

Identifying unmapped ancient woodland



WOODLAND
TRUST

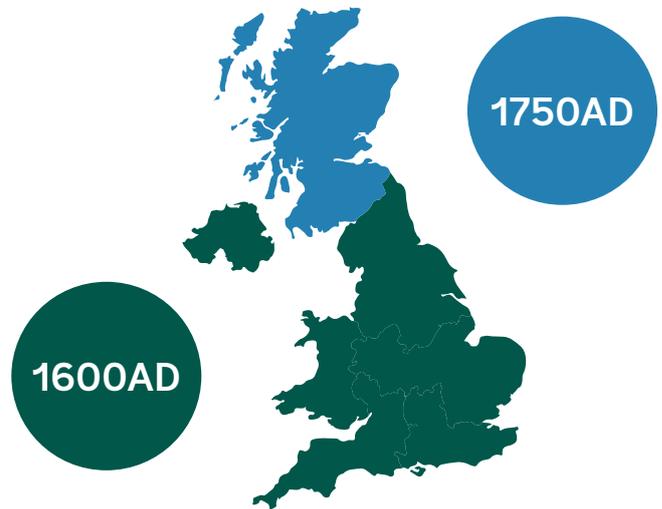
What is ancient woodland?

Ancient woodland is defined as land that has been continually wooded since at least 1600AD in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and 1750AD in Scotland. Ancient woodland is the product of woodland that has developed and evolved over centuries or even millennia. This long period of being relatively undisturbed has allowed ancient woods to form highly valuable and biodiverse habitats that are characterised by the relationships between plants, animals and soils. This all amounts to a habitat that is irreplaceable.

In many ancient woods, trees and shrubs are cut down periodically as part of management practices, so ancient woodland does not necessarily contain very old trees. Therefore, ancient woods will have trees of many different ages on account of woodland management, natural decline and regeneration, and new planting.

Many ancient woodland sites have also been felled and replanted, often with commercial timber, such as conifers. These sites are referred to as Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). While they may

not look like irreplaceable habitats, they still harbour important remnant features of the ancient woodland, such as woodland specialist plants and relatively undisturbed soils, and can be restored through careful management.



How is ancient woodland protected?

Ancient woodland is afforded protection through the planning system. When a planning application threatens ancient woodland, local planning authorities will look at the level of impact to the ancient woodland and then consider whether this fits with national and local planning policy. Ancient woodland carries a higher level of protection in the planning system in comparison to more recently established woodland. These are the main areas of planning policy for ancient woodland in the UK:

England: [Paragraph 118](#) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It should be noted that an update to this wording has been proposed and is currently being consulted upon. This could deliver better protection for ancient woodland.

Scotland: Scottish Planning Policy, [paragraphs 216 to 218](#), and the Scottish Government's [Control of Woodland Removal Policy](#).

Wales: Planning Policy Wales, [paragraph 5.2.9](#). As with England, Welsh policy is also currently under review.

Northern Ireland: [Paragraphs 6.192 and 6.193](#) of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS).

Many local planning authorities will often also have their own local policy or guidance relating to the protection of ancient woodland. Local policy must be consistent with national policy, but does not have to reiterate it. Planning authorities can choose to strengthen ancient woodland protection in their plan.

How do I know whether a wood is already identified as ancient?

Many ancient woods have been provisionally mapped – each country holds an Ancient Woodland Inventory outlining areas of woodland classed as ancient. The AWI is maintained and governed by bodies representing England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland:

- [England – Natural England](#)
- [Scotland – Scottish Natural Heritage](#)
- [Wales – Natural Resources Wales](#)
- Northern Ireland – Woodland Trust

How can I prove woodland is ancient if it isn't on the AWI?

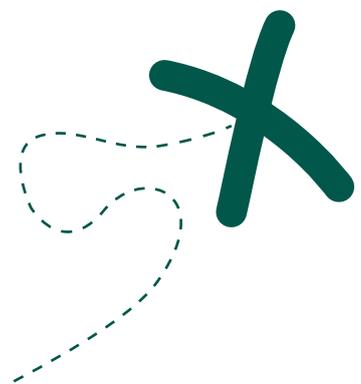
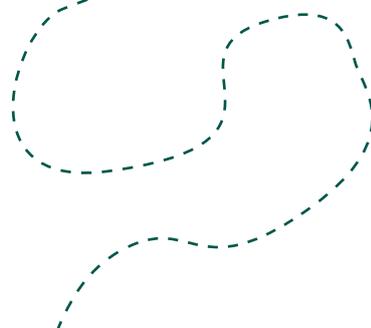
If an area has remained continuously wooded since at least 1600AD, it will be considered ancient. It may still be considered ancient if it was open for only a short period of time and there has been no large scale ground disturbance.

However, a history of the wood needs to be established to determine whether the woodland being designated ancient is a genuine possibility. Therefore the first step is to review available historical evidence.

Historical maps of an area could show whether a site was wooded or not. Present day maps can be used as a comparison when looking at old maps to provide clues to the wood's presence, for example through boundary shape. Ideally, you should be able to date the wood as far back as possible and show that there has been a continuation of woodland cover to the present day. It is important to look for as many sources as possible to present more complete evidence of its history.

Where can I find historical maps?

- Good websites to view historical maps include www.visionofbritain.org.uk, www.old-maps.org.uk or www.oldmapsonline.org. These websites often have historical maps dating from the early 1800s up to 1960.
- You could also contact your local historical records centre and/or archive office to find out if there are any other historical maps of the area. There might be tithe maps, enclosure award maps, public undertakings maps or estate maps available.
- The National Archives' 'Discovery' website may help to identify other relevant documents and show where they may be deposited: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>.
- In Scotland, historical maps can also be found online on the National Library of Scotland website: <https://maps.nls.uk/> or by searching for the Roy Military sketches that date back to around 1750: <http://geo.nls.uk/roy>
- For Wales, details of historical maps can also be found on the National Library of Wales website: <https://www.llgc.org.uk/en/collections/learn-more/maps/>



What do I do with the historical evidence?

If the wood you have been looking at is threatened by a planning application then you should ask the local authority to request that the applicant carries out a full investigation into the wood's ancient status. You can help by presenting historical evidence to show continuity of woodland cover as far back as possible to the local authority. If you think it just needs adding to the AWI then contact your country's relevant authority, e.g. Natural England and present them with the evidence.

From there, the relevant country's authority will be able to undertake a more detailed investigation to confirm whether the woodland is ancient or not, including the consideration of historical evidence and survey evidence.

Survey evidence may include:

- Ecological surveys – certain species are known as Ancient Woodland Indicator Species (AWIS) for their affinity with ancient woodland. They are typically sensitive species that are intolerant of change and require undisturbed conditions to thrive. Examples include wood anemone, bluebell, wild garlic and dog's mercury. Different species will grow in different regions or types of woodland. Survey work or evidence from biodiversity record centres can help in this case.
- Archaeological features – these features may indicate the history of the management of a wood and could show a preceding historic and prehistoric land use. Examples include banks and ditches, sunken tracks or stone extraction pits.

How do I identify ancient trees?

For guidance on identifying ancient and veteran trees please visit: ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk



Who to contact:

For further information you should look to contact the respective organisations for each country, as listed above. If you are unable to find the correct person to speak to then contact us at campaigning@woodlandtrust.org.uk and we can help.



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