

Managing Archaeological Sites in your Woodland



Guidance Notes

From Bronze Age burial grounds to abandoned mines, woodlands can be home to an enormous variety of historic environment features. Forests and woods have always been important to human settlement and some of these features, such as boundary banks and charcoal-burning platforms, may have been part of past woodland management and provide us with insights into past societies and their interactions with their environment. Other woods have been allowed to grow around deserted castles or industrial sites. Woodland can provide protection to historic sites, if it stops the land being cleared for agriculture or building, but the vegetation needs to be properly managed and controlled if it is not to damage the remains.

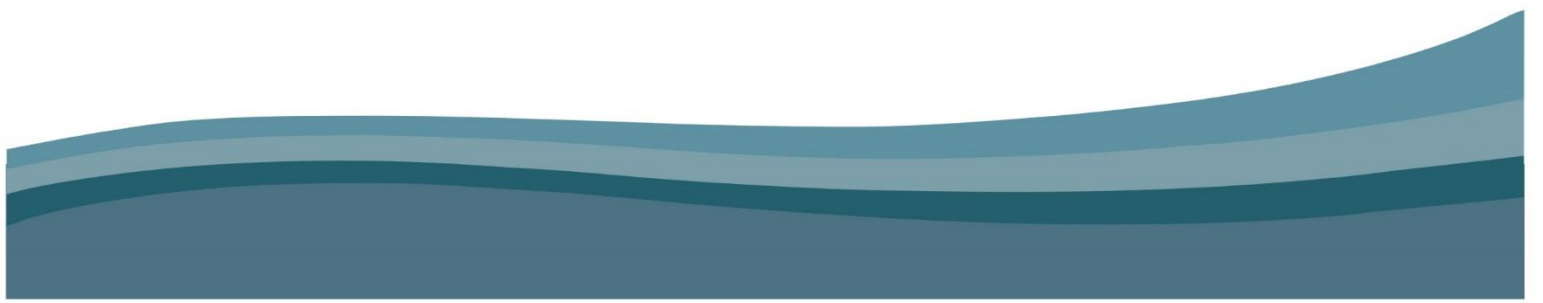
Historic environment features seen in woodlands take the form of earthworks and stone structures. Earthworks may include sites like hillforts, burial mounds, and Roman roads. Stone structures tend to be more obvious, and commonly include features such as old derelict buildings and walls. All these features can be damaged by both natural and human activity:

- Trees and shrubs should not be allowed to grow on stone structures, as the roots can push apart the stones and weaken the structure. Roots also affect the water table, which can lead to subsidence when the tree is removed.
- The growth of roots also damages archaeological remains underground.
- A woodland environment can attract burrowing animals that cause damage to earthworks and underground deposits.
- Weaker trees can be uprooted by wind blow and rip up their root plates. This will destroy any deposits that have been in contact with the root plate. Structures can also be damaged by trees falling on them.
- Although ivy can help to protect the surface of walls from weathering, but if it gets too heavy it can pull the wall over. It should not be cut off at the root as this will stimulate the suckers to become roots, which will force stones apart.

What should a well-managed site look like?

The site should be clear and visible, allowing easy access for maintenance and also allowing it to be appreciated.

- There should be no vegetation rooted in the feature.
- The area around the feature should be unplanted and understory vegetation managed.
- If there are several features within close proximity of one another, there should be a single clearing around them all.



Archaeology-friendly maintenance

Procedures which can help to maintain archaeological features:

- Keep understorey vegetation trimmed back.
- Deal with woody growth in a manner that does not disturb the ground surface.
- Do not use machinery, especially in wet conditions.
- Remove any vegetation that starts to root itself in stonework. Trees are much easier to remove when they are seedlings than when they get any bigger.
- Monitor ivy growth on stonework, and trim it if it starts to become heavy. Do not cut off at the root.
- Do not site pheasant enclosures on archaeological features.
- Control burrowing animals if possible.
- Dilapidated walls and other boundaries should be kept and possibly rebuilt with any original stonework, taking advice from heritage professionals.
- If tree felling may be required, plans should be devised to prevent any more damage to the feature. It may be more practical to leave tree stumps to rot in some cases

For more information and advice on archaeology and woodland creation in South East Wales, contact the Heritage Management team at the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust. Email hmggat.org.uk or telephone 01792 634225 or 01792 634227.

