

# BEACON HILL WOOD

Beacon Hill Society Newsletter

September 2005

## PLEASE NOTE

With regret it has been decided to cancel the Open Day on 25<sup>th</sup> September  
The display boards which were going to be set up on site can now be seen in the Shepton  
Mallet library from 26<sup>th</sup> September until 1<sup>st</sup> October.  
The Wood is of course always open for you to enjoy at any time.

### Dates for your diary:

#### **Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2005 at 2.30pm**

Wildlife walk led by Les Cloutman. Celebrate Halloween and prepare for winter with a stroll round the wood flavoured with Myths, Legends and Folklore.  
Open to the public. Meet at the main gate.

#### **Monday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2005 at 7.30pm**

Committee meeting of the Beacon Hill Society. Meet at the Kings Arms, Leg Square, Shepton Mallet.

All members are welcome, please request an agenda if you would like to attend.

#### **Autumn 2005**

Archaeological investigations in Beacon Hill Wood. Led by Peter Leach and supported by members of CHERT (CharterHouse Environs Research Team). We will be looking at some of the old quarry sites, to see if their exact purpose and date of use can be identified, and further explore potential routes of the Fosse Way. Volunteers are welcome to come and assist or learn more.

## A Message from the Secretary

We are long overdue a newsletter, so, in the absence of articles, I have produced a précis of the minutes of the last meeting to keep everyone up-to-date with things Beaconwise. I intend making this the usual means of communication in future and will also include anything of interest you would like to submit. Let me have items by the date of the next meeting; the newsletter will appear shortly afterwards.

I will not, as previously, be sending out agendas/minutes for the next meeting to all members; only committee members, and those who have previously expressed an interest in attending, will get them automatically. If you have attended recently you will get an agenda; if not and you would like to come to a meeting you will be most welcome, but please do ask me to send you an agenda.

It is disappointing to have to confirm the Open Day has been cancelled, but there are other exciting new projects being arranged. We have been fortunate to be offered a grant from the Somerset Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund; this will be used (a) to develop a website and (b) to carry out further archaeological investigations into the history of the hill.

The website will enable anyone interested in Beacon Hill to find out more about its past, present and future. From this it is also intended to produce a booklet for use when high technology is not available or appropriate.

The archaeological investigation promises to be most interesting and members are invited to come and assist – see the article by Peter Leach. Let me know if you wish to be involved in any way and I will keep you informed of developments.

I wholeheartedly endorse the sentiments in a letter recently received from Pru Piper (see below). Any comments, queries or suggestions you may have are always welcome, whether about the Society or things you see happening (or not happening) in the Wood; please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Peter Banks tel: 01749 860396  
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From Pru Piper

*This year the Beacon Hill Society celebrates the 10th anniversary of the purchase of the wood by the Woodland Trust with a 100% grant from Mendip District Council ratepayers' money. The Society's job is to keep the Woodland Trust informed about what we would like to see in the wood, so that it is a resource for Mendip people of all ages.*

*My own experience is that the members are as friendly and open a group of people as you could wish to meet. Anyone is more than welcome to join in and share their ideas with us, and work to realise them in practice in the wood.*

*A Society like us needs new blood, new ideas all the time to get the most out of this precious asset of ours, and to help the Woodland Trust manage it for us as we would like.*

*We have done a lot in ten years, and want this to continue into the future – so don't be shy; join in with your enthusiasms!*

*P. P.*

## BEACON HILL WOOD ARCHAEOLOGY

### Proposals for further research

#### *Introduction*

Beacon Hill Wood is remarkable for the preservation of a wide range of archaeological remains within its bounds – from prehistoric burial mounds to evidence of World War II activity. The character and importance of this evidence has in recent years been highlighted by study and survey, notably those by Ian Powlesland; *Beacon Hill, Somerset. An Archaeological Survey* (unpublished BA dissertation, University of Bristol), and more recent ground surveys; *Beacon Hill, An Archaeological Survey 2002-2003* by Mark Corney, for the Woodland Trust.

These studies and other archaeological discoveries in Somerset in recent years have further emphasised the importance and potential of this place. With this in mind attention has been drawn to some of the remains within the wood and the possibilities of enhancing our understanding of their significance through additional research. As part of Mark Corney's surface survey some geophysical prospection was attempted to test the potential for more remains surviving below ground. There were some hints of this but ground conditions for such survey within woodland are poor, and thus a programme of small-scale exploratory excavation is proposed as likely to be more productive.

#### *Sites*

Two groups of remains present themselves as having potential for exploration through excavation: the Fosse Way Roman Road and the remains of ancient quarrying.

In 2002 a very limited attempt was made to locate the Fosse Way in the course of clearance works along side the main holloway route ascending the hill within the western part of the wood (Corney 2003, survey plan no.3). This was not successful but a detailed report (unpublished) was submitted to the Woodland Trust and the Beacon Hill Society: *Beacon Hill Wood, Somerset, Archaeological Survey. A report on investigations to locate the route of the Fosse Way in 2002* by Peter Leach.

This attempt was based upon a suggestion that the course of the Fosse Way through the lower part of the wood might be marked by a low earthwork bank set parallel to the present main track (Corney 2003, survey plan no.1). It is therefore proposed that another trench be excavated across this line at a convenient point further south.

The survey also identified remains of a possible road terrace on the steeper slope further north (Corney 2003, survey plan no.7). Limited surface cleaning of soil/leaf litter and a small excavation trench might clarify this suggestion.

Evidence of ancient quarrying is extensive and widespread throughout the wood but has never previously been investigated. Stone from Beacon Hill has been identified in late prehistoric and Roman archaeological contexts in the region, utilised in pottery manufacture, production of grinding querns and millstones, and for road metalling on the Fosse Way. Small-scale excavation might confirm some of these suggestions and throw new light on dating, production methods and the products themselves.

Two sites are proposed for examination, a platform and ramp with a small quarry in the western part of the wood (Corney 2003, survey plan nos. 2 & 22), and a more extensive area of platforms and quarrying further east (no. 40).

### ***Method***

It is proposed that a small team of local volunteers, comprising members of the Beacon Hill Society, CHERT, and other local people who have expressed a willingness to participate, should undertake the work under the direction of Mr Peter Leach BA FSA MIFA – a qualified professional archaeologist and member of the Beacon Hill Society.

The investigation will focus on at least two of the proposed sites – a quarry working area and the Fosse Way – within a finite period, probably 4-5 days, during autumn 2005. Subject to results and support it may be appropriate to undertake a second session of work in the spring of 2006.

The prime purpose of these operations is an assessment/evaluation of selected archaeological remains and their potential, rather than to attempt full exposure and excavation. Trenches will therefore be restricted in size – 5 x 1m areas max., and to depths not exceeding 1m. All will be excavated by hand and backfilled at the end of the period of work. Care will be taken to minimise disturbance to the local flora and to ensure that excavated areas are returned to a state as close as possible to that prior to their opening.

The investigations will be undertaken in accordance with guidelines provided by Somerset County Council for such works within the County (*General Specification for Archaeological Work in Somerset* SCC 1995), and Standards laid down by the Institute of Field Archaeologists. This requires the employment of standard recording methodology, collection and care of finds, and ultimately the preparation of a full report. A summary report will also be prepared and submitted for publication in the County Archaeology Society Proceedings.

Subject to approval by The Woodland Trust and the Beacon Hill Society, firm dates for the excavations will be proposed, volunteers recruited and the specific sites and precise location of trenches finalised.

- Health and Safety requirements?
- Risk Assessment?
- Participants at your own risk?

***Peter Leach***

## **Précis of the Minutes of the Meeting held 7.30pm on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2005 at the Kings Arms, Leg Square, Shepton Mallet.**

Present: 4 committee members + 3 ordinary members, apologies received from 9 others.

The minutes of the last meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> August were accepted.

### **Matters arising:**

Peter Banks confirmed the display stand, with some new material, had recently been erected at the Mid-Somerset Show and Oakhill village Fete.

LHI project; The CD containing the Education Pack had been looked at by a couple of members but still needed more work to make it useable.

### **Future Programme:**

An offer by Les Cloutman to widen the scope of his Wildlife Walk on 30<sup>th</sup> October to include Legends and Folklore was gratefully accepted

### **Projects:**

PB confirmed that several members of CHERT, who study archaeological remains in the Charterhouse area, were keen to help carry out some excavations in Beacon Hill Wood. Peter Leach had shown a party round the wood and identified four areas worthy of further investigation into past activities likely to date back to the Roman occupation.

PB was also pleased to report that an application for funding from the 'Somerset Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund' had been successful. This is to be used to cover expenses for the archaeological investigations, plus the development of a 'Beacon Hill' website.

### **Newsletter:**

PB informed the meeting that he had not received sufficient items to produce a newsletter. Although it was obviously essential to circulate publicity for the forthcoming Anniversary event, he was concerned about the ongoing situation. After discussion it was agreed to circulate all members shortly after a meeting, with a précis of the minutes to ensure they are kept informed of any activities, and include any such additional articles as may be available. All members will be encouraged to attend meetings and submit articles, but agendas will only be sent out to committee members and those members requesting them.

### **Promotion:**

The website: The success of our application for 'Somerset Aggregate Levy Sustainability Funds' ensured we would be able to employ an outside contractor to undertake the work. It was agreed to contact Richard Dixon to progress this and arrange for a couple of committee members to meet with him to discuss the project.

Open Day: Beacon Hill Society open day on 25<sup>th</sup> September, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of our stewardship of the wood. Arrangements to provide refreshments and accommodate the display boards were agreed. It was also intended to make the I-Spy section of the Education Pack available and set up additional information displays in various sites in the wood; the Woodland Trust to be invited to provide some publicity. Open to the public between 2.30 & 4.30pm.

### **Woodland Trust:**

Management Plan: The meeting felt it was important to include in the introduction a clear statement that the wood had been purchased entirely with a grant from the local Mendip District Council and that close liaison with the Beacon Society had been agreed at the time.

Woodland maintenance: concern was expressed about the continued presence of fly-tipped tarmac and deep ruts at the east end of the wood.

**Date of Next Meeting:**

It was agreed to meet next on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2005 at 7.30pm in the Kings Arms, Leg Square.