

Email 220825 from Natural England to Hyndburn BC

Subject: Ancient Woodland Query Land east of Cut Land Rishton, Hyndburn, Lancashire - Your ref 468071

Dear Ms. Van Sylvan

Thank you for your email regarding Cut Wood, Rishton.

Cut Wood, Rishton, Hyndburn was identified as ancient woodland as part of the Ancient Woodland Inventory Update Project for England. The revised dataset for Lancashire was delivered under contract to Natural England (NE) in 2024 and published in January 2025. As a result of queries raised by Hyndburn Borough Council in June 2025 Natural England has now reviewed the evidence for this site.

Evidence in support of the site as ancient woodland consists of presence on maps and aerial images dating back to 1840 (OS Drawing) as well as 40 ancient woodland vascular plants (AWVPs) recorded in the 1 km grid square. However, the site is not recorded as woodland on the 1786 county map by William Yates which is evidence against the site being ancient woodland. It should also be noted that the site is named as a plantation on the Ordnance Survey First Series (Epoch 1) map. Whilst this suggests the woodland is not ancient it can be the case that woods named as plantations and showing both broadleaved and conifer symbology in this period are ancient woodlands into which conifers have been planted.

Yates' 1786 map represents a significant milestone in the cartographic history of Lancashire, being recognised as the most accurate survey of Lancashire available in the late 18th century with Yates receiving a gold medal from the Society of Arts for his efforts. The map shows an area of unenclosed land as well as an area with no symbology north of Blackburn Road in the vicinity of the present day Cut Wood and Rishton Reservoir. The symbology of the uncultivated area is identified as moorland in analysis of the Yates map by Harley (1962). Although an accurate and detailed map of its time, 1 inch to 1 mile county maps of this period must be interpreted carefully. Apparent absence of woods (that are visible on later and larger scale surveys) on this type of map can rarely be safely interpreted as evidence of absence of the wood and should not be relied on (Sansum 2018). In Wealden, Kent, a landscape with many small woods, (Macnair and Williamson 2011) found that a relatively low proportion of woods smaller than two hectares in size are shown on the 2 inch scale map of Andrews, Dury and Herbert produced in 1769. Omission of woods can be demonstrated using contemporary estate maps. In this case the wood at that time, if in existence would have exceeded 4 hectares, both its size and location next to the main road suggest it would have been recognised and that it is likely to have been included if present.

1786 Yates County Map of Lancashire with approximate location of Cut Wood highlighted in yellow.



The presence of 40 AWVPs is unusually high and if accurate would indicate that the site is ancient woodland. NE have examined the survey evidence and concluded that the number of AWVPs that can be reasonably attributed to the site, rather than its 1 km square is much lower. Of the 796 botanical records (including some duplicate records) that relate to the 1 km square, only 50 are confirmed as being from the Cut Wood area. These being 46 records from Cut Lane which is the eastern boundary of the site and a further 4 records derived from a 100m x 100m square in the south-east corner of the site. AWVPs are identified in The Wild Flower Key by F. Rose (2006). The Rose lists of AWVPs are widely recognised as being an important tool for identifying ancient woodland. Of the 50 botanical records for the site, six are included in the Rose lists as AWVPs. Two of the species (Holly and Hazel) are so common that they are not reliable indicators of ancient woodland and a third species is only considered to indicate ancient woodland in Somerset. This leaves a total of 3 AWVPs. Three is not a significant number of AWVPs and as such does not support a classification of ancient woodland.

In conclusion, the evidence currently available to Natural England does not support the site as ancient woodland and Natural England will now remove the site from the Ancient Woodland Inventory at the next opportunity.

References.

Harley, J.B. 1962. William Yates and Peter Burdett: Their Role in the Mapping of Lancashire and Cheshire During the Late Eighteenth Century. The Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire

Macnair, A. & Williamson, T. 2011. William Faden and Norfolk's eighteenth-century Landscape: a digital reassessment of his historic map. Oxford, Oxbow.

Rose, F. 2006. The Wild Flower Key (Revised Edition) - How to Identify Wild Plants, Trees and Shrubs in Britain and Ireland, Warne

Sansum, P. (2018) Ancient Woodland Inventory Handbook, Natural England Commissioned Report 248, Natural England

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4876500800634880>

Yours sincerely

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