

Farnham Heath (Tilford Woods): section through the parish boundary 2006

In 2002 the RSPB purchased the Tilford Woods - a 163ha conifer plantation, in three blocks, situated about 3.5km south-east of Farnham. The intention was to restore the area, now renamed the Farnham Heath, to its former state as a greensand heathland, by clearing the majority of the conifers from the site. Before tree felling commenced the authors undertook a rapid historic landscape survey at the request of the RSPB. This recorded, among other sites, several Mesolithic scatters, a lime kiln, a number of Second World War features, including a spigot mortar base, and the well-preserved parish boundary bank. This marks the boundary between Frensham and Tilford and runs in a straight line parallel to and slightly inside, the RSPB property boundary on the east side of Old Frensham Road.

The parish boundary bank is *c* 2m wide at the base and 0.6m high and is flanked on either side by 1.5m wide, still discernable, ditches. The line of the boundary is in all probability medieval but it is unlikely that the bank is of that date and more likely that it is either Tudor or late 18th century in origin. As the pine trees in this section of the property were due to be felled towards the end of 2006/early 2007 and it was decided to take the opportunity to cut and record a section across the bank, which was at risk of being damaged by the forestry contractors' heavy machinery.

A team of volunteers from the RSPB, under the direction of the authors, spent a morning in October 2006 cutting a section across the bank at SU 8540 4340. The section clearly showed that the bank had sealed a buried soil level, with the remains of a possible marker peg showing more or less centrally - perhaps relict from laying out the boundary. The bank itself was contained on either side by two turf walls, which retained the loose grey sand fill that comprised the bulk of the earthwork (see photograph). The two ditches showed in section and proved to be *c* 0.6m deep from the original ground surface. No doubt the bulk of the material in the bank derived from this source.

Soil samples were collected from the buried soil level and a preliminary examination by Royal Holloway confirmed the presence of pollen. However, given the uncertainty as to the date of construction of the bank, the RSPB did not feel that the cost of a full pollen analysis was justified. No further work is therefore proposed and a recent inspection shows that the greater part of the bank has survived the forestry works.

David Graham

Photo: Cross-section through the bank; the turf wall is clearly visible on the right-hand side.