

**AREA 4: PARISH OF BRANDON & BRETTFORD:  
THE POOL, BLACK SPINNEY AND LONG SPINNEY, LITTLE SPINNEY,  
BRANDON WOOD, BRANDON LITTLE WOOD, BRANDON HALL WOOD,  
LAWYERS, SYDENHILL and BRICK KILN SPINNEYS, PRIVET, LONG and SQUARE COVERTS  
BRANDON MARSH WOODLAND, NEW and OLD HARE COVERT  
PARISH OF WOLSTON: GROVE AND PLANTATION**

**ECOLOGY (1)**

**Great Brandon Wood** is a mosaic of coniferous and deciduous, planted and ancient, semi-natural woodland. In the 1960s there was extensive planting of conifers, leaving a deciduous strip along the southern margin. In 1980 the Forestry Commission sold the wood, and the proposed extension of mineral extraction led to the purchase in 2000 by the Friends of Brandon Wood who had managed it since 1981. It is gradually being reverted to mainly broadleaf woodland by thinning, bringing the proportion of Corsican pine down to 32% of the total trees from the original 48% by 2021. There is good ground flora with bee and spotted orchids. Also recorded are butterflies, including white admiral and purple and white hairstreak, and rare hoverflies, sawflies and beetles. Dormice recorded in 1999 have not been seen since (17). 69 species of birds including goldcrest and firecrest, stonechat, redpoll, linnet, woodcock, great grey shrike and hobby have been recorded. Previously only recorded in the pine forests of Inverness is the giant wood wasp, a harmless 25mm long mimic of the hornet. A small black sawfly (*Microdiprion pallipes*) was sighted in 1987, a first for England (2).

**Little Brandon Wood** is predominantly ancient semi-natural woodland, possibly never felled, with hazel coppice and a small area of conifer; abundant bluebell and greater stitchwort. There is a plan to join **Little Brandon Wood** up with **Brandon Great Wood** by planting up the intervening field.

**Brandon Hall Wood** is parkland with scattered mature trees and ground flora including dog's mercury; there is a ditch across the southern half.

**The Pool** is mixed ancient woodland, much of it undisturbed, with impeded drainage. It has a well-developed canopy of oak, larch, alder, and willow. Ground flora is poor, with bluebell and wood sorrel.

**Black Spinney** is wet woodland with alder and a rich ground flora. It includes derelict hazel coppice with standards.

**Long Spinney** has an open canopy of birch, ash and pedunculate oak. The north-west section has an old open cast coal site.

**Brandon Marsh** is a mixture of habitats, including reed bed and woodland, many of which are uncommon in such close proximity for the local area.

**New Hare Covert** is secondary woodland composed mainly of ash, larch and Scots pine and managed for biodiversity.

**Old Hare Covert** is secondary woodland with ridge and furrow evident to the south.

**Sydenhill Spinney** and **Long, Square** and **Privet Coverts** are all secondary woodland.

The **Grove** is secondary woodland with an open canopy dominated by beech, sweet chestnut and oak.

The **Plantation** consists of ash, beech, oak, sycamore, elm, pine and yew.

**HISTORY**

**PARISH OF BRANDON AND BRETTFORD**

Domesday Book 1086 records '*silva*' (probably wood pasture, 18:p121) covering only about 50–75 acres (4:44), owned by Saxon Thorwell (11). The wood and heath of Brandon mentioned in a deed of 1226 stated that they were separated by a heath from the enclosed wood of **Burleigh**, now **Birchley Wood** (see **Area 2**). In 1279 the Hundred Rolls (an inquiry into landholding in England by Edward I) recorded 2 acres of **Binley Wood** belonging to the Abbot of Coombe taken into the **park of Brandon** which stretched to the boundaries with Willenhall (see **Area 3**); also listed is a 'foreign' wood (*a wood outside the bounds of a*

*manor*) in Brandon of 40 acres (4:p44).

A survey by the Mayor of Brandon in 1571 recorded a park (102 acres) of which **Brandon Hall Wood** may be a remnant, a **Great Coppisse** in the park (107 acres) and **Little Coppisse** (37 acres), in total three times the estimated area of the Domesday Book '*silva*' (4:44).

A survey of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century - early 17<sup>th</sup> Century records **Great Coppis** (136 acres), describing in detail the wood bank forming the boundary between it and the '**Cottigers part**' which can still be seen; '**Cottigers**' suggests that this part of the wood was part of the Manorial waste over which villagers exercised rights of common. A multitude of species in the bank attest to its antiquity, including wild service tree, now rare in the county (11).

An estate map, c.1630, confirms the location, shape and area of **Great Coppis** and **Cottigers Part**, also an adjacent area called **Thickthorns**, suggesting it was carved out of waste or primary woodland and put to arable or pasture, possibly in the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It is later postulated that it fell out of cultivation and returned to woodland, possibly as a result of the Black Death (3).

A map of Brandon and Bretford, dated 1630, shows **Little Coppis**, **Great Coppis** with **Thickthorn Wood**, **Cottigers Part**, **Spyers Park** and another area (illegible on the map), all in the area of the present **Brandon Wood**. Also shown is **Broomshill**, not as woodland but possibly now **Pool** (3).

The parish of Brandon and Bretford was enclosed in 1692. The tithe award map of 1849 confirms the near completeness of the **Great Coppis** but as it does not show **Little Coppis** perhaps most of this wood had gone by this date (3). **Great Brandon Wood** is shown in its current shape with the exception of 2 acres converted to arable, since reverted to woodland (11), and **Little Brandon Wood** (originally **Cottiger's part**), now separated from it by a field; also the **Pool**, and **Black** and **Long Spinneys** (possibly remnants of **Little Coppis**) between Willenhall Wood and Piles Coppice. Six more recent spinneys and coverts are also shown: **Square**, **Privet** and **Long Coverts**, and **Lawyers**, **Brick Kiln** and **Sydenhill Spinneys**; **Lawyer's Spinney** and **Brick Kiln Spinney** are recorded in the written Enclosure Award as the site of brickworks (3).

**Brandon Marsh Woodland** has grown up on the site of a quarry and was opened as a Nature Reserve in 1992. **Old Hare Covert**, to the west of Brandon Marsh, is not shown on the 1849 tithe award map but present on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map and still present today. **New Hare Covert**, to the east of Brandon Marsh, is also present today but not marked on 1888 OS map (16).

**Little Spinney**, west of **Long Spinney** and possibly also a remnant of **Little Coppis**, is shown on the 1888 OS map and is still present today although smaller (16).

The Manor House on the edge of Brandon Village, its grounds enclosing **Little Brandon Wood**, has deteriorated into ruins but the shooting lodge built in the 1600s was bought by James Beech in the late 1800's and became known as Brandon Hall. In **Brandon Little Wood** there is an ice-well, used for preserving game shot in the Manor Grounds.

## PARISH OF WOLSTON

The plan of the Wolston Estate dated 1869 in the Local Record Office is badly damaged and cannot be opened until restoration. '*Terriers*' (*records of payments*) from 1698 and tithes from 1701 mention a **Grove Field**, location unfortunately unknown; this may be **The Grove**, west of the village of Wolston (3).

Tithes for all 'spring' (i.e. coppiced) woods in the neighbouring parish of Stretton-on-Dunsmore and for all the woods in the Lordship of Brandon were paid to the vicar of Wolston so it is possible they were once one parish. Curiously, tithes for all spring woods in the parish of Princethorpe were also paid to the vicar of Wolston. It is possible that Wolston had no wood of own but it would be necessary to view the damaged estate map of 1869 to confirm this (3).

The **Plantation** at Wolston, north of the **Grove** alongside the R. Avon, has a large deep pit which seems to be man-made and may well have been a quarry of unknown date (1); there is no evidence of a quarry at on early maps (3).

**Sources of information:**

1. Ecosite notes (*Habitat Biodiversity Audit, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust*)
2. Tasker, A. (1990) *The Nature of Warwickshire*
3. Local Record Office, Warwick. (Moffatt, R. 2017/18)
4. Wager, S. J. (1998) *Woods, Wolds & Groves: the woodland of medieval Warwickshire, British Archaeological Reports British Series 269.*
11. Friends of Brandon Wood leaflet (1982)
16. Ross, A. (2020) *Dunsmore Woodlands GIS project*
17. Moffatt, R. (2017) *The Status of the Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) n Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull in 2016*
18. Rackham, O. (1986) *The History of the Countryside*