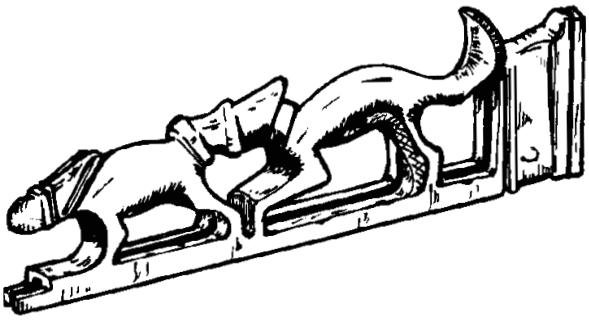
Ampthill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

Rail Points Revealed

Found during the construction of a car park on the A6 lay-by near Maulden Woods Bedfordshire

TL. 073394

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Introduction

While taking part in a team building exercise, a group from Center Parcs Woburn Forest undertook the task of levelling the surrounds of the new Greensand Trust Headquarters in Haynes West End Bedfordshire for a "Woodland Discovery Area". They found some iron work in the spoil left by a bulldozer during the initial clearing which turned out to be a set of narrow gauge railway points. They were obviously not found in a position to be used and were of a portable design. The group lifted the points and cleaned them up to the condition shown in this report's photographs.

The discovery of the points posed a number of questions; where did they come from, when were they used and for what purpose? Susan Raven from the Greensand Trust kindly allowed the ADALHS to investigate.

Two immediate possibilities came to mind.

1/The site is on the edge of Maulden wood, where the trees were cut down in WWI by the Canadian Foresters before sending them to the Western Front to be used as pit props and for shoring up trenches. We know the Foresters used rails to transport the timber to the sawmills, but all the evidence we have, suggests that three foot gauge rails were used at that time, the recovered rails are two foot gauge.

2/ All the woods in this area were part of the No 27 Ammunition Storage Sub Depot in WWII the principle storage of ammunition for D-Day. Narrow gauge railways were used to move ammunition from motor vehicle unloading ramps to nissen huts hidden in the trees. The author remembers them in Warren wood, Clophill. Although the rail points unearthed are the same gauge as those used in WWII they are lighter in construction and clearly portable.

To help with our enquiries we contacted Mr Robin Waywell who is the author of a comprehensive book on industrial railways in Bedfordshire. He records a Bedfordshire County Council "Wilstead Contract JC2" to reconstruct the A6 trunk Road between Bedford and Luton c.1934 to 1937. It transpired he was brought up in Clophill and confirmed the memories of the WWII rails in Warren wood. He then produced a collection of amateur photographs taken in the early thirties which he had been given. He kindly allowed us to copy them for this report. The photographs conclusively show the rails in use during the straightening of the A6 where it passes though Haynes West End. Compared with today, the methods used were very labour intensive, in fact we know from local knowledge that the whole scheme was used as a make work programme to employ men out of work following the depression. The father of one of the author's friends worked on the road until he moved to Vauxhall Motors Ltd., just before the start of WWII where he worked on Churchill tank assembly.

This report deals with the work carried out pre-war on the A6 between Clophill and the top of Wilstead Hill. It can be assumed the points were left when the work was abandoned.



Photo 1. Narrow gauge rail “Left hand turnout points” showing the underside with steel sleepers.



Photo 2.

Top view of rail points showing some damage, possibly caused by the excavator.



Photo 3. Greensand Trust Headquarters, the points were found to the right of the picture.

Greensand Trust Headquarters



Photo 4. Aerial view showing Maulden wood and rail points find spot



Photo 5. Duelled A6 North near find spot, Oxleys Cottages are at the top of picture



Photo 6. Oxleys cottages portrayed to confirm location of contemporary photos



Photo 7. A6 Road straightening project, Oxleys Cottages on the horizon



Photo 8. North of Oxleys Cottages approaching Wilstead Hill

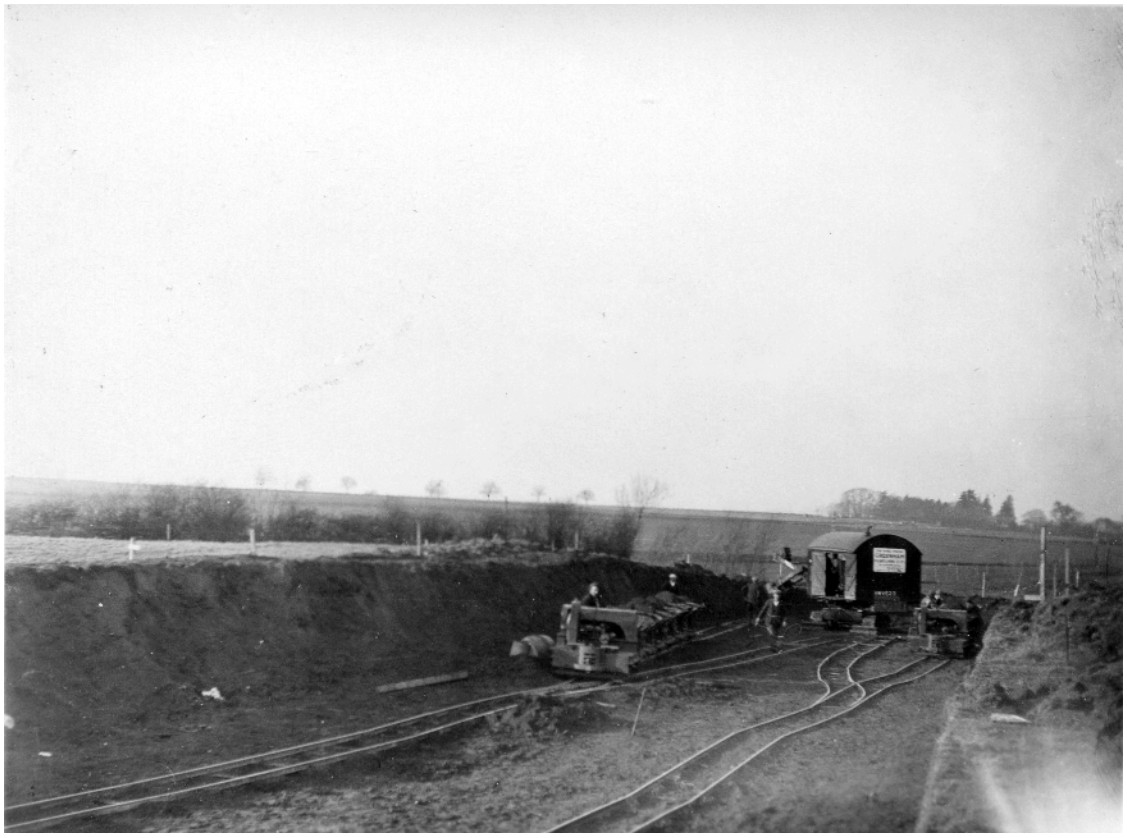


Photo 9. Earth moving using a powered shovel to load”V” skip wagons with soil. Points similar to those recently recovered are clearly visible.

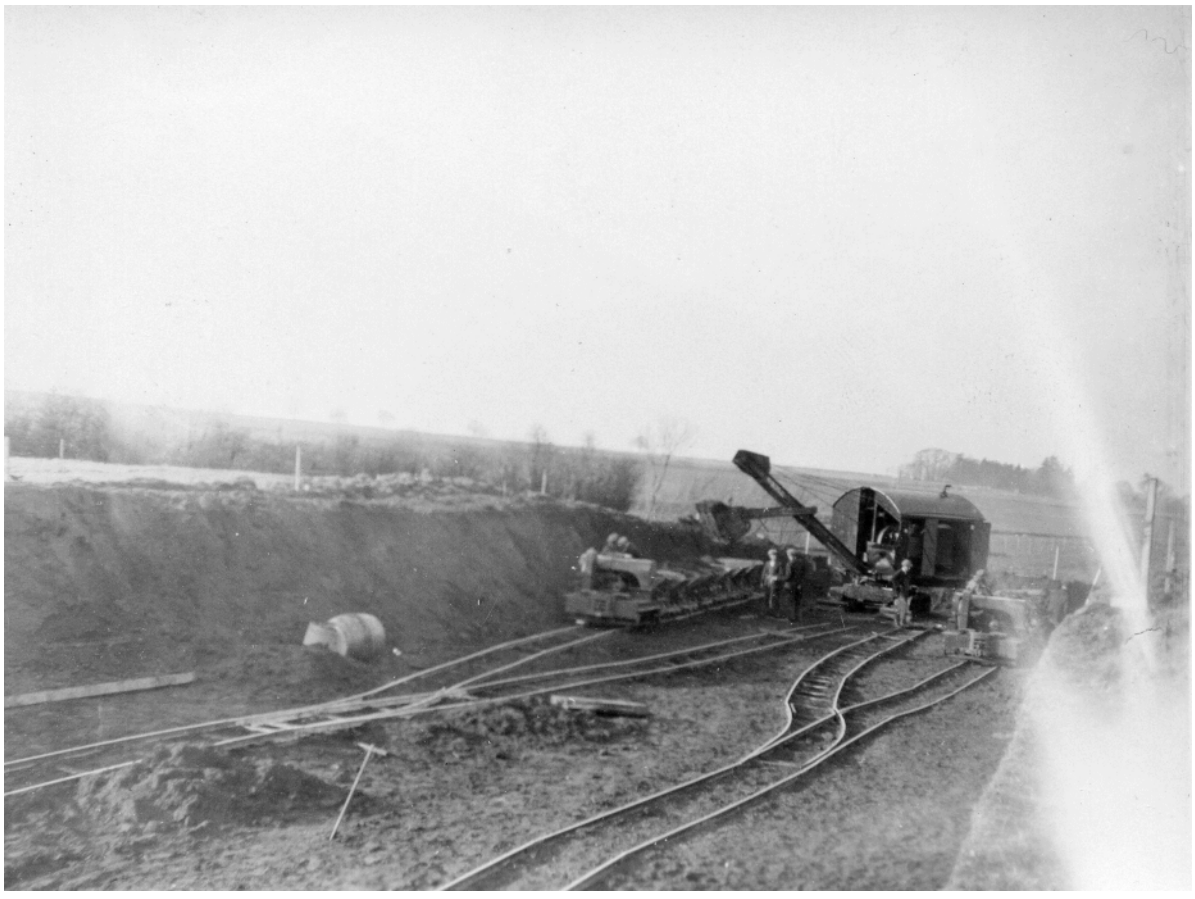


Photo 10. Another view of the powered shovel in action with two loco’s pulling trucks, the points are in the foreground.



Photo 11. Clearer view of soil in transit with a small internal combustion engine pulling the trucks. “Simplex”type, built and marketed by Motor Rail Ltd., Bedford.



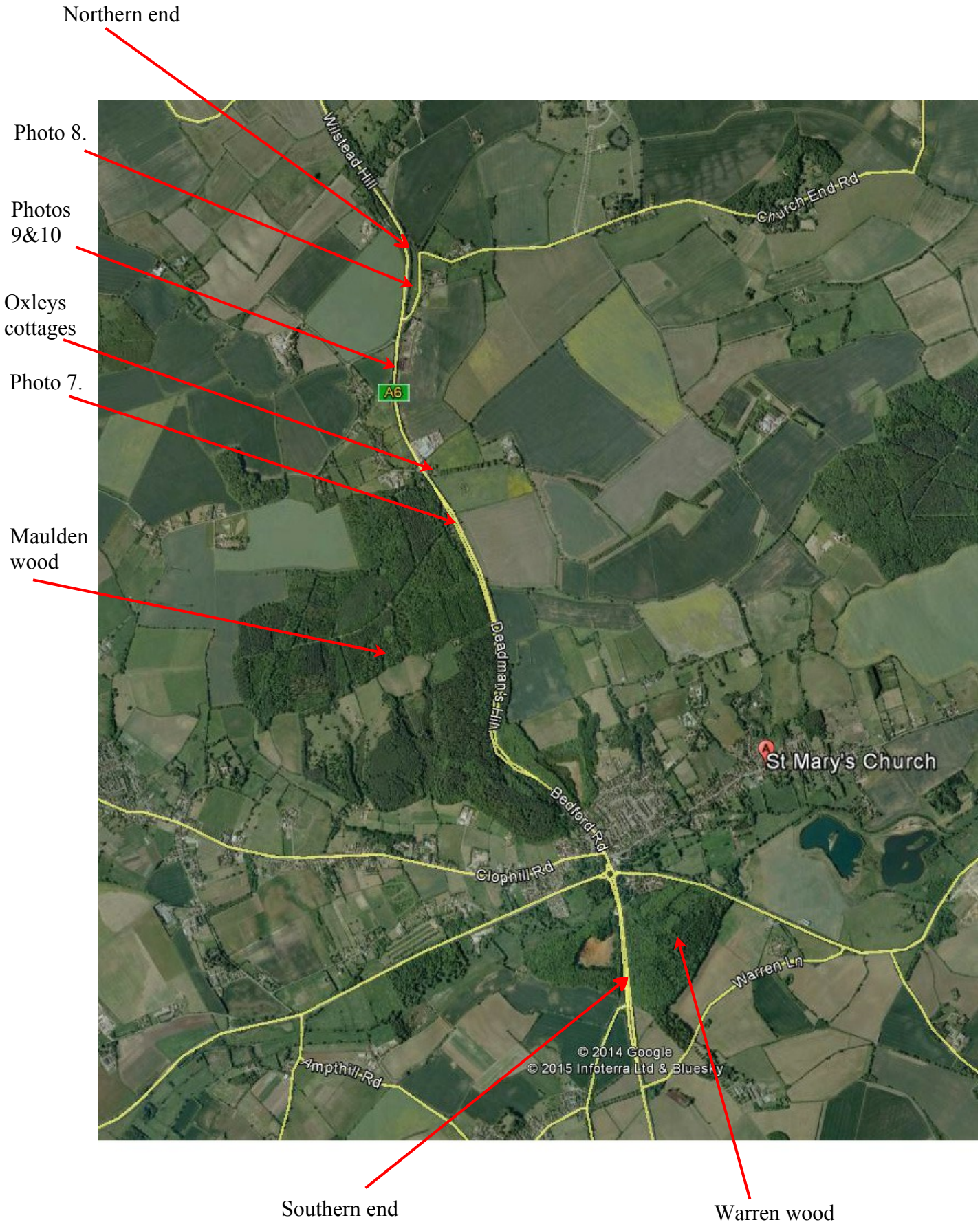
Photo 12. Consolidating the soil before laying the concrete foundation.



Photo 13. Laying the concrete foundation for the road.



Photo 14. Aerial view of Clophill, timber from Maulden wood in the upper eastern quadrant of the photograph was cut down in WWI. Warren wood in the lower western quadrant had narrow gauge rails in WWII. Both woods held ammunition in store in WWII.



Extent of A6 improvements between Wilstead Hill and Clophill started in the 1930's and completed after WW11.

Discussion

The rail points found are certainly of interest in themselves and need to be preserved, the reason for their location has been established. The area in which they were used is also of interest and this report adds to the evidence of how this seemingly quiet part of Mid Bedfordshire was affected by the two World Wars and the depression between.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Susan Raven, Greensand Trust, Robin Waywell, Alan Sprod and Joanne Makin.

Also to the Center Parcs UK team for careful excavation and cleaning the points.

Reference. Industrial Locomotives of Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire & Northamptonshire, Robin Waywell ISBN 1 901556 24 7.

WWII activities in Ampthill, Kevan Fadden www..adalhs.mooncarot.org.uk.

126th Coy Canadian Forestry Corps, Herman Porter www.adalhs.mooncarrot.org.uk.

Aerial Photographs Google Earth.

Black & White photographs Robin Waywell Collection.

Colour photographs by the author.