

The Parish Perambulation 2019  
'Let the fields talk'

Next month we shall embark on the first leg of the Parish Perambulation as we 'Beat the Bounds' of Ilsington. It is a great tradition and will focus on the long history of the parish. The four walks will follow the parish boundary, often across private land and we are grateful to all the landowners who have kindly consented to the event. Our journey will take us to little known corners of the parish and through many fields.

The fields are older than many of the settlements and can reveal a great deal about local history. Field-names are numerous, local in use and derived from local conditions. Manor boundaries survive in place name elements such as 'har', 'hor', 'ra' and 'mearc' with local examples with Horridge - boundary ridge, Rora -boundary stream. Summerhill 'suthmeresfeld' on the edge of the Heathfield Common in Liverton has an Old English origin meaning the 'open field on the south of the boundary'.

A network of paths criss-cross the parish. Three major drift lanes led cattle from the lowland down-country manors of the South Hams to rich summer grazing on Ilsington Commons. Place names including 'ford', 'weg', 'brycg', 'stoc wey' abound.

It will come as no surprise to learn that we have a rich collection of words describing the landscape of the parish: 'Cumb' -coombe, 'dic' - ditch, 'hege' & 'hay' - hedge, 'broc' - brooke, 'torr' - hill, 'hlaw' - tumulus, 'grycg' - ridge, 'haec' - fence. Further descriptive terms are often used such as 'rah hege' - rough hedge and 'cwichege' a living hedge but the parish fields named 'Pink Hay', 'Lucy Hay' and 'Pitch Hay' need a local expert.

Many field names are clear and functional: Long Park, Home Close, Kiln Close etc. Across the parish there are 41 uses of 'brake' referring to a break in slope, and 40 references to the local kilns more often used for burning lime, but some associated with making bricks. Other field names speak to us of settlements and cultivation: 'plat' - a small field, 'stroll' an elongated enclosure sandwiched

between two enclosures, '*arrish*' - stubble and '*gratna*' or '*gratner*' which implies the field has been mown for hay.

Botanical references abound: '*withy*' - willow, '*pron*' - thorn, '*ac*' - oak, '*aesc*' - ash, '*bremel*' - bramble (hence Brimley) and '*birc*' for birch which combined with '*hanger*' such as at Birchanger, gives a strong indication of a steep wooded slope. Further references to woodland are found in place-name elements with '*beare*', such as along the eastern boundary of the parish above Colehayes Park.

However, not surprisingly, many field names have meanings and origins, which require further investigation, and a selection from around Sigford reveal the social and cultural richness of local field names '*Tobits brake*', '*Hackferry*', '*Ticham*', '*Pinkery*' and the delightful named '*Goody*' in the appropriately named Sweets Sigford!

Do join us on these historic walks and please do share your own knowledge of these really important field names - before they are lost to history.

Anne Parkinson, Ilsington Local History group