

Ghosts Trees from the Past



Woodcut of the 1607 Great Flood/Bristol Channel Tsunami
Simon Haslett

By the 17th century Rodborough's Custom Wood was becoming diminished. Continued harvesting, alongside increased sheep grazing, which would have prevented natural regeneration of the woodland, would have gradually turned the woodland into grassland.

It is possible that what remained of the Custom Wood was finally destroyed in the great storm events of 1607 and 1703.

Both events caused extensive and widespread destruction, loss of life and flooding throughout South West England and South Wales.

Rodborough's exposed aspect facing into the Severn Estuary would have made its trees vulnerable to extreme storms, much like the lonely tree was today.

Although the tops of the Common are now largely tree-free, the ghosts of trees from the past can be seen, in the few woodland flower species that still thrive on the common, and in the tree throws which can still be seen today as dips and mounds in the grass.

A Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society trip to Rodborough in 1880 examined these dips and mounds, believing them to be 'rude places of ancient habitation'. Their excavations showed that the mounds consisted of rotting wood or mould, with gravel on one side of the dip.

Modern archaeology however suggests that these were more likely to be tree throws - the mound being comprised of the rotted and covered tree root, and the dip being the place where the roots used to be.



Fallen Tree, Lupton Park
Derek Harper