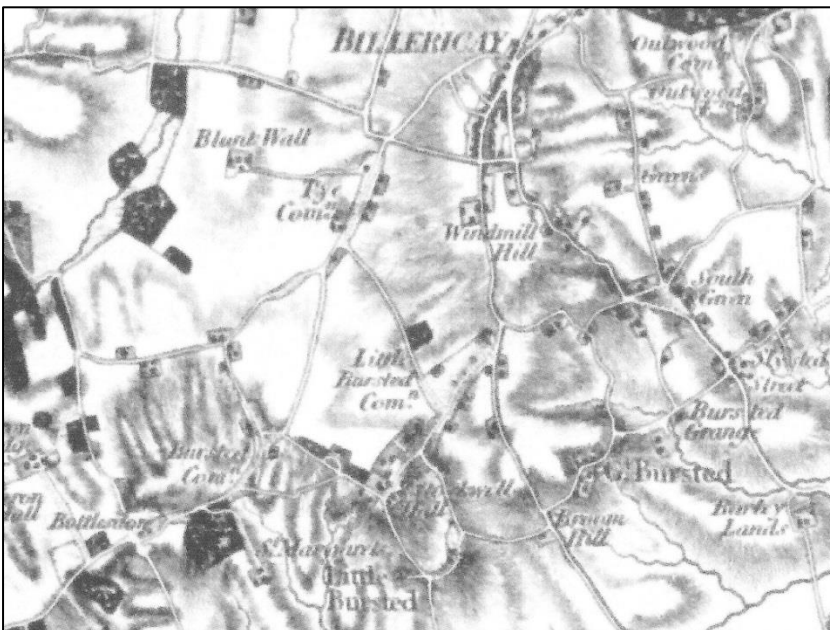


Figure 4 Extract from the 1805 Old Series 1st edn. OS map

1839 Tithe Map

The earliest cartographic evidence for Frith Wood is the 1839 Tithe map for Laindon parish (Figure 5). This depicts Frith Wood ('Thrift') as occupying the same area as the current woodland extent. The fields are depicted as is Frith Farm and the buildings that border

Laindon Common. The depiction of the woodland shows it as relatively open with standard trees, tussocks of grass and two clumps of denser vegetation. It is not known whether this represents wood-pasture, or is just diagrammatic.



Figure 5 Laindon Tithe map 1839, with addition of fieldnames from 1837 tithe award and 1855 Bishop of London estate map (EROD/CT199)

1855 Plan of Laindon Frith Farm

The 1855 plan of Laindon Frith Farm, property of the Bishop of London, in the London Metropolitan Archives, appears to have been based on the Tithe Maps (Figure 6). Again Frith Wood is named as 'Thrift' and identified as a wood in the key. The colouring on the plan denotes the areas of pasture and arable land.



Figure 6 1855 Plan of Laindon Frith Farm, property of the Bishop of London (LMA Collage Rec. 30897)

1874 1st edn. OS map 25"

Frith Wood is clearly shown on the 1875 1st edn. OS map of the area. The boundaries remain the same as those of the present day, and those on the Tithe Map.

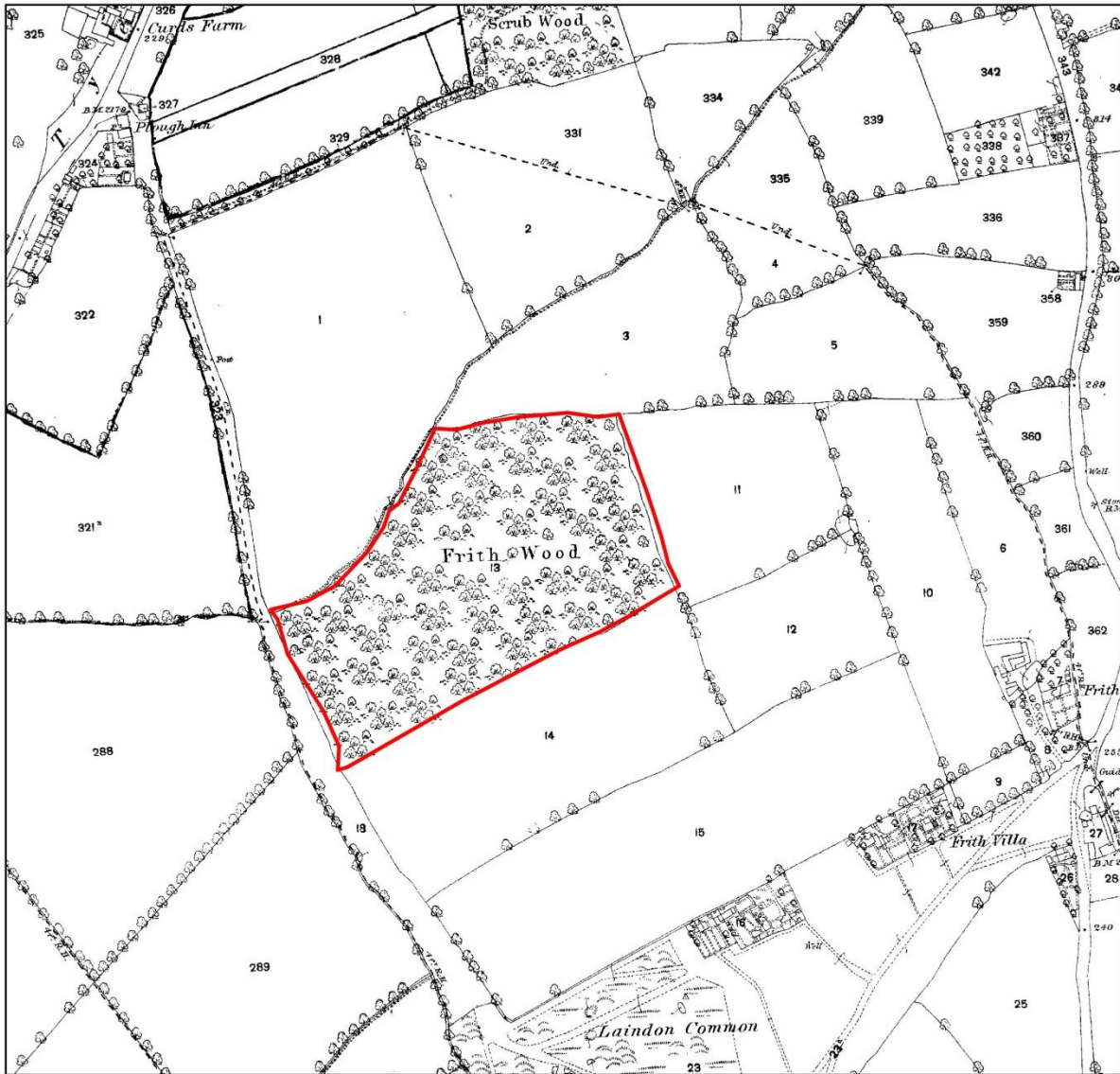


Figure 7 Extract from the OS 1st edition 25" map (1874)

1889 Laidon Common Enclosure map

The Enclosure map of Laidon Common is virtually identical to that of the 1st edn. OS map of 1874. The boundaries of Frith Wood remain unchanged.

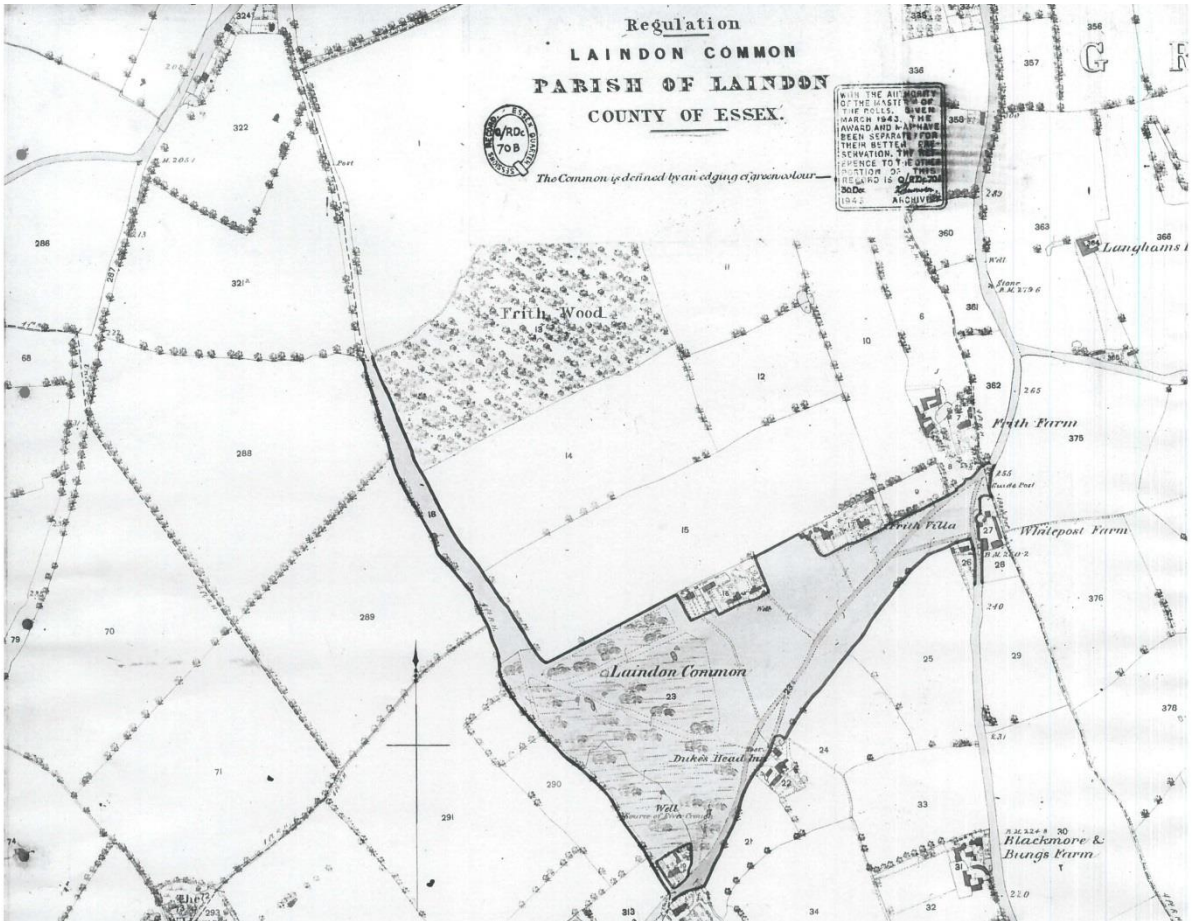


Figure 8 1889 Laindon Common Enclosure map (ERO TS/M 63/13)

1895 2nd edn. OS map 6"

Frith Wood is again clearly shown on the 1897 2nd edn. OS map, there are no significant changes between the 1st and 2nd edn. OS maps except the two fields on the eastern boundary of the wood have been merged to form a single field.

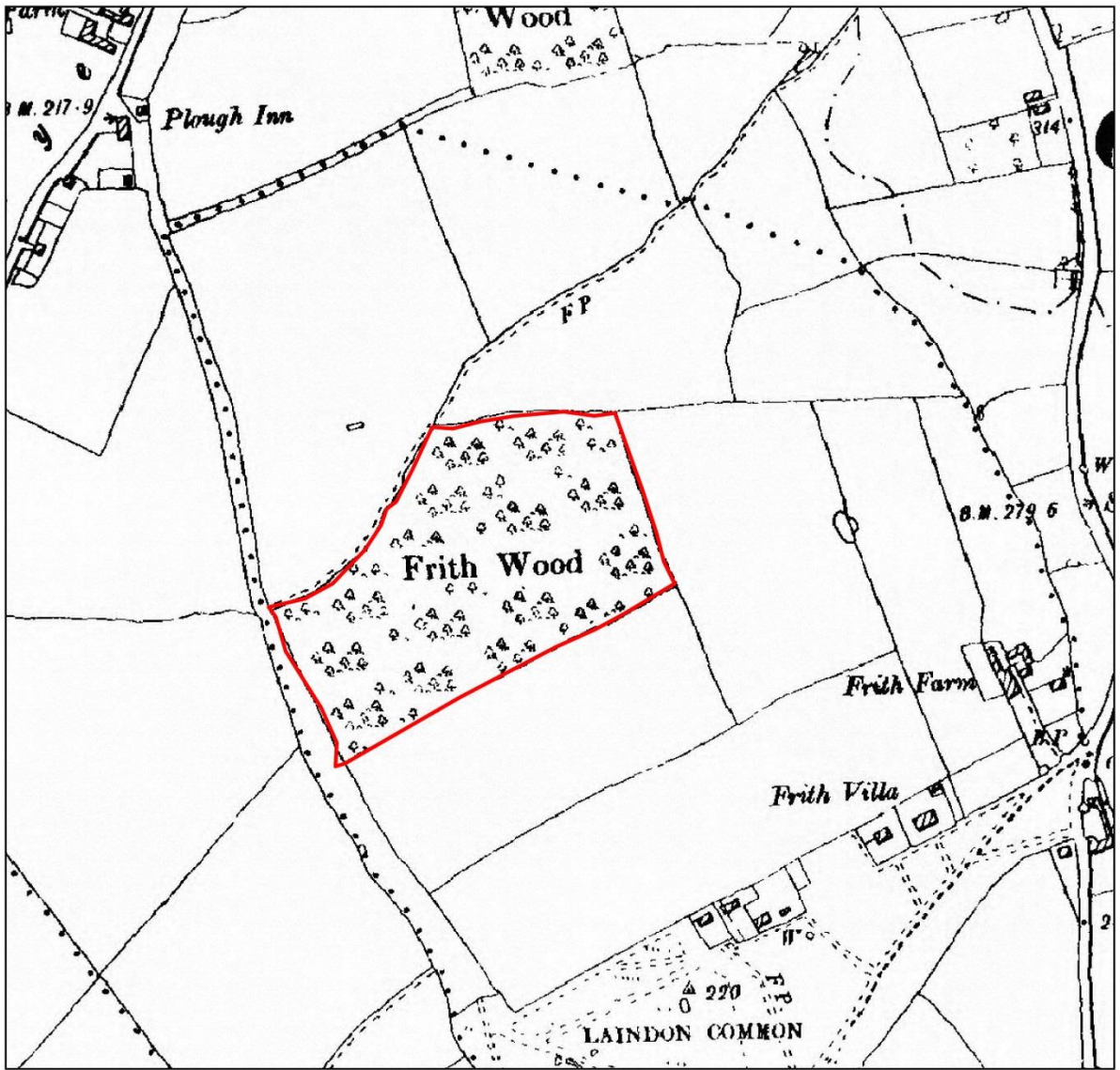


Figure 9 Extract from the OS 2nd edition 6" map (1895)

1919 3rd edn. OS map 6"

The 3rd edn. OS map is little changed from the 2nd edn. OS map.

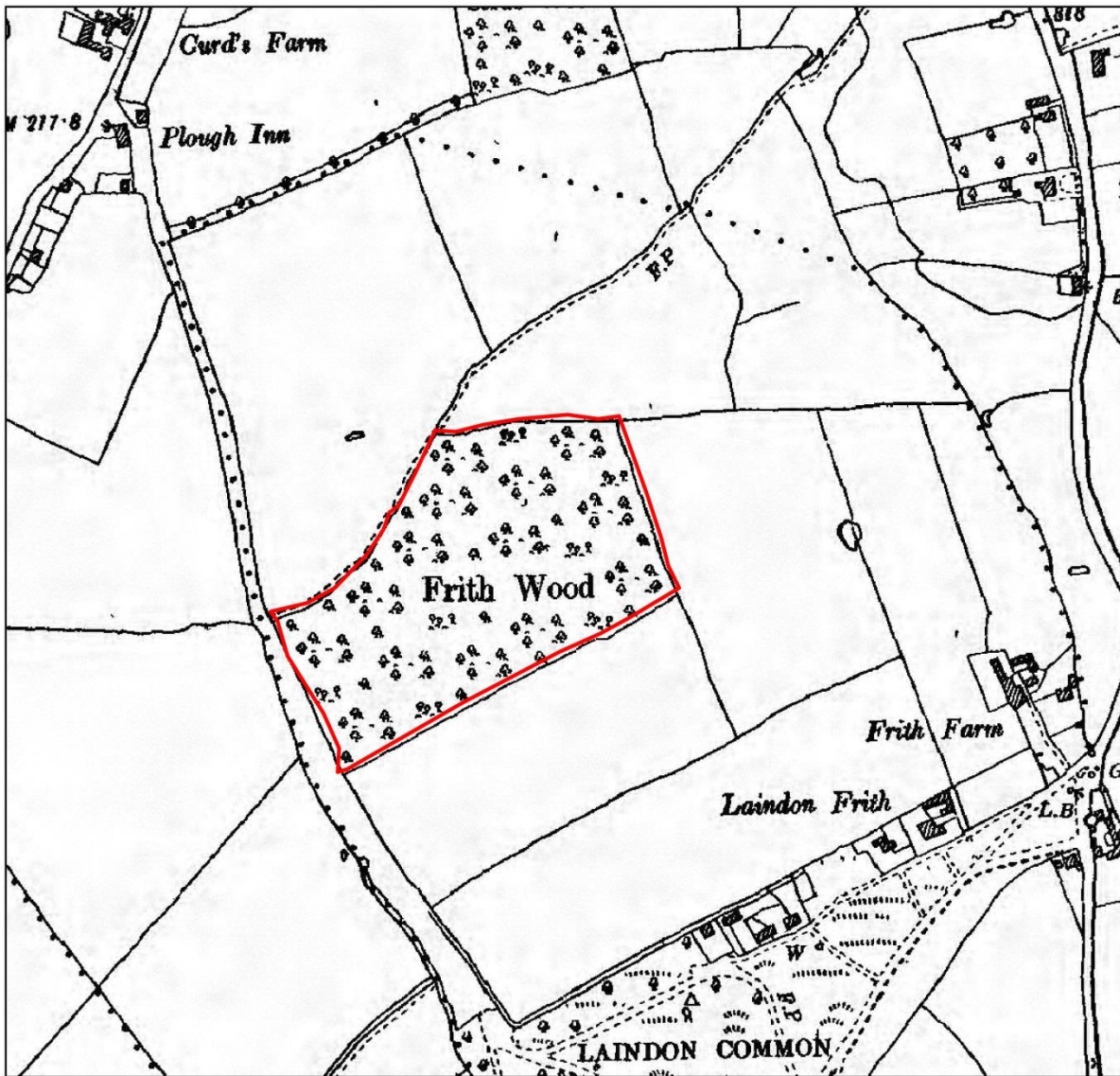


Figure 10 Extract from the OS 3rd edition 6" map (1919)

1937 4th edn. OS map 6"

Frith Wood is unchanged on the 4th edn. OS map. However construction has begun to the west and North on the Tye Common estate.

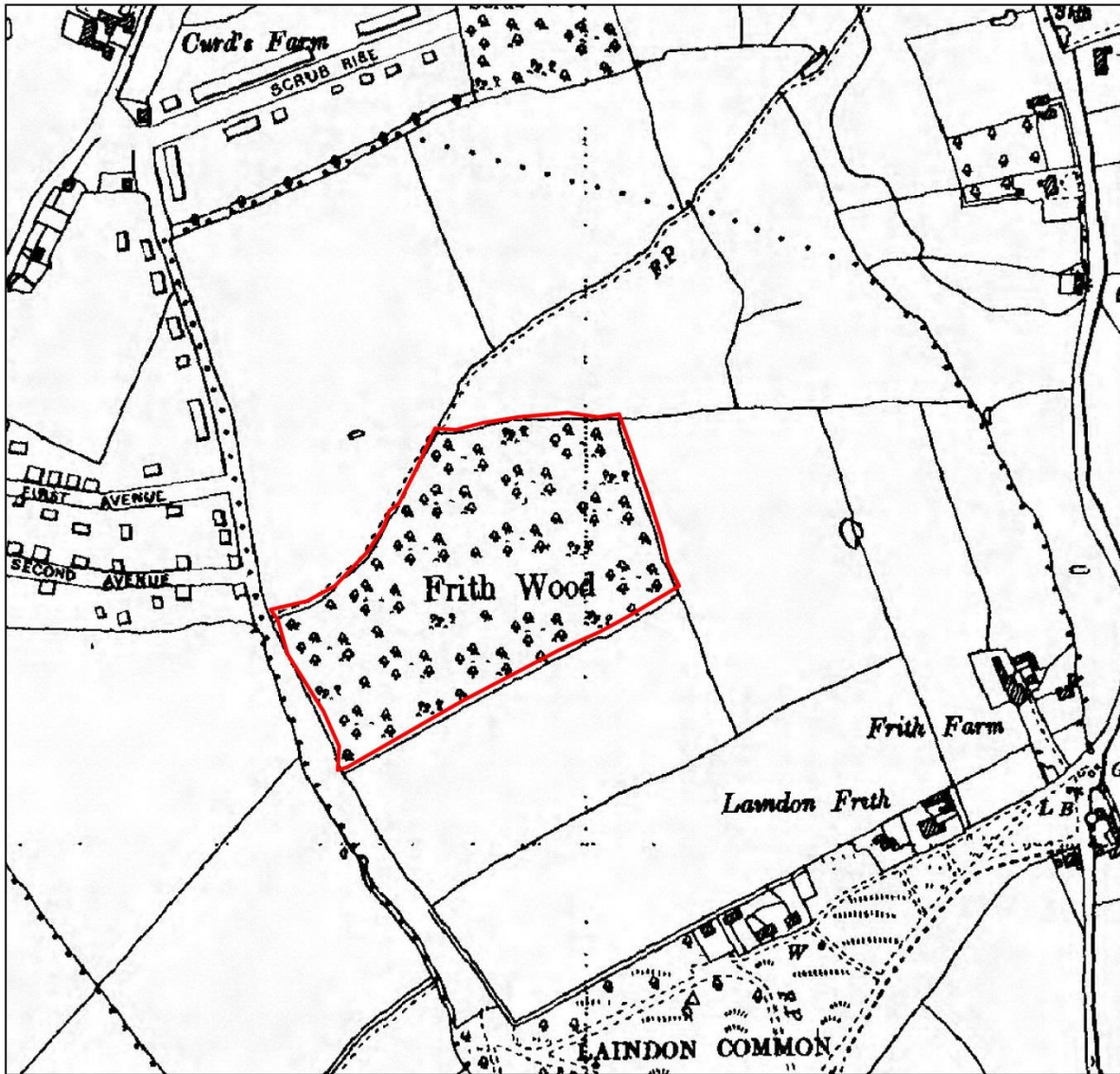


Figure 11 Extract from the OS 4th edition 6" map (1937)

4.3 Lidar survey

Airborne Lidar (Light Detection and Ranging) consists of an active laser beam being transmitted in pulses from an aircraft and the returning reflection being measured. The survey method uses the principle of measuring distance through the time taken for the pulse of light to reach the target and return. The results can then be used to create a Digital Terrain Model (DTM) based on the measurements of the returning pulse to the sensor (English Heritage, 2010, 4-5). The key data recorded with Lidar is height data (three-dimensional coordinates on the ground) which makes the detection of features of archaeological interest possible.

For the past 18 years the Environment Agency (EA) has been carrying out extensive Lidar surveys across the country and uses the data for creating flood models, assessing coastal change and evaluating land use. The EA Lidar archive covers 72% of England covering mainly flood plains, coastal zones and urban areas. In 2015 the EA Lidar archive was made available,

free of charge, for anyone to use and the data can be downloaded from the Geostore (www.geostore.com/environment-agency/survey.html#/survey). Along with different spatial resolutions, the EA Lidar archive generally offers two sets of data for each survey resolution; Digital Surface Models (DSM) and Digital Terrain Models (DTM). A DSM includes all surface features including vegetation and buildings generated by the first return of the laser (i.e. are the first points to bounce back often reflected by the tree canopy or buildings) whereas the DTM removes these higher level surfaces (normally using the last return of the laser, i.e. the last point to bounce back often from the ground surface). While a DTM can reveal earthwork features below vegetation cover the data manipulation used can smooth and 'soften' the archaeological detail (English Heritage, 2010).

The use of existing Lidar data for archaeological survey purposes is well established and has been used within Historic England's National Mapping Programme (NMP) for several years, but while many of the NMP surveys have successfully used Lidar to record new features it does have its limitations for archaeological surveys. Of particular relevance to archaeological use is that Lidar does not penetrate the ground, therefore if the archaeological features are sub-surface then the Lidar will not be able to record anything except general topography. In addition Lidar does not 'see through the tree canopy', but relies on penetration of light through gaps in the canopy and this enables the ground surface to be recorded under certain circumstances (English Heritage, 2010). However, when used in conjunction with standard aerial reconnaissance material the Lidar data can be invaluable.

The EA archive was checked for Lidar coverage of the Frith Wood area. There is good coverage of the area with multiple datasets available with the surveys conducted between 2002 to 2016. The resolution of these surveys ranges between 1 - 2m. For the purposes of this work the 1m composite DTM data was used (accessed 16 July 2018) and several different visualisations were created using the Relief Visualisation Toolbox (RVT, version 1.1) software to aid the interpretation of the visible features, by allowing subtle changes in the topography to be seen more clearly (Figure 12).

The hill-shade image allows the ditches and banks within the area to be seen, particularly the ditches and low-level banks that mark the boundary of the wood, fields and common. The lack of a substantial boundary feature between the western side of Frith Wood and Laindon Common is clear. Within the north half of the wood a wide curving earthwork feature is visible (A on Figure 12). The lidar data indicates that this feature has a low-level bank on either side of a ditch. The paths within the wood are also clearly defined (B on Figure 12). In the southern half of the wood is a circular earthwork feature, probably a pond (C on Figure 12). A ditch separates the tongue of Laindon Common which links it to the former Tye Common and Frith Wood and the main area of Laindon Common (D on Figure 12).

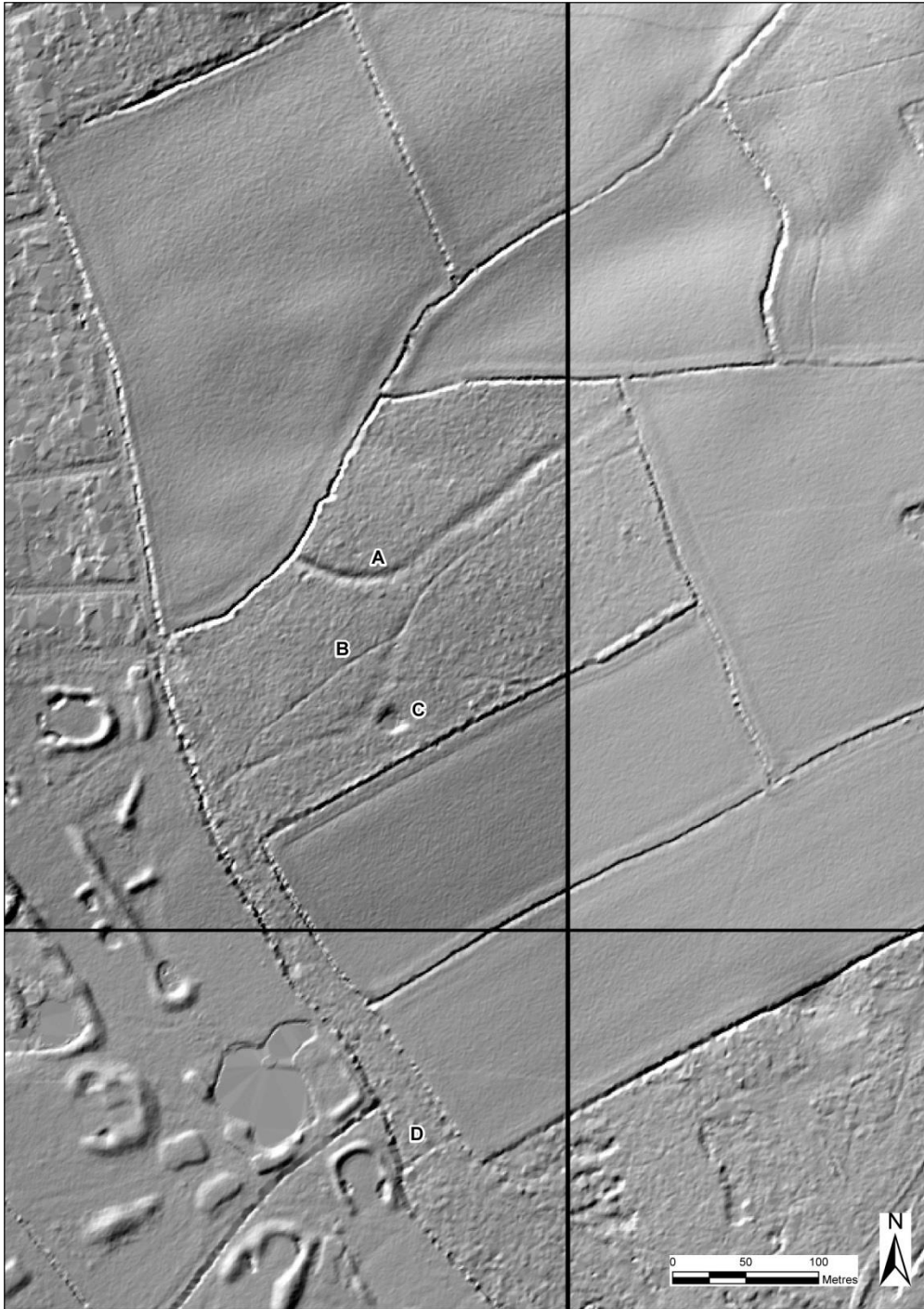


Figure 12 - Lidar plot of earthwork features in and around Frith Wood

4.4 Documentary evidence

This woodland was known in the Middle Ages as Frith Wood (Laindon) or 'le Frith', and by the 17th century as either a 'Frith or Bushett'. As is typical for such names, by the 18th and 19th centuries 'Frith' had developed into 'Thrift'; the property was called Threft Farm in 1777 and

the Thrift c.1840.¹ It is worth considering the name of this wood in relation to its landscape and boundary context. The most recent interpretation of 'Frith' appears in the standard work *The Landscape of Place-Names* by Gelling and Cole. They note that the name is more common in minor names than major settlement names, and that the term perhaps never applied to uninterrupted woodland, more like heathland with trees. Their preferred interpretation of the name Old English/Middle English Fyrth(e) is 'land overgrown with brushwood, scrubland on the edge of forest'.² The later alternative name (Bushett) is similar, deriving from 'Bush' - 'a bush, a scrub', and therefore seems to indicate a similar type of heathland or scrubland woody environment.³ It should be noted that another, smaller, wood existed further to the north called 'Scrub Wood' on the first edition OS map of 1874 (see above Figure 7). A 'Scrub Field' also lay adjacent to Frith Wood in 1839.⁴ The names all fit the topographical location on poor soils which were probably avoided for cultivation in the early Middle Ages. The poor quality of the land was noted by 19th-century surveyors when it was described as 'generally of a poor hungrey gravel on clay' and 'the subsoil of the whole Farm is of very bad quality and altogether it is a poor spot' (1834) and 'the Lands are generally of a poor sandy quality, part upon gravel, part upon water holding sand' (1855).⁵ The adjacent Laindon Common to the south must have existed as an area of common heathland for the same reason.

The parish boundaries are also instructive. The main part of Laindon lies some distance to the south, with Laindon manor and church centrally positioned with a roughly square block of land. A thin tongue of Laindon land then stretches northwards, crossing the river Crouch at Noak bridge and passing between Little Burstead to the west and Great Burstead to the east. The tongue of land stretches to Laindon Common and beyond to Laindon Frith, with the land being surrounded on three sides (west, north and east) by Burstead. This arrangement was undoubtedly contrived to give the inhabitants of Laindon parish a share of the northern woodland and is likely to be of pre-Conquest origin (i.e. before the late 11th century). Similar arrangements can be seen in the structure of other nearby parish boundaries such as the so-called 'parallel parishes' of Little Warley, Childerditch, West Horndon and East Horndon; a series of long thin parishes, laid out north-south, so arranged that each obtained a share in the Thames marshlands (south) and inland woodlands (north).⁶

The Bishop of London had anciently held the estate or manor of Laindon. It is first recorded in the 'ship list' of St Paul's Cathedral dating from c.1000 AD wherein an estate called 'Ligeandune' (Laindon) provided one shipman towards the manning of a ship for the royal fleet.⁷ In 1086 the bishop still possessed a large manor at Laindon, assessed as a manor and 9 hides (a hide is a unit of tax assessment, equating to c.120 acres) and valued at 20s. which had been tenanted by a Saxon woman, Ælfthryth, in 1066. By 1086 the greater part was held directly by the Bishop, but two Normans, Ralph and William held 3 hides and 80 acres. The Bishop's manor of Laindon had woodland for 100 pigs and pasture for 100 sheep, and these pasturage rights might have lain towards Laindon Common and the Frith. The Bishop also

¹ P.H. Reaney, *The Place-Names of Essex* (EPNS, XII, 1935), p. 162.

² M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, 2000), pp. 225-6.

³ A.H. Smith (ed.), *English Place-Name Elements Part I (A-IW)* (English Place Name Society, XXV, 1956), pp. 64-5.

⁴ Tithe Map and Award: ERO, D/CT 199A, B.

⁵ LMA, DL/D/F/012/MS12726.

⁶ J. Hunter, *Field Systems in Essex* (ESAH, 2003), pp. 29-35.

⁷ D. Keene, A. Burns, A. Saint (eds), *St Paul's. The Cathedral Church of London 604-2004* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004), p. 15.

held another valuable manor (20s.) called 'Wella' in 1066 tenanted by the Saxon Wulfwine. By 1086 it had become tenanted by Ralph and Tuold and was held as a manor and 30 a. and also had woodland for 40 pigs.⁸ Reaney has cogently identified this second estate with Well Farm in Great Burstead, located on the western side of Great Burstead village and near the Laindon border and less than a mile from Frith wood. It probably represents the Bishop's later manorial holding in that parish. It seems possible that the woodland for 40 pigs recorded at Well Farm in 1086 also referred to the general location of Laindon Frith and/or Laindon Common, although it cannot be proven.⁹

The first certain reference to Frith Wood occurs in a document dated 1 October 1260 when an inquisition *ad quod damnum* (an inquiry taken as a result of an application for a licence or grant) was held before the forester of the royal forest of Essex concerning the bishop's enclosure of Frith Wood to form a park.¹⁰ The record is worth setting out in full:

"Pursuant to an inquisition *ad quod damnum* taken by Richard de Muntfichet, forester in fee of the forest of Essex, grant to H(enry) Bishop of London, for his good service, and to his successors, of licence to enclose with a dike and hedge the wood of Leyndon, called Le Fryth, with the demesne lands adjoining the said wood, which is without the regard of the forest and far from the covert; and to make a park thereof; grant also that the neighbouring lands, which they can acquire of the fees of others, they may enclose in like manner up to seventy-eight acres by the king's perch of the forest; and that they may hold all the fore-going, so enclosed, as a free park, quit of waste, view, and regard of foresters, verderers and all forest officers."

Frith Wood must therefore have existed before 1260 and up to that point had been 'common' woodland forming part of the king's forest. Attempts to enclose or cultivate the area would have been restricted without a licence being obtained. Here we should be clear that 'forest' means the reservation of hunting rights to the crown, rather than a continuous stretch of timbered woodland; but, nevertheless, the crown's officials carefully protected remaining woodland in order to give shelter to deer.¹¹ By his new licence the bishop could create a dike and hedge around the Frith and adjacent lands to hold as a park from which the royal forest officers would henceforth be excluded. The size of the enclosure was expressed as 78 a. 'by the king's perch of the forest', which would be equivalent to about 53 a. in standard measurement.¹² Later, in the reign of Edward I, the origin and legality of such private rights were questioned (Quo Warranto proceedings, 1290), and that may explain why another inquisition *ad quod damnum* was held 1291 again concerning the Bishop of London's enclosure of the Frith Wood at Laindon.¹³ It may also be significant that in 1290 Edward I confirmed to the Bishop of London a View of Frankpledge (public court leet) in the manors of Laindon, Orsett, and Chelmsford, suggesting that the Bishop was taking care to have his pre-

⁸ *Little Domesday Book. Essex* (Alecto Edition, London, 2000), pp. 56, 60-1. Another small manor of half a hide worth 6s. was held by the Bishop and tenanted by Ralph in 1086.

⁹ P.H. Reaney, *The Place-Names of Essex* (English Place Name Society, XII, 1935), p. 147.

¹⁰ *Calendar of Charter Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office, Vol. II. Henry III – Edward I. A.D. 1257-1300* (HMSO, 1906), pp. 28-9.

¹¹ In the 13th century the crown regarded nearly the whole of Essex as being within the forest: W.R. Fisher, *The Forest of Essex* (London, 1887), pp. 18-35; J.H. Round., 'The Forest of Essex', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, new series, 3 (1897), pp. 36-42.

¹² The forest perch was 24ft compared to the 16½ft of the standard perch: Fisher, *The Forest of Essex*, p. 321 note 1.

¹³ TNA, C 143/15/17.

existing rights confirmed. According to the 18th-century historian of Essex, Philip Morant, the Frith was the location of the Manor-house 'where Courts are kept'.¹⁴ That the Frith had been enclosed as a private estate wood by the late 13th century is strongly suggested by other references collected by Reaney, including reference to 'Leyden' frith, Leydonefrith' from unpublished Pleas of the Forest (1291).¹⁵

Detailed archival material relating to the Bishop of London's manor of Laindon survives at both The National Archives (TNA) and the London Metropolitan Archive (LMA), in the form of court rolls and account rolls from the late 14th century to the end of the 15th century. It is apparent from these sources that Frith Wood (Laindon Frith) was managed as one of the assets of Laindon manor's demesne farm (i.e. the bishop's 'home' farm).

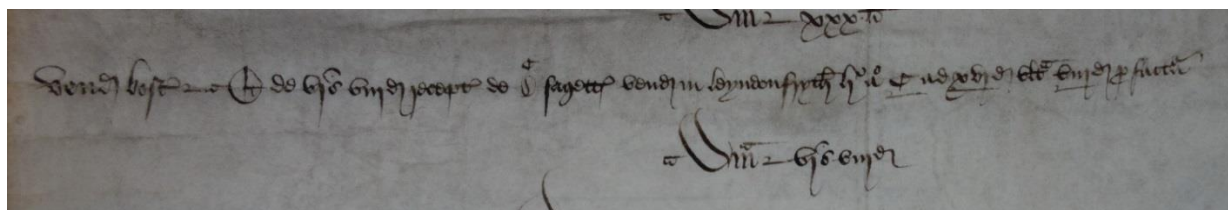


Figure 13 Example extract from TNA, SC 6/1140/22 (account roll 1442-3)

Vend[itio] bosc[i] *Et de vi s. viii d. recept[is] de D^o fagett' vend[itis] in Leyndonfryth' h[oc] a[nno] C ad xvi d. ult[ra] viii d. p[ro] factu[ra].*
S[um]m[a] vi s. viii d.
Sale of wood: And from 6s. 8d. received from 500 faggots sold in Leyndonfryth this year 100 for 16d. beyond 8d. for making.
Total 6s. 8d.

The Frith was important enough that a Wodeward or 'custodian' of the wood of Leyndonfryth was appointed as a manorial official. In 1442-43 and 1443-4 he was called John Breton and was paid a stipend of 6s. 8d. for the year.¹⁶ Entries detailed the usage of the woodland, and offences made against it by local people, are summarised in the following table:

DATE	REFERENCE	DETAILS
1386-87	LMA, DL/D/B/020/ MS21665	An inquiry was held before the jury of the manorial court into the sale of 1000 faggots 'in Leyndonfrythe' at 2s. each.
1439-40	TNA, SC 2/173/11 (18 Hen. VI)	Thomas Gylot of Billericay, Robert Heyward, Thomas Rose and Stephen Sandon fined 1d. each for transgressing in the lord's wood by cutting down brushwood in Leyndonfryth.
1441-42	TNA, SC 2/173/11 (20 Hen. VI)	John Breton fined 16d. because he cut loppings from three oaks without licence in Leyndonfryth.
1437-38	TNA, SC 6/1140/20	40s. from 30 old trees sold this year in Leyndonfryth with 40 carts (i.e. cartloads) of billets and lops of the aforesaid trees.
1442-43	TNA, SC 6/1140/22	6s. 8d. from 500 faggots sold in Leyndonfryth.
1443-44	LMA, LMA, DL/D/D/024/ MS25416/001	6s. 8d. was received from the sale of wood 'in Leyndonfryth'.

¹⁴ P. Morant, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex*, Vol. 1 (1768), pp. 247-8.

¹⁵ P.H. Reaney, *The Place-Names of Essex* (EPNS, XII, 1935), p. 162.

¹⁶ TNA, SC 6/1140/22.

1445-46	TNA, SC 2/173/11 (24 Hen. VI)	Thomas Alys, John Kele and John Rose transgressed in the lord's wood called Leyndonfryth with their animals at diverse times; John Campe cut down 16 cart loads of wood there without licence.
1458-59	TNA, SC 6/1140/23	£4 from sale of underwood at 8s. an acre (i.e. from 10 acres in total) sold in the wood called Leyndon Frith by indenture between Master Richard Cole (for the Bishop) and William More, Thomas Warley and John Reynold.
1453-54	LMA, LMA, DL/D/D/024/MS25416/003	20 cartloads of underwood provided by the lord's wood of Leyndon Frith, as well as 12 carts of green billets made from 6 trees.
1462-63	LMA, LMA, DL/D/D/024/MS25416/005	For repairs undertaken to the bishop's manor house at Orsett (South Hall) manor, a labourer, John Eyer, cut down diverse pieces of timber in the lord's wood of 'Leydon' Frith'.
1463-64	TNA, SC 2/173/12 (3 Edw. IV)	Thomas Weston fined 8d. for digging clay upon the common called Leyndonfrith without licence.
1465-66	LMA, DL/D/D/024/MS25416/007	Nothing received from the sale of wood and faggots beyond (<i>extra</i>) Leyndonfrith.
1466-67 1467-68	TNA, SC 2/173/12 (6 Edw. IV & 7 Edw. IV)	Thomas Weston fined for digging clay and mud upon the lord's common towards Leyndonfrith without licence.
1468-69	LMA, DL/D/D/024/MS25416/008	2s. from underwood sold to Thomas Weston beyond (<i>extra</i>) Leyndonfrith; Paid to John Weston labourer for making the bounds of the wood there called Leyndonfrith against the holding of John Hacch and the royal road containing in length 53 perches (a perch = 16½ feet; so about 875 ft in total). 2s. 2½d.
1479-80	TNA, SC 2/173/12 (19 Edw. IV)	The lord of the manor had 30 perches (about 500ft in total) of a ditch unscoured at Leyndonfryth.
1480-81	TNA, SC 2/173/12 (20 Edw. IV)	Thomas Weston took from lord's wood of Leyndonfryth 4 cart loads of 'lops and crops' which he had cut down without licence.
1481-82	LMA, DL/D/D/024/MS25416/009	Repairs made to fences on west and east parts of wood called Leydon Fryth for 54 perches (about 890ft), at ¾d. per perch. Total 3s. 8d.
1499-1500	LMA, DL/D/D/024/MS25416/010	Repairs to fences at Leydonnfrith towards le Chapelgrove.

Table 1 Examples from manorial accounts rolls and court rolls relating to Frith Wood, Laindon

The references in the table above indicate that Laindon Frith was carefully managed by the Bishop of London for its timber products, either for sale or use elsewhere on the estate. The wood was clearly ditched and fenced probably in order to help the Wodeward keep out malefactors. Most of the Frith was apparently managed as different types of underwood, some probably produced in the form of coppiced stools, from which cyclical harvest of poles would be taken (typically every 7-10 years but the cycle could be longer). These may have been hornbeam and chestnut which still survive in the wood (above, p. 5). Probably a 'Frith' was understood to be a wood of this sort. When Lawshall Frith (in Suffolk), now Frithy Wood, was leased in 1621 it was clearly a coppice wood where poles on a stool were cut in rotation and taken away by cart.¹⁷ However, the number of references to 'lops' being taken from trees in

¹⁷ O. Rackham, *Ancient Woodland. Its History, Vegetation and Uses in England* (London, 1980), p. 160.

the Frith, including from three oaks in 1441-42, and the timber taken for the repair of Orsett manor house in 1462-63, suggest that the medieval wood also contained larger oak timber trees known as 'standards' which were cut much less frequently.¹⁸ Again, the surviving flora indicates that oak is one of the species present in the wood (above, p. 5). The later loss of the 'standards' by no means invalidates the continuous existence of the wood, as the survival of underwood was more critical. As Rackham notes, 'Timber trees come and go; the continuity of the wood is maintained by the long-lived underwood stools and by the herbaceous plants which constitute the ground vegetation'.¹⁹

As an interesting aside, the later 15th century court rolls contain numerous references to Thomas Weston fined for digging clay on Laindon Common or Heath, and also more occasionally at Laindon Frith from which he also illegally took timber (see above Table 1). Very probably Weston was a potter, with the clay used to make his vessels and the wood used to fire his kilns.

It would appear that by the Elizabethan period the Bishop's estate had decided to switch away from directly managing Frith Wood to a system of leasing. Later evidence suggests that probably what was let was the pasturage and managed underwood while the timber, with its higher capital value, would have been protected. An undated document in Chancery Proceedings (but between 1558 and 1603) recorded that the Bishop of London had leased the wood called 'Layndone Frith', estimated at 50 acres, to Thomas Tendring for 21 years at a rent of 40 shillings (£2) annually, the lease being confirmed by the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral. After Tendring's death the ownership of the lease was disputed between Tendring's heir or executor, John Paine, and Saloman Saterley, who had taken possession.²⁰

These arrangements continued, as a bundle of leases in a continuous unbroken sequence has survived in the London Metropolitan Archive for the period 1635 to 1848. Throughout this period the leases were for 21 years (but typically renewed every 7 years). The first of these documents from 1635 records that the property had been leased to a member of the Essex gentry called Henry Smyth, of Cressing Temple (near Witham). The description in this first surviving lease suggests that the main timber trees or standards in the wood had been removed sometime previously (probably in the Later Middle Ages), leading to its description as 'heretofore a Wood but longe since destroyed'. The acreage of the property was again said to be 50 acres and the rent £2. Nonetheless, trees, woods and underwoods apparently remained, or were expected to do so in future, as all timber trees, now and in the future, were reserved to the Bishop, as described in the following extract:²¹

"All that Frith or Bushett heretofore a Wood but longe since destroyed scituate lying and beinge in the p(a)rishes of Layndowne Bursteede or Billerikeye conteyninge Fyftie Acres or thereabouts com(m)only called Layndowne Frith w(i)th all and singular the appu(r)t(e)nances together w(i)th all the Trees Woods and Underwoods growing or to be growing in and upon thee said Frith or Bushett w(i)th all & singular co(m)modities and p(ro)fits unto the sayd Frith or Bushett belonging or app(er)teyninge (except and allwaies reserved unto the sayd Lord

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 3-5, describes these different types of woodland management.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁰ TNA, C 2/Eliz/P15/18.

²¹ LMA, DL/D/L/236/MS12718, lease (1635).

Bishopp & his successors all the tyber Trees now growing or hereafter to bee growing in or upon the p(re)misses.”

The description of the property remained unchanged in subsequent leases, as did the rental value of £2 p.a., probably both indicating the conservatism of the Bishop’s administration. The main significance of the wood to the estate was as a reserve of timber which could be accessed by the Bishopric when required. From 1749 the leases reveal that the property was in the hands of the Newcomen family, first Revd Stephen Newcomen who was probably the man of that name who was rector of St Nicolas Church, Laindon, from 1719. He was succeeded by Mrs Sarah Newcomen in 1785, perhaps his widow, and in 1813 by Miss Sarah Newcomen. The lease from 1813 exhibits the first alternation in the description of the property, although the rest of the document and its value (£2) remained unchanged. The acreage was then estimated at 86 acres, and the reserved rights of the Bishop were set out in more detail, as follows:

“free ingress and egress and regress to and for the said Reverend Father and his successors and his and their servants and workmen to fell cut down and carry away with carts and waggons and horses such Timber Trees and the lop top and bark thereof from time to time and when he and they shall think fit and convenient in proper season”.²²

An important documentary source for the history of the wood in the mid-19th century is two surveyor’s valuation reports of ‘Laindon Thrift’ from 1834 and 1855.²³ The latter was also probably the occasion for producing a coloured version of the 1839 tithe map showing the bishop’s estate of Laindon Frith (above, Figure 6). The 1834 report describes the lease arrangements and then the small farm house and outbuildings. The whole estate was then listed comprising a total of 83a. 1r. 27p. The Wood called the Thrift was said to be 16a. and two fields, no longer woodland, had the word ‘Wood’ in the name (Woodfield; Tye Lane Wood Field). Concerning the Frith it stated that:

“There is no Timber in the Wood and the underwood is not of the best kind, there are plenty of thriving Oak saplings that would become Timber but they are in a neglected state and unless properly trimmed will never produce a Tree worth the trouble of cutting, it is a pity to see them in such a state, and they ought not to have been left so at the time of felling the underwood, when a little attention and trouble would have put them all right at a trifling expense.”

The 1855 report takes much the same form, although the farm had expanded to 88a. 3r. 30p. There had been little improvement in the Frith, the surveyor reporting that: “...the woodland of very little value, without any Timber in it, and the Oak Saplings appear stunted”.

The leases and valuation reports from the late 18th and 19th centuries overlap in date with the first cartographic evidence pertaining to the wood. The wood is not depicted on the country map of J. Chapman and P. André (1777) (above, Figure 3),²⁴ but the map is unreliable for smaller and low-status landscape features. Other woods are certainly missing from the map; an example is the medieval Harewood on the boundary between Thorpe- and Kirby-le-Soken,

²² LMA, DL/D/L/236/MS12718, lease (1813).

²³ Both reports archived as: LMA, DL/D/F/012/MS12726.

²⁴ J. Chapman and P. André, *Map of Essex from an actual survey taken in 1772, 1773, and 1774* (1777).

which still measured c. 34 acres in 1778 and 1800 but which does not appear on the 1777 map.²⁵ A more reliable guide is the first edition 1" OS map of 1805 (above, Figure 4), which clearly shows Frith wood north of Laindon Common (although, like Chapman and André, it misnames the common as Little Burstead Common).²⁶

The topographical setting is first detailed on the tithe map and award of 1839, which gives an acreage for Frith Wood (15 a. 3r. 13p.) and the surrounding fields.²⁷ The illustration on the tithe map appears to show open woodland with two denser coppices within the Frith. The shape of the wood roughly matches that on the 1805 map, so we may surmise that prior to 1800 a large part of the former wood had been grubbed up for cultivation (probably at the start of the Napoleonic Wars in the 1790s). How exactly this section tallies with estimates of the wood's size in the leases of 50 acres (from late 16th century onwards) and then 86 acres in 1813 is uncertain. The whole of the Bishop's Frith estate in 1839 measured 82 acres 2 rods 31 perches (plus 26a. 0r 29p. on Laindon common). Presumably the estate and the wood had expanded at some point to measure about 80 a., the earlier estimate at 50 a. either being based on the original grant of 78 a. 'by the forest perch' (i.e. about 53 a.) or simply an unmeasured estimate. Most if not all of this estate must have formed the Frith wood in the Middle Ages as it certainly seems to have stretched south to abut Laindon Common. The arable 'Scrub field' and 'Wood field' north-east and north of the Frith in 1839 may suggest that woodland also stretched further north, although by 1839 the latter was owned by another estate. The wood can then be continuously traced on Ordnance Survey maps from the late 19th into the early 20th century.²⁸

In conclusion, the existing 16-acre Laindon Frith Wood appears to be the only surviving fragment, in continuous existence, of a once much larger tract of medieval woodland immediately north of Laindon Common. It was originally enclosed from the Forest of Essex by the Bishop of London in the 13th century. Originally, the Bishop may have managed the wood as a mix of coppiced underwood with a few larger trees ('standards') to provide timber for his estate buildings. By the 19th century (if not earlier) the larger trees had apparently gone and saplings had not been actively managed to replace them. The coppiced timber and undergrowth remained and even today, if managed, the oak timber would probably regenerate (as was noted in the mid 19th century).

5 Site walk-over survey

A site visit was made on 17th of July 2018, a dry and sunny day, to assess both the wood and its immediate environs.

²⁵ *Victoria County History of Essex*, Volume XII (forthcoming), citing ERO, D/DFI E1; D/DHw E9.

²⁶ B. Harley and Y. O'Donoghue, intro., *The Old Series Ordnance Survey Maps of England and Wales*, Vol. I (1975), Essex, sheet 26.

²⁷ ERO, D/CT 199A, B.

²⁸ OS Map 6" (1:10,560), Essex sheet LXXVI (1st edn, surv. 1866-74, 1877, published 1881); OS Map 6" (1:10,560), Essex sheet LXVIII NW Quarter sheet (2nd edn, 1898); OS Map 6" (1:10,560), Essex sheet LXXII SW Quarter sheet (revised edn, 1919; publ. 1923). For these and other maps, see above, 4.2, Cartographic Evidence

Frith Wood is private property and its boundaries are partially fenced, with 'Keep Out' signs prominently displayed. Its exterior can however be accessed from the public bridleway linking Laindon Common and Tye Common and the footpath linking Frith Wood to Laindon Road . It is also possible to get reasonable views into the interior of the woodland.



Figure 14 Aerial view of the site, 2014 (©ECC)

The southern, eastern and northern boundaries of Frith Wood are delimited by a woodland ditch and bank. The ditch averaged c.1m in depth, although this varied along its length, at the time of the visit it was dry but it was evident that it usually held water. The internal bank was much eroded, averaging not more than 20cm. A number of historic coppice stools were observed on the northern bank. There is no bank or ditch on the western side of Frith Wood, although there is a slight slope downwards from the interior of the wood to the bridleway/common, probably reflecting historic erosion along the bridleway route. The western boundary of the Laindon Common is delimited by a bank and ditch with historic coppice stools and mature trees on the bank.

The Lidar survey identified a number of internal features and these could be observed where they came to the edge of the wood. Feature A comprised a wide shallow earthwork, resembling a slightly sunken cart-way or a substantial infilled ditch. The interpretation of a cart-way is unlikely as no means of access or egress was observed in the woodland boundary. It is possible therefore that it is a ditch that pre-dates the woodland, the record of Middle Bronze Age bronze objects having been found on the Frith Wood boundary raises the intriguing possibility that it might be prehistoric in origin. Prehistoric and Roman earthworks

survive in other woods in Essex; these include the route of the Roman road through Chalkney Wood and the round barrow in Norsey Wood.



Figure 15 - South-western corner of Frith Wood boundary taken from the bridleway showing ditch and bank



Figure 16 Western boundary of Frith Wood taken from the bridleway showing the modern fence and slight slope in the ground



Figure 17 North-western corner of Frith Wood boundary taken from the bridleway showing ditch and bank with historic coppice stool on bank



Figure 18 North-eastern corner of Frith Wood boundary taken from the public footpath showing ditch and bank



Figure 19 Track inside wood seen from eastern boundary



Figure 20 Historic coppice stool on woodland bank, north side of Frith Wood



Figure 21 Historic coppice stool on woodland bank, north side of Frith Wood

6 Assessment of archaeological potential and significance

6.1 Prehistoric activity (High potential)

There is high potential for prehistoric activity within the study area. The discovery of a bronze Age hoard or ritual deposit from the woodland boundary attests to prehistoric activity directly associated with the site. It is also possible that the earthwork feature A identified by the Lidar survey and observed on the ground is prehistoric in origin. The Late Iron Age settlement at Billericay School is located 500m to the north-east of the site and it is probable that the site fell within its sphere of agricultural activity.

6.2 Roman activity (Moderate potential)

There is considerable evidence for Roman activity in the vicinity. The Roman settlement and cemeteries at Billericay School is located some 500m to the north-east. To the west on Wiggins Lane there is evidence for a substantial Roman farm or villa and the discovery of Roman coins on Laindon Common suggests yet another settlement in that location. The

spacing of these settlements would suggest that the survey area was probably located in an area of agricultural land associated with one or other of the settlements. However it is also probable that the two smaller settlements were linked to the larger settlement at Billericay School and to the putative road-routes by tracks and these may well have passed either through or immediately adjacent to the site.

6.3 Anglo-Saxon activity (Low potential)

The evidence for the Saxon period is confined to the evidence from the Domesday Book which demonstrates that the parish at that date belonged to the Bishop of London and included in addition to arable land and pasture the woodland of 100 pigs, which may well have included Frith Wood. The settlement pattern of the 29 households recorded as having been present in 1066 was probably highly dispersed individual farms, with the church and manorial hall complex located to the south of the site. This is the usual settlement pattern for late Saxon and medieval Essex.

6.4 Medieval activity (High potential)

It is clear from the documentary evidence that Frith Wood was in existence in the medieval period. The current area of woodland appears to have been a part of a once much larger tract of medieval woodland located immediately to the north of Laindon Common. It was originally enclosed from the Forest of Essex as a park by the Bishop of London in the late 13th century. There are extensive records in the 14th and 15th century manorial accounts demonstrating how the woods were used and managed by the Bishop as a mix of coppiced underwood with a few larger trees ('standards') to provide timber for his estate buildings. The boundaries of the woodland and park were demarcated by a bank and ditch. It is possible using the available documentary and cartographic sources to develop an interpretation of the medieval landscape of the Frith Wood/Laindon Common landscape (Figure 22).

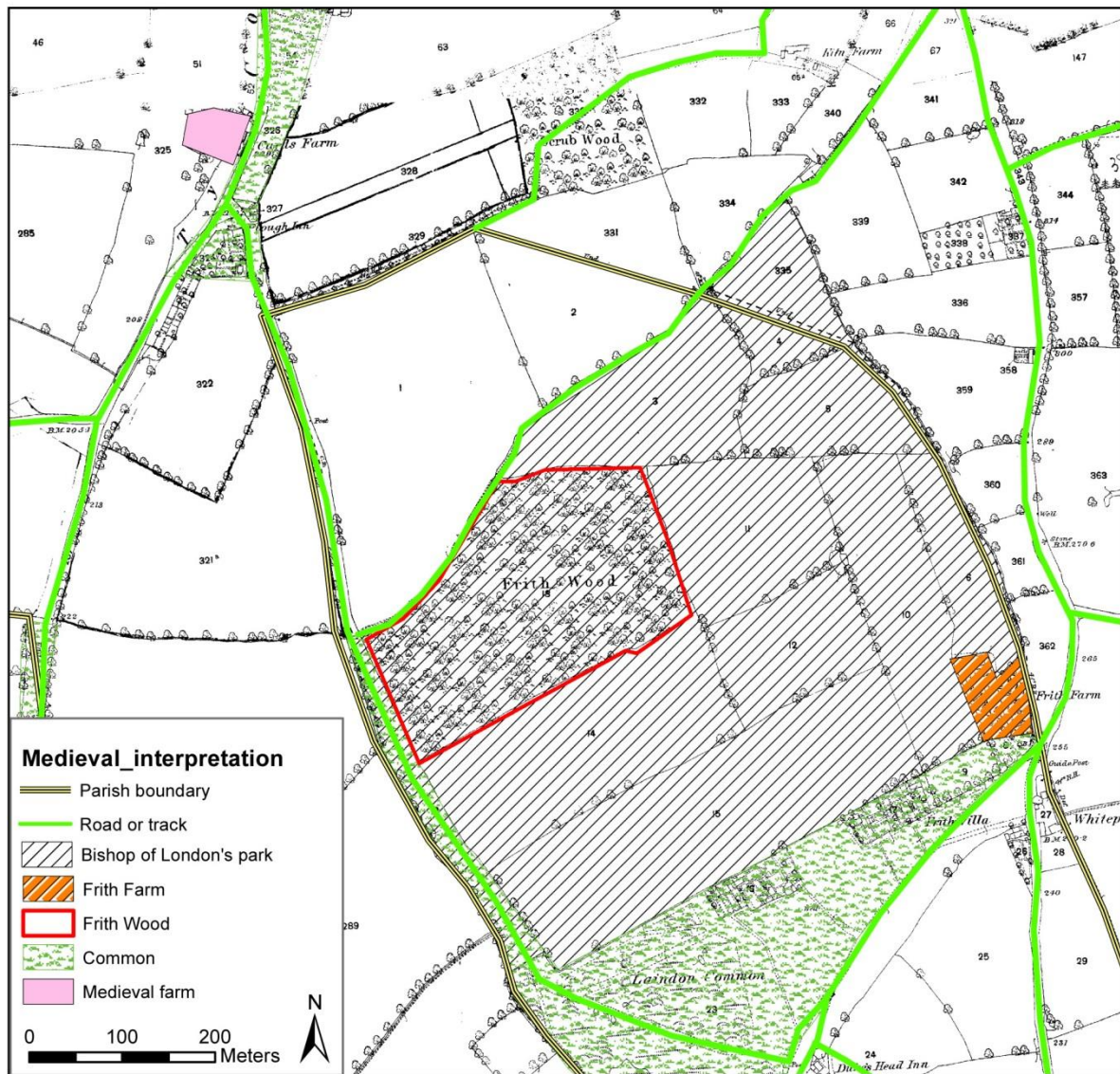


Figure 22 Interpretative map of the medieval landscape of Frith Wood/Laindon Common

6.5 Post-medieval and modern activity (Moderate potential)

Frith Wood is shown on the historic maps of Laindon (with the exception of the Chapman and Andre map) and extensively recorded in the documentary evidence. By the beginning of the 19th century it had been reduced to its current size and shape, possibly in response to the expansion of arable agriculture in the face of the Napoleonic grain embargoes of the late 18th century. Also by the 19th century (if not earlier) the larger trees had apparently been removed and saplings had not been actively managed to replace them. The coppiced timber and undergrowth remained and is still a feature of the present woodland.

7 Conclusion

Frith Wood represents the surviving remnant of a larger area of medieval woodland, which was enclosed by the Bishops of London in the 13th century, as part of the manorial holdings in Laindon. The woodland took its present shape and form in the post-medieval period, possibly in the late 18th century and has retained its current boundaries since its earliest depiction on the 1805 Old Series OS map. There is considerable potential for earlier archaeological deposits to survive within the woodland and its immediate environs, given the discovery of a Bronze Age hoard in the southern boundary ditch. Analysis of the Lidar data as well as field observation on the ground has established the survival of earthworks, both enclosing the wood and within it.

8 Bibliography

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Medlycott, M.	2010	'Roman Billericay: excavations by the Billericay Archaeological and Historical Society 1970-1977', <i>Essex Archaeol. Hist.</i> , Vol. 1, 51-108
Reaney, P.H.	1935	<i>The Place Names of Essex</i> , Cambridge University Press
Rumble, A.	1983	<i>Domesday Book: Essex</i> , Phillimore, Chichester

Appendix 1

EHER record details

Summary catalogue of EHER sites within the Study Area:

EHER	GRID-REF	NAME	DESCRIPTION
5392	TQ67539360	Billericay School Rd	Late Iron Age and Roman finds
5393	TQ67539360	Billericay Comprehensive School Playing-field	Iron Age and Roman settlement
5394	TQ67539360	School Road	Roman settlement and burials
5395	TQ67539360	School Road	Roman settlement
5397	TQ67539360	Billericay Comprehensive School Playing-field	Roman cremations
5398	TQ67539360	School Farm	Post-med quarry
5400	TQ67559344	Buckenham's Field	Roman cemetery, settlement and pottery kiln
5401	TQ67549346	Noak Hill Roadworks	Late Iron Age cremation cemetery
5402	TQ67579344	Noak Hill Roadworks	Roman cremation cemetery
5403	TQ67539360	Holly Mount	Roman pit
5404	TQ67539360	Gravel Hall	Site of Gravel Hall
5405	TQ67539360	Windmill Hill	Late Iron Age burial ?
5406	TQ67539360	North of kennel Lane	Roman settlement, hypocaust and cremations
5472	TQ66149308	Wiggins Lane	Roman roof tiles and half a Samian base
5473	TQ661930	Wiggins Lane	Double-banked ditch, wall foundations, Roman pottery ?
5474	TQ661930	Wiggins Lane	Roman pottery
5483	TQ67239384	Kiln Farm	Place-name evidence for a kiln
5515	TQ67209280	Laindon Common	Edward IV half-groat
5516	TQ67209280	Laindon Common	83 coins – includes Roman coins
5517	TQ67209280	Laindon Common	83 coins – including post-medieval coins
14375	TQ67249387	Former Quilters School Playing-fields	Evaluation showed 19 th century quarrying of brickearths
15251	TQ67459322	The Firth, Billericay	Boundary Stone, no longer extant
16057	TQ66959315	Frithwood metal-detecting find	Bronze Age objects found on SE edge of Frith Wood

16058	TQ672935	Farmland	Late Iron Age quarter stater (gold coin)
16059	TQ972935	Farmland at Billericay	13 English hammered silver coins – late medieval or post-medieval
16060	TQ972935	Farmland at Billericay	13 English hammered silver coins – late medieval or post-medieval
16845	TQ67249369	S of Quilter's Field	17-18 th century pottery kiln
18231	TQ660932	Wiggin's Lane	Cropmarks of field boundaries and possible ring-ditch
53604	-	PAS site	Early Mesolithic-Middle Neolithic flint
54152	-	PAS site	Post-med vessel

Place Services

Essex County Council
County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1QH

T: +44 (0)333 013 6840
E: enquiries@placeservices.co.uk

www.placeservices.co.uk

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