

# Rodborough's Custom Wood



Watson, Charles Ernest, 'The Minchinhampton Custumal and its Place in the Study of the Manor', Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 54 (1932) 203-384

This tentative map of the Minchinhampton Demesne c. 1300 shows Rodborough Common with a good deal of woodland cover left, although the custumal also records a large *assart* on the boundary of Rodborough and Minchinhampton, indicating that an area of woodland had already been cleared for agriculture by that time .

There were two woodland types in the Medieval Manor - the demesne wood, which the Lady/Lord of the Manor had primary control over, and the Custom Wood which commoners had greater rights over.

The common rights over the custom wood were rights of **estovers** - to harvest wood through pollarding or coppicing for building and tool making/repair (*housebote & cartbote*), and for firewood, and the right of **pannage**, which allowed pigs to be released into the woods to forage for acorns and beechnuts (as long as their noses were ringed).

The extent of the Rodborough and Minchinhampton custom woods can be surmised by the belief that in the early medieval period they supported some 2000 swine!

Today just 2 properties in Rodborough retain the right of pannage and 3 the right of estovers.



Pollarded Beech Tree  
London Permaculture

# The Custom Wood (Pasture)



Evidence of Coppicing, Dusty Lane, Rodborough Common  
Sharon Gardham

Felling and selling timber from the demesne woods was the primary source of income for the Lady/Lord of the Manor during the medieval period.

Later attempts to enclose the demesne woods in Minchinhampton were resisted by fence breakers during the 17th century - their resistance was however ultimately unsuccessful.

The custom woods however remained unenclosed and largely represent the Commons we see today. Tree cover gradually diminished, so that by the 18th century the commons were largely the more familiar grassland that we see today.

The business of the Custom Wood was overseen by the Wood Warden and their sub-wardens.

The Wood Warden was also known as the 'Axe-Bearer'. He would mark which trees could be harvested by the commoners.

Over-harvesting or felling trees entirely was strictly prohibited and the Custom Wood Court could impose fines for non-compliance. Wood harvested could also not be sold on or even given away.

Grazing rights (pasturage) were present at Rodborough alongside those of estovers and pannage. It is possible therefore that the custom wood was a wood pasture, supporting both woodland and grassland uses.



Belted Galloways Grazing in Wood Pasture, Ryton Willows  
Copyright Andrew Curtis

# What's in a name?

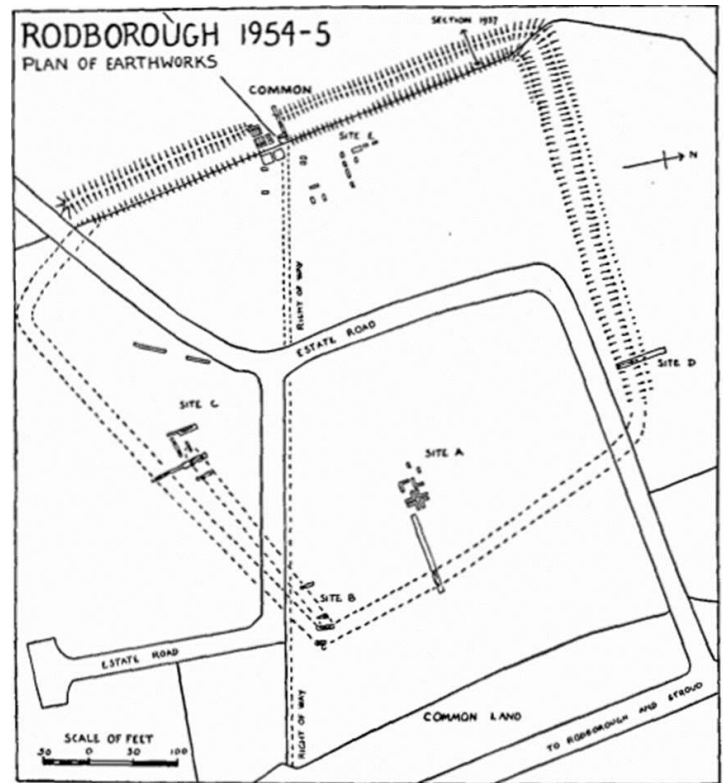
The Kynnes family were the Wood Wardens of Rodborough for at least seven generations. They occupied land around current day Kite's Nest Lane and Bowl Hill. They build a court on the latter, and it is from this that modern day Kingscourt takes its name.

Other place names in the area bear witness to the trees that once covered the area, not least neighbouring Woodchester.

The Anglo-Saxon word 'bearu' meant a grove wood, with 'beorcholt' meaning a birch wood. Could it be that the Bear Inn derives its name from the memory of the woodland pastures on Rodborough Common?



The Bear Inn , Rodborough Common  
Sharon Gardham



D.M Rennie, 'The Excavation of an Earthwork on Rodborough Common in 1954-55', Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, (78) 1959, 24-43, p. 26

It is possible that Rodborough itself also gained its name from the clearing made in its woodland. It could have derived from 'rewd' meaning to clear land, or 'rod', a clearing. Borough, from burgh in Old English referred to a settlement in a fortified enclosure, or later simply a town.

Excavations in the 1950s when the housing was being built at Private Road and The Hithe suggested that they were located on the site of an Iron Age settlement surrounded by ditches and banks.