

The Hedgerows of Chidham, Hambrook and Nutbourne East

Introduction

The civil parish of Chidham and Hambrook is rich in hedgerows, the most ancient dating back to the Middle Ages. In learning more of these hedgerows, such detail can ensure, through use of the Hedgerow Regulation of 1997 that appropriate protection is given to the most significant and important. This same information can also add to the known history of the parish, providing those who walk its footpaths a greater understanding of the historical domain through which they are passing.

Under the Hedgerows Regulation 1997 it is against the law to remove or destroy certain hedgerows without permission from the local planning authority. Here a hedgerow is defined as on common land or adjoining land used for agriculture, forestry or the breeding of certain animals and does not include garden hedges. It is the local planning authority, Chichester District Council, which is the enforcing body with written permission required before removing hedges that are at least 20 metres (66 feet) in length, more than 30 years old and contain certain plant species. Failure to gain permission (whether the hedgerow is of importance or not) can result in an unlimited fine and possible cost of replacing the hedgerow (chichester.gov.uk). Following a request, the authority will assess the importance of the hedgerow using criteria set out in the Regulations and which include wildlife and landscape importance as well as archaeological and historical significance.

To be of historic significance, and focussing only on factors relevant to Chidham, a hedgerow to be protected under the 1997 Regulation will be one that

- marks the boundary, or part of the boundary, of at least one historic parish or township; and for this purpose “historic” means existing before 1850.
- marks the boundary of a pre-1600CE estate or manor recorded at the relevant date in a Sites and Monuments Record or in a document held at that date at a Record Office
- is visibly related to any building or other feature of such an estate or manor.
- is recorded in a document held at the relevant date at a Record Office as an integral part of a field system pre-dating the Enclosure Acts.

Determining the Age of a Hedgerow

Dating a hedgerow requires maps and documents generated in past centuries, with these available at the West Sussex Records Office (WSRO), the National Archives (TNA) and the British Library (BL). Field work involves an examination of individual hedgerows to determine whether a hedgerow appearing on any particular map is still the same as that which still survives to this day. Close scrutiny of one especially important map, Yeakall and Gardner’s *Topographical Survey of the County of Sussex* (1778-83) allows for detection of hedgerows that are of medieval origin, made possible because this map shows hedgerows and field boundaries at a time prior to subsequent straightening and regularization. In particular, it shows

some of the hedged boundaries to have distinctive shallow reversed 'S' shapes, these likely to have resulted from piecemeal enclosure of fields that traced, in simplified form, the landscape of the open fields they had replaced. The boundaries of open fields were, themselves, rarely straight, disturbed over the years by successive generations of ploughmen who had gradually adapted their furrows to the lie of the land and the practicalities of ploughing. In addition, and demonstrated by the Yeakall and Gardner together with later maps of Chidham, is that of numerous field boundaries linked in a series of 'dog leg' patterns. Later enclosures, these usually undertaken by Act of Parliament, rather than general agreement, produced very different field shapes, much more rectilinear in character with existing road pattern often rationalised and new rights of way created. While the number of species within a hedge might also be used as a possible indicator of age, there can be no suggestion of an equation based on the number of species and multiplied by a certain number of years, as once thought possible, will provide a rough estimated year of planting.



Above. Medieval strips, such as this boundary hedgerow to the south of Chidmere, often took the form of a shallow reversed 'S', caused by the way the ploughman and his team were obliged to move to the left as they approached the headland at the end of the strip, in order to avoid too tight a turning circle.

The Medieval Field System

During the Middle Ages, the Peninsula (the area of the parish south of the modern A259) possessed three large open fields that were communally farmed, namely Weston, Easton and Middleton fields. At some point prior to the mid-18th century all three were enclosed, the larger portion of each formed into separate estates, Easton remaining with the Lord of the Manor becoming Home Farm, Weston becoming part of the Cobnor Estate and the third becoming Middleton Farm.



Left. The two open fields south of the church.



Above. The Yeakall & Gardner map shows by final quarter of the 18th century these two fields had been partially sectioned, this for the better folding of sheep and the cultivation of secondary crops, but both fields were fundamentally left open for the purpose of growing a main crop.

Below. Aerial view of Easton Field showing straight hedgerows planted for the purpose of creating a number of small fields out of the larger residue of Easton field and first appearing on a 1785 estate map (WSRO Add Ms 2158, f.64-5).



To the North

The area between the north-west edge of the original Middleton Field and the Portsmouth-Chichester road (now the A259) by the late eighteenth century primarily consisted of a number of small holdings that probably emerged out of common waste land that had been enclosed at some time prior to the Yeakall and Gardner map. Most likely, those with strips on the three communal fields were compensated upon the enclosure of those fields with land formed out of the common land and given the right to enclose an area of land of acreage that equated to the amount of land that they had formerly farmed. In addition, the land permitted to them would have been further enhanced by additional acreage to compensate for the loss of communal wasteland being now enclosed.

Below. The northern section of the Chidham Peninsula as it appeared in the late-eighteenth century.



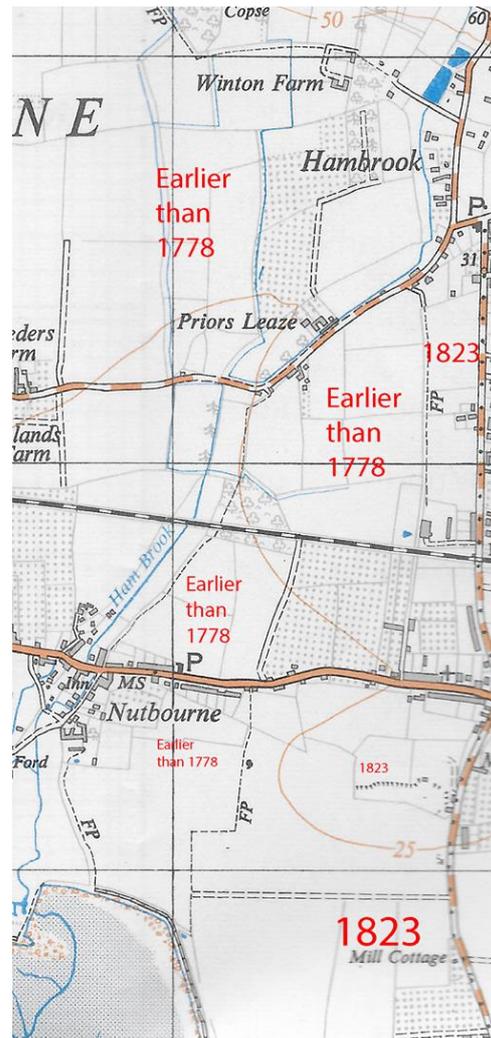
Those landowners to the north of the peninsula who had gained small enclosed fields would still have retained a right to graze animals on open common land of Hambrook Common on the far side of the main Chichester-Portsmouth Road. Part of the Common had certainly been enclosed by the time of the Yeakall & Gardner map was drawn (1778), divided into 37 separate fields of varying sizes. In 1812, there was also a further adjustment of the already enclosed fields on Hambrook Common.



Approximate date of hedgerows in Hambrook.

A further enclosure Act of Hambrook Common came into force on 28 May 1821, this distributing much of the remaining common land and requiring all those gaining land from this bout of enclosure having, at their own expense, to provide a hedge around their fields. Furthermore, nobody was to graze animals within the newly enclosed area until the hedge had matured sufficiently to prevent animals from straying. An additional imposition upon those receiving land, apart from the cost of the hedge, was construction of a new road through the former area of the Common, the present day Broad Road, which was to connect the south part of the parish to Funtington in the north.

On the west of the modern-day civil parish lies Nutbourne East, since 2014 part of the civil parish of Chidham & Hambrook, but originally within the parish of Westbourne but latterly Southbourne. An open common area with just a few settlements, the pattern of enclosure was different, the common area of Nutbourne mainly enclosed under Acts of Parliament relating to Westbourne passed in 1818 and 1836. For an appreciation of the field system as existing in the mid-nineteenth and as a result of the passing of those two Acts, reference is best made to the Westbourne tithe map of 1840 (WSAO TD/W138).



Approximate date of fields in Nutbourne.

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