Coombeshead Farm and Trelaske Parkland

CATF visits 2018 and 2019

View across the valley looking north towards the converted old stables and the site of the original house to the left. The stream runs across the centre. The land in the foreground with its hawthorn and standing stone is on Coombeshead Farm.

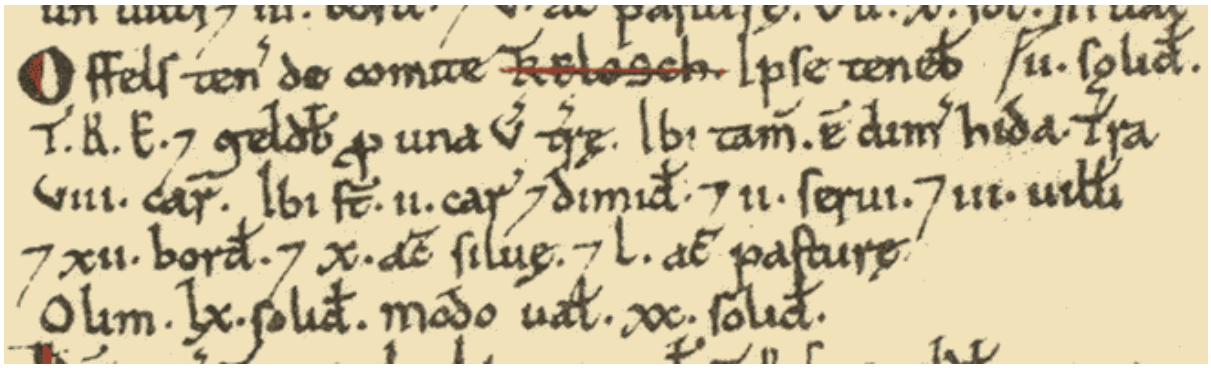
Introduction

The Cornwall Ancient Tree Forum visited the site on two occasions to put together the picture of the ancient and veteran tree coverage on this historic site that was once the parkland of the Trelaske Estate near Lewannick and a few miles from Launceston in North Cornwall. However, in the 20th century, the estate lost its main house and has been divided into smaller ownerships. A total of 10 volunteer verifier recorders over the two separate days recorded a total of 43 trees for the Ancient Tree Inventory https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk

The largest of these ownerships is the main farm, Coombeshead, and we were given permission by the owners; chef Tom Adams and his wife Lottie. The farm is set within of 66 acres of wood pasture woodlands and stream in the central valley and operates as a guesthouse, restaurant and bakery . Two other property owners on the northern valley side also gave us access to record trees on the land of Trelaske House and Trelaske Stables.

History

Trelaske Manor was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. Its inventory included 17 households in total with 3 villagers, 12 smallholders, 2 slaves, 8 ploughlands, 50 acres of pasture and 10 acres of woodlands. Its Lord was Osfrith of Okehampton – a Saxon lord who interestingly owned the land before the conquest and managed to retain some control after.

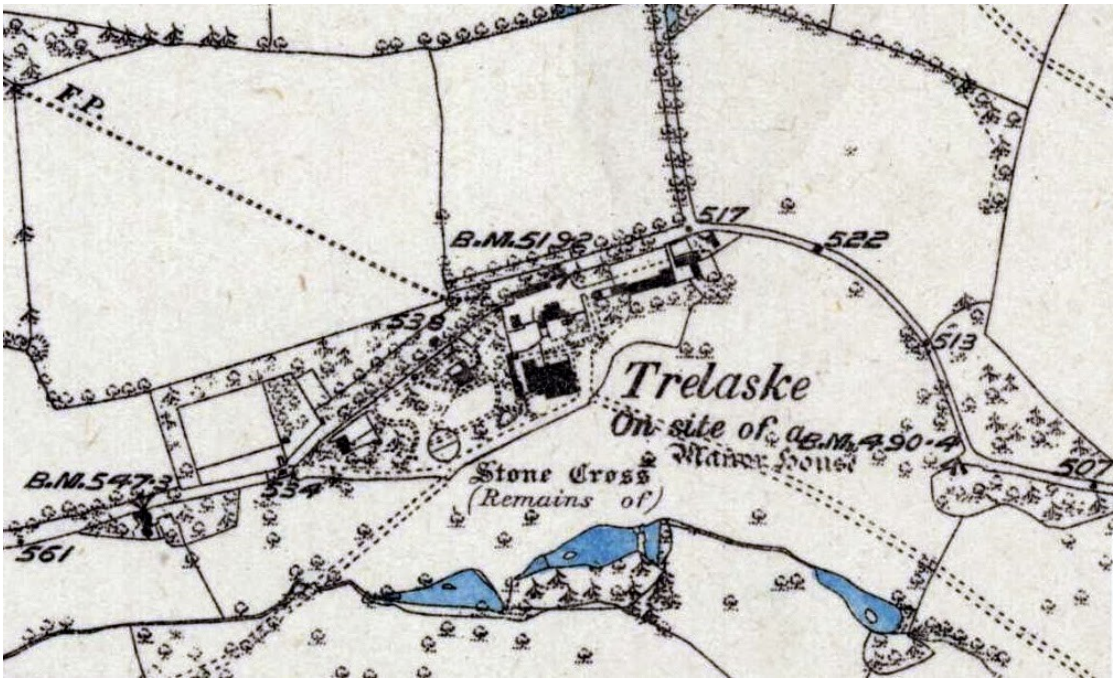


Above: The entry for Trelosch, now Trelaske, in Domesday Book

Historian Nick Kingsley uncovered the history of the estate- owned by the Upton family from the time of Richard II to 1541 known as Trelaske Hall. For five generations it was owned by the Lower family and in the 18th Century passed into the hand of the Archers who lived there until 1957. The house was remodelled in 1790-91, the same time that the park was laid out. In 1827 the house was remodelled again in the form we can see in the engraving below, also showing the pasture parkland as viewed from the easterly approach. We have uncovered no evidence of a deer park at the location so presume it was never emparked. In 1959 the empty main house was demolished in 1959 leaving the west servants wing to be adapted and now forming the house on the site. The stable block was later converted to a second residence.

Lithographic engraving of Trelaske published by Twycross in 1846. This view is from the easterly side of the parkland with the stream and the walk leading to the house clearly shown.

This photograph taken around 1900 shows the same view with a stone surfaced drive approaching the house from the east.



The first edition OS map of 1882 shows the original house as the large black square in the centre and the parkland or wood pasture in the E/W running valley to the South. The dotted drive can be seen running to the house from the east and the stream with small lakes in the bottom of the valley.

Parkland looking east from the stables – the line of the walk is visible today and the old estate railings are still existing.

Ancient Tree Inventory records

4 special trees were recorded as ancient. That means they are among the oldest of their species in the third or ancient stage of their lives and with high levels of biodiversity and habitat value.

These were:

1. A maiden Pedunculate Oak in the lower valley. An oak of this size (6m girth) is very rare and one of the top ten oaks in the county with an age between 420 and 480 years. Tree aging is a rough estimate but is done by comparing tables of known tree ages and girth measurements while taking account of the ground conditions and the form of the tree. This picture shows the Ancient Tree Inventory volunteer recorders.

2. This pollard oak alongside the stream is undoubtedly the oldest tree on the estate. It is 6.69m in girth measured in-between the burrs and estimated to be between 520 and 590 years old. This great oak would have been alive at the time of the Cornish rebellion of 1497. It is the third oldest oak in the county. Number one is the Darley Oak near Upton Cross and number two is Hernes Oak near Rezare.

3. This Holly is described as a multi-stem the girth of 10.6m refers to the whole base of several stems . It is almost certainly a single tree but has grown either by coppicing or by suckering [new stems growing from the roots]. The individual stems are large and the original one has completely hollowed showing that the tree is of considerable age for its species.

4. This Beech at 5m girth is the largest of the beech trees growing on the estate along the southern edge. It has grown alone, unlike some of the other small groups of beeches and could have just pre-dated the other plantings. Bear in mind the beech does not grow as old as the oak – this one could be around 250-300 years. It has the post of the original iron railings embedded in the roots.

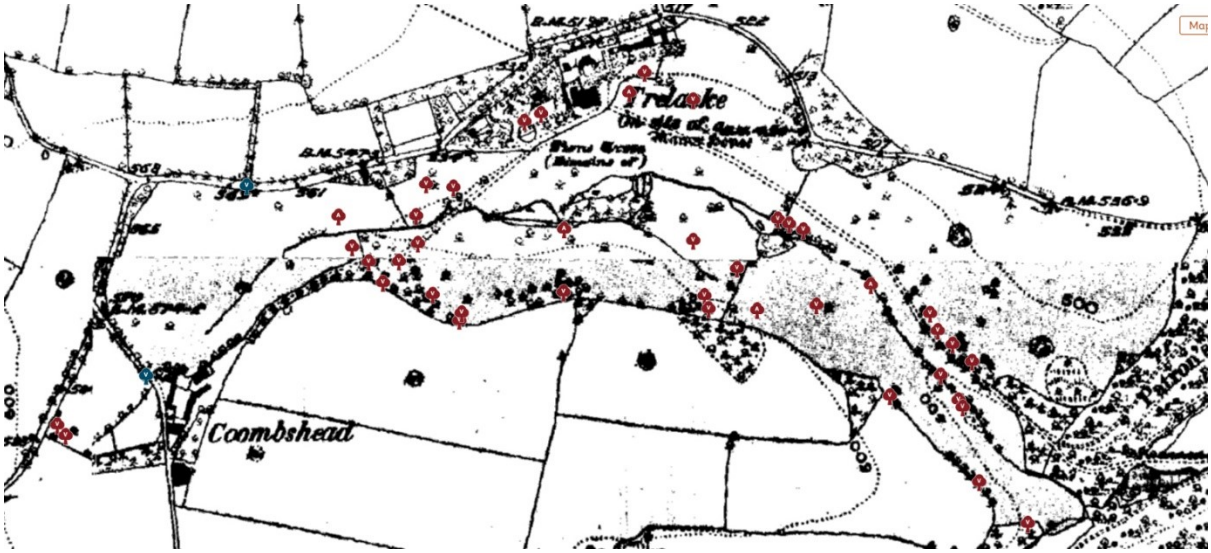
5. This sweet chestnut sits on the northern side of valley on the land belonging to the stables. It is 6m girth and although the same size as the maiden oak it will not be as old – the sweet chestnut grows in quicker and has more variation in the girth size for its age. A sweet chestnut of this size could be between 340 and 480 years old.

Other trees of interest include:

6. This burred oak sits at the eastern end of the estate and is one of a line of trees marking the original drive or walk running eastward to the house. It is measured at 5.1m girth and is classified as a veteran tree because it shares many of the characteristics of good habitat and biodiversity but is not quite old enough to be classed as ancient. This view shows the original levelled walk or drive.

7. We think of hawthorns as just being planted in hedgerows, but they are often wonderful old features of our ancient wood pastures and parkland. This one appears on the southern slope of the valley about half way along the estate. It is classed as a veteran and could be 150 or more years old. It has grown in a multi stem form, common for this tree. One stem has collapsed but is still alive and it has an elder tree growing out of the middle. Of special interest is the old stone alongside which must have predated the tree, this has a small iron ring leaded into the top corner.

It is interesting how much information the mapping can give us, which is accessed off the Ancient Tree Inventory website. The first edition OS map led me to home in on this site since it was clearly identified as a wood pasture or parkland [with darker shading and trees shown in open areas]. Flicking the map over to the satellite images showed that many of these trees were still existing as was most of the open parkland. You may not be aware of the fact that in the first edition OS mapping [c 1870-80] the surveyors recorded and marked the position of individual trees in open fields, pasture, parkland and on hedgerows. If we look at the comparison for this site, we can see that trees large enough to be recorded 140 years ago correspond with the veterans and ancients we recorded today. This is a great tool for historical landscape research.



First edition OS 1870 with ATI records

Satellite 2019 with ATI records

Preliminary management advice

These trees and the parkland have survived fairly well over the last 80 years since the estate has been split up. It is clear there are some rare and valuable trees on the estate and a look at the aerial photograph gives a clear indication how different this wood pasture is from the rest of the surrounding countryside. To retain this value and character it will be important to ensure the key factors are maintained and some management work carried out in one or two areas in the near future. The following principles should be considered:

These are protection of the large, wide spreading, open grown trees [as opposed to the narrower taller forms that grow in the woodlands]. Wide open grown trees have full access to light and to nutrients and water in the ground without excessive competition.

Decaying wood and deadwood management

Decaying wood in the tree crown or on the ground is a haven for wildlife and one of the most colonised habitats in ancient and veteran trees. Deadwood has more "life" in it than a young tree. Ideally any decaying wood should be left where it falls and only moved if it presents a major risk or could benefit forming a "dead hedge" or barrier to keep animals away from live tree roots. Hollowing trunks are the most valuable of these habitats.

The highest value is decaying wood still on the tree, then a "monolith" or a dead tree left standing, then large diameter trunks and branches left on the ground, then small and medium branches left on the ground. Each habitat supports a different range of specialist species. Retaining trunks, stumps and fallen trees in large sections is the ideal and does not devalue the quality of a historic landscape.

The collapsed Sycamore on the southern boundary provides valuable and long lasting deadwood habitat for many species such as this Inonotus Dryadeus fungus commonly known as the Oak Bracket - a white rot generating fungi.

Haloing

Veteran trees can be overshaded by more vigorous younger species growing nearby. These younger trees can out-compete them for access to light and nutrients. The younger trees will not have as much biodiversity value as the veterans and ancients. So, the process of removal of surrounding younger trees is good management and is called haloing – clearing an area or circle around the veteran tree. This should normally be done in stages to avoid scorch or shock to the older trees if it is heavily shaded – removing trees firstly that grow up through the veteran's canopy and then for a couple of metres beyond the canopy.

The oak trees located on the original walk are prime contenders and could be part of a plan to restore the walk. The beech on one side has a very high dense canopy and is likely to shade out other trees itself. However, the oaks as not shade tolerant – they require as much light as possible particularly in their older stages where the trees form begins to change as they re-trench or shrink in height while growing in girth. Sometimes larger trees to be removed could be ring barked, allowing them to die and decay more slowly - reducing the shade more slowly and providing deadwood habitat in the meantime. A review of all the older trees particularly the oaks will reveal others that some haloing would benefit.

Left: One of several veteran trees along the eastern section of the walk where the new woodland is beginning to overtop and shade the original line of trees.
Right: An oak on the southern boundary with potential for haloing to stop future overshading.

Ivy

Ivy is a great habitat for bats birds and providing nectar for bees. It does not need to be managed in younger or most veteran trees. Only occasionally when a tree is very old and has a very high deadwood habitat could some management be an advantage. When a tree becomes very old it starts to get "short and fat". This is called re-trenching – the upper branches decay and you start to notice epiphytic growth lower down. It begins to form a

lower crown as the upper one recedes. If the lower tree is covered with ivy, the buds will not get enough light and new growth will be stopped.

Soil condition

Avoid, if possible, any further fertilizers, soil "improvers" added into the pasture. These have a detrimental impact and will kill off the mychorizzal fungi which are present in the ground and work symbiotically with the tree to help it absorb the necessary nutrients and water.

Grazing animals

Continue with the pasturing of animals as a natural management of the parkland but ensure this does not get over-intensive to have a negative impact. Large numbers of animals shading or collecting to feed or water under tree canopies will compact the soil and prevent the aeration necessary for the roots feeding processes. Regular urination by animals under trees will lead to an increase in nitrates also affect the roots and the mychorizzal fungi. Sheep are usually pastured here which are fine in small numbers – some estates have introduced heritage breeds of cattle with great success such as Red Ruby or the English Longhorn. The Mangalitza pigs that are kept in the new woodland will have a big effect on the tree roots in that concentrated area although there were no veteran trees. Signs of excessive nitrates from urine are intensive nettle growth around the tree. Signs of compaction are bare trampled earth.

Other wildlife

It is worth noting that beavers have been introduced to certain sites in Devon and Cornwall and these are naturally spreading slowly along the watercourses. These may arrive on the Inny and its tributaries soon and will have some effect on the landscape. This is not a problem and should be seen as a natural re-wilding of the landscape, Further advice can be sought from Cornwall Wildlife Trust

New planting

As an initiative it would be worth planting of sycamore, beech and oak where they would be replacements for trees that have been lost. It is clear that trees on the southern ridgeline planted as wind breaks are now succumbing to collapse. You could look to start where there are old stumps and other obvious historic loses however, beware about planting trees too close together as individually these trees will often grow one sided and can be more susceptible to collapse later in life, especially when one of their neighbours is lost exposing them more to the wind. New trees should never be planted close to existing veteran or ancient trees which they could eventually shade out or too close to each other so that they don't develop an open grown form. Places like Thornhayes, Perihale or Burncoose nurseries are reputable firms in the SW that provide good quality trees.

Tim Kellett April 2019

Sources

The Ancient Tree Inventory – This link will get you directly into the tree search for the site at Lewannick Cornwall from where you will be able to change maps, zoom in and click on records and photos for individual trees https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/tree-search/?v=1567961&ml=map&z=13&u=1&up=v&nwLat=50.64887329250763&nwLng=-4.642464637756345&seLat=50.54786511669357&seLng=-4.203011512756345

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Also available as free pdf http://www.ancienttreeforum.co.uk/resources/ancient-trees-books-shop/

The Ancient Tree Forum http://www.ancienttreeforum.co.uk/

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