

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WOOD

The wood has been an integral part of Totley Hall estate for centuries, and its history, as far as can be established with any certainty, is closely interlinked with that of the Hall and the village. There seems little reason why the wood should ever have been anything other than what it is today, but to prove its existence as far back as the history of Totley itself is almost impossible. A village is naturally the centre of noteworthy events; a wood is simply an adjunct of the village without a population to cause any events worthy of note.

There is reference to the village in the Domesday Survey of 1086:

"In Totinglei (Totley), Tolf had IV bovates¹ of land hidable². Land for one plough. It is waste. Wood, pasturable³, 1 mile in length and ½ mile in breadth. T.R.E.⁴ value X shillings; now XII pence."

The wood referred to in this extract would seem not to be Gillfield, but since the wood clings to a hillside with poor soil which, in all probability has never been ploughed, it is possible that the present wood is a remnant of a larger area of woodland. The earliest reference to any natural feature of the area is one dated 1180, which refers to Totley Brook. This stream has been important as a boundary for many centuries, and in the case mentioned above, it formed the boundary between the lands of Beauchief Abbey and those of Totley Manor.

The first direct reference to the wood by name was found in Cameron's book "The Place-Names of Derbyshire" which states that the 1561 Survey refers to "*a springe woode called Jyll felde*". Since the wood's antiquity can be traced back so far, it may fair presumption that it is much older than this early record. The origin of the name is open to conjecture, but it seems most unlikely that one explanation - that it was named after Leonard Gill - bears close scrutiny (Sheffield Clarion Ramblers 1954-5 - information from the Derbyshire Archaeological Society Journal of 1895). Leonard Gill (pronounced with a soft 'G') was the owner of a lead-mill or smelting-house probably at or near the area now known as the 'chemical yard' situated on Totley Brook about a mile downstream from the wood. Leonard Gill was living during the 1600s, so the reference in the 1561 Survey predates him.

The report of the Derbyshire Archaeological Society Journal of the same date also states that there were 20 acres of woodland in Totley in 1317, but there is no source of information quote for further reference. I see no logical reason why this should not be reasonably accurate, but in the absence of further details, it must simply be recorded as so far undocumented.

¹ bovate - the land which can be tilled by one ox

² hidable - taxable

³ pasturable - which may be used for the pasturage of domestic animals, e.g. pigs

⁴ TRE. - roughly translated means in the reign of Edward the confessor

The ownership of the Manor of Totley gives a direct clue to the ownership of the wood, in that the two seem interlinked by occasional references to a wood in Totley (see below); and then the link seems to be between Totley Hall and Gillfield, a much closer physical relationship than with the Manor, since one can see the wood from the old Hall building. The first owner of the Manor that I have been able to trace, is Stephen Bright, Bailiff of Hallamshire and of Carbrook Hall, who acquired the lands in 1630. Some eight years later, he bought the lands of Beauchief Abbey, following the dissolution by Henry VIII, and so became owner of both banks of Totley Brook,

A tenuous, but quite possible reference which may allude to the wood, occurs in letters between James Bright and Edward Gill, dated May 3rd, 1653.

"Revocation, James Bright to Edward Gill and Nicholas Stones, lead merchant, at Himsworth, revoking a previous grant. Messuages⁵ and lands in Dore and Totley."

Edward Gill was Stephen Bright's son-in-law, and was granted joint education of Stephen's daughters with Antony Hadfield his brother-in-law.

"They are to stand seised of the first fall of spring wood in Ecclesall and Totley to the use of their daughters."

(This information was found in the 'Bright Papers', lodged in Sheffield City Archive Section, ref. number: WWM. D. 134). This extract infers the presence of a wood of fair size, and although there is no proof that it is indeed Gillfield, I have found no mention, or evidence of any other wood in the district. (Holmesfield Park Wood would not have been in the same parish although it is quite near to the village of Totley).

Stephen Bright's will made on May 20th, 1642, willed all his lands in Totley to John Bright, his son, and his issue; or, in default, to his brother John Bright, vicar of Sheffield. John Bright (the son) died in 1688, and details of the manor from this point, become very difficult to find. However, in 1630, just 58 years previous to John Bright's death, Totley Hall was built by George Newbold, and certainly in later years, Gillfield seems more tightly tied to this building than the manor.

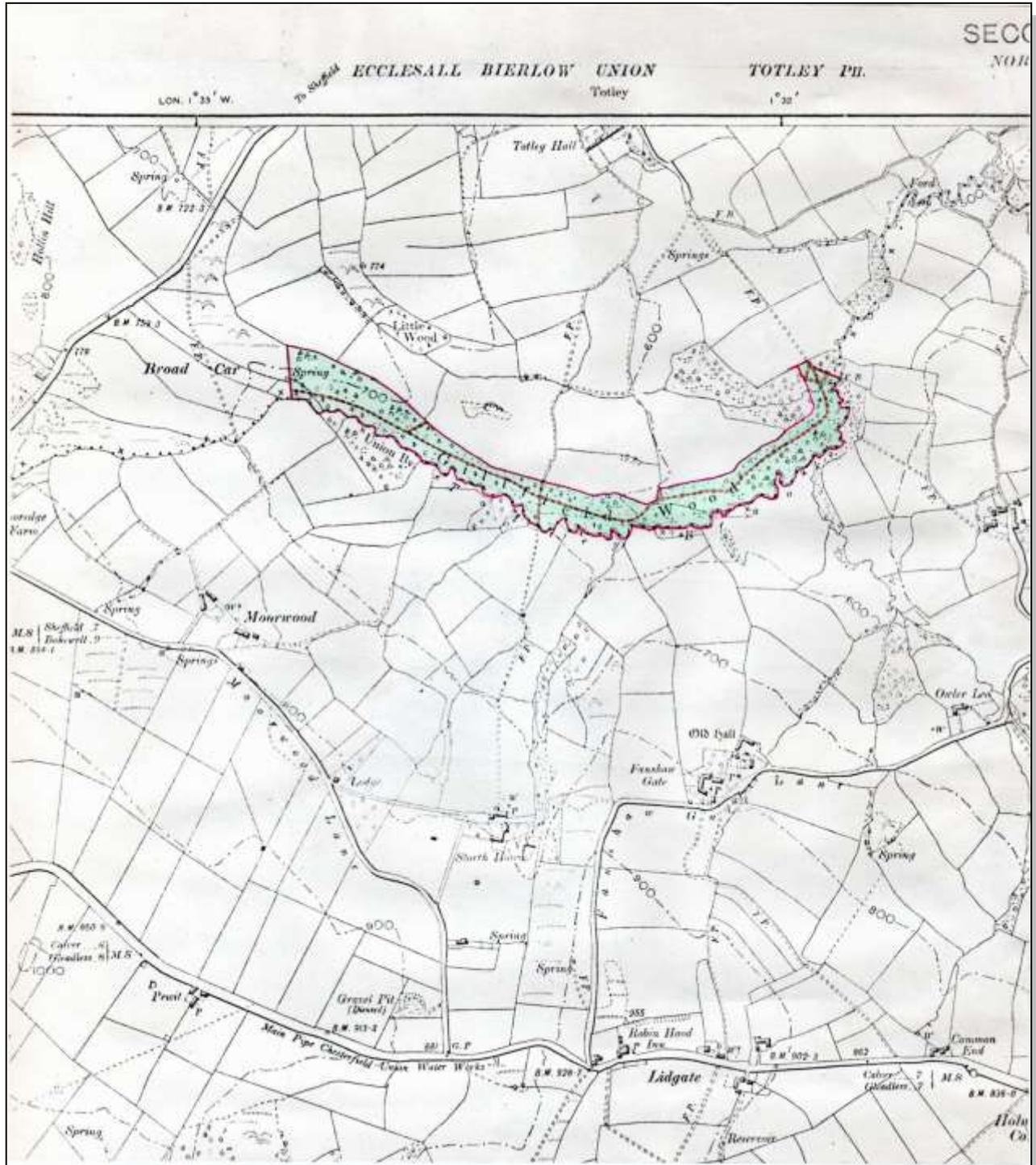
It is only during the Hall's period of occupancy by the late W. A. Milner that there is any specific reference to Gillfield, although the wood was marked on a map prepared by Fairbank for the Rev. D'Ewes Coke in 1813. This map is in the Fairbank Collection at the City Library Archive Office and indicates that the boundaries of the wood have not altered at all since that date. The map of 1899 below, shows the wood and its surrounding fields which are almost unchanged today.

⁵ messuages - dwelling houses and buildings

The History and Geology of Gillfield Wood

Map of the Area dated 1899

This shows Gillfield Wood, and the surrounding area and may be compared with the frontispiece, which is far more modern, being reduced from several 25-inch modern Ordnance Surveys.



Milner, as squire of Topley Hall, used the wood for recreation, and was fond of organising shooting parties on his land which extended to Moorwood Lane at Holmesfield. To this end he arranged the conversion of an old stone-built building (see

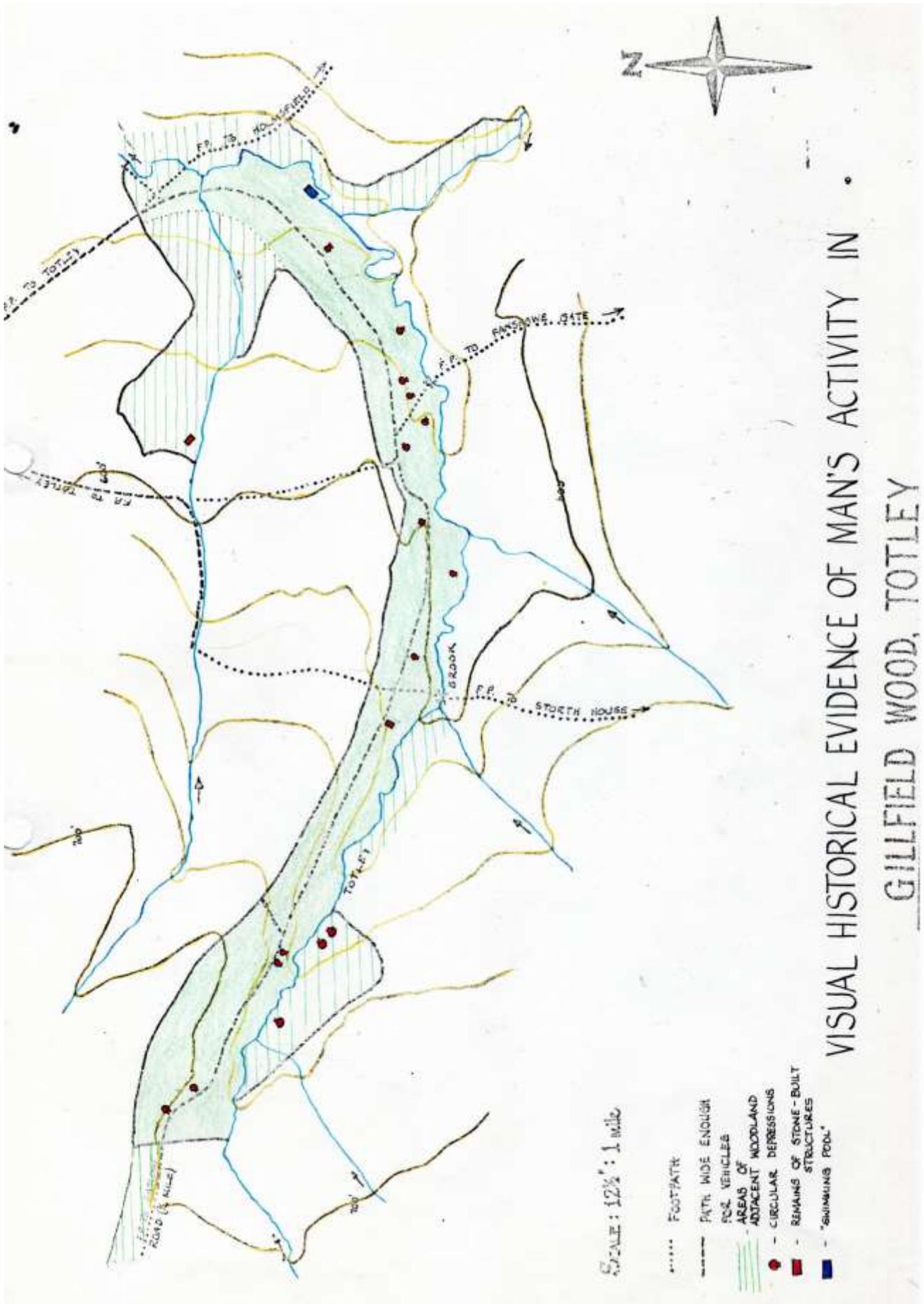
page 19) to a small shooting cabin, where the sportsmen could have a drink or snack. The arm of the wood at the eastern end which has always been fenced off, was used for rearing pheasants, and a gamekeeper was employed for this purpose. There are now no pheasants in the district. It was on the owner's wish that the 'swimming pool' was excavated late last century, and it was indeed used for swimming by the owner, and also by the youth of Totley at the time. It has been re-excavated on a few occasions since it was first built as it silts up quickly. Unfortunately, each excavation is regarded by those concerned as the first, so it has proved very difficult to pin down the original digging to a definite date.

The recent history of the wood is well-documented since it is well within living memory. The wood was bought, with the rest of the Totley Hall estate, by Sheffield City Council in 1945, after it had been clear-felled by the combined efforts of the felling company and the residents of the village. It was then left untouched for a number of years before being re-forested and generally tidied up between the years 1965 and 1967. Since the latter date, little has taken place apart from the routine maintenance necessary in an area of woodland such as this.

This is roughly the sum of the documentary evidence that I have been able to glean from the papers deposited in the Record Offices at Sheffield and Matlock. This has proved a very time-consuming task, and often the results of several hours work has been no tangible evidence whatsoever. What has proved of equal interest, and similar frustration, has been the visible remains of man's activity which are to be found within the wood itself.

A total of about 20 small regular depressions may be found in the study area and surrounding woodland. The average size of these is about 15 feet wide and 18 feet in length, although some are now rather indistinct and very difficult to find. Peculiar features are that none of the sites is on level ground, and all appear to have an 'exit' which faces downhill. An excavation of one site failed to provide any information, except the fact that at some time in the past, a fire had been built in the centre of the depression, and that coal had been burnt in it. Enquiries were made at the City Museum, Sheffield, and the letter received from them is to be found in the Appendix.

The contents of the letter were examined in the light of a geological map of the area, and it was a consensus opinion that the two explanations offered; iron mining and coal mining did not really hold water. A letter was sent to the Industrial Archaeology Unit at Bradford University, including all the relevant details, but no reply has been received to date. A map showing the sites of these 'pits' is included on page 17.



VISUAL HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF MAN'S ACTIVITY IN
GILLFIELD WOOD, TOTLEY

PLATES 6 & 7: showing two of the 'Pit' sites.



The photographs above show two of the more distinct sites, note the characteristic 'exit' in the second plate.

Another structure which has been the cause of much speculation, is the stone-built 'shooting-cabin' found in a Larch copse near the Totley-Storth House footpath rediscovered on December 1st, 1974. The villagers who were old enough to remember this being used, referred to it as the 'dug-out' and this certainly seems to be the case. Plate 8 below shows the present state of the ruin with very little of showing above ground level. What remains of the walls suggest that a great deal of care went into the construction, as there is no evidence of any mortar being used, and yet the remaining walls and corners have obviously been made with great precision and accuracy. Whilst there are still people alive in Totley today who have dim recollections of the swimming pool being built, they were unanimous that the 'dug-out' "had always been there". (Interview with local inhabitants, January 21st, 1974, see report page 136). This building is not recorded on any of the maps scrutinised and is not mentioned in any of the documents studied so far.

**PLATE 8: ‘Dug-Out’,
Gillfield Wood**

Note the finely
constructed corner and
the large flat roofing
slab on the floor in front
of the joint.



A similarly constructed building was found in Area C, the only major difference being the size, which was quite small (approximately 2ft 6inch by 4ft, compared with 5ft by 8ft for the previous structure). The locals were unaware of this latter site’s existence and said that it must have been built by some of the local youths, but the same care seem to have been taken with the construction, even though the rood is obviously of more modern origin (see below).



**PLATE 9: Second ‘Dug-Out’ found in
Area C**

This is now used as a den by the local
children and much of the stone walling has
been removed. Traces of it can still be seen
at the lower part of the rear wall. This again
follows the ‘dug-out’ pattern of the larger
building.

A BRIEF GEOLOGY OF THE WOOD

Gillfield Wood overlies rocks of the Lower Coal Measures, the particular rocks here being sandstone (Greenmoor Rock), mudstone and siltstone.

Greenmoor Rock is a fine-grained sandstone, grey to brown in colour, flaggy (i.e., splitting easily and regularly), making it an ideal rock for drystone building. There is a small quarry in a field adjoining the wood, where the stone has been taken for this very purpose. The mud and siltstones are very fine-grained and dark grey in colour. These rocks can only be seen in and near Totley Brook, for there are no other outcrops of rock within the wood. Occasional fossils are dislodged from the streambed by flooding, those discovered so far have all been specimens of *Stigmaria*.

The environment which must have been responsible for a geological succession such as this, is thought to have been that of a river delta, with the sandstones being deposited by tides and currents, and the shaly mud and siltstones being deposited in somewhat quieter areas. The successive bands of sandstone and shales which can be seen clearly on the map on page 22 are due to the variable conditions brought about by the unstable nature of any delta area, and which may be seen in action today in many parts of the world.

Two faults pass through the wood, but they appear to have little effect upon the landscape - the contour lines show very little deviation, and the course of the streams seems to be totally unaffected. The areas of Greenmoor Rock do indicate slightly more resistance to erosion than the intervening bands of mudstone and siltstone. This is most noticeable in the fields surrounding the wood, rather than the interior, the most striking effect of this can be seen beside the Totley-Fanshawe Gate footpath, at the southern edge of the wood. Here, there is raised ground to each side of the path, these areas conform exactly to the position of the Greenmoor Rock as indicated on the geological map, with the softer materials between these two raised areas.

The dip of the rocks is northwards, at an angle between 8° and 30° . This means that the bed exposed along the strike has been liable to undercutting by the stream, and hence has been eroded more rapidly than the southern bank, where the slope of the land follows the dip.

The History and Geology of Gillfield Wood

KEY TO GEOLOGICAL MAP

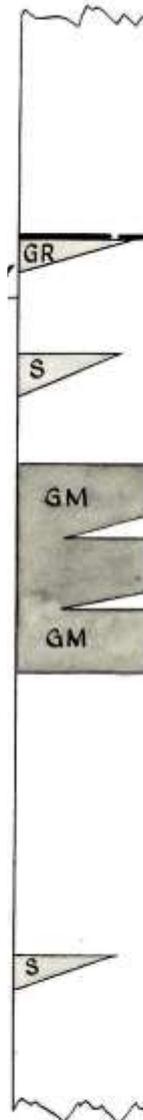
GM	Greenmoor Rock
LCM	Lower Coal Measures
S	Silkstone Rock
	horizontal strata
	inclined strata and angle of dip
	vertical strata, long bar indicates strike.
	Gently undulating strata (general disposition uncertain)
	Undulating strata (general dip in degrees)
	Geological boundary (solid)
	Fault at surface
	Stream
	Area of Gillfield Wood
	Study area
	Line of sections (see page 19)

Generalized Vertical Section

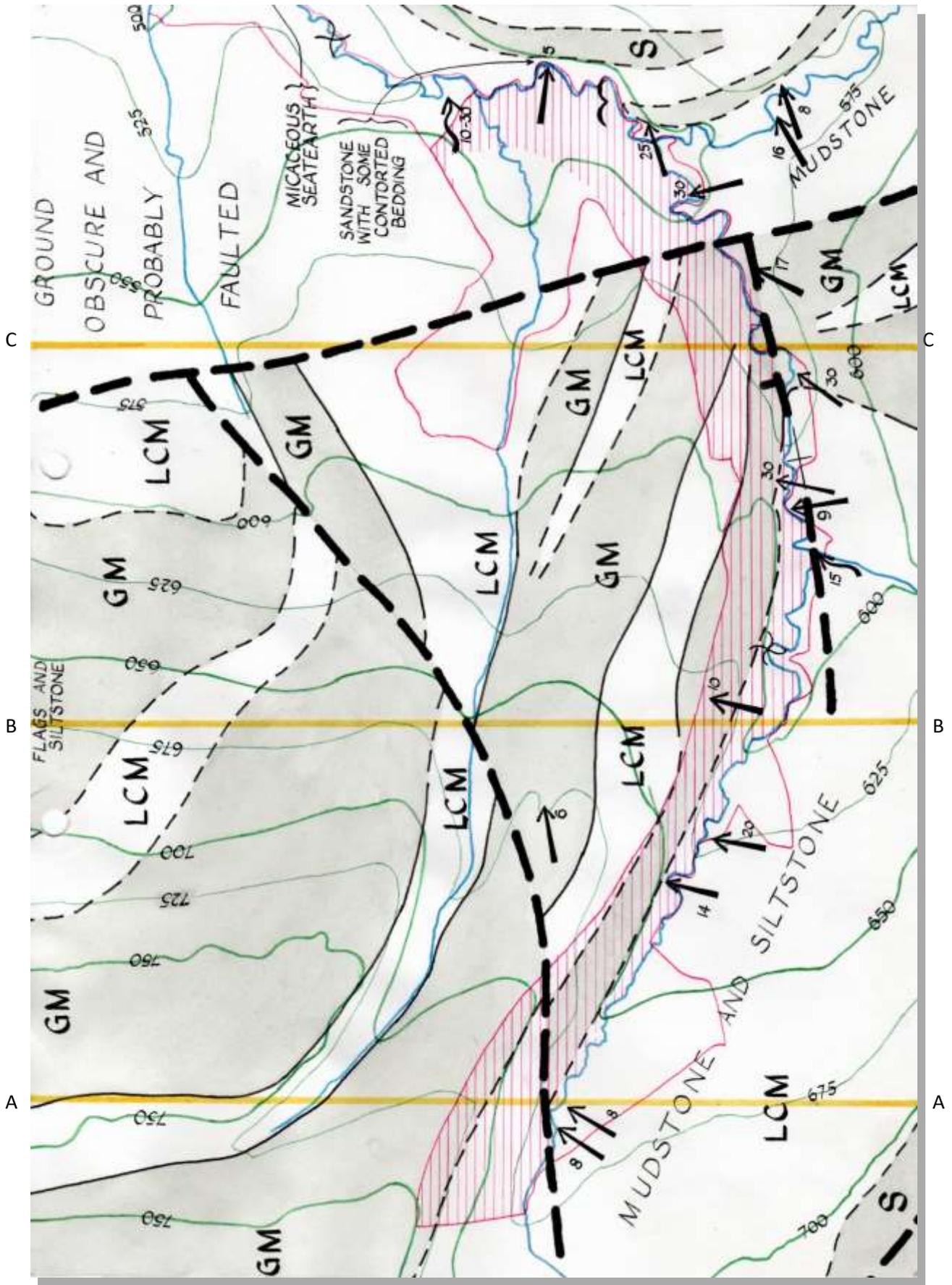
Scale: 1 inch = 100ft

Grenoside coal
Sandstone
Thin Grenoside
sandstone

Greenmoor Rock



Lower Coal Measures

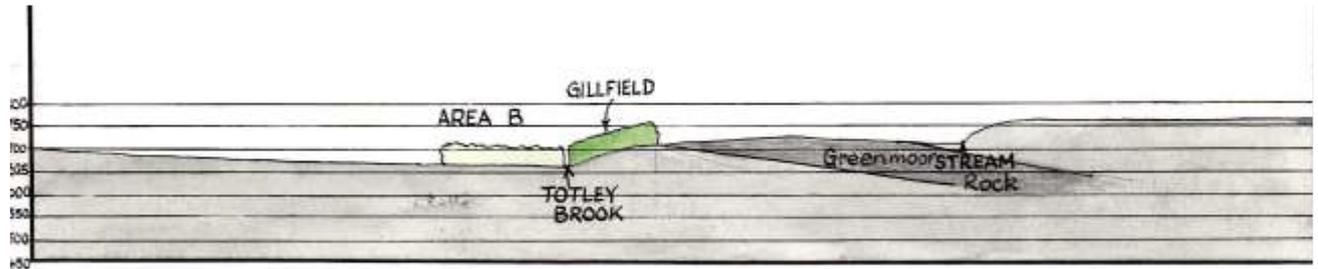


The History and Geology of Gillfield Wood

SECTION LINES from MAP

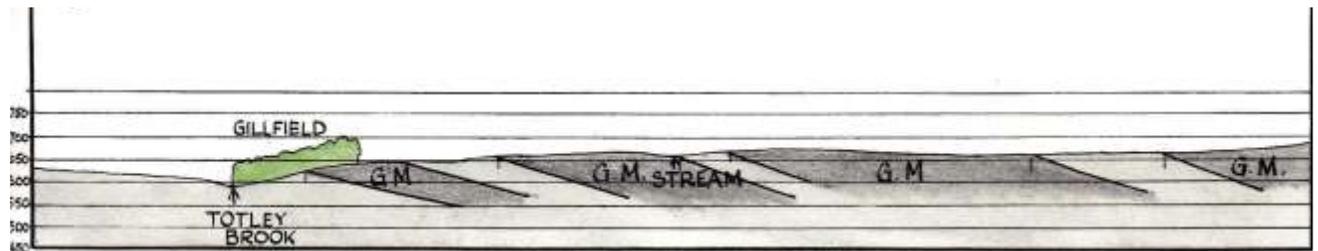
Line A. Profile across the western end of Gillfield Wood.

This clearly shows the double scarp slopes of Gillfield and Little Wood, and the rising land to the left of the diagram, this reaches just over 900 feet at Holmesfield, less than a half-mile away.

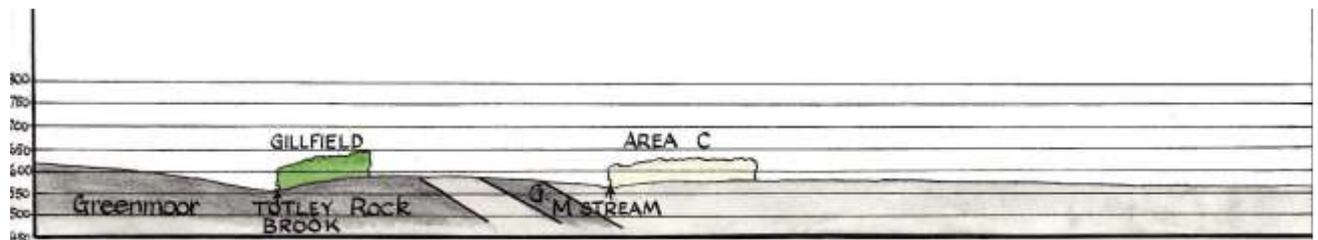


Line B. Profile near the middle of the wood.

It is interesting to note the general levelling-out of the landscape at this point.



Line C. This section is taken towards the eastern end of the wood, just before the confluence of Toley Brook and the stream featured in the centre of the diagram.

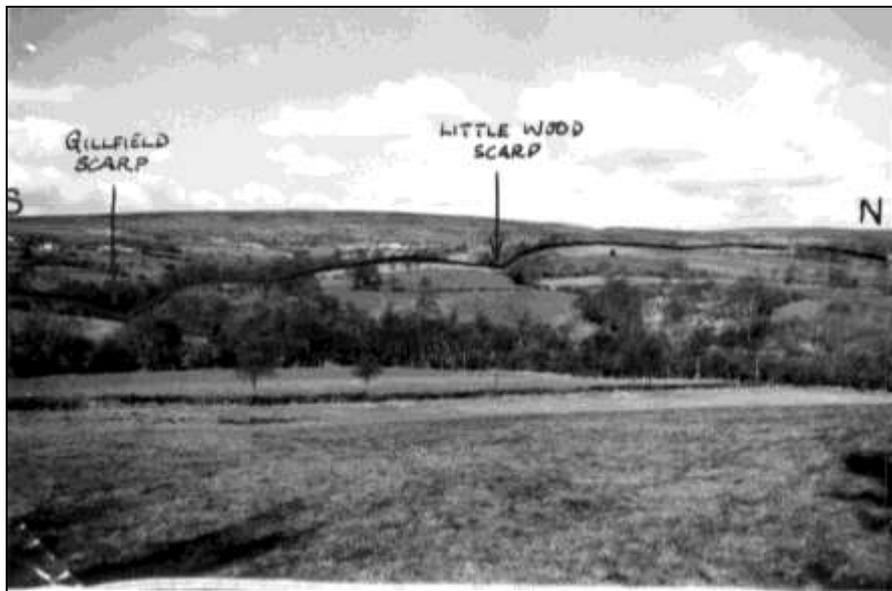


All these diagrams were drawn to the same vertical and horizontal scale ie: 1cm to 44 metres. They are all taken exactly north-south and the location can be seen on the geological map on page 22.

An interesting feature of the area is the double south-facing slope which can be seen very clearly from a distance, with Gillfield on the more southerly slope, and Little Wood on the more northerly. This has been caused by the downcutting of Topley Brook and its more northerly tributary through the Greenmoor Rock into softer mud and siltstone beneath. This effect can be seen in the plate below.

PLATE 10: Double Scarp Slopes near Gillfield

The overlay indicates exactly where the two scarps occur. Photograph taken looking WNW.



This effect can also be seen clearly in the cross-sectional diagrams of the wood on page 23 especially in the first (and more westerly) of the three.

Within the wood, Topley Brook and its few tributaries have been the agents of change. The Brook has obviously cut through the Greenmoor rock, and one tributary in particular, has carved a steep-sided valley through the rock. This can be seen in the plate below. This tributary has but a brief journey beginning in the fields about a half mile from its confluence with Topley Brook. This tributary runs obliquely across the boundary between a section of Greenmoor Rock and the overlying mudstones without any deviation.

PLATE 11: Small valley carved by tributary of Topley Brook.

This feature can be seen beside the Topley-Fanshawe Gate footpath through the wood.

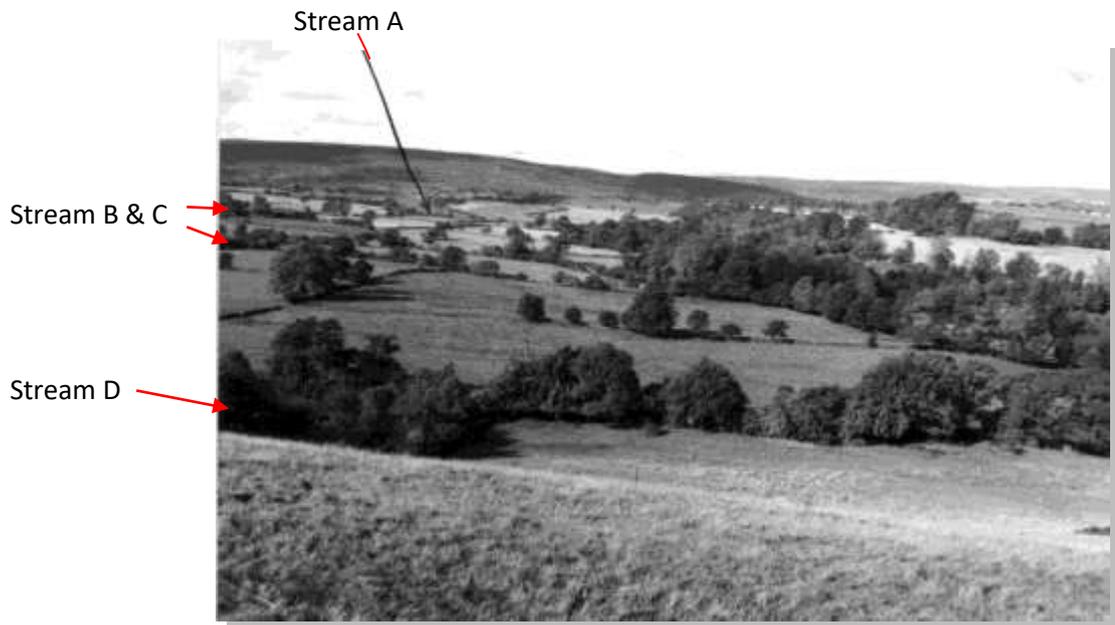


The History and Geology of Gillfield Wood

The highest point of the wood is at the western end, on the Ridge, which is 750 feet above sea-level. The lowest point is approximately 530 feet at the exit from the wood of Totley Brook, at the eastern tip. This gives an average gradient of about 1:17. This causes several minor waterfalls and riffles in the brook, which, for a great part of its course through the wood, conforms to a pattern of riffles and shallow pools.

The drainage pattern into Totley Brook is dominated by that from the fields to the south, with only two very small ditches, the stream featured in Plate II on the previous page, actually contributing water from within the wood. The photograph below shows the drainage pattern from the south quite clearly.

PLATE 12: Drainage Pattern to the South of Gillfield Wood, Draining into Totley Brook



Stream A in the photograph enters the wood as Totley Brook. Its source is on the moors in the distance. **Stream B and C** are small tributaries leading from the pasture to the left of the plate. **Stream D** is much larger and has its source at a spring about three-quarters of a mile from its confluence. One further stream joins Totley Brook from this direction, but its location made inclusion of all four streams on one photograph, impossible.

pH READINGS IN GILLFIELD WOOD

A series of pH readings was taken throughout the wood in order to establish the general pH level if this was at all possible. These readings were taken so that there were as few areas of the wood as possible which were not sampled. The task of taking a very large number of samples seemed to be an inordinately time-consuming undertaking for the relative importance of this section of the study. I decided to take the minimum number of samples to cover the widest possible area of woodland. Sectors of special interest, such as quadrats taken in connection with other lines of enquiry; marshy areas; areas of alluvium; or simply contrasts in vegetation were included and mapped so that an overall picture of the ground covered, or more importantly, not covered, was available for reference. Any anomalies, or great deviations from the norm would be investigated more thoroughly.

A total of forty-seven samples were taken at a depth of about 2 inches. The samples were tested by using the B.D.H. Soil Testing Kit, and, with one notable exception, the soil proved to be acidic with an average of 5.6. The exception to this general pattern occurs at site number 13 on the accompanying map (see overleaf), where a reading of 7.0 was obtained on January 12th (see report of that visit, page 118). Further samples were taken in the vicinity to verify the first result.

On the subsequent visit, samples were taken at foot intervals in a pattern radiating out from the original site. The aberrant area was quite local, and although a reading of 7.5 was obtained at one point, the tendency seemed to be that this was a peak, and that the figures dropped again to acidic values a short distance away from this point.

Reasons for this localised effect are rather difficult to find. Geological maps show no possible outcrop of alkaline rocks to explain it, but circumstantial evidence, in the form of old fertilizer bags, would tend to suggest that these may be to blame. Details on these bags were rather indistinct, but the words "Nitrogen 22%: Phosphoric Acid 11%; Potash 11%" could be deciphered. The bags were, unfortunately, quite empty, so that a test of the contents (the simplest thing to do) was rendered impossible. If a similar bag can be found, then a test of that may give the answer, but this may not be the case. It could be that prolonged exposure to the elements alters the chemical constituents of the fertilizer and also its pH.

A sample of the fertilizer was obtained and tested for pH. The result was a reading of over 8.0, which would make this a logical cause of the rather aberrant figure obtained previously. Thus, the overall picture is one of acidic soil, mainly podsollic in character with very few sites within the wood deviating from this general pattern to any marked degree. I have not tested the area around the paths for pH, since these have recently been resurfaced, some areas with concrete, and some with limestone chippings. As yet there seems to have been little or no change in vegetation caused by this work, but a careful watch must be made in case these small inclusions have any effect upon the immediate flora.

